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# The Ripple Effect

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*The Ripple Effect*

An Honors Thesis

Presented to

The Department of Film, Theater, and Communication Arts

Of the University of New Orleans

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts, with University Honors

And Honors in Film, Theater, and Communication Arts

by

Ashley J. Hunter

December 2011

### *Acknowledgements*

I would like to extend many thanks to the numerous professors who contributed to my education at the University of New Orleans. Specifically, the Film, Theater, and Communication Arts (FTCA) professors who were most influential during my early learning as a screenwriter include Steve Hank, Laszlo Fulop, Erik Hansen, Erik Reuter, and Hamp Overton. Each of them has contributed in ways that cannot be expressed.

The Honors Program at UNO has been a wonderful resource and motivation for this thesis. Specifically, Dr. Noriko Ito Krenn was always helpful and eager to assist in any way possible. Thanks goes to Dr. Edward Johnson, the director of the Honors program who helped me to get on my way; and to Dr. Carl Malmgren, the director of the Honors program who was a great help during the last part of my journey. My thesis advisor, Laszlo Fulop, performed above and beyond, serving as a major source of advice and focus. My second reader, Erik Hansen, also helped make this thesis possible.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge every person who has had a part in this particular work, whether by input during the creative process, feedback during the polishing period, or support throughout the entire project. These include Laurie & Jace Hunter, Pastor Michael Sprague (Trinity Evangelical Free Church), Mark Lewis (Director, TouchGlobal Crisis Response), Shelby Smoker, Amy Mullins, Alicia Stickles, Louise Autry, Beth Masters, and Benjamin Connell.

Above all, my friend and colleague Chris Smith was an invaluable voice of reason for me, helping me to stay focused, brainstorming with me, and walking alongside me in this journey as a fellow honors student working on a senior thesis. I am deeply indebted to him for his advice, feedback, ideas, and support throughout this project.

With this companion paper, I have three objectives:

- 1) To detail the research and creative processes I used to compose my thesis,
- 2) To explain how this project came to be and why I chose it, and
- 3) To show my influences and people who helped me find a voice.

### *Research and Creative Processes*

When I began this project, I knew that I did not want to merely write a research paper—I desired to produce something individual and creative, an honors thesis that would utilize my interests and education. With help from Dr. Carl Malmgren (UNO Honors Office), Dr. Noriko Krenn (UNO Honors Office), and Laszlo Fulop (Department of Film, Theater, and Communication Arts), I developed guidelines for a screenplay for a short film. I was given a length requirement – 25-40 pages – and I took the Spring 2011 semester to conduct research and begin constructing my project.

I was well-equipped with personal research work for my project's topic. When Hurricane Katrina made landfall in 2005, my family was residing in south Louisiana. I knew many people who lost every material possession they owned. In the two years following Katrina, my family spent multiple days assisting in the recovery efforts based out of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Covington, Louisiana. Since 2005, I personally have donated my time and labor for rebuilding efforts including demolition, construction, yard work, children's programs, mobile food services, team coordination, and job site supervision. In the period from September 2005 to November 2011, I estimate that I have donated over 400 man-hours to the recovery effort headquartered at my home church. My script is set in post-Katrina New Orleans and deals with non-profit volunteer groups; because of my personal, hands-on experience

with this setting, I had years of original experience that were supplying me with material for my project. Thus, many of the occurrences and people in the script are based on real events that I have seen or heard about firsthand.

My main character, “Steven Oakley,” is very loosely based on a close friend of mine who also experienced the life-changing power of the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. My friend is also from Pennsylvania; his family moved to New Orleans in 2006 to assist in the natural disaster recovery. He was a junior in high school at the time of his family’s move. They stayed in the New Orleans area until 2007, at which time my friend returned to rural Pennsylvania to finish his senior year. After he graduated from high school, he signed on to be a permanent laborer and job site supervisor, assisting in the recovery effort. He is currently serving as a team leader and construction supervisor.

Most of the other research that I performed for this project involved the use of the Hurricane Katrina Digital Memory Bank ([www.hurricanearchive.org](http://www.hurricanearchive.org)). During the Spring of 2011, I was enrolled in a class with Dr. Michael Mizell-Nelson at the University of New Orleans, who is very involved in the Bank’s founding and upkeep. He was helpful and provided me with the tools to utilize the Bank’s resources in order to better my own understanding of the post-Katrina setting.

### *Why this project?*

I wanted my project to reflect my personality, my interests, and what I have been concentrating on during my stay at UNO. The idea of writing a fictional screenplay was one of the first proposals I had, and it filled all of the requirements from the Honors office as well as my own objectives. Screenwriting is what I desire to do at some point in the near future, and I was happy to get the opportunity to write my own project with the support and insight from UNO’s experienced film faculty. Often when writing for a

class, a student is held to a set of guidelines and rules. With this project, I was able to compose a work that was largely independent of an instructor's creative control.

I chose to write about post-Katrina volunteer work because I perceive that it is a period of time that is not widely publicized, nor is it well-known outside of the New Orleans area. However, with my personal experiences among the volunteers that helped in the years after Hurricane Katrina, I feel that this is a major story that should be told. It is a story of hope and renewal, of new beginnings growing out of bad endings, and of the American spirit coming back after a crushing blow. The volunteers who came in the years following the storm have all seen the rebirth of New Orleans firsthand; they know what the miracle looks like and what it did to their lives. Thousands of people who came to serve did not expect to leave with a completely new perspective on their lives; many moved to the city permanently.

In particular, nonprofit organizations such as churches were extremely influential in this work. The Evangelical Free Church of America formed an international ministry after Hurricane Katrina ([www.efca.org](http://www.efca.org)). In the months immediately following the storm, Trinity Evangelical Free Church (Covington, LA) served as the Northshore headquarters for Compassion, becoming one of the largest nonprofit crisis response centers in St. Tammany Parish. Their work in the region served as inspiration for me as well as a source of empirical research. Countless families were supported and helped back on their feet by the work done by volunteers.

The character of Steven Oakley has always been my choice for the main character of *The Ripple Effect* because he offered many opportunities for character development. He is at an age where he has to make some decisions that will shape his character for the rest of his life. This time for him is fundamental to his later years—it will determine what kind of person he is. The volunteer trip to New Orleans is a time of personal growth for him; he begins to see that he is not the center of the universe, that there are bigger things going on than his own life. He offered me with the opportunity to take a self-centered, short-sighted character, give him a learning experience unlike anything he has ever

experienced, and release him back to his world as a more adjusted and balanced character. He begins the story as an unstable, volatile adolescent boy, but he finishes as a more focused, humbled young man.

Louis is based on many children with whom I have come into contact over the years. He represents the orphaned children who are left after a natural disaster, the ones who carry a painful past around and face a bleak future. Louis also personifies potential in the wake of a crisis—he is talented and strong-willed. He is dealing with his grief, but he does not let it steal his hope for a future. By the end of the screenplay, Louis is moving forward into a brighter day, part of the rebounding remnant of crisis survivors.

#### *Influences on my work*

My writing style is a conglomeration of several different influences to which I have been exposed over the past few years. The instructors at UNO who helped me learn and refine the screenwriting skill have all contributed to the style which is now my own. I am grateful to each of them for the time and advice that they have given me; each of them had a definite and individual impact on my screenwriting. I also have been fortunate enough to get my hands on some wonderful books and resources while learning my craft. These include *Story*, by Robert McKee; *Making Movies*, by Sidney Lumet; *Writing Movies*, by Gotham Writer's Workshop; *Writing the Screenplay: TV and Film*, by Alan A. Armer; and *The Short Screenplay*, by Dan Gurskis. These books have been extremely helpful in clarifying and outlining the structure of screenwriting.

On this particular project, my main influences came from my empirical research. The characterization of the two boys, the progression of Steven's time as a volunteer, and the use of sports as a parallel to Steven's life all came from personal experiences. The character of Terrence is loosely

based on a team leader under whom I served a long time ago. I do not remember the leader's name, but I do remember his nearly-obnoxious optimism and energy.

### *Conclusion*

As an honors student at UNO since 2008, I have had the opportunity to learn under experienced and well-versed teachers who have challenged me to think more deeply and to produce better work. My honors work has been motivated by teachers such as Harmon Greenblatt (Director, Arts Administration); Dr. Michael Mizell-Nelson (History); Dr. Madelene Powers (Former Chair, History); Dr. Nikki Brown (History); Erik Hansen (FTCA); Steve Hank (Formerly of FTCA); and Dr. Lisa Verner (English). Each of them have been very helpful in agreeing to take on extra work from me, and they have all given me useful feedback that I can take forward into my post-graduate life.

*The Ripple Effect*

Written by Ashley J. Hunter

**Summary:**

In 2006, Steven Oakley, an eighteen-year-old high school senior from Pennsylvania, is bribed by his father to go on a volunteer trip to hurricane-ravaged New Orleans, Louisiana. During his time, he meets a broken family whose experiences change Steven's perspective on his own privileged life.

**Audience:**

The audience for this screenplay is comprised of people who are interested in the post-Hurricane Katrina situation in New Orleans. If made into a short film (around 26-30 minutes), the work would reach people in the community who experienced the help of volunteers similar to Steven, people who served on volunteer teams and left changed, and people who never got to experience the devastation of Katrina firsthand.

Keyword 1: Screenplay

Keyword 2: Script

Keyword 3: Hurricane Katrina

Keyword 4: Volunteer work

Keyword 5: Based on real events

The Ripple Effect

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Senior Honors Thesis 2011  
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EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

FADE IN

It is a normal school day at Ripple Creek High School.

Hundreds of teenagers swarm around the halls and courtyards, sitting at picnic tables, lounging under the painted trees, enjoying the beautiful fall weather in rural Pennsylvania. New clothing styles are showcased by cheerleaders of both genders. The air is filled with noises of teenagers socializing.

INT. MISS GRADY'S OFFICE - DAY

The sunlight pours in through the open windows in the office, bringing with it the sounds of the teenagers outside.

MISS GRADY, 50s, the school principal, sits behind her desk. A portly, gentle lady, she looks like she just stepped right out of 1975. She wears an ill-fitting dress with neon florals and big hair with a pencil stuck right into it.

She takes off her black horn-rimmed glasses and sighs.

MISS GRADY

Mr. Oakley, this is something that I cannot take lightly. As the principal of this school, I must address the issue at hand.

In a very ugly yellow chair sits STEVEN OAKLEY, 18, one of the most popular seniors in the class of 2006. His blond hair, ordinarily a perfectly maintained swish, has taken on the personality of a shredded wicker chair. His usual cocky grin has been replaced by a face filled with chagrin and confusion.

MISS GRADY (CONT'D)

Well? Is there an explanation?

A moment of silence passes. Steven looks whipped.

Miss Grady sighs again and replaces her glasses.

STEVEN

What makes you think this was me?

MISS GRADY

Mr. Oakley, the accounts and details of the incident all point

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MISS GRADY (cont'd)  
to you as the perpetrator...You  
must understand that I cannot  
ignore the evidence.

Steven shrugs.

STEVEN  
Isn't evidence only partially valid  
when it's word-of-mouth? This  
is...uh, defamation of character,  
slander, whatever you wanna call  
it.

MISS GRADY  
You are a senior in high school, an  
honors student, and a star baseball  
player. I just cannot understand  
how you could behave like this. A  
fist-fight in the gym with the  
captain of the basketball team is  
hardly becoming for a student of  
your stature.

Miss Grady pulls out the pencil from her hair and  
accidentally drops it on the floor behind her desk. She  
leans down to pick it up, temporarily out of sight from  
Steven.

For a split second, his face changes to one of impish  
mischief. Has he been pretending the entire time?

Miss Grady sits upright and opens a folder on her desk,  
Steven's name on the top of it. She starts writing on one of  
the papers inside.

STEVEN  
Well...I think I've been framed.  
I'd like to know how I'm implicated  
in this if I was also...helping  
out...at...the...car wash...

MISS GRADY  
After a thunderstorm and power  
outage that morning?

Miss Grady sighs, picks up the paper on which she was  
writing. As she closes the folder and sets her folded hands  
on it, she continues speaking.

MISS GRADY (CONT'D)  
Mr. Oakley, I will determine the  
appropriate punishment, which you  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MISS GRADY (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
will perform when we return from  
fall break.

Steven rolls his eyes.

MISS GRADY (CONT'D)  
You are dismissed.

STEVEN  
But--

MISS GRADY  
Dismissed.

Steven picks up his backpack and slams the door behind him.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

In the hallway, Steven stops for a second...grins, flips his hair sideways, and saunters down the hall, shoving an acne-faced freshman out of his way.

On one of the walls is a friendly poster that yells in big blue letters, "HOME RUN DERBY! Benefiting the Lakewood Children's Hospital. October 21, 2006." Steven rolls his eyes, and flips his hair.

INT. OAKLEY HOUSE - DAY

MR. OAKLEY, 40s, is seated in the expansive den area, watching a college football game on the large-screen television. He is holding an elegant crystal glass containing dark red wine.

The front door slams.

STEVEN (O.S.)  
I'm home.

Mr. Oakley does not budge.

Steven strides into the den and flings his sturdy frame onto the leather couch.

ANNOUNCER (T.V.)  
Well, I'll tell ya, Fred, this is the most intense game we've seen all season. The Sharks' strong offensive line has been in control the entire game. The Pirates really need to rethink their strategy.

(CONTINUED)

Steven looks up at his father, who is fixated on the television. Steven pulls out his cell phone when it rings with a text message alert.

STEVEN

Where's Mom?

MR. OAKLEY

She's in the kitchen. Stir fry for dinner.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The two teams are setting up. The Sharks have the ball on the Pirates' 40.

Mr. Oakley takes a drink.

MR. OAKLEY

You started your fall break today.

Steven is still texting.

STEVEN

Thank you, Captain Obvious.

MR. OAKLEY

What are you going to do?

STEVEN

I dunno. Play ball with the guys, probably.

MR. OAKLEY

Serving detention for the stunt you pulled last week?

Steven acts surprised. Mr. Oakley takes another sip.

MR. OAKLEY (CONT'D)

Principal Grady called me this afternoon.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Sharks are asserting their dominance in the offensive arena. No impressive show by the Pirates, but it looks like they're trying a new tactic.

STEVEN

First, the basketball captain is a moron. Second, she said she'd make

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

STEVEN (cont'd)  
me do something when fall break is  
over...By the way, I need money for  
my car that you won't buy me.

MR. OAKLEY  
How do you expect to save for your  
car if you don't work?

STEVEN  
Look, Dad, that old clunker of a  
Beamer is just not good enough for  
someone like me.

His father is nonresponsive. Steven sighs and looks at his  
phone.

INSERT - The wallpaper on his phone is a bright blue Porsche  
Roadster, zipping through a curvy mountain road.

STEVEN (CONT'D)  
I've been saving for a year.  
Driving Beamers seems to be good  
enough for some people, but not me.

MR. OAKLEY  
Does that make me "some people?"  
Because I drive one, and I'm  
completely fine with it.

STEVEN  
I'm not you, Dad.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)  
The Sharks punt away to the  
Pirates...

STEVEN  
You've never given me what I want.

Mr. Oakley snickers.

MR. OAKLEY  
You know, there are bigger things  
in life than a Porsche.

STEVEN  
Whatever. We're not poor, Dad. I  
want that car, and I know you can  
afford it.

(CONTINUED)

MR. OAKLEY

You've never really worked a day in your life.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Pirates' quarterback drops back in the pocket--

STEVEN

So? I wouldn't have to, if you would only give me what any parent should give their son...a nice, practical car--

MR. OAKLEY

Your mother and I have determined what you will be doing over your fall break.

Steven looks at his father, who is still looking at the television.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Fumble! The Pirates' quarterback fumbles! Turnover, the Sharks are running the ball back--

MR. OAKLEY

We have arranged for you to go to New Orleans to do volunteer work with a group from our church.

STEVEN

What?! No! I won't!

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Sharks are stopped at the Pirates' 35. A quick huddle--

MR. OAKLEY

You're not doing anything else worthwhile...Just for the sake of argument, let's say you go on this trip and you work hard...

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Pirates line up, but they look shaky--

MR. OAKLEY

Your mother and I are prepared to offer you compensation.

A few seconds go by. Steven shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

STEVEN

Wait, wait, wait. You mean...you're paying me to go on a volunteer trip?

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Sharks' quarterback throws an interception! Power is back on the Pirates' side! The ball is stopped at the 50 yard line.

Mr. Oakley takes another drink out of his glass.

MR. OAKLEY

We are paying you for your work. If you work hard, it'll be worth your time.

Steven's eyes widen.

MR. OAKLEY (CONT'D)

We'll pay for the car.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Pirates hike the ball--the quarterback drops back and fires off--

Steven's eyes nearly pop out of his head.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Another interception! Unbelievable! It's caught at the ten-yard line by Sharks' running back Trey Johnson. He makes a touchdown!

Mr. Oakley breaks his concentration on the television. He takes a long look at his son.

MR. OAKLEY

We have a deal?

Steven thinks for a second, then nods his head.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

The Sharks take back the lead after losing the momentum for the first time this game. It might be a new ball game from here on out, Fred...

EXT. BUS - DAY

MONTAGE OF LANDSCAPES

The charter bus drives along landscapes, which gradually change from rolling Pennsylvania fields to long stretches of pine forests.

INT. BUS - DAY

MONTAGE OF TEENAGERS IN THE CHARTER BUS

There are about thirty teenagers on the bus, together with four adult chaperones.

Steven tries to sleep in his window seat with his iPod headphones in his ears, but he keeps getting disturbed by the other boys on the bus. They bump into him and are really loud; one of the paper airplanes they are tossing around falls on Steven's face. He crumples it grumpily.

One of the other teenagers bumps Steven's backpack. Steven's brown and very expensive-looking baseball glove falls out of the pack.

Steven immediately picks up his glove protectively. He glares at the teenager, who murmurs an apology and scuffles off.

Steven relaxes, and taps the glass of the window with his glove. He looks bored.

The teenagers are playing a guitar, card games, iPods, and joking around.

Steven pulls his blanket over his head.

EXT. NEW LIFE BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY

It is early morning. The bus pulls into the parking lot, and TERRENCE, 40s, jumps on the bus.

INT. BUS - DAY

Terrence greets the bus driver and the group chaperones, and turns to the teens.

TERRENCE

Well, kids, congratulations! You've made it to the Big Easy!

A cheer erupts from all of the teens except Steven, who grudgingly pulls his headphones out of his ears.

EXT. - BUS - DAY

The bus begins moving towards the low-profile skyline of New Orleans.

TERRENCE (O.S.)

Alright guys, my name is Terrence  
and I'll be your team leader all  
week.

INT. BUS - DAY

TERRENCE

I've been doing this for a while,  
and since I'm not getting paid, no,  
I can't quit.

The kids laugh, and Terrence smiles knowingly.

EXT. BUS - DAY

The bus takes some small roads, leading to some beaten-down neighborhoods.

INT. BUS - DAY

TERRENCE

You might have seen the news, you  
might know a little bit about what  
happened here over a year ago. New  
Orleans was hit with one of the  
worst natural disasters in her  
history.

The kids watch the landscape outside morph out of well-maintained urban homes into neighborhoods stricken by desolation and destruction.

TERRENCE

A lot of the houses destroyed were  
ruined by the flood waters that  
were let in by the broken levees.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The bus passes by a group of children playing with a dirty, mangy dog on the street corner.

TERRENCE (O.S.)  
 Everybody in this area has a story.  
 If you want to know the real truth,  
 just sit and let somebody talk.

A few feet later, a tired old man sits on a porch step of a house. He watches the bus drive by.

TERRENCE (O.S.)  
 They'll tell you about their  
 experience. A lot of them just want  
 someone to listen.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

The bus stops in front of a tiny yellow house.

TERRENCE (O.S.)  
 This lady we're going to help this  
 week is that way. I need about ten  
 of y'all here, the rest of y'all  
 are going to another work location.

Terrence hops off the bus. The teenagers follow him and line up on the sidewalk. Steven is the last one off the bus.

TERRENCE  
 Miss Pearl lost her daughter and  
 grandson in the flood waters. By  
 the grace of God, she and her other  
 grandson Louis survived.

Steven looks around, uninterested.

MONTAGE OF DESTRUCTION

The dark brown water line is clearly visible nine feet above the ground.

The front screen door hangs halfway off the hinges.

Piles of muddy trash cover the front yard.

The concrete front steps are crumbled and unusable.

An old porcelain garden gnome grins from under his coat of slime.

(CONTINUED)

A bright red spray-painted "X" with numbers surrounding it is displayed prominently on the front wall of the house.

There's a white FEMA trailer parked on the overgrown driveway.

END OF MONTAGE

As Steven takes all of the information in, he gradually loses his arrogant facial expression.

TERRENCE

We're going to help her by cleaning up her yard first, then we can pull all the stuff out of her house. A little bit of demolition may be involved.

Terrence winks at the kids.

TERRENCE

I know you boys like that stuff. I know, because I'm a boy and I like that stuff.

Terrence leads the way for the group. Steven keeps his distance.

As they approach the broken chain link fence, PEARL, 85, appears around the side of the FEMA trailer. A bent-over African-American woman, she wears a faded one-piece dress and sports a pair of thick glasses that comically distort her eyes.

She smiles and shuffles towards the group, carefully picking her way around the wreckage. She speaks with a thick New Orleans accent.

PEARL

Lord, bless my soul, it's Terrence!  
You's a blessing for these ol' eyes.

Terrence smiles that same easy, welcoming smile that he seems to give everyone.

TERRENCE

Hi, Miss Pearl. I brought some help this time.

Pearl takes in the kids with a wide, sweeping gaze. Her mouth gradually falls open in awe.

(CONTINUED)

PEARL

Bless my soul! All these children  
here to work on an ol' lady's  
house? Lord bless y'all!

Terrence addresses the group, using wide sweeping gestures.  
He is annoyingly energetic.

TERRENCE

Alright, y'all, let's get sweatin'!  
We're gonna be clearing out the  
yard today, cleaning it up, getting  
rid of the trash. Let's get to it!

EXT. PEARL'S BACKYARD - DAY

The teens spread out around the yard and begin picking up  
muddy, slimy debris.

Steven picks up a large broken tree branch and takes it to  
the debris pile on the street curb.

Standing next to the debris pile is LOUIS, 8, an African  
American boy with arms crossed and an angry expression on  
his face. He is wearing a beaten backpack and a faded  
baseball cap, backwards.

Steven drops the tree branch on the pile. Louis never breaks  
his gaze. Steven looks around, then turns away.

Again and again this same thing happens: Steven carries a  
piece of debris to the trash pile, and Louis glares at him.  
Neither one of them says a word.

LATER -- The group breaks for lunch.

Steven sits separate from the other teenagers. He takes a  
long drink out of his water bottle and sees Louis sitting a  
few feet away.

The young boy still has a suspicious look on his face, but  
his arms are not crossed.

STEVEN

What do you want?

Louis doesn't respond.

STEVEN

You're creeping me out.

(CONTINUED)

Louis holds his icy glare. Steven finishes his sandwich and balls up the plastic bag. As he puts the bag in his pocket, he notices Louis has an old, ragged baseball glove on his left hand.

He meets Louis' eyes again.

STEVEN  
You play baseball?

For the first time, Louis lessens his glare. He nods slightly.

STEVEN  
I'm a baseball player at home. The best, actually. What do you play?

Louis says nothing; Steven clears his throat and stands up.

LOUIS  
Don't play no more.

Louis looks down at his dirty shoes. A long moment passes.

TERRENCE (O.S.)  
Okay, guys, let's get movin' again!

Rolling his eyes, Steven resumes clearing tree branches from the yard.

MONTAGE OF WORKING SCENES

Dead trees are cut down and hauled out of the yard.

Leaves and trash are raked up and put into trash bags.

A few of the girls use scrub-brushes and buckets to tackle the stubborn mildew on the side of the house.

The pile of trash on Miss Pearl's front curb grows until it is almost waist-high.

INT. PEARL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

TERRENCE (O.S.)  
Okay, kids...you six, go tackle the bedroom. The rest of ya, the kitchen.

Steven walks into the living room alone, surrounded by knee-deep piles of waterlogged belongings.

(CONTINUED)

Sounds emanate from the door behind him from the boys in the kitchen, down the hall.

BOY # 1 (O.S.)  
EEEWWW!!!

BOY #2 (O.S.)  
I dare you to touch it!

BOY # 1 (O.S.)  
It smells!

Steven is still taking in the destruction, a grossed-out look on his face.

STEVEN  
Wow, this is nasty.

A clear brown line on all four walls shows where the water was deepest. Steven sees that the line is at his shoulders. His disgusted expression changes as he looks around the room.

The room is typical of a flooded home: books lay in inch-deep mud, the couch is disgustingly filthy, the furniture is shuffled around, and the floor is coated with silt and grime.

Closing his eyes, he can hear the sounds of rushing wind and water.

A book slides off of a chair and hits the ground.

Steven looks over and realizes that he is not alone--Louis stands at the opposite wall. From the ribcage down, Louis is blocked from Steven's sight by a mountain ridge of furniture and ruined books.

STEVEN  
You gonna stand there all day, or  
you wanna help me?

Louis doesn't respond as Steven pulls on his work gloves and face mask. He flips open a black trash bag and starts to pick up the worthless belongings in the room.

For a few moments, Steven is involved in his work. He hears something skittering around on the ground, and looks down just in time to see movement under one of the overturned wicker baskets on the floor.

He cautiously bends down and taps on the basket with his finger; tiny scratching sounds occur for a few seconds and then calm down.

(CONTINUED)

Steven looks up at Louis, who has not moved from his place against the wall.

Steven takes a deep breath...puts his fingers under the basket's edge...slowly picks it up...

From underneath the wicker basket, a stampede of gigantic brown roaches explodes.

Steven jumps back and hollers loudly, startled.

STEVEN

AHH!! What the--

The bugs pour forth, frantically sprinting for any available shelter.

Steven's first instinct is to step on them; the hideous creatures hiss in protest, which only makes Steven yell louder.

STEVEN

Nasty! -- Eew! -- Gross! -- Don't hiss at me! I don't-- What--

From the corner, Louis starts to smirk, then giggle. Soon, a full-throated laugh comes pouring forth from the boy.

When the battle ends, the critters gone into the dark sanctuary of new piles of debris, Steven glares at Louis.

STEVEN

I bet you think that was pretty funny, huh?

Louis still laughs.

Steven starts to attack the pile of trash again, muttering to himself angrily.

STEVEN

I never wanted to come on this stupid trip...I hope you're proud of me now, Dad, look at what I've...awww, what the heck is--

A lone roach sprints out from under the pile of trash, but it is not quick enough to escape Steven's shoe.

Steven looks over at Louis again. The boy is still smirking.

(CONTINUED)

STEVEN

Keep laughing, moron.

Instead of answering, Louis sits down behind the couch. Steven exhales loudly, exasperated.

STEVEN

Look, I'm...sorry, ok?

No response from behind the couch. Steven rolls his eyes and continues cleaning.

Louis slowly steps out from his hiding place. He watches Steven clean for a bit.

Steven picks up an armful of old books and newspapers. He walks over to the trash bag, but he is having a tough time keeping the bag open wide enough while still holding the armful of trash.

Then, the bag is being held open. Steven looks up. Louis is holding the bag with both hands. Steven looks at him for a moment.

STEVEN

Thanks alot.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

It is the end of the day; the sky is orange with sunset. The teenagers are loading up into the bus.

The last two out of the house are Steven and Louis. They are each bringing a large trash bag to add to the growing mountain of debris on the street curb.

Louis is so little that his trash bag is dragging on the ground, but he is valiantly trying to keep up with Steven.

Miss Pearl watches from her front steps as Steven takes the bag from Louis and tosses it onto the shoulder-high pile.

Steven brushes off his gloves and his pants, then looks over at Louis.

Louis is staring at the ground again. A moment passes, and Steven's face softens.

Steven reaches out his hand to Louis.

(CONTINUED)

STEVEN  
See ya tomorrow?

Louis looks up at Steven. Slowly, unsure, he gives Steven a big-boy handshake.

STEVEN  
Maybe I'll bring my glove  
tomorrow...we might play some  
catch.

Louis nods quickly, and then runs towards the house.

Steven exhales loudly, rolls his eyes, and walks towards the bus, wiping his face with his shirt.

INT. PEARL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Steven and Louis have almost got the entire room cleared of debris. Now, they are down to the large furniture.

The sounds of the other teenagers clearing out the kitchen ring down the hallway.

LOUIS  
You think we can play catch?

STEVEN  
Let's finish up this big stuff  
first.

The boys haul out a few chairs and the coffee table through the front door. Louis, little as he is, is incredibly strong.

A few of the other teenage boys come in momentarily to help with the heavy lifting. A particularly stubborn cabinet is wrestled out of the room.

Steven and Louis sit down on the floor for a breather. The other boys are yelling outside, probably throwing sticks at each other.

LOUIS  
Can we play?

Steven thinks, then pulls off his work gloves.

STEVEN  
Got a glove?

Louis glances at his old tattered glove, laying on the windowsill. He looks down at his hands.

(CONTINUED)

LOUIS

No.

A tense moment passes. Steven flips his hair, though not so arrogantly as before.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Well...I brought my glove.

Louis looks up at him.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

It's my best one. I played in the state tournament with it last year.

LOUIS

Really?

STEVEN

Yeah. Third baseman.

LOUIS

I'm outfield.

Steven grins.

STEVEN

That means you've got a good arm.

LOUIS

That's what my brother--

He abruptly stops and looks at his hands.

Steven watches him. He looks down at his hands, then over at Louis' tattered glove. After a moment, Steven sighs.

STEVEN

If you promise to be careful with it...I guess...you can borrow my glove.

Louis' face instantly lights up.

EXT. PEARL'S BACKYARD - DAY

In the newly cleared-out backyard, Steven drops his backpack. He pulls out his oiled brown leather glove and slowly hands it to Louis.

Louis turns it over reverently a few times before trying it on. It is far too big for him, but he does not seem to care.

(CONTINUED)

Steven grabs a clean white baseball from his backpack and trots over to the end of the small yard.

Louis readies himself to catch the ball.

STEVEN  
How long have you played?

Louis catches Steven's throw.

LOUIS  
Forever.

STEVEN  
That's a long time.

The boy releases a throw to Steven, who catches it with his bare hand.

LOUIS  
There used to be a baseball field  
down the street.

STEVEN  
Oh yeah? What happened to it?

He tosses the ball back to Louis, who catches it effortlessly.

LOUIS  
Same thing happened to everything  
else.

He lets another easy, underhanded throw loose. Steven catches it easily.

They toss a few more throws back and forth without talking.

Louis catches a pop fly from Steven.

LOUIS (CONT'D)  
Why you here, Steven?

STEVEN  
Huh?

Louis tosses the ball to Steven.

LOUIS  
Why'd you come?

Steven thinks for a second, tossing the ball from hand to hand. Then he throws another pop fly to Louis.

(CONTINUED)

STEVEN

Uh, I had nothing better to do.

LOUIS

What, you don't want to?

STEVEN

Not really. I told my dad I didn't want to, but he...convinced me.

Louis laughs.

LOUIS

If I ever backtalked my brother,  
I'd get a whipping.

He imitates a stern father figure.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

He'd say, 'Boy, you do what I tell  
you, 'cause I'm your big brother  
and I say so.'

STEVEN

Don't you ever argue with him?

Louis throws the ball to Steven.

LOUIS

Nope. Never did.

STEVEN

Where's he now?

Louis catches the throw from Steven, then throws a hard,  
straight ball right at Steven.

Steven catches the heat with his bare hand.

STEVEN

Ouch. Wow, you really have a good  
arm.

Louis smiles, and catches a pop fly from Steven.

MISS PEARL (O.S.)

LOUIS! Louis, come here, child!

Louis tosses Steven's glove to him. Louis wipes his face  
with his T-shirt, then jogs around the side of the house.

Steven slaps his baseball glove with his other hand and  
walks into the house.

INT. PEARL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Steven takes a swig out of a water bottle. He looks over at the last pile of debris in the room--a couch that blocks off the corner where Louis had been standing the day before.

When Steven pulls the couch away from the wall, he finds a pile of relatively clean junk, set apart from the rest. He starts to pick it up carefully.

An old, faded baseball cap with a barely-readable Cubs logo on the front. A battered and hole-filled baseball glove. At one time it was black. A page of laminated baseball cards. At the bottom of the pile is a stained, ripped-up shoebox.

Steven looks back at the door; nobody is there. He sits with his back to the wall, picks up the box and opens it.

INSERT -- On the top is an old picture. It is yellow around the edges and water-stained. A BLACK TEENAGER with a Cubs baseball cap on, standing behind a young boy with his hands on the boy's shoulders. The boy's pant knees are dirty, and he holds a too-big baseball glove in both hands. They are both smiling widely.

Steven turns it over, reading the handwritten caption on the back.

STEVEN

Randall and Louis, City Park, July  
fourth, two-thousand-and-four.

He sets the picture aside and looks at the next item in the box.

INSERT -- a stack of handwritten letters, all beginning with "Happy Birthday, Louis!" They are dated on September 21 in successive years, beginning in 1998.

The next item in the box is an obituary without a picture. The title reads, "Randall Damien LaFouche, 19."

Steven reads it out loud.

STEVEN

"On September twenty-first,  
two-thousand-and-five, Randall  
Damien LaFouche entered eternal  
rest at the age of nineteen. He was  
the devoted older brother of Louis  
Damien LaFouche, and beloved  
grandson of Pearl Ivy LaFouche."

Steven looks down into the box at the very last item.

(CONTINUED)

INSERT -- Carefully pulling it out, he reads the headline on the tattered and yellow newspaper article.

STEVEN

"Deadly School Shooting...Police have identified Randall LaFouche, nineteen, as the sole victim of a deadly shoot-out in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans on September twenty-first."

INSERT -- In the middle of the article, a picture of the school with an insert photo of a young black man.

Steven looks at the picture of the man, and then he picks up the picture of the man and boy.

INSERT -- Back and forth between the article's picture and the photograph.

Steven realizes that the dead man is one and the same.

STEVEN

(whispering)

Oh, man...

LOUIS

What are you doing?

Steven looks up, startled. Louis is standing in the door of the room, his fists clenched.

Steven starts to pick up the papers and return them to the box.

STEVEN

I...uh...

LOUIS

What are you doing?!

Steven scrambles to his feet, holding the box, mitt, page of baseball cards, and cap.

STEVEN

I thought that I--

LOUIS

Not your business!

STEVEN

I--

(CONTINUED)

LOUIS

You don't care nothing! You're a selfish, rich white boy! YAAAHHH!

Louis screams at Steven. He reaches out and snatches the box from Steven. Turning to flee down the hall, he drops the baseball glove at the door.

Steven watches his retreat. The kitchen door slams, and a heavy silence settles. The teenagers in the kitchen stop talking.

Steven's gaze falls to the glove on the floor. It looks incredibly pitiful, with frayed stitching and loose webbing.

Closing his eyes, the anger builds on his face. He suddenly punches a hole into the wall nearest to him. A second passes. His breathing quickens.

He starts kicking and punching the walls. The moldy drywall falls easily under his wrath. Pent-up frustration is unleashed on the helpless wall.

MONTAGE OF FLASHBACKS

He sees himself trying to get his father's attention, but Mr. Oakley is ignoring him in order to watch a football game...

A piece of drywall falls to the floor.

...beating up a terrified freshman while his friends watch and laugh...

A well-placed kick to the wall.

...a fist fight with the basketball captain...

Punching a crater into the wall.

...a blue Porsche with Steven at the wheel...

Drywall falls again.

...roaches pouring out of a basket, hissing...

Moldy dust on the floor.

...Miss Grady shaking her head disapprovingly...

Steven slips on the pile of drywall dust on the floor and grabs one of the now-exposed studs to catch himself. For a few seconds he tries to catch his breath.

(CONTINUED)

Someone in the doorway coughs. He looks up to see several teenagers from his group standing in the doorway, staring at him with wide eyes.

Through the group comes Terrence, pushing his way into the room. He looks around for a second, and then turns around to the group of teens with his typical optimism.

TERRENCE

Alright, guys. Looks like we're tearing down drywall.

The teens let out a whoop and start punching the walls. Terrence crosses the room to stand near Steven, who is still breathing hard.

TERRENCE (CONT'D)

You okay?

Steven wipes off his face with his shirt sleeve and shrugs. Terrence looks down at Steven's bloody knuckles.

TERRENCE (CONT'D)

Take a breather for a second.

Steven picks up the frayed baseball mitt from the floor. He goes out of the front door and slams it behind him.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

Steven sits on the front steps of the house, holding the baseball glove in one hand. He wipes his face off again with his shirt and takes a deep breath.

In the window of the FEMA trailer, Miss Pearl looks out and sees Steven. A few moments later, she emerges with two glasses of lemonade.

MISS PEARL

You alright, boy?

When Steven does not answer, Miss Pearl shuffles over and sits down next to him, offering him a glass of lemonade. He takes it but does not drink at first.

For a moment, they just sit on the steps, surveying the pile of trash on the street curb. Miss Pearl looks at the glove in Steven's hand, and sighs deeply.

MISS PEARL (CONT'D)

Before the storm hit, my daughter and her boys came to stay with me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MISS PEARL (CONT'D) (cont'd)  
They was worried I wouldn't be able  
to take care of myself.

Steven looks at the glove. It is dirty and frayed. Steven is turning it over in his hand.

MISS PEARL  
Leann was taken in the flood. Louis  
and Randall and me, we stayed on  
the roof for days before a  
helicopter got us.

She wipes a tear from her eye.

MISS PEARL  
Randall never recovered from it. He  
never was the same.

She smiles wistfully.

MISS PEARL  
Louis ain't been the same since  
Randall was taken.

Steven looks at his bloody hands.

MISS PEARL  
He and Louis, they was two peas in  
a pod, those two.

Steven finally looks at her. Her eyes glisten with tears as she smiles at him.

MISS PEARL  
Stuff happens, and we just gotta  
get back up and keep going.

She sighs.

MISS PEARL  
There's hope for everyone. Hope  
turns into love, and love fills us  
up in a way nothing else can.

Miss Pearl chuckles.

MISS PEARL  
There is someone who knows you  
better than you know yourself.

Steven looks up.

Miss Pearl lays her hand on Steven's shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

MISS PEARL

Knowing him--that's hope. That's  
really living.

He looks at her, and she smiles through her tears.

STEVEN

I guess I'll have to find out for  
myself.

He stands up, turns away and heads toward the corner of the house.

INT. PEARL'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The group of teenagers leaves through the front door. Steven sweeps the broom one last time over the floor, then surveys the room.

The piles of trash and furniture are gone. The stained wood floor is glaringly obvious. The moldy drywall is stripped from the walls.

Terrence and Miss Pearl enter the room from the hallway. Miss Pearl gasps and holds her hand over her mouth.

MISS PEARL

Oh! Lord bless my soul!

Terrence wraps his arm around her shoulders as she starts to cry.

TERRENCE

We've done all we can. It's at  
least getting you back on your  
feet.

MISS PEARL

Lord knows what's gonna happen  
next, but...I got a feeling he's  
not done with me yet.

She looks over at Steven and smiles.

MISS PEARL (CONT'D)

But I got hope. Whatever happens  
with my house, I got hope.

Steven, across the room, leans the broom against the corner and turns to leave.

(CONTINUED)

MISS PEARL

Hold on, boy.

He is suddenly grabbed by his face and kissed on his cheek. Miss Pearl draws him close in a full, grandmotherly hug. For a second, he resists--then he hugs her back.

MISS PEARL

Thank you.

Miss Pearl pulls back, smiles, and pats him on the cheek.

EXT. PEARL'S HOUSE - DAY

Steven walks out of the front door and looks around. The teenagers are filing onto the bus. The adult chaperones are counting them as they step in.

Steven hears a THUMP from the side of the house. A few seconds later, it happens again. He hops off the side of the steps and looks around the side of the house.

Louis is there, tossing a baseball up against the house and catching it. When he sees Steven, he stops.

Steven puts his hands in his pockets. Louis does not move. Behind Steven, Terrence looks around the side of the house.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

I have something for you.

He reaches into his back pocket and pulls out his prized baseball glove. He takes a deep breath, and then holds it out to the boy.

Louis hesitates, unsure. He looks back at Steven, who is still holding out the glove. Slowly, he takes it from Steven.

Steven holds out his hand to Louis, waiting for a handshake. Finally, Louis reaches out and takes Steven's hand. Steven grins.

Steven turns away and joins Terrence. They walk across the yard to the bus. Louis follows them as far as the front steps, where he joins Miss Pearl.

INT. BUS - DAY

Steven sits down and looks out of the window.

STEVEN'S POV - As the bus pulls away, Miss Pearl and Louis wave and smile. Louis is wearing his new glove. The tiny house is almost obscured from the street by the huge pile of debris.

Steven smiles and waves back.

LATER -- In the distance, the New Orleans skyline rises.

Steven looks out of the window, then pulls out a baseball from his backpack. He looks at it for a second, tossing the ball up in the air and catching it again.

EXT. BUS - DAY

MONTAGE OF DRIVING AND LANDSCAPE

The bus drives down the street towards the interstate, passes a sign that says "INTERSTATE 510 NORTH."

It drives along the same landscapes as before:

City highway, past grungy houses built closely together.

Flat interstate through overgrown pine forests.

Finally, gently rolling Pennsylvania hills and small farms with white picket fences.

INT. BUS - DAY

Steven looks out the window. The kids are in the back of the bus, laughing and taking pictures with cameras.

INT. OAKLEY HOUSE - DAY

Mr. Oakley is sitting in his chair, watching the ESPN Sports Center.

Steven slams the front door. The sound resonates through the huge living area.

STEVEN  
I'm home.

(CONTINUED)

He sets down his keys on the front table. His eye catches a bright green paper in the stack of mail. He pulls it out and looks at it.

INSERT -- "HOME RUN DERBY! Benefiting the Lakewood Children's Hospital. October 21, 2006."

Coming around the front of the couch, Steven drops his backpack and duffel bag on the floor. He sits down heavily, still holding the paper. The TV buzzes with announcers chattering away.

MR. OAKLEY

How was it?

Steven rubs his face with his hand.

STEVEN

Good.

MR. OAKLEY

Work hard?

STEVEN

Yeah.

Mr. Oakley pulls out a folded piece of paper from his pocket and holds it out to Steven without taking his eyes off of the television.

Steven looks at the paper, then at his father. Finally, he reaches out, takes it, and unfolds the paper. For a long moment, he looks down at the advertisement.

INSERT--An amateur picture of a blue Porsche, sitting in a dealership parking lot.

MR. OAKLEY

When are you going to get the car?

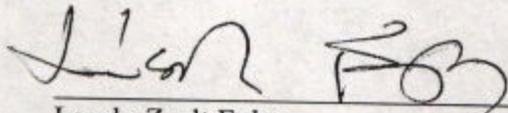
Steven is holding the green flyer in his left hand and the ad in his right. He looks back and forth from one to the other, then slowly smiles.

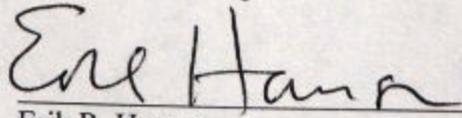
FADE OUT

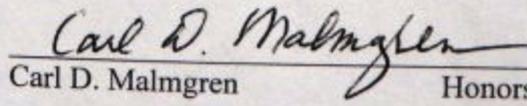
APPROVAL SHEET

This is to certify that Ashley Joy Hunter has successfully completed  
her Senior Honors Thesis, entitled:

*The Ripple Effect*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Laszlo Zsolt Fulop Director of Thesis

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Erik R. Hansen for the Department

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Carl D. Malmgren for the University  
Honors Program

December 6, 2011  
Date