

Behrend Showcase

"Show Yourself"

"Enthusiasm is excitement with inspiration, motivation, and a pinch of creativity."
- BO BENNETT -

My first fight

LOIS HEISE - Creative Writing Major

Walking along the sidewalk outside Erie's Bayfront Convention Center, the sunny day was turning into a pleasant evening along Lake Erie's bay. It was this Pennsylvania city's mixed martial arts sporting event appropriately named Beatdown on the Bay 2, and that's just what I expected. Once inside the main room, my eyes went directly to the ominous octagon in the center of the large room. Circling the cage was a single row of tables and chairs; the rest of the room had wooden folding chairs fanned out surrounding the octagon. Four large teletrons hung on the walls. People were everywhere. The program showed the first fight of the night was my son's. Good, I thought, get it over with right away.

I sat on my wooden chair in the row chosen by my two oldest sons and people watched young and middle-aged men and women mill around. There were a few children, the twenty-somethings wore baggy pants, and their ball caps turned sideways. Men gawked at women walking by and most people held a plastic glass of beer in each hand. I was tempted to ask my oldest son for a swig of his beer to help keep my nerve up, but I didn't.

The escorts for the fighters were two blond girls, probably in their twenties, who kept walking back and forth close to the cage, which made me wonder who got more attention - the fighters or the girls in their black bikinis and high heels. The disc jockey played blood pumping music like "Bad to the Bone" and "Highway to Hell." In between, he repeated announcements of buying beer at the back of the room where no lines existed.

When it came time to introduce the fighters, my son, Nick, was escorted down the aisle by one of the girls while they played his theme song, "Car Wash." He played this same song during high school swim meets to pump up his fellow athletes.

At the start of the first round they touched gloves and mostly boxed or did standup. This reminded me how I watched Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali on television with my father as a teen. My son was taking it easy at first, evaluating each other. Shins and outer thighs were kicked, and both fighters used one-two combos. Nick's opponent, Brian, countered with punches immediately following Nick's, causing Nick's head to whiplash. Nick grabbed his opponent's neck making him swing wildly, and because of that Nick got hit in the head and eyes. Nick's right knee found its way into his Brian's abdomen. The second air horn sounded sending both fighters to their corners.

I originally didn't watch the fight because I protected my children all their lives growing up. Should I pay money to watch him get beat up? My husband agreed with me. Weeks before the event I decided to go in case he needed me if he really got hurt. I had a morbid curiosity in case I wanted to write about it. The day of the fight my husband reluctantly agreed to go by Joe, my oldest son, who came seven hours from Philadelphia to watch his little brother's first fight. Nick's younger sister, friend, and both of his brothers came to support Nick. There we all sat before the cage watching, and waiting for brutality.

The fight started with lone calls from the audience, "Yeah, Nick!" The bell rang and I kept muttering under my breath, Damn that hair. He showed more than a ponytail. Nick's opponent came out swinging his head first at Nick slamming him up against the cage. The crowd was a sea of excitement.

I had to see the fight on the cage floor, so watching the teletrons helped, but being a novice I didn't understand what I was watching. The next round Nick replayed a video someone showed him and explained the fight scenes. The first round was an aggressive power play. A bull rush. A double leg take down occurred

when Brian wrapped his arms around Nick's legs and rushed him against the cage. Nick countered by wrapping his legs around Brian's body in a guard and putting his knee in between both their bodies. Nick then moved his hip to prevent Brian's head and arm control in what's called passing the guard.

Nick explained when you kick someone; don't keep looking at where your kick lands or you'll end up with a fist to the face like Brian. The loud crack made the crowd go nuts. The second take down mimicked the first one with the same basic scenario with Nick up against the cage. This time, Nick hooked his left arm around Brian's head, locking his left hand onto his right; however, he couldn't get his knee between their bodies due to the pressure of hugging each other. Just then the bell for the end of round two rang.

The second and third rounds were more intense than the first, but not like veteran fighters. Both Nick and Brian were amateurs. So was I. I didn't doubt Nick could fight well because I had been watching him learn martial arts since he was seven years old. I made bi-weekly treks to classes, until he could drive himself at age sixteen and no longer needed my taxi services. I was a martial arts mom; knowing belt advancement, talking the lingo, rattling off sparring and tournament rules, and spending more money on his uniforms than groceries. Would I have done that if I knew he would someday get a license to get beat up?

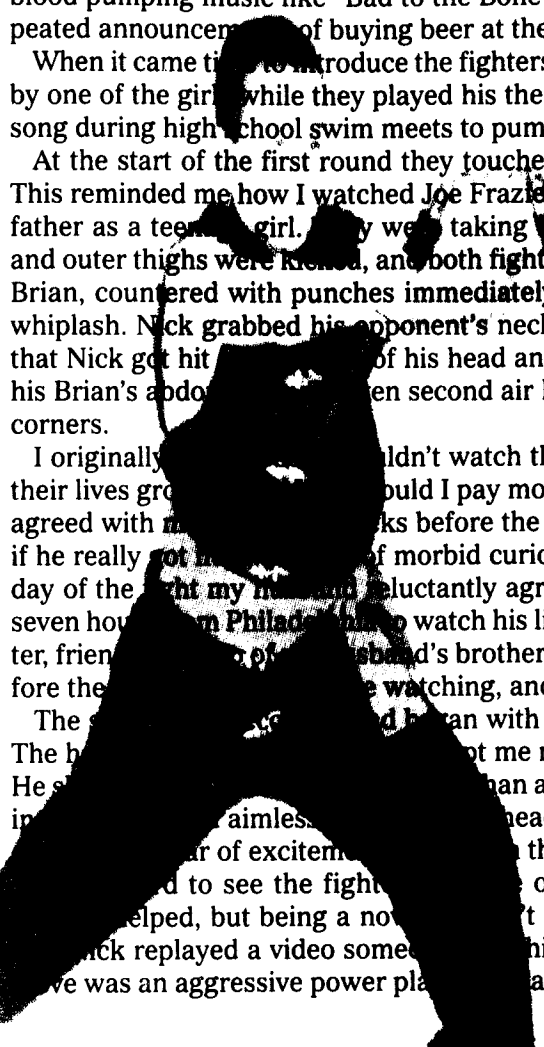
Round three started with a deep voice yelling "Go Nick" from somewhere in the crowd. Out from their corners, slapping hands, punches flew back and forth until Brian shot quickly into Nick for another double leg take down. Damn that hair. The crowd thundered with excitement. Nick told me later he anticipated this ground strategy, so after he hooked a left fist he stepped back, widening his stance. Brian's fatigued attempt at a take down failed when Nick grabbed Brian's head to prevent it.

After a few punches thrown between them, Brian rammed Nick, lifting him against the cage. Once on the floor, Nick hooked his arm under Brian's, his right leg around Brian's right leg, and centered his weight using his hips to turn himself over. A verbal wave of excitement came from the crowd when Nick showed control by pushing hard twice. Before Brian could create space between them by getting on his hip, Nick flattened him onto his back, and used his left hip to keep pressure on his opponent's chest. Throwing his right leg over, Nick took mount, which meant he was sitting on his opponent. He kept head control isolating Brian's arm and set up a submission. Nick called it an arm triangle. The bell rang, the round was over, and the opponents hugged each other. I sighed and grateful it had come to an end.

Nick won by a split decision. I apologized to the woman in front of me. Sorry for hollering and cheering, that's my son who just won the fight. I turned and apologized to the men in back of me. Sorry for standing, but that was my son that won. The woman was more excited for me than the men.

To be honest, the interaction seemed awkward to me though it wasn't, only because my little boy was taking hits to the head. At least he didn't end up with a broken arm like I thought he would. The little boy anyone, and that fight helped me understand that when he was a child, he had become more of a man than I realized.

Afterwards, Nick told me that he was waiting for the fight to start, he took a deep breath, and blocked out the crowd. Nick's coach during the fight told him he was just the other way around him. He was a great Nick. He was great. He accomplished what he set out to do. I was worried if he could endure the elimination to finish a desire. He had shown such support for his endeavor. He is accomplishing what some of us in our early fifties are just starting to do; making check marks on a bucket list of life accomplishments.



Forgetting

NATHAN CARTER
Showcase Editor

Haddie eased herself across the front porch, the arthritis in her hind legs starting to show in a heavy limp. She licked at her water bowl, a prior rain. The food bowl was empty. Len was drinking again, slept in. When he woke up to the sound of the neighbor's lawn mower, Haddie was beginning to whine through the screen door. There was a note: Went to Lynn's place.

He forgot when the last time she left was, just like he forgot to go to church on Sunday. These were the times that a bible proved extra useless to him. He'd just forget what it said anyways, so he didn't see a point to it anymore. Trying to remember the names of the faces in the pews, what sickness the priest's mother had, the next church outing, it was all for the birds. He just drank his coffee, letting his memory roll off his moustache like the steam. Len fed Haddie, added some extra for her wait.

"What, no tip?" Len says, petting the back of her head, her beagle's ears falling onto his hand, back down to her chin.

The coffee drowns his need for a cigarette.

"It's about time you quit," she says.

He never felt much need to tell her no, only when he'd had a few. Last night was one of those times. As the shots were slowly pulling Len's eyelids closed, he watched Lauren packing her suitcase, grabbing the keys to her car. He remembered to mumble, to drool, didn't remember her birthday though, or their anniversary. The look on her face when he handed her his grandmother's apron but pawned his great aunt's sapphire brooch. He forgot that she still wore it even though most would consider it a rag, with its aged grease spots and torn edges.

In an hour, he was supposed to meet Harold Biggum at the pump to play the numbers, so Len figured a shower necessary. He climbed the stairs to the bathroom, first passing his wife's art room. The easel held a peculiar piece, the use of dark browns and grays with hints of yellow, a family playing in the mud under a tree. It was rather good, he had to admit, much better than the first painting she showed her on their first date. He bought her a funnel cake and himself a burrito. She slid it over to him across the picnic table, he fought back a smile. The fair was popular that year with the city folk, expecting to see a hot sausage but not to get their Cadillacs dirty. Two years ago he found one with Harvey Gross, a gold emblem stuck out on its hood. He found it hanging out of Harvey's back pocket when they found two girls in his wheel. He showed it to one of them, always trying to impress.

"The thing about it is that it's bigger than his pecker," he said. Harvey scowled, laughed later over more drinks.

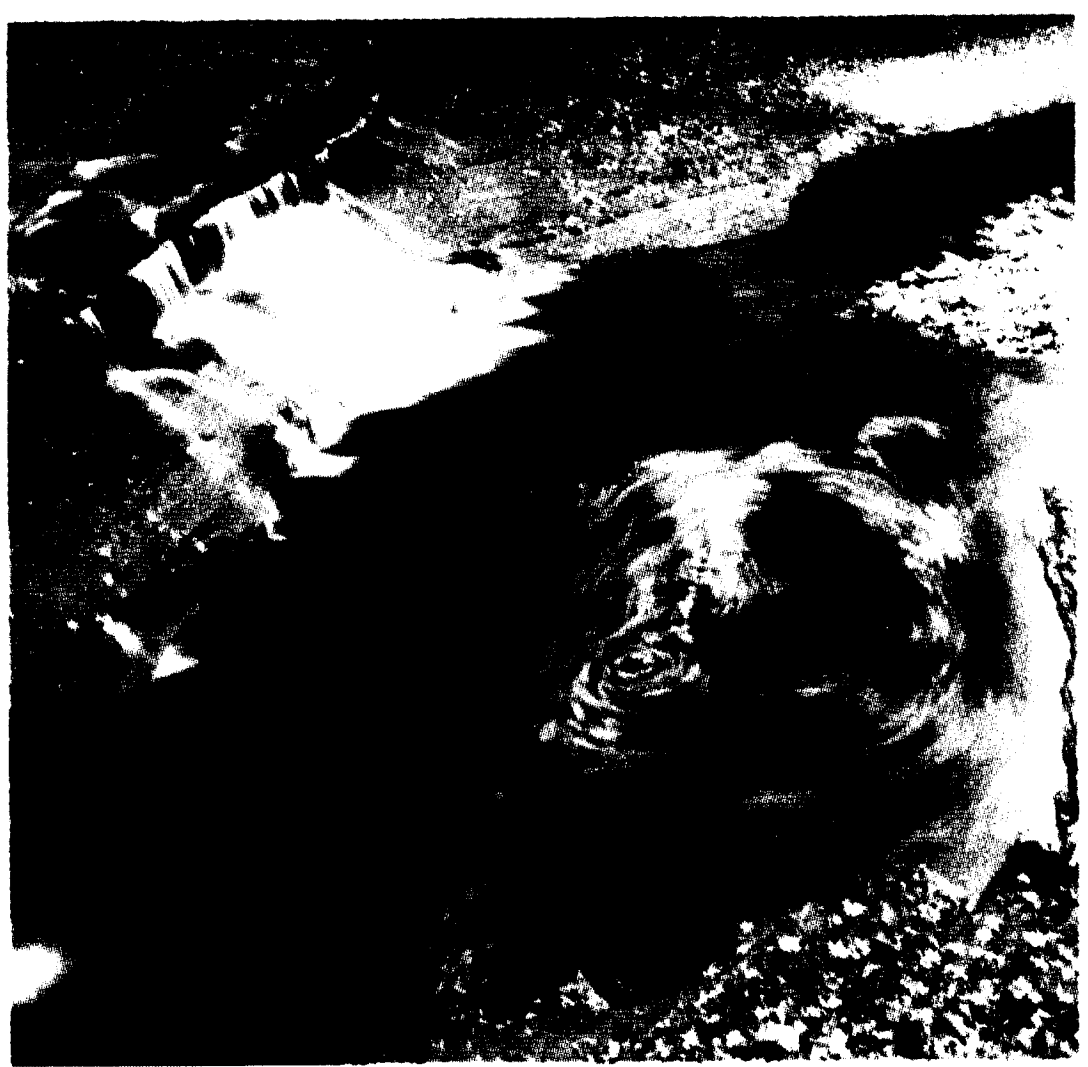
When Len walked back downstairs, buttoning his shirt, there was an officer outside. He opened the door, the eyes of the man in blue and asked, "What's this about, officer?"

"Hello, Mr. Jacobs," he said, hesitating. "I found your wife. We found her body in a car up the road. Sorry to say this, but, uh, she didn't make it through."

A look of confusion spread across Len's face. "I don't have a wife. It's been me, this dog, and them fields for twenty-seven years."

The officer looked back to a second man. "What's your name, officer?" "Nathan Jacobs is my name, Leonard?"

Len knelt, pet Haddie again, she howled once. "I've got a new yard of her. Certainly ain't my wife. You see, I've got a new yard of them Oak County Jacobs' because I think I might have their number. I've got some of their mail."



SEASONS IN THE WATER: Extended Exposure in the Gorge
STEPHEN FYFITCH - AET Major

Souls

NATHAN CARTER
Showcase Editor

There is a moment of suspension when one dies; when the world goes black. No pain, no fear, no regret.

He closes his eyes, before he ends, the moment before he hits the sidewalk. The wind whips his hair, as the street looms closer, waiting for the trajectory to turn into a series of twisted strands.

Exhilaration, the feeling replace the knot in his stomach as he continues to plummet downward, to the ground.

The middle of his life, his innocence, his last wishes, his final goodbyes. Inevitably, he dies.

He thinks of leaving the gravity that he's relief on, but he can't see; that he cannot deny still waits.

The blood pours from his hands; there were notes he wanted to read, but he can't see. He wishes the pain, unable to remember the last moments of his life.

He's mangled his demise, leaving no need to feel. He didn't mean to let his hands on the broken edge of the window, but he can't see. He lost all thought like the flick of a light switch. When the light comes on, it can't be a burden, and he's sure it won't matter by then.

They found the dark souls in his father's attic. They aren't in the attic anymore.

