(1) Each summer, as the sun beats down through the heavy Michigan humidity, Rick, John, Karen, Mike, Alex and I spend nearly every free minute swimming in the crystal-clear water of Rick's pool. One fateful day, Rick's dad invited their rather staid pastor and his family, so we all shared the pool. We kids were noisily splashing and dunking each other with our usual rowdy enthusiasm when it happened. Through my extremely near-sighted eyes everyone in the pool became a faceless blur above the water's surface, but I was sure the blob to my left was Alex. So, I swam silently behind him and gleefully shoved him under the water. The rush of triumph I felt was immediately squelched, however, when the pastor surfaced, choking for gasps of air. This painfully embarrassing situation is one of many I have experienced as a lifelong nearsighted person. Thus I have good reason to feel that Webster's impersonal definition of nearsightedness, "having better vision for near objects than for distant ones," lacks an understanding of what nearsighted people experience.

(2) My optometrist explained my condition, which he labelled myopia, as a problem in which I can't see objects distinctly because their image is focused in front of the retina instead of on it. I explain to my friends that, without corrective lenses, my world is a picture in a toddler's coloring book where crayon marks stray out of the lines, or a scene drawn with a marker on absorbent cloth, its edges and angles bleeding into fuzzy abstractions.

(3) This out-of-focus view of the world can have many effects on one's life. For instance, exclusion from the ranks of their normal-sighted playmates and mocking chants of "Foureyes, Foureyes!" can make life miserable for a nearsighted child. With the passage of time, however, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority dissipate. Unfortunately, such feelings are replaced with fears of the "unseen." One night I forgot my glasses by the bathroom sink, as I have upon occasion, and was awakened later by strange noises. At that point I faced either the terrifying prospect of meeting an intruder on my way to retrieve my glasses or the frustrating reality of my futile attempts to discern anything suspicious in the blurs of shadow. Looking out the window didn't yield a license plate number or car description, just a blurry streak of red as a set of tail-lights disappeared into the night's smudge of blackness.

(4) Fear of the "unseen" is also evident in many myopic persons' communication techniques. Without corrective lenses to bring the unidentifiable blur of facial features into sharp focus, it is impossible to watch facial expressions or lip movements. This can result in misunderstandings and unheard messages.
(5) Trying to understand someone nearby without seeing clearly is difficult enough; recognize someone at a distance is next to impossible. This is a major problem for nearsighted swimmers and often a cause for embarrassment, as I disclosed earlier. Another problem myopic swimmers face is a forced lack of spontaneity. Others can suddenly decide to dive in, but the person wearing glasses must first find a safe place to store them, and the wearer of contact lenses must be sure that the necessary solutions to reinsert them will be available.

(6) All the difficulties and setbacks nearsightedness causes are too numerous to mention. In the face of such overwhelming drawbacks, it would be easy to say that no good comes from myopia. However, nearsightedness isn't all bad; it kindles a greater awareness and appreciation for the sense of sight and provides a second, rather unusual viewpoint from which to see situations. For instance, you watch the scenery flash by during a long road trip, soon becoming repulsed by a decaying edge of the city you're riding past. With normal eyes you see a large, distant building, its peeling billboards weathered to the same neutral grey of its rundown walls, hunched over a semi-filled parking lot. A grimy sidestreet runs along one side; a vacant lot, litter-strewn and overgrown with weeds, borders the other two. On the other hand, I see it with nearsighted eyes, mobile blurs and smears in an abstraction of shapes and textures. Some colors remain static, others are engulfed by those surrounding them. All perception of depth is gone, and background merges with foreground. In the near distance a mountainous grey rock looms over a brightly speckled beach, bordered by a vast sea of greyish green. Surprisingly, nearsightedness often teaches a lesson in perspective: where there is ugliness, one can find beauty.