A Retrospective

By Josh Vajda

Everyone experiences seminary differently. It's always some mix of sacrifice and blessing, joy and pain, and relationships and seclusion. While I had my share of tough times, I'm one of those students who loved DTS start to finish. But that doesn't mean I don't have regrets. As great as it was, there are a few things I wish I had done differently. Some are as simple as not taking NT103 and OT101 concurrently. Others run a bit deeper.

For example, I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry. Nobody gets an award for finishing their ThM in four years—even if the catalog makes it look normal. I wanted to get back to ministry as quickly as I could, and I had enough pride to think I didn't need to slow down. So when my studies really challenged me, I got into the habit of shelving the issue. I soldiered on rather than questioning my views. It wasn't long before I found myself in a kind of “agnostic haze” where I knew all the possible answers but not which one I should fight for. I wish I had the humility to slow down when I needed to.

After you've been here a while you may notice that your professors don't always agree. In fact, sometimes they disagree passionately—and on important issues. By the end of my time here, I let that get to me, and I let my commitment to doctrine undermine my commitment to love my fellow Christians. I wish I hadn't chosen “sides.” Disagreement between godly men and women is an opportunity for growth. I wish I had spent more time trying to understand people rather than writing them off in my heart. I'm not saying doctrine isn't worth fighting over. On the contrary, it's worth fighting over well, and at bare minimum it means a commitment to love and not reject the other person. (This principle also applies to people who think everyone should be an evangelist or an exegete or a scholar.)

As important as these issues are, I have one wish that ranks even higher—a regret that spawned a number of smaller regrets each with its own set of troubles. I wish I hadn't let my academic goals become an excuse. Plenty of professors warned us in class not to make our grades an idol, and to take time for ministry, family, and personal devotions—even if it impacted our academic records. I would think “Amen! Wish I could, but I'm in the academic track.” So when I had to choose between my studies and local church service, studies won and I kept involvement to a minimum. And when I had to choose between my studies and non-seminary community, studies won, and I never developed deep relationships outside of class. And when I had to choose between my studies and family—well, enough people warned me about that one that I took it seriously, thank God. But when I had to choose between my studies and my personal devotions, studies won, and I assuaged my guilt by telling myself all I ever do is study God's Word, one way or another.

I'm not in any way saying my studies were a mistake. (May it never be!) They are good, and they take sacrifice, but they can't take everything. I wish I had fought harder for my quiet time. I wish I had served more at church. I wish I had made non-seminary relationships a priority.

Of course, if I had done these things, life still wouldn't be...
From the Editor

Howdy all:

Welcome to the second issue of the new digital format. We hope you like it. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please email us at studentpaper@dts.edu.

With comprehensive exams knocking on my door, this will be my last issue working with the paper. I am happy, however, to introduce Jeremy Closs as our next editor. Jeremy is a gifted writer and thinker, and I know he will do a great job.

This issue also finds us saying good-bye to one of our graduating staff members. Richard Morris has been heavily involved with the paper for the last three years, both as a writer and editor. Thanks, Richard—we wish you all the best as you go out to serve the Lord!

Greg Rhodea

The Words of Life

by Brandon Giella

Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

— Proverbs 18:21 —

We really are half-hearted creatures. We are unbearably afraid to say what we mean, to be exposed, to be rejected. In seminary especially, surrounded by intelligent and spiritual people, it simply will not do to be vulnerable. We do anything to avoid sounding stupid.

Piling on spiritual altruisms wearies us and muddies our language.

Perhaps this is why we use words like fellowship, community, and intentional. They are the vague and ever-begging words that do not really define or say anything. Perhaps this is why unbelievers feel so uncomfortable in our Christian culture: they are afraid to say what they feel, always assuming a burden of judgment upon their words or their emotions, the same burden you and I feel. Piling on spiritual altruisms wearies us and muddies our language.

Our thinking too becomes inaccurate because of slothful language. "If you use ready-made phrases," George Orwell wrote in Politics and the English Language, "you [do not] have to hunt about for the words." Nor do you have to feel exposed. The attraction for this way of writing and speaking, he said, is that it is easy. "By using stale metaphors, similes, and idioms, you save yourself much mental effort."

If we are afraid to say to a fellow student that we got a sixty-eight on our BE exam, we will be afraid to write in our papers that this book or that essay was terrifically boring. We will be afraid even to share the gospel, for the fear of feeling rejected will overcome us. Without this sort of honesty, we invite the human race into extinction: there is no progress without authenticity, for their souls or yours.

The irony is that we spend hours of our day studying the greatest work of literature in all of history. Higher than Keats, Shakespeare, and Milton, we have sitting right in front of us the words of the Apostle Paul, King David, and Christ himself. Unfortunately, our repetitive language can dilute this prose into mere clichés. Orwell continued by saying that "orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand lifeless, imitative style." While I understand his argument, let us prove him wrong.

Let us come together and tell each other what we're really thinking. "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity." Never let Orwell's words be true of Christians. There is freedom in Christ, so shouldn't we speak with more clarity than the rest of the world? There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, so unashamedly stand on your rooftops and sound your barbaric yawp, "I'm having a terrible day." Or use it positively, "You are having a fantastic day." Our clarity will ease unbelievers and refresh our relationship with God.

There is freedom in Christ, so shouldn't we speak with more clarity than the rest of the world?

But the love I mean! The love that can come out of our mouths when we cast aside this fear. That we can tell someone how we feel doesn't mean we have to be critical. We can say a thing like, "You have beautiful lips." Or perhaps, "Your footnotes are quite clarifying." Or some other thing seminarians say to one another.

Know that you don't have to have something super-spiritual to say.

Only say what you mean.
First Place: Short Term
by J. Daniel Mosher

Miranda tried to muffle her cough, but it wasn’t enough.
Professor Forge turned his head and fixed his gaze on
her, his eyes peering over thin glasses. His mustache twitched.
“Ms. Moore.”

Her name hung in the air like a verdict of
guilt. She wished she had heard his question.
“Yes?” Her voice squeaked.
Forge said nothing. After a few seconds, he
raised one thick, grey eyebrow.

Miranda stopped. She felt the eyes of the
class on her. Then she saw the question. It
screamed at her in capital letters of aged
chalk. No one had an answer to this question.

But she could not sit back down. Not now.
Not anymore. She wanted to write an answer,
even if it turned out wrong. Miranda took a
step down the aisle. She left her reputation at
the top of the landing and slammed the door
behind her. She found the latch and slid it into
place.

She turned to meet Forge’s stare. “I do.”

A song came to her mind. She could hear
her grandmother’s voice singing the very
same words as on the board. Miranda heard
that quivering voice sing the answer—the last
words her grandmother ever sang.

Miranda grabbed the chalk and wrote in
letters onto the board, B-U-T.
He stepped back as she finished: THE
BLOOD OF JESUS.

Miranda put the chalk down and turned to
the class. They all looked confused.
She could feel tears on her cheeks. “How
could we forget?”
“What prompted your answer, Miranda?”
She turned to him. “A song.”
“A song? What song?”
She looked at the words she had just written.
Her mind drew a blank. “I don’t know.”
“A song you know, or one someone sang to
you?”

Miranda felt panic rising in her chest. Why
did he ask such hard questions? “I don’t know.”
Forge frowned. “Thank you, Miranda. You
may be seated.”

Miranda breathed again and returned to
her desk. Once in her seat, she watched with
the rest of the class as Professor Forge finished
erasing her answer. She couldn’t remember
what she had written. All that was left on the
board was a question. One she knew no one
could answer.

Forge turned back toward the class and
reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out
a small box. He pushed a button and held
it up to his mouth. “Zechariah Forge. Day
One Hundred and Twelve. Student Fifteen
answered the question, prompted by the
memory of a song. No recollection of what
song or where she heard it, though again she
continued on page 4

Second Place: Here Already
by Jeremy Closs

Miranda tried to muffle her cough, but it wasn’t enough.
The creaking above her stopped. Soon
she heard the thud, thud, thud of heavy
steps coming down the stairs. She knew
she had to move,
now—get out of the pantry and down into the
basement—but her body wouldn’t listen.
The footsteps stopped. Whatever it was
must have reached the foyer. Miranda
listened.
After a pause, the thing spoke again in its
rasping voice.
“Heeeeeeeeeeere.”

That jolted Miranda out of her paralysis.
She ran across the dusty kitchen floor and
through the doorway leading to the
basement stairs. Catching herself, she spun around at
the top of the landing and slammed the door
behind her. She found the latch and slid it into
place.

It had all started as a stupid initiation for
The Weekend Players, the theatre group that
had drawn her to the University of Maryland
in the first place. Some members of the group
had driven her to a local haunted house she’d
never noticed before, tucked away in the
suburbs of Lanham. They told her to go in and
grab a souvenir, then make her way back on
the bus before midnight.

Miranda had gotten out of the car and
stared at the house. She barely even heard as
her new friends drove off laughing behind her.
Whatever paint the house had worn in the
past had been bleached gray by years of wind
and sun. None of the windows were broken.
That wasn’t right. The haunted houses on TV
always had broken windows. Not this one. In
the light of the reddening sky, these windows
glowed like eyes.

Steeling herself, Miranda walked up to the
front door. It opened with no resistance, not
even the ubiquitous drawn-out creak. “Horror
movies lied,” she said to the empty foyer, and
coughed. Opening the door had stirred up the
dust that had coated the bare wooden floors.
She went straight for the staircase leading up
to the second floor. That’s when she heard the
first thump.
She froze. Waited.
When the house remained silent, she
started forward again, laughing at the way her
heart pounded. Then another thump came,
louder than the first.
Something upstairs spoke.
“Hheeeeeeeyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy.”

A third thump, closer than the other two.
At first she thought the other theatre students
must be pranking her, hiding upstairs with
sandbags or something, but then she saw a
shadow up on the landing above her, cast by
the red light outside. Its shape looked like
nothing she’d ever seen. The shadow seemed
to twist and morph as her eyes tried to make
sense of it. A fourth thump. The shadow
lurched closer.

Miranda ran. First she tried the front
door, but it wouldn’t open. She shook it and
hammered her fists against the wood—but no.
She panicked and ran down the hall, into the
kitchen.

She hid in the pantry, and it seemed to
work. The thing upstairs stomped around for
a time, and grew still. She thought she’d been
in the clear.

But then she had coughed—and now she
was stuck in the basement, with no hope of
hiding.

The stairwell seemed pitch black after
leaving the bright kitchen. As she felt her way
down, she could hear the footsteps moving
continued on page 5

Editor’s Note: This semester we held a flash fiction contest open to the DTS family. Each author needed to use the same first sentence, one which was picked by Dr. Reg Grant. The finalist entries were rendered anonymous and judged by Shannon Reibenstein. Each winner will receive a DTS Book Center gift card.
I wish I hadn’t let my academic goals become an excuse.

perfect. It may have even put a damper on my plans for academic ministry. But if you have to consistently choose between being a good scholar and being a good Christian, maybe God isn’t calling you to scholarship. Where to draw the line probably depends on your makeup and circumstances, but I wish I had drawn mine a little further in.

Sometimes I hear people who have graduated regret one aspect or another of the requirements here, but I’m not one of them. I don’t regret studying the languages. I don’t regret taking every ST and HT elective I could. I don’t regret the courses I had to take outside my major, or the SF requirement, or all my time in chapel. I don’t even regret the long papers I wrote or the long hours I logged in the library writing them. They were often hard, but they were worth it. What’s more, I’m confident God has still only just begun to use all of these experiences in my life.

No matter where you are in your seminary journey, you will be done one day. And you will no doubt look back with your own set of regrets, no matter how great a time you had, or how wisely you approached things.

But I hope that none of these regrets of mine will make their way onto your list.

I wish I hadn’t let my academic goals become an excuse.

exhibited the cough as a psychosomatic indicator of cognizance.”

Miranda wondered which one of them was Student Fifteen.

Forge continued speaking. “This marks the tenth confirmation that the Wipe is reversible, at least for youth. Project Memory Reconstitution continues.”

Forge clicked the button on the box and put it into his jacket. Miranda wanted to ask him what the box did, but she didn’t dare raise her hand. Only people with answers raised their hands.

Professor Forge put his hands on his desk, lowered his head, and sighed. Miranda couldn’t remember him ever looking so sad. But he soon looked up at the class with determination in his eyes. “All right. Who can tell me?” He glanced back at the board and read the question aloud. “What can wash away my sin?”

Miranda felt a tingle in her throat.
PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

This semester’s photo contest theme was **orange**.
Each winner will receive a DTS Book Center gift card.

FIRST PLACE: Meridith Johnson

SECOND PLACE: Katya Tabares

THIRD PLACE: Daniel David

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Here Already from page 3

closer above.
She reached the bottom and began
fumbled around, hoping to find something,
anything.
The thing’s huge mass slammed against the
door, making the stairs shake. It was here.
She moved further into the dark, her legs
catching on unseen implements strewn on
the floor.

Another crash from the door. Miranda
looked back and saw dust falling off the stairs.
After a moment, it clicked. Her eyes were
adjusting. She peered around, looking for a
way out. After a moment, she saw it. Through
the far wall, a sliver of dim red light shone in.

She ran over, ignoring the cuts she picked
up on the way. It was a window, covered with
rotting boards. She began ripping them away,
not caring about the splinters in her palms. A
third and final crash came from behind her.
Pieces of door tumbled down the stairs. The
thing began to shamble down, and the stairs
groaned under its weight. Miranda yanked
the last board away. Reversing it in her hands,
she smashed the glass. She hoisted herself up
and clawed her way outside.

She ran down the street, pushing her way
out of the suburbs. Soon, she collapsed in the
safe artificial light of a bus stop. Her body
shook the whole time until the bus came.

Soon, she was back at her dorm. She flew
upstairs into the bathroom, and slammed the
door behind her. She sat huddled on the
floor for a long time, with her face in her hands as
she caught her breath. Finally, Miranda tore
off her clothes, threw them in the trash, and
stepped in the shower. The pressure of the hot
water as it washed the grime from her body
felt wonderful.

As she was washing, she thought she heard
a loud thump downstairs. She turned the
water off.

From outside the door, she heard it.
“Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeere.”
Miranda froze in disbelief as she heard the
bathroom door open. The tiled floor cracked
as a heavy shape stepped inside.
Saint Patrick was kidnapped at age sixteen by a band of Irish raiders, and he was sold into slavery in Ireland (Conf. §1). Britain in the fifth century was an easy target for Irish slave traders. The Roman garrisons had pulled out of Britania in 410 and the Roman Emperor Honorius told his citizens left in Britain to do their best to ward off the barbarians by themselves. Patrick’s family villa was an obvious and easy target. The life for a slave in Ireland in the fifth century was nasty, brutish, and short. During this time of desperation, Patrick turned to God, and after six years of slavery he escaped home to Britain (Conf. §17). Yet while back home in Britain, Patrick dreamt of the Irish people pleading for him to return to them (Conf. §23). So Patrick did the unthinkable; he sold his family inheritance, underwent ordination, and returned to Ireland to evangelize the people who had enslaved him (Ep. §10). Patrick spent the rest of his life in Ireland as an active missionary.

Despite the fact that we know more about Patrick that any other ancient Briton, the subsequent legends have dwarfed his historical person.

Patrick’s ministry was marked by a deep sense of calling, total dependence on God, and a love for the lost.

Today Patrick is most associated with green beer and corned-beef and cabbage (neither of which were staples of the fifth century diet). Even by the seventh century the Patrick of history had become the Patrick of folklore and propaganda. In the seventh century the Irish writer Muirchú composed an account of Patrick’s exploits. Never one to let the facts get in the way of a good story, Muirchú created a Patrick of pure fiction. His Patrick is presented as an aggressive miracle worker who fights druids and converts the whole island in a triumphant and unstoppable march. Even today some of Muirchú’s literary fancies are presented as historical fact. The famous incident of Patrick lighting the Paschal fire at Tara is straight out of Muirchú’s imagination. The story of his driving the snakes out of Ireland is a legend from a twelfth century Northumbrian monk named Jocelyn. And in the eighteenth century, we read of Patrick using a shamrock to teach the Irish about the Trinity. Despite what you may have seen on YouTube, Patrick never used shamrocks as explanations for the Trinity (“That’s modalism, Patrick!”)

The Patrick of history is a much more interesting person. Far from converting the whole of Ireland, Patrick was not even the first Christian missionary in Ireland. As early as 431, Pope Celestine had commissioned a man called Palladius as the first bishop of the Irish who believed in Christ. Unfortunately, no further details have survived of Palladius’ mission. Historians generally agree that Palladius ministered in the southeastern part of the country. When Patrick arrived in Ireland (possibly sometime around 461), he extended the church in Ireland, and is thought to have ministered in the north and western parts of the country (Patrick’s

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Saint Patrick

from page 6
earlier enslavement was spent on the western coast of Ireland [Conf. §23]). Patrick's own writings portray ministry in a deeply pagan society where Christianity is still a minority (Conf. §41). Far from turning his pagan opponents into foxes (see Muirchú for the details), he used diplomacy and frequently had to placate local chieftains with monetary gifts to ensure safe passage into their territories. This tactic was not always successful, and Patrick mentions times when he was imprisoned (Conf. §52). Irish chieftains weren't his only concern; many of his fellow Britons did not like what he was doing in Ireland, and accusations of impropriety were made against him (Conf. §46). His Confession is in large part Patrick's defense for his ministry in Ireland in the face of opposition from home (Conf. §46).

Despite the fact that we know more about Patrick that any other ancient Briton, the subsequent legends have dwarfed his historical person.

Patrick's second work, his Epistle, is a short letter to a British petty king called Coroticus, who was involved in the slave trade. Coroticus, along with some Irish raiders, had enslaved several Irish women who were converts of Patrick and later sold them in Britain. This brief letter is Patrick's most emotional work. He rails against the evil of slavery and the reprehensible action of a supposedly Christian ruler enslaving Christians for profit. Patrick questions the civilized Roman Christians who were involved in buying barbarian Christian slaves, and in a powerful declaration of solidarity with the barbarian Irish he wrote, "Can it be they do not believe that we have received one and the same baptism, or that we have one and the same God as Father. For them, it is a disgrace that we are from Ireland" (Ep. §16).

Patrick's life is a powerful testimony to the grace of God. Six years of slavery were not forgotten years, but the means God used in preparing Patrick's heart for future ministry in Ireland. Patrick's ministry was marked by a deep sense of calling, total dependence on God, and a love for the lost. As he wrote in his Confession, "I bore many persecutions, even chains, so that I could give up my freeborn state for the sake of others. If I am worthy, I am ready even to give up my life most willingly here and now for His name. It is there that I wish to spend my life until I die, if the Lord should grant it to me" (Conf. §37). If you haven't read Patrick's Confession and Epistle, I strongly urge you to do so (you can start at confessio.ie). As seminarians, we can all be encouraged to see what a heart for ministry looks like in Patrick's own words.

Here Already

from page 5

Trembling and holding her breath, Miranda pressed herself against the cold tile of the shower wall. She could see its outline through the shower curtain. She could see its head turning slowly back and forth.
She waited for it to pull the curtain open—
And waited.
Minutes passed. The water became clammy on her skin. The thing cocked its head, as though waiting. But for what?
She felt it then, deep inside, rising in her chest, growing stronger. She closed her eyes and tried to choke it down, pleading with her body. No, no, no, no.
Miranda tried to muffle her cough, but it wasn't enough.
I had budgeted $15 to spend. Not enough for a shopping spree, but just what I needed to go and buy myself something fun that said, “Hello, Summer!” I love thrifting, and over the years I have found many hidden gems for just a few dollars. I chose a store I had heard about recently and headed out for my mission in the sweltering heat of late June in Dallas.

I pulled up to Dot’s Closet. At first I was a little creeped-out by the faceless mannequins that stood with messy wigs in the windows. As I walked in the door, I saw a hand-written sign that said, “25% off everything in the store. Except movies and magazines (And other items).” I had to smile—an additional note said that some plants were not 25% off either. Bummer.

After picking my way past the fine china, VHS tapes, and a plethora of porcelain dolls, I spotted my target—a doorway that led to the clothes section. Here was my haven, with the musty and the ancient, all hung on racks together. I could hear opera music playing somewhere in the back of the room. As I sifted through the hangers, I recognized that it was a performance of Rigoletto. Interesting.

I went back to the front to check out, but no one was there. As I waited, I noticed that there was a $10 minimum purchase for credit and debit cards. I look at my items and was thankful to find enough, since I only had a few dollars in cash. I peered over the counter and noticed that the counter did not have a computer. Instead, only a small cash register and a strange looking machine and pad of paper sat there.

The store clerk, about 65 years old or so, finally returned. Yet by this point two men

In seventh grade I experienced a series of supernatural events. While I was otherwise distracted by the drama of eighties hair, my math homework, deriving life from the dark powers of the girls’ locker room, somehow grew legs and ran off.

At first I thought I was just flaky and left it at home. Then I began to worry God had decided to punish me for the ridiculousness which was my life in 1987. But alas, I eventually came to the shocking conclusion—someone was stealing my math homework.

Of all the things to steal, this seemed absurd. I’m not even good at math.

Once I thought about it, the answer was obvious. Her Phys. Ed. locker was next to mine. Although I always locked up my stuff during class, I had not seen any reason to hire an armed guard to watch a stupid math folder while I perfected my bangs with a giant bottle of Aquanet.

About the time I realized I wasn’t losing my mind along with my math homework, we were assigned a project which involved a number of algebra word problems. Because I knew the culprit hadn’t spent much time working on hers in class, mine would inevitably be five-finger discounted the second I turned my back.

And it made me mad.

Because I felt helpless.

So in my twelve-year-old anger, I came up with a plan. I completed two copies of the project—one hidden away to turn in, and another with answers completely out of left field placed neatly in the front of my math folder.

This took some hours. But I got it done, and leaving my math folder unattended, I wandered off without a care in the world.

Of all the moments of poetic justice in my life, this one was the best. The look of confusion on that girl’s face, as I handed in the assignment she assumed to be in her possession, is still gelled in my memory twenty-seven years later. She got a 23. I got an A.

I love telling this story. How many of you are cheering me on in this pinnacle of junior high justice? Guess what? Jesus wasn’t.

One of the more irritating and difficult parts of Christianity is that we are expected not to return evil for evil.

continued on page 10 ➤
Confession. I am a broccoli snob—especially when it comes to Chinese food. It makes or breaks a meal for me. I've even sent dishes back because of soggy broccoli. Don't judge.

Like the search for Waldo, discovering authentic Chinese food has frustrated me since my move to "Big D." Dallas natives and locals have sarcastically wished me luck on my hopeless quest. So when my editor asked me to check out First Chinese BBQ, I hardly expected satisfactory results. But then my glass-half-full rationale kicked in, and I decided to give it a shot.

The closest location required a short trip north on I-75, not one of my favorite weekend routes. As if to enforce that opinion, Mr. Use-No-Signal jumped into my lane and almost caused a multi-car pileup. "They'd better have really good food," I muttered.

I exited the highway, and the further I traveled from it, the quieter my surroundings got. When I pulled into the restaurant's lot, I sensed calmness. The nearly empty parking lot lacked the weekend busyness that most strip malls enjoyed. I'd hardly had a relaxing moment that week, so I welcomed the quiet. First Chinese BBQ (111 S. Greenville Ave., Richardson) is nestled between a nail salon and a café, looked like the perfect place to linger over a late afternoon meal.

But my anticipation deflated as I opened the door and walked in. I'd taken only a few steps when chatter, in English and Chinese, buzzed around me. Confused, I looked through the window into the still-empty parking lot. I noted two groups, one waiting for the hostess to seat them, and one waiting to pay for meals at the check-out counter. To the right of the check-out counter, the headless bodies of cooked chickens and ducks hung on display behind a protective clear case.

I joined the first queue and wondered about the wait. I considered leaving and coming back later, but the couple in front of me offered repeated assurances that the line would go quickly. The garlic and ginger smells from to-go containers also convinced me to stay.

I joined the first queue and wondered about the wait. I considered leaving and coming back later, but the couple in front of me offered repeated assurances that the line would go quickly. The garlic and ginger smells from to-go containers also convinced me to stay.

Sure enough, I found myself in the dining room within minutes. But waiting for the server to take my order tried my patience. Finally, I flagged down a waitress just to get a glass of water. When she returned with my water, she promised that my server would come to take my order. By the time my server appeared, my ice had started to melt. She flashed an apologetic smile and quickly took my order of beef with rice and vegetables.

No music floated through the air, just the rattle of dinnerware as busboys dropped them into their bins. After a short while, my waitress returned with the order, and I eyed my dish—a generous portion of bright green broccoli blended with strips of beef, coated with a light sauce. I eagerly forked the combination into my mouth, chewing tender meat against firm broccoli, accented by hints of ginger. The results? A winner. Although the service failed to impress me, I would definitely come back for a good meal at a good price. Who knows, I may even try the spicy fried squid.

First Chinese BBQ, a Dallas favorite since 1982, has 4-star ratings on Urbanspoon, Yelp, and Foursquare. NOTE: They accept cash only, and website below has their menu but only maps their Austin location.

firstchinesebbq.com
had walked in and were meandering near the front door, and the store clerk told me he would be back in a few minutes. The two men at the door were waiting for him. They patted him on the back and asked him how he was doing. The clerk replied cheerfully, and they all walked out the door. I watch the two men help the worker down the curb, gently touching him on the elbows. It was a sweet and simple gesture that I wasn't expecting.

In just a few minutes the clerk came back. I gave him the clothes and verified the discount. He slowly removed the tags, wrote down the information on the pad of paper, and scanned my card with the machine—which imprinted the card number onto the same pad of paper. He added up the total of my three items long hand, including the tallies, and consulted a worn tax form laminated under the pad of paper.

I was amazed at the process. I would have had no earthly clue how to run a store without a computer, and this man did it so eloquently that it looked as natural as breathing. I smiled in curiosity and asked him how long the store had been open. 23 years. I couldn't help but tell him that was exactly how old I was. We laughed together, and I told him I was born in July. I let him keep the hangers and the bags, since I didn't want to be an inconvenience in the slightest. The total came to $15.34 and I was elated. How perfect.

The clerk gave me my receipt and told me they were a charity that helps the terminal ill. He looked into my eyes. “We really appreciate your business.”

I thanked him kindly and told him to have a great day. He smiled. “Have a great Fourth of July, and happy birthday.”

I smiled back as I turned to leave. “Will do!”

I never would have guessed that the little consignment shop would make me feel the way it did. The whole experience brought me to a whole world that I don't see very often. It was as though I had stepped into a time machine, just to enjoy someone else's world for a few moments.

Although it was a brief and simple visit, I loved every second of it.

Dot's Closet is the fundraising arm of the Disciples of Holy Trinity, a non-profit, non-church organization that helps terminally ill clients. The shop is located at 5810 Live Oak St. #12, Dallas, TX 75214.

Karen Locklear is a native Houstonian. By day she earns a living attempting to persuade teenagers reading and writing are awesome. By night she is a DTS student at the Houston campus, who hopes one day to use her writing to show the awesomeness of Jesus. In her spare time she reads, blogs, cooks, and works diligently to keep her sanity through Christ.