BRIDGET HICKEY

Bridget Hickey graduated from Lincoln-Way East High School where she was a member of the Student Council executive board. She is involved with several organizations at NIU, such as Lincoln Hall Council, as well as with mentoring and serving as an Ally. Bridget majors in special education with an emphasis on vision impairments. In the future, she plans to teach those with visual impairments. This essay is important to Bridget because it is about the special relationship she shares with her father.

Bridget wrote this essay in Rikki Knutti’s English 103 course during the fall of 2010.
In my dorm, I lay on my bed, thinking of all things yellow. Lemonheads popped into my thoughts, and before I knew it, I was sitting on my dad’s lap in the large, yellow, Naugahyde chair in the basement. I watched as he ran his fingers smoothly and efficiently across thick pages full of small dots. I found this to be the most intriguing mystery of all time. I couldn’t figure out how he could read with his fingers instead of his eyes. Dad grabbed my hand and let me feel the long lines of embossed dots. My brows furrowed as I bit my lip; I was like a burglar trying to break into a safe, but there was no way to crack the code.

“Dad,” I said. “How come I can’t read dots like you can? What’s your secret?”

He smiled and let out a small laugh.

“I’m going to make you a deal,” he said. “I will tell you my secret if you can share with me.”

I sat there puzzled, and tried to think of what he wanted me to share. It was obvious that he didn’t want to play with my American Girl doll or use my circus tape because I never saw him play with either. Maybe he wanted something bigger like my purple bike. Whatever it was that Dad wanted, I knew that I had to give it to him. I looked back up and agreed to share in order to gain access to the confidential information that my father kept locked up in his mind. He didn’t want me to share my doll, my circus tape, or even my bike.

Dad looked at me, right in my eyes, and said, “Tell me about yellow.”

On August tenth 1961, Bart Hickey was born prematurely. While the doctors were busy saving his life, oxygen in the incubator caused Retrolental Fibroplasia, ultimately blinding him. Growing up, he could see shadows and flashes of light, but as time went on, he was left in total darkness. We shared a vision of the world through my eyes. This interpretation was sometimes difficult for me because of the importance that it held for my Dad. How do you describe the color yellow to someone without sight? Is yellow the feeling of the morning sun on your face, the second before a smile, the cool feeling of the bright Naugahyde chair, or the taste
of a Lemonhead candy? I refused to let him down, and when I managed to take the time and think what yellow was to me, I came up with a definition that Dad could understand.

Yellow is happy.

Dad would ask me to describe everything I saw, making sure I would include every detail. He was especially interested in my ability to correctly identify cars. As soon as one would rumble down the block I would hear him say, “What do we got now, Bridge?”

“It’s a ’69 Chevy Camaro, and it is a canary-bird yellow, with black stripes on the front. It looks like a bee.”

“That’s my girl, sweet.” Dad adds.

He wanted to know everything, and I soon found myself describing without being asked. Together we toured our universe, pasting pictures in the scrapbook of our minds. Dad stayed true to his word. He began to unleash the great mystery of the small dots that he read with his fingers.

He started with the letter “B,” which he said was his favorite. I sat there while he put a thick sheet of paper into the Brailling machine and punched two of the six keys on the metal contraption. Dad slid the paper out and asked, “What is here?”

“Two little dots.” I answered.

“Is that it?”

I stared at the two dots on the page. What more could he want? “I feel two dots on top of each other. They are little, and when I put my fingers over them, I only feel one bump.”

“That’s better,” Dad replied. “Let’s move on.”

The dots were small, and I would mix up the combinations for the different letters. My head would end up in my hands, and the paper with the different letters would be thrown across the room. I wanted to be able to run my fingers across a line of the dots and be able to understand just like Dad did. We both wanted something we could not fully grasp. I would learn sooner or later, but it occurred to me: Dad would never completely understand or experience yellow.

It was a Saturday, so Dad let me go with him to his auto shop. I walked up to the butter yellow and slightly rusted ’69 Plymouth Barracuda, opened the door, and climbed in. This was no ordinary car—this was my state of the art speed machine. The Barracuda transported me to the Talladega Superspeedway, and I
was the first ever famous female NASCAR driver ready to take on the competition and get to Victory Lane. The green flag was waved, and I heard the voice of Darrell Waltrip shout, “Boogity, boogity, boogity, let’s go racing!”

I am off. I zoom past the other drivers and try to take the lead. I see Dale Earnhardt in front of me as I pass Gordon. Earnhardt and I are neck and neck, and it is coming down to the final lap. I give it all I’ve got, and just as I am about to pass him and take my rightful place at Victory Lane, I hear, “Bridget!”

It’s Dad, and I’m not supposed to be racing in my speed machine when no one is out in the lot with me. I exit my vehicle and promise Earnhardt a rematch before quickly running back into the large red brick shop. It is then that I see the Perkins Brailler, the machine that makes the dots. I hop up onto the chair in the office and slide a thick piece of paper into the machine like Dad does. I hit one of the six keys and see a dot. My head turns to get a better look and I feel a rush of excitement. I peck at the machine again until I am punching keys at the speed of light. I reach the end of the page and stare with wonder and awe. I turn the chair around, hop onto the black and white linoleum floor, and run to Dad. I find him almost completely hidden by the car he is working under.

“Dad, feel this!”

He sets down the tools he has been working with and ducks out from under the massive car, holding out his hand. I give him the paper and wait anxiously. His fingers race over the dots faster than a driver at the Daytona 500.

*Just one word.* I tell myself.

He is getting close to the bottom of the page and has not made any comments. My heart is about to drop when I see his fingers move back over a set of dots. A smile crosses his face, and he says the word:

“Mop.”

On the ride home, I tell Dad how I am going to be a NASCAR driver. He tells me if I am really going to be a driver, then I should go to my very first race for some “research.”

The grandstand at the speedway was gigantic and full of glittering seats.

“This place is huge, the seats are all over, and the drivers are right there!” I tell Dad.
He smiles and nods, and asks me to look at our tickets and help Uncle Louie find our seats; I look down at the tickets and see that Dad has gotten us pit passes. My heart is about to jump out of my chest. I would be up close to all of my heroes and see what it is really like to be a driver. Watching the cars speeding around the track was exhilarating. They moved so fast that if I blinked, I would miss important moments.

“Where’s Earnhardt?” Dad would ask. “He’s gotta get a top ten, Bridge.” I look over and see that Dad moves his head to hear where the cars are at.

At the end of the race Uncle Louie and Dad take me over to the drivers and their crews. I am given a lug nut from Jeff Gordon’s car. I turn it over in my hand and look at the slightly dirty banana-yellow piece and tell Dad.

He flashes a smile and says, “So it’s happy?”

In my dorm, I jump down from my bunk and go sit at my desk. I open the small, black window box and pull out two dingy banana yellow lug nuts and four index cards. I am reminded of my favorite man, my biggest inspiration, and why I am sitting here right now. I have been given a road map to follow, the patience and understanding of a parent who knows first-hand that everyone is unique and not everything can be done or learned in a conventional or singular manner. Keeping this in mind, I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of each future student, remembering the quiet times on my father’s lap, when I needed to describe the color yellow.

I run my fingers across the last line of dots and smile. Written in Braille is the advice my Father has given me, and is the most important, “No matter what, stay yellow. Love, Dad.”