APGEE
Spring 2001
# APOGEE

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APOGEE

POEMS
Monday
tonight you died
before i could tell you

i miss you

please swear death is false
and you will wake,
so i too can believe
and live
a tomorrow
that almost never comes
true

You smile
you smile as though they are free.
you give them up(smile)
so generously
as if they lie in some untouchable well too deep above the words.
you smile as though you have an abundance.
but mostly
you smile
so mildly
so fragile
you smile
as if it were your last and i
your first.

Never Touched
as i have longed for you
your fingers
i have felt them
around the creases of mine,
it so strangles
my mind,
so
please
ing
i believe...

that in
days

of wheres and hows have not
one rule.,
only love
it
matters.
A strangers Glance

how can one person
make you so ..... just...

you dont even know who

but..

A Chance

fall with me
please.
into the gentle break
of time's glass hand.
everything undying told us
were lies mothers keep
in fear.

feel with me
so.

so softly
are your most alive dreams
that leave me drenched
with slightest eyes.

i dont know who i am
because of your hands

leading into the spine of my soul.

teach me

how to breathe
as flowers learn from love
how to grow.

Dave Faby
Souvenirs of Duty
Heather Cheek

You retrieved from the mahogany cabinet
A dark green canvas memory
And from the cold tile floor, she saw
The shiny knives, the scissors, silver tongs of war
And your grimace as you stashed it away again.
A Typical Day of the 24 Hour Liberated Woman
who's come a long way
Catherine Smith

My Day Begins at 5 O'clock
With What's for Breakfast and Where's my Socks?
Clinging Children, Baths to Give, Bags to Pack, Lunches to Fix
Can we watch Cartoons while we Eat?
Do we have to go to School Today?
Hurry! Hurry! So we won't be late!

Drive to Daycare to drop them off
Debate about whose turn to sit in the Front Seat
Teacher says, “There’s a problem with your Child,
Can we set up a Conference?”
I’ll Check my Schedule and Call you Back

And the Guilt Sets In

Arrive at Work a little after 8
The Boss is Waiting, I shouldn’t be Late

And the Guilt Sets In

Work all Day, Running, Selling Typing, Presenting
Clients rude, Boss gives Pressure
Rumor of Layoff, Paycut, Shutdown
Lunch time comes, Girlfriend Calls
Erica on the Soaps is having an Affair
Who has the Time or Energy for an Affair?

Rush Back to work, There’s a Report due
A meeting to Attend and so much else to do
Can you stay past 5 o’clock?
Must be done Today!
Rushing to Daycare, Ready with Excuses
Children upset; may be late for Practice

And the Guilt Sets In

Ask Husband if he can help with Dinner
“I’ve Worked all Day, I think I’ll rest here in my Chair”
“Can you run the Vacuum or start the Laundry?”
“Let’s wait until Saturday”

Sit down for Quality time with my Daughter
We read Cinderella
She asks if one day a prince will come for her
I assure her that he will

Rushing, Busy, Pajamas on, Clothes Laid out
Dishes Washed, Children to Bed
Goodnight Prayer, Song, Drink, Snack, Hug
Children Asleep, What a Relief!

At last Alone in the Bathroom
I look Tired, Old
Need to Color or Perm my Hair
Why can’t I lose that last 15 Pounds?
Maybe I need a makeover

Lie Down, Exhausted
Husband wants full Attention, Interest, and Enthusiasm
I make my Excuses and Drift off to Sleep
Ready for another day of Freedom and Equality

And the Guilt Sets In
What War is Like
Donalee Goodrum-White

The soldier creeps through the jungle,
with stealth and wariness,
so as not to wake the enemy.
His life depends on it.

The woman creeps through her home,
with stealth and wariness,
so as not to wake the man.
Her life depends on it.

The dinner was cold when he finally arrived
tired, hungry, and high.
Her hands shook as she warmed it up.
He had a bad day, she thinks to herself and knows
she is stupid and slow.

Daddy and Mommy are fighting, again.
Their three-year-old daughter cowers
under her bedcovers, awakened
by their yelling and sobbing.
She whispers to her teddy bear, “Shh, don’t be afraid. I have you.”
Cruelty
Doug Herring

I found a little dead duck on an old pile of dirt
And immediately I set out to dig it a grave, when
A horrid boy approached, seized the duck by the legs,
And like a discus he flung it into the air,
Plunging down into a cold, dead lake.
They sat on the mantle,
Each one meticulously labeled—quart sized Ziplock bags of sand;
Juno, Gold, Utah, Omaha, Sword;
On the 50th anniversary he filled those bags, claiming what was rightfully his—
A part of France.
Toy Soldiers
Doug Herring

Carefully, we picked them, little men,
Tiny weapons, one by one, into two piles,
Then placed them strategically among
Blades, bushes, and trees of a front lawn
Soon to become a war-torn battlefield.
She lit a candle by the window and it reflected off the glass. Outside, the pre-dawn blackness was still, but an edgy breeze forewarned a storm. Her pink nightgown swept the hardwood floors as her bare feet pitter-pattered back and forth from the bedroom doorway to the kitchen.

The candle’s flame blinked and swayed. Its staccato light made her eyes ache, and she began biting her fingernails on her way back to the doorway.

The sky changed. The sun and the birds were still not out, but the sweet smell of a new day was afloat, and a blue hue had replaced the blackness.

She paused and looked down at her belly. It was smooth and unstretched. Innocent. Although it had never swelled before, it would. How long would it be before people could tell?

The green wax dripped down the candle, and the sky was getting brighter. There was still no light escaping from the crack beneath her father’s door, but an alarm clock was buzzing within. He did not know.

She paced back to the kitchen. Maybe she would make it. She would be a good mama. They would be friends. Partners.

Orange and pink began to swirl around each other amid the damp sky. She didn’t need the candle’s light anymore to count her allowance. Her dad walked out of the bedroom, a serious man, and she dropped some quarters, surprised. They jingled and rolled down the kitchen floor, he kissed her on the forehead and handed her two crisp dollars from his wallet.

“Here, Sugar. What are you counting your pennies for?” He straightened his tie and headed towards the front door. “Are they selling candy bars at school again? Save your allowance for a rainy day,” he mused.

“Your old man will take care of you,” he said.

She wanted to tell him, but the door had already slammed behind him. He was gone.
I have blank pages to fill. Reports to assemble. Research proposals to compose. Presentations to prepare. Realize, please, that my last priority is fiction. There is no class assignment for fiction this semester; it is not required.

I roll around and look at the clock. It’s later than I thought.

In the kitchen I put a cast iron pan on the stove. I move the dial until the arrow points to MED. I take a Ziplock out of the fridge and remove four slices of bacon. They go into the pan; still too cold to sizzle, but the fatty parts begin to turn translucent.

I cross to the table where my laptop rests overnight. Usually it’s never off, but this morning I have to push the button and wait for it to start up. Already I’m off my pace.

I click on the TV and flip through kids programming imported from Japan. A supervillian blows up a jet with mental telepathy. The cartoon jet blips into a cartoon puff of smoke as the cartoon heroes stare useless from the ground. Off camera, so that there are no lips to sync up with, someone says, “I see a parachute.” I doubt that line was in the Japanese original. There is no cartoon parachute floating away from the cartoon puff of smoke. But in American cartoons, pilots always eject in time.

I hear the first sizzle of bacon just as my laptop—Toshiba In Touch With Tomorrow—is ready to go. I click for word processing and leave it to load a fresh blank page.

I flip the bacon once; the slices are shrinking quickly as they cook. I assemble coffee—filter, grounds, four cups of water—and press the button. I reach under the counter and pull out a small aluminum bowl; from a drawer, I take a whisk and a spatula; from the upper cabinets, a plate. The coffee is just beginning to perk.

My program has performed an illegal operation. An obscure legislative program has apparently outlawed the victimless activities of my honest, hard working blue-collar program; an executive program has had to intervene, lest it seem to be soft on illegal operation. A judicial program has decided to make an example of the miscreant; the sentence is terminal. I click OKAY to restart my computer.
M*A*S*H* is coming on TV. Again. If I ever signed up for the full range of channels my cable company offers, I bet I could find M*A*S*H* reruns 24/7. As it is, I have to make do with six hours a day. I loved the show growing up; I still do. But I'm always aware of how artificial it is. Someone pointed it out to me once and now I can't un-see it. No one talks like they do on M*A*S*H* – real life is not witty. Not even in Korea.

The laptop is up and running again and I try to coax my word processor back into the light. It will probably just get in trouble again. I must be a bad influence.

Back in the kitchen, the bacon comes out of the pan and onto a paper towel. Cast iron is replaced by a non-stick sauce pan. A little butter; heat still at MED. Two eggs get whisked in the bowl along with some salt and Half&Half. I’ve heard cream is a mistake in omelets. I pick the pan up and tilt it to spread the melting butter. In go the beaten eggs. Before long I can add two slices worth of bacon, crumpled, and some cheese from a resealable pouch labeled Mexican Blend. I fold the omelet into a semi-circle. Sugar and milk go into a mug waiting by the coffee machine. I flip the omelet over completely to brown the other side. Coffee is poured. The omelet goes onto a plate with the rest of the bacon and some salsa.

By the time I get settled to eat, I have a blank page waiting on my screen. Between bites I type my name and the date. Sipping coffee, I space down to where my text will begin. Then I go ahead and add in page numbers, adjust the font and line spacing, and double check my assignment. Analyze this. Compose that. I'm beginning to think that there's very little difference between consumption and creation. Create and consume; consume and create. Synthesize.

I take my empty plate back to the kitchen. I'll probably take the time to clean my two pans and load the dishwasher. I can hear a new episode of M*A*S*H* coming on. They run in two hour blocks—four episodes back to back. Every time I catch the theme music I hear the lyrics in my head. Not so many people remember the lyrics; they're from the movie. Alan Alda wasn't even in it. The song was composed impromptu to accompany a mock suicide. The lyrics still seem creepy to me. Suicide is painless. It brings on many changes. But I can take or leave it if I try. I've heard Marylin Manson has done a cover version.
Heather Cheek

GOING HOME

Ella slammed the door behind her and hurried down the cold cement stairs. Tim’s friends were still sitting outside on the balcony, and one of them spit off the side onto the grass. Once again her car key caught in the lock. Hours seemed to pass as she jiggled and tugged at it impatiently. The lock popped, and she swung the door open.

Taking one last look at the balcony, she thrust the beaten-up Blazer into reverse and pulled out of Anglewood Heights. The radio blared one heart-wrenching song after another as she sopped tears up with her right sleeve and cupped her left hand over a swollen cheek. Maybe that would prevent the people in other cars from seeing it.

By the time she reached the highway, the six o’clock traffic jams had subsided, and she had the road to herself. In her rear-view mirror, the sun was setting behind her. It looked like her past: disintegrating in red, orange and yellow flames. She turned the mirror away.

She kept thinking about Tim, but she couldn’t rationalize what he’d done. Only thirty-five more miles until Rocksboro. Only thirty-five minutes left before she had to tell her mom that it didn’t work out after all.

She remembered moving into the apartment and smiled. He had dropped their new love seat down the stairs instead of asking her for help. He never could set his pride aside.

Her cheek was throbbing, and she wanted to stop and get a soda. She took the next exit and pulled into the gravel parking lot of an old-fashioned service station named Big Willy’s. After fumbling around in her purse unsuccessfully, she turned it upside-down and shook everything out. She had left her money on the dresser when she hurried out. Still thirsty, she pulled back out of Big Willy’s. Maybe she should go back and get her money. She didn’t feel like fussing with her mom anyway.

Ella pulled back into the apartments and saw Tim talking and laughing with his friends on the balcony. She hurried past them and up the cold cement stairs hoping no one would see her face.
APOGEE

ESSAYS
AT FIRST I WAS JUST AN AMERICAN GIRL LIVING IN AN UNFAMILIAR COUNTRY. I WAS surrounded by lace, waffles, chocolates, and Belgians waiting anxiously for my return to the US and my hometown of Belle Mead, NJ. Three years passed and I found myself engulfed in new customs, traditions, and culture. Now my hometown seemed distant, a foreign land of which I was no longer a part.

My family moved to Belgium on a three-year assignment for my father's company. I was in sixth grade—going through puberty and excited about boys and fashion—soon old enough to drive. When my father told us, I was confused and excited. I ran to tell my best friend Dawn. When she asked me where Belgium was, I wasn't sure. "North Jersey, I guess," I said. When I got home my father had put a green post-it in the Encyclopedia. I opened it, read, looked at some maps and began to cry. How could my father move us away from everything we knew? In February 1991, my family said good-bye to our relatives, friends and country. Little did I know I was about to commence on the greatest journey of my life.

In Belgium I was scared and nervous about this strange place, people and food. I worried about being "different." What if I didn't dress or speak right? There were so many "what ifs?" Yet, on my very first day of school, I felt comfortable. Many of the other students were American like me. We were all in the same boat—fathers from 3M, AT&T, or Johnson & Johnson. It didn't matter what I looked like or how I dressed; my acceptance depended on my willingness to become accustomed to my new home. Living overseas in Belgium opened my eyes and the door for many extraordinary opportunities.

I mingled with the children of presidents, expatriates and ambassadors. I saw the wonders of the world. When I was little, I had gotten chills looking down on NYC from the Empire State Building. Now as an eighth grader I cried at Normandy where my grandfather fought, and we went tracing our ancestry in the countryside of Italy. I realized that although I didn't speak the language, there was little language barrier to cross. I was who I was and they were who they were and that was okay.
Spring 2001

Living in Belgium helped me become independent and ready to face life. Being involved in sports while overseas brought me a higher level of determination, experience and success. Housing with host families, I not only became familiar with Belgium culture but also with the customs of other nations. Every time I left a host family, I took a little piece of them with me.

Belgium/Europe, as a whole, is a melting pot of cultures. I was encouraged to look to those who had something different to offer. The friends I made in Belgium came from Swedish, Scottish and Belgian decent. Some of my friends I met in Belgium are just as close to me as those from New Jersey. I only was in Belgium for three years, but the friendships have crossed miles.

Being part of an international community broadened my horizons. While I studied French at the International School of Brussels, being in a French speaking country encouraged me to apply what I knew daily. Speaking with the old lady who worked at the cigar shop meant much more to me than talking to a cashier from NJ.

When I returned, I was shocked with the friends and places I had left behind. I realized that while my Belle Mead house had been my abode for years, Belgium was more home to me than Jersey. My friends were less mature than I had become. While they were here fighting over boys, doing drugs and turning to violence, I was biking across the Loire Valley, go-carting in Marbella, Spain and visiting the gardens of Versailles. My friends at home weren’t interested in my experiences overseas, and I felt isolated in my own country. I was disappointed with America as a whole for being so self-involved and nationalistic. The Empire State Building no longer impressed me, and neither did the small-minded people I was once like.

Now I’ve been back in the US for five years, and enjoy reminiscing and re-living my time in Belgium. I still keep in touch with many of my friends who have all moved away and are currently attending colleges across the US. I have never quite felt the same about America or my house on Ivy Lane, Belle Mead, NJ. I only long for the day when I will be able to return to Europe, my home.
I entered my freshmen year at HPU in the fall of 1998. I was the typical, nervous freshman, and very excited about meeting my roommate. Her name was Bessie Fleming, and I had no idea how much I would learn from her.

Bessie was going to be my first African-American roommate, and likewise I was going to be her first white roommate. We found out on the first day that we were both on Track scholarships. We spent most of the next couple of days just hanging out and getting to know each other. Bessie wasn’t what you might consider a “drinker,” but she even took care of me when I got a little intoxicated and had a three-day hangover.

Bessie took very good care of her hair, and this is the beginning of how I learned everything I could ever need to know about black hair care products. Bessie announced to me that she needed to go to Sally Hansen to buy a home perm for her hair because “it was looking a mess.” All I could do was agree to give Bessie a ride to buy the perm, but the entire time I kept picturing Bessie’s chin length hair in tight, spiral curls. I was scared for her because of the traumatic home perm experience I had gone through in fourth grade. My mother fried my hair to a crisp and it took two years for the curls to grow out. I decided that I had to tell Bessie this story; it was only right. Bessie proceeded to tell me that perms were used in African-American girl’s hair to make it straight and to add volume. I realized how little I knew about African-American hair care. This was just the beginning.

Bessie would marvel at the fact I could wash my hair everyday and a lot of times twice a day due to cross-country practices. Bessie could only wash her hair once or twice a week or it would be too dry. The rest of the days she wore a shower cap that was the cause of much ridicule. She looked like a little old lady in her robe with a peach shower cap on and a pair of old, ratty flip-flops. After her shower she would take this blue can out of her closet and spray it all over her hair. After a while my curiosity got the best of me and I asked her what it was. “Oil sheen,” she said. I had no idea then that oil sheen would be our link for the rest of our college years. She proceeded to show me all its other amazing uses. She cleaned her black shoes with it almost on a daily basis.
Anything she wanted to make shiny she just put a little “sheen” on it and it was good to go.

Oil sheen didn’t serve much of a purpose to me except that I almost fell on Bessie’s side of the room on more than a few occasions, due to the slick condition of the floor. I used it a couple of times to shine my shoes but never for its original use, “to make my hair look shiny and healthy,” that is, until Homecoming night.

I considered Bessie to be the hair master; she could do things to my hair that were new, fun and usually a little painful, so it was no big surprise that I entrusted my hair to her on a big night. This was mistake number one. Bessie spent two hours trying to get my hair to curl, but she didn’t understand that white girl hair just doesn’t curl like her hair. After enduring pain and frustration, we got something we liked. Bessie said, “Time for the finishing touches,” and pulled out that big, blue, multi-purpose can that I had seen so often. She put sheen on my hair and she loved the outlook. I looked like I had sprayed Crisco in a can all over my very blonde hair. After a serious shampoo and a quick blow-dry everything turned out great, but I vowed to never use black hair care products again.

Bessie let me look at her extensive hair care products and explained them all to me. Curl Wax is my personal favorite. It is this thick orange goo that she uses to “really curl hair.” That goo never touched my hair. I also got a lesson on Pink Moisturizer. Bessie didn’t really like that stuff; she always said sheen was better.

Bessie did teach me everything I could ever want to know about African-American hair care, but she and I also learned about each other’s race. We are still great friends and would probably still be roommates if she hadn’t chosen to become a RA; she still isn’t a drinker. If more people could be put in the living situation that we were in and be as open-minded as we were, I think many racial barriers could be overcome.
I GROW UP IN BARS. THEY ARE MORE COMFORTABLE TO ME THAN MY OWN HOUSE. THE
smell of the stale cigarette smoke and rotten beer mixed with the scent of urine and
perfumes are my equivalent to smelling my mom's proverbial meatloaf baking in the
oven. The distracted bartender and the omniscient soundman are my friends. We're
family; the incestuous encounters among the wait staff are my topics of inquiry every six
weeks when I visit a venue. I enjoy the magic hour, whenever that may be, when the
masses make their entrance and I stare bleary-eyed and contemptuously at the meatheads
brandishing their Barbie dolls competing with homosexuals, punks, and skinheads
proudly beating their own chests with pride.

The bar is my home, the staff my family. My sisters serve drinks and constantly
battle the roving hands of our inebriated guests. My brothers are the bartenders,
generously pouring liquids overflowing into small glasses for anyone who winks, blinks,
or thinks they can handle it. The soundman is my father. I must obey his every
command so that the evening will flow in accordance to his schedule. The missing
member is the mother, whose loving morality is never present in this sea of leaches,
atheists, hedonists, pimps, and addicts. The family is all together in this and providing
each other comfort as we serve—and consume—elixirs of entertainment and relief; even
to the moral right who enter our home desiring a dance on the dark side.

The family that provides relief is a family united. Brother, sisters, cousins,
uncles, step-vixens unite as one in a struggle to survive reality in the world of the
superficial. There is no relaxation among them. There is no relief in sight. Hedonism is
the subject and the tavern is the topic sentence. The delight of the thirsty washing away
the dust of reality radiates as the volume increases. Whispers develop in the vocal cords
that are shredded by the end of the evening. Last call brings sorrow. It bids farewell to
the gender left alone. There is no company this evening for the tab closer who remains
standing in the new fluorescent light.

Now—only now—the family bonds through the retelling of the day's events.
WE CALL HER GAGA. SHE'S A JAZZY OLD LADY, NOT THE TYPE TO CROSS-STITCH OR MAKE quilts between naps all day. She wraps presents and works the switchboard part-time in Customer Service at Dillard's Department Store.


Each payday, she stashes her money away until her Dillard's card bill comes in the mail. This pays for the singing and dancing mounted fish she bought for laughs; her long jean dress with the cowboy hat embroidered on the chest pocket; the leather pants she already bought me for Christmas; and the pale-pink baby dresses that were marked down so low. She rationalizes that she might as well get those dresses just in case she has a great-grandbaby.

Her hair is short and brown. Its artificial waves look painfully frizzy from too many perms over the years. She often rubs her crooked, arthritis-stricken fingers through it and tells me how she wishes it were snow white.

“Just like Kenny Rogers’ hair,” she says. “Boy, that looks sharp!”

When I was a kid, my older sister and I stayed there almost every Friday. We went out to Skipper’s for fried shrimp and scallops and then back to her house to play Scrabble and watch Bobby Ewing in “Dallas” until we fell asleep. Kelly and I always went to bed early. We couldn’t wait to sleep in her “electric bed” that sat up and shook at the touch of a button. I fell asleep with my teeth chattering and the electric blanket up to my nose. Gaga would check on me before she went to bed, and I would keep my eyes closed tight. I was sure she thought I was asleep when she gave me Eskimo kisses on my nose and told me how much she loved me.

She has beautiful green eyes. She was captain of the cheerleading squad and homecoming queen in high school, not the type to get excited over an invitation to the movies. I’ve seen pictures of her and Poppy at the park when they were courting. Gaga was wearing a graceful linen dress that hooped out at the bottom, and Poppy had on his
Sunday slacks. A classy couple, they were! He must have been something else to win her affection!

Some Saturdays, Gaga took me to square dancing class with her. Beverly from across the street drove us in her Buick once. I sat on the bleachers and watched the old-timers twirl and sachet all around the gym floor while a man with white hair and an outdated dress-shirt called the directions into a microphone. Every time Gaga danced by, she threw her head back and winked at me.

Now, she teaches Line-Dancing and Exercise classes at the Senior Center. Last summer, she brought the old ladies from class, all sizes and hair colors, over to our pool for water-aerobics, line dancing, and casseroles. It was a grand party to watch. Our breezeway was lined with little ladies and plump ladies spooning bits of cakes, casseroles and salads onto Styrofoam plates. As they ate in the den and the dining room, each bragged about how easy it was to make her dish, the homemaking veterans that they were. Gaga zipped back and forth, entertaining all of the guests with good hugs, gossip and laughs, until she had to carry a paper towel along with her to wipe the sweat from her brow.

Mom and Dad own a condo on the beach in Cherry Grove. Once a month, the family goes down there to relax and spend time together. Gaga always packs her sassy, blue bathing suit cover-up with the fringes that hang down to her knees. On the way, she tells me, “I might just find myself an old, fat-bellied fisherman to take home with me.” Then, she laughs and reminds herself, “They’re all crotchety-old-farts, though. I’d just as soon be by myself. Old men are too set in their ways.”

Poppy died of lung cancer when I was a small child. After that she spent some time with a crabby old fisherman named Richard. They wrote each other once in a while, and he came to visit her on holidays. Only a year after they met, we received word that Richard died of cancer, just like Poppy. Gaga has deliberately been alone ever since.

During these so-called “lonely years,” Gaga has been busier than I have. It never surprises me to see her cream Chevy Buick out on the roads after dark due to her love of going out to eat. Anytime she finds companions to come and talk between onion rings and the main course, she throws her hair up in curlers and wheels out of her parking
space to pick them up. Sometimes, she and her friend Jenny will also go to a movie or a church function.

The more I think about it, the more I realize what a phenomenal woman Mrs. Janie Marie Mitchell is. Who would’ve known that I would have to live twenty-one years before figuring out why.