The Massasoit Community College One Book, One College Program presents

The Annual Writing Contest Winners

FAMILY STORIES

“Ou libere?” (Are you free?)

Writing Contest - Literary Reading
Massasoit Community College
Upper Student Lounge
SC Building, Brockton Campus
October 27, 2017
12:00pm-1:00pm

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2017-2018
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Every family has a story. You know the story I’m talking about. The one that has been told at every family gathering you can remember. The one that almost everybody in the family knows word for word. My family is no different. We have many stories, all of which have been told more times than I can count. But, there's one story which has always stood out to me. It may not be the most popular, or the most memorable to everyone. But to me, it was. It is the story of my grandfather’s service in the Ghost Army during World War 2, and it's a story I’m going to share with you today.

This story starts in America in 1941. The day was December 8th and the United States was about to be forced into a war that many people did not want to fight. At 7:45 AM a Japanese naval fleet attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. The attack was devastating. Four battleships were sunk, along with three cruisers, three destroyers and one mine sweeper. In total 2,403 Americans were killed, with an additional 1,178 wounded. This attack thrust the United States in to the middle of the World War 2, the biggest war the world had ever seen.

Fast forward 3 years. It’s now 1944 and the United States is fighting a war on 2 fronts. The U.S invading forces had just been devastated by the bloody landing at Normandy beach, and were now looking for any advantage they could find as they pushed their way farther into Nazi occupied France. That’s where the Ghost Army comes in to the picture.

The Ghost Army, or the “23rd Headquarters Special Troops” as it was officially known, was a tactical deception unit. It was made up of 1,100 soldiers that were split in to four different groups; the 406th combat engineers, the 603rd camouflage engineers, the 3132 Signal Service Company Special, and the Signal Company Special. The basic task of the aptly nicknamed Ghost Army was to impersonate other, much larger, Allied units to deceive the enemy.
They did this by setting up fake tanks and planes, sending out fake radio information for the enemy to use, and even simulating the sound of an Allied unit on the move to force enemy troops away from where they were needed. In order to do this they needed a very special, and very different group of soldiers. That is where my grandfather comes in.

Octavio “Joe” Martino had always dreamed of being a pilot. He was an intelligent enough man, there was no question about that. But, ultimately his poor eye sight meant that he would never be able to fly a plane. This did not deter him from joining the army, he knew he had other skills. He was a very talented engineer, and carpenter, and a very dedicated worker. So Joe, as he was known by his friends, joined the army, and in 1944 was asked to join the Ghost Army as they began Operation Quicksilver.

The Ghost Army was different. It was composed not of hardened killers and expert riflemen, but of artists, engineers, and other creative types who would use their brains as their primary weapons. They would be on the front lines intentionally drawing enemy attention by pretending to be a unit of up to 30,000 troops, complete with tanks, artillery, planes, and everything in between. When, in reality, they were just over 1,000 men, with nothing more than inflatable decoys and the courage and wit to pull off some daring operations.

My grandfather was a T/5 Technical Corporal in Signal Company Special. His company’s main objective was to send out intentionally bad intel on the radios in the hopes that the enemy would pick it up and think it to be true. The men of the Ghost Army had to be very highly trained. The enemy knew to some extent that false radio reports were fairly common. So to counteract this, the soldiers of Signal Company Special would learn how to perfectly mimic the departing operators method of Morse code. This would allow for them to put out false reports with the enemy still believing it was the previous operator, and never questioning the authenticity of the reports.

This would in turn take the enemies focus away from the actual Allied units making their ways through the country.
The techniques used by the Ghost Army turned out to be very effective. Using decoy tanks and recordings of armored vehicles they were able to convince German installments that they were a much larger unit than they were. In some instances the replications were so realistic that the enemy actually surrendered or left their positions in fear of being overrun. This allowed for Allied forces to make their way through parts of France with a lot less resistance than they would have otherwise faced.

In total the Ghost Army ran 20 successful operations in different parts of occupied France. They were in use from June of 1944, to March of 1945.

I do not know much about my grandfather’s specific duties beyond what I have told you in this story. Sadly he passed away before the majority of this information became declassified in 1996. Most of what I know about his role has come from the stories that have been passed down from my grandmother and my own research, and even from that I have not learned much. But, it is for that reason that I admire my grandfather and his story even more. The humility he showed by never really mentioning his service is something we can all learn from. He was a great man who did great and amazing things for his fellow soldiers and his country. But, I’m sure if you asked him he would smile and say he was “just doing what had to be done”.

I can't even begin to imagine the amount of courage and intelligence it took to be part of a unit like the Ghost Army. These men put their lives on the line with nothing more than inflatable tanks and some radio equipment protecting them from the enemy. They were able to make a huge difference in the ultimately successful Allied war effort.

This is why I find my grandfather’s story so inspiring. If he would have had things his way he would have been flying planes over the fields of France rather than setting up decoy tanks in them. But instead of giving up on his dreams and dwelling on that failure, he moved on. He realized that even though things hadn't worked out exactly as he had planned, he could still achieve greatness. He
became a part of a very successful, elite group of men who made a big difference in the war. And that is something to be proud of.

I wish I could say that I think of this story every day, but I do not. But, when I do think of my grandfather’s story, it serves as a very powerful reminder to not give up when life doesn't work out the way you hoped it would. It reminds me, that just because you didn't achieve what you thought were your dreams, does not mean you’re destined for failure. You can still change the world in ways you never thought possible, and you can still find happiness, which is really the most important thing.
It seems that I hear or ponder the story of my father’s recovery from shattering his foot every day, and I know I experience the after effects every minute. There is a reason that my siblings and I are as healthy, strong, and hardworking as we are today, and it all started one day with a devastating injury. Whenever I feel inadequate, incapable, or incompetent, my dad reminds me of his journey.

My dad has always been an extremely active person. He played football all through high school, has cycled over one hundred miles, raced motocross in a professional class, and participates in Olympic- and Half-Iron Man-distance triathlons. Endurance exercise is his idea of fun. Therefore, when he shattered the bones in his foot back in 2004, he was devastated. Being an athlete, of course, he’s more prone than the average person to injuries such as these. He had broken his wrists, tailbone, ankles, and even his pelvis before—but this one was different. He managed to find a specialized surgeon who said he would need to lodge a permanent titanium plate and seven screws in his foot. “Here’s the deal,” the doctor said. “We’re going to do our best to reconstruct your foot so you can walk again, hopefully without any devices, but there are no guarantees. You’ll likely have a limp for the rest of your life, and you’ll certainly never run again.” My dad knew the surgery was his only hope for being able to get out of bed and off his crutches, so he agreed to go through with the procedure.

After the surgery and eighteen months of physical therapy, he could walk again, but with the addition of the promised limp and support from a dozen Motrin capsules per day for eight years. Because of his condition and his inability to keep up with his normal exercise regimen, his health gradually declined and he fell into bouts of depression. He always describes the fall of 2008 as his lowest
point. He was missing out on many milestones in his three children’s lives, was becoming extremely overweight, and had developed Metabolic Syndrome (a common precursor to diabetes). When his physician warned him that if his blood pressure and sugar levels didn’t improve within six months, he would be forced on additional medication, my dad decided that enough was enough.

My dad spent the next four years working with a personal trainer, during which he began to study the facts behind nutrition and endurance sports. When, after every attempt to curb his blood sugar, it still didn’t drop low enough, he kept digging deeper until he discovered something called the ketogenic diet. Ketosis is a state of the body in which it is processing stored fats for energy instead of sugars and carbohydrates. After many trial runs, my dad learned that by consistently eating fats in place of grains, starches, and sugary foods, he could lose weight faster and last longer in athletic events. Then, being our father, he passed his knowledge on to me and my siblings. Thanks to him and his journey, our overall health, endurance, and athleticism have also seen great improvement, even if we’re not quite as strict and self-disciplined as he is. But my dad didn’t stop there. Now that all of his issues, including the painful, everyday inflammation in his foot, had been so noticeably lessened, a question arose in his mind—would he now be able to run again?

One day in early spring of 2013, my dad experienced one of the most pivotal moments of his life. He has described this particular part of the story in such detail that I could never forget it. On his way home from work, he noticed dark clouds beginning to appear in the sky and, predicting that it would soon begin to rain heavily, decided to grab the mail from our mailbox before going inside. After parking his truck and walking across the street, however, he realized he was a few seconds too late. The clouds opened up and rain began pouring down on him. Without even giving it a second thought, he grabbed the mail, slammed the box shut, and sprinted back into the house.

“It took me another few steps before what just happened hit me,” he says. He had just run painlessly for the first time in almost ten years. He recounted this experience in a post on his blog, writing
that “to the average person, running to seek shelter from a pouring
rain is nothing out of the ordinary…but to [him], this was a mind-
bending moment.” For nearly the entire past decade, even mere
walking had caused him pain to the point of misery. Running had
been completely out of the question. I remember when we used to
play at family softball games, and he would purposely try to hit a
grand slam over the fence every time he was up at bat, because his
only chance of getting around the bases was to slowly walk them. I
remember him being forced to participate in relay versions of
triathlons—he could bike and swim just fine, but then he would
longingly watch a teammate from the sidelines as he or she
completed the running section in his place. I remember watching
him sit down on a couch and ice his foot at the end of a day of
walking around Disney World, not understanding as a young child
just how much agony he was experiencing—but then everything
began to change.

My dad dashed through 2013—literally. He began running
almost every day and completed his first full triathlons. After each
of them, he recounted parts of his story to us again and again. His
doctor had said he would never run again. He had believed it
himself. And yet, here he was. By 2014, he was running ten miles at
a time. In 2015, he completed a Half-Iron Man triathlon, which
includes a 13.1-mile run. And later that year, after noticing that one
of his business clients was looking for runners for their charity, he
set his sights on the Boston Marathon.

It was during this leg of the journey that I really began to
listen to him and fully understand his story. I watched him train
every Sunday, riding my bike alongside him as he ran, holding his
water bottle as he progressed from fifteen miles to twenty to twenty-
five each week leading up to the race. The experience was
incredible. This guy had gone from being bedridden with a shattered
foot, always forced to the sidelines, to running and completing the
2016 Boston Marathon. Every member of my family knows his
story, young and old, even if they weren’t directly involved in it.
This story has shaped all of our perceptions of what is truly possible
to accomplish. We have all been inspired by my dad to strive to
achieve any goal we have—athletic or otherwise—despite our impediments. He has taught us all by retelling his tale again and again that we can overcome anything to which we set our minds, even if it goes against all odds.
The Tall Tale of Moby John
Kimberly I. Langford

While most children grew up learning about the well-known and infamous story of *Moby Dick*, I, on the other hand, grew up listening to my Dad tell me a tall and exciting tale about a giant fish with purple polka dots. His name was Moby John. I learned about this elusive beast when I was only about 4 or 5 years old. My Dad had decided that I was finally old enough to tag along with him, my brother, and the family dog Ralph, as we would all soon spend our summer days fishing. The story of Moby John ignited a spark in my imagination like no other. This imaginary character not only enchanted my childhood, it also gave me a memorable bond with my father, and even created memories for future generations to come, as the story continues to be told to this very day. Moby John is more than just a tall tale about a fish with purple polka dots. It’s a story about a daughter and her Dad, and some amazing memories…

I can remember being so excited to go fishing…despite the fact that my Dad made us all wake up at 5 am just so we would be the first ones on the beach. However, I must admit, I can’t exactly say that I truly recall my first fishing trip. But I do still have a picture that my Dad took of me holding the first fish I ever caught! I always smile when I look at it because I can see my dog Ralph looking up at me as if he wanted to grab the fish and run off with it. What I do
remember is all the wonderful, little idiosyncrasies that were associated with our daily fishing trips. For example, my Dad always had two large steel thermoses ready for the trip: one for him and one for me. His had steaming hot black coffee, while mine had warm, creamy cocoa with marshmallows (because you can’t forget the marshmallows of course). My Dad also always had a cooler with enough food to feed an army (sometimes I wondered if he forgot he had just two kids). Then there was the drive…the very looooonnnng drive to the beach. We lived in Brockton, but my Dad liked fishing at a place named Spectacle Pond down the Cape in a town named Sandwich. Now asking a 4 year old to get up at 5 am and then sit in the car for an hour is quite a task. Yet, somehow my Dad managed to get me up and going every time. Now I’m not a 100% sure but I think I may have fallen asleep most times on the ride there. Either way, I have to say my Dad is a miracle worker!

Anyways, the drive from Brockton to Sandwich was never a straight shot because we always had to make at least two stops: one was at the bait store (of course because you need fresh worms for the fish), and two, I can remember us sometimes stopping at this little diner to get breakfast. I always had a warm blueberry muffin with butter. Well, I’m sure you’re beginning to wonder when I’m going to get to the fishing part, right? Don’t worry I’m just about to get there. When I first started fishing with my Dad, the family still owned this old 1970’s brown two-tone Ford pickup with a hard cap on the back. My Dad would throw everything in the back of the truck, from fishing rods to bait to food to even a portable toilet (just for me of course because I was usually the only girl fishing most of the time). Then when we all pulled up to the pond (which was usually no later than 7 am), my Dad had us all lug everything out of the truck and down a hill-like pathway that lead to the beach. And so it would all begin:

Once everything was on the shore, it didn’t take long for my Dad to get into fishing mode. He always came over to make sure my fishing rod was set up just right. I can even remember my Dad teaching me how to put a worm on the hook. For some strange reason it didn’t gross me out. I think I was just so happy to be doing everything my Dad was doing. But then something even more
amazing happened. My Dad taught me how to cast my own line, and, as he did, he told me about the ever-so wonderfully amazing and elusive Moby John:

“Now Kim, make sure you cast that line as far as you can. Moby John is out there! He’s this big [he held his arms out all the way apart] and he has purple polka dots! There you go! I bet your worm landed right on his nightstand!”

And so began my endless adventures and pursuit of Moby John. I spent numerous summer days on the same shore in Sandwich casting over and over again into the same waters hoping to just see one glimpse of this giant fish. I can recall my Dad cheering me on as I reeled in every single fish saying “There you go Kim! I bet you this one is Moby John! Don’t forget to keep the rod up. Keep reeling! I know it’s Moby John! I know it!” But I never did catch Moby John, and, as I got older, I went fishing less and less. Soon the excitement of the mysterious Moby John left my mind, as I grew up and found other adventures.

The story of Moby John thankfully did not end when I grew up. It would soon resurface years later as my Dad, now a grandfather, retold it to my nephew on his first fishing trip. And now as I approach 40, my Dad and I have reminisced about those years passed. I’ve thought about the true impact and meaning of Moby John. Was it just a silly story about a fish with purple polka dots or was it something more? Was my Dad just trying to get me to like fishing? Perhaps it was neither of these. Instead I’d like to believe my Dad was teaching me to never give up, even if something seems impossible to obtain. Everyone has a Moby John…I’ve learned the question is not is he real, but rather how far are you willing to cast in order to catch him?
Nobody Talks About Grampy
Heather Cunningham

Nobody talks about Grampy. Grampy was my great-grandfather, on my father’s side, and except for funny stories, no one in the family really talks about Grampy. At least, there’s no mention of details, nothing with too much substance or too many facts – definitely nothing too negative or too serious. Oh sure, there’re plenty of humorous anecdotes, but don’t ask too many questions. There's this glaring reason why one doesn't ask too many questions about Grampy in my family: His name was Anthony Pino and on January 17, 1950 he robbed the Brinks Armored Car building in the North End of Boston.

Grampy came to the U.S. as an illegal immigrant from Sicily, Italy at the age of 13, or so states the FBI.gov website. I know he grew up in Southie, in Boston, from around 13-years-old or so, but I learned about the illegal immigration status from that FBI website. I have no idea how he got to the U.S. or even from what city or town in Sicily. I’m assuming by ship. I'm not sure anyone in the family really knows anymore. If you ask my paternal grandmother, his daughter, anything about how he got here the answer is invariably: “We don’t talk about that.”

My grandmother's answer may be due to the fact that he was almost deported twice, among other obvious issues with law, like the story of how he might not really be my great-grandfather. Supposedly, from what I'm told, from what is talked about... Sometime while he was a 'teen in Southie, he was run out of a corner-store for shoplifting, tried to scale a fence while running away, and was shot, ahem... well... was shot in the balls. Supposedly, he was sterile possibly. But, whether he was possibly sterile or not totally depends on which family member is telling the story. Whether it even really happened or not depends on which family member is telling the story. Either way, story has it he
adopted my grandmother as his daughter and always swore up and down that she was indeed his biological offspring. Or moreover, that she was his "daughter and that was it," and so, "We don't talk about that."

When I was much younger, growing up, especially as a teenager, I was fascinated by the character of Grampy. He died shortly before I was born, so I never met him. From family stories, in my mind, he was a notorious gangster, part of The Mob, The Mafia, maybe a made-man. I even asked my dad if he was made. Mostly the answers are no, he wasn't a "made-man" with various family embellishments as to why. If the history books written about the Brinks' case are accurate, he wasn't in The Mob even.

Regardless, family stories about him make him out to have been a larger-than-life character. Like the time he robbed an appliance store or a department store (the story changes with the storyteller), in broad daylight, while the store was open, by holding the door open (whether it was the front door or the back loading door also changes with the teller) and pushing packages or boxes out the door with his foot. I'm not sure what appliances can be pushed out a door with your foot; maybe it was toasters? Or, as in one of movies made about him, the time he robbed a candy factory and opened the wrong storage door and was buried in 10 feet of gumballs. (My dad swears this story really happened; it's not just "in the movies.") Or, when my dad proposed to my mom and needed a ring, Grampy took him to see someone called Vinnie The Greek who was told, "Hey, my grandson's getting married. Give him a ring." Then, my dad picked out a ring from a cookie tin, any ring he wanted. I have no idea if this story's true. Then, there's story of the silver turkey platter that "fell off a truck" and became my parents' wedding gift from him.

Of course, there are tons of questions we don't ask. Like, where's the missing money? Is it really in the Quincy Quarry? Most likely, no one still alive knows. And, of course, there are tons of questions that just can't be answered, like trying to trace my family tree. I get a bit envious when I see those people on Ancestry.com commercials reciting who they found in their family from records.
Grampy didn't exactly want written records of where he came from and what he did when. He's not exactly on a ship passenger list. Trying to trace my family tree on my father's side is just a dead-end. Then there's questions no one dare ask, like did he really have that one Brinks' guy killed, or try to? When it comes down to it, no one really talks about Grampy.
My Nana, Lela Williams

Ricketta Pryce

Lela Mae Williams

Reverse Freedom Riders

Just imagine being told about a time in history where someone in your family was a part of that specific moment in history. Reverse Freedom Riders. I never knew about my grandmother Lela Mae Williams being a part of the freedom riders back in the 1960’s, until after she passed away. She was amongst the first black families to get a free ticket to get on the bus with her younger children to be able to leave Arkansas. It’s just amazing how I can look up her name on google and find an article mentioning her, how she made her journey from Huttig, Arkansas and traveled to Boston and that’s where she raised a beautiful family of 13 children, and till this day she has over 50 plus grandchildren residing in the Boston area. Just hearing this story just shows how much blacks had to go through in the past just to live a normal life, and it’s sad that it had to be that way. We are still dealing with racism and segregation in a way such as the color of our skin, the religions we follow etc. but we still have more freedom than they did in the past, so we need to be grateful. They paved the way for us, and I feel as if my grandmother paved the way for her family, including me. If it wasn’t for my grandmother getting on that bus, who knows where we would be today, where I would be? Just hearing this story makes me think, what am I willing to do for my children to make them have a better life? How far am I willing to go? My grandmother is a loving, strong, brave and phenomenal woman.

Just knowing this piece of information really made me have more respect for my grandmother Lela. Especially seeing everything that she has gone through, and hearing that story makes me smile still till this day. I can just imagine her sitting on that bus smiling.
because she finally found a way out, her ticket out. I can’t even fathom what my grandmother went through back in the 60’s. I know it was a time where a lot of segregation was going on and a lot of black people couldn’t even purchase a ticket to get on the bus, and do many other things, that’s just one example, yet my grandmother was given a ticket. That ticket was given to her to create a better life for herself, her children and her grandchildren. That she did, she raised my mother who is her youngest, who raised me and now I’m raising a family, and will one day tell my children this amazing story about their great grandmother being a part of the Reverse Freedom Rider’s.
Author Biographies

Doug Phinney is from Holbrook, MA. He is currently a freshman at Massasoit and is enrolled in the Liberal Arts Transfer program. He plans eventually to transfer to Bridgewater State University where he hopes to major in English.

Sarah McLauglin is sixteen years old from Bridgewater, MA. She is a dual enrollment student of one year here at Massasoit, and a tutor in the Writing Center. She loves writing everything from plays and music to short stories and research essays. In addition to writing, she enjoy singing, acting, dancing, and playing piano. She will graduate high school in 2019 and plans to study literature, creative writing, and theatre.

Kimberly I. Langford was born and raised in Brockton. She is a media communications and computer programming student at Massasoit. Currently, she is producing, directing, and filming her first documentary on the homeless and their struggles in Brockton. She has a BA in psychology with a double minor in sociology and child development from Ashford University. Upon graduating from Massasoit, she plans to attend Boston University and obtaining her MFA in film production.

Heather Cunningham is a Computer Technology and Information Management student, studying post-bachelor's programming certificates at Massasoit Community College, Brockton. She received her bachelor's in Communication from Emerson College in Boston, graduating with honors. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and on the Dean's List, as well, at Massasoit. After her student career at Massasoit, she hopes to go on to earn a master's in Computer Science or gain a software development or web development position within a tech company.
Author Biographies

Ricketta Pryce was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts. She has always had a love for writing; she wrote her first book in the 9th grade. She is a published author, with several novels and short stories under her real name and pen name "Pinky Dior". She spends a majority of her time with her children and family. Being a full time mother, student and also running her new business “Modest Girlz” from home in hopes of opening a clothing store one day in Boston, MA.