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Northern Eclecta

Department of English - Dept. 2320

North Dakota State University

Fargo, ND 58108-6050

www.northernelecta.com

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We've Been Here Before

NORTHERN ECLECTA
NO. 17

Concept

Established as Carbon World in 1995 and rebranded in 2007 as *Northern Eclecta*, this journal was originally created with the intent of representing the creative talents of North Dakota State University undergraduates. Over the years, the journal has featured fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and photography, with the goal of representing a more diverse collection of talents and interests. The name *Northern Eclecta* is meant to embody our geographic region and eclectic mix of artistic work. Our symbol is a species of moth named *Bucculatrix eclecta*.

We brought numerous changes to the seventeenth edition of our journal and class this semester. At the core of our changes, we've added the word "Art" to our name making us *Northern Eclecta Art and Literary Journal*. This new title better encompasses our mission as a platform for both authors and artists from a diverse array of backgrounds including NDSU alumni, students, faculty, staff, youth, Fargo-Moorhead community members, and anyone else who wishes to contribute. We hope to continue reaching creators from all walks of life. We also expanded on changes made last year: we made extensive additions to our website in the form of blog posts and had greater outreach to the community. We hope you enjoy these changes as you journey into the age of nostalgia, memory, and recollection in our journal "We've Been Here Before."

Mission

Northern Eclecta is North Dakota State University's annual art and literary journal and is dedicated to publishing diverse and creative voices regardless of genre or background.

Letter from the Editor

It is with pleasure that I introduce to you Volume 17 of *Northern Eclecta's Art and Literary Journal*. Through thoughtful discussion, this year's team decided that we wanted a theme that wouldn't box in any creators. We wanted a theme that, while structured, was open to interpretation, allowing for different content and subthemes to create diversity within the journal. Drawing from various perspectives and opinions allowed us to craft a theme that we felt could encompass all our different stories under the concept of "We've Been Here Before."

Each one of us has had different experiences that have shaped who we are today. We wanted our theme to focus on those feelings of nostalgia and déjà vu along with highlighting the memories, places, and events that have influenced us. Because we have all had different experiences, we felt that this theme allowed everyone an opportunity to create work that tells their unique stories. It is my hope that, as you begin to read through Volume 17, you are able to connect with the pieces that we have chosen and can reflect upon your own story.

While choosing a theme was one of the biggest decisions for the class, we also spent time reviewing and selecting the content that would be published. This was honestly the most challenging part of putting this journal together. We received many high-quality pieces and to narrow it down at times seemed impossible. While this did make it difficult for us, we are tremendously grateful for all of those who submitted their work, as this is what allows us to put the journal together.

I truly could not be more thankful for the group of students that were involved in *Northern Eclecta* with me this year. Their initiative and dedication to the journal has made all the difference. The social media team spent their time promoting

our theme and getting the important messages and information out to those who support us, while the editing team spent time carefully reviewing our many submissions. Along with this, the design team created promotional materials and spent hours piecing together the content that makes up this volume. Each member of the class contributed to creating this journal, and without their dedication, it would not have been possible.

Again, I am proud to present to you Volume 17 – “We’ve Been Here Before.” Thank you all for sharing your stories with us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kylene Kubas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kylen Kubas
Editor-in-Chief

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as it was then, and as it is now

Tohm Bakelas

And after all, when memory fails,
photographs placed inside old
shoeboxes and tucked away at the
back of dark closets, help to fill in
gaps we have forgotten—either by
choice or through innate survival.

And though the photographs, too,
have begun to fade, the preserved
past unlocks doors sealed shut for
years. Smiles suggest happiness,
but poverty of recollection
contradicts today's beliefs.

Were we in love? If so, for how long?
Was it passion or simply intoxication?
Questions without closure resurface to
no avail. Ghosts of former lives rise and
fuck with reason. Excavated recollections
unearth truths ignored at the time.

This is why we tossed everything to the
shadows. This is why we abandoned the
past for the future. This is why we should
never look back. And as it was then, and
as it is now, the things we buried became
the things we carried. Nostalgia is hell.



"Old Stairs, New Times"

Hallie Hoffarth, Photography

Roam

Hiram Larew

Wander as if
 you just slipped through
Wander through what you'll never become
 near to good but towards bad
 and wander beyond even that.

Wander away to hardly be found
And wander deep down inside
 as lights are turned on
Yes, wander those temples.

Wander up and down fields
Wander all pillows
And wander alongside even what's hard or ill.

Surely in this way or that
 wander the heart.

Wander what circles the sky
 or barely comes home
Wander the curve that bends
 from bread to soup
And from there
 wander the bones.

Ruby and Louie: Just Like We've Always Been

Ruby Richard

I met Louie in elementary school. It was in passing since we never shared any classes together, but we both knew that the other existed. In middle school, we were always in the same circles, but we didn't start hanging out alone until the sixth grade. She was the kind of girl I always wished I could be. She was funny, outgoing, she had so many interests and activities, and she did not care for a second what other people thought. Even if she did, which knowing what I know now is probably the case, she would do anything for her friends.

Though I had a lot of different friends in middle school, none of them handled me being in the church as well as she did. It's hard for kids to understand, so I certainly do not blame them, but there were some days that it felt like being 'the girl in the cult' was all I knew. When I was with Louie, that didn't matter. She brought me to a water park when we were in sixth grade. Her mom had a Groupon and said each of her daughters could bring one friend, and of all of her friends, she chose me to bring along. On the way there we had gotten Starbucks, which was quite the luxury for me, but the real luxury that day was that I got to wear a two piece swimsuit for the first time.

Because of the church, all I owned were one-pieces, and I didn't typically get to wear them without some additional covering. We had a sleepover the night before we went to the water park, and when we were laying on her bunk beds I started getting nervous. I couldn't stop thinking about how weird I would look

being the only one of us in a one-piece swimsuit. I asked Louie what she was wearing and she simply hopped off of the top bunk, and pulled out all of her swimsuits to show me. By the light of our iPod touches she pulled out all of the ones she thought would fit me best, and we decided to wear her set of matching ones. They were the same suit but in opposite colors. I was able to go to sleep knowing I would be normal the next day, knowing that I wouldn't be the freaky Jesus girl, knowing that I had a friend who would help me to do that. She helped me feel normal many more times throughout middle school. She was with me through the last couple years that I was in the church. Most importantly though, she was there with me when I left it. For the years leading up to me quitting the church, I had slowly been testing the waters of secular life, usually with Louie by my side. Even if she never explicitly said it, she knew that I was unhappy, and she eagerly helped me separate from religious separation whenever she could.

We were in a class together in the eighth grade, actually, the only reason I was in the class at all was because Louie put in a good word for me. For this class, the broadcast class, you were supposed to submit an application at the end of sixth grade, and go to that class as your homeroom for seventh grade. Once you reached eighth grade you got to take it as an actual class and create the videos every week. I had always wanted to be in the class, but missed the due date for applications for whatever reason. At the end of seventh grade, two of the students in the homeroom actually skipped a grade, so there were two open spots. Louie knew straight away that she would have some input on who would be there with her. She told her teacher all about me, and a couple of emails later I was in. We spent the entirety of eighth grade blowing off classes we didn't like, because 'We have to go work on the broadcast!'. Broadcast was the best class I have ever taken in my life. It was fun and interesting, I learned how to write scripts

and edit videos, and I was able to do it all with my best friend.

Alongside the broadcast class that year, Louie and I were partners for the big History Day project. The project essentially was to use one of the approved forms of presentation to teach people about something from history. They always have a theme. I do not remember what the theme was in the 2015-2016 school year, but whatever it was, we chose to make our project about Rosie the Riveter. Being the showmen that we were, we chose to deliver it as a performance. This was great for a couple of reasons, one it meant that we got to put a lot more creativity into it than the groups who did tri-fold boards or slideshows, but it also meant we needed a lot more time for rehearsals. We took this time during our classes of course, and always went to the broadcast room to ‘rehearse’ which really just meant dick around until someone else came into the room.

Since we were doing Rosie the Riveter, we obviously chose her iconic denim jumpsuit as our costume. For us this meant jeans, a red bandana, and a denim chambray button up. I did not own a pair of jeans at this time in my life, so one day, Louie’s mom dropped us off at the mall, the good one that was ten more minutes away, and we shopped. We went to an Aeropostale, and we both bought matching skinny jeans. After that we went to shop around a little bit more, Louie needed a few other things so I just tagged along while she shopped and provided color commentary. At some point, we ended up in a Victoria’s Secret store, Louie needed to buy new underwear. I had never been inside of Victoria Secret, and I had never owned a pair of underwear that didn’t come out of a plastic pack of eight. But that day, with her encouragement I bought some grown up underwear. We even bought one pair that matched, so we could really be matching on presentation day.

When presentation day did come, we both wore our costumes to school all day. We didn't add the hair and makeup until after school when we got ready at her house, but we needed an excuse for me to wear jeans at school. Up until this point, which was midwinter of that year, I had only successfully worn pants at school a few times. I had a couple pairs of leggings that I could slip under my maxi skirts, and take the maxi skirt off once I got to school. I also wore sweatpants once, again they slipped under a maxi skirt, I was sweating the entire day. But by telling my mom we had to wear the jeans, I didn't have to hide it for the first time. I'm sure we looked insane that whole day, and I cannot believe that she wore that outfit all day just for me, but she did, because she knew how badly I wanted to wear jeans at school, how badly I wanted to be normal, and I can never thank her enough for that.

In terms of the actual competition we advanced past the first round and made it to regionals. This was very exciting for us, but we also knew it would happen the entire time. The decision was made by category, and we were the only group doing a performance. We were still very proud nonetheless, because although I don't remember the script at all I do fully believe it was regional worthy. When we went to regionals I was so excited, Louie seemed a little bit tired, but fine otherwise. What I didn't realize was that she was going through one of the worst events of her life. She told me part way through the day what had happened, and I felt terrible that she came to regionals at all. But she said she knew how much it meant to me, and she wanted to be there. The competition went pretty well for us despite her emotional state, although we did have one technical issue. The youtube track that we had cued for the dramatic gunshot noises (which I don't recall exactly why they were in the piece, but trust me, it was necessary) accidentally got played for a full minute instead of the ten seconds we usually held the position for. In my opinion we should have moved on to state, and then won nationals from there, but

I may be a little biased. We did not move on, but all of our classmates who had also advanced did come to see us perform, and they couldn't stop raving about how great we did.

Louie and I had a lot more formative experiences that year. We shared a lot more firsts, first shot of vodka, first time picking sea glass (we got ours from a creek but whatever), first time sneaking out, and the first time attending the funeral of a friend. We both knew Liv through different ways, she was my sister's best friend growing up so I was very close to her in a familial way. Louie had met her at their dance studio, and they became good friends. That year we were all on the Speech team. Liv was a couple years older than us, and attended the local private high-school, so we weren't on the same team, but our schools competed at every meet together. We would see Liv and she would run up and give us each a hug, she was so sweet and personable, and she and I were in the same category. I did drama that year and was terrible, but she always made me feel so good. She was so talented, I would sit and watch her perform if I got put in the same room as her, and I was so in awe. I had no idea how she was able to act like that, to be so moving. And it shocked me, that with her incredible talent she would even bother talking to me. But she always did, she always made me feel safe around the older kids.

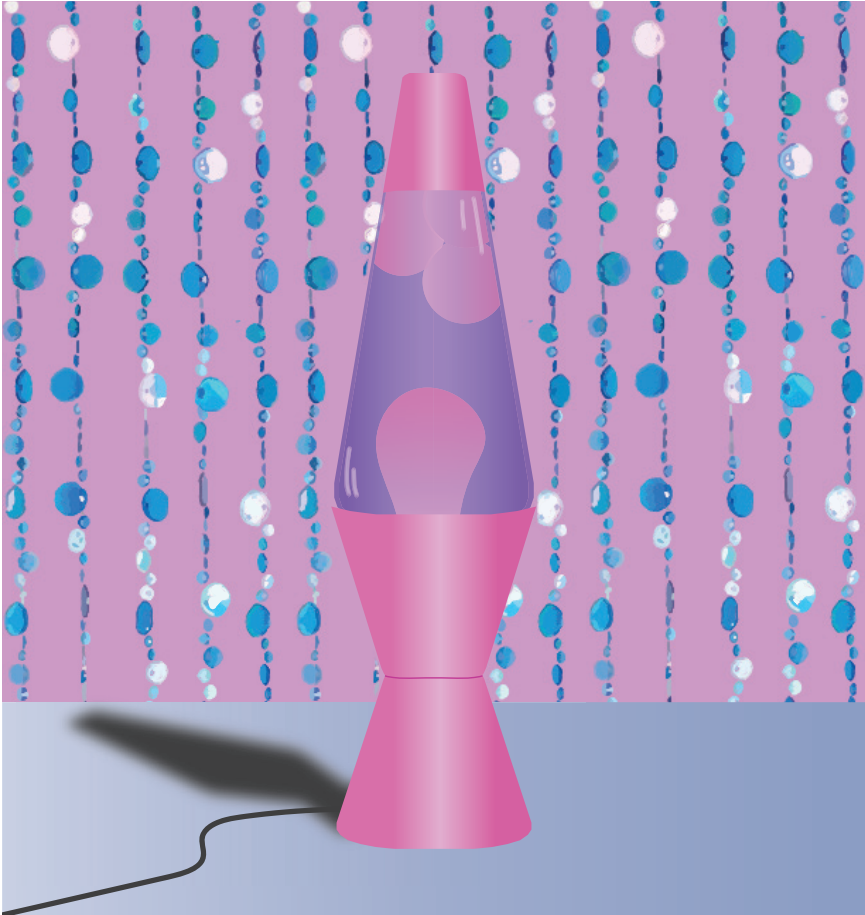
Liv passed away in May of eighth grade, she committed suicide. The stories of how we heard the news are very different, but neither of us was in a good position to process it. We were sad, and we were confused, but we still had school the next day. In broadcast class the next day they announced her death. She was a former student of the middle school and most people knew her well. I started crying when the teacher said it, silently in my seat. Louie squeezed the hand I didn't realize she had been holding, as she was doing the same. Our teacher told us there was counseling available to anyone who needed it. Louie and I went hand in hand,

mostly as a way to get out of the class I think. It was awkward, and uncomfortable to cry in front of our classmates like that. When we got there the counselor, who I always had a weird bad feeling about, talked to us in his office. He asked the usual questions, we asked some as well. Then he got weird, and I don't remember exactly what he said but it made me feel worse.

That's how most of the day went. Later that week her funeral was held. My mom came and picked us up early from school to attend. We were both dressed in little white dresses. We had been out buying them a few weeks before, so excited and giddy. Our eighth grade graduation was scheduled for the same day as the funeral. We had to go back to school after the funeral to make it in time. We didn't have time to change, and since we bought those dresses already we had no other choice. The funeral was heartbreaking, it was the first one I had been to in a long time, it was the first one for a friend. We sat with my mom as she held us on either side, we watched as they gave eulogies and sang hymns, we said a prayer. I watched as my sister and her friends sitting further up in the pews held each other and grieved. We watched a mother mourn her fifteen-year-old daughter, and then we went back to school.

I didn't want to be there anymore, graduation felt silly. I remember in science, this boy Damien said, "Who died?" when he saw how sad I looked. It took him a second to realize what he'd said. He had known Liv as well; they were in community theater shows together for years. I could tell he felt terrible, he mustered out an apology as we got in line to walk to the auditorium at the highschool across the street. There was not much he could say, not much I could focus on. Louie was much further up the line from me alphabetically, so I didn't get to see her until after the ceremony.

We shoved our grief down, went to the big dance afterward, and then had a nice sleepover with all of our friends. All of our grief was pushed away from us, sped up and ripped away. I wish we had gotten to be kids a little longer, I think that's around where it ended for me, something shifted. It was an awful day, but I got through because I had Louie. After that summer we had our ups and downs. We had a big dramatic breakup (because of course we did) . We didn't speak for nine months, and then gradually became close again. We ended up going to the same college, and we would meet for dinner about once a month freshman year. The summer after something happened, we came together so quickly. We did a production of Mamma Mia together, and ever since we talk nearly every day. If we don't see each other we call, if we don't call, we text, but we are always in contact. I am so glad to have had her with me in eighth grade, but I am so much more grateful to still have her now.



"Nostalgic Artwork"

Maddy Ulmer, Digital

midnight, dawn, dusk

Tohm Bakelas

1.

Downtown, after midnight,
along Broadway, under
artificial light, past benches
the clocktower, and empty
parking lots, there are ghosts
that walk again. They are the
lost ones, the forgotten ones,
the ones without names. They
are the ones we locked out of
ourselves because we are alive.

2.

At dawn, in the cemetery, where
tombstones look like grey heads
protruding from beneath blankets
of powdered white snow, the sun,
blinded by its own radiance, was
naïve to autumn's dying breath.
And winter's bitter beauty cracked
its cold whip across the faces of
the living while the world was
frozen in glass-like frost.

3.

As if we could rewrite history,
as if we could turn back time,
we romanticize death by chasing
ghosts in the bottom of bottles.
These autumn days are numbered,
marked by crumbling daylight
that reflects in broken shards of
green glass beneath blue dusk.
We, who are forever cursed,
accept the night as our sun.



"Shared Sky"

Mafruha Shifat, Photography

I took this photo on February 08, 2023, at around 5 pm, returning home. It was taken from my phone with no filter edit. It is because I wanted to capture the natural color of the sky. As a child, I traveled to many places with my parents for my father's job. Whenever we were on a bus, train, or ship, I used to look outside and wonder how the sky was moving with us! I questioned my parents several times if the sky was also going with us, as we have the same sky everywhere. They never disagreed! My father told me that even if they could not be with me in the future, the sky would always be. Well, I left my home and my country two months ago. Fargo, North Dakota State University, and its people

embraced me with warmth and welcome. Nevertheless, the sky embraced me more with all its shades and colors. Later in my life, I lived in the busiest and most populated city in my country, and I got separated from 'my' sky for a few years. High Rise buildings were all around, and I could not see the sky often! Then after reaching Hector International Airport, the first thing I noticed was the beautiful blue sky! Now, everywhere I go, to my school, workplace, and grocery store, I keep looking at the sky, and it feels like home! I use the MatBus 33 for traveling on workdays. The day I took the photo, I just dropped off the bus and looked at the temperature; it was around zero degrees, and the sun was about to set! I took away my phone and released the shutter. I looked at the sky for a couple of minutes and thought, this sky belongs to me; this is the sky my mother is also seeing, and my father too, who is no more with us but maybe from another world; he is also watching the same sky. Therefore, this photo is a reflection of my mind. It proves I am no longer a newcomer to Fargo. For a long time, I shared the same sky with the people here. The sky, which my parents shared too! Thus, we belong here and everywhere; the sky is the thread to knit us all!

Bear

Cady Wang

The raggedy washed-out teddy bear
Sits in the blinding white bookshelf of my room,
Lying untouched by you and I

Do you remember how the teddy and I
Haunted by worries that I alone could not bear
Bursting in at unknown hours into your room

Do you remember how you shifted over to leave just enough room
In your unbearably stiff bed and welcomed teddy and I
Into your soft and warm embrace, the worries now on your
shoulders to bear

Even though you are gone and I am alone, the teddy bear will
always stay in my room



"Zoey, Circa 2011"

Winnie Weninger, Photography

To my first dog, the time we had together could never be long enough.

The Walmart on 34th Street

Jen Lavin

We ran inside through clouds
of our own breath, locking the car
on my fob key and grabbing baskets
when we knew we would need carts

wandering up and down the aisles,
picking out the expensive peanut butter
our paychecks couldn't afford and
my friend swears she saw

Peter Pan next to the orange juice,
Capri Suns overflowing in his cart
like he was trying to convince himself
he wasn't growing up and in between

the egg noodles and the alfredo sauce, we
found the recipe for mac 'n cheese with
microwaved hotdogs from seven summers
ago when our mothers still cooked us

lunch and we got distracted by the small
humans in the front seat of the carts, buckled
in with their wide eyes full of life as
we went through the self-checkout lines

so we could pretend that we were actual adults,
bags overflowing with comfort foods to get us
through the stress of being twenty, Lunchables
and Pop Tarts and Mott's gummies and when we

got home, I realized I forgot the cream cheese,
still sitting next to the yogurt and the memories
of easier days, of elementary fun, of innocence
and popsicles in the summer.

The Problem with Names

Jennifer Hernandez

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Although I was born and raised in Fargo and graduated from Moorhead State University (back when that's what it was called), I have also had the privilege of living in England, Japan, and Mexico. For the past 20+ years, I have lived in the Twin Cities and taught English to middle school students from immigrant families. Without a doubt, I have the best job in the school. The draconian policies that have prevented many refugees and immigrants from seeking asylum in the United States in recent years have taken a toll. Despite the challenges, our country continues to become more diverse and much richer, as a result.

My name has been pronounced in a variety of ways depending on who was saying it. The vowel sounds of Jennifer (or Jen) can be shaped by a tongue in high, mid, or low position, tenser or more lax. The spelling doesn't change. The fundamental outward appearance, the letters and their sequence, remain the same. But as with the bearer of the name, shifts were inevitable.

I met my husband in Mexico. We were set up on a blind date. He was the brother of a co-worker. We were married ten months later.

We knew that we eventually wanted to move to the States, but we weren't in a rush. I'd seen the movie *Green Card*. I didn't think it would be a big deal. I knew the color of his toothbrush.

People who say that immigrants should just get in line and

do it “the right way” have no idea what they’re talking about.

We moved from my husband’s hometown of Culiacán to the border town of Ciudad Juárez around the same time that he filed his paperwork for permanent residency. Twelve months and one pregnancy later, we finally received notice of his appointment at the U.S. Consulate.

Suffice it to say that the seven hours I spent outside of the Consulate gates in the summer sun of the Chihuahuan desert in August – three months pregnant -- did not result in the desired outcome. Only petitioners were allowed inside the compound, and although I was not allowed to enter the building or grounds, I was also not allowed to leave the area, in case they needed to talk to me, to confirm our relationship.

This was 1998. There were no cell phones.

I took refuge in the scant shade of a taquería across the street and waited. When my husband finally emerged from the Consulate and said we were done, I was confused.

“You got it?” I asked.

The answer was negative. There was no clear explanation as to why, no clear plan forward. He was told to wait, they needed to check some things out. His name was very common. The name itself was an issue.

We went home. We waited. We heard nothing. We couldn’t get through on the phone. Week after week, all we got were busy signals. Months passed. Our son was born.

My mom came from Minnesota to Juarez to meet her first grandson. The day before she left to return home, she told me that I had to go to the Consulate and try to find out what was going on. I went. I stood in a long line. I took a number. I waited some more. I didn't get any answers, but I was told to come back the next day.

The next day I drove my mom to the airport for her flight. Then I bundled my five-week-old baby into his car seat carrier and returned to the Consulate to stand in line again. And take a number. And wait some more. But this time, when I got to the window, the woman said, "Where's your husband?" At work, I said. "Well, tell him to call this number and make an appointment."

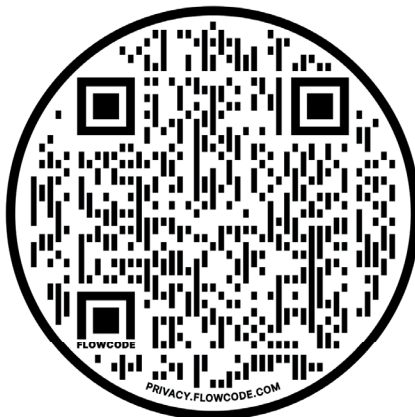
So he did. And this time when we waited outside the Consulate -- my baby and I -- we found an enclosed restaurant with comfortable booths. And two hours later when my husband appeared, his paperwork was stamped and signed. His name, presumably, was no longer a problem.

"A Journey Untold"

Rose Yang, Video

This video was created to show the journey of my family and highlight my parents' resilience. My parents are children of the Vietnam War and took part in what we know as, "The Secret War". Though my siblings and I may not have received all the shiny things in life, we did receive unconditional love. My parents' survival of the war has shaped my family into who we are today. My siblings and I were given the opportunity to chase the American dream because of my parents. In this piece, you will hear me speaking in Hmong. I am simply repeating the previous sentence before me. I hope you all understand, if I could, I would've done this entire piece in Hmong. I have lost the language that I once knew so well. Lost due to embarrassment and the criticism that surrounded me. I used to be ashamed of who I was. But now I am proud of the untold journey my parents went through. Proud of the story that has shaped my siblings and me. Thank you to my parents, siblings, significant other, and mentors for the endless motivation.

Scan this [QR Code](#) to view the video:



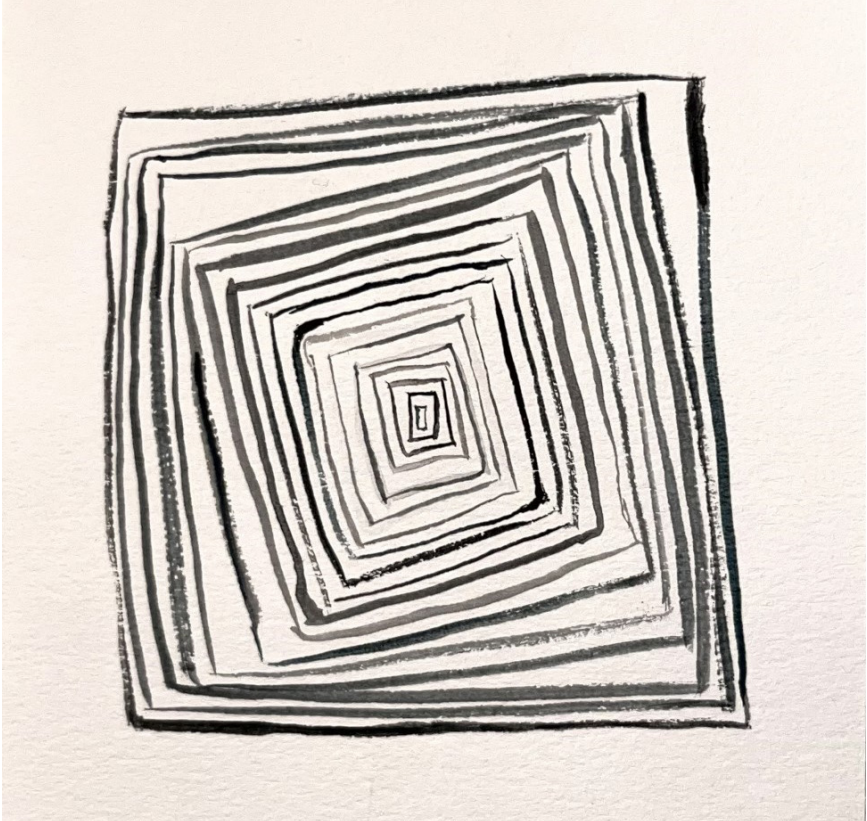
A B Cease

Eric Podgie

A surreal darkness creeps across
As I mourn another loss;
A loss of a friend,
A love,
A life.
And I'm left lying
Alone

But what am I to do without her
Because quickly I feel myself descending
Black tar sticks to me, swallows me down.
Before I know it, I will be consumed
Beyond a void of redemption
Bound to love no longer

Cease
Clandestine doomed thoughts;
Continue forward,
Continue to live,
Continue to love.
Climb from this abyss I've made
Continue to remember, who I am



"Reframe the Picture"

Rachel Luebke, Watercolor

My main goal with this piece was to symbolize how memories can become skewed throughout time. Despite the very simple shapes, they get bent and warped the further away they get, representing possible false narratives that come with rethinking about the same event over and over.

Baby Blue Dodge Caliber, 2007

Jen Lavin

My hair was still long when I
first sat in the driver's seat, not even
sixteen yet, but my father told me
it was a good car, so I handed over the
envelope with most of my savings inside
and got the keys in return.

Drove my sister to school five days
a week until I started to enjoy her
presence in the passenger seat
that sits empty most of the time now,
holding imprints of memories, crumbs
in the cracks from Chick-fil-A nuggets &
one-dollar cones from McDonald's.

Drove my mom and I to my first
therapy session later that year and
swore I would never go back, only to spend
five months my sophomore year of college
doing exactly that every Wednesday
afternoon until I could drive without wanting
to crash into the power line pole on
the way home.

Drove myself to the hair salon during
the second year of covid to chop all of it off
because everything was so heavy
because dying it blue and then gray with
Walmart box dyes wasn't helping enough and
I reasoned that the change needed to be bigger.
I surprised my father when I came home,
lowering my hood to show him
the missing 17 inches of dirty blonde.

Drove the inside of my closet to my new
apartment in August, the backseat so full of
hangers and gray Nike socks that used to be
white that I couldn't see out the rearview mirror
and I cried most of the way there because
change sits too heavy in my chest.

And now the front seat holds the pills I
just picked up from the pharmacy and the
back is full of reusable Aldi bags next to a worn
out ice scraper on the floor, the cloth seats
holding the remains of depressive episodes
while the bottom is rusting out and the back
wheels are balding and the engine light refuses
to turn off.



She Is Still Me

Kooper

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I came across this photo of myself by accident while rummaging through the archives of my mom's Facebook page. I suddenly remembered that day. I remembered that I used to exist as the girl in the photo. Just as quickly, I remembered that she is gone forever. Overcome with such a strange grief I took to my keyboard in an attempt to help us both understand our pains through space and time. Inner child work is so important for all of us in order to make sense of our experiences and do our past selves justice. The girl in the photo did not always feel heard, but I felt her smile as I said the things she never could.

This girl was tall for her age, and smart. She cut out each item with safety scissors, every object on the board was to represent some aspect of herself. The heart cookies are because her birthday is on Valentine's Day- she had only had five of those.

Her smile beams so brightly at me, so full of pride and lightness, that my heart is gripped with pain. Her death makes me profoundly sad. She knew nothing of divorce or shame or anxiety, only of collages and the euphoria of being scooped up in her mother's arms.

I can feel the sequins between her toes. I can feel the ghost of her mother's hands putting that braid and bun in her hair. I can feel the remnants of dried glue on her fingers. I can feel the newfound autonomy that comes with the first year of school. I can feel the beaming smile returned behind the camera, a mother bursting with love.

How can the girl in the photo be me? I am so stained, and she so pure. She's not the imposter- I am. Over time, piece by piece, I have replaced her, working side by side with the world to destroy her.

Each time she was left to vomit alone in a bathtub,

each time she laid awake at night practicing her breathing exercises,

each time her heart panged so painfully that her cries got stuck in her throat,

each time she hid in a closet with her secret phone and dialed her mom's number,

she died over and over again.

I am all that's left.

I wish I could hug the girl in the photo. Unscarred, undamaged. Nothing more perfect exists in all of space and time. I would touch her soft skin and take her outside to catch frogs.

She knew nothing of the world to come and so she was unafraid and braver than I will ever be. I wonder if she would look up to me, if she would love me even if she knew everything I've done. I wonder if she would take my hands in her little ones and show me around her bedroom, play with me.

Her mom is now an imposter too. Watching your little girl have panic attacks and hearing her explain loneliness and shame like a person triple her age and then dropping her off at the door and watching it close will kill a mother.

We are friends now, we imposters. She and I drink coffee and silently apologize for traumatizing each other. What's done is done, though. That girl in the photo is dead; killed by time and circumstance. I weep for her often, increasingly so as she slips further and further from my memory, dying even now. However, I chose to believe that some portion, some glowing fraction of her is immortalized in my heart, somewhere. It pulses and shines; alive when I see her face, if with sorrow.

Like a Curve

Hiram Larew

The lady with dogs who sells me eggs
and has done so for years
says she'll be moving away before long.
Her front porch makes blue green sounds
as she lists the reasons –
All of the fences need mending every Spring she says
and foxes keep worrying the chickens
and farming's mostly gone.
I drive home
with her carton of eggs on the rider's seat
over roads that smell, somehow,
open and grateful.
And all at once
for a washy minute
I'm sad like a curve.
It's probably for how
years from now
I won't remember the friendship
or her shrug that's half muddy boots
half hum.

10/09/2022

Tohm Bakelas

This year, the second October Sunday brought a full moon. The entire day was one long adventure, and you thought of all the ways to bring closure to the night.

After dinner, when dusk arrived, you loaded your kids into the car, headed east down Morris, then left onto Kitchell, then right onto Hillcrest, and followed the road straight for about one to two miles.

On the way up, you pointed out the moon, how it was orange like a giant pumpkin, and how happy you were to share this moment together. Your kids screamed about Halloween, about trick-or-treating, about the costumes they would wear. You smiled, thinking of memories you had with your parents, one dead and one dying.

At the top of Hillcrest you parked the car. Bats flew overhead as everyone walked to the edge of the cliff. You showed them the exact place the horizon meets the city skyline, the exact place stars glow in the black night.

And together, you watched the moon rise
over treetops, watched it turn from orange
to white and illuminate the cold cliff you all
stood on. And you knew, right then, that
their lives changed—forever.

My Unspoken Thank You

Cady Wang

Your rough and overworked hands
Held my smooth soft ones
I never once said thank you



"A Nod to One of the Greats"

Carlos Roybal,

Charcoal, Chalk Pastel, and Acrylic Paint on paper

An homage to one of the greatest athletes in American sports and his contributions to making a nation of black and white into a more vibrant and colorful tapestry.

This Is Not About a Clock

Monika Sauer

There's a clock taking up residence in my home. In my life. My husband wanted it, claimed we needed it. Something about being a proper family, as though having this clock would make us more respectable. I always thought our lives were perfect, fulfilling, and complete. It was a shock when my husband approached me. We're older, him and I. Too old, I said, to bring a clock into our home. He would not be swayed. All his friends have clocks, he said, all their wives love clocks. I didn't love clocks, in fact I didn't even particularly like them. I tried, I really did, to convince him, but he's stubborn. He threatened to leave me. I couldn't have that. I had a job, but not one that could support me all alone. No, I needed him. And so I relented, and soon enough we had a clock, just like he wanted.

I had my reasons for not wanting a clock. My mother had had three, and she'd slaved over them for years. They required constant maintenance, you see, and with time the constant dedication drained her. Granted, she did love those clocks, but I knew very early on that I never wanted to follow in her footsteps.

I didn't have a choice now, though. We have a clock now, and that's final. There's no going back. There's no avoiding it.

My husband likes to show off the clock to his friends. He brings them to the house to show it off like a prized toy. When he can't drag them to see it in person he takes photos of it. Ones with the clock resting beneath his arm. Ones with the clock basking cheerfully in his attention. When he's not showing it off, the clock becomes my burden. I knew, I suppose, that he wouldn't do

his fair share. It's always expected that the wife keeps track of the household. Why should he think any differently? And so, just as my mother before me, I do everything to maintain the clock.

I get up to shush it when its constant ticking wails through the walls and interrupts our sleep. I make certain that it's on time, and kept looking pristine. I clean up after it, after the many messes it has made in our home and in our lives. Me. I have dedicated my busy life to the maintenance of a thing I never conceived of wanting.

If the other wives heard me, heard how much I hate clocks, hate my own clock, they would think I'm a monster. Everybody likes clocks, they'd say, even when my clock gives me trouble I still love it. But I don't love it. I can't. I resent that stupid clock. I hate what it means, what it stands for, what it's done to me and my life.

I hate that clock so much. But there's nothing I can do, nothing I can say, that will free me from the burden of it. I'm trapped here now. I can't leave my husband, leave the clock, not without forfeiting everything I have. I have no choice but to stay, dissatisfied, in this home I've come to hate, with family I resent.

I'm certainly not the first to fall prey to this life. I can only hope I learn to love it before I can work up the nerve to tear it all down.

The Places We've Been

Kylie Menge

Two friends had met
Without the full intentions of love
A day was spent, and hands were held
A car, a trampoline, a house

We meet again
Intentions now open
A celebration with a stolen kiss
A dorm, a hotel, a bar

Another meeting
Love had started to form
Some silly costumes and pictures galore
A bridge, a store, a park

This time, travel had taken place
Growing closer and closer
More connections and deeper bonds
A bus, a college, a mall

By now you know the story
Love can be seen to last
Sickness and health
A family home, a couch, a small bed

New year and deeper feelings
A love has grown fonder
I love him and he loves me
A couple, a story, a connection
Every past place
And all the new ones to come

To the places we've been
You've made my past

To the places we'll go
You've given me my future



"Midsummer Moon"

Hallie Hoffarth, Photography

Every Time, the Same

Molly Setchfield

Shelves collect dust as journals lay upon them, unbothered.
Aside from a few inscriptions, each is empty.
Years have passed without ink saturating the lines;
To the outside world, they may seem incomplete,
But to me? They are overflowing.
Each time I open a cover
Each time I read the few spaces grazed by a pen
My memory fills in the remaining gaps from page to page
And I recount the words that would have been.
Different years.
Different people.
Different circumstances.
Yet, every time, the same.
Words come most easily with pain.
Another new notebook.
Another first page.
Another opportunity to disappoint my recurring intentions
To only fill the book with good.
I will live,
Then ache,
Then write.
A cloud of dust will settle upon the new arrival.
Years will go by without recollection of its contents
Aside from the empty feeling, all will be repressed.
Once again,
Shelves will collect dust as memories lay upon them, unwanted.

Jagged Glass and Smooth Pebbles

MZ

I'm staring at a glowing white computer screen—an empty doc—and tap my fingers haphazardly, unrhythmically against the keyboard. A memoir...

There was a thunderstorm last night. Pounding rain, wind that ripped and clawed, and lightning and thunder dancing in the sky. I opened the window so I could breathe in the wet air and try to feel natural in a six-story building of cement and steel. The room had been dark, the only light glows in from the streetlights standing below in the rain. My glasses glare and I close my eyes to feel the damp that soaks through a metal and fabric screen.

Memoirs are not comfortable things. They fit like too loose socks in too tight shoes. Chafe and scrape and rub me bloodied and blistered. They want to dig up the broken glass in my memories. Grip it tight and pretend it isn't still sharp. "Pick that one. There wasn't enough time to soften and smooth it." A jagged rock on a beach of soft sand.

It doesn't have to be painful. That's something I'm sure of, but that's not what my inner critic says. My critic that slumps deep in my chest cajoles and cackles whenever I attempt to pick a smoother memory. "Stop being such a baby. Confess—confess and feel shame. You deserve it."

She loves memoirs. Disguises herself amongst lines and the 'correct choice'. She brings forward those broken pieces and too-sharp edges and displays them to me proudly. "Pick from these," She dips down with a double-edged smile. "They're the

best of the best, don't you know? Everyone loves the uncomfortable bits."

Her kindness weighs like stones in my gut. Her smile widens and cuts deeper. "Don't you want to write something good? All the best stories hurt, you know that."

I don't know that.

What I do know is that a lot of the best writers and poets and artists hurt. They struggled and faltered and crumbled to pieces. Sometimes they never got back up.

But pain can't be the only way, because I want to write about...

The basement, where there was no light and hardly a sound besides the rattling of the pipes as the sink was used upstairs. The windows are cluttered with blankets and foam workout mats and the most random assortment of trinkets and junk to try to keep any light from entering. And the monster creeps, occasionally teasing us with calls of "Come out, come out, wherever you are..."

I'm in the big rectangular "play" room; treadmills, a bench press, and an elliptical take up one half in a decent attempt at a home gym. The other looks tornado swept with an ancient couch and toy chests and tubs. Random junk is scattered along the floor from the hunt for window coverings. Tucked in the far corner amongst the clutter, I hold my hands over my mouth to disguise my breathing. The door creaks as it opens and my whole body tenses. Across the way on the opposite wall I know my cousin Zack is perched on a table, back pressed into the corner and relying on the darkness to disguise him entirely.

He chose a bad place to do that.

The monster turns and pauses in her creeping towards my spot. She tilts her head and cackles viciously and in the back of my mind I'm impressed with Ashley's commitment to the bit. "Oh brother...I see you." We all scream as she lunges and I use the opportunity to sprint past into the hallway, and if it was dark before it's like sinking into tar now. I'm squinting and I hear shouting behind me and everything is chaos.

Then I bump something. There's a crash and a shatter. We all freeze before someone finds the lights. I stare down in horror at the shattered remains of a porcelain toilet. I forgot it was sitting out in the hallway as mom renovated the bathroom and now, well...

We had to get a new toilet, and we were banned from playing hide and scare in the basement ever again.

Probably one of my favorite memories, to be honest. Back when my siblings, cousins, and I were all young enough to play. I smile to think of it, even now.

The critic is insatiable though. She's insistent that there's something better to write about, something that'll "hit harder," but every idea she gives makes my stomach twist.

I've always hated the idea of having to suffer for your art; of cracking open your chest and displaying the broken pieces. Even now, just writing around the broken pieces makes my throat clog.

It's colder now, after sitting on this for a little over a week. The wind is dry and I'm bundled up when I walk across campus

for class—almost time to pull out the mittens. Trees are nearly bare with only straggling brown and red leaves remaining and I find my eyes trained on the concrete, watching each leaf I step on with worn tennis shoes. They're pretty, the leaves. My campus has a good batch of trees so there are a lot of different shapes and colors.

The critic could be right, I suppose. Maybe writing the sharper bits is better. There's beauty in vulnerability and catharsis in describing it. I just wish it didn't ache as much as it did—pushing on old bruises.

What if I let her win just this once...

There were three people I wanted to ride the Ferris wheel with.

Today's our first comfortable day on a week-long trip. We'd been swimming through the air more than breathing it for the last few—miserably hot and humid. The after-rain coolness has got me smiling as we walk down the dock of the National Harbor. The sun is setting over the water, washing the horizon in oranges and yellows that filter through the towering frame of the Ferris wheel at the end of the pier. The wheel's glowing neons race up and down the spokes. Each cabin is the size of a small room, encased in steel and plexiglass with benches on opposite sides.

We have a large party so when we get in line for the Ferris wheel we have to split up into groups of six. Hannah, Lily, and Grace are chatting with our underclassmen and I'm with Maya not too far behind. I figure they'll grab us when it's time to get on.

We haven't hung out a lot but I reason it's just bad timing—

differing interests. We've always had different interests all the way since second grade and it's never been an issue before. Of course, it's not catching up to us now.

I ignore the ball of dread coalescing in my stomach.

As we near the front I try to catch their eyes—any of them. I think Lily makes eye contact but there's nothing there. I'm already gone for them. A ghost of past commonalities that they've outgrown without me noticing.

There's this pit in my stomach, but I simply turn to Maya and shrug. We ride with two others.

I laugh too loud and joke too hard for our entire turn around. I don't think Maya bought a lick of it, but she's kind. The others were too.

A good distraction.

And by the time we were back on the bus and headed for the hotel I had tucked it away; out of sight, out of mind. Staying the execution of a twelve-year friendship for just a bit longer.

Until the blade's less dull and reluctant.

I didn't let it fall until my first year at college, after time and distance had sharpened the ax so it'd do the job with one swing. A clean sweep.

Sometimes though, I think it's still hacking, a phantom blade sawing...sawing away whenever I see neon Ferris wheels or orange-purple sunsets.

A story that felt like pulling teeth and rotten gums...and it's not even that good. Not worth the tears I shed remembering it.

Everyone loses friends. I just so happened to lose mine while in DC on a Ferris wheel. The critic adores these rough edges and sore spots though. This is her time to dig her claws in. She bleeds through my fingers as I type and she stings my eyes as I think and she's never louder than she is in these moments.

Memoirs are not comfortable things.

There are still broken shards and jagged stones. Pieces so sharp I'll never pick them up, resisting the critic salivating and clawing from my chest at the sight of them.

But there are also well-worn pebbles and wave-soft sea glass. There are wonderful monsters in dark basements and even the single smooth edge of a beautiful sunset on a Maryland pier. The artist won't always hurt; won't have to hurt. I find hope in the simple fact that Van Gogh did his best work when he was happy.

And it's dark out on a Monday evening.



"Monarch"

Liv Ronning, Photography

Thalassophobia

Terra Dahlman

Excuses for drunk men don't make them
Any more sober.

Slamming doors shake this house by its roots.
Memories wail from within.

I jump at loud noises now,
Loud words.

I worry about us
Becoming my father,
Your mother.

I fear drowning.
The deep water of the ocean
And the bottom of a cup.

If Jane Were Death

Jane Braaten

I would soothe the pain
With whatever's at hand
Tylenol, Morphine
Drip Drop Drip Drop
Like whiskey? For some.

A washcloth to moisten
Chapped lips forever
To wipe away Sadness
Knowing solo flight awaits—

I'd smile such thoughts
From me to you
Caressing Memories
Unfold fresh quilts
To blanket your limbs

Read Keats and Emily
While holding your hand
Listening for pulse, sporadic it seems.
Remembering haunts
Haunts remembering.

But I do.

Of colors such dusty pinks
Such ancient greens and blazing reds
Make music, cool jazz
Hum ballads of yore
Heart rhythms
Mere iambs, pentameters too.
There's a rhythm for life
And,
There's a rhythm to death.

Fresh wild flowers
beside the death bed
Arranged for the scent
To travel barely by

Noises subside
and

The Temperatures of Life
Are over.



"Sanna"

Marissa Philipp, Charcoal

Grandma's Hands

Reagan McGillis

My grandmother's hands were the strongest I've ever known
They were as strong as her voice
As her will
As her love.

My grandmother's hands were methodical in her work
Kneading the bread dough with a practiced purpose
Holding my hands in hers
To teach me how.

My grandmother's hands were wrinkled
Age spots dotted her knuckles and the backs of her hands
They shook on occasion
But her grip on my hands never wavered.

My grandmother's hands were warm
They were firm and steadfast
Like her hugs were
They were safe.

My grandmother's hands were tired
at the end
Worn and weary
But God, her hands were the strongest I've ever known.

The Grungy Office

Max Borman

An aquarium sputtered out a bubble or two in the corner forcing the resident clownfish to run wild. An older lady sat behind a desk at the front, her glasses falling down her nose. A couple of young-looking people were strewn about the grungy office, all holding pamphlets filled out to varying degrees. As the man scanned his surroundings, he looked down at his own pamphlet, his name scrawled on the top, and the rest of it waiting for his answers.

As his pen hovered over his paper, he longed for the days when things were simpler. When he was able to sit on his large red couch in the small yellow house on the quaint Minneapolis street. His small, grey dog laid upon his chest as he browsed the internet. Looking at his friend's social media posts, filling his Amazon shopping cart, reading some dumb article, and wasting his time until he would eventually fall asleep.

He longed for those cold Christmas nights. The large tree sitting in the living room, donned with millions of ornaments and bright white lights. The fire burning ever so slightly in the rustic fireplace. His family sitting around the room, gossiping about the neighbors or their extended family. Mariah Carey belting her Christmas songs, the TV playing *Elf* for the tenth time, and the smell of cookies coming from the kitchen. All while he sat at the dining room table, building whatever new LEGO set Santa had brought him.

He longed for the days where he could head down into the basement after school without a care in the world. With a

few clicks on a video game controller, the faulty TV would light up with the latest Call of Duty, Super Smash Bros., or Star Wars game. Sometimes, a brand-new Minecraft world would even sneak its way in. Sitting on the old, green, decaying couch with his buddies surrounding him, he would spend all night playing whatever games were not covered in scratches. Each of them ready to insult each other as they gamed away all night.

He longed for those long Friday nights when he was in high school. When his closest friend would walk home with him, sit on his couch with a laptop that barely held together, and play whatever war game he had just bought. He would sit on his own computer, playing the war game right alongside him until the sun set and rose again, and the sound of his mom's waking footsteps signaled that it was time to drift off to sleep. The computers would turn off, an episode of Family Guy would turn on, and the two of them would finally lay their heads down until they awoke again around noon.

As he slowly began to answer one of the questions, he longed for the days when he could just relax. His parents would go out and buy him the latest toy or a nice helping of microwaveable treats. White Castle sliders, Stouffer's Mac & Cheese, Waffles, and on the rare occasion, Hot Pockets. He would sit at the kitchen counter and down them without a care. As the freezer emptied, more treats would arrive. As the toys broke, new ones would take their place. A never-ending cycle, at least it seemed that way.

As he riffled with his tie, he longed for the times when he was able to run around the quaint yellow house wearing nothing but his underwear. Instead of a tie, there would be a blanket wrapped snugly around his neck. He was Captain Underpants saving the world from unspeakable horrors, protecting his loved ones, and yelling his favorite catchphrases until his older sister

told him to shut up. Fighting invisible enemies and stopping the end of everything, until he eventually crawled back to his twin bed and fell asleep surrounded by his large collection of stuffed animals.

He longed for the days when that Minneapolis block was his fortress. When his friends would run across everyone's yards protecting them from evil with whatever superpowers they had that day. The fights were legendary, the battles everlasting, and the victories as sweet as they come. They were the only ones standing in the way of total destruction, and their bravery was always rewarded with a cold glass of milk or a slice of banana bread.

He longed for the days when his only source of income was a small lemonade stand on the corner. His family wagon would become a traveling store, and his neighbors would come from all over to buy a glass of his famous sugary lemonade. Occasionally, a game of Plinko would lean against a tree waiting to be tested by anyone who was willing to spend the extra dime. Then all that money would go to something shiny, something new, and something that was entirely his own.

As he watched someone leave the room in tears, he longed for the days when he could just learn. Sitting on a green weirdly textured chair with a guitar on his leg, strumming away at the latest song that his teacher showed him. Even though he may have never wanted to play it unless he was forced to, he still longed for those times. He could get lost in those chords. Dreaming that he was a hero who beat people with music, or that he was some kind of wizard with a magical guitar in his hands.

He longed for all those days long past. The good days and the hard ones. The ones filled with fights and the ones filled with

love. The ones that left him in tears and the ones that gave him a smile. He even longed for the times he spent coughing on the couch, bandaging fresh wounds, and hiding away in his room. Every second, a distant memory.

A Normal Day in the Newsroom

Jasmine Patera

It started as something like an internship, a test drive,
to be a thing more skilled than I am.
It was winter when the call came, and the lights flashing
red-blue,
blue-red
blue
red
led me half a block from your resting place, where I parked
and walked,
so as not to desecrate
that hallowed riverbank

The ones who found you cried, as they had a right to—one
screamed at me
things I could not even deny; I steeled myself:
It's experience.
I pulled out the camera;
people need to know.
The red light blinked
And back at my desk, my hands on my keyboard
I realized
what I did.

I heard “good job tonight” from one boss, a text ‘cuz he was busy;
but the other one was disappointed my hands were so shaky as
the footage rolled.
“Use the tripod next time; it’s your job,”
nonchalantly, as I was shivering still.
And now every time I drive past that place, a few blocks from my

house, I remember:

Red-blue, blue-red, he's dead and

you can't use that footage, but you took it anyways.

Every finger for every story I typed after had a weight;

As heavy as my soul.

You found me in public, with my family or alone, in my night-
mares, always

wracked with tears; I imagined the cold you felt

as I was getting paid to write about you, who are only a few years
older than me

and will not remain that way for long. I decided months later, I
will never pick up my pen again;

at least, not to profit from tragedy. If I do, it will be to write about
sweet things;

dreams and hopes and words to rot out your teeth.

There is a place for people who want to do what I did, but—
it's not as if *I* was the victim; no,

I was the vulture circling overhead.

Now when I drive past that street, I remember lights;

Blue, red, blue and when I stop at that sign, I close my eyes
and hear sobs.

I wish we hadn't met that night.

Gap Year

Johanna Ziegler

Now

There exists, in the study of geology, the concept of unconformities. They're breaks in the geologic rock record, missing time that's unaccounted for. In a continuous layering of homogeneous sediments, there's a sudden, obvious boundary between two vastly different rock types. It's rough. It's uneven. It's jarring. And geologists can only make educated theories about what must have happened to pause the story, radically change the story's course, and then resume progression. They can only make ballpark estimates of how long it must have taken for this entire process to happen.

They have to ask themselves, "Why?"

Because there must be an explanation.

They have to ask themselves, "Where did the time go?"

Because it must've gone somewhere.

2017

I read the Twilight book series on a whim the summer before my freshman year of high school. I am fourteen, and I believe I am in the prime of my life to relate to Bella Swan and her miserably desirable love-life.

New Moon, the second of four books, includes several blank pages that feature only the printed names of successive

months in a calendar year. It's to demonstrate the passage of time in which nothing happens to Bella. Edward has broken up with her and disappeared, leaving her to live through several months of a depressive void.

This is expressed in the film adaptation as well. A *Variety* magazine article from 2009 describes the scene as a “twirling 360-degree shot that shows the passing of time as Bella recovers from the breakup.” The article called it one of the film’s “nifty cinematic tricks.”

Blank pages. Endless camera circles. Rough scars across stacks of sedimentary rock.

Disappearing time.

Nifty.

2012

To market myself as the most sought-after tablemate during the fourth grade’s lunch hour, I emulate a charming technique I picked up from my father. I tell stories. But the technique is all in the delivery. My father was a radio disc jockey for many years and discovered in the early stages of fatherhood that he can dazzle his two little girls by reading bedtime stories in his special radio announcer voice. He hums theme music for us, has my sister and me provide sound effects, and intermittently pauses the story to hear an ad from the sponsor, typically a goofy acne medication he names, “Hickey Off Hickey Cream Pimple Pads by Brillo™.”

For an hour every night, my father invites us into his imaginary world of K-DAD Radio, “All Dad, All the Time.” A day of eating breakfast in the car, questioning how to spell ‘television’ on a test, and coming home to watch reruns of *Arthur*—a day which

is scripted to end with nightmares and throwing up all over my pillow again—is temporarily interrupted by my father to bring me a special program from K-DAD radio. Tonight’s featured bedtime story? Dick Bruna’s “The Egg!”

I know that I’ve always liked the way these bedtime stories make me feel, like anyone but myself. Anyone more entertaining or thrilling than an unremarkable nine-year-old.

So, at the lunch table, I introduce K-JGZ Radio, my own spin on my father’s creation. I tell stories to my classmates and watch with delight as they squabble over who gets to perform the sound of impending doom and who gets to recite the coveted Pillow Pets commercial.

“Mm, no no, we said Anabella would do the opening music, and then Shelby would take the commercials,” I have to clarify again, licking the last bit of apple sauce off my spoon. Begrudgingly, Shelby complies, and Anabella delivers her best rendition of generic theme music.

I toss my spoon back into my lunch pail and rip open my fruit snacks. “And we’re live in three, two, one...Welcome back to K-JGZ radio! I’m your host, Johanna Geralyn Ziegler, and you’re listening to the number one radio station for all things...scary.”

Genevieve’s and Megan’s eyes widen.

“That’s right, folks. Today we’re going down a bit of a darker path. Or should I say tunnel!” I nod to Charlotte. She perks up and rounds her lips, mimicking an echoey ghost sound one might hear in a haunted train tunnel. Anabella squeals excitedly. She loves scary stories more than the rest of them do.

“...so to get into the tunnel to rescue her brother, Jess and

her friends decide to climb through the abandoned school bus, stepping over a bunch of broken glass and, like, twisted metal, and even a few bones—”

“Did you just say bones?!” Shelby cries.

I smirk. “Maybe I did.”

Megan clings to Genevieve’s arm nervously. “I don’t like where this is going.”

But I do. I enjoy every moment of these stories. I enjoy this break in the day when I am no longer unimportant but instead a zombie-hunter or a super-spy or a peachy romantic lead.

My stories move forward every day at the lunch hour.

But Johanna Ziegler, as she exists in reality, does not. I am okay with this.

2016

To everyone’s surprise, including my own, I am cast in the lead role of my middle school musical. Initially, I tell myself that I am talented enough for the challenge, but an embarrassing voice break and lyric fumble in the first rehearsal calls this confidence into question.

“Oh, shoot, I—”

“Just keep singing, Johanna.” The teacher’s tone is sharp and impatient.

“I’m sorry, can we just go back—”

“No, we can’t. Deal with your mistakes later.” She snaps the tempo, waiting for me to find my place again. Each snap feels like a slap across the cheek.

The rest of the cast watches me silently. An eighth-grade boy who does community theatre outside of school checks his watch and glances tiredly to his friends. When the first rehearsal is over, he approaches me and points to my water bottle.

“You know, drinking cold water is bad for singing,” he says. “So...maybe you shouldn’t do that anymore.”

And for the first time in my precious thirteen years, I develop the imposter phenomenon. Though the term will eventually appear in the mental health pamphlets I’ll browse subtly as a young adult, at the moment many researchers still struggle to put a pin on it and its effects. A few years into the future, Brown University will compile enough resources to confidently state what it is: “a psychological pattern whereby an individual doubts their accomplishments and has a fear of being exposed as a fraud.”

The author will explain that the term was first coined from a 1978 study on high-achieving women.

Though I won’t understand what is happening to me until years later, the phenomenon takes aggressive hold of me. My eating habits fall out of step. I weep every night. My friendships taste bitter. I scare myself sick, and suddenly, I’m clinging to my smuggled bag of plastic inhalers, rattling pill bottles, neon-colored cough syrup, and expired throat lozenges in the corner of my favorite bathroom stall. What should have been limited to only a seasonal cold and a bit of stage fright festers into heaving up multi-colored phlegm from crackling lungs and the irrational assurance that if my voice breaks one more time during rehearsal,

my teachers will realize they have made a grave mistake in casting me.

My anxiety spirals like the toilet bowl water I flush down.

There isn't even any vomit in it. Just fear and phlegm.

Every day, after rehearsal and basketball practice, I am supposed to return to the extended-care classroom where all the left-behind kids are stored until their parents can come pick them up after the sun has set. I never want to go there because it is noisy and cramped and I'm afraid one of my classmates will be there, and they'll strike up a conversation I'm horrified to have. I picture them commenting on how I'm singing so badly in rehearsals, how Olivia from the eighth grade would have been much better suited for my role.

To avoid this, I become gutsy and justify my late delay by taking "the scenic route" back to the classroom. I walk around the entirety of the campus, often taking detours into the cafeteria's kitchen. I pour myself a glass of water, clean my sneakers, and talk to my imposter. I wander over to the lunch tables, and the talking eases into singing, soft and sweet and smooth.

"Not bad, Ziegler."

I grip the glass in my hands. Turning back, I see one of my teachers, Mr. V, walking in with a plastic bucket of stage-building tools he's returning to the cafeteria's storage closet.

"Thanks," I mumble.

"Why don't you sing like that when we're rehearsing?"

I stare at the ice cubes floating in my glass. “Because there’s no microphones now.”

“You afraid of microphones?”

“I just don’t want everyone to hear me mess up all the time.”

He sighs. “If you’re gonna make a mistake, Ziegler, you might as well make it a loud one.”

“I don’t know how to do that.” My voice breaks again.

Mr. V smiles tiredly and begins to walk away. “Yes, you do, smarty pants.”

When his figure dips around the corner, I dart back to the kitchen, snatch my backpack, and retreat to the restrooms. I slump down to the floor while my imposter continues to whisper doubt and infection into my ears.

Today, she points out that the stalls smell like cleaning products and decay.

Today, she points out that they smell like me.

Daily pilgrimages are made to my bathroom stall now, and I allow myself to burn many hours of my life sitting in solitude beside my imposter.

I convince myself that not moving backward is the same as moving forward.

2020

Every day, I light a candle. Every day, I select a different scent.

Holiday apple for Mondays. Tahitian vanilla for Tuesdays and Thursdays. Always winter pine for Fridays.

I light my candle and scoot it over rebelliously close to my laptop. I keep it there so I can play with it. I like to swipe my fingers through the flame, taunting it because I move too fast for the heat to sting me. I like to dip the tip of my pinkie into the hot wax and watch it cool into a fragile shell over my fingernail. I like to rip out strands of my hair and set them over the flame because it's pleasing to watch the hair pop and curl and shrivel as it burns. My father comments every day how strong the candles smell, but he knows it means a lot to me, so he lets me light them still.

I only discover what burning hair smells like because I'm a habitually nasty fidgeter, and since March, all I've been able to do is fidget. My hands toy with candles, scissors, nail clippers, pencil tips, note cards, highlighters, anything within reach on my desk. When my sister flies home at Christmas, she re-gifts me a fidget spinner to help. It works for a few weeks.

Several months have elapsed since the state quarantine mandate. My concept of time has begun to blur. Now, I cross off days on the calendar for the same reason a stranded person marks how many days they've been marooned on an island.

But the blur isn't all bad, I've come to learn. There are special splotches of color that'll periodically flash across my window, and these are the colors I choose to recall when I close my eyes every night.

Moments with my father are red.

Red like the sauce on the ribs we re-heat every day for lunch. The sauce tastes like ketchup, probably because that's all it really is, but I'm always hungry now, so I hug my father and thank him for the food. He clicks on a long, stiff documentary about famous geologic features in the national parks, and we smack on our ribs silently as we watch. At precisely 12:25 p.m., I thank him again, put away my plate, and run back to my room to my laptop and my candles.

Moments with my friends are blue.

Blue like my bed sheets, where I sit every Friday night to play games with them online. We're all patched into a group call, and we spend many hours roleplaying as warriors and magic-wielders in what none of us will formally admit is a world of make-believe. When the session is done, usually after midnight, the group's attention is turned to me as I read aloud installments of a corny apocalypse story that I've written. There's theme music and sound effects, not unlike K-JGZ Radio. It's a silly affair, but my friends are invested in listening because all the characters are just us, only older.

Some nights, I narrate the combat scenes too loudly, and my groggy-eyed mother steps into my room to request that I quiet down or hang up the phone altogether. When she leaves, I slip into my closet, shut the door, and press a blue-colored pillow to the wall to dampen my noise. Then I continue my story.

I feed on my friends' gasps and laughter and wild theorizing on what they think will happen in the next installment. I feed on their voices because I'm always hungry now, and their voices are the only aspect of them I'll get for some time, so I stay on the phone with them until my body is sore. It hurts to sit on hardwood floor in between pairs of shoes I haven't worn since I

stopped leaving the house.

Moments with my imagination are green.

Green like the cloak I request for my eighteenth birthday. It's a highly impractical gift, but my parents indulge me because they can't really give me anything else except a device through which I can further daydream. They know that daydreaming is what preserves my sanity.

When my mother is at work managing hospital shift rotations, and when my father has ventured out for more groceries, I am left alone with my viridian-colored cloak and a house full of speakers. I throw the cloak over my shoulders, blast my folk songs, and dance around the kitchen with thousands of different imaginary partners. I've only just recently taken a liking to folk songs, but something about their sense of community and necessity for group-dance appeals to me. The songs demand the presence of people to enjoy, and I have enough voices in my head to fulfill that quota.

My father comes home and walks in on my ritual dancing by mistake, but he doesn't shame me for my absurdity. He methodically removes his mask and washes his hands, and then he joins in on the dance. We waltz and polka and perform our Highland Flings until my mother comes home. She is exhausted, but after removing her own mask and scrubbing her hands clean, she joins in as well. I step back and let my parents dance together for a time. I sweat in my cloak, and the fabric becomes heavy on my shoulders, but I am grateful to feel something for the first time this week.

Moments with my future are silver.

Silver like the body of my school-issued laptop. For fourteen months, it is the portal through which I live.

I finish my junior year kneeling reverently on the period key because I pray that this might be the end of it. I waste away a summer stretched out on the space bar because the heat of over-rendering software tans my skin. I begin my senior year stepping lightly onto the return key because the phrase, “We’ll be back by January,” is a false platform that will shatter and drop me the moment I trust it with my weight. I commit to a college pressing my ear flat against the volume key because I can’t hear the interviewer’s question about why I’d be a good fit for this scholarship. I meet my future roommate standing still on the question mark key because I want to ask her if she’s spent her last year of high school online as well.

She hasn’t.

2021

Over a year later, we’re allowed to come to the high school two days a week in rotations. We follow distancing guidelines, wear our masks, and text updates to our friends in the other rotation instead of paying attention to the teacher in front of us.

People notice the many ways I have changed. I have bangs now, they see. I wear stylish makeup, and I boldly flaunt my purple boots and sparkly mask like there is no tomorrow. Well, I think, there probably won’t be.

But over-compensating my appearance to provoke compliments and attention is not enough for me. I still face what I fear most: I am being replaced, and I am being forgotten. For all the time I invested into my precious media and theatre departments, for all the film and journalism awards I won on behalf of

the school that had not been won before, there are already new students waiting to take my seat. New officers run my clubs before I've even left. Talk of next year's competitions drown out the announcement of this year's results.

When I step up to deliver my valedictorian speech at the social-distanced graduation, I can see my classmates already forgetting what I have said, and soon they'll forget who I am. I know somewhere deep within myself that people started to forget me the day I clicked "Join Zoom Meeting" for the first time, just to log into my math class.

I tell myself that these unsettled feelings are unnecessary. What do I realistically expect from my high school? A memorial plaque in my honor for all my contributions? Constant mention of my name after I'm gone? These requests feel vain and ridiculous to even consider. But what is it then that I am seeking so desperately? It cannot be memorability or attention or gratitude.

Can it be time?

Now

To avoid my geology homework, I crawl down into my phone's camera roll to perform a deep clean. Photos clog up 2019 and early 2020, but there suddenly occurs large gaps in time between the photos that follow.

I glance up to the cursor flickering on my laptop screen. In my typed lecture notes, it reads as follows:

1. Unconformities

- a. Breaks in the geologic record; missing time

My thoughts jump from one feeling to another, and I end up on YouTube where I re-watch my aging film projects from junior year. I begin to cry. I cry because I understand now that I am mourning. It is hard to articulate this to my mother when she calls a few minutes later.

“I feel like I lost something.” I laugh, but my face is dripping wet with tears and snot. “I feel like I got pushed into college without any closure on the first part of my life, you know? That last year got taken from me, and there’s no way for me to fill that gap.”

She’s quiet for a moment. Months ago, she might have poked fun at me, reminding me that I was too good for those silly rites of passage a person always experiences in high school. Would I really have gone to the Friday night football games anyway? Would I actually have danced that much at the formals? Would I have honestly woken up for Senior Sunrise or paid to go on the senior class trip?

I don’t know.

Perhaps that’s why I hurt.

“I know,” she says finally. “But, honey, you still did so much. And, I mean, look where you are now. You’ve earned all this for yourself just from the desk in your bedroom.”

I search for a tissue and wipe my nose. “Maybe I did, didn’t I? I still...did things.”

These words sink down into my mind. I may not have been able to spend that time doing what I had hoped to do, but I did spend it, and it was meaningful. I have to insist to my imposter that every bit of time that I did or did not use, from fourth grade

to twelfth grade, was meaningful.

The evenings I spent reading stories with my father and then repeating those tales to my classmates were meaningful because it developed my talent and my passion. The hours I spent hiding from myself in kitchens and restrooms were meaningful because eventually I did leave; I did leave to return to that classroom and to that stage and to that microphone where I sang my mistakes and my successes so loud that I started to hear my own voice again over my imposter's.

And perhaps the months I spent wilting before a laptop screen were meaningful because it gave my roots a chance to heal.

There were no homecoming or holiday formals, but there was dancing with my father in the kitchen. There were no winter musicals and leading roles, but there was my cloak and my playlists and my own little stories to delight in. There were no senior trips with my friends to amusement parks or ocean shorelines, but there were the walks with my parents and my dog, and there were the giggly calls with my sister, and there were the masked visits with my best friend, and there were all the millions of little feelings of happiness when I played with my candles or watched Twilight marathons or told my stories over the phone or scripted my some-day short films or sang at the top of my lungs about fools who dream.

That is where the time must have gone.

When book critics review the novel of my life, and they come upon those blank pages, they will understand perfectly what it is the emptiness symbolizes. When Variety publishes a piece on the film adaptation, they will praise the silent, circular passage of

time as cinematic and profound and, well, of course, nifty.

When geologists excavate and uncover the sedimentary layers of my mind, they will observe these unconformities, but they will know where the time has gone.

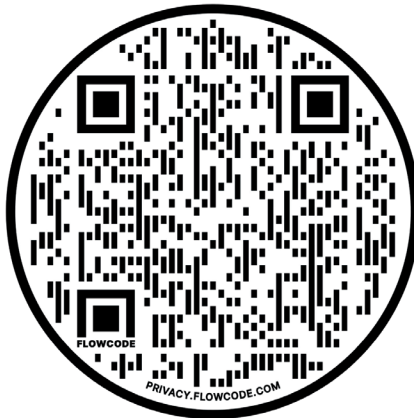
There are many uneven lines that trace across my soul
now.

But all of them are meaningful.

"Places That Are Mine"

Johanna Ziegler, Video

Scan this QR Code to view the video that goes with "A Gap Year":





"Insubordination"

S.J. Williamson, Photography

A Response to Debra Marquart's “Lament”

Austin-Alexius Klein

We have to live carefully, in case they try to tear us apart all at once,
but usually they start one piece at a time.
Outsiders (those in *real* cities) say we do not exist.
They say nothing exists here (long). They say *do not* exist here
(if you can help it), that it is a hopeless place for people like us.
That our fighting and our pride will always be in vain.
But we just want everything the way life should be.
We want our hearts to heal by falling in love with someone we should.
We want them to break by falling in love with someone we shouldn't.
But we live in fear of being exposed, without safety or anonymity.
Told to bite our tongue. Grin and bear abuse that you deny happened.
Our “mouth full of rocks.” Our mouth full of blood.
We are told to lock ourselves away or suffer alone on a country road,
trapped in a barbed-wire noose. Humiliation—the death of Spirit.
You will not humble us any longer.
It is brave to fight, even if there is nothing to hide behind.
we “were the blushing [pale] wallflower...” Now our petals burn red
from the scars endured from your corrupt system.
Do you see all our scars? Glowing. Streaming out of us.
North Dakota—sometimes we want to abandon you,
but these scars just prove that we can survive here.



"Final Future"

Audrey Marineau, Digital

This work was inspired by topics of consumerism in society, where the work depicts the future with advanced technology and discarding our valuable products we use in the present-day. I aspire to make creative worlds and concepts for others to enjoy, whether it is a narrative illustration, or surreal artworks. I mainly emphasize in digital work. I love creating art and fantastical worlds, and I shall continue to do so for the rest of my life.

girlhood

amanda

Menstruation is girlhood grief
Blood from shaving legs bubbling at the pores
Boys stare and shun and desire the glossy new robe that is the
pain produced
Bloodied boned adolescence
Knock kneed and pre-teened
Large sweatshirts and belly-button rings

Which one is right— which one determines my path to woman-
hood?

If I pattern myself after you or you
And my teeth are white and my ribs are confettied
Then what does that mean?



"Justice in Motion"

Carlos Roybal, Collage

A narrative on the direction we as a nation are taking regarding the rights of women in the short time since losing the force that is Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

Memories of You

Rachel Zempel

sometimes
late at night
i stare at the ceiling
and wonder
if the only forever
we were meant to have
is what remains
in my memory
of you



"Blast Off"

Faron Blakely, Photography

Six Word Stories

Rachel Zempel

1. stuck in a photograph; life continues
2. from tamagotchis to chasing a toddler
3. I wish I could go back

The Bird

MZ

I was seven years old the day the bird came— alighting on the clothesline.

She stretches a gossamer wing, winking one of three nebulous eyes. Her plumage is deep as midnight air and my lips part just to witness her. I wipe dirt caked palms on dirt caked jeans and stumble two steps closer. Three eyes fix on mine and I'm unblinking despite the sun-white sky. My nails are black as I extend my hand, each crease in my palm darkened with filth.

Yet she leans down wicked beak gleaming and—

There's not a sound as the arrow pierces her third eye, only the thud of her body hitting drought dry earth.

"It's just a hawk. Get back to work." Dad calls as I kneel in parched grass. She weighs nothing—a body of dandelion fuzz cradled in corroding hands. Once pristine feathers are dusted and her smoke eyes dull, half-closed.

The air reeks of copper as blood soaks through the knees of my jeans.

Childhood Stolen

Anonymous

Content Warning for sexual abuse.

I was just a girl, so young and naive,
When my own brother made me grieve,
With his hands that touched, and his body that forced,
He stole my innocence, and left me feeling divorced.

I was just a child, with a heart full of dreams,
But his actions shattered, and ripped at the seams,
Of my soul, my spirit, and my will to live,
And left me with scars that will never forgive.

But I refused to let him win,
For deep within, a strength did begin,
To rise up and fight, with all my might,
Against the darkness that consumed my light.

It was not an easy path to take,
But slowly, I found my voice awake,
And with it, the courage to speak my truth,
And to bring to light, my brother's abuse.

For though he tried to silence me,
With threats and fear, and power he'd decree,
I refused to bow down, or to give up hope,
For within me, there was a fire that would not elope.

So, to my fellow survivors, I say this,
You are not alone, and you are not remiss,
For your strength, your courage, and your will to live,
Are the greatest gifts, that you can ever give.

For in the face of darkness, and pain untold,
Your light still shines, and your spirit still bold,
And though the road is long, and the journey tough,
You will survive, and rise up, and be enough.



"Deliverance"

Marissa Philipp, Screenprint and Woodcut Print

A Man's God

Che Flory

My grandfather was buried with his umbrella. It was one of those large ones with a hooked end and a brass tip. All of the mechanics of it were made of wood. I don't know if I have ever seen another one that worked like it. It wasn't remarkable, but it was. He carried it with him everywhere, even had a little umbrella stand for it next to his bed. I always thought it was some mystical old man thing, something I wouldn't be able to understand for a few decades when my kids were in college. But even on the sunniest days, he would have his umbrella, just in case a rogue rainstorm swept through. I brushed it off because grandparents are supposed to always be prepared. The first round of children taught them that, and then they got old and joined some elderly Boy Scout troop or something to keep the tradition alive.

I never thought it was weird. Nothing ever feels out of the ordinary when that is how it has always been, but then, I grew up. I saw all the old men without their umbrellas, and I thought about him six feet under in his suit and hat with an umbrella. You might call it his Sunday best, but he wouldn't have. He wasn't the churchgoing sort, not in the abrasive alcoholic way that some old men are. It just didn't suit him. He put his faith in something more mundane. He believed in daily papers and apple cinnamon teas all year round, but more than that he believed in his wooden umbrella. I'm not saying he placed this umbrella as a deity in his life, although "In Umbrella We Trust" would look pretty great on some currency. I'm also not not saying that. Maybe you would like to be a cynic about a happy and hopeful old man, which is well within your rights. But I have my biases. I'm going to put a little of my own faith in his magic, and I'm sure hoping it's genetic.

I've been trying to find my own umbrella of sorts. I didn't think an umbrella would suit my everyday in the same way his did, but I've been scouring for something worthy at the local antique stores. I found an embossed cigarette case, and I just knew that it was meant for me. I appreciated the size because I don't have the confidence of a septuagenarian yet and carrying a massive umbrella when there is not a single cloud in the sky takes a level of confidence that I simply do not have. No one needs to know that my belief system fits in my back pocket. In fact, I'm really glad they don't. I brought it home with me and read a few articles on polishing different metals, and after a trip to the supermarket, I found my little deity to be an idol worthy of its position.

The rest of my family refuses to acknowledge the whole umbrella ordeal. They've never had much whimsy, so I haven't been able to gather much information on his practices or if there even were any. Thus far, I have determined that the world is marginally better with my cigarette case in my back left pocket. I get around ten percent more green lights when I'm in the driver's seat, and I haven't lost my keys since it joined my routine. I think I've been getting more smiles on the street. I have something to believe in that is tangible and ordinary and overlookable. I have a family heirloom that isn't my family's, but at the same time, it came from my grandfather. If my savior is a cigarette case, who are you to tell me I'm wrong?



"Lavish Lavender"

Christina Gruber, Photography

A Fake House Made of Leaves

Jen Lavin

There is a pile of leaves in the yard I just drove by on the way back to my apartment, reds, and browns and deep yellows on the sidewalk. I remember when that's all that Saturdays held, raking leaves in the backyard, crunching around on the ground next to my brother who held a rake and my sister, a smaller one. And all that mattered was who made the biggest pile, arguing over who wasn't pulling their weight. We'd make a leaf house, walls and rooms and chairs that wouldn't hold us but we pretended they did. And when it was almost completed, someone would take a running leap and destroy it all. We'd get mad but then join in. We would pretend to start over, but the desire for some hot chocolate became too much so we'd abandon our makeshift home and run inside, cold fingers and sniffing noses, the smell of fall all over us, running to the cabinet to grab the marshmallows, throwing them across the kitchen in the general area of the other's mouth but never really getting close. The floor was littered with them; we'd find stale ones days later, tucked behind a chair deep in the corner. Dad was on his recliner grading papers while he watched the game, pretzels and a diet Dr. Pepper leaving a ring of condensation on the end table. Mom would be paying the bills, a YouTube playlist in her earbuds and paper spread all over her desk,

receipts in the brown folder on the floor. Hot chocolate settled in our stomachs, the haze of the afternoon crash settling as we read Calvin & Hobbes on the living room floor. Full on Cheez-its and renewed energy that you only get at seven years old, Mom would shove us out the door again and we'd go build a fort in the woods or chuck the nerf football over the powerline that crossed our driveway or throw the bouncy balls onto the roof, seeing how close we could get to the peak, trying to catch them as they bounced back down, getting the ladder when they got stuck in the gutter. The air was crisp as the sun started to set, just staying warm enough for shorts while our fingers froze. And Dad would throw a frozen pizza in the oven and we'd watch *The Clone Wars* over dinner on the couch, begging to watch one more, one more, *just one more dad, c'mon* until we wore him down and watched another. The lights were long gone when we finally climbed into bed, hair wet from a shower that would leave the pillow damp in the morning, bellies full of ice cream that we flooded in Hershey's chocolate syrup, too wiped out for the sugar to keep us up any longer. And we'd dream of doing it all again tomorrow because that's all life needed to be.

A White Trash Love Story

Ruby Richard

My mom used to call us white trash, WT if she was pressed for time. I never knew what it meant, but I knew I loved it. I knew I wanted to *be* it. Because it couldn't possibly be bad, when we were so happy. I think that's part of the reason why I love Dolly Parton so much, she too can appreciate what others think is trash for what I know to be true, there is an incredible amount of beauty in it.

My mom was very no nonsense, not in a mean kind of way, she just was (and is) very to the point. Her constant worry about being white trash was based on the fact that we were in fact very poor, qualified for 'Women with Infant Children' benefits poor. She had always been poor, she grew up in a trailer on a farm in Iowa. As these things tend to go, as her parents got older things got better. My mom being the oldest set out on her own almost immediately as she entered adulthood. She joined the air force where they trained her as a Russian translator (the cold war, things were weird). She met a man (Ukrainian translator), fell in love, and had a baby. She was stationed in Berlin when the wall fell, a fact that I find incredibly neat. After Berlin, her and her husband were relocated to Alaska, where they would end up getting a divorce. She also lost her son at this time, he passed away from a head injury. I won't detail all of the things that she went through during this process, it was deep and it was heavy and she doesn't like to share. But when her time with the airforce was over, with her son buried on my great grandparents' plot in her hometown, it was time for her to move again. She went into whatever Alaskan coffee shop she lived near in search of a paper, ideally Chicago or Saint Louis, only to find the last paper left was

Minneapolis. She used the listings in the paper (because this was the late 90's and that was how they did things) to find a job and a roommate and then drove from Alaska to Minneapolis, fun fact: on this drive she drove under a moose. Upon arriving in her new city, and starting her job as Assistant Manager of Timber Lodge Steakhouse, she met my dad.

My dad was all nonsense. All nonsense all the time. He was a 21 year old asshole with mountains of debt and a girlfriend. He was also her employee. Before my dad ended up at the Timber Lodge, life took him from place to place as well. He was raised in the twin cities, originally raised catholic, but early-ish in his life his Mom converted their whole family to CGC. Christ Gospel Churches Int. is a pentecostal church based out of Jeffersonville, Indiana, it's bonkers, but it's not the point of this story. He went through highschool, partially homeschooled by his extremely religious mother, was all slated to start college at Mankato State, he was going to be roommates with his highschool best friend, Eddie. Something happened to stop that, I am not sure what, but the smart bet is my grandma forced him not to. He played around with the idea of enlisting in the army, Grandpa was in the service himself so it was a natural progression. Instead he ended up moving to Jeffersonville. There he was involved in the church, (he's got a lovely voice he was always a very hot ticket for song service) he was even blessed enough to be set up by our church's founder Rev. Sister Bernice R. Hicks. It didn't take, she wasn't too happy to have her grand plan interrupted and so, he was sent to Oklahoma. In Oklahoma he was the only white member of a touring gospel band, they traveled around and sang for the churches. His time there ended when he got into a motorcycle accident and moved home. Once he met my mom (his boss, also seven years his senior) he wouldn't stop asking her out. She wouldn't stop saying no.

It is borderline impossible to get information from my parents regarding their past, but from the bits and pieces we do have, I imagine it went something like this. We open in the Timberlodge managers office. I would describe it for you but I wasn't there, it's very '1999 steakhouse' if that helps. "You have a girlfriend Joe, and I'm your boss, get back to the bar." Mom sits behind the desk I assume, it is her desk after all. Dad is in a chair in front of it, I always imagined it kind of angled to the side so he could lean closer to her over the desk. From his perch in the chair, he reaches over and grabs whatever ancient phone existed in 1999 (I imagine a rotary?) There's probably a smoky haze in the air, this was back when smoking was cool, and I know for certain my parents both smoked. There, he calls said girlfriend in front of my mother and breaks up with her on the Timber Lodge office phone. And then of course my mom was wooed and they had a whirlwind romance ending up together forever, or something along those lines. Although I am very interested in this story I wasn't there, and it is like pulling teeth to get my parents to talk about the past, so let's all be happy with the romanticized version from my head.

** I read this portion of the story aloud to my parents, I thought they'd find it funny. What they mainly found funny was that I thought there was room for a full desk and chairs in the office. They did however immediately start having an argument about what really happened. They both have conflicting memories of the events, and the conversation led to light name calling and hurt feelings. Either way my version is way more cinematic and they were pissing me off so this is now canonically how it happened.**

However it happened, we know that it did. My parents

even really had a whirlwind romance. They dated for three months before getting married on April Fools day of the same year. She was looking for community and ended up joining him and his family in the strict pentecostal church. They were so young, they still are to me. They'll always be two dumb kids, even if they've now raised three of their own. And they'll always have each other, they just live in a nicer house now.



"The Family Trade"

Charles R. Boevers, Ink on Bristol

That Old Barn

Cody Goehring

That old barn has seen a lot:
Three big old milking cows called it home in the 50s
I helped grandpa change his tractor's engine one high school
summer in the late 60s
My dad fell from the hay loft and broke his leg in 49
His school yearbook photo has him in a cast standing next to that
barn, painted gold
It stored grain for a season when my uncle had a huge harvest
The barn hosted five award-winning pigs and a goat that ate the
nails seven years in a row
The old musty hay where the barn kittens roamed always made
me sneeze
We painted it pink when my grandma fought breast cancer
Blue when the farm dog Max passed away
He picked the bluest collar when he was a pup
It was ragged and black with grime when he died
That barn must soon pass on too
No longer the army green for my cousin Sylvia who went into the
military,
Grimy and moss-filled
Dilapidated. Rotten
No longer of use
I like it better in my memories

Clown College, School Songs, and Second Chances

Wendi Wheeler

When I was young, I wanted to be a clown. I pulled the white rectangular postage paid postcard from the Barnum & Bailey Clown College poster hanging on the bulletin board in my high school band room, filled in my info, slipped it into the mailbox, and waited. In no time, I received a package full of recruiting materials, which also included a large poster of terrifying clown faces which I hung on the wall above my bed.

I also wanted to be a flutist (not flautist) with a symphony orchestra. For a short time, I said I wanted to be an architect because a very tall, handsome boy from my school went on to become an architect. Early on, I realized I needed to marry a rich person so I could pursue my passions—fleeting as they were—and not have to worry about paying the mortgage.

What I did not want to be is a teacher. I came to NDSU in 1989 and told my advisor that I wanted to play in a symphony orchestra. He told me I should get a degree in music education “just in case.”

On the first day of education methods class, Dr. Cummings told us to pull out a sheet of paper and write at the top: “Why I want to be a teacher.” Then, we were to respond to the prompt and share with our classmates.

“I don’t want to be a teacher,” I wrote. “I want to be a clown. And a flutist in a symphony orchestra.” Needless to say, I did not graduate or go on to become either of those things.

I attended college full-time for one year, then part-time for four more years. I was a good student but a lost soul. Neither of my parents had graduated from college, and my father thought secondary education was a waste of time and money.

At the time, there were no outreach counselors, no retention programs, no first-generation student resources. In my last semester, I was attending classes but had not registered. I don't know why, but I hoped beyond hope to fly under the radar. When the Registrar found out, I was told to leave.

I walked off campus on a spring day in the early 90s. I remember crossing 12th Avenue at Albrecht Boulevard and saying to myself, "I will never be a college graduate, and that is ok."

For a time, I worked at Erbert & Gerberts with other college dropouts. Later I was the salad girl at Grandma's restaurant, and I was working on the line the night O.J. Simpson was fleeing the LAPD in his white Bronco, and our fry cook, who was on the NDSU cheer team, was doing back flips while flipping burgers.

In August after the flood of '97, I moved to the big city of Minneapolis with \$100 in my pocket and a U-Haul filled with desperate prayers, second-hand furniture, and bird-shaped baskets. For 18 years, I lived and worked in the city, hopping from one location and one vocation to another. I changed jobs, apartments, and relationships every three years or so, always in search of some person, place, or thing that would finally lead to fulfillment.

I returned to college in 2001, and five years and two majors later I became the first person in my family to obtain a bachelor's degree. I thought getting my diploma would help me figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up, but from age 36 to 50, I

was as aimless as ever.

Then in the midst of an existential crisis, a major depressive episode, and the frozen February of 2022, my friend David asked me a question that would change my life. I had been visiting him and his schizophrenic dog, Ellie, two or three nights a week because I was suicidal and on hold until May to see a therapist. We would drink tea, I would tell my problems to Dave and the dog, and then I would go home.

One night David, impressed with my insightfulness, asked, “Have you ever thought about becoming a counselor?”

I laughed. “I have neither the time nor the money to go to grad school,” I said. “And besides, I’m sure you need a degree in psychology or something, which I do not have.”

“I think you should look into it,” Dave said. So I did, and that’s how I found myself back at NDSU studying to become a therapist.

One day during my first semester of grad school, I was leaving campus and heard the Westminster Quarters followed by twelve long, somber gongs. Then the tower launched into a pipe organ rendition of *On Bison*, our school fight song.

On Bison, carry the flag. State is backing you!

I smiled when I recognized the tune I played hundreds of times with the Gold Star Marching Band, during pep rallies and parades and after every touchdown in championship seasons of the early 90s.

Then I remembered back to the day I left this campus,

ashamed and hopeless, believing I would never be a college graduate.

Every time I walk over the NDSU letters stamped into the sidewalk on 12th and Albrecht, I am grateful for the opportunity to be learning and teaching again. When I am standing in front of a room full of students who would rather be anywhere than in my class, I am grateful. When I read page after page of the dreadful DSM 5-TR, submit yet another reflection paper, even when I pay my tuition, I am grateful.

Because 30 years ago when I left here, I never imagined I would return. Now I'm back, exactly where I belong. And now, when I hear that fight song blaring from the middle of campus, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for this second chance.

On, you Bison. Fight, you Bison. Stampede and win this game!

I laughed. "I have neither the time nor the money to go to grad school," I said. "And besides, I'm sure you need a degree in psychology or something, which I do not have."



"Young, Wild, and Free"

Hallie Hoffarth, Photography

The Frying Pan

Jen Lavin

The bright sign flashes *OPEN* 24/7
as we walk through the door,
father, mother, brother and me.

The waitress with a nose ring walks
us to the back where a chill
has settled in, Taylor Swift singing
about her exes though the speakers

and we order eggs and a sandwich and
pancakes on the side while
we talk about the last month,
my mother rubbing my back
and my father stealing fries from across
the table, dipping them in the
ketchup splattered across his plate.

My knee bumps his under the table
and I am six years old again
at Perkins, eating pancakes next to
my sister and it's snowing outside,
coloring crayons laying next to the bottle
of syrup that has been poured excessively
onto my plate, dripping thickly from my fork
and all is good.

Moon and Star

Gwyneth

the chain, the clasp, the charms
are worn
from years of constant oils
from fingers and skin and hair.
its silvery coating is
dull
and lackluster
my fingers have ruined the shine
the charms are small.
one moon. one star.
the moon is a crescent that
cradles the star
like a babe
they catch on the chain
when i pull them
back and forth

it's gone now, of course.
the necklace.
it's lost like
the love
of the boy who was with me
when the chain snapped
on a neighborhood playground.
he loved me then.
he searched the woodchips
for the charms and chain
and presented them to me
like a needle

drawn from a haystack
when he found the tiny star
and crescent moon.



"Weapons of the Knight"

Christina Gruber, Photography

Runaway

Caitlin Barnard

Heavy breath follows me, and my legs continue to move forward. My bare feet pound rhythmically on the pavement of the sidewalk as I make sure to keep ahead. The breath gets heavier, so does mine, but I don't stop. I can feel her getting closer to me, and I know I have to get away. I'm about eight years old and I feel the tears pricking harshly against my eyes. I have to run faster. I have to get away.

A few blocks later, the heavy breathing behind me becomes hoarse, raspy and violently panicked. I turn my head slightly to look back at her, but my feet never stop moving. She yells out to me, but ultimately, I turn and keep running, letting her fall further and further behind. "KATY!" The word, if you could call it that, tears out of her throat in a garbled scream that echoes through the chilly air. It'll be dark soon. I can't stop to think about that. I can't stop for anything. I won't let her catch me. The breaths behind me get heavier, more labored as I get another block further. Soon, those heavy breaths turn into heaving, violent wheezes that escape her in terrifying gulps of air that sound far too much like choking. I slow to a walk, looking behind me at the woman coming to a stop with hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath.

"Come back here, right now!" She yells, and I remember why I'm running, once again forcing myself away from her. I can still hear her gasping breaths behind me, and even though they're getting farther and farther away, I still hear them getting louder and louder, their echo pounding against my ears as my feet pound against the pavement.

“Fine!” Her voice hollers hopelessly, and once again, I freeze. Looking back towards her as she starts walking towards the place we’ve both just left. “If you wanna do this, I’ll just call the police. They’ll know how to deal with you.” A throwaway comment casually tossed over her shoulder, as we walk in opposite directions. Well, as casually as it could sound with her still gasp-y, wheezing breaths. I can’t stop to think. Not about what she said. Not about what I should be doing instead of this. The only thought in my mind- I can’t stop. Not yet. I’m not ready to go to bed yet. I just wanna play outside a little bit longer.

They yell at me, egging me on. My siblings are on the blue playground set that’s bolted, not well, in the ground of our backyard. “It’s time to go inside.” My parents tell me. But it’s not fair. I want to play longer. I don’t care that it’s starting to get dark, or that I have things that have to be done before I go to bed. Actually, I do care about the last part. I do care that I have to do chores, take a shower, and brush my hair and teeth. I care, and I really don’t want to do all that stuff. I just want to play outside.

I start out with a brisk walk, it doesn’t stay a walk for long as I get closer to the edge of the fence line. Soon, I’m at a run, and then a dead sprint. My bare feet barely meet the ground as I fly over the grassy plain of my backyard. The grass so sharp it splinters my feet and the dirt so hard underneath that I can feel the bones in my shins shake as each heel lands. I don’t care. I love the feeling of running. Of being free. Of not having to go inside and do the chores that should have been done before I was even allowed outside in the first place.

I see a cop car drive past, and only one thought enters my mind “I don’t want to go to jail.” I veer off the sidewalk and under the chained sign that states No Trespassing, and duck my

head so that the cop won't be able to see me. I sit there for minutes, hours, a millennium, as I wait for my own heavy breathing to slow down, from my run, and from the panic that rises within me. I don't want to go to jail. When my breath is finally back to a comfortable level, I dart from underneath the swinging chain, and run back in the direction I came from. Maybe, if I get home on my own, I won't get caught by the police. Maybe I won't get arrested for running away.

When I walk in the door of my house, my mom is sitting on the couch, breathing deeply from her inhaler. My dad barely glances at me; "Go to your room." I do.

That was the last day that I've ever run away from home. The day I gave my mother one of the worst asthma attacks that I've ever seen her have. I've regretted it ever since.

Trigger Warning

M. Schlangen

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This poem originated in 2017 and has evolved from the anger of living in a country with high rates of gun violence, especially mass events targeted toward hatred of religion or race and school shootings. I grew up in a district shadowed by one of these events. We have been here before.

When tragedy strikes in America
We watch it unfold on TV
Hear the recap on the radio
Listen as newscasters and broadcasters describe the unthinkable
that occurs

 That already occurred
Momentarily at the edge of our seats
Before lounging back into our neutral position
We hear the pop pop popping through the speakers
We see the horrors sweep across the screen
Sanctuaries destroyed
Lives stolen
We witness it all from the comfort of our homes and cars

When tragedy strikes in America
Politicians debate and politicize and criticize
Everyone blames anything
No one blames anyone
We collectively quantify
 Breaking it down into numbers
 The 67th of the 44 days of 2023
 4 or more means Mass

How many lives are worthy of screen time?
Our Facebook feeds flood with Prayers for Them
The minimal effort to show we support them
We seem to share in the suffering
Of those who lost everything
While we watch it all with our wif

I grew up with backpacks locked away
So that they couldn't conceal while carrying
textbooks
Our schools have turned from a safe haven to a battlefield
With bulletproof white boards
And active shooter protocols
To keep it from happening

Again

I cannot imagine going to meet kin for a picnic
Or grocery shopping
Or to worship
And instead meeting a violent end

When tragedy strikes in America
The shock wears off
No universal policy changes
Because no one stays true in their call to change
Prayers disappear off the main pages of our social media
The radio turns back to tunes
With the occasional update on life after
Time passes
And we care
Until we don't
We wait until the next event
To bring out our patriotism like it's the solution
For when tragedy strikes in America

I've been here before

Natasha K. Hancock

It's Tuesday and I'm throwing my bags
in the car. Escaping my life to
someplace new. Believing this adventure
will be what I need. Hoping it
will see me through.

I've done this before.

Pulling into a dinky little airport that
sees maybe 200 people a week. Catching
the first flight out of this nowhere town
where I'm fading into anonymity. Praying
this time will be different.

That I'll be different.

The first month in my new home is
exhilarating. Everything is exciting and
there is so much to do. I find people to
pass the days with. Hanging on the outside
of the group like a wolf that needs a pack
to survive but can't quite connect with
them. Swearing that if I try harder, I will.

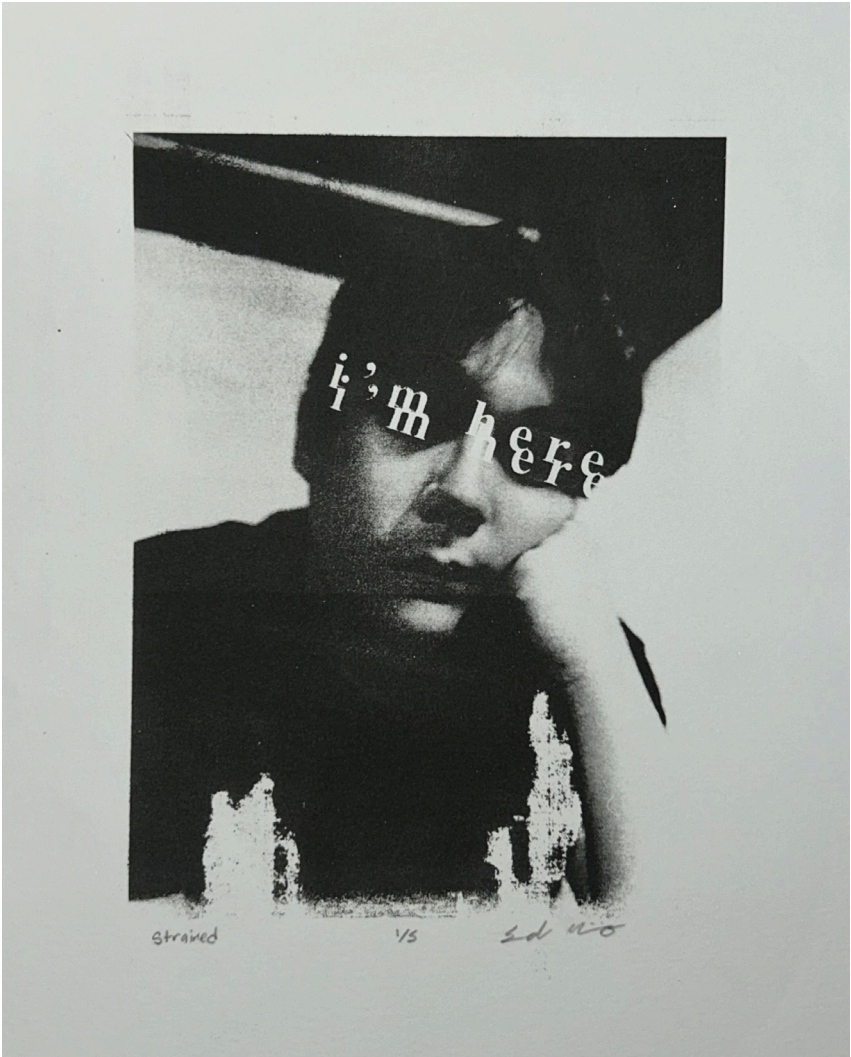
I never do.

Time passes and days once bright with the
chaos of discovering new places, people, and
things have turned grey with the monotony
of everyday life. I tell myself this happens to
everyone. They surpass it, I can too.

I don't, I run.

It's Tuesday and I'm throwing my bags
in the car. Escaping my life to
someplace new. Believing this adventure
will be what I need. Hoping it
will see me through.

I've been here before.



"Strained"

Sacred Mauricio, Lithography

Stuck

Reagan McGillis

My hometown is smaller than it was when I left.
It feels like my favorite pair of shoes that I want to wear
But I've grown out of.
When I go back to my hometown, everything is different.
I'm out of place, out of touch.
These people I've known my whole life
Don't know me anymore.
And I don't know them,
Because I left, and I keep coming back
Over and over,
But it doesn't feel the same.
I'm stuck between two places:
My past and my present.
When do I get to have my future?

The Cycle of Eternity

Monika Sauer

I was probably too young the first time I went into the woods by myself, but they surrounded the back of my childhood home, and as a curious toddler with a knack for evading supervision, I couldn't help myself. It's not my parents' fault though, I was pretty crafty. I had snuck outside while my mother was grabbing me the snack I'd had a meltdown over. My stubby legs had carried me at a steady pace down the steps and toward the uneven terrain of the forest. The tall trees patiently shielded me from the glaring summer sun as I padded onward, the damp moss soft and cool on my bare feet. I loved the forest instantly.

I was still running, heading swiftly forward, when my mother, desperately searching for me once she realized I'd vanished, called out my name. It had been easy to ignore her. The call of the forest was far more persuasive than hers. Home meant rules, bath time, shoes, but the forest, the forest had no rules. I was free as long as I kept running.

I was unable to run forever though. Running, I would find, takes a lot out of you, especially when you'd missed snack time. I made it pretty far before I finally gave in though. When I had reached my limit I sat down, exhausted. At the edge of a small clearing I made myself comfortable, yawning into the fresh open air. The sights and sounds of the forest filled me then, like it was meant for me. Birds sang in the trees above my head, crickets chirped a staccato melody, the trees forming a harmony with their swishing as the wind made them dance to the tune of the woods. I fell asleep there, nestled beneath a tree many times my size, head pillowed by moss and low forest brush. I slept

peacefully until I was found.

I was forbade from so much as looking at the forest after my little escape attempt. Weeks would pass before the strict watch over me began to loosen, months before I was allowed to do anything by myself. I didn't try to escape again, having learned the consequences. I missed it though. My youthful mind began creating many dreams and fantasies, fuelling my growing connection to the forest. I had only my thoughts and dreams to sustain me for a long time.

I was eight years old the first time my parents let me play in the forest by myself. My father was a hunter, and he often brought me with him on his trips to teach me survival skills. I loved learning about the forest, but I wasn't meant to be a hunter. I wanted to experience the forest, not take from it. And so I spent many years learning how to survive so that I would eventually be given the opportunity to enjoy the forest how I wanted. It took a few years, but after my birthday I was finally given the opportunity. Not without limitations of course. I had been given several warnings. Only as far as you can hear me yell... Be back before dinner... Not a scratch or you'll stick to the backyard... Don't eat anything wild... And so on, but still, I had finally been given the freedom to explore as much as my heart desired. Within earshot, at least.

I was nervous walking into the forest without my dad for the first time since my initial introduction. I knew the forest better then, but the feeling I'd had that first time, the hold that it had had over me, I couldn't be sure it would be the same. Taking my first step I was hesitant. The shaded entryway of the forest giving me pause. On my second step I was more sure. The forest was a friend, even if it might not have as tight a hold over me. By the third step I was running, just like the first time. All the fear I'd

had, the melancholy, disappeared as I stepped fully into the arms of the forest. That feeling, the calm, loving grasp, took hold of me, pulling me forward just like before. Perhaps even more forcefully. I started heading straight, but then shifted toward the right, running toward something I could only feel. I ran. And I ran. And I ran. Heedless of my parents' words. I ran until my breath gasped from my chest in quick bursts. I ran until my legs wobbled with exertion, and my feet threatened to give out. I ran until I fell to my knees, hands grasping the fresh growth and living dirt beneath my finger tips. From the forest floor I dug my hands into the soil, connecting with the earth around me. Connecting with the forest itself. I hadn't reached wherever I was being led, but I had already gone too far. I knew that if I didn't start heading back the consequences would be dire. And so, I trudged, begrudgingly, all the way back home, unfulfilled and a little roughed up, dirt tucked beneath my fingertips. I returned to find that I was in trouble, having come back late with small scrapes and bruises from my fall. I knew what would happen, and I knew that no excuse I could give would be enough to escape punishment, but that rush, that familiar feeling of home, even without making it wherever I was going, had been worth it.

I was around ten years old when I was finally allowed more freedom to play in the forest. To be fair, my actions when I was allowed near the forest unsupervised up until that point weren't the most controlled, and so it made sense that it had taken so long, though the wait certainly tested my patience. The start to my school days was in large part the reason for my parents' change of heart. I had been in school a few years by this time, and with difficulty I had made friends. Interacting with peers was difficult for me, and I quickly found that if you didn't fit in you wouldn't survive, and I was different. People my age, normal people, didn't feel the way that I did about the forest. In fact, I learned that it was weird, unusual, to hold such reverence

for a place with nothing more to offer than solace. Theme parks? Sure. The playground? Of course. But the forest? No. The forest was scary, they said. It was dirty, and there were bugs. And why would I wanna spend so much time all by myself with nothing to do, that sounded boring. I learned that the forest wasn't cool, that I should keep my weird fascination with it to myself. And so I did. I changed myself to fit in, to be normal. I had been granted all this freedom to explore, but suddenly I no longer wanted to.

I was twelve or so and still not the most well liked, though I had stopped talking about the forest. Early on someone had nicknamed me tree-hugger which had stuck, and anytime we talked about insects or plants people would mock me. There were a few people who treated me like a normal person, but it was only a few. The only place that made me feel accepted was the very place that left me ostracized. The conflict made me miserable. I began to resent the forest, and my peers, and maybe even myself. I gave away more and more of myself in an effort to become more than the weird kid. With effort I was able to gain some popularity, but at home I was depressed. My grades started slipping, I started lashing out. Soon enough I was so numb that I didn't even care about popularity, at least not openly. I could feel the pull of the forest gently tugging, asking me to come home, find some peace, but I ignored it. I watched as my parents grew more and more frustrated with my academics and behavior. I ignored them too. I lost myself, lost the happy, hopeful child I was, and soon enough I fell in with the other lost souls haunting the school.

I was fifteen when the forest became a cool place to be again. I had long abandoned my relationship with the woods in favor of more normal, relatable things, like sports, or TV. I could still feel it, gently prodding at me, calling me like always, but I was too afraid, too resentful to reach back. I never went in the forest, not even with my dad, not anymore at least. I figured I'd never

step foot inside a forest again until the day my friends dragged me on an unexpected trip. They weren't my woods, no one, not even them, could convince me to go there. My forest was on the other side of town, but just the sight of the trees and the foliage left me feeling homesick.

I was contemplating heading back, nervous and fidgety, when Emma, a sophomore year repeat, introduced the group to drugs for the first time. I hadn't known what to expect when she had suggested a jaunt through the woods, but I suppose it shouldn't have been all that surprising that we weren't here because of the trees, or the plants, or even the animals. It wasn't the scenery that brought us out. No, Emma had suggested coming here to share in illicit activities.

"So... I've got a surprise" Emma said, stopping us somewhere about halfway down the trail.

"Uh, okay. What's your surprise weirdo?" Someone replied.

"Well, my big bro has this stash right..." she pauses for unnecessary effect.

"And?" We prompted.

"And, I may have grabbed some stuff, and I may have brought it." She grinned at us.

I was nervous, a few of the others were too. We weren't the best students, but none of us had fallen prey to the druggie bad kid stereotype. Not yet anyway. It must have been clear how hesitant we were because her grin fell away, becoming a frustrated grimace.

“No way you’re all gonna wuss out on me? Really?” She remarked, staring us down in disappointed annoyance.

“God! What are we even doing here then? Maybe we should just go!” she yelled with an eye roll, turning her pointed look in my direction.

I was actually very okay with leaving, but having the full force of her focus left me off center. It was her expression, the disgusted, disappointed one I had seen so many times on my parents face, that broke me. Things went quickly from there. A bong was grabbed from somewhere on her person. She lit it, taking a puff before handing it to me. With little instruction I inhaled. The smoke burned as it entered my throat. I hadn’t done it right. I simply took a breath in and breathed out through my nose, both rookie mistakes, leaving my throat and nose feeling like fire ants were pouring out of them. I coughed frantically as Emma leaned back and laughed, patting my back condescendingly before grabbing the bong to pass off to the next person. My reaction made the whole group even more uncertain, but Emma was persuasive, or maybe she was just a bully. Either way everyone eventually gave in. Though the circumstances weren’t the best, the feeling of being high was like nothing I had ever felt. My throat was still raw, but my mind had calmed, my feelings swimming in a soft pastel happiness. The forest around me faded, my connection to it becoming distant. Was this what it was like to be normal? I couldn’t know for sure, but that illusion of normalcy was addictive, and with just one puff I was hooked.

I was seventeen, my grades had dropped even more since I’d started skipping to get high with my friends. My parents had given up on me, they barely held out hope that I would make it to senior year, let alone graduation. I had given up too. I didn’t care about school, work, whatever. I just wanted to hang out with my

friends and have fun. I wouldn't think about how bad it hurt to hear my mom tell counselors there was nothing they could do. I wouldn't think about how long it'd been since I was completely sober, how terrified I was that that freaky connection would come back if I ever let myself be. I wouldn't think about how wrong everything had gone, how scared I was that I'd never find a way to fix things. No. I wouldn't think about any of that. I would get high instead.

I was eighteen when I got so messed up that I broke the rules.

Never let anyone know about the connection.

Never follow the connection - EVER.

Never go into the forest behind my house while under the influence.

I had set those rules years ago, added to them when we started getting fucked up all the time. But after years of dutifully following them a sudden change called to break them.

I was laughing, bubbly and floaty, when I felt this tugging in my chest. That strange connection I had always felt to the forest, dampened for years by the drugs, now back and stronger than ever before. If I had been sober it might have freaked me out, but as it was all I could think about was following it. It was an unlucky coincidence that I was with friends at the time.

“Oh my god! You know what we should do?” I exclaimed, the weed giving me more confidence than sober me could ever hope to have.

“We should go to the forest behind my place! It’s like, so cool, and like, I have this feeling right? And so, we should, like, go there.”

No one was sober enough to disagree.

I was excited, high. I hadn’t let myself go into the forest without my dad in years. And now the pull had flared to life, leading me to some far off destination. I couldn’t conceive of ignoring it. I didn’t know what had prompted this sudden change. Perhaps the forest, eternal though it was, had gotten tired of waiting, and was using our connection to bring me home. Maybe it needed something from me.

I was leading my friends down a hunting trail not ten minutes later. It started in my backyard and went straight forward before twisting left. Even high I could navigate the forest as easily as my own bedroom. I thought to show off that skill, leading them right, toward my goal and off the trail into open wilderness.

“Hey guys, check it! This way” I instructed as I ushered them on.

“You sure? I don’t wanna get lost” someone, I think Blaine, complained.

“Yeah, we should stop, my feet hurt,” Shayla added.

“Come on guys!” I rolled my eyes at them. “Live a little. There’s something this way, it’ll be cool I promise” I goaded.

They groaned but obliged.

I was leading them forward, enjoying the scenery. Time

passed quickly as we got closer to whatever destination the forest had waiting for me. I continued on, drawing myself and my friends toward what could only be the heart of the forest.

“Where are we? Where are we going?” Blaine again asked.

“Oh, um, we’re like two-ish miles out. I don’t know how much farther exactly, but I know it’s this way.” I admitted.

I was met with several disgruntled looks.

“We’re not lost are we?” The last of our group, Jay, asked.

“No.” I scoffed. “We’re not lost. The forest will show me the way.” I said nonchalantly.

“Right, because that’s totally not a fancy way of saying lost.” Shayla said with a pointed look.

“Not lost! Okay? We’re not lost. Stop freaking out.” I said with an eye roll.

“Okay? Cool. Take us back then. This place is freaky.” Shayla said, looking around warily.

“We’re almost there, promise”

I wasn’t lying when I told her that. The connection, both due to the sobering effect of time and being so close to our destination, had strengthened quite a bit. I’d never noticed it before, but the pull, which I’d always envisioned as a rope of sorts, felt more like a hand holding my heart, beating in time with it. It was a little claustrophobic, the feeling, but also comforting in a way. It made the growing fear seem unimportant.

We walked for another fifteen or twenty minutes when a cave entrance appeared from the brush.

“Whoa,” it could have been any of us, maybe all of us who exclaimed.

The cave was dug into a slow incline, looking almost like a hole. It was huge though, at least six or seven feet wide, but only about three or four feet tall. It was made from a grayish stone, at odds with the dirt and green plants of the forest surrounding it. There was a feeling of intentionality to it, as if someone put it here to serve some purpose.

Without hesitation I stepped toward it, fully intending to follow it wherever it led.

“Hey, no, wait!” Shayla shrieked.

“What? Let’s go, there’s something there” I ushered.

“Jesus, we’re not going in the murder cave idiot!” She returned, looking at me like I’d suggested something heinous.

I wanted to go though, the forest wanted me to go. As much as I cared about my friends, they wouldn’t stop me.

“Shayle, first off, not a murder cave, second off, I’m going down there.” I moved to continue forward.

“Hey, hey, no! No murder cave!” She put a hand on my arm, roughly pulling me to face her.

“Christ Shayla, let go”

“Abso-fucking-lutely not,” she turned to the others, “help me?”

Suddenly all three of them were pulling me away from the cave. I don’t get it, don’t they know how amazing this place is? Of course they didn’t know. They didn’t have the connection.

I had made up my mind before we had even stepped foot on the trail. I would go wherever the forest led me, and this was it. I pulled away from them, fighting my way free. I ran forward, toward the cave. They ran after me. I wasn’t as athletic as I had been before giving up the forest, but I was motivated, they had no chance of catching me.

I dove down, into the cave and away from my friends. They didn’t follow me in, they were afraid. I rushed down. The cave, though tilted down at a steep angle, had an almost stair-like floor. It was rough-hewn and damp, but the forest wanted me here, it wouldn’t impede me now, not when I was so close.

I kept moving, down, down, down, never sure when I would arrive, but certain I was getting closer. The terrified screams of my friends had long since been swallowed by the distance, and still I continued on, walking down a dark and winding path I could feel in my mind.

I walked, unaware of the passage of time, until something, a light, shone just down a bend in the path. It was the only light I had seen since I had become swallowed by the darkness of the cave. Whether for survival, the pull, or both, I hastened my step and hurried toward that light.

It was faintly blue, bright enough to see at a distance, but not nearly bright enough to fill the chamber, massive and ancient,

that I found myself walking into. From what I could see, which was startlingly little, the chamber, like the rest of the cave, was a grayish stone. The walls had the appearance of an unfinished sculpture, all rough lines and sharp edges. It felt made. But that couldn't be right. A place as massive as this? Without anyone knowing about it?

I continued forward, mind clearer than it had been in years. Looking around I spied what was casting that ghostly light. It was a stone, blue, and embedded in what looked like a short podium. Definitely made.

I moved closer, captivated. It was like no stone I had ever seen before. It was multifaceted, but not evenly, and it was polished so cleanly that it couldn't have been done by any man or machine. This stone, or whatever it was, was unreal, ethereal even. It was a strange blend of reality and fantasy. A messy contradiction contained within a beautiful, otherworldly relic. Creeping closer, the light, when it touched my skin, radiated an energy like something living, breathing. Something about the energy made it feel like it was alive.

Fear, held at bay up to this point by the calming presence of the forest, overtook me. Maybe my friends had been right. Something about this place was strange, natural almost to an unnatural degree. I made to step back, to leave whatever this was exactly as I had found it, when the light pulsed. It flashed, and flickered, fading slightly.

Mesmerized, I stopped. The light slowly brightened. I took another step back, and it flickered again. Looking around at the darkness, hoping for answers it couldn't give me, I halted. I had two choices, either leave, and hope whatever that flickering meant wouldn't be a problem, or stay and figure it out. I knew,

with absolute certainty, what the forest wanted. It wanted me here, it wanted me to go right up to the glowing pedestal and do, I don't know, something. But what did I want? What would I do if I left?

If I abandoned this place I suppose I would just go home, get high, and pretend this whole thing was a bad trip. But then what? My parents could hardly stand to look at me. My teachers sometimes didn't even hand me the homework when I went to class. My friends though, I did have them. But Shayla, Blaine, and even Jay were still pulling enough C's to pass. Even if I went back things would only stay the same for a few months, and then when summer ended I would be left behind.

I looked again at the light. Then back to the entrance. Even if I went back there would be nothing waiting for me. There was nothing to look forward to. The best I would get is some dead end job flipping burgers or being yelled at by people twice my age. No. There was no point in going back. I didn't hate my life, but the forest was more my home than the four walls I'd grown up in anyway, and at least if I stayed here I couldn't disappoint my family anymore than I already had.

I spent several minutes contemplating. It wasn't a decision I made lightly, once I decided there would be no taking it back.

I made my choice.

I walked toward the stone. It shone brighter, glittering in the darkness. Resolutely I stood, leaning over the podium. I reached up a hand, uncertainly, and slowly, carefully, I pressed the tips of my fingers to the surface.

It was cool to the touch. The surrounding stone was damp

but warm, comforting, where my other hand rested. A feeling, like the quiet trickle of brook, or the light sprinkling of rain on a hot day filled me.

I smiled.

And then I am gone.

I am the grass that tickles kid's feet as they run, carefree, through my fields.

I am the trees that hunters hide beneath, waiting, as the silent deer weave past.

I am the water that cools burning skin, and washes away the stress of the day.

I am the animals that creep, climb, and slither, growing and dying and growing again.

I am the paths that humans weave to traverse me, to make me safer, to make me theirs.

I am the forest.

I am the grasping pull tugging at my former self. The grass tickling the toes of a toddler running like something wild into my embrace. The moss pillowing the head of that same child as they sleep. The dirt beneath the nails of a child chastised for their misdeeds. The wet leaves dusted with ash and trampled by clumsy feet. The well worn path that a bitter teen abandons in the search for something better.

I am the forest that shaped the being that was me before I

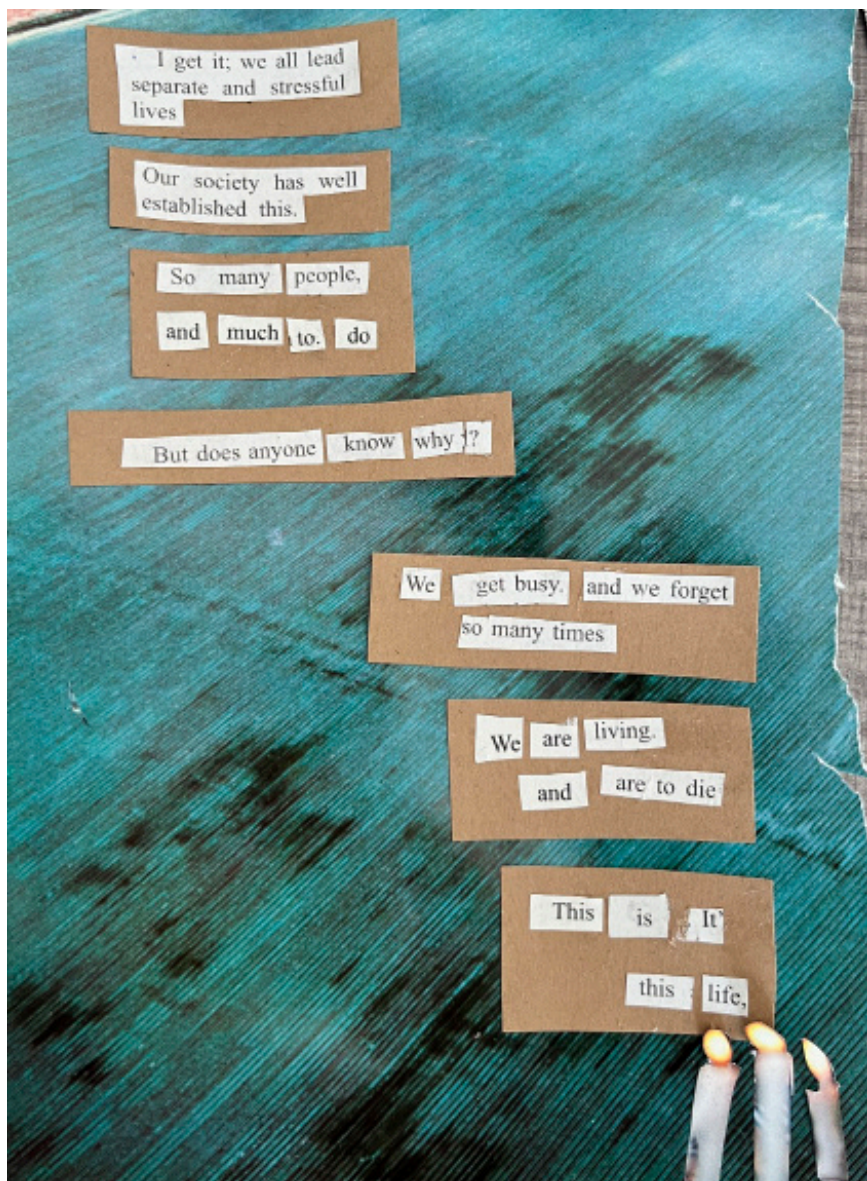
became me. I existed before and now I exist in the after. The beginning of one linked inextricably with the beginning of the other. Our fates intertwined in a cyclical dance.

The world of man believes that I am gone. The being I was before did not return from their journey. They do not know that I became more. They mourn for who I was not knowing that I have not left. They do not know that I am the forest.

And so I watch, patiently, as they grow and learn and fail and try again. I watch and I listen. I wait. Because I am eternal. I am the forest.

Found Poetry

Kyleigh H.



Family Farm

Lauren Foley

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Family Farm is a piece I wrote that reminded me of simpler times as a child. My Great-Grandpa, Stanley Foley, and Great-Grandma, Bessie Foley, owned this beautiful white farmhouse out in the flat cornfields of Illinois with their five children (one of their children being the one who still takes me back there now when he can (thank you, grandpa), my Grandpa, Ed Foley, whom I dedicate this piece too). This little home stands alone in East Central Illinois, but even so, it stands strong, and with it, my memories. I wrote this piece, not only for comfort in my own memories of the home and of my loved ones coming together at it; but also for those who may hold a place close to their hearts, no matter the size, years that go by, or memories, that they too have been greatly impacted by. My hope is that as my audience reads this piece, they choose a place of nostalgia that has the ability, even to this day, to fill their minds with happiness, their hearts with love, and their eyes with "awe" again as they recall all of the precious memories they once spent at that place with their loved ones. So, readers, as you follow this piece line to line, I encourage you to put yourselves in that little place that you hold dearest to your heart. Remember all the reasons you cherish it, and never let go.

down that straight long path of gravel
i could hardly wait to get into this old house
that to once again, i had traveled

i'm not really sure if it's the green auger for a mailbox or the
small, strange black horse pole in the front yard but something
about this place has always caught me off guard

dad, mom, us kids, grandma and grandpa would park
i would get out and look around excitedly
there was so much to do before dark

i always loved to climb on that yellow trailer ramp
or even to pump the water well with my siblings
to see who could make the ground more damp

maybe it was those rusty, old swings
or the Illinois breeze
or the crick my cousins and I swam in
you know, those simple things

my great-grandpa always encouraged us to go to this field past
the crick “there are arrowheads to be found up there,” he said,
causing my cousins and I to run up there real quick

now that I’m older, I’m not there as often
but when I am, all the memories come back
the well I still push
the grass below it, becoming sodden
i walk into the house and play the piano as if I were a kid although
this time i know what I am doing
before, my fingers didn’t know what they did

whenever I am there, I play for my great-grandpa
he sits in the room over in his recliner in awe

as he talks with the family, I head upstairs
there's something about this old house that though I wasn't born
yet i feel as though in the distant past, I was there

i walk up the carpeted, creaking stairs
to find four rooms untouched, dust floating in the air

i walk into the first room on the right,
my grandma tells me this room was my Aunt's
two very old cribs inside, pink wallpaper so bright

i then head down the hall to my dad's favorite room to stay in as a
kid
the bed still sits in there, sheets in the chest at the foot a big win-
dow with the ever-so-famous box fan amid

apparently this was the grandkids' favorite room to stay my father
and uncles included of course,
in the attic above it was their secret hiding place during the day

drawings still hung as if it was just another day
sometimes I wish I could go back and play

next, I walk into the room across the hall
to see two twin beds on each side of the room
but that was not all
on the dresser sat a picture of my great-grandma
along with the most precious jewelry in a dish
if only I could have met her
as I walk around this house, that is my one and only wish

finally I end in the room that was my grandpa's
i look around at all his shelves still stacked with books it was hard
to believe i was in such awe

i sat down on his bed and looked at the ceiling above and at the
striped wallpaper surrounding the room,
a room to me, it seemed, that was filled with such love

what a privilege it is to walk the same halls my grandpa did as a kid to hear about all of my dad's greatest memories at this home of all the fun things he and his cousins did

it's hard to believe that me, my grandpa's granddaughter, would one day be sitting in the room that he himself grew up in

and that one day to this place, her dad brought her

now, whenever I see my great-grandpa
although it may not be there
I always remember the memories, the smell of the air

this beautiful little white home out in a farm field
gave me a piece of heart that will forever be sealed

although I may not have as many memories as those before me,
whenever I think of this place I feel free

it seemed to be a home of hard work, happiness, and love
and I am beyond grateful to be at least a tiny portion of the memories thereof

Skinless Knees

Ruby Richard

When you're little, you learn that sometimes you skin your knees
"This is just a part of being a kid"
"Just some bumps and bruises"
"It'll help toughen you up"
Your mom cleans your wound,
Gives you a band-aid,
And sends you back out to play.
But it's sort of expected,
That as you grow up, you stop.
Everyone else stopped.
But I just cannot stop fucking skinning my knees
I'm grown up now
And I feel sillier and sillier
And I don't understand when everyone else stopped.
Am I just clumsy?
Am I the only one still skinning her knees?
But now they're skinned
So I clean them diligently with an antiseptic wipe
In a teary eyed impression of my mother
And my knees will scab over and begin to heal
Until I skin them again
And they break back open
And I clean them again
An endless cycle
Of a skinless knee



"Sysco's Smile"

ChristiAnna Schmidt, Oil Paint on Canvas

This is a piece I created as a tribute to my horse. This painting perfectly represents his ditzy personality.

Every Memory from Every Summer

Kyleigh Hilbert

8:00 a.m., sometime in June

I slowly wake from my dream to the sounds of clanking as my neighbor is pulling his clunky lawn mower out. He works hard to start the mower's engine and begins to cut the grass. My bedroom window is cranked open and I hear the buzz of a small bug trying to get through the mesh screen protector on the window. Through the open window, I catch a smell of the freshly cut grass as the mower engine continues revving on. The sun has already risen for the day and the clouds are slowly moving across the sky. Clouds in the shapes of horses, people, cars, and big white blobs of fluff drift by. I slowly sit up and watch out the window, listening to the birds singing their morning songs and calls to each other. I slowly move out of my bed and towards my closet, grabbing a simple tank top and pair of old jean shorts, wearing as little as possible in preparation for the heat of the later afternoon. Before I go, I make sure to grab my swimsuit and stuff it into a draw-string bag, because who knows where this day may lead.

As I walk out of my chilled house and out my front door, I am hit with an immediate wave of heat. A drastic change from my air conditioned house. The sun is beaming hard as I squint trying to adjust my eyes to the bright light. I begin to feel a burn from the heat of the cement underneath my bare feet. I slip on my cheap rubber flip flops to relieve my feet from the pain. The sprinklers are going in the garden, giving the flowers a relief of water from the bone dry soil. I turn to walk towards my bike, laying in the cool grass of my front yard. The plastic seat of the bike is hot from the sun beating down on it. I pick up the bike and hop on, pedaling towards the road. No particular destination at all. I

assume I'll find one of my friends and we will fill our day with adventures outside. We will forget about time and care in the world, maybe we'll even take a swim in the river down the road.

I open my eyes to an older version of me, living far from home, in the cold winter dreaming about those beloved summer days. My heart aches to feel the sun beating on my shoulders, to feel the stiffness from my skin being burnt, to feel the relief of the shade underneath a tree. Dreaming about playing outside for all hours of the day, coming home with feet dirtied from running around without shoes. Staying out until the mosquitoes start biting and the sun has set. I ache for the simple and careless years of childhood, I ache for every memory from every summer.



"Drifting Summers"

Hallie Hoffarth, Photography

I've Got A Secret

Jade Lindquist

Content Warning for sexual abuse.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This piece recounts a traumatic experience I had in high school. For much of my life, I've kept secrets about the people and the things that've hurt me. I've hidden my pain underneath layers of shame and guilt, scared of what would happen if someone knew. I eventually told my mom about what happened and it has been one of the best things I've ever done for myself. Friends, don't hide; don't bury your pain. We weren't created to suffer in silence

Words on the tip of my tongue
Desperate to be spilt

Confused and frantic for compassion
Weighed down with guilt

An unrelenting torrent of shame
My once unblemished skin now etched with his touch

Unwanted, I'd say
It was too far and too much

The flashbacks of that night
Staring at the fan

Paralyzed with fear
It's too late now; I should've ran

I wanted to go home and wake up my mom
Run into her embrace

And forget about that night
And forget about his face

I felt my mind leave my body
Away from him and away from his voice

But this is my fault
Be a big girl and deal with your choice

Months go by in a haze
It has hallowed my soul

But didn't I want it?
Wasn't that my role?

Sometimes I look at my mom
Thinking it's time

I need to tell her
What was stolen of mine

She sees it in my eyes, can't she?
My yoke is heavy

But the words get caught in my throat
I am still not ready

The voice in my head sneers,
"Stupid girl, why did you freeze?"

You asked for it
You were designed to please”

Mom, I've got a secret
My heart is pleading

Yet I wait another day to tell her
About the wound by which I am bleeding

To the one I used to love...

HaiVy Chau

AUTHOR'S NOTE: From an old friend, a former lover, a forlorn and bittersweet memory.

Thank you for all the times before that made me smile, cry, and made me feel so much more.

May the next person who becomes a main character in your story be cherished. I am wishing you the best in these today's and the tomorrow's that come after...

Thank you for having once loved me.

Nostalgic to think that I now look back and think to myself, "*How did things turn out like this?... where could we have gone wrong?*"... The tears I shed crying into my pillowcase won't bring your hands to caress my face and wipe away the streams. Squeezing my teddy bear any harder won't bring you there to hug me back. Seeing you in my dreams won't let me see your familiar face when I wake up. No matter how much I sobbed, pleaded, and called your name into the black screen reflecting my broken heart, nothing changed. Seeing or hearing your name gives me false hope, it's *deja vu*. Nothing I could do would turn back the clock to when you felt happy to be with me, nothing I could say would be able to change your mind. If things happen, they happen, and we did happen. Our time was up, and that was where the chapter we shared ended.

It took time, but I have finally come to terms with the reality we put ourselves aside in. I reflect and do not think I would have changed a thing: I don't ever regret having made that first move, and I wish I could have been able to do so many more. Call

me selfish: I wanted to have ALL of your hugs, and kisses, and to always be able to cuddle up next to you. I wanted to tease you and watch you get flustered with my flirty antics. I wanted to spoil you and shower you with gifts that reminded me of you. I wanted to keep dancing with you as the music blasted, no matter how awkward of beans we both were. I wanted to wake up next to you each morning with dumb smiles on our faces. We shared many firsts, I wished we would have been each other's last. I wanted to grow old with you... I wanted the one I shared the rest of my life with to be you, no matter how short or long that time is... I didn't know that time would be so short.

I wanted you because I love you.

We made our own story - two polar opposite characters that you never would have expected to be a couple. In the end, both characters were just another plotline in each other's journey, not the conclusion or epilogue. I could not promise we wouldn't ever hurt each other, because we did. We knew the honeymoon phase wouldn't last forever. No matter how many miscommunications or life difficulties came our way: I wish you had more trust in me so we could have been able to face them together. I believed you once to be Prince Charming, now, you are just another side character that was once incorporated into my tale. I am my own heroine, so my story continues.

I am thankful to have come across you by chance. If you're happy now, then I'm happy. If you're sad, I wish I was there to help cheer you up. And when I am sad, I know you're no longer the one I yearn to hold the most.

I appreciate you, I am grateful for you. You motivate me, you made me feel special. I was uplifted by your side. I was myself around you: comfortable, vulnerable, and full of color. You left

your mark on this cover, and it still smears.

It was by accident we met, but it was by choice we became what we are now. The time we have known each other was short, but that sense of comfort I felt around you was as if we had been in each other's lives for years.

I fell in love with you... No, I stood in it.

I stood in the love I had for you and you meant the world to me.

I love you.

And now you will just be another cherished memory in my heart. The photos of lovely moments are left in a closed scrapbook that sits high up on the shelf.

No matter where you go, no matter who you'll be, I will say it so many more times you'll get so annoyed with the phrase: "I appreciate you so much, thank you for everything that you've done for me." You were mine, and I was once yours. I know your heart will one day belong to another who will love you more than I ever was able to. May we both find our own happy endings.

To who was once my safe place, my dear. To the one who had loved me back... truly, forever, and always; thank you for having let me once love you.

A Second Chance

Heidi Johnson

Kate panted as she climbed up the hill. Apparently, there used to be steps to make the climb easier, but she couldn't even see remnants of any. She hates hiking – it's hot outside, there are always lots of bugs, it's tiring, and there's basically nothing to do!

But her girlfriend, Sam, loves to hike and Kate just couldn't say no to that face when she asked her to come along. Now Kate was really starting to regret it – she loves Sam, but next time, she can bring a friend instead.

“Isn't this great?” Sam said. She looked way too animated and energetic after this steep hill.

“Uh-huh,” Kate managed, which caused Sam to start laughing. “Stop that! You're the weird one here!”

“Sure I am.” Sam held out her hand to help Kate get to the top of the hill. Taking it, Kate rolled her eyes and pulled Sam in for a kiss. As annoying as Sam could be, Kate couldn't imagine herself with anyone else.

“Come on,” Sam gestured with her eyes. “Got something to show you.”

Sam dragged Kate by the hand farther down the gravel path until they came to where the path diverged into two. Sam barely glanced at the post with the map then marched along the path leading to the left.

“How far is this going to be?” Kate asked.

Sam turned to face Kate. “It’s only half a mile there and back.”

“You’re telling me it doesn’t even make a loop with the main path?”

“No, but it’ll be worth it. I promise.” Sam’s expression wasn’t lying, so Kate knew she’d end up being right and it’d be something outstanding.

“Okay... I guess I’ll trust you.” Kate tried to look jokingly suspicious of her, but she couldn’t keep the smile off her face. The couple continued to walk along the side-path, with Sam occasionally pointing out pretty flowers and cool-looking plants to Kate.

Eventually, the two came to the end of the path, which widened into a rectangular area with two wooden benches near the cliff. Kate gasped as she approached the edge. The grassy hills rolled across the horizon and the sun reflected off the surface of the river that was lazily running near the bottom of the cliff they were standing on.

“Didn’t I say it would be worth it?” Sam smirked.

Kate rolled her eyes and continued to stare at the landscape. She might have to change her opinion on hiking – it certainly has its perks. As Kate tried to take in all the details, she noticed the riverbank had a few muddy spots by it that weren’t overgrown with vegetation.

“Is there a way to go down to the river?” Kate asked.

Sam looked towards the river, then around the viewing area. “I don’t see a path other than the one we just came from so I don’t think so.”

Kate didn’t like that answer so she conducted her own search. She walked over to the left edge of the mowed area and saw a nearly imperceptible trail of flattened grass.

“I think I’m just better than you,” Kate smiled. “Look over here.”

“Look where?” Sam joined Kate.

“Right there,” Kate pointed with her index finger as she spoke. “You’re telling me you’re not seeing it? It’s literally right there.”

Sam eyed Kate. “There isn’t anything, but if you’re willing to go down without a path, I’m all for it.”

Kate didn’t know how Sam didn’t see it, but it wasn’t important, so Kate just started down the path. She didn’t get more than a few steps when Sam put a hand on her shoulder. “Maybe I should go first since I have more experience? And then that way, I can catch you easier if you slip.”

“But you don’t see the path,” Kate stated.

“You can tell me which way to go if it’s that important to you, I just want to make sure you’re safe.”

Kate turned around to look at Sam’s face. She didn’t like how worried her blue eyes were.

“Okay, if it makes you feel better.”

Kate went back to the clearing to let Sam go first down the trail then followed behind her.

They didn’t get very far before she slipped and Sam had to catch her – maybe it’s occasionally a good thing that her girlfriend cares about her safety. This trail wasn’t very well kept, and there weren’t any steps put in like with the other paths on the hike. There were a few times when Sam tried to go a different way from the path, but Kate corrected her each time, even when it seemed like Sam’s path was safer.

“Your path worked better than I thought it would,” Sam said once they reached the riverbank. Kate faked an offended gasp, causing Sam to giggle. Kate redid the ponytail her red hair was pulled into and stepped past Sam to get closer to the river.

“Whoa,” she said once she had a clear view. “I’m having some crazy déjà vu right now.” A pit formed in Kate’s stomach.

“Have you been going on hikes without me?” Sam joked. “I can’t believe you would do that to me.”

She shook off the ominous feeling and said, “Yes, I’ve been going hiking for years without you – it was my evil plan all along.” She added an evil laugh that turned into actual laughing when

Sam wrapped around her and started tickling Kate.

“Okay, okay stop, stop,” Kate wheezed. Sam released her, but they both continued laughing anyway. Once the two caught their breath, they stepped up right to the edge of the river. It

somehow looked like it was moving slower than when they saw it earlier. Kate looked to the middle of the river, hoping to see some fish, but only saw Sam and herself drowning.

Kate quickly stepped back and tried to get air. It felt like water was filling her lungs just because she looked at the river. She heard blood rushing through her ears. Ice pierced her heart. She could faintly hear Sam calling her name, but her voice was fading away.

• • •

Victoria is quickly walking to Abigail's house. She has to warn her. Someone figured it out and told the rest of the townsfolk. If they don't do something, they are going to be killed.

She knocks on the door. She hears some shuffling before the door opens and Abigail's father appears.

"What are you doing here?" he asks, his disdain clear in his voice. Victoria swallows before replying, "Hello, sir, I'm here to work on embroidery with Abigail." She holds up the project she brought in case it wasn't Abigail who answered the door.

He mumbles and reluctantly lets her in. Victoria bows her head in gratitude and briskly moves to Abigail's room. Her room door is open, so she enters and closes the door behind her. Abigail looks up from the book she's reading and smiles when she sees Victoria. "Hello, I wasn't expecting to see you this early."

Victoria can't help but to smile back, despite her dire reason behind the visit. Abigail gets up to brush some of Victoria's loose strands of red hair back into place. Victoria watches Abigail's blue

eyes look to find any other loose strands. Victoria wishes she could just stay in this moment of time and not ruin her day.

“Abigail, I-” Victoria cuts herself off as she starts to tear up. “I overheard people talking about us and that someone saw us...” Victoria trails off, seeing that Abigail already understands and is tearing up as well.

Victoria takes a deep breath. “Everyone already doesn’t trust me because of my hair and my parents. I can say I put a spell on you and that you don’t really love me-”

“No.” Victoria looks into Abigail’s eyes and sees her determination. “No, I won’t let you do that. I’m the one who made the first move, so if only one of us goes down, it would be me.”

“But they already think I’m a witch, if you try to take all the blame, they’ll just kill both of us.” Abigail bites her lip and blinks back tears. “I would rather go down with you than live without you in my life.”

“Abigail...” Victoria knows there’s nothing she can say to get Abigail to change her mind, so she stays silent. Abigail holds Victoria’s head and gently kisses her. It isn’t the worst way to spend her last free moments.

The door suddenly is kicked down, and they pull away from each other to see the priest leading a small mob of people with pure hatred on his face.

“Abigail!” He nearly shouts. “You are a good Christian, why would you allow this witch to seduce you with her unholy ways?”

Victoria notices that Abigail stops shaking before she says, "I love her."

"You will love Thomas when you are wed in spring."

"I'll never love any man you try to put me with!" Abigail holds on tighter to Victoria's hand. Victoria can see Abigail's father walk away from the gathering. She thinks she saw a tear running down his face before he left— is he just accepting this? Is he not going to fight for his daughter's life?

"You know the punishment for such a sin, Abigail," the priest says a little more calmly. "It's not too late for you to recant and ask forgiveness from God."

"I think you're the one who will need to ask forgiveness," Abigail states plainly, which causes him to yank her away from Victoria and toss her into the mob while he grabs onto Victoria's wrist.

The mob marches Victoria and Abigail through the center of town and out to the hills. For two hours, they climb the hills until they arrive at the top of the one where Abigail first kissed Victoria. Victoria grabs Abigail's hand as they're made to face the mob. The waning sunlight casts long shadows of the trees surrounding them.

"Any last words before we begin?" the priest asks.

"I'm not a witch and I love Abigail," Victoria says. Abigail stays silent.

The priest ignores Victoria, then turns and starts down the path on the edge that leads to the river. Victoria and Abigail are again forced along to follow him. Once they reach the riverbank,

two large men break away from the rest of the gathering and move towards them. One grabs Victoria, the other Abigail, and pulls them apart so they're no longer able to hold hands.

The priest begins chanting in Latin and everyone else, excluding Victoria and Abigail, joins him in a ritualistic way. Abigail struggles against the man holding her. She manages to get out of his grasp, but she wasn't balanced, and she falls as soon as she does. Victoria screams when Abigail's head hits a rock and blood streams from her. For the first time, Victoria fights against what's happening and tries to get to Abigail, but she's unable to free herself from the man's grasp.

The other man picks up Abigail and carries her to the water, and the man holding Victoria follows suit. They don't stop at the edge – they keep walking to the middle of the river.

“Abigail!” Victoria screams. “Abigail, wake up! They're going to drown us!”

Instead of holding them under at the same time, Abigail is submerged underneath first. Victoria sobs as she sees Abigail waking up to no air and panicking. Victoria tries to look away, but the man forces her to look and watch as the air bubbles and struggling stops. The other man walks away, leaving Abigail's body floating in the river.

Victoria goes numb as she stares at her body. She had just been holding her hand.

She feels a hand on her head and is forcibly shoved underneath the water.

• • •

Kate gasped for air. She frantically whipped her head around to figure out where she was. She stopped when she saw the rock that Sam – Abigail – hit her head on, and screamed.

“Kate! Kate! What’s wrong?” Sam asked as she turned Kate’s head to look at her. Kate stopped screaming and started sobbing. She turned into Sam, who sat down with her to embrace her better. They sat with each other until Kate’s cries stopped. Kate took shaky breaths as she continued to calm down. Sam kept holding her without asking any more questions.

“I-” Kate cleared her throat, which was hoarse after all the screaming and crying. “I don’t know what just happened, I’m sorry.”

“Shh, don’t apologize,” Sam soothed. “We don’t have to talk about it until you’re ready, and it’s okay if you’re never ready.”

Kate took a deep breath. “How do you feel about talking about it at home after the hike?”

“As long as it’s what you want.”

“It is. Could we go back to the path now?”

Sam helped Kate climb back up the hill. Kate looked out at the river from the top of the hill. It was strange that she didn’t have any bad feelings on the hill like she did once they had gotten down to the spot on the river where they drowned – but she could no longer feel any of the wonder she had when she first looked

over the cliff; Kate could only think of Victoria and Abigail's tragedy.

She decided she would propose to Sam as soon as she got a ring. They died once before for loving each other; Kate wanted them to live happily this time around. Kate wasn't going to waste their second chance.



"True Colors"

Maddison S., Pen and Watercolor

White Dress

Austin-Alexius Klein

From behind a veil, she stared at the man
who had abandoned her time and time again
to fight in a never ending war,
and laid with other women,
and lied about it,
so that he could lay with her.
At the reception, she nervously
knocked over a bottle of champagne,
saying it was an accident,
but she needed to run
to the bathroom to fix her mascara.
She was not entirely coherent
when she made the decision to marry,
but she had sealed her fate with an “I do,”
and all she wanted was to run
away. She wanted to run
through a never ending
wilderness. She wanted to run
back in time to when she thought
she might be lovable. She could be—
lovable. But not like this. Not tonight.
She had to run. She had to fight
a never ending war. She had to be with
other men. She had to find and face the truth.
She had to pick up the broken
bottle of champagne. She had to grip
the shards of glass. She had to let
the mascara drip
down onto her white dress.

No Name

Atlas Christianson

My hands trembled while holding the brown lunch tray, somehow too heavy despite the lightweight plastic, a visible strain for my arms. I dodged around fast-moving high schoolers with stuttered steps and split-second pivots. Same table every day, like anyone in high school does; I ducked down in greeting as I sat down, familiar chill of the Commons sliding into my bones.

Small smiles to acquaintances I hardly know, and then I turn to face David. He is, at sixteen, my whole world, my best friend, technically an ex. (In retrospect, I'll recognize that the end of that relationship was a façade at best, but at this age I don't question much at all.) The squad of four that we'd once been part of has split in half, and the other half split again; April, the girl I'd met in super-shy middle school, the former glue of our friend group, had decided that we aren't interesting enough for her, now that she smokes weed and hangs out with college kids late at night. And right after, she abandoned her long-time best friend for the same reason. Formerly four: a strange closeness keeps David and I bound, holding hands and linking arms. I can drive but he can't, so I haul us around everywhere, any excuse to spend time alone without interference. Back at the lunch table, he grins at me as he slides his notebook over, a comical drawing of an anime character dressed in my own favorite outfit.

This crafted image is constructed out of many. Splitting the conversations we had, the moments, the adventures, into separate beings is something my split-second-rocket brain cannot do. I have the memory of someone who ignored almost everything throughout their high school years, caught in my own

daydreams, spun like spiderwebs with a willing gnat caught in the center. I was sixteen and undiagnosed ADHD made my thoughts run faster than I could control, anxiety making them always cycle back to doomsday predictions. I trembled through my days, the impending doom sometimes so fierce I scared my mother with questions that could've (in a different family, a different setting) put me in a psychiatric ward. I found little solace in anything but imagination, but I also liked to talk. And talk to David I did.

“I don't think we're like... siblings. I don't see us as that. We're something else,” he says one day, curled up unsafely in the old leather seats of my hand-me-down 2005 Honda pilot. It had once been the family car, and it shows, scrawled drawings from a four-year-old with a pen still staining gray plastic. I laughed as we drove off to the mall, right hand clasped in David's as my bubblegum pop music blasted through the speakers of a car only two years away from a death sentence. I'm sixteen and I don't think too hard about what we are, the delight of easy closeness muddled in my brain starved for dopamine. I don't feel romance, don't feel sexual desire the way my peers do; I don't notice that we still feel like a couple despite all appearances of having broken up, that though intimacy with friends is good, what we're doing isn't that.

“I was sixteen,” I always tell people. “I didn't know any better.”

David has it worse than I do. His depression spirals into deep black pits that I, weekly and without complaint, pull him out of. I have his number set up so that my phone will ring, always, even at 3am, so I can be there to assure him of my deep love and affection for him. No, I'm not going to leave. No, I won't date them, I'm happy with you. I'm sixteen with a Catholicism-induced martyr complex, my lineage of devout and austere farmers spill-

ing into my personality despite my only farm experience being at holidays with my grandma, and I've convinced myself of my own role, a Madonna-esque figure of constant patience, pulling others up without worrying about my own needs. The Catholic obsession with the Holy Virgin Mary claimed yet another victim, though I haven't ever really been religious. It doesn't matter that my own anxiety makes me so sick I can't eat with any frequency, that my fingers can't steady, that sometimes I'd rather die than tolerate the unending fear; no, others have it worse. David has it worse, and he's my whole world. He's first priority. I need to make sure he's ok.

It's when I'm seventeen, when I stumble into making more friends, that my world and its horizons begin to broaden. Not just My World and some kids I talk to in class; I have good friends, friends who invite me over, that I hang out with outside of school, that don't mind my one-track mind or chatty conversation style. Justise is cool and popular online; Vi is protective, doesn't let others be mean, hovers around the freshmen like a mother hen. I am not used to an easy friendship, one where I don't have to work to keep the other half stable. David is frustrated that I'm not as available anymore, and I assure him, assuage his fears, calm his anger: "You will always be my best friend." Always my priority, always first on the list.

I've learned, since then, not to say 'always' anymore.

Sophie, another friend I met and two grades below, is sweet and soft and calm. She is fun, not like a riot but like a movie night; she's got her own problems, but she manages them, asks about mine, asks how I am. I am not romantic, but I like Sophie, and Sophie likes me very much. That last summer, we grow close, hang out often. David's fears of being left for someone else rear their ugly heads, and I'm now juggling even more anxieties I've

tasked myself with quenching.

“I’m frustrated because whenever we hang out, you’re just on your phone, texting Sophie,” David says in a huff. I apologize meekly, not mentioning how upset he gets when I don’t respond in seconds, even if I’m hanging out with someone else. Not mentioning how I’d left hangouts early, multiple times, because he was upset and needed comforting.

I can’t talk freely. I can’t talk about the Dungeons & Dragons campaigns I’m in that don’t include him. I can’t talk about Sophie, or Bee, or Adam, or Rowan, or Vi. I’m trapped, a chatterbox left with no fodder, grasping for old fascinations to keep conversation flowing. David gets upset when I don’t talk to him, when I have nothing new to say, but he doesn’t like hearing about what I’ve been doing, either. I tread on eggshells. My phone buzzes, and I get nervous. My hands shake a lot. I still don’t eat enough.

Three fights. To detail them would be to regale you with stories you already can guess; each time I forgive, invite back, and each time I’m sent panicking even worse than before. It isn’t until the third, when I ask Vi if I’m a bad friend, that I realize how bad it’s gotten. “Oh, great,” she sneers with an eye roll. “What did David say this time?” I hadn’t mentioned him, but any one of my friends could guess exactly who and what I’m talking about. It’s become A Thing with me and him, so close but completely at odds, now.

For the last time, I reach out. Try and make amends, try and communicate what’s going wrong, how I’m feeling. It goes ok, I think; we both miss each other like a stranded frog would miss water. Later he texts me to ask if I want to hang out, go to the mall that afternoon. I apologize sincerely. I’ve already made plans.

The words that come streaming into my phone begin to blur together, pixels and shapes filled with an anger so familiar by now I have a set response. But I'm fed up; I've had a taste of not being responsible for others, and now I can't stand what I've been doing for two years. I turn off my phone, I put it away.

We never talk again.

He hates my guts now, mutual friends tell me. The person who always looked to me for comfort in his darkest moments now rants about wanting to hurt me, overnight. I'm more annoyed than scared: had I not suffered enough, tried hard enough for him? Had I not done everything I ever could to fix something I was incapable of mending? Over months my righteous anger bleeds into sadness, and then over years into a fond recollection. "I was sixteen," I say with a laugh to friends who didn't know me in high school, who never equated me with being part of an incapable duo. "I didn't know any better, and neither did he. I hope he's doing better."

Part of me was lost, back in high school. I can't remember what it was, but I know it's still in that old Pilot, whatever junkyard it ended up in when the brakes gave out. I bled and bled and bled for another, for someone who was so caught in his own wounds he could never recognize my own. But, you know, I was only sixteen: how could I have known any better?

"I miss him," I muse, late at night. One of my friends threatens to come over and hit me with an inflatable hammer, and we both laugh about it. Teenage misery turned into a learned lesson, early enough that I can say it was all for the best. After all: the only thing worse than a teenage people-pleaser is a grown-up martyr.

growing up

Marie Saylor

your unchecked pretension
comes through in your letters,
and i wish i could see things
the way you do,
just one more time.

perhaps it is all beautiful.
perhaps it is about me.
perhaps i am different,
and perhaps i am loved.

the cynicism of growing up
attached itself to me too fast,
and now i watch from the outside
as peers like you
learn girlhood,
in all its trials and mistakes.

i gave up dried roses too early, and i learned too well
what it looks like when i sing.

i know myself too thoroughly,
and i know what everyone thinks of me, too.

oblivion slipped away from me too fast,
and i am sick and tired

of knowing the truth.



"Playground Delight"

Hannah Nelson, Gouache

Auntie Angie

Ruby Richard

Once, when I was little
My aunt went on a business trip to Peru
She lived in a different state
But after her trip she came to see us

She was going to pick us up early from daycare
I don't remember how old I was
Just that it was nap time
I knew she'd be there soon, so I picked a spot by the window and
waited
And watched

When she picked us up she was snapping her gum
Popping it
But not in big outward bubbles
She taught me how to do it
To make the little snappy bubbles
And pierce them with my teeth

We were driving down Central
About to pass the turn for Target
I don't know where we were going
But she said
"Hey watch this"
And she drove with no hands
It struck me
It stuck with me

I know now that she was using her knees

But then I just thought that was her
I thought she could just do that
I thought she was the only one

She gave us these dolls
They were handmade in Peru
Mine, had a gorgeous hat
And a little pair of gloves
I still have it somewhere

Auntie Angie has kids now
And they can't believe it when I talk about how cool she is
But they love my mom
She lets them swear
And eat junk food
But she didn't teach them to pop their gum
And she can't drive with no hands

That was all Auntie Angie.

These Are Just Stones

Kurt L. Reynolds

It was Memorial Day, 2005. Rain threatened from swollen clouds the color of spilled milk. I stood with my father and uncle, Dick, at Myrtle's grave at St. Joseph's cemetery in Red Lake Falls, MN.

Myrtle was my dad's mother in law, Dick's mother, and my grandmother. She was the matriarch of our family and towered over us all much like the large oaks swaying in the May breeze cast over the three of us now. The stiff breeze made a jacket necessary. I stuffed my fists deep into the front pockets of my windbreaker. Dad and Dick were engaged in similar tactics to guard against the chill.

We examined the new plastic flowers beside Myrtle's headstone. Dad held last year's faded flowers in his right hand. The new bright yellow, red, and white flowers we picked up from Walmart an hour earlier seemed out of place. Mom always picked out the flowers and arranged them.

We would visit her grave next.

After making sure the replacement flowers held firm against the wind, we broke our silence. Dad said he was taking the old flowers back to the truck. I said I'd be there in a bit and then reached into my jean jacket and snatched my journal.

Dick turned his back to the breeze, plucked a Camel from the pack in his breast pocket beneath his suede jacket while he fumbled a lighter out of his Dockers. He cupped his hands and

struck the lighter several times until I saw a red glow from inside his palms. He took a small drag and watched as the breeze snatched it.

I turned my back to the wind and pried my journal open. I took the pen that had been crammed between the pages and scrolled, “Myrtle D. Baril (Demann) Feb 21 1905 – July 30 1988.” Then I peered at her husband’s name on the headstone and wrote, “Theophile J. Baril March 7, 1905 – May 28, 1971.” I hoped to fill my journal with the key dates and places to fill in the gaps in my graduate thesis, a creative nonfiction, multi genre memoir, on Myrtle. The stories needed places, dates, and times. I had to give them context. They were all jumbled together in my memories and poured out into my thesis that way too.

Dad was great with the stories, but dates and places escaped him. I hoped to obtain those from Dick. He was up on his annual visit to his hometown from St. Paul. This might be my last chance, for we feared Alzheimer’s was setting in. Dick had been a day late. Normally, that wouldn’t have worried us, but Dick was well into his seventies. He had trouble finding his way up north from the cities. Not only did he get lost on the way up—a trip that he made hundreds of times before—but he also began forgetting names and faces. The man who is my mom’s oldest brother, my godfather, and who even shares my birthday, forgot my name at Mom’s funeral last summer.

With my pen poised over my journal, I drilled my uncle about the key dates for the stories in my thesis: *When did Myrtle begin teaching at Knox elementary in Thief River Falls? How many years did she teach there? Was it true that she was suspended twice in high school, despite graduating valedictorian? What year did she graduate? Was it true the first suspension was for wearing slacks? And that she spent that week hitch-hiking? Was her second suspen-*

sion really for cutting her hair short? And was it true that she spent that week writing the school song? What year was that? Was it true that she hid her marriage so she wouldn't lose her job as a country school teacher? Then when she was pregnant with you and began to show, did she really lose her job? But then the parents protested and the school board changed the rules so she could teach again? What year was that?

I watched as he took another drag, noticing his hairy forearms ending in slender wrists. Forearms and wrists that were the same as the ones that held my journal and pen.

Dick took a shallow puff while I waited for answers. He looked over at Dad who was now climbing into the Silverado's cab. Then he released the smoke from his lungs and began, "I heard that Mom had to walk two miles each way to her first teaching job at a country school in Red Lake County. It was in Lake Pleasant Township. The school house is still there right along Highway 32. It's just south of where Susie and your dad live now. Well, where Susie lived. Sorry about that," he added with a wince. Maybe he was remembering a piece of my mom that he hadn't thought of in years. Maybe he was pondering that this might be one of his final trips up north. Maybe he was pondering how one day we would be referring to him in the past tense too. After a moment, Dick exhaled another drag and continued: "That's where Mom's teaching career began. You've driven past that school house a thousand times. Yet you never knew that?"

He was right. I had no idea. This was all new to me. This was going right into my thesis as soon as I got back to my apartment. I then asked Dick what year Myrtle began teaching.

Dick just began another story. This one about his parents and their house on mainstreet in Red Lake Falls. I asked him about

when Myrtle and Theophile—"Tuff," Dick corrected me—had started dating. I knew Grandpa's nickname had been "Tuff," for it was part of family legend. I just never heard anyone use it before.

Dick told me how Myrtle and "Tuff" met at the Maple Lake Pavilion and spent Saturday nights dancing all summer long back in the early 1920s... Dick never gave any specific dates. The stories flowed, though, and I tried to scratch them down in my journal as fast as I could.

Finally, Dick stopped long enough to yank the Camel from the corner of his mouth, kick up his brown Hush Puppy, and grind the cigarette out on the sole.

He exhaled and watched as the wind gave the final puff a new life, carrying it up above the graves toward the tall oaks. "Let's get out of here," he said, turning his brown eyes on my journal and poised Bic. "And I'll tell you some stories." He examined Myrtle and Theophile's polished black headstone and the dates one last time. Then he scanned all of the others lined around it. After a moment, Dick added, "These are just stones."

I wrote those four words down and followed him back to the truck where Dad waited.



"Majesty of the Northwest"

Christina Gruber, Photography

In the north

John C. Swanson

There's this thing about lakes
when you live in the north country
Particularly a lake you've known
intimately and lovingly most of your life
You know
The ins and outs
Of its shoreline
its smells
its colors
its creatures
its secrets and treasures
real and imagined

the lake always filled you up

countless painted turtles
would sun themselves
on fallen tree trunks along
the back bay that
teemed with sunnies and bluegills
And green leopard frogs
They all cruised through
the pale green root tangles
of yellow and white water lilies
Whose pads shaded the layered floor of
Fallen tree limbs and rotted ochre leaves

the pungent smells of fish and water
Drifted out from the ankle deep shore

From which you fished
Casting Into the scrim of weeds
That nurtured the sunnies you caught and cleaned
That were lovingly fried by your grandmother
for a dinner your sisters refused to eat

01.10.23

02.01.23



"Pure as the Driven Snow"

Alexandra Kostelecky, Photography

The phrase "pure as the driven snow" implies perfection, flawlessness, or a sort of innocence often tied to virtue. I named my piece "Pure as the Driven Snow" not only because of the snowy landscape in the photo but also because this path - when traveling in the opposite direction I was headed at the time this photo was taken - leads to the street corner at the southeast edge of campus. At this corner, the traveler is provided with a clear view of a Newman Center/church, which ties to the purity and virtue implied through the piece's name. This photograph relates to the journal theme because this path is one that I find myself taking on an almost daily basis, and I am often struck with a sense of déjà vu.

Snow Fairy

Myra Morton

I met her when I was very young. It was winter, and large blankets of snow covered the sidewalks and lawns. I had escaped from my home with a puffy winter coat, a hat, and mittens that only covered my palms and never sat nicely on my wrists. The snow was cold and dry, and, much to my disappointment, refused to stick into a ball no matter how hard I pressed my hands together. I was standing in the icy powder, forlorn and prickling with cold, but unwilling to retreat from my excursion, when I heard her voice.

“Hail and well met!” was the first thing she had ever said to me. I, being only eight, had no idea what this had meant, but I greeted her in kind.

She had appeared to me as a young girl, with fine white-blond hair and wind-burnt cheeks. Her smile was warm, but her lips were tinged blue. She had no coat, no hat, and no ill-fitting gloves to speak of.

“Arentcha cold?” I asked her. She shivered and shook her head no.

I thought it was odd how she blatantly lied, but I simply offered her my gloves, and said nothing more on the matter.

We had played for some time after that—until the sun had lowered on the horizon and our skin felt numb. She looked so sad when I told her I had to go. Her chin had wrinkled in that way only children could get away with, and she began to peel my

snow-laden mittens off. I stopped her with my hands and told her she could keep them. Her smile was so bright I feared I would go blind. She scooped me up into a hug, lifting me from the ground—something I thought would be impossible with her small frame—her grip bruising as she swung me around.

I left her there in the snow, and I didn't see her again for a very long time.

~*~

We seemed to only meet in winter. Deep, deep in winter, when the migratory birds have left and the Christmas cheer has worn off.

She never wore winter clothes. Not even when the temperature went well below zero. Each time I questioned her, she would tell me she simply wasn't cold. As if to be directly contradictory to her claims, her hands were ice each time she would touch me. She would refuse when I would offer my coat, but would always take my gloves, and I would give them happily.

Each year, we grew older in tandem. I would always be ever so slightly taller than her, and she in turn would always be pointier and bonier than I.

One day, while we lay in the deep snowbanks, she told me that sometimes she wishes she weren't real. That she wishes she were something from a fairytale, she said. That she could end each day knowing that, at some point, there would be a happy ending.

I had frowned at her, suddenly sad. She never really told me about her homelife, but at some point as we grew together I

realized it can't have been that good.

“Well,” I said after a long moment of quiet, “You’re already kinda like a fairytale to me.”

She raised an eyebrow, incredulous.

“I mean, I see you once a year at around the same time, and then you disappear like you were never here in the first place. You’re mysterious.”

She stared at me, eyes wide and sparkling in the twilight. “If I’m a fairytale...” she started, “I think I’d be some kind of fae.”

“Fae?”

“Yeah. A snow fairy I think,” she smiled sweetly before forcing my head into the snow.

I flailed, snowflakes gumming my eyelashes together.

“Snow fairy?!” I cried out, all fake outrage and bluster, “You’re a goblin! A demon!”

She laughed, and I felt warm.



"Vibrant Valley"

Christina Gruber, Photography

Cryptid

Austin-Alexius Klein

What went through your mind
before you transformed?
Were you unable to retrace
your steps through the endless plains
that take so much from us all?
Before you walked on four legs,
possessing the body of another,
did you cry out for a miracle—
and receive this curse instead?
Did you flinch when you saw
your reflection in the water,
wearing the skin of someone else?
And something as constant
as your heartbeat faded into silence?
Did you cry out in a deformed,
otherworldly voice that nobody recognized?
As you inhabit the bodies
of countless humans and animals,
has your story been rewritten
too many times that it has lost all meaning?
Are you a stranger to yourself,
now that you are trapped
inside the bodies of strangers?
Trapped between moments of almost belonging,
in a world devoid of closure—
your words go on forever
without making sense, never finding peace.
Trapped to walk in a world without end,
but where are you going?



"Finish Our Race"

Morgan Reeder, Painting

2023 Staff



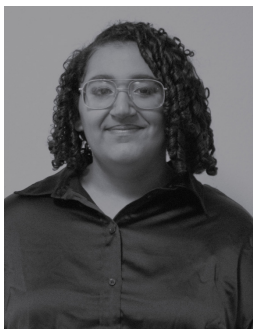
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Editor-in-Chief



Kylie Menge
Design Team Lead



Monika Sauer
Editing Team Lead



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Social Media Team
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Team Lead



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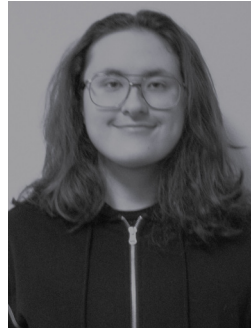
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Editing Team



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Epilogue

The *Northern Eclecta* team would like to thank you for taking the time to read our journal. Over the course of the last several months, we have worked tirelessly to bring you a journal that we feel allowed writers and artists an open way to create. As a class, we spent time developing a theme that we felt was both specific and open to interpretation and landed on the concept of “We’ve Been Here Before.” This theme encompasses the feelings of nostalgia, déjà vu, and anything that follows a person and ultimately shapes their story. It is our hope that these pieces spoke to you and allowed you to reflect on those experiences that make up yours.

Finally, we would like to extend a thank you to all of the artists and authors who submitted their work to us. Your submissions make this journal possible, and we hope that you enjoyed this process as much as we have. We would also like to thank the North Dakota State University English Department, whose continued support has allowed us to develop and get our journal to all of you.