

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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Emeritus teacher Dave Underwood helped students with our original layout and design.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our Call for Submissions page for submission guidelines.

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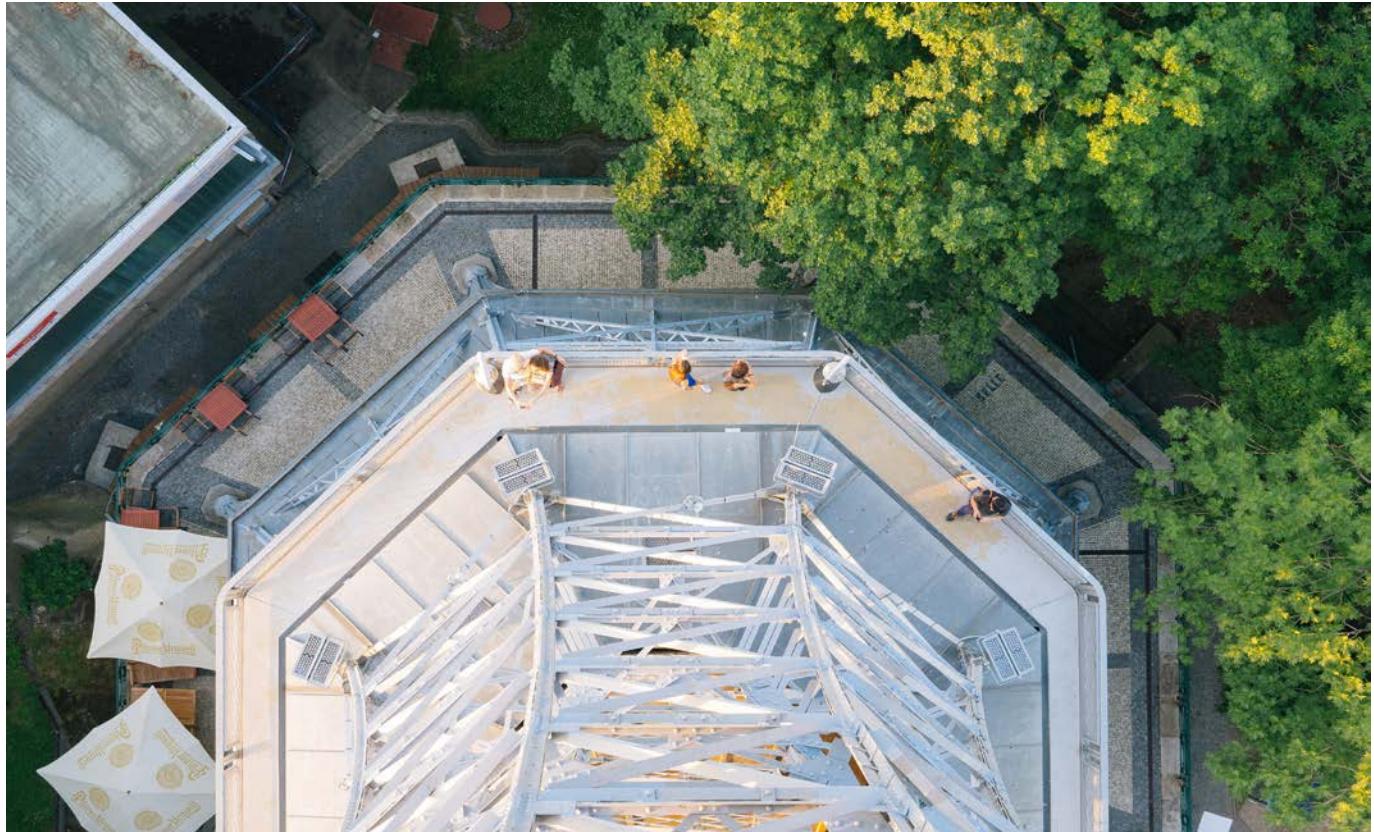
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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY

Once, on a reporting trip to India for **WIRED** magazine, a cab driver offered me this advice: "If you want to be a human, you must go to the burning ghats, and watch the bodies burn."

The cabbie's words haunted me. I finished my reporting and flew north to the ancient city of Varanasi, took a cab to the city center, and descended a staircase drowning with humanity. At river's edge, I hired the first boatman I saw, a thin teenager named Aryan. "Take me, please, to see the bodies burn," I said.

Thirty minutes later, squinting through thick smoke, I stepped onto an ash-covered shore, impossibly close to the hot fire—a remote corner of Hell, I thought. Two men carried an ornately decorated litter over and set it on a metal rack. As flames ripped through its white sheet, I was shocked by what I saw: a thick mane of long black hair and the gentle curves of a woman's face. Too young to die, I thought.

We stared. That was my job: to witness. Hours later, all that remained was a charred section of sacrum and a single vertebra. Both bones were removed from the ashes, set next to a flower and a flickering candle on a tiny boat, and let go into the Mother Ganges, an offering from the dead. I said a prayer to nobody and climbed back into Aryan's boat. Three days later, back in the States, I knew I'd been changed, though exactly how I hadn't a clue.

Transformation. Many stories in this issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** explore this—not the type in Hollywood movies, but the hard-won variety, burning away the past. Talicia Montoya give us a healthy dose of truth in her poignant piece, "**NO, NOT LIKE THAT**." Her writing is both gritty and soft, as she walks us through her realization that she is asexual, arrived at like scratching an itch till it bleeds. But the story is also beautiful. By the end, we experience what she experienced: new hope that she's not alone. Indeed, maybe there's a tribe of her. Nozomi Kido's "**EPIDURAL HEMATOMA**" tells the story of both painful injury and growth, a transformation by transcendence, permanently inked on her body, "Mom, I'm not scared." "**TO GUATEMALA AND BACK**" by Makena Lambert plays with arrival and transcendence as well, born not of pain or physical trauma but of a very particular type of love: the temporary love experienced during a study abroad in a foreign country. Her story, both graceful and bittersweet, depicts the arrival at a new, more honest place. Love is temporary.

We are all temporary. Stories are eternal. ☀

BRAD WETZLER

*Brad Wetzler is the author of **REAL MOSQUITOS DON'T EAT MEAT** (Norton), and has published in **THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE** and **BOOK REVIEW, GQ, TRAVEL + LEISURE, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE, WIRED**, and was an original contributing editor to JFK Jr.'s **GEORGE Magazine**.*

Art and writing speak to the ideas we cannot express purely with our voices. Whether its highlighting becoming fascinated with our own death as in “**COLOR ME OBVIOUS**,” the written word is powerful. I have often heard that twenty-somethings can’t write about anything important, that they haven’t experienced enough to create meaning. **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** proves this wrong with “**FREQUENT FLYER OR WHY ISN’T DAD DEAD YET?**” and through the wonderful staff who spent countless hours working in inDesign. Each voice is important and valuable. In 2016, an election would change the course of history as we knew it. Artists took this as a rallying cry to go forth and create, whether it was in happiness or in despair. **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** highlighted this in our extended call for submissions which included bipartisan pieces like “**THE DAY AFTER**.” “**THE POLITICS OF WINGS AND BEER**” also addresses how sometimes the thing that is supposed to divide us the most can bring us together. Art is a unifying voice bringing between generations, religions, and genders. ☀

TAYLOR SHORT, MANAGING EDITOR

We at **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** are enormously proud of the artistic and aesthetic outcome of this year’s issue. The decision to pair a piece of art with a piece of writing is something we do not take lightly. We strive to find art that connects with the very core of a piece writing. Sometimes that even goes as far as to include images that seem disconnected from the piece, but represent feelings of angst or desire. The art we have chosen fully embodies the spirit of creative nonfiction, and gives us the opportunity to make an author’s piece come to life with beautiful art. We have featured the finest art CU has to offer, and every artist included is enormously talented, but we would like to make specific commendations to Mark Haselmaier and Noah Dreeban for their outstanding photography that is displayed several times throughout. ☀

MATHEW FEUER, ART DIRECTOR

The issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** you are holding in your hand is the product of unified efforts across academic disciplines and is entirely student produced — getting involved in the production is easy, just stop by our office at UMC 440, visit us online at journal2020.com, or email us at journal2020@colorado.edu. Students who join the **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** Creative Nonfiction Club have access to desktop publishing, video, and audio recording equipment. Take advantage of this opportunity to meet other like-minded individuals and gain a wealth of knowledge and experience around the creation, publication, and distribution of this unique and expansive genre! ☀

FRANK KOGEN, SENIOR EDITOR AND CREATIVE NONFICTION CLUB CHAIR

GET INTO PRINT

All University of Colorado Undergraduate students are eligible to send in writing for consideration by **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**. Submissions go through blind review by our Editorial staff.

We only seek creative nonfiction, but in any of its genres:

- Creative Scholarship
- Narrative Journalism
- Humor
- Lyric Essay—the Truth told with a poetic Slant
- Travel, Food, and Sports Writing
- Portraiture and Memoir
- Graphic Creative Nonfiction
- Digital Compositions and Videos for Web Publication

Artists

Send us your stories through artwork of any type—for consideration by our Art Direction staff, for publication in either our print or online editions. We especially seek multi-media work for our website, including but not limited to: video, animation, music for podcasts, etc.

Join our staff

Take the fall section of **WRTG 2090** (yup, for the journal production course, that's twenty-ninety) or sign up for a one, two, or three-credit **INDEPENDENT STUDY** in any semester with one of our Faculty Advisors. Independent Study is offered at both the upper and lower division level. We seek anyone wanting to learn Editorial, Art Direction, Digital Production, or the Business and Marketing of a print and online journal of creative nonfiction—no previous experience required. A position on the **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** staff will foster the development of strong job skills while learning about the exciting genres of creative nonfiction, and publishing the region's premier print and online journal of only creative nonfiction. We exist to serve and further a community of creative nonfiction writers (and artists) across campus.

Find us online at Journal2020.com

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ALL ATHEISTS GO TO HELL

by Ellie Marcotte

A “t” hung on the wall.

It was a lowercase faded driftwood “t” nailed to the wall of my classroom, right in front, so no matter where you sat you always saw it.

The elegant, water-wrought lowercase “t.”

I knew what it meant. But I always savored the reactions of my classmates when I deliberately stated, “What does the ‘t’ stand for?” Their reactions were always instantaneous – they never skipped a beat. There were baffled looks, fiery glares, and offended splutters of “Th—That’s not a ‘t’ Ellie, that’s a crucifix!”

I’d look confused for a second, nod slowly, and walk off, as if four years of strictly Catholic education had not taught me what, exactly, the profound symbolic meaning of our Lord and Savior’s Holy Cross was. It was my main source of entertainment.

Drawing my attention away from the cross on the wall, I listened to what the teacher was saying. I hadn’t known Ms. Cole for long, but from what I gathered she was a genuinely nice woman. She stood at the front of the classroom, lecturing my freshman theological studies

class about the fundamental idea of theology. More specifically: Catholicism.

The topic struck a chord. I narrowed my eyes, eying the big letters on the whiteboard: “CATHOLICISM—THE TRUTH.” I wanted to scoff. As if that one word was the end-all answer to life on this planet. As if it could answer questions humankind has never figured out. As if it were our salvation.

My question was about half-thought out before I felt it leave my mouth.

“Do atheists go to Hell?”

Ms. Cole paused her lecture to look at me. “Come again?”

“Do atheists really go to Hell?” I asked again, adding a forceful element to my tone. I thought for a moment before rewording my question. “If you’re an atheist and a good person, would you still get into Heaven, even if you don’t believe in God?”

Ms. Cole adjusted her cat-eye glasses in thought, brushing her stringy brown hair out of her eyes. Her lower lip puffed out; she looked baffled, almost offended at the prospect of the question. After a moment of silence, she laughed. “Of course not. If you don’t have faith in God, you don’t go to Heaven. Why would you go somewhere you don’t believe?”

*It was as if this conformity to a
hierarchical social construct was the secret
to a life of prosperity . . .*

The atmosphere of the class seemed to err on the side of agreement with her. I felt them staring at me, their glares like daggers slashing into my spine. I felt the heat of embarrassment rush through me and suddenly it felt hard to breathe.

To this day, four years later, that statement sticks with me. If you don’t believe in God, why would you go to Heaven? And of course that brings about the question, if you don’t believe in Hell, what then? Where do you go? Why would you go somewhere you don’t believe?

It was as if no matter who you were, what you’ve done, or how you’ve lived, as long as you could put on your résumé that you believed in this one rendition of a higher power, you were given access to the finest vacation spot the universe had to offer: Heaven. It was as if this conformity to a hierarchical social construct was the secret to a life of prosperity and a solid

after-life. It was as if living by a thousands-year-old and heavily misinterpreted rulebook was the key to the living the complete human experience.

And if you didn't follow the rules, if you questioned "THE TRUTH," if you didn't find some kind of deeper symbolic meaning behind the pale, washed-out "t" on the wall, you didn't go to heaven. You went somewhere else—and where that was remains unanswered.

There was something about that idea, that close-minded exclusiveness and narrow vision of what the "human experience" really was, that continually leaves me baffled after years of developing and growing in my own unique spirituality. It reached a daily point when my mother turned on the news and I listened to a man in a crisp, clean suit tell me just how many people died from the day's bombings, famines, diseases, and shootings, I felt a little piece of my faith in this merciful higher power tear off and drift away. It seemed as though the further my education developed and the more I saw of the world, the further I drew away from this idea of an all-forgiving, all-loving God. Ultimately, all that remained of my spirituality was an undirected sense of intellectually curious agnosticism — or rather, a genuine "I don't know" paired with an open mind.

But to give this transition a timeline, my theological journey, or rather anti-theological journey, began when I was seven years old.

My dad took me into a room after a long phone call with my mom. I heard the yelling, but I didn't think much of it. He got to his knees, grasped my shoulders, looked me dead in the eye, and stated in a tone so serious I had no idea what to make of it: "Ellie, I need you to remember something. You hear me?"

I nodded. I heard him just fine.

"Your mother Laurie and I— What we had, it was special. We were married. When you're married, it's forever. Okay? Forever. When you grow up and get married, remember that God views it as forever. Okay?"

"Okay, Dad."

It wasn't until years later did I truly understand the irony of his words. Her name was Jessica, my dad's first wife. Then her name was Laurie, and then Michelle. I half expected him to get cursed if some holy being really valued marriage as much as he claimed. But after years of prosperity and financial success on my father's part, I started to question whether it meant anything at all. Whether the relationships I grew up with—

*"When you're
married,
it's forever.
Okay?"*

Hermione and Ron, Cinderella and Prince Charming, Ariel and Eric—were expectations that I should have for both the people around me and myself. Was love something real to be sought after, or just a half-thought, idealized and fundamentally artificial dream? Where was God in these relationships? If he had as much value in them as my father seemed to believe, why did so many of them fall apart? What did that say about God?

*I wasn't "believing"
the right way—
silent, obedient,
and unyielding . . .*

I didn't really know what I thought about this idea of a higher power growing up. I never gave it much of a second thought, preferring to deal with conflicts at hand rather than talking to forces I couldn't see. Granted, I wasn't against the idea of Catholicism; I just didn't fully understand it until I was ten years old and forced to transfer to private school. I wasn't opposed to the change – the year and a half I spent at my public school consisted of teasing, name-calling, and your average fourth-grade bullying. My mom insisted that the kids and teachers at Ave Maria would be much nicer. They had God in their lives, after all. Didn't that make people nicer? More welcoming? More ethical?

And I believed her. At least until I received a detention slip for standing at Mass when we were supposed to kneel, sitting when we were supposed to stand, and for questioning why on earth it mattered in the first place. I believed her until my friend yelled at me for chewing the bland flatbread cracker I was given at Communion, as that was “disrespectful”. I believed her until I took home a C in Theology, because I wasn't “believing” the right way—silent, obedient, and unyielding. I had an attitude, they said. I asked too many questions. They couldn't understand why I refused to believe.

I couldn't understand why, either. As I search through the furthest and deepest corners of my memory, I cannot think of a single time where I didn't question why the “Our Father” wasn't

“Our Mother” or why the “Eucharist” sat in a box of solid gold on the altar while there were people in the world starving. I cannot think of a single time where I felt as though I were actually speaking to some higher “great, almighty Father” as I got to my knees and thrust my hands together in prayer. Eventually I came to the realization that I wasn’t outright refusing to follow this one way of life that I was raised around. Rather, it was my fundamental disagreement with the uniformity of organized religion and the corruption and lack of individuality it entailed that had me drawing away from it.

When I was fifteen years old, my father, brother and I visited our friends in Mazatlan, Mexico over spring break. Familial conflict had our small stepfamily spread across the continent—my stepmother and stepsister were somewhere in Florida visiting family of their own. The timing of this trip happened to fall right over my birthday, and although I was dejected over the fact that not everyone was there to celebrate, I also understood that with relationships came conflict. In the grand scheme of things, I really had nothing to complain about.

The sun was just beginning to set over the ocean, turning the water into a gigantic chasm of fiery reds and yellows. It shot beams of light across the sky and silhouetted the islands in a way that looked so picturesque it was as if God had taken his inspiration straight from an oversaturated postcard.

We had just come back to the hotel after an evening of exploring and cake-eating. My father had been going on about a gift he had for me—he was excited to give it to me, and as anyone else would be, I was excited to receive it. His enthusiasm was contagious.

“Ellie,” he said, after practically sprinting into his separated bedroom and returning with his hands behind his back and a smile on his face. “It’s your sixteenth birthday. And I think the most important thing to do is make sure that we’re celebrating it with God.”

Already, my borrowed enthusiasm began to drain out of me, leaving behind a sour sense of dread and a bitter taste in my mouth. My father and I had differing views—he claimed himself to be a preacher while deep down I knew I was a heathen.

But I played along. It was better not to argue—not now, not in a way to spoil the mood. I nodded, plastering a smile onto my face.

*Suddenly, the
jewelry in my
hands seemed
slightly less
attractive.*

He brought his hands out from behind his back and presented me with a small box. It fit perfectly into the palm of my hand, pure white as if to allude to what was inside.

I opened it.

It was a ring. A dainty, silver ring, encrusted with diamonds, reflecting the dim, artificial light of the hotel room and glittering attractively. It was beautiful.

“It’s white gold,” my dad said, carefully assessing my reaction with a certain air of elation. “Do you know what this means?”

I paused for a moment and shook my head slowly. “—No, I don’t.”

“It’s a purity ring.” He said. “You wear it on your left hand as a symbol—a promise between you and God, saying you’ll stay pure until you get married. Only your future husband can take this ring off. You can replace it with your wedding ring.”

Suddenly, the jewelry in my hands seemed slightly less attractive. I felt as though the thin, beautiful ring weighed more than it should have. My dad’s words didn’t sit right with me; they left something rancorous and unpleasant in my mouth, stinging like a barb in an odd place right behind my eyes. I wasn’t bothered by the fact that he didn’t want me having sex—that was expected—but I felt as though some inherent freedom I had to do as I pleased with my own body had been taken away from me. I felt as though this ring was a symbol of being controlled by someone who wasn’t myself—watched continually by some Big Brother figure, only to be condemned when intimacy inevitably presented itself. I felt uncomfortable in my own skin, as if my privacy had been violated, as if my virginity somehow increased my value as a person in the eyes of God.

*I realize now
that there is a
sense of peace
in knowing
without a shadow
of a doubt ...*

I smiled anyway and thanked my father for the gift, doing my best to ignore the nagging, grating feeling of forced submission under some invisible force that I suddenly felt. I slipped the ring onto my right ring finger, as if that could somehow negate the meaning behind it. As if somehow, wearing it “wrong” could turn a symbol into an object, a proclaimed hard-standing yet fundamentally theoretical fact back into a mystical idea, a question—or a series of questions—nobody really knew the answers to. I realize now that there is a sense of peace in knowing without a shadow of a doubt where I stand—in a state of comfortable uncertainty and acknowledgement that everyone can and will believe in what they feel most negates their fear of the unknown. Whether those answers present themselves uniquely to an individual in the form of a holy cross or a lowercase *t*, is, in the purest and most fundamental sense of the word, theology. ☙



NUMBER

By Alex Nguyen

These are the things I carry.

No matter how hot the weather is or how cumbersome the rest of my clothes are, I'm always wearing the same outer layers. Sometimes, it's the thin flannel shirt that, like most of my clothes, is a hand-me-down, one of many from my mother that she used to wear in the nineties. Sometimes, it's an enormous black hoodie that looks more like an odd dress than a jacket on me; every time I wear it someone asks me if it belongs to "my boyfriend" — which aggravates Number. Other times, it's the hoodie that's supposed to be burgundy, but also tends to be the shade of whatever meals and snacks I've eaten in the past several weeks, considering I rarely wash it. Occasionally, it's my green winter coat, the one I bought that matches most of my clothes and somehow never smells bad no matter how many times I wear it, which comes in handy considering it's supposed to be dry-clean-only and I can't afford to keep it clean that way. Most of the time, it's my black athletic jacket that absorbs endless warmth even in below freezing weather. This one I love for its endless pockets, each of them big enough to cram earbuds,

two phones, an ID card, and one small dinner roll—this makes it best for handling Number.

Not that I'd ever admit the “dinner roll” part to my sister Rebeka—she found week-old tater tots in my pockets when I was eight, and if she knew that I'm still aware of exactly how much food I can fit in my pockets, she would never let me live it down. Number wouldn't like that.

Even when I don't need to, I stuff my backpack full with at least two notebooks, a divider, the latest novel assigned for Language and Comp, my graphing calculator, my pencil box with the lenticular design that entrances everyone who looks at it, and three folders, all of which fit into the biggest pocket. This may seem like a lot to be dragging around, but trust me—it's not even half my locker size, and considering my high school is two floors, four hallways, and three buildings (two of which are gyms), its weight isn't much of an issue, not when Number is so much heavier.

Though I'd never admit it to most people, least of all Rebeka, I tend to squirrel food away in my backpack or jacket, often fruit snacks, an apple, or two clementines. It's for good reason—if I don't keep my blood sugar high enough, I can collapse and go into seizure-like episodes—but Number's arms get tighter when others notice that I have food in my pockets, and I don't enjoy blacking out in front of others, so the food doesn't stick around for long.

The smallest, most real things fill the pockets of my jackets and weigh down my hands, yet bear no metaphysical weight; instead, they are a counterbalance, lessening the pressure that clings to my back. It loosens the thread-like arms that threaten to stop my heart and tear my stomach to pieces, leaving me quivering in a ball on the floor, tears streaking my cheeks.

I don't like crying on the floor. It's cold.

It's this that I'm considering one grey-sky morning, standing at the edge of a damp-darkened street edged with leaves that press themselves in piles, all a bright golden yellow that fades to dull brown. I take this in, inhaling one last unhindered breath; I won't get another one until evening in the solitude of my room if Number gets its way, and Number *always* does.

Even before my feet carry me up the steps of the bus and onto a leather-plastic brown seat, I feel eyes on me, watching, and Number trembles, swells, and constricts its arms around my neck.

This is normal.

*... Number
trembles,
swells,
and constricts
its arms around
my neck.*

Number is a dark, swollen, inky mass clinging to my back with its countless thin, spindly arms wrapping around me, slipping through flesh and tightening around my spine, sternum, and each rib, winding against my throat and gut and heart. It has no gender, no face, and no voice, unidentifiable by any method except for the way its slimy body shoots pain through my nerves and leaks rotting sludge into my bloodstream, its wire-tendrils amplifying everything from feather-light touches to pinprick points.

I keep myself pressed to the window, cold metal biting through my jacket, head down and hood up, tongue heavy with the silence that Number stacks on it to weigh it down. There are permanent, faint shadows under my eyes, borne from countless nights of Number reaching into my brain and stealing away what little melatonin I have; this is what it means for me to survive, and so the tired ache in my bones is no more unfamiliar a burden to carry than Number is.

I rub my eyes, wincing as the sleep-crust drags against the soft skin above my cheekbones. The back of my seat jolts forward as a body crashes into the seat behind me, and I can feel Talyn laughing as Michael grins, muttering insults. Number releases a tiny, skittering bug from one of its fingers, letting it fall onto my arm, and I brush it away absently, reciting trigonometric identities in my head despite my growing concern that I won't memorize them in time for the quiz this afternoon. I still have to print out my essay for Rupp before lunch and finish that last question on my Spanish homework, and I reach into my backpack, wiping away a glob of Number's sludge from my neck and scribbling in my planner. I'll just tell Garcia I'm going to the bathroom and then print the essay out in the library.

When I stand, I can feel the staggering weight of Number with acuity; it's grown not in size but in density, bloating and quivering, counting each dark endeavor it slips into my head, every thought of carbon-stolen breath or swallowed toxicity. Still, piling off the bus is worse, if only for a moment—I'm never quite fast enough to get off first, and so, with a habitual weariness, I end up trapped between others. As it always does, Number reaches into my lungs and tugs away the air, pressing tight to my temples so that loneliness seeps into my skull like stagnant water. I smile and thank the bus driver, who gives me an indulgent smile before her eyes drift to Talyn and Michael, the twinkle in her eye flickering a little, and I duck my head, letting my hair fall into my face to hide a tiny smirk.

I have carried Number's weight for so long, I do not remember what it is to stand straight and tall without Number's suffocating arms tugging my shoulders down and forcing my head to bow, to sit in my room without seeing mice and rats skittering at the corners of my vision, to fall asleep without scratching, scratching, scratching at flies and spiders and parasites that aren't there. Still, I harbor no anger nor hatred towards Number—it's been with me so long, eating away at everything I could have been, nibbling at potential and wistful dreams, leaving hard-crumb feelings, ones that leave urges to slice open my own skin with razors, leave a slit in my femoral and watch red flow out. I cannot tell where Number ends and where I begin and everything that hurts Number hurts me, too; all I know is that if I stop fighting, if I submit even a little to these urges, if I let myself fall, if I trip for one moment and don't get back up, Number will consume me, and I don't know if there will be anything left.

Sometimes, I wonder if there's even anything left for Number to take, and I try to catalogue the snippets of what Number hasn't claimed: poking a fellow soprano in the side and teasing her until her face turns red; burying my fingers in Devonte's hair and reveling in how soft his curls are; visiting my mother at work and pressing kisses to her cheek; throwing my arms around Adam, a smile so big on my face it feels like it's about to burst free. These thoughts taste like sunlight and rainwater, and I hold them close, carrying them with me; it's not easier to breathe, but they make it so easy to pretend that Number doesn't exist, even with all its weight.

Alex, RaKaye, Megan, and Devonte stand sheltered by the bathroom doors in the school lobby, packed together in a circle, standing in the same spots with the same backpacks and faded-dye hairstyles. Number pricks the back of my neck, radiating bitter irritation and longing at the sight of them huddled together, and I nudge each of them, unable to manage even a quiet hello with the way Number wraps a tendril around my tongue and pins it to the floor of my mouth. I mumble in greeting, letting my face plant into Devonte's chest, and he wavers for a moment before he gives me a half-hearted squeeze, leaning away.

It's little more than a moment, but it's enough, and Number expands with sudden ferocity, sharp thorns digging into my skin as I back away unnoticed, unable to remain there any longer. Number is extravasating, radiating a sickly ooze that tastes of fury and despair, sliding down my throat, and I drown in it. I can feel my heart struggling, the ventricles and atriums fighting against Number's grip, and

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*There are things
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so I slip my earbuds in with shaking hands and let sound filter in. The music pushes back at Number's sludge, tugging at its thread-thin arms to loosen them just enough to let me breathe without my breakfast coming back up my throat.

There are things I always carry to lessen Number's weight.

First is an old cell phone, secured in a browning jelly case and a weathered, scratched screen protector; next, a pair of earbuds, wrapped and knotted, seconds away from breaking and leaving me stranded with no music to create a barrier between Number and I. The phone and earbuds never leave my pocket, always there for me to plug myself in and keep the needles at bay, a wall of bricks built from pulses of harmonies and melodies to keep me safe.

Second is my school laptop, carried at my side, forcing my arm into a stick-straight line that leaves my elbow creaking and sore. The versatility is worth the ache—internet, writing, reading, homework—all are unquestionable excuses and easy distractions in themselves, and they keep Number at bay as long as they hold my attention, giving me precious moments of air and lightness.

Third is a necklace, sometimes of rhinestones, sometimes fake gold and false pearls, sometimes crystal, but mostly jade, wrapped in silver and tied around my neck in a leather cord I already know I will wear until, quite literally, it rots off my body. It stays there, bounces when I run, always present for me to roll in my fingers while I gnaw at my lips, twiddle my fingers, bounce my thigh, rub my eyes—anything to keep my hands from shaking, to keep Number at bay until I can handle its weight again.

I carry these things with me now, letting them drag down my hands, distend my pockets, and press bruises into the space between my breasts, and even as Number trembles, still hissing and leaking rot into my bloodstream, I remind myself that today is still better than the worst days. Most of the time, the things I carry lessen Number's weight, a replacement for a small orange bottle filled with colorful, clattering chemicals, but on the bad days, I'm lucky enough to gather enough willpower to drag myself out of bed for a single drink of water. This is not one of the worst days—I refuse to let it be so, and besides, I need to get to U.S. History, and I can't worry about silly things like not being able to breathe properly or being unable to hold a pencil and write without my hands quivering.

This is normal. ☺



PAREIDOLIA

By Kai Kresek

My memories of myself before the thousand-mile flight that carried me from the low hanging clouds drifting above the Chinese province of Anhui, to the dry and dusty state of Colorado, are as grainy and disjointed as the home videos and photographs that embody the only physical evidence of this journey I endured eighteen years ago. Sometimes I sit alone, flipping through the pages of photo albums and watching film after film, with a vague sense of urgency. I'm convinced that perhaps, if I remember who I was as that two-year-old child, I could somehow figure out why I've become who I am today. My Chinese name means "the opening of new doors," but I have always felt like a shuttered house, within a locked gate, within a walled city.

In one shaky frame, I'm a stumbling sprout of a child in a little yellow sweater and squeaky shoes running through the whitewashed halls of a Chinese orphanage. I watch the video and I invent the sounds of other children, the amalgam of sweet and sour smells, and the feeling of thin carpeting giving way under my soft slippers. I stare into the eyes of the first picture ever taken of me—the one they sent my parents

in America months before they would arrive to adopt me. I have a perplexed look about me, as if I've forgotten something.

I misspoke before—there are more than just videos and pictures. There are stories I've been told time and time again. The first is the story of my birth. In my mind, it's an immaculate birth—one without parents. Of course this isn't true, but to imagine my birth parents is too abstract, and too painful, to attempt. Pareidolia causes their images to emerge from my mind's fog before shifting and slipping away. In reality, I'm told my birth parents loved me but couldn't care for me, so I was left on the stairs of a police station without even a name to keep me company. Is this why, throughout my life, I've always maintained a distance between myself and others, and why I've filled a moat of ice water around myself in the hopes that I could protect myself from being abandoned again? I desperately want someone to wade across it and find me because right now, I'm not strong enough to emerge on my own. I wonder that if someone did, would they find a little girl in a yellow sweater huddled in the corner, trying to remember how she'd ended up there?

Another story is about food. I've heard that there wasn't a lot of it at the orphanage, and so I would store as much of it as I could in my cheeks to save for later, and to protect it from being taken away too soon. When I arrived in America I was ravenous. There was more than enough but I couldn't stop eating. My parents did their best to control me, but I would scream for more—I would sit in my high chair and unleash terrible wails and cries that they told me broke their heart. There's a photograph of myself as a child in the darkened kitchen looking longingly into an empty bowl. There's a video of myself sobbing and throwing my dishes across the room in frustration. My hunger, this angry and impulsive monster, was buried eventually and I learned to eat like someone who knows that there's always enough. I forgot about it until years later and the monster's jaws re-emerged. Is it childish to imagine my hunger as a monster? It certainly seemed that way to me. I felt it before I saw it and when I saw it, it was never in the form I expected.

When I was a teenager, there was stress, sadness and insecurity. I hungered for control. Though I felt as if I were always hungry, I wouldn't eat for days. In this way, I mastered

*When I arrived
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eating.*

myself and derived pride from the strength it took to become so fragile. This phase was short and volatile. When I could starve no longer, I ate uncontrollably and spent hours bent over a toilet vomiting up myself. Hours stretched into years and there was a time when I became a monster; a pale, hollowed out girl who redirected the hate she felt for herself towards those who tried to love her. In the end, it was these people who, despite my anger and resistance, helped me to bury my monster once more. These memories are a chronic ache, moments that I know have left scars on more than the fingers of my right hand. I recall them in blurry, washed out colors and muddled pixels. I've never had a crystal-clear image of myself.

*I'm afraid that it means
that I am made up of
something immaterial
and inauthentic . . .*

I think that in attempting to understand, I'm also trying to absolve myself of responsibility. I want to believe that through these experiences, this sadness I've carried with me throughout my life was loaded onto my shoulders against my control. That somehow the events that have dissolved into time and space are what have closed me off and made the monster inside of me grow so big, not my own nature. Memories have the capacity to both comfort and nourish, as well as to shatter and suffocate. The more I pour over them and attempt to deconstruct and rearrange them in a way that makes sense, the more confounding they become. I see the twisted pines and the Huangshan peaks appearing in real life like the dreamy brushstrokes with which they're so often depicted in art. I see seven puzzled little girls arranged on the couch of a Chinese hotel looking lost and unsteady. I see a video of myself laughing for the first time and then another of myself tripping over a plastic train and bursting into tears.

In what picture have I become who I am, in what fleeting frame was another aspect of myself formed, and what

does it mean that I can't truly recall any of them in my mind? I'm afraid that it means that I am made up of something immaterial and inauthentic, like a story that was once true but has been chewed up, tasted, and regurgitated until nothing remains but the flavor of bile and the faint impression that there had once been something significant on the tip of my tongue.

I want you to know that in almost every way, I am fine. These are all thoughts that I try not to indulge in too often because they place a fine filter over my ability to recognize that I am almost obscenely fortunate. There's a feeling of immense guilt that accompanies sharing all of this because everything is so vastly and completely okay. I am warm, I am full, I am free. It's possible to live without an identity. It's one of those things a person could spend their life attempting to construct and never get farther than a step towards realizing. In the early hours of the morning, in the hollow moments between one task and another, and when I'm alone with my thoughts, I take the pieces of my past that I'm left with—scraps of images, the smell of a room, the glimpse of a familiar face—and use them to explain to myself why I am.

Two girls in brightly patterned night clothes stare up at the camera from the crib that they share. The sound of an orphanage nanny as she sings me a lullaby I can no longer understand. An image of her holding me tightly against her chest, the soft white fabric of her blouse cushioning my cheek. A hazy face, emerging from a dense mist, smiles down at me before fading away into the sounds of shoes against pavement and tri-tonal sirens from the nearby station. Then there's nothing, and I imagine it to have a milky color and to be cool to the touch. ☙





FREQUENT FLYER: WHY ISN'T DAD DEAD YET?

“I don't feel frightened by not knowing things. I think it's much more interesting.”

—Richard Feynman

“Innocence tinctures all things with brightest hues.”

—Edward Counsel

By Bruce Kirkpatrick

It's my birthday, February, 2002. I'm turning seven. My best friends have congregated at my house for a Spy Kids-themed extravaganza, complete with plastic briefcases filled with mirrored sunglasses and disguise mustaches for every child in attendance.

I have a good life. My brother, Greg, is six years older than me, a too-cool high schooler craving the freedom of college. My parents are overbearing with him; we call it “first-child syndrome¹.” He always needs to be home by midnight and can't have his door closed. Ever. They're less concerned with me—second-child syndrome²—I can close my door, disappear to my

1. First-child syndrome: A powerful evolutionary force driving parents to feel obligated to confirm the living and lucid presence of their first-born child, likely a consequence of desire for genetic legacy.

2. Second-child syndrome: A reprieve from first-child syndrome, in which

friends' houses for hours at a time, and existing rules are rarely enforced.

The party is over. My parents have been acting weird. They hardly seem to be enjoying our post-party viewing of Spy Kids. Black bags hang heavily, like storm clouds, under both of their eyes. They're probably just tired.

Mom doesn't work. She stays at home, taking care of my brother and me while Dad runs his practice. He's a doctor, so he doesn't have much free time. When he's home, he and I practice violin together (we're on a book of Bach partitas right now). Sometimes, we'll go golfing with Greg, although I'm not very good and Dad and Greg are both excellent.

Recently, Dad has been flying to St. Louis a lot. Mom told me why, but I wasn't really listening—something about one of his old classmates working there. Dad joked that he's going to have a million frequent flyer miles soon, if this keeps up.

Sometime after my birthday, Dad shows me that his neck is swollen while we're practicing violin—I reach out and feel it; it feels normal, but the tone of his voice and his expression inform me that it is not. He tells me that he's sick, which is why he has to go to St. Louis so often to see his classmate—she's an oncologist now, a cancer doctor. He says he was sick, kind of like this, when he was in medical school. He says he's going to get sicker before he gets better. I ask if he's sick like Mom, since I know she has something called "M.S." that makes her tired and achy. He says no, that this is a different kind of sick; he tells me that it's called Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. I have no idea what he's talking about. I've been sick before, and didn't need to go all the way to St. Louis.

Oh, well. Grown-ups are weird. Dad will get better.

Weeks later, Dad picks me up from a tennis lesson with a new haircut—he's bald now.



It's my birthday, February, 2006. I'm turning eleven. Dad and I have flown to St. Louis. He has cancer. I understand this to

parents feel no need to intervene in any potential mischief their second-born child might be involved in, likely a consequence of exhaustion from raising their first child (and hell, they've got one to spare now).

Grown-ups are weird.

be a bad thing, something that makes you very sick and requires unpleasant intervention. This trip to St. Louis (Dad goes almost once every two weeks), I've come along to meet Dad's old friends that he stays with and to visit the "City Museum³," a birthday adventure I've looked forward to since seeing pictures of the building months ago.

Dad's friends (an older couple, Mike and Cathy) are nice in a strained sort of way—they know something bad that I don't, but they're trying their best to be happy for my birthday. Mike is a giant of a man with a crest of grey hair, like the feathers of some enormous bird of prey. Cathy is small and frail and her hands tremble when she talks. Dad says that he met them while he was a student here, in St. Louis, and that Mike was working at Washington University at the same time. Mike says that they played basketball together and have been friends ever since. Dad was my basketball coach, but he stopped last year when he got too sick to go to all the games.

One morning during our trip, Mike takes Dad and me to a huge building where Dad says he trained—Barnes-Jewish Hospital—to see Dad's old classmate. We take an elevator and walk down many hallways to arrive at a huge waiting room, filled with the sickest people I have ever seen. Everyone in the room seems like they could die at any moment; some hack into handkerchiefs and scarves, others slip in and out of consciousness, many are wired into tall machines next to their chairs: some kind of vampire robot, pulling the life out of its host.

We wait a while in this room—I try to do a few of the cardboard puzzles sitting on the waiting tables—before a lady behind a desk calls my dad's name. She guides us through some heavy doors in the room to a back hallway lined with offices and examination rooms. One of the examination rooms is open, and the woman leads us to the door. Waiting inside is a woman reading a file on the computer with her back to us.

My dad is excited to see her: "Nancy," he exclaims. "I brought my youngest!"

3. St. Louis' "City Museum" is a local treasure; a city-block sized former bank, now inhabited by miles of slides and scaffolding for children and adults to climb, slide, and get stuck on.

The woman turns around and seems equally excited to see him: “Don! Good to see you.”

*He says he's really
starting to rack up
those frequent flyer miles.*

Dad introduces me to the woman and we talk a little. She is Nancy Bartlett, Koman Chair of Medical Oncology at Washington University School of Medicine, a Very Important Person with Lots of Titles. She and my dad went to medical school together, and now she's his doctor.

After the introductions and pleasantries, my dad lays down on the examination table and Nancy probes around his body with her gloved hands. She pushes on his neck, under his arms, along his waist—I haven't seen my dad like this before. He's weak and requires someone else's help. During the exam, he and Nancy throw a lot of big, technical, words—words like “prognosis” and “serum LDH” and “metastases,” at each other.

She hooks Dad up to one of the machines I saw in the waiting room for what seems like an eternity. Dad's skin tone pales and he sweats while he's plugged in; the vampire machine is sucking the life out of my dad, and the doctor is doing this on purpose. Dad is sicker than I thought.

The next day, Mike and Cathy take me to the City Museum. Dad's not feeling well and needs to stay in bed. They're fun, but not as fun as Dad.

After another day, Dad and I go to the St. Louis airport to fly back to Washington. Dad says he's feeling better. When we say goodbye to Mike and Cathy, Dad tells them that he'll see them in a few weeks. He says he's really starting to rack up those frequent flyer miles.



It's my birthday, February, 2011. I'm turning sixteen. Dad and I are practicing driving in my high school's parking lot.

He takes more time off now—in the last two years, we've started doing a lot of things as a family: a tour of Europe, week-long stays at golf resorts like Bandon Dunes and Pebble Beach, weekend trips to the beach with our dogs.

Growing up was a cruel and unusual process. Middle school was filled with unspeakable awkwardness, most of which I've since blocked from my memory⁴.

I remember a few things: my 8th grade encounter with alcohol⁵, the ever-present regret associated with reading the entirety of Stephenie Meyer's Twilight saga⁶, and that Dad had ongoing cancer treatments until I was in 7th grade. Mom told me he was in remission now, which meant he had an "acceptable" amount of cancer in his body for someone who wanted to continue living for the foreseeable future, and didn't need any more treatments for the time being.

Greg has been in college since 2007. He's going to school in Tacoma, an hour and a half drive north of our house in Longview. Dad and I visit him when we drive to Tacoma for violin lessons—one of Dad's favorite pastimes.

High school has been a breeze. Homework is mindless and brief, obligations are few and far between, and a reckless sense of freedom guides my actions.

Death is largely absent from a young person's mind. Until tragedy strikes, the concept of deletion from the physical world seems abstract and alien. My friend Jake's dad drowned last year. The death of a father is the death of an internal God; I had not seriously considered that my dad would die at some point. He had been sick, very sick, and was treated successfully. Jake's dad's funeral was one of the saddest things I've ever attended; so many people weeping in one place is an overwhelming experience. I felt so fortunate to have not been in Jake's position, and cried a little bit after the service at the thought of losing my father.

Until 2008, my career goals were in the financial sector. After the stock crisis, I put off considering life after high school

*The death of a
father is the death
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God...*

4. Unfortunately, the internet does not reflect my internal censorship of these years as I had the tremendous misfortune of discovering YouTube before graduating from the adolescent nuisance phase of maturation.

5. This was the first of several terrible experiences with Smirnoff green apple flavored vodka.

6. I will actively deny this in conversation.

for a few years. Now, I decide to further entrench my family history in the medical field. I ask Greg about different types of doctors—he's studying to be one—and he tells me about cardiologists (like our dad's old friend Big Greg), gastroenterologists (like our dad), and oncologists (like Nancy). Greg tells me that he'd like to be an oncologist, like Nancy, since she saved our Dad.

I'm not sure what Greg means when he says that Nancy saved Dad. Greg says I'll have to talk to Dad about it. It's not a pressing concern, and it leaves my mind as easily as it entered.



It's my birthday, February, 2016. I'm turning twenty-one. My family has gathered in Evergreen, Colorado, at our new house. Dad took a job here two years ago and Greg has lived in Denver since 2012 after accepting a position in the MD/PhD program at CU's medical school. I'm in my senior year of a Chemical and Biological Engineering major at CU Boulder. I'm planning on being a doctor, like my brother, like our dad.

I have no illusions now regarding what happened to my dad. He should have died.

In 2002, my father was diagnosed with late-stage Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, with metastases originating from his lymph nodes on many of his major organs, including his lungs. His prognosis was five or fewer years, or, with an experimental treatment, ten or fewer years.

This was not his first bout with cancer. When he was in medical school (before my brother or I were born), he was diagnosed with testicular cancer: he went through several weeks of radiation therapy and an orchiectomy.

The discovery of his lymphoma in 2002 marked a spiritual rebirth for my father. He became deeply interested in religion and the notion of life after death—maybe mortality became more concerning with the extant threat of cancer. Elaine Pagels, Christopher Hitchens, and C.S. Lewis⁷ books littered the shelves of his office, he attended church services of varying religions, and he drew deeply within himself. If you

Nowadays, if you ask him if he believes in the afterlife, he'll tell you that he's "not sure, although people should be nice to each other."

7. *On Christianity*, not the *Martian Chronicles of Narnia*.

ask him if he believes in the afterlife, he'll tell you that he's "not sure, although people should be nice to each other."

According to his initial prognosis, he should have been dead three years ago. Since 2011, he's had two small sets of radiation to remove a tumor behind his eye (2012) and to re-irradiate some lymph nodes in his neck (2014). His newfound passion for hiking with our dogs has him in the best shape of his life.

The medical care my father received was, fortunately for my family, some of the best in the world. Barnes-Jewish Hospital was recently ranked sixth in the country and Dr. Bartlett is a leading expert in the field of Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. The experimental treatment he received was unusually effective, and his current life expectancy is nearly that of someone without cancer.

Dr. Bartlett and her family are visiting us in a few months. They love to see our family in good health and spirits after seeing my father so often during his illness. Nancy especially loves to interrogate my brother on his research: he's doing his PhD in cancer biology.

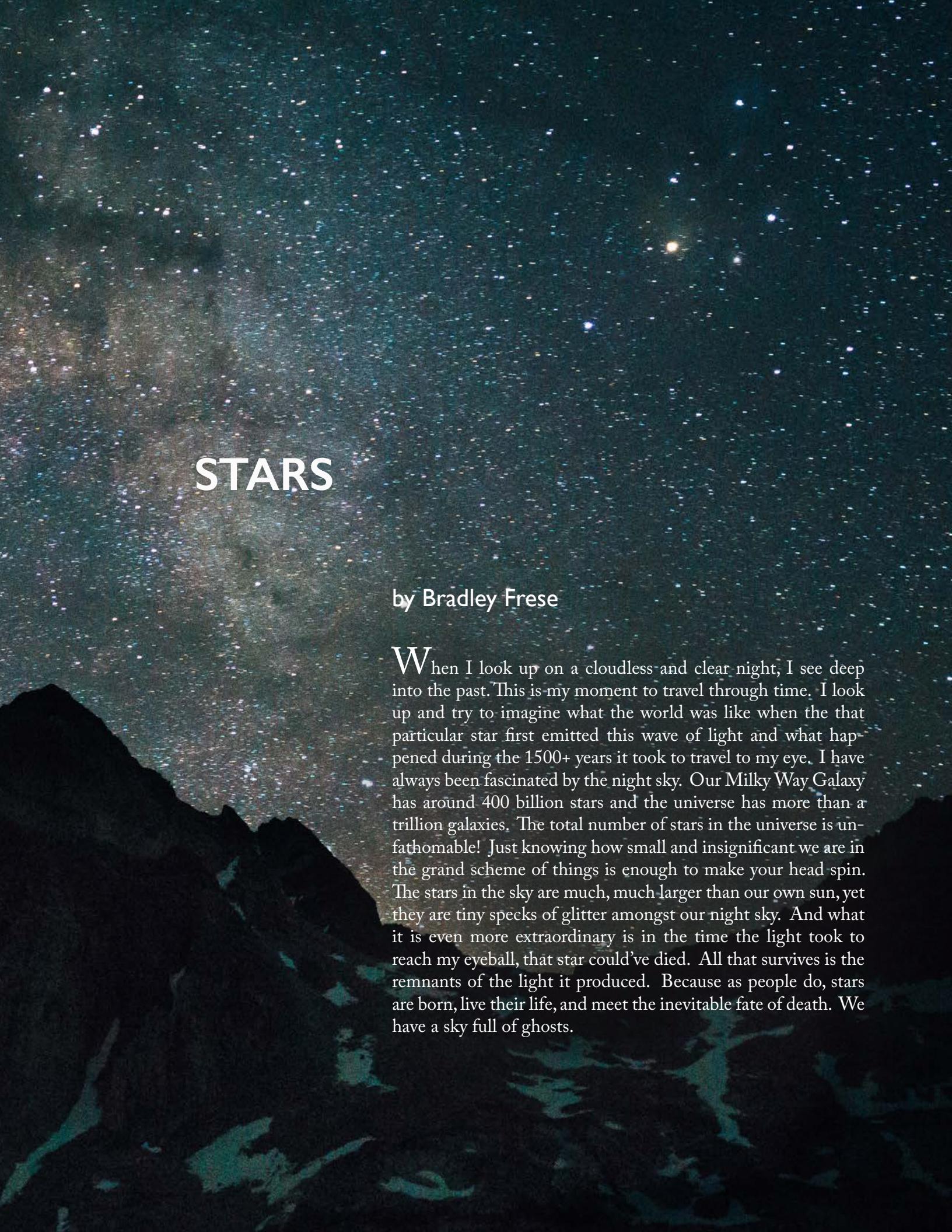
I'm applying to MD/PhD graduate programs—the same kind Greg is in—to pursue a career in medicine. Witnessing my father's salvation through clinical research and later understanding what I had seen has imbued in me a sense of obligation to medical progress.

Although much of our family time is spent discussing the future—Greg's and my upcoming research plans, our Dad's ongoing Master's degree work at Harvard (a new project he's taken on in the last year)—we still find ourselves reflecting on our lives in Washington. We sold our house there a few years ago, and Dad sees Nancy for a checkup once every six months nowadays. We're glad to be somewhere new⁸, especially somewhere as close to the mountains as Evergreen. Plus, if we want to take a trip back to the Pacific Northwest, the plane tickets are free; we've accumulated a number of frequent flyer miles in the last fifteen years. ☙

8. Where it rains less.



Photo by Noah Dreeban



STARS

by Bradley Frese

When I look up on a cloudless and clear night, I see deep into the past. This is my moment to travel through time. I look up and try to imagine what the world was like when that particular star first emitted this wave of light and what happened during the 1500+ years it took to travel to my eye. I have always been fascinated by the night sky. Our Milky Way Galaxy has around 400 billion stars and the universe has more than a trillion galaxies. The total number of stars in the universe is unfathomable! Just knowing how small and insignificant we are in the grand scheme of things is enough to make your head spin. The stars in the sky are much, much larger than our own sun, yet they are tiny specks of glitter amongst our night sky. And what it is even more extraordinary is in the time the light took to reach my eyeball, that star could've died. All that survives is the remnants of the light it produced. Because as people do, stars are born, live their life, and meet the inevitable fate of death. We have a sky full of ghosts.



Birth

The birth of a star is no small feat. It takes place in parts of the universe where there is a concentration of clouds of gas and dust. These areas of conception are called nebulas. You can actually see the Orion nebula with a pair of binoculars (look right below his belt). These are beautiful and vast areas of space that act a bit like a nursery. Once the conditions are favorable, physics takes its course. The gases condense and collapse under their own gravity. Chains of nuclear reactions begin and they ignite. How incredible is it that something life depends upon starts from something as small and insignificant as some molecules and cosmic dust? The birth of a star gives hope and opportunity. It is possible the newly formed star might foster the right conditions to create life on one of its planets. The birth of a star is not that different from the birth of a human. It's miraculous and beautiful. How can something so complex like a star and a human be so easily conceived? Certain conditions must be met and it requires bits and pieces from different things, but the process is relatively easy. Bringing a new child into the world is a wonder of science as much as the birth of a star. It is a representation of new life and with that, it brings a new hope. Who knows what this new baby will grow up to accomplish? It could have the secrets to the universe's deepest and darkest mysteries, or the cure to the world's worst diseases. This new child could possibly be the missing puzzle piece to unlock the secrets of the universe. There is so much potential in the future of the child and so much potential in the future of a new star.



Just knowing how small and insignificant we are in the grand scheme of things is enough to make your head spin.

Life

The life span of a star with a similar mass to that of our sun is about 10 billion years. Think about that number: 10 billion. So much can happen in the life of a star. Look at Earth, for example. In less than half of the predicted lifetime of our sun, Earth has created complex life from the simplest of ingredients, and through evolution, I am now sitting here ruminating on the

*Nothing is
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beauty of stars. Who knows what the world will be like in the second half of the sun's life? Did you know we are all made of stardust? Everything we are and everything in the universe originated from stardust. It is regularly floating through us even today. It directly connects us to the universe. What a concept! Our sun is middle-aged, and going through a midlife transformation similar to that of a man or woman. It might not be able to buy a new red convertible or trade-in its planets for new younger and hotter ones, but it's going through changes nonetheless. It has temper flares and solar outbursts. It's a seasoned veteran at this point, gradually getting older and hotter. In a way, it is a bit like a proud grandparent with eight orbiting children of its own and several billion grandchildren. It is there for the best of times and it is there for the worst of times. Right now, it is witnessing life on one of its planets like a proud parent seeing their child graduate or getting married. It's a stoic and unemotional being, but sometimes you can't help but think the sun knows how much it is relied upon. It is steady and dependable. Our sun has been viewed as a God for much of its life. So many cultures have worshipped our mighty sun and have been at the mercy of a giant fiery ball of gas. The life of a star may seem largely uninteresting, but it is there to provide stability and support. It keeps you warm and happy. I see my parents as strong and supportive as a star. They're always there even if I can't see them or feel their love.



Death

Everything must end. It's just how the universe works. Nothing is immortal and that includes something as powerful and massive as stars. Some stars are destined to collapse under their own gravity and blow out all their gas. This is a spectacular sight to see. In about 5 or so billion years, our sun will begin to expand like the gas bubble it is. No one will be around to witness the death of our star. Life will be long gone. Our sun will expand, and through that expansion get so hot that it will kill anything left on our planet. Earth will be a fried crispy rock. It's a bit of a frightening concept. Just all of a sudden ceasing to exist. No more thoughts. No more movements. No more sights or smells.

Just nothing. It all just stops. I don't like to get hung up on the idea of death, but death is inevitable. Sometimes you have to think about it. Death is reason I want to do something that will have an impact long after I burn out. There is no telling if I will have a lasting impression, but just like stars, certain lucky beings do something special. Stars can have a lasting impression after they die. If a star is massive enough (something around 10 times the mass of our sun), they collapse into something so dense it creates a gravity field strong enough to pull everything near it inside without the possibility of an escape. This is the creation of a black hole. There is possibly nothing more mysterious and incomprehensible and just flat out weird than a black hole. It does things that baffled the greatest minds in physics, like Newton, Einstein, and Hawking. My favorite concept of astronomy is the black hole. I think it is because I want to be a black hole. I want to do something so great in my life that after I die, I will have a lasting effect. I want my memory to burn on. It's a comforting feeling to have when thinking about death; knowing that I might be physically and mentally gone, but still impacting someone, somewhere, much like the effect of a black hole. I want people will talk about me long after I'm gone. I want to be remembered, but doesn't everyone want that? Just like stars, not everyone gets to be a black hole. However, unlike stars we get to choose to do something that will have a lasting impression. Stars are either massive enough or not, but humans have the ability to choose to do great things so memories can be everlasting. Einstein, Newton, Hubble, Sagan, Copernicus, all these men are black holes. But, thanks to recent discoveries by their colleague, Dr. Hawking, it turns out black holes aren't even immortal. Even they will eventually evaporate—so I guess death will always win. ☀





COLOR ME OBVIOUS

By Kate Petrik

I've always been intrigued by the concept of my own death. I'm not suicidal, by any means. No part of me wishes to die, but I romanticize it. To close my eyes and drift the Lake of Shining Waters to Camelot by way of a flowery grave—Like Anne Shirley? An Unfortunate Lilly Maid? No? Irrelevant. That was an attempt to restore some sort of tangible normalcy to my childhood, hoping that someone else may have also spent their Saturday mornings fantasizing over the exploits of Anne of Green Gables, rather than drooling over the Teletubbies. My parents were marked intellectuals. Anyway, Anne—she had no deliberate intention of killing herself either; turns out she was only plagued with a case of vapid narcissism and an affinity for Medieval literature. But to each their own I guess. My thoughts of death come and go quickly, like this split-second day dream I have about making out with my high school soccer coach, harmlessly intertwining themselves amongst other monotonous thoughts, like what I want for lunch, or how I haven't flossed in a few days.

I've never told my parents, and it's not that I don't feel comfortable sharing this information with them. It's just that

I've told very few people. Mainly because it would be an inconvenience. Once I admit—out loud—that I regularly think about death, they will want to rationalize the fact that it could be indicative of some deeply-rooted emotional issue. My mom would definitely take it as a blow to her motherhood, and my dad would readily seize the moment as an opportunity for one of his psychoanalytic lectures. And just like that, there goes, yet again, another two hours of my life that I could've invested elsewhere. A nap. A run. Anything. I love my parents, but I'm fine.



I make lists. A fair amount of them. An abnormal and slightly concerning amount of them, at least that's how my mom put it. She tells this story about the way I used to throw fits over my socks when I was four. Unless the seam was perfectly aligned across all ten tips of my tiny toes, I'd promptly place the matched pair on the floor, and refuse to wear them entirely. She called it early onset OCD. I called it simply being unable to understand how someone would settle for anything less than perfection when it came to the positioning of their socks OCD.

The notes app in my phone looks like that of someone newly diagnosed with amnesia—page after page of seemingly useless information to anyone other than myself, or maybe someone trying to steal my identity. Whether it's song lyrics that I want to remember, a to-do list from 2015, or the names of people I want in my wedding, I can't seem to delete them. It's like I think that I'll forget, but I won't. I'm positive actually—aside from my social security number, which I legitimately could not retain even if stapled into the palm of my hand—if any of these lists were to ever disappear, I could recite them from memory. Like this:

Lies I've Told Today:

Initially, I wanted this to be a poem, but I got lazy and gave up. It's aimless, but has evolved into more of an inside joke with myself. I have a lot of those. So now every time I tell a lie, I'll type it out and chuckle. These are my latest and greatest.

Yes, I'm registered to vote at my current address.

I'm just super tired.

Wow, that's so cool.

I wish I had some profound explanation for why, exactly, I would die to meet any of these individuals . . .

Songs I Want Played At My Funeral:

In high school, I told my two best friends that if I were to ever die prematurely, they were to be in charge of my posthumous mixtape. I instructed them to play the following, only the following, and to not feel bad if they laughed at the service.

Con te Partiro by Andrea Bocelli

Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen

Send Me On My Way by Rusted Root

Sweet Avenue by Jets to Brazil

Songs That I Know Every Word To And Will Never Get Old Until The Day I Die:

(See above list)

Surprise. It's the same list. Coincidence? I'm not really sure.

Halloween Costume Ideas:

Last year, I planned my costume for about six months. I wasn't dressed as Avril Lavigne. I was Avril Lavigne. Naturally, it took a few days to transition back to reality. I'm not a Canadian punk idol. It was tough, but I made it back okay. This list is by far the most extensive, so I'll spare you an extra two minutes, and cut it to my top four.

The Hash Slinging Slasher

Buttercup from The Princess Bride

Rex Kwando

A dad

Famous People I'd Want To Get Dinner With:

I wish I had some profound explanation for why, exactly, I would die to meet any of these individuals. I guess they exude extremely endearing energy that I'd hope to pick up on. I also would really just love to know exactly what Julie Andrews smells like. Probably cookies. Yeah, Kevin Spacey smells tastefully of aged Bourbon, and Steve Martin definitely smells like aftershave and freshly cut grass. If I'm wrong, I'll be sorely disappointed. But I'm pretty positive I'm right.

Lucille Ball

Kevin Spacey

Julie Andrews

Jimmy Fallon

Ellen DeGeneres
Steve Martin

Things That Genuinely Make Me Happy:

These all sound like they came straight from those text posts on social media that normally make me want to scratch my eyes out and question the individuality of our nation's youth. But then again, I am 20 years old and still cruise Tumblr on a fairly regular basis. I guess happy things are sometimes universally cliché.

Running without feeling tired

The weightlessness you feel while skiing through powder

The warmth of a fireplace against your back

Coffee

When babies smile at you

Being the first person awake in the mornings

*It's unfortunate
really that such
a cool name can
belong to such
an uncool person.*

People I Can Hangout With Indefinitely And Not Feel Depressed:

I pride myself in being good at people. Absolutely nothing is worse than chatting up the weather with an acquaintance, but it's unavoidable, and exercising one's proficiency in small talk is just part of being a decent human being. I go through bouts of "depression". But I don't want any pity. That's not my motive here. Depression is common, and I don't dwell on it. Sometimes I give away my own happiness trying to make other people happy, so I'm working on becoming more conscious of when it's happening, and appreciating those who don't drain it from me.

Mom/Dad

Any of my siblings

Grandma

Haley

Scott

Amos... dogs are people too

Annie

Names I Like:

A good number of names on this list (4...) were taken from persons I've had, let's say, friendly relations with. Given that information, I'm fairly convinced that at least half of my physical attraction to a person is in direct correlation to how much I like their name. I'm not crazy. It's unfortunate really that

such a cool name can belong to such an uncool person. Any way. I digress.

Macaulay

Dakota

Porter

Lennon

Hunter

Keaton

Asher

Luke

Callan

Lyrics That Get Me Every Time:

I view hipsters as people who actively diverge to belong. I'd like to think that I'm too multifaceted to be defined by such a mindless term. Then again, that kind of sounds like something a pretentious hipster would say. My acid reflux is triggered every time the word is casually thrown my direction—Which, ironically, is often—I'm actually starting to worry about the structure of my esophagus at this point, but there's just something about the masses that has always turned me off. In the third grade, all the girls in my class bought these new pleated skirts, so, naturally, I went and bought camo cargo shorts. The visual is sickening, yes, but no one else had them, and frankly, I thought the pocket storage was economical.

Your fear of normalcy is hardly strange

Let's be freaks, plain clothes police

Let's be deliberate, because it's obvious to me

Deliberately weird is pretty obvious.

So color me obvious

I just want to be happy half the time

And blue only when I have the time.



I attend all social gatherings in the same fashion that one would attend a friend of a friend's party—one where there's top 40 music, but no booze to keep you drunk enough to enjoy it—I show up, dance the hardest, laugh the loudest, and find excuses to leave early. So much so, that my friends call me the Lil Dipper ...

They don't. I just came up with that actually, but I wish they did. That'd be kind of cool. College is a weird place.

It's exciting. It's confusing. It's depressing.

❧ ☘

The sadness comes in waves. It's when I'm alone that it becomes most intense. Being around people helps, but I really enjoy being alone.

I mull over death because I can't control it. I can't shove it into the pockets of my cargo shorts. I can't throw it on the floor, and refuse to acknowledge it entirely. I can't just jot it down, or confine it to a list.

I can't be truly full of life without experiencing all emotion deeply. So why am I waiting for you to see that I'm alive? ☘





NO, NOT LIKE THAT

by Talicia Montoya

Steam rose from the surface of the water, curling around our flushed faces, and glow sticks shimmered below at our feet. My friends and I were playing a game of truth or dare at Tia's birthday party at the end of my senior year of high school, which became more like truth or truth since none of us wanted to leave the warmth of the hot tub. As with any game of truth or dare, the questions focused mostly on a single topic—sex.

In the beginning we asked each other questions like “Which teacher do you think is hottest?” and “Which of the Avengers would you like to be in a threesome with?” and “Who in our class would you most like to bang?” Around the circle we went, only giving pause when it came to me. My question: “What was the weirdest sex dream you had?” I was stumped, unable to think of even one sex dream, weird or not. It took me a moment to think of anything that might qualify. Finally, it came to me. “I had a dream that my boyfriend came to my house with his hands behind his back and asked if he could mash something against my face. I thought it was going to be pie, but he wound up kissing me. All I wanted was pie.” My answer brought

a round of laughter, and they couldn't believe that was the closest thing I'd ever had to a sex dream, but they accepted it and continued on with the game.

Eventually, they stopped asking me questions; I didn't have the answers they wanted because none of the questions applied to me. I'd never given much thought to sex or looking at people and thinking "I want them inside me." It was a foreign concept, one I never identified with nor wanted to identify with.

Before the game ended, Tia turned to me after I apologized for not being able to answer any of the questions and said, "It's okay that you're asexual."

Her words stuck with me because it was the first time I'd ever considered the possibility that "asexual" could apply to me. Not the first time I heard the word, but the first time I thought of it in conjunction with myself.

*It's okay that
you're asexual.*



In middle school, the pages in my journal were dog-eared and scribbled on, trying to emulate what I had seen in the movies of girls doodling hearts and flowers around boys' names. None of my doodles came close to the Valentine-esque aesthetic of the diaries in the movies; they always fell flat because I was only trying to do what I thought people were supposed to do when they had an infatuation with someone else.

I used to be notorious for having a new crush almost every week. It was an exaggeration, obviously. There was Josh, Anthony, Taylor, Benjamin, Patrick, Rory, Roland, and Austin. My mom had poked fun at me, asking, "Who's the flavor of the week?"

My infatuations, however, stemmed only from the idea I had to have a crush on someone. All my friends had their crushes; they'd tell me how they'd kiss the posters of celebrities they liked. I started putting up posters of my own—posters of Taylor Lautner and Orlando Bloom—but I never felt nor understood the compulsion to put my lips to paper and imagine they were their actual lips. I only ever liked to look at them.



*It was a week or
two after
National Coming
Out Day when I
began to
suspect I was
something other
than straight.*

They tried several times to have the “sex talk” with me before I went off to college. My mom called me into her room to discuss the importance of condoms, my grandma visited me in my room to remind me how, “if I let too many people spit into my cup, no one would want to drink from it,” and my dad, I’m still not sure what he wanted to say.

It was two in the morning; the only ones awake were my parents and me. All my other siblings were sleeping except for my brother, who was sixteen at the time. He was the reason they were still up; me, I was too focused on *Skyrim* to sleep.

The phone rang only once because Mom was quick to answer. “Where are you?” A beat of silence, broken by the dying scream of an enemy character on the television screen. “Stay there, I’m coming to get you.” She hung up and grabbed her keys, leaving with a “Catalina’s mom drank, he needs a ride back.”

And then there were two.

My dad joined me on the couch, watching me let loose another arrow and kill another enemy. “So,” he began, “about sex—” He left the statement open for me to pick up and continue the conversation.

Pausing the game, I turned to face him. “Not interested.”

“At all?”

“Nope.”

He seemed confused but relieved. “Well, good talk.”

I returned to my game. They were confused by my utter lack of interest in sex, confused but didn’t question it. I insisted I had other things I was more interested in at the time—my stories, drawings, and video games. Not much time for thoughts of sex when you spend most of your mental efforts thinking of new idea to torture your characters or how to draw a properly proportioned human body.

Enter college—a time for change, for newfound freedom and self-sufficiency, for realizing how sex-obsessed everyone is. Maybe obsessed isn’t the right word, but it’s hard to escape the subject of sex when you find yourself living in the LGBTQIA friendly hall. I made friends easily enough, but it was strange to be considered the one straight friend in a myriad of gay, pansexual, and bisexual individuals. We joked

about it often; how innocent I was and how they'd teach me all about the different kinds of sex. And for a couple months, I did think I was the only straight one in my group of friends.

It was a week or two after National Coming Out Day when I began to suspect I was something other than straight. In the middle of a round of BS, Ev, one of my new friends, announced, "I'm so sexually frustrated. It's fucking ridiculous!"

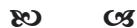
"What does sexual frustration even feel like?" I'd never experience sexual frustration; I was never really a sexual being. Sure, I found people aesthetically attractive, but the feeling never went further than enjoying their presence and looks.

Ev gave pause before speaking, probably because she'd never given serious thought to describing sexual frustration. Her final answer: "It's like I want to have sex with so many people, but I can't."

Not much of a helpful description, especially for me, but I didn't press for more.

Later, my roommate, Ashley, mentioned how sexually frustrated she was, but she described it more as a desire to cuddle with people and be physically affectionate. The sheer coincidence of having two people lament their sexual frustrations called into attention what I was feeling, or more, not feeling, wasn't what the typical college student felt. While many people may not be as vocal about it, I figured a lot of people wanted and thought about sex, even in passing, more than I was.

It made me wonder if being straight meant feeling sexual frustration, whether I could be something other than straight. But I knew I wasn't gay or pansexual or bisexual. It made me wonder what I was.



For the next couple weeks, I spent my time walking around campus, searching for fellow students who I found to be the most visually pleasing. It was a test, trying to see if I could imagine myself in physically intimate situations with these perfect strangers. I thought if I could, it meant I wasn't actually asexual. Girls in well-fitting jeans and knee-high boots, boys in leather jackets and sunglasses—none of them I imagined myself being with sexually. All I ever wanted was to look at them.

*Wait, so you
reproduce by
binary fission?*

According to a study regarding human sexuality, only 1% of the population is asexual. My roommate, mostly joking, partially not, said that's probably overestimating the amount of asexual people there are.

Of all the people I knew, other than myself, my friend Johnny was the only other asexual I'd ever met, so it was only natural I felt closer to him in a way I didn't with all my other friends.

On more than one occasion, Ashley brought her boyfriend over, I had texted Johnny telling him she brought Simon over and asked if I could swing by. Every time, he said, "Of course," because he understood exactly how much I couldn't stand seeing them cuddle together in her bed, kissing and giggling and leaving hickies on each other's necks.

It got to the point where as soon as the two of them walked in, I gathered my laptop and walked down the hall to join Johnny in watching reruns of *Forensic Files* or the animated series of *Batman*. Because he disliked seeing public displays of affection just as much as I did, he had his door open to me should I need an escape from the sexual tension of two college students in love.

Coming out to my friends was easy. It made sense to them because they knew I had never been into the concept of sex. It wasn't a huge deal because they saw it coming. I'd been vocal about how often I'd found sex scenes in movies and television series to be superfluous and how I didn't understand sex jokes or why people do unfathomable things they do during sex.

The only hitch was when Tia's boyfriend at the time, Josh, said, "Wait, so you reproduce by binary fission?"

I literally face palmed. "No, not like that," I said.

"But that's what asexual means."

"That's the scientific definition, not the sexual orientation."

"Whatever," he said, "You do you, or not do you, in your case."



"T, can you come back here?" My mother called to me from the bedroom in the back as I read in the living room. "Close the door," she instructed when I entered her room.

It was never a good sign when my mom wanted to talk to me with the door closed, but I did as told and sat on the edge of her bed, waiting for an earful of whatever it was I might've done wrong

“So, Dad tells me you’re asexual,” she began. I had told him first. I nodded. “What does that mean?”

I took a deep breath, knowing this conversation had to happen sooner or later. “It means I don’t feel sexual attraction.”

“How do you know?”

“Know what?”

“That you don’t feel sexual attraction?”

Resisting the urge to expel and exasperated sigh, I said, “Because I’ve never wanted to have sex with anyone.”

“But you’ve had boyfriends.”

“I only went out with them because I figured why not.”

“This isn’t something you’ve read in a book and self-diagnosed, is it?”

“No.” My voice was sharper than it should have been, but the question itself was offensive. It implied there was something inherently wrong with it, implied it was a sickness in need of curing. It isn’t something you diagnose; it’s not a disease or disorder.

She didn’t seem to register the shortness of my response, only continued interrogating me. “Your dad and I didn’t make you think sex is bad or gross, did we?” She was worried they had ruined sex forever for me because of how badly they reacted when they found out my brother was watching porn.

“No. It’s just not something that interests me.”

“How long have you been it?”

As if I could suddenly become it. “Umm, since ever.” I didn’t know how else to answer and was sure the tone of my voice was less than kind.

“When did you start thinking you were asexual?”

“Just before the summer, I guess.” And I relayed the details of Tia’s party to her, hopefully stemming the flow of her questions. She listened, mouth pursed, to the progression of my discovery from early June to late November. I saw it in her eyes—she didn’t get it, couldn’t fathom how I had a lack of sexual interest—but I had no clue how I could make her understand.

Cameron, the Australian grad student with an oboe, whispered compliments in the dark while we watched a movie.

I had tried dating. I say tried because each conversation over coffee, each discussion over dinner felt forced, as if I were an actor in the role of someone who had the potential to be sexually interested in the other.

Richard, the twenty-three-year-old third grade teacher, said how he was admiring me from across the awkwardly small table at a Starbucks. His mostly forgotten cup of coffee sat beside his hand as he filled every second of silence between us with small talk. Mine was almost gone because what else was there to do other than drink when you couldn't find words to offer.

Cameron, the Australian grad student with an oboe, whispered compliments in the dark while we watched a movie. I had to resist the urge to shush him because, while he seemed to have a fixation on stroking my arm and inching ever closer to me, I was genuinely interested in the movie's plot.

None of them lasted longer than the second date. I couldn't keep playing the role they thought I was because I felt I was deceiving them. They thought they were dating a pretty girl who was straight, if not, bisexual, a pretty girl who would find them physically attractive and might even get into bed with them somewhere down the line, when all I wanted was an engaging conversation and good company.

With Tim, I thought I should try telling him outright in the hopes of alleviating the uncomfortable feel I'd be lying to him if I didn't.

"What does that mean? What's it like?" he'd asked.

My go-to answer for such questions had become part of a script. "It means I don't experience sexual attraction. And it's just like I have little to no interest in sex."

"That's bizarre and awesome."

I wasn't sure how to take his response, both the bizarre bit and the awesome bit. To me it wasn't bizarre because it had always been how I felt, even when I didn't have a word for it. But I'd never had anyone give a somewhat positive response. Everyone had always questioned whether I actually was what I said, either that, or they were neutral to it, took it at face value and moved on.

"Do you feel like it gives you any advantages or disadvantages?" he asked.

A moment of silence passed as I considered. “I don’t really think it gives me an advantage,” I admitted. “Other than never knowing what it’s like to be sexually frustrated.” This brought a little laugh from his end. “But the hard part, I guess, is finding people who would still be interested in a possible relationship without sex.”

Without sex, it seemed any relationship would become less, no more than an abnormally close friendship. This was the case, especially with me, since I couldn’t even do kissing.

One day, I had asked my friend Emma why people get pleasure out of kissing. I told her how it was basically smashing the meat of your mouth against the meat of another person’s mouth. She laughed, saying, “Well, when you put it like that. It’s hard to see how anyone would get pleasure out of it.”

It wasn’t the first time I wondered what made a relationship between lovers who don’t have sex different than a relationship between close friends.

“So what are you looking for?” The question was always the same though the faces behind it always changed. What are you looking for in regard to dating and relationships?

I used to tell them, “I’m just hoping to meet someone cool and get to know them better and maybe see what happens from there.”

Too many times I had sat across from someone and looked at them, thinking about whether I’d be willing to spend hours with them just passing the time, whether I’d want to talk with them late into the night about whatever might strike our fancy, whether I’d be comfortable sitting next to them in silence while doing our schoolwork. And too many times I’d had the realization they might not be thinking about anything other than whether they were going to get laid at the end of the night.

But my script, since then, had changed. I became more honest with potential suitors. “I’m just looking for someone to have an interesting conversation with and maybe get to know them better. That’s all,” I had told them.



The chatter of conversations among friends and classmates filled the hall in the basement of the physics building as classes let out.

Students pulled backpacks over their shoulders and zipped up winter coats as they spoke.

On my way to Spanish, which was tucked away in a small room with too many desks, I had caught a flash of bright red-orange hair—Tia. I had called to her in the frantic moments between classes.

“Talicia!” Her attention had turned from her other friend to me. “Oh! I have to tell you something!” she said quickly as she pushed open the door to the stairwell. “Text me later or else I’ll forget!” And she had gone, rushing to catch the next bus to Will Vill.

I had almost forgotten our brief exchange until I was lying in bed, nearly asleep. Stifling a yawn, I rolled over and picked up my phone, screen blinding in the dark of my room. “What was that thing you needed to tell me?” I asked her.

Her response, despite how it was past midnight, came in less than a minute. “Oh so my thing was a friend came out to me as ace [asexual] the other day and she’d never met another ace and so she said she’d like to meet you sometime if that’s cool with you.” I laughed because only a week before, she texted me saying how she needed more asexual friends because she had gotten tired of hearing all about her other friends’ sex lives.

It was like hitting the jackpot to find out another asexual person went to the same school as me. No longer would it be just me and Johnny, even the two of us meeting was a feat in itself considering how rare asexuality is. Now there was this person who would understand completely what not feeling sexual attraction meant, a third person out of a campus of well over thirty thousand.

Smiling, I typed out my reply back to her. “Ooh yeah, of course I’d be down for that!” As if there were any doubt about me jumping at the opportunity to meet another asexual, one who had just started the process of coming out as I had only the year before. ☀



VOLCANIC BLEEDING

By Leah Alette Reed

Ovarian Cycle

Follicular Phase

The flowers begin to grow and open as the sun shines through the ashy gray sky. Huckleberry invade the subalpine meadows, intertwining with sage to invade my senses.

I sit on a bench, waiting for the touch of a human I have never before felt. Hoping something would grow in the grass my feet sit on. Waiting for the beauty that had been described.

The man scrutinizes the fruit which I laid out in front of him, just within reach, tempting him to care for my being. He responds by laying me out at market, a dollar sign next to my name. Cherries pulled too soon and bagged for the mouths of those who ignore as they pass.

Flowers that have lived within my body may be burned by the fire that grows inside of me. The air I breath becomes too vile to sustain the life I grew for so long. The thick white

duvet that lingers above us grants the perfect environment: cool water, sun, air thin enough to promote life.

Ovulation

Although the man I try to know is a stranger in truth, I hold on to the possibility that his touch will melt the snow that has piled up year after year without enough sun to melt its chill. I prepare to hold a life greater than that which lives around me as the man selling me at market craves another bite. Longing for penetrative disruption, my chamber swells double in size.

Luteal Phase

My sheets contain my fear as I hide my swollen eyes below them. Hundreds of years pass around me as I await sweet release. From the pain caused by the man picking my fruits, hiking, unwelcome on my land. The pressure his feet create shallow my breathing, until it is barely detectible.

Sheets of white begin to slide down my walls, giving fair warning for the release of life around me. Air thickens and sinks, filling the lungs of those drinking my coffee, chewing my berries, my cherries.

Be it life, be it eruption. I quiver.

Uterine Cycle

Menstruation

Not only magma flows as the ash melts snow into water. Destruction is worsened as thick red heat and the earth's skin mix in to one. A mix that could foster life so long as the heat doesn't grow too close.

I scream out in the darkening sky and call for the creatures who have loved my body, my mind, my soul to run as I begin to boil. These warnings remain unintelligible to the men that lingered too long at my base.

He grew too sure. Moved too close. Refused to respect my power. He had mistakenly seen someone like himself. Planting seeds to help life grow but not a home to produce it. He thought that he could take my power but now he runs.

I produce smoke and lava too thick to breathe through. Breaking the life that had commodified my own.

Proliferative Phase

Photographing my power, he wonders when it will end. When I will seduce him once again with my fruits. The air darkens until the lights in his camera are too full of dust to flash. Clog the veins that I once found attractive, until his last cough echoes through my valley. My ashy laugh responds, reminding him of my body's capability to rid my land of life unexpected, unworthy, broken.

Secretory Phase

Waiting for the next chance to produce life, my ash floats down and coats home with potential. The nutrients the soil needs begin to seep in as I hope to make the heather, the trees, the fruits grow once more.

I will wait for the next life to come. A chance to find someone who will better care for my maternal wishes. Centuries will go by before I feel another breath graze my neck. One that eases the concoction growing in my belly. ☙



THE DAY AFTER

“Progressions can’t be made
if we’re separate forever.”
—Q-Tip

by Noah Stein

November 9th 2016:
Anger so thick you can slice it like butter for your toast
The Day After
Morning in America comes with hesitation, trepidation, the
smell of rotten fish
Anger on the news Anger on the internet Anger in the hearts
of Citizens, Students, Democrats, Republicans, Whites, Blacks,
Muslims, Jews, Women, Men
One nation huffing cans of intolerance, inhaling the smog of
hate but never Marijuana
Makes me wanna
vomit

The educated blame the non-educated
The men blame the women
Whites blame Blacks and so on and we don’t know how to talk
about it
We’re ballerinas on issues of race, gender, sexuality and religion

Drowning in putrid swamps of inequality, covered in our own disease-ridden blood

We must not continue to allow our lives to be dictated by demagogues standing above us on platforms of blame and violence and negativity

We, the youth of America cannot and will not accept the Steve Bannon scumbags of the world as the leaders of this country, who think “gay” is a disease and “Muslim” an invasive species
Who behave as invasive species, dividing and conquering our protected environments into oil fields

The Zebra Mussels of humanity

We will not allow Chris Christie’s belly of bullshit and scandal to crush us

Old white folks more twisted than a Rudy Giuliani face

Aloof like Secretary Clinton on a good day

Enough of the hateful rhetoric, enough of white nationalism and government that does not represent the plurality of our country
Their hate is the heroin of political ideology, numbing the truth, replacing it with something
far
more
heinous

The Day After in America

Fear

Frustration

We cannot be hypnotized by this nonsense

Our generation must wake up, we must change our countenance from tear-filled terror to ear-to-ear smiles, our hearts from gloomy, pre-thunderstorm humidity lathering our veins with toxic sweat to napping under a tree on one of those perfect days when rays of sunshine shoot through branches rejuvenating a tired soul, a tired nation
The Day After

Our cognitions from hate to love rather than fighting anger with anger

We must rise above

Our generation must support each other

Listen to each other

Our differences? Simply complicated constructs erected by intolerance, enforced by the manipulation of the Few

The Day After

We the people say no We are all human We all deserve a chance to live lives of peace

Us white folks must descend our fools-gold false-mountains to engage in dialogue

Our lack of communication enforces the division between our generational peers allowing the status quo of divisive rhetoric to locally anesthetize our collective consciousness

These are my thoughts on The Day After

These are surely the thoughts of others in my generational cohort on The Day After and on The Day After, we must not become pillars of salt

On The Day After we will never forget yesterday's mistakes; yet instead of reminiscing, we will look forward to tomorrow with hope and with our voices rather than our eyes, our love will beat their hate, our bridges will traverse their walls, our generativity will conquer their stagnation

On The Day After, we must make sure that tomorrow the sun shines brighter

The Day After. ☙

*We are all human
We all deserve a
chance to live
lives of peace*



THE NEW YORK STORIES

By Nicole B. Ryan

Not All of New York Shouts // 6.29.16

Not all of New York shouts.

Sometimes it whispers, like the rustling of the wind through the trees in Central Park, The gentle crash of the waves on the docks of Battery Park.

Sometimes New York sings, like the street performers who play for tips, ducking inside the subways when it's cold, or raining. Ah, the peaceful bliss that is New York in the rain. Most profoundly late at night, when it gets so quiet you can hear each drop as it graces your window.

Sometimes New York prays. Like the hundreds of flowers and mementos left on the doorstep of the Stonewall Inn, after the Orlando shooting.

Sometimes New York cries, as I imagine it did the day its skyline was changed forever.

And often New York laughs, like in the tucked away comedy clubs of the Upper West Side, or the little kids playing in the fountain in Washington Square.

It dances, rejoices in the beauty that is, and only can be, New York.

And always, New York is proud. As Lady Liberty stands in the harbor, like she's done for over 100 years, welcoming those to what is, and always will be, the greatest city in the world.

And yes, occasionally, New York shouts.

Top of the Rock // 6.15.16

I found my love for New York in many places. In the majesty of Liberty Island, in the tranquility of Greenwich Village, in the excitement of Times Square; all the hidden haunts and faces of people you see once on the train, knowing you will most likely never see them again. So many times I fell in love with New York, over and over again. Yet, I never truly knew my love for New York until I saw it from the top. 8 million people condensed on this island. I looked down as sirens wailed, tiny cars and ant-like people hurried by, a city moving, yet still. I imagined their stories. Up here, time was suspended, as I watched life keep moving down below. I am reminded... shown truly, my love for this city. The city that slows down for no one, fights, blossoms and grows, even after you're gone.

The city beats on...

Something More // 6.1.16

He brushes the hair out of her face as the train slowly sways them. Drawing into each other, she curls into his chest; her protection from the turbulent world around them. In a packed train car, they act as though they are the only two people there. Quiet tranquility, not speaking, just being. They don't need words as they hold on to each other. Frozen in time, he looks at her in wonder. If there is something more than love, these two knew what it was; holding it secret in the entanglement of their bodies together.

Beautiful. Together. One.

Just Because // 5.30.16

Walking down the streets of Chelsea, I passed a little shop on the corner selling flowers. I thought to myself, they're all so beautiful, I wish I had a reason to buy some. After grazing through the flowers for a few minutes, I decided to buy some for myself... just because.

It's good to do things just because sometimes...

Humanity // 6.14.16

*A Muslim man
was there
advocating for
peace and unity.*

I saw humanity come together at the Stonewall Inn.

During my time in New York City, the Orlando shooting happened. It was near impossible to grapple with the painful heartbreak the shooting caused our nation, and the LGBTQ community. I was left shocked and devastated, as this served as another reminder of how far we are from peace. I admit my hope was lost. Seeing how one person could take so many innocent lives over things like race and sexuality shook me to my core, leaving me with little faith in my fellow man.

The Stonewall Inn is a historical monument, which serves a great importance to the LGBTQ community for its history of the 1969 riots that started the gay rights movement. In the wake of the Orlando shooting, people flocked to The Stonewall Inn to leave flowers and candles as a vigil for the lives lost. I was moved by what I saw when I got there.

Couples holding hands, holding each other. People crying. Strangers taking the time to talk to one another. People standing in silence looking upon the faces and names of those who had died. A Muslim man was there advocating for peace and unity. People stopped to talk to him and thank him for his message. In the half hour I was there I encountered dozens of people; gay, straight, from all races and walks of life, came to show solidarity, to acknowledge, pay respect, and remember the innocent people killed.

My faith in humanity, my faith in the world around me, was restored that day. I know there is hope for a brighter future.

Even the Clouds // 6.19.16

Lying on my back, feeling the warm grass beneath me
A relaxing moment captured on Roosevelt Island
As I look up, I notice the clouds surging through the sky
Even the clouds move quickly over Manhattan

Where are they going?
Surely clouds hold no responsibilities
No important meetings they're running late to
No last minute lunch dates or kids to pick up at school
They exist above us, beholden to nothing but their gliding across
the sky

The astounding energy of the city rises, forcing even the clouds
to race to keep up Movement, always pushing forward, always
taking another step
The clouds too keep in time with their city
Endlessly trudging forward through the New York City sky

Going Unseen // 7.01.16

I couldn't tell you where I was, because I don't remember
Maybe somewhere on the Upper East Side, searching aimlessly
for a subway station
The sun was finishing its decent into the horizon,
The warmth from the scorching day that had just ended still
rising from the ground below me
The city had fallen into a quiet hum

My attention was caught by the soft, distant sound of a guitar
As I turned my head, I noticed the doorman of the building
directly to my right He was sitting behind a large desk, alone,
quietly playing
I stood there for a moment, watching him through the glass
He smiled as he played his guitar, seemingly enjoying these
precious moments he had to himself

These are the small moments that go unseen
The moments we take for ourselves, to do something we love
The moments that aren't shared

In this city so full
With millions of people living millions of different days, all at once
Imagine how many of these small, magical moments are happening
How many guitars are being played, poems being written, and prayers being said Simultaneously all going unseen

I walked away, a smile on my face
The doorman's soft guitar becoming continually more distant Its sound eventually going unheard

Continued online at journal2020.com. ☙





WHAT DYING YOUNG TEACHES YOU

By Jacqueline Farrell

“Martin’s funeral is on Friday.”

He spoke the words to a silent and anticipating congregation. Silence hung in the air. Yet I knew he had enjoyed saying those words, enjoyed how much like a pastor he sounded.

On the previous Friday I stayed late at Goddard Middle School’s talent show rehearsal. I was operating the spotlight and hadn’t told my mother. Apparently because of this she called the school and the police, a problem which could have been fixed with the cell phone I was denied until nearly seventeen. When I got home on the activity bus on that day of middle school, she raged at me. But it was not out loud and obvious rage; it was the kind that expressed itself in pressed lips and stunted words. The cooler her demeanor, the angrier I knew she was.

When I stepped through my front door, I looked down the long hallway and saw my mother and father sitting at the kitchen table around an orange plastic Blockbuster bowl of pasta salad. Rather than approach them, I decided to slink through

the door to the laundry room. I took the etched mirror I had made in Mrs. Bates' art class out of my backpack. I had X-Acto knifed the edges of the template for weeks. The template my father had spent hours cropping on the computer from photos of 'American Beauty' by 'The Grateful Dead'. I put the mirror on the laundry room counter and busied myself with 'Windex' and a cloth, resentful of my mother's aggression and the surely noxious pasta salad.

My hands slowed when I realized what they were discussing.

As I listened, I realized I had to finish that task up, right now. If I didn't, the mirror would sit there, in dust and unused cleaning cloths.

Hesitantly and uneasily, I moved toward the kitchen. I stood before my parents with my chest open and my hands plainly to my sides. I stared at them accusingly for something I knew even then that they couldn't possibly fix.

"Do you know that Martin Walworth boy from youth group?" my mom asked. "Who was in the hospital last week?"

"Yes," I said, nailed to the floor by the years-long crush I was hiding from them.

"He died yesterday," my mom said, her face like wax.

I looked at them in blank silence. I turned and walked slowly to my room, sat on my bed staring at the wall, feeling for the first time that my eyes were like corks and my throat like a lidded mason jar, and that all that was in me could not pour out through futile tears.

We tried to go to the funeral the following Sunday. The family banded up into our late-model SUV in our Sunday finest. I wailed the whole way, which brought my parents' ridicule. We arrived to an empty church—turns out we got the date wrong. My parents drove home in a silence full of shame. The real funeral was a week out.

That week before the real funeral, one friend, who never thought deeply about much but had a big heart, invited me over for a sleepover to watch 'Spider Man' and eat ice cream. But when a song by 'My Chemical Romance' about dying young came on, she knew to ask me if I was okay.

"It's fine," I said, turning over and looking at the popcorn ceiling from my sleeping bag on the living room floor. I thought bitterly to myself—what do these boys know about dying young?

We arrived to an empty church—turns out we got the date wrong.

I remember that I went with her to Target the week before the funeral and we both bought cheap, showy espadrilles. I pretended that I would wear them to the funeral. My mom made me return them. I still hate espadrilles.

*... I most deeply regret
saying: "I don't
love you enough
for that."*

Later that week, my mom and I were on the way to an oral surgeon in the foothills. I had been going there for years over a receding gum line, and every time my mother took me in for a surgery, we were fighting. I think this was not an anomaly, but a statistical measure of the state of things between us. "You need to stop crying about Martin," she told me. "Strong people have to pull themselves together. It's getting irritating to me."

My heart felt like a well, a sticky well with a clotted-over surface. I thought of its invisibility to my parents, and yet their intricate capacity to needle and pierce the clotted skin. I responded with one of the things I most deeply regret saying: "I don't love you enough for that."

After that there was the kind of silence in which she used to punish me without words and instead with a hot, terrifying anger. I suspect this moment has found a recessed cavity in her heart.

I remember very little of the eulogy. A song of the Christian worship genre which I was not to hear again for nearly a decade cried out softly in the rafters, 'Almighty God'. As though it were begging, as though it were crying out in helpless darkness in the only terms it knew. The chapel was full of sound. It was a groaning sound that was like the wooden belly of an old ship, straining against a storm outside and leaving the dark, interior space under a spell of quiet moaning, the sound of many people grieving together. It amounted to a slow, deep lake. I knew the sound in this room even though I had never heard it before because the sound of grieving, like the smell of burnt hair, is written on the inside of human skin.

There was a projector and a screen above the pulpit. The youth group had turned Martin's Facebook wall into a memorial, the screen displaying messages from it.

"I thought we needed you here on earth but I guess God decided to take one of his angels back." And, "One time you were in the emergency room with me on the other side of the curtain, and you didn't know I was there. You had broken your arm at football practice because you didn't know how to play, but you just kept on bragging about how you'd done it. The doctor just let you. I couldn't stop giggling."

*It was humid and
small flies navigated
above the lawn,
white in the sprinklers*

After the funeral, there was a booklet open on a table. People were writing their memories of Martin. I went up to it and silently used my pen, the thing which has become my quiet mode of protest against the world. Martin was the first time I used it, but there were others later. When I became crushed by high-school depression, I used the pen against literally thousands of handwritten journal pages, in some cases even carving them up. I used it the first time I failed out of college to express to my parents that I was unfit for engineering school. When I starved for my work in a bug-filled apartment three years later, I even used my pen against God. Martin, I wrote, "When the youth group went biking up Platte Canyon, we got way ahead of everyone, and chased each other back down the whole way. And then for a while we sat under trees beside the river, just the two of us." Martin at his time of death was two years older than me. It may not seem like much, but to a pair of middle-school kids, two years might as well have been ten. The year before he died, peach fuzz had appeared above his lip.

I signed my name and walked out of the church into a bright day of spring. It was humid and small flies navigated above the lawn, white in the sprinklers. Easter was coming.

My father, the laugh lines on his face now pressed into grief, put an arm around my back and took me to the car.

I went to high school with some other people who went through this with me. One of them became one of my best friends. I think we even dated over it, until we fizzled out over recognition that the times and places of real, complex love were elsewhere, and because sixteen is just as stupid as fourteen when it comes to these things. After we had broken up, I sat with him many Friday nights on the porch of his parents' house after our friends had left the coffee shop, and he would look out into the distance, eyes darkened with something other than age. He would say, "Martin taught me to live. You never know when you're going to go. That's why I like Zorba so much," referring to the classic Greek tale of life well-lived that we had both read that year. He thought he believed this. But I could see that, deep down, he knew he didn't. What he did know was that he hadn't learned how to live. Doug would come up with other life mottos from time to time, but there would always be that dark, confused look in his eyes as he tried to convince himself he had found the right one.

I heard rumors after that of other youth group members who had gone on to major in theater or business. Most of them seemed normal. There was one boy, Travis Bentley, of whom the only thing I heard was a "he's— well— struggling" from my parents. He was the one who didn't eat for a week afterwards. I don't think he graduated. There was another girl who wound up in Hollywood, as my parents said "on the child-actress route." I never saw her in a movie, and I hope that she met a better fate than Travis.

A few years later I was cleaning out the hoarder's accumulation from under my bed. It was the end of my last summer of high school, and my belongings were packed for the move to engineering school. A small leaflet of paper had been pushed to the center and was lying on the dusty carpet. I retrieved it and flipped it over—it was a picture of him, cut from a church bulletin, horribly faded and bleached, the acid-paper eating and blackening the image. He was wearing 'Converse All-Stars' and holding a guitar. He was four years younger than I was. I stuffed the picture to the bottom of my trash.

I discovered a dusty shoebox. The cardboard had become brittle and the corners of the lid separated when I took it

off. Inside, neatly packed, were paraphernalia from that church. I unburied them, useless to me now: an elementary-sized Bible t-shirt, a rolled-up little booklet of Sunday school lessons. In a wadded handkerchief, I discovered something I thought I lost. A present my grandma ordered from a catalogue when I was five and smashed my face through a table. We called it the bluebird of happiness. When she gave it to me, I was in so much pain that I could barely see or hold it.

I hadn't packed away too many happy things into that church box: gaudy adolescence, familial apathy, an experience of death. But apparently, I had packed away that bird I loved—waiting to be discovered on that last hot night of summer when my girlhood was about to end.

*If you asked me what
young death taught me,
I couldn't tell you.*

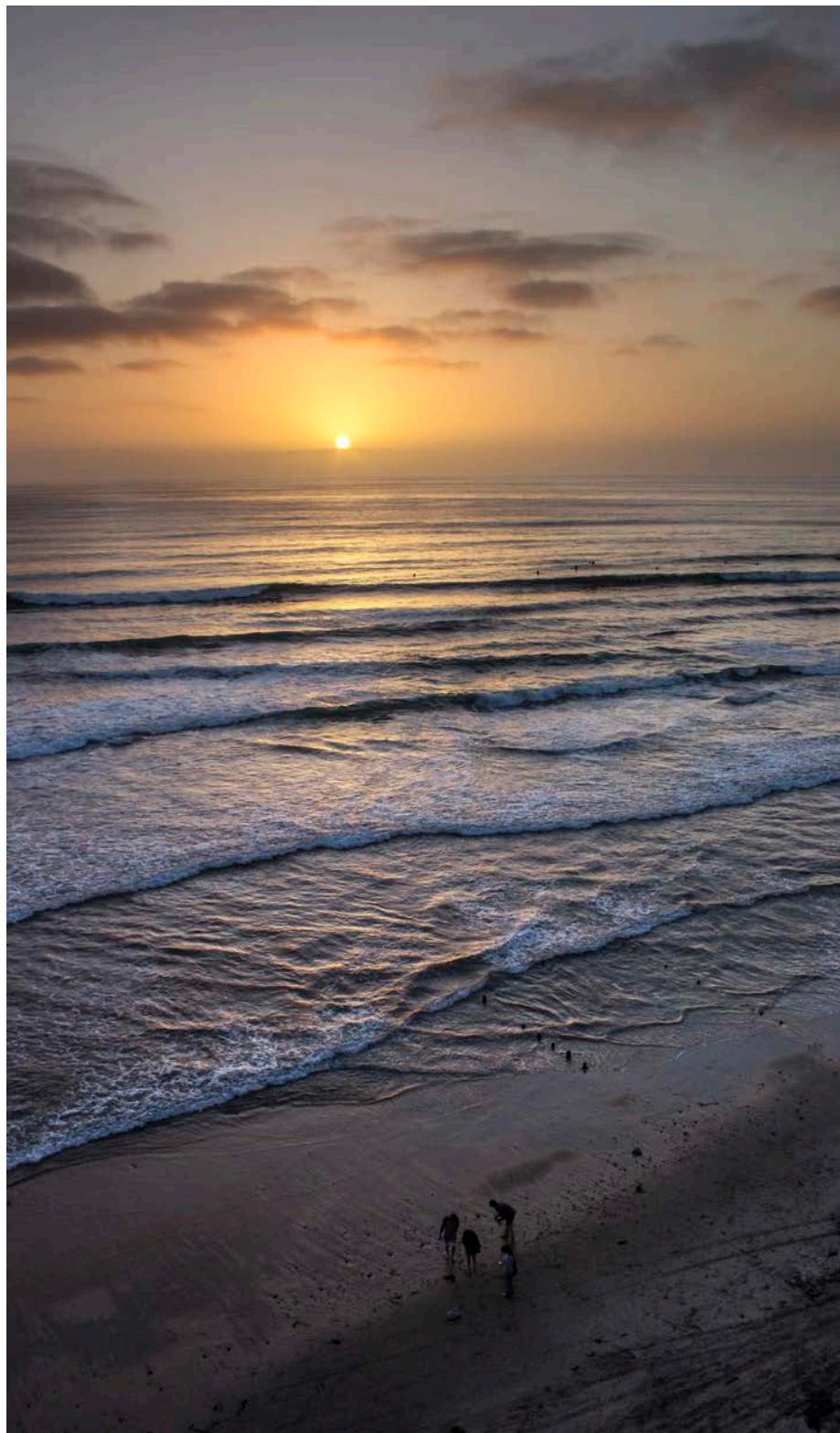
If you asked me what young death taught me, I couldn't tell you. People will say a lot of things about it, but I think that might be because they haven't experienced it. It tells you nothing. It screams nothing louder than a freight train loaded down with coal, skidding toward you on steel rails, blaring but unable to stop. You are that penny the kids put out on the track for it to run over—you squirt out flattened, and they laugh.

Some people use God to make sense out of young death, as I think his parents probably did. Even though God has made sense of nearly every tragedy in my life, he never made sense of Martin. I don't know if he ever will. Eventually, I'll get there and we can have a chat. Me and Martin and God. But I don't think it will be about how he died—I think it will be about how good God was to us, in my long time on earth, and in his short time. That was one thing he saw at fifteen that I didn't.

The year before I came back to God, I went to a drumline competition. The drumline from the high school Martin would have attended was there performing, and in the audience, I saw Martin's parents. He was their only son. Doug and I went up to talk to them, but he did most of the talking. I just stared in awe. They looked like gods, there on the grass. His dad in a Hawaiian

shirt, his mom in a sunhat. You can't touch some things. You can't explain them. All you can do is see what they are, feel the weight of them.

It took me a long time to discover God again. The churchiness of my middle school experience gave way when that church dismantled under a greedy pastor. The congregation moved out when they sold the building to something else. They painted over the walls of the youth room. If you went there now you could scrape up the paint and discover the way we painted it when we were still there, with clashing colors and bad drawings, and with our paint-covered handprints. His handprint is on the wall beside the door. I have no evidence to confirm it, but I think that if I went there and scraped up the paint and put my hand on the wall, his print would be slightly smaller than mine. ☙



MONARCH

by Taylor Pattison

I.

An old acquaintance once referred to my only friend as the porcelain pal. The manufacturer carved my pal's name above his stainless steel handle that seemed to always need an extra jiggle. The name read Sloan. I interacted more with this toilet than anything else. Sloan really knew me, he knew every me. As a fellow prisoner, my dear friend Sloan witnessed every flavor of my self-destruction, manifested in color. The beige walls of my space systematically repainted by the reds of blood, yellows of urine, various browns, blues, and, of course, black. The space within these walls provided me solace, where a codependent love affair between my sadness and me flourished. Like my father, Sloan observed from a distance in silence as my struggles with my liquid lover worsened.

Daily visits to Sloan always followed quality time with the most important 'her' in my life, the bottle. I identified alcohol as a female simply because she nurtured my sadness and I loved her for it. Yet, that night I hurt her, again.

She deserved it. After all, I loved her and she did not reciprocate, she just wanted more from me. In a fit of rage I broke her bones on that shit-brown mini-fridge she slept in. Sloan watched in silence as I picked the glass out of my trembling fingertips. She nevertheless nurtured me as an antiseptic, disinfecting the wound she had herself created. Alcohol as an innate trickster appealed to my senses and seemingly healed the outsides. Little did I know that this cunning little bitch played the long con, to quench her insatiable lust for my insides.

II.

Winters here consisted of an ever-persistent black. Unlike neighboring Chicago, everything slowed in my suburb of Aurora, Illinois. Outside, howling winds whistled through brittle leafless tree branches. Faint scratching on the window sill moaned through the cracks, this sound secreted the taste of blood on my tongue. Fond memories from winter's past got me thinking this cycle might finally end. Never mind how I acquired papa's handgun. Never mind everything in that state. At last, I achieved enough courage. That numbing pain inside would soon end. My lack of identity would no longer matter.

Teardrops dribbled down my rosy acne ridden face as I inserted my father's Nine-millimeter handgun into my mouth. I shut my eyes, engaged single action, and flipped the safety off. One deep breath plus one squeeze would equal freedom.

Somehow, five pounds of trigger pull became 500. As I opened my eyes, the rear right on the gun gave me perspective. Clarity proceeded. Only emptiness separated my father's Beretta and me. I pulled it out, wiped off the drool, and tossed it across the yellow-brown carpet. I recognized that moment as the eye of the storm.

I pardoned Miss Smirnoff from her box, and forgave her once again for biting my hand. I figured all love hurts and I rationalized in a mutter to myself, "all high school freshmen must go through this at some point." School started in 5 hours so I put my bandages on and drank to blackout. My tears dried, and my long sleeves would again cover the season's battle wounds.

Alcohol as an innate trickster appealed to my senses and seemingly healed the outsides.

III.

My teammates screamed, “Pull, pull, pull, GO!!!” as I flip-turned the 3rd wall at our senior year sectional swim meet. As team captain and one of the fastest back-strokers in the greater southwestern Chicago suburbs, I had to win that race. I needed to qualify for the state championship. I had always swum well under this “state cut” during other races throughout the year. Olympic trials seemed inevitable at the rate I was progressing.

*I was not bipolar.
I was an alcoholic and a drug addict.*

As my teammates screamed for me, so did my rotator cuffs. I partially tore the tendons in both of them the year prior and swum with damaged shoulders my entire senior year. They once again flared up and failed me as I swam too slowly to qualify for the championship. I struggled to pull myself out of the pool and hobbled the twenty feet to the adjacent warm-down pool. Tears filled my goggles, but not from the physical pain.

For whatever reason, I finally accepted what I feared all season. No more swimming. I knew that from then on I was going to ride the drug and alcohol train until the wheels fell off.

IV.

I graduated high school in May of 2009. By September of 2011, I had destroyed my relationships with my parents, my brother, all of my extended family, my girlfriend, and every last one of my friends. I nearly totaled my car twice, beat two misdemeanors in court, dodged one felony altogether, and medically withdrew from two colleges. I had seen half a dozen psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers and was prescribed nearly twice as many psychotropic medicines. Like the good drug addict I was, I manipulated my doctors, my family, and my friends. I somehow had everyone convinced that I was merely a victim of bipolar disorder. I was not bipolar. I was an alcoholic and a drug addict.

My first exposure to Alcoholics Anonymous and the 12 steps followed a brief stint in a psych ward in October of 2011. After my intake at the psych ward to ‘stabilize my meds’, I tried to dance around how much drugs and alcohol I used weekly. I copped to half of what I really swallowed and they put me in a drug and alcohol “concerns” group. “Concerns” grew enough to send me to a more intensive outpatient program for substance abuse, requiring AA meetings. I played the game, continued to use, got kicked out of the program, and was medically advised to go to treatment. Naturally, I manipulated my parents into not making me go to an inpatient treatment center by making more empty promises to go to AA meetings, and get my life together on my own.



November 2nd 2011 was the first time I was entirely honest with anyone about my life. This man went by Officer Summers, a member of the Naperville, IL Police department. My using cycle finally stopped in Naperville, the neighboring township to my Aurora. I was returning from a routine trip to Chicago to get my favorite designer hallucinogenic drug. As per usual, I finished my drugs in the parking lot to avoid a possible possession charge if pulled over. Driving under the influence was second nature to me, but this time was different.

I was sucked into a full psychosis as I pulled my father’s 300 horsepower Oxford Green Jaguar XJ8 out of the parking lot and proceeded towards the highway. I had never driven under the influence in my dad’s car. My psychoses entailed a manifestation of voices in my head. Half of these voices were calm and positive, the other half were horrific. Whatever music was playing always fueled these oddly spiritual psychoses, but this time the positive voices could not be heard.

I attempted to engage the cruise control and coast home, but I zoned out. The cruise control did not engage. Horns from other cars helped me zone back in. I realized I was weaving in my lane and traveling a mere 45 mph, so I floored the pedal in a vain attempt to control this green beast of a car. The 300 horsepower engine had me traveling at a near 100 mph in no time. I took a deep breath and slapped myself

out of the psychotic trip that gripped me. Luckily I was able to slow down to the speed of traffic. Of course I tried the old cruise control ritual again and the same cycle continued for the next 15 miles on the highway.

*... I was terrified these guys were
aliens planning on
abducting me.*

Somehow I avoided crashing on the highway and made it to my exit in Naperville. I came to a stoplight, stopped too late, and rear-ended the car in front of me. The guys in the car were reasonable and we agreed to just exchange insurance information. I somehow kept the fact that I was on drugs contained, even though I was terrified these guys were aliens planning on abducting me.

Two cop cars pulled up. The lead officer asked, "What's going on here?"

I tried to play it off like a simple traffic accident, just exchanging insurance. "Oh yeah, just a car accident I see," stated Officer Summers as he looked deep into my eyes and smirked. They sat me down on the curb but did not handcuff me. His partner chimed in with, "Come-on man, where's the dope at? Your eyes are all pinned out, just tell us where the heroin is so we don't have to bring dogs and cut daddy's car up." They clearly thought I was running heroin from Chicago to the suburbs, which was a fair assumption in the Chicago area. Officer Summers pointed straight up in the air and said; "you see that helicopter up there?" I looked up and nodded a yes. "That has been tracking you. We have gotten multiple reports in the last half hour of a green jaguar driving recklessly all over the highway. You know how fucking expensive it is to dispatch a helicopter?" Tears of relief started to well in my eyes.

Teardrops again ran down my acne-ridden cheeks. Before he started to call bullshit on my tears I came unzipped. I spat out, "Listen, you get lied to all day. For once! I am not trying to manipulate. I can't stop using this shit and have been on the fringes of getting kicked out of my parent's house for months now. I am relieved and know I am going to jail. Any

change is better than this shit.” Finally admitting defeat caused a strange sensation of calm deep in my diaphragm and my fingertips tingled as if they were falling asleep. My tears and hyperventilating began to subside. I looked off at the nearly setting sun, and waited for my handcuffing. Officer Summers broke eye contact with me and walked away to talk with his partner.

*Everyone knew there were
no measures my parents could take
to prevent me from using . . .*

As I sat on the curb with my thousand-yard stare, a yellow monarch butterfly fluttered into my line of sight. It danced over the brittle branches of a nearby shrub. As the butterfly landed on one of these branches, Officer Summers spoke at me, “Where’s your mom at?”

I looked at him, “Home—I think.” He stared me down, “Listen, we can hit you with reckless endangerment, erratic driving, driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, and a litany of other traffic violations. Jail is clearly not what you need. Get some help.” I gazed over at him and his partner sincerely dumbfounded. He continued, “Call your mom. If she can get here in 20 minutes, we will release you to her, and she will follow up with us that you’re going to get some help.” I paused for a good ten seconds, and blurted at them, “are you fucking serious right now?” The partner followed with, “you want us to change our minds? We really shouldn’t be doing this, so believe me, if you get caught for anything in between now and going to treatment, we will get involved and throw all of today’s shit at you.” I hurried to call my mom. Minutes later, she arrived more livid than I had ever seen. Slapping me around and swearing me up and down, she herded me into the car and took me home.



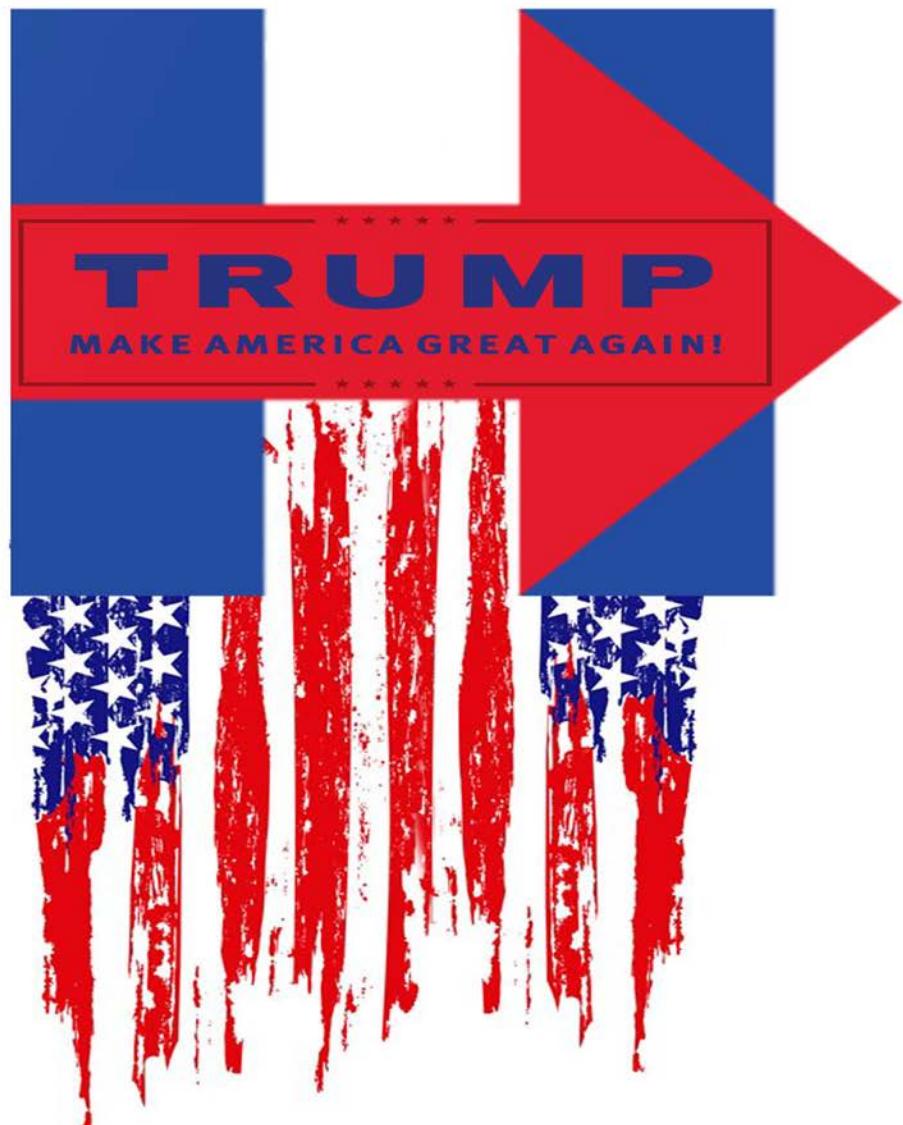
A couple hours later my mother got off of the phone with a lockdown 28-day dual-diagnosis addiction treatment center in Minnesota. I was set to travel on November 14th 2011, which

meant two weeks of drug addict limbo. Everyone knew there were no measures my parents could take to prevent me from using in the two weeks between. During those two weeks I lied about going to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings to get out of the house and got high on whatever possible instead. Often I would go to the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; I'd just get high before and after. My parents had a close eye on me and assumed I was still figuring out how to get high. It did not matter to me. Nothing mattered in that state anymore except getting on that airplane on November 14th.



Ultimately, I managed to evade the law for the two weeks and made it on the airplane to Minnesota. My journey to recovery began that day. November 14,th 2011 was my original recovery date. I wish I could say I stayed sober since then, but I did not. After staying inpatient in Minnesota for thirty-eight days I went to Delray Beach, Florida for another four months of treatment. I stayed sober for thirteen months and relapsed in December of 2012. I was using drugs in Florida for one month and my addiction continued like it never stopped. Within the first week of using again, I started using a drug that I had not done yet: crack cocaine. Attempts to stop on my own by going to AA meetings brought the same result. I could not stop on my own; I needed a new world.

In mid January of 2013, I called my father in a drunken stupor and begged him to send me to treatment again. The next day my father called me up and told me had arranged for my AA sponsor to take me to a treatment center in neighboring Boca Raton, Florida. I was ready, willing, and grateful for the physical change of environment. Sloan could tell you how many objects I had flushed down a toilet. That day nearly four years ago, for the first time ever, I flushed away the last drugs I've ever done. ☙



THE POLITICS OF WINGS & BEER

by Sean Anderson

Two people sitting at a bar. Conservative. Liberal. Wings. Beer. America. Friends.

I had put off completing my ballot for weeks. It was not something I was looking forward to, but something I knew I should do. This would be my second time voting for a president, though this time I had no respect for my party's candidate. In a rebellious period of my life I had declared myself a republican, much to the dislike of my liberal parents. This election would test that decision and my beliefs. Out of nearly 20 candidates, no one expected Trump to win. I doubt that that even Trump thought that he would win. I recall a car ride down to Denver in January with several other GOP interns. We had all collectively agreed that we would quit if Trump received the nomination. Slowly, the other candidates began dropping like flies. The once promising contenders had been vanquished by the terrific Donald J. Trump. It was surreal to watch the party unravel and friendships become strained. The rise of "Trumpism" pushed me more toward the center than any "I'm with Her" advertising campaign ever could. I was disgusted to hear Trump apologists

try to explain offensive rhetoric, lewd actions, and failed businesses. It seemed like the more he put his foot in his mouth, the more powerful he became. America was at a crossroads and no one could have predicted the result.

Saying no one expected Trump's victory isn't exactly accurate. All my life I have lived in liberal bubbles. Living in Boulder or San Francisco, it is easy to forget about the rest of the country. As Trump's victory became imminent, even many anchors and pundits would fall victim to the same metropolitan mindset. An eccentric billionaire was about to become the most powerful man in the world and everyone was wondering if America would still be standing come morning.

"Another IPA?" asked the bartender at The Sink. I said that I might as well have one, I still had a few wings to polish off and needed something to wash them down. After dropping off my ballot at the UMC and collecting my "I Voted" sticker, I met up with an old friend from high school to get some lunch on the Hill. We decided to go to the Sink and were pleasantly surprised to find that they were offering a free beer to anyone who voted. Here we sat on a Tuesday afternoon drinking beer and eating chicken wings. Two friends from different sides of the aisle partaking in a great American pastime. Our talk of the election was minimal and light, mainly consisting of jokes about the candidates. The time for fighting and disagreement was past, and now we just sat at the bar shooting the breeze. A testament to friendship in spite of differences and the future of our nation.

Two friends sitting at a bar. ☙

*The rise of
'Trumpism'
pushed me more
towards the center
than any 'I'm with
Her' campaign
ever could.*

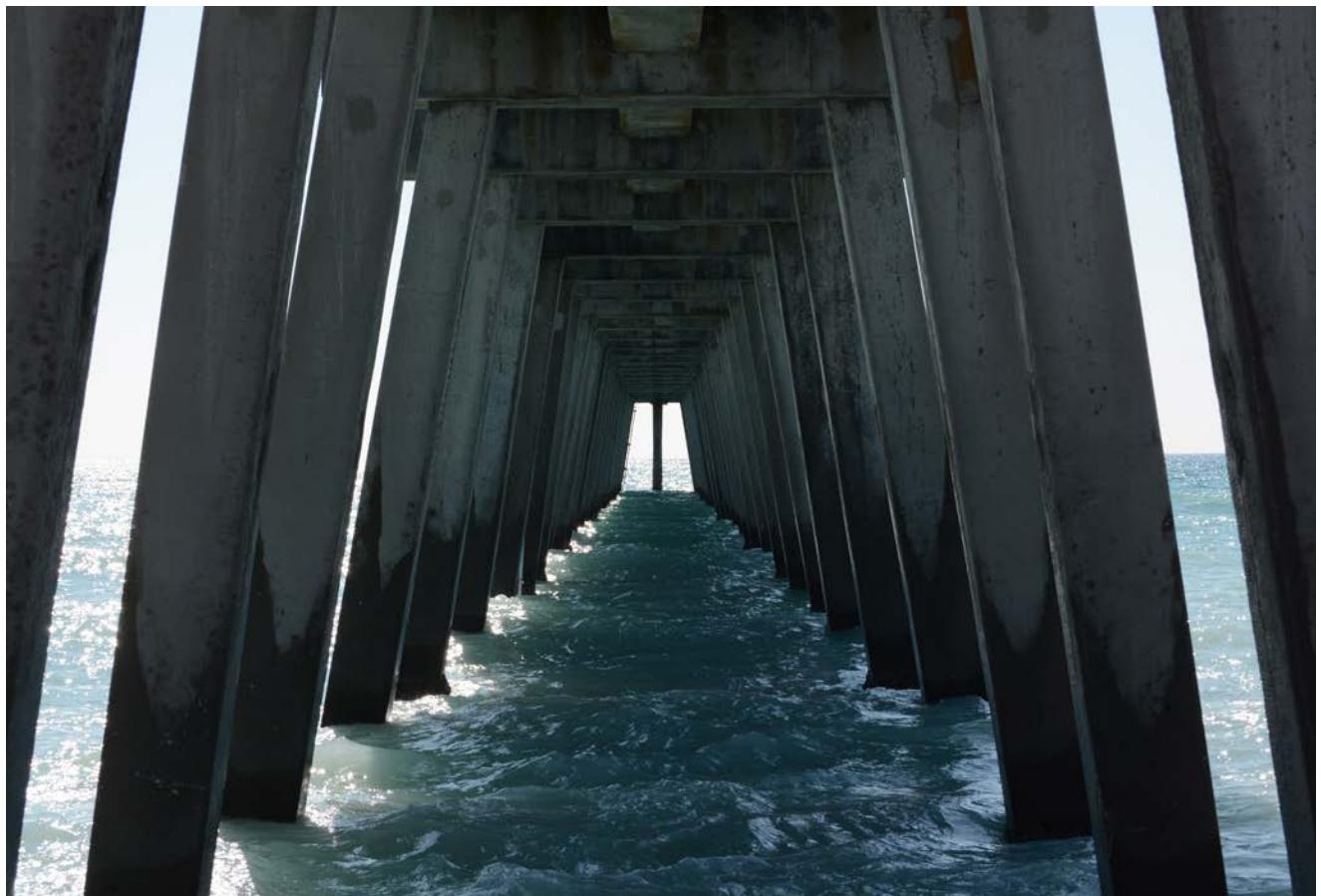
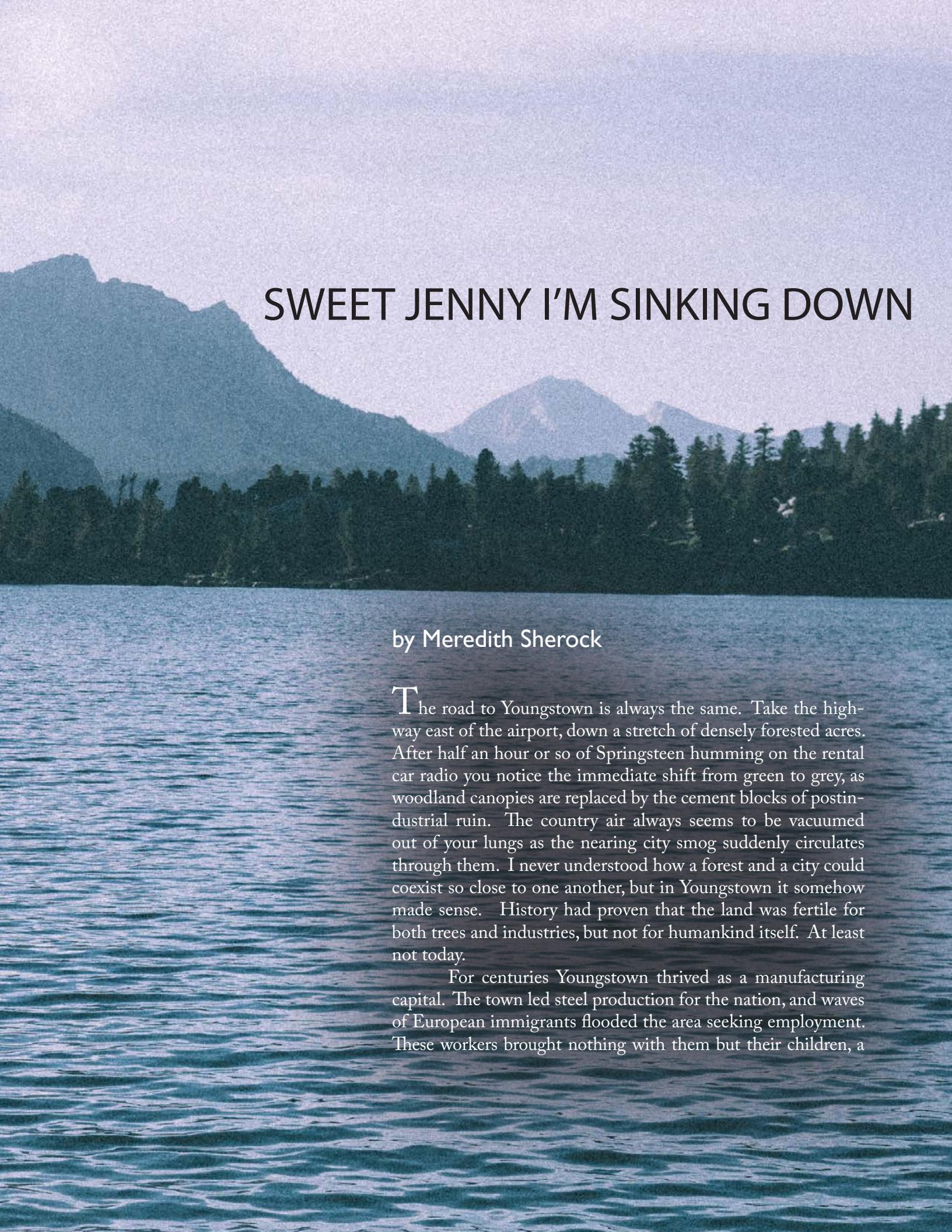




Photo by Noah Dreeban



SWEET JENNY I'M SINKING DOWN

by Meredith Sherock

The road to Youngstown is always the same. Take the highway east of the airport, down a stretch of densely forested acres. After half an hour or so of Springsteen humming on the rental car radio you notice the immediate shift from green to grey, as woodland canopies are replaced by the cement blocks of post-industrial ruin. The country air always seems to be vacuumed out of your lungs as the nearing city smog suddenly circulates through them. I never understood how a forest and a city could coexist so close to one another, but in Youngstown it somehow made sense. History had proven that the land was fertile for both trees and industries, but not for humankind itself. At least not today.

For centuries Youngstown thrived as a manufacturing capital. The town led steel production for the nation, and waves of European immigrants flooded the area seeking employment. These workers brought nothing with them but their children, a

pair of steel-toed boots, and the fierce spirit of Eastern Europe that pulsed through their blood. Over time, union strikes became a common occurrence among this crowd. In 1952, the most widespread strike took place, focused primarily on workers of Youngstown Sheet & Tube Company. The union strikers eventually attracted the attention of President Truman, who issued an order to seize control of the company and force the rebels back to work. The issue was taken to the Supreme Court, in which justices ruled against Truman and demanded that the steel companies be turned back to their rightful management. Youngstown workers rejoiced, but their victory didn't last long. Demand for steel plummeted to then ground in the 1970s, as did the factories. Bulldozers tumbled the historic smoke towers that bordered the city like a grey picket fence. Trains deported the few lucky workers to new factories, while the rest were left in the relics of their history. The population dropped nearly fifty percent in twenty years and by the time the new century rolled around, Youngstown was left in ashes.



I never knew my grandfather. His life and death were never spoken of, despite the size and sociability of our family. The only fragments I've come to understand are about as generic as one can get: his job, his family, his appearance. In every picture I've seen, he looks well-aware that he's become the handsome legacy of my surname. Dark skin, green eyes, stoic expression - he looks like a rough Italian mobster who's seen one too many wrongs in his life. He looks just like my dad and my dad looks just like me, so at least I can say that I've come to know my grandfather through heritable physicality. He's been described as a quiet man, and I suppose his absence of words followed him into death. I don't know when my grandfather died, but I know it was too soon. A life in the factory does that, or so I've been told.



A couple years ago my grandmother moved in with her daughter. It seemed like the rational thing to do. Having been a widow

*Today they're
silently fighting
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and for a return to
prosperity.
In fighting, they
refuse to move on.*

for nearly twenty-five years, and with retirement funds slowly dwindling due to a passion for handbags and Olive Garden luncheons, she decided to give up the family Victorian house in an act of conservation. Within a year, things were packed up and her home of half a century was left behind. It was certainly cheaper splitting rent with her daughter's family, but already I began to realize that things were off to a sickening start. The price she was paying for a new place was immediately questioned, merely based off the billing situation. How could an 84-year-old, four-foot eight-inch tall retired woman pay for half a house, especially when the other half is split between four able-bodied people? I was irritated with the idea before I ever visited their new place. If only I knew that it could all get worse.



After nearly fifty years of a fallen economy, Youngstown has yet to rebound. It's a city forever trapped in its once-thriving past, which is evident on every street corner and in the eyes of every olive-skinned resident. Broken windows decorate any given building, mirroring the broken souls pacing the adjacent sidewalks. Youngstown is part of America's Rust Belt, a modern ghost town where its people pass the decaying Sheet & Tube plant silently, pretending the economic collapse never happened. I have a theory that there's still an underlying sense of rage and rebellion in the Youngstown blood, a product of Italian heritage and laborious shifts working at the mills. Years of hard labor and strikes bred a city of proud, hardheaded citizens. These people are still unwilling to let the fight go, although the union strikes and steel work are a thing of the past. Today they're silently fighting for resurrection of a once-stable town and for a return to prosperity. In fighting, they refuse to move on. As a result they're trapped somewhere in the past, existing in an eternal state of denial. The wave of change and rejection that overtook the area is still visible today, and I get a glimpse of ancient memory with every trip I take.



My two cousins are vile human beings. Family is family, I'm aware, but certain personalities develop in a family tree that simply taint the bloodline, bringing into question if these people are in fact your own. Never have I witnessed anyone disrespect my grandmother the way they do, let alone disrespect anyone of her age and fragility. Last winter I was horrified to hear that my grandmother was hospitalized for a broken hip. Too lazy to shovel the driveway and pick up the paper, my cousins allowed my grandmother to trek through the ice and snow to fetch it for them. Any sensible individual would know that one fall can be fatal to an old woman, but in this particular act of self-entitlement my cousins nearly offed the matron of the household.



Once my father drove me through his memories of Youngstown. He drove me by a weed-infested plot of land, the former site of the steel mill where he used to work. "As a number cruncher I never worked in the factory itself" he said, implying the existence of a steel-constructed hierarchy. We passed by the mill where my grandfather worked, and his father, and his father's brothers, and his father's brother's sons. Somewhere there was the crumbling carcass of Jenny, the furnace of Youngstown Sheet & Tube, left to decay forty years ago. I saw the small Catholic school where my father attended K-12. "It was a diverse school," my dad commented. "We had one Irish kid and one German kid to balance out the Italians." Down the street there was a Sparklemart, the only grocery store in sight. Even as a child I grimaced at the irony of such a title, disturbed by the often vacant shelves, selection of outdated children's toys, and the bleak inauthenticity felt in each employee's "have a nice day." Nearby a motel's sign flickered, "Free H O." A week later and the "B" was still just as vacant from the "HBO" as customers were from the business. People were scarce, and when you did see one it felt like you've seen them all: olive skin, dark hair, green eyes. Looking through the town's phonebook, there's rarely a last name that doesn't end in a vowel. The sameness is overwhelming, and inescapably eerie.

The drive through Youngstown is something I can never forget. From end to end it's less than an hour, but everything

seems to happen in slow motion. Red lights stop you just a few seconds too long, allowing downtrodden people to cross in such a way that makes you question if their shoes are full of lead, or stacks of heavy steel. Smoke-like clouds linger overhead, blocking the sun and freezing the earth in its rotation. The world stands still in Youngstown, and it's chilling to witness. It's as though time has stopped for all of its inhabitants, industries, and infrastructures. No matter where you are in Youngstown, it feels like ghosts are following in your shadow.



During my first visit to my grandmother's new place, I witnessed the family's incomprehensible behavior firsthand. Her daughter scrolled through Facebook in a total trance, pausing only to verbally assault some townsperson's actions through the anonymity of cyberspace. My cousins, two young men emerging into adulthood beyond all odds, flanked their mother on either side, all their weight leaning against the kitchen counter. The first of many demands broke the silence. "Grandma," my twenty-something-year-old, partially-college-educated, entitled-piece-of-shit cousin said, "make me a sandwich." His younger brother, in well-practiced synchronization, chimed in, "Grandma, me too. I need a sandwich."

My grandmother, either too exhausted to fight or too accustomed to these demands, obeyed. "Just a moment," she told them, "I'm still working on your laundry." To this, my young butterball of a cousin scowled, accentuating the perspiration accumulating below his chins. Their mother, rather than offering help or pointing out that her children are fully capable of feeding themselves, did not raise a finger, other than to vigorously craft some Facebook post on her keyboard.

I was, and still am, appalled to say the least. Never have I encountered anyone treating my grandmother that way, let alone any individual of age and status. This behavior was quite typical of how the household ran, and I continued witnessing this abuse throughout my stay. There was an aura of privilege walking through the halls of this house like a tormented ghost. It seeped through the walls and creaked into the floorboards and twirled into a whirlwind on the icy driveway where my

grandmother fell. It's interlaced in my cousins' words and caresses the outward curves of their bodies pulling tighter, tighter until they obey its commands. These individuals are vessels to their own selfishness, greed, and self-entitlement, and follow these qualities willingly, without remorse.



Like most immigrants, the Illias family came to Youngstown with nothing. They stepped off the boat, hand in hand, clutching the last memories of Italy their family would know. They settled into a garage attached to their tenant's house, for it was all they could afford. He found work in the mills, toiling away every day as his wife tended to their growing family. Soon they had six beautiful babies, all of whom were raised in the confinement of that cold garage. She stayed at home while he commuted to work, returning at night to pull off his grease-stained boots and collapse on a lone mattress. Every day and every night was the same routine, as this once-temporary living space became a home where memories were made.

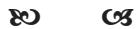
This family's modest lifestyle eventually paid off, despite the years of poverty and struggle. Two of their children advanced to medical school, one became a lawyer, and most have families of their own. These are now my great aunts and uncles, a second generation that inherited the hard work of their parents. The Illiases were the epitome of immigrant determination and labor. First generation immigrants have an undeniably honorable work ethic, laboring day after day for minimum wage. Not only was there no other choice, but these individuals were simply thankful for what they could receive. Just having escaped a country of political turmoil and poverty, the immigrants saw America as the land of high hopes, of promise and prosperity. Having traveled here on a boat ride through the clouds to heaven, these families believed America could never let them down. The Illiases, like most families that sailed to here with high aspirations, worked to their death with the vision that their descendants would benefit from their labor. They came here to establish security for us all.



I was part of the mistreatment that I loathed.

Looking back to my last trip to Youngstown, I begin to experience utmost unease as I am transported into that tight kitchen, leaning against the counter, noticing the loud steps of my cousin while tracing the weathered lines of my grandmother's face. It's all too vivid to forget. I remember there being a swelling in my stomach, bursting with rage, horror, and something else I could not yet identify, something burning at my insides with the intensity of a million smoke towers. Suddenly I no longer felt like an observer, but a contributor to my cousins' attitudes. All I could think of was my personal responsibility, my role in neither encouraging nor halting this immoral scene. Quite simply I didn't know if I wanted to hide from the abuse, mend this gap between generations, or apologize to my grandmother on behalf of her inconsiderate grandchildren. My silence spoke for itself. I was no savior, I wasn't going to mend this scene despite how strongly my heart ached for me to. I was there as an outsider who escaped Youngstown and Ohio and seemed permanently transplanted as far away as possible. Not quite part of this house, of this city, of this slave-driving relationship between people I'm supposed to love.

Whether it was my place or not to speak out is irrelevant now. All I can accept is that I was there, and I was quiet. I was part of the mistreatment that I loathed.



The only concrete piece of my grandfather's life that I've come to understand is his occupation. He worked in the Youngstown steel mills, as did everyone else in his generation. The only break he had from work was during the war, when he registered as a medic. He spent years touring Europe, tending to the injured but never facing combat himself. My father remembers an old helmet in his attic with a swastika hastily taped to the side, surrounded by signatures of forgotten comrades. My grandfather had discovered it in a battlefield in Germany, and kept it as a memorial to his time overseas. Years later my grandmother threw the helmet away. She got rid of his bayonet and rifle. She discarded pictures of concentration camps, firsthand witness to those twisted and tormented corpses. This history, she argued,

would have no tangible value in the future. This history was not Youngstown history and it was not hers, therefore it must go. My grandmother, a woman so trapped in and in love with the past, sent history to the graveyard where her husband rested.



My cousins have never seen a day of work in their lives; they've never felt the blisters of labor on their hands and feet after a long day at the mill. They've never considered the priorities of others; they haven't chosen to sleep on a cold floor so that the ones they love could rest well. They've never protested for anything but a thicker sandwich and faster service; they haven't had to fight for a higher wage, a safer workplace or a place to live. They've never lost anything but their phone chargers or the bills in their wallets. They will never lose their steady jobs in the face of reconstruction, or lose friends in a war, or lose the love of their life too young, or lose the heart of their hometown in the forgotten pages of history. If these children could live the Youngstown dream and death, maybe then they'd have some perspective.

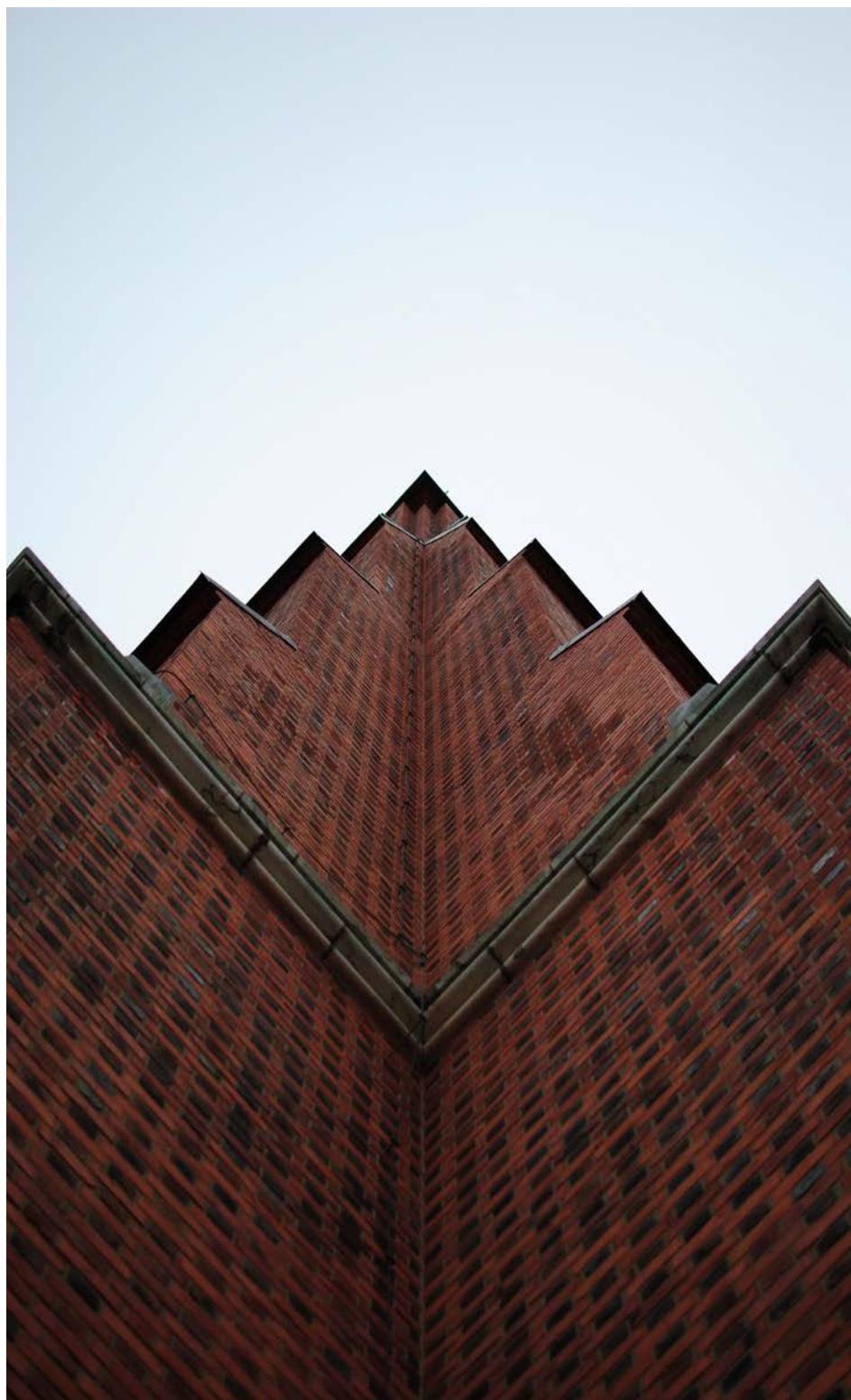
This is the disparity between my family's generations. This is how the beautiful ideals and values that my family sailed to America for came crumbling down, over a mere century. Not so long ago, families came to this country with nothing but their hands and their hope. It took years to build up Youngstown to the industrial capital it was, all of which was destroyed before I was even born. They gave all their labor to this city and all their love to their descendants, hoping it would all pay off in the end. But now this labor is gone as the industry is no longer considered valuable, and the love is gone as the individuals no longer value it.

Maybe this is why Youngstown is as desolate and troubled as it is today. There's a tension between what is now and what once was. People today are afraid to admit that they've let their relatives down, that they're not living the American dream. Perhaps we could call this laziness, or perhaps it's mere defeat. The vision of Youngstown, of prosperity and serenity, has been lost in the debris of demolished steel mills, along with the restless memories of those who built them.



Leaving Youngstown doesn't seem possible. There's always that pang of discomfort within me when I think about it, despite the distance of separation I've made geographically. And for those who live there, there really is no way out. A steel cage encompasses Youngstown, covered in years of ivy and rust. It's open for escape, but few choose to leave. There's a comfort in living in confinement, in seeking the shelter of familiarity. That's why so few ever drive down the exiting highway, despite the obvious tension in the city air.

With the gentle motor of the car buzzing in sync with the summer grasshoppers, I say goodbye to Youngstown, but farewells are never infinite here. Behind me, broken grey towers begin to take cover under forest branches. The city shrinks behind the trees, and the trees fall dark under the moon. Youngstown's ghosts are roaming, knowing that in this fading history, they'll never find rest. ☙



COMMONEST, CHEAPEST, NEAREST, EASIEST

Reading Walt Whitman and
Trying to Write in Los Angeles

by Katie Armstrong

Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is still rather new to me, but I feel like I've read it before—like I'm remembering old lines instead of grappling with new ones. I'm beginning to think that if you've read any Whitman before, all Whitman will begin to feel familiar to you, especially if you find yourself preoccupied with the same fear and yearning that preoccupy me.

In "Crossing," Whitman performs as the poem's speaker. He bears encyclopedic witness to his crossing of the East River, designating himself as the pivot point upon which the whole scene turns. We feel Whitman dissolving spatial, temporal, and national boundaries as he crosses, aiming to unite his subjects—past, present, future, animate and inanimate—in a single "well-join'd scheme" (2.1.2). His objective: an all-inclusive communion, an intense spiritual intimacy. I applaud this purpose and the method by which Whitman hopes to achieve it because his

objective has also been mine. But in the process he ought to beware self-aggrandizement; he ought to beware crafting his communion from a place of fear, as a bulwark against loneliness, as I have been wont to do in my own brief stints as a poet.

I read Whitman's poetry most rigorously in the two years that I lived on my own in Los Angeles, during which time my teen years ended rather dimly and my twenties began more dimly still. It is true that I was working to "improve myself" at that time—I studied in a fever, working towards an undergraduate degree in engineering—but my profoundly cold, mechanistic, and uncomplicated education served only to set me in motion down a long, narrow rut, an extended personal nadir. If we use Taco Bell consumption as a barometer for my social and internal situation, things weren't going so well. Taco Bell was less than a block from my apartment. Eating there minimized my daily energy expenditures, which was essential given that I was depressed and didn't have a tremendous energy reservoir on which to draw. And, needless to say, living in Los Angeles and still deigning to eat at Taco Bell on a regular basis was itself a tragedy in miniature.

Reading Whitman poems beside various lavish campus fountains, though, I liked how easy it felt for me to intellectualize his representation of the material world. I liked that Whitman and I could collaborate, elevating the banal into the divine. And most of all, I liked that we, having gained access to the divine, could claim a piece of it for ourselves. (Divinity was a hot commodity for me at the time, and so it remains.) The exercise made me feel less alone—socially useful, even, as if I were a participant in some nebulous community.

How might this community be made, and who could make it? Whitman has some idea, and his vision begins auspiciously enough in "Crossing." He speaks of the condensation of identities which is hastened by the poet's own work. He commands, for instance, that the "flags of all nations [...] be duly lower'd at sunset" (11.2.12). We can imagine another flag taking their place, one that represents a single spiritual identity, not disparate national identities. It is Whitman as poet who prefigures this new spiritual union: "fine centrifugal spokes of light," after all, lie reflected "around the shape of [his] head," like Moses descending from Mount Sinai, the commandments of the covenant in hand.

... living in Los Angeles and still deigning to eat at Taco Bell on a regular basis was itself a tragedy ...

Whitman will even compress space and time in order to create his spiritual community. In one instance, he describes the flight of seagulls to us as he looks on from the ferry: he “saw the slow-wheeling circles” that the birds’ movement suggested in the sky (3.3.6). The use of metonymy here—naming the seagulls’ flight pattern as a way of naming the birds themselves—speaks to the way that the poetic imagination can transport material beings out of their physical arena. In a literal sense, a bird can only occupy a single point in space at any given time, but Whitman transcribes the bird’s flight as a continuous shape, much like using a sparkler on a summer night to “write” in midair. In this way, he rearticulates his subject’s context—from static corporeal moments to a dynamic temporal scale—in a powerful poetic gesture. Compressing a thing’s past, present, and future into a single node means that he can incorporate it in the grand union in which “every one [is] disintegrated, yet [is] part of the scheme” (2.1.3).

As the speaker, Whitman situates himself at the center of a narrowing gyre. Multiple static frames of reference collapse into a single dynamic frame: the poet’s personal vantage. His survey of the river crossing yields almost too many aesthetic riches to count, but Whitman gathers them conveniently with his own “sights and hearings.” Material beauties are collected handsomely, like “glories strung like beads,” as if upon a necklace (2.1.5). And the various beauties Whitman sees and hears reflect rather well on him, it would seem. They adorn his person, elevating him to a higher status. As a poet, Whitman fashions an alluring vision of unity among his subjects, but this vision cannot be divorced from his personal ambition, as the speaker, to achieve an exalted art. Whitman goads us to consider his power to refine mundane verse: “What the push of reading could not start, is started by me personally, is it not?” (10.2.5).

When Moses, clutching the tablets, descended from the mountain to speak to the Israelites, he put on a veil, diffusing the intensity of the holy light emanating from his face. Whitman obscures himself, too, though hardly in the spirit of Moses’s self-effacing gesture. By concealing his own eyes, Whitman effects a panoptical power dynamic: “Who knows but I am as good as looking at you now, for all you cannot / see me?” (9.2.3-4). This dynamic grants him a critical distance, almost a physical separation, from the poem’s subjects. We can imagine Jeremy

Bentham's architecture as having a temporal element, as well, an opportunity that Whitman keenly exploits. "I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born," he writes, crowing about this intergenerational surveillance. At another moment, Whitman's boasts approach taunts: "Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in unknown ways be / looking upon you" (11.2.1-2).

Whitman carries his own engraved tablets, but he actually composed the words there, not just delivered them. The river water, the sun, the crowds of men and women—he has inscribed them all, articulated them in writing. But the poet has also inscribed them in a geometric sense, drawing their shapes enveloped perfectly by his own figure. Whitman goes on to address "you faithful solids and fluids" directly: "we plant you permanently / within us," he reminds them (12.1-2; 12.2-4-5). Obviously, the poem's subjects will have no meaningful return from this consumption. They "furnish [their] parts towards eternity," and in doing so are forever undone (12.2.8). Meanwhile, Whitman celebrates the "impalpable sustenance" he receives "from all things" in his field of view (2.1.1). But the incorporation of all the world's contents into Whitman's self-rests on two dangerous (and dubious) notions: first, that the contents are his to know; second, that the contents are his to name.

I'm haunted on Whitman's behalf by the consequences of this inscription. I fear that he'll bankrupt his own poetic exercise and that the bankruptcy will break him. Whitman clearly doesn't mean to disfigure his subject, to annihilate its context, to ingest its spiritual filling. The reason I know so comes straight from the poet himself, only in a different poem ("Song of Myself") in my favorite Whitman stanza:

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest, is
Me,
Me going in for my chances, spending for vast
returns,
Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first
that will take me,
Not asking the sky to come down to my good will,
Scattering it freely forever.

Here, Whitman offers his neck to us, sticking it out for the possibility of inclusion in the "well-join'd scheme." Humbled, laid low, he supplicates at an altar. He "adorn[s]" himself, to be

sure, but more than enriching Whitman's decadent self, this adornment benefits others. Lest we worry that old Walt has debased himself, we need only notice his consciousness of risk in the last line. By "asking the sky to come down to [his] good will," he realizes he would despoil it, "scattering it" for all eternity—a far cry from the communion he imagines during his river crossing.

For his part, like mine, Whitman knows what it means to struggle with the problem of loneliness. "Saw many I loved in the street, or ferry-boat, or public assembly," he recalls, "yet never / told them a word"; even as his friends "call'd [him] by [his] highest name," he makes no reply (8.1.2-7). In Foucault's conception of the panopticon, the observed figure provides information but never participates in communication—so it is with Whitman's subjects, with whom he struggles to engage in a genuine and reciprocal way.¹

Whitman's anxieties about what it means to inhabit a body undercut even the intimacy of "their flesh / against [him] as he sat" (8.1.4-5). "I too had receiv'd identity by my Body," he begins. "That I was, I knew was of my body—and what I should be, / I knew I should be of my body" (6.2.2-4; emphasis added). "That [he] was"—the basic fact of his existence—rests upon inhabiting a physical body. But Whitman presses up against the limits of his corporeal form as he frets over spiritual fulfillment. On some level Whitman knows he "should be of [his] body," but his embrace of that notion is hamstrung by his struggle toward an ethereal dimension. The panoptical observer's actual presence in the central tower of Bentham's architecture is ultimately irrelevant, of course: the mere possibility of his gaze effects the panopticon's purpose. With his panoptical gaze, then, Whitman denies his own body. But ought he risk denying the body even as he yearns so strongly for genuine human connection?

As much time as I spent reading and re-reading Whitman in my first two years of college, I likely devoted even more to writing and re-writing my own attempts at poetry. I spoke so little around this time—sometimes not for whole days—that I more or less lost acquaintance with my own voice. Still, I convinced myself to enroll in an undergraduate poetry workshop in my fourth semester. The workshop involved, needless to say,

They adorn his person, elevating him to a higher status.

1 Foucault "Panopticism" in *Discipline and Punishment*

some speaking. But the exercise of talking ended up troubling me much less than the exercise of writing. I fell into cataloguing habits, like Whitman; I couldn't stop writing in the first person, engaging in invented arguments or negotiations with some unnamable "you." Writing poems ultimately became strategic, a method of claiming a social space for myself.

But in fixating on this notion, I had a lot of trouble believing that my writing could ever constitute an act of giving to anyone else. "Going in for my chances" and "spending for vast returns" required vulnerability, a willingness to share myself. Like Whitman, I often found it easier to gobble up swaths of the universe, even if they weren't mine to take. And while I can't entirely pin my want of intimacy and community on my reckless writing habits, they are insidious contributors to some degree or another. I didn't manage to keep in touch with anyone from that poetry workshop, by the way.

Both Whitman and I have to be wary of forgetting to "bestow" ourselves—or, more dangerous, forgetting how to bestow ourselves altogether. If we insist on looking, then we have to allow ourselves to be seen. If we insist on divinity, then we have to accept the laying on of hands, locked as we are in these physical bodies. If we insist on writing, finally, let us "go in for our chances," and let the poem be a gift to somebody else. ☙





EPIDURAL HEMATOMA

by Nozomi Kido

Everything moves slow; my eyes gently bat. I find myself caught between darkness and blurred chaos. The men and women draped and layered in white and baby blue prepare me meticulously. This one touching me, her hands feel stressed, used and broken in. I am accustomed to similar hands. Maybe it's her? My head slowly pivots around my neck, and our eyes meet, but no. Strangers eyes stare back at me, yet heartache overcomes the face of the fragile woman still, as she stands to my left with her hips pressed against my bed. She reminds me of my Ma, the way her eyes sing to me saying, "You don't realize how precious you are". My eyes shift slowly to the right, but my attention is redirected toward the caring woman once again, as she pinches me gently. Wait, what is she putting in my arm? Stay calm. I suppose she's trying to help, since ma told me they would make me all better. Ma's always right. *Where is ma, anyway?*

A muffled ringing travels and echoes through my four year old eardrums, obscuring any words spoken by my audience. I am being subdued, I can tell, but at this moment I am not exactly sure why. My heart inevitably begins to race, fighting to escape the cage of my body. A heaviness presses down on the

bottom right of my fractured skull, as it refuses to inflict discomfort on my person. I discover pain is indistinguishable at the moment, and sound is irrelevant; my eyes process as much as possible to assemble somewhat of a memory. Sleepiness and a wave of warmth drown the lids of my eyes as they now grow heavier. I am failing to keep awake. *What got me here?* I keep asking myself. *Where is ma? Did I do something bad? Am I being hurt? No, I was already hurt.* Now I remember. Machines begin to scream as the adults grow still. I slip into a deep, two month rest.

*“No, my camp counselor
dropped me down a flight
of concrete stairs,
and my skull fractured
into my brain.”*

The room is dry, with occasional beeps and conversations between machines, my only company really, as they fill the stale spaces between the air. My eyes attempt to slowly open. I think I'm in my bedroom at first, but as I take my first conscious breath, an eerie feeling clouds my head as my unfamiliar environment is registered. I begin to panic at first. I am not where I am fond of, a place I can call home. *Where am I then?* I try to move, but my body is still and unresponsive. I am vulnerable.

I hear familiar heels now, as they quietly tiptoe past my bed while I lay. I can smell her hair, fresh and still damp from a shower with the Pantene she and Christina always used, sautéed with her three year old Chanel she so cleverly rations. Ma's always been amazing at all that, along with many things. It wasn't until many years later that I came to that realization.

I try to explain it to many friends, or even my science teachers and professors these days.

“Yes, it's called Epidural Hematoma (as I sigh and prepare for the usual explanation), a traumatic accumulation of blood between the skull and the ripped off dural membrane. It basically involves a focused blow to the head, like one from a hammer or baseball bat.

“You were hit by a baseball bat in the head when you were four?!” If only it were that simple, but no.

“No, my camp counselor dropped me down a flight of concrete stairs, and my skull fractured into my brain.” That’s where the questions usually end, or cease to.

She used to say, “you don’t ever need to explain anything to anyone. You owe nothing to the world. Your story is yours and it’s made you who you are, be proud of your scars!”



At only five-foot-one, Ma is still a hell to be reckoned with. Stocky at best but never underestimated. She carries a sort of demeanor which forces you to step out of her way while walking past you, almost out of respect. I never understood why I did this naturally throughout my childhood. I understand she is my mother and I should respect her indefinitely, but she was much more than that to me and the rest of the world. She always kept her hair nice and short as well, even though I wanted her to grow it long. “Short hair shows professionalism. Long hair is too casual. I’m at work to do business, not play around,” she would say. She considers every detail towards the outcome, as if it’s her against the world. But is she right?

*There is no room for others,
I have begun to realize,
as I look into her
hardworking eyes . . .*

As if she were her own president, her own boss, her own parent even, I soon notice Ma’s methods of success. Despite her endurance, years of dedication supporting a struggling family has paid its toll. The look in her eye harbors pools of mistrust, strategy and sacrifice with good reason. Life has molded her into a cold woman. Can I blame myself for this, as I reflect similar behavior towards her? We feel a sense of detachment from each other, as I convince myself I was a disgrace to my own mother. During my

quiet and distanced childhood, unlike my sister I, avoided and blamed my harsh situation on a single mother. *But why?* Her deep brown eyes carry windows to her untouched heart, preserving its few ounces of love only for her two children, my sister and I. I've discovered each decision I've ever loathed her for as a young, ignorant child has inevitably benefited my existence, thanks to her fierce self-sacrificing nature and never-ending love. There is no room for others, I have begun to realize, as I look into her hardworking eyes, and see my own. I am her and she is me.



Love is an odd concept for the Japanese, as my family contrasted greatly from others in our crowded suburban town of Bellmore. I'd visit the houses of the few friend's I had, awed at the mother's behavior towards their gold prized possession of a child. Anger collected inside of me as I noticed children my age blessed and showered with gifts, but with no reason behind the reward. I questioned my mother over and over again about this, until the scorching summer day of August 18th, when I finally moved out. Anger from years of my childhood still festered in my mind and cold heart as I boarded my flight, watching the passengers frantically running and pushing into the plane.

Separation causes appreciation, I believe. As a college student now, I have a new perspective on the importance of everything and anything. My mother, through years of hardship and unorthodox methods of raising a child has shown me the importance of self-sustaining survival; Forget the irrelevant materials and individuals in life if they refuse to contribute positivity towards you.

I like to see every day as a restart button now, as we are the creators and engineers of who we are to become, adapting to an ever changing and dangerous environment proving only successful for those who refuse defeat. We are the hunted, as our day -to-day existence involves survival only, no matter the measures and costs. Escape is not our only option. In my case, death was not an option for me and my mother.

*This one touching me,
her hands feel stressed,
used and broken in.*

“Non-chan kuakunai-o” my tattoo reads in Japanese. “Mom, I’m not scared.”; the last words slipping my pale lips as I clasp my mother’s desperate hands. They attempt to roll me away as we hold on, refusing to let go. A smile runs across my innocent face, as I tell myself no, this is not the end of my story. Our entwined fingers begin to slip, and I am viciously wheeled into the room of work.

Everything moves slow as my eyes gently bat. I find myself caught between darkness and blurred chaos. The men and women draped and layered with white and baby blue prepare me meticulously. This one touching me, her hands feel stressed, used and broken in. I am accustomed to similar hands. Maybe it’s her? ☺



TO GUATEMALA AND BACK

By Makena Lambert

It was 9:45 pm and too dark to walk home by myself, so you walked beside me. You walked me home every night after I told you about the time when a group of five boys harassed me. Their motorcycles skidded to a stop right in front of me, purposefully blocking my path, sending dust flying up into the air between us. They were being rowdy, laughing and yelling things that I couldn't understand. What to say when you're being harassed wasn't part of my school's Spanish curriculum, although now that I think about it, it should be. I walked on the edge of the road, trying to make my way around them.

"Stop. Parar," I mumbled under my breath as they turned to follow me.

They didn't stop, so I ran off the road into the rows of milpa¹, zigzagging around until they weren't behind me anymore.

The next night, as we headed down the same road, you pulled your hands out from your pockets to show me you had

1 milpa: corn stalks.

your fingers crossed. I looked up at you confused and you told me you hoped they'd show up again. You wanted to make them wish they'd never messed with me.

It took fifteen minutes, maybe less, to walk from the house we all convened at during the day, back to the small, concrete home that I lived in for those ten days with all ten members of my host family. But with you walking next to me, I remember wishing it took longer. I hated saying goodbye to you at the end of the day. I enjoyed being in your company more than anyone else I had ever met. Positivity seeped out of every pore in your body and I swear it rubbed off on everyone around you. Including me. Between the reforestation project and two hour Spanish lessons, our days were long — physically and mentally exhausting, but your simple motto, "It's all good," always put my mind at ease. You liked my company too, I think. It wasn't long before the other people in our group noticed just how much we liked each other's company. Maybe it was because we sat together at every meal, or because when we were set loose to explore the town, we always stuck together. In a rare moment when we weren't together, Ellie pulled me aside to ask me if I "liked" you. I remember telling her that I was hesitant to, or at least hesitant to admit that I did, because I didn't know what you wanted. I couldn't help but wonder if you and I would turn into something more someday. After these three weeks were up and you weren't just stuck with me in Guatemala.

I tried not to spend too much time with my mind in the future. It wasn't hard, as I was enjoying every moment we were living together right then, like you walking me back to my host family's house. It was a cold night, so I wrapped my arms around your left bicep and you took that as your cue to take your jacket off and sling it over my shoulders. Sure, the jacket was warm, but just looking at you in your basketball shorts and blue tank top made me cold. You were notorious for not wearing enough layers. The week before I would have tried to give the jacket back to you, but by then I knew better. You're too stubborn.

Fuego, who had once been trotting along next to us, was now far ahead, but I could still hear his collar jingling. And then I couldn't hear it anymore — the quiet was stolen by a motorcycle engine. You pushed me to the other side of you, out of the street. You always did that, but it made me smile every time. There weren't any street lights, just milpa on either side of the dusty

*I hated saying
goodbye to you at
the end of the day.*

road, but I could still see your face. The sky was bright. You told me that when you were a kid, your dad would always say, "Have you looked up yet?" to remind you to look at the stars. That stuck with me.

We were almost to my house and you still hadn't said much, but you told me that you couldn't stop looking at me earlier when we were all sitting around the fire pit. You said the fire lit up my face nicely. I wanted to tell you that during the Mayan ceremony, when it was my turn to close my eyes and hold the candle to my chest to make a wish, I wished for you before tossing the candle into the flames. But I didn't. Wishes don't come true if you say them out loud. And I didn't know what was going to happen when our summer abroad trip was over and we got back to the states. Would you still like me in the U.S.? Or were you just a summer fling? I never had a relationship last longer than three months, so I wouldn't say I was optimistic, but I was certainly hopeful. And yes, there is a difference. The way you tell it, you weren't looking for a relationship, in fact you didn't want one, but when we got back to California you decided to give me a chance.

We loved each other all the way to Guatemala and back. Past each milestone — three months, six months, and then a year. But I moved to Colorado and took my heart with me, while you kept yours with you in California. Still, I know that if I could sit down right now at that same Mayan ceremony, I'd do it all over again — wish for you before tossing the candle into the flames. Knowing this time that eventually, it would have to burn out. ☙

*We loved each
other all the way
to Guatemala
and back.*



TO THE MOON: ABILITY DESPITE HAVING A DISABILITY

By Inna Kathreen Chang

“We finally made it!” I whispered, as I dramatically wiped the non-existent perspiration off my forehead with the back of my hand. “Now, where did we just land?”

“Moon!”

“Let’s try saying it as a sentence. We’re on the moon!” The twelve-year-old boy repeated those words and I praised him for verbally communicating in a complete sentence.

“People say ‘Shoot for the moon, and if you miss, you’ll land among the stars.’ That means if you try your absolute hardest, you will achieve great things no matter what,” I explained to him. “And look what happened, we made it to the moon!”

He began clapping and laughing at our incredible accomplishment, eliciting an identical response from me. Once I caught my breath, I attempted to further engage him in the activity by asking him what else he saw.

“We’re on the moon!” he replied with a lingering giggle.

“That’s right! But if you look a little bit closer, you can also see some stars—and some rocks—and an astronaut!” I exclaimed, pausing after every object to point with my finger toward the concave screen.

Hearing the sound of the fire raging under our feet, I let my co-pilot know we were taking off to our next destination in space. He responded by excitedly jolting forward in his seat and placing his hands on top of the exposed head sitting in front of us. Its owner froze, her shoulders hunched up, almost grazing her ears. With suspense, my coworker slowly turned her head back—her crinkled nose and slanted eyebrows creating a burst of laughter that echoed throughout the Fiske Planetarium at the University of Colorado Boulder. His attention was then quickly redirected to the astronaut waving goodbye.

“Bye! See you next time!” He let go of my coworker to wave into the abyss, pausing for merely a moment to watch his dwindling friend with endearment. He looked at me with his dusty, azure eyes that somehow were still illuminated in the darkened dome and proceeded to wrap his arms around my head as we continued our adventure.

After knowing him for over a year, I was well acquainted with the successful but exhaustive methods that encourage him to participate in these community-based activities. When he shifted his hands from my head, my coworker’s head, or his lap onto the armrest, it signaled it was time for excessive enthusiasm. Verbal phrases like “We’re still in space, silly! We can’t get off yet!” or “Are you holding on tight? I think we’re taking off soon!” while simultaneously patting him to provide physical stimulation was sometimes enough to keep him interested. Other times, he was already up, maneuvering through dangling feet and a sea of backpacks to tap his peers on the shoulder and wave closely to their face as we traveled through space.

He is one out of 12.6% of the United States population that has a disability¹. Some well-known disabilities include autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy, but not all disabilities fit neatly under a specific diagnosis. For my first day of work, I was assigned as his therapeutic instructor. When I read about his personal information in efforts to prepare myself for the upcoming

“We’re still in space, silly! We can’t get off yet!”

¹ 2014 Disability Status Report

shift, his plan stated he only had a developmental disability; there was no precise diagnosis to explain his infallible positivity, desire tactile stimulation, or why he is always on the go. Instructors have clocked in as many as 12,000 excruciating steps with sweaty Fitbits after working with him.

That afternoon, when I told his mother he was in the planetarium for the entire show, her jaw dropped.

“The whole time?”

“The whole time,” I grinned. She fixed her attention to the boy, who was stimulating his senses by finger-painting the car door with invisible dye.

“I am so proud of you for watching the show. What did you see in space?”

“We’re on the moon, Mom!” he emphatically repeated. She beamed at him and then me. The dimples on her cheeks and the twinkle in her cerulean eyes confirmed that she understood; she understood how difficult it must have been to keep her son in a room for half an hour instead of exploring every inch of the building. I reassured her that he made up for it by incessantly walking around the park during our lunch break.

Reflecting on our day, having to spend ten hours with him just gave me a glimpse of his life at home. When a child is diagnosed with a disability, parents must face many obstacles to ensure their child’s protection, among the most important include keeping their child integrated with peers, identifying a suitable education, and increasing family support for the child². Most of the time, however, parents do not have the necessary assistance. As community members, it is our duty to understand the perspective of individuals with disabilities so we can better support them.

Children with disabilities are not easily included because of stigma and assumptions. Parents explain that kids without disabilities feel like a disability is contagious—distance is essential if they don’t want to catch it. People also assume those with disabilities prefer to be alone due to their non-sociable personalities or their tendencies to run away, but it is not the case. This is explained by Naoki Higashida, a thirteen-year-old boy with autism. He wrote his book, *The Reason I Jump*, using a computer and alphabet grid to express his inner trapped thoughts:

² Resch, J. Aaron, et al. “Giving Parents a Voice: A Qualitative Study of the Challenges Experienced by Parents of Children with Disabilities.”

I can't believe that anyone born as a human being really wants to be left all on their own, not really. No, for people with autism, what we're anxious about is that we're causing trouble for the rest of you, or even getting on your nerves. This is why it's hard for us to stay around other people. This is why we often end up being left on our own. (question 13)

In reality, children with disabilities want to be included. Researchers from Oslo and Akershus University College found that children with disabilities would rather exert more effort to feel like a "normal kid" than risk the stigma of having a disability³.

Many things barricade possible inclusion and extensive research has been done on whether or not kids with disabilities should be involved in regular classroom settings. Some parents argue their child with disabilities isn't being challenged enough in special education, while others value the teaching of daily living skills over learning how to read⁴. In addition, the American education system is very inflexible and intractable. A mother explains this with a story about her child with autism; a teacher asked her child what color she was holding and her son answered maize, when the "correct" answer was yellow⁵. A child with cerebral palsy states "Teachers just don't know my learning style... There are a lot of things I can do; it is just not in the same sense"⁶. The limitations of common core education make it difficult to include children with disabilities into a regular classroom setting.

However, a recent study by Nowicki and Brown shows that kids are more than happy to include children with disabilities into their classroom. Some ideas brainstormed by classmates included teachers initiating group interactions, educating other classmates that peers with disabilities may need extra time, and creating a supportive environment. Another mother from Ryndak's research stated that "inclusion is philosophically the right way for people to live and grow up". By being included in the community, children

The limitations of common core education make it difficult to include children with disabilities into a regular classroom setting.

3 Asbjornslett, Mona, et al. "Being an ordinary kid' – demands of everyday life when labelled with a disability."

4 Palmer, David S., et al. "Taking Sides: Parent Views on Inclusion for Their Children with Severe Disabilities."

5 Ryndak, Diane L., et al. "Parents' Perceptions of Educational Settings and Services for Children with Moderate or Severe Disabilities."

6 Higashida, Naoki. The Reason I Jump.

with disabilities will be given far more opportunities to increase social skills and self-confidence.

The most vital thing a child with a disability needs is a supportive microsystem, such as parents, caregivers, and teachers. I was blessed to meet someone who has managed to juggle being a parent and a superhero. I met Leslie through my job, as I have been her daughter's therapeutic instructor countless times. Her daughter and son, Jordyn and Kolten, are both diagnosed with pontocerebellar hypoplasia type 2, which makes it difficult for them to produce voluntary movements or communicate verbally, and they often experience seizures. This results in the two of them needing support for daily living skills, such as eating, changing their depends, and transitioning between their wheelchairs and the floor.

The most beautiful characteristic of Leslie is that she genuinely believes in the potential of her children. Research states that no patient with this disability has independently performed movements such as sitting, crawling, or standing⁷. However, Jordyn could sit on her own.

The first time I saw it was at Jump Street, which is supposedly Jordyn's second favorite place on this planet (her first being Disney World). I assisted her onto a secluded trampoline, safely distanced from kids doing dangerous flips and tricks. While sitting with Jordyn's head on my lap, I was slamming my hands on the trampoline, causing her to bounce and laugh. A coworker came up to us and asked for some assistance helping a teenager who uses a wheelchair onto a trampoline.

"Okay, Jordyn, I'm going to help Rachel," I said, as I gently took her off my lap and laid her onto the trampoline. "I'll be right back, so don't have too much fun without me." I made sure to spring off the trampoline with enough force to hear her contagious laugh. Looking back, I saw her beautiful smile with her arms outstretched up toward the sky.

"What did I just say?" I yelled, and then giggled as I went down the four steps to help carry the participant onto the trampoline.

When I started walking back up the stairs toward Jordyn, I stopped.

⁷ "Pontocerebellar Hypoplasia - NORD (National Organization for Rare Disorders)." www.rarediseases.org/rare-diseases/pontocerebellar-hypoplasia/

Jordyn was sitting up.

Her legs were tucked under her bottom and her long arms supported her.

I stood there frozen, both stunned and joyous.

Throughout the activity, she would lose her balance and fall onto her back, but I repeatedly witnessed the steps she used to get to this outstanding achievement. She would roll onto her belly, tuck her knees under her belly one by one, and then push herself up with her hands. Each time Jordyn repeated the process, it took her at least five minutes to sit upright. And each time, I encouraged her to keep fighting with my heart fluttering in my chest.

I practically screamed the great news to Leslie the second she came out of her car to pick Jordyn up at the end of the day.

She shrugged. "Oh yeah, she does that all the time."

My jaw dropped to the floor. She laughed at my dumb-founded face as she went over to greet her daughter, who she tends to call another name. "Hi Momma, how are you today?" Leslie asked Jordyn, as she leaned down to give her daughter a kiss on the cheek. "I missed you."

As I continued to stare at her, I felt my shock transition into admiration. I can't even imagine how difficult it must be for her to witness her children struggle but Leslie has believed and continues to believe in their potential. In an interview, she said:

"I have learned to push myself more and not give up as easily. If they can go through their daily lives with the smiles and laughter that they have, what do I have to complain about? They are in pain and unable to explain to us what it is like to be them but still wake up, laugh, smile, hug, and show compassion to others; they are my inspiration and way of life. I strive to be more like them, complain less, smile more and enjoy what is around me instead of what isn't."

She has consistently told me that her children have taught her more than she has taught them. She cherishes every single moment with her family, which is such a different lifestyle from what most parents experience. Despite the challenges, she would never change it for the world; she truly is a super mom.

After giving Jordyn a kiss, Leslie put on the brakes of Jordyn's wheelchair. She opened a backdoor of her tan Toyota Sequoia and nestled a baseball mitt in the crook to ensure the car door would stay open. She then helped Jordyn unbuckle her chest and leg straps.

"Oh yeah, she does that all the time."

"Okay Momma, give me a big hug!" She wrapped her arms under Jordyn's arms with her feet shoulder-width apart and her knees slightly bent. After counting to three, she swung her almost-as-tall-as-her daughter over her shoulder and carried her to the propped open door.

"Duck, Momma, duck."

I could see Jordyn taking time to process the verbal prompt as her eyebrows furrowed, and then try with all her might to tuck her chin toward her mother's back. I wondered how it must be like to fight against your own body to perform a voluntary movement as Leslie carefully placed Jordyn into the car seat. Once Leslie began strapping Jordyn in, I put Jordyn's things into the back of the car: her tie-dye school backpack with her lunch box and extra clothes, her black backpack with her communication device, her communication device's arm, and her other black backpack with her necessities that include emergency seizure medication, bibs, wipes, and depends. Some days, Jordyn had a few extra things, including things like a swim floaty, her blue striped tote bag with her swim clothing, her winter jacket, her spray bottle, or the canopy for her wheelchair. The wide, unique assortment prepared every day by her parents is both astonishing and inspirational.

After Leslie had Jordyn safely buckled, she met me at the back of the Sequoia so we could load the wheelchair together. She gave me a warm hug, thanked me for hanging out with her "little turd", and wished me a wonderful night, signs of gratitude she always expresses before taking Jordyn home.

Although Leslie is overflowing with love, I have experienced numerous times when people with disabilities were not treated appropriately. I have seen middle schoolers run away snickering from a kid who uses a wheelchair. I have heard my coworkers talk as if the child isn't there to hear it. One of the most devastating experiences was a time when Jordyn came home with a barely touched lunchbox. For eight or more hours, the person responsible for Jordyn did not give her any nourishment at all. It may have been because Jordyn often has wounds in and on her mouth from people roughly shoving a straw in her mouth to drink. It may have been because Jordyn prefers to have a sip of juice before eating. It may have been because Jordyn was having a bit of trouble keeping her arms still and she accidentally hit the provider in the face. It may have been because the caretaker was

unwilling to ask for help when they couldn't figure out how to feed her. It may have been because of an endless list of reasons but it should have never happened. It is never okay to consider that Jordyn, or any child with a disability, does not have the same basic needs as any other child.

On the other hand, I have experienced numerous times when people with disabilities were treated appropriately. A fellow student asked a kid who uses a wheelchair how his day was and if he brought a jacket because it was chilly outside. Many of my coworkers spend entire shifts talking to their participant, even if their participant cannot verbally reply.

And that day with Leslie and Jordyn was a prime example.

While I was walking away from the car, I overheard Leslie through her slightly rolled-down windows as she backed out of the parking spot. It was like a private exchange of words I shouldn't have heard, but I won't ever forget how personal and beautiful it was.

"So Momma, I bet you have some great stories to tell me."

Jordyn groaned.

"Mm-hmm, what else happened, Momma?" she sweetly replied, "I want to hear all about your crazy day."

Jordyn then replied with that same contagious laugh I heard at Jump Street.

I smiled as I continued walking away, my chest feeling tight and warm.

Jordyn's yearbook quote this year was "I may not be the same, but I am equally different." Despite our differences, whether or not we have a disability, we all have the ability to shoot for the moon.

In this case, the kids I've met always seem to be laughing at the fact that they have already made it there. ☺

Jordyn Grochocki was granted her wings on February 9th,
2017.





CONTRIBUTORS

SEAN ANDERSON is currently a senior studying Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. A Bay Area native, he will return to San Francisco after graduation to attend the University of California, Hastings College of the Law. Dissatisfied with the current state of partisan politics, he was prompted him to write a response to the presidential election for his Writing 3020 class. A lifelong love of literature led to him joining the staff of Journal Twenty Twenty this spring. His piece, **THE POLITICS OF WINGS & BEER**, was selected through blind review prior to his involvement.

KATIE ARMSTRONG is a senior studying environmental engineering. She is a lifelong Westerner (Denver to Los Angeles to Boulder to—someday—San Junipero), an oil and gas researcher, a leftist, and a reader, but not in that order. **COMMONEST, CHEAPEST, NEAREST, EASIEST** was written for Dr. Jay Ellis's section of WRTG 3020 ("Don't Fence Me In"). Katie's work has also appeared online at Hobart and Heavy Feather Review. She is on Twitter at @ArmstrongKatie. Her piece was selected through blind review.

INNA KATHREEN CHANG is a graduating senior double majoring in Biochemistry and Psychology with a minor in Chemistry. She has a passion for assisting and advocating for kids with disabilities and currently works in providing therapeutic recreation for them to expand their independence. She aspires to attend graduate school to become an occupational therapist for kids with disabilities. Her piece is dedicated to Jordyn Grochocki, one of the sassiest and happiest girls Inna has ever met. You are loved so very much and missed every day.

JACKIE FARRELL is a Junior from Littleton, Colorado studying Creative Writing at CU Boulder. She writes fiction and creative nonfiction centering around depictions of the complex inward life of ordinary individuals, focusing on life in the modern American West. In her free time she enjoys skiing, hiking and working out, as well as gaming with her boyfriend.

BRADLEY FRESE is a senior majoring economics. After graduation, he will be moving to New York City to pursue a some sort of career in the entertainment industry. He loves stand-up & sketch comedy. Bradley grew up in the mountains of North Carolina in the small town of Waynesville. His interest in astronomy and the interconnectedness of the universe are what inspired the subject matter of Stars. His favorite author is David Foster Wallace and draws inspiration from the way he observed the world.

BRUCE KIRKPATRICK is a senior in the Chemical and Biological Engineering department. His piece, **FREQUENT FLYER: WHY ISN'T DAD DEAD YET?**, was written for WRTG 3030. Despite his background in hard sciences, Bruce's passions include playing several instruments, watching art-house movies, and creative writing. He hopes to matriculate into an MD/PhD program within the next several years but is looking forward to taking a break from academics in the near future. Bruce would especially like to thank Dr. Naomi Rachel for her wonderful editorial skills, constructive feedback, and constant encouragement.

KAI KRESEK was born in China and moved to Denver, Colorado as a child. She is currently in her third year of pursuing a double major in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology and Geography. She hopes to one day be involved in environmental science research and is currently obsessed with remote sensing and GIS. Kai enjoys writing as a way to make sense of herself. She spends her free time taking long walks in dry river beds, trying in vain to remember what that one song is, and deciding whether to spend the last of her book money on Bukowski or Keats.

MAKENA LAMBERT is a freshman at CU Boulder majoring in Ethnic Studies with a minor in Spanish. While Makena grew up just south of San Francisco, CA, she has always deemed Colorado her happy place because growing up, her family spent many summers at a Colorado ranch. She is thrilled to finally be able to call Colorado home. As the daughter of two journalists, Makena has always loved to write, but feels like she finally found "her voice" in this past year and would like to thank the editors of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY for giving her the opportunity to share that voice. These days, her passions include slam poetry, rock climbing, traveling and social justice work.

ELLIE MARCOTTE has a mind for all things visual. Having spent most of her life living on the Front Range, she couldn't imagine going to school anywhere other than the famously scenic University of Colorado at Boulder. As a starting freshman at CU, she hopes to pursue a double major in studio art and advertising, as well as a minor in business. Although it's a full plate, she will always find time to do the things she loves: hiking, camping, skiing, writing, and cuddling with her pets. Ellie has a broad range of interests, but her real passion is in art. She hopes to someday visit the Louvre in Paris, and with any luck speak the language of the people. But a nice trip to Burano, Italy doesn't sound too bad either.

TALICIA MONTOYA is currently a senior majoring in Psychology with a double minor in Creative Writing and Spanish. Born and raised in Colorado, they lived briefly in Las Vegas, Nevada before moving back. When they aren't writing, they're rereading their favorite novels (often by Stephen King), watching movies, or hanging out with their fellow writer friends. After graduation, they hope to join law enforcement, entertain the notion of becoming part of the FBI, and publish at least a few of their still unfinished novels. Their piece **NO, NOT LIKE THAT** was originally written for their WRTG 1250 class and won first place in the 2015 First Year Creative Nonfiction Writing Award and third place in the 2015 Diversity Writing Award.

ALEX NGUYEN is a freshman studying International Relations, and hails from Platteville, CO. NUMBER was written for an assignment in First-Year Writing and Rhetoric. As a child, Alex performed nihon buyo and bon odori, or traditional Japanese dancing, with the Denver Buddhist Temple. Alex has a penchant for writing, reading, acting, dancing, and singing, especially when any of the aforementioned interests include being loud or overdramatic. In their free time, Alex holds Studio Ghibli marathons and screams about Steven Universe to anyone who will listen. Alex intends to become an international journalist and bring attention to important issues around the globe, especially where it concerns privilege, race, gender, sexuality, class, and religion.

TAYLOR PATTISON grew up in Aurora, Illinois and attended Michigan State University for two semesters prior to seeking treatment for his substance use disorder. Over a two-year period, he spent time in treatment centers in Minnesota, Florida, and California. Ultimately, he was able to get sober in January of 2013 and has been in active recovery ever since. Taylor earned an associates degree at a community college in Florida and transferred to the University of Colorado-Boulder in 2015. Currently a senior at CU-Boulder, Taylor majors in Psychology and minors in Sociology. Optimistic about the future, Taylor plans to attend a graduate program in Clinical Social Work or pursue a Psy.D in Clinical/Counseling Psychology. Taylor believes his past experiences along with formal clinical education and training will hybridize, and consequently enable him to become an even more effective clinician.

KATE PETRIK grew up here and there, from the mountains of Vail, Colorado to the music and art scene of Austin, Texas. As an outdoor enthusiast with a passion for aesthetics, denim, and debatably mediocre humor, she loves nothing more than black coffee and a good reference to Spongebob Square Pants. She thanks you for taking the time to read this generic statement about herself, and hopes that you maybe smiled or exhaled forcefully out of your nose.

LEAH REED was born and raised in the suburbs of Denver, CO. She is a graduating senior, finishing two BAs: English with a focus on Creative Writing and Communications. "VOLCANIC BLEEDING" is her first published work and came out of an assignment in Dr. Eric Burger's Advanced Creative Nonfiction class in the Fall of 2016. She hopes her creative work will raise awareness to the struggles young women face in America. She would also like to give Dr. Burger a shout-out for giving her the confidence to submit this piece in the first place.

NICOLE RYAN is a senior studying English Literature and being licensed in Secondary English Education. She has a multitude of passions, but finds writing and photography the most rewarding. She originally believed, without a doubt, she wanted to teach. However, junior year of college brought an abundance of experiences and opportunities that lead her to believe that a career in writing wasn't such a far fetched idea. After all, pursuing your dreams and doing what you love is more important than any type of stability. **THE NEW YORK STORIES** was a large part of this realization, as it was written after spending the summer of 2016 in NYC interning; an experience she believes helped her uncover who she truly is. She is also a writer

for and Music Director of Cliché Magazine, which has given her the tremendous opportunity to gain professional writing experience. She believes that you get what you give, and if you're fearless enough to put what you want out into the universe, the universe is benevolent enough to give it to you.

MEREDITH SHEROCK was born and raised in the highly cultural and incredibly dynamic suburbia of Centennial, Colorado. A disenchanted senior majoring in geology, she has mastered the technique of identifying rock samples while cheerfully disguising how dead inside her coursework makes her feel. Having neglected her passion for writing in favor of more conventionally practical subjects, she has finally returned to the pen and hopes to keep it that way. She is planning to pursue a masters degree in scientific writing in the UK upon graduation, as she fell irreversibly in love with northern England when studying abroad last year. Outside of school, she enjoys wearing bell-sleeved tops, collecting mushroom-shaped decor, sporadically running a travel blog, and rummaging through garbage at any given thrift store. ☙

