

# OUR JOURNEY: OVERCOMING THE STIGMA OF THE INVISIBLE MONSTER



An anthology by several members of a little-known, ostracized segment of society, written to acquaint people with who we are in order to quell the misunderstandings and thus the mistreatment of us by many people because of our chronic medical body odor

Edited by  
Richard R. Cook, Jr.  
Illustrated by  
Benjamin Rimmer



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## **DEDICATION**

To all who suffer the agonizing condition of chronic medical body odor and the immature giggles and painful taunts that come with it. And to all who are hopeful to someday see better medical treatment and a cure for this malady.

## **PREFACE**

Many people wrongly assume that chronic breath or body odor conditions are well researched and well understood. They assume that their doctor or dentist will have an expert knowledge of the cause and treatment of their condition. After all, halitosis (bad breath) and bromhidrosis (smelly sweat) are recognized medical conditions.

The truth of the matter is that doctors and dentists generally know mainly about the types of odor conditions which are associated with disease (pathology) or with hygiene issues. For instance, a doctor will be able to tell you that there are medical conditions

such as liver failure, kidney failure, lung abscess, etc. that can cause body odor.

Similarly, a dentist will be able to tell you that gum disease, tonsil infections, ENT (ear, nose, and throat) infections, dry mouth, etc. can cause breath odor. This is why the dentist and doctor should be the first port of call for getting the odor condition investigated.

So what about chronic odor conditions where the patient does not have any associated diseases? Well, for body odor the doctor will focus on hygiene (bathing often, changing clothing often, use of deodorant, etc). Similarly, the dentist will talk about flossing the teeth, scraping the white/ brown plaque from the tongue, using antiseptic mouth rinses, etc. for bad breath.

So what to do if you have a very marked problem and none of these measures really helps? What is the cause? Well it does appear that most of us who have participated in this book appear to have some hitherto un-researched disorder(s) related to our metabolism. This is painstakingly obvious in those people (such as me) who are “gifted” with both breath and body odor!

As a Pharmacist who has been involved in some human odor research (analytical chemistry) in the past, I believe some types of strong human odor conditions are systemic as opposed to local in origin.

This means that the odor is generated in the body due to a metabolic defect and is passed around the body via the blood and is excreted through the skin surface via sweat glands or via the breath. Believe it or not, the exact biochemical origin of many of

these conditions has yet to be documented. This means that they do not have a name yet!

I believe these conditions are due to enzyme disorders which bear some similarities to a condition known as Trimethylaminuria (Fish Odor Syndrome) in that they are systemic (as opposed to local) in nature.

Many of us with these severe odor conditions can shower then literally stink within twenty minutes. The odor can be like regular body odor but a thousand times stronger. Some of us can smell of garbage or feces or even have urine odors, the range of odors is almost endless but invariably unpleasant.

Variable, too, is the intensity of odors. I have come across cases where the odor was so strong it traveled through the air-conditioning in an office and came out in another office at the other end of the building!

Doctors and scientists remain as incredulous and disbelieving of our conditions as the psychiatrists we are encouraged to see. (These conditions can cause severe depression and social anxiety.)

Generally speaking, doctors are at a loss to know how to treat this category of odor conditions (strong peculiar odors but where no organ disease is present and where hygiene is a non-issue). They have noted that these patients have a high incidence of suicide and are generally socially crippled by their condition.

Some of us with these conditions can not detect our own odor just as people can no longer smell the aftershave or perfume they wear after a while. Bizarrely, some doctors

use this as a tool to try to convince distraught odor sufferers that they don't have an odor problem!

Imagine for a moment a person with strong breath or body odor which can fill a large room in minutes. Now imagine that same person bathing several times a day and exercising meticulous oral and body hygiene but all to no avail. This encapsulates a snapshot of our lives with this condition.

Next time you sit next to a person who smells really unpleasant, please question the thoughts that society has brainwashed you with. We are not dirty, unhygienic people who don't like taking baths, don't like brushing our teeth and have never heard of deodorants.

Arun Nagrath

Pharmacist and scientist

BSc Pharmacy Hons, MSc, MRPHARMS.

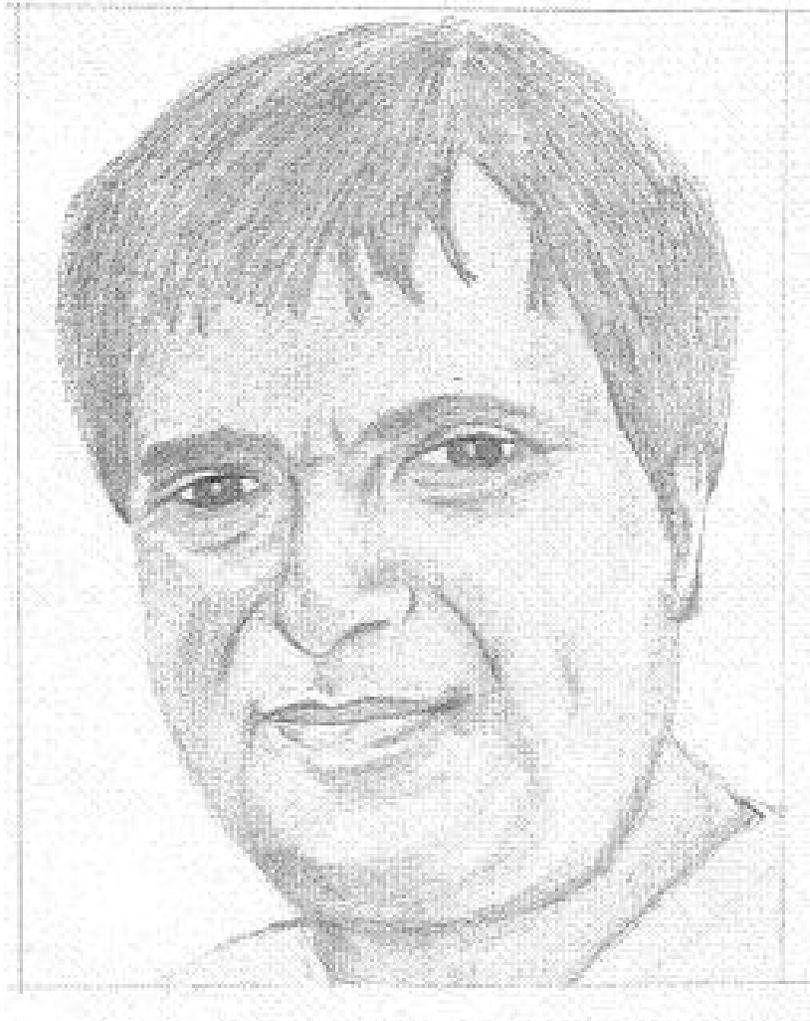
ACCEPT ME

Hiding in dark corners  
Like an untouchable in shame,  
Afraid to talk, afraid to love,  
Afraid to play the game.

If I were to reach out and touch you,  
Would you back away from me?  
Or would you see me as God's creation,  
Like an apple or a tree?

Arun Nagrath

Not every contributor to this book wished for h/her true name or likeness to be included into it. Drawings were made of those individuals who requested it.



Arun Nagrath

### **A NOTE TO THE READER**

This anthology was created and written by members of an online support group for people who suffer from chronic body odor. The managers of this group are Maria de la Torre, C. Hall and Arun Nagrath and Sharon C. We comfort, listen to and encourage one another. Many of us even consider one another family—because we do all the things any true family does. Oftentimes, members of this forum are the closest thing some members have to a loving and caring and understanding family. The sporadic and mysterious nature of our condition and its affects on our day to day lives often leads to

rejection and misunderstanding not only by co-workers, classmates, peers and strangers but also by our own families. Though we live in various countries, with different backgrounds and are different races, we are united in desperately trying to figure out what has gone wrong with our bodies and how we can get the scientific community to pay more attention to our disease.

Because our condition is so socially isolating, this effort has proven to be frustrating—but not entirely fruitless. We are finally starting to see movement, albeit at a snail's pace, in our direction from doctors and scientists. We have brilliant members in our support group who have decided to make it their life's work as scientists to find the answers we are seeking for our condition, and we all applaud them for that!

This book was written in part to give mainstream society a tour into our rarely talked about, taboo world. All proceeds will go to research for a cure and better medical treatment. It is impossible for anyone who is not afflicted with this chronic body odor they cannot wash or brush away to fully understand what it is like to live this kind of life with this nightmare. We are not asking for pity, but simply for others to understand that we are also human beings who happen to have an odor condition. We have the same emotions and needs and wants as everybody else. We have dreams and hopes. We want to go to school. We want to hold jobs and build careers. We want to form families of our own. We want to use our brains and talents. We do not want to be rejected, forced to live lives of total isolation and desolation. We wrote this anthology with the belief that it is time for our voices to be finally heard and for our needs to be met.

We believe it is possible for anyone who is fortunate enough to have never suffered from this problem to understand our plight to the point of giving us the compassion, dignity and respect that we deserve; to understand that we are not suffering from some delusional disorder of having an odor that does not exist; to understand that our antisocial behavior does not usually come from a desire to be antisocial, but to shield ourselves from humiliation and offending other people; to understand that when we are invited by relatives and friends to join in social activities away from home and we decline, that we are not being the selfish, lazy, insensitive people that we may merely appear to be at the time.

Oftentimes, there is not much happiness in the lives of the members of this support group, and we know that our kind is on a short list of peoples that are shunned by society. All of us with this condition are, in our own way, doing the best we can to live our life in spite of it. We care for and love each other because we are one in our experience living with mysterious and socially, emotionally and financially debilitating medical malodors.

We hope some of you will feel compelled to look more into this misunderstood malady and maybe even contribute to our efforts for a cure. With understanding comes hope. Instead of dismissing us as “smelly people,” you have decided to pick up a copy of this book having to do with an issue many of you are still unaware of and maybe even uncomfortable dealing with. Thank you for taking the time and having the courage to read and learn more about our lives.

by Richard R. Cook, Jr., Sonya McClinton & Reina Rivers

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## OUR LONELY LIVES

No one knows loneliness like we know it.

I used to immerse myself in blues music, just to see if they really knew what the blues was.

And even when John Lee Hooker, the legend, even when he sang so softly you could barely hear him, "no I ain't singin' this for you, you don't know what I'm talkin' bout, I'm singin' it for the people, I had the blues since I was 12 years old..."

Even when the legend sang this, with the pain dripping from every whisper--even

John Lee didn't know the blues.

No one knows loneliness like we know it.

Maybe a lot of you are like me and you have tried to kill this pain with drugs, alcohol, or sex. Maybe some of you are married and more lonely than you've ever been....I know I was lonely when I was married. It is so difficult to live two realities at one time. Those of you who are in relationships know exactly what I am saying right now.

To all of you who are wandering through this life without answers, without finality, and without understanding, please hear me:

There is no place for you left to go. There is no drug, no unhealthy relationship, no different city that will give you understanding.

The only place a person like you and a person like me can find understanding--true, meaningful, life affirming understanding--is in this group...among each other.

We are all we have. We have seen the depths that no other person could imagine. We have sought to fill this hole with everything and everyone...and they all failed us. We know exactly what we need: Understanding.

--C. Hall

## ESSAYS

Atypical Day

by

Benjamin Rimmer

After hitting the snooze button maybe half a dozen times, I became sick of hearing the annoying, intermittent beeping of the alarm. So I finally got out of bed and dragged myself to the bathroom to undertake my daily hygienic ritual. Lather, scrub and rinse. Repeat. And again. Once clean and satisfied, I applied a deodorant and antiperspirant combination quite liberally. I brushed my teeth. I styled my hair with a bit of pomade. And to finish off, I sprayed myself with some cologne. Now that I was clean and fresh, I was good to go.

When I arrived at school, I ran into a friend of mine named Ryan. We were both glad to have moved up in the high school ranks, being seniors now. Even though I was starting my final year at the same school, I only had two friends.

The warning bell rang and I scurried to find the location of my first class. I entered the room and looked for a seat in the back. The back seats were already taken, so I settled for a seat near the back corner. As soon as I sat down, I heard some whispering behind me.

"Hey, that's the guy from one of my classes last year. He reeks so bad." And laughter arose from the small group behind.

I sat there silently, feeling broken, naked and exposed. As I began to hear other students sniffing, I had the urge to bolt out of there. I might have, too, but my emotions overwhelmed me, siphoning all my energy, leaving me bereft of vitality. I remained frozen in a trance-like state. I could hardly wait for that class to end.

My reputation seemed to precede me wherever I went. Students in every class made comments, jokes and gestures about me. Teachers even commented about me. I was accustomed to this discomfort, but I always hoped it would somehow end.

I was thrilled when school let out, but then I had to go to work. I was a cashier at a gas station. I freshened up in the bathroom and applied some more deodorant that I had in my backpack. It didn't do me any good. For some reason I reeked worse than ever. I put on my uniform and badge and went to work.

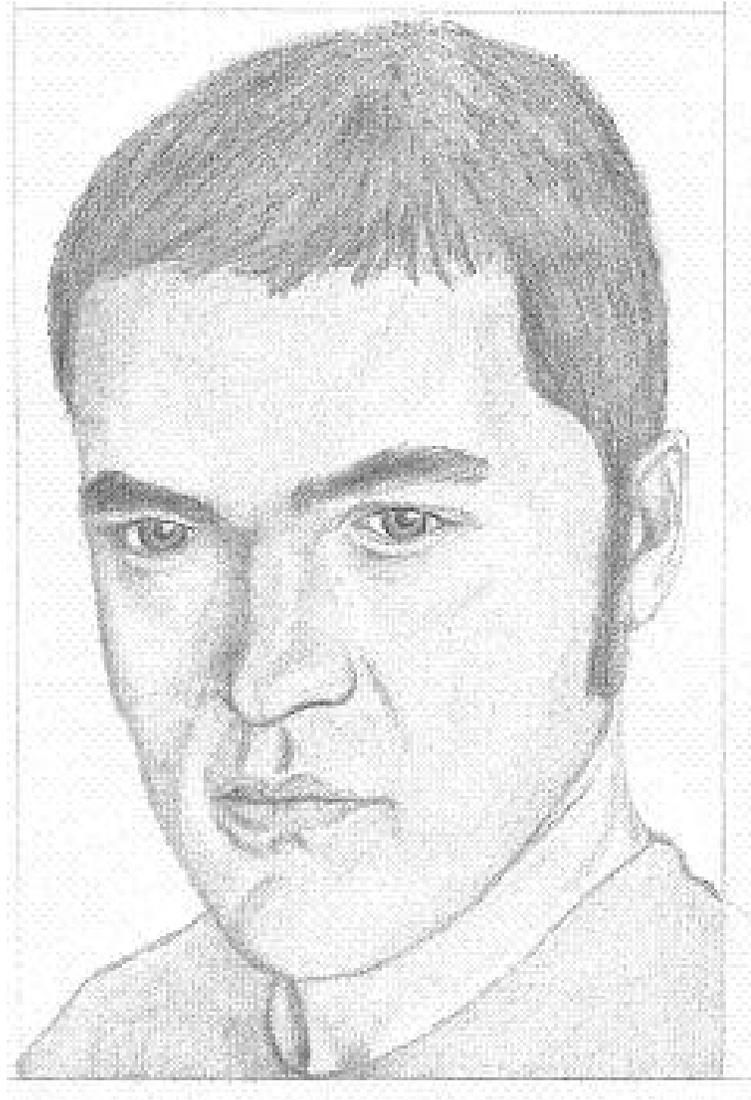
Work was just as bad as school. Occasional customers would sniff and cough, but

it was some of the regular customers and co-workers who always made the jokes. There were a few customers that would linger around for a while and sniff in the air, a volley of laughter following. I couldn't understand how they thought that someone with body odor was so funny. As if they had nothing better to do, they would hang around and make jokes that they thought I didn't catch the meaning of.

"One of these things just ain't like the others," my co-workers sang out loud. They would look at me, then look at each other and smile or laugh. After an eight-hour shift I was physically tired from standing, but it was the emotional roller-coaster that thoroughly drained me of energy.

When I got home I took a long, hot shower. Then I went straight to bed. Sometimes I wasn't even sleepy yet, but I had no motivation to do anything after my stressful day. I'd just lay there and value my solitude, my only moment of peace. Very soon thereafter I lapsed into a deep sleep.

My alarm clock woke me up the next morning. I turned the alarm off and went back to sleep. Sometimes I wished that I would never awake. Just another typical, atypical day.



Benjamin Rimmer

## MY UNAVOIDABLE TRIP INTO HELL AND BACK

by

Richard R. Cook, Jr.

I awoke the morning of March thirteenth, 2008 around three o'clock after an uneasy sleep, painfully aware of the nightmare that awaited me. But it was a necessary nightmare, one that I had no choice but to go through.

After breakfast I took a one-hour-and-forty-five-minute bath followed by a forty-five-minute shower. I used all of my usual hygiene products, which I use whenever I have to leave my apartment. Still I knew I would have to go through something I've gone through many times before, something no person should ever have to experience.

I called for a taxi. When it arrived, I had my bicycle ready to put into the trunk. But it turned out to be a taxi mini van, so I put the bike in the rear. I could tell the driver noticed my odor right away. And down the drain went my hopes that maybe—just maybe—the nightmare wouldn't be so bad. He coughed from time to time during the excruciating twenty-five-minute ride.

He had the radio blaring. Three DJs were discussing an overweight woman being stuck on her toilet for weeks, and they were laughing about it. Under less stressful circumstances, it might have been funny to me too, but I found myself feeling sorry for the woman and wishing I could help her in some way.

I hate those mini vans. They force me to sit too closely to the driver. And the windows don't open as big as the ones in cars. With each passing minute, I became more apprehensive of how bad the morning would turn out, of how long the ordeal would last.

At eight sixteen a.m. the driver pulled up to the Illinois Secretary of State's Office, west of Chicago. Chicago is where I live. There was a line of seven or eight people at the locked door of the one-story building. The place wouldn't open until eight-thirty. I paid the driver and gave him a very undeserved tip and extracted my bicycle from that damned mini van.

I locked up my bike on a nearby light pole and got in line. It wasn't long before people began noticing how I smelled. It's hard for me to notice it because I've gotten so use to it. Each time I heard a cough or a harrumph, my heart pounded harder, which in turn increased my anxiety, which in turn worsened the odor.

By the time eight thirty came, several people had gotten in line behind me. When I got inside, we all had to tell the guy in the foyer our reason for being there. I was so traumatized by then that I could barely speak. It was as if all the saliva had dried up in my mouth. But I got it out that I needed to get my state I.D. card renewed.

I had to go to two separate counters. People looked at me as if I were disgusting, that's when anybody looked at me at all. After standing at the first counter, and before the second, I had to sit and wait for my number to be announced. No one was sitting to my left or right.

A young woman who was sitting behind me was the same person who stood behind me in line outside. She was the only one who didn't try to make me feel worse than I already did; she made no sounds to let me know that I was offending her. Looking back now, I see her as having been my guardian angel that morning. Every step throughout the process, she was right there: right behind me, right beside me. It was as if she cheered me on with her silent presence; to let me know that I'll get through this one too, that I will survive it. That stranger whose name I do not know will never know how much she helped me that day, and today. Then again, maybe someday she will.

When my number was called only after seven or eight minutes of waiting, I went up to that second and last counter. That's when the worst part of the entire nightmare unfolded. Just about everyone on the other side of the counter coughed and harrumphed in unison, as though they were doing their best to shame and humiliate me. I understand that I was causing them discomfort, but why not give me the benefit of the

doubt that I have an odor-causing skin condition. I believe I know myself well enough to know that that's what I would've done.

Finally my picture was taken and my renewed ID card handed to me. I scurried out the door, hoping to be taking all my foul odor with me. From the frightening moment I stepped in, to the glorious moment I left, only fifteen minutes had elapsed—though it felt a lot longer. I had expected to be there at least half an hour.

I jumped on my bike—and I do mean *jumped*—and rode exactly one hour and fifteen minutes to my basement apartment. It was ten o'clock a.m. when I got home. I felt like crying for what I had just been through, but I was too tired and happy that it was over and done with.

My state ID card now expires on December 12, 2013. I pray that by then I won't have to go through any more of these nightmares.



Richard R. Cook, Jr.

## TAKE THE REINS

by

María de la Torre

One warm Saturday Floridian night, my husband and I picked up our fourteen-year-old son, Alberto, his girlfriend, Pía, and five of their friends from the movies in our SUV to take them to their respective homes. All was well in Alberto's relatively short life as he was enjoying the beginning of his high school years with his many new friends and beautiful girlfriend of almost a year; little did he know that all this would soon be detoured as the old millennium faded into the new one. All of a sudden, a strange odor filled the truck that alarmed my husband and me. There were no mangroves around this

part of Miami, so why did it smell like the peculiar odor of decomposing death? Is there something rotting in this truck? I thought. But we never smelled it driving to the movie theater on our way to pick them up. Then again, was it a mangrove odor, or possibly a burnt rubber odor, though not quite, or perhaps some type of sulfur acne cream that any of the kids could be wearing? But why would a manufacturer produce such a horribly smelling product in this day and age?

Not knowing what it was, I became afraid that it would be something unhealthy for everyone, so I kept lowering the window to air out the truck, only for it to invade again as soon as I would close it. No one seemed to care that I was bringing ninety-eight degrees Fahrenheit air into the cool air conditioned SUV. After everyone was dropped off at their respective homes, my husband and I struggled with the futile attempt at figuring out what we smelled, until Alberto opened his mouth to speak: it slapped us in the face – this odor was coming from our son. My husband and I remained speechless as our minds tried to process this impact.

Later that night as we were getting ready for bed, I dared ask my husband what he thought was causing this odor in Alberto. He seemed fixated in simply trying to identify the odor, “It smells like feces, but I don’t think it’s coming from his butt. It’s coming from his mouth, how could that be? In fact, I think it smells of bile.”

Even though my head hit my pillow in a defeated attempt to sleep, I was paralyzed with terror and could not reply. How would he know what bile even smells like? He said it smells of bile; could my son have a terminal illness like my sister’s, I thought as I lay in

bed in the darkness of night with my eyes wide opened. She had terribly smelly feet from as far back as I could remember; it was an odor that could not be washed off. It would fill a room and linger long after she had left it. I should know; I shared a bedroom with her until we left home in our early adulthood.

She and I were only eleven months apart, and I took it upon myself since early childhood to protect her because she was sickly and was supposed to have died at birth from what they thought at the time was a digestive tract problem. Thirty years later she was finally diagnosed with SLE: Systemic Lupus Erythematosus and liver disease, but by then, she had major damage to most of her organs because she had never received a proper diagnosis or treatment. Don't tell me that now I'm going to have to live through the same slow death process all over again with my own son! Oh God, please no!

Prior to falling asleep, I remembered two years ago when he was twelve years old; he came home from school upset. It was something a mother can detect just by looking at her child's face. To the best of my recollection, this is how our conversation went:

"How was your day, son?" I had asked him.

"Good." he said as if playing a recording to avoid conversation.

"How would you like some lobster cocktail for a snack that I prepared for you from the lobster you and your father caught this past weekend? And I'll make you some black beans and rice for tonight. What do you say?" I asked in a cheerful voice trying to lift his spirits, knowing this is his favorite meal.

"Yeah, that sound's good, Mom, thanks." Then he said, "Mom, today a girl said that

I smell. The class went outside for PE, and when we came back in, we were standing in the hallway and she was right behind me. She screamed, 'Pew, you stink!' She said it so loud that the whole class turned and looked at me," he said softly as if keeping it a secret.

"I take a shower every day and brush my teeth hard every time I eat, but I can't brush in school, and I sweat a lot doing exercises in PE, that's right after lunch when the sun is so hot..." he said gazing out the window.

"What about going to the bathroom after your PE class, to rinse off the sweat and to rinse your mouth?" Then I looked at his hair. "You know, Alberto, your hair is too long. Maybe you could cut it short so that the sweat from your scalp can evaporate faster. What do you think?" No answer was returned.

"Alberto, do you like this girl who said that to you?"

"No way, she's such a little bitch! She's always saying and doing things to get attention and to try to be cool, and she's just so stupid and a fake!"

I was silent for a moment, and then gently said, "It seems to me that you don't like her at all, so her opinion of you is not important, is it; at least not as much as it would be if you did liked her. Instead of focusing on who likes us or doesn't like us, we need to be more concerned with whom we like and respect, whom we want to allow into our lives and then work on having positive relationships with these people."

I had left him with his thoughts.

Back to the present, I awoke the morning after the trip from the theater. Oh no, the

alarm clock didn't go off this morning, I thought as I stumbled out of bed still half asleep.

"Alberto, wake up, we're late." I announced as I slightly opened Alberto's door. The stench that escaped from his room woke me up. As the family rushed through a semi-breakfast, and competed for our brief moment in the bathroom, I got my turn and quickly brushed my teeth to take my sons to school. I noticed that there must have been a dead lizard or some other dead animal in the bathtub drain or in the toilet. I looked but could see no such thing. As I rushed out the door, I asked my husband to please check the bathroom plumbing for a dead animal when he had a chance.

Later that evening, he told me that he couldn't find anything out of the ordinary in the bathroom. "I poured a half gallon of bleach into the drain and toilet, but I don't think it's doing any good," he said. "Honestly," he added, "I think it's Alberto's odor that is on the shower walls and curtain, in the toilet, and in the air," he said despondently. I realized then that Alberto's odor had also invaded his room and even his bathroom. It wouldn't go away while he was out of the house the whole day, just like my sister's odor.

The telephone ring interrupted us. It was my brother-in-law. "María," he said, "I think you better come now; she's slipping away and is asking for you."

I dropped everything and ran out the door. I knew my sister couldn't hold on to life any longer. As I entered their apartment, there she was sitting in her recliner, with her hospice nurse nearby. I saw an intense pain throughout her body like an aura that had encased her in her prison.

“Hi, my sweet sister,” she said with a smile from ear to ear that came from the depths of her being as she stretched her arms to me, grasping for the last hugs. It’s as if she knew that this would be our last encounter. We held each other for what seemed to be a fleeting moment, yet an eternity. Her face against mine was as warm as a heater in the dead of winter, and the fifty-one years of our lives together flashed through closed eyes as the flood gates opened. I fought hard to search for inner peace as my last gift to her, and in the release of our embrace, I gave her the tenderest smile from the bottom of my heart.

“How are you feeling?” I asked, knowing that she had always ignored this question throughout our lives as she fought to push aside from her mind all her physical challenges and limitations in an effort to live life to the fullest.

“Remember that summer’s day,” she said, “when we were fourteen and fifteen years old, and we went water skiing with our friends Jorge and Paco at Mom and Dad’s lake behind the house and I had a seizure while skiing?”

I thought it strange that she would talk about this, since she never focused on her illnesses.

“Yeah, I rushed to try to pull you out of the water, and Jorge and Paco had to pull you out because I couldn’t. I’ve always struggled so much to protect you always and tried to make you well, and I’ve only felt more and more helpless through time...so very helpless,” I confessed to her in search of absolution.

“My dear sister, you have given me more than you would ever know. You have a

great gift from God, and through you, He has guided me throughout this journey,” she said lovingly. Nonetheless, somehow I felt unworthy of her praise. She continued, “Do you remember what you told Mom when you brought me back home?”

I recalled it as if it had happened the day before: “To feed you well so that you can regain your strength, so that after your nap, we can go to the party.”

“That’s right, never forget that,” she said. “We all have challenges, some more severe than others, but they don’t define who we are, and we can’t let them control our lives either. Yes, I slept for hours, ate my black beans and rice, and then got up, put on my makeup and dress, and we went dancing all night long. If I had surrendered to my physical challenges, I would never have enjoyed watching my ‘secret admirer’, Jorge wiggling his firm little butt as he danced salsa.” Our explosive laughter rang through the house as we both envisioned Jorge’s frenzied body swaying to the music. This is a lesson we need to teach our kids. They are more than just their bodies, whether healthy or sick.

“Richard,” she called to her husband, “my feet are cold. Would you please bring me my socks?”

“Here they are, my love,” he said with the tenderest loving voice that only a husband can project to his wife. “Let me put them on you.” As he sat in front of her to put them on, he could see the degree of pain she was in and asked her, “How would you rate your pain now, Marta, on a scale from one to ten?” But she just gazed into space and didn’t reply.

“What about a hit of morphine, my love...Maria already came, and you’ve talked and laughed; now you can stop the pain for a while.” She looked at him with penetrable despair, and he knew to press the button knowing that this might be the last we would see of her consciousness. Then he lovingly took one of her feet in his hand to put on her sock, and I witnessed what was one of their most intimate moments as she entered an opiate state. “You know, my love, you have the smelliest feet I have ever smelled. I never knew such a smell existed. It could fill our room in a matter of seconds. I shall miss this, so I will always keep your shoes with me forever.”

“I had to leave the house to seek refuge in my car where I wept profusely.

She never regained consciousness again.

All the while I’m completely helpless as I see my son’s whole demeanor gradually change before my very eyes. He was getting thinner and less muscular. His jovial verbal expressions that had accompanied his warm smile and tender eyes had ceased to exist through his college years, as he attempted to not open his mouth for fear of his odor escaping, conquering the room, and invading each of its occupants’ senses only to then see their most dreaded facial expressions.

In spite of him withdrawing more and more into his room, most of his high school friends strove to maintain their friendship with him; and to this day, they have kept coming around our house. Most of them have loved him very much, and have seemed to treat him as if he were the ‘guru’ of the group. Every time they each had a problem, they would seek refuge in his smelly room as they offloaded their inner turmoil on him,

and they somehow found comfort and guidance in his smelly words. My heart died a little each day as I feared he was gravely ill, and I hated myself for yet again being totally powerless to save the people I love most.

As these eight years of Alberto's odor passed with no answers, and now one year after my sister's death, I have only seen my son fall into a very profound depression, which is deeply reflected in his beautiful face and in his reclusive loneliness. I had already taken him to a gastroenterologist, allergy and asthma specialist, dermatologist, and dentist, and they only diagnosed him with having GERD: Gastro esophageal Reflux Disease, life-threatening allergies, asthma, skin rashes, and a very healthy mouth. Unfortunately, no one could explain why he had this odor, just like no one could diagnose my sister's symptoms until she was in her early thirties.

"Why am I always feeling helpless around the closest people in my life?" I asked God. "Why can't I find answers? Why can't I save them?" This sense of doom was consuming me, and my own body had already begun to fail me with my own illnesses, as I had embraced my secret death wish.

I can't give up. I will fight back, and I must keep searching, I silently declared to the universe. I vowed to not only keep searching for an explanation, but to find a cure. Maybe it is his liver; as my husband says, since it smells like bile and feces. Since no one can give me answers, I just had to check on the Internet. There must be someone else in this world that has the same problem. Maybe they can tell me what it is. Then I'll know whether my son has a terminal illness.

Finally, one glorious day, as we were preparing dinner, my husband and I froze in place as we heard on TV a discussion about a model that smelled of fish. “Turn it up so we can hear it,” I said to my husband. There was a woman named Camille on *Prime Time* talking about her odor condition.

“That sounds like what Alberto has,” my husband said to me.

“I’m going to try to find it online,” I told him.

I don’t know if he smells of fish, maybe he does sometimes, especially when we eat a lot of fish that my husband and sons catch themselves throughout the year. So I searched online and stumbled upon an article in the National Institute of Health about Trimethylaminuria. It actually has a management protocol to follow. Why didn’t any of his doctors know about this? Isn’t this government agency responsible for disseminating this information to medical schools and to all physicians? What’s the use of our tax dollars going toward research if then the right people don’t benefit from it because the information doesn’t get dispersed throughout the medical community, and the proper testing does not become standard procedure, and the insurance companies don’t cover this testing process?

I wrote to the Trimethylaminuria Foundation and to a lab to find out what I needed to do to have him tested. I also came across a Body Odor forum, and I began to chat with other sufferers, and I saw how they were all at a loss, just as I was.

Eureka! I don’t think he’s going to die of this, I thought as the tears rolled down my face. I took a deep breath and released a sigh of relief from within my innermost being.

The light of optimism peeked through the cracks in the walls of my dungeon of despair. I bellowed, "Thank you, God!" as images flashed through my mind of my son's happiness growing old with a loving wife, their children, grandchildren and happy in his career...

Thank you, God, for putting people who, like me, want to search for answers, for research, a cure, relief of symptoms, and for support. My whole life has led me to this crossroads; the path I am to walk upon is now clear. I have never felt this all encompassing, perfectly pure, and peaceful joy. And for once in my life I am experiencing untainted contentment, as in a state of rebirth. I am now anchored with a clear purpose which stems from an intense love of humanity and all living things. If this is euphoria, I'll take it.

And after all my aimless wondering for over half a century, I have found a focal point which has empowered me to now take baby steps to help heal others as I have helped my son's condition decrease by assisting him in learning how to control his odor with the Trimethylaminuria management protocol.

As the dam walls that held me back from being able to protect my sister and later my son have begun to tumble and collapse with each of my keyboard strokes, I now feel hope rushing like water through the valley of my soul as it creates a peaceful lake upon which the sky, the mountains, and the trees are reflected as little fish swim in it, grow and multiply.

### Mission Statement

To gather the rejected into the fold engenders its cornerstone,  
When the unloved is loved, a seed is planted and life begins,  
When the undesirable feels desired, love's essence breaks through,  
When beauty is tapped inside the uncomely, all beauty breaks loose,  
To give joy to the sad cleanses the soul,  
Companionship creates a refuge to blossom,  
In comfort, mourning hastens by,  
To seek and save the lost, a path is woven,  
To bind the wounds of the hurting brings stillness and peace,  
To heal the broken hearted morphs a new life,  
To proclaim acceptance makes us one with the universe,  
Lori, as your name implies, fire-tried creates art!

Maria de la Torre



Maria de la Torre and her sister, Marta

## ODOR! ODOR IN THE COURT!

by

Richard R. Cook, Jr.

In January, 1989 my heart dropped to my feet when I read the jury duty summons that I had received in the mail. All kinds of horror scenarios exploded in my mind concerning my chronic body odor condition. Basically, I was being told that by law I was to be forced to come into close contact with dozens of people who would be offended by my presence. I had no idea how to prevent this nightmare from coming at me. I certainly didn't want to be arrested or fined. So, what other choice did I have but to go through it?

I had four agonizingly long weeks to contemplate how bad the second jury duty of

my life would turn out to be. My first one came three years earlier, and that experience wasn't quite as bad as this second one. My odor had worsened during those three years. The only way I could know this was through an increase in other people's reactions, for I could not detect my own odor, and I still can't.

When the day before I was to report to the federal court building downtown arrived, I decided to write the judge a note explaining my odor condition and apologizing for not getting a doctor's written excuse. My hope was that the judge would let me leave, for I knew how much of a problem my illness would be for me and everyone around me.

The next morning, after a long shower, I left the house with the judge's note in my backpack. Accompanying the note was baby powder, soap, a wash cloth, deodorant, lotion and a change of underwear. To this day I carry these items in my backpack whenever I must go out. I do this in case I need to refresh myself, as much as my condition will allow, that is.

I wasn't surprised that taking public transportation to my destination was barely a problem. At that time, a shower lasted much longer for me than one does now. But I knew my shower would expire before I left the court building. And I knew when that moment would come crashing down on me, as well as on everyone close by. Getting to where I needed to go used to be a lot easier than it is now.

When I got into the building, I had forgotten how the security guards had to search you for weapons. I felt embarrassed when they discovered the kind of items I had in my backpack. That embarrassment, however, paled in comparison to that which awaited

me in the hours to come.

At first, they had dozens of us waiting in this spacious room, which resembled an airport seating area. Still, my morning shower had not expired.

But then we were herded into a small courtroom. Because it was February in Chicago and therefore cold outside, I did not detect air conditioning. The room became packed with wall-to-wall people. Because the jury box had already been filled, I sat in one of the seats to the right side of it; these chairs were reserved for the juror alternates during trial. I felt the pores of my underarms, groin and forehead filling with perspiration. I kept my legs closed and my coat and backpack across my lap, hoping to strangle the odor. Instead, I was sure I was doing that to the people around me. A woman and the judge made some brief comments as to what the entire process of that day for us would entail, and so on.

When we were told to leave for a two-hour lunch break, I took the opportunity to hand the judge's note to one of his assistants. She told me she would give it to him after the break, which broke my heart; now I would not be able to leave for at least two hours.

I went into the men's room. I guessed that every other man in the building had the same idea. Eventually I found an empty stall. All I needed to do was urinate, but I didn't want to use a urinal for fear of getting too close to anyone and offending them with my odor. I found that my morning shower had expired while I sat in the courtroom minutes earlier. From then on, it would be a war between me and the "normal" people until my

next shower.

Before the washroom emptied out, a man yelled, "Damn!" I saw him through the slit at one side of the stall door as he was leaving.

By that time in my life, I had gotten to the point where any loud cough or negative remark sent my paranoia into overdrive, and I would assume that it was a reaction to my odor. Sure, he could have yelled *damn!* because his feet hurt, or because there is so much hunger in the world, or because he had a headache. I knew for a fact that he was referring to my odor. It hurt to the point where my eyes teared up, but I didn't cry. (If I cried every time such a thing happened to me, I would rarely stop.)

I decided to stay in the stall for the entire two-hour break. After all, there was no way I could see myself going out to spoil people's lunch. Besides, my appetite at that time did not exist. So, where else could I go?

During the long two hours, I changed my underwear and frequently washed my face. Fortunately, nobody else came into the washroom the whole time.

To further help myself win the battle to stay awake, I fantasized. In my fantasy, that man who yelled, "Damn!" was the defendant in a courtroom. He stood and gazed up at the judge, who spoke:

"Has the jury reached a verdict?"

The foreman came to his feet and said, "We have, your Honor. We find the accused guilty of purposely hurting people's feelings as if he were superior to them."

The judge said, "Very well. The defendant's sentence shall be a strong body odor

for the rest of your life.”

Gasps and murmurs erupted in the courtroom.

The judge pounded his gavel. “Odor!” he shouted. “Odor in the court!”

These thoughts were enough to keep me awake for the remainder of the lunch break. I also placed other people in the defendant’s role who had given me a hard time about my condition, including certain family members. I wondered then, and still do today, how these people would cope with having such a skin problem; how they would be affected by the same harsh treatment that they hurled at me.

I imagined such a trial for reasons other than just trying to stay awake. I wanted to punish that guy who yelled, “Damn!” by giving him my problem. And I wanted to try to make myself at least smile for a moment, but I couldn’t do it. Whenever I’m in that kind of situation, it is next to impossible for me to see humor in anything. Nevertheless, I always try, if only to distract myself from smelling bad.

I glanced at my watch and saw that the time had come for me to finally leave the stall. I returned to the courtroom to find other individuals trickling in and taking their seats. I took the same seat I had before, hoping that the judge’s eyes had met my note by then and that I would not occupy that seat for more than a few minutes.

After the room was filled again and the lawyers and the judge were sitting, I was pleased to see the judge being handed my note. He read it and motioned with one hand for the lawyers to come up to the side of his desk. They stood in a huddle, presumably discussing the contents of the note. I noticed one of the young lawyers make a

comment and then chuckle. No one else found what he said to be humorous. I wondered if he quipped, “Odor in the court.”

The judge returned to his chair at his desk and the lawyers to their seats. With searching eyes upon the crowd, the judge called my name. My coat in my arms and backpack hanging from one shoulder, I walked up to the judge’s bench. He handed me a slip of paper excusing me from jury duty; I excepted it and thanked him.

It felt like a very long walk from the judge’s desk to the double doors at the rear of the courtroom. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop on the carpet: no coughing, sneezing, sniffing—nothing to remind me that I had odor (as if I needed to be reminded). I sensed every eye follow me until I was finally through the doors.

The combination of the cool hall and no longer being in the presence of all those people calmed my nerves; put a tiny smile on every pore of my flesh. Even though my soul danced at that moment, I knew the trip back home would not be easy.

After taking the judge’s slip of paper to the office downstairs, where I received disgusted stares and harrumphs, I happily left the building. I was too afraid to take public transportation back home, so I walked the eight or so miles through the February snow and cold.

If I had enough money on me I would have tried to get home by taxi. But there was no guarantee that any driver would have wanted me as his passenger, anyway. So far, since that day, I had been turned down by one cab driver because of my odor.

About five hours later, somewhere between seven o’clock and seven thirty, I arrived

at home with my legs feeling like Jell-O. (Living with several relatives with my odor at that time is a whole other horror story all by itself.)

I promised myself I would never go through another jury duty ordeal again. Since then I've gotten out of it twice, never even having to step inside a court building. Whenever I receive a summons in the mail, I just send them a letter describing my odor condition, along with copies of certain of my medical records. And that's one less nightmare for me to contend with.

As I wrote this essay, I wondered if any of my fellow prospective jurors at that time realized how free they were to be able to go to places people like me find it very difficult to go. Did they know how fortunate they were to be able to sit in a restaurant and laugh and talk with other people as they ate their lunch that day? How great it would be if I could find a way to be able to do something as simple as that again.

This leads me to also wonder if people who have problems other than odor tell themselves, how wonderful it would be to be able to see the sun set, to see what a clear, blue sky looks like, or the stars at night; how much freedom I could have if I were able to walk and run; how fantastic it would be to be able to communicate with other people using my own voice, my own hearing; or, if only I had more time to live, how I could mend all the ruptures of all the relationships in my life that had gone bad...

CRY

by

Hon T. Haur

I'll never forget that certain night in my life which brought painful tears to my eyes. It happened on a beautiful evening while everyone was happily attending a university prom at a famous five-star hotel in Malaysia. We were all dressed for the occasion: the ladies in their elegant dresses; we men in our neat suits and ties.

Everyone else enjoyed themselves while I yelled in silence with my broken heart. I tried to keep myself isolated from the crowd the whole night as best I could, hoping not to give my dearest friends any discomfort from my body odor condition. I knew my

odor became worse whenever I got nervous; and that night, smelling like a skunk among seven hundred people, relaxing was not a possibility for me.

I was physically and emotionally drained. Depression weighed me down, while nearly a month of a vegan diet and three days of fasting (that day being the last of the three) further exhausted me. I felt I should not dare touch the beautifully prepared food that was served.

At one point in the evening, as the prom continued with excitement and entertainment, I was suddenly unable to contain my emotions. I made up an excuse to get away from everyone. I went out onto the enclosed balcony, with a view of the outdoor swimming pool. I stood staring at my fuzzy reflection in a window, seeing the blurred loneliness, hopelessness, and sadness.

I gazed up at the twinkling stars and whispered repeatedly, "God, why do you want to treat me so badly? Did I do something wrong?" I knew I wasn't supposed to blame God for me having such a miserable life, but I did.

I'm not a person who cries easily. But that night, because I wanted so badly to be able to enjoy myself with my friends, I spent a long period of time alone on that balcony crying. I lost control, tears of sadness dropping everywhere.

Then I heard a different commotion from the crowd. I turned and realized that the prom was ending. People split into clusters, taking pictures of one another.

I also saw several of my friends only a few steps away, coming toward me. I stopped crying instantly and quickly wiped the tears from my eyes. I pretended to be as

normal as I could. Thankfully, the lighting on the balcony was poor, and they couldn't see that I had been crying. Slowly I walked forward and gave them a big smile.

Today I continue my life's journey, having finally gotten the surgery I needed to cure my odor. I am happy that I can share my story with all of my dearest friends in the body odor support group (of which I am still a member), as well as with all of the people who know very little about us.

I know that crying is not the answer for us. But it is another way for us to release the tons of pressure, sadness, tension and unhappiness that builds up inside of us. I believe crying that evening is one of the things that gave me the strength I needed to keep living my life.



Hon T. Haur

## IT'S MY BIRTHDAY AND I HAVE BODY ODOR

by

Hope R.

Today is my birthday, being born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1970. I am now thirty-eight years old. This is a day of remembrance for the Second World War, whilst we pause in silence on the eleventh hour of the day. This is the day I take a moment and ponder my life and how each day I struggle with body odor.

My problem began in puberty at the age of eleven. I knew from the beginning, I was different from friends at school, but like most teenagers, I thought this period of change would pass. Until entering my early twenties I had concerns that this problem was not

going away. And I tried to manage my problem as best I could.

I went along with everyday life. I went to college and university. I had friends but I never discussed my problem with them. I remember one friend at college telling me inside of a store, next to the deodorant counter that she had this friend who had really bad BO and she didn't know how to tell them. She then took a deodorant spray from the shelf and began to spray me. I knew that very second she was talking about me. I was so ashamed; I felt so dirty! I guess there must have been loads of similar incidents whilst I went through teenage life, some I remember more vividly than others.

In my mid thirties I began to challenge this condition. It was beginning to affect every aspect of my life: work, employment, friendships, relationships, neighbors verbally abusing me. I needed answers. I began to search websites on the Internet related to Body Odor. At first I thought I was wasting my time, as most sites I came across regarded this condition as a person's lack of ability to maintain personal hygiene. Then I came across the MSN Body Odor Support Group. For the first time in three decades I began to have a better understanding of body odor and read other people's horror stories which mirrored my own.

I took the research I found from the site and approached my general practitioner (GP). This is not the first time I have spoken to a medical professional regarding this matter. Previous attempts have been in vain. And often I was treated for depression, which is a common source of treatment for this condition, but never really dealt with the problem. I requested that my GP run a test for Trimethylaminuria, a rare metabolic

disorder. I related my life experiences of other people's reactions to my body odor to my GP. Unfortunately my GP thought I should be referred to a psychiatrist. I agreed with my GP to run the test for Trimethylaminuria.

The psychiatrist stated, "The patient believes people's remarks are purely a response to an unpleasant odor that she intermittently emits. I introduce the possibility that some of the experiences were slightly unusual and that the patient might benefit from a trial of antipsychotic medication."

I didn't agree to this diagnosis. And until I have the results of my test, I will not let doctors lead me down a path that is not fully addressing my condition.

I feel so strongly about this condition that I have even approached a TV medical program to find answers. I am a quiet person and keep to myself. I don't revel in being the center of attention. But this is a genuine condition I have had for too long. And it is about time I found out why I smell so bad. Because believe me, people have told me I do!

## NOT EVERYONE IS CRUEL/A SIMPLE ACT OF KINDNESS

by

Reina Rivers

For those of us with the medical malodor trimethylaminuria (TMAU) living with medical malodors, it's quite easy to fall into the habit of dwelling on the negative things that have happened to us in the course of our lives. That's why it's easy to recall (and dwell on) the times when acquaintances and strangers and even so-called friends have made comments to us about our odor. But if people suffering with this disease try really hard, I think almost all of us can remember at least one instance when somebody was nice to us despite our odor.

I can recall the many instances of taunts and social ostracism and even outright discrimination because of this condition over the last decade and counting. My odor problems started becoming noticeable by fifth grade but it wasn't until eighth grade that they became a daily ordeal and a living nightmare for me. To make matters worse, when I started high school the next year none of my old friends came with me. I was a quiet, shy individual and making friends had never been easy for me even before this condition started rearing its ugly head. So in high school I had no friends to help me deal with this and other problems. I was left to myself to cope with all of my problems. A few individuals would talk to me once in a while but we were never friends. In fact, as I suspected even in those days when I was more gullible, some of those people who would talk to me were allied with my main tormentors. I don't know why they would talk to me. Maybe it was because they would get a kick out of it or maybe because they were trying to figure out what was wrong with me. So was I.

But one story that I often fondly recall is one that shows how good the human heart can be—but only if it is willing to let itself be so. There is this girl who comes to mind every now and then. P. was in the same homeroom as I. Too bad, though, because homeroom only met once in a while. P. also was in a music class of mine during freshman year of high school. But we didn't have time to talk during class. We did talk after school every now and then. I would sometimes see her on the bus to the subway. It was during one of those times that P. remarked to me that she didn't care about my body odor and what people were saying about it. I wish I could remember her exact

words. Another time she told me she wished that she had invited me to her birthday party. Even the very thought meant more to me than any actual invitation. I wish I could tell her that right now. But I can't. At the end of ninth grade, P. transferred out of our high school and I lost touch with her. If I could see her again, I would thank her and tell her how much her sincerity and kindness meant to me at a time in my life when I was unable to reach out to anyone, and no one else was either capable or willing to reach out to me. I would also tell her that she was the closest thing to a friend I had, not only in high school but virtually for over ten years.

While sharing this story with you all, I hope that each and every one of you has had at least one similar experience. If you did, I hope that you can go back to that moment every now and then, especially when you feel all alone in the world and feel like nobody cares about you, because in the end each and every one of us can find someone who cares but only if we are willing to let someone in through the barriers we set up, supposedly to protect ourselves.

## CAUSES OF BODY ODOR

It is estimated that 50 million people worldwide suffer from chronic body odor (or BO). Some forms of BO, such as fecal odor, can be noticeable for days or weeks and then inexplicably go into remission for as many as months at a time. But other forms of BO are more constant, such as Trimethylaminuria (TMAU), or fish odor syndrome; although, very few BO sufferers' odors can always be detected. Bromhidrosis is also a condition that causes chronic body odor, which to a large extent is determined by apocrine gland secretion, although other sources may play a role. (Bromhidrosis is also

known as Osmidrosis and Bromidrosis.) Excessive secretion from either apocrine or eccrine glands that becomes malodorous on bacterial breakdown is the predominant cause of bromhidrosis.

#### Apocrine Bromhidrosis:

Body odor is the smell caused by bacteria feeding on sweat on the skin, especially in the armpit and the groin area. The apocrine glands are located in those two places as well as the breasts. The sweat by itself does not smell bad. The sweat that comes from these glands contains proteins and fats, which bacteria feed on and cause the odor. This condition is known as Apocrine Bromhidrosis which is the most common of the two types of Bromhidrosis and is more prevalent in dark-skinned ethnic groups. People of African ancestry appear to have the largest and most active apocrine glands. In Asian people, it is possibly associated with a positive family history. It only occurs after puberty, since the apocrine glands are not active until puberty is reached. At that stage in our lives our bodies begin to make more of the hormone testosterone. This makes the apocrine glands produce more sweat, which is why sweating and body odor are more common after puberty. This condition is more common in men than women, which may be a reflection of greater apocrine gland activity in men than in women. *Corynebacterium* species are the most common bacteria found in the armpit and have been shown to produce the offensively smelling fatty acids. Apocrine glands produce a thick secretion that contains pheromones (or personal scent). Permanent treatment options to Apocrine Bromhidrosis are the removal of apocrine sweat glands

by superficial liposuction and the removal of apocrine sweat glands by surgical excision.

**Eccrine Bromhidrosis:**

Eccrine glands, however, are found over the entire body. They produce a dilute salt solution in response to increased body temperature. They too produce odorless sweat. But if the bacteria get a chance to break down the stale sweat, an offensive odor results. This condition is known as Eccrine Bromhidrosis and may result from underlying metabolic or endogenous causes. The odor can be caused by the ingestion of various substances, including certain foods (i.e., dairy products, garlic, curry), alcohol, or certain medications. This occurs in all races. It may be rarely caused by metabolic disorders (i.e., amino acid disturbances), Trimethylaminuria (or fish odor syndrome), sweaty feet syndrome and odor of cat syndrome. (Amino acids are organic compounds which are essential to human metabolism.) The role of excessive eccrine secretion (or Hyperhidrosis) in causing Bromhidrosis is unclear. It may promote the spread of apocrine sweat and cause further bacterial overgrowth and decomposition, or it may improve the symptoms of Bromhidrosis by flushing away the more smelly apocrine sweat.

There are individuals who believe that they have Bromhidrosis when in fact they do not. This condition is known as Bromhidrosiphobia. Bromhidrosiphobics have a morbid dread of having bodily odors, and their sensory delusions can be an early warning sign of schizophrenia.

**Athlete's Foot:**

Athlete's Foot is also known as Tinea Pedis in the medical community. It is a foot fungus that is caused most commonly by the following fungi: trichophyton, epidermophyton, floccosum, or microsporum. Athlete's Foot is very common and easy to treat and avoid with proper foot care. Although, if you're not careful, it is easily contracted and spread. And if not properly treated, it can become quite serious and painful; secondary bacterial infections could develop. The fungus does not necessarily stay confined to your feet. Athlete's Foot can spread easily to your groin region or your armpits. All it requires to flourish is a dark, dampish place. Countless fungicides to treat Athlete's Foot are sold over the counter. They can be used wherever the fungus manifests itself on your body.

#### Metabolic Body Odor:

Metabolic body odor occurs when one or more of our internal cell enzyme(s) (for example the flavin-containing mono oxygenase 3 metabolic enzyme or FMO3) is saturated by one or more smelly compounds that would normally be neutralized (in the case of FMO3, by oxidation) by this enzyme(s). This results in an unmetabolized compound entering the main circulation and exiting throughout the body. It can also be termed as "systemic body odor" or "blood borne body odor" or "cell-enzyme saturated body odor" or other various names of the same concept. It is possible that some forms of halitosis (or bad smelling breath) may be metabolic sourced as well, with the toxins exiting via the alveolar breath from the lungs.

Normally someone with a metabolic odor condition will release the toxin in any way

possible, for instance through the skin perspiration, through the alveolar breath (from the air pockets of the lungs), urine, etc. This does not necessarily mean that the person is low in the enzyme(s) involved; it can be because they are consuming, absorbing, or producing too much of the smelly compound(s) that the enzyme levels are not able to oxidize. For example, many people often smell of garlic after garlic ingestion; the reason being there is an excess of the garlic compounds and the cell enzymes are unable to break down the amount; and so these compounds enter the main circulation unprocessed and exits through the skin, breath, urine, etc. However, with those who feel they have an ongoing metabolic body odor issue that affects their life, it seems likely there may be a genetic aspect to this, even if only slightly.

Reasons for metabolic body odors:

(1) One or more cell enzymes not functioning at normal levels: This could be due to a genetic weakness, such as in primary Trimethylaminuria (or TMAU), where the person shows not to have normal capability of neutralizing trimethylamine (or TMA) into non-odorous trimethylamine-n-oxide. Normally they will have some capability, such as 50%, 60%, 90%, etc. Although in theory it could be one of many cell enzymes, the main suspects (until ruled out) would seem to be the group of xenobiotic metabolizing enzymes, especially the flavin mono oxygenase 3 (FMO3) enzyme.

(2) Abnormal amounts of smelly compounds being absorbed into the bloodstream and transported throughout the body: This is when the person is absorbing too many smelly compounds into the main circulation, basically overloading the enzymes

that usually neutralize such compounds. An example of this would be smelling of curry or garlic after eating such foods. Secondary Trimethylaminuria is another example, involving a microbial imbalance, or dysbiosis.

In practice, possibly many people are a little of both of the above, with the main factor being of a genetic cause, and the other factor having to do with treatable issues, such as gut dysbiosis. At the moment, metabolic body odor is not accepted as a problem by the main medical system, apart from Trimethylaminuria, which only a small amount of doctors would have heard of.

Types of metabolic body odors:

Dimethylglycinuria (or DMGU):

Only one research paper has ever been done on this, although it seems to be tested for by one or more testers. However, if metabolic body odor syndromes would be fully studied by researchers using a full volatile organic compound test (VOC), it would likely show that many more of these smelly compounds may be found in individuals.

Unfortunately, TMAU is the only real test that the few testers prescribe (and some also test for DMGU), rather than a full malodorous VOC test. Dimethylglycine is also said to have a “fishy” smell.

Isovaleric acidemia:

This is a very serious metabolic disorder usually due to a lack of the enzyme isovaleryl coenzyme A dehydrogenase. One of the tell-tale symptoms is a sweaty feet body odor due to high levels of isovaleric acid. However, it seems probable that people

with borderline “variants” or carriers may possibly have just a transient problem with the sweaty feet odor and no other obvious symptoms. However, on the online body odor forums, such cases do not seem to be common.

Various metabolic body odor smells:

“Fecal body odor”: may include fecal, gas, rotten egg, garbage, sewage, rotten fish

Trimethylaminuria: rotten fish

Isovaleric acidemia: sweaty feet

Trimethylaminuria:

Currently Trimethylaminuria is the only recognized metabolic body odor syndrome (also termed a condition or disorder) that has been documented by more than one researcher. Trimethylaminuria (TMAU) is currently the only accepted “systemic” body odor condition by the medical community. It was detected in 1970 by a group of doctors in Colorado who tested a child with other health issues. The child was also said to have a “fishy odor” at times. They performed a urine test and discovered high levels of trimethylamine (TMA). The Colorado lab today is still perhaps the only clinical lab in the USA with any long-term interest in TMAU. HBRI also has an interest in the FMO3 genetics.

Trimethylaminuria is a genetic metabolic disorder inherited in an autosomal recessive manner. The parents of an affected individual are obligate heterozygotes (or carriers) and therefore, carry one mutant allele. Heterozygotes are asymptomatic. TMAU is determined by DNA mutation analysis of the FMO3 gene indicating a

deficiency in the FMO3 metabolic enzyme produced in the liver. (FMO3 is flavin-containing mono oxygenase 3.) TMAU is an autosomal recessive condition, meaning that each parent of the individual is a carrier of one mutant allele whether they are asymptomatic or not, though mild or intermittent symptoms can sometimes occur in carriers of FMO3 mutations. This deficiency of FMO3 enzyme results in an inefficient FMO3 function with a failure to process the chemical trimethylamine, which can often smell of rotting fish, as well as other compounds that contain nitrogen, sulfur or phosphorous. Symptoms are usually present from birth and may worsen during puberty. In females, symptoms are more severe just before and during menstruation, after taking oral contraceptives, and around the time of menopause.

Trimethylamine (TMA) is a chemical created in the intestines by a few bacteria in the colon during the digestive process of foods containing choline and TMA. It is normally transported to the liver to be broken down into non-odorous trimethylamine N-oxide (TMAO) by the FMO3 metabolic enzyme produced in the liver. Both TMAO and TMA are normally excreted in the urine. However, when there is a deficiency of the FMO3 enzyme due to an autosomal recessive condition resulting in an FMO3 mutation, TMA is then not oxidized, and thus remains in an odorous state. Over time, this chemical compound may stay in the body longer, building up and causing the excretion of a strong and offensive odor to leave the body through every single pore, breath, urine, and reproductive fluids.

This offensive odor significantly interferes in the sufferer's social life, such as in

school, work, or personal relationship. This social crisis usually results in profound psycho-social side effects as the sufferer falls into a deep depression and intense state of anxiety, becomes reclusive, and develops a very lonely life style without relief in sight. One of the most traumatic aspects of this disorder is that the sufferer has no recourse in the medical system to find treatment and a cure, and cannot understand why the medical community is not well versed in this condition. Therefore, a sufferer very rarely receives the necessary appropriate medical attention and treatment to control the odor.

History of the diagnosis:

1970: Colorado lab doctors do TMA urine test on child with “fishy odor” and discover high trimethylamine levels.

1987-89: First serious continuous research into TMAU begins. Researchers include Mitchell & Smith of London.

1992: First pub med paper about TMAU featuring Dr Preti.

1997: DNA papers published about FMO3: Cashman, et. al., in Seattle, Dolphin in London.

1997-2005: Most TMAU papers written in this period, especially DNA. Notable researchers: Cashman, Treacey, Mitchell, Smith, Phillips, Shephard.

1999: 1st international TMAU workshop held.

2002: 2nd TMAU workshop held. Was supposed to become bi-annual.

2007: Dr. Fennessey says he sees TMAU mentioned in medical teaching literature for first time.

Current TMAU advice:

In a publication in the Office of Rare Diseases Research (ORDR), Genetics and Rare Diseases Information Center (GARD), the National Institutes of Health outlines the only treatment currently available for TMAU. The University of Washington, Seattle with the funding support of the National Institutes of Health, has published an article in GeneReviews, which includes the management and recommended "Strategies for the treatment of Trimethylaminuria." It cites the following:

- (1) Low choline diet: avoid eggs; liver; kidney; peas; beans; peanuts; soy products; brassicas (brussel sprouts, broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower); and lecithin and lecithin-containing fish oil supplements. Trimethylamine N-oxide is present in seafood (fish, cephalopods, crustaceans). Freshwater fish have lower levels of trimethylamine N-oxide and thus are not a problem to consume.
- (2) Suppression of intestinal production of trimethylamine: A short course of antibiotics to modulate or reduce the activity of gut micro flora, and thus suppress the production of trimethylamine. Such treatment may be useful when dietary restriction needs to be relaxed (e.g., for important social occasions), or when trimethylamine production appears to increase (e.g., during infection, emotional upset, stress, or exercise).
- (3) Antibiotics: recommended for Trimethylaminuria to suppress production of trimethylamine by reducing bacteria in the gut:
  - A. neomycin: appears to be the most effective in preventing formation of trimethylamine from choline.

B. metronidazole: particularly effective against anaerobic bacteria and protozoa

C. amoxicillin

(4) Enhancement of residual FMO3 enzyme activity: Supplements of riboflavin, a precursor of the FAD prosthetic group of FMOs, may help maximize residual FMO3 enzyme activity. RIBOFLAVIN (Vitamin B2) SUPPLEMENTS: 30-40 mg three to five times per day with food to enhance residual FMO3 enzyme activity.

(5) Sequestering of trimethylamine produced in the gut:

A. Activated Charcoal: 750mg twice daily for 10 days.

B. Copper Chlorophyllin: 60mg three times/day after meals for 3 weeks.

(6) LAXATIVES, such as lactulose: decrease intestinal transit time, may reduce the amount of trimethylamine produced in the gut.

The following should be avoided:

(1) Foods with a high content of precursors of trimethylamine or inhibitors of FMO3 enzyme activity, including seafood (fish, cephalopods, and crustaceans), eggs, offal, legumes, brassicas, and soya products; avoid or eat in moderation.

(2) Food supplements and "health" foods that contain high doses of the trimethylamine precursors choline and lecithin.

(3) Drugs that are metabolized by the FMO3 enzyme. These compete for residual FMO3 activity. As well as exacerbating the condition, reduced metabolism of the drug may cause adverse effects.

(4) Factors that promote sweating, such as exercise, stress, and emotional upsets.

NOTE:

pH factors: Trimethylamine is a strong base (pH 9.8) (Acids have a low pH)

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Normal skin pH 5.5-6.5

It is recommended that you use acid soaps and body lotions.

Currently known testing labs in the United States:

(under construction)

San Diego

Denver

Arkansas

HBRI

Colorado

Arkansas

Fecal Body Odor :

This is by far the most common type of metabolic body odor problem mentioned on online body odor forums, and possibly even the main form of body odor. MeBO, a body odor web site, has intended to focus on this syndrome in particular, since it is the most common and needs to be defined. At the moment, this body odor is a mystery. It appears that it may not be an entirely precise label, since the sufferers seem capable of a wide range of smells that also include gas, sewage, garbage, rotten egg, and many more. Perhaps people use the term "fecal body odor" because this is the odor associated with the most hurtful remarks (and also the most confusing). Since there are so many smells involved, it seems the main suspect would be one or more saturated xenobiotic metabolizing enzyme(s), since these enzymes deal with a multitude of "substrates," including toxins. FMO3 is one such enzyme of this group, and so an obvious

main suspect, although perhaps more enzymes could be involved.

Much of the information in this section was taken from the MeBO body odor web site created by Maria de la Torre and two other people who wish to remain anonymous, in order to compile as much data as is currently known about types, causes, and treatments of body odor in one place. The web address is: <http://meboresearch.com/>

## THE MALODOROUS PEOPLE'S DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one group of People to state their grievances with fellow humankind, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the Nondiscriminatory and Equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to seek such Equality of Rights.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all humans are created equal, that they

are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. Throughout History, Humankind has long oppressed and emotionally scarred our fellow Brothers and Sisters, of which are unfortunate Victims of various malodorous Medical Conditions. Prudence will dictate that the Status Quo should not be changed for light and transient Causes; and accordingly, We do not request anything other than an Entitlement Due to all Humans; all people have the Due Right to uphold their Dignity, no matter however Nature and God chose to endow each and every one of Us. Therefore, We the Malodorous People Unite, and firmly assert our grievance; all that We ask for is Respect. To secure these Rights, we the Malodorous People of God's Great Earth, do now state cause for our collective grievance against humanity. Let these Facts be submitted to a candid World.

Humanity has oppressed our Aspirations by means of Discrimination, Harassment, and Indignities of which We have been subjected.

Humanity has stripped Us of our Dignity, denies Us our due Respect, and injured our Reputation.

Humanity has suppressed our Emotional well-being, forcing Us into Solitude and Depression.

Humanity has Siphoned the very substance of our Souls, Depressing any reason for Rejoicing.

Humanity has Infected our minds, making Us think that We are Insignificant, Substandard, and Unwanted.

Employers have wrongfully Terminated our right to employment due to our Condition, and Not due to our Performance.

Employers refuse to consider Us for Employment upon interview due to our Condition.

Employers and employees employ strategic Tactics in order to cause Us to Abandon our positions and Quit the company.

Doctors have ignored our symptoms and complaints, regarding Us as Hypochondriacs.

Doctors have suggested We take Mental medication to alleviate our Mental condition, when we have a Physical condition that affects our Health.

Friends have Abandoned Us, family does not believe Us, and even our pets turn up their noses and turn tail to escape Us.

In every stage and event of our Oppression, We have remained Reclusive in disquietude. Any action We have taken toward Resolving our complaints against humanity have been answered with Doubt, Disbelief, and total Rejection, thereby adding insult to injury.

We, therefore, the Malodorous People of The World, do make this grievance in order that the common people of the world do Realize that our Medical Condition is not of our Will, but forced upon Us by Nature's endowments. Further, We assert that We give every effort to Combat this malodorous stench that clings to Us, albeit with limited success. Additionally, we encourage any enlistment of those that may have Solutions to

our Dilemma. We Reek not of our Will, though We are United as One; a malodorous family that seeks only Respect and Understanding.

Signed,  
Benjamin Rimmer  
+ All other Malodorous People of the Earth

## POETRY AND QUOTES

## DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know  
That I cry at night  
Thinking about the day ahead?  
Wondering what things might be said.

Did you know  
That I cry at night never getting to sleep?  
My fears don't let me,  
I never find peace.

Did you know  
That I cry at night and find something to eat?  
Even though I'm not hungry,  
I regret it, then weep.

Did you know  
That I cry at night?  
No you didn't,  
Because it's hidden under false smiles and laughs.

It is pathetic,  
And it makes me sad.

Tiffany B.

“Enzyme disorders stem from genes. Something we are genetically predisposed to. This is not a personal defect, this is a medical defect.”—Arun Nagrath

NEVER SEEN YOU

Never seen your faces,  
Never ever heard your voices,  
Wouldn't know you  
If I passed you on the street.

From different places,  
All over the world,  
How in the world  
Did we meet?

I found shelter, a place where I can release,  
A place to rid myself of all the pain inside,  
A place I no longer feel  
I have to run and hide.

A place where your tears and fears look just like mine,  
I am encouraged,  
You be encouraged,  
One day we'll all make it and be just fine.

Lori Jester

"In a strange way, I know that it is my blessing to be reviled and excluded because even if I don't see the promised land (i.e. a cure for this condition, greater social acceptance), I know that this life is a vapor that comes and goes, and I have another home."--C. Hall

## MY DISEASE HAS A NAME

My disease has a name,  
Finally, my disease has a name,  
Or at least  
I hope.

This disease that makes me the plague of the world and the outcast of society,  
The thing that in every moment of the day  
Makes me think why me?  
Has a name.

But I don't know how to feel about it,  
How do I feel about having a disease that's almost unknown, rare,  
That even doctors may look at me and wonder what part of my imagination  
Created such a condition.

I can finally explain what is wrong with me,  
But the explanation will be as much a mystery even after I explain,  
Unreal.  
So instead of explaining myself I don't say a word.

I stay bottled up inside,  
And have people continue  
To think, I just don't take a bath or brush my teeth,  
What are they going to say to me when I tell them?

What are they going to think?  
I could explain every detail of my condition,  
And all they'll hear  
Is I smell.

I don't know how to feel of having a condition that's not curable,  
Yes, there is treatment,  
Much of which is not successful for some,  
Even many.

And no one is really out there trying to find out how they can find a cure,  
As if my condition does not matter  
Because I am not going to die,  
My condition is not threatening to my health.

But it is a threat to my psyche,  
My self esteem,  
My self worth,  
And even my desire to live.

I fear trying the treatment, the diet of nothingness,  
The tablets of what the hell herbs and whatever,  
Low dose antibiotics that will eventually affect my liver,  
Refraining from physical activity it seems like another type of prison sentence.

I fear diagnosis,  
I have lived so long not knowing,  
Not understanding,  
And now I have a miniscule hope that I may be fixable and this is my malfunction.

But what if I'm wrong,  
I think I like pretending  
That I'm right  
More than knowing.

I think the only thing  
That gives me one clear emotion  
Is knowing  
I Am Not Alone.

I can't believe that all this time I have been suffering,  
That I have tried to understand why,  
That I have wished death upon myself,  
And felt I was not worthy to breathe.

That there were others like me that felt as I felt,  
That soaked their pillows at night,  
That feared venturing out into the world,  
Who wished only as I to be normal.

That makes me feel relieved,  
I am relieved,  
Yes my disease may have a name,  
Yes I don't know whether to be afraid, happy, unsure.

I don't know what to think,  
This may be the beginning of the end of my turmoil,  
The continuation of it,  
Living in a reality.

Or continuing to live in the unknown,  
My journey is just that--a journey,  
But the difference between me then and the me now  
Is now I don't walk the path alone

I walk  
With others like me,  
Who believe, know, or hope  
That they have TMAU.

Jessica F. M.

## I AM WORTHY OF LOVE

I was waiting today,  
Waiting for I don't know what,  
I stopped my day, my life  
Just waiting.

Waiting for you to change your mind,  
To take it back,  
To hate me,  
To be disgusted by me as everyone else.

I was waiting for you to end it,  
To say it was over,  
That this would never last,  
Because I wasn't worthy.

Worthy  
Of your time,  
Your patience,  
Your love.

How is it that I,  
The plague of the world,  
The person prisoner in society,  
Has found someone to love me for me.

To love me despite who I am,  
To not be aware  
Of my crimes,  
My dirtiness.

How is someone as unlucky in life as me  
Be so lucky?  
How is this possible  
That I could?

How could I who does not love myself,  
Who does not appreciate the person in me,  
Who is damaged and seems almost unfixable  
Find someone who loves me?

Who sees only my beauty,  
Who sees my real personality,  
And does not judge me without even an inkling of who I am,  
Who is okay without understanding or knowing why I won't leave my house.

But doesn't mind staying in because it makes me happy,  
Who is willing to take it one step at a time,  
No matter how frustrating I make them,  
Or how much I push them away.

How are they able to see so much in me?  
To put so much faith in me,  
When I do not have  
That faith in myself.

I have become so afraid,  
Afraid of betrayal,  
Afraid of being ignored,  
Being brutalize.

Being a victim,  
A cancer to society,  
Feeling unwanted,  
Feeling alone.

That I don't know when it's okay to trust,  
I have grown not even to trust the people who are my family,  
Because they don't know how to deal,  
Because I don't know how to deal.

So I push them away in fear,  
Fear of rejection,  
Why is it that I fear rejection of someone  
That I have rejected over and over again?

And still comes back,  
The person who unlike others  
Never thinks of my smell,  
But only thinks of me.

Why can't I have the same love and appreciation for myself?  
And realize I am worthy,  
Worthy to be loved,  
To be appreciated.

To have support,  
To have someone to depend on  
When my world  
Is crumbling down.

I spend so much time dwelling on my disease,  
I don't see what's right in front of me,  
What I'm throwing away  
Because I can't look past my condition.

But I won't anymore,  
I will not take them for granted,  
I will not chase this disease in my mind  
Until I have run away from everything and everyone.

And been left alone  
Still with my disease,  
My disease is but one part of my life,  
But my life is so much more

And if I love myself,  
Or ever hope to love myself,  
I must live the fullest life I can,  
Jumping head first.

Because everything is a chance,  
Friendship, love,  
If someone is willing to take a chance on me  
I should take a chance on them.

Because I am worthy of love and so much more.  
Jessica F. M.

## FOUR WALLS

I am bound by four walls,  
Walls that are both my prison and my sanctuary,  
But what are the crimes to which I have to pay?  
Where is the root of my evil?

I am a criminal to society,  
I live in a room with windows I cannot open,  
And stuff towels underneath doors  
So that my crimes may not seep below.

I am in a prison condemned to by self,  
Self loathing,  
Like a murderer I am almost inhuman,  
More like an animal.

My stench is my weapon  
Of which I've ravaged many lives,  
Don't come near her,  
That beast.

The killer of special moments,  
She is not remorseful  
In continuance of her serial ways,  
They say.

People fear me,  
Lock their doors and windows so I may not come in,  
They run to the safety of clean fresh air,  
Clenching their noses in defense with what ever they may have on hand.

To those in the outside world,  
I am more than just a criminal but a threatening disease,  
I walk into a room  
And I surround them with my army of stench.

As they are surrounded  
They cannot hide from me as I cannot hide from myself,  
I find a way into their nose,  
Hindering breath and inhalation.

My only solace from being a plague to the outside world  
Is the very walls which keep me captive,  
Walls to which no soul ever has to see me until I pass the threshold of my room,  
These walls protect me from my victims as they protect me from my attackers.

I'm comfortable here locked away,  
I worry not,  
Some days I may pass without a morsel of food or a drop of drink,  
I just lay in bed.

Food and drink don't nag at my desires,  
I only think of them when the coast is clear,  
When I may traipse in the isolated dark hallways of my home  
Like a thief in the night.

I long very much to leave my safety net,  
But like the sex offender I know I am unwanted,  
What are joyous moments of freedom  
In the faces of disgust, horror and distaste.

But as easy as it would be to stay behind these walls,  
At times, however, I have no choice but to leave them,  
I am bound by bills,  
As I am bound to pay my debt to society.

But the society  
Which mocks and judges me  
Does not allow me a method  
To successfully do so locked away.

As a result  
I am going deeper and deeper into debt,  
I cannot provide for myself,  
Not many employers hire criminals.

And those that do  
Also employ others who  
Batter me daily with  
The sharpness of their words.

This is my life,  
A life that consists of four walls,  
And what is beyond those walls?  
Solace within and terror outward.

This is the life  
Of a prisoner of self,  
Prisoner to the crime of TMAU  
In these four walls.

Jessica F. M.

## YOU CONVINCED ME

You convinced me today,  
Convinced me  
I might be wrong about myself,  
Wrong about the way I am.

It's like you said, I see myself as having an odor,  
I imagine reactions that I don't hear,  
I sense repulsion without looking someone in their eye,  
This has to be imaginary.

Right.

So I went out today and  
I said to my imagination,  
Imagination, you cease to not exist,  
The power you have over me is gone.

Anxiety, you cease to not exist,  
The power you have over me is gone,  
I am the controller of my thoughts,  
And I say to my thoughts, you shall not run rampant.

So I go out into the world, confidence at my forefront,  
My one thought is I have showered,  
I have perfumed, lotioned,  
All that the world tells me should make me as fragrant as a garden.

But

But the looks I receive,  
The people covering their noses,  
The whispers, stares,  
They all make me think that maybe my garden has died.

Am I crazy?  
Crazy to see what is before me?  
Am I crazy to see my world and  
The people in it for who they are?

Has my imagination suddenly taken control?  
Maybe people move away when I am near  
Because they had planned to move away,  
But only did in that instant that I was close.

Maybe people cover their noses because they feel a cold coming on,  
Maybe they are whispering about someone else while they stare at me,  
Maybe the odor that they complain about whenever I am around  
Is just always wherever I go and not me.

Right.

Wrong.

You told me for my sake  
You hope I do have body odor,  
Because the idea of creating such a psychotic nightmare  
Is far worse.

They have drugs  
For psychotic episodes,  
They have places  
For those who are going insane.

But there are very few places for people like me,  
For you to say that it is better to smell than to think you smell,  
You must never have spent a day in this skin,  
This skin I live in.

You convinced me but for a moment,  
Or maybe you convinced that part of me  
That wishes that my nightmare  
Was only just that--a nightmare that would end.

But you know what?  
The dream of pretending that I don't smell,  
In a world where I do,  
Is far worse than knowing it

When I get up in the morning  
And prepare myself to leave  
The sanctuary of loneliness,  
I tell myself I smell.

My smell is but one part of me,  
It does not define me,  
So when I reach the outside world,  
I am not bothered or perplexed by the reactions I know will come.

Yes they will come,  
I know it because  
My imagination doesn't control me,  
I control my imagination.

I am sane,  
Maybe my reality makes me  
Feel like I'm going insane,  
But I am sane.

To tell myself that I am insane,  
And smell of roses  
In the face of constant rejection  
Is to constantly set myself up for failure.

I know who I am,  
I know what I am,  
I know that I have body odor,  
Reactions will come.

And they may never go,  
I know it  
Because I live it,  
No one can convince me otherwise.

Once I face what I am,  
I move on to be  
Who I want to be,  
I am more than this odor.

Yes I have odor,  
But this odor does not define me. Jessica F. M.

## DO YOU REMEMBER ME?

Do you remember me?  
Because you may not,  
My new appearance and self confidence  
May have you shocked.

I have come to change,  
No longer ashamed,  
And now know that odor and dirtiness  
Are not my name.

Do you remember me?  
It seemed I had no face,  
For I hung it down  
In such disgrace.

Now I walk proud,  
I say it loud,  
I am  
No longer bond.

Do you remember me?  
I am no longer afraid,  
My fear and insecurity  
Have come to fade.

I am confident,  
I am strong,  
And I know  
I can go on.

Do you remember me?  
I never went outside,  
But behind four walls,  
I chose to hide.

But now I'm free,  
I fly free  
Like a bee,  
This is the new me.

Do you remember me?  
The girl you scorned,  
Making me wish  
I had not be born.

But now I'm a woman,  
Feet planted firm in the sand,  
Knowing despite you,  
I was born to be who I am.

Do you remember me?  
I accept myself,  
I love it far  
Beyond anyone else.

I don't understand  
The things I cannot change,  
But those things  
Will not drive me insane.

Those things at the back of my mind,  
That beast I cannot tame,  
For that beast did not destroy me,  
But molded me to the strong woman,  
That I became.

Jessica F. M.

"Winners never quit! Quitters never win! Yes U can do this! It starts today!"  
--Dr. Cheryl "Still Standing" Fields, MBA, Ph.D. President/Founder, Trimethylaminuria  
Midwest Region Foundation

## ALONE NO MORE

I sit alone,  
My pain is exhausting,  
It's too much to bear,  
Loneliness creeps in,  
My spirit fades and darkness invades.

Sadness looms,  
My fears are realized,  
Only my Creator knows my pain,  
Yet I remain.

Mockery and laughter surrounds,  
Do they sense my pain?  
No, it's merely their game.

Whispers and stares,  
One cold icy glare,  
Like an animal I am trapped in their snare,  
No one could care.

My soul is trapped,  
They cannot see,  
Is there another that could feel like me?  
Could it be?

Your spirit floats beside mine,  
I feel your soul, it is kind,  
Alone no more,  
Burdens lift and hearts soar.

Quickly darkness ends,  
Light begins,  
A new day is born again,  
Hope returns,  
A possible friend.

Slowly light peeks through,  
A flash of joy,  
Something new,  
My soul dances.

Watch me soar,  
This is what I was created for,  
I am alone no more.

Sonya McClinton

## I WATCH THE WORLD GO BY

I watch the world go by,  
It calls to me,  
But I cannot come,  
Instead I hide myself.

Tucked away  
In my own world,  
Afraid to live  
Freely.

I watch people go by,  
They look at me and wonder,  
What's wrong with you?  
I want to tell them but I can't.

I am too afraid  
To tell them  
That I am different,  
They already know.

I watch my life go by,  
I yearn for more than this painful existence,  
I am like a turtle inside a shell,  
When life gets tough I retreat inside.

I cover myself with a tough skin,  
I watch the world go by,  
Sometimes I cry,  
I want to be accepted.

But they reject me,  
So I  
Stand alone,  
Broken.

I watch people go by,  
They torment me,  
Cruelly they laugh,  
Do they know my pain?

That I  
Am human,  
No,  
It matters not.

I watch my life go by,  
Trying to understand,  
I wonder if I can fly,  
Could I soar high above?

I look down,  
Yes, I can fly,  
Maybe this feeling  
Will last forever.

I wake up,  
It is only a dream,  
So I watch the world go by,  
It calls to me.

Sonya McClinton

## DO YOU SEE ME?

Do you see me?  
I just walked by.  
Do you see me?  
Please, look me in the eye.

Do you see me?  
You walked by so fast.  
Do you see me?  
The pain will always last.

Do you hear me?  
I call out in vain.  
Do you hear me?  
This is not a game.

Do you hear me?  
I spoke only a word.  
Do you hear me?  
This is absurd.

Do you smell me?  
Of course you do.  
You got one whiff  
And then you knew.

You saw my weakness  
And you were through,  
You walked on past  
Like all the others do.

Do you know me?  
How could you ever?  
Do you know me?  
You act so clever,  
Your chance is now gone forever.

You judge me in an instant  
And then look away,  
How could you ever  
Know anyone that way?

Do you see me?  
I am here,  
I am tired  
Of living in fear.

Open your eyes,  
That have been so blind,  
Leave the past  
Mistakes behind.

Do you see me?  
I know that you do,  
Don't walk past  
Like the others do.

Look at me through  
Eyes that are new,  
Look at me the way  
I look at you.

Now tell me, do you see me?

Sonya McClinton

“Although I may be limited [genetically predisposed], I’m by no means out of the game [of life].”—Latisha Williams 🌹



Latisha Williams

## I'M TIRED

I am tired  
Of all the crap,  
This condition is just  
Some big bum rap.

I'm tired of all the looks,  
The stares, the endless glares,  
I'm tired of the life  
That this condition ensnares.

I'm tired of feeling  
Like I should be living,  
Instead of passing time,  
Never taking, only giving.

I'm tired of trying  
To feel attractive,  
Even the dogs  
See me as defective.

I'm tired of trying  
To make conversation and smile,  
When my whole life  
Is spent like a prisoner in exile.

I'm so tired  
Of being bloody me,  
Won't someone  
Put me out of my misery.

Arun Nagrath

“We are in the blender of life--broken, shredded, minced; we still exist.”—Jessica F. M.

## COMFORT IN MY LONELINESS

There is comfort in my loneliness,  
I won't feel good if I hurt you,  
I won't cry tears of insincerity,  
I won't lose myself because you don't value me.

Instead I will cry,  
I will cry because the world has taught you  
To hate, despise, control  
And remove what isn't the social norm.

I will cry because you were unable  
To rise above the rest  
And live on the level of righteousness  
And freely love and respect without the hands of hate holding you back.

I will cry because when you do shed tears,  
They are lost in the crowd,  
Never to fall on deserving shoulders,  
But instead on your own cold hands.

I cry because you will never know  
True integrity of spirit,  
I cry at the shame in that,  
And I cry because there are so many of you.

Sheri Norton

## IF ONLY

If only I had known  
That you would offer your hand in friendship,  
Only to turn and walk away....  
Would I have walked away first?

If only I had known  
That my investment in you  
Would cash out far too soon,  
Would I have spent the time?

If only I had known  
The memory of you would become my tormentor,  
Would I have given you  
The best part of me?

Looking back to  
The "If I had only knowns,"  
I would have done  
Them all again.

I took the best pieces of you,  
Tho so unaware,  
I foolishly believed  
That you would always be there.

There is no point in placing fault,  
Maybe the day will come  
When you will no longer  
Turn and walk away.

And the love that  
Is so freely given to you  
Will be a treasure to you  
And not just a phase.

I cannot fault you,  
Our journeys are not the same,  
You will see when you walk it long enough,  
It's not about who you can blame.

It's about who you loved  
Without regret  
And not just who you  
Thought would be the best bet.

Sheri Norton

“Compare ourselves to ourselves, not to others.”—Maria de la Torre



Sheri Norton

## SEEDS OF BENEVOLENCE

Upon mother Earth, by seed produced,  
 flower and weed, blind nature induced.  
 Through mothers womb, from seed of sire,  
 diversity sprouts void of desire.

Dandelion and Rose in competition,  
 survival devoid of intuition.  
 Disparate, turbulent humanity,  
 may cognizance uproot insanity.

Admired flowers, despicable weeds,  
 adjectives are not borne within seeds.  
 Poisonous ideas create enmity,  
 human hubris feeds animosity.

Sustenance provided by Earth and Sun,  
 natural resources are overrun.  
 For flower and weed, a perpetual fight,  
 may wanton humanity supersede this plight.

Flowers blossom, the weed intrudes,  
 opposing ideals power feuds.  
 Seed determines both flower and weed,  
 Buds of the mind derive from no seed.

Humble weeds' stigma, glorious flowers' fame,  
 impressions received dependent upon name.  
 Infinite possibility, ideas can impart,  
 may virtue proliferate and vice depart.

The flowers of humanity discriminate the weeds,  
 disputing over differences, neither concedes.  
 With weeds hoed and uprooted, flowers sever and fall,  
 such atrocious antagonism poisonous to all.

Thoughts germinate within the mind,  
 peaceful ideas are of the best kind.  
 Flowers and weeds, in the same garden reside,  
 may prejudice wane and discrimination subside.

Malevolent seeds, only lunacy sows;  
from every sprout, just enormity grows.  
From pure seeds of benevolence sown,  
are buds of virtue and benefaction grown.

With every kind act, every jovial affair,  
and other contagions of love and of care-  
with peace and prosperity without objection,  
may the whole of the Earth contract such infection.

Benjamin Rimmer

## I'M HUMAN TOO

Humans.

I see them-  
broad smiles,  
cheerful faces.

I watch them-  
giving kisses,  
sharing embraces.

I'm human.

I near them-  
irreverent scoffing,  
malicious leering.

I hear them-  
raucous laughter,  
malevolent jeering.

I'm human too.

I escape them-  
solitary solace,  
forever lone.

I understand them-  
I'm different,  
perpetually alone.

But I'm human too.

Benjamin Rimmer

## LIVING WITH CHRONIC B.O.

I don't think it's in your head  
when in fourth grade your sister says  
you smell like urine and milk  
and you get pissed off, 'cause you clean yourself properly  
and think she is being preposterous.

I don't think it's in your head  
when in fifth grade your other sister says  
your scalp stinks  
and you are mortified  
and wonder why.

I don't think it's in your head  
when in fifth and sixth grades your breath  
suddenly starts to smell bad  
and you can't hide or mask it, not even with mints and gum,  
and you feel embarrassed and glum.

I don't think it's in your head  
when by seventh grade your breath is horrible  
and one of your few friends offers you gum but you say  
you don't like peppermint and she replies sort of under her breath  
that it's better than having bad breath (afterwards, you're still friends, sort of).

I don't think it's in your head  
when by eighth grade you start stinking up every classroom  
and everyone thinks you're farting even though you aren't.  
(And you want to scream at them, "No, I am not eating beans and broccoli!  
I don't hate them but I don't like them either.")

I don't think it's in your head  
when by high school you've gotten new nicknames  
but hardly the kinds anyone would want: Smelly Cat, Ferdy Nerdy  
and one kid even says that your perfume smells worse than whatever the odor is.  
(And you thought perfume would make you smell better).

I don't think it's in your head  
when by college the comments and odor persist,  
glued to you like the plague,  
setting you apart like a leper.

(And the fact you eat fewer foods doesn't matter whatsoever).

I don't think it's in your head  
when doctors tell you that you have Crohn's  
and you smell worse than a sewer sometimes  
but other doctors tell you that you have IBS but  
they have nothing to offer but more b.s.

You already know—don't eat this, avoid stress, blah, blah, blah...  
(And you wonder which is worse, doctors who take  
you and your lab reports seriously and giving you  
alarming news and diagnoses, or doctors ignoring you  
completely and telling you nothing is wrong with your body...).

I don't think it's in your head  
when you are finally headed toward a total health breakdown  
despite eating well and staying active even though often you would rather  
hide under the covers than go to school or work, or ride the subway or bus,  
or go shopping or socializing.

(Because not knowing  
what's going on can be  
just as devastating  
as what is  
and drive you completely mad.)

I don't think it's in your head  
but I bet you wish it were.

Reina Rivers

## FLASHBACK (TO NAMES I HAVE BEEN CALLED)

“Smelly Cat”

Back in eighth grade  
when it all started to get worse,  
(Whoever said,  
“the best is yet to come,” lied.)

“Ferdie Nerdy”

In tenth grade,  
by which time I had realized that  
whatever I had was there to stay,  
That definitely wasn't funny—at least I wasn't laughing.

(Now I know his comment was not only a sign of  
his immaturity but also, his jealousy,  
Yes, jealousy,  
I wish I had realized that back then...

Maybe I did but I can't remember,  
What I do remember is  
all the nasty names unjustly spewed  
out at me while I was in a school for the gifted—

If the “gifted” were so callous and unrelenting,  
I wonder how the “average”  
highschooler would have treated someone like me—  
maybe like a leper...that reminds me of...)

“The Leper in the Cellar”

The time I wanted to live in a basement because I couldn't work  
due to my disabilities and I couldn't afford to rent a place of my own,  
But I desperately needed to move out to maintain my sanity—  
not from the teasers and name-callers but from my own so-called family!

(Uncle Sammy, where was/is my disability money?!  
I can assure you I'm not malingering and neither am I a bum,  
In fact, I even voted just the other day!  
There is so much talk about diversity but when will more learn to accept this “diversity”?)

“Skunk”

By a group of kids outside my apartment building  
back in 2005 when the gastroenterologist  
thought I had Crohn’s  
and the smell was really, really BAD.

(Probiotics, antibiotics—you know what?  
I’ve tried about a gazillion so-called cures and helpful products,  
But in the end they only made my system worse,  
So I don’t think I’ll be trying anything—at least not anytime soon.)

“Smelly Girl”

Just the other day at the doctor’s, six days after Independence Day,  
But I wasn’t free then and I am still not free  
and I won’t be till a cure is found—  
then I’ll have my real independence from this horrible condition.

(Of course, I still need a diagnosis despite years of searching for answers,  
even in these days of “modern” medicine—hello, doctors, are you listening?)

Reina Rivers

“If I can’t deal with what problems I have in life, I will have no life.”—Sandy Gordon,  
TMAU Support Group Foundation Founder

## BOARD MESSAGES AND REPLIES

Members of this online Body Odor Support Group communicate with each other mainly through posting messages on the message board. This is how we show our love and support for one another, along with periodic conference calls. The following messages and some of the replies to them were taken verbatim from this board. No messages were taken without the permission of their authors. To preserve the authors' original postings, only minor proofreading was done.

### MESSAGE ONE: HOW TO DEAL WITH A CO-WORKER

Can you all help me out with dealing with a co-worker? I had a co-worker ask what was that smell and another worker replied, "That's Tom." I was stunned and did want to talk to the co-worker. They know I shower every day and am not nasty. I would like help in dealing with this person because it does not hurt my feelings anymore, just annoying. I have realized I smell different and that I have to work and this is the situation that I'm in right now. Years ago I could wear cologne, but now I can not even put on a little dab after I had an ulcer and took the medicine.

Please help. I don't know how to deal with this.

--T. Thompson

REPLY:

T. Thompson,

Sorry to hear about what happened at work.

My suggestion is, do what feels right for you. You have to be there day after day with these people, and you have to do whatever makes it tolerable for you. There is a long list of options, whether it be to speak to a manager, to talk in private to the guy who insulted you, to be a radar just looking for payback opportunities, or to detach yourself emotionally from this person and focus on the more caring people, you need to do what feels right for you.

We are limited with what we can do to change the world, but we have endless possibilities about how we can change ourselves to adapt to the world. For starters, we can get a good grasp of who we are, our good points and our weaknesses and challenges (internal and external), and what we do to strengthen them so that WE can feel good about ourselves. Then, we have to be able to discern between what is out there in the world that we would like to allow to enter our private space, to internalize, to allow to affect us deeply, and when to “build up walls” and not let it penetrate.

We also need to discern who and what would make us feel good, would help us grow to be better human beings, and to make us happy, so that we can “let them in.” That's all we can do, I think.

--María de la Torre

## MESSAGE TWO: FIRST WEEK AT WORK

And it's the usual coughing, sniffing, laughing, flared nostrils....and so on. And could

of sworn today I heard, "You stink of shit," from a chef in the kitchen. I hate it so much because I'm a hard worker and want to work so bad so I can get on with my life, but workmates are keeping me back...I'm gunna keep strong though...

I don't care if I smell to them. I'll pretend to be oblivious to it until they fire me....

Anyway I hate the actual job too. I'm cleaning dishes and cleaning up after people who talk about lowest of the low and even worse. The clients are models and media types, so they just LOVE ME hahaha! Oh well, onwards I go...

--Doc G.

REPLY:

Doc G.,

You have a great attitude which will keep you employed until the next opportunity comes along. If you do a good job and don't ruffle too many feathers, they'll hang onto you. It's hard to find enthusiasm like yours, in *any* job.

I have the same problem that you do, and find some things keep it at bay. Please don't be offended, I'm just trying to help a kindred soul. Try to leave for work with an empty bowel (to reduce potential gas "leaks"), increase your roughage intake, and take probiotic capsules. Potatoes, wheat, and red meat are especially bad for me, so you might want to see if they affect you too.

Whenever I heard that same kind of comment, my heart would sink, but nobody fired me over it. They enjoyed my good work and persistence. In the end, I moved on

when I was ready to go after something better.

Even if it isn't your dream job, try to love your job for what it is—a stepping stone to the next good thing. You're in the market and giving it all you've got. Feeling good about it will do wonders for keeping positive energy in your body.

Good luck Doc G.! I'm smiling for you.

--Debra Q. ;o)

### MESSAGE THREE: SERIOUS MELTDOWN

I'm seriously losing it and I don't know what to do. In my last post I was feeling good and didn't care about the comments at work and stuff. But yesterday everything just collapsed. All the chefs started to say there was a really bad smell and were trying to find it, with some of them knowing where it was coming from. So there were about 6 or 7 people trying to sniff me out and still were wondering where the smell was coming from. Then the word got around to the bar staff and they all came in to find the smell, then managers and owners came in as well, so basically everyone in the building that matters were in there trying to find this "disgusting smell." Then the head chef told me to take the trash out 'cause it could have been coming from there. When I came back I could feel all the eyes on me.

Then I was asked to go home. I just had a major breakdown when I got home and had a big argument with my mum about how every day I go through hell not living the life I deserve because of this. And she still says the same thing: "I can't smell you. Who

says you smell? What do you smell of?" I just can't handle it anymore. I'm getting really down and I just don't know what to do.....

I need serious help.

--Doc G.

REPLY:

I hate that you had to go through something that was so horrible and demeaning. I know that you are hurting and want to run and hide somewhere and never return to that job again, but don't quit. You have a medical condition and it is not your fault! I have completely been where you are now, which is why I am not working at the moment. I let them run me off my job and now I have no money coming in and at my age, 41, I need to work for SSI or retirement benefits let alone no health insurance. If they don't have the guts to address this with you in a professional manner then don't give them the satisfaction of just quitting. I wish that there was some kind of discrimination law that protected us because it is not fair. Sounds like the whole incident was orchestrated to me. I've had that happen too. I left work bawling like a baby, barely able to drive after the mean, heartless things ex-coworkers have said and done. **THIS TOO SHALL PASS!** I promise it will. If you quit, then you will be denied unemployment benefits which is what they want you to do because they know that if they try to fire you for an odor condition—especially one due to medical reasons—then they are going to be held liable, and so they are trying to force you out. Stand Strong. We are all standing with

you, and these are not empty words coming from us. We feel every pain that you feel now just like it happened to us, because it has. We support and respect you and you know we've got much love for you too. My email is... (Email address omitted for privacy)

--Lori Jester

#### MESSAGE FOUR: WHAT HAS THIS CONDITION DONE TO YOU AS A PERSON?

For some of us, having this condition has made us softer. Some of us have become harder as a result. I guess it's all a matter of perspective in terms of judging "soft" or "hard" as being a negative or a positive?

--William Sheffield

#### REPLY ONE:

It has opened my eyes to the world. People can no longer bull\*\*\*t me anymore. I can see right through people. So, I think it has made me a wiser person.

--G. Frankinton

#### REPLY TWO:

It's made me slightly stronger in some ways and more self aware, but the negative effects it's had on me overwhelm them really...i.e., depressed, more reclusive/unsociable, angry a lot/short temper, very paranoid, no ambition anymore, little confidence, very quiet, push people away, need to get stupidly drunk to relax (when with

others)...--T. N. Toast

REPLY THREE:

It's a good question, Will.

This condition has given me a mission. Actually I think it gives us all a mission. In some people, take Ben for instance, his mission is clear and determined. The dude knows what he wants to do because of this condition. In some people, the mission is less clear...but I think as you age and mature, it begins to become clearer. People like Maria and Sharon...I know their missions in regard to this condition. Arun...I can see his mission. Sandy, Camille, Dr. Fields...I can see their mission. Some of us are less "group-oriented" and we just want to be personally successful and master this somehow...then be left alone. It's interesting to see how this affects different people.

Sonya and Trish and Tisha and Glenna...I can really see them just striving to be good Moms and good to their families. Melissa is a budding lawyer, and I can see her at Columbia very soon.

For me, personally, it has given me the desire to seek out every person around the world with this. I want to talk to everybody like me. I want to meet people like me.

Make no mistake that the people who go to meet-ups are so courageous. It takes a certain amount of acceptance and self-worth to show up and actually meet someone else like this. It's almost like saying, "This is me." I don't know if I can explain it adequately.

But it surely has given me the mission of bringing us together in some way. I will do this, God willing, before I die. I am going to build us up and make us strong again...at least that is what I want to do.

I don't want to die without making a difference for people like us in this world. I am not going to allow my own fear and doubt to keep me away from people like me. I want to master my condition physically and mentally. There is no way I could do this by myself.

--C. Hall

REPLY FOUR:

It has been one of the biggest challenges I have ever had to face.

I will have to agree with Cabel. I'm not so sure it gives us all a mission, but I do believe it gives us a responsibility, which I think is what he meant. I feel compelled to do my part to make a difference in this dilemma, this condition, this curse.....whatever you want to call it.

I understand that talking about it helps, especially with other people that suffer, but I can only talk so much. I want action! I want answers! I want some damn solutions! I can't stand to think for 5 minutes about other people having to go thru life like this. I think of all the people that are out there that haven't found this site or any other sites, people that don't have home computers (I know most people have them, but still a lot don't). People that have isolated themselves so much they don't even realize this is a

condition, they think it is just some God-awful curse they have to endure. My heart breaks for them.

Let's face it, mainstream medicine, with very little exception, has not even acknowledged (some of) our conditions much less given us any explanations. Most of the helpful tidbits that any of US have found are things we have learned from trial and error or maybe MIRACULOUSLY found while we were researching until all hours of the night.

It's time for some action. We could start a clinic. How many of us have medical backgrounds? We will need some people with administrative talents, some accounting backgrounds. Someone who is very good at raising money. A rich relative??

I think this site is a wonderful thing, and it is possible because a handful of people cared enough to want it, then they envisioned it and then slowly it became a reality. Let's do that with a clinic. Arun won't have to go to Thailand to have someone smell him; I will do it for free and with a pure heart.

Anyone want to move to the middle of the country with me and start a clinic? It (this condition) may be one of my biggest challenges, but I am not ready to say "uncle" yet!!  
--Claire C.

REPLY FIVE:

I Agree with Cabel, This condition has given me a Mission. Back in College I remember seeing my peers developing convictions for Human Rights, Corporate

Domination, Discrimination of other Races; you name it someone was fighting for it. Now I know what my conviction is. Its to find a cure. There is nothing I can do better in my life than die giving it my all.

Personality wise it has done a lot of good and bad. In many ways I have learned to take control of my life to get what I want. Getting doctors and labs to work with me to send my blood and urine to Dr. Cashman for Testing was one of my greatest performances. They would place so much friction against me but they could read the determination on my face. I was not going to leave that building without my blood and urine in their appropriate containers. I didn't need them to ship it; I shipped it myself.

Another trait that I have developed because of TMAU is that I have become an awesome researcher. Give me any topic. I will find pages of information and even be able to write a short summary. I've spent way over a thousand hours researching TMAU in the past 4 years. Finding information has become second nature to me.

Overall, this condition has let me see how normal people let themselves be defeated by small things. I keep saying to myself, if I didn't have TMAU I would give 10X more effort than your average person. Let's say life is a race and everyone is at some point trying to finish it. I see my condition as a brick wall keeping me from advancing from the starting line. Every day I take a long head start and I sprint against that wall. I fall, covered in blood, rest, and start the next day all over again. One day, I will reach a speed so fast that I will break through that wall. Not only will I have broken that wall, I will be going so fast that I am going to leave everyone else in the dust.  
--Joel M.

## REPLY SIX:

William, Shaun, and T. N. Toast, thanks so much for sharing in such a deep way. Joel, I'm there to help you hit that wall, and to wipe the blood off you each time you fall, amigo. Melissa, thank you very much for always reaching out to this community with such a warm dedication. You are much needed, and a tremendous asset to this community, thank you for that.

This condition is absolutely overwhelming at times (most of the time), and it is absolutely devastating when you see your only two sons suffering from it as well! Nothing can top that!!!

For me, this is my driving force. When I carry my nephew's baby, my heart tears in half just thinking, hoping, and praying that she too won't have this condition. Every time I smell her poop odor, I run to make sure it's in her diaper only, and I wash her well. I forever smell her feet for fear they will smell as my older son's feet smelled as a baby – and sometimes they do! What an obsession I suffer with! OH GOD, HELP US!!

It does make me wiser; it does help me become more sensitive to the needs of other people as opposed to my own, but it also tears me down; and through all these years I have fallen victim to fatigue and powerlessness. Sometimes I feel like an 80-year-old woman instead of a 55-year-old woman. I feel like I've been to war and have deep emotional wounds, and the war follows me home. There really is no escape!

It is precisely for this reason that I am so driven to do all I possibly can to find a cure, and at the very least to find a good management protocol for all types of BO. This

is the way I cope best. This effort is slowly but surely helping me come out of reclusion, at least a little – first through my computer, then through the conference calls, and a few times through meet-ups. This community IS my healing process, my lifeline. My thanks to all of you!

--Maria de la Torre

#### REPLY SEVEN:

It has made me an extremely paranoid person. I know everyone feels like this but I think I go too far when they rub their noses or make comments. Sometimes when my coworkers say things, I won't say anything to them or will make a rude comment about them. I can't believe none have commented back with a "Well you stink." This girl said, "What if I light a match and put it against the water system at the top of the store. I said back, "I'm glad I don't work up here, I'd hurt somebody. I'm trying to remember that some people just are really ignorant, but it's hard. I used to be "caretomuch" on the old board. I had my baby boy and things pretty much are the same.

--Carrington Ford

#### REPLY EIGHT:

What has this condition done to me as a person?

It has done me some good and some bad.

The Good: I am very understanding of everyone, no matter what they have done or

what kind of flaws they may have. This condition has given me the opportunity to think a lot about humanity and human rights, injustice, and social relations among humans (and even animals; those cuddly critters).

I have immense willpower to succeed despite having such a condition. Having this condition has made me realize how easy it is to accomplish pretty much anything in relation to how difficult this condition can be. Is it easier to deal with this condition or learn Calculus? Calculus is by far much, much easier. Having this condition makes everything else seem so very easy.

This condition has directed me to the field of work that I would like to do. We have this metabolic body odor problem, but everyone in the world is affected by some ailment at some time in their life, and there are no exceptions. I don't like suffering of any kind, whether it be animals or humans. My aim is to make and find solutions to such ailments and suffering. My life is dedicated to this end.

The Bad: This condition has made me very reclusive. It has made me asocial most of my life. It has prevented the development of social skills. It has caused pain, frustration, and anger. It has made people think that I am just gross. Some people even hate you if you reek. Others just keep their distance. Either way, you just don't get much respect.

Additionally, this condition has made many aspects of my life much more difficult. Avoiding people as much as possible was my primary coping strategy. And so I avoided going to school, never graduating from high school. I missed work excessively

whenever I was having particularly bad days. I had only one relationship with a female. I've had very few friendships.

One thing that has always been extremely difficult is getting references for jobs and such. Who is going to recommend a smelly guy?

Another really bad aspect of this condition is having to avoid certain chemicals, mainly anything with a fragrance. I hate having to move every time someone comes and sits near me wearing fragrances. I sometimes have to relocate myself 3-4 times in a single day at the library or common grounds at school. Very irritating. I should carry around some enclosed container of dead fish or something, and open it up to make them move. Hehe.

The Ugly: People are so often very ugly in their attitude towards people with body odor.

All in all, I would say that this condition has done far more damage than any good that has come from it.

Luckily, I now can manage my condition and I am not affected by it much anymore. The positive aspects of having this condition will always remain, but unfortunately, so will the negative memories and some of the residual damage. Emotional damage mainly. But healing comes with time.

I used to be very tense when around people, stricken with anxiety. I still am to a degree, but not nearly as bad as before. The more I am social, the more my anxiety subsides.

I guess that even on days when I happen to have body odor, I don't even care anymore what people say. I have my mission in life, and that is all that really matters to me.

Nothing will stop me now.

--Benjamin Rimmer

MESSAGE FIVE: I ACTUALLY CONFRONTED SOMEONE...

Hey Guys,

So, here's the deal. I was shopping today and I got several comments. Comments that were directed at me and loud enough for me to hear. As I was checking out, the comment from one employee to the other was "That lady stinks, and it's so strong that it'll knock you out."

Normally I just let it slide and slip away, but not today. I actually confronted the person who made the comments.

I said, "Excuse me, mam, I really don't appreciate all of the comments that you were making about me." Then I said, "I have a medical condition that causes this problem, and it's not due to an issue of un-cleanliness." She replied, "I don't have any idea what you are talking about," the whole time not looking me in the face.

I replied, "The medical problem is called TAMU, and just because I have this problem, it doesn't mean that I am deaf as well!" Finally I told her, "I am a human being and I have feelings too."

I walked out of the place and I felt a great deal of pain in my heart. I am so hurt. The burden that I bear seems so heavy right now.

Should I have confronted her? I really don't know. I cried most of the way home. I feel very tired today. I have been tired for a while; this condition wears a person down emotionally. I talked to my very good friend Richard, and he really made me feel better. We actually laughed, and talked about some hymns, and how we both need to commune with God more. Asking for everything through prayer.

I am worried about my kids and what their reactions might be when they get older. Will they know this terrible thing about me?? They are not aware of any smells right now, except for my breath odor, only when I have asked them if it was bad.

I do what I want for the most part, and ignore people. I just feel down trodden and weak right now.

Please any of you that are Christians, pray for me and my family, as I pray for all of you guys in this group.

--Sonya McClinton

REPLY ONE:

Sonya,

You are going to be okay. Your kids will love their mommy forever...no matter what you smell like. Your kids need you like a cub needs his momma bear. Take it from a grown Momma's boy, nothing will keep me away from loving my Mom....nothing. It's the

same way with your kids.

I go between confrontation and ignoring as the best way to deal with this. The older I get, the less sure I am about anything.

We live a hard, hard life. There is no reason to sugar-coat it. We are going to live a hard life. I have to focus on how I can be mentally strong and happy or else my life would be chaos.

--C. Hall

REPLY TWO:

Hey Sonya,

I didn't tell you on the phone yesterday whether I would've spoken up for myself in that situation. I've never come across that kind of blatant verbal abuse before. I've gotten a lot of loud coughs and even hysterical laughter but nothing like what you went through. I think if that happens to me the first time, I would ignore it. But if it happens a second or third time I would have to say something, especially if the incident involved the same people as before. I am proud to call you my friend and I am proud of you for standing up for yourself!

--Richard R. Cook Jr.

REPLY THREE:

Yes, I agree with Richard, well done Sonya! I must admit, I rarely get such blatant

comments. When I do, I just ignore them, quite literally in one ear and out of the other. I figure, why should I listen to someone brainless and insensitive when there are plenty of good people on this earth.

Families often develop acclimatization to our odors if they live in the same house. If they can't smell you now, they probably won't be able to do so when they are older. In any case, once the mother-child bond has formed, it surpasses everything.

Good supportive remarks, C. Hall! Well said, dude.

--Arun Nagrath

REPLY FOUR:

Sonya,

I am so sorry about your pain. People can be so ignorant.

And the guys are right: your boys will love you no matter what. Keep your chin up.

You will be in my thoughts and prayers.

--Claire C.

REPLY FIVE:

Hello, Sonya, I think you did the right thing by confronting her. I too have let a lot of comments slide; other times the frustration builds and we have to let off steam. With some people I guess it's best to let their comments go in one ear and out the other. I'm going to write up a short letter explaining TMAU and other conditions that cause body

odors, and that we don't smell due to poor hygiene. When someone makes rude comments or stare at me as if I'm a freak, I'll just hand them a copy. I have become extremely tired of verbally explaining this condition. I too worry about my children and grandchildren. Family love is unconditional. Take Care. and remember you're not alone. Best Wishes,

--Linda M.

MESSAGE SIX: 25 YEARS AND COUNTING, HELLO, ALL,

Hi, I just want to say thank you. For many years I thought I was the only person in the world that was going thru this. I know I am so wrong now. I started searching on and off for the last 3 years. Always reading posts as Guest and too afraid to sign up anywhere. I am not afraid anymore. I have signed up to three sites in the last month and scoured the internet every few days to keep looking and growing.

I don't want to bore anyone with details, but I do feel it is important to see where we all are coming from. My problem started just before 6th grade. Prior to that I was just as un-smelly as could be. Puberty struck and I really feel this was the big culprit. My friends started asking the usual questions....blah, blah who farted? The weird part that struck me was that I could not smell it, only occasionally. When school started, comments flourished. I actually had a meeting with a teacher ( who did not believe me) and students who were commenting, and no one admitted it was there. Very frustrating. I drove my parents crazy with this. And as usual no one in my family would smell it. (Not

until years later, but none would believe it was me!) I will say I am very fortunate to have my friends. They accept me even though they will not admit it to me. Years later we are still close.

I would like to mention that this odor is not constant. It comes and goes as it pleases. Usually it is a rotten egg smell but also can be regular poo smell (lol). It can appear like a bomb going off and dissipate rather quickly and at times (not normally) seem to ooze out of me slowly. It can stick around for weeks pushing me to the brink of insanity and then go away for a month or two to let me settle down a bit.

The "bomb" so to speak does not always go off on top of me. I have had comments in class and other places where it drops away from my immediate area (bubble). I know some of this stuff sounds kooky.

Somehow I made it thru school and 2 associate degrees.

I realized I had some allergy issues and began some new medication for my nose a few years ago. Since then I am able to smell my unwelcome compadre most of the time.

Some other items I would like to mention. I do have asthma/allergies since very young. Some people feel it has to do with silver tooth fillings and I do have these also. I did end up with a wonderful wife and 4 healthy children. My wife thinks it is all in my head, but she is very supportive. My children have noticed the stink on several occasions and have managed to get me with a few embarrassing moments. Children don't lie.

A positive attitude is so important to have and A SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL

STRUCTURE. This is why I started out saying thank you. This site seems to me to be the most well rounded of the ones that I have found so far. Kudos! I do apologize for long intro.

Things I will try to cover next time are: what have I done to try and fix things, actually met two other people in my life who have a similar problem (and 1 is a friend of mine) and anything else that comes up. Thank you again.

--A. L. Gettinby

REPLY ONE:

Welcome here buddy. I can relate to pretty much everything that you talked about in your post...the on-and-off nature of this condition, the family thinking it's in your head, and the struggles that you have with the people who notice it and make life difficult.

You are right: a support structure is the key to everything for us right now. A solid support structure is something people like us have never had, but I think we are slowly coming around to the idea that this is what we need. It is great to have a group like this. Our group is closer than most. We try to keep in contact as best we can. It's great that you have met someone like you already and are friends with them! That is probably the one thing that has kept me sane for the past few years.

Keep in touch man, and hang in there for your family. They love us even with our eccentricities. Think of us as your extended family. There are some awesome people with a lot of love and courage in this group.  
--C. Hall

REPLY TWO:

Hi A. L. Gettinby,

Welcome to our community! I'm so glad you've gotten over the initial apprehension of participating in the forums. It's great that you have decided to join us because we can draw a lot of support from each other.

As a community, we share in many activities, such as regularly scheduled bi-weekly conference calls and women's calls, meet-ups in many places around the world, and in projects like participating in Arun's survey and in the community anthology. Our future goals are to organize a world-wide fund raising effort to promote research efforts large and small in the US and UK for starters.

Within the last six months, we had many meet-ups in London, Manchester England, Asia, Chicago, Miami, and other places in the South (USA). A few of our members have written blogs, and a link to them is noted on the sidebar of this forum's homepage. As you can see, we are a very close, supportive, and very active community. We always strive with outstretched arms to welcome new members as well.

Congratulations on having a wonderful and supportive wife and 4 healthy children. You are richly blessed! I am very much looking forward to hearing about what you have done to try and fix things.

--Maria de la Torre

REPLY THREE:

A. L. Gettinby,

My problem also started around puberty, and like you, I had no odor problems whatsoever before then. I was healthy and happy. When this problem struck, my whole life changed. I was only 12 or 13, so I hadn't lived long up until that point, so I was so overwhelmed and confused. I drove my parents nuts with my complaints. It drove me nuts that people were complaining that I stopped bathing, yet, I was bathing so hard and so frequently that my skin was peeling off onto my washcloth. I used so many products that made the problem worse and not better, without recognizing it at first.

This problem does make life difficult, but you have all of us to share your life with. No one will criticize you here. We are very caring people.

--Glenna Gonzalez

MESSAGE SEVEN: NIGHTMARES RELATED TO YOUR PROBLEM

Does anyone else get these sometimes in relation to their condition/personal problem?

I must get 'em at least once a week...usually involving me being trapped somewhere, can't get out of, with people or situations I can't get away from...And I'm horrible and stinky and everyone around me clocking on and looking at me disgustingly or holding their noses, or whatever. And then I'm feeling like shit...Then I wake up suddenly and I am like, "Phew!" (as you do with a nightmare).

I've gone through this in real life many a time (as have most here in the group, I'm sure) and it always messes with my head for ages after it happens. And things I always dread happening and annoying would mess with me head so much as to give me nightmares about it.

--T. N. Toast

REPLY ONE:

I thought I was the only one who had these dreams. In my dreams the people never say anything to me; they just give me the nasty looks. They whisper to each other and giggle about the "smelly girl." It's always embarrassing to me, but I wake up and I am in the comfort of my own bed in my home. I think we have these types of dreams because the odor is such a big part of our lives that we can't escape it—even in our dreams. I know everywhere I go I get some type of reaction from some ignorant asshole. That type of treatment from others on a daily basis is bound to stick with a person, even if you don't want it to. I can't tell you how many times a day I wish I could flip a switch within my mind and turn off my feelings when they become too much for me to bear. Since I can't really do that, I find it helpful to talk to someone who understands and who I can trust with my feelings.

--Khalil Lenore

REPLY TWO:

Hi T. N. Toast,

For the past few months I've been waking up several times a night with panic attacks; it's very unsettling. A couple times, I've actually jumped out of bed. I know it's this disorder that's causing them. Most of my nightmares are usually someone telling me I need to bathe or people moving away from me and laughing. You are not alone.

--C. A. Staubs

REPLY THREE:

Lately I've found that I'm not even free of my odor in my dreams. My dreams became filled with the same paranoia and comments as my reality... hopefully this changes someday soon.

--Citoyen Kiran

REPLY FOUR:

T. N. Toast,

When I was in high school, I had horrible nightmares on a regular basis, in addition to all kinds of panic attacks. I grew out of it, but it was terrible at the time. I would dream about being laughed at and not being able to get away.

I also had dreams about leaving the house without all of my clothes on. I'm sure that's because with a problem like ours, we feel so exposed.

I remember reading a post from one of our teens asking if anyone was getting “unwanted attention.” At first, that puzzled me. The reason is that many of us are near being attacked physically, in addition to the verbal attacks. That's way past "unwanted attention." Apparently, the teen had just started having BO. This is really hard when you are a teen. Really, really hard.

--Glenna Gonzalez

REPLY FIVE:

Hi Jamie,

I've had these kinds of recurring nightmares for years, once or twice a week. I have 2 or 3 types of them.

One type is that I'm inside of some building (once it was a school, another time an airport, etc.) and I can never find my way out. Sometimes I'm outdoors and I'm surrounded by many people who I can't get away from because I'm lost; I can never find my way home.

Another type is when I'm in the presence of other people and they're coughing really loudly. And I can't get away from them either. When I wake up, the neighbors upstairs are coughing. If I can hear someone cough from upstairs, it's because they WANT me to hear them. My odor gets worse while I'm sleeping, for some reason. I even notice it sometimes when I awake in the middle of the night or morning.

--Richard R. Cook, Jr.

REPLY SIX:

Hello,

I have them all the time, about my past jobs, that I'm back in the workforce being treated very badly by coworkers again. Then I wake up all sick and upset until I realize it was just a nightmare. Then I'm glad it's over. And other times I'm at work; I have lots of friends and everyone enjoys working with me, that I'm kind of cool and popular. That's one of the good dreams, then I wake up and realize nothing has changed. I'm still stinky. Another dream is, I'm hiding in the trailer behind a bale of hay and the bad guys are looking for me. They open the door and look around and state they don't see anyone, but it sure stinks in here. They open the door again and I'm sitting in plain view this time. I'm looking right at them. They state they still don't see anyone but again it stinks real bad in here. I guess that's how I think people perceive me: just a horrible odor, not a human being with feelings and hopes and dreams like everyone else. In my dream I'm invisible; I represent an odor not a human being, or that I exist.

Best Wishes,  
Linda M.

MESSAGE EIGHT: LOOKS LIKE I MIGHT HAVE A NEW JOB AS A...

lab animal technician. Working with animals, I never considered it. It pays the same as entry level for where I was trying to go (unsuccessfully). Besides, I'll be alone most of the time, on my own. Though my BO is mostly manageable, I don't think the animals

will complain if I have a bad day. I'm working with mice and RATS! Taking care of those that are being used in scientific studies. Look, the economy being as it is, I'll take it!! I might have to work with primates too at some point. This is so different from anything I ever imagined for myself. I think it will be fun. I can use something completely different.

I say might have a job because though I've been offered the job and have accepted and will go in tomorrow to fill out the final papers, I'm still like something can happen between now and the start date.

I'm thinking if I like this maybe I can stay in this field and possibly, down the road, become a lab animal vet.

I am so nervous about going back into a workplace environment though. Having a boss, having to behave, and pretending to be normal. But this isn't your average work setting. Wish me luck. --Yolanda G.

REPLY ONE:

Hi Yolanda,

After reading this post of yours, I kept thinking about the fact that you say that, "My BO is mostly manageable. I don't think the animals will complain if I have a bad day."

This is the kind of remarks I've been hearing over and over again in the forums and in emails that sufferers send me. Many people, who have managed to minimize their odor or to get their odors under control, still have episodes of odor flare-ups from time to time. This is what I keep hearing over and over again. Sometimes, they are cognizant

of having broken their odor-management protocol and the odor was expected. However, there are other times when the odor flares for a day or two without any apparent cause and this latter situation is what intrigues me. What could be producing this intermittent odor when the sufferer has stayed fast to the odor-management protocol that seems to have been working?

Would you like to share with us how you have mostly manage your odor, and what you think triggers your episodic flare ups? It may help us all understand this process better.

--María de la Torre

REPLY TWO:

Thank you Tisha,

Your message was very comforting, I kept it in mind today as I went in to sign my papers. Just coming from someone who knows why I feel anxious about it all.

Maria,

Thanks for your continued support. You guys are always there, here. If you know what I mean.

Well for me, avoiding coffee, sugar, and high glycemic index carbohydrates seems to work. When I drink, eat these things I notice an increase in BO or it becomes less manageable/breaks thru the deodorant barrier. Usually, during that time of the month too. Maybe carbs affect my hormones in the same way that that time of the month does

somehow?

It still hasn't gotten back to the intensity it was about 4 years ago when I tried to gain weight by eating a lot of bread. I didn't know my sensitivity to carbs at the time. There was no managing or hiding that smell. Eliminating all carbohydrates for 3 rough months (anticandida diet-though I don't know if it was/is Candida or not, it was a shot in the dark) really got rid of the intensity and it has never gotten that bad/strong/unstoppable again even when I load up on carbs.

--Yolanda G.

#### MESSAGE NINE: THE MOST UNLIKELY FAMILY

Don't ask me why but I was listening to late afternoon talk radio today; I think her name is Dr. Joy Brown. She is one of those call in doctors, if you know what I mean. Anyway, there was a woman that called in and said her 65-year-old husband is developing a "weird smell" and it is "turning her off". She talked about how his smell was getting in the way of their sex life (I know, it is hard to imagine 65 year old sex, but hang with me).

Of course, the "Doctor" of show had absolutely no answer other than, "he needs to get a physical." Doctors not knowing anything about odor disorders does not surprise me. What really surprised me was the disgust and anger in the wife's voice. I think too many of us have heard that voice before.

I am not surprised anymore when strangers, co-workers, friends, and even family

hate us for this. I am getting better and better at letting go of wanting acceptance from the world.

I feel like we have become the most unlikely family.

Despised, rejected, but not alone anymore.

--C. Hall

REPLY ONE:

If I have been with someone forever I would love them despite their smell. Because I love the person not the physical and not something they may or may not be in control of.

--Jessica F. M.

REPLY TWO:

I totally agree with Jessica. If you have had a loving relationship with a person for almost a lifetime, and that person begins to have BO, that BO bothers you as much as much as your baby's dirty diaper bothers you - not at all. Would a parent love their baby any less because their diaper smells?

--Maria de la Torre

REPLY THREE:

C. Hall,

I totally agree with you that at some point we have to stop trying to gain acceptance or understanding from society. I've never found it even from people who knew I had good personal hygiene they too would make comments and gestures. I am a new member of this "family" of ours and my heart is so glad to have found a group of people who have been touched with the feeling of my infirmity and love and support me. I have never felt such a sense of 'belonging'.

--Lori Jester

MESSAGE TEN: DO PEOPLE PLAN AROUND YOU?

Hey everyone,

Do other people have to plan things around you and your odor? This weekend my family is going to a wedding without me because they know I will stink up the room. This condition can be so hard sometimes; I mean can it get any harder? Sorry to be blunt with my words but I'm upset.

Anyone else feels that friends and family plan around them?

--Doc G.

REPLY:

Hi Doc G.,

It's great that you were enthusiastic about attending the wedding. I admire your courage. Weddings are a tough call, though, because so much preparation and

expense go into them on the part of the hosting families. I was in the same situation last May. I sat on the fence until the last minute, not knowing if I should have some great fun with my family for once, a whole weekend out of town celebrating, or decline the invitation to spare the others' discomfort. I couldn't risk the horror of embarrassment (mine and others), so I declined. It was also some fancy footwork explaining to my family why I wasn't going. The way I reconcile it in my mind/heart, is that the downside of this condition is less of a social life. The upside is greater understanding and compassion for others' difficulties. It seems like an okay deal. For now, anyways.

--Debra Q.

#### MESSAGE ELEVAN: THE SECRET: LAW OF ATTRACTION!!!

Hi everybody,

I read this book "The Secret" few days back. I was surprised and I found out it really will inspire a lot of people, moreover we can benefit by this "Secret." I really agree regarding "like attracts like." It means positive attracts positive & negative attracts negative, something like that. By the time I'm reading, suddenly what appeared in my mind was "Body Odor Support Group." This website attracted all the "negative" from each of us. Is not so good, to be honest (my personal opinion).

I joined this group a few years ago because I had a BO problem that I was suffering for more than 10 years. I made a lot of negative comments and heard a lot of negative comments. I even knew a girl in this group, and we met up and we sat down and talked

about negative thoughts. Everything is so negative. I hope you know what I mean. We may have to bring Body Odor Support Group to a new concept and revolution. We shall renew our thinking and not make Body Odor Support Group for BO disorder people to only share our horrible experiences and negative thoughts. We should bear in mind in first, Body Odor Support Group is a positive group that joins forces for the whole world to share a positive living and happiness. Secondly, we find out solutions on dealing with our BO disorder and support each other no matter what races or religion. Management team on this group can maybe change things and convert a sense of negative into positive. A lot of space in this website can be modified and done. Trust Me.....

I'm a community member & volunteer in HIV/AIDS foundation. Positive living really means a lot... a lot!

God Bless everybody.

Best Regards,

--Hon T. Haur

REPLY ONE:

I guess I am not understanding where you are getting this site to be of a negative nature. We are just a small percentage of people in the world who suffer BO issues in one form or another and have come together in accordance to find relief in a multitude of ways ranging from physical to emotional to swapping recipes, etc.

The reality of our situation is in general, disheartening but I think for the most part,

this site does an awesome job as each individual plays a vital part in keeping up the moral of our group as a whole....shedding light at the end of the tunnel for many who are blind to it.

I have not read "The Secret", but have spoken to a few who have and I have a general knowledge of the content of the material and it is IMO, probably an excellent read as I concur with the notion that positive attracts positive and negative attracts negative. It is all about what you put into this group. That in itself, as with anything else that is undertaken, will determine what you get out of it.

--Sheri Norton

REPLY TWO:

Hi Hon,

I think you are definitely on the right track. When I began to read the posts in this forum only a few months ago, there was a great deal of out-of-control talk of suicide, negativity, disrespectful language when referring to someone with body odor, etc.

Now, we're talking about raising social awareness as a tool against injustices, and we're creating and participating in an anthology, posts in the forums, and posts on our blog, increased participation in the conference calls for this purpose. All these showcase our creative talent, our self-worth, and the need to 'come out' of seclusion and to participate in meet-ups.

More and more people are openly participating in conference calls, my blog is

showcasing people with singing talents and people who share with us their career goals to be musicians, scientists, medical doctors, private entrepreneurs, etc. The whole purpose of the blog is to live a dream that people of odor and experts from all parts of the world to unite and to participate in research at various levels, and this is slowly but surely coming to fruition in only a few months time. This is all new, and it's a product of us opening our minds and stepping forward into our positive thoughts of where we are going and where we will be in the future.

In my opinion, you most certainly have the right approach to life, and thank you for pointing it to everyone. It is important that we go deep within ourselves, 'clean out our internal attic' and replace all the clutter with visions of where we want to be, and act accordingly. The anthology, conference calls, and meet-ups help us 'pick up the rocks and clear out the worms', and with the support of this community, we find comfort and guidance in the use of remedies and management protocols as we trust that a cure will be forthcoming in the not too distant future.

Please do keep pointing out to us when we need to improve our focus and direction with specific examples, so that we may chose to put into practice this positive way of life.

--Maria de la Torre

MESSAGE TWELVE: FINALLY

A doctor had finally gave me some antibiotics for this condition. Despite them

knowing I have TMAU (I've been to a few different doctors) they said I didn't need it, what for .... and to just eat what was recommended. Well, the other day, another doctor was taking the place of my regular doctor. This new lady was so understanding and caring. I think she read up on TMAU. She wrote me a prescription for antibiotics 250 mg. She even, without me asking, said she recommended I take b-12 since I don't eat fish and other types of foods. She knew what she was talking about. I think she actually took the time to research and understand the condition. Now, she's a doctor that I can live with. I will be changing my doctor. Hopefully there will be more like her that will listen and find out what's going on instead of just denying there's something wrong or denying you need any further care from them.

--Angie T.

REPLY ONE:

I'm taking a multivitamin with 25 mcg B12 per day. Is that enough?

--Debra Q.

REPLY TWO:

I'm not sure what the correct dose is . I don't think there is one. She gave me a prescription for b12 it was over the counter so I got it that way. They kept the prescription. Is there a suggested daily dose of b12 for the TMAU, like the b2? Does anyone know? --Angie T.

REPLY THREE:

I take about 5000 mcg of B12 a day. I buy the sublingual micro dots. B vitamins are water soluble - what your body can't use, it will excrete through your urine.

--C. Hall

REPLY FOUR:

Thanks for the info, C. Hall.

--Debra Q.

REPLY FIVE:

Just wanted to add that I am a vegetarian, so I don't get B12 from meat, which is the most common source of B12...that's why I take so much.

--C. Hall

MESSAGE THIRTEEN: L

When it comes to love and having this problem, it leaves me truly alone. I'm not deserving of love! I don't want or need the craziness and stress of a relationship! My being can't stand it. Why jump into the same bottomless pit of trying to love another, when it only lets you down! Even those FACIALLY challenged get a few go-rounds at it. Not this guy though! It can be sharp, painful, and deep like a scalpel to the flesh. Will I know it when /if she comes my way? How should I approach you? When you'll only

turn me away, staying so elusive. Love or feelings can be deceptive! I DONT TRUST YOU. So I won't ever say anything about it. Stay elusive! I don't need you, want you, or obtain your emptiness.

--Jercory S.

REPLY:

Relationships are stressful sometime. But relationship require effort. You have to be understanding, to think of the other persons perspective, to want know every part of them good and bad, and be there for them. There not easy. And with this condition and the insecurities that go along with it's especially harder because we feel that we are not worthy for love. Even vile creature have mate. Love is blind you don't have to be beautiful to be in love. Love is a chance. And the thing about chance is, it finds you. When you least expect it. Wait around. You seem like a guy that would truly give of yourself to someone. And maybe if you interested in dating someone like us. Someone was discussing that the other day. That is an option.

--Jessica F. M.

## SHORT FICTION

## CHOICES

by

Richard R. Cook Jr.

At times it all felt like a dream. I would imagine being detached from my body, looking at myself with disgust as I, Flora Tucci, joined two other women in the office in harrumphing, giggling, spraying perfume while we paraded by this certain woman's cubicle. We did this to this poor soul several times daily: once right after the workday began, once again just before lunch break and one last time minutes before the workday ended. Alas, this was no dream. (Are we ever truly out of high school?) How she endured such psychological pain day after day for over a year, I cannot say. I can

only ask myself, would I have been as strong? She complained about us, but we were never told to stop. I think management (of this computer software company) secretly wanted her to just quit.

I envisioned her going home every evening and having a good cry. Then she would eat her dinner alone; maybe watch the news for awhile, then something funny on television. Then she would collapse onto her bed out of sheer physical and emotional exhaustion, only to go through it all over again the next day, like a non-stop merry-go-round from hell. I imagined this as being her world, a world forced upon her by forces not fully understood by a single human being.

This “she” I speak of is a petite, dark-complected, attractive woman known as RoKisha Kimani. All I know about her is that her family immigrated here to the United States from Kenya when she was nine years old. And she became a U.S. citizen only two years ago at the age of twenty-nine, which was the age I was at that time.

Up until recently, I worked in the records department. There are a lot of things about myself I’m ashamed of. Being nosy of other people’s lives isn’t one of them. I mean, I didn’t snoop into my co-workers’ personal files just to find “dirt.” It’s just my way of getting to know them; that’s my excuse, anyway, and I’m sticking to it. The only blemish I found on the life of RoKisha Kimani did not come from her file but from her body in the form of odor.

On this particular day, as the two other women and I were concluding our morning attack on RoKisha, she did something she had never done before. She glanced up from

her desk at me. Her hurting eyes were directed toward me especially, as if she knew what a phony I was. I felt my face erupt in white hot flames. For it was that moment that I saw the reflection of the hypocritical ugliness of myself in her pleading, painful gaze. Her eyes told mine to please stop, and for what possible reason are you doing this to me? I swung round. My heart felt like lead, the blood furiously pumping in and out, every pore of my flesh clogged with sweat.

“Flora, what’s wrong?” asked one of my fellow jerks. “Where’re you going?”

Ignoring her, I bolted through the maze of cubicles and stumbled into the ladies’ washroom, trying to blink away the tears. I stood alone over a sink, looking at my face. I wanted to grab my bleached hair and tear it out of my scalp. I wanted to blow away my body’s pleasant scent, which I knew I did not deserve to have. I wanted to smash that and any other mirror I would ever use again and to only look at my distorted image through the cracks.

I stepped into one of the stalls and sat on the toilet without pulling down my undergarments. I lowered my face into my hands and asked while sobbing, “What am I doing?”

The memory of a washroom incident in high school came to life. Then as now, I had sat on a toilet without needing to use it. I had gone into that stall to escape the torments of the other students, if only for a little while.

When I had heard some girls come in I quickly propped up my feet against the stall door. Three pairs of shoes stepped in front of the sinks and mirrors. Their giggles and

their mean words of that moment still today haunt deep inside my memory's ear, forever echoing to me that they will always be there. The girls gleefully handcuffed my name to their painful remarks, specific words I do not dare awaken in my present thoughts. For dwelling on them would surely plunge me so far down into the depths of depression as to make it impossible for me to climb back to the surface of relative sanity. In school it does not matter in what way you deviate from the "norm"; such treatment is unfortunately expected.

Shamefully, all those years ago, I longed so much to be one of those girls: a member of the cool, the popular...the cruel. Did they grow up to be the creeps they were back then? I asked myself in the present.

After the girls left the washroom I dropped my feet to the floor. As I stood I felt a hundred pounds heavier, as if the weight of despair clung upon my shoulders.

I had left the stall and gazed into a mirror. That teenage face which had stared back at me so long ago—its rheumy, gray eyes; frowning, pursed lips; crinkled brows—now mimicked the adult face of RoKisha Kimani.

Having now left the memory lane of adolescence, and returning to the present, I lifted my head out of my hands. I snatched some toilet paper from the roll, dried the tears, blew my nose. As I stood up I felt that damn hundred-pound weight of despair again, wishing now I could use it to kick the asses of my two fellow jerks out there in the office.

I left the stall and stared into a mirror. I thought about my desire to be a member of

the “cruel” when I was in school. Now, as an adult, I wished that I had not fulfilled that wish. And I had to figure out how to put the proverbial genie back in the bottle.

After washing my face and rearranging my unnaturally blond hair so it would no longer resemble Albert Einstein’s “perm,” I went back out in the office. I had no appetite for torturing anyone—ever again!

At home that night I found RoKisha’s email address, which I had accidentally noticed in her file when I used to work in the records department, then I accidentally wrote it down along with other information from other people’s files, then I accidentally brought it all home with me. I guess I figured I would need some of this stuff some day. Well, that day had arrived. I emailed RoKisha some information on Trimethylaminuria (TMAU) and other odor-causing diseases.

Several hours later I still had not gotten a response: a thank you, a who the hell are you? a kiss my ass—nothing. Was she offline? Was her computer broken? Did she somehow know who sent this information? But how could that be? My email address says nothing about my name.

Getting into bed I had this sick feeling in my stomach, like I had eaten something uneatable, something ugly and scary. But one thing made me happy: that day was over.

When my alarm clock woke me the next morning, that ugly feeling had not left my stomach. In fact, it had grown worse. Breakfast was out of the question.

I knew I had nightmares during the night, and I knew they involved RoKisha. I always hate it when I can’t remember dreams, even when they’re bad ones. And I knew

this one to be bad because it had darkness and tears and screams in it. I just couldn't remember enough of it to put it all into one coherent series of events.

In the office, next to RoKisha's cubicle, one of my fellow jerks JoAnn sniffed the air and remarked, "Why does it smell so good in here?" She then dropped her head of red hair closer into the cubicle. "Oh, it must be because el stinko's not here today." She giggled and slithered away.

It was half past nine a.m. Why wasn't RoKisha at her desk? Why hadn't she responded to my email the night before? I worried, but why? After all, how long would I have lasted there taking that kind of daily abuse? I wouldn't blame her if she quit her job. Yet I still worried, as that monster in my stomach grew increasingly restless.

My cubicle stood across the aisle from RoKisha's. All morning I glanced over at it. Her computer screen blank, her chair empty, her desk devoid of paper work, as well as the coincidental blown-out light bulb overhead all added to the atmosphere of an abrupt end to something once alive. And I had assisted in bringing about its demise. How cowardly I felt. How very sick to my stomach I was.

"Where in the world are you, RoKisha?" I kept asking under my breath.

Lunchtime did not coincide with the return of my appetite. My belly screamed to get rid of what little food occupied it. A little monster stamped its big combat boots across my stomach lining, at least that was the image in my mind's eye at the time.

When I got back to my cubicle after a half hour of fresh air, I fell into my chair. Physically I felt like I had just climbed a mountain or finished a marathon.

Then came the end of my life as I knew it. Both of my co-worker jerks, with deadpan faces, appeared at the entrance to my cubicle: JoAnn the pale red head and Tottiana the tall, thin black woman.

Tottiana asked, "You hear what happened?"

Not only was I disgusted by their presence, but it took a deep down effort to engage them in speech. "No," I said, not giving a damn what they wanted to tell me. "What happened?"

They both answered in unison and in matter-of-fact tones, "She killed herself."

Everything stopped. The earth stopped revolving. My heart stopped beating. Life itself stopped.

I stared up at the two with a gaping mouth. Like windshield wipers in a rainstorm, I blinked incessantly to keep my vision of the two women clear.

My lips were on auto-pilot. I spoke without thinking:

"Who? Who killed herself?"

"Are you kidding me?" asked JoAnn. "El stinko. Who else?"

I felt a tear run down my cheek.

"I don't believe you. How do you know this?"

"Everybody's talking about it," said Tottiana.

My grief yielded to anger. I reiterated firmly, "How do you know this?" I stood up slowly.

"We just do," said JoAnn.

I moved toward them like a leopard preparing to pounce on its prey. I said, “So it’s only a rumor, you sick, insensitive demons!”

They backed out of my cubicle and out of my way, both standing side by side.

JoAnn said, “Doesn’t matter how much you don’t wanna believe it; it’s still true.”

I ran through the office to the washroom. While bent over a toilet, not only did that monster with its combat boots spill out, but a thousand of its chunky siblings came with it. They all came up with such force as to bruise my throat; the soreness lasted for days.

Afterward, I splashed my face and rinsed my mouth.

I stood staring at myself in the mirror, seeing the pained eyes, never-smiling lips of RoKisha break through my face. Was she really gone—forever? Whether it was denial or something else, I could not bring myself to believe it. How would I go on with my life knowing how I had treated that beautiful person?

Making my way back through the labyrinth of cubicles, I thought, It’s a good thing I don’t have a loaded gun. I would only use it on JoAnn and Tottiana. First I’d shoot them in the legs and arms, then I would—

Over the walls of the remaining cubicles in front of me, I saw the two of them standing near the entrance to JoAnn’s, which was adjacent to mine, talking. As I neared them, their voices grew:

“I think it was some kind of pills,” said the first.

“But why? Why did she do it?” stupidly asked the other.

“I don’t know,” stupidly answered the first.

The carpet muting my stamping feet, I appeared so abruptly at them, they jumped and stepped back.

“What the hell do you mean, why did she do it?! The way we treated that woman! The way we made her feel like she was less than shit!”

I could have sworn there was steam coming out of my ears.

“Who among us,” I continued, “is so damn perfect that you have the right to belittle another person?”

JoAnn had backed so far into her cubicle that the back of her thighs made contact with her desk. I concentrated briefly on her wide eyes, opened mouth, looking like a deer in headlights.

“And you, JoAnn: going through your third divorce, is it? Or is it your fourth by now?”

I turned to Tottiana. She stood outside the cubicle holding on with both hands to the top edge of the partition, as if she would tumble down a steep cliff otherwise.

“And you, Tottiana: Making us all believe that you have a degree in chemistry, when in reality you never finished college.”

Tottiana started to speak, “How did you—“

“All these things make us imperfect,” I said. “And there’s nothing wrong with being imperfect. There is something wrong with being a hypocrite and a phony.” My voice dropped. “And I’m the biggest phony among the three of us.” I took a deep breath and went on: “I’ve had an odor condition since high school. I learned how to manage it. And

now this poor woman is possibly dead partly because of me.”

Miguel Cruz, our supervisor, came from behind me. I heard his voice before I saw him. He said, “You three look like you wanna kick each other’s asses—instead of getting back to work.”

As he was almost past us he stopped at Tottiana’s side, turned to us and said as an afterthought, “Oh, in case you ain’t heard, Rokisha is in the hospital. She took a whole lot of sleeping pills, I hear, and they had to pump out her stomach.” He then continued on.

My heart came back to life. The earth revolved again. Life itself lifted its head.

“Thank God,” I said, tears swelling my eyes.

I yelled, “Thanks, Miguel.”

Without turning he waved.

Not surprising in one way but surprising in another, neither JoAnn nor Tottiana looked particularly pleased by this news. What could have happened in these ladies’ lives to make them so inhuman?

During the rest of the workday conflicting feelings went to war with each other in my head. On one hand RoKisha was alive. On the other hand I helped to put her in this condition.

Minutes before the end of the workday Miguel stopped by my cubicle to drop the third bombshell of the day. He told me that RoKisha wanted me, JoAnn and Tottiana to visit her in her hospital room whenever we could, and that she would probably be there

until tomorrow. Tomorrow was Saturday. He handed me a piece of paper with the hospital address and RoKisha's room number on it.

I was stunned. Why would she want to see us? To cuss at us? She certainly had every right to do that. I would even help her to do that.

I decided to visit her on my way home.

Dusk darkened in a hurry. And in late September the autumn chill made itself at home once again. The leaves hadn't started to turn yet. But in Chicago, that wouldn't happen for another two weeks.

I parked my car in the hospital lot. I sat there wondering what in the world I would say to her. Maybe, "Sorry for all the shit I did to you." Or, "Sorry I made you attempt suicide, so now we can be friends." I had no idea what I was going to say or how I was going to say it. It felt like jumping off a cliff in total darkness. Would I land in water or on boulders?

I finally left the car and went into the building. After receiving my pass at the desk, I got into an elevator. I went to the third floor. RoKisha's door stood a few steps down the corridor.

The reason I hated rubbing alcohol came to mind. That's the way hospitals always smell to me. Why can't they have that McDonald's french-fry smell? Then I wouldn't hate going into them so much. But then I would probably hate McDonald's french fries.

When I got to RoKisha's room, I saw her through the glass in the closed door. She sat up in bed, with an older woman with graying hair in a chair beside her. I assumed it

was her mother. Did RoKisha tell her how her co-workers treated her? How I treated her?

I reached for the knob but as I watched RoKisha smile, I dropped my arm back to my side. It occurred to me that after working with her for over a year, I had never seen her so much as give a tiny smile. It was contagious. All I wanted to do was stand there with that grin on my face staring at her through the glass. Seeing her this way tickled my soul.

My anxiety having now faded, I turned the knob. I licked my lips, pushed the door in.

The talking and smiling ceased the moment I entered. The older woman gave me a scowl and stood up. She said several hushed words to RoKisha and kissed her on the cheek. She then turned and walked by me without a word or eye contact.

Upon the door shutting behind me, RoKisha spoke:

“I didn’t think any of you would come. Have a seat.”

I sat usually facing her profile, for she rarely looked directly at me the first few minutes of my visit. You wouldn’t think there was any reason for her being there: no intravenous bag, no tubes or anything else at her side. I figured they had her there only for observation.

Like a roller coaster: first the anxiety, then the dissipation of it, now the return of it—but not for long.

“How are you?” I asked.

“Better.”

“Good.”

After an awkward silence, she said, “I guess you know what happened.”

“You mean the suicide attempt?”

“Yeah. I guess I’m glad I called my mother just before doing it,” she said, her eyes fixed upward at the blank television near the ceiling. “All I told her was I love her. She didn’t like the sound of my voice, so she called the police. They had to pump my—”

“I’m sorry,” I blurted.

She jerked her head toward me. The corners of her opened mouth rose a little. “I know,” she said softly.

Her gentle manner gave me the courage to tell her about my own odor condition. Her expression didn’t change the way I thought it would. I expected shock, maybe even rage. Instead, the smile which had already adorned her face broadened.

She said, “I always had a feeling that whenever you tormented me, you were doing the same thing to yourself. I just didn’t know why until now.”

It was then that she began to look me in the eye more.

“It’s okay,” she said, her smile falling. “I forgive you.”

Seeing the tears in her eyes brought tears to mine. Struggling like hell not to break down, I spoke, with a quiver in my voice:

“But how? How can anyone forgive such despicable behavior?”

“If you love yourself, Flora, you can forgive anyone for anything. Because you’re

doing it to free yourself.”

I vowed to myself to always live my life by those golden words of hers. Both JoAnn and Tottiana chose not to visit her, and RoKisha forgave them as well.

It is now seven years later. After RoKisha successfully sued that software company we worked at for neglecting to end a hostile working environment, together we found better jobs working at the same law firm. Our small children play together. Our husbands watch football games and yell at the television together. We have barbecues together.

With my help, RoKisha’s odor is more manageable. With her help, I, Flora Tucci, am a better person. And life goes on...

## CHILD GONE WRONG

by

Patricia K.

The happiest day of any woman's life is when her first child is born. I was no exception. When I held those seven pounds of soft, fragile new life of my Adela, crying through her pinched red face, my heart stopped. I cried, from relief, exhaustion and, yes, fear. Before my pregnancy, I had avoided the topic of having children with my husband, Glen, for as long as I could. I would make excuses: tell him I wasn't ready yet; that I was too busy; that I wanted to concentrate on working; that I wanted us to finish traveling first.

One night our friends Tammy and Joshua came by for dinner. They were bold enough to ask why after six years we still had no kids. I bawled and bolted out the room.

Glen came to me in the kitchen indignant. He said, his voice low, "Even our friends now openly talk about our personal life. It's so embarrassing. Do you know what the guys say about me?" Glen looked at me, flustered with wide-eyes. His face was red with humiliation. He then broke off, turned and paced the room. His hands fisted to his sides, he huffed a succession of deep sighs.

Glen was a large man, chubby and prematurely balding with tiny inset blue eyes. He was my "teddy bear." Outbursts from him were rare, and whenever he did display anger, it was hard not to notice it.

Finally, he spoke again, his voice rising:

"I'm so tired of your excuses and secrecy, Janie! I think we need a break for a while. I think I'm going to--"

"Glen, please", I said, choking through sobs, "The truth is...." I paused, scanning the room as if I would find the strength to answer him sitting atop the stove or clinging to the refrigerator door.

Through the kitchen entryway, I saw Tammy and Joshua sitting at the dining table. Tammy fiddled her yet to be filled dinner plate, feigning interest in it and slowly turning it around. Joshua constantly readjusted the napkin in his lap, looking over at Tammy, hoping to exchange a conspiratorial, "knowing" glance with her.

"The truth," I said, stalling again, "is that I'm scared."

Glen sighed impatiently. “Scared of what, Janie?”

“Scared that our kids will inherit my condition,” I mumbled, my head down.

Glen’s face turned from annoyance to concern. “It bothers you that much, huh? This odor business.”

“I didn’t bring it up because I know how much you hate discussing it.”

“Well, I promise you even if our kids did have this “odor” thing we’ll both do our best to deal with it, okay? I will love, support, and cherish this child as much as I would if he or she were normal, OK? No matter what he or she is like, the child is my flesh and blood. You know I would do everything in my power to help him.”

I lifted my head and hugged Glen. “If you promise that much, I promise to try to give you a child.”

That was two years ago. Now I cradled Adela in my arms. I fed her, changed her diapers, put her to sleep, rocked her in my arms.

I often looked at myself in the full-length mirror in the baby’s room, while I stood there holding her. Gazing back at me was a tall woman with a lanky, adolescent figure, a small mousy face and disheveled hair, beaming down at the bundle she held. I had to admit it, she looked rather silly gawking at her child, holding her nervously in her arms. But it didn’t matter, because that woman in the mirror looked so happy. Color had returned to her pale cheeks. And a sparkle made a rare visit in her brown eyes.

It was surreal. I thought I would never be a mom. All those years I envied other mothers. All those nights I cried to sleep thinking I would never be one. Now I’ve

created a whole new being. My Adela, my sweet Adela. The first few months, I was scared out of my wits, not because of the new task of being a brand new mom, but because I thought I would detect that Adela had an odor. I would check sometimes, just in case. A sniff here and there, her hair, her stomach, her back--nothing. As the years progressed, I continued my search for signs. Derisive comments from strangers, distancing from other kids, I noticed none of that happening in Adela's life. She blossomed into a happy little girl. She was active, joyful. And best yet, she loved her mom, despite what others said about me and the disrespect and cruel comments I got from strangers. Adela was not aware of all that concerned me about my odor. To her, mom was the center of her world, the most powerful being on the planet. To her, I could do anything. But the truth was, I was just scared of life, miserable, lonely.

Sometimes when a day is particularly bad I'd sneak into Adela's room after bedtime and just cry, lying next to her, my head resting on her long, blond locks, smelling her sweet shampoo. "You are my one solace," I would whisper. "When I see you smile at me I know that there is still reason to hope."

Then years later it happened. My world collapsed. Adela's innocence, her pure heart, her trust and faith in me ended suddenly. Adela had come home from school one day, her head down, her feet shuffling across the floor, a stuffed book bag swung over one shoulder. She had inherited my tall, skinny frame and at fourteen, she was already five foot, eight inches, towering over most of the other girls in her class. Her tall height made her feel self-conscious, and I often saw her with her shoulders hunched over,

whether she was walking or eating at the table. I had been the same way throughout the years, but it saddened me to see Adela already doing it at so young an age.

“Adela, hon, what’s the matter?” I asked. I was fully prepared to respond with tenderness about a school project gone wrong or a friend that had mistreated her, but to my shock she said the following:

“Is it true?” she stammered, tears in her eyes. Adela clutched her book bag tightly in her arms against her chest.

“Is what true?” I asked.

“What the kids say in school?”

“Adela, I don’t know what the kids say in school.”

“They made fun of me at school today.” She started to sob.

“Oh, honey, I’m sorry. What did they call you?”

She continued sobbing. Finally, she shouted in the midst of her sobs, “It’s all your fault!”

I shook my head in confusion. “Adela, what are you talking about? I don’t under--”

“They called you the monster, okay?” she shouted. “The smelly monster! And they said I was the monster’s child.”

I felt myself turned red from anger and embarrassment. My blood was boiling. I had lived with flinging insults all my life, but now my daughter was getting the shit end of the stick too. That made me mad. “Adela, please don’t listen to—“

“Go away!” She ran out the room, slammed the bedroom door. Her sobbing was

still audible.

Later that night the tension was high. Adela refused to look at me all through dinner, even when I made it a point to talk to her. I tried acting as if nothing had happened, even though my heart was breaking.

Glen noticed something amiss and asked gently, "Adela is something the matter? You shouldn't ignore your mom when she's speaking to you."

"Please leave me alone, Dad." She muttered.

And when Glen made an attempt to retort, I pleaded with him to just let Adela cool down before getting into her business, and he let it drop.

That day changed our lives. Now Adela practically ceased talking to me. She gave only a nod or a curt reply when I would ask her a question. She avoided eye-contact too. But, once in a while, I'd catch her staring at me. Much the same way strangers look at me: the invasive stare, as if they were staring at a zoo animal. It was so much worse coming from Adela. Was I now so repulsive to her?

I cried every night in bed. Glen tried to comfort me, but I was inconsolable. I couldn't tell him what was the matter. I just told him generally that I worried about Adela. Glen gave a pat response about kids and how natural it is when they grow older to get moody, and lose some respect for parents. I just nodded. I was afraid to tell him the truth. Glen, for some reason, couldn't detect my odor and was somehow oblivious to much of the reactions I got in public. He would say I was just being paranoid again if I brought it up, so I stopped bringing it up.

Years of dealing with hostile strangers and co-workers helped prepare me in some ways in dealing with Adela. I no longer gave her hugs or initiated conversations with her, no more compliments. I didn't smile much, and I kept my distance. When she entered a room, I often moved away or even went into another room, as I knew she disliked the sight of me. Glen picked up on this and asked me about my odd behavior. I brushed it off, saying that the less I'm around, the more she will eventually miss me. I wore a false grin as to confirm my statement.

One day Adela brought a friend over, and I was surprised, as Adela had stopped bringing friends by after the incident at school. I took this as a great, positive sign, and I greeted this new girl with a warm smile and a heartfelt welcome. But as soon as the two girls went into Adela's bedroom, which was right off the kitchen, slamming the door shut, I heard uncontrollable giggles erupt from behind it. My heart sank. I stood near the doorway drying a dish, but had stopped when I heard the laughter.

"Oh my God, did you see the big grin your mom had on her face?" I heard the visiting girl say.

"I know. Usually she is all mopey and miserable."

More laughs.

"I didn't know what to say to her; it was just so scary looking at her."

"I know, she's a freak"

They laughed harder.

"Thanks, Adela, for bringing me over to see her. I was just so curious!"

“Yeah, I should charge fees to bring people to see her.”

I couldn't take it anymore after hearing their conversation. I burst out of the kitchen and ran into my bedroom. I called Glen at work in tears.

“What's the matter?” he asked.

“Oh, I can't take it anymore,” I blurted, “I can't live with Adela anymore!”

“What?! What are you talking about?”

“She treats me like a freak. She treats me just as bad as everyone else. She's even bringing her friends over to see me, because I'm a big joke to them. And they want to laugh!”

Glen sighed. “That is just crazy talk, and you know it. I think maybe we should contact Dr. Richardson about adjusting your meds.”

“Glen, please, listen to me!” I shouted.

“Okay. Okay. Calm down. Calm down, Janie.”

“Maybe I should move out, Glen.”

”For how long?”

“I don't know.”

“Would you want a legal separation too? You're being ridiculous, you know that?”

“I'm sorry, Glen, I just can't think straight right now.”

Glen sighed again. “I'll have a long talk with Adela, and I'll try to figure out what's been going on. We'll resolve this, okay?”

“But I don't think it'll work.”

“We have to at least try, right?”

All through dinner that night, I was on pins and needles. We all sat quietly, not speaking one word. Adela spent the rest of the evening watching TV and chatting on the phone with a few friends. Finally, I heard Glen take Adela aside and tell her he wanted to talk with her. They sat outside on the porch, and I eavesdropped on them as I sat at the kitchen table nearby. I saw their two figures through the kitchen window.

“What’s up Dad? Something the matter?”

Glen cleared his throat. “Well...just trying to figure something out. First off, how is school going?”

“Good. Oh, it was so funny today at lunch...umm, Kyle was throwing those rancid cafeteria nuggets onto the wall, calling them his chicken missiles. And then one of the cafeteria ladies passed by, and he ended up clonking her in the head! Oh my God, Sarah and I were cracking up so bad!”

“So, this Sarah and Kyle, they friends of yours?”

“Well, Sarah is my best friend, and Kyle is....” Adela nervously chuckled.

“He is a boyfriend of yours?”

“I don’t want to talk about boys with my dad. That is, like, so weird!” Adela looked away.

“I’m just curious”

“Oh God, okay he’s just some guy I kinda like...umm, can we change the topic, please!”

“Okay fine. How are you with friends? Do you have many?”

“Geez, you are so personal today. Yes, Dad, I have friends.”

“Who do you hang out with?”

Adela sighed. “Mostly with Sarah, Teresa and Sharon, but sometimes Debbie and Vikki.”

“How come we never see any of these friends over?”

“I dunno” Adela said.

“Are you embarrassed or anything to bring them here?”

Adela laughed, but then stopped.

“Why do you laugh at that?”

“Cause...” Adela paused. “You should know the answer to that.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“God, you are so oblivious to everything!”

“That’s what your mother says all the time,” said Glen quietly.

“Then I should stop saying that.”

Glenn said, “Adela, I have to ask you, you have been acting very cold to your mom and even disrespectful. Why?”

“You always ask that.”

“Yes, but you always avoid answering me. You just snort and then walk away.”

“Cause, again, you should know the answer to that!”

“Your mom is very upset about this. So stop being secretive, Adela, and out with it!”

“Oh God, I don’t care what she thinks.” Adela looked at Glen and rolled her eyes.

“Well I do!”

“You know what...fine, if I have to spell it out for you! Everybody in school talk about her! They call her the freak, a toxic waste dump, funky skunky....”

“That’s odd,” said Glen. “I know your mother says people talk about her that way, but I never believed it.”

“Well, you should because it’s true.”

Glen was silent a moment, then said, “Adela, even if this was happening, why would you not stick up for your mom, if she’s being ostracized”

Adela sniffled. “Why?” Her voice cracked. “Why, because she’s ruining my reputation and my life! They treat me like a freak because of her! People would talk behind my back too, and sometimes they wouldn’t sit next to me and walk the other way when I approach them. So, I had to show them I don’t want anything to do with her, and that I don’t want to be like her!” Adela, sighed. “Dad, you are forced to....like, make fun of her, too, and join in to show them you are just like them. Otherwise, they’d continue treating me like I’m a freak, and I’m not!”

“Is that why you brought a friend over today? So that you can have a good time at your mom’s expense?”

“So what if I was?” Adela said raising her voice.

Glen raised his’ as well. “Then you are not just disrespecting your mom, but disrespecting me, our whole family.”

“Nooo, Dad. I don’t mean to hurt you, I love you”

“What about your mom? Don’t you love her too?”

“I hate her!”

“Don’t say that, Adela.”

“Why not? She’s ruining my life!”

“No, she’s not.”

“Yes, she is! For the first time in months I’m actually able to hold my head up again, talk with friends, be normal, and it’s because I’ve disowned her.” Adela replied with a tone of satisfaction.

“What?! You can’t do that?”

“Yes, I can. I’m going to court to divorce her.”

“Adela....Please think of what you’re saying....please”

“What is there to think about? It’s the only way I can live.”

“Then you are just a selfish, ungrateful little girl! Do you know how much you mean to us and your mom especially? She said you were the most important person in her whole life, even more than me.”

Adela was quiet.

“She cries every night in her bed with me for hours, because she said she’s afraid that you’ll never look at her again and feel any compassion or love. I’m sometimes afraid she’ll harm herself. Do you know how serious this is?”

Glen's voice cracked as he spoke that last statement. I knew he was near crying.

“Adela?”

“What?” Adela said quietly.

“Do you know why we named you Adela?”

“No.”

“Your mother named you after St. Adela. Do you know why?”

“No....she’s not even religious or anything.”

“Yes, but she said she named you after St. Adela because you give her faith and hope in a world that was long dead to her. She said she worships you with every drop of blood and every bone in her body, like if you were Jesus, and you are the one reason she finds reason to live in a painful, dark world. Adela?”

“Yes.”

“You are awful quiet. What are you thinking?”

Adela sniffled. “I think I’ll give her a hug tonight.”

TOO FEW ANGELS

by

Richard R. Cook, Jr.

DeVontae Brown sat at the armrest of his sofa and dialed 911, a .38 caliber gun lying beside the telephone, below a glowing lamp.

A female voice came on the line:

“Boston 911. What is your emergency?”

DeVontae replied calmly, “I need an ambulance. Somebody was just shot.”

“Okay, sir, an ambulance and a squad car are being dispatched to your location. Is this a basement apartment, sir?”

“Yeah. There’re two of them. Mine is the rear.”

“Okay, who exactly was...”

DeVontae hung up.

He left the sofa and stepped to his front door. He opened it wide enough so that a portion of the hall wall, carpet and bright, bare bulb were visible.

He then returned his five-foot, ten-inch frame to the same spot on the sofa. The ring of the telephone jerked his head toward the caller I.D. unit. Seeing it as the 911 operator calling him back, he ignored it.

He brought the glistening black revolver to his lap and fingered its many grooves, curves, crevices. Pensively he stared down at the barrel, at the cylinder, at the trigger and at the hammer.

At the ceasing of the telephone ring, DeVontae nestled the gun in his right hand. He raised it and pressed the end of the barrel against the side of his brown, shaven head. His eyes squinched shut while his finger pulled the trigger back one millimeter at a time.

Five days earlier, Monday morning, DeVontae sat at his home desk in front of a blank computer screen and keyboard. He had the telephone handset to his ear, while one finger continually tapped the keys to the letters P, A and L.

“I feel real good about this, James,” he said. “I been hiding myself away from the world for way too long. My odor’s not all gone. But I think it’s low enough now, thanks to the diet and these alfalfa and charcoal tablets, that I can do what I been wanting to do for a long time.”

“Welding.”

“Right. I told you my father was a welder. And he never even reached the age I am right now: thirty-nine, in case you forgot.”

“Well, you got this support group now, something you didn’t have the last time you tried to do this thing. So maybe you’ll make it this time, huh?”

“Hope so. Know so,” said DeVontae, pressing now the keys to the letters H, O, P and E over and over.

“You know you’ll still probably get reactions, like coughing and all that crap. I still get ‘em at work. You have to come to the reality that—”

“I know, James, I know. That kind of thing will probably never stop, unless some brilliant scientist comes along with a cure. Otherwise, it’s something most of us will just have to deal with for the rest of our life.”

“I wish we didn’t live five states away from each other. We could hang out together.”

DeVontae smacked his lips. “Yeah, how cozy. Me, you and your girlfriend. Be a lot better if I had one, too, don’t you think?”

“Everything comes in its own time, buddy. I can see us double dating one of these days. Besides, I was only talking about the two of us, anyway.”

DeVontae took his hand from the keyboard and glanced at his watch. “You get to go to bed this early in the morning while I’m off to my first day of school. You wanna trade places?”

“Are you kidding? I’m nocturnal, remember? I would kill to keep my night job.”

DeVontae stood up. “Well, off I go into the wild blue yonder, or else into the pits of hell,” he said. “Be nice if I ran into an angel or two at the school.”

“Angel?”

“I’ll tell you all about the angels later.”

Thirty-eight minutes later, DeVontae sat at the back of the class. He felt the blood pounding in and out of his heart. Another male student also sat at the back.

DeVontae thought, Why, oh why did you have to sit back here with me, of all places? There’s a seat up there. Why didn’t you take that one, asshole? I guarantee, next time you will.

A plump, graying, fiftyish man stood at the front of the class and introduced himself as being their instructor.

Oblivious to him, however, were events taking shape at the rear of his classroom. It became increasingly obvious to DeVontae that the start of this road would not be a smooth one.

Four hours and sixteen minutes later he sat typing at his computer:

Well, everybody, I’m back home from my first day of welding school. It’s three and a half hours long, five days a week. I expected to get a few reactions, but I wasn’t quite prepared for what really happened. Of course, I sat at the back of the class. But that didn’t seem to be enough, because people near me looked back in disgust; some of them giggled. And they noisily dragged their chairs and desks farther away from me. I felt like my face was on fire. When that happens my odor

gets worse. I just wanted to quickly and quietly leave the room and never come back.

But I made a promise to myself that no matter how bad things got, I would not quit and go back to hiding myself inside my apartment. I must get on with my life and not let this condition stop me. Or maybe I should say, not let people's reactions to this condition stop me. We all know how damn hard that is to do—but not impossible.

I'll keep you all posted on how things go.

Tuesday morning, the second day of school, DeVontae sat at the same desk at the rear of the classroom. Once again the other male student accompanied him there.

And again, DeVontae spoke to him without moving his lips or turning in his direction:

Why are you back here with me? I know you can smell me. So why?

DeVontae made a double take at the only woman in the class, sitting in the front row. She was gazing back at him with a shy smile.

Four hours and eleven minutes later, DeVontae sat at his computer, his finger tips pounding on the keyboard:

There's this really good looking woman in my class who looks like she likes me. Throughout the class she looks back at me from time to time with this really sweet smile. As soon as I get up the nerve, I'll talk to her. I know I can't wait too long to do that, because somebody else could beat me to her. I can't let that

happen; it's been a while since I had a steady girlfriend. I've been lonely for too long. I know a lot of people in this support group know what I mean.

I'll let you all know when I talk to her and how it went. But I won't go into a lot of details about it—especially if it all goes well.

DeVontae noticed a response to his message about his first day of school, which he posted yesterday. It read,

I'm sorry you had to go through that kind of a first school day. I'm glad you've decided to keep at it regardless of how people react to you. That's harder for some people to do than others. If you need to talk, here is my phone number...

Without looking at the number, DeVontae left the support group's message board.

"I'm telling you, James, this woman is gorgeous," he told his friend that night on the telephone. Sitting slumped at his desk with a pen and paper, he drew heart shapes as he spoke. "She sent my rocket to the moon with plenty of astronauts on board."

James laughed and said, "How long is it gonna be before you say anything to her? A year? Two years? Three—"

"I'll talk to her. Don't you worry about that."

James asked, "You gonna tell me now what you meant last time about seeing angels and what not?"

"Oh, yeah, that's right." DeVontae sat up in his chair. "Angels come in a lot of different forms, right?"

"Hey, man, if you say so."

“I mean, you got the people who save other people’s lives and so on. But then you got the people who smell our odor but refuse to give us a hard time about it. These people are angels too.”

A new enthusiasm awoke in James’ voice:

“Yeah, yeah, I know the people you’re talking about. I just never thought of them as angels before.”

“I wish there were a whole lot more of ‘em,” said DeVontae, watching the sheet of paper in front of him slowly fill with hearts. “That way, going through this kinda life wouldn’t be close to being as hard as it is. I might run into one or two of these angels in a six-month period, sometimes maybe one or two in a whole year.”

“I hear you, buddy. And they come in all colors, shapes and genders. An old man I work with on the assembly line is one of them.”

DeVontae said, “There’s this guy who sits in the back of the class with me. I think he’s one too.”

“He’s the only one who sits back there with you?”

“Yeah.”

“You sure he’s not there because he likes you, if you know what I mean.”

“I don’t think so. All I know is that, even if he is gay, he don’t seem to be that attractive to me. He just does his work and leave.”

“Maybe he can’t smell you.”

“When I was just walking into the room, I heard one of the other guys ask him if he

can smell me, and he said, 'Yeah, but I always like sitting in the back.' That sound like he's gay to you?"

"I don't know, Dev. But like I said, these angels, as you call 'em, they come in all different ways. And like you said, other kinds of angels save people's lives and do other things like that."

"Uh-huh," said DeVontae, the page now fraught with heart shapes.

His friend continued:

"Some people are angels and don't even know it."

"Yeah, and some people are forced to become angels."

"Bull," said James. "Either you decide to be one or you don't."

A heart DeVontae was completing became deformed when he jumped at a thump on his wall. "Oh, shit!" he said.

"What's wrong?"

"My wild and crazy next door neighbor. I hate her freaking guts, man." DeVontae turned the heart-filled sheet of paper over to the blank side.

"What's she doing, Dev?"

As DeVontae drew the outline of a gun at the top of the page, he said, "Her and her damn boyfriend. Whenever he comes around to visit her, they get really rowdy for about five minutes, then you barely hear a peep out of 'em for the rest of the night."

"So what's the problem? It's only five minutes."

"The problem is, I can't stand living next door to her. And I can't afford to move right

now.”

“What is it about her, man, that you hate so much?”

“The fact that she hates me makes me hate her so much. She smells me sometimes through my door.” DeVontae’s voice rose. “And yeah, odors do go through walls and doors!”

“Calm down, buddy. You don’t have to convince me.”

“Sorry. I’m just thinking about how she sometimes holler, ‘Skunk’ right outside my door. And she slams her own door a lot, just to get on my nerves. Nobody in this building ever wants to say a damn thing to me, because they hate me.” He drew bullets coming out of the barrel of the gun. “I don’t have one freaking friend in this whole city, James, including family. I hate hating the people who hate us.”

“Yeah, but you just said you hate your next door neigh—”

“I know what I said. I say I hate her, but do I really?”

“You don’t know?” asked James.

“I feel mixed up sometimes. I can hear the words, I hate her or I hate them coming out of my mouth, but I can’t hear them coming out of my heart.”

“That lady next door: Is she young, old; beautiful, haggish?”

“Well, first of all, her boyfriend is tall, dark and ugly all day. I don’t know his name. But her name is Broom Hilda.”

James laughed and said, “You’re crazy, man.”

“Her real name is Ruth Hilga.” DeVontae started on another gun further down the

page. "She's in her forties, like him. And as for the way she looks, well, let me put it this way, if she's real lucky, she could win maybe third prize in a dog show."

Both men laughed.

James said, "Damn, man, I hope you're exaggerating."

"If anything, I'm being too kind."

"You make me laugh, man. Must be why I like the hell outa you. Even though we never met in person, Dev, I can say I love you like a brother, man."

DeVontae ceased doodling. With the pen, he scratched across the guns until they were all unrecognizable.

"Dev?"

DeVontae's voice cracked:

"Yeah." He cleared his throat. "Yeah, you, too, man. Listen, I gotta get to bed."

"Yeah," said James. "My break is just about over, anyway."

"I don't wanna be late going back into battle in the morning. Going through this knee-deep elephant do-do every day is worse than freaking Marine Corps boot camp."

Three days went by before DeVontae accosted the only woman who sat in his classroom. He scurried up to her as she was leaving the building after class. "Hi. I'm in your welding class," he said, now breathlessly walking beside her.

The woman smiled and said, "Yeah, I know."

They introduced themselves.

Four hours and eighteen minutes later, DeVontae sat typing at his computer:

Well, everybody, I finally found enough courage to talk to that woman in my welding class. Up until now, I thought maybe I was in love with her. But I know better now.

Our little talk after class didn't go all that well. My odor is always a little worse after class ends than when it begins. As we walked toward the bus stop, a little after twelve noon, she played with her nose a lot and coughed from time to time. Then she finally looked at her watch and said she had to hurry off so that she wouldn't be late for work. I've seen her catch that same bus every single day we have class. On this particular day, she decided to flag down a taxi that was coming down the street. As she jumped into it, she let out a "Whew! My Lord!" and slammed the door shut. And no, she didn't say that because her feet hurt! I know when somebody is reacting to my odor and when they're not.

That slamming sound right in front of me literally, and in all other ways, pained my heart. I'm going to be honest with you all and admit that I cried like I never did before when I got back home. Before I had this odor condition, I was rejected by this girl in high school and it hurt. But this is another kind of rejection—a deeper, more bruising, more shameful hurt. And I'm guessing it will also be a longer lasting pain, even though I'll do my best to make it short.

It's getting really, really hard to see the goodness that's supposed to be in most people, because I have to go through my life with this invisible creature on my back, which is scaring so many people away from me. I would rather not have a life

if I have to live it all alone like this.

If another person tells me that everything is gonna be all right, I'll choke them, which my odor would probably do to them, anyway. I don't give a damn if I'm feeling sorry for myself. I'm angry, damn it!

I need to know that there is a place for me on this planet. I need to know that I can be a help to somebody in some way, shape or form. I need a reason to want to keep my life going. But I can't find it!

DeVontae then noticed a response to his second message from the same mysterious person who had also responded to his first one. This is the reply that was intended for that second message that DeVontae had posted three days earlier:

I'm glad you might have a romance in the near future. It sounds like she really likes you. If you need to talk about the not-so-good issues, here's my number again ...

This time DeVontae wrote it down.

The following afternoon, Saturday, he sat on his sofa leaning forward with the telephone to his ear. As he spoke he rolled a bullet back and forth atop the coffee table with his index and middle fingers. The gun lay inches away.

"Thanks, James, for calling me," he said. "I need your ear to whine into right now. Nobody in my family ever wants me to bring up the subject of my odor. I don't know what they're so damn scared of."

"My family is the same way, buddy. But they don't mine letting me know what the

hell is ailing them.”

“Yeah, I hear you, man.”

“I called because I just read what you posted yesterday,” said James. “I almost decided not to turn on my computer at all today. You sounded like you’re close to having a nervous breakdown or something.”

“Yeah, or something.”

“These are things you gotta get over, Dev, like any other disappointments in your life. You gotta find a way to move on from this woman. You can’t let this one person get you this far down, man.”

“It’s not just this one person, James. It’s every freaking thing all piled on top of each other. I can’t keep a damn job; my own mother uses my odor as a weapon against me; and on and on and on. It’s like, this woman is the final straw that broke the back of my will to...to go on.”

“I’m not saying it’s easy, buddy. I’m saying that life itself ain’t easy. And I don’t think it’s supposed to be.”

DeVontae blew out a breath as he continued rolling the bullet.

James said, “I saw a quote that somebody posted on the message board: ‘It’s better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.’”

“Yeah, that’s real cute. I’m cursing the darkness right now because every time I light a freaking candle, the damn thing goes out.”

“If you stop lighting it you’ll never find your way out. You can’t beat a problem if

you don't survive it."

"Another quote from the group?"

"No. It's not a quote. Just something some people need to be reminded of."

"Uh-huh," DeVontae grunted.

James went on:

"I got an idea for you to do when you go back to the school Monday. Make a short speech in front of the class about your odor. You can tell them—"

DeVontae groaned.

"You can tell them that it's not a hygiene problem but a medical one."

DeVontae tucked the telephone handset between his shoulder and ear, freeing his hand. He then took the gun, opened its cylinder and inserted the bullet into a chamber next to the one that was already loaded.

"You hearing me, Dev?"

"Uh-huh."

"And you can tell them that you're doing the best you can to fight your condition, something like that. I bet more than half the class will understand and back off from giving you a hard time."

DeVontae laid the gun aside and reached to the side table below the glowing lamp. He took another bullet from its box.

"You hear what I'm saying, man?"

"Yeah, I hear you. I'm not going back to that stupid school."

“Oh, no, Dev. What happened to you staying in the school no matter what? You’ve only been in the school for—what?—one week, right?”

DeVontae rolled another bullet back and forth atop the coffee table. “I’m tired as hell of this shit, James.”

“All of us are, Dev.”

“I mean, do I have to go through this for the rest of my life? Am I ever gonna be able to have sex again? What woman is gonna want to have anything to do with me?”

“You need to pull up, man, before you crash and burn. I got the same problem as you do. And for a long time I couldn’t find a woman until I met my Mary.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I was rejected plenty of times because of my odor. The only reason I was able to meet Mary is because I never gave up.”

DeVontae said, “I noticed I been fantasizing more and more of just sitting down and having a conversation with a woman. I mean, without any odor to get in the way. Damn, James, I can’t even do that!”

“Good grief, Charlie Brown. Listen to yourself, man. You’re feeling sorry for your—”

“I’m feeling sorry for myself because I’m frustrated as hell. And I don’t know any other way to get my anger out. I gotta right to be angry about all this crap.”

“I know, Dev, but you gotta start trying harder to feel better about yourself.”

“You know what I feel like, James? I feel like there is this damn writer writing everything that happens to me and everything I say and do. And I just wanna tell him to

put the damn pen down and leave me the hell alone, or else write some kind of happy ending to this story of mine.”

“That writer is you, Dev. Don’t you know that? You have to help write your own happy ending.”

“I don’t feel like I’m in control of any of this, James. I don’t feel like I got anything to contribute to this world.”

“You’re not always in control of what happens to you, man. But you’re in control of how you react to what happens to you. And sometimes a good cry is not a bad thing.”

“I know but sometimes when I do, it’s hard to stop.”

“If you don’t know that you have a place on this Earth yet, just wait. Something will come along in your life to convince you that you’re needed.”

DeVontae glanced up at the thump against his living room wall. He sighed, “Oh, hell.”

“What is it?”

“Through this cardboard that the landlord calls walls, it sounds like witch Ruth and her creature boyfriend are at it again, like two jackals in heat.”

“You mean that raving beauty who hollers, ‘Skunk!’ right outside your door?”

“If you mean raving beauty as in a very attractive turd, yeah, that’s Ruth Hilga all right. The hate of my life.”

James laughed.

As DeVontae perused the shape of the bullet and how it moved over the wood

grain of the table, he found that he suddenly needed to put forth more effort to speak, as if the desire to do so had been drained from him.

“I’m through with all this crap, James.”

“Buddy, people care about you. Did you see all the responses you got for that last message you posted? At least twenty. I think people think you might hurt yourself, man.”

DeVontae pushed his words out without feeling:

“Why would they think that?”

James gave a forced chuckle and said, “I know, it’s crazy. I know you well enough to know that you wouldn’t even think of doing anything like that...right, buddy?”

DeVontae loaded the third bullet into the six-bullet chamber of the gun. “You know me, pal.”

“Do me a favor, Dev. Call me tomorrow and the next day and every day until you calm down from all this stuff. Okay?”

“You don’t have to worry about—”

“Please, buddy! Please! If I was there right now, man, I would get us a case of Millers, and we would forget the world even existed, for a while, anyway.”

“Won’t your girlfriend be jealous?”

James’ chuckle came more genuine this time. He said, “All I’m asking is for you to call me tomorrow. You won’t be able to reach me tonight, because they’re moving some of us to a part of the factory where you can’t get a cell phone signal. They move us like this every Saturday now.”

“All right, I’ll call you, pal, if that’s what you want.”

“What are you gonna do right now, Dev?”

DeVontae replied, “Probably take a long, hot shower and call it a...day.”

One hour and thirteen minutes went by. After dialing 911 and telling the operator that someone had been shot, and being told by her that an ambulance and squad car are on their way, DeVontae hung up the telephone before the woman could ask him for details about his situation.

He then pulled his front door ajar before returning to the sofa. The ring of the telephone jerked his head toward the caller I.D. unit. Seeing it as the 911 operator calling him back, he ignored it.

He brought the glistening black revolver to his lap and fingered its many grooves, curves, crevices. He stared down at the barrel, at the cylinder, at the trigger and at the hammer.

At the ceasing of the telephone ring, DeVontae nestled the gun in his right hand. He raised it and pressed the end of the barrel against the side of his brown, shaven head. He squinched his eyes shut while his finger pulled the trigger back one millimeter at a time. He sensed sweat break out of every pore of his flesh. As the trigger reached the end of its pull, the deafening click of the gun caused him to jump.

Aware of the remaining two empty chambers and the three filled ones in the cylinder, DeVontae squeezed the trigger again. Again he jumped at the click above his ear. He wondered if the next pull of the trigger would finally result in an explosion of gas

and flame, sending a bullet tearing through his brain.

The thumps against his wall were back, this time accompanied by a woman's scream. DeVontae loosened his finger of the trigger, opened his eyes. His neighbor was yelling for help.

He started off the sofa but then sat back again, his mind's eye and ear visiting the cruel words and deeds of the woman next door over the past two years. He placed the end of the gun's barrel to his head again and shut his eyes. He pulled the trigger slowly.

The screams increased in volume and in length. DeVontae took his finger off the trigger, lowered the weapon. He whispered, "You don't deserve my help. Damn you."

He got up and stamped to his opened front door, the gun clenched in one hand. In the hall, under the bare, glowing bulb, he stood before his neighbor's door. He grabbed the knob, finding it expectedly locked. He aimed the gun at it and fired, then easily kicked the door in. The stench of liquor immediately attacked his nostrils.

On the living room floor, the shirtless man sat over Ruth's belly, punching her in the face. DeVontae stepped inside with the gun stretched out in front of him.

"Get off her!" he shouted.

The man turned his head toward DeVontae, his face dripping with sweat and rage. DeVontae licked his lips and swallowed. He stared into the man's blood-shot eyes as the man rose to his feet, eventually lifting DeVontae's gaze skyward.

"What the hell do you want in here, stink boy?!"

The deepness of the man's voice caused the gun in DeVontae's hand to quiver as he raised it. Clutching the weapon with both hands, he aimed it at the man's chest. Stammering a bit, he said, "I'm here to shoot you."

The man took two steps toward DeVontae. "You ain't shooting nobody, you little stinking—"

DeVontae lowered his aim and shot him in the thigh. The man yelled out in pain and dropped to his knees.

"You shot me, you funky mother—"

DeVontae shot him in the other thigh. "Shut up, you monster!"

He then took three steps to Ruth, knelt at her side. Her eyes were blackened, her lips swollen. Cuts sent blood sliding along the sides of her face toward her ears, neck and the floor. Not knowing what else to do, DeVontae slipped one hand underneath Ruth's head and gently lifted it. "Hang on, Miss Hilga," he said. "The ambulance is on its way."

Sirens erupted in the distance.

Ruth took DeVontae's hand. She looked up at him and spoke above the whimpering of the man on the floor nearby:

"My angel. I'm glad you're here, DeVontae. After how I treated..." She coughed blood.

"Hold on, Miss Hilga. You're gonna be okay."

DeVontae compared this situation to his own personal turmoil. The brute who

moaned in pain behind him became his odor. He looked upon the life he now held in his arms as being his own fragile existence. He rooted for their survival, for their triumph over their adversary.

“You and my niece got a lot in common. A lot,” said Ruth. “I mean, if she knew the shameful way I treated you because of your odor problem, she would never speak to me again. I think I’ll call her up. She would be crazy about you.”

“Sounds like the kind of person I can be with.”

The sirens intensified, then ceased.

“The ambulance is here, Miss Hilga.”

“Already? I never saw you call for it.”

“I gotta get up to buzz them in. okay? I’ll be back.” He lowered her head to the hardwood floor and carefully slipped his hand away from underneath.

DeVontae pressed a button next to the opened door. A chorus of footsteps stumbled down the six stairs leading from the outer door, down to the basement.

DeVontae returned to Ruth. He kissed her hand and said, “You’re gonna be all right now, Miss Hilga.”

“Please, call me Ruth. All my other friends do.”

“Okay.”

“The world needs more angels like you, DeVontae.”

Despite the bruises and blood, Ruth Hilga became, at that moment, the most beautiful person DeVontae had ever seen.

The paramedics came in and ushered him aside.

After being questioned by the police and having to show his weapon's permit, DeVontae shut his door and locked it. He dialed his friend's cell phone number but got no answer. He then found the phone number that he had gotten from the support group's message board. It was from the person who was always the first to respond to his welding school messages.

He dialed. A woman's voice answered.

He said, "This is DeVontae Brown. I was just yanked from the edge of a cliff. And I need somebody to talk to right now."

I AM NOT SMELLY CAT (...ANYMORE!)  
(Partially based on a true story)

by

Reina Rivers

One day, a month after school started, Rose noticed that she felt more bloated than usual, especially after lunch. Rose was puzzled. Then one day, she remembered there was something called lactose intolerance that caused some people to be unable to break down a sugar in milk and dairy products called lactose as they got older. And that lead to excess gas. So Rose thought that she most likely had lactose intolerance and she stopped drinking milk during lunch time, which she had been doing since fourth grade, because everyone including all the milk ads said that it was important to drink

three to four glasses of milk a day so that you could get enough calcium and have strong bones when you were older.

But the bloating continued. And after a while, it wasn't even bloating anymore. Rose's classmates (and practically everyone else in the school) thought she was passing gas even though she wasn't. She even had a new nickname: "Smelly Cat." Angie Anglemore called her that one day as the entire class was walking down the stairs at the end of the school day. Rose was startled but she had expected something like this, especially as the kids had been teasing her and giving her a hard time ever since the "gas/smell" problem started. The room would smell even though Rose wasn't passing gas. And the worst part was that Rose couldn't tell anymore if she smelled or not. She figured she had adjusted to it.

It wasn't that Rose didn't clean herself properly. No, Rose showered every day and put on fresh clothes, too. Plus (and this was really, really difficult, especially when you are a picky eater), Rose now avoided more and more foods: things like beans, broccoli, cauliflower and even ice cream—and this was very difficult as Rose loved ice cream. Rose even went to the corner deli and bought her own Lactaid milk. But none of this seemed to help. The smell continued—it must have because everyone still complained and the awful name-calling continued even though Rose still couldn't smell anything most of the time. She tried to block it out but it was difficult.

Then one day when Rose was late to lunch and was sitting apart from her friend Zee because there wasn't any space next to her, she overheard her talking to some

other girls who were part of the “other” crowd, the more “popular” one. They were talking about her.

“Yeah, her bad breath is getting worse,” Rose heard her friend say.

Then another girl who had been in elementary school with Rose chimed in: “Yeah, it’s definitely getting worse.”

Rose felt betrayed, but not that much. She knew it was true. She had been having bad breath since fifth grade, despite her brushing and flossing daily. And even though she couldn’t detect the main odor, Rose could sense the bad breath. She tried chewing gum and breath mints but they didn’t really work and if they did, it was only for a short time.

Rose didn’t know what to do. All of this was so embarrassing. Her few friends never discussed it with her and she never discussed it with them. Plus, she found it impossible to make new friends. She always had felt lonely and now she only felt lonelier. Though Zee and Jia were still friends, Rose felt all alone in the world, especially with this horrible, alienating condition. And one of the worst things about this was that Rose still didn’t know what it was. It was like facing an unknown and unknowable enemy. Rose thought there was something wrong with her stomach and digestive system. After all, a close relative had died from the effects of digestive cancer. Plus, Rose had been having problems with digestion since she was younger. But because the smells persisted and were just as awful even on days when she had proper bowel movements, Rose figured that this all had to do with something more than a stomach problem, but she didn’t know

what it was. Plus, she didn't have anyone to turn to.

Life at home was very stressful, with her mother being very ill and all. And it wasn't much better with her father. When he was home he acted as if he weren't, then there were plenty of times when he literally wasn't, spending as much time away from home as possible. Rose knew that it had something to do with the "war" they had both been through as well as how bad both of their childhoods had been, but no one talked about that, either. They weren't bad people. They could be very helpful, especially when it came to helping out the poor. But they just didn't know how to be effective parents. And Rose suffered because of that. So did her siblings, but not as badly as she did.

Rose knew she should give the doctors all the details of her problem, but she was too embarrassed. Of course, she knew that it was even more embarrassing and humiliating to have everyone else, especially at school, know and talk about it. But she just couldn't confide in any doctors, especially as the clinic gave her a different doctor each time she went there, whoever was available at the time. To make things worse, Rose had a fear of going to the doctors. And so she hardly went, anyway. When the school asked for a health checkup, Rose didn't tell the doctor at the clinic anything. And the doctors never asked her about the smell even though it must have been pretty obvious.

At school, the name-calling and ostracizing continued. "Smelly Cat! Smelly Cat!" It followed Rose like a malicious chorus all day, everyday. As usual she tried to ignore it—but it was very, very difficult. At times Rose wished she didn't have to go to school

anymore but she liked learning and was even in the top gifted class. So school became a place she wanted to be and a place she didn't want to be at the same time. And things weren't getting better at home, either.

At the next doctor's appointment, Rose finally gathered up the courage to talk to the doctor about her problems.

"Doctor, I've been having some digestive problems." Rose took a big gulp as she continued, "And... people think that I am passing gas even when I am not." Rose looked at her feet as she said all this. It was not easy at all but it had to be done.

The doctor looked puzzled. He took a while before answering. "Have you been dealing with stress lately?" he asked.

"Yes," Rose replied.

"Then it's probably IBS or Irritable Bowel Syndrome," the doctor said. "Let me refer you to a gastroenterologist. Do you know what type of a doctor that is?"

"Yes," Rose replied. She knew more about medicine (and just about everything) than the doctor could have guessed. After all, Rose was very, very bright and well read. But no one could figure that out by just looking at her, and she did look several years younger than her actual age (plus she was borderline underweight), though the glasses should have given a clue, to anyone who bothered to pay attention, that is.

Rose went to the gastroenterologist's a few weeks later. This new doctor asked her some questions about her symptoms and then prescribed Zelnorm, a medicine used to treat IBS.

The doctor told Rose, “Make sure you are less nervous around people.” Rose was perplexed. How could she do that? Although she was quiet around people, Rose had never been as self-conscious or nervous as after her smell condition began, not before as the doctors wanted to believe.

Rose took the Zelnorm and even though it was next-to-near-impossible, she tried to be more relaxed at school, not letting the nervousness and self-consciousness (which was once again because of the smell problem) nag her as much as before. Yet, weeks after she had been on Zelnorm and more “relaxed” at school, the horrible smell continued.

Rose went back to the gastroenterologist for a follow-up. Even though the doctor looked puzzled, she told Rose, “You just have to give it more time.”

Rose thought that eight weeks had been enough time. And as before, the smell was there despite regular and proper bowel movements. Rose felt frustrated.

“So much for doctors,” she muttered as she left the gastroenterologist’s office.

It was a cold day. Rose felt chilled to the bones despite her thick overcoat, which she had bought like the yellow t-shirt and jeans she had worn the first day of eighth grade because she had to be her own parent. Being an adult all the time was not fun. Being a kid was more fun, as Rose recalled from less awful times, like when she was younger and happier and had fewer responsibilities—and before this horrible odor began.

Rose remembered the saying, “What does not kill you only makes you stronger.”

She adopted it as her words to live by and repeated it in her head several times a day, especially at times when she felt like she couldn't stand it anymore.

And when it came time for graduation pictures, Rose smiled even though she didn't feel like smiling—just so the others couldn't get to her someday when she was looking back. She would remember how brave she had been throughout this ordeal.

A few weeks later, Rose went back to the primary care clinic. It was good that she got to see the same doctor again so she didn't have to discuss her highly embarrassing problem with someone new. Rose told him how things had not gone too well with the gastroenterologist and the Zelnorm. The doctor told her that he would do some research and get back to her.

Good, thought Rose. I need this thing taken care of.

True to his words, the doctor called Rose a few days later. "I think I know what you have," he said.

Though she didn't even know what it was that the doctor suspected she had, Rose felt a sense of relief.

"Come to the clinic next week," he said.

Rose was more than ready to find a name and a cure for her awful malady.

The next week Rose arrived at the clinic early. Even though she was nervous, Rose was also excited because she would finally get some answers. But the doctor didn't look too happy.

"I think you have a metabolic disorder called Trimethylaminuria or TMAU," he said.

Rose looked puzzled. Although she was familiar with a lot of medical terms from reading so much and being very scientific, she had never heard of this condition.

Before she could ask what it was, the doctor continued, “It’s a rare illness that is not fatal but there is no cure for it. People with this illness cannot break down a certain chemical properly. As a result, their bodies release the chemical as a gas and that is what causes the odor. The odor can smell different from person to person and some people can’t even detect it.”

Rose was taken aback. Although she had also come to the conclusion that her condition was life-long after dealing with it for so long, a tiny part of her had always held out hope that it would go away. The worst part (even worse than all the days of torment and name-calling) was that not only had this condition made Rose’s life hell over the past several months but now the doctor was telling her that it was definitely incurable!

After the initial shock, Rose could only think of one thing to say: “Is there anything that I can do?”

The doctor seemed a little less troubled now. “Yes, actually there is a low-choline diet you can try. This diet helps reduce the odors for many, but not all, patients with TMAU. But the first step is to get you tested. There are two tests that can diagnose or rule out TMAU: a blood test and a urine test. Only the urine test is necessary to get a diagnosis but the blood test helps in the research and the search for a cure. It looks for genetic mutations that result in TMAU. The bad news is that there are only four labs in the United States that perform the tests. I already ordered all the testing information or

protocols from one of those labs. Now the nurse will tell you what to do and she will take some blood and urine samples. Although the samples will be taken today, you will have to wait up to eight weeks for the results. As I said, there are only four labs that do the testing and so the process is slow.”

Rose didn't care if it took that long to get the results, as long as she would finally have some answers and hopefully solutions to this awful thing that had been making her life miserable for so long.

She said, “Thank you so much for helping me go a long way toward finding the answers I need. Now at least I know what I could have and I can do something about it.”

For the first time in months, Rose felt a sense of relief and she couldn't help smiling a little: She might defeat this monster after all.

Weeks went by, more awfulness at school. The same old name-calling and shunning: “Smelly Cat, Smelly Cat,” followed Rose around like a curse or plague as if she were a leper or something. But despite all this and the problems at home, Rose held her head high most of the time. And she never felt like giving up or crawling into a dark hole. Rose knew that she was bright and very talented. She had better things to do than hide, like making a difference in the lives of others, particularly those in need (and who hasn't been needy at least once in their lives?) by lessening their suffering.

Rose knew she had to go on no matter how awful her own suffering. She was here for a reason and that reason could and would not stop at a stupid smell condition. Rose would turn her problem into a further motivational tool to do all that she already wanted

to do. She would not let it paralyze her. No, she was never one to let even the worst things in life stop her, although they would still affect her. But Rose would always get through the darkest moments to better ones and what a relief that was. Rose realized that she lived for the better times, as she had in the not-always-happy days of her childhood. And she wasn't a child anymore. She was a young woman and she had a life to live. No Trimethylaminuria would stop her from doing that.

As Rose checked the mailbox after school one day, she saw an envelope—the envelope she had been waiting for all of her life without even knowing it. Finally it was here. Rose rushed to open it. As she did so, the paper pricked her and a streak of blood streamed from her right index finger but Rose didn't care. Here were the results that would affect the rest of her life.

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

by

Richard R. Cook, Jr.

Sixteen-year-old Billy Bulldagger sat with his stocky frame bowed over a writing pad on his bedroom desk, a glowing lamp at his side. This whole weird thing, he wrote, started a week ago. It was Monday.

Billy dropped the pen onto the desk and shut his eyes. He raised one hand to the back of his head, stroked the ends of his braids at the nape of his neck. With gritted teeth he thought, Damn! Going back over all this is gonna be harder than I thought.

He opened his eyes and grabbed the pen. He wrote, I was in the school lunchroom

with my best friend, Steve. While we walked with our trays in-hand we spotted this little freshman kid sitting by himself again. For the third school day in a row, me and Steve sat at the table next to his. And again we snickered and made fun of him. I know him from my study hall room. I think his name is Kwame (pronounced Kwommy). Kwame something-or-other. He's got this really bad body odor, probably the smelliest kid in all of Columbus, maybe even in all of Ohio. Nobody wants anything to do with him. He's always by himself. He sat there under a burned out light bulb. I knew he could barely see the words in the opened book on his lap as he periodically looked up to take a bite of his hamburger. At one point, as he looked up through his eyeglasses, he had tears in his eyes.

All of a sudden my friend grew a bleeding heart. He said, "Let's just eat, man."

Steve is short and chubby (a roly-poly), always needing a haircut and some new shoes.

"I can't believe you're feeling sorry for that skunk," I told him.

"I'm not feeling sorry for him. I just wanna eat."

"So who's stopping you, jerkoff?"

Steve crinkled the corners of his lips and continued to eat his lunch.

For some reason when I got home that day I couldn't get that stinking kid off my mind. I wanted to taunt him and laugh at him until he broke down and cried. I wanted him to feel so bad for the rest of his life for having a problem like he had, even if it wasn't his own fault. I don't know why I felt that way; after all, I didn't know the guy. So it wasn't like he had killed my dog or anything. But still I felt that way.

I don't know if you know what it's like to experience a kind of traumatic event when everything that came before it was your old life and everything that comes afterward is your new one. But that's exactly what happened to me when I woke up the next morning. The previous day and all the days before it was now my old life. I got out of bed and I smelled that damn boy in my own room. It was like rotting fish mixed with pee. But he couldn't have been in there. Shrugging it off as being only my mind playing tricks on me because of how much I had been thinking about that kid the day before, I stepped into the bathroom and did all the usual morning crap.

When I got back to my bedroom the smell was gone. Relieved, I jumped into my clothes and skipped down the stairs for a quick breakfast.

Before I got to the bottom step, there that damn smell was again. Where was it coming from? I thought. Was that kid somewhere in my house?

"Billy," my unseen mother bellowed from the kitchen, "I heard you stumbling down the stairs. You better get in here before you're late for school."

In case you haven't already guessed it, the worst possible thing that could have happened, happened! That damn kid's smell was on me! All over me. But how? I had just taken a shower.

"Billy, get in here. Now!"

My mind had a nervous breakdown. It was going a thousand miles an hour down a bumpy road. God almighty! I couldn't go to school that day—maybe not ever! How could I even go into the kitchen to eat?

I yelled to my mother that I was sick. I forget what exactly I told her was wrong with me, but I said I couldn't go to school that day. Before she answered me, I turned and bolted up the stairs.

When she came up to my room I was forced to tell her the truth. She was skeptical at first, telling me things like: it's just temporary, and maybe you didn't shower long enough, and more crap like that. She got this real concerned look on her face when I mentioned seeing a doctor, because she knows how much I hate going to clinics or hospitals. So we went that very day.

They took some tests. While we waited a few days for the results, I stayed at home, away from school, away from my friends, away from the world. The same questions kept exploding in my head: What was happening to my body? What if this is permanent? How could I live? How could I go back to school—especially after making fun of that kid for having the same problem? And what are those damn test results gonna show?!

I guess my mother felt sorry for me or something, because she told me she was finally going to get me a computer. It's funny how nicer parents are to you when they know you're buried under a mountain of do-do—in my case, literally.

Finally on Thursday we went back to see the doctor. She told us I got this damn disease I can't even pronounce called Trimethylaminuria (or Fish-Malodor Syndrome), which is the cause of my body odor. There are certain foods like meat, fish and eggs I can't eat too much of because of my body's sudden inability to break them down and

eliminate them properly. They don't know the cause of it. The disease is also called TMAU. There is no known cure. She also told us about this thing called Bromhidrosis, which is another type of odor condition that some people have.

I called my best friend, Steve, when I got home that day. It was the first time I had spoken to him since Monday: the last day of my old life. I told him everything. And we talked about Kwame. I told Steve I didn't know how that kid could go to school every day like that, with nobody wanting to be his friend, nobody wanting to eat with him.

Steve quickly added, "And people making him feel worse by bullying him about it."

"I know," I said. "And I'm ashamed of that. But you're not all that innocent either, y'know."

"At least I stopped, Billy, remember?"

He had a point.

I told him I didn't know how I would be able to do that: to concentrate on my classes, to get up every morning knowing I would be going right back into combat. I told him how I thought about killing myself.

Steve being Steve, he doesn't always say the right thing at the right time. But this time he was right on target. I remember him saying, "Everybody's got some kinda war to fight, man. It's just that, some wars are tougher than others. I mean, I go to school every day hoping nobody'll find out I'm gay. Oops."

Like I said, Steve being Steve.

The following Monday, which is today, I went back to school for the first time in a

week. I don't have to tell you I was shaking in my "boots," do I? I just thank God I had a friend for support on this first day of school in my new life.

I thought about that kid all the way to lunch time. And there he was again, sitting alone at that same shadowy table with the burned out light bulb above it. Me and Steve had our trays, walking in his direction. It was like I was seeing that kid with new eyes. Needless to say, I didn't have the same feelings about him. He was no longer one of them: one of those kids who deserve to be pushed around and made to feel bad—or to feel worse. I can't see anybody in that way anymore. He was me and I was him. I now walked in his shoes. And *boy* did my feet hurt!

With Steve right behind me, I stopped at the dark table. I looked down at the little hunched-over kid pretending to be so involved in the book on his lap. A hamburger sat in his lunch tray with a single bite taken out of it; the fries looked to be untouched. I sat down in front of him, Steve at my side. Sensing a hundred eyes suddenly focus like laser beams on the three of us, I noticed the boisterous yapping at surrounding tables fall to a soft chatter.

The kid glanced up at me through his black-rimmed eyeglasses and back down to his lap. He silently blew out a breath and closed his book. He opened his backpack, which sat atop the table beside his tray, and began to slip his book into it until I spoke:

"You don't have to go."

He glanced at me again, then completed his task. He started to rise.

"I'm sorry," I said quickly. "I didn't mean all those things I said before."

“Me too,” said Steve.

Still sitting, he gazed at both of us with wide eyes, his mouth open a little.

Voices around us rose again, as nosy laser beams left us alone.

I stretched my hand over our trays at him. “I hope you can forgive me, man.”

A tiny smile flashed across his face and then it was gone. I remember every single detail of that moment this afternoon. He just sat there staring at us.

I asked, “You gonna leave my hand hanging here?”

“What kinda game is this?” he asked.

“Game?”

“What do you two want from me?”

“Want?” I withdrew my hand. “We just want you to know that we’re sorry and we want to be your friend.”

“You think saying you’re sorry makes everything okay after how you treated me?”

Steve is the only person on the planet who would ask this: “What do you want us to do? Kiss your big toe?”

The kid stood up.

I told him, “I got the same skin problem that you do.”

He grabbed his backpack and tray. “Congratulations,” he said. He took a few steps away from the table and stopped. He stood there a couple of seconds looking down at his tray. Without lifting his eyes, he turned around and inched his way back. He gently placed his tray onto the table in front of mine and sat down.

We talked as we ate our lunch. I learned that he was nowhere near the weak little kid I thought he was. He had courage of steel. He taught me ways of how to get out of bed and on to school every day, in spite of all the inevitable negative reactions from people.

“You have to push yourself,” he said.

“Oh, is that all? It can’t be that simple, man.”

“Are you joking? The loneliness, isolation, coughing, stares, whispers, ain’t nothing simple or easy about living with odor. But life’s not supposed to be easy, anyway, is it?”

“Yeah, but it’s easier for some people than it is for others. I guess, that’s why life’s so unfair, huh?”

“What I do every morning,” said Kwame, “is imagine myself in a cockpit flying hundreds of people to where they want to go. I know the only way I can make that come true is to get through high school first, then the next hurdle, and the next until I’m in the air. Just think of where you are between 1 and 10, and 10 is where you wanna end up.”

Saying these things to me, he was more alive than at any other time I’d seen him. His eyes were wider. His head was up for a change.

I asked him, “Where are you between 1 and 10?”

“I’m at 5 right now.”

“So you’re halfway there?”

“Yep.”

I said, “But cockpits are pretty confining, man. What if nobody wanted to be in there

with you, on account of your odor?”

“I like to believe I’ll have the right kind of treatment by then and have it more under control.”

“Yeah, but what if—“

“I don’t like what ifs. I like I cans.”

Like I said, courage of steel.

He looked at me with this open-mouthed smile, like he had just seen something for the first time. I asked, “What are you smiling about?”

“The irony.”

“Irony?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Now that you got this problem, you’re a nicer person than you were before.”

Lightning struck my soul! The kid was right. I really had changed, wrote Billy.

He concluded his writing: (When we got to study hall afterward, Kwame helped me write down that whole lunch conversation we had.)

I don’t know if I can ever be as strong as he. I don’t even know if I would’ve forgiven me if I were him. It’s scary as hell to think I might have to go through the rest of my life with this smell on me. But just knowing that somebody like my new friend, Kwame, has such an upbeat attitude about it all, gives me a whole lot of hope that I can still live my life. It’ll just be different from how I imagined it would be—more challenging.

He also told me about an online odor support group. I’m writing all this to give this

group my story. And he said if I didn't have access to a computer, to talk to a relative—to somebody—about how I'm coping with everything.

Suddenly I'm traveling down the kind of bumpy road I never knew existed. But it's still a road.

Billy Bulldagger put down his pen, turned on his new computer and said, "And now, on to my new life."

THE MEETUP

by

Richard R. Cook, Jr.

Every time I, Carlos Cazares, thought of what awaited me in the hours to come, my heart pounded harder from a combination of fear and excitement. So, while I sat in the front passenger seat of the convertible, the nighttime breezes massaging my face, un-combing my hair, it was a hell of a challenge trying to put my mind on other things.

My brother, Mario, and I were the only two people in the car. I glanced over at him and raised my voice above the din of the air beating against my ears and the hum of surrounding vehicle engines on the highway:

“I never met anybody in person with the same problem as me.”

“How many more times you gonna tell me that?”

“I guess until it’s not true anymore.”

“Stop being so nervous, big brother. Everybody you’re gonna meet tomorrow are just like you. So just be yourself and enjoy your weekend.”

Mario has always been my best friend. He calls me big brother sometimes because I’m one year older than he is, but he’s really my big brother in spirit. That is to say, he’s the one who defended me against bullies in school, as opposed to the other way around. He’s always been taller and more muscular than I, and gregarious, too—all the things I wish I were. But I’ll just have to settle for my five foot, seven inch height. At that time I was still working on my shyness.

Mario said, “Anybody gives you any bull about your sexuality or anything else, you beat the shit out of ‘em, like I taught you.”

“You know I hate it when you talk like that, Mario. So why do you do it?”

“You already answered your own question.” He glanced at me and flashed a smile. “Relax, big brother. It’s only life.”

“How can I relax when my stomach is in my back pocket?”

“Where’s your courage and enthusiasm?”

“At home keeping each other company in my sock drawer.”

In the back window of a car ahead of us, a little girl waved and smiled. I forced myself to return the gesture.

I said, "I didn't have that talk with Mom and Dad yesterday, after all."

"So what. Why should you? Your personal life is your own business."

"You can't understand, Mario, what it's like to know that you can't be the way your parents want you to be. That you can't get married to a woman; you can't have kids; you can't—"

"Explain to me, Carlos, why you have to tell them. Why should it be their business?"

"When you met the woman you fell in love with, didn't you wanna tell Mom and Dad? When you proposed marriage to her, didn't you want Mom and Dad to know about it?"

He nodded slowly.

I went on:

"I know it's not really their business, but in a way it is. I'm their son. I wanna know that they still love me whether I'm gay or not. I need to know that."

"Well, since you put it that way..." He left the sentence unfinished.

"When I fall in love, I want Mom and Dad to be happy for me too. I just think it's a better idea for them to already know that I'm gay and be used to it by that time. They'll know sooner or later, anyway, right?"

Mario switched to another lane, which led us off the highway. The slower speed brought less wind and more quiet. We lowered our voices.

Mario said, "You know how they'll react, don't you?"

"Yeah, I know. They'll say homosexuality is against the Bible, et cetera, et cetera."

“You already know how I feel, Carlos. Man created the Bible and—”

“—and God created me. Yeah, yeah, yeah.”

Mario stopped for a red light.

I asked, “Is that my motel up ahead?”

“Yep, that’s it. We lived in South Carolina all this time, and we’ve never been here to Myrtle Beach. You gotta tell me all about it when I pick you up.”

“All about what? How we all pretended not to detect each other’s odor condition?”

Mario smacked his lips. “How you enjoyed yourself a helluva lot better than you thought you would.”

“Oh, all about that,” I quipped.

“Yeah, all about that.” At the turn of the traffic light, he sped through the intersection.

My heart thrashed about in my chest more and more the closer we drew to the motel. By the time Mario parked the car next to the well-lit office, I felt sweat slide down along my arms from my armpits. I didn’t understand why I felt so nervous. After all, it wouldn’t be until the next morning that I would come into contact with other people from the support group.

“I’ll wait here until you get your key,” Mario said as I got out of the car.

Inside the tiny office, I showed the elderly gentleman, standing on the other side of the high desk, my I.D. and signed in. He handed me my room key.

After thanking him and heading for the door, he coughed loudly and repeatedly as

if he suddenly had pneumonia. Before I had even gotten out of the car, I suspected my odor had gotten worse during the two-and-a-half hour drive. The old man confirmed my suspicion. Of course, I could have assumed that he only had a cold; but after having an odor condition for over fifteen years, I believe I had acquired a kind of sixth sense about the times people were reacting to my skin problem and when they weren't.

"All set, buddy?" Mario asked.

"Yep. No turning back now." I reached into the back seat for my traveling bag.

"Do me a favor, big brother."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Have a good time this weekend, will you? At least do it for me, if not for yourself."

"All right, all right. I'll have a good time, even if it kills me."

"Now, that's what I like to hear...I think." He started the engine. "I'll see you Sunday night."

We waved, and he backed away and drove off.

I skipped up the outside stairs to the second floor, with thoughts of a long shower dancing in my head. My door was adjacent to the first one I came to.

As I shoved the key into the knob, that door next to mine squeaked open. I looked over to see blond hair and a face peeking out at me.

"Hi," the woman said softly. "Are you in the group?"

I licked my dry lips and swallowed. "Yeah," I said. "I'm in the group."

"Just to be on the safe side, what group am I talking about?"

“The odor support group. I’m here for the meetup.”

She opened the door wider and brought one foot onto the balcony, revealing a half white shirt which exposed her belly, and tight red shorts. The light in her room spilled out and brightened one side of her face.

She said, “My name is Maggie Waitfield.”

“You smellymaggie902?”

She smiled broadly and said, “Yeah, that’s right. That’s my group name. You wanna come in for a few minutes?”

I glanced down at my key and turned it in the knob. “Well—”

“Just for a little while. I promise, I won’t bite.”

A lot of things that could happen were on my worry list; her biting me was not one of them.

“Let me put this inside first,” I said. “I’ll be right there.”

“Okay.”

I stepped into my room, tossed the bag onto the bed and dropped myself in a sitting position next to it. I blew out a breath, glared at the closed door, thinking, I’m tired. I need a shower. It’s after eleven o’clock. I don’t feel like being bothered with anybody right now. And I’m gay.

If she had been a good looking gay guy, none of those things would’ve been a problem.

Eventually I found myself sitting on the edge of a bed beside an attractive woman.

I'd be in heaven if I were either a heterosexual man or a lesbian.

I asked her, "Can you smell me?"

She took a breath through her nostrils, bit the corner of her bottom lip before answering. "No," she half whispered. "What about me?" she asked.

"No," I said hating myself.

We sat in an awkward silence for what seemed like a long time.

Finally I asked, "How can we expect people who don't have odor to be honest with us about ours if we can't be honest with each other?"

Maggie's shoulders dropped. She smiled and freed a relieving sigh. "I know," she said. "I do smell you. I can't smell my own odor, and I can't smell everybody else's either, just some people." She slowly looked at me up and down. "But I don't mind yours."

I cleared my throat and licked my still dry lips. I felt like I was trapped in the middle of a desert surrounded by beautiful and sexually aroused women, while dying of thirst.

Maggie said, "It's okay with me if you smell like a mixture of fish and my grandmother's feet."

I jerked my head back as if I had been hit by an invisible baseball bat. I didn't know whether to laugh or to be angry at her for being so blunt.

She said, "I mean—oh, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

I shut my eyes and rubbed the left one, which I always do when I wish to be any place else. I had been doing that ever since I was fourteen, when a visiting cousin told

me that I stink like a rat.

“Really,” Maggie said. “I’m sorry. I say things I shouldn’t say sometimes.”

I somehow calmed myself.

“It’s okay,” I said, cursing every word. “We all make mistakes. Besides, I’ve heard a lot worse.”

“You never told me your name,” she said, thankfully changing the subject.

“Really? I thought I did.”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Carlos Cazares.”

“Cazares,” she said. “I like that.”

“A lot of people think the C in my last name is hard.”

As we sat facing each other, one leg folded on the bed, the other hanging alongside with one foot to the floor, Maggie slid one inch closer to me. She asked, “What’s your group nickname?”

“CarlosCJr,” I said.

“I don’t remember seeing anything on the message board from you. How long you been with the group?”

“About a month. I ain’t posted anything on the board yet. Besides, sometimes it’s hard for me to get online; my computer is starting to treat me like some people in my family do.”

My heart skipped a beat from the surprise of Maggie grabbing my hand.

“My family,” she said, “is made up of self-righteous, judgmental turds. I think they should all be hung by their genitals, the women too.”

I wrinkled my face. “Maggie!”

“I’m just kidding, Carlos. At least about the second part, anyway.”

“Wow! What a joke.”

“I shouldn’t have said that either, right?”

From the apparent habit that Maggie had of sticking her foot in her mouth, I foresaw a very interesting weekend ahead.

Again she changed the subject, fondling my hand with both of hers. “I know you’re going to the breakfast in the morning, right?” she asked.

“Yeah. I was told it would be on the beach, behind this motel.”

She nodded with a little open-mouthed smile, dropping her eyes to my belly.

Wondering if she was gazing at something lower, I withdrew my hand and said, “I should be going.”

“Yeah. We don’t really know each other that well, anyway, do we? Yet. I mean, we got plenty of time this weekend, right?”

I tried to ignore what she meant by that. But it gnawed at me while I tossed and turned in bed that night. I thought about how disappointed she might be when she found out I had no interest in being intimate with her. Would she hate me, like some women had in the past? Or would she be understanding and except me for who I am? Finally I let go of everything and fell into a deep, restful sleep.

The alarm clock I had brought with me woke me at seven thirty. I had one hour to prepare myself for the first of the two meetup breakfasts. I stayed in the shower for over thirty minutes, hoping and praying that my odor wouldn't be too bad. I worried about that, even though I knew I would be among people with the same problem.

At eight twenty-seven I was out the door, into the bright, sultry morning. I headed for the stairs but stopped before passing Maggie's door. Had she already left for the breakfast? I knocked, and after about twenty seconds I turned to leave. That's when the door opened.

Maggie had a towel wrapped round her head. She took her toothbrush out of her mouth and smiled. "Good morning," she said, the toothpaste muttering her speech. "I'm running kinda late. You wanna wait in here? I'll just be three minutes."

I declined, and after the door was shut I turned with a growling belly and leaned over the railing, gazing down into the parking lot. A woman and two men got out of a car. They were in mine and Maggie's age group: late twenties/early thirties. One carried a cooler; the other two held what looked to be bags of food. And they were engaged in a heated discussion, talking almost at the same time.

One of the men who was bald looked like, from my vantage point, instead of having a head, he had an oversized egg sitting on top of his neck. He stretched out his free arm and yawned, then said, "I'm telling you, the guy is a freaking faggot. I know 'em when I see 'em."

"Wow!" said the woman. "What a gift you have. Your parents must be really proud

of you.” She giggled.

I couldn’t help but to feel sorry for the guy. All of that bigotry poisoning whatever kindness he might have had in himself.

They walked passed the office and disappeared around the corner, headed in the direction of the beach.

I hoped that guy was not here for the meetup. At first I was more concerned about my odor that weekend than anything else. But more and more, that worry yielded to how some people in the group might react to finding out about my homosexuality. I refused to believe that those three people were talking about me. How could they have been? Nobody in the group knew me yet. Then again, maybe they didn’t even belong to the group.

My alter ego yelled at me to stop worrying so much and to relax more. I wanted so much for that part of me to take the “steering wheel” for a change. I hoped to find a way to make that happen before the end of the weekend. I thought about what my brother had said:

“It’s only life.”

To my surprise, Maggie came out looking like a million dollars, instead of a dollar and ninety-nine cents like she did a few minutes earlier.

On the beach, we walked along the sand toward an elongated, white canopy with a long table and chairs underneath it, Maggie in her sandals, me in my sneakers with no socks, both of us in shorts. Four people stood at one end of the table, where paper

plates, cups and containers of food sat.

I was grateful to see that bald guy and his two friends setting up their private picnic, albeit only about thirty yards away from us. But at least they were not a part of our group.

Maggie and I introduced ourselves; the four individuals did the same. Three of them turned out to be administrators of the group: two men and a woman.

The female administrator offered us seats at the table and asked what we wanted for breakfast. She mentioned that some people with our condition weren't able to consume certain foods like dairy products without causing their odor to become worse.

At that time, I had no idea what kinds of foods I needed to stay away from, or if I had to avoid any at all. All I wanted to do that morning, as the table gradually filled with chattering people, was just shut that lion up in my stomach; so I ate until I was full: scrambled eggs, sausage, biscuits, orange juice. I kept my fingers crossed that it wouldn't all make my odor worse for the next few hours. I can't detect my own odor, so I have to rely on other people's reactions or the lack thereof in order to gauge how bad it is.

Maggie chose her breakfast more carefully, based on how certain foods affected her odor. She opted for fruit and frosted flakes cereal with rice milk.

By the time I took my last bite, every chair under the canopy was occupied. To my left sat Maggie, to my right sat a man with a goatee and with familiar verbal poison spilling from his mouth.

*Faggot, homo, sissy* were the words I heard him use in the conversation with the man on the other side of him. Without thinking, I found myself, for a moment, shutting my eyes tightly and rubbing the left one. Even though this guy was not the bald man I first saw in the motel parking lot, he sure sounded like him. I had heard such words many times before without affecting me much; but it was especially troubling to hear them coming from a fellow member of the group, as if I was hearing my own brother speaking that way.

As Maggie and I made small talk, she caressed the back of my hand periodically and, after removing one sandal, ran her toes up and down my lower leg. It felt like she was in dire need of trimming her big toe nail.

I looked up when I heard someone say, "Hey, you're Richierichthree, right?" And two men shook hands. I knew that nickname from the online message board. I don't know why, but I figured he'd be taller and better looking.

I turned to Maggie and said, "Nobody here looks like I pictured they would."

"I know," she said. "Ain't that weird? If you had posted something on the board with a name like yours, I would picture you with maybe a sombrero and one of those colorful scarves you people wear over your shoulder and one of those really big guitars and..."

She stopped when she saw my grimace.

"Oh God, that was the wrong thing to say, wasn't it?"

Once again, the big foot shoved into the big mouth. It was a wonder she still had teeth.

I smiled because I realized that she never meant any harm whenever she blurted out any inappropriate remarks. Her ignorance and naiveté were endearing qualities about her. I fell head over heels in love with that woman. In fact, I came to love her as a friend.

She made an excellent suggestion for us to do: Thirty seconds later, we strolled side by side along the beach in the wet part of the sand, our shoes hanging upside down by our fingers. Every once in a while the tide would rush at us and crash against our ankles, swallowing and cooling our feet, and then it would recede again. I felt relaxed, my thoughts free of my odor and all of the bigotry of my sexuality. For a change, I was me.

I had a strong feeling that Maggie was tolerant of different types of people and therefore a decent person. I knew that in the minutes to come I would be either proven right or wrong; for eventually, because of her physical attraction to me, I had to let her know who I really was.

It had been several minutes since either of us said a word when I asked her, “You always been this way? I mean, saying things without thinking.”

She stared down at her feet as she walked. “I was teased in school about how I smelled when I was twelve. I told my mother and father about it, and they said they couldn’t smell anything. I believed them.”

“You still believe them now?”

She looked at me. “I believe they lied to me, like a lot of other people have.” She

dropped her head again. “My father took me to a dermatologist who also said she couldn’t notice it, and she suggested that I see a child psychologist. I remember thinking at that moment that if the kids in school can notice it, why couldn’t these adults? But still I believed them when they said they couldn’t smell me.”

She paused as another cool tide noisily swept onto the beach beneath us.

She then said, “So my father took me to see a psychologist. I think I must’ve taken every type of pill known to man for every type of childhood mental illness. I was told I was a schizophrenic because some schizophrenics give off a certain odor.”

“Really? Some give off an odor?”

“Yeah.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“And I was told I had delusions, depression...you name it.”

“Why do you think they did all that and at the same time lied to you about your odor?”

“Who knows. Maybe because it was easier for them to ignore something they couldn’t understand and focus more on something they could understand. But if that’s the answer, then they were thinking more about themselves than about me.” She blew out a breath. “That psychologist said my odor—which she said she couldn’t detect—was probably due to stress from school. I think she was trying to have it both ways: telling me that I have odor and at the same time telling me that I don’t. I hate that.”

“So what does this all have to do with my first question?” I asked.

She made eye contact for two seconds, then stared at her feet again. “I was just getting to that. I believe all those different kinds of pills for different kinds of mental problems changed my personality a little. Sometimes I just don’t think before I open my mouth.”

Underwhelmingly, I said, “Wow.”

“No child, Carlos, should be given all that crap when their brain is still forming.”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

We finally arrived at one end of the beach. Our voices rose above the crashing of the tide every few seconds against some large rocks there. We sat in the sand facing the water. The nearest person was in the far distance.

“My parents lie about my odor too,” I said. “The only person in my family I can really trust to treat me like a normal person, instead of an idiot, is my brother. He loves me enough to give me an honest answer when I ask him a question. I know the people in my family who lie to me love me, too, but honesty about this is a refreshing rarity.”

“You’re lucky. I’m an only child, and I’m not that close to my cousins or aunts or uncles.”

“Don’t you wish sometimes that you could live on your own private island or even planet?”

She turned her head and looked me square in the eye. “I never wish that, Carlos. I have a right to be here. Anybody who has a problem with me, has a problem.”

We gazed out at the ocean again.

“Well,” I said, “I wish that sometimes. Because if I could separate myself from this world, I wouldn’t have to be bothered with gay people not liking me because I smell and people who smell not liking me because I’m gay.” My pulse raced after the mention of that last word.

Maggie looked at me with a blank face. She said, “I suspected that, when you were in my room last night. But I wasn’t a hundred percent sure until now. You feel better now that you told me?”

“I don’t know yet.”

Maggie returned her eyes to the ocean. “My libido is having a nervous breakdown right now. But it’s okay with me if you wanna be that way. Free country, right?”

“For who?” I asked without expecting an answer, my glances seesawing between Maggie and the sparkling blue water as I spoke. “And what do you mean, if I wanna be this way?”

“I mean just that.”

“This is the way I was born, Maggie. It’s no more of a choice than me being five foot, seven or having brown eyes.”

She shook her head and crinkled the corners of her lips.

I continued:

“If being gay was a choice, there would be a lot less gay people in the world, because who wants to be hated and discriminated against, especially by members of your own family? Sense I didn’t choose to be gay, I figure this is the way I was meant to

be, and I got no problem with it.”

“Carlos, a lot of people like to experiment with sex. That’s why so many married people either fantasize about doing it with a person of their own gender or they just go ahead and do it. They make that choice.”

“Those are called bisexuals, Maggie. For some reason people forget about that gray area.”

“Gay, bisexual, whatever. It’s still a choice.”

“I was getting aroused at the age of ten when I saw Tarzan on T.V. That sound like a choice to you?”

Maggie looked at me and laughed.

I laughed too. I had never seen any humor in that fact until I heard myself say it for the first time.

I was happy that she didn’t verbally respond to what I had just told her. By then I had gotten to the point where I was almost afraid to hear what would come out of her mouth next.”

“I fantasize sometimes,” I said, “about how better my life would be, not only if I didn’t have this odor, but if I wasn’t gay either. I meet and fall in love with a woman. We have a child. Society would accept me; my parents would be proud of me; people wouldn’t look down on me.”

“You’re a moron for thinking like that, Carlos.”

Oh God, I thought.

“And, no, I’m not going to apologize for what I say this time,” she said. “You should just be yourself. Forget about the people who don’t like you. Right? What matters is the people who do like you—just the way you are or wanna be.”

Sometimes when she shocked the hell out of me, I would feel my alter ego agreeing with her completely. I wondered what other surprises awaited me for the rest of that meetup weekend, whether good or bad.

Maggie’s voice lightened:

“Can’t wait for the party tonight,” she said. “Right here on the beach.”

“On the beach?”

“Yeah.”

“So it’s not gonna be indoors, huh? That’s a relief,” I said.

Maggie leaped to her feet with such energy, she whipped sand in the air, some of which slapped me in the face.

“Come on,” she shouted, as she took my hand from my eyes and pulled me up.

Partially blinded by the sand, I was led into the water. We played and laughed and pretended to try to drown each other. I couldn’t remember the last time I enjoyed myself so much. I wished that morning could last forever. But the afternoon was closing in fast.

Lunch was set for twelve thirty. Maggie and I returned to the motel at ten minutes to noon, sand clinging to our drenched shirts and shorts, arms and legs.

After a long shower (in our own rooms, of course) we took our time making our way back to the canopied table on the beach together, even though we were a few minutes

late. We were too busy laughing, talking and clowning around on the way there to care about the time. During that walk it dawned on me that my new friend's twisted sense of humor totally reflected mine.

We had to pass by the three people I had seen that morning getting out of their car in the motel parking lot. We ignored their giggles and loud coughing, as they were covering their bodies with sun tan lotion. We were sure they couldn't smell us.

Under the canopy half of the members of the group had arrived, others were strolling in individually, in pairs, and in small groups. Maggie and I sat in the same chairs as before.

To my dismay, that guy who sat beside me at breakfast, vomiting his homophobic rhetoric, now glared at me from directly across the table. Automatically my eyes closed and my left hand came up to vigorously rub my left eye. During the course of lunch, the black-haired man with the goatee and mustache conversed with a woman on one side of him while aiming his murderous stare at me from time to time.

I struggled to enjoy my fruit salad and Maggie's effervescent mood.

"What's wrong?" Maggie asked.

I stopped chewing and sighed. "Nothing," I muttered.

The lady manager of the group stood at one end of the table and made an announcement:

"I hope everyone here is enjoying our meetup and making friends. After lunch, for anyone who's interested, we'll have volleyball and softball. And for those of you

interested in a less strenuous activity, we'll have a game of charades here on the beach. Otherwise, you can do whatever else you want with your afternoon until dinner and afterwards the beach party tonight starting at eight o'clock."

Suddenly I had no desire to attend any kind of party, then or ever. I wished for my alter ego to take over and cheer me up again.

That guy across the table spoke to me for the first time:

"Your motel room is next door to hers, ain't it?"

"Yeah," I said thinking, What the hell is it to you?

He looked at Maggie. "You probably already know he doesn't wanna go into your room for anything...for anything."

I had no idea how he figured me out. I felt like I had the word gay tattooed on my forehead.

Maggie raised her voice. "Why don't you mind your own damn business, you creep!"

A blanket of heat came over me as I stood up and said, "The only kind of heterosexual men gay men don't threaten are the ones who have complete confidence in their sexuality."

His face wrinkled, eyes squinted. "You son of a—"

"After the crappy way we're treated by the world," I continued, "I can't believe that any of us here have the nerve to be prejudiced against any group of people on this planet."

I left the table in a hurry. I stood thirty paces away, at the edge of the wet part of the sand gazing out at the horizon.

Maggie came to my side and did the same.

I asked, “Why is it that these people think that my personal business is their business? I don’t give a damn about their personal life.”

“Why are you talking like he speaks for everybody in the group? I doubt if he even speaks for one percent. And you need to let go of the people who wanna be your enemies and concentrate on the people who wanna be your friends, like I told you before.”

“Your lunch is getting cold, Maggie.”

“It’s fruit salad, Carlos. It’s supposed to be—”

“Maggie, please.”

She turned and left. I think I hurt her feelings. And I felt bad about that.

Those three people—one woman and two men—were sitting behind me and to my left. They were close enough for me to hear more of their derisive laughter, coughs and comments about my odor condition. I was certain they couldn’t smell me out there and that somehow they found out that we were all members of a body odor support group. They were enjoying themselves at our expense.

I realized the group was where I belonged, so I went back to it. As I approached the canopy, the goateed homophobic member passed by me going in the opposite direction, rolling his eyes at me.

The moment I sat back in my seat, an explosion of coughing and giggling turned my head in the direction of those three people. Now they were taunting the homophobic guy. I couldn't hear what they were saying to him, but it was egregious enough to stop him from walking and to turn and address them. The two men, sitting on a beach blanket with the woman, pinched their noses as if smelling something bad.

I leaped from my chair and headed toward them.

"Carlos, where're you going?" asked Maggie.

As I arrived and stood beside my fellow group member, one of the men said, "What the hell do you want? Oh, that's right, you skunks stick together, don't you?"

I said, "I'm here because you're bothering my brother."

Voices grew louder behind me.

"Uh-Oh," said the woman. "Here comes the whole damn family."

Behind me a man's voice asked, "Is there a problem here?"

I turned to see that he was one of the managers. Everyone else who was under the canopy came with him.

The man with the bald, egg head replied, "Now that the wind is blowing stronger, no. No problem."

All three laughed.

The lady manager asked them, "Was it a choice? Or were you born this cruel?"

The three ceased their laughter and looked away.

We all turned in the direction of our table, with harrumphing coming from the trio

now behind us.

A hand gripped my shoulder and stopped me from walking. The homophobic guy came round and stood before me, offering his hand.

“I’m Al,” he said.

I shook his hand. “I’m Carlos.”

For the rest of that weekend, Maggie, Al and I were inseparable. Some members of the group began calling us the three musketeers. I had a new appreciation for “All for one and one for all.” By that time I no longer needed Maggie or my alter ego to keep rescuing me from myself. For I had finally become that better part of me.

During the drive home that Sunday night, I told my brother everything that happened. And I mentioned how we all enjoyed the beach party that Saturday night and all the other friends I made.

Mario couldn’t resist telling me, “See? Didn’t I tell you that you would have fun?”

I, Carlos Cazares, had the time of my life that weekend. And I’m looking forward to the next meetup, and the one after that, and the one after that...

## PERSONAL THOUGHTS

### ONE

I used to live with my girlfriend on the fourth floor of an old storefront in Madison, Indiana. It was a really dream-like flat that overlooked the main street of an old river town.

At night there were street lamps that lit up everything, and there was an old theater across the street from our apartment that used to play old 45's that you could hear throughout the whole town.

A few times when I would be up at night, I would look out of our big story windows onto main street and see one lone person walking through town. He was a young guy, and I could tell his body was deformed in some way. His left arm was short and mangled. His left leg was contorted so that he could barely walk.

Night after night I would see him walking through town...just taking it in...and stopping to look into storefronts. He was happy. It was then that I started to realize that he was walking at night for a reason. He was walking at night to avoid the eyes...to avoid the glares.

*It was then that I realized that asymmetry is beauty.*

--C. Hall

### TWO

I was contemplating yesterday on the many obstacles and misfortunes that have

occurred in my life. Thinking about these things brought me to a couple of realizations: Since having TMAU I have always been a victim. Misfortune has followed me with this condition. But why is that? Is it because I'm so desperate to look for friends where I may find? Is it because I fear to speak out against others out of fear of being ridiculed? Or that I ignore my surroundings to hold onto the little sanity and sense of relief I have left? Have I become so naive to the dangers of this world? Or have I so believed too much in what is greater than me and the greater good? If I thought about all my misfortunes in life I must realize they had begun before TMAU entered my life and they will continue.

To continue to dwell on the past is just another wish to die. If one can never move on, how can one live on. When I think at times of the things in my life that have hurt me to the core and made me feel less than a man, I don't think of TMAU. My greatest obstacle is not my greatest misfortune. TMAU is what I have to deal with on the day to day.

But those things that have affected my character, my sense of self-approval, these are all I have. To take those from me now would be a crime, to rob me of what is left of my dignity a capital offense.

Now I have learned that people will say what they please and do as they may. I must not seek the approval of man, for I will always fall short. I must not aspire to be what is whispered underneath the breath of many. But I must be who I am. And accept that no matter who I am and what I will become, misfortune does not define me. I believe in who I am.

Therefore I should decide in who I will become. What is beyond my control should not nag at my senses or stand in my desires. In the eyes of man I will always be lacking. But in my own eyes there is always an opportunity to move forward. I do not care of the past, what was said and what was done. I cannot change it now.

What lies and misdeeds that have occurred to me are nothingness. Misfortune is nothingness. When I think of TMAU and misfortune I know that TMAU is a small part of my life. I live with it; therefore I can live through it. If it were stronger than me I would have been engulfed by it and ceased not to exist. I am greater than I have ever imagined being and no obstacle is impossible to me. I am in the blender of life, shredded, broken, minced, I still exist.

--Jessica F. M.

### THREE

If you reeked incredibly, I would still give you a huge hug. And if you wouldn't allow a hug because I reeked too badly, then I'd just have to sneak up on you and steal a hug. If I were a misanthrope I would defy this for you, and I would like you anyways. If you were a misanthrope, then I would like you just the same anyhow. And if you shall perish before me, then I will not forget you. If I shall perish before you, please, good woman, forgive and forget all the nonsense that I ever posted, and remember well of me as I would of you.

--Benjamin Rimmer

## FOUR

(The following is in reference to people who taunt us because of our odor.)

I know it sounds crazy but I've been working with this today. Yeah, a whole day LOL. Anyway, I've tried so many ways to keep myself from being upset when I hear the easily issued "uggh" or "yuck." And I hate when I have to admit to myself that no, that method didn't work, that still stung and hurt me. Well, today this really seemed to work more easily than anything. It's not that it could be worse or others have it worse, that kinda thing does nothing for me. It's just that it is crazy to keep looking at jerks in awe as if they are doing something awesome. Look at yourself when they do what they do, are you in awe? Should you really be? Aren't there better things to be in awe of? I think this is a serious, serious thing to consider. In awe of how rude people are, is it something to be awed over? It's very unworthy of awe. It is common as dirt and easy as pie. Nothing to see here.

Awe is a form of worship toward something. They are not gods. Do you give God that much awe? Nope, you have no idea what will come of you if you stopped "caring," but what do you know anyway? I guess that is where faith would have to come in and fill in the gap as they used to say. I'm not religious and I am not a part of any religion, but I am spiritual and I know that "the universe" or whatever you want to call it is good and is on the side of every person to do right and be right and feel well no matter what is going on. Not necessarily for everyone to have money, popularity and everything else that seems so wonderful when you don't have them.

Aside from that, there is accepting the feeling of suffering. Someone said something, well I need to suffer because of it. Right now I believe that my suffering is called for here. Is it really called for? Is it ever a wise decision to suffer? I know it seems like you have no choice, but you do. I don't want to suffer anymore; I don't want to be devastated day after day. And if this is what it takes, to stop believing in devastation, well, that is what I will have to do: ask myself questions like these every day.

Well, that's my 2 cents for the night. I just thought it was so valuable that I had to share regardless of how crazy it sounds. I got this sentiment from elsewhere and find it pretty bitter medicine for me, but whatever it takes. Whatever, it does no one any good to wallow in misery regardless of how logical it seems.

Good Luck people.

--Yolanda G.

Although an odor-causing skin condition is a very serious and debilitating illness, those of us who must live with it sometimes find comfort in having a sense of humor about it.

TMAU MATH:

1 TMAU patient + 1 case of beer = 1 happy TMAU patient

1 TMAU patient + 1 Fish = 1 Fishy TMAU patient

100 TMAU patients + 100 Fish = 1 Biological weapon

1 TMAU patient + 1 full auditorium = 1 empty auditorium ???

1 TMAU patient = 1 garbage dump (regarding odor variance)

1 TMAU patient + 30 classmates = 1 nervous TMAU patient

1 TMAU patient + good hygiene = 1 stinky patient

1 TMAU patient + life = survival, or

1 TMAU patient + life = suicide, or

1 TMAU patient + life = insanity

1 TMAU patient + insanity = 1 loose canon

1 loose canon + 1 spark = Oh shit!

1 TMAU patient + 1 understanding support group = 1 stable TMAU patient

1 TMAU patient + humor = one of the only reasons to live

1 TMAU patient + 1 TMAU patient = "I can't smell anything. Come closer, give me a hug."

1 angry TMAU patient = 1 angry, stinky TMAU patient

1 happy TMAU patient = 1 happy, stinky TMAU patient

100 TMAU patients = 100 hypochondriacs (ha ha, just kidding)

100 TMAU patients united > 100 TMAU patients alone

A world full of TMAU patients = No need for a cure!

1 TMAU patient + God = "Good God, you stink." (I didn't say who said that.)

1 TMAU patient + no B.O. = Heaven

1 TMAU patient + 100 doctors = No diagnosis

1 TMAU patient + 1 doctor = "Take this mental medication."

1 smelly TMAU patient + 1 doctor = "I smell nothing; it's all in your head."

1 doctor who develops TMAU = "Oh shit, they were telling the truth."

1 cure for TMAU = 100's of happy TMAU patients

1 thread of hope = 100's of hopeful TMAU patients

1 desperate TMAU patient + 1,000 remedies = "I'm cured! I'm cured!" + 2 days later =  
"Oh shit, it came back. On to the next miracle treatment. Oh, woe is me."

1 'cured' TMAU patient = "Yeah, whatever. Well, what the hell. What are you taking?"

1 'cured' TMAU patient + "Back to reality" = Worse off than before.

1 TMAU patient + 'The Devil' = "I'll kill you."

1 TMAU patient + Hell = Reality

1 TMAU patient + confidence = "yeah, right"

1 TMAU patient + 1 dream = 1 nightmare

1 TMAU patient + respect = wishful thinking (Rodney Dangerfield thought he didn't get

any respect. Ha ha)

100's of TMAU patients + 1 Body Odor Group = "Damn y'all, we all got screwed by nature. Let's meet up. I'll bring the beers."

1 TMAU patient + 1 empty beer can = "Damn it, back to reality."

Benjamin Rimmer

My name is Kristen Jugueta. I am 28 years old as of the writing of this book in 2009, and I am from Australia. My website is about my life so far. I have written detailed information about my medical history, symptoms, diet, and my experiences as a person who suffered from a body odor condition and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities. I wrote this information in the hope that it will help others who have, or who possibly have, chronic body odor, Halitosis, and Multiple Chemical Sensitivities like I did. I also want this information to help researchers and medical scientists to get a better understanding of these medical conditions. There are also some positive posts about my life as well. I want people who suffer from body odor, Halitosis and MCS to know that there is hope and a future to look forward to. Please visit my website at: <http://www.kristenjugueta.info>



Kristen Jugueta

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(In alphabetical order by last name or last initial)

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## ONLINE INFORMATION ON CHRONIC BODY ODOR

Maria de la Torre's blog: <http://www.bloodbornebodyodorandhalitosis.com/>

Kristen Jugueta's blog: <http://www.kristenjugueta.info>

Arun Nagrath's blog: <http://www.bodyodorsupport.com>

Citoyen Kiran's blog: [maudlinreflections.wordpress.com](http://maudlinreflections.wordpress.com)

Comprehensive Body Odor research information: <http://meboresearch.com/>

Trimethylaminuria Midwest Region Foundation: [www.geocities.com/emporia962000/classic\\_blue.html](http://www.geocities.com/emporia962000/classic_blue.html)

Sandy Gordon's TMAU Foundation: <http://curezone.com/forums/fm.asp?i=1126864>

Body Odor and Halitosis: <http://www.bloodbornebodyodorandhalitosis.com>

Yahoo Trimethylaminuria Support Group: <http://healthgroups.yahoo.com/group/Trimethylaminuria>

WrongDiagnosis.com: [http://www.wrongdiagnosis.com/sym/body\\_odor.htm](http://www.wrongdiagnosis.com/sym/body_odor.htm)

Donating to the Australian Trimethylaminuria Foundation Fund: <http://www.tmuafoundation.org.au/donations.html>

Donation link: <http://www.rarediseases.org/helping/donate>