



SADDLEBACK COLLEGE
MISSION VIEJO, CA

WALL

LITERARY JOURNAL 2017

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WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College. All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College. Submissions to WALL are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff.

We accept entries that embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees; they are solely those of the authors and creators of these particular works.

To submit your work for the 2018 edition of WALL, please see the guidelines for submission at www.saddleback.edu/la/wall.

The deadline is January 25, 2018.

wall

MISSION STATEMENT

WALL Literary Journal is dedicated to providing an open space for creative experimentation. We encourage the unfettered expression of ideas, images, and emotions in literary and artistic works that explore and illuminate the human experience. Aimed at a multicultural, cross-generational audience, the works represented in the pages of WALL encompass a diversity of voices and visions. This is art in the raw and in the round. We want our readers to laugh and cry, smile and sigh as they immerse themselves in the pleasures and power of art and literature.

**is a community space for creative displays.
It is a fresh canvas, a blank surface
begging for decoration, a vast white page
awaiting our words and images...**

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Air. Earth. Fire. Water. These four elements of the universe form the basis of human existence. We breathe air to stay alive while Earth is comprised of the precious soil on which we survive. Though it can threaten our lives and property, fire keeps us warm. Water is the nourishing liquid that fills our bodies and slakes our thirst. Subtle signs of these essential elements take on a deeper significance within the works of art and literature that inhabit the pages of WALL 2017 in the form of design motifs devised by this year's staff. These motifs (explained in the Editor's Note by Brooke Campbell on page vii) connect the ancient aesthetics of Plato with a sleek, 21st century artistic sensibility.

Just as these natural elements are essential for human survival, so, too, the behind-the-scenes work and contributions of students, faculty, administrators, staff, and members of the community are fundamental to the creation of WALL. The staff and I would like to thank South Orange County Community College District Interim Chancellor Debra L. Fitzsimons and the district's Board of Trustees: Timothy Jemal, James R. Wright, David B. Lang, T.J. Prendergast III, Marcia Milchiker, Barbara J. Jay, Terri Whitt, and Jordan J. Larson. We also are grateful for the support of Tod A. Burnett, President Emeritus of Saddleback College; Denise Whittaker, Acting President of Saddleback College; and Kevin O'Connor, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division.

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Through the famous allegory of the cave, Plato taught us that the shadows cast on the wall were only pale imitations of actual objects. WALL goes beyond the shadows, casting light on the reality of life in all its beauty, cruelty, and elemental force.

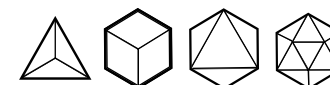
Gina Victoria Shaffer
Faculty Advisor
WALL 2017

EDITOR'S NOTE

The process of creating a successful literary journal is no easy task; as a first-time editor, I faced both the hardship and joy of delving through a plethora of brilliant submissions along with my fellow staff members. Choosing the "right" stories, poems, personal narratives, and/or artwork seemed daunting: *will this short story resonate with Saddleback's students? What is this poem trying to say, and is it important? How will this personal narrative represent the current generation? Does this artwork use its medium to express the inexpressible?*

In the beginning of this process, my desire was to create a literary journal that possessed a certain level of unity—a literary journal that read like a song with distinctive instruments sung in harmony. However, this desire was met with adversity in the face of submissions ranging from morbid death to parental struggles to playful childlike fantasies. Given this reality, I felt drowned in a sea of varying submissions—until the idea of the Platonic solids was mentioned by one of our graphic designers, Charlotte Hughes.

Platonic solids are geometric shapes that represent the four primary elements: fire, earth, water, and air. These representative geometric shapes were theorized by the famous philosopher Plato, who thought them to be sorts of spiritual entities upon which humanity might build life. He wrote that fire ought to be in the shape of a tetrahedron because it is the most mobile; earth ought to be in the shape of a cube as it is the most immobile; water ought to be in the shape of an icosahedron since it is the least mobile; air ought to be in the shape of an octahedron because it is intermediate in mobility.



FIRE EARTH AIR WATER

Once the staff and I stumbled upon the idea of the Platonic solids, the unity of the 2017 edition of WALL Literary Journal sung its way into harmony—just as I had originally desired. It seemed as though each work represented a certain element of either fire, earth, water, or air. Some pieces were passionate and lent themselves to fire, other pieces were family-oriented and aligned themselves with the stability of earth, some pieces were more literal and simply used water as a metaphor, while a few pieces felt whimsical like the idea of air.

By using the Platonic solids to unify the varying submissions, the staff members and I found a sense of peace that resonated with us in a beautiful and rather philosophical sense: though we, as human beings, may live in different cultures, eat different foods, dress in different fashions, or celebrate and grieve in different ways, we remain in unity as a race of *people* who possess the capacity for love, experience the heartache of pain, and ultimately, desire the reality of peace. It is my hope that, just as the Platonic solids have united our varying submissions, we as a people sharing a common humanity might unite and embrace our differences.

Thank you to all the incredibly talented artists, writers, and staffers who contributed to this year's WALL—it's been an honor to serve as your editor-in-chief.

Brooke Campbell
Editor-in-Chief
WALL 2017

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The Sound of Color



Photography

Charlotte Hughes

Watercolor

Only the divine can walk on water,
but we can walk through puddles.
Splashing and sprinkling on the sidewalk,
I tiptoe through rippling thoughts.
My socks are soaked,
but my shoes are awake.

Rain is a weather of many notes,
and its metronome is a thought-keeper —
Inviting me into its realm
and closing the door with a key to the world.
Each sound sticks like a stamp,
sending me to a different destination.

Inspiration works like this:
Raindrops fall like arrows,
Shooting across the ocean-blue sky,
and striking the attentive with their knife-sharp points.
Colors bleed like blood into unexpected places.

All of these underwater dreams,
They skip like stones as I cast them out —
Writing them down in a murmur of fingerprints on pressing keys.





Photography

The very first color heartbreak was supposed to feel was blue, right? Well, I saw red. I saw the red of the blush that crept on his cheeks when we went out for the first time. I saw the red dress that he loved so much. I saw the red of my cheeks as I felt my face heat up with anger for being so upset.

Then I saw red blend with purple. And I saw a different set of images. I saw the soft purple orchids he had given me on my birthday. I saw the purple hue of the sky as we drove through the desert, believing that our love would last as long as the stars. I saw the purple of his tie when I dragged him to my cousin's wedding. Now, purple reminds me of my heart's bruises.

Next was green. His eyes popped into my vision automatically. His clear green eyes that saw me for who I am and chose to love me anyway. The green grass we chose to stain our jeans with when we went to run away from the world into our own hideaway. Now, it is the green mold that had built itself in our fresh spring of love.

Next was yellow. Like the summers we spent lying on the grass with youth by our side. I saw the yellow sands where we had carved our names, knowing full well that the ocean was going to wash it away clean at any given moment. But that was what gave it fire, ironically. The knowledge that our names together could be washed away at any given moment was our fuel. We spent these last eight months burning a fire we didn't quite completely understand. We rode on its passions. We got caught in the energy it gave. We believed in the life it had given.

Now, it is all washed away in some unknown storm. Where the blue ocean met with the gray sky and crashed upon every single structure we had built. Everything that we had known shook and fell apart. The bricks of our relationship were crumbling and we did nothing but watch the ocean continue to rage against our walls, leaving us with nothing but the faint memory of some colors that once were and a vague outline of our names in the sand.

Then a tear escaped my eye and stained everything blue.

Blue rained down from the depths of my mind washing everything away. Nothing was left but a numb feeling as I stared at my phone, turning it over in my hands and thinking over the last conversation I had with him.

I had hoped this was all a dream, but it hurt too much.

Water Girl

I don't know how long I sat there; it could have been two minutes or two hours. All I know is that when I finally decided to stand up and feel the cramps in my muscles, the sky was gray, like it was touting the fact there were no colors left for me to marvel at.

I tiptoed around my apartment, careful not to make a sound. Looking for anything to distract me from the numbing thump in my chest, I didn't dare ruin the otherwise perfect silence that filled the air.

I looked out of my terrace into the little garden I had promised myself I would try to keep alive but had neglected these past few months. The small pot held nothing of interest, just damp soil that came from the slight drizzle earlier in the day. The seed was probably long dead.

I was about to turn away when I caught a glimpse of a small bump in the midst of the desolate soil. No one would see it at first glance. But I saw it. A pale green plant rising above the surface.



FICTION

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

I take the fastest showers of any other person I know. Yes, that includes guys. And I don't mean take a shower as in a quick splash on the hair and soapdown on the body. I mean a full scrub from my head to my toes, with hair thoroughly shampooed to perfection.

Now this may sound questionable coming from a South Orange County white girl, but I assure you it's my reality. The shortest shower I have ever taken was timed at 57 seconds.

The reason for my absurdly fast showers is pretty simple: I have a personal intolerance for the waste of time and resources. It first started when I was eleven and went on a trip with my mom to her home country of Colombia. I was sent to play outside with some girls in the city of Bogota. Amidst the dusty streets and homeless onlookers, girls my age were playing in parks and going in groups to the library. I later met one of the girls, Muffy, and learned many of the girls didn't have constant access to water in their houses and often lacked consistent Internet service, which kept them from completing their homework.

Eleven-year-old me was in full swing, obsessing over Club Penguin and constantly trying to convince my mom to buy me ice cream. It shocked me to think these girls couldn't use their free time doing the same leisure activities I did, yet they managed to stay proactive with their time.

It was summertime when I went to Colombia. Since the country borders the Caribbean Sea, most days brought a humid overcast to the city, meaning a sweat-filled day for me. I kept asking my mother for something to eat despite having snacked just a few minutes earlier. It's all I seemed to care about since my age kept me from truly grasping the privilege of traveling.

Minutes later, after walking into a gated apartment complex and being dumped near a dog park at a playground, I met some girls my age. Muffy and her friends greeted me very suddenly with rapid-fire Spanish and wide-grinning faces. I was torn over wanting to go back inside, but I also knew my grandmother's smoking hobby would prevent my mother from letting me back into the building. Mom was afraid we would breathe in too much secondhand smoke, thus leading me to contract lung cancer, a disease affecting my grandparents. My middle-school mind protested the mere idea of a playground; no video games and no air conditioning was a veritable insult to my summer vacation.

On the flip side, Muffy and her friends found it novel that I only spoke English. To my embarrassment, they spoke both English and Spanish with certain ease. I quickly became staunchly determined to show them I was competent in other areas.

It's weird for me to look back on that time. I was a wildly insecure child with an equally bratty compulsion to make sure people my own age didn't "one-up" me. However, this trip definitely started a change in me that would go on to shape who I am. As much as I wanted to automatically hate Muffy and her friends for no logical reason, they almost immediately endeared themselves to me. They loved playing Pokemon and Club Penguin, two trends that seemingly left me behind back home. They also read books just like me, though not as obsessively. Nonetheless, I found they were familiar with the Spanish versions of books that I had only touched back at my American school.

During the afternoon, I was invited up to Muffy's small apartment. She opened her fridge and offered me papaya juice, which I quickly declined. If it wasn't a soda of some kind, I seemingly wasn't having it.

Sitting down, her friends and I began to play Apples to Apples in Spanish. The hours dragged on. I noticed numerous times that Muffy's living room had a TV in it—yet none of the girls touched it. All the curtains were open, letting natural light illuminate the kitchen; I found out later why this was.

In their houses, they could only run water from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., while electricity had to be conserved for bare essentials. I was shocked by how similar my interests were to Muffy's, yet how differently we had to pursue them. There I was annoying my mom for water while these girls were just happy to still have water running through each building.

The memories of Muffy and her friends still stay with me. I've since come to admire them and now try to replicate their ideas. Working against procrastination and avoiding excuses is a big part of my life now. This ideology went on to touch my bathing routine when California entered a state of emergency due to a drought in April 2014.

For me, there's no time to waste. Saving our environment and conserving my resources is the first step to help. If taking quick showers helps to clean up this mess even a little, it's a worthy use of time.



Sound of her song
music all her own
the rhythm of her waves
melody in her tides
melting a snowy shore

the roar in her tune
each note
playing the clear blue splash
along a salty strum of the bass
slow mellow ballad
continuously strong and sweet

life sustained by her embrace
not taken for granted

summoned by moon's desire
heated with sun's soothing fire
her turquoise allure
glistening, dancing, exotic tunes

sweet perfume
calling of freedom
in her gaze of bliss
we together
in this oceanic
mystery kiss



Jorge Maldonado

Monochrome Dance



Photography

Shannon Cardella

The Lady by the Sea

The lady by the sea
Solemnly gazing at the broken keys

Closing her eyes to hear the rise
The lady by the sea
Playing by silence

The waves wash in symphonies next to her keys
The lady by the sea
Grinning, chuckling, buckling, and shuffling next to me

The lady by the sea
Hidden by the reflecting moon light
In her corner, genius lay
In her corner, the shining day
In her corner, simplicity remains

In silence my memory claims
The lady by the sea



Caregiver



Clay sculpture

Keeping a Secret

When one has a secret meant to be kept from the knowledge of others or the most private of thoughts, the burden becomes immense. You are taking into your heart the guilt, pain, sorrow, or happiness from the giver of that secret.

Beware of this task and what you promised. You will be the keeper of that secret forever. In most cases, it will weigh on your psyche no matter what its subject entails. One could say it is a “be careful to consider all the circumstances and consequences gift” from Pandora’s box. Once the lid has been opened, you never know what prolific sources of trouble lie within. It could be a fire you cannot douse. It could be pain you cannot heal. Of course, there are the good, uplifting, and happy secrets that give hope and enlightenment to our spirits.

From my own experience, though, the box seems to be permeated with more of the dark secrets that can cause damage or change lives in profound ways. This heavy whisper of a secret can manifest itself as a mist that is visible yet invisible. The responsibility of keeping it can become a daunting task.

You are the vessel that carries the burden of this secret. You also become the blank first page of a journal. The words spoken of the secret will always be written on your heart and etched into your brain. As the journey of your daily life unfolds, the secret is hidden like a viperous snake in the dark corners of your heart. Just when you think you have forgotten the secret, it slithers into the light of day. You have to be on guard, continuously, of what you say from that day forward, making positively sure you do not stumble in your thoughts, making sure to never to reveal the giver of a secret or its privileged information.



PERSONAL
NARRATIVE

Kayla McHale

The Face of Truth



Ink on bristol board

Conor Reed Carlson

I Have Seen

I have seen many things in my life
Undoubtedly I am worried beyond measure
Because hell is here and has been for some time
I'd say there's nowhere to go but up
But maybe up's now down

Mass murder, bodies burning, rape and torture
As we speak, breaking bread
Last night I watched Aleppo sink further beneath the surface
Via Twitter; I think the girl is dead now
And he was still on fire when they covered him with a blanket
A perversion of the burning monk
Just the other day I watched a wife beat her husband's head in with a bat
It was live on FX, 7 PM Pacific
A fake murder on a Wednesday.

I have seen many things in my life
Some I want to forget
But when I choose to close my eyes
The images crystallize
I have to watch because ignorance isn't bliss
I choose to watch because others can't.



Julia Dupuis

I See the Body

There's a strange, oppressive quiet in the corridors despite the nurses and doctors bustling from room to room, teetering under the weight of enormous stacks of towels, water slapping the sides of wash bins.

I pick up my clipboard from the front desk and duck into the room of my fourth patient. Silence pinches at my ears, broken only by the beep of the heart monitor in the corner. A potted plant sits by the door and sulks in the swampy heat. Expired celebrity magazines slant on the bedside table, a fan whirs uselessly overhead.

In the bed, a man sleeps. His eyelids don't flicker, even when I rearrange the rumpled crest of blankets. I snatch back the curtains and open the window, letting the cool air spill over my face and into the room.

The door creaks. Feet scuff onto the tiled floor. A woman in pale clothes enters, a shapeless figure in the sea of white.

I can see the familiar lurch of disappointment in her eyes, the uneasy curl to her mouth, and the way her gaze trips painfully over the lump of a man in the bed. She forces a smile edged with long, white teeth.

I step forward and clear my throat. "Hello, I'm Zia. I'm working as caretaker today. Are you family?"

The woman hovers in the dead space between the sliding door and the bed, blinking her gold-flecked eyes rapidly. "Yes," she says. "Yes. He's my brother."

I look down at the patient: a large man, splayed out over the barren white sheets. I know why she can't tear her eyes off of him. A week of lying in the ICU with organ failure has wilted her brother into a pin cushion in the shape of a man.

Holding up the clipboard, I flip through his report. These kind of cases are the hardest. It's the sort of cancer that defies chemo and turns up its nose at radiation. For months he had been doing so well, and then suddenly he wasn't.

"He's a good man," the woman says in a hollow voice. "He has a husband and kids. He loves them so much."

Nothing inside of me twinges. It used to, when I first started working here. Hundreds of patients, hundreds of faces, hundreds of crying family members. Everything goes so fast. I never have the chance to wonder what my patients were like: were they funny? Happy? What did their smile look like? The woman keeps talking, pulling the memories out of her skin like thorns.

First memory: going to the beach. She describes the water reflecting the sky like a broken mirror, distorting the clump of gray clouds into silvery wisps. Waves slapping the sand into foam. The shivering sea was mesmerizing to her wide, five-year-old eyes, and she stepped in too far. Cold water rushing up to her neck and in her mouth. Feet tethered in the marshy sand. Then her brother's strong arms wrapping around her chest, pulling her to safety.

Second memory: driving a shiny red car that screamed of danger, wheels cruising over gritty asphalt, city sky swallowing them up with its star-studded gleam.

Third memory: first day in high school. Trading her light-up Skechers and braces for push-up bras and lipstick, giving up her brains for boys. Her brother's hand on the back of her shirt, guiding her away from the bad crowd under the bleachers, away from the jocks that valued the swell of her breasts more than they did her personality.

"He did so much," she says. "For me, for his family. And he had so much left to do." I look at her, and I feel cold. I can't see it.

The man described so lovingly is gone. His kidneys, lungs, and stomach have quit on him. Brackish fluids seep from his eyes and nose, skin pale and mottled with bruises. He is little more than a fleshy shell of the soul inside.

I imagine standing in the woman's shoes, watching a loved one wither away on the bed. I swap out the man's face with my boyfriend's face, my mother's, my baby cousin's. I can't remember the first time my mother took me to the beach, or the first time I rode my father's car. I can't see my loved ones' smiles or sparkling eyes.

I look down at my patient and see the cracked, bleeding lips, the swollen throat. I see the lab results and endless prescriptions for medicines that keep his life hanging by a chemical thread. The machines: filtering, breathing, reviving what little humanity is left inside of him.

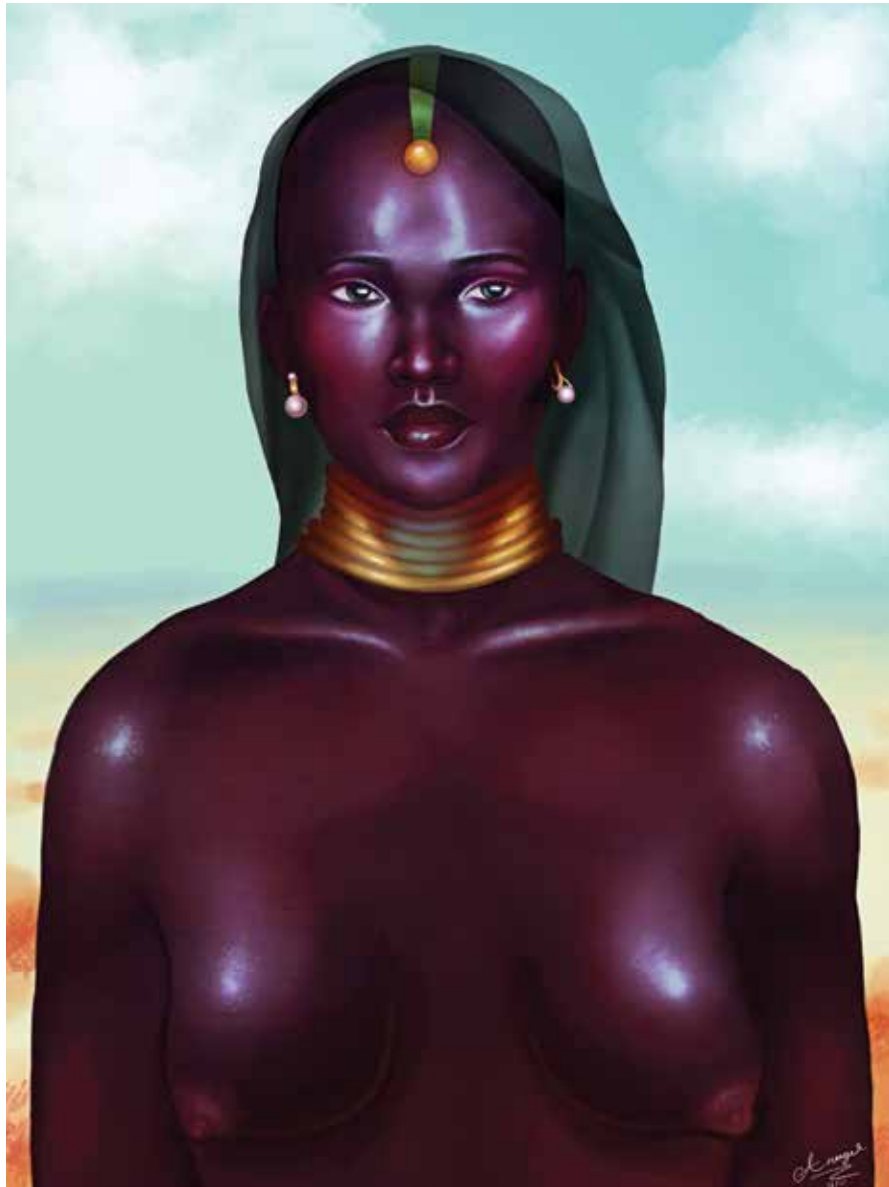
She sees the man.

I see the body.



Ann E. Nordman

Dark



Digital art

Julie Chang

Havana, Cuba



Watercolor, egg tempera, and gouache

Rachel Cornforth

Pipeline Sioux



Watercolor

Joshua Acosta

That Which Divides

That which divides burns like a fire
Bright and lovely, yet draws the ire
Of those who would rather remain in the dark
Their sole purpose to snuff out each spark
Of light wherever it deems to reside
Yes, these are the sorts of things that divide

How great the disparity
That afflicts our humanity
Lost in an abyss of grey
Both fire and dark
Have each left their mark
In worlds of both night and day



POETRY

Christopher Bast

Faces of War

“What was it like over there?”

It’s a question I’m often asked. In fact, if I could pull up a statistic, I’m sure it’s ranked in the top five of questions I’m asked. However, I’ve never once been able to come up with a legitimate answer. How am I supposed to explain my time in a quiet Third World country during a time of war? How do I try to make people understand my time as a United States Marine in Afghanistan? Do I tell them of the heart-pounding moments of confusion and fear after a roadside bomb goes off or a Taliban round screams past your head, demanding your full attention? Do I tell them about the soul-crushing moments of boredom? Or maybe I tell them about how I miss it all and want to return? Marines love to fight, but we’re not all natural born fighters. It doesn’t come as a gift from God to all of us. Instead, we yearn to be fighters and shape our lives around it. We train our minds and push our bodies to the limit so that when the time comes we are ready. We long for the baptism of fire and internally scream if it never comes. Even after the baptism, we still want it—much to the contradiction of civilian stereotypes. So I’m often caught off guard by one memory in which children would interrupt everything.

For myself and the Marines of 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, Delta Company, 1st Platoon, Afghanistan had become a sort of home. Though we had only been there for four months, each Marine became an expert at reading people, surroundings, and the telltale signs of an oncoming fight. On one particular patrol, the signs flashed brighter than neon lights.

We patrolled along the Afghan countryside through farmlands of corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and the ever present poppy and marijuana. The Third World stench was often overpowered by the scent of the marijuana fields, which many a Marine had joked about lighting on fire. That day’s objective, however, wasn’t the marijuana fields; instead, we focused on a large singular compound that was surrounded by the tall plants and bright flowers of poppy that would later be used to make heroin.

Our squad of eight Marines walked slowly but intently. Each step under a careful eye to avoid stepping on a covered bomb while another eye scanned the horizon for a potential shooter. Our shoulders sore from our heavy body armor while baking under a hot Afghan sun. Weapons held at a low ready—if something happened it would be met deliberately and appropriately. We were

soon at the target compound centered among the poppy fields, with irrigation ditches and canals running like a maze throughout the area.

Immediately, the local families saw us, and the women and children began to walk indoors. It was usual for the women to leave because their customs didn’t allow any interaction between us and them. But the kids would stay; in fact, the children would normally rush toward us with open arms, wanting candy or water. Instead, their mothers rushed them indoors. Warning sign number one just flashed.

“Bast, post security!” my squad leader, Sergeant Gutierrez, yelled.

I began to survey the terrain, spotting the positions that would give the best cover and outboard security, and then positioned the Marines accordingly.

“No MAMs,” Pate, my machine gunner, said to me as we positioned ourselves in an irrigation ditch next to a mud hut. He was referring to military aged males, the ones who usually did all the fighting. He was right: the only males around were elders, too old to be the husbands or fathers of the women and children who were inside their mud huts. Warning sign number two now.

With security set, Pate and I watched outboard, making small talk about which was better, KFC or Popeye’s Chicken.

Soon, my squad leader approached us after talking to one of the village elders. “This guy’s nervous and asking if he can leave. Keep eyes out.” Number three shot up.

I passed the word to the other Marines. Everyone was getting tense, including the locals. But I could see the small grin on Pate’s face. He was excited. Hell, so was I. As much as combat is something to be avoided as a warrior, you can’t help but yearn for it. The adrenaline rush is like no other. To best a man that is trying to kill you is a feeling that can’t be replicated.

I looked up at the blue Afghan sky and saw the large white blimp that was one of our surveillance drones in the area. As if on cue, Turner, who was holding a radio, mumbled something to Sergeant Gutierrez that I couldn’t hear.

The sergeant approached us once more. “Eye in the sky says there’s a lot of movement around us. Hang tight.” The final warning sign shined bright.

“Got it, sergeant,” I responded and turned to Pate. We gave each other reassuring nods. But my heart was pumping. I wanted this fight as well. Let the Taliban take a shot. We faced outward again and just as soon as my heart began pumping, it stopped again. Just in front of us coming out of the nearby mud hut were four children, two boys and two girls no older than eight. Brown eyes wide and innocent, hair matted and dirty. They’d never experienced a real shower or eaten at a restaurant. They stared at us. Immediately, I no longer thought of the incoming firefight. Instead, I thought about my unborn daughter—due in just a couple of months.

“Get inside,” I said to the children, but they just stared, not understanding

my words.

"Pate, when this kicks off, cover me," I told him. "I'm pushing these kids back into the building."

While I kept my eyes on the children, thoughts ran through my mind. *Why are you out here? Don't you understand what's going on? Get inside! Why aren't your mothers watching you?*

Time stood still. For me at least. I stared at those children and burned their faces into my memory while twenty minutes passed.

"All right, let's get it moving!" Sergeant Gutierrez said.

Soon, our squad made our way back to our own friendly lines.

"What a letdown," Pate said. The others agreed. As for me, I was thankful.

How do I explain stories and emotions like that when people ask me "What's it like over there?"

Instead, I smile softly, push the memories away, and try to think of those kids.

"It's different."



I miss the muddy fields
The times in darkness
The weight strapped around my torso
The roll of canvas bags
I miss carrying sandbags for the wall

I miss the fear
The acceptance of death
The poppy fields
The heightened awareness
I miss filling sandbags for the wall

I miss the feeling of excitement
The scene of red lens on maps
The green haze in my eyes
The safety in each bag
I miss tying sandbags for the wall

I miss leading
The grip of steel
The snap of impacting metal
The safety of sandbags piled two deep
I miss stacking sandbags for the wall

I miss my brothers
The ones who said "I hope you don't go"
The ones who said "I hope you do"
The ones who dug, filled, and tied
I miss repairing sandbags for the wall

I miss the unison
The understanding in silence
The aggression and thrill
The adventure
I miss needing sandbags for the wall



PERSONAL
NARRATIVE

POETRY

The Business of Dinner

I watched as he swirled his wine glass, continuing to avoid eye contact with me. When he didn't like what was being said, he looked to other things to occupy his mind, and this was one of those times. I could remember a lot of those times. The low ceilings in the dimly lit restaurant didn't help the fact that I was feeling trapped. Despite the low light, his grey beard and piercing blue eyes were still apparent. I have been avoiding this dinner with all my might. My dad only thinks I've been avoiding it for a week. I've been avoiding it for years. I was just about to speak when his phone rang.

"One second. Gotta take this."

I could hear the conversation at the table next to us. A young couple was arguing. The candle flickering at their table looked identical to ours. Everything in this restaurant looked identical, now that I think about it. All the tables were lined up like a grid. The owners figured out how to fit as many people in there as possible. More tables meant more profits. I learned that in a small business class I had to take at school.

"But you gotta understand, I haven't closed a deal all month," he said. "I've got bills to pay here. Gimme a break."

It was the sound of him losing another client. The voice on the other line probably decided to go another way. This happened all the time. It probably wasn't personal; they must have just found another option that saved a few dollars. This meant no paycheck this month, something that had become a regular occurrence as of late. This never seemed to bother my dad. I think he enjoyed it. I guess there is something exciting about that uncertainty. He was always confident that he would make something work, somehow. We were similar in that way. He used to tell me that people were at their best when they were backed into a corner—that's when the best ideas were created. That's the spirit you need to be successful. I learned that in Entrepreneurship 101.

When I was young, I had always assumed exactly what my father assumed: go to school, start a business, or take over the family business. It was the same for everyone in our family: my uncles, my grandfather, my dad. My future had been decided for me. It was like there was an imaginary finish line waiting for me after I was done with school, but it never felt quite right to me.

The waiter came and interrupted our silence.

"How was everything?" he asked.

"Fine, thank you," my dad said abruptly, trying to end the exchange.

"Well, I just wanted to apologize if anything didn't meet your satisfaction. I'm sorry if I didn't meet your expectations."

"Everything was fine. Thanks."

The waiter looked dejected, nodded, and walked away. I looked away for the entire exchange. This happened all the time, so I had become used to it.

"I wish you would just tip a normal amount," I said. "The guy has a lot of tables tonight."

"When you start paying for dinners, you get to decide the tip," he replied. "See how that works? He'll get over it. What is it you wanted to tell me, anyway?"

It was a tough question. What I wanted to tell him would take a lot more time than we had. But I knew what he meant.

"Well, you know how I've been taking those business classes the last few semesters?" I said.

"Yeah, what about them?" he replied, listening closely now.

"Well, I haven't been fully honest about that."

"What exactly does that mean?" He was angry now.

"I dropped out. A year ago." And that was that. The words came out of my mouth like a fist and were sent across the table, hitting him square in the face. There was no going back now.

I had always thought that when I eventually told him the truth—that I stopped going to school, that I really had no idea what I wanted to do in life, and that the only thing I was certain about was that I hated business school—I always thought that would be the beginning of the real struggle. Explaining myself after that would be the hardest part, I thought. But as soon as those words came out, I felt free.

I could no longer hear what the couple next to us was arguing about. As he stared at me speechless, I knew that we were about to become the spectacle that the table next to us would overhear. Overcome by the deafening silence, I continued, "I just wasn't happy. I need to find something else. Something I can be passionate about."

"And what in the world could that be?" he said swiftly, his voice becoming louder.

"I don't know yet. But whatever it is, it's not waiting for me in business school. I need to be on my own for awhile. See what life throws at me. See what I can throw back. I'm going out on the road for awhile. I don't know exactly when I'll be back. But I'll keep in touch with you and Mom. I just need to get away for a little bit."

Then the longest silence came. The anger had subsided and the confusion had taken over. He just sat and stared through me for what seemed like minutes.

Shock Absorption

I wasn't surprised. This came out of nowhere for him, but I had been preparing for months.

"I don't even know what to say," he started, staring directly at me. "I have an entire career, an entire life, waiting for you. Do you know how many people would drop everything to take that? Can you even comprehend that? This might be the dumbest idea you've ever had. You're going to regret this forever."

"You may be right," I started. "But that'll be my burden to bear. I'll never know what I'm capable of if I just take what you've made."

"You really shouldn't—"

"I've thought it through," I quickly interrupted, growing frustrated.

"This is what I want to do—for now." I replied quietly, catching myself before I became too angry.

"Well then, I hope it works out for you," he said, staring at his now empty wine glass.

I knew he didn't fully mean it. But I was okay with that. He would come to terms with it, eventually. Or maybe he wouldn't. The truth was, I didn't care any longer. And that was freeing.



The first time I ran six miles was after my dad died. I was back in town for his funeral. It was November in Kansas. I didn't mean to run that far; I never had before.

I put on pants and a jacket over my normal running gear. It was a brisk fall day. Since I'm used to running in California, all the layers feel smothering. I don't run well in the cold because of my asthma, so my mom lets me borrow her face mask for cold weather running. It looks like some weird Hannibal Lecter serial killer mask, but whatever. It's too cold outside to care. I lace up my shoes and head out the door for a short run. I start off down my parents' street. *My mom's street.* I try not to think too much about why I'm in town. *Just focus on putting one foot in front of the other.* I turn left on the main street, and a gust of wind hits me from the side as I make my way over the highway overpass. I tug my hat down a little further and focus on the music thumping in my ears.

As I jog over the bridge, I feel as though I'm passing into a previous life. Slowly moving past streets, I become more and more familiar with the surroundings. I take a right and turn down Garnett Street towards my husband's parents' house. *Ex-husband's.* I wonder if I'll see him. I haven't seen him since I left for rehab five months ago. I haven't had any contact with him whatsoever in four months, since I had a lawyer send him divorce papers. *One foot in front of the other.* When I come to the end of the street, I have two options: turn right and run past his house or turn left and run the opposite direction. I choose to run away. *Of course, always running.*

I cross another major street to enter the neighborhood I grew up in. As I turn down Monrovia Street, I slow down to a walk. The trees have changed colors on this street, and the street has changed, too. It is worn from age—the asphalt bleached by the sun, cracks in the once newly cemented sidewalk. The orange and yellow trees have grown tall and broad. I remember zooming through the crunchy, brown leaves on my bike with my friends. Then, later, zooming down this street in the fall in my navy-blue Camry after I turned 16. I shiver. My damp skin gets colder as I walk.

I start jogging again past an old friend's house. My dad used to coach our soccer games when we were kids. I see the grassy yard where we would practice kicking the ball to my dad as he pretended to be a goalie, his coach's

whistle hanging around his neck. The thought oddly catches in my throat. One pitiful half-gasp, half-sob escapes me. *Just focus on one step at a time.* I use what I've learned in California: *Just take the next indicated step.* My headphones bump Britney Spears in my ears. I'm not proud of my choice in running music. Totally inappropriate for the moment. I am hot under my jacket from the effort of running, but the sweat on any exposed skin is cold. I am very aware that I am breathing back in my own humid air. This serial killer mask sucks. I pull it down around my neck as I run.

By the time I reach the house I was raised in, I'm a mess. My face is red and damp from exertion and emotion, I have a Hannibal mask trying to strangle me, and now there's half-frozen snot on my face from taking the mask off. Hopefully my husband doesn't see me like this. Ex-husband. That would be embarrassing.

I stop in front of my childhood home. Strangers live there now. It looks so different and, yet, still so familiar. While I was growing up, the house was painted dark brown and cream. Now, the house is a lighter color. The big window next to the front door is painted a beige color along with the rest of the trim. I look at the two sandy-colored windows above the garage, my brother and sister's old rooms, and wonder what is in those rooms now. I can remember my brother, sister, and I trying to catch fireflies in the front yard at dusk. Sledding down the driveway in the winter. Our dad weaning us off our training wheels on the front sidewalk. I miss my dad. I haven't seen him in three months, since I was newly sober.

It was the first time I had been back in town since I had left, and I didn't have much time to visit with him. The last time we were supposed to spend quality time together, I fell asleep on the sofa next to him. I guess I took the time I had left with him for granted. He had been sick for so long. I didn't know that would be my last visit with him. My mom called me before he died to tell me he wasn't doing well and that I should come out as soon as I could to see him one last time. I never made it. She called early in the morning a few days later to tell me he had passed. I was on a plane an hour later. *If only I had gotten on a plane that quickly the first time she called.* My mom said it was okay, that he knew I loved him and that he finally was at peace knowing that I was safe and getting healthy in California.

Something catches my eye from the front window, and I'm snapped back into the present. A woman is staring at me from behind the panes. My legs are shaky and my ears are aching. I wipe my nose with the back of my gloved hand, tug at my hat again, and start running away from my past.

I take the shorter way home to avoid any more trips down memory lane. I'm too tired to think anymore. I've already run further than I ever have before. I'm just too cold to stop and walk. I have to keep going. *One step at a time.*

As I'm jogging back through my parents' neighborhood, my mom's

neighborhood, I realize just how far I've come. I've made it through so much these past few months. Just as I ran through my past neighborhoods and physically became stronger, I got through those past experiences and became a stronger person for it. I wish my dad could see me now— even stronger than I was before. But I know that he will be with me in spirit. I know that he will stay in the hearts of the people who loved him and those who were loved by him. I open the front door to my family's house and feel the warmth envelop me.





Scratchboard

Sometimes,
When there is blackness all around her
When she finds herself deserted
And she lies in bed forsaken
She mends her seams.

Sometimes,
When the night swallows her
When she discovers herself isolated
And she catches her reflection
She tears her seams.
She goes to extremes.

She goes to extremes.



Sharon Inbar

Spiritual Quest: The Journey



Bronze sculpture

Giuliana Rose

Why Did You Doubt?



Ceramic

Emma Elizabeth Fischer

Immortal Life



Ink sketch of the immortal cells of Henrietta Lacks

Arnold Agustin

Clouded Thoughts



Ink on bristol board

Angel Alay

Confusion

Most people in the world will experience some questionable event that will change their lives forever, for better or for worse. These events happen when they are least expecting it, and once they have happened, their lives will never be the same again. While these incidents can range from marrying a loved one to losing one, I believe one of the biggest origin points of such events is religion. Everywhere in the world, religion offers people a huge incentive to be a good person and continue to follow a specific faith. But not all people start from a clean slate as a child and choose their religion. Usually, they are brought into a faith by their parents and really don't have a say until they are old enough to "think on their own." After a certain age, forcing anyone to accept something he or she doesn't believe becomes more like torture than enlightenment. In my own experience, being part of a Pentecostal family hit home with something similar. I was brought in by my parents to a place I didn't really want to be. In one night that I will never forget, everything changed, and I could no longer see the world that I had lived in the same way as I did beforehand.

As I continued through the years, I slowly began to accept and believe in what I was being presented at my church as truth, just as my parents had done. I made many friends there and was constantly pondering when the day would come that I would be baptized and promised eternal happiness for when I passed into heaven. That all changed one night when our religious service lasted two hours longer than usual. All of the children in the room were to be escorted out to another room while the rest of the parents, young adults, and my fifteen-year-old self stayed for a very special ritual and prayer to let the spirit of God into our beings, with the help of our pastor, of course.

As soon as it started, I realized why the smaller children had to leave. The prayers began, the choir sang, and everyone in the church had begun to act in such a peculiar way, as if some invisible puppeteer had made them get up from their seats and start to dance frantically. With arms moving like fish desperately trying to get off of a line, eyes moving quickly and randomly in their sockets, trying to escape from their owners' faces, they acted like frantic zombies straight out of a horror movie. The pastor ran around giving everyone the utmost of blessings, and with each blessing, the effects soon followed. Many of the older women in the church began to flail their arms as if they were trying to keep bees away from their hair. All the older men proceeded to get on their knees and weep

uncontrollably, like they had seen all of their loved ones killed right before their eyes. While all of this was happening, I stood there next to my cousin, frazzled and confused, wondering if what was happening was really true. Was everyone really in the hands of God, and if so, why would He have them act in such a strange manner? But to my surprise, the worst was yet to come. Like the big red ribbon on the top of a big Christmas present, the event that really left its scarring mark in my head was so out of the ordinary to me that just thinking about it reminds me why I never went back to that church.

Probably the strangest thing out of everything that was going on happened when the pastor's wife opened up a black plastic trash bag. I turned to my cousin to ask him what the bag was for and, before I could say one word, the answer became very clear. The plastic bag was going to be used as a giant sickness bag for anyone in the church needing to barf.

Apparently, it was a common event at the church for members to feel the power of God with such intensity that their mortal bodies could not handle it and they would begin to vomit uncontrollably. Never in my life had I seen such a disturbing scene. More than ten full-grown adults were barfing into the same trash bag, all while continuing to pray. So many red lights were flashing in my mind all at once, telling my body that it was time to leave and never come back. To this day, probably the biggest image that still lingers in my head is watching this whole event unfold so casually. Was I really the only one who found this scene so out of the ordinary?

Before I could get my question answered, the pastor asked for all of the young people to please go up to the front and stand in a row for everyone to else to see. I had come to know many of the other teenagers being addressed by my pastor; I had even become great friends with some of them. This being the first time that the pastor had made such a request, we did as he said and went up. Questions flowed through my mind. Why do we need to go up to the front? What is he going to do? Are we going to experience something similar to what everyone else did?

I stood next to my cousin and watched as the pastor began to beg God for forgiveness and let us into His Holy Kingdom. Then, out of nowhere, the pastor tapped the first teenager on the head and the girl dropped like a fallen statue! Luckily, the church's members had planned for this because there were parents behind us, ready for when we would become paralyzed in the name of God. The rest of the teenagers stood there quiet and motionless in shock, waiting for what would soon be a similar outcome—like a deer standing in the middle of the road caught by the headlights of a truck, waiting for an inevitable collision. All while my good friend lay there on the ground in a state of peaceful slumber. One by one, the teenagers fell, asleep and resting in the hands of God. For the first time in my life, I was ready to put my faith to the test and really see if everything I had

been told was true. I was finally going to see if the path handed down to me by my parents really was the one to guarantee me a spot in heaven.

I could already tell just by the expression on his face that my cousin was just as skeptical as I was, but we both were ready to believe anything at that point. The pastor finally made his way to my cousin and me, and my cousin was the first to go. I watched as the pastor prayed to my cousin before delivering the holy tap, but nothing happened. Wondering what had gone wrong, the pastor left my cousin standing there and took a few steps to make his way towards me. He began his prayer for me and tapped my forehead, but to no surprise, I was also immune. The pastor left us there, the only two teenagers still standing after all the others had fallen in the name of God, while everyone continued acting out of sorts.

I looked around, as everyone else in the church was in the presence of the righteous creator in some way or another, except for the two of us. What had we done wrong? Why had God ignored us? Were we really not faithful enough to be impacted? I had let God into my life, prayed in His name, and knew that He was over my shoulder protecting me, always letting me know He was there somehow, so what exactly was going on? In my eyes, what had looked like a wonderful ritual—where God himself revealed His existence to us—had turned into a madhouse in the blink of an eye.

As everyone continued to experience seizures and vomit in the name of our Lord and Savior, I continued to play along and not look freaked out from what I was seeing. Eventually, the sacred storm had passed and everything went back to normal. Tears were wiped, women calmed down, and teenagers awoke. The children came back inside to see their parents the same way as they had left, not knowing what strange things they had done while they were gone. The service ended with one last amen, and we were all finally able to go home. My cousin and I looked at each other one final time with a confused expression. From that moment on, we were never the same.

As I left, everything I had believed in before was being questioned by the logical side of my brain. All my faith turned into a giant question made up of smaller ones. I no longer walk knowing that some all-powerful being is watching me all the time or that all of my actions are being accounted for when I die. But I do not discredit them for what they are. Instead, my mind has become fonder of the middle road, where both science and religion can be taken as fact, as long as there is evidence to prove that it is true. Since a lot of ideas in religion and science are just theory, I now won't follow a specific religion until its followers can prove that what they are preaching is nothing but the truth. I now walk this planet with the mind of an agnostic, constantly questioning everything in search of answers and never returning to that place of worship where a certain memory still resides.



Sabrina Botros

The Coffin

My mother stared down into the coffin. Her hair was pulled back into one of her tight buns—her signature hairstyle. The top of her head had a slight gray tone, fading into black. It reminded me that she wasn't as young as she used to be. Her maroon lips were pressed into a thin line, and creases formed at the corners of her eyes.

I followed her around the dimly lit funeral home, standing at her side as family members I'd never even met came to give her their condolences. Their exchanges were awkward—what could one really say in these situations anyway. "I'm sorry for your loss" seemed to be a common one. Funerals were unfamiliar territory to me, and I found that it all seemed a bit superficial. Everyone was only here for the crab cakes anyway.

When we had finished at the funeral home, there was a service at our local church. We lived in one of those small towns in the heart of Connecticut where everybody knows everybody. A tragedy for one was a tragedy for all. I listened as Pastor Dave droned on and on, reminding us all that the human soul is immortal, that we should be rejoicing, and blah blah blah. Distinct sniveling flooded the parish, and I began to wonder if it was because this was a funeral or because Pastor Dave's speech was simply so moving. Probably the first one, but who could really be sure?

I studied the blood red curtains and the people, but mostly the latter. My mother was the most pressing, with her thin lips and vacant expression. I knew her well enough to know that she was upset but simply pretending to be strong. Not that she had to pretend, particularly, but my mother had never been a tough woman. A widow who lived off of her inheritance—a hefty sum, it was—my mother wasn't used to handling difficult situations. Up until now, money had always been the solution to everything.

My Aunt Stacey sat in the row behind us, a tissue pressed to her eye. Every once in awhile, she would lean forward and squeeze my mother's shoulder. I was a bit surprised by her show of support. Two years ago, Aunt Stacey and my mother had gotten into a fight over how to baste the Thanksgiving turkey. They hadn't spoken since. But, as strange as it seems, death was one of those things that brought everyone together. When Pastor Dave finally finished, it was time to head to the cemetery for the burial. My mother was strict: family and close

friends only. So, naturally, being members of a small town, nearly everyone in the church found themselves tromping across the wet grass half an hour later.

My mother and I were the first to arrive. I sat next to her as she drove slowly behind the hearse. Her breathing was shallow, as if she were willing herself to hold back an outburst. The sun began to peek out from behind the clouds overhead, illuminating her black silk dress. It seemed out of place, as if it wasn't meant to be worn while the sun was out. Somehow, that knowledge made this whole situation all the more terrible. While we waited for the rest of the town to find parking, my mother and I chanced a peek into the coffin.

With my flaming auburn hair and soft, sixteen-year-old skin, I had been beautiful. There was no doubt about that. I wondered if everyone who died got to attend their own funerals or if it was only those who died tragically. Or maybe it was only those who died young. I had managed to do both. An accidental drowning in the lake, they claimed. No foul play suspected. But I knew better: I had lived it. My mother closed the coffin—surely it wasn't considered appropriate to open it at the burial site—and turned away, preparing to greet her guests.

Pastor Dave arrived last. Surely this seemed normal to everyone, seeing as how he'd had to lock up the church after the service. I watched him with narrowed eyes despite the fact that he couldn't see me. I stood next to my mother, hovering somewhere between life and death, invisible and untouchable to all around me. It was impossible to describe the way I was feeling because I couldn't feel anything. Did this happen to everyone when they died?

It's him, I wanted to tell my mother. It's Pastor Dave. He did this.

It was time to lower my coffin into the ground. The cemetery was on the outskirts of town, surrounded by evergreens. It was exactly the kind of place you'd think of when you thought about cemeteries, assuming you were the kind of person who thought about them in the first place. In short, it was eerie. In the distance, a hawk cried.

Something pulled me to my left, and I looked up with a gasp. Emerging from the dark canopy of the forest, a strange sort of light radiated from the trees in front of me. Was this what people meant when they claimed they had seen a light as they nearly died? I was dead and had been for days now. Since I had drowned, there had been nothing but cold, wet darkness. The light brightened, transforming into a sort of halo-like glow. I felt a tug, like an invisible cord, pulling me towards it without mercy.

I turned towards my mom. She was crying now as she watched the coffin containing her only child get lowered into the ground before disappearing from sight. I put my hand on her arm in a useless attempt to comfort her.

"It was him!" I cried at the top of my lungs despite the fact that she couldn't hear me. "Pastor Dave did this to me!"

My mother gasped. At first I thought it was because she was out of breath

from crying, but instead, she was looking down at her arm, where my hand hovered. She glanced up in my general direction.

It was him. I squeezed her arm, but she didn't flinch.

"Dave." She whispered suddenly. She glanced across the stretch of grass and open ground, her eyes resting on the town pastor.

The light pulled me harder now, and I went willingly. I chanced one more glance at my despairing mother, who watched Pastor Dave with a look of comprehension. So long as she knew what he had done, that was enough.

I reached towards the light as it encompassed me in its golden glow, and I felt my body go light as gravity itself faded into nothingness.



Zach Seamons

Black

Black

"Come back"

People gather around

The cacophony of the sound

Of tears rolling down smooth cheeks

It's been weeks since I finally became too weak

To keep seeing the world without purpose and without color

But had I known that my colorless vision would lead to my colorless face

And people having colorless conversations wearing suits and dresses of a single color

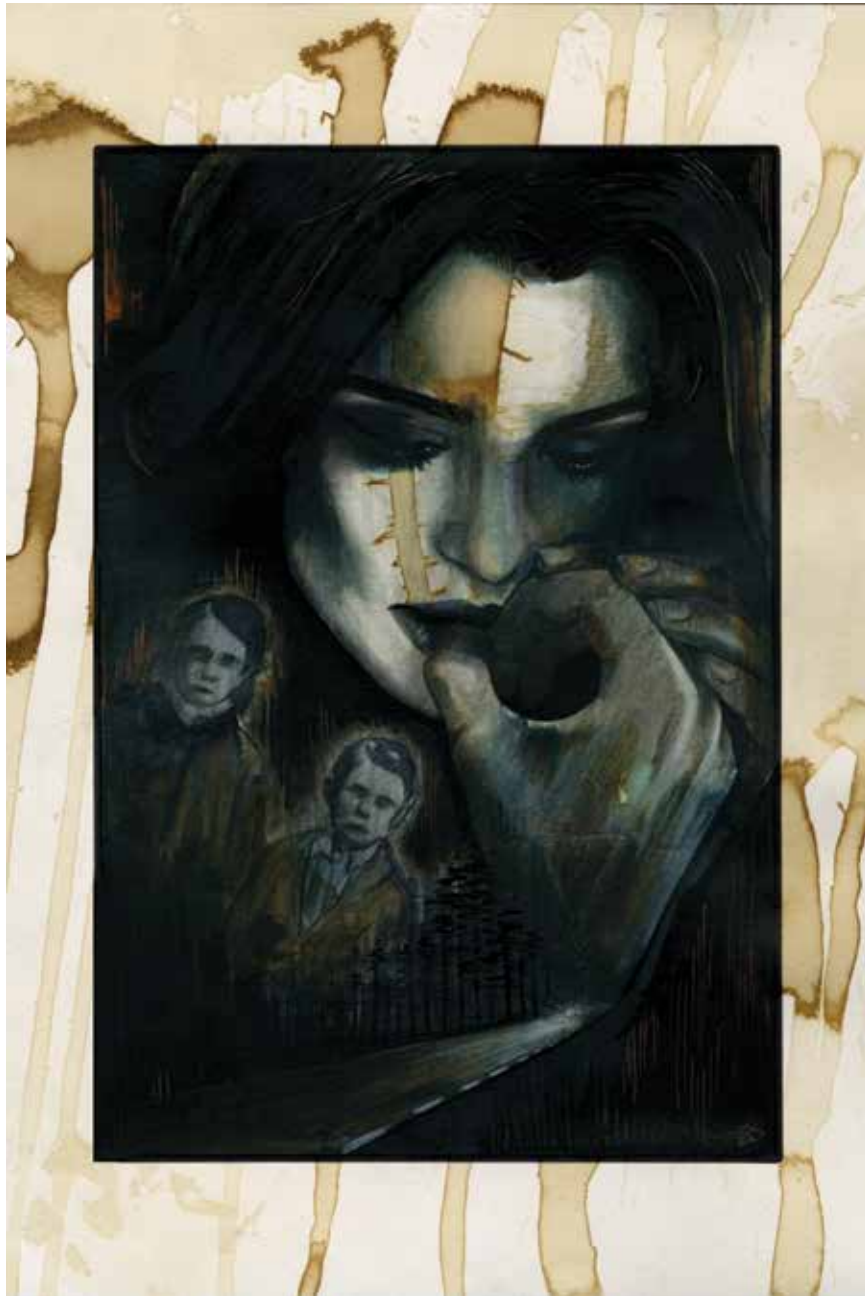
Maybe

I wouldn't have chosen

Black



Knock Knock



Mixed media

Part 1

Alaina took another sip of her wine, a few strands of her dark hair bouncing off of the glass. She sank back into the sofa, her pale skin glowing in the light of the television. She took a gulp. This time, the rest of the wine ran down her throat like a tear. She saw the TV, but she didn't comprehend what she saw. It simply droned on, as did the gentle rain faintly rattling on the large roof of her sister's suburban home. She was drifting toward sleep when ...CRACK! She was suddenly cast back into reality. Glancing over her shoulder and across the couch, she spotted her sister's family cat staring guiltily into her eyes for a moment before silently gliding across the tile floor and upstairs into the darkness. Alaina sighed. She should eat and clean up whatever had broken. Getting up was difficult. Not physically, but it was difficult.

She flipped on a lonely light above the sink, grabbed a dustpan and hand broom, and began to sweep up the broken pieces. It hadn't been long since she had freed herself from Elliot. One night, she just told him she'd had enough. That she couldn't do it anymore. That she was going to be moving out soon. He didn't take it well. Dark fingers were only now beginning to fade from the pale skin of her slender arm. He had left to take out the rest of his anger on another bottle of whiskey, and she had left for a safer place.

She was sitting at the table with a simple ham sandwich, pouring herself another glass of wine when the first knock came. It was unexpected, confusing really. It was late, and if the next one hadn't been so stern and clear, Alaina might have questioned whether she had really heard it.

"Hello?" she called across the living room. Her eyes were locked on the door, which changed colors in the glow of the television. The bottle hovered above the table.

"Let us in. Please." The voice was young, but clear and precise. The dull mumbling of the television was the only thing that warded off deep silence after that. The rain had stopped. Alaina strived to move as quietly as she could, although she didn't know why, as she slipped out of her chair and drifted toward the door.

Knock. Knock. "We're hungry, and it's time for us to come in."

She pressed herself against the door tightly. Gripping the handle firmly. She didn't have to open the door. She could just finish her wine. But they were just children, and they were hungry. Look at how small the little one was and how nicely they were dressed. Their clothes were something from another time. The taller one had black ribbons holding her black ponytails together and wore a well-worn but proper-looking little wool coat that ended at her knees. She held her little brother's porcelain hand and pulled the little gentleman toward the kitchen. Alaina followed them. The door wide open and unattended.

"Thank you Alaina, we are just so hungry."

"Here, you can have this," she said in a soft voice and pushed the sandwich she had been about to eat toward them. Her stomach was empty, but she wasn't hungry. She wasn't much of anything, just fascinated with these children and, for some reason, no longer afraid.

"Thank you, Alaina. We need to eat, and this will do."

She stood beside the table, feeling its cold, hard smoothness under her fingertips, watching the children as they each opened their half of the sandwich, took the meat between their little fingers, and began to eat only that, their faces turned down toward the table. She moved over to the chair opposite them and sat down. The lonely kitchen light behind her illuminated the tops of their heads, their parted and well-combed hair a glossy black. As she looked away at some magnetic letters on the refrigerator door, fear began to flow back into Alaina's mind. What am I doing? I think the door is open. These children are ...

As she looked back across the table, terror seized her. No longer fear, but unholy terror. Their blanched faces were not those of children or adults. They were youthful, but menacing and stern. Lips like dull red paint. But no detail was burned into Alaina's memory as deeply as the profane blackness of their chilling little eyes.

"Elliot. He's the one who hurt you?" They spoke in unison.

She heard every syllable of every word, as clearly as if they were speaking directly into her ears. She felt their words, pulling a response out of her. There was no hiding anything. She had let them in, and they could see everything, every dark corner. Every cold place. The violent things she hid from, the places she hid. She had let them inside, and now they could see it all. She would have closed her eyes, but it would have made no difference. She would have seen them just the same.

"Yes."

Their black eyes continued to peer into her as they grasped each other's hands and replied together, "Thank you, Alaina."

"You don't need to know that. Why do you know that!?" she screamed as she stood up, turned around, and covered her sobbing eyes. "Please, I don't..."

They were gone, completely gone. The door was closed, and she heard the

faint sound of cheering on the television.

Part 2

On the wooden steps of a lonely bar, off of a windy road, Elliot sat sucking the last bit of life from his cigarette. He wasn't sober, but he was sober enough to ride home. It was probably about time to go collect Alaina anyway; she'd had long enough to pout. He didn't know exactly where she was, but he could hunt her down if he felt like it. She might be with that bitch Sandy or at her sister's. Maybe tomorrow. He hauled his big self off of the creaking steps, dusted some ash off of his leather jacket, and stomped his way over to his motorcycle, one of the last bikes in the lot. He slipped his helmet on and dropped himself onto the classic machine. The roar of the engine broke the stillness of the night and a moment later he took off down the long asphalt road.

Elliot swerved. All at once he was sliding, the bike was screaming, and his head was spinning. Then he abruptly stopped. As his bike rumbled in a slow and steady growl, he took a breath and looked around. He was on the very edge of the two-lane road and he couldn't move. His left leg was completely pinned under his bike. He scrambled to quickly remove and toss aside his helmet. He needed to see more clearly. *Where was that little boy? He hadn't hit him, that dumb ass. Maybe he did, but then why wasn't he splattered across the pavement?* He placed his big boot against the seat of his motorcycle and began to push. It normally would have been no problem to lift up his bike, but his leg was burning. In fact, everything was starting to hurt. As the bike began to lift, the blood began to flow. A pool of thick, warm fluid formed, black like oil in the low light. He pushed hard, and the bike flipped over onto its unmarred side.

"Ahhh... Shit!"

What the fuck was a kid doing out here!? At night!

The asphalt had ground away Elliot's jeans, along with the meat on the outside of his leg. Nearly down to the bone. The newly flat side of his leg was slick with a steady flow of blood. Life oozing away.

He went for his belt. *A tourniquet. I can make a tourniquet. And I have to get out of the road. Some du...*

"You! What the fuck are you doing! I almost ... Are you ..."

The black little silhouette just stood there. Unmoving, except to cock its little head, like a bird. Elliot could have sworn the child he had almost hit was smaller and not wearing a dress or whatever. It must have been that one, the one peering over his overturned bike. He couldn't see anything very clearly, but that skin. *Were its eyes black?*

"What's wrong with you! Go ge..."

The little one leaped onto the bike and then an unnatural distance straight

onto Elliot, sinking its little teeth into his thick throat. Blood spurted, not steadily, but in pulsating globs. Elliot made a gurgling, wheezing noise and uncoordinated, flailing attempts to grab the boy. The boy bounded backwards, flesh and trachea still firmly in his teeth. Elliot slipped into cold darkness.

We're just so hungry.



Madison Taber

The Man Outside the Window

I'm not the sentimental type and, to be honest, getting tucked into bed by my mom and dad every night seems a little excessive. I was talking to Avery yesterday on the monkey bars and she said her parents stopped tucking her in when she turned ten because they said she's "mature enough" to fall asleep by herself. At first I didn't know what "mature" meant, but Avery said it means "to act like a big kid and be smart." Do Mom and Dad not think I'm "mature" enough? Or maybe they don't want to admit that I'm growing up because I am their only child? But it was 8:30 and, on schedule, I heard Mom and Dad tiptoe up the stairs toward my bedroom.

"Knock, knock," Dad said, as he did every night without actually knocking on the door. As always, I lay silently, staring at the door and waiting for it to open.

My mom came in first and said in her tender voice, "Good night, Miss Olive, we love you so much."

Then my Dad whispered, "See you in the morning, Liv! Tomorrow is Tuesday, so that means pancakes for breakfast!" He pulled my grey fuzzy blanket over me, straightened the pillows beside my head, and smiled.

"Good night, love you," I said, my words muffled by my pillow. I choked with frustration, knowing that I was not "mature" enough for them.

As soon as Mom and Dad walked out of my room and shut the door, I rolled over, adjusted my pillow, and closed my eyes as I felt myself drifting off to sleep. All of a sudden I heard a SCREECH on my window and my whole body shook. What was that scary noise? I held my breath and gripped Foxy, my stuffed fox, and crossed my fingers, hoping the sound wouldn't come again. Again, a SCREEEEEEECH sound came from my window and this time I knew exactly where the sound was coming from. It was a man. He was screeching on my window. But I have a spelling test in the morning and spent ages learning to spell "definitely" and "cucumber." I closed my eyes again and turned away from my window in hopes that the man would not scrape it again.

SCREECH. This time I surrendered. I will not make it to my spelling test tomorrow because this man is going to scrape right through the glass and steal my toys and my TV and maybe my parents' car. Or maybe even me. Where would he take me? What does he want? Where would he put my toys? I bet he has a big collection of all the toys he steals. I took it upon myself to hide Foxy

because it would be really bad if he stole her. I shoved her down to the very bottom of my bed so the man wouldn't see her.

I started to think about Mom and Dad and how they would feel if the man stole me. I'm sure they would be pretty upset because I am their only child and they would not be able to tuck me in every night. I should have been nicer to them tonight when they were saying good night because it might have been the last time. I hope Dad will check my room in the morning before he makes pancakes because if he doesn't, he will waste a lot of pancake mix. I bet Avery will be pretty upset when I'm not at school ever again because we're the only girls who play on the rock climbing wall at snack time. And I never said sorry for the time I stole her lemonade during our play date. And she will be mad at me for not trying the new seesaw with her tomorrow because I pinky promised and pinky promises are important.

Propping myself up on my pillow, I spotted my brand new purple Converse sneakers—all laced up and ready for me to wear them to school tomorrow. Grandma had picked me up from school today and brought them for me as a surprise 'cause she knew how badly I wanted them. I don't want her to be sad that I never wore them.

I gasped as a thought entered my mind: What if the man outside the window wanted my Converse sneakers? Maybe the man outside has the same taste in shoes as me...or maybe he has a daughter who is just like me and loves purple.

Whatever the case, it would be a shame if I never got to wear those shoes. But wait, I have an idea. I'll wear the shoes right now so when the man breaks through the window, he won't see the shoes under my covers! I slid softly out of my bed and crept over to the shoes and put them on, tightening the laces extra tight. I jumped into my bed and tucked my happy purple-shoe-wearing-feet under my sheets, where he would never find them.

I relaxed for a moment before hearing the nasty SCREECH again on the window. I adjusted my feet underneath the covers and my shoes stuck to the sheets, making it hard for me to turn them. Was this stingy of me to hide my shoes from the man? After all, I had plenty of shoes in my closet to wear and his daughter might really need them. She might not have any shoes to wear to school and the woodchips on the playground probably hurt her feet. I could never be barefoot all the time! Maybe the man knows I have lots of shoes and that's why he wants to steal them. Now that I think about it, I should probably give him a few of my toys and clothes for his daughter to use. Like my purple teddy bear to match the shoes and a cozy jacket to keep her warm.

As I looked around my room, I saw many things that I did not use every day. These toys might make another girl very happy. I have been pretty high maintenance by making Dad buy me all of the new My Little Pony toy sets. And I have so many outfits I hardly ever wear and that someone else would appreciate.

The man probably knows all of this and thought it would be a reasonable choice to take home some of my toys for his little girl, and I can't blame him.

The noise stopped after a while and the next thing I know, Dad is in my room waking me up for school. I could not believe it was already morning! He looked at me with a puzzled face and said, "Why do you have your shoes on already?"

"Well, it is a long story, but I've decided I don't need these after all because I have plenty of shoes," I said. "I'm going to give them to someone who needs them more than me."

With a smile, Dad replied, "Wow, I can't wait to hear about how you decided that. You will have to tell me while we are eating our pancakes!"

When he left my room, I grabbed a jacket, my teddy bear and my purple shoes, and headed for the window, ready to hand them over to the man. I was a little scared, but I closed my eyes for a second and yanked back the curtain. When I opened my eyes, there was no man. Just the branch of my mom's lemon tree. It must have slid across my window when the wind blew, creating a screeching noise. I shook my head in disbelief that a tiny branch was the only thing outside my window last night. But that branch got me thinking about how much I have. I got ready for school and headed downstairs for pancakes with Dad while I mentally resolved to prize people I love more than the things I have.



Celia Wu

First Day of School



Watercolor

Diane Fahrion

Moscow Circus #1



Watercolor

Mozy (Monkey Lizard)



Clay sculpture with acrylic paint

Creative Juices

Like many self-proclaimed “artists,” my goal in writing and performing is to exorcise some demon that silently haunts me. I don’t mean to portray myself as some kind of perpetual victim (I generally find self-pity to be an ugly practice), but I have had my fair share of pain in life. Pain that stays long after the initial incident, disrupts my life at all the most inconvenient times and places, and sticks to me like a shadow even under the brightest sunshine. Far more people can identify with this feeling than I think our society likes to admit, which is why art is such an invaluable pillar of our lives.

I wrote short stories and songs in high school whenever I had something I needed to get off my chest. They were never meant to be read or heard by anyone, but the act of writing was cathartic in and of itself. I had a notebook full of stories and ideas, plus about a dozen super-low fidelity recordings of song concepts I’d play in my garage; I got some kind of cocky joy out of knowing I technically had a “body of work.” It was all mine and purely mine, and that was how I wanted to keep it.

The first time an outsider infiltrated my sacred realm of creativity was around March of my senior year. I was writing a story about Russian pro-gay neo-Nazis when my good friend, Aedan, sitting beside me, began reading my draft. I didn’t notice immediately, but when I finally did, it felt like someone had caught me masturbating. My cheeks turned rose-red as I quickly shoved the paper into my backpack.

“Jesus, you can’t just read that without asking, asshole.”

“I’m sorry! I didn’t think you would care. Don’t worry. I thought it was really funny.”

“Yeah, okay. Whatever. Just ask next time, okay?”

I had no idea why I implied there would be a “next time.” There was no way I was letting her read any of my stuff again. Luckily she had only seen one of the stupid ones. She could have been spying on a story about domestic abuse or suicidal thoughts. Instead, she read a paragraph where Vladimir insists to his friends that fascism and LGBT pride aren’t mutually exclusive. Crisis averted, in a sense.

And yet, there was something sinfully gratifying about her telling me my work was “funny.” It may sound absurd, but up until this point the only time my

writing was ever evaluated or critiqued was in English class. I had very rarely read my own work or worked on second drafts, so knowing that she genuinely enjoyed it was more than a bit intriguing. The next time I sat down to write, her first impressions snuck their way into my head again. I tried to push them out, but they wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Soon enough, I was trying my best to make every sentence as funny as possible to show off how hilarious I am. The story had started off as a kind of dark comedy, but by the end it had become a lighthearted family comedy. Silliness with, dare I say, a dash of whimsy.

When I saw her again the next day, we shot the breeze for a bit before I told her I had finished the story she had taken a peek at. She asked if she could read it (just as I had planned), so I handed it to her and sat with bated breath as I anticipated glowing praise of my genius. (Oh my god, it's hysterical! I love it so much!)

"You changed it a lot, didn't you?"

"Oh yeah, I added some more funny bits."

"It's all funny bits," she chuckled. "Like, the whole thing."

I could hear disappointment in her voice; she wasn't fond of this new and improved masterpiece. To my shame, I blamed her at first.

"Yeah, I worked a lot on it. I carefully thought of every joke."

"Exactly!" she blurted, "You thought too hard about the whole thing."

That hurt—it really did. But when I read it again at home, I realized just how right she was. The whole thing was a platform for jokes rather than an actual story. It had a brain, but it was missing flesh and a heart. I threw it away out of frustration and flung myself face-first onto my bed. While I was lying there, my mind started drifting off to different thoughts, specifically different stories I had written. I wanted to write something new and get it right this time, but I wasn't in the mood for comedy at the moment.

I turned over and grabbed my pen and notebook, almost out of instinct. Without any forethought or planning I started writing. *He held a gun in his hand. It shook as he told me to get on the ground and stay quiet.*

It felt like that had just appeared on the paper. I kept letting the words spill out for an hour or so, and before I knew it, my story was finished. The end product was a new premise, much darker and not so humorous. Definitely not for the faint of heart, but at least it wasn't pretending to be something else.

I had Aedan read the new one, promising not to be a sensitive loser if she didn't care for it. She didn't say a word until she got to the very last page. She paused for a moment and gave it back to me.

"I love it. It really works."

"Really? What makes you say that?"

"You wrote from your gut."

Those words have stuck with me whenever I try to create anything

meaningful. Writing, to me, feels a lot like singing: natural, confident and free from artificial emotion. No matter how long you've been practicing, when the time comes, you need to feel what's on the page.



Cy Hill

Bowling

My mother would never bowl
She was too much of a lady for that.
A farm girl, child of the Depression;
Tough times taught tart truths.
She knew a senseless silly game
A ball to roll, pins to spill.
Besides, what would she wear?



POETRY

Ali Marcotte

You Hide, I Seek



Photography

Miranda Kalagian

Mountains

Sometimes
I think I'll be there
At the very end
Overtly proud of my ability to say
That I got everything I wanted
That I reached every goal
That I did everything right

Sometimes
I think I'll look up and see
Degrees hung on the walls
From universities chosen based on reputation
In cities I never wanted to live in
Because vanity comes first, always
Alongside photographs of Machu Picchu,
Or of me, strapped in a parachute
Suspended in air
Suspended in time

Sometimes
I think I'll hear them
Screaming from their decorative frames
Look at me! Look at the mountains I've climbed!
The ones I've jumped off!
Look at all I've done!
And I'll realize, suddenly,
That I have nothing
And no one
At all.



Jim Langford

Listening



Photography

Paris Ghassemian

Anywhere But Here

I can't remember the day I officially became a hypochondriac or even pinpoint what precisely shifted my role from baby of the family to token delusional. But nevertheless, every trip taken down memory lane is steeped in equal parts disease and dis-ease.

"Don't be silly!" My mom would chuckle with a lightheartedness that refused to spread to her eyes. "Honey, can't you see? It's just all in your head."

"Mom, can't you see? These bruises came out of nowhere!" Her denial and mixed emotions fueled my avid claims. "It's one of the main symptoms of leukemia! Check the encyclopedia!"

I was born the youngest of three siblings, all of whom fit nicely and neatly within their designated roles: Sarah, the all-star athlete; Jeff, the smart and quirky one; and me, Jessica, the one with a psychiatrist for my childhood best friend and a body filled with more meds than your local pharmacy.

This one's name was Matt ... from Tinder. Yes, Tinder the dating app. Now before you get all judgmental, I'd like to point out that virtual dating is definitely a thing these days, something commonly used by people other than Craigslist Killers and men still living at home with their parents. I figured that if somebody like me (i.e. a semi-grounded, nearly self-actualized and moderately functioning college student) was willing to give it a try, then there must be an acceptable male counterpart waiting, phone in hand, ready to be swept off his size 11 feet. But who's being picky?

It all began with a simple "hey you" and before I knew it, things had escalated into a four-month text-a-thon. What he lacked in banter, he made up for with a stupidly hot body, his boy-next-door charm, and the sheer fact that, after a few days, for some reason he still hadn't fled the scene, a phenomenon often found when navigating the sexually frustrated, shark-infested waters of Tinder.

I still couldn't figure out what drew me in most about all of this: Matt himself or, perhaps, the invisible line linking me to someone who was always there, a constant. Someone I could keep in the loop and distract myself with when the daily routine would grow far too mundane to bear. Someone I could envision while tipsy, dancing at the club with my roommates. We'd drift to sleep, curled up in each other's texts, and I'd sleep soundly, knowing his words would

be waiting for me to read in the morning as soon as I wiped the sleep from my eyes.

Two weeks later, I found myself perched here on a cracked leather bar stool at the local watering hole, O'Malley's Tavern, fifteen minutes early for my first date with Matt. I pulled my phone out of my clutch and opened my Tinder app to find Matt's profile. His bio read "Just a down-to-earth guy looking for his co-conspirator in crime." I flipped through his pictures, committing to memory the face I was about to finally see in person.

Picture of Matt wading in some body of water, shirtless with a tanned six pack. Aesthetically pleasing. Check. Picture of Matt, all tidied up in a fitted navy suit and winning smile. Stable job. Check. Picture of Matt mid-laugh, at what seemed to be a bar, arm tossed over some guy's shoulder, beer in other hand. *Has friends/isn't a weird loner.* Check. Picture of Matt holding a chubby Gerber baby-looking toddler in a tutu. *Family guy.* Check. *Baby is not crying or struggling to escape.* Check. Check.

Looking over his profile helped soothe my nerves. *This is my Matt. There's nothing to worry about.* Every time I glanced at his pictures, I felt myself falling for him more and more. *He's it. The one you've been waiting for. It's finally happening. Tonight.*

I grabbed my glass of chardonnay off the bar and took a sip, looking around the dimly lit dive bar for any sign of him. Finding none, my eyes settled on a group of girls around my age, sitting at a table, all doing something or another on their phones. The beat of some crappy Katy Perry remix thumped so hard it reverberated inside my skull, seizing every synapse. My increasing heart rate and the damp bodies of the inebriated pounded in sync. My hand scrolled down the WebMD page opened in my phone, looking at the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

Joint aches: *Check.* Anxiety: *Triple check.* Fatigue: Definitely. Shortness of breath: *Check. Check.* Depressed mood. .. *Jesus Christ, I'm the poster child of fibromyalgia.*

I remember walking home earlier that night, anxious and scared. An appointment already booked online to see the school doctor the next morning. The only thing that kept me going was my Matt, his voice filling up my right ear with talks of us and our future, helping to ground me back to reality.

"Jessica?" a man's voice asked.

I was so zoned out it took a second for my brain to register the sound of my name. I blinked a couple times and focused my eyes on the source of the voice. It came from what must've been Matt. But he didn't look like my Matt. There he stood, all 6 foot 4 inches of him. Weather-beaten. War-torn. The sort of aging that comes from years of hardcore partying, like he had crawled out of his skin and back into it too many times to count.

"Hey you," he said, sliding up onto the bar stool next to me. Once I stopped counting the crow's feet surrounding his mouth, I noticed him staring

deeply into my eyes, as though he'd just found all that he'd ever been looking for.

"Oh hey," I mustered.

"Hope I didn't keep you waiting too long. I'm really sorry if I did."

"Oh no, you're fine," I replied.

"No, Jessica. NO! It's not fine. I'm sorry. I promise to never do this to you again." Matt was acting as though he'd driven my mom over with his Jeep or something. "Let's get started, shall we?" He perused the bar menu for seconds at a time, only stopping to take in long glances of me. "Oh uh, bartender? Yes, bartender, I'll be having the virgin mojito and refill milady's glass, why don't cha, chief."

Steve, the bartender, gave me a "really-this-is-the-douchelord-you're-with?" look, then grunted some kind of confirmation and began mixing potions.

"Virgin, huh?" I said.

"Oh yeah, didn't I mention? I'm on the sober train. One-way ticket to Sobersville for me!" Matt laughed at his own lame used-up Dad joke.

"Oh nice," I replied.

Steve slid over my third glass of chardonnay while Matt played with the umbrella in his mojito.

"Yeah, it's no fun," Matt said while taking a dainty sip, "but it keeps me on the straight and narrow ... God I'm starting to sound just like my probation officer!" He laughed, smacking his thin thigh with his own hand.

I attempted to muster a response: "Yeah, uh, definitely."

"Oh no, did I not mention this before? Oh God. I can tell from your face you had no idea about that or ..." Matt gestured to his ankle, which was adorned with an electronic monitor.

"Yeah, uh, I think you kinda forgot to mention that," I said.

"God. I should've waited to tell you. Now I've messed up my chances. Or at least I should've told you earlier so you didn't have to waste your time on a loser like me." While repeatedly slapping his palm to his forehead, he yelled, "STUPID! STUPID!"

"No, no, don't hit yourself. It's okay Matt. You're okay!" I tried to calm him down while attempting to process what in the fucking beard of Zeus was actually happening.

Steve stared me down from the left side of the bar, shook his head, and mouthed the word "loco" (Spanish for "crazy") while doing a running motion, making it clear I should run for cover.

Matt looked up from beneath the palms clapped to his face and said, "So you mean you're not over me? There's still a chance for us?"

I could have easily gotten up and left at that very moment to join my roommates Taryn and Kim at Taco Tuesday one street over. Maybe I felt bad for the guy. Maybe his pathetic hopes of sweeping me off my feet resonated with

my own deluded dreams of finally finding love through a dating app. But something compelled me to stay rooted to my chair and tell him "yes," he did still have a chance with me.

We continued the old dance of drinks over small talk. Matt had some kind of job selling bulk food to hotels. But after his third DUI, he was forced to move back home with his parents at the age of thirty-three, meanwhile keeping all of these discretions from his boss. He hated his life. His unhappiness pervaded every word that fell from his lips, emanated from his pores in a familiar stench that I'd known too well. After the sixth glass of wine and only baby Jesus knows how much talk of Matt's sad life story, I found myself convincing him to see a therapist, futilely attempting to de-stigmatize the use of antidepressants.

"Think of it this way," I said. "If you have high blood pressure, then you take meds to control it, right? It's the same thing with depression, Matt."

He agreed with everything I said. Even if he hadn't just a minute before. Before I knew it, we were closing the tab and I was in an Uber with Matt, about to be dropped off at my house. The car drove through the same streets I walked through every day to school, but somehow it all looked different now. The trees crouched in on the street, looking for something to cover. Fallen leaves mixed with trash and abandoned plastic bottles of cheap booze to intimately hug the sidewalks.

I felt like everything was one giant vibrating being as I watched the streets fall in and away, my hand forcibly interwoven with Matt's clammy one in the back of Carlos's silver Prius. In the darkness of the car, with the faint sounds of R&B reaching out from the car stereo, Matt could have been anybody I wanted him to be. He could be my Matt again.

"Well, this is me," I slurred, removing my head from Matt's shoulder, looking up at my towering, dilapidated off-campus housing apartment with fresh eyes.

He insisted on walking me in and I didn't put up a fight. We walked up the flight of crumbling stairs to my floor and as I fiddled for my keys, ready to say good night, Matt asked to use the bathroom.

"I have two more hours till curfew, ya know, doll," he said as he walked to the door I had pointed to as my bathroom.

I fell onto the red sofa Taryn and I had bought off some creepy Craigslist guy, glad that she and Kim were spending their night somewhere else. I sunk into its warmth, wondering about all the bodies that had laid on it before.

"Hey you," Matt said, clumsily falling down beside me and turning his face towards mine.

"Hey," I whispered back.

All those chardonnays seized my gut and my stomach fumbled for something, though I did not know what. Matt traced a finger down my face and I looked into those tired blue eyes and drowned in painful waters. I saw everything and nothing grow slowly through a Vaseline-covered lens. I saw the curve of Matt's angular jawbone. I

saw the dimple next to his crooked smile. I saw my Matt again.

When we kissed, I couldn't get lost in it. Instead, I smelled the stale four-dollar mojito saturating his breath. I heard his mind running a mile a minute through the calculated maneuvers of his darting tongue. I felt his rough hands leave snake trails of goose bumps on my bare breasts, pondering the origins of these sandpapery hands that were providing me with an exfoliating session on the house: Not properly moisturizing? Hereditary case of eczema passed down through Dad's side of the family?

I had wanted so hard to get lost, to be consumed whole by his hungry lips with my own hunger. I shut my lids as tight as my tired eyes would allow, my mind willing my body to lose itself. He thought I was in front of him, but I really wasn't. I was adrift, anywhere but there.

He got on top of me. My breathing grew short. *Oh god, here comes the fibromyalgia again. Was fibromyalgia life-threatening? What are my chances of beating it?* I made a mental note to look it up after Matt left.

He took off my top. *What if it's all in my head again? What if I don't really have fibromyalgia?* He unbuckled his pants. *That can't be. I must have it. I matched all the WebMD symptoms.* I heard the crinkling of a condom wrapper being opened. *Maybe I should ask Matt. How awkward would it be if I interrupted him in the heat of the moment?* The sound of groans as Matt put his full weight down on top of me. *Wait. What if Matt is my fibromyalgia? What if I just dreamt him in my head, too?*

Once he finished, he kissed me passionately and told me he'd text me tomorrow so we could "do dinner or something."

I knew I wouldn't see him tomorrow. I wouldn't see Matt again.

I fell to my bed exhausted, as though I'd just run a 30K. I fell asleep with my Tinder app open, fingers numb from the left-right-swipe tango that always left my hands itching for more.

Tantalizing thoughts
Consume my mind
Liquor burns my throat as it makes its way down
The beauty in the mystery that is You
A blurry haze,
Yet a memory quite fond to me
Echoes and will not cease
I long for more,
The taste of your lips
One hand inches down my waist
The other grasps my hair
Breathless, I gasp for air
The idea of You
Never crossed my mind till now
The rhythm of our bodies
Forever haunts me in sound



Ilia Deylami

Bronze Heart



Bronze sculpture on wooden base

Chris Lee
Twang

I felt the strike before
the sound;
your gesture, love,
the target
found.

My love, profound,
submits; surround
my ardor with your breath.
Indeed, love feels
Like unto death:
your bosom,
hallowed ground.

Draw and pull,
aim, fulfill:
let my passion flow.
From your bow
The only sound a
twang!
before I fall.



Alyssa Richardson

Song of the Unspoken

The song of the unspoken unravels my heart,
Falls into the crevices of a dream about to break apart.

Eternity passes.
Courage is embraced.
I open my mouth before judgment lapses.

The wind masks my voice, hiding my thoughts,
Keeping you in the dark.
My voice as useless as rusty needles thrashed into blind eyes.

A fleeting moment, a reverie,
Your warmth a cold memory.

A blink, a dare, am I fair?
How can I erase that smile on your face?
A stab, I laugh, will he see through this mask?

The truth is pain.
What can I say?
I am never to know what our stars may hold.
The volume is deafening,
That of your words unsaid.

So silent I'll stay,
Tell him I love him another day.



Jessica Pham

The Language of Flowers

Nobody ever gives flowers to somebody they despise.

Which was just one of many unfortunate social norms, as there were plenty of flowers that could portray April's hatred towards her ex-boyfriend more accurately than she ever could. If Douglas opened his door to an arrangement from her, red snapdragons would roar at him, "*Douglas, you dirty cheater, you lied to me!*" Then to top it off, she would frame the snapdragons with orange lilies, a glowing halo of her hatred.

After four years together, it was likely Douglas knew the language of flowers as well as April did, since her version of pillow talk was listing flowers and their meanings. Sometimes she could go on for hours. By the time she finished explaining that gardenias symbolize a secret love, peonies represent a happy marriage, and so on and so forth, April would glance over in the dark, expecting to see Douglas's eyes closed, his breaths deep and even. But in the beginning, his brown eyes would shine back at her, completely amused by her rambling.

And that, April had decided, was what made her fall in love with him: his ability to make her feel cute and smart when she talked about what she loved while others typically zoned her out. But as the months together turned to years, he often was too busy to listen to her rambling, too busy to ever really see her at all. Instead, all his time was spent lying about late work nights, letting another girl's lipstick form petals on his lips, her nails embedding roots into his back.

As snow fell like white cherry blossoms outside, April shook the bitter memory from her head and focused on her work. As she stood in her small flower shop, arranging a combination of lavender, pink, and red roses into a bouquet bound together with kraft paper and satin ribbons, she noted what each flower was saying: lavender for love at first sight, pink for happiness, and red for eternal love.

A year ago, the romantic that lived within April since she was a little girl would have loved this bouquet's story. Though most customers who came into her shop were oblivious to what each flower was saying to them, choosing their blooms purely for looks, April always took notice. Ever since she was a daisy-picking, honeysuckle-licking toddler, she was enamored by the language of flowers.

A bell chimed and April was hit with a gust of snow-kissed air. A man

walked in with pink roses on his cheeks planted there by the chill—the one who called in earlier that morning for the bouquet of roses. A flick of a wallet, the swipe of a card, and less than five minutes later he walked out of her shop with his temporary devotion grasped tightly in his hand.

“No love is eternal, no matter how many red roses you give her,” April wanted to yell after him. But she stayed silent. Let him figure out for himself that love goes hand in hand with the seasons. Sometimes Chicago summers stay for so long that everyone expects them to last forever, but autumn will always come along and rip the summer leaves from the trees, littering the sidewalks with orange confetti. It’s such a big mess to clean up that one begins to wonder whether the beauty of the trees at full bloom was even worth the aftermath, whether all the good times in a relationship were worth the inevitable fallout.

Winter melted into spring, and greenery tentatively returned to dispel the gray world. From December to March, the same man came in every other week to pick up his bouquet of roses, leaving as quickly as he came—a tall whirlwind of rushed movements and happy eyes.

Until one day, he did not show.

April stored his longstanding bi-weekly order in the back, convinced he would show the next day in his usual rushed manner—this time with a flurry of apologies. When two more weeks passed and he missed another order pickup, April put that bouquet in the backroom and threw away the brown roses from the two weeks before.

During his absence, April caught herself watching the door more times than she liked to admit. Two months passed, and the man still did not show.

“Typical man, ending his relationship and forgetting to cancel the flower orders,” April muttered to herself. *“She must’ve meant nothing to him.”* An irrational anger filled her at all the missed pickups. She picked up the fourth unclaimed bouquet, deciding it would be the last one she made for him.

As she stood there staring at roses in her hand, her last conversation with Douglas forced its way into her mind.

“You were at work late tonight,” April said once she heard Douglas come into the apartment they shared.

The kitchen clock was glowing green, 2:18 in the morning. April stared at the time, remembering when they last stayed up this late, sitting at the kitchen table with warm mugs of tea, her cold feet resting on top of his as they talked for hours.

“Jesus, April. Why are you still up?”

April ignored his question. *“How was work?”*

“It was fine.” Douglas scratched the back of his head and tossed his suit jacket onto the back of their couch. It was a harsh winter for Chicago that year, and melting snow peppered his dark hair, dissolving the gel he used to tame it.

That’s why his hair looked disheveled—at least, that’s what April had assumed until that night.

April’s fists clenched around the rag she was using to wipe down the kitchen counter — the one she’d been methodically wiping down for the past hour as she waited for him to come home.

“My friend saw you,” she hissed, tossing the rag into the sink and turning around to fully look at him.

Douglas was halfway to the bathroom, but he stopped in his tracks at her words. Slowly, cautiously, he looked at her.

“Saw me where?”

“She saw you kissing another girl.” April’s voice shook as she said the words.

The hum of the refrigerator was the only sound that filled their apartment. April stared at the vase of roses on the counter. Roses she brought home from work. Douglas stopped getting her flowers after the first year.

“You own a flower shop, April,” he’d always say. *“There’s not really any point.”*

Douglas’s jaw worked, clenching and unclenching. His eyes looked anywhere but at her.

“You’re not even going to deny it?” April cried.

“I was bored,” he said finally.

April laughed a short, bitter laugh. *“Bored? Bored of what?”*

“Bored of life!” Douglas shouted, breaking out of the position he had frozen in and waving his arms in the air. *“Bored of this apartment! Bored of spending the weekends in! Bored of always listening to you talk about flowers! Bored of ... bored of you!”*

His words hung between them, and April thought she might have seen a twinge of regret on his face. But he didn’t say anything to take them back, didn’t even move towards her. They stood there facing each other for a long time.

“Okay,” she finally responded.

She didn’t want to give him anything more.

Her entire body was shaking, grief and rage blooming inside her like those flowering teas that unfurl their leaves and petals once the hot water hits them. She pushed past him into their room, yanked her backpack from the closet, and haphazardly threw clothes in. A part of April wanted him to come in, grab the bag from her hands, and tell her it was all a mistake. Tell her not to go. Tell her that the past four years meant as much to him as it did to her. But while she was waiting for a ring, he was waiting for someone better to come along.

That final night, as she grabbed her keys from the counter, he was standing in the exact same spot he was in during their fight, facing the kitchen. Almost as if he were afraid to disturb her frantic packing. Almost as if he wanted her to go. As she walked out the front door, he didn’t look back at her once.

In her shop, April threw the fourth bouquet into the trash.

In early May, a man walked in with pink carnations in his cheeks planted there by the sun.

Anger was the first thing April felt when she spied the familiar man.

"I don't have your roses today," April told him, her tone concealing none of the disdain she held for him. "You never cancelled your orders, but you stopped coming in to pick them up, so..."

But as he came up to the counter, April saw that sadness lined his eyes so deeply it looked like it was permanently rooted into his skin.

"I'm sorry about the roses before," he said. "But I actually came for those."

He pointed to the bouquet that was ordered online that morning.

During their first year of dating, Douglas had asked her what her favorite flower was.

"Carnations," April had said immediately.

"What do carnations mean, then?"

After a moment of hesitation, April said, "They mean eternal love."

Douglas had hummed to himself. "So...just like red roses, then."

April had just shrugged then, strangely embarrassed and unwilling to elaborate.

Back in her shop, the one she worked so hard to open in order to bring people new ways of expressing their love and happiness, April picked up the flowers. The kraft paper crinkled loudly in her hand.

She passed the carnations to the man.

And as his trembling hand took them from her hold, April knew. She knew that he knew. All along, he'd also known the language of flowers.

Carnations mean eternal love, outlasting any obstacle—even death.

What she hadn't told Douglas was that to her, carnations were more romantic than any rose or lily. They represent loving someone so strongly that the true heart doesn't die when the physical one does.

"I'm so sorry for your loss," April whispered.

But she was sorry for more than the man would ever know. For the anger that she felt towards him when he stopped picking up the roses. For her assumption that he had simply ended his relationship, never sparing his spurned lover and flower orders a single thought. For the hatred that she kept inside for so long, too long, towards Douglas. For letting one ruined relationship murder her belief in love as easily as a pair of garden shears clips a rose from its bush.

The man paused and then looked her in the eye. A sad smile formed on his lips, and he nodded once.

"Make these a bi-weekly order, please."

April blinked rapidly. Nodded back. Wrote the order down on her sheet.

The afternoon sun crowded in and warmed April's face as he slowly slipped out of her shop, until the door pushed it out again. But April still felt its

kiss, the warmth lingering on her cheeks.

April didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The next day, Douglas opened his door to a delivery of daffodils.

There was no note attached, but he knew who they were from and what they meant. As he bent down to pick them up, he smiled a wistful smile and could almost hear April's voice coming from the blooms.

"I forgive you."



Edrian Ochoa

Language

Visual sound, stamped upon surfaces;
Impressed lines and dots
Repeating uniquely.

Read, said, and listened to.
Seen by the deaf
And felt by the blind,
Consumed and vomited
By everyone.

Organic in evolution,
Static in stereotype.
Words, yet not meaning,
Transcend life.

Still emotion embodying perspective,
Words are quiet
Despite their yells.

Can you hear your voice,
Speaking my words?
We can't talk, yet you now know
Everything about me.



POETRY

Elaine Michals Cohen

Nobody Dies

A dear friend died last week. She had cancer, she died, and she's dead. An acquaintance who was 101 years old also died last week. She is also dead.

Why don't we use those words? We use euphemisms instead.

She has passed. I am glad she did not fail.

He has transitioned and is on his journey. Where is he going?

He is now in a different dimension. No longer 3D?

Elvis has left the building. In a limo or a hearse?

I lost my spouse. That is sloppy housekeeping. Go find her or him.

He is gone now. When will he be back?

The late Mary Smith. I have a friend who has never been on time in her life. Would it be appropriate to call her the late Lynda while she is very much alive?

He has left his earthly home. Is he now floating in the infinite universe? I picture a little angel flying around, playing a harp, and eating Philadelphia Cream Cheese, the heavenly cream cheese.

My favorite is *He is now in the loving arms of Jesus.* What about Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shintos or Druids?

Nobody kicks the bucket, but we all have bucket lists.

Nobody buys the farm; farming is a thing of the past. We now have agribusinesses.

We use the word dying in a strange way. I am dying to see you. I died laughing. We still manage to speak the words. We are still alive after speaking them.

I am not without feelings and I understand that we have to do what we have to do to assuage our grief and sometimes guilt. If using a euphemism makes you feel better, by all means, do so. The ancients said you are still alive as long as the last person on earth remembers your name. I believe when you're dead, you're dead. We live on in the hearts and minds of the people who loved us. That is good enough for me.



PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Kendall Halliburton

Transplant Shock

The earth held her tightly
Intertwined with infantile roots
That fed in upstream color;
She appeared white, but soon
Seeped into spoiled wine.

Her mind is a dark hallway
With no walls.
She is split open,
A dahlia in a metal tray—
Pins holding her stems apart,
The bulb cringes under
Fluorescent glares.
And with a scalpel, he takes
What he cannot return.

Striking the black surface, she awakes.
Her pants are at her ankles
In a carpeted, foreign room
Absurd floral paintings line up
Clutching the edges
Where the light cuts through
Poison creeps up her throat
Defacing the sides of the bowl

The lady behind the counter
Hands her a box with a pill
Will her petals still drink?
Her tongue tastes of pennies
Blood spilt without bloom
She's got a broken shoe,
A frame that still needs a picture,
And not a single idea
What to feel.



Katayoun Zamani

The Social Club

“Did it feel good... hurting him?”

The detective didn't ask *if* I did it or *why* I did it. His mucus and his tears, his vomit and his blood all stain my mortal being with red, hot accusation—a story of his that only I can tell. The fact that I was caught standing over his limp form, holding only a switchblade, didn't favor my current circumstances.

The authorities claim female insanity, and my friends claim it never happened. They want to pin labels on me—that I'm psychotic, hysterical. No, the best one yet—“chemically imbalanced.” But not a sane killer with intent. I'm just a silly sorority girl.

I tell them *why* I did it and they shut their ears to me, twisting the truth until it's a version that sounds most appealing to them. They don't care that I met him on the outskirts of our university, that he hurt me, and that I sought him out for months, learned that he was a member of a social club, and then waited to strike. Because college girls aren't assaulted by rich, white college boys with lucrative futures. Right?

I can't say whether or not my intentions truly matter: I wanted closure. I wanted him cold, silent, and dead. I wanted vengeance for my blissful ignorance before it was shattered into a thousand bloody shards by one man's actions. But none quite eroded the void which sunk low and wide, encompassing the very depths of my heart, and it was that which left me restless, seeking more and finding none.

Nearly six months ago, I had been sworn in as a full-fledged recruit, regressing further and further into the wild theatrics of Alpha Sigma Whatever, manipulating my words with the same nonsensical banter of which only degenerate half-wits are capable. And with such confidence. The facade fit for a while, and then I just became “one of them.”

I joined because I knew he was affiliated, and that somehow, eventually, I'd find him here. And there was only ever one *him*. Initially, I feared it was too far-fetched to think I would just bump into him one day and confront him for his actions. I'd find him, we'd talk or I'd report him to the police, and then the deed would be done. Realistic me told *me* to go take a hike.

Of course, there were social functions much like fundraisers, and then there were mere excuses to party. This occasion was the latter.

Catherine insisted that we come here, this thumping glass house of sparkly lights and cage dancers in all its glory. We. As in she and I together, spending *quality time* in a place neither she nor I could hear ourselves talk. The polished floors seemed to vibrate with the loud music, and it was so dark that the flashing colors of the disco ball were the only source of light. Catherine absolutely refused to go alone, and I was obligated to partake in any disaster in which she found herself because, as sorority sisters, we were now apparently best friends. The one and only matter we both agreed on was that I was inevitably more capable of driving us home and she, my harebrained rabbit, was lost in her moment.

I found him.

And just like that, I forgot how to breathe.

He stood alone at the bar. Fidgeting. Staring at the face of his wristwatch with such indignation, and then fidgeting again. He'd surely drag the hour-hand forward if he could. He scratched his nose now, a habit accompanied by insecurities. Occasionally the man swayed on the rubber soles of his feet, flirting with the beat of the violent sound. Or rather, flirting around the beat as a reclusive stranger may do when he senses danger. The danger of rejection—as if his only fear and subsequent goal was to leave with the comforting lie that he was noticed. That he mattered. That he actually succeeded in gracing the very perimeters of the room. "I did my job," he'd say.

Then he left. Alone.

Pathetic. It made me boil inside to see him so vulnerable, so human. As if he was incapable of causing as much harm as I knew he could. How cruel it was to recognize the demon in the flesh and be softened by its image. I knew him to be so much more than that, so much more dangerous than that. It was deceiving and unfair. What he wanted was control, and when he couldn't have it, he took it. Took innocence of heart from the lively and left nothing but dead roots and soil.

I only knew him once. I knew him intimately, but in passing. I knew him from that night at Lauren's party when I had one too many cranberry vodkas and couldn't distinguish two fingers from six. I knew him from the back alley behind her house. The alley that he pushed me into. I knew him from the bruises he left behind and the psychological wounds that have yet to heal. I knew him from the fraternity sweater he stupidly wore because he was too drunk to notice that it was a very. Bad. Idea. He wasn't a face I painted on the entire male race. No, he was *the face*. He was the sinister monster that haunted my dreams.

I wish I knew his name. Maybe it's Jack. Or John. Or Jimmy. Monsters don't have names. I snicker, considering how appropriate that was. Just a nobody going nowhere but down. He doesn't deserve a name.

I was so close. Nearly there, standing across from him. And yet, an ocean

of space between us.

"Nice, this place is buzzing!" Catherine broke my reverie, electrifying my still space.

"Yeah, buzzing with inebriated fucktards." I panicked. My one chance was getting away.

"What was that..?"

"Let's get drinks!" I quickly pulled my little rabbit into the throng of people. She was gasping for breath but all smiles. A ball of blonde, bouncing energy beside me. Although I prayed for her to be feigning ignorance, I had a guilty, lingering feeling that she was too stupid-happy to realize that I'd redirected her attention, moving her closer and closer to my goal.

Before I could take one step in his direction, my empty-headed companion made a beeline for him, suddenly intoxicated with interest. It hadn't occurred to me that I could possibly care, so I ignored that burst of empathy burning in my gut, that flammable feeling. But then he looked up and their eyes met.

I was ready to combust. I followed her in quick haste, adrenaline roaring. Terror rose as concern for her safety finally gripped me. Whatever awareness I had suddenly became tunnel vision as I raced behind her, shoving and cursing. Just out of reach. I finally came up behind her and, grabbing the oblivious idiot by the tail, I dragged her back before she closed in. "No, don't go after him!"

"But he's so mysterious! I have to know him!"

I wanted to throttle her. "He's beneath us," I quip.

She took me seriously. "Oh," Catherine actually stopped, considering the thought, "You're probably right." Then she sulked.

I was incredulous, just watching her shift states. Situation deflected. But Catherine wasn't my focus. And so I turned, looking for someone I wasn't sure I was imagining or not. It felt like the room was spinning. I felt nervous. I felt sick. "Okay, just—just stay here." I couldn't find him.

Suddenly Catherine was gone. She should have been waiting there. I began to wonder where the time had gone. She was *just there*. Everything was moving too quickly. Space and time were meaningless when I was walking in circles. And then I was crying. Why was I crying? It was all so frustrating to not know, to not have control. The strongest sense I had was the vibrating feeling of my pounding heart as it threatened to burst from my chest. But I had a sickening feeling in my gut that I knew where she was and I knew where he was. I didn't want to find them there. I didn't want to revisit this.

I slipped through the back door of the dance club into the dark blues and purples of the night and withdrew a pocket knife, something metallic and shiny.

There he stood, leaning against a pile of trash bins with a cell phone in hand. Lazily. Leisurely. Just as I had left him before, years ago in the dark alleyway behind that party.

"Where is she?" I nearly screamed, shoving at him, trying to make sense out of this constant thumping pain in my head.

"What—who the hell are you?" He stammered, glowering at me.

"Catherine! That girl you watched inside! Where is she?"

"You mean that bitch ogling me? No id—" He didn't get to finish the thought before my fist met his chin and an awful crunch pierced the night air.

"What the fuck! You bitch!" He cradled his bloodied jaw in his hands while he staggered back, keeping a safe distance. But that was his bluff. He spat the blood out at my feet and lunged.

I was ready for him like I'd been ready for months, for years.

The knife's sharp edge glimmered under the moon as I held it in my shaking, quivering hand in that split second, almost afraid to act, and yet so sure of myself. It was that moment of hesitation that should've cost me my life. But the man suddenly stiffened in front of me. His eyes bulged and his chest lurched forward with the arch of his back. There was an audible gasp before a fit of coughs sprinkled blood across my frozen face.

His large, masculine body swayed one last time before it fell forward, revealing a slim, slight figure caked in dirt and grime. Her hair matted and tufted in places. Rings of fingerprints ghosted the flesh around her neck and her clothes were torn. Catherine stepped forward under the streetlight. Her ashen face and hollowed, ghostly eyes, framed a story imagined but unsaid. Suggested but unspeakable. She held a crimson blade clutched tightly between her fingers, seemingly wanting to crush it in her grip.

"I had to do it, Emmie." Catherine's hand rattled as she spoke. It was only a whisper, but I didn't need to hear to understand the pain in her glittering eyes. It was second nature. I took the bloody knife out of her hand and folded my own around it, marking it with my body, my identity. She had killed him.

No, I had killed him.

And then the sirens came.



Night Terrors

There is nothing more terrifying
than the Secrets and Fears
hidden deep beneath our skull,
wrapped and wired into our Brain.

Often it is a choice
to deny conscious access.
Then,
we are left to depend on our Unconscious Mind

to make the same decisions
we make throughout the day,
to block out the impulses
we refuse to face.

My Dreams are not my Reality;
they are images my Mind creates,
but they tear my Mind left and right
as my body lies inert.

Then,
I am ripped from my Sleep,
screaming and shaking,
left with one last worry

of the Terrors I will face
the next time
I close my eyes
and fall asleep.



L. Croft

Nameless

She has no name. Crouching on a worn wooden floor, she waits, hoping not to be found. Her body is contorted into the corner of a musty old closet, a trail of ants mildly missing the tips of her toes. The cool, damp air, which hugs every surface of her body, smells like manure after fresh rainfall.

She extends a nubby finger, using a callused fingertip to pry a strand of acacia wood from its foundation. A sharp prick startles her, hurling her into the wall behind her. With a thud, she is back on the ground. She cautiously crawls back into the same corner. This time she is trembling. A bead of sweat slides down her porcelain skin and settles into a crease beside her nose.

She is now taking shallow, rapid breaths. She holds up her hands and glances down. Every finger is shaking at different speeds and opposite directions. With her left hand, she covers her mouth in an attempt to muffle the sound of her breathing. Footsteps appear in the distance. She brings her legs to her chest and begins rocking back and forth. The footsteps draw nearer, shaking the ground with each thud.

She cannot contain her emotions any longer. The fear that has been building up inside her, starting in her toes and kicking and thrashing its way up to her head, has finally broken free. She begins screaming, further straining her already raw throat. Her bare feet lunge at the door, further cracking the thin paint covering its surface. The sliver of light that shone under the door has disappeared.

With a few clicks the door handle rotates. This is it. Shuddering, she turns away from the crack of light growing thicker as the door begins to open. She shields her body with the sleeve of a peacoat filled with holes where moths once were. Even they had found this an unsuitable home. Nothing happens. Confused, she peeks out from behind the sleeve with only one eye. She hadn't been grabbed or hit or dragged out of the small room. There was simply a hand reaching down to her. The hand belonging to an unfamiliar face. This face was kind. Something she had never known.



Charlotte Hughes

Reaching Out



Photography

Sun Salutation



Linoleum print

In the hot room, everything is intensified. At 104 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity thick enough to fog the mirrors, my mind has no choice but to remain completely present. It's all I can do to stay on my mat when everything inside me is screaming *Get me out of here!* I fall out of postures, especially ones that require me to balance on one leg. No one else in the crowded room notices. Everyone is focusing on their own bodies, yet there is a feeling of togetherness. I get back up, finding that place within where I know *I can do this. I'm going to summon the strength to try again.*

I push myself, and every day I come back a little stronger mentally and physically. Every day I find I'm a little more open, flexible, and I get deeper into the postures. One day, I get through all of them without needing a break. My strength and stamina have improved enough that my practice starts to flow—I move in and out of the postures gracefully, with control and precision. I have learned how to engage my inner thighs. My first day, I had to think before I decided which arm was right and which was left. Now, the connection to each limb, digit, and muscle is as fast as lightning. My brain has rewired itself.

Three years ago, I moved to Southern California after being brought to my knees by a heroin addiction that nearly claimed my life. I had tried countless times to get clean, but the drugs kept winning. I felt like the darkness was beckoning me. Every time I managed to string together a couple of weeks of clean time, I found myself longing for the emptiness, the void, the calm that overtook me when I was high. Being sober was intolerable. The guilt and self-hatred would consume my every thought. It's hard to put into words the repulsion I felt just being in my own skin. As much as I knew I was hurting everyone around me, as assuredly as I knew I was wasting my life, I couldn't seem to stay away from my dealer. He was always there, waiting for my call, as sure and true as the shame I carried on my back.

I eventually got myself in enough trouble that I was charged with a criminal offense. I was ordered to attend an outpatient rehab program, which was populated with offenders who had been caught with small amounts of marijuana. We would sit on folding metal chairs and go around in a circle, explaining why we were there. I felt a weird sort of satisfaction when it came my turn, and I saw the small timers' eyes widen with shock as I described what a

speedball was. *That's right, kiddos. I am what you will become if you keep messing up. Better get your acts together, the boogeyman is right around the corner.*

Of course, I flunked out almost immediately. There was weekly drug panel testing that could detect all the different classes of drugs: marijuana; opiates; cocaine and its by-products; amphetamines; benzodiazepines; and MDMA. I lit that panel up like a Christmas tree. *Damn. Now what?*

"Rehab, that's what." My probation officer explained my choices to me: "You will attend a 90-day inpatient program as a ward of the state. And don't even think about leaving early like you did the last time. This time, you're in custody. That means your case manager will call me as soon as they notice your bed is empty, and I will issue a warrant for your arrest. If you refuse treatment, you can just serve your 90 days in jail. And your charges will remain on your record."

I didn't care anymore. Something within me broke. All the years of trying and failing, running away from the one thing I could never escape: my own mind... this had finally made me weary. No matter how much I dosed myself, it always wore off. Then the shadows overtook me once again, filling me with certainty that the men who had seen opportunity in my teenage naiveté were right: I was only good for one thing, whether I liked it or not. I replayed those scenes over and over, berating myself for even being in those situations in the first place. For trusting too easily, for not being sober enough, strong enough to fight them off. My family did not want to hear from me. My friends had all given up, and I had no one to blame but myself. I couldn't think of a worse person. I told myself I didn't care if I lived or died. Looking back, though, I know the biggest part of me wanted to live. I knew that this path was not for me, that there was something more.

I found myself in a cushy medical detox in Costa Mesa. Medical detox meant that they would give me lots of pills so I wouldn't have to suffer through those first few days of heroin withdrawal with any physical symptoms. I had "kicked" many times before, when I'd tried to get sober on my own, and it wasn't pretty. It felt like an amped up version of the worst flu of my life. My eyes would water uncontrollably, my nose would run, I'd be unbearably hot and freezing cold at the same time. Restless. That's why they call it "kicking"—because your legs kick and shake. Lying still was impossible. Aching pain smoldered in every part of my body and I'd do anything just to make it stop.

In this detox, though, I didn't have to worry about those symptoms. A doctor prescribed muscle relaxers, which did just that. Anti-anxiety medication to help slow my heart, which would be beating out of my chest, no longer slowed by the heavy depressants my system was used to. And best of all, suboxone, a miracle drug that stopped the withdrawal. It completely nulled the pain. I would float from one bubble of dope to a slightly less intense bubble, easing my

transition into the cold, hard world of sobriety.

The next morning, that bubble popped. I woke up with a giant welt on my foot the size of a tennis ball. I had no more usable veins in my arms, so I had been using the veins in my feet to shoot up. One of them became infected with staph, a devilish bacteria that quickly brought my temperature to a delirious 102 degrees. I hobbled my way out of my room toward the nurse's station but passed out in the hallway.

Several hours later, I woke up in the hospital, sicker than I'd ever been. No medication, no drugs, just lying with my foot suspended in a sling and IVs of antibiotics in me. I looked at the clock: 11:59. It was dark. New Year's Eve. I was alone in a hospital room, and the symptoms of withdrawal were back, full force. It was hell, not just because of the physical part, but because my spirit felt raw and battered. The misery was intensified by my solitude. I could hear fireworks going off in the distance and knew that while the rest of the world was celebrating a new beginning with their loved ones, I was alone because of what I had done to myself. It was at this moment that the magnitude of the consequences of the lifestyle I was living hit me like a Mack truck. For once, though, I didn't wish I was dead. I knew that I wanted another chance.

I completed the program holding on to this feeling of complete surrender and humility. Rebuilding my life wasn't easy, but I slowly began to pick up the pieces. I got a job, volunteered wherever they would have me, and stayed as busy as possible. I learned to pray and meditate, and soon after, I was introduced to an obscure branch of yoga called Kundalini yoga that involves lots of chanting and breathing exercises. It helped me train my mind and body to be still, relaxed, and calm without any chemical assistance. A new concept for me, indeed. It was excruciating at first, but I soon found it to be soothing, as if my mind were a musical instrument that sounded more beautiful if it were tuned every morning.

At three years clean, I hit a rough patch. Contrary to what I thought at the time, getting clean does not equal enlightenment, and I had made some seriously questionable choices in early sobriety. I was now a single mom with a perfect little girl counting on me to keep it together, and my mom suggested I try hot yoga. I will forever be indebted to her for introducing me to the place where my soul found the deepest healing.

The hot room tries the mind, body, and spirit in every way. Like I found with meditation, the first to rebel was my mind, challenging me with the question *who is really in charge here?* My fight-or-flight emotions would try to run me, and I learned not to let them, training my mind to serve me, not the other way around. I pushed my body to my edges, learning to support my weight on one leg, then on my head, then on my arms alone. The whole time I maintained my inner environment through my breath, which over time became steady and disciplined. I detoxified my body by sweating more than I ever thought possible.

Mouse

All those years of being a regular at my dealer’s house plus several more of being a smoker had surely left me toxic with a capital “T.” It was in the crucible of the hot room that I came to understand: I am not what happened to me.

I am more than my story. My reality was purely of my own making, a mental projection based on my own negative beliefs. The central belief I held was that I was damaged and unworthy. Once I experienced my own inner strength and worth, I began to let those untruths go. I started creating a life that looked like that of a strong woman with self-love.

I earned my 200-hour certificate as a yoga teacher in April 2015. This allows me to share the healing practice with others who struggle with addiction, which has become my most rewarding pursuit. As soon as I registered as a yoga teacher, I started teaching at a women’s shelter where I had the privilege to serve women who could not afford the fancy inpatient treatment center I attended. I came full circle this year when I was hired to teach the women at the same rehab I was lucky enough to attend.

I never feel alone when I am in the hot room. I don’t feel isolated, embarrassed, or anxious when I am leading other women in their practice. Yogic philosophy states that we are all connected, not just on a spiritual level but on a cellular, energetic level. We are all composed, as teacher Yogi Bhaajan said, “of the same clay of the five elements.” If this is true, I have learned that the pain of isolation I felt so intensely was all born of a lie. Personal responsibility and discipline have become dear to me, when before I never cared much for them. And that overly sensitive little girl, who tried in vain to numb that part of her down just to fit in, has grown into a woman who uses her sensitivity as one of her greatest strengths. My sensitivity allows me to meet others where they are, instead of being blinded by assumptions of where they should be. It makes me a better person, mother, and teacher. Though I have walked a dark path, I know that journey is the reason today that I wake up, roll out my mat, and salute the sun.



I hit play, close my eyes, and wait. Let the feedback from the microphone settle while I sit there patiently with my headphones hissing. Allowing the memories to take over as the beat begins, and there you are, my friend, clear as yesterday. I can hear you, I can see you, but there is no Mouse here to hug. The immortalization we created together is the only thing I have left, the greatest gifts you left behind for me to remember you by. The music we made together, the photographs, the videos, our soccer games, and our adventures. Your influence is carried with me every day. As I am writing this, the movie of our travels plays through the laughs of our everyday jokes, the tears of our women-related problems, the blood laid inside the mosh pit scuffles, the comfort of our cannabis-induced conversations, and the glory of our future plans and dreams.

It was a rainy weekend afternoon after a friendly bar crawl from the night before. The semifinals for the UEFA soccer league were about to take place between my favorite Spanish team, Real Madrid, and their longtime rival, FC Barcelona. It was only right to watch the game at the local Ball Park Pizza for some brews and wings. Typical gathering for a rival celebration between friends. I ordered two pitchers of Lagunitas IPA, along with 30 traditional spicy wings, on top of what everybody else ordered for the feast. Trying to beat the hangover and dehydration by keeping the drunken pace going. We occupied three rows of tables in the soccer goal seats along the walls, accompanied by glass clinks in cheer as we reminisced about the previous night and took turns verbally roasting each other’s teams, bets, and predictions. Halfway into the game, the score was 3-2, with Real Madrid in the lead. Tensions were high, with nothing but sheer hope and aggression.

On a casual stroll through social media during halftime, one of my friends came across a local news post concerning a nearby car accident, which happened the night before in the city of San Clemente. It’s always been a tradition among our friends to give a moment of silence for nearby accidents and our safety. Curious, we started doing a bit of research, gathering whatever we could find.

A white BMW was heading down South El Camino Real around 1:30 a.m. It lost control, hitting a lamp post and a palm tree, splitting the car in half. There were four fatalities and one person was rushed to the emergency room. Three of the passengers were ejected from their seats due to the high-velocity impact of

the vehicle. There was also a video of the car accident on ABC7 News, which displayed the horrific aftermath. We looked at each other, thankful for our safe return home, and offered condolences to those fatalities. Then, we gave a quick cheer and got back to the final stretch of the game.

During the mayhem of the event, I received a phone call from Manny, a neighborhood friend. His sister was dating Mouse (my nickname for my friend Louie), and Manny was an FC Barcelona fan. I picked up with an immediate insult of his team, thinking he was calling me for the same reason, but he was silent. Manny gave no immediate response, no chuckle or quick-witted comeback. I got only a long silence, followed by a sigh. He asked where I was at and I promptly responded.

“Take a seat if you’re not seated already, man,” Manny said to me in a sullen whisper.

“What’s wrong, man? Just tell me, bro. Do you need help with anything, dude?” I was trying to get him to answer me as the game was getting more intense.

“Louie passed away, bro,” he muttered.

“What?” I replied.

“Louie died in a car accident last night. He was in the San Clemente accident.” For a moment, everything went still. I became frozen in disbelief.

“How?” I asked.

“He got ejected out of the car. He died instantly.”

I looked around at my friends and let them know what had happened. The mood of the place immediately changed and a few of us shed some tears. I promptly called a few close friends to confirm what I had been told and to my dismay, his death was confirmed by his family.

The next couple of days consisted of organized events for Mouse. I met a lot of his immediate family. He was the spitting image of his parents, which brought back a lot of emotions and memories. During the visit to his parents’ house, I was asked if I could videorecord and photograph the whole church ceremony, including the house memorial. Of course, I agreed to this.

The whole ceremony was a blur for me. I was behind the lens capturing details in people’s faces, which gave me a deeper grief because I felt their pain through my lens. It was voyeuristic sadness that impacted me throughout the actual making of the video of the whole event. I didn’t cry or shed any tears during the event until I was putting together the movie and the photographs.

I remembered my hands started shaking, my throat got lumpy, my chest felt like it was caving in, and there was no sound. I stopped what I was doing and began sobbing. The pain didn’t hit me until everything was gathered and done. After he was lowered 6 feet under. After I took those shots of tequila with his dad. After his mom blessed me. After his sisters told me how much they cared for me. I remember my mom coming into my room and holding me tight. Telling me to

let it all out and I did. It felt like a raging river of so many emotions flooding my entire body.

It took me a month to finish the movie and gather everything because every time I went back to it, I couldn’t bear the faces and emotions of everyone else and the impact he made on so many people.

I finished the movie and gave it to his parents. I haven’t been to his house since. I see his parents and his sisters throughout town, but I can’t bring myself to visit his house because of the emotions it brings back. They understand and respect my grief, happy to see me every time. We chat about how things are going for me and, as usual, they couldn’t be happier.

The influence Mouse gave me brought me to where I am today. In school, with my family, with music, with photography, how I carry myself, and how I treat other people. I hear him and chat every time I close my eyes and call his name, so I know he’s still here with me. In a way, he never left but transcended into a bigger source of inspiration. Something beyond physical and more spiritual.

So, whenever I get sad and feel down, I remember to close my eyes, hit play, let the feedback from the microphone settle with my headphones hissing. And there he is. Clear as yesterday. Mouse.



Michael J. Cara

Tapped into the Pulse of the Wind

Tapped into the pulse of the wind
Searching ardently for
The beat of the ocean when

We find ourselves in the time that's been
Trapped between the beat before
Tapped into the pulse of the wind.

And the blazing sun beat down will mend
The soul, broken, that once bore
The beat of the ocean when

You find yourself out on a limb,
Tuning into something more,
Tapped into the pulse of the wind.

The energy that had been
Will at once be restored,
The beat of the ocean when

Everything within the Earth's spin
Feels the force, at their soul's core.
The beat of the ocean when
Tapped into the pulse of the wind.



Shahin T. Massoudi

I Am, I Am the Light



Clay sculpture

Allison Liaw

Illustration for *Until We Meet Again*



Watercolor and gouache

Jean-Michel Ochsenbein

Until We Meet Again

I was seventeen years old when I knew the day my dad was going to leave this world. A date and an hour had been chosen a week before. I was told of his departure only two days before the fateful date. I do not think I would have wanted to know it earlier, as there is never enough time to be prepared for this. Georges, my dad, was an exceptional man whose generous heart was equaled only by his greatness of soul. Tall, thin, with gray hair, he did not look his age. His life, which began with his birth in Paris during the interwar period, had been full of extraordinary events. With an inherent talent for storytelling and a great sense of humor, he could speak passionately and knowledgeably about any subject for hours, which made him my hero as well as my mentor.

The day came on a cloudy Tuesday morning in September 2005. The summer had been hot, but the temperature had started to decline, suggesting the arrival of the crisp weather of autumn associated with the magnificent color change of the Swiss forest. In the house, the heavy atmosphere was palpable. The day before, our dog, Yendi, howled a few times in a mournful way we had never heard before. Undoubtedly, she knew. I crossed the threshold of the living room—filled with bookcases of French literature, a large and heavy mirror with a gold frame and paintings hung on the walls—and I saw my mom, a compassionate woman in her forties, with short, brown hair and hazel eyes, as beautiful inside as she was outside. She was looking at my dad with an expression of infinite sorrow. Only my little brother was not present. Since he was so young at the time, my parents feared he would not understand the complex situation.

My dad appeared tired, pale, and a bit nervous, but relieved at the same time as he was ready to take his train on time. I like to remember him as a long-time traveler heading to a far-off land with which we can only communicate through our dreams. It makes me feel as if we are in a long-distance father-child relationship and does not give me any sensation of inner emptiness, which is often triggered by the notion of death. Indeed, his was a one-way ticket for this kind of train that we only take once. A rare, incurable, disabling, and painful disease had forced him to make an irreversible decision.

Aid in Dying has been legalized in Switzerland since 1942, and forty years later, an association appropriately called Exit was funded in order to enable people with hopeless prognoses to leave this world with dignity and without

pain by drinking a lethal potion. My mom had heard about the association, and since my dad was developing serious suicidal thoughts about escaping from his suffering condition, she suggested this possibility as a last resort. I had a discussion with my dad about this subject in his office a year before.

"When your mom told me about this association, I couldn't believe it," he said with an expression of surprise and relief. He added, "I could not bear the idea of being bedridden. Thanks to her, when this situation won't be supportable anymore, I will be able to..."

"To take your train," I interrupted him as I did not want him to say the word.

"My train?" he asked, slightly raising an eyebrow.

"You know what I mean, Dad," I said as if it was evident. "When you'll leave." It got him thinking.

"My train," he repeated with a smile, lost in thought. He seemed to like my metaphor. My father had his one-way ticket and could leave whenever he decided to. Nevertheless, having control of his destiny gave him an undeniable peace of mind and the strength to stay one more year with us.

In the living room, another person was there as well, a woman volunteer from the association who had the lethal potion in her possession.

"Are you still decided, Mister Ochsenbein?" she asked my dad.

He nodded and said, "Yes," with a calm but decided tone.

I was staring at my dad intensely, as I knew that it would be the last time I could lay eyes on him. I knew he could breathe his last breath at any time, and I always made sure not to go to bed while mad at him; or without hugging him or saying "I love you." As a matter of fact, I was not sure I would see him again the next morning. My dad looked at me and smiled lightly with an expression meaning "I am ready." I headed toward him and embraced him as I usually did every night. I will always remember that exact moment, the contact with his skin and his signature scent—a light fragrance of cologne. Hundreds of memories of my dad might have gone through my mind such as our usual autumnal walks in the forest where we often deviated to a grape field nearby to satiate our hunger or our chess games, not forgetting, of course, his incredible and compelling stories. One of my favorite stories involved my dad fleeing from Nazis after refusing the Service du travail obligatoire (Compulsory Labour Service, STO)—the deportation of countless French workers to Nazi Germany during World War II contributing to the German war effort. Thus, he fled Paris, which was in the Occupied Zone at the time, to Brittany, a region located in the northwest corner of France. He was my hero. Unfortunately, none of these memories came back into my mind. I was incapable of thinking. My head was empty. I only wished that instant could last forever.

Eventually, the time had come for my dad to embark on his train.

"Don't mess around," he told me like a father to his unruly child. It was his way of joking about the gravity of the situation. He knew very well the kind of person I was and the well-behaved child I had always been. "Take good care of your mother and little brother," he added.

"I love you, Dad," I told him as I could no longer hold back my tears anymore.

"I love you too, my son," he replied, his eyes filled with tears. His last words are still echoing within me.

He gently broke my embrace, and I walked away, letting my parents alone for their last moment together. They went to another room where the volunteer was waiting for them. My dad drank the lethal potion, and then fell asleep peacefully in my mom's arms. Despite the profound sadness I endured, I felt lucky to have had the opportunity to be there for my dad just before his departure, and it certainly helped me overcome the grief. Most importantly, it was not a goodbye but an "au revoir" since somehow, deep inside of me, I knew we would meet again.



WALL 2017 STAFF BIOS



BROOKE CAMPBELL Editor-in-Chief

Brooke is a dedicated Saddleback College student who studied English Literature and attained her Associate for Transfer degree in May 2017. Throughout her three-year stay at Saddleback, Brooke has enjoyed various endeavors such as working as an English composition tutor at the LRC Tutoring Center and upholding the title of editor-in-chief of WALL 2017. While her hobbies include goofing off at Disneyland and playing video games with her baby brother, she tries to stay focused and sometimes succeeds; her future plans include transferring to California State University, Long Beach in Fall 2017 as a creative writing major with the hopes of becoming an awesome writer and professor.



GINA VICTORIA SHAFFER Faculty Advisor

Gina teaches composition and creative writing as a professor of English at Saddleback College. She previously served on the faculty of UCLA Writing Programs. Before becoming an educator, she worked as a newspaper reporter, magazine editor, and theater critic. A published playwright whose works have been staged throughout Southern California and in New York, she earned her Ph.D. in English at UC Irvine. She is perpetually inspired by the creativity and innovation of the students who staff WALL and of those who contribute their words and images to it.



MITCHELL LAWSON Fiction Editor

Mitchell is a writer of fiction, nonfiction, and songs. In his opinion, writing is the purest form of art because it can conjure up visceral emotions from imagination alone. Though he generally writes for himself and rarely shares his work, he has won scholarships for various essays he wrote during high school and college. In his spare time he plays drums in local band "10 Easy Payments of 9.99" and consumes any and all fiction and/or music he can get his hands on. Many have accused him of being a pretentious ass, and he is inclined to agree.



KATAYOUN ZAMANI Fiction Editor / Copy Editor

Kat is currently an undergrad majoring in English Literature at UCI and plans to pursue graduate school there as well. She has been writing stories since she was six years old, but her serious writing career began when she started college. She is fortunate enough to have previously had her fiction published in WALL (2016 edition), which she uses as incentive to write more. Kat has a knack for knitting and sewing clothes, and, appropriately, has been deemed the proverbial "cat lady."



ARNOLD AGUSTIN Graphic Designer / Layout Editor

Arnold is a graphic designer and illustrator who completed the Graphic Design Associate's Degree program at Saddleback College in May 2017. He also won 1st place in the Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation's 2017 Student Design Competition, which will be featured in the PRINT 17 Trade Show in Chicago, IL. He is an information junkie who is fascinated with the arts and sciences, as well as history that doesn't turn up in textbooks. An artist who uses both traditional and digital mediums, Arnold plans to pursue a bachelor's degree and work as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator. He is also a typography enthusiast; so yes, he'd kern it. His work and portfolio can be viewed at aagustindesign.wordpress.com



CHARLOTTE HUGHES Graphic Designer / Layout Editor

Charlotte is a student working on her Graphic Design Certificate. Before she discovered her passion for creating art, she studied it, earning a bachelor's degree in Art History and English Literature from Chapman University. Prior to joining the WALL team, she was a board member for Chapman's literary journal Calliope for two years. Her literary idols include Virginia Woolf, J.K. Rowling, and Kazuo Ishiguro. Contact her at charlottehughes.e@gmail.com



JOSHUA ACOSTA Fiction Committee

Josh is a 21-year-old student of Latino heritage with aspirations of becoming a successful author. He still has a long path ahead of him, so sometimes he can get discouraged. The great works of those who came before, including J.R.R. Tolkien, are both inspiring and daunting. He likes reading, writing, playing games, dancing, and sleeping. He especially likes to read stories with fantastical elements.



MADISON TABER Fiction Committee

Maddie, who is transferring to Chapman University in the Fall, is pursuing a career as a writer for a fashion magazine. Aside from writing, she enjoys photography, fashion merchandising, lattes, and long days at the beach.



SARA BOIVIN Personal Narrative Editor

Sara is an avid reader of fantasy books, a dedicated video gamer, a movie soundtrack junkie, and a makeup enthusiast. She has been accepted into USC's undergraduate program in Writing for Screen & Television. Special talents of Sara's include collecting tea mugs, eating level 10 spicy Thai food, organizing group hangouts with friends, finishing books she checks out at the library, and, of course, writing short fiction. Currently, she is working on mastering fluency in Spanish and beginning the basics of Japanese. Sara hopes to enter the film industry and eventually become a screenwriter for TV shows.



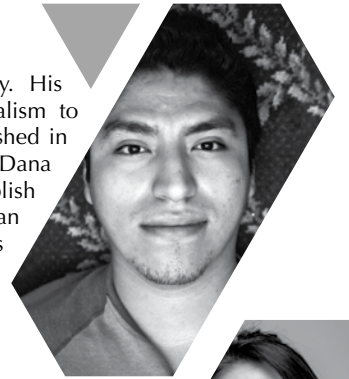
JESSICA PHAM Personal Narrative Committee

Jessica, who is pursuing some sort of writing career, finds herself constantly drifting towards cute dogs on the street, the ocean during sunset, and overpriced coffee shops. Her time is eaten up by taking pictures, writing stories and poems, and reading long books. Her main goal is to always be moving towards happiness and to find inspiration in everyday life.



RACHEL SCHARNETT Art Editor/Publicity Chair

Rachel is currently pursuing a degree in film at Saddleback College. Her passion is working with stories and artists from all over the globe. She believes that art and story unite people regardless of race or religion, or even individual culture. In addition to being a visual artist, Rachel also writes poetry, nonfiction stories, and lyrics for music. She is also a featured vocalist in the Pay It Forward Band, a volunteer band that performs for veteran's groups and residents of assisted living facilities. When not working on personal projects, she designs and promotes for The Peace Exchange, a global fair trade company that features products from artists and artisans in developing nations. Rachel is a self-professed adventure junkie whose idea of fun includes talking to strangers (sometimes in English) and traveling to remote locations. Follow her adventures through her blog at <https://msadventuredotblog.wordpress.com> and contact her at msadventured@gmail.com.



JORGE MALDONADO Personal Narrative Committee / Photography Editor

Jorge is studying photography, journalism, and astronomy. His photography ranges from commercial, fashion, and journalism to portraiture, weddings, and events. His work has been published in The Lariat, The Capistrano Dispatch, San Clemente Times, and Dana Point Times. He hopes to start his own media source to publish the progress of humanity and our endeavors. Jorge is also an adventure junkie who loves talking to strangers and enjoys long walks to the fridge while reading Carl Sagan's A Pale Blue Dot. He is also a typical Californian surfer dude, bro.



MEGHAN GRUHIN Poetry Editor

Meghan loves reading good books, drinking coffee, keeping things simple, and hanging out with her family. Now and again she rides her bicycle. An artist who typically works in paint and pastels, sometimes she arts with words—writing about her previous adventures in a complicated life. Today she attempts to maintain a more user-friendly life, one day at a time. She is proud to say she will be going to Cypress College in the Fall and will graduate in 2019 as a registered dental hygienist. You can contact her at msgruhin@gmail.com.



ELISHA MIRANDA Poetry Editor

Elisha dreams of transferring to Cal State Fullerton to get her B.A. in communications. She recently moved back to Orange County from Michigan. After a year of doing Christian services in Lansing, she finds herself living as a fake Michigander in a Californian's body. Her recent goals include working as a social media marketer in the entertainment industry and hopefully having enough time to either finish a book or make a movie. Not a fan of horror movies, overused quotes, and videos where people don't hold the phone horizontally so you see the black bars, she has a passion for binge-watching Netflix, taking short walks on the beach, and pretending to laugh at all the height jokes she receives. She is currently trying to keep up with her Snapchat streaks and faking adulthood one day at a time.

WALL 2017 CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

ANGEL ALAY

An engineering student currently at Saddleback College, Angel plans to transfer to either California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, or University of California, Berkeley. He is a volunteer mathematics tutor for the CLASE Transfer Mentor Program at Saddleback College that focuses on helping Chicano/Latino students transfer to a four-year institution.

JUAN E. ALVIZO

Believing that without art he'd be lost, Juan sees creating something that brings joy and pride to him and others as way more valuable than any check he's ever received. His motto: Never sacrifice happiness for comfort. More of his pieces can be seen on www.flickr.com/photos/jalvizo

CHRISTOPHER BAST

A combat veteran of the United States Marine Corps who served two deployments to Afghanistan, Chris has now turned attempted writer in hopes of telling stories based on experiences in the Global War on Terror. His personal narrative in WALL is his first publication. Email: chris.d.bast@gmail.com

COURTNEY BERRY

An English lit major, Courtney has been writing for as long as she can remember. While taking her first creative writing class at Saddleback, her love for writing, especially poetry, accelerated. In Spring of 2017, her poem "Longing" was selected as a finalist in a poetry contest judged by Red Shuttleworth, an award-winning poet and playwright. It was her first time entering a poetry contest.

SABRINA BOTROS

While finishing an AA in English, Sabrina writes fantasy fiction for young adults. A lover of coffee and good books, she enjoys daydreaming about worlds that don't exist.

MICHELLE CAIRNS BRYCH

With bronze, stone, and clay as her preferred mediums for sculpting, Michelle is a ceramics teacher whose work has been featured at the Sawdust Festival in Laguna Beach and Saddleback's Annual Juried Student Art Exhibition. In addition to being a sculptor, she is a poet and short story writer whose work was published in UCI's New Forum in 2008. She believes that when writers run out of words, they become sculptors. Check out her work on Instagram at [blockedwritersmakeart](https://www.instagram.com/blockedwritersmakeart)

MICHAEL J. CARA

Michael has been attending Saddleback for almost two years now. When not wasting time outside, he is working on homework or spending time with his girlfriend, Riley. His favorite medium is poetry, but he is currently taking a ceramics course at Saddleback for fun.

SHANNON CARDELLA

Currently a full-time student studying nutrition, Shannon maintains a Hello Poetry account, where she posts poems on a public forum. People don't know her secret party trick: juggling fruit. But now the secret's out.

PEGGY A. CAREY

Semi-retired after working in high-priority secretarial positions at the FBI and Douglas Aircraft, Peggy is enjoying peace of mind from the carousel of life. A creative writing class she took through Saddleback's Emeritus Institute became a gift beyond her wildest dreams, leading to publication of two pieces in the journal Reflections. The unexpected twists and turns of life—from varied professions, life partners, children, friends, and family—have given her a well of knowledge that never runs dry. kclbchev@cox.net

CONOR REED CARLSON

Conor loves to write. He also hates to write.

JULIE CHANG

After a long career in software development with Xerox and IBM, and an M.S. in Applied Mathematics from Northwestern University, Julie started taking art classes from Saddleback's Emeritus Institute. In art, her true passion, she discovered that one is free to express, explore, examine, and reflect without boundaries. She has exercised her underutilized right brain ever since. Email: catcusi@gmail.com Blog: <https://ling-chu.blogspot.com>

ELAINE MICHALS COHEN

Elaine was a teacher in Massachusetts and Connecticut for thirty-five years. She taught elementary, middle, and high school. In high school, she taught world history and sociology. In 2012, she published a memoir titled Still Gathering Rosebuds. She writes from the heart and sometimes colors her writing with naughty words which she learned as a high school teacher. She credits her writing skills to Susan Hecht, a Saddleback Emeritus Creative Writing teacher. GramE@comline.com

RACHEL CORNFORTH

Rachel began her fine arts journey with watercolor and gouache classes at Saddleback College. She is currently expanding her studies to include drawing and graphic design. She can be contacted at cornforth@cox.net

L. CROFT

The author pens primarily poetry and prose. She is a fan of alliteration and always brings a cat on the first date.

ILIA DEYLAMI

Bittersweet memories and ensuing emotions from the past inspired Ilia to fabricate the bronze heart, built from bronze, to tolerate a life of beating. Not just a statue, the heart represents a torch illuminating his path to the better man he will become as well as his future career as a dentist. He dedicates his bronze heart to his parents, Dr. Massoud Deylami and Mitra Soltazadeh, who made him from their own hearts piece by piece. Special thanks to Mr. Ernie Welke, Mr. Larry Jones, Mr. Hesam Jamyari, and Dr. Masih Rezaei. Contact Ilia at Ilia deyлами@gmail.com

CHRIS DIXON

A former student of Saddleback College who is currently attending California State University, Fullerton as a psychology major, Chris is a veteran of the Iraq/Afghanistan war and retired after twenty years from the United States Marine Corps. A resident of Lake Forest, he is currently working on a book addressing military culture and the psychological thought process of veterans in combat. As far as his outlook on life: no worries!

JULIA DUPUIS

A student journalist, activist, and dog enthusiast whose work has been featured in the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and the Claremont Review, Julia is a graduate of the Alpha Writer's Workshop. When she's not writing, Julia works as a part-time wage slave at Subway.

ADAM ENGLISH

Adam is majoring in English Literature and plans to obtain a bachelor's degree from CSU Channel Islands. In his free time, Adam enjoys drinking coffee and traveling, in that order.

DIANE FAHRION

After completing a career in teaching learning-disabled students in elementary schools, Diane began taking art classes at Saddleback College where she has enjoyed many exciting and challenging art projects as well as experienced an environment rich in conversations with multi-age and multicultural students. She wanted to learn how to draw and paint as well as tell stories from her past in visual form. Her watercolor *Moscow Circus #1* is an attempt to narrate the transitions experienced by children and their families when they enter the circus.

EMMA ELIZABETH FISCHER

A visual artist and classical dancer, Emma accepts struggles and hard times as opportunities to work harder and try her best every chance she gets. Emma is grateful for all the opportunities she's had to prove she is capable of achieving her dreams. One day, the hard work will all be worth it; one day, she will have turned all her opportunities into achievements.
Instagram: theartofembers Email: twiggiefisch@gmail.com

PARIS GHASSEMIAN

A part-time marketing guru and full-time screenwriter, Paris graduated from UCLA earning a BA in Philosophy and English, with a Creative Writing Emphasis. Two of her scripts are currently being developed into short films for WHW, an OC-based nonprofit, as she juggles Saddleback video productions classes and producing her very first web series. She will be applying to screenwriting graduate programs this Fall, in the hopes of taking over Hollywood one day. In addition to writing screenplays and short stories, she spends her time buying matching sweater sets for her pretentious puppy, Sir Franklin Kensington III. Feel free to email her at pghassemiian24@gmail.com for more!

KATIE GROAT

Katie plans to major in deaf studies and become a courtroom interpreter using American Sign Language. During her first semester at Saddleback College, she served as photo editor on the staff of The Lariat, Saddleback College's newspaper. You can contact her at groatkatie97@gmail.com

KENDALL HALLIBURTON

An honors student at Saddleback College, Kendall plans to transfer to a college with a distinguished program in film production or English. As a creative professional, she has been successful as a freelance photographer and filmmaker/screenwriter in California and in her hometown, Montana. If you wish to see her work, please visit her Instagram photography account: kendall.halliburton

CY HILL

Cy received recognition from the Liberal Arts Division of Saddleback College as an Outstanding English Student in Creative Writing in a ceremony in May 2017. He enjoys having all of his children and grandchildren living within 20 minutes from him.

SHARON INBAR

After moving from Tel Aviv, Israel, to the United States, Sharon studied multimedia design at Laguna College of Art and Design (LCAD) and worked in the commercial arts for a number of years. In more recent years, she has transitioned into fine arts, exploring different mediums such as porcelain, bronze, and a variety of metals. She loves the challenge of pushing the materials to their limits in order to realize her vision. Website: sharoninbar.com

MIRANDA KALAGIAN

Miranda, a college student and independent musician, enjoys making her writing as sassy as possible. She aims to create both a literary and musical time capsule of her youth. Her poem "Holiday" was featured in the 2016 edition of WALL. You can contact her at mirandakalagian@yahoo.com

NATALIE KNOWLES

A registered yoga teacher, Natalie started practicing yoga as a way to heal her mind, body, and spirit. She became a student of Kundalini Yoga in 2011, but it wasn't until she started practicing in the hot room that she discovered she wanted to teach. She earned her 200-hour teaching certificate in 2015 and loves to share the benefits of yoga practice with others. Email: npknowles@gmail.com

JIM LANGFORD

Photography was in Jim's blood from the day he was born. When he's not working in the Photography Department at Saddleback College, you can find him photographing landscapes, most things that don't move, and a bunch of things that do. Please like, follow, and share. www.jimlangfordphotography.com

CHRIS LEE

Chris has nearly finished his AA in Art History with plans to transfer to California State University, Long Beach. He is very thankful for his mentors and fellow students at Saddleback who taught him how to love art, write, laugh at himself, and see the world anew. He will miss everyone greatly.

ALLISON LIAW

Allison is currently earning a certificate in graphic design at Saddleback College. She took a bit of a detour to get where she is today, having completed a bachelor's and a master's degree in completely unrelated fields. Her foray into graphic design and illustration has been her best adventure yet, and she's excited to see where she ends up next. Please see her portfolio at www.allisonliaw.com

BRANDON MALETA

Writing is a new hobby for Brandon, who hopes to pursue a career in nursing. “Knock Knock” is his first published work. He likes to write fiction that is just on the edge of reality. A slightly twisted version of the familiar. Strange enough to be interesting, but familiar enough to be relatable.

JOHN MANDUJANO

John considers himself an ambitious photographer, musician, and artist, with talent prevailing early in his photography career. His photography, which celebrates life, joy, and beauty, preserves the moments that fly by all too fast. He enjoys turning memories into fine art that we can keep forever.

ALI MARCOTTE

Ali’s photographic and artistic imagination is always in the driver’s seat, while her camera rides shotgun to capture moments seen through the eyes of a former street cop. Her dark side seems to have a mind of its own, so pay attention as there is usually a message in her craft. However, her main goal is to have the viewer become visually intoxicated... Is that a crime? Inquire at Artisticlightimager@gmail.com

SHAHIN MASSOUDI

A self-taught artist in her teenage years, Shahin studied studio art at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Her artwork has been exhibited in art galleries and museums throughout the East and West Coasts. In the past few years, she began a new chapter in her art career by moving from oil to working with ceramics and sculpture. Shahin’s sculptures have earned her a scholarship as well as awards for Best in Show at local juried art exhibitions, including an Award of Excellence in Sculpture from Saddleback College in 2017. As she continues to pursue her own work, Shahin teaches art to preschool and elementary school children, whose pure and unrestrained sense of discovery through art continues to provide her with endless inspiration.
shahinmassoudi@yahoo.com cargocollective.com/shmassoudi Insta: Shahin Massoudi

KAYLA MCHALE

Kayla, who works at an escrow office, plans to transfer to the Ringling College of Art and Design to study computer animation. Once described by a good friend as “90% caffeine and 10% sarcasm,” she won an award in the May 2017 Student Art Exhibit at Saddleback in the 2-D/3-D category. When she was in sixth grade, she won an Honorable Mention in an art show at the Guggenheim Gallery. You can contact her at kaylamchale7@gmail.com

MORGAN MYERS

A graphic design student working towards his associate degree, Morgan typically likes to work with branding, logo design, infographics, and has only recently started to get into illustration. The illustration for “Sun Salutation” is his first published piece. In 2015, he received a bachelor’s degree in organic chemistry from Boston University, but he has since decided to switch directions to pursue graphic design and a creative career that blends science and art. His portfolio is located at www.morganmye.rs.

ANN E. NORDMAN

A second-year college student seeking to create her own media production company, Ann has drawn and painted since she was very little. Almost every day since she could hold a pencil, she has continued to live that passion. She looks forward to learning more about art and other creative work.

EDRIAN OCHOA

As a first-year student at Saddleback, Edrian is majoring in linguistics but intends to apply to a few art schools in the hopes of pursuing a career in animation.

JEAN-MICHEL OCHSENBEIN

Born in France and raised in Switzerland, Jean-Michel, an English major, dreams of becoming a novelist. Concerned about the future of the planet as well as human rights issues, he is working on a sci-fi book series entitled Rebalancing. In the meantime, he wishes his mother all possible success in the publication of her first book. Jean-Michel considers her an extraordinary woman who has the courage to write about her experience as a witness of his father’s departure. Her intention is to share not only the multitude of emotions she went through but what she learned from one of the most difficult experiences a person can live. She explains her special “spiritual bond” with Jean-Michel’s father, who did not believe in the afterlife during his lifetime, but gave her many wonderful signs from “the other side.”

OLGA PERELMAN

Olga, who has earned an Associate Degree in Fine Arts at Saddleback College, is a Russian graphic designer, illustrator, and printmaker. She strives to create designs that make people happy, which in turn makes her happy. She recently started a company selling hand-drawn designed T-shirts, stickers, greeting cards, and handmade prints. Follow her new creative journey via www.innerpeach.co and [@innerpeach](https://www.instagram.com/innerpeach) on Instagram.

ESMERALDA PINEDA

As a visual artist, Esmeralda has always been involved in creating art. Finding courage to pursue her dream, she is getting an education in the arts. She is working on a bachelor’s degree in graphics with a minor in fine arts.

ALYSSA RICHARDSON

Alyssa loves photography, delving into fantasy-adventure stories, writing poetry, and exploring novel ideas. She is passionate about environmental protection and human equality. Alyssa considers herself an introvert who constantly creates new worlds and dimensions through the written word and wishes to be buried in fluffy kittens.

ASHTON RIEMER

Currently a full-time graphic design/illustration student who plans to earn a bachelor’s degree in marketing, Ashton is building a freelance design and blogging business. She is hoping that her growing online presence will turn profitable very soon! Art is her love while travel is her passion. She seeks to explore as much of this planet as possible while here. <http://www.nativehummingbird.com>

GIULIANA ROSE

Giuliana is an illustrator, ceramicist, and graphic designer. While working toward transferring from Saddleback, she has been interning as a freelance graphic designer. She also has a side project of converting an old ’70s school bus into a tiny house. GiulianaRose.MyPortfolio.com

ZACH SEAMONS

Zach enjoys writing short stories and poems. He's even been known to dabble in playwriting. Impressed with his cold readings of various characters in their plays, his creative writing peers tell him he has a knack for acting, which may come in handy if Zach pursues a career in voice-over.

BRITTANY W-SMITH

Brittany is an artist and an adventurer. She has adopted the motto "I make weird things & make things weird" as she enjoys few things more than bringing strange ideas to life via paint. If you'd like to purchase her creations or commission one of your own, you can find her at www.bsmithereens.etsy.com. Be sure to check out www.instagram.com/bsmithereens53 to see works in progress, Brittany's adventures, and way too many photos of her dogs.

CELIA WU

Celia, a fulltime artist, believes in art. Following a career in information technology over decades, she returned to school to study art at Saddleback College. Searching for a fulfilling challenge, she chose painting and found a passion she could follow for the rest of her life. Her vision is to show viewers a different world by allowing them to see through her eyes for a brief moment as her distinctive and particular vantage point reflects her view of the whole. Celia.wu@ymail.com and www.celiawu.blogspot.com



Design by Leanne Black

TAKING IT TO THE WALL

Submissions for the 2018 edition of WALL Literary Journal are being accepted through January 25, 2018. Each work must be an original, unpublished piece submitted by a Saddleback College student enrolled Spring 2017, Summer 2017, Fall 2017, or Spring 2018. For a submission form and guidelines, please go to the WALL Literary Journal website at www.wallliteraryjournal.org.

JOIN OUR WALL STAFF

If you are interested in being involved hands on in producing WALL, enroll in ENGLISH 160: Literary Magazine, a 3-unit class that focuses on creating our award-winning literary journal. Staff members are responsible for reviewing and selecting student submissions; layout and design; copy editing and proofing; and publicity. Also, students on staff have the opportunity to have one of their own pieces published in the magazine. We seek students in English, Creative Writing, Journalism, Art, Photography, and Design, but the class is open to all students and no experience is necessary. For further details about the class, please contact Professor Gina Shaffer by phone at (949) 582-4544 or via email at gshaffer@saddleback.edu. You may also check for information on the WALL website at www.saddleback.edu/la/Wall.