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Integrative Project

Thesis Statement

March 12, 2010

### Introduction

When I was a sophomore in college, I was presented the opportunity to go to Detroit for spring break and help serve at a local school. This school had sinks that were carved into with random initials, unusable due to bad plumbing. Cupboards hung with broken glass planes that posed danger to students and old and outdated library books sat shelved as the only resources for students. After spending two months in Detroit, I was shocked by the numerous issues I witnessed in not only the school, but also the city as a whole—poverty, corruption, and abandonment amongst many others. The need was clear to me, despite having heard extensively about the issues in passing before. This particular trip instilled in me more of a desire to devoting my life to helping those in need.

In pursuing this aspiration, I continued on to develop a passion for Detroit specifically—especially after meeting a particular Detroit resident by the name of Novella Jones through my mother who was volunteering at a local Detroit shelter. Novella has lived in Detroit for over thirty years and has devoted her life to providing bare essentials like food and clothing to those in need at this shelter, even though she has very little in terms of possessions. Novella's selfless and genuine compassion and commitment to those struggling in Detroit has spoken volumes to me to what it means to devote ones life to seeking out positive change. She does not put her value into material things, security, or status, but solely on her relationship with God and how she can show

his love to those around her; even if those around her believe differently, she still wants to bless them in some way. I have personally witnessed her individual commitment transform lives at the shelter she works at. Her passion is why I wanted to collaborate with her on this project; she is subject to the issues every day and is actively trying to improve them. Through knowing her, she has inspired me to think about the potential of people and their power for change in any place that is broken. The way I decided to respond to her and her devotion was to create an animation—showing the process of constructing a newer physical Detroit that transforms as she describes her aspirations. This animation serves as a representation of watching one's positive impact on a community and how that impact can spread and change a place in a great way. Though an animation does not solve the specific and incredibly complex problems that exist in Detroit in a direct way, it serves as a documentation of how people, like Novella, are making dents in addressing such issues.

In order for this project to have validity and substance, it is critical to further understand Novella's background and character along with her involvement in Detroit. Out of Novella's small apartment she actively runs a ministry year round called *His Forgotten Harvest* off of Woodward Avenue, where she finds people who are willing to donate food, clothing, and toys to poor families in need. The name *His Forgotten Harvest* is derived from a passage in the Bible's book of John. This passage reflects the mission of the ministry that Novella spends her life serving: "Do you not say, 'Four months more than the harvest?' I tell you open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life" (John 4:35-36, New International Version). In this passage, Jesus is teaching his

disciples, or followers, to look at people like a farmer looks at his field: ready to “harvest,” or prepare them for heaven by leading them to have a relationship with God. Jesus, along with his disciples, wants to live out this mission by showing people love (John 4:34, NIV). Inspired by Jesus’ mission to love, Novella’s dream is to do the same by giving bare essentials to those in need. Adding on to helping others, she aspires to eventually construct a building specifically for *His Forgotten Harvest*, rather than having to run it out of her small apartment. She described this dream building in great detail as having, for example, seven rooms that represent the seven books of the Bible and six out of the seven rooms housing families in need of shelter. Therefore, it makes sense that Novella’s aspirations involve God because she places him at such a forefront in her life.

#### Contextual Discussion:

One specific project has influenced me greatly in terms of direction for my project. A conceptual artist and activist named Jackie Surnell is currently working on a project where she is collaborating with a prison inmate named Herman Wallace. He has been in the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, Solitary Confinement, or Closed Cell Restriction for fifteen years (MacCash). Surnell asked Wallace the following question which initiated a four year collaboration: “What kind of house does a man who has lived in a six feet by nine feet box for over thirty years dream of?” From his description, Surnell used 3D modeling to construct his imaginary house based on his desires, similar to how I am using 3D modeling to transform Novella’s neighborhood based on her aspirations. The below images are screenshots of the model both her and Herman Wallace created, along with another detailed image of a room on the inside that show acute attention to detail (“The House That Herman Built”).

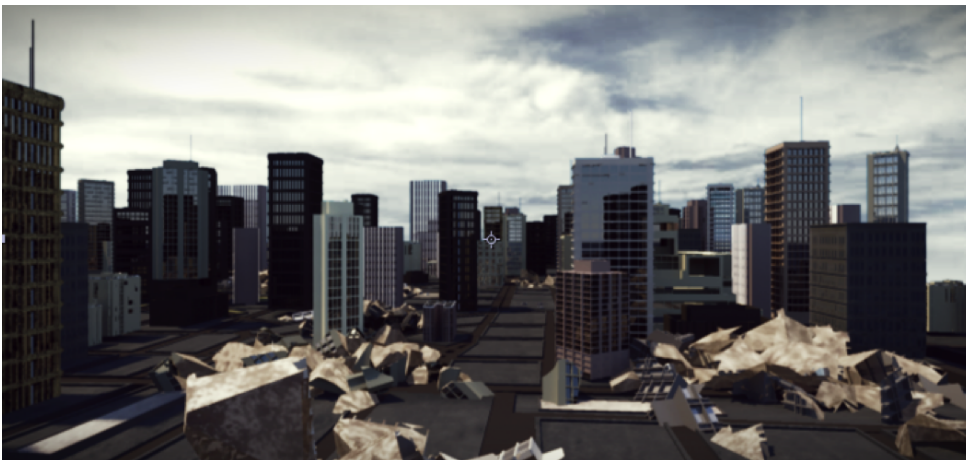


Herman's collaboration with Surnell allows him to aspire for something more than is currently present in his life. Much like Novella, he has few possessions, but has a very specific idea of what he desires. In addition, his aspirations allow people to think more about the issues within the prison system, much like how my project is hopefully encouraging people to think more about the issues in Detroit and how to positively respond to them. Most importantly, Jackie Surnell takes the dreams of someone who does not have anything, and translates them into something visually powerful. Both Novella and Herman's dreams are not just about gaining material things, in Herman's case for himself and Novella's for other people, but about the positive inner change that can result from relationships and helping other people. Through this process, Jackie Surnell and Herman Wallace became friends and learned about each other's experiences in life, though they both have very different backgrounds. The relationship that I have developed with Novella is very much similar.

Creative Work:

I used a 3D modeling and animation program called Maya to re-create the area around Woodward Avenue—her specific neighborhood in Detroit greatly stricken by poverty. Googlemaps has allowed me to accurately depict the buildings and surrounding landscapes. The opening scene will then transition into Novella’s neighborhood on Woodward Avenue. The end product is an animation where the viewer sees a replica of Novella’s neighborhood in Maya, broken down and abandoned. While the camera animates through the setting, Novella’s voice explains her aspirations for Detroit and her neighborhood transforms and takes on a new physicality. In her tape-recorded thoughts on the issues she sees first hand in Detroit, she talks extensively about her strong desire to help those around her and how this desire can transform her city. This audio is accompanied with abolished buildings rebuilding themselves from the ground up. In addition, her dream for *His Forgotten Harvest* builds itself from nothing as she describes it in the end as a direct response from me to her. Thus, the viewer enters the city as it is broken down and leaves it transformed.

The following image is a snapshot taken from the scene of broken down and abandoned buildings in the outskirts of Detroit’s Toll Area. This replica, which represents the reality of Detroit, will transform as Novella shares her dreams.



As the viewer enters Detroit, Novella starts to specifically talk about the struggles and need present and how that need reflects the broken buildings in the setting. At one point she talks about a little girl that she met at the shelter she works at and how, despite her circumstances, the little girl still aspires to be a ballerina. As she describes her dreams, the camera twirls around a building as it rebuilds itself. Below are two snapshots taken from this part of the animation:



The ending of this animation is when Novella shares her individual dream for a *His Forgotten Harvest* building. Once this building starts to build, all the other buildings around it also start rebuild themselves up from rubble.

### Conclusion

This project is about forming relationships and the positive impact one person can have on a situation if their heart is in the right place. I see Novella's heart in trying to

make Detroit a better place by devoting her life to giving to residents there. This project is not, however, about creating a utopia Detroit, but is meant to showcase real life examples of people who are devoted to making their aspirations a reality. The reason for doing this project is seeing these aspirations “come to life” on a larger scale. In having Novella share her dream, this project will hopefully encourage people to both dream and take action in trying to create change.

## Bibliography

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