

WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION
Women's History Month 2005

NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2004 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2004 or Spring 2005 to be eligible. (Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor Karen Loeb _____ Dept. English _____

Course Number and Name 1-Credit Capstone Eng 480 Semester _____
completed Fall 2004 _____

Title of Nominated Work "The End of Summer" _____

CATEGORY:	Sampson:		See	_____
	Undergraduate Research Paper	_____	Olson	<u>X</u> _____
	Undergraduate Project	<u>✓</u> _____	Kessler	_____
	Graduate	_____	Turell	_____
			Belter	_____

STUDENT INFORMATION:

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too much longer)

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****WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

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Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.

Submission deadline is February 11, 2005.

I am very pleased to nominate Jessica Young's short story "The End of Summer." I have placed it in the Sampson award category, but the Olsen Awards would work too. I have worked with Jessica in two creative writing classes, and I have seen her development over the last two years.

She was in my fiction workshop last semester when she did her 1-credit capstone project. Since it needed to be different from what she was writing in class, she chose to do research on her mother's history, and wrote of a very specific time in her mother's life. In the story we encounter a very young woman dealing with the death of her own mother (this would be the death of Jessica's grandmother).

What works especially well are the fictional techniques Jessica has used in the story, from characterization to dialogue and flashback. She spoke extensively with her mother, did some other research of the time period, and then let the story happen in her imagination, using the facts she had gathered to guide her. The piece reads as an involving short story, and as with any good short story, where it came from is interesting, but the final product must stand on its own, and I believe this one does.

Karen Lueb

The End of Summer

Sammy slipped her slender arms into the sleeves of a black polyester dress her older sister lent her specifically for today. She stood in front the full-length mirror in her bedroom, ran her hands over the dress, and tried to smooth out the wrinkles. Black seemed too dense for August. She really wanted to wear something pink today, because it's her mother's favorite color. Lucy said no one wears pink to a funeral, especially his or her own mother's.

Sammy looked in the mirror and corrected herself out loud, "Pink was her favorite color." She stopped for a moment and listened to the album that played on her record player. She had been listening to it over and over, one song in particular—*Across the Universe*, certain phrases sticking themselves deep within her mind. She was glad that Lucy had not come upstairs to tell her that listening to the Beatles over and over the day that your mother was about to be buried might not be the most appropriate thing to do.

The album had been released around the same time of her fifteenth birthday, May 1970. It had been a gift from her mother. Sammy thought of its cover with each member of the band in a black square with white letters on the top saying "Let It Be." John was her favorite, but she thought George was the cutest. None of that mattered now, she thought. Her mother was dead. There were not enough and too many words all at once, to describe how she felt, but they were all in her head, *flowing out like endless rain into a*

paper cup...Pools of sorrow drifting through my open mind...Nothing's gonna change my world.

Sammy brushed her long, frizzy, dark hair and pulled it back into a braid that hung down between her shoulder blades. She thought of the way her mother's hair was dark like hers, before it was claimed by sickness. When it grew back it wasn't the same, and Sammy felt bad that she couldn't remember what it looked like.

She touched the dark circles under her eyes and thought she looked older than fifteen. It wasn't supposed to be this way. It was supposed to be a good summer. She was going to go swimming, fishing, out for ice cream, walks in the park, and she couldn't wait to go to the fair in August. She had been going to the opening day of the fair with friends every year for a while now.

Sammy's parents had always made sure she had a chaperone, usually her sister, Lucy, who was ten years older, and her husband, Al. Last year Sammy ended up spending more time helping Lucy pushing her six-month-old twin nephews around the fair grounds in baby carriages. Al was there, but he mostly played games and stopped at food stands—cheese curds, French fries, and funnel cake. Lucy definitely had her hands full. This summer Lucy said she and Al wouldn't be able to keep an eye on Sammy, that she was too busy with the twins who were running her ragged now that they were walking and into everything.

Her mother said she could go without a chaperone this year. Her mom and dad were usually pretty strict most of the time, and Sammy thought this was because of their

ages. Sammy's dad was already 65 and her mother was 55, ancient Sammy thought, at least her dad anyway. Her mother didn't seem so old really, just old fashioned.

Sammy had always compared her mother to the mom on the old re-runs of "Leave it to Beaver." Her mother was the type of woman who was always made up, dressed up, and in heels, no matter if she was going grocery shopping or vacuuming the living room floor. Sammy remembers her in her favorite pink and white dress, the one with the polka dots and shoes to match, sweeping off the back porch. She baked, she cooked, and she cleaned, and never once complained or asked for help. Sammy had read about women like this and was waiting for her mother to become disillusioned with being a housewife. Maybe she was a "Victim of the System," even though Sammy wasn't entirely sure what that meant. What she did know is that she preferred sneakers to high heels and could not imagine walking around the house in her mother's shoes.

Sammy's mother surprised her when she said she could go to the fair with her friends, without a chaperone. This was the summer she was finally going to have a little more independence and she wanted to make the most of it. She would be free. She had imagined herself at the fair, carefree, among the warmth and laughter of her best girl friends, giggling and whispering secrets about boys they would pass in the arcade and food stands. A day full of butterfly stomachs from tilt-a-whirl rides, candied apples, and salt-water taffy. She would play the game where you win a gold fish and another where you pop balloons with a dart to win small mirrors with the name of rock bands etched

across the bottom. She was going to win one of these and hang it on the wall behind her dresser, if her mother said it was okay.

She walked over to her dresser and opened the gold clasp on a small pink and white jewelry box. Inside, a plastic, broken ballerina danced on a tiny mirror to a slow song that Sammy recognized, but couldn't quite place. She pulled out a small silver tube of lipstick her mother once gave her. Sammy hated makeup; it made her feel like an imposter. She tried it a few times with encouragement from her mom and Lucy, but she was never any good at putting it on. Her mother and Lucy always seemed to have too-bright-red lips.

Lucy told her mom that women shouldn't have to wear makeup to be beautiful, that it wasn't a very feminist thing to do; after all, it was the Seventies.

"Maybe you should try not wearing lipstick everyday, Mom—you don't need it."

"Maybe I'll do just that," she said smiling, and kissed Sammy on the forehead, leaving a blurred imprint of her kiss.

For a moment, Sammy's fingers moved to her forehead and then reached to turn the bottom of the tube of lipstick. She gazed thoughtfully at the crimson red hue. She brought it up to her lips, smelling the waxy perfumed scent that always gave her a headache the few times she did try to wear it.

Headaches, Sammy thought, is how it all started. Terrible, terrible headaches. Her mother had always had them, but in the last year, right after Sammy's birthday, when spring start to morph into summer, the pain had become unbearable.

Sammy stepped over to her bed and sat down. She tried to make it perfect that morning, the way her mother would have, tucking the gingham print sheets in at the corners, folding them back on the top. She almost did it, but she could never make the beds quite the same way. Maybe she just didn't have the heart for it. She thought about how she would have to keep up the house, do the cooking, cleaning and laundry until she is old enough to move out on her own. Her father had never really learned how to do any of these things, and neither had she, but she was doing them.

Her mouth was dry and it was hard to swallow. She picked up her pillow and sank her tense, cramped fingers into it. She thought about ripping it apart and sending a storm of downy feathers into the air and onto the floor, but she stopped and set it down. She stared at it, holding her breath, holding her tongue. Sammy wanted to scream, but her dad and Lucy, Al and the twins were all downstairs. She could hear the high pitch baby squeals of her nephews and the pounding of blocks.

Sammy didn't want someone coming up and telling her that everything would be fine—she wasn't ready. She didn't think they were either. Lucy had been so busy helping set up funeral arrangements that Sammy didn't think their mother's death had really hit her, and Sammy's dad had become quiet and withdrawn. Maybe they all had.

She exhaled, sliding her hands under the pillow, stretched her fingers and moved her palms across the patchwork of her bedspread, a quilt that her mother had made for her out of decades of old clothes. With the tips of her fingers, she traced the seams where the pieces of fabric came together and thought of stitches.

It had been the beginning of June, not long after Sammy's fifteenth birthday, when her father had brought her mother home from the hospital, after the surgery. There had been a tumor the size of a grapefruit lodged in her brain. When Sammy's mother walked through the door, Sammy could not help feeling that her mom's head looked like some sort of grotesque baseball, white and naked, sewn up with oversized stitches.

The night of Sammy's birthday celebration, her mother had made Sammy's favorite meal—spaghetti and meatballs with extra oregano. Lucy came over with Al and the twins and her dad brought her a specially made cake from the bakery. They all sang "Happy Birthday" and Sammy's parents danced around the table. They were always doing that sort of thing. Sammy never thought she would miss all of that "mushy" stuff, the kissing, hugging, and hand holding, but she did.

That night, in the middle of the birthday dance, Sammy's usually graceful mother had stumbled.

"Whoa, are you alright, Ora?" Sammy's father asked.

"It's nothing...just a headache." She braced herself against the dining room table for a moment. "I must have been spinning too fast."

Lucy got up and pulled a chair out for her mother. "You sit down, Mom. Sammy and I will help clean up, don't worry about it." Lucy had grabbed a couple of plates, walked over to Sammy, nudged her shoulder, and smiled as if she was telling Sammy not to worry either.

"No, no, no, I'm fine, really. It's only a silly little headache. It's Sammy's birthday today, and I want all of you to stay here and finish your cake."

The next day Sammy's father had convinced her mother to see a doctor. She agreed to go and admitted her usual headaches were getting worse. The doctor patted her mother's hand and sent her home with orders to take some aspirin and lie down. It had not helped.

Sammy's mother was the type of woman who always had dinner on the table by 5:30 every night. Sammy's dad would come home from his job managing a downtown supermarket around five and read the paper for about a half hour. Then Sammy's mother would go get him, greeting him with a kiss on a cheek and say, "Dinner's ready, Earnie," and he always said, "Okay, thanks Ora, honey, I *am* hungry!" That was their little routine, and dinner was routine. Sammy's dad liked his meat and potatoes, and there was always bread on the table. Sammy wasn't sure if she would cook dinner for any man every night, even if he did say thank you.

A few nights after the doctor sent Sammy's mother home to lie down, the familiar dinner custom had fallen apart. They were all sitting down, passing food around the

table, getting ready to eat. Sammy could tell her mother had another crushing headache, the way she rubbed her temples between bites. Sammy was sure her father could see her mother's pain too, but he just didn't want to believe it was real. That evening, Sammy's mother forgot to put the bread out.

"Ora, honey, are we out of bread?" Sammy's father asked.

Sammy's mother said nothing. She brought her hand up to her face and covered her eyes.

"Ora?"

"For christsakes, Earnie, What!"

Sammy had rarely ever heard her parents snap at each other, and it had made her nervous.

"Nothing," Sammy's father said, "...I ...just wondered where the bread was that's all." Sammy had known even then that routine had been her father's comfort. She thought that he felt as long as he had that, maybe there was nothing that wrong with his wife. Sammy knew he didn't want to lose her.

"Jesus Christ, Earnie—my head hurts—can't you see that? Can't you get your own goddamn bread?" Sammy and her father sat silent and bewildered as her mother slapped her open palms against the table. "Don't worry," she shouted, "I'll get it!"

When she tried to stand up, she lost her balance and caught herself on the back of the chair. Sammy's father had gotten up from his chair and walked around the table quickly, panicked and wanting to help. She told him to leave her alone and pushed him away.

At that moment, Sammy remembered their family cat that had gotten sick from eating rat poison out of the neighbor's garage. When anyone in the family tried to comfort it, it scratched and hissed and cried out in pain. Shortly after that, it died.

"Ora, please," Sammy's father said, "let me help you." Sammy's mother had turned to him and collapsed in his arms sobbing. Sammy noticed that her nose was bleeding and ran out of the room to get some tissue.

Sammy checked herself in the mirror once more before going downstairs. There was a throbbing ache in her lower abdomen. She wasn't sure if it was nerves and hoped it wasn't cramps. She was glad that her mother had been there when she had gotten her first period over a year ago. She guessed she could talk to Lucy, but she was always so busy with her family, and how was she supposed to talk to her dad about a thing like that?

Her mother had tried to comfort her when cramps twisted her insides, even though she had felt too old to be coddled.

"Do you need anything?" Her mother asked as Sammy lay in bed curled up tight on her side, her quilt to her chin.

"No, I'm fine"

"7-up?"

"No."

“Hot water bottle?”

“No.”

“Hot tea?”

“Mom—“

“Okay, okay, Samantha.” Sammy rolled her eyes. She hated it when her mother called her that. “Do you want me to rub you back then? It always helped you feel better when you were little and not feeling well.”

“No, Mom, I’m fine. You can go.” She didn’t go; she had stayed with Sammy and sat on the bed rubbing her back until she fell asleep.

She opened the door to her bedroom and saw her father and sister at the bottom of the stairs, holding onto the banister. Her father looked worn out and old. Lucy appeared worried, but tried to smile. “That dress looks nice on you,” she said to Sammy.

“It’s hot.”

Sammy’s father cleared his throat, “Are you ready to go?”

“Just give me one more minute.”

He nodded and told her that would be waiting in the car. They have to go to the cemetery soon. She walked half way down the stairs and sat on the steps looking at the living room where a hospital bed had been set up for her mother these last few months. The bed had already been moved, but on the coffee table, a little silver bell sat, piercing a memory into Sammy’s mind.

Sammy had come to hate that bell. Her mother rang it several times a night, and Sammy’s father had come to wake her, telling her that her mother needed her.

“Why can’t you help her?” Sammy had pleaded with him, wanting to sleep through the night, exhausted from crying herself to sleep and wanting to be left alone to dream.

“She’s asking for you, Sammy. I don’t think she feels comfortable with me helping her use the bedpan. His eyes had been full of pity, but Sammy had not been sure if it was for her mother, or her.

During the last month of her life, Sammy’s mother had stopped talking. Cancer had devoured the part of her brain that allowed her to speak. She had been buried alive in her own body. She rang the bell and Sammy attended to her, trying to figure out what she wanted, what she needed. Sammy remembered her mother’s eyes, deep pools of sadness and humiliation. She had not been used to being taken care of.

Sammy should have sat with her more, looked in her eyes more and held her hand, but she had turned away--she had been tired. Her father had become distant, afraid of his wife’s condition, the small frail creature that she had become, and Sammy had been doing most of the care giving. She was resentful that she had to leave school at eleven o’clock everyday to come home and spoon-feed her mother, help her use the bedpan every night, and had to try to keep up with the housework. She had been angry that her mother could no longer speak to her, that she was no longer the one who was able to do the comforting. Sammy felt guilt crushing her for letting herself have these emotions, but she could not help it. It’s just that the summer had been going by so fast, and she had not been ready for it to end.

Sammy has heard people say that you never forget where you were you doing or what you did the day something tragic happens. It was like the day that President Kennedy died. She had been in her second grade reading class that day at the catholic elementary school. All of the nuns were weeping and crossing themselves, whispering to God. Sammy and the rest of the children were weeping right along with them. She wasn't sure if they had been crying out of grief or fear, or both, but she would never forget it. She knew that she would never forget the details of the day her mother died either.

Sammy's father had hired a nurse to help with her mother—Doris Jensen. Doris was an older woman who wore her hair up in a tight bun and smelled of lavender. At first, Sammy had been relieved to have her around and looked at her as a sort of surrogate grandmother that had come to help out. After awhile, however, Sammy had come to feel that Doris was bossy. Sammy had become sickened by the smell of lavender that fused itself to the medicinal pall that hung over her mother.

Doris was always trying to get Sammy to talk to her mother more, take her out to get some fresh air, anything to make more contact. "She knows what's going on, you know," Doris would say as she hovered over Sammy's mother, tucking in blankets and loose corners of the bed. "She *can* hear you."

Sammy had hated Doris for telling her what to do. "I do talk to her," Sammy said, "I have taken her for walks." And she had, but she always felt uncomfortable. She was embarrassed and had not seen herself as a normal kid, walking her sick mother around the block in a wheel chair. She didn't want to answer the questions that would

come later from those who witnessed their outings. "How is your mother? Is she doing okay? How is your dad holding up? How are you?" She didn't have the answers. She didn't know.

"Why don't you take her out for a walk this afternoon," Doris said, and then when you come back, I'll fix you and your dad a nice dinner. Your dad says you love spaghetti and meatballs. I have a special recipe for that."

"Why don't you stop telling me what to do," Sammy had snapped. "You're not my mother...I don't need you." Sammy looked at her mother, who could do little more than blink. She was fluttering her lids rapidly, trying to tell Sammy something. Sammy turned on her heel and walked out the door.

It had begun to rain and although it was warm, Sammy shuddered. She started to walk downtown. The sidewalks smelled bitter and metallic and she couldn't help but notice the cracks in the cement. She had imagined herself slipping through them, and decided to go to a movie to try and take her mind off things for a while.

She went to a matinee showing of the *Sterile Cuckoo*, a movie with Liza Minnelli. The movie was about a teenage love affair where the girl liked the boy more than he liked her. The Minnelli character was so lonely. Sammy felt bad for her and was disappointed when the movie didn't really have a happy ending, even though she saw it coming.

After the movie, Sammy walked home. Her hands were tense and sore. She had been clenching her fists lately, something she always did when she was stressed. When she opened the door to her house, Doris, her father, Lucy, Al and the twins were all there, waiting for her.

"Mom's gone," Lucy said. Sammy's father held out his arms, but Sammy had walked past them and up the stairs to her room, trying not to look at her mother's bed on the way up.

Cold sweat began to bead up on Sammy's breastbone. Her father came in from outside and told her that they really had to go now; everyone was waiting. Sammy sat on the front seat of the car, the place where her mother would have sat. Lucy sat with the twins in back, and Al drove in a separate car. Sammy turned and looked at Lucy who fussed over the twins, licked her thumb, and tried to clean off any smudges on their lively little faces. Sammy turned back around. They approached the cemetery just below the hill the fairgrounds rested upon. It was the cemetery where her mother would be buried. The twins were pointing and babbling at something up on the hill.

"Do you see the Ferris wheel, boys? Lucy asked.

"It must be the first day of the fair," Sammy said more to herself than anyone else.

She thought that later, she would call up some friends and invite them to go to the fair. Her mother said she could go. She would be carefree among the warmth and laughter, giggling and whispering secrets about boys that pass them by. She would stop and play the game where you win a gold fish and another where you win a mirror just by popping a balloon with a dart. The boy that works at that stand would tell her that he went on the road because his mother died. She

won't say that her mother died too, she would only say that she is sorry. She and her friends would get in line for the Ferris wheel, and when they were on it, and it stopped at the very top of the ride, she would take in the entire view of everything: old people, young people, parents, and children with cotton candy fingers and caramel apple smiles. She would see the cemetery where her mother is buried, the green of the grass, and trees that will be changing soon. The wheel would begin to turn again, and she would be ready.