

LEARNING TO LOVE THE PROCESS

An Anthology of
Non-Fiction Essays
From the Students
of SWU's ENGL 270:
Non-Fiction Prose
and Its Process

Edited by Amanda Platz and
Dr. Jonathan Sircy

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“This course helped me to love writing again...The raw honesty in a good essay is enough to change how someone thinks or sees life.”

– Julia Joyce

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INTRODUCTION

Wherein the teacher becomes the student..

1

AN UNDENIABLY FUN CLASS I'D TEACH AGAIN

Dr. Jonathan Sircy

The fall 2018 semester was my first at Southern Wesleyan University, and I was assigned one upper-division course—ENGL 270: Non-Fiction and Its Process. There was, as they say, just one problem: I had no idea how to teach it.

The course had no institutional precedent. Though ENGL 270 had been in the SWU catalog for a few years, no one had actually taught it before. I certainly had no personal precedent for the course. My area of expertise was the English Renaissance, and I doubted that assigning Richard Hooker, Roger Ascham, and Sir Francis Bacon would kindle my students' desire to write.

So I leaned on what I knew. We read one book: David Foster Wallace's essay collection *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. The book had (at least) three merits. I loved the essays, and I knew that even if they fell flat with students, I would be passionate about teaching them. The essays were diverse; a memoir about growing up playing tennis in the Midwest was next to a profile of film director David Lynch which was next to a travelogue of going on a week-long luxury cruise (the "supposedly fun thing" of the book's title). As a result, Wallace's essays helped me decide what kind of essays the students would write: a memoir, a profile, cultural criticism, and one that combined at least two of those three. Finally, Wallace's prose was so good, so smart and so funny (often simultaneously),

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that there was no illusion that we could do what he was doing. He both showed why writing non-fiction was a worthwhile pursuit and forced us to focus on the craft of writing. We weren't going to *produce* essays as good as his, but we could learn to love the *process* of trying.

From the very beginning, the students were committed to the writing process, even if they didn't love it. Unsurprisingly, most of the essays in this collection are the product of revision—and I don't mean simply revisions between first and second drafts. I mean revisions between final drafts and better additional drafts. Almost no one got it right the first or second or even the third time. Reflecting on what she had learned in the course, Julia Joyce wrote, "Going through the process took fortitude, but the satisfaction with a better end product made it at least tolerable." For many students, learning to love the process meant learning to trust that the hard work required by that process would be worth it. This collection testifies that it was.

A quick story about Julia, who has three essays in this collection: the semester she took ENGL 270 was her last at SWU. With Julia's 'A' assured, I submitted her final grade to the registrar early so everything would be in order for her graduation. And yet, less than a week before commencement, Julia sent me an email that read: "I had no intention of returning to these essays, but it felt like I was leaving something undone." Attached to the email were two essays which she, of course, had significantly improved.

I'm deeply convinced of the connection between education and discipleship, not just at the level of content but in the very approach we take to teaching students and following Jesus. Working at a Christian university makes this connection more overt. *What* I teach and *how* I teach are deeply intertwined. I approached this course as a far-from-finished product. The course required that I be vulnerable and that I show a willingness to revise and improve as a teacher even as I taught my students to revise and improve their writing. Consequently, my affection for the

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course and this set of students deepened when I began bringing in my own writing for review. I realized that I needed to write the essays I was asking my students to write and that in giving them drafts and revisions, I was submitting myself to the same process I was teaching them to adopt.

The essays you are about to read are exemplary. Even before the course ended, I was thinking about editing a collection of the students' best work. In April 2019, four of these students read their essays for a student-led Humanities Division chapel, and I was struck again by just how good the essays were and remained convinced that it would be worthwhile to collect the best essays those students produced. I made a table of contents consisting of at least one essay from each of the course's twelve students, and last summer, Amanda Platz (whose essay in the Hybrids section is one of the collection's best) edited most of the essays here. Many of these students, including Amanda, graduated in 2019. Now, as the remainder of these students graduate in spring 2020, I wanted to finish the anthology as a tribute to them.

As it turns out, I'm scheduled to teach ENGL 270 again this fall.

I can't wait.

- May 2020



Section I

MEMOIRS

Wherein writers reveal spiritually significant moments...

2

THE WRONG TYPE

Dynestee Fields

“*Woah*, look at this, guys! I am *so* using this. I have to use this!” howls Amanda as she grips a Pete the Cat book in her pale fingers. I glance around like a startled deer. My friends and I aren’t the only people in the children’s library today. In the corner, a dark-haired mother alternates between shooting wary glances in our direction and keeping an eye on her toddler. I expect them to bolt from the tiny space at any moment. They don’t. I inwardly congratulate them on their resilience.

I turn back around, expecting Amanda, Aaron, and Marshall to be chatting about Pete, but no... the conversation has changed in the last 30 seconds. I’m hopelessly lost until Marshall blurts out, “The last time I took the test, I came out as an INFP.” Instinct immediately kicks in, and my face goes slack. Expressionless. “Same!” calls Amanda from across the two-foot-long aisle. “That’s what I always get too.”

As I try to tune out the conversation, I hear Aaron sounding in a comment from behind me. “I think that I’m an ENFP, or maybe an I...” Within moments, their voices combine into a hive of conversation around me, their energy pulsing like bustling bees. Two years ago, one of those voices would have been mine. But now, I sit here silently.

Against my will, I find my thoughts drifting to the year that it all began...

THE WRONG TYPE

2013 proved to be a year of great exploration. Organ regeneration is unveiled, evidence of cannibalism in Jamestown is excavated, and I discover personality typology. My discovery isn't immediate; I spend eleven months warming myself by the fire of onomastics before the words *choleric-melancholic*, *enneagram*, or *Big 5* integrate themselves into my vocabulary.

I can't recall how exactly I stumbled into onomastics. The only thing evident to me is a raging curiosity about definitions and a searing excitement linked to finally being able to define myself. The more that I study names, the more that the world around me becomes clearer. The seemingly disorganized dispositions of the people around me begin to make sense as I start linking name meanings to recipients. It becomes obvious that names, either first, middle, or a combination of both, act as roadmaps for the paths that people will follow in life.

Of all the names that I research, my own finds itself at the top of the pile. "Dy nestee," or "dunasteia" in an earlier Greek form, translates to "powerful ruler" or "lordship, power." What this discovery does to my already insatiable curiosity is the equivalent of what following that famous white rabbit down its hole did to Alice's. This heightened fervor to know more about what my name means in terms of my own nature leads me to the homepage of *Kalabarians*—a popular website that offers in-depth descriptions of personality based on names.

The phrase, "Based on your name, this is what your personality is" becomes my constant mantra. Soon, I am entranced by personality typology and become a frequent visitor of sites that school me in the science of type. Myers Briggs gives me my most popular system and then honors me with the mantle of INTJ (introvert-intuitive-thinking-judging), the four humors teach me their chemistry, and the Big 5 calculate my levels of openness and conscientiousness. At this time, a great sense of satisfaction encompasses me. Not only do I now know who I am, but now I

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can use this great tool to find those like me. I relax into a newfound sense of order.

But I soon discover that this special order only exists within myself. My mother, as it turns out, is not appreciative of having her entire nature explained away. As a result, even the sweetest notes of conversation sour without a moment's notice.

On one particular evening, my mother and I sit in front of the television set in the living room. The jingle of Christmas commercials and the sentiment-infused conversation of the Hallmark Channel as it revels in its most commercialized season act as the score to our conversation.

As for what we are talking about, there is neither anything brilliant or noteworthy about the subject matter that will allow it to be recollected after the week has passed. Whether the conversation is about the sweetness of the amber colored tea in our glasses, the predictability of Hallmark Channel storylines, or whose job it is to scour the grime off of tonight's dishes isn't relevant. The only thing that either of us will remember is that the conversation started off amiable, and then rapidly descended into belligerence.

"I am *done* with you. Leave me alone!" shouts my mother, her face scrunched in rage.

"Of course, you are! You're an ISTJ. That's just the way that you think," I growl back.

"I wish that you had never discovered personality types! Everything that anyone says or does these days is dictated by their *personality type*!" she accuses, and then strides towards the kitchen.

Like the shadows cast by the glare of the television in the dark living room, thoughts ricochet around my brain. Whenever one of these unfortunate squabbles breaks out, my mother nearly always blames personality typing for our inability to come to a peaceful resolution. *I* know

THE WRONG TYPE

that the problem is that our brains are hardwiring us to behave in certain ways. Why can't *she* understand that all of this is due to our conflicting types? I sigh and relax back onto my seat, the Hallmark-esque peace now fully dissipated.

Weeks pass and I try to employ my special science to find myself friends. All efforts turn up fruitless. My Personal Wholeness class requires us to do the Myers Briggs test and bring the results to class. I show up on that glorious day, ecstatic that I'll finally be able to discuss personality, and life in general, with people of my own type. In the end, only two other INTJs are in the class. They quickly gravitate towards each other and don't react when I make myself known as one of their own. I do not interpret these disappointing results as a failure in terms of the accuracy of personality typology, as a thorough analysis of the situation might have suggested, but rather as an unfortunate experience dictated by time and space (not sitting on the right side of the room or having arrived early enough to class).

It is during the summer of freshman year, nearly a year later, when I finally come to the realization that I'm practicing an unreliable science. The exact moment of this realization occurs at home as I reflect on typology information. In one moment, I'm headed *somewhere* to do *something*, but in the next, I stand transfixed. A feeling of guilt, which was never there before, settles in my stomach. It feels like a harbinger for an unwanted epiphany. The harbinger, of course, accomplishes its purpose. The very presence of the guilt forces me to ask the question: Is what I'm doing *wrong*?

Without even giving the question much thought, a host of memories provide it with an answer. In one of these memories I sit in the Personal Wholeness classroom listening to classmates share the results of their Myers Briggs tests. One girl with latte colored skin and corkscrew hair speaks about her extroversion. In another memory, I remember a girl with an affable nature discussing popular novels with me in a crowded classroom. The flashbacks continue, with each showcasing someone I

FIELDS

deliberately decided was not worth pursuing to become my friend. They simply were not INTJs, and therefore, were unable to “get me.”

I acknowledge my error with uneasiness. *Yes*, there is a problem. But, do I actually care to fix it? The guilt urges me to answer yes. However, my mind, savoring the pleasure of learning more about myself and uncovering the mysteries of human nature, convinces me to delay the decision.

The conflict concludes over the weekend as I drive down the road with a Christian radio station broadcasting through my speakers. Trying to ignore the persistent guilt connected to my personality-typing ways, I listen intently as the music yields to a message. While the five-minute message itself has nothing to do with an erroneous use of typology (it’s really about Paul’s desert-based isolation after his conversion to Christianity), the words of its *title* push me towards a response to my dilemma. Ironically, the message is called “Others Can but You Cannot.”

I drive along in the car, contemplating what I’ve heard long after the program has given way to music. The phrase “Others Can but You Cannot” thunders inside of my brain. Finally...I concede. Because my use of personality typing is detrimental, I have to give it up. *Other people* can use it, but not *me*.

When I get home, with tears in my eyes, I tell my mother about my revelation. I also hand her my signed copy of Veronica Roth’s *Divergent*, a novel whose plot centers heavily on the concept of personality typology. The moment that the books leaves my hands, I vow to turn my back on my destructive science. The guilt dissolves.

In the present, surrounded by friends that I would have dismissed two years earlier and knowing that it’s for the best that I stay out of the conversation, I resist the urge to smile.

3

STORIES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

Julia Joyce

Cambodia is overflowing with stories. I have memories and tales of the time I spent in Asia floating in my mind, and every once in a while, something will call a random one to the surface.

An old lady in a droopy sun hat watering her garden will give me a flashback to a moment that happened halfway around the world when I saw a man standing in his driveway pouring water into the bowl perched at the entrance of his spirit house. What was his story? What brought him to the point where he needed to offer food and water to spirits? Was he simply following the Buddhist and animistic ways that are so thoroughly integrated into his culture? The largest Buddhist temple in the capital city, Phnom Penh, is named Wat Phnom. Inside the ornate temple countless people can be seen worshipping delicate, life-size statues. These statues have money in their shirt fronts as an offering and food set out on a table for them.

The stories of those people are drastically different from the story of the schoolgirl who grew up in the same Buddhist culture, fatherless, but who gave her life to God five years ago and now takes English classes at a Christian church so she can have a better future. We found similar stories when we gathered with a family that met as a house church and learned they had recently lost the matriarch of the family. They were suffering through that heartbreak together. In this pivotal point in their story, they

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turned to God for comfort and guidance. These stories that Cambodia is saturated with can be of the everyday variety or heartbreaking, devastating or encouraging. Each individual, location, community, and the country as a whole has a story.

As I walk through the market, I see booth after booth, seller after seller, each one modeling a product, shouting a price, or offering me something. There is no natural light. There is a tin roof held up by beams; this forms the market. Each section (automotive, clothing, produce, meat, etc.) has a distinct aroma. There is also a general stench of body odor mingled with dirt. It is sensory claustrophobia. There are hundreds of workers and stories in this chaotic place, and these are their lives, their everyday story. We are introduced to one woman whose story struck me. She lost her house to fire. In the midst of the rubble of life she found God. She is one of the few in this market who is honest with foreigners, and she generously gives us each a bracelet as a token of gratitude. By the time we are finally ready to leave, I will myself to walk at a steady pace even though my limbs are screaming at me to run towards the sunlight and open air I can barely see up ahead. When I can breathe again, I look down at my wrist, at the simple black and gray string bracelet, and I am filled with hope.

There are stories from more than a thousand years ago represented by the expansive, intricate temples we marvel at. They built a plethora of temples in Siem Reap—the most famous ones being Angkor Wat and the one from the scene in *Tomb Raider* (officially named Ta Prohm). There is also a temple named Ta Keo that reaches 147 feet towards the heavens. Looking up against the sun, the other tourists are miniature at the top of this massive structure built from sandstone bricks. There are the steepest stairs leading up to the central tower. The sun beats on our backs and sweat pours from our bodies as we make the treacherous climb to the top. The stone is cool in the shade as I stand in the windowsill that is leagues above the treetops. I attempt to unravel the story in my mind of the people

JOYCE

that built this astonishing architecture and worshipped here. People come from all over to marvel at this feat of humanity, but in the stillness of this moment I realize those ancient people built their structures to reach the gods, but most of their work now languishes in ruin. We pray while we are at the top of the temple. We pray that these temples that were dedicated to other gods can now be a place where the God of Christianity can change stories.

Out in the rural provinces, worship is much simpler. We sit on bamboo flooring with cows mooing underneath the elevated house. They are visible through the slim slats of the floor, and so are the trail of ants marching the short distance of the single room. The children sit on one side and the twenty or so adults stare back at me from the rest of the room. We foreigners sit on a thin mat, a courtesy, and shift our weight every five minutes when our feet fall asleep. I have the honor of preaching. A cow relieves itself at one point. When I have moments to think—after every thought I share I have to wait for it to be translated before I can speak again—I wonder at the stories these people walked here with. Their lives look very different than mine, but God brought them together in this community to worship as one. This community might be poor in an earthly sense, but they worship the living God together, just as our church does each Sunday 9,000 miles away. What makes this time together so memorable is singing songs I do not know with people I have never met. Voices meld together in a language I can't understand, but God is present. God meets us on the unforgiving floor in the living room of a villager's house.

There is a story to explain the conditions, poverty, and brokenness of Cambodia. The darkness stems from what is called the Khmer Rouge. In short, it was a genocide, not one that happened hundreds of years ago, but one whose few survivors are still living to tell the tale. The tale is told to me by a voice that speaks slowly and is distinctly Cambodian. The voice plays,

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from the old-style headphones I was given, as I walk through what used to be a high school in the middle of the capital city. The place where students once learned was mutilated into a disturbing place where those supporting the Khmer Rouge learned the information they needed from civilians, except it wasn't freely taught. It was tortured out of the captives. Those stained, tiled floors saw things I struggle to hear said out loud. There are rusted bed frames that were used to restrain victims and a wooden post used to hang and strangle, but not kill, those that "acted out." There is wire fencing covering the balconies so no one else could jump off. Room after room tells gory detail after detail of how innocent people were stripped of dignity and humanity because of something as small as their occupation, education level, or because they were somehow seen as a threat. Just standing on the same ground and in the same buildings as the tortured and torturers is almost too much.

Then, I remember what I had been told before we stepped past the gates of this prison. "Look for the flowers." Sure enough, when I look up there is a tree with delicate white flowers sprouting from it. A few minutes later, there is a brilliantly colored peacock strutting through the horrific scene. The same day I don those headphones, as I see where thousands were executed and buried in mass graves, I see actual human bones, a memorial tower filled with skulls, and a gnarled tree that had been used to kill babies and children. Later, as I tried to process what I had seen, I would write in my journal, "I saw and heard things that I never wanted to, but now I don't think I'll be able to forget. I'm thankful I don't usually dream because they would be nightmares. I still see it when I close my eyes, and I don't know how long it will take to go away." I still remember these snapshots, and they are the stories that affected the whole of Cambodia and its way of life. Each time I see the ugliness of humanity, or remember those horrific stories, I close my eyes and think about those flowers—the ones that were so simple, but impossibly beautiful.

They were the light growing in the darkness.

4

GLASSES AND GRACE

Jahanna Schwab

The blindingly blue autumnal sky was not enough to keep my eyelids from drooping as my rickety Honda Civic sputtered through the suffocating humidity of Carolina heat. I probably looked like a total goon wearing a long-sleeved t-shirt, even though it was the end of September. I was only wearing it because it advertised the retreat I was returning from, and it was much colder in the mountains, I swear.

Wearing contacts while running on an unbearable lack of sleep and driving in heat—heat so satanic that the cooling system becomes possessed and refuses to produce AC colder than lukewarm bathwater—is, overall, a terrible idea. So, while braked at a stoplight, groggily squinting at the passing cars, I peeled contacts from my withering eyeballs and tossed them out the window. This relieved the burning itch in my eyes for the most part, but it also caused mild blindness.

Glasses were an easy fix here. Simple.

It took me about seven seconds to realize that my glasses were missing. Immediately, my heart rate accelerated, my vision blurred, and my body doubled the amount of slimy sweat that it was already producing. I left my glasses at the campground. Hours away. My eyes can't deal with contacts for more than a few hours at a time, and I didn't have the bank to buy new glasses. My mind screamed a slew of self-deprecating insults

GLASSES AND GRACE

about incompetence and stupidity and the like. Still driving, I groped for my phone and croaked, “Hey Siri, call Mary Elizabeth.” (Mary Elizabeth: the definition of hipster. Also, a delight. Also, the intern from the weekend).

Answering almost immediately, she chirped, “Hello?”

“Hey, M.E. Sorry. So, I think I left my glasses at Greystone, and I kind of need those. What do I do? Who can I call?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry! Okay. Maybe call Stephen and the camp staff? See if they can look for them and ship them to you?”

Heavy sigh. “Alright, I can do that. Thanks. Again, sorry to bother you. Can you send me some numbers?”

“Stop apologizing. It’s all okay! Yeah, I’ll hook you up...”

A few hours later, I was perched on my bed while several staff members searched far and wide for my glasses without me. I moped, bathing in self-pity.

“It seems like this is about more than your glasses.”

I paused, frustrated, hesitant to enter into an introspective debate with myself.

“Well, I just want to be better. At everything,” I retorted. “I want people to think I’m capable. Well, capable doesn’t really cover it. It’s more like competent... and... well... perfect. I want people to think I’m perfect. I want to be perfect. And... I know I’m not.”

Tears have been my dearest companions in both the best and worst of times, so it was no surprise that they decided to gush in full force just then to keep me company. They did, however, stick around for an embarrassing amount of time. Tears really have no sense of social boundaries, I swear.

A few days later, after the tears subsided and my glasses had been

rescued and shipped to me by a saintly staff member, I was still processing all of the thoughts and feelings that had been running laps in my head for days. “I guess I just don’t know who I am,” I thought. “I know who I want to be, but that’s not who I really am. I want to be perfect; I get that now – but in reality, I just feel... weak. And I don’t want anyone to know.” Moments from the previous weekend’s retreat began to flood my mind—words about grace and newness of life and the fact that when the Father looks at me, He doesn’t gag at my unbelievable brokenness like I do. Those thoughts kept nudging my heart, insisting that I process productively—on paper.

I submitted. Glowing laptop, box of tissues, trembling fingers: I had everything I needed to begin writing.

Many words (and tissues) later I constructed a post that disclosed not only my fears and weaknesses, but also the real truth about my identity in Christ. A proclamation, if you will. And I shared it: with close friends, family members, and, you know, most of the internet. The compassionate support I received was overwhelming, and I realized, maybe for the first time, how much of myself I was selfishly hiding.

Apparently, we’re all broken and terrified. I guess it just took \$8.70 in shipping for the Spirit to teach me what it means to be human.

5

SOUL STORY

Shawndre' Young

The transition from high school to college was difficult. I had a hard time balancing basketball and my academics. Our schedule was grueling compared to the normal high school workouts, especially during preseason. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were for weights and conditioning. Tuesdays and Thursdays were for individual skill sessions. Long runs outside in the heat, lifting our maximum weight, and high intense drills on the court became the norm. On top of the difficult workouts, my mental toughness was being tested in the classroom. It was challenging trying to focus on schoolwork while thinking about how I was going to get through practice that afternoon. It was then that I knew what it felt like to be a college athlete. There was barely enough time for us to relax and just enjoy life. I became so accustomed to staying busy that it felt weird to settle down. I wanted to experience more than just work. I had to constantly remind myself of the reason I was still playing basketball.

Moving up to Varsity that year was one of the best things that happened to me. I was one of just a few ladies from the JV team who got to take a trip to Honolulu, Hawaii for a Christmas tournament. After all of the hard work and dedication, I was finally catching a break. President Voss surprised us with this once-in-a-lifetime trip early in the fall. To be honest, I did not expect to go. Once our coach told us the ladies who were going, I was shocked to see my name on the list. I had to start out on JV and work

SOUL STORY

my name on the list. I had to start out on JV and work my way up to Varsity. This was a perfect example of why I should never doubt God and his plans for me. My team had the chance to stay for a whole week and only had to play two games. This was honestly a mini-vacation, and we were dying for a getaway. Of course, we wanted to win games, but we could not ignore the fact we were going to be in paradise for the break. My teammates and I were overjoyed and thankful for the opportunity that was given to us.

However, there was a problem. I have never flown a day in my life. I was excited and afraid at the same time. I did not know whether to jump with joy or make up an excuse not to go because of my fear of flying. The flight to Hawaii was eight hours, but that was only after our layover in Dallas, Texas. The flight from Atlanta to Dallas was two hours, and I had to get over that hurdle first. I remember arriving to the airport, going through customs and not knowing what to think or expect. My teammates helped me get through it all. The first flight was on a fairly small plane. I had to release all the negative thoughts like what had happened on 9/11, the possibility of the plane crashing, and a million other unlikely tragedies. Luckily, I was sitting in between two teammates who had already flown a few times in their life. Their demeanor ultimately made me feel better.

I remember sitting there with my eyes closed, holding onto one of my teammate's hands. My coach looked back at me and said, "Moe, you alright?" I replied "Yes." I had a smile on my face, but I was extremely nervous on the inside. It was rough at first, but we landed in Dallas, Texas in no time. The next flight was a lot smoother. I took a sleeping pill to help me relax, and the next thing I knew I was looking out the window at a completely different place. As we were walking to the shuttle bus, girls dressed in skirts and flowers put leis around our necks. I felt a part of their tradition after watching the girls dance and give us flowers. It was an incredible experience to be greeted onto their island in such a beautiful way.

YOUNG

The majority of our week was spent swimming in the clear blue water and laying out in the sun on Waikiki Beach. The beaches were crowded, but everyone was at peace doing their own thing. I took delight in watching people surf, kids building sandcastles, and women doing yoga every morning. Despite the crowds, there was a sense of tranquility. One day we did a devotional during sunset on the beach and it was an incredible experience. That particular devotional felt special because we got to relax in God's beautiful creation while hearing His word. The event that made me feel most thankful was the luau in the end. We took a thirty-minute trip to another side of the island to a secluded place. Alongside the luau was a private beach area and a huge lighthouse. We got to watch an amazing show done by some professional Hawaiian dancers. I still have all of the beautiful pictures we took from that night.

When I arrived home, I felt pleased about my decision to fly to Honolulu. The fact that we got to do a whole lot more than play basketball is just what I needed. The feeling of being on an island and experiencing God's wonderful creation made me feel thankful for being a part of something so special. Because of this experience, I learned how to trust in God more.



Section II

PROFILES

Wherein writers detail their spiritual models...

6

SMILES AND DEVOTION

Kierra Gilbert

“May God bless and be with you on your journey.” Those were the last words that I heard from Professor Williams when leaving her classroom at the end of the semester. Anyone can say, “God bless you,” but only a few will mean it. Every time I go through something difficult, I hear those words echoing in my head. She wanted us to remember no matter what we go through, if we trust that we have God by our side, we will be okay.

Professor Williams moved to South Carolina in 1990 and is known all over Southern Wesleyan University for her kind and caring demeanor. Her appearance is soft and sweet. She has chocolate, brown skin and blackish, grey hair, and when she reads the devotion before the beginning of class, she always wears a smile. When you see her, you want to give her the biggest hug you can possibly think of. Her soft voice is like music to your ears. You can catch her sitting in the front-row during chapel or taking a walk around campus humming gospel music the way other professors drink a cup of coffee. It gives her energy.

Williams has made a name for herself through not only her teaching, but through her love and passion for helping other people. She was honored with Southern Wesleyan University’s Excellence in Teaching Award in 2017. University President Todd Voss stated, “She is one of the few people who is willing to help and serve others.” Williams is a mother, counselor, teacher, and close friend. She said that her goal is “to work with individuals where I can continue to educate and train them while also demonstrating and modeling a strong moral and ethical character.... thus,

SMILES AND DEVOTION

empowering these individuals to grow holistically (mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially), where they can hopefully become ethical, productive members of society.” She teaches her students about serious situations and at the same time is able to lighten the mood. She understands that certain topics—suicide, abuse, and pornography—are sensitive topics. Because of this, she teaches in a way you can understand, while not being too serious. Every time class ends, she always says that if you need help or know someone that needs help, she is available.

Students and faculty describe her as someone who is passionate about caring for other people. Williams has inspired colleagues and students with her dedication to create curricula and spaces where all students can strive towards their highest goals. When Williams tells her life story, she always ends by saying that God led her to teach at Southern Wesleyan. She claims that it was God’s plan for her to spread the gospel through her teaching. She shares interesting stories from when she lived in New Jersey: how she did things she was not proud of, how she carried herself as a person, and how she eventually changed when she became a Christian.

At the end of each devotion she read, she would always say, “I believe that someone needed to hear that today.” She never asked if anyone *wanted* to hear a devotion because it is not about what you want to hear, but about what you *need* to hear. She believes that the choices you make today will determine the outcome that tomorrow holds. I remember sitting in her classroom when she asked us this question: “What is it that keeps us from being servants of God? Are there morals and principles that we need to be able to follow in our lifestyle to where we can be free and be servants?” Of course, her answer was that the most freedom a person can ever have is being a servant of God.

Professor Williams said, “I feel honored that God has selected me to take all of my clinical counseling experience into a classroom setting. This allows me to teach future clinicians in the human services and psychology

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programs. Teaching also allows me an opportunity to encourage our students to become individuals with strong godly character where they display moral and ethical qualities.” I admire her, and her loveable and admirable persona is something that, like her wisdom, is unforgettable.

The last devotion she read to us in class was Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways to submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” She followed it with five simple words: “May God be with you.”

7

A SERVANT AMONG SPECTATORS

Lyssa Henry

The year is 1998. Pastor Andy Henry is sitting patiently, waiting to meet his little girl. She was early, a little too early, but he had faith that this one would be alive and well and live a full life. It's the day before his birthday, and a little person to take care of is one heck of a present.

That girl was me.

Twenty years later, I realize that this man's faith is unmatched by almost everyone I have ever met, although he is not always recognized for the way he lives out what God has called him to do. There are people everywhere living out their faith in the shadows, which is something that the Bible calls Christians to do, but we are also called to lift each other up, and I believe that Andy deserves to be lifted up.

Andy is a super-tall and muscular looking guy with dark hair, too-tan-for-someone-with-freckles skin, and deceptively young eyes who is standing in the middle of the East Davidson High School gym, the place where the church had designated to be the stage. No one there has heard him sing, so they have no idea what to expect. Then the service starts. Andy Henry opens his mouth to sing, and this church is changed. They're going to keep this guy around.

For Andy, singing comes just as naturally as looking tough. He isn't as tough as you would think from far away, but he is tough. On the outside he

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is a long-time repo man, but on the inside, and after even one conversation, he is the ultimate youth pastor/teddy bear/friend/dad/husband/dude. He thinks his jokes are funny, he knows Jesus very well, and he is really good with babies. He's basically the epitome of "husband goals," so my stepmom is pretty excited to have him (which makes sense!). He sings his favorite worship songs so often it isn't difficult to figure out that he is a very good singer and that Jesus is an important part of his life.

Every day, at least as long as I can remember, Andy has done something to help someone. He has his priorities in order. He serves God by prayer and through the decisions he makes and the advice he gives and the little things he does throughout the day like sending someone a nice message, stopping to help a neighbor catch the dog running through the neighborhood, fixing someone's car, or just smiling that "I can tell why God loves you" smile that makes you feel important. It doesn't matter who you are. If Andy smiles at you, it's next to impossible not to smile back. It's one of those crinkly-eyed contagious smiles that takes up his entire face.

Wellspring Community Church is one of those churches that people refer to as their home. Everyone there is friendly and welcoming. As soon as you walk in, there are at least ten people walking up to say hello. Everyone loves each other. If anyone in the church endures a hard time, the church community will give food, an intimidating number of hugs, meaningful Bible verses, and prayers out the wazoo. Everyone also happens to be very flexible. It doesn't matter to the members where the church meets any given week; they will all still be there. It has gone through a lot of different buildings and facilities, but Wellspring has not, at least for the 11+ years I've known it, missed a Sunday. They have met in a high school in Thomasville, a barn in Trinity, a bank downtown, different members' front yards, and finally, after a long nomadic period, a remodeled warehouse in Thomasville, on the little road right before the hill driving past Fair Grove Elementary. The building looks great, but what the church,

HENRY

and specifically Andy, is most excited about is the opportunity this building gives them to reach more people. Not only will almost twice as many people fit in this building than the last one, but more people will see the new building and come check it out because they knew what it used to be. That warehouse was big and empty and all kinds of useless, but now it is beautiful and inviting and exciting for everyone who made the change happen. One of the big helpers in making the warehouse what it is now was none other than Andy Henry.

If someone new walks into church on any given Sunday, Andy is one of the first people to say hi to them and make them feel welcomed. This is not easy. Meeting new people, for many, is the scariest part of going anywhere. Walking into a church with nobody to talk to is not usually a good feeling. You know the members probably follow Jesus, but they might not do what God says. They might not live out their faith and bring kindness to people they haven't met before. Andy is one of the courageous Christians who is not afraid to do what he has been called to do. Even aside from the initial relief a new attendee may get from talking to Andy, they will, as soon as the worship begins, see that they have just been talking to someone big in the church. He leads worship almost every week. On some Sundays, he preaches a sermon. Andy shares his faith just as much as he lives it. It is really beautiful to see.

I am twenty years old. Most twenty year olds are away at college (like I am). Most twenty year olds are excited to be away from home and away from their families. That is not always the case for me, because I don't want to miss out on watching the awesome things my dad does for his Jesus. I was born in 1998 and ever since then, every single day, Andy Henry has been the biggest reason I know how to love people. He has taught me to put myself out in the world and get to know people. He has taught me how to make people feel included and welcome. Anyone that has the opportunity to meet Andy Henry should do it. I promise he will make them feel loved. He certainly made me feel that way.

8

President, Professor, and Servant

Julia Joyce

It's a typical Thursday afternoon. The office looks like it always does with bookshelves filling all available wall space and books still scattered around. Photographs of trees and mountain scenes hang proudly on the walls. Among the remnants the tornado left on her desk are a half dozen post-it notes with to-do lists and a thick stack of theology papers waiting to be graded. Somehow, she will find time to read every word and mark each paper with her green pen. Class is in less than an hour and there are some final details still to be attended to. She is snacking on some chips she scrounged up that will have to qualify as lunch. She sips on some tea from her Peanuts mug and clacks away on her keyboard. She is answering an email regarding the Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy board meeting scheduled for tomorrow that she does not feel prepared to lead quite yet.

As a work study in the Religion Division, I walk into this scene most days. I am about to ask what my task for this shift is when a student walks up behind me and hovers in the doorway. The woman at the computer pauses and notices the student; as recognition washes over her face she glances back at her computer screen once then ushers the student in. I catch fragments of the conversation about the student's struggle with an assignment as I leave the room. Today it was an assignment. Tomorrow it may be a student needing guidance about next steps, or a colleague asking for her advice on how to handle a case of plagiarism.

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Mari Gonlag lives at a fast pace, but she makes time for others and is able to pick up on the minute needs of people around her. She lives her life oriented around serving God and serving others in both obvious and subtle ways. She sees needs and meets them.

As a theologian, minister, organizational leader, and professor, she has worked tirelessly to pave the way for others and equip them to serve the Church. She has led organizations and served behind the scenes. She has held the title Division Chair and beloved professor. She has pastored congregations, and she has worked at Headquarters for the Wesleyan Church. Reading her résumé, one would not be able to predict her appearance because she does not resemble a typical leader. She doesn't quite reach five and a half feet and has short feathery gray hair that is bordering on white. Her face is youthful but holds wisdom. When she reads she wears thin framed glasses. If given the choice, she would wear dress slacks before she wore a dress, and she would never wear heels. Her presence and personality are not overbearing, but people listen when she speaks. In meetings, those gathered look to her for guidance. In a room full of rowdy college students, all she has to do is begin talking and all the attention shifts to her. She does not lead with a robust, extroverted personality, but she has garnered the respect of those she leads through her dependability, wisdom, and commitment to excellence.

No matter where she was serving, she has always cared for the marginalized. She launched a program called the Urban Ministry Plunge so students could see ministry outside of the context they were accustomed to. She led teams of students to Milwaukee and Chicago and urged them to see God at work where others only saw brokenness and poverty. She was making a way for women in ministry by pastoring when it was very uncommon for a woman to lead in that capacity. Her service to women in ministry extended to include running the Center for Women in Ministry and working with Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy to support women

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that were serving on the front lines.

She was there when Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy (WHWC) began over twenty years ago. She has served on the board and been an intricate part of its success. Then, its president had to step down. Despite being the primary caregiver for her elderly mother whose health was rocky, being in the middle of teaching, and serving on various boards, she hesitantly took on the presidency of this organization that was in the middle of major changes related to rebranding and a new vision. She would later say, after numerous meetings, trips around the country, and a well-executed conference, that she took it on because she was fearful for the fate of the organization she valued so much. She did not know if the organization would have survived if any other board member had been prescribed the responsibility since they were all so new. In the midst of her hectic life, she willingly took charge and gave even more of herself so that women in ministry would continue to have a safe place to come to and would be encouraged.

I had been working with her for around a year as a work study when she took the position of leadership for WHWC. She asked if I would like to be her assistant as she navigated the changes that were coming. I was not sure what this role would entail for either of us, but it included trips together to Atlanta, Indianapolis, Memphis, and Denver. It also included a gathering of influential church leaders to assess the state of the organization, a board retreat, countless hours of meetings, and a topnotch conference. I was next to her through all of the stress, doubt, and success. There was a conference to be planned for an organization that just months before had been questioning its survival and purpose and initiatives to be launched because of a new perspective. That would cause enough stress and doubt if you had known that those changes would be happening from the beginning of your presidency. Imagine if all of the responsibility fell to you out of the blue.

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Through every phase she worked tirelessly and faithfully. She gave directions from the stage, but she was also cleaning up after meetings. She never sought praise for herself but gave it freely to the leadership team and volunteers. She valued the input of others and led with grace. She cared about everything down to the smallest detail like how a woman in a wheelchair would be able to get around at a site that was all hills. Every aspect mattered to her because of how it would affect the women that were coming to the conference and were a part of WHWC. She was greatly influenced by the network of strong, capable women she gained through this organization, and she was an integral part of helping other women find that as well.

Gonlag did not need to bring me, a college student who had no real business being there, along with her, but she did not just talk about the importance of empowering women. She did it. She used her position to extend a seat at the table to me, and never let me feel out of place. I was not the only student she cared about. She helped other students get to the WHWC conference, but she did even more than that for students. Nicole was another one of Gonlag's students. She said Dr. Gonlag "has always been a professor where if a student was struggling, she would go out of her way to help them." At the slightest prompting, Nicole talked about how she heard of Gonlag giving a student that was struggling financially a \$100 gift card to Walmart so the student could buy groceries. Then, she jumped to how Gonlag feeds students passions by getting them in touch with resources. She moved to how Gonlag took on a church's finances when it was closing and helped to transition it back to the district. She landed on the fact that it was amazing how Gonlag was the primary caregiver for her mom because being a caregiver alone is difficult, but Gonlag still cared about students while doing that.

Gonlag was a professor for twenty years. She spent two whole decades pouring into students. She has left an impact on the campus of

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Southern Wesleyan University because of her commitment to the purpose God gave her, her passion for the transformation that could happen in the classroom, and the time she made for students where she encouraged, challenged, and listened to them. “My freshman year she was willing to get lunch with me and tell me her story,” Caitlynn (who is now a junior) said. She spent her time not just lecturing behind a PowerPoint presentation, but engaging Scripture, students, and the real world. Lexi Darling, a senior at SWU said, “She was difficult and strict as a professor. It was hard in the moment, but it made me a better writer, thinker, and student. She did me a service by having a high standard, and I knew her care and love for me was behind it.” Gonlag fought for students to know that they were capable, and also expected them to work to earn the right to say they knew why they believed what they believed.

She loved students inside and outside of the classroom. John spoke of a time when he was staying at a friend’s apartment in town and did not have access to a car or groceries. Not only did she bring him groceries, but she took him out to lunch because she knew his extroverted tendencies and need for time with people. “She’ll go out of her way to help students and other people,” he stated definitively. Lexi also spoke about the point where her accountability group leader Michelle DeRossett was sick and how the week after she passed, the week of the funeral, she was in Gonlag’s office every day. The conversations were always about how Lexi was doing. Gonlag cared about the group of girls Michelle had led. “Through everything she did it was obvious her whole heart was for the students.”

Mari Gonlag’s office door was always open, unless she had students or colleagues in her office asking for advice and guidance. She sought out students who she knew were struggling and sent them an encouraging note or sat down to have a conversation with them. She prepared a road trip snack bag for me when she knew I was making the ten-hour drive back home. She has a drawer in her guest bedroom full of things that her brother

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Who lives in California likes so she can easily prepare his birthday gift each year. The list of all the little things she purposefully does to encourage and support the people in her life could go on for pages.

Her life is a testimony of selflessness and care for others. No matter how busy she becomes, she makes time to serve others. She chooses to live her life in a way that is personally inconvenient but impacts every individual around her.

9

Never Not Serving

Marshall Tankersley

Becky Tankersley is the kind of person who you know is filled with love from the moment you see her. Her friendly, I've-Known-You-Forever smile and exclamation of 'Hey!' makes sure you feel welcomed, whether you're someone she's known for your whole life or someone she's only just met. Her auburn hair is possibly her most defining feature for two reasons: one, her hair has now turned a natural gray and has to be dyed, and two, that dye is one of the only things she does to specifically treat herself. As bad as it might be to say this, I'm not sure exactly how to feel about the dyed hair. I'm glad that she's comfortable being herself and doing things just for her own pleasure, but I can't help but feel that if anyone deserved the honor conveyed by a hoary head, it's her.

Today, Sunday, I'm visiting her house with my immediate family for dinner. This has been a tradition dating back to my childhood, dedicating Sunday afternoons to food and family, letting the various stages of the Tankersley Clan mingle with each other and just have fun. It's a welcome escape from the hassle and stress of everyday work, and something I'm look forward to as each weekend rolls around.

"Marshall!" she calls, midway through the lazy afternoon, post-food but pre-dusk. She jangles the keys to her Jeep with one hand, a kindly, determined glint in her eyes. I walk up to her and ask her what she wants.

"Here's my Jeep keys," she says, pressing them into the palm of my

NEVER NOT SERVING

hand. “I’ve got it all filled up with gas, and I want you to use it this week.” I protest, telling her that she needs it more than I do, but she’ll have none of it. On everything but giving, she’s one of the most understanding people God has ever created, but if you try and stop her generosity you will discover that she’s also quite stubborn. Not in a mean way. Not in a way that says she’s more concerned with her own opinion than yours. Rather, in a way that tells you she’s determined to put you first. She’s stubborn to do good.

As a mostly stay-at-home mother since the birth of her first child in 1967, my grandma has centered her life’s work around her family. Raising her three children has consumed the bulk of her time on Earth, and now that those same children have grown up and started families of their own, she has transferred that love, care, and devotion to her grandchildren instead. I can’t recall when she wasn’t willing to give of her time, food, or money to me, my siblings, or my cousins. If we made a mess, she’d clean it up without a fuss. If we got hurt, she’d be right beside us with compassion. If she had any extra cash, it’d be divided equally between us in a heartbeat. If nothing else, she has inspired others to pursue these same virtues.

Some days, her advancing age gets to her and she’s not able to be as active or actively generous as she’d like. Regardless of how tired she gets, she refuses to abandon grandkids and the rest of her family when they’re over at her house, and she’d run herself ragged if we let her. Here’s where we get to practice many of the same virtues she’s taught us – despite her many protestations, we try to clean her house and dishes whenever we’re over, and we try and make sure to leave early if she seems to be getting worn out. She’s the kind of person who needs looking after every once in a while, but then she’s back up and raring to go serve someone, somewhere.

Grandma’s forged pretty meaningful relationships with people outside of her kin, too. She’ll drop anything she’s doing if one of her friends needs help or just wants to go riding around town aimlessly. She’s also

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made a point of including and keeping an eye out for a mentally challenged fellow who's been a friend of the family for years. Grandma always takes him meals on the holidays, so he doesn't feel lonely, makes runs to the garbage dump with him so he doesn't feel like he's unable to do anything productive, and is just generally available so he doesn't feel alone. She never stops doing what she can to treat him with dignity and respect and include him in the society of others.

Sarah Tankersley, grandma's only daughter and my aunt, said that she "...drops whatever she's doing to help when anyone needs her, no matter when that happens to be" and that she also "often sacrifices her own desires, wellbeing, and/or needs... for others." Aunt Sarah mentioned grandma's selfless giving of her own Jeep to those who need it, as well as her always extending a listening ear to those who need it both at home and at the tax office business she runs with Sarah. The adventures those two have had would take all day to recount, but suffice it to say that grandma is always one to look out for those who come to her for help, and she's more than willing to deal with less-than-pleasant people at the IRS if it'll help her client out of a hole.

Grandma loves to look at serving and giving as a singular thing, not separated into the arbitrary categories of What-Must-Be-Done or What-Is-A-Good-Idea-But-Not-Necessary. She's generous both with her money and with her time, giving money to her grandchildren whenever she can and spending time with anyone who needs her help. She's clear that she sees that as an extension of true Christian giving and not because people will look at her as some kind of saint. She doesn't want to see tithing as the only way to give as a Christian, nor does she feel that tithing is the full extent of true giving. Instead, by seeing the things she has as inherently worth less than the benefits she can give others, she makes it a lifestyle, a way of living that she hopes honors God. It does.

NEVER NOT SERVING

Back in the present, she's still holding out her keys for me to take. Slowly, unsure of myself because I know how much it'll cost her, I reach out and take them. She smiles and pats me on the shoulder. "You're a good boy," she tells me, the phrase a familiar encouragement she's given me since I was too young to remember.

"And you're a great grandma," I tell her, giving her a hug. She hems and haws, trying to play off the compliment because she doesn't want to make this about herself. It's still true, though.

These are the moments that will stay with me for the rest of my life, the moments when I remember what she's taught me about true service. It doesn't have to be something large, or something flashy everyone will see – and in fact, serving once in a big way is far easier than the way she lives. She dies to herself every single moment of every single day. She's always serving in little ways, making her whole life one long stream of service to those people God's placed around her for that same God's glory.

I can't think of any better way to serve.



Section III

CRITICISM

Wherein writers train their analytical eye on SWU...

10

SWUNITY

Quinton Bent

During my freshman year at Southern Wesleyan University, I remember finishing my first ever four-hour college baseball practice. It was the most intense thing I had ever done. We ran, stretched, ran again, went through about ten pages of defensive plays, ran some more, and hit for about two hours. I was seriously wondering whether or not I would survive as a college athlete. I knew it would be hard, but I never knew it would be *this* hard.

On top of the physical exhaustion I suffered during my first practice, while I was walking to my dorm, my Canvas application on my phone was blowing up. I had completely forgotten I had to write a two-thousand-word paper by midnight on why I chose to come to SWU, and I had a Biology exam the next morning.

I say all this to explain the fact that I was stressed. Both physically and mentally, my body was being pushed to new limits as an eighteen-year-old freshman. The last thing I had on my mind was socializing with people who were full of energy and appeared to be inconsiderate of my current exhaustion—also known as non-athletes. While I had no intentions of being a jerk, I can honestly say I answered their questions with as little detail as possible. I was short and to the point, because all I wanted to do was go to my room and take a three-minute nap before my night of homework. Later, I would literally hear people tell their

SWUNITY

friends not to talk to me. I guess because of my shortness, I came across as rude and stuck up, and this is sad because I know a lot of other student athletes can relate.

As a student athlete at Southern Wesleyan University, it is very clear that all fellow athletes are placed in one group: “the athletes.” From the perspective of the non-athletes, we are often looked down on because we carry ourselves differently than other students. From our perspective, we often place those who aren’t athletes into categories too: the SWUBYs, the singers, the religion majors, the intramural kids and so on. Some of these groups believe they are better than the rest of us. At the top of the pile lies the religion majors who, because SWU is a Christian school, think they are the God’s gift to the campus. At the bottom are the intramural kids, because they don’t feel adequate enough to place a varsity sport. The SWUBYs, singers, and student-athletes all fall somewhere in-between and are constantly swapping places.

Mark 3:24-26 reads, “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end.”

It has become a practice on the campus of Southern Wesleyan University to divide up into small groups and pretend to be better than one another. SWU cannot stand as a strong university if its student groups are divided and tearing each other down. If the “house” of SWU is divided against itself there is no possible way for it to achieve the desired unity everyone wants to see.

I’m sure everyone in the concert choir always envisions singing in a standing-room-only Newton Hobson building with thousands of students cheering them on. Unfortunately, this is not currently possible at Southern Wesleyan because each of the little groups do not feel the need to support each other. The best solution for this would be for groups to reach out

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beyond their comfort zone, whether it be athletes eating with religion majors in the caff or SWUBYs showing up to the Concert Choir's performances. I know as an athlete, I always want to play in front of as many people as possible. People aren't just going to come out and support us if we don't reciprocate that same love.

People need to understand why student athletes don't want to engage more fully in the SWU community. Until you know what it's like to have a full course load and be in-season, you can't blame us for not coming out to play an extra game of flag football or intramural volleyball. Speaking for myself, whenever I get the opportunity to go out of my way and talk to other people, or do little things around campus, I do so. At least twice a week I intentionally invite classmates who are considered SWUBYs over to my apartment to do homework together. I also make a conscious effort to see one performance arts event a semester. Yes, I do have a busy schedule with baseball but there is a plethora of fine arts events listed on the SWU Fine Arts Website.

Reciprocation of the love and support we desire ourselves would put an end to the division at SWU. I'm not saying we shouldn't have our own unique groups, however it is important for each group to realize their role and importance to the campus as a whole. If we can focus on unity, our campus would be so much stronger.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what group you're in. If we can remain unified while we are here, it'll make the overall experience so much more enjoyable and memorable.

11

MONDAYS AND WEDNESDAYS

Tyler Fuller

9:45 A.M. Monday. I clumsily roll out of the tangled mass of sheets I call a bed and shuffle to the bathroom. Chapel in fifteen minutes. Sigh. I really don't feel like going today. Nonetheless, after a hazy, abbreviated version of my usual morning routine, I find myself sauntering across campus to Newton Hobson to get my chapel credit. Admittedly, that is the only reason I go: because I have to.

10:04 A.M. I enter the dimly lit auditorium and make my way over to the shadowy left-hand side of the room and join the congregation of students who also don't want to be here today. I don't know anyone around me, but I recognize some faces. I plop down in a seat, making sure I'm at least three seats away from any given person in the room. I get a little perturbed when someone sits down next to me. I just want to enjoy looking at YouTube videos for this hour without feeling like my next-door neighbor is judging me. I don't know why I care; everyone sitting over here is looking down, their necks contorted into a half 'U' either from sleep or from their eyes locking themselves on their phone screens. In a way, it makes me feel a little less guilty to know that everyone around me is only here to get a chapel credit as well. I wonder about the crowd sitting in the middle rows, bathing in the orange glow of the heavenly overhead lighting. They raise their hands, close their eyes, and appear to sing along with the music. It always seems like they're just moving their lips instead of actually singing.

MONDAYS AND WEDNESDAYS

Something seems forced about it all, I'll admit. Sometimes I wonder if they're just here for the credits too, they just make it more interesting for themselves by getting involved with the service. I suppose they could actually be invested in the church and genuinely engaged with the message. What a refreshing thought that would be.

10:45 A.M. Before I can finish my twelfth conspiracy theory video, the service is over. I bleed into the congregation that was, only moments ago, fully engrossed in the service but now couldn't seem more ready to leave.

10:55 A.M. By the time I reach my room, I have no recollection of the chapel service, not that I paid attention to much anyways.

9:45 A.M. Wednesday. My phone's alarm is screaming in my ear. I contort myself into a sort of crooked 'Z' and pick it up off the floor. Chapel again. Sigh. I lay in bed for a few more minutes to wallow in my own self-absorbed pity, pressing my palms into my eyes to push out any remaining sleepiness. The "few more minutes" lasts a little longer than anticipated, and, after muttering a few words my mother wouldn't be proud of, I find myself jogging towards Newton Hobson already five minutes past ten.

10:08 A.M. I enter the auditorium through the one door they leave open for stragglers like me. It's more difficult to find an isolated seat today in the dark side, so I nervously sit down in one of the back-edge seats of the middle section. I can feel the glowing, orange lights slightly warming my scalp, but only barely. As the chapel singers finish their first song, I reach for my pocket, grasping for my phone. I feel its cool, rigid edges and begin to unsheathe it from my pocket. Something stops me, though. I can't help but feel more exposed out here. In the dark side of the room, I feel free of judgment, free of any watching eyes, but out here I feel like God himself is peering over my shoulder. I release my grip on my phone and drop it back

FULLER

into my pocket. The singers and band roll into their second song, and I find myself enraptured by the crowd around me. From the dark side of the room looking in, it all seems so superficial, but up close, something about it seems... different.

To my surprise, much of the middle-section crowd is, in fact, singing and not just mouthing the words. Still, however, I'm not sold that the hand-raising and feet-stomping is to glorify God and not their egos. The rhythmic gesticulation of the arms and raised hands still seems like more of a social statement than a physical sign of worship, but I digress. For once in a chapel service I feel like part of the service, even though I may not necessarily buy into the message. I'm admittedly too full of myself to sing along, but by being around the quiet chorus of voices singing in unison with the band on stage I can't help but feel, at the very least, more involved with all that's going on.

10:23 A.M. The band disperses into the congregation as today's speaker makes his way to the stage. As he begins speaking, I can't escape my own thoughts and soon the rambling in my head overshadows what he is saying. I'm still hung up on the singing. I don't exactly know what it is, but something about the fact that they were actually singing has really done a number on my brain. Now, I know it may sound silly but, in all my pretentiousness, I genuinely thought they were all just mouthing the words as some sort of pseudo-involved act. It seems like such a foreign thought to me, but could they actually want to be here?

10:54 A.M. The jubilant applause around me breaks me out of my daze. I don't remember a single word the speaker said today, as usual, but, at least, I feel like I'm taking something away from today's service. Something about the concept of people actually wanting to be in chapel and actually enjoying it and embracing it has stuck with me. Not stuck with me in the sense that I am going to have some grandiose spiritual awakening but stuck with me in

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the sense that I have a little more appreciation for chapel now, as corny as that sounds. To know that it genuinely affects people and that people are genuinely invested in it gives it more purpose for me. Sure, it's required by the university, and sure, I am certain there will still be an abundance of days I don't want to go, but I have to respect what is going on in that auditorium. Whatever it is, it's bigger than me, that's for sure.

11:00 A.M. I pass through my apartment's lobby and to my room. I kick a pile of month-old papers to the side and collapse into my bed. Looking up at the off-white ceiling broken light fixture, I close my eyes and let my mind rest. I still can't believe they were actually singing.

By now, it should be blatantly obvious that I'm not the most religiously inclined fella in the room. I don't have anything against religion, per se, but in recent years I have grown away from it. Perhaps this has a lot to do with my opinions on chapel. I'm not sure.

What I am sure of, though, is that, in its current state and in my current frame of mind, chapel isn't doing much for me. I hate to say it, but it's the truth. Seeing all those happy faces singing and praising in the middle sections of the auditorium, in a way, makes me feel guilty for not expressing the same feelings they do.

Obviously, I can't put myself in the shoes of someone who is fully invested in chapel and actually enjoys attending, but, at the very least, I know this type of person actually exists now. As detached and pretentious as that sounds, I actually thought almost everyone in chapel was like me. Well, not exactly like me, but like me in the sense that they really didn't want to be there and were only attending because of the mandatory credit. It's refreshing to know otherwise.

12

IT'S NOT A MATCH

Caroline Jelley

It's the bond between a woman and man: something extremely special, intimate, and holy. It's called love, and it's not always easy to find.

Between messy juvenile breakups, intense and dramatic divorces, or actually finding the right “fish in the sea,” finding love is a process, and there are correct and incorrect ways of going about it. Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” God tells us to make Him the number one priority, and all our wants and desires will be given to us in the proper way.

When love gets filtered through social media and pop culture, it loses its extremely significant definition. Online, we are prone to seeing love through the lenses of lost people. Dating apps—Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and plenty more—have made the process of love inauthentic. Anyone is able to make an account and use whatever pictures they so desire, yes even that selfie you edited to no end so that it doesn't even resemble the original acne-scarred face in the mirror.

You can pretty much be anything or anyone you want to be online, which, I know, we've all heard. I've sat alongside friends scrolling through the never ending list of less-than-average suitors, seeing people who obviously make themselves look better than they really are, include pictures of themselves with a better looking comrade, or, best of all, not even show their face in the pictures, in hopes to claim a match with their

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“witty” biography sentence, maybe along the lines of some extremely cheesy pick up line. As for my own friends, they haven’t necessarily gone full out catfish, but I have noticed that the pictures they advertise of themselves are always the ones that don’t truly describe the way they look or act in reality.

In Tinder, you tap through a series of unbetrothed and desperate suitors, hoping to find the one person that sticks out. Then, knowing that the pictures of said suitor doesn’t fill your curiosity, you read their bio, the given 500 characters to describe the way they live their lonely life. You may slide left to say no to that person with the tattoo of his ex-girlfriends initials, or the girl who “just wants someone to understand her,” but risking a slide right on that particular person who stands out could mean they did the same for you and you have won yourself a “match.” You can then message your matches and see what happens from there: corny pickup lines and cringe-worthy attempts to ask that person on a date. Complete strangers use sometimes witty, sometimes extremely inappropriate, lines like, “Bring a friend over and we’ll eat some prime rib” or “Let’s meet up and do the dirty.” There are also suitable users that really are looking for someone good to get to know, but even though not everyone on Tinder is a creep, it is just not a good approach at finding your soulmate. Most of the time, the romantic interest that emerges from the apps doesn’t last. I have witnessed friends taking a chance on a specific man, only to find out that things between them would never work out. In essence, it’s a desperate attempt at finding love.

The Bible, our direction book for life, has so much to say about love. Two specific verses, quoted by Jesus, deal with the issue of desperations and angst in finding the right mate. John 14:1 says, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me.” If we trust in God, we should not have to worry about the future, and that would give us the patience to wait for Mr. or Mrs. Right. Obviously, it is going to be hard when your best

friend of twenty-three years is getting married, and you, being painfully alone, are stuck in the middle of the wedding, praying to God to let someone good come into your life. Most of us can understand how it feels to be alone, convincing yourself you aren't good enough for anyone and unable your true worth. These are the lies that Satan tells you when you are vulnerable, when you are alone. These feelings of worthlessness and doubt are what usually cause people to seek out the option of online dating.

Now, I am not here to curse Tinder or be like that mom that's always wanting to hate on every adolescent's fads. I just strongly disagree with the effect social media has had on love. As a first-hand witness to the unnecessary heartache dating sites have even caused my own friends, I am passionate about bringing its effects to light and comparing them to Jesus' own words. It is not a legitimate way of finding love, and it is not God's plan for his children. I believe that God teaches us many lessons in life, and we are supposed to learn from those lessons.

I also believe that because of this He is testing our patience, but also our love for Him, and will certainly provide the right one for each and every one of us when the time is right. Mark 8:36 says, "And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?" Don't take the first opportunity you have for affection, only to regret it later.

Good things come to those who wait, so give it time and you won't be disappointed.

13

SHOULD WE SHINE?

Morgan Rackley

Our elders tell us, “Make sure it is obvious that you are a follower of Christ in all that you do.” But is this thought counter-productive to the idea that Matthew chapter 6 verse 1 is trying to make when Jesus says, “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven”? This verse clearly states not to look good in front of others. Yet we are also encouraged to let our light shine before others so that others might know we are followers of Christ.

As a community and a body of Christ-followers, are we defeating the purpose of Christ’s warning? Should we really shine before others?

Christ is present everywhere you look on Southern Wesleyan University’s campus: in classrooms, dorms, and even Blue Hill. Southern Wesleyan University, an outwardly Christian institution, has Christ integrated into its mission and identity. Many students are attracted to the Christian aspect of the university. But if we read the verse above from Matthew, it seems as if we are directed to keep our “righteousness” quiet so that others don’t obviously see it. If this is how we are supposed to live, why is the Christian aspect of our university its most prominent feature?

In the few months I have been at Southern Wesleyan University, I have seen Bible verses posted on building walls as well uplifting quotes and

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“everything Jesus” hanging in dorm rooms. In every class, I have seen professors lead us in prayer and devotion. I have witnessed Bible studies and discussions in the middle of a noisy, full-of-life coffee shop. I have heard songs played over the speakers in Blue Hill that declare Jesus is Lord. All around there is evidence of Jesus’ presence and faith in Jesus expressed by students and faculty alike. Is this right?

As we dive into this verse, we notice that Jesus says, “Do not practice your righteousness...” The word “practice” essentially means the actual application or use of something, in this case righteousness. The word “righteousness” means someone or something that is morally right and justifiable. But what does this mean for us as Christians? Jesus also says, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every nation” (Matt 28:19). We are expected to preach the Gospel and spread the good news of Jesus, but we *shouldn’t* practice righteousness in front of others? How are we supposed to shine?

I believe that Jesus is intending this verse almost as a warning for Christ-followers at SWU. We are expected to share the Gospel and live as Jesus lived, but we should not practice it in a way that exalts ourselves over Jesus or takes the “shine” away from God and puts it on ourselves. When looking at the way we live and the way we practice as members of Southern Wesleyan University’s community, we should always remember to “practice what we preach.” If we live in this way, we will never allow ourselves to “shine” before we allow the spirit of God that is in us to “shine”. The university must always consider who is shining and for what reasons. As long as SWU, and Christians in general, never lose sight of who should be shining and why the light matters, people will see Jesus more than us. That’s a good thing.

14

SPINNING THE WHEEL OF CHANCE

Marshall Tankersley

It's an absolute tragedy to be invited to come and consider Jesus, only to be quietly turned away and given some kind of substitute by people who think they know best what your soul needs.

Walking into chapel at Southern Wesleyan feels like playing an old roulette wheel, each player hoping against hope that they'll manage to land something good and profitable instead of the normal next-to-meaningless dross. The only problem with this wheel is that it's so ancient that its paint is cracking and fading, the reds and blacks almost impossible to tell apart. Even if someone did manage to land a good roll, they probably couldn't tell the difference.

"We believe that the Southern Wesleyan University community affirms its highest allegiance through the means of corporate worship," the Southern Wesleyan University Student Handbook reads. It continues:

As we seek to develop life together within a Christian setting, opportunity must be given when the entire community is encouraged to find wholeness in Christ and readiness for ministry... We affirm the critical and crucial importance of a meaningful chapel program to a Christian university. Chapel fosters a sense of community as we worship God and learn together.

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Those are good words. The idea of making university chapel something that encourages Christian community and builds up its attendees to pursue Christ better is great. But at the same time, these words can only go so far.

Despite high ideals, chapel doesn't always manage to achieve its goals. Chapels run the gamut between the good (such as Garret Kahrs reminding the student body to examine themselves) and the rather oddly bad (Matthew Sleeth talking about trees in Scripture and claiming that not focusing on trees makes one lose the full understanding of the gospel). Still, neither of these examples define chapel by and large, as most services fall into a comfortably bland zone of aggressive stagnancy. Who remembers what the opening chapel of the semester was about? The names of just two speakers? Something worth taking out of a message?

Oftentimes, the wheel spins and lands on something comfortably numb.

It's late October 2018. After the chapel band returns to their seats, fresh from overplaying the choruses of "Overcome" and "Flood the Earth," chaplain Ken Dill takes the stage. Chaplain Dill always seems to be a well-meaning walking contradiction of ideas. On the one hand, he tries to be a relatable figure for the student body to connect with, while also having the inescapable detachment that is his somewhat advanced age. It's hard to try and blend in among all of the Fellow Kids if you're sporting desaturated hair. Today, Dill wants to try and connect to his audience by using an extended card trick. After fiddling with the deck for a solid five to seven minutes (with the assistance of another student who seems as lost as the rest of us), Chaplain Dill tries to make the point that there are No Tricks in Life, and that we have to do hard things. He then invites his wife onto the stage to give her testimony about her struggles in fighting breast cancer and how she leaned into her relationship with both Christ and other people to help her through those dark days.

In a nutshell, this service shows exactly what's wrong with SWU chapel. Instead of focusing on either the comedic attempts to relate a life lesson to a group of distracted millennials or encouraging those same people to trust in Christ more during desperately dark times, chapel tries to do both at the same time—and each ends up the less for it. The focus is not ultimately on teaching deeper lessons or on exalting Christ (as the Handbook says), but instead on making chapel a place full of nice feelings that connects with the student body.

Chapel can be excellent at times, but instead it settles for being aggressively stagnant, replacing what we need in Christ with some kind of palliative designed to hold our attention. But what's the point of holding our attention in chapel if we're not being taught Christ?

Jesus takes the idea of his children being turned away from Him very seriously. When He was approached by them, his disciples thought they knew what was best for Him and tried to keep the children from approaching, but Jesus would have none of it.

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away." (Matthew 19:13-15, ESV)

These children were a picture of hearts earnestly seeking after Him, and Jesus refused to allow them to be turned away because "...for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." In expositing this passage, Biblical commentator Matthew Henry had this to say:

And let us learn of him not to discountenance any willing well-meaning souls in their enquiries after Christ, though they are but weak. If he do not break the bruised reed, we should not. Those that seek unto Christ, must not think it strange if

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they meet with opposition and rebuke, even from good men, who think they know the mind of Christ better than they do.

Children seeking after their Savior should never feel that their pursuing Him is reliant upon the whims of some Wheel of Chance, nor should they feel that their pursuit is hindered by those who feel that they know better how to communicate Christ yet end up being only a distraction.

To some extent, I'd much prefer for chapel to be consistently bad; at least then the problem would be obvious and easier to fix. Instead, all I see is an institution with grand ideals misinterpreted, holding back its attendees instead of pushing them and encouraging them in their pursuit of Christ. It has become the very thing it tries to fight against.

Don't hinder us. Please.



Section IV

HYBRIDS

Wherein writers merge genres to illuminate the truth...

15

FOOSBALL IS THE DEVIL

Tyler Fuller

The facility was immaculate. The navy blue and orange color scheme was questionable, but who am I to argue with heritage? We had passed our fair share of marshes on the bus ride here. It was my first time at Auburn, first time in the state of Alabama, and I was equal parts impressed and deterred. I was visiting with a group of my teammates on the football team from high school. A few of them were yammering on about how this visit was tarnishing their reputation as a Georgia Bulldogs fan, how they would rather die than be associated with this “off-brand Alabama,” yada yada yada... I tried to zone them out. I was willing to set aside my own allegiance to the Bulldogs for just a day so that I could enjoy the visit.

Only maybe a couple of us were good enough to even be given the slightest look from a school like Auburn and I certainly didn't belong to that group. I was a good high school football player, or at least I like to think I was, but the odds of a two-hundred-pound offensive lineman signing with a school like Auburn were as low as me living in a state like Alabama in the first place. Anyways, whether it was for the self-esteem boost or some blind faith my coaches had in my potential as a football player, here I was touring Auburn University.

I couldn't believe the sheer amount of *stuff* they had. They had any exercise equipment you could imagine, all shiny and pristine as if trying to convince us that the eighty or so man-children that suited up on Saturdays

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were just naturally that big and hadn't actually used anything in the weight room. The technology, too, was something to behold. There were iPads for the weight racks, iPads for the treadmills, and probably a few iPads for the other iPads. I couldn't imagine why anyone would need so much tech just to work out, but I digress. After passing through the weight room, we proceeded to the clubhouse and locker room area. The room itself was arranged like a shrine to Auburn football, with glass cases holding helmets and equipment used by revered alumni and a massive hanging sign that read "Auburn University" looming over the navy blue carpet that featured the iconic "AU" logo positioned proudly at the center of the room.

I have long been a Georgia Bulldogs fan, and thus swore a hatred for Auburn at a young age, but I was in awe. *All of this just for football. Wow.*

The tour was wrapping up and after a brief, uninspired speech from one of the assistant coaches, we began making our way to the exit. As we passed through the double doors back to the lobby, I noticed a small, square sign on the wall. It was placed on the wall obscured enough as if to be inconspicuous but also in a place that once you saw it, you saw it every time you passed it. On it were two simple words: "Beat Bama."

Suddenly, under those two double doors, I felt a surge of hatred rush through my body. As a Georgia fan, there had been only one thing that I had been taught to hate more than Auburn and Tech and that was the Alabama Crimson Tide. I had never been told why, only that, harkening to the wise words of Ms. Helen Boucher, Alabama was "the devil." Nick Saban might as well be Satan himself, because my household and the majority of our like-minded friends sure do treat him like he is. Truth be told, I don't know too much about him, only that he can be a little arrogant, never seems to smile, and is the head coach of the biggest abomination to ever grace the ranks of major college football. Other than that, though, he seems like a pretty good guy.

We exited through the doors of the main building and were yet again greeted by the more-than-slight tinge of swamp gunk that seemed to always be hanging in the air around here. Boarding the bus, I couldn't help but wonder what it was that come over me when I saw that "Beat Bama" sign. Perhaps I may have exaggerated a little with the whole "surge of hatred" bit, as it was more of a slight pinch of annoyance than anything, but you get my point.

Anyways, that feeling, whatever it was, had gotten me thinking: why did it even happen in the first place?

Aside from a few screen-printed t-shirts, I had no real connection with the university of Georgia or their football team. I had just been indoctrinated from a young age that the "Dawgs" were the greatest assemblage of football talent to ever grace this planet and that the Crimson Tide was the purest amalgamation of evil. The bus lurched into motion as I replayed a series of memories in my head, times I had argued with friends, and sometimes enemies, over college football. I thought about the couple of college football games I had been to and, even though I was very young, I could still remember the animosity that lingered in the stadium between the opposing legions of fans supporting their respective teams. Thousands of people all pledged a hatred for the opposite fans simply because they rooted for another team. It seems like every Sunday, after the pandemonium of College Gameday the day prior, new videos surface online showing alcohol-imbued superfans brawling with the other teams fans, falling over stadium seats and knocking other, more well-mannered, fans around all in the name of their favorite team. Their dedication to their teams is commendable, I'll admit. I would never fight a total stranger because they disagreed with my choice to root for Georgia, so this level of fandom is something I must reluctantly respect...and fear. I had always thought Alabama was the worst thing about college football, but now I couldn't help but feel like it was, instead, the fans.

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The bus ride was dragging along even slower than planned. I aimlessly flipped through a small Auburn football recruiting questionnaire, my thoughts continuing to meander. *What is it that causes us to act like we do over college football?* I know rooting for a team provides a sense of community, a sense of “being a part of something bigger than oneself” and all that, but none of that explains the animosity that always seems to accompany the most dedicated levels of fandom.

It turns out the real darkness in college football doesn’t have anything to do with any team, or even football at all. The real darkness lies within the fans. Their blind, unrequited devotion to these teams: teams they’re willing to argue and fight with total strangers over, teams they’re willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on, and teams that, ultimately, give nothing back in return other than a few hours of entertainment on Saturdays. The facilities at Auburn were all possible because of the team’s massive fanbase and their quick trigger purchasing of merchandise at games.

Now, I know that teams like Auburn, Georgia, Alabama, and the like all receive unimaginable donations from wealthy donors and supporters of the school, but this money is distributed throughout the college whereas the money from merchandise sales, ticket sales, and television revenue all feeds directly into the football programs’ already exaggerated budget. Alabama and Georgia each make well over \$100 million a year from athletics, with over \$98 million and \$84 million, respectively, coming solely from football. In terms of merchandise, the Crimson Tide will add around \$66 million in what is listed as “Licensing and Rights Fees,” while Georgia will pull in about \$56 million under that same category. In other words, they make all of that from their little logos being printed on Nike shirts and sold for half a mortgage payment from concession stands alongside a few cold hot dogs. So, the idea is that the fans provide these facilities to the teams out of their own wallets and the teams repay them by playing

football, totally unaware of the identities of their horde of supporters. It's a one-sided relationship, but the fans seem alright with that.

My theory is that these, at times, radical fans see the football teams as a part of themselves. They feel sad and disappointed when the teams lose and overjoyed when they win. Their lives, who they hang around with, what they wear, and what they do is all dictated by something that does nothing for them. The hatred they feel for their rivals oftentimes outweighs their love of their own team. I am not saying to not be a fan, not at all. Rooting for your favorite teams to win is fun and exciting and a great way to spend time with friends and meet new ones, but when one is totally invested in these college football teams to the point to where you act differently or place the notion of the team above your own aspirations then there is a serious problem. When focus lies on the hatred for the "enemy" and the desire to witness their destruction rather than the hope that one's own team will succeed, then an already serious problem becomes a catastrophic one.

What is the solution? I couldn't tell you. At this point I can't help but feel like we're in too deep. There are entire families whose sole existence seems to be based on the glorification of their favorite college football team, whole groups of people who are willing to come to blows over their teams, and people willing to spend everything they have just to have the newest merchandise. These tendencies, I've noticed, have leaked into other aspects of life and sprouted devoted fandoms to other things like movies and video games, but the problems with college football fans seem to be the most volatile and worrisome to me, at least right now.

Who knows. Maybe the whole college football craze will die down in a few years and we'll be discussing how fans of *The Walking Dead* are brawling in the streets with fans of *American Horror Story* (not so sure I'd complain about that though; that would be quite a spectacle).

FOOSBALL IS THE DEVIL

The bus slams into the curb as it turns back into our high school's parking lot, jolting me from my thoughtful haze. The doors slide open with a hiss and I grab my bag and hop down the set of three little stairs. Walking towards my car, one of my friends calls my name.

"Tyler!" He says, jogging up to my side. "A few of us are getting together at Nic's place to watch the Georgia game. You wanna come?"

"For sure, bro," I say, smirking. "Just as long as no Bama fans are there."

16

DESIRING A RELATIONSHIP

Julia Joyce

Stuart-Bennett Hall, affectionately named StuBe, became my new home when I moved onto the campus of Southern Wesleyan University. When you move ten hours away from everything you know, you have to quickly adapt. I realized early on that sometimes the elevator, Otis, would decide to stop working. On those days, I did not leave my fifth-floor room in StuBe much—unless I felt like climbing. It only took a few times to know that if a toilet flushed while I was in the shower I needed to move or risk getting burned by scalding water. I picked up the habit of not going to the cafeteria after the first hour of food service unless I wanted to resort to cereal for dinner. I learned that cereal at any time of the day was acceptable. I learned what sections were “acceptable” to sit in during chapel, and that the coffee shop was a great place to pretend to be productive, but that I would perpetually get too distracted to actually do homework.

There are a lot of unique aspects of SWU and college life that are normal to me now, but that I had to learn at one point. Nonetheless, there are still things that I struggled to figure out. Namely, why 8 a.m. classes existed, and how to not procrastinate. Something else I never did quite understand was “freshmen mating season”. This term refers to freshmen couples who begin dating during their first week of college. I observed this phenomenon happening, I just did not understand why people jumped into relationships like that. These people who have only known each other for

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one week could be seen walking hand in hand, or sitting awkwardly close in StuBe's lobby. Everyone knew and talked about that fact that the likelihood of sustainability for the happy couple was not good. That did not affect the rose colored glasses they wore. I would see these couples making googly eyes at each other and wonder what they expected from such a relationship. I could only see their relationship's expiration date. What were they looking for?

When a ton of hormonal young adults are thrown together in basically their own private world there is bound to be an intermixing of the sexes. Did you know that the average amount of hookups for college students in a year is 10.8? That number is mind boggling to me, but it is somehow understandable. One glance at the music or film industry serves as an explanation. Money is made by selling sex and making it seem like everyone is doing it. An example I thought of in half a second is "Versace on the Floor" by Bruno Mars. The whole song is about undressing the girl and what that will lead to. This lyric sums the song and the industry up, "So baby let's just turn down the lights, And close the door, Ooh I love that dress, But you won't need it anymore." This is just one of the many songs whose foundation is sex.

It turns out that sex does not bring just pleasure. In that same study of college students 84% of men reported having enjoyed the experience, but only 54% of women said the same. It is interesting that there is some level of regret conveyed by those who engaged in what popular music and movies deem normal. These industries are flooded with the notion that sex is the answer, but the real-life experience does not seem to fix anything.

What happens the next morning when you wake up and you are alone again?

JOYCE

Not only is casual sex glorified by this perceived norm, but relationships are distorted. Take the 1996 movie *Jerry Maguire*. The line that wins the girl back is “you complete me.” Jerry delivers the line with such confidence. It’s as if the point of their relationship was for them to fix each other and make each other whole.

But shouldn’t Jerry be whole on his own?

Humans were created with a desire for relationship. We want to be known, valued, and loved. It is a part of the design. Yet, we look for that affirmation and worth in the wrong places sometimes. A cute couple picture that gets a thousand likes on Instagram, or a boy saying you are pretty is never going to be enough. A girl giving you her number or even sleeping with you is not going to make you whole.

While Christians are not promoting premarital sex, I am not sure that the answer they give to young adults concerning relationships is necessarily better. It is an unspoken expectation that Christians go to a Christian university to find a wholesome mate to marry. Every time I go home, everyone asks whether I have found a boyfriend. Well no, but let me tell you about the friends whose relationships have made me a better person, or what I have been learning about my relationship with God, or what I have learned about myself since I have been gone. There is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to find a serious relationship while in college, until that becomes a college student’s only focus. God calls the individual to authentic community not just to a romantic relationship. Scripture also tells us that Jesus is the bridegroom. The one who gave us the desire for relationship is calling us to marriage with Him.

It’s been three and a half years since I was educated about the term “freshmen mating season.” There is now a wedding dress hanging in my

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room. It is a strapless, A-line gown with a sweetheart neckline. The ivory lace of the bodice is accented with delicate pearls. The floral lace is complemented by the detailing of the floor length veil that accompanies the dress. The whole ensemble is shiny, stunning, and perfect. It's just not mine.

My roommate is a week from "I do", and every other girl in this house of six is either in a serious relationship, about to get engaged, or engaged and planning a wedding. I, on the other hand, am days away from walking across a stage for a piece of paper, not down an aisle for a husband. The only gown in my closet is a black formless one with a matching funny hat. I'm graduating summa cum laude, but I failed to get my M.R.S. degree. That is bordering on sinful in Christian college culture.

According to the predictable Hallmark movies that I love, I am supposed to have a prince charming and a plan for my life that includes riding off into the sunset. What if I don't know what six months down the road will look like? What if I am just sitting alone in an apartment somewhere? My couple pictures are going to be with my dogs because I would prefer to not be a crazy cat lady. Does that make me an oddity? (i.e. Not having a significant other, not that I prefer dogs to cats)

I know with my head that having a relationship with Jesus is the only relationship that will make me whole, but it does not always *feel* that way.

Looking around, all I see is pairs. While I am super excited for my housemates who all have solid, Christ-centered relationships and while I am proud of the example they set, sometimes it stinks always seeing picture perfect couples everywhere. I see couples walking hand in hand down the street. Movie theaters and restaurants are full of pairs. Who wants to be the sad, lonely person watching a movie alone? Concerts have couples dancing together. Coffee shops, parks, and stores are all the same way. I have already attended and been in multiple weddings which are not nearly as fun if you go to them alone. Why does it seem like the whole world is paired up?

JOYCE

As a bridesmaid, you get paired with a groomsman to walk down the aisle with. My roommate's fiancé had a groomsman inform him that he could not be there for their wedding. I was the one who was going to be walking with him. In the discussion that ensued, my roommate somewhat jokingly talked about picking a new groomsman based on who would be a good match for me. I was both amused and slightly embarrassed. Part of me secretly hoped this played out, and the other part fought against my shallow desire to be in a relationship just to fit into the mold of Christian college culture.

It is too easy to connect worth to relationship status. Just finding a random guy to be in a relationship with seems like an easy fix. I could fit in on Instagram. My life would look like the movies. No more negative self-esteem. No more loneliness. No more doubting myself.

Is being in a romantic relationship the way to be whole?

Romance, intimacy, and marriage are beautiful constructs. They are a reflection of our desire for relationship. They should also be a reflection of our intimacy with God. Our human intimacy should not replace our intimacy with the one who created us for relationship.

I have learned a lot in the past three and a half years, but letting my identity be rooted in my relationship with God above all else is a lesson I have to return to over and over.

17

ASHAMED OF DEPRESSION

Amanda Platz

I hugged my knees to my chest, curled up into a little ball in the corner of my bedroom in my family's rental house, and sobbed uncontrollably. I had no friends. I was all alone, and I felt like I would always be alone. I felt like maybe God didn't love me, like He had abandoned me. I had recently moved across the country from Seattle, Washington to Seneca, South Carolina. I had left everyone I knew behind, and was stuck here in a small town thirty minutes away from the church we had decided to go to.

The bedroom was neutral and bland. The carpeting and walls were white. No decorations had made their home in the room. But the room held clothes in cardboard boxes, books stacked carelessly on a shelf that was too small, and an unmade bed. Pillows were piled next to the bed. The only real color in the room was a quilt, which was blue, brown, and green with floral décor. Cicadas chirped outside. No light was coming in the solitary window. The only light in the room was the overhead light, which was bright enough to illuminate the room but not for much else.

My parents' features darkened the door to my room. They asked what was wrong. I decided to take the risk and be honest. I was really struggling. I told them what I was thinking. Saying that they were not happy is a bit of an understatement.

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The shouting began quickly.

“You just need to trust God more! How dare you feel this way! You have no right to be acting like this!” my parents yelled. “You’re not trusting God and you’re sinning horribly. You need to just get over this!”

When Mom is this angry, looking into her eyes is impossible. All I can find is hatred. I felt that if my own mother hated me, how much more must God hate me? It must be my own fault that I was depressed. I already felt as if I weren’t good enough, but now, knowing that God felt I wasn’t good enough and that God hated me was even worse.

That day, I discovered the shame of depression in the church. The church’s relationship with depression is knee-deep in shame culture. Depression is one of the many scarlet letters of the church. If you have it, it is plastered on your chest and you wear it as an emblem of your status as a sinner and outsider. I have heard stories from friends who are too afraid to talk to clergy members about their depression because they have been shut down and dismissed by clergy who tell them to just “pray harder” or “trust God more” or even tell them, “You’re sinning. So stop.”

In her article “Shame v. Guilt” Brené Brown writes, “I define shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging, something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.” Depression runs on shame. In fact, Depression’s entire empire is built with shame at its core. Depression takes a passing comment about how you look tired and turns it into an explosive insult about how you’re an ugly and worthless human being. Depression takes a comment such as “I’m not going to leave you,” and says, “Yes you are; you’re just saying that so you don’t have to deal with me right now.” Ed Welch says, “Depression (or shame) corrupts every blessing and leaves the curses in their untouched,

pristine form.” Depression takes the kindest things people say and perverts them and magnifies any insult. Shame does the same thing. Depression and shame are inexplicably intertwined.

So then, why do churches so often resort to a sort of shaming culture when they try to help those who are depressed? I know the church’s goal is not to destroy those who are struggling any more than my parents’ reaction was intended to destroy me. But the thing is, it does a lot of damage. My parents’ reaction was not intended to harm me but to help me. But they dismissed my problem as simply a spiritual issue, something that I was at fault for and therefore could fix by just being better, praying, or trusting God more.

Viewing the problem of depression as some sort of legalistic battle that you can win only makes it worse. Campus minister and author Sammy Rhodes, comments, “Whenever we start talking about depression, we are typically talking about three different aspects: the spiritual, the emotional, and the physical. To deal with only one of these elements is to reduce depression to something that can easily be managed.” Depression, however, is not reducible and is not easily managed. It may be a spiritual issue, but it is also an emotional issue. Often, it is also a physical issue, like a chemical imbalance in the brain. The church ignores this fact and often reduces the problem of depression to a merely spiritual issue, ignoring the complexity of depression that makes it so truly difficult to deal with.

When my parents shouted at me that night, they were viewing my depression as a spiritual problem, and they were concerned for my faith. Ultimately, that’s why they reacted in anger. They weren’t angry with me, nor did they hate me the way I thought they did. They were angry because they thought I was struggling with my faith, and they viewed that as a problem I could fix by simply correcting my faulty emotions. They made an awful lot of assumptions about me that night and reacted based on those

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assumptions rather than on the truth. The church is guilty of the same thing: where do you think my parents got it from?

The church often unintentionally condemns people suffering from depression. Instead of listening to, understanding, and empathizing with those with depression, they assume they understand what's going on and try to give advice that more often destroys than helps. Alicia Cohn, talking about the church's reaction to depression, says that "Unfortunately, many of us who have spoken up in church communities have been told to 'pray harder' or 'have more faith.' These suggestions might be well intentioned, but they often discourage and isolate those of us in desperate need of support." More often, what is needed is empathy, understanding, and compassion rather than simply suggesting spiritual solutions to a much larger problem.

Because of the shame surrounding depression in my family and in the larger context of the church, I was under the impression that it was not okay to not be okay. I began to feel that I had to be constantly optimistic. I was ashamed of vulnerability and depression. I felt that it was some sort of monster I had to keep locked in my closet, hidden away so no one could find it. I would let out some sort of vulnerability, little tidbits of honesty, but never depression. I was not depressed. After all, others have it worse than me. I'm not as depressed as other people. I'm okay, really.

"Hey, so what's going on?" With that question, Ben opened the closet door I'd been holding closed—the one that housed all my vulnerability and depression, the one I had been fighting to keep closed all day. I hadn't really been able to keep the door closed recently. I had been showing the symptoms of depression a lot, but this was one of the first times I actually talked about it with anyone.

I paced the porch of my third-story apartment. The railings and

ceiling were tragically covered in spider-infested webs of evil. There was no adequate seating on my porch—just a plastic lawn-chair that was also covered in cobwebs. It had been there before we had moved in, like every other piece of furniture in our apartment. There wasn't much wind chill, so it was surprisingly comfortable outside. It was dark, but the porch lights—Christmas lights and an overhead porch light—combined to create a glowing atmosphere. The lighting in the hallways outside were dimly lit by less than stellar overhead lighting, but it was adequate. I had gotten back from a shift working at an unnamed coffee shop, feeling rather depressed. I hadn't really been able to see people in a while, and I constantly heard my friends or people I knew in different apartments in my building gathering together for a time of community and Christian fellowship—community I was naturally excluded from. That, coupled with the facts that I am graduating in May and don't have a definite plan for my life, I have a job I don't really like, and my homework keeps me from seeing what little friends I do have, made the semester very difficult.

We had been talking about something else at first—Pokémon, I think. It quickly took a more serious turn. I texted him in a moment of uncharacteristic vulnerability, "I think I'm depressed."

"Why are you depressed?" he asked.

"I'm going to be alone forever. I have no friends. I'm never included in things. I don't think anyone really wants me around. I'm working two jobs, and I'm exhausted. I don't have energy to get out of bed in the morning. I have too much to do. I'm never going to get into graduate school. I'm going to fail at everything. I'm never going to find a job. On top of all of this, some shit happened at my old church in Seattle that's really messed up." The list may have been longer.

"Oh, shit. You really are depressed. Why don't you call me?" he responded.

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So, at 9:30 PM on a Sunday night, I called Ben, who spent more than two hours on the phone with me while he was meal prepping. It was a harrowing adventure for him and an entertaining experience for me. Just imagine a grown man swearing in a way that would make your average SWU student blush because he splattered grease on his bare chest while trying to cook (cook being a questionable word choice, as his favorite college meal was boxed macaroni and cheese made with ketchup instead of milk). Add to that a phone-call to a depressed friend who was pacing outside her apartment in a somewhat sketchy area in the middle of the night, and you've got the ingredients for an interesting evening.

He asked me a couple of questions to get me talking, and then just let me talk. He spent most of the time listening, only stopping me to interject a couple things or ask questions to spur my processing. Sometimes he told a joke to lighten the mood when he could tell I was ready for one.

I ended up telling him about my dad. Dad died eleven years ago of adrenal cancer. I was processing how much this event had affected my life, when I started to get emotional. I quickly said, "but there's good that came from that. After all, I wouldn't know you if Dad hadn't died," I was forcing sobs back down my throat.

That's when he stopped me.

"It's okay to be upset, you know." His voice was calm and gentle. "You don't have to look for the positives in everything. It's okay to not be okay."

I felt as if I had been struck in the stomach with a two-by-four. *It's okay to not be okay.*

"What?" I was still processing. "I mean... I guess you're right."

And here's the thing. Ben got right what my parents had missed. What I had missed. It's truly okay to not be okay. Having been told my whole life the lie that depression was sinful and wrong, I had missed that truth. It's okay to not be okay.

PLATZ

It's okay, not because Ben told me it's okay, but because God has promised to comfort us in our sorrows, not to condemn us in them. II Corinthians 1:3-4 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." God promised comfort, not condemnation. Like the lion Aslan in C.S. Lewis's *The Horse and His Boy*, Jesus also says to "tell me your sorrows." Unlike a church that suppresses depression, Jesus shines a light on it and brings hope. He tells us to bring our sorrows to Him and He will take care of us. That, not legalistic rants, is what the Gospel is really about.

18

SOUTHERN SHAME

Jahanna Schwab

I pause as Tim jiggles the key into the lock. This building was built in the 1990s, but don't be fooled. As far as function goes, it could've been built in the 70s, easy. Cracked and discolored concrete holds us in the air on his third floor balcony, until he finally opens the cranberry colored, mud splattered mess that serves as the front door to Tillman Place apartment 931. As we step inside, he flips the switch on his left to illuminate the fairy lights hung around the ceiling. Immediately, they blink on.

The whole space is open, and about three hundred square feet. It's a living room, kitchen, and dining area all in one. My eyes glance first at the Black Keys poster above the fraying, yellowed couch, and then to the wooden mug rack (with Star Wars paraphernalia scattered about it), and then to the sink. There are a few dirty dishes, but not as many as I've seen here before.

I shuffle over, head down, and wash my hands. We've been outside for hours in ninety degree weather, and even my hands feel sweaty.

Tim strides over a few paces from the front door to the miniscule corner of the kitchen. I dry my hands on a (probably never been washed) kitchen towel.

We both stand, staring into space. Silent. Thinking.

Have you ever canon-balled into a freezing lake, just to avoid the pain

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of inching your way in slowly, one step at a time?

That's what this was: a forced cannon ball into the Bolding family. Tim, my boyfriend, just met my entire family for the first time at a riveting 4th of July celebration. Don't be fooled. When I say entire family, I don't just mean grandparents, parents, siblings, in-laws, nieces and nephews (in total, about 25 people).

Think cousins. Extended cousins. Everyone.

I'd love to say that this was primarily for Tim's sake, but in reality, it was for me. Get it over with. Splash.

I finally scrape together enough courage to look into his brown eyes and say, "Well... what did you think?"

He pauses, then grins.

"I had fun. I do see what you mean about them being... controlling, though."

My heart sinks to my stomach. I turn my head to the ground bitterly. Tears burn in my eyes. I huff.

"I just... I didn't realize how hard this would be."

His eyebrows scrunch together, confused.

"What do you mean?" he asks.

I throw my head towards the ceiling in frustration.

"You don't get it," I spit. "My family... that place... the things they said... I'm just angry. I didn't realize that I would feel so... ashamed."

This feeling of shame in relation to place, home, family is not uncommon. What makes my story unique, however, is that all of the shame that I felt was in relation to the South.

SCHWAB

The South is known for its pride, but did you know that Southern shame runs just as deep?

The US Census Bureau says that the South is everything from Florida to Delaware, North Carolina to Oklahoma, which is the joke of the Sunday dinner table.

Geographically, the South is sure as hell not Maryland. Missouri is laughable. And don't even think about bringing up Florida. No one knows what to do with Florida.

When outsiders (and some insiders) think of the south, they think only of slavery, bigotry in Baptist churches, and Trump/Pence signs planted in the front yard.

The south is perceived to have a generally 'backwards' perspective and lifestyle, pushing against the grain of progress, tolerance, inclusivity.

This is where I grew up.

And I was deeply, painfully, almost-ready-to-lie-about-where-I-lived ashamed of it.

Author and researcher Brene Brown says, "If you put shame in a Petri dish, it needs three things to grow exponentially: secrecy, silence, and judgment."

I didn't talk about (or even realize) the strength of this shame for years. I knew if I spoke about it, I would be judged for judging the south.

Secrecy. Silence. Judgment. Done.

As JD Vance points out, the essentially south functions as a shame and honor culture. This tendency towards shame was built into me as I grew up. I knew shame and humiliation instinctually.

However, in my family, any shame that might've been felt from living in the south (or of being a southerner) was blissfully ignored. We never talked about the fact that the south, as a whole, might be wrong about some

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of its values or practices.

And, if I ever mustered up the gumption to criticize the south in front of my family, I could almost hear the heretic-burning kindling igniting.

Betrayal was not an option.

Why?

Because the South is always right, the rebel flags flying on homemade flagpoles scream. Southerners act as if they are neo-Israelites, functioning under a God-sanctioned mission to grasp so tightly to “traditional” ideologies that they joyfully push the rest of the world down to Hell in a handbasket.

And all with a smile on their faces, mind you.

Brown writes, “Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behavior. Shame is ‘I am bad.’ Guilt is ‘I did something bad.’” This is important: the shame I felt was one of identity. Of being.

I am ashamed because I am a southerner, not because I did something abhorrent. My shame was not necessarily related to action – or at least not my action – but instead to a label of identity thrust upon me at birth, courtesy of my forefathers.

Born in Greenville, South Carolina in 1998? Boom. You are a southerner.

The funny thing is, because this shame was braided into my identity, I wasn’t only ashamed of the negative aspects of southern life and history. I was also ashamed of the positive aspects, of which there are many.

Because, if you’re truly a southerner, then you don’t just spew sexist, racist, etc.ist slanders, you also love homegrown tomatoes and family reunions and owning a million chickens that cluck around your backyard.

But if you are deeply ashamed of being southern, then you can’t

SCHWAB

associate yourself with the bad or the good. Either way, you will be functioning under the label.

You will be lumped. Pushed. Stereotyped. Good luck getting out.

This is an exhausting way to live your life because shame is soul-sucking. It is darkness. And when shame is related like this to identity, to home? You're probably never going to feel like you will escape it. I thought this shame would be a thing that 1) I could just forget about eventually after moving away from home or 2) would stick with me forever.

Neither are true.

The other half of Brown's analysis of shame is this: "If you put the same amount [of shame] in a Petri dish and douse it with empathy, it can't survive. The two most powerful words when we're in struggle: me too."

Isn't it funny how art can illuminate even the darkest of circumstances? Even shame.

Why? Because empathy is powerful.

Soon after the Tim-meets-the-Boldings fiasco, I met some artists who just about changed my life. These magicians were southern authors and southern songwriters who had backgrounds just like mine.

J. D. Vance. Edie Wadsworth. The Avett Brothers. Jason Isbell. Many more.

Their words floated into my heart and whispered, "me too." Their perspective was one I'd never seen before. They could criticize and embrace, condemn and cherish southern culture.

And they could do it as southerners.

Apparently, you can both love and hate the south—and that's okay. In fact, it's healthy.

For example, Isbell, has songs that extend across the spectrum of

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criticism and affection. He's written songs like "White Man's World," a self-reflective criticism of southern history. He speaks of walking on Native American bones, seeking African-American eyes in fields of cotton. He laments who he used to be as a southerner and knows that the issues are far from resolved: "Wishing I'd never been one of the guys / Who pretended not to hear another white man's joke / Oh, the times ain't forgotten."

Isbell is also the author of songs like "Something to Love," a song about growing up in a small southern town where glorious front porch singing built him as an artist: "Old women harmonizing with the wind / Singing softly to the savior like a friend / They taught me how to make the chords and sing the words."

In reality, the south is not hell. Vance argues that the south has "many good traits—an intense sense of loyalty, a fierce dedication to family and country." There are truly valuable things about the south: storytelling around dinner tables, scampering up trees barefoot all summer long, warm biscuits, garden plots, banjos, hospitality.

It just took me so darn long to realize it.

I feel my heart rate begin to accelerate as Brian, my eldest brother (second born), steps up to the microphone. Around seventy-five people are packed into the Bryant Lodge, stuffed from their dinner of jambalaya. Our glasses have been filled with sparkling grape juice for toasts, because SWU sure as heck doesn't allow any sort of alcohol near the venue.

Round tables donned in creamy tablecloths surround the wedding party: my wedding party.

Those around us are family. This is the first time that many members from our separate families are meeting each other.

SCHWAB

My family: deeply southern, mostly pastors and blue-collar workers.

Tim's family: total Yankees from Philly, engineers and U.S. ambassadors. Totally terrifying to me.

I have felt self-conscious all evening. "What do they really think of me? What will they think of my family? They are all crazy important in the world, and many members of my family don't even have a college education."

My pre-wedding anxiety found an outlet in worrying about his family's perception of my family (and thus, his family's perception of me).

And all eyes are front and center on Brian. Brian is bald, around 5'5", and has a surprisingly red beard that stretches off his chin just enough to let you know that he cares more about beard hair than the average human. His lightly checkered shirt is tucked into khaki shorts. He dressed up. He is 20 years my senior, a pastor in rural Tennessee, and one of the most tenderhearted men I have ever met.

As I glance from Tim's beaming face to the microphone, I hear Brian clear his throat. I can tell that he's stalling. He doesn't want to show everyone that he's already crying.

"Jahanna and Tom," he begins, masking his emotionalism by misnaming my fiancé. The crowd roars. His twangy accent echoes off the walls, and some of Tim's family members exchange surprise at how strong it is.

"Tom, you have to know that Jahanna is my baby sister. I don't know you that well, but I need you to know that she is one of the most precious gifts you will ever receive. I remember this one time..."

Brian continues to entertain with his tale, and as he does so, I glance around the room. It's an odd amalgamation of people.

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I see the laughing faces of both my family and my soon-to-be-in-laws, two worlds colliding. It is obvious that some members of Tim's family are fairly amused at my family's oddities.

I look back at Brian. I see the tears in his eyes, dripping down around his nose and into his crazy red beard. Tears of love. Tears of loyalty. Tears that I don't deserve.

I realize with an odd and overwhelming peace that I no longer want to actually care about what Tim's family thinks of my southernness. I love my family. This place. This crazy complicated culture that I've wrestled with for years. I criticize it often, and still struggle on occasion with shame, but my love for the south has also matured fairly fast in the past few years.

It feels like healing, like the beginnings of freedom.

Tim's family doesn't understand how complex it all is. They might think that we're just simple and silly. And that's okay. For so long I didn't even understand.

But I'm starting to get the feeling now that the days of total shame and anger? The days where I could almost lie about where I was from? When all I could think of was moving far, far away and reestablishing myself as anything but a southerner?

As Jason Isbell sings, "Those were different days."

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“Non-Fiction is more than just books of facts. You’re probably a better writer than you think and details are everything. I learned that I don’t have to be afraid to write the way I want to and I don’t have to be afraid to write something that hurts...I would recommend this class if your goal is to be a good writer.”

-Lyssa Henry

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