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## Outdoors

By John Craig

There has always been something about being outdoors that is appealing to me. I have always enjoyed it. The feel of the breeze, the chirp of the birds, the heat of the sun, and the feel of grass on my bare feet beckon to me and make me feel at home. When I am outdoors though I notice that I am usually alone. While it doesn't bother me a whole lot it does make me wonder where everyone else is.

When I was in Europe I noticed that almost everyone is outdoors. At the cafes, shops, restaurants, parks, memorials, and even walking from place to place people are always outside. It doesn't seem to matter if it is cold or hot, wet or dry, light or dark, people spent their time in the open. It was something that I grew accustomed to and really learned to like about the people in the different countries that I visited.

Back home though, we are a nation of indoors and we have come up with a lot of good reasons to be indoors. The pollen count is too high and it is messing with my allergies. It is too hot today, I think I will stay in the air conditioning. Those Killer Bees are going to get here one of these days!

I wonder when it all changed. When did we go from a nation of Thoreau to a nation of drive-thru? We use to get in the car and travel long distances just to be outdoors somewhere else. Kids attended summer camps where they fished, learned to shoot a bow and arrow, swam, hiked and played games.

Maybe that is when it changed, when we were kids. Our ever well meaning parents worry for our safety and teach us to fear the outdoors. Strangers, sunburns, and the neighbors dog are things we grow up fearing and the only way to avoid them is to stay indoors. To keep ourselves entertained we invented gaming systems, air conditioning, cable/satellite TV, super-deluxe couches with remote control and drink holders, and computers with permanent internet connectivity. People sit at machines indoors and send electronic messages to people four houses down.

I think it is time for us to experience an outdoor Renaissance. Let's take our Kindle outside and sit in shade instead of sitting in the coffee shop. Step off the treadmill and go walking on the trail at the local nature preserve. I think if we do we will discover that this world is really not a big scary place after all.

## Mugs Across the Centuries

**Jill Davidson**

Two coffee mugs sit across from each other on a wooden picnic table at Lincoln Log Cabin, left behind from an earlier conversation. As I examined these two ceramic vessels hardened by the fire, I imagine they represent the women who held them only a few minutes ago and the ones who held them over a hundred fifty years earlier. The common variable of the coffee mug intrigues me because of what it reveals about human nature.

The coffee mug is not only a functional dish that has stood the test of time. It is a symbol of the value of relationship building. For centuries, treaties and great documents have been forged with one in hand. Friendships have flourished cradling a mug of warm liquid. Marriages have been saved with deep, difficult conversations over a cup of coffee. Terrifying nights of uncertainty have passed with the comfort of a strong mug.

Coffee mugs are entertaining in and of themselves. How often has my morning coffee been lightened by an encouraging quote wrapped around my mug as I filled it up? That yellow mug with a gigantic smiley face holds the memory of a dear friend who sent me balloons anchored in Hershey kisses in that mug.

The earthen ceramic mug striped with tones of blue with a butterfly sealed on its side reminds me of the dear mentor who once filled it with Diet Coke every morning. She sold it to me at a garage sale for twenty-five cents. When she passed, I held it as I grieved and celebrated her life.

Perhaps those mugs were once the pioneer lifeline. “Facetime” meant something else back then. Facetime was interacting with a person in close proximity. This kind of facetime allows for a sharing of a drink and a handshake or hug. It is obvious to me that a coffee mug is one important venue for my need of companionship.

I fear their pioneer concepts of those terms may eventually be lost on many in this generation. While the media propaganda promotes this farce of connectedness with our social media, I find myself much more connected to that person sitting across the table from me. We need our coffee mugs. As we sip from our mugs, we share our hearts, minds, and souls in a sacred tradition that can never be hacked.

So, come, my friend. Your mug is ready across from mine. Join me in that old fashioned tradition of conversation.

## A Brief Reflection on my EIWP SI 2013

Heavenlee Harris

Preparing to participate in the National Writing Project Summer Institute at EIU, a flurry of emotions were present. I was definitely excited. I love taking classes and I would never stop going to school if I could afford it. But, for the first time in a long time, I was also super nervous. First of all, I do not feel like writing is my strong suit, especially creative writing. To make matters worse, I do not know anyone who has been through the program and could give me any insight. Lastly, the program boasts about experienced teachers working together. Except for subbing and students teaching, I have no actual classroom experience. I would not qualify as one of those experienced teachers.

The first day was a blur. Thankfully, I knew someone who was also participating in the program from my school- the one who told me about the project and then dropped the class after the first day. The nerves were not quelled as I was asked to do things completely out of my comfort zone, like freewriting for 20 minutes, coloring, snapping, and using glue sticks.

In order to feel a little more prepared for the class and put down some of my nerves, I did some research on current topics in the teaching of writing. I found many articles about "writing to learn" -not really having any idea what that might mean. Although I was previously unfamiliar with the term, during the free writing activity called "sacred writing", I indeed, "wrote to learn."

As I sat there staring at my paper, having no clue what to write without a prompt, I began to write about my feelings of nervousness. I realized that my nerves and feeling of discomfort was precisely how many of my students feel sitting in most of their core classes. I had never been able to relate to students in this way because I have always enjoyed school and been fairly good at it. I realized that my feelings of inadequacy were similar to many students. And just like I had no clue what to do when I was given a glue stick, magazines, and markers, and told to decorate a folder, many of my students had no clue what to do when I gave them a reading selection and questions to answer. Stepping outside of my comfort zone and participating in the EIWP SI 2013 has allowed me to make a connection to my students I may have never made otherwise. And just like Dr. Murray and the coaches were able to model expectations and ease my nerves, I hope I will be able to do the same for my students. Out of the many, many things I have learned this summer, this realization may be the most important.

Darcey Helmick

EIWP 2013

Creative Piece

### True Love

I love my husband. I really do, but sometimes he does things that really, really annoy me. I am not talking about the little annoying things that we all do like licking the butter knife or walking around the house in underwear while the curtains are open (I apologize now to any and all neighbors – I truly have tried to discourage this). Everyone has those little annoying habits that can be overlooked, but sometimes there are annoying habits that take a great deal more effort to overlook.

I am talking about those I-didn't-think-it-all-the-way-through or it-seemed-like-a-good-idea-at-the-time type decisions that my husband can sometimes make. The most recent example of this really annoying action would be last night, or to be factual, I mean this morning because it happened at 3 AM! Yes, that is my darling husband fiddling with a brand-new contraption for the very first time at a less than opportune time...for me as I was sound asleep like most normal people at 3 in the morning. I probably could have ignored the deafening noise and rolled over to go back to sleep if it was not for the terrified "death yowl" of one of our cats, Maddix (who is not named after a Cubs former pitcher).

You see, Maddix is easily frightened by strange noises, unknown people invading his territory, or just about anything out of the norm. So the high-pitched fearful yowl from my extremely skittish cat brought me right out of bed. I should also mention that Maddix has been throwing up for the last few days, so my concern was for his fear as well as for the sake of our carpet, hardwood floors, tile, and the kitchen table (which he managed to vomit on that then dripped over the edge onto the floor). Thankfully for the floors he is not getting sick – just petrified by the insanely loud noise.

After jamming my glasses on my face and stumbling down the stairs, I find the whole house fan on high speed and all the living room windows wide open. No wonder Maddix is frightened; I am a little freaked out, too. While I listen to my husband explain why he thought it was a good idea to test out the new whole house fan at 3 AM, I realize that he is standing in his underwear...with the living room windows and curtains wide open! Oh how I love my husband.

Duane Huffman  
Summer 2013  
Creative Piece

Charleston Square

Art deco room,  
Piano bar,  
A bit of gloom,  
See it from afar.

Those sidewalks of hope,  
Or did they lead to despair?  
Of broken dreams beyond the scope,  
Oh, if I could get some fresh air.

The stench of smoke,  
On every block,  
Makes me choke,  
I can't even talk.

Old bookstores, so sour and forlorn,  
The internet beacons me,  
Away from books so worn,  
To a freshness, don't you see?

The owners, a ragtag crew,  
Hunched around a crowded space,  
I'll take a coffee brew,  
The fragrance rich, oh to embrace.

Empty shops and little foot traffic,  
Just watch those blind one-way streets.  
I didn't view anything graphic,  
Just a bonneted lady that no one greets.

I'll take my beloved teacher's salary,  
Versus a chance of business gone awry.  
Yes, it beats a 70's art gallery,  
I just can't tell kids good-bye.

Duane Huffman  
Summer 2013  
Creative Piece

## Lincoln Log Cabin

The walking by farms, fields, and gardens - they remind me of my Hoosier childhood. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, just after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, we moved from the city of Muncie to an old farmhouse with twenty-two acres. I remember the frequent chores, cattle, pigs, chickens, the manure that goes with all of the aforementioned, and gardening. So close to nature! When my parents decided the first crop would be oats, I didn't know how we could possibly eat that much oatmeal! A hand pump water well on the back porch, an outhouse, and a galvanized tub for bathing are vivid, but difficult memories.

How could they?  
I can never forget.  
Will I ever forgive?

## SONG: Take Me Home, Country Roads

Almost heaven, Indiana,  
Rolling hillsides, Ohio valley.  
Land of my childhood,  
Walking pathways,  
Hay fields calling,  
A Hoosier here I come.

CHORUS: Country roads,  
Take me home,  
To a place where I belong.  
Indiana, now Illinois,  
Take me home,  
Country roads.



April Karpus  
EIWP 2013  
Creative Piece

*The Secret Keeper* by Kate Morton

Laurel Nicolson, a famous actress in London, has never gotten over what happened in her backyard when she was 16. She can't get the image of what her mother did out of her head. Who was that man and how did he know her mother's name?

50 years later, her mother is dying and Laurel decides it is time to discover the truth. But digging deeper only brings up more questions. Who was Dorothy Smitham before she was Laurel's mom? She knows her life during the war was difficult, but will what she find out change her opinion of her mother?

Kate Morton really catches the reader's attention and will keep you guessing until the very end. What do you know about your parents' lives before you? Do you really want to know?

Brooke Moeller

SI 2013

### I Believe in Miracles

Miracles were something that only happened long ago in Bible times, or so I thought. I started to believe in miracles about five years ago when my husband, Jeremy, and I got pregnant with what we thought was our third child. From the onset of the pregnancy I could feel that something was amiss, because I had two children previously and was never as sick. Therefore, the doctor suggested that I have a sonogram. On December 1, 2007 we found out that we were going to have triplets. Wow, what a surprise!

Subsequently, we had to transfer to a high risk doctor in St. Louis. At our first appointment with the new doctor we learned some rather distressing news. The doctor suggested that the identical twin girls may have something known as Twin to Twin Transfusion Syndrome (TTTS). TTTS occurs when twins are monochorionic, which means they share the same placenta. The problem with this Syndrome is the recipient twin gets too much blood and the donor twin does not get enough blood. The doctor suggested a “wait and see” approach with not very much hope for a good outcome. He stated, “the fetuses may end up just aborting themselves.” At this point I was scared and more than just a little hysterical. To me they were more than “fetuses,” they were my babies and they already had names. Their names were Isabelle, Lucas, and Madison, and this wait and see approach was unacceptable. I frantically began praying and completing every web search I could to gather more information. On the rare chance that I would get a response I e-mailed Dr. DeLia, the founder of the TTTS foundation, and leader in this field. Surprisingly, he called us at the phone number I left almost immediately. He suggested that I immediately be on bed rest, laying on my left side, and begin drinking four

Ensure a day. Dr. DeLia also found a new doctor, that he had trained, who would see us on a weekly basis to monitor the babies closer for signs of distress.

This led us to Dr. Abrams and Dr. Benirez. At first things seemed to be going okay, but then on February 14, 2008 at our weekly sonogram visit, things made a turn for the worse. I was immediately admitted to the hospital and we were told, yet again, that we were going to lose the babies by Dr. Benirez. Distraught and devastated we both cried and prayed. Dr. DeLia, even though he was miles away, had stayed in constant contact with me and I informed him of the latest news. Immediately, Dr. DeLia contacted Dr. Abrams and began video conferencing with him on how to perform an emergency amnio reduction, in hopes of saving the babies.

After the reduction, things did stabilize some, but the outlook was still not good. This led to several visits from the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) neonatologist. They gave us the very grim statistics of babies born at this stage (24 weeks gestation). They discussed mental impairment, blindness, orthopedic impairment, and numerous other adverse affect that the babies could end up with. However, my husband and I prayed and continued to believe that it was all going to be all right. God has chosen us for these blessings and he would help us get through it no matter what came our way.

On April 2, 2008 Isabelle, Lucas, and Madison were born ten weeks premature. I was relieved that they were all here, but I also realized the tremendous uphill battle we still had to overcome. The babies had a two month stay in the NICU with numerous problems like jaundice, PVL, breathing difficulties, and PDA. Through it all though, I kept believing in the miracles that God had provided over and over again. These miracles went against the odds, statistics and research. After the babies were born one of the doctors stopped us and said “Those babies didn’t follow the rule book,” and this will be one of the few times I will be ecstatic that my kids didn’t

follow the rules. We now have three beautiful, intelligent, and loving five year olds. Yes, they do have some minor challenges such as; cerebral palsy for Lucas, and Isabelle has a weak immune system, but they are here and they are ours. Miracles do happen, never stop believing!

Amanda Ogden

“An Antique Poem”

Wooden spools, paper trails

Scraps of fabric, trains on rails

Baskets of billiard balls, typewriter keys

Stacks of well-worn school books

Put teachers' minds at ease

Chinese checkers, pick up sticks

Metal banks and magic tricks

Tables scattered with chairs in seafoam green

Gather 'round the table

Children eating ice cream

Depression glass, blue ball jars

Festive ads dotted with stars

Apothecary in most ev'ry isle

Cola in a glass bottle

Come sit and sip awhile

Tea cups beside strands of pearls

Ferris-Wheels and Tilt-a-Whirls

Crusty tin cans and crates from early years

Rows of dainty porce'lin dolls

Watch parts beside tiny gears

Crusty old tins, rusty tools

Rolls of frayed twine, thread on spools

Words of past preserved from an attic crypt

An exchange between sweethearts

Journals penned in loopy script

Back at the beginning

A trip through time is through

A reflection of treasures

Rediscovered as new

Mary H. St.Clair

## The Fog

We all knew that someone would have to take out the last rowboat to search for the captain. He ventured out in the other rowboat at noon and should have been back easily by three bells, and we all agreed that if he wasn't back by four, we were going to set out the other boat. By daylight we could see the shore and knew that it should take a mere two hours to the shore and back again. The captain was to aim for the lighthouse only because it was the tallest landmark and sure to be visible even from the water. It was also sure to be occupied when he got there to inquire on docking the *Elizabeth* and finding lodging for the night. We knew he would not need the services of the lighthouse beacon.

Now it is dusk and our Captain has still not returned, nor given signal with his flare. It was decided that I should be the one to carry out the search. Beanie is far too weak to row that far quickly and Jack is acting captain, being the only one of us with knowledge of the whole ship. Besides I have the strength to easily row the distance and keep a pace to find Captain quickly.

When Captain left out an eerie fog was already creeping around the shoreline. Though it was daylight the strangest white fluff curled around the coast in dancing wisps, motioning for us to come explore. I have never in all my travels seen such a strange fog.

As we drop the boat off the side to the water, I can't help but feel a sense of my own mortality, that sixth sense that tells a man to back

away slowly to the safety of one's own cabin without taking his eyes off the enemy.

I board the vessel and voyage out toward the now shining beacon. The same path that I know the Captain took almost seven hours ago. I have to row fast. If I can only reach him, find him in his distress, and get us both back to the safety of the mighty *Elizabeth*. I gain speed, moving faster, faster, across the waves.

I can just barely see our great ship now on the horizon, and equal distance in the opposite direction the great beacon of light over the top of the fog. I must keep going, faster, row faster, row, row, row. I'm not sure how to describe it but I am certain right down to my bones that our Captain is in great danger somewhere, no sign of him, no signal flare, and no message from shore. If only I am not too late. I must row faster.

I move closer and closer to the fog. It's curling white tendrils like fingers motioning me to come closer. They wave and dance on the shimmering water. The fog is thicker now, almost solid white fluff, rolling over the waves. The dancing wispy arms beckon me closer into their grasp, only to close in and smother me like a large sea monster, yet the rhythmic sway is so peaceful that if I weren't so fearful I would enjoy its beauty. Still I must keep this brisk pace. I must find him, he's out here somewhere and he needs us, I can feel it.

I have reached the fog. I seem to be a mile or so from the ship and at least a mile, maybe two from the shore. The long tentacles swirl around me, around my boat. The blanket is so thick I can't see through it except for the bright light slicing through. As I move fully into the fog I notice it is not damp, not cold at all, but warm like a cozy comforter



against my bare arms, against my face. From somewhere I smell a faint scent of lavender and lilacs, reminding me ever so much of my youth spent in Grandmother's garden taking in the smell of her beautiful flowers. I always felt so safe there, relaxed, happy, spending hours lying in Grandpa's hammock, the summer sun on my face, the fragrant aroma rocking me to sleep.

I can't think about that now. It slows me down. I must keep rowing. I must reach the Captain. The whole crew is counting on me. Row. Row. Row.

I can't help but wonder where this wonderful aroma is coming from. I am at least a mile from shore. Why would this fog be so warm, not a damp mist, but a lovely, thick, white blanket, wrapping me in its warmth? Why do I smell this ever growing fragrance of Lavender?

I must focus. I catch myself ever distracted by this relaxing scent and warm sensation. It seems to be clouding my senses. As I breathe in strong deep breaths, the beautiful scented air fills my lungs, my nostrils, my mind, lulling me along as I row to the rhythm of the sloshing waves, the rhythm of the revolving beacon of light, row, row, row.

I must row faster but this euphoric sensation keeps clouding my conscious, making me almost forget my task. I have never felt such a strange sensation, almost losing myself in this carefree feeling, wanting to rest, to sleep, to dream of my peaceful youth. I must pick up the pace, Row, Row, I know I must get there, I take in a deep breath to focus my strength, I must find....

What a peaceful feeling coming over me, out here alone on the water with no worries at all, just my own thoughts, just floating along on the calm sea, toward that lovely yellow light, circling round, and round, and round. I breathe in deeper the wonderful fresh air around me and as I give in to the urges to lie back in this nice boat I've found, I notice again the warm sensation of this blanket covering me. I wrap my arms around myself and notice the oars slip from their moorings, escaping into the water. I hear the beat of the soft splashes of the water against the sides of my little boat, splash, splash, turn, turn of the distant light. I lay back and as I drift off to sleep, my boat hits something else floating in the water. I glance over to see that it is another boat identical to mine. I notice in the boat lies a man, sleeping, ever so soundly, dreaming a wonderful dream as I see him smiling peacefully. Just before I drift off I watch the beautiful white fluffy arms envelope this sleeping man and pull him ever closer, into the lapping waves.

I take one more deep breath and the beautiful fragrance overtakes me and brings me to the most restful dream I have ever experienced.

Journal Entry – Thursday, June 20, 2013

### Special Memories

She was as round as she was tall and when she laughed her whole body would rattle causing everyone around her to laugh too. Yes, that was my Grandmother Bloemer, or rather “grandma” as we so affectionately called her.

Grandma was my mom’s mother. My mom was the youngest of grandma’s ten children and I was just one of her seventy-nine grandchildren. We lived only a mile and a half from grandma and so we visited her quite often. I’d like to say our visits were due to how much we loved grandma, which was true;ut, in reality it was the fact that my favorite cousins (all fifteen of them) and their parents lived with grandma.

Christmas was a special time at grandma’s house. All of her children and grandchildren (well, at least those who could make it) would gather together on Christmas night. As a little girl I couldn’t wait until grandma would hand me my Christmas present. I knew what it was going to be: 2 suckers and a pack of Wrigley’s gum. But, would it be spearmint, doublemint, or juicy fruit? And of course, I couldn’t wait until I was old enough to receive the “big kid’s present”: a Hershey’s candy bar with a pack of gum!

Grandma’s birthday was July 7<sup>th</sup>. This was always a special day too. We would all gather at her house where the younger children played with their cousins, the aunts talked and gossiped, while the uncles turned the cranks of ice cream freezers. It was quite a picture to see ten ice cream freezers going all at once. We probably served more ice cream than Dairy Queen!

As young children, my sisters and I would often visit grandma and my cousins. But every summer we would get to spend one night (an all nighter) at their house. One particular slumber party that I will never forget still brings a smile to my face. It was close to midnight and we were playing Spin the Bottle. My cousin, Marilyn, was taking her turn in spinning the bottle. She proclaimed, “Whoever the bottle lands on has to go out into the barnyard and crow like a rooster three times. As grandma turned her head, Marilyn stopped the bottle on grandma. At first grandma protested that it was too late and that she couldn’t maneuver her wheelchair out in the barnyard. But this didn’t stop the Bloemer girls. No siree, they just wheeled her out into the barnyard anyway.

Once we had all gathered under the big light pole, grandma began her crowing. “Cock-a-doodle - do”. But before she could get the second crow out, she burst into laughter, causing the rest of us to laugh too. She crowed two more times but that wasn’t good enough for the Bloemer girls. They quickly informed grandma that she had to crow three times without laughing in between crows. Needless to say, we were out in the barnyard for a very long time because as soon as one person starting laughing, grandma would start laughing, and then she had to start all over again. I often wondered if anyone

passed by that night and if so what was going through their heads when they saw a mob of girls standing around grandma in her wheelchair.

This week marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her death. Grandma died in the early morning hours of June 17, 1973, at the age of eighty-six. I can remember that day as if it were only yesterday. It was a Sunday and my parents were having a special mass and celebration for their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Grandma had been in the hospital since Tuesday and we all assumed that she would get better. When the call came at 6:30 in the morning we were completely devastated. My mother said that we would celebrate just as planned, that grandma had always enjoyed parties, and that she would be with us in spirit. And so, we celebrated with a mass and reception. The only difference was that my mass petition had to be changed. Instead of "For our Grandmother Bloemer who is in the hospital, may she recover and come home to us" I had to say "For our Grandmother Bloemer who passed away this morning, may she rest in peace". I was thirteen years old. I made it through the petition but as soon as I stepped away from the podium, I burst into tears.

We celebrated that day just as grandma would have wanted us. We had invited over 300 guests to the anniversary party, most of whom were descendants of grandma. We laughed and cried and cried and laughed. Yes, mom was right. Grandma was indeed with us!