

2017 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Essay Category

First Place: “Six Feet Above” by Therese Powers

Oh no! I must have gotten hurt again! I slowly opened my eyes. Where was I? I was in a white bright light that surrounded my entire being. I felt weird. I was weightless and I could not sense my body at all. Am I dead? Do I have a body? I perceived only my intelligence. It was just me and my brain, but with more knowledge than I ever had. My body was all intact but I could not detect it. I felt like a radiant fluffy cloud resting on my stomach. A deep sweet love enveloped my whole inner spirit as it permeated all through me. I felt a peace that was beyond anything I had ever experienced before. I started to look around. I saw only white light in front of me and all around me. I moved with no effort. It was easy, like I weighed nothing. I was fully aware of everything around me. I decided to look down and noticed I was suspended above my own body. What was happening to me? Where was I?

I was flat and motionless on a narrow examination table. It was sliding in and out of this tunnel, rotating around me. The x-ray tube and electronic x-ray detectors were located opposite each other in a ring, called a gantry. The computer workstation that processed the imaging information was in a separate control room. The technologist operated the scanner and monitored my examination in direct visual contact with me. He had a speaker and a microphone so he could hear and talk to me.

The problem was I could not hear anything. It was totally silent all around including my own heartbeat. My mouth would not open to speak. I could not communicate with him even if I wanted or had to. I had no ability to hear, smell, or touch anything. It was like my ears, nose, and sense of touch did not work at all. I had no use for them, where I was. Everything was beautiful and tranquil. I felt no pain. I appeared to be dead, but it did not bother me. I saw everything that was happening to me in detail. I knew I was having a cat scan on my brain. I saw my head was shaved in bald spots with long thin tubes sticking out, around twenty of them. The nurses were arranging the tubes so they would go through the scan properly.

CT imaging is compared to considering a loaf of bread by cutting the loaf into thin slices. When the image slices are reassembled by computer software, the result is a very detailed multidimensional view of the body's or brain's interior. But why are they scanning my brain? Something terrible must have happened to me. This must have been a bad one. I remembered nothing. I just knew I was a jockey and would never give up on anything, no matter what the problem was going to be. I would get back on that horse and fight my way back to riding races again, like I always did! That was what I was created for, from the beginning of time, right? I am a jockey, only a jockey, I am a jockey. No matter what, I will never give up. I am a jockey, I will never give up. Thoughts kept running through my head like the speed of lighting. I never wanted to leave, where ever I was. I glanced toward my physical structure once again. I wanted to stay there, suspended high in the air, above all the chaos that was happening beneath me.

Down below was involuntary and up above was infinite, and never-ending. A calming stillness and serenity had prevailed in the center of my bliss.

Then I saw him! He was unbelievable! I recognized precisely who he was. We started to converse without saying a word. I understood exactly what he was saying to me. We had a clear and innermost connection. He articulated to me in fifth dimension like it was another language from a different world.

I told him, "I don't want to go back!"

He said, "but you must go back my child. Your work is not yet done."

"No!" I responded with conviction. "I don't want to go back to pain and misery. I feel light and free with no heartache. Up here is harmonious and forgiving. I am blessed and have divine favor just by being in your presence. You are powerful and almighty!"

I announced, "can I stay with you Father, please?"

He was sweet and kind as he looked at me, like he knew me for a long, long time. I gasped at how much he adored me. His eyes pierced mine with a keen intuitive awareness. A sensitivity to the presence of perception and wisdom that goes way beyond my comprehension. Strange and hard to explain, it was bright and I could not see any features, yet I knew he was there. I was familiar with my surroundings. This was where I fit in! I was home. Home sweet home. I felt his power beyond any kind of measure that I knew. We were relaying a lot of information to each other in a nanosecond. I knew everything he was transmitting to me. It was like a high frequency energy that disseminated my entire existence. It was unimaginably astounding!

I repeatedly begged him, "please let me stay, please, I don't want to go back. I am where I am supposed to be. This is my real place and where I belong."

He gently but firmly said for the last time, "you have to go back. Your calling awaits you. Fulfill your purpose my good and faithful servant."

This time there was no look or communication, and in a flash, I was back inside my body. For two weeks I was motionless in the hospital. I finally woke up, only to find that I couldn't feel my feet or move. Plus, I had severe back pain. I thought I was paralyzed. I told the nurse and the results were alarming. I had five compressed vertebrae, after they took my x-rays, T5 – T9. The only thought I had after that was to get back riding. I had work to do and horse trainers were waiting for me. They need me to ride their horses and I have to be there for them. Get me out of here! I can't just lay here. My next thought was, no problem, I will ride again. I just need to fix this problem. It might take time but I will do it! I know I can do it! I will never give up.

At that moment, I remembered my experience. Wow! What a phenomenon. I laid in the hospital bed thinking, what a profound effect this was going to have on my survival and my success. I knew at that point, I would not be paralyzed, plus I would ride again. I also realized my recovery would take some time. As long as I could ride races, I knew my ability would motivate me to handle anything. I would never give up. That's been my motto since I was nine years old and sat on my very first race horse. I will never forget that day.

My Dad was ponying me and I was on my first race horse. I looked at him with wide, excited eyes and said, "Dad, I want to be a jockey!" From that point on I never thought of anything else. My plan was to be a jockey for the rest of my entire existence.

I was in the hospital for a long time. I'm not sure, but long enough for the feeling to come back in my feet. I remembered knowing that the feeling would come back in my feet as I laid immobile on the bed in the hospital. My memory improved every day. Not once, did I worry about my brain or the ability to be able to ride again. I knew everything was going to be fine. I

just kept exercising and doing my therapy every chance I could. I had to wear a back brace for approximately eleven months. The brace kept my spine perfectly and uncomfortably straight as I went about my daily routine. It felt like a lifetime. I couldn't wait to sit back on a horse. I knew I would be back even though I couldn't move my spine. Frankly, the doctors thought I would never ride but they didn't know me or my determination. I told them all to watch me. I love proving people wrong.

The doctors and my family watched as I fought my way back. I had to learn how to walk again. It was difficult because I had a severe concussion also. My brain needed to connect back to my body and learn how to think and move properly. It was hard, but I only thought of getting back on a horse. I couldn't wait to ride races. I had physical therapy five days a week. I looked forward to every session with the therapists. I knew every day with them would be one day closer to my goal. They were amazed at how I made my legs work even when they didn't want to. I would make them move even when my back was on fire with pain. I was certain that I would be getting back on a horse soon even though I had a back brace on during that time.

Finally, the time came when I got back on my first horse since my spill. It was exciting but painful. I had lost a lot of fitness since the accident. I decided to have my Dad pony me from his horse. I was on one of our family's race horses who was easy to get along with. As my father and I went around the race track side by side, I was thinking, this pain will all be worth it very soon. I'll be back riding. My legs and back were hurting by the time I got to the half mile pole. I sure wish I knew what my dad was thinking when we went around the track. He's not with us anymore, but I bet he was proud of me. He would tell everyone how great I was even though I never heard him say it. I'm pretty sure he would say, see, I told you she would come back! She's tough and she will be back on top before you know it.

I would get on a bunch of horses every morning. Then I would go to the fitness center to work out some more. I lifted weights every other day with cardio mixed in. The treadmill and free weights became my friend. I could feel my muscle mass coming back quick. We all have memory muscles. Thank god, they didn't forget me. I rode my horses in the morning then walked and jogged and lifted weights the rest of the afternoon. Blood sweat and tears got me closer to my aspiration. Look out jockeys, here I come!

Fourteen months from the tragedy, I rode my first race and won! It was the best feeling in the world when the dirt hit my face so hard that tears came out of my eyes. I had goose bumps on my goose bumps on my goose bumps. Racing along at forty-five miles an hour, I was six feet above on the horse.

JUDGE'S COMMENTS:

The story's title is a play on "six feet below," alluding to the near-death experience it revolves around. The title also suggests the view from horseback, the preferred vantage point of this author. The essay begins in a hospital after a serious riding accident, and paints a vivid picture of the terror of knowing one is grievously injured yet being unable to communicate with doctors and technicians. The experience of having a CT scan morphs into an encounter with God and a conviction that life holds unfinished business. The choice to live leads to rehabilitation and an ultimate return to the saddle, aided by an understanding parent. The essay tells this complicated tale compellingly, blending multiple strands into a unified whole.

Dr. Joel R. Brouwer is retired from teaching English and Communication for 47 years, the last 21 on the faculty at Montcalm Community College. During that time, he taught creative writing and mentored numerous aspiring authors. He also coordinated the statewide LAND Creative Writing Contest for many years. For an example of his writing, consult his travel blog, <https://hippieroadtrip.wordpress.com>