

JOURNAL 2020 is a collection of the finest creative nonfiction writing and undergraduate artwork at CU Boulder—the work of young writers with enough strength of voice, vision, and courage to tell their true stories and the true stories of others.

2015
VOLUME THREE



JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY

2015 • VOLUME III

JOURNALTWENTYTWENTY
PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

CREATIVE NONFICTION
VOLUME THREE

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Volume Three, First Printing March, 2015.
University of Colorado Boulder Imaging Services.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY is made possible thanks to the support of the Program for Writing and Rhetoric, John-Michael Rivera and John Ackerman, Directors; start-up funding from Susan and Dick Kirk; a generous grant from the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program: Joan Gabriele, Director, and May Penuela, Coordinator; and our Anonymous Donor.

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 back page for submission guidelines.

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY regrets failing to credit Penelope Baggs correctly for her photo on page 83 in our first and second print runs. Penelope is not only a fine photographer but also a former editor for the journal. See our previous issues for more of her work.

Queries: **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**, Program for Writing and Rhetoric, UCB 317, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0359; or journal2020@colorado.edu. We are a green journal and prefer electronic submissions and correspondence. Printed on recycled stock and fully recyclable (including the cover). Single copy costs are \$12.00 per issue in the U.S. and Canada, and \$14.00 outside North America.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY



When I came to THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC at CU, I was close to earning my undergraduate degree in Environmental Design. I needed only to fulfill six credit hours in my field, and three more in an elective to walk down that aisle. The problem was it took all the effort I had to even show up for class, because my husband had just died. I still don't know what possessed me to choose "Ways of Telling the Story" for my elective, or what exactly happened during my twelve weeks in that class, but I know that I wrote—a lot. The confusion and, at times, utter helplessness that accompanied the loss of someone so close to me were emotions I couldn't begin to articulate, but what a gift it was to learn how to talk them out on paper. Paper never talked back, it never asked questions, and never once did it give me advice. It simply listened.

While I wrote often during those weeks, I know what I first wrote probably wasn't very interesting, or even worth reading. However, my instructor Kerry Reilly's encouragement kept me writing. To my astonishment, I had one of my stories published that year. I cannot help but thank her again and again. Not only did I have a story worth reading, I discovered how much I loved the art.

After that experience, I decided I wanted to earn a Master's degree in Creative Writing at Farleigh Dickinson University. I still wrote about loss, but new stories emerged as well. I began to write about my family, and their history during World War II. I arrived at a dreaded question—what's at stake? A question asked so often, it still haunts me. Even now, when I write, I worry—did I give the reader what's-at-stake? Or did I miss the mark altogether? I now understand that once I've written my story to its end, what's-at-stake seems to miraculously appear anyway. So, as I read the many wonderful ways the stories contained in this journal were told, I had to wonder about the writers: How many of them also discovered the miracle of what's-at-stake?

"LIFE AS A TWINKIE" invited me to peer at life as a Chinese girl adopted by a Caucasian family. In "AN ISLAND OF SOLITUDE" I pondered the difference between solitude and loneliness, and came to understand how a memory could become an addiction like cigarettes in "HER BEAUTIFUL CURSE." "MERIDIAN" took me on a solo camping trip in the snow, while "WHEN YOU'RE A STRANGER" sent me down lonely highways in Utah. I listened in on randy behind-the-scenes dialogue between restaurant workers in "CHICKEN WINGS AND NICETIES." I read of loss: death, suicide, and the ways people deal with both. I was moved by the miraculous evolution of story.

An axiom of **THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC** is, “We write because we have something to say, but we don’t always know how to say it out loud.” Perhaps this is the stake, then—that we have a story, and when we write it all out, sometimes things get said that we had never thought of before we wrote them. I believe that’s what happened for me in that first writing course I took at CU, because as I look back, I realize my pain did dissolve. I believe writing had much to do with that. I believe you too will find such miracles in the pages that follow. I believe you will be moved as I was by the lyricism and the honesty, the humor and, in some cases, the tremendous courage it took to write. In a world as confusing and strange and too often sad as ours, saying it on paper when we can’t always articulate it out loud, we find what’s-at-stake—the miraculous evolution of story. It is the reason we write. ☀&

KERSTIN LIEFF

✉ ☈

Having the opportunity to work on the editing team for **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** is always amazing. We get the privilege to read and delve into the experiences of other undergraduate writers, to see through unique lenses their perspectives on their world, their events and the people they know. Running on our fourth issue so far, it’s heartening to know that each group of new submissions proves that interest in creative nonfiction genres is very much alive and well. We received dozens of submissions—both in art and writing—and being able to sift through them all, and review and discuss them in our makeshift round table of editors, was and will continue to be truly a pleasure and an honor. We want to thank each and every one of our writers, photographers, and artists for helping us make this journal a reality, to continue the proud legacy of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** and its dedication to our students, and to provide a platform for the young voices of our undergraduate campus. It’s been a blast working with all of the writers and faculty to make this journal happen. ☀&

ANDREW HECKOCKS AND AMGD ABDELGADIR, EDITORIAL STAFF

✉ ☈

For years, Hannah and I have toted around cameras, amassing a range of styles and subjects. Becoming Art Directors was just personal evolution. We were delighted to receive a variety of mediums from film to watercolors, covering a plethora of styles, from students across campus. Our search for **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**’s artists to work with the written pieces in this issue proved successful as we received dozens of powerful and beautiful works of art and photography. We know how empowering it is to be published

and we’re excited for the opportunity to publish the best undergraduate works of art on a public platform. We hope you enjoy them. ☀&

CHAD HENDERSON AND HANNAH VINE, ART DIRECTORS

✉ ☈

JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY continues as a print publication annually (no longer every semester). Why write “Volume Three” for our fourth “Issue?” Because we started that way, flying against the digital wind by publishing print twice a year. Because we like memoir but also pieces with footnotes; scholarly journals don’t put leaves on their covers (neither do we; like leaves, but not on our covers). Mostly, we’ll keep “Volume” because the student staff decided on it in last Fall’s course for journal production (**WRTG 2090**—another confusion, I know). Volume Three as a fourth issue remembers that the quantity of strong writing produced by University of Colorado at Boulder undergraduates filled an issue every semester for our first year and a half (and, with enough funding, still could). VI-I1 started us out, then VI-I2, then VII-I1—and now we’re annual, with VIII. Printing once a year allows us to get copies of this beautiful print journal into more hands. And with Independent Study students on staff between Fall offerings of our **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** course, we can develop more online. After you’ve read Volume Three, look for more on the web in months to come.

Send us your writing (if you were a CU Boulder undergraduate when you wrote it) for next year’s print Volume. Look for us to add multi-modal creative nonfiction online—and send us yours. **THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC** continues to teach strong sentences and graduate-level research techniques, but some of us also teach digital storytelling—essays, arguments, scholarship, and creative nonfiction in all its sub-genres, pairing words spoken with words read—with images and sound in all digital forms.

KERSTIN LIEFF came to us for a writing class with Senior Instructor and Journal Faculty Advisor Kerry Reilly, finishing a degree started years earlier. She had just lost her husband to metastatic melanoma; with Kerry’s encouragement, she wrote powerfully from that devastation, publishing in *FragLit*, “when all has gone. white.” That encouragement urged Lieff to graduate work in creative nonfiction. There, a cache of her mother’s letters to a lover during the Russian occupation of Berlin, along with hundreds of hours of interviews before her mother died, gave Lieff the material for *Letters from Berlin*, the 2013 winner of the Colorado Book Award for Biography. Whether or not the survival of those letters says anything about the surprising persistence of writing on paper (we think so), we are honored to have Kerstin Lieff delivering our first guest forward, and the keynote for our Launch of this issue. ☀&

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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THE DOVE

By Maja Solbakken

Looking into my jewelry box, I see way too many necklaces, rings, bracelets and other sorts of accessories. I often run late for school because I can't decide which one to wear. Today, however, I know exactly which one I am going to wear. I pull out the bottom drawer, and there it is: the dove. I hold it up gently and let the white golden necklace slowly run through my fingers.

"That's a great piece of history you're holding right there." I didn't notice my mother enter the room.

"I guess you can say that," I reply without taking my eyes off of the dove.

"Do you want me to help you put it on?" She says with a faint smile. I nod gently and give her my dove.

I received it from my grandmother for Christmas two years ago. She got it from my grandfather after the war ended in 1945. She was only 17 years old back then, and he was 19. Doves had always fascinated my grandfather. He used to bring me to the park to feed them when I was a child. As I sat on his lap, he would tell me stories about how they tricked the Nazis and saved a lot of lives. He was originally a lumberjack, but dur-

ing the war he worked for the Norwegian resistance opposition as a soldier helping Jews to cross the border to Sweden. They were transported to our village hidden in crates, and then guided through hidden paths over the mountain pass into Sweden.

“Of course the Nazis knew what we were doing, but they never found any proof: no one knew the mountains better than us, or how to handle the cold winters.” I would listen to him talk in awe.

“They would threaten and interrogate us, and rummage our houses in the middle of the night, but they never found anything and no one ever spoke of it.” I was too little to understand back then, but I will never forget his stories.

My favorite part, however, was when the war ended, and they celebrated it by releasing hundreds of doves in the park. I don’t know whether he gave the dove necklace to my grandmother as a symbol of peace and love, or just because he liked it. I never asked.

“Are you ready?” My mother’s voice takes me back to reality.

“Yes, I just have to grab my notes.” I answer absently.

“Good, I’ll be waiting in the car with the others.”

I stare into the mirror. My usually long, free-hanging hair is tied up in a tight knot. I look older with my hair this way, but I do not feel any more mature. My grandfather was only two years older than me when he joined the army and risked his life fighting for our country. I could never do that. My grandfather is the strongest person I will ever know.

Silence invaded the car ride. I am seated between my two older brothers, staring at the road ahead of me. As we leave the car my oldest brother lays his arm around my shoulder.

“Are you nervous, little sis?”

I try my best to collect my emotions and give him a smile, but all I can muster is a weird grimace. Half an hour later, as I take slow steps towards the guitar, my heart is palpitating, working faster and faster—even faster than a rabbit on ecstasy. My legs are shivering beneath me like dying leaves. I do not even need to look down, I can feel it: all eyes on me, staring with no smiles, just expectations.

In my mind, all that I’m thinking is, “Why the hell did I sign up for this?” But there is no more time to think. I take a deep breath, trying to clear my head. All my senses sharpen: the lady in the third row clearing her throat, Uncle Thor opening the

program sheet, a baby crying, someone chewing gum like it is an Olympic sport. My skin pushes through a fog of lilies and roses. As I take all of that in, I notice my fingers are moving across the strings, filling the room with sounds that most would find beautiful. The music flows into people’s ears. They are enjoying this moment, but I find it horrible. It’s like a hole is being drilled through my heart, and my happiness is dripping out of it. Each chord sends the drill further into my heart, and my sadness seeps from the wound. After the intro my voice chimes in. My own version of Sissel Kyrkjebøes “Innerst I Sjelen” (“Innermost in My Soul”) starts to surge through the room.

I cannot look at the audience. My eyes are closed and I am back in the park with my grandfather. We are feeding the doves. I drop the breadcrumbs and, in one second, what feels like hundreds of doves are attacking my feet. I scream. My grandfather reaches out his hands and pulls me into his lap.

“Doves are like boys, Maja. They only bully you because they like you!” He says, as I can feel his heavy heartbeats against his chest, and the strong smell of aftershave.

I could not be in a safer place.

Sound waves from the last note resonate around the room. I am back. I raise my head, open my eyes and stare at the crowd. No applause or smiles. I do not bow. Some people nod gently at me, telling me “good job” without actually using words. I put my hand in my purse and pull out a small paper dove. My grandfather taught me how to fold them. I walk purposefully to the middle of the room. My feet can barely carry me. I have never felt so weak. I place the dove on the top of the casket and lean down. Wanting to say something, a last word, but my voice cracks—instead warm tears stream down my cheeks. As I walk down the aisle back to my seat, I see a dove on the windowsill. From the corner of my eye, I think I see it spread its wings and fly away. ☙

*My legs
are shivering
beneath me like
dying leaves.
I do not even need
to look down, I can
feel it: all eyes on
me, staring with
no smiles, just
expectations.*



Photo by Hannah Vine

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HER BEAUTIFUL CURSE

By Pauline Zenker

Then I woke up.

He deliberately held a cigarette up to meet his lips like an old friend. A blue flame wrapped comforting arms around his smoky treat. He inhaled a deep breath of velvet smoke, slowly releasing a cloud of tension that lingered between us outside a greasy New York City diner. Watching him brought me back to her, my beautiful curse. He stood smoking his Marlboro Red with an artistic manner in an elegancy that you can only pick up from her. The exhaled fumes made the clear a little hazy. I was falling into a silky dream, one where I found myself miles overseas surrounded by her.

This dream started black and white like a broadcast show on an outdated television set. Before I realized, she was painted over with the oils from an impressionist time, coloring the black and white. She was arresting and always remained graceful. She pulled me into her world like she had planned, like a street gambler would on the avenues and boulevards. My eyes explored and followed the lines of her rich baroque architecture, lengthy

men in black tailored suits, an endless amount of picture frames, and the river boats that circulated through her veins, pumped by a nostalgic heart.

My reverie was disrupted by an unpleasant bitterness lingering on my tongue from the New York coffee. I looked back at him, the stranger, to see colorfully detailed flames slowly burning crisp paper and the fragrance of tobacco in this cement city that we tolerate.

A familiar shrieking noise quickly lured me back into my daunting dream. My ears had become fine-tuned to the similar sound of reckless New York City drivers. This shouting silence was the token symbol that brought me from one to the next. It was the music of metal yelling as the wheels ran deeply into the tracks. As I sat down for a transient ride on the metro, the occasional performer would harmoniously charm all the travelers with the familiar Portuguese tune, *“Ai Se Eu Te Pego,”* on a dull accordion. Distracted, sometimes I would miss my stop and go further than I had anticipated. This didn’t bother me. I was gifted with the luxury to get deeply lost under her skies that Van Gogh’s mesmerizing hand once painted.

Uproarious honking from aggressive yellow taxis forced my eyes to open. Glancing over, I saw he had inhaled almost half of his cigarette. The biting perfume, permeated his clothes, absorbed me back into this dream.

I stood on her newly born street, Rue Oberkampf, where all the young were scattered. I sat on the rooftop of seven floors, the tallest you’ll ever grow in a skyline so modest. I sunk into these white cushions with the starry night shining ever so gently on my dark clothes. This is where I went to find music, while the tall church’s bells would play along, as the spotlight from Gustave’s tower would find me through the crowds.

¤ ¤

“But Paris was a very old city and we were young and nothing was simple there, not even poverty, nor sudden money, nor the moonlight, nor right and wrong nor the breathing of someone who lay beside you in the moonlight.”¹

1. Hemingway, Ernest. *A Moveable Feast*. NY: Scribner’s, 1964; 58.

¤ ¤

Then I woke up from this dream I once lived.

He nearly finished his smoky outing before I noticed. I watched him pinch the butt of the cigarette and extinguish it on the lifeless cement that stood below us. I knew it wasn’t his last because it never was. That was okay. I understand the desire of addiction: The desire to return to her, my addiction, the best place I have come to know. Until I return to Paris I can’t help but dream of her. I am stuck with this beautiful curse. ¤





ANSWERS

By Laura Ridyr

The west is a promise. It is the promise that beyond the next sharp bend in an endless stretch of road, there is a something. A something worth having that one cannot touch and which one cannot view—whether through camera lens or oil paints or prose—anywhere else. A something, intangible but somehow visceral. It is also a promise of things: the concrete but unquantifiable. Riches, resources, or homes for a vagrant kind of soul.

Things and somethings. These are the promises that once drew wanderers and treasure hunters, gold miners and desperados driven by greed as much as need; that enticed outlaws and optimists alike. The somethings seduced ranchers motivated by the necessity of space, as well as the persecuted seeking some semblance of freedom that never existed for their forefathers. The west promised a place where the ability to survive was qualification enough to be considered human and where justice was queen, until she wasn't. Where, at times, blood and squalor and trails paved with tears over-

powered her. A place for the independent-minded fleeing the masses and the corrupt seeking exemption, a place where the athlete goes for a challenge, and the moneyed now seek the best views. The west is the promise of contradiction: of life and death, of wealth and destitution. The desert is now home to the likes of Las Vegas, and somewhere behind a jagged fence line, a mansion looks out on the Dallas Divide. Oprah lives outside of Telluride on a patch of land worth millions. A patch of land just over the mountains from the tiny semblance of a town where my great grandfather worked himself to death to make a living, sucking in silica and candle smoke as he hammered along quartz veins by hand in the dark damp of silver mines.

The west is the promise of every dream that wanderlust can endeavor to imagine, but it is also a hard reality. It is heat and storms and snow, rattlesnakes and falling rock, earthquakes and—so they say along the Cosmic Highway that winds down from the Sawatch—aliens. The west is where the weird come to retire, in the gated community of Area 51, near the tourist-town charm of Roswell. Where the strange go to be apart from the rest of the world, to seek solitude under broad swatches of sky. A place where people and fortunes disappear on treacherous byways and inside darkened casinos, and where fortune seekers of old paid in blood and black lung for the hope of coal and gold. Gold, a promise in its own right, which has since been replaced by other resources infinitely more valuable: oil. Farming subsidies. Water.

The shouting over that precious thing begins at ten thousand feet where tributaries turn to creeks, tumbling off rock and pine to the grassland below, while elsewhere down the line people bite their nails in an incongruent desert paradise of recycled liquid and neon cowboys. But the water does not come easily. Like the mountainside that has—over time—crushed and frozen and buried and starved miners and road builders and explorers and commuters as payment for daring its slopes, so too the rivers exact their tolls. Water tempts the definition of finite in great and sudden swells, sweeping away the roads that lead to headwaters and tearing out the foundations of the houses that perch on riverbanks. You asked for water, say the skies and say the mountains, as every hundred years or so they offer it ten-fold. They surrender it in such excess that the ground can't absorb it

*A place where
people and
fortunes
disappear on
treacherous by-
ways and inside
darkened casinos,
and where
fortune seekers of
old paid in blood
and black lung for
the hope of coal
and gold.*

and the dams burst and the people, standing knee deep in mud when the flood passes, are looking at no simpler a solution than they'd been looking at the day before.

The west is the promise of well-intentioned retribution. It calls in debts with little warning, long after the dealers have forgotten that they're bound to laws of even exchange. Deserts run dry till they flood. The prairie is endless until it comes to a careening halt against the mountains' feet. Snow sits quietly before the avalanche. From the foothills' shrub-shrouded sides to the rain slickened cliffs where the coast meets the sea, the question is never if there will be a price to pay, but when, and how high.

That is not to say that the west knows no forgiveness; that it is any more evil than it is good in its state of reckless nature. To say that the west is wicked would be to say that God is comparable to man or that the rivers don't know their own courses. It would be to say the mountains don't know where they stand, would be to assume that their indifference to the fall of trees and the passing of time stems from meanness and not from nature. From the understanding that, as time decays, their iron innards will inevitably corrode. And despite this, they will outlive us.

Men may dig out their cores while fire and blight strip them of their outer dressings, but they themselves will go on long after the trees and the men are gone, standing—if a bit worn—until the world hangs naked in the solar system under an exploding sun. The mountains know this. Perhaps we know this. Perhaps the promise of knowing this is a part of the something drawing us westward; one of the answers we seek. Perhaps their endlessness is enticing to the flighty, briefly present human heart.

The west is a promise of a something. Of an eternity. It is a promise of adventure, of hope, of beginnings; of sanctuary and wildness. It is the promise of things. It drives a hard bargain and offers, in exchange, a raw and uninhibited world where the same elements that grant life also grant destruction, but where, nevertheless, life persists. It is a promise humanity runs towards in multicolored droves, for it is a promise not of winning nor losing, or of failure, or success; but a promise of movement. Of being moved. Of contradiction. The West is a promise of questions, because it is the promise of answers. ☀

WIND

By Keiran Pirie

The wind is mysterious. It leaves me with such wonder and fascination that it's hard to decide if I find it treacherous or exquisite. Is the wind a he or she? Is it the Katrina who blew out the candles before going to bed? Or is it Joplin; who found himself lost in southern Missouri? I like to believe the wind is the beauty I hear when I don't want to hear anything.

Peter, Paul, and Mary told me "the answer is blowin' in the wind," but what does that mean? Nothing I've come to learn in the city is ever that easy. The only thing I know to do, is let its quietness fill me up, ignore the rest. Pretend the screech and screams do not exist. When I hear the rustle of orange leaves scatter gracefully, I zone out and find a different place inside of me. This place is the closest thing I can relate to feeling truly free.

Wind is such a simple word it should have a simple meaning, but it doesn't. Shouldn't I know the answer to wind, being from the "Windy City" of Chicago. A doctor is a cooling sea breeze in the Tropics, and I'm never going to become a doctor. So in theory I can't understand the language. The language that originates in one place but really never stays. A girl you thought you knew just became a runaway.



Photo by Alexandra Upadhyaya

I have this feeling deep in my gut. It seems to die, then rise again. The wind may travel far from home, but I sure know where I belong. Does the wind ever feel homesick? Happening all over the world, where did it begin? Some people say wind comes from the unequal heating of the Earth's surface, but if that were true, then where's its mom? It needs a home to keep it warm, the wind has lots of thoughts to store.

Invisible to the naked eye, escaping millions one day at a time, that's the power I need to find, much more useful than any wind turbine. Wind power doesn't rule over man. It produces four percent of the world's energy, not having to kill anything.

Not having to deal with the pressure of making someone proud. The wind does as it pleases, and usually with a howl. If a human faces a problem, a struggle is to come. The wind will blow right through it, as if it never were. Life has an ending point much like a book. A summer breeze always seems to find a nook. The expectation of wind is to be kind and friendly. To allow young creatures to herd in flocks, warm and pure, without a harsh breeze to disdain their allure. Often unpredictable the wind will see what's fit. Having no eyes or no shape it might just be a myth. A human, however, shall do their job. Whether it's being a student or fighting a war. The schedule is premeditated and really quite a bore. The only thing unpredictable is time itself. How will the years impact your soul before your ashes are on a shelf?

"Thought is the wind, knowledge the sail, and mankind the vessel," said Augustus Hare, a man with great wisdom. This phrase confuses me much like a prism. Looking closer I realize the truth it speaks. Build your ship with a brain and find what you seek. To whom do we listen when given a direction? The voice in our ear? Our own reflection? There's a silent killer in the air. The fever is rampant and really not fair. Don't look around now, you'll see it instantly. Found within ourselves is a deadly mystery.

Why is a classic romance titled *Gone with the Wind*? Is it because wind has become a phrase to take something forever? To carry a love that should have been never. A straw in the wind is a sign for tomorrow. Wipe away your past and forget the sorrow. Mankind doesn't know the meaning of love. We would rather put money far above. The wind loves to ring the chimes. Bring a smile to my face a mile wide. Compassion is a sought after trait. Human feelings are mostly hate.

*I love the sound
of nothing.
Nothing to me
feels a lot like
something.
A something
nobody else can feel
because it's unique
to me.*

Being lost should be expected today. Can't lift off the stone that seems to weigh. Looking for a place to thrive. Follow the breeze and get left behind. The wind won't wait. It moves with great speed. Much like a lecture, slow down, I plead. The wind is great friend's with reality. Not caring about anybody's vitality. You work all day in hopes of a better tomorrow, to find around the corner a new Sleepy Hollow. Why must our aspirations be cut so short? The wind doesn't stop, it only soars. A wind symphony plays off in the distance, but trapped you are by your own existence. Not having time to enjoy the beauty of wind, you must return home to your own kin.

I love the sound of nothing. Nothing to me feels a lot like something. A something nobody else can feel because it's unique to me. Day dreaming on a cloud holds the key. The wind knows all, it's been to Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Wind is air, it keeps us alive. We welcome it with diesel, methane, in hopes it will survive. Nothing turns into something when everyone realizes its importance. The wind has no name tag, should we give it our fortunes?

Acts of random kindness are very rare. But the wind never fails to blow through my hair. It's as easy as a hello in an unfamiliar place. Just like a mountain wind blowing in your face. Happiness can be caused by the weirdest of things. If you are lucky, something will cling. Hopefully this happiness is produced naturally. Addiction to synthetic love is only fantasy. ☙



THE EXISTENTIAL LADYBUG CRISIS

By Alyssa Chacon

I've always been a bit of a nihilist. I believe the world is meaningless and that there's no point to anything in it. The problem is I wish I didn't see the world this way, so I try to find inspiration in anything I can. Eventually, everything disappoints me by being underwhelming or void of meaning. My favorite question to ask people is, "What do you live for?" A lot of people can't answer the question at all. Some try to argue that in the end they want to be able to look back on their lives and say they were good people. I comment that in the end they won't look back on their lives at all. They'll be dead. They'll be nothing. That ends the conversation because it's impossible to argue with nothing. Undeniably, everything comes to an end. Everybody will die, the world will end, and there will be nothing to show for it. So, of course there's no point. We're all working towards nothing. It's a radical idea, but it's all I can ever think about.

I don't know why I started feeling this way. I've gone through a lot in my life, but I don't blame anybody for my problems. I could blame it on seeing my grandma's dead body when

I was eight. I could blame it on the times when we didn't have water, electricity, or food. I could blame it on my mom for being a drug addict. I could blame it on my mom for begging me to let her kill herself one too many nights, convincing me I was the one who should feel guilty. I could blame it on my mom for slitting her wrists in the backseat of the Cadillac leaving me covered in blood. I could blame it on my mom every time, but I don't. It's not her fault that the world is cruel. Everybody experiences hardship; that's just the way it is. It sounds like I'm bitter and sad about the bad memories from my past, but really my experiences have opened my mind to accept things for what they are. I expect things to disappoint me, so when they do—and they always do—I accept it and move on. Life follows an inescapable pattern, and even the smallest moments fall victim.

One day, I was sitting in front of a hallway window, waiting for my biology class to start. I was completely lost in my phone, scrolling through other people's lives, when suddenly I was pulled back into reality. Something landed on my head and started crawling around in my hair. I shook it out as quickly as I could. My heart started beating so fast I could hear it in my head. I panicked because even the sight of a bug will make my skin crawl all day. Bugs may be harmless, but I can't help but to be repulsed by them. Looking around for the culprit, I was pleasantly surprised to find a ladybug crawling around on the floor. All my fears faded away.

Ladybugs are constantly appearing in my life at important moments. They're like a sign from the world that everything will always be okay. Once after a bad day at school, I got on the bus and there was a ladybug crawling on the window. There was a ladybug on the ground at my grandma's funeral. When my mom had another episode and ended up in the hospital, I woke up to a ladybug sitting on my nightstand. That's why I feel so strongly about such an arbitrary thing. It's amazing that a ladybug could be in the right place at the perfect time.

I put my finger in front of it and let it climb onto my hand. I watched as it crawled to the edges of my fingers, trying to find solid ground. As the ladybug was exploring the landscape of my hand, the class was let out and I put it back on the ground. Hundreds of kids started flooding out of the lecture hall. The hallway filled with the noise of conversation and shuffling feet. Through the chaos, I looked down and saw the ladybug caught in

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the middle of the rush. The poor thing was facing his imminent death. People walked right over him and came so close they would just nearly miss crushing him. Every second that went by was painful. Everybody just kept walking along completely unaware of the miracle under their feet. He was frozen in the middle of the crowd waiting for his fate to be determined. One wrong step and he'd be dead. It was one of those horrifying scenes that you don't want to watch, but just can't look away from.

After the crowd had dissipated, he was still standing there in all his glory. It was a miracle that my little symbol of hope had been faced with inevitable death, yet survived. It didn't even make sense that he was alive. Feeling relieved, I was prepared to go to class satisfied with my life. Then some brute in combat boots came down with one swift step, unknowingly destroying his innocent life. She walked right out the door with his guts stuck to the bottom of her boots. I just stood there in shock, staring at the remaining pieces of his tiny body scattered across the carpet.

The world had yet again made a cosmic joke at my expense. In a moment that tiny creature was crushed, along with all my hope, affirming my belief that the world is ultimately meaningless. After all was said and done, it was pretty funny. At least I can laugh at how absurd it all is. It's hard coming to terms with the fact that the world has no meaning and you have no purpose. People are so afraid of mortality. It's close to impossible to imagine what it would be like not to exist. It's terrifying to think that one day you'll be gone. If you really think about it, death is so natural and pure that it's almost beautiful. We all struggle and work so hard to reach goals that will have no value. We try and try, but it's useless. I'm still enchanted by ladybugs, regardless of their fragility. They're going to die one day, but that doesn't mean I can't enjoy them while they're alive. The paradox is that even though I see life as worthless, I still choose to continue to live it. ☀



Photo by David Coons

LOVE IS IN THE EARTH

By Matthew Thomas

Emily, first things first, I'd like you to say hi to Ryan for me. Tell him his friends are safe with me, and that he needs to take it easy with all the wine Jesus keeps pouring him- so he doesn't forget to help you shine the moon. I went in to your room yesterday (sorry I know you hate it when I do that) and found the earrings I bought you for your last birthday. You never got around to putting them on . I'm just gonna assume that they were so beautiful, you were afraid you'd lose them.

You were my greatest fan, and my biggest critic. I'm going to miss having you around to keep me honest. And yet, I have the strange feeling that you will still keep me truthful even if you are not physically present.

I exhale and watch the room around me disintegrate. I'm tossed through the rings of Saturn into the realm of my mind, which lies well beyond physical incarnation. It is the most unfamiliar, beautiful, insightful, and terrifying thing my eyes have ever seen. The waking world around me has become a dream.

It's clear now that one can travel very far through the universe not by spacecraft, but by simply looking within one-

self. The self, unlike the ego, is not a singular entity that exists separate from the universe around it, but is the universe, which surrounds all of us. What we see and feel here and now is what the entire universe is doing.

*"All matter originates and exists only by virtue of a force which brings the particle of an atom to vibration and holds this most minute solar system of the atom together. We must assume- behind this force- the existence of a conscious and intelligent mind. This mind is the matrix of all matter."*¹

My sister was always the sober one at the party because my sister never wanted to miss a second of consciousness. She knew that what you do with your time here matters. She knew that no possession was to be taken for granted and that no thing was to be taken seriously. When she was mad at me, it felt as if a tidal wave had hit me. When I could get her to grin, it made me feel like I was the funniest person in the world. When I could get her to laugh, the world didn't exist at all.

*"For truly I believe that Ill Fortune is of more use to men than Good Fortune. For Good Fortune, when she wears the guise of happiness, and most seems to caress, is always lying; Ill Fortune is always truthful, since, in changing, she shows her inconstancy. The one deceives, the other teaches; the one enchains the minds of those who enjoy her favour by the semblance of delusive good, the other delivers them by the knowledge of the frail nature of happiness. Accordingly, thou mayst see the one fickle, shifting as the breeze, and ever self-deceived; the other sober-minded, alert, and wary, by reason of the very discipline of adversity."*²

The doctors called it a "brain tumor." But if you'd ask me, I'd say that my sister's giant soul was simply too large for the small, slender, and beautiful figure which the Earth had provided her spirit. A spirit so beautiful and pure, that it was able to uplift everything and everyone that came near her.

We come into these bodies and we are given a simple task from our Earth mother. This task is to assist everything and ev-

1. Max Planck. "Das Wesen der Materie." [The Nature of Matter], speech at Florence, Italy (1944) (from Archiv zur Geschichte der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Abt. Va, Rep. 11 Planck, Nr. 1797).

2. Boethius. "Philosophy" The Consolation Philosophy. W.V. Cooper, trans. London: Dent, 1902.

*It seems that
a lot of us have
forgotten the
instructions for
how to live
on this planet.*

eryone within our environment. And although we are all given this task, it seems that very few of us actually take it seriously. It seems that a lot of us have forgotten the instructions for how to live on this planet.

My sister had not forgotten these instructions. For the eighteen years that she lived, my sister was able to make everyone she talked to feel like her best friend.

"But death is not easily escaped from by anyone:
All of us with souls, earth-dwellers and children of men,
Must make our way to a destination
already ordained where the body,
After the banqueting,
Sleeps on its deathbed."³

In the seventh year of my life, right as the sun began to shine just a little more than the moon, my dog Isis got sick. Isis was a Siberian husky, and she was beautiful. Her coat sleek and well groomed; her senses keen. She was strong, and she was much smarter than the average pup. Undoubtedly though, her most beautiful feature was her eyes. Her right eye was as brown as the bark of a sturdy evergreen tree. But her left eye was a piercing turquoise as blue as the sky itself. So blue that it was almost white.

I once asked my mother exactly why my dogs eyes were different colors and other dogs weren't.

"It's because your dog is magic."

Isis died of lung cancer on the first day of that summer. Everyone in my family cried, even my father. It was the first and last time he would ever let me see him cry for the next fourteen years. And it wasn't even really a cry. He didn't sob like I did. Rather, he sort of reluctantly released two or three tears onto the aged quilt, which had become his face.

My father buried Isis. He carried her to the top of a steep hill which over looked everything and everywhere I'd ever known. He took a hard, blunt stone and used it to carve her name into a piece of sandstone.

It's been a very long time since I've gone to see her.

3. Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

I had an amazing friend once tell me: "You think you're alive? No—you're just asleep on the couch in life's waiting room. Once you die, that's when you wake up and start living."

Death is an act of creation. You knew this better than anyone. Right now, in your death, you are living more than all of us. This thought brings me much comfort.

Cause you definitely got the right idea Em. No more homework, and no more class. Now, you get to play in the snow forever with Isis, Gracie, and Grandpa Bill. Bailey can come too, but I'm pretty sure she hated the snow.

I gotta say though, I'm quite jealous—I would like to join you as soon as possible. But apparently God's got this whole "master plan" thing—so I got to stay here and do a few things first.

Wherever you are though, that is where the moon is, where my heart is, and where my home is. From you, I have learned that home is not a particular place. Rather home is state of mind, which one must constantly master throughout life. If you are "going home", well then you are never going to get there.

"High on a stag the Goddess held her seat,
And there were little hounds about her feet;
Below her feet there was a sickle moon,
Waxing it seemed, but would be waning soon.
Her statue bore a mantle of bright green,
Her hand a bow with arrows cased and keen;
Her eyes were lowered, gazing as she rode;
Down to where Pluto has his dark abode."⁴

Me and my sister stand next to a pile of dirt which sits adjacent to my apartment complex.

"Do I have to?"

"Yes," I say, "now take your boots off."

I slide my shoes and socks off quickly and watch my sister do the same. Once I'm sure she has fully removed her footwear, I allow myself to sit in the dirt and bury my feet.

4. Chaucer, Geoffrey. Neville Coghill, trans. "The Knight's Tale," *The Canterbury Tales*. London: Penguin Books, 1951.

*Wherever
you are though,
that is where
the moon is . . .*

"No way. This isn't going to do anything."
"Oh come on. What have you got to lose?"

Through her piercing aquamarine eyes, my sister shoots me a look so skeptical that it would even make a Nobel quantum physicist doubt the words coming out of his mouth. After a long, well-placed pause, she finally sighs and decides to play my game for just a minute or two. She slowly lowers her fragile young body into the Earth.

I start to cover her feet with the dirt.

"Ew . . . Matt this is weird as hell."

"No, no—just simmer down."

Her feet are fully submerged; I hand her a cup of chamomile tea. She raises the mug to her mouth and cautiously lets the smallest amount of liquid to slide in. As she sips the tea, we start to talk about nothing in particular. Her life has been far too serious lately; all I really want right now is for her to smile. I can tell she has been somewhat lonely lately; she thinks sitting in the mud for healing purposes is "weird as all hell", but I can see she is happy to be with me either way.

One of my weird, fanatical comments that I make only around people I'm comfortable with finally gets through—she starts to laugh. And for this instant everything is okay. As long as she can still smile, as long as she can still shamelessly show me, her perfect grin that could light up the moon itself, everything is going to be alright for me.

"Hey, this feels kinda good actually." As she says this, her smile lifts my heart upward, past my fiery, toxic need for power—into the loving air, which controls no thing.

I'll see you with the full moon. Every 28 days you will pull the tide upward and release that water onto all of us. You can be seen in the tears which fall from the eyes of the countless human beings you effected positively. And I can feel you in the tears that fall from my own eyes. People have told me that 18 is too young, but I know without a doubt that your soul is already as old as the moon itself.

Our debt is to the world my sister. I will stay here until our job is done and every lost soul has been lead into the light, which you shine.

I'll see you the next time around.

Forever yours . . . ☀

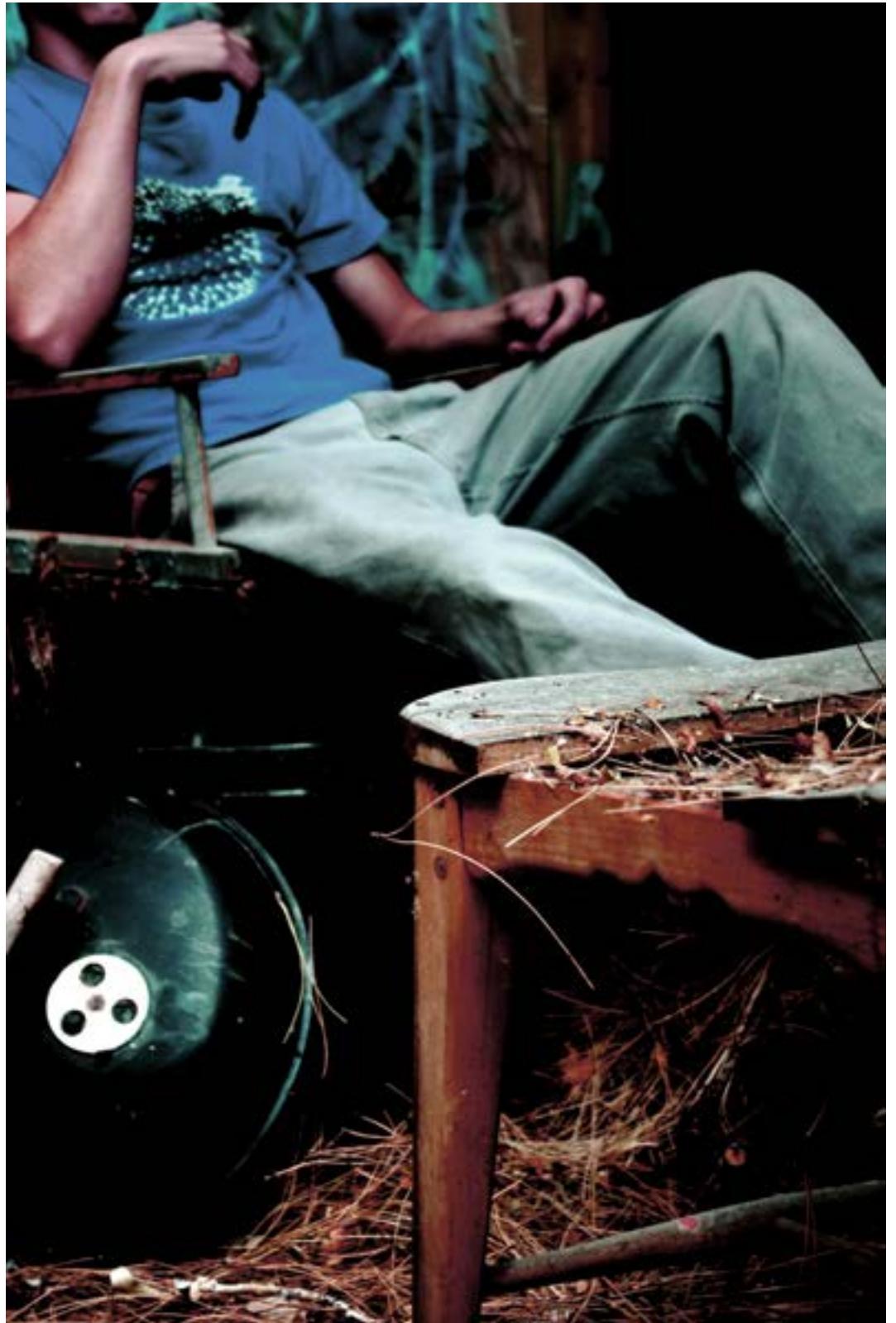


Photo by Natasha Collins

AN ISLAND OF SOLITUDE

By Jonathan Fedyschyn

Loneliness. It creeps into your soul. It finds every bright corner of your life and fills it with shadows. It starves the body of hope, of desire. It rots away happiness, joy, humor, all of the so-called good emotions. Like the most stubborn tick, once loneliness has lodged itself inside you it is extremely difficult to root out. Once you think you've taken it out, that tick's head still lives beneath the surface of your skin.

In the cold, northern Atlantic, off the coast of Maine lies a small island. On one end waves roll in from the ocean, breaking against the rocks with rhythmic crashes. Each crash is an avalanche upon the ears. Crossing the island brings you across two trails, both cutting a path through a dense green wood that is only occasionally peppered with a dead brown tree.

Close to the opposite side there is a large field, dotted with houses. The field leads down to a small tan strip along the coast, a beach. Here the waves gently lap against the sand and the shells. Only the massive wake of the lobster boats break the rhythmic peacefulness. Off the beach lies a small sandbar that

only pops out at low tide. The north end of the island points to the town of Friendship. It opens into a bay, across which you can see the town harbor. Throughout the day, the harbor slowly fills back up as the colorful lobster boats make their way back home. Except for the mornings the bay always quiet and peaceful.

In Maine, there is no rooster crow, no morning songbird. The wakeup call of Maine is the lobster boat. It sets out with a diesel roar well before the crack of dawn. Alone, this roar is almost charming, a reminder of where you are and the business that drives the economy. But Friendship is a lobstering town. At 4:00AM a hundred lobster boats, sized from little skiffs to monsters that take twenty people to crew, set out from Friendship Harbor. On many days a thick fog blankets the bay. The stillness only accentuates the noise; the grumble of the diesel engines echoes off the islands.

It is here, in a small cottage perching over a cove, that I call my home. Over the years I have lived in many houses; houses in Japan, Texas, Virginia, Florida. But this is my home. I have a connection to this place. An attachment that I do not feel for any other place in the world. The small twin bed on the second floor, dressed in a sailboat comforter, is mine. Wherever I might go to school at the moment, whichever part of the world I currently inhabit, I know that bed will be waiting for me. It is perhaps the only constant thing in my life.

There are many laws in Maine governing when a lobster is large enough to be caught. Unfortunately, there is no way to keep the smaller lobsters from entering the trap when it is on the ocean floor. When they get pulled up by the lobstermen, the younger lobsters inevitably get tossed back over the side. This can be horribly disorienting, as the lobster boat may have moved a significant distance before they can throw the little lobsters back.

My life is that of the small lobster that is constantly being caught and thrown back far away from my home. My dad was a naval aviator. The most time I ever spent in a house was two years. By the time I was old enough to comprehend what was going on, I no longer cried each time I was ripped away from the people I knew. Except for when we moved to Japan. My mind could not comprehend the concept of going to another country, so far from where we were. More than six thousand five hundred miles lie between Friendship and Japan. There was a delay over the phone when talking to family back in the United States.

But my home, my real home, will always be that cottage in Maine. It is a wonderfully confusing place. Each year I desperately want to be there. When I get there, I desperately dread leaving, yet I desperately want to leave. I often find myself sitting on the dock that protrudes out into the cove. I listen to the cawing of the seagulls fighting over the small red shells that are last night's lobster dinner. It is blissful, and yet, also agonizing. From my vantage point, I can see families out on the water, tubing and skiing across the bay. Where, I wonder, are the people I can do that with?

Wanting to escape from the torture, I hike down my family's secret trail. It is marked with everlasting red dots on trees, always there to guide me home. These days going down the trail has become an expedition only I am willing to undertake. Long past are the days when my grandfather was strong enough to keep the trail clear. Now, the meandering path is cluttered with fallen trees, some small enough to step over, others standing so high you can't see past. Pine trees batter your face with their needles and completely obscure your vision. It's claustrophobic. The trail passes close to the coast, so every now and then you get a glimpse of the shining water from between the trees. Here in the coastal forest the smell of pine mingles with that of the salt water, and it is almost overwhelming.

Eventually I reach my destination, a place that is now solely my own. In a rare moment of cooperation and boredom, my brother, my cousin, and I came together to build a small shack up a little rocky cliff. It overlooks the trail, but is impossible to spot. It was our hideaway, our personal playground. This was years ago though, and now it is in shambles. The once green trees we used to wall the shelter have all died, and it is now brown and barren. The roof is broken, collapsed from the heavy winter snow. Littered around it are dead pine needles, remnants of the roof and walls. This dead, broken down shack is punctuated by the sounds that echo through the woods. The swishing of the leaves and the slow creak of the trees in the wind. I sit, and relax, and think.

Even sitting here though, I cannot escape the melancholy. The woods are silent, but for the creepy noises nature makes. This is not a good place to reflect on loneliness. It is a reminder that here I am, home, yet once again alone. I ponder the happiness I would feel to break the silence with ululations of

*The once green
trees we used to
wall the shelter
have all died, and
it is now brown
and barren.*

joy; what it would be like to chase and scream and run through the woods with other people. But I will never know that feeling.

Around the time I was born, my grandpa and my dad (with only token help from the uncles) built Fort Friendship. Something of a tree house, Fort Friendship looked more like it had been plucked out of the old west and plopped on an island in Maine. The blond, two story structure even had wooden spikes sticking out of the top its walls. I loved and hated it. When I was alone, Fort Friendship was the best companion to an overactive imagination. In it, I fought aliens, rescued princesses, and conducted the defenses of a siege.

However, when my brother was there, I often found myself locked in the lower floor, where there is no light. It is a small, damp, smelly cube infested with bugs. There is no room to stand up, I had to sit in the dirt. Since my brother has always been significantly larger than I, all I could do was wait and hope he eventually let me out. The lower floor was a lobster trap. The lonely lobster sits and waits to be freed.

Evening falls, and I return to the cottage. My grandparents relax with a steaming cup of tea, but there is no one my age here. I curl up on the couch with a book, my only escape from the oppressive loneliness. It is only by living through these stories that I may, for moments, find companionship. My only friends were the characters in the stories. I knew them almost better than I knew myself.

These books were my passion. In those days of course, you couldn't just download a book to your Nook that you picked off the internet. Even if that technology had existed, even now there is no cell reception on the island. Each book I had was a special treasure; it was carried from wherever I lived at the time, sometimes from ten thousand miles away, just so I could read it over the summer. Here, I developed the habit to reread books. Nearly every book I own I've read four to five times completely, that doesn't even count the times I've read my favorite parts. The page corners of those parts are permanently creased. I would wander the island and pretend I was living with my favorite characters.

At night, I go up to my bed. There are four beds in my room. Three of them are empty. They only serve to remind me, again, that I am alone. This room was not meant for one person, it was meant for siblings and friends. But my only siblings are

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ship.*

not my friends; I have no friends. When I go to sleep, I convince myself that I am not sad because I am home. But this home is also my lobster trap. I always wind up back here. Inevitably I will be plucked from the island, and thrown back out into a place I do not know. I will stumble around until I inevitably am lured back into the trap, a place that is at least familiar to me.

In the morning, the massive roar of a hundred boats wakes me up, and reminds me that I must survive yet another day in this lonely paradise. The morning sun burns away the blanket of fog, I hear the gentle lap of waves in the cove, and I breathe in the salty air. These are my pillars of strength, and there is no place in the world I would rather be. ☀





CHICKEN WINGS AND NICETIES

By Danielle Hawley

Chicken wings in a plastic basket clattered down on the line in front of me. The kitchen reeked of grease as the cooks dunked cut potatoes in oil and poured cheese sauce onto steaming noodles. In the dining room, a kid cried about the color of her crayons, and two men in suits shoved onion rings into their mouths. I watched from the kitchen entryway, chewing on my pink, curly straw—we were required to have a lid and a straw with our drinks. I had been a server for a month. The motorcycles hanging from the ceiling no longer impressed me and I had stopped noticing the smell of fried food weaved into my clothing. It was the slow hour between lunch and dinner. The wait staff chattered as they walked in and out of the kitchen, trying to kill time. A waitress named Jazmine skipped over and leaned against the wall next to me.

“Guess what?” She asked.

“What?”

She scooted a little closer, “I bleached my ass last night.”

I choked on my drink. Adam, a waiter with thinning hair and a mohawk standing nearby, let loose a manic laugh before tucking his smile between tight lips. The kitchen hand, Gilly, snorted as he passed.

"Well, I mean, not my ass. The hole, you know? It's so pretty now! My boo is going to love it when he gets back in town," she said while I finished coughing up iced tea.

Jazmine was my age, nineteen. While I was playing flip cup at college parties, she was taking care of her three year old daughter with the help of her mom. She brought her daughter to work occasionally, and the little girl stared at everyone as though she had just swallowed cough syrup, never saying a word. I'm not sure if the time restraints of parenthood made Jazmine cut the small talk, or if she had always been this way, but everyday something she said yanked my eyes open. Actually, most of what the staff said threw me for a loop. No one in the restaurant business has a filter during conversations, except when they are talking to customers.

"I want to get a wax too. Go big or go home and all that. Do you wax? You recommend anywhere?" Jazmine asked.

"Um, I don't really know. Sorta? I mean ... uh ..." I faltered.

She prodded me with eyes of false lashes fanning her face, and sharply curving liner at the end of her creaseless lids.

"Hey, Danielle, I have that book you wanted to borrow," Adam said, waving a paperback while he peered around Jazmine. I hurried over and took the book. More food slid onto the line. Jazmine grabbed the tray and walked into the main room after shooting us an annoyed look.

I mouthed 'thank you' to Adam. He winked at me.

A tattooed tail hung out from the sleeve of his T-shirt. When we first met, I thought it was the tail of a tiger, but later he showed me the full tattoo—a fading demon that he had gotten done years before. He had drunkenly stumbled into a tattoo parlor and pointed to a drawing on the wall. It was his first break from the suburbia of his youth.

As a teenager, Adam traded his parents' expectation of a college degree for job hopping and moving around the U.S., and in the process learned the blunt language of restaurant culture. My family has two kids, a dog, and a white picket fence. I grew up knowing how to navigate potlucks, not conversations on literal assholes. Adam remembered going through the same shock, and would throw me a lifeline every once in a while.

The fluorescent lights of the kitchen created shadows on his face where his skin pinched into pockmarks. Those marks al-

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*She read the
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ways reminded me of elementary school, when I would run outside the double doors everyday to smattering of moms in work-out clothes. One mom had pockmarks as well, but filled the indents with thick foundation. She would yak with the other moms about interior design and the best family photographers.

There was a day that the pockmarked mother wasn't there. The other moms whispered news about her husband's accident through painted lips. He had been hit by a mail truck while on his bike, and was pronounced dead at the scene.

The dress I wore to the memorial service was too short, and I wiggled throughout the speeches trying to pull it down. It seemed my entire school community was there: students, parents, teachers, administration, as if it was some fashionable event to attend. My classmates sniffled around me and nodded along with the heartfelt memories, though we had only known the man from the occasional sleepover.

When the pockmarked mother walked up to the podium, her hair was straightened into a perfect bob that stayed stiff with each step. She read the lyrics from the song of her wedding dance, her voice steady and hollow. Curtains were tied off with golden rope to the sides. I half expected them to unravel for an intermission.

Afterwards, I shook her hand. Her mask of heavy makeup shifted into a smile, and she thanked me. She blinked rapidly, forcing tears back behind her lids. It had been less than a week since her husband died, and here she was, still slipped into her role. I wish I had told her it was alright to cry, but instead I moved aside so the next person could give their condolences.

I once dreamed about that funeral before a shift, but I was the one at the podium. I was reading from a script to a room full of mannequins. I woke up with a glass panel between me and the rest of the world. That day, I worked as a runner—the person who takes the food to the tables on busy evenings—so I observed my co-workers between plates.

Two of the wait staff, Ted and Harmony, flirted in the dish room. Teddy's bright orange shirt dampened from the stray of the washer. Their intertwined hands slowly swung in and out of sight. Harmony knew he was married with children, but that didn't stop the affair or the bluntness of their relationship.

Ashley, the new girl, leaned against the wall with her shoulders hunched around her neck. Hair was caught in her premature wrinkles, but she didn't pull the strands away, and the bloodshot whites of her eyes surrounded her green irises. She was hung over, probably from her usual mix of alcohol and acid. But rent had to be paid.

From the back entrance, the bartenders walked in from their break, laughing and smelling like smoke. Mike loomed over me in his six-foot-four frame, and he patted Ashley's head as he went by. His dark jeans were too short and showed his green and white socks.

This wasn't a performance like the afterschool huddles, or the packed funeral. This was real, and raw, and open for all to see. The honesty of the moment whirled around me, the outsider looking in. I checked my makeup in my reflection in a tin of ranch dressing, lifted a tray of food, and walked into the main room.

*Nine hours into my double shift,
one wrong order, two non-tipping
tables, a children's basketball team, a
hair in a quesadilla, and
unlimited wing night.*

A few weeks passed, and I sat on the floor of the cooler with my eyes closed. I twisted my ring. The ice, collected on a bucket of celery, melted through my shirt and goose bumps rose across my back while the uncovered bulb flickered. Outside, my manager bickered with the head cook over the consistency of BBQ sauce, pots clashed against each other, grease splattered and sizzled as it hit water, non-slip shoes squeaked. The noise seemed to condense the air around me, squeezing the space surrounding my lungs so I could only take short gulps. Nine hours into my double shift, one wrong order, two non-tipping tables, a children's basketball team, a hair in a quesadilla, and unlimited wing night. My eyebrows felt permanently sewn into a furrow.



The door swung open and banged into the metal shelves. I scrambled to my feet and grabbed a tub of single-serve sauces. Gilly's face appeared from behind the door, and his wide cheeks folded into a smile when he saw me.

"Heya, galla! What you doing back here?" He asked.

"Just, you know, restocking."

I dragged the side of my mouth up and nodded to the bin.

"Always on top of it! You're making me look bad!"

The teasing crinkled his eyes. He reached beside me for a package of frozen fries and heaved it over his shoulder. The wet air from his nostrils condensed in the frigid temperature, creating two puffs.

"Best get back out there, galla. I swear, the kitchen's about to catch on fire, everyone's running around so much," he said, grabbing the door handle.

My hands shook slightly and made the metal bin in my hands sing. My lungs felt tight. I could see smudged mascara on my fingers from rubbing my eyes. I tossed the bin back onto the shelf.

"Wait, Gilly? I—I'm freaking out a bit. Could you stay for now?"

I wiped the rest of my makeup off with the heels of my palms.

He turned around and looked back at me. He held up one finger before disappearing back into the buzz of the restaurant. I slumped to the floor. Minutes passed, and no one came. As I surrendered and began to drag myself to my feet, the door popped open again, and the smell of french fries filled the space. Gilly sat down beside me and offered me a plate of fries, pretzels, and onion rings. I took a handful of fries and stuffed them into my mouth. Gilly cracked a grin at the ends sticking out of my mouth.

"You're going to get into trouble for this, you know. It's technically stealing," I said, still chewing.

Gilly shrugged.

"People got to stick together. Be real with one another," he replied. We sat in silence for a moment.

"Gilly?"

"Yea?"

"Remind me to tell Jazmine that Beauty Plus gives miracle waxes." ☀



Photo by Chad Henderson

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MEANING IN MEMORY

By David Griffith

There are two places in this world I have been to that have brought me true solace: the beach and McDonald's. Now I don't differentiate, it could be Newport Beach or Clearwater Beach; as well as it could be the McDonald's off Baseline and US-287 or the one off Zuni and 128th. Granted, everyone has their own opinions about solace, but for me there are really only two kinds. There is the exotic and surreal solace of an aesthetic and rarely visited place and there is the solace of comfort, safety, and company. Each unique and separate form of solace holds stories that stick to our memories like mnemonic devices. From a rebellious and gangly kid to a slightly less gangly adult I have been molded by solace.

We were all gangly. Typically there would be three to eight of us. We would make the quarter mile trek down the hill for some McDoubles or Hot n' Spicy McChickens. At least three of us had the menu memorized, and with our soaring metabolisms and lack of anything to do on hot summer days, we were there often.

Our time spent there dwindled as summers went by. As we grew older, everything got bigger. We moved from bikes and scooters to cars, from kick the can to climbing onto rooftops at night. The younger days were better. With cars we broadened everything and McDonald's suddenly had competition for our solace. Sonic had a happy hour with half-priced drinks and because of the limitless flavor combinations the horrible service was completely worth it.

Our group changed as we did. What was once a large mixture of football and basketball-playing kids slowly became as divided as East and West Germany. The neighborhood park served as our Berlin Wall. It became the upper half, and the lower half. The upper half kids learned of the world without filters before the lower half kids could. Spurred on by a lack of sheltering and older siblings, they grew up fast. Like most lower half kids, I was from a conservative family with strict rules and preconceptions about things. These differences drove us all apart.

Growing up, I felt pretty close to Evan, who lived in the upper half. We weren't best friends, and I never admitted it, but I looked up to him. I was incredibly cocky, still am, and Evan was flat out better than me. He was faster, stronger, and better at sports, which was all that mattered to us. I was always second. Evan represented what I wanted to be. I lost a part of myself as he faltered. He began to hang out with other kids, upper half kids, while I stayed with the lower half kids because I was more like them. As high school wore on, the gap widened. Evan's parents got divorced and his dad moved to California without saying goodbye. His older brother sold drugs and there was no one Evan looked up to more. I heard stories of how his mom would bring other men home and I would want to talk to Evan about it but I knew there was no possible way to relate. So I turned my head. Evan stuck with the upper half kids and I with the lower half.

The younger days were better. I moved on to a different McDonald's with friends from school that didn't live in my neighborhood. I found solace there in the absence of the solace I had been missing at home. Once a week, the day following a Broncos' game, we would go during lunch at school. We had a card that got us Big Macs for a dollar apiece the day after the Broncos won, and they basically always did. After football season, we went every Friday during Lent because

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to more.*

the fish sandwiches were cheap and we were sick of vegetarian food. McDonald's became a safety net for our outside troubles.

But it wasn't until recently I realized we never really went there for the food or the deals. When we were young, we went there because we could. Because our parents would tell us to be careful and some of us had to call them once we got there, but we were actually able to leave the borders of the neighborhood and venture into the unknown.

We went there for food at night, after we had gone bowling or after sundown during Ramadan for my friend Yazen. At school we went there for tradition. Our unit strengthened through our McDonald's outings and became more than friends. We were brothers. My friends from the lower half and I were always brothers. I barely distinguished them from my actual brothers and that holds true to this day.

*We all talk about our ability to change
our futures, and I never believed it.*

I've heard that the only thing that changes in this world is the clock. I wonder if that belief is actually true. I always thought our lives were merely paradigms, set out in patterns that are predictable and arranged. Looking at my friends and family, I can tell you what will likely happen to them in the future. We all talk about our ability to change our futures, and I never believed it. I told myself that I knew things all along, and that there was no avoiding what was ultimately bound to happen to him.

I think Evan changed. I think I could have changed him too. A lot of people are predictable, but not all people. There are some rare people, like Evan, who are malleable and ever changing until they reach the impeding point of no return in adulthood. It took me too long to realize this. I let Evan go his way, when I could have changed him. I used to think about actually trying to understand him, but I never brought myself to do so. The only things that move are clocks and these special youths. So we wait for them.

But what if all youths are like this? And what if we didn't wait for them, but met them halfway? Or what if through Evan's eyes I was the one who was changing? Depending on the perspective taken, it seems like everything is adaptable, freely weaving in and out of definitive resolution up until adulthood. Men and women don't change often. Once we've chosen a path, it's very hard to go back and very easy to fall into meaningless routine.

It's natural for humans to choose what's easiest, so that's what happens. If this newfound possibility is indeed true, I am now teetering on the edge of concrete formation. Evan and I aren't friends anymore. There is no right or wrong to the story. We both have changed and time has moved us away from each other like the separation of sticky-notes from the ever-shortening stack. There is no way of telling how people change, however marginally or catastrophically, it just happens. It could be an intrinsic motivation or external factors, but it cannot be measured, only remembered.

We can reflect on time and change through our memories and experiences. I can remember hundreds of visits to McDonald's, but time blends them together. My memory holds stronger the notion of solace than of experience. It's important to distinguish the two. Experience is temporary, fleeting, and true serenity or definition of emotion is permanent. I can't recall every individual time I have been to McDonald's, but I can hold in my heart the power of the solace it has given me. The permanence in those memories is held in the setting and the smiles I can recall.

It still makes me happy, going to McDonald's. It's a different feeling than when entering other rivaling establishments. In McDonald's I feel home, incredibly comfortable to be in a calorie capital building covered in grease. The food is somatic, as if it belongs in my body regardless of whether or not I want it. Each bite I took signaled the organs in my body to function correctly, and triggered my brain to converse in human tongue with my friends. I ate through the happy and sad times. I ate in the rain, the snow, the sunshine, and those freezing days when the sun is still out just to give false hope. McDonald's was my safe haven, and when I was inside the stresses of life were left at its doors.

I could talk about the special moments. I could bring up the times I've cried laughing, or confessed my love to a girl.

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I could talk of the differences in my friends, and how each of them has changed so much and how I have changed so much but there is no point in that. Our true purpose in anything is what we make it. Some of us meditate on the past, working with the specifics, and we hold onto those for as long as we can. I grapple with the motif of each story. Every joke made, every story told, every laugh produced. All of these comprise meaning.

Our lives are like the bottom of a fish tank. Each rock is a memory, and all of them together make up the floor of the tank. Each rock is important, but the ultimate goal is to build up the floor. When reflecting, or when looking at a fish tank, we don't look at each rock or memory, but instead we focus on the composition that each rock or memory creates. The total sum of memories I have make up the person I am now. The solace, the joy, and the sorrow: these are what make us who we are.

The specifics don't matter. In memory, the specifics never matter. Look at a piece of non-fiction literature and it's plain to see. Memories are imperfect, so non-fiction writers fill in the blanks with perceived experiences and occurrences that didn't actually happen. The emotions of the memories are true, raw feelings that changed the writer's outlook or perspective. However, the dialogues, the characters' appearances, what they were wearing, are all fictional. We can call the author a liar but we don't. We believe it because we all know the clock moves too fast and our brains process too slowly so we try to take from memory the absolute necessities. Out of everything I've experienced at McDonald's, solace is the most important. So I won't recall those specific stories, even the ones I remember the strongest. The only thing worth noting is the solace and the time, but only how time moves, not the specifics of it. I have been walking to McDonald's since I was in fifth grade. I don't know how many times I have been, and I don't remember what I wore or the elemental properties of the earth on each day I walked, but I do remember that it made me happy. ☙

PRAXIS



By B. James Dougherty

There's a screaming in your mind
that rips apart the synapses
leaves them flipping around like a garden hose left by your first son
and you love him but soon you will realize he is missing
the hose splashes in its own puddles on the lawn you taught him to mow
when you felt he was too young but he was eager
because he wanted to be like you

It stops the electricity
stops the pulses

melts his brain into a beautiful melted sherbet the dog would love to lick up
barking hysterically and is hungry now
No one is home

He becomes a zombie
an abomination that craves completely and lacks totally and
reminds you of the times in college when you skipped class and
sat next to your window letting the radio drown out the sound
of the sirens outside

Your breath becomes mustard seed
blooming on the bottom of your tongue
a garden planted in the manure of the broken bottles from your
youth

The same garden you would hide away in when your wife cried in
agony and convinced herself of stillbirth
the garden you slept beside when your son smiled at you for the first
time as you pressed the last of your underwear into a dirty suitcase
the garden that needs never be watered
because it grows during the lulls of the mind
and it grows in him now **ca**

A landscape photograph of a volcanic eruption. In the foreground, a dark, rocky landscape is partially obscured by a large, billowing plume of white and light-colored smoke or steam. In the middle ground, a bright, glowing lava flow is visible, with a large, dark, turbulent cloud of smoke and ash rising from its head. The background shows a range of mountains under a hazy, overcast sky.

GOTTA LOVE THAT DIRT

In Memory of Tino Cuellar

By Amy Helen Chu

Dirt is an ever-moving surface upon which I have physically struggled to keep my balance. My life has become emotionally intertwined with the phenomena of earthquakes, fires and floods.

When I was five years old, the earth struck from below quite sharply. In my hometown of Boulder, Colorado on Easter, 1967, my young cousin was visiting. We were sitting in our high chairs, crunching colored eggshells in our teeth and marveling over the revelation that it was harmless to do so. Mom was standing right behind us, and remembers how much it hurt when the earth slapped her feet - it stung. I was happy to have experienced this 'natural' wonder. Registering 5.4 on the Richter scale, it was not from a natural cause.

Colorado is normally considered an earthquake-neutral area. Apparently, workers at the Department of Defense's Rocky Mountain Arsenal north of Stapleton Airport had been pumping liquid waste from their weapons storage activities into a 12,000 ft. deep well. There was actually a swarm of quakes, according to the United States Geological Survey. The association of the D. O. D. injections and the ground movement was theorized, and the pumping was stopped, but not before the whole Denver suburban area felt some. Such quakes soon subsided, bolstering the theory that these were man-made.



A wave of emotion welled over me when I met my future husband at a dance. He said he studied earthquakes, and I joked, "Does that have anything to do with the number of Quakers in the area?" It turned out he was a Quaker, like me! He liked the fact that I loved to live in the country, wanted to stay home with the children, and was not afraid of snakes.

He didn't have close friends. It was apparently because he didn't want to over-exercise his rescuer gene and have them asking him to help fix their cars. He didn't mind helping strangers because they couldn't come back for more of him. He became a workaholic, rescuing everybody at work and feeling important there. He never did understand my needs, such as my desire for time together with him, or evenings talking with my friends. A project on the "honey do" list he would largely ignore. However, if I started in, failed to make it just right and needed rescuing, why, then he'd be right home to fix it.

Soon after our wedding, we moved to earthquake country—north of Los Angeles, where the San Andreas Fault marches its way across California in a straight line except for a jag around the meeting point of the San Gabriel Mountains and the Los Padres Mountains. The jag loads it with more stress than ever. At this exact location it traverses the gigantic Interstate 5 Freeway and canal, one of the few pinch-points that moves people, food, and water into the Los Angeles City Basin.

We did not want to live in "the city that shouldn't be" as we called the whole L. A. metropolis, due to its lack of ability to provide for itself from its own natural resources. So we moved as far away and into the mountains as we could, (65 miles) anchored

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by his early Global Positioning System work at the Jet Propulsion Labs in Pasadena. We lived in Frazier Park, one of the small towns strung like pearls on a string stretched alongside a narrow arroyo that wanders away from the I-5 freeway going west along the San Andreas. Living along the fault was an exercise in my faith.

Despite the preconceptions about California being a surfer's paradise, there are actually mountains, pine trees, and snowstorms there. Right next to Frazier Park, the mountain town of Lake of the Woods recently made the news by nearly running out of water. That is yet another hazard of living in the arid mountains at the corner of the Mojave Desert. Rainfall takes a precipitous drop every year along around March and doesn't recover until December. Lately, three years of marked drought have made for dangerous situations in the forests for fires, and in the little towns for dry wells.

My family experienced some huge fires while we were in Frazier Park such as the Day Fire, named thusly because it started around Memorial Day. My farm animals were trapped on the ranch in box canyons with no other exit but through the fire zone. As the fires spread, they left hot, blackened hillsides below mushrooming ash-cloud formations. The smoke's grey and white cloud-canyons were lit orange from the miles of hellfire coals and flames spreading below. We didn't have to evacuate that time. Our ranch survived those disasters without a scratch. The red and white hens still ran in their chicken yard and the goats gamboled next to them. Our steep hills made of squared-off rocks still had pokey-leaved scrub oak trees, sage-colored stringy rabbit brush and fuzzy-seeded mountain mahogany bushes that made up the chaparral. The live oak trees still held their lofty heights and hollow ant-filled trunks. In later years, however, after the ranch was sold, those hills were burned thoroughly, right up to the foundations of the house and garage buildings.



My neighbors were going through divorces, un-pairing one by one. The destruction was marching up the canyon towards us. I still believed the rampage would not touch us. My

faith in God seemed to grow ever stronger as each day passed, as I felt that whole neighborhoods may fall under this mayhem, but that it would not even approach me.

The San Andreas Fault line itself was quiet while we lived there. However, in 1994 the sudden release of the previously undiscovered Northridge fault threw me into the wall as I tried to climb under our bed to hide. Then it shook back, slamming me into the bed's frame. When would I make it to the floor, I wondered? The seismologist had planned for us by building a queen bed raised on stilts so we could take refuge below it in just such a case. The dog was delighted to have us join him in his little under-bed fort. Our house wasn't hurt and we had only a few items thrown off the mantel onto the peppered white carpeting below. We moved outside for the day, in case of larger aftershocks. The tremors turned out to be minor.

This was symbolic of conditions in my marriage. Differences between us had begun to rattle our lives. The seismologist was merely a Quaker by culture, and not by faith. He was an atheist, not a seeker, as I once thought. He wanted the children to be raised atheist. Being left alone a great deal loaded my life with tremendous stress. We grew apart. I did my church activities alone, or with the boys. There were days and nights I thought I would crack from loneliness. Somehow I muddled through, believing the main rift in our lives would never slip enough to separate us completely because it was held by a promise.

¤ ¤

The hills along the fault line completely hide the sandy creek bed and its arroyo inhabitants from the passing trucks below until the creek reaches its highest point: Apache Saddle, with 1,000-foot drop-offs. The maroon sand cliffs fall from such heights, and so suddenly, that people don't often see them until they're tipping near the dizzying edge. The locals there still collect piñon pine nuts every year despite the hazard. The grass and stubby trees give no clue as to what's ahead. During an end-of-high-school party, a graduate wandered away from his group of his friends and fell off that cliff and died.

After fifteen years of marriage, my life was recklessly and suddenly pushed over just such a cliff when the seismologist jumped off the high bed one day, admitted he "couldn't do

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*So we lived on the
"island side," as it
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it anymore" and walked out. The shock, the splitting and tearing of the children in court, the stress and wrenching of shared goals, the ruination of a whole family became all I could see. My hopes, future, dreams, ranch, farm animals and all my belongings were crushed, dropped and let to tumble over one another precipitously to their own demise.

Sometimes in my mind I wander through the lonely, dusty heap of memories, looking for a hope here, a dream there—something that could be rebuilt from the refuse. There are possibilities in the items others consider wasteful. An upside down piece of a chicken hutch just needs to be righted and shoveled out. A new hinge on its egg-door could help considerably. A broken dish could still serve as pieces in a colorful mosaic tabletop. My hoarding gene goes into full swing, and I am assembling a hill of projects that need work—lots of work. Wandering through the scraps lends me hope. Collecting bits helps me feel that my life is no longer lost to me. Friends wonder how long I'm going to hang on.

A medium-sized three-bedroom trailer home in Lake of the Woods became available for cash on the day my ranch divorce sale was final. It was affordable, although it was going to be nearly impossible to sell that old house-on-wheels someday because banks wouldn't finance older mobile homes. It was right next to the arroyo, and had four bright-green poplars in the backyard that reached heights of up to seven stories. The front door was in a little alcove off a turquoise porch. My boys could have their own rooms for once, on the every-other weeks I was allowed to have them back with me. The swamp cooler kept the desert summer heat at bay, the heater seemed to warm the winter and life was going to be possible.

My boys and I began to explore the pearl-on-a-string where we landed. The San Andreas grinds the land so far along its length that the gorgeous white marble stones on one side of the fault are not found on the other side until some 300 miles to the south. So we lived on the "island side," as it is still called, which comes from the tall tale that a big quake could be great enough to shake the entire state apart and leave the coastal chunk floating somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. The fault doesn't spread apart like that. It scrapes along like someone keying a car—with another car.

As we wandered downstream, we found our side had no marble, except what had tumbled into the stream, rounded and sculpted by erosion over the years. We were living instead on the lava cones, whose hills were made of dark yellow and maroon crumbles, and brown and black pumices. The right and left banks competed for a place on the bottom of the arroyo; chalky whites here mixing with darks there.

The soils affected which trees grew there as well. Our volcanic side had short piñon trees, but the marble side had Jeffrey Pines. They looked like the Ponderosas from my childhood, but the cones were larger than my hand. I hoarded some, thinking of many projects that could be beautified by such patterned objects. All I got was pinesap spots on my hands and shirt. My sons and I marveled at how the lava cones on our side could be found a great distance to the north on the other side of the fault.

The arroyo fills with sand in quiet times, yet can get stripped of its contents quickly in a sudden desert downpour. Closer to the trailer, the larger rocks were replaced by sand embankments eroded into rough cliffs. It became clear these were not just any heaps of streambed sand. There were screen doors, chunks from wooden porches, cream-colored bricks, and metal pipes of all kinds poking out of the steep banks. We asked around and found out there was a tragic flood in the arroyo in 1971 and that's why our trailer was placed there the next year—because new sandy fields were made available for development after the recovery. The water had ripped roads and houses from Lake of the Woods and piled them up so high that they had actually dammed up the stream. The grinding had taken out the road above us in the process.

We took to searching and collecting bits of history. The thought of running across bones from people who were never found kind of creeped us out, but we gathered treasures from the stream nonetheless. Car door parts! A crystal-glass doorknob! A 7-UP can from the 70's! Blacktop! Tiles! The hoarder gene was delighted, fully functioning.

As the years passed, and the boys looked toward college, I could find no reason to continue to go into debt living in California. It was difficult to sell the trailer due to a lack of financing options and because I was storing stuff high up against the walls. The realtor couldn't imagine showing

There were screen doors, chunks from wooden porches, cream-colored bricks, and metal pipes of all kinds poking out of the steep banks.

it with a hoarder living there, and I had to move out for an entire year in order to get it empty enough to suit her. I got rid of the stuff.

A friend who lived higher up the stream in Cuddy Valley needed someone at his house at seven in the morning to make sure his teenage son got to class, so I went there to live and help out. The three boys were best friends, so that was a win, and then they all scattered to different colleges.

"When are you going to move on?" My friends worried. Once the trailer was readied for sale, I did leave earthquake country and returned to live with my mom in Boulder. Back in the gorgeous, hillside house where I grew up, I often think about the quakes I have experienced in my life.

According to The National Geographic, there have been more tremors in Colorado as of late, likely caused by fracking. The policy developed in the days of activity at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal was to stop pumping if injection-induced quakes were occurring. None of these vibrations have been felt in Boulder yet.

The Colorado Front Range did, however, have its own tragic flood. This September falling rain overwhelmed the ability of the land to soak it up. I defended the house successfully by digging a small trench to allow the runoff to reach through the yard to a lower area on the hill. My mom was quite traumatized by the previously lush mountainous canyons stripped down to exposed rock piles, log-jammed streams, and people's broken lives shoveled out on the curbs in huge piles for everyone to see. The hoarding gene flexed its muscles in me, seeing opportunities in the white porcelain surfaces of toilets and tank lids for painting with ceramic layers. Collecting cabinets and bookshelves also would have been natural for me, but I resisted. I did pick up a strip of new peppered white carpeting to cover my garden walkway.

"Don't fear the floods, Mom," I told her. There are treasures to be found when the ground moves, and after all, disasters are nothing like a divorce. ☙



HIGHWAY 2

By Brian Streeter

Windows down, hair glued straight back by the cool California air hitting me right in the face. The sound of the engine's revs being drowned out by the heightened volume of the perfect cliché rock ballad now blaring from the speakers. Every turn we make putting us deeper into the mountain forest whilst the L.A. skyline became smaller. As we rounded the last hairpin, putting the city out of view, smoke from our hand rolled cigar filled the Beemer as prominently as Bob Seger's heartfelt voice. My friend Tom and I were heading up on a routine "Crest Run," our name for our recreational excursions up Angeles Crest highway.

People went up "the Crest" for many reasons, among them to hike, ski, stargaze, or to just simply drive. The Crest was to me the sixty six mile highway road that managed, impressively, to shoot through a labyrinth of chaparral wooded mountainside. Angeles Crest Highway (or Highway 2) has become a popular destination for thrill seekers of all sorts, from outdoorsmen and campers, to bikers and drug enthralled teens. Its windy upslope has captivated many with its thinly populated mountainside and

endless number of lefts and rights. At a certain time of day you could drive up and see the blood red from dusk's reflection shining in between the beach and the mountain islands far in the distance. It was that time of day as Tommy and I sped up the highway with no set destination in mind.

Tommy's coupe seemed to maneuver organically around the tight corners and bends, its leather seats always very comfortable. At this time I had been thoroughly enjoying my shotgun seat, my mood ecstatic as I coughed with puffy eyes over my swisher sweet. After clearing my lungs of the sticky smoke it always felt nice to breath in the mountain air long enough that you forgot about the ominous cloud of off-colored air that settled over the city every evening.

I would need to avoid looking at the ground in front of and beneath me, as it seemingly went on forever, an infinite number of turns. We whizzed through rolling hills, curved flat pavement, and the occasional dynamite-blasted hole in the face of the mountain. Slabs of decomposing, brittle granite jagged out of the mountain and zipped past my head, just closing in by a half a yard stick. We occupied a one-ton German-built needle, threading through the San Gabriel Mountains with near-expert precision. The oak trees and cliff sides, although visible for a split second alone, seemed to melt together as one slideshow of natural beauty. All I can remember as a nauseated child riding up Highway 2 was the looping twists and turns, like one of those circus rides designed to make you lose your lunch. Today though, I just felt the majesty of the woods, the accomplishment of conquering the mountains, and the thrill of the machine. I felt high on the bliss of the drive—my imagined opposite to carsickness. There still were things I could see on the road that could make me sick to my stomach, as I soon realized.

"Oh, I think those skid marks are just around this turn." Tommy said in a surprisingly flat and dull tone.

"What, was somebody trying to drift or something?" I threw out only half-jokingly.

"These marks have been there for a few weeks. It always gives me goosebumps when I drive by them."

Surely enough the sight we drove up to made me pause inside: black smears leading from the center lines, through our lane and then off the very edge of the road. No guard rail to the right of us, only a several hundred foot drop-off lined that Caltrans-maintained stretch of California highway. The two

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burnt rubber outlines pointed to what had to be a fatal trajectory. As our car passed safely over the spot, my heart sank and goosebumps immediately went up my arms then down my spine.

With that sight etched squarely in my mind now, hope of this trip being anything close to a leisurely drive went out the window, as surely as the roach that we had just flicked out. I immediately wondered, how fast were they going? Had the driver washed down a couple of beers with his dinner? How hard did they slam on the brakes? What song had been playing on their radio? How long did they just fly through the air intact, before becoming aggressively acquainted with the valley hundreds of feet below. I could only think of one way to survive a fall like that, and it involved a parachute. Those skid marks were a harsh reminder of the fragile nature of mortality to the thousands of motorists speeding up and down Highway 2.

While Tommy's and my ride that day ended without incident, it became increasingly more difficult to bury the sensation of uneasy apprehension that would randomly accompany me at the wheel. Although after several weeks I completely forgot about the skids on the road and the mangled cars below. Dozens of Crest Runs later and I was back on the horse, straddling the mountains with all of L.A. to my one side and Palmdale, with the endless expanse of "nothingness California" that stretched as far as the eye could see, to the other. Behind the wheel I was back to where I wanted to be and it wasn't until I was reminded that the uneasy sensations resurfaced.

"So here is the example for everybody to solve." My quirky physics teacher Dr. E. proposed to the class my senior year. "Five teens are driving back on Angeles Crest highway from a rave one night." I had a feeling like I knew where he was going with it. He chuckled slightly and slowly looked around the room as if for dramatic effect. "Their car over-corrects on a turn and the teenagers find themselves flying off the cliff which is 500 feet high. So if we convert that into meters, and we know that acceleration due to gravity acts at 9.8 meters per second squared, then find how long were the kids falling before they..." And then he clapped his hands loudly as if we couldn't imagine the ending of the story on our own. As I plugged the values into my calculator I got an answer of 5.6 seconds. *5.6 seconds?*

I tried to imagine as I sat in class what those last few moments might have been like. Sure they were going fast, and likely

slammed on the brakes. It must have taken a few moments to realize what was happening. That first second or two their electric music must have been drowned out by the loud, telling noise of tires losing their grip and screeching all over the pavement. As they took off over the hill, maybe it was two or three seconds before they felt the sensation of falling. Accelerating now straight downward, it must have been in seconds three to four when they realized this was it. And then that last second and a half. I could only imagine that feeling you get on a plane when it suddenly drops, and you feel your heart and lungs shoot up through you in a disconcerting way. Except I could only imagine that those teenagers felt suspended in time and air with their hearts and lungs permanently now settled to the bottom of their throats.

Stories began to come forward from distant memory about the dangerous nature of this morbid highway road. A van filled with ten rocket scientists flying off the road on their way to work (Jet Propulsion Laboratory), a famous kidnapped Raiders cheerleader found in a shallow grave, and stolen cars thieves had grown bored with. These were all things found along the route of Highway 2. The steep incline of the route straight into suburbia was a recipe for injury. Just ask my good friend Shane "Staplehead" Martin, whose less-than-stellar longboard performance landed him in a hospital bed with a coma for the better part of a week. A couple of semi-trucks had even lost their breaks on the steep last portion of the highway, becoming three-axed bowling balls smashing through my quiet suburban neighborhood. Something about the way the highway went from the hustle and noise of the city, to the untouched, unoccupied and already dangerous mountains must have made it perfect for those who needed a hiding place. I could also see why it might become the perfect burial ground for "accidental suicides".

When I thought about Angels Crest I couldn't just think about accidents though, because I began to see how it was among the most mysterious places to kill oneself. Besides the fact that you could easily find a contour on the sixty-six mile line where you most likely would not be found for several weeks if you flew off, nobody would know what happened. Maybe he drove too fast. Maybe he drank too much. Maybe he didn't care how much he drank or how fast he could go because he had, in a way, already accepted that fate. The most alluring and disturbing fact about

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the highway is that we will never truly know the intent. Accident or not, it was the most mysterious and terrifying suicide I could imagine.

Angeles Crest never lost its allure to me. Even when I slept in my warm bed (in my new cold home) in Colorado, I dreamt about the quick, decisive turns and the cultivating view that got more picturesque every mile up the highway. My confidence at hand behind the wheel of my Honda grew stronger, with the clouds of smoke that wouldn't be quite thick enough to obstruct my view of the endless road in the distance. Bob Seger's words being sung from my speakers directly at me:

*"He spent all night staring down at the lights of L.A.
Wondering if he could ever go home"¹*

Waking up, feeling the nostalgia of driving that car of mine up the New-Deal aged pavement into somewhere I would be deathly afraid to spend the night alone, made me miss home. I missed L.A., and I missed the Crest.

I knew what I had to do when I first returned home from Boulder. After flying into Burbank and making my favorite freeway drive in the city (up Freeway 2 towards the mountains) I know what the first thing I had to do was. After greeting my family, I got into my Honda and gave the Crest a visit. I had driven up only about ten minutes when I got to the famous look-out point that sat just out of the city limits. It just happened to be that time of day again too, you know, when the sun looks like it's bleeding through the notoriously dirty rag that is the L.A. atmosphere. Let the doctors and scientists tell you what they will about that layer of thickly colored air and what it might do for your health, but at that moment it was beautiful. The sun was coming down in a way that all the trees and hills around started to dim, but the city below me was illuminated.

I could see without turning my head the sphere, in its entirety, in which I had spent my whole life. The vastness of the less traveled road laid behind me in the dark. I was straddling the edge between what I have always known, loved, and seen my whole life with what is unfamiliar, exciting, and dangerous. I think I realized that evening that it is only human to appreciate the realities of getting close to the edge, but Goddammit that is the place you will always find the best view. ☀

1. Seger, Bob. "Hollywood Nights." *Stranger in Town*. Capitol: 1978.



THE ESCAPE

By Renee Blevins

A warm beam of Minnesota sunlight streamed through an open window, naturally bringing the light and sounds of summer into a cluttered room. The room was round and open. Months previously, a father had carefully painted it pale blue. A white wooden bed was placed under the window with a green comforter lain haphazardly on top. A matching nightstand, chest of drawers, lamp, and bookshelf inhabited the remainder. And, of course, toys were everywhere: Barbies, tea sets, blocks, and balls. In short, all that was expected of a girl around the age of six. And so she was. Rebecca sat in the middle of this eruption of toys on an oasis of thin off-white carpet. Her long blonde hair floated from the crown of her head to the middle of her back in a thin, disheveled braid. It sparkled and shimmered in the sunlight as she happily played with her plastic friends, sending them on countless adventures over hills, through mountains, and into magic kingdoms under the sea.

Her mother's voice floated up from downstairs, announcing the arrival of Laura from down the street. The girl

stood up from her toys and leaped over her river of clutter, jumping onto the sparse stones of clear space leading to the door. She ran down two flights of stairs to eagerly press her nose against the front door's window, her breath making spots of white appear on the clear glass as she watched the car in her driveway. The back of a curly brown ponytail emerged as Laura got out of her mother's van. Rebecca opened the door and, keeping her feet on the cool wooden floor, leaned her thin body over the threshold to wave. Then, she saw her: a second girl, Laura's older sister, stepping out of the front seat.

Rebecca's little feet made scarcely any noise as she marched towards her mother. When she entered the kitchen, she let out a long, drawn-out groan. She turned to see her stick of a daughter silhouetted with little hands planted on hips and an accusatory glint in her eyes, "Elle's here, too." The little girl's voice echoed through the spotless kitchen. Her mom sighed.

"Now Rebecca, I'm sure Mrs. Johnson has some good reason for dropping Elle off."

Rebecca gave her mom a look, reminding her of all the times she had come home from Laura's house shaken by some awful encounter with Elle.

"I know she's a bit harsh," she said, "but it's just for an hour. Then Mrs. Johnson will come back and pick them up. They both have to get haircuts."

Rebecca threw her head back and groaned, inches away from a temper tantrum.

"And that reminds me that a haircut, missy, is something we have been putting off for far too long with you."

"I don't want Laura to leave in an hour. I don't want Elle to be here."

Her mother turned back to her dinner preparations.

"And I most definitely don't want a haircut!" Rebecca huffed at her mother's back and pounded towards the door.

As the gold van backed out of the driveway, Laura and Elle waved goodbye. The little blonde's bright blue eyes watched as Elle pushed her younger sister out of the way the moment their mother was out of sight. Elle turned and walked straight into the house, not even bothering to knock. Laura, shorter and chubbier, followed sheepishly. The sisters shared the same thick, curly brown hair but little else. Laura shot her friend an apologetic look and shut the door behind

*They went on
many adventures
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and even
underground.*

her. Rebecca defiantly stared at Elle. Today, she was not going to let Elle be mean to her. This was her house and her toys. They were going to play her way. She turned and skipped lightly up the stairs, her braid flying out behind her as she lead her friends to her room.

They played Barbies, mostly. The taller brown headed ponytail fought with the shorter skinny blonde braid. They bickered in the way little kids do, neither girl able to truly one up the other. Laura meekly accepted the roles handed to her and played quietly, trying to appease both her older sister and her best friend. They went on many adventures through forests, over valleys, and even underground. They attended balls, concerts, and circuses. The hour passed all too quickly for the three, and soon, Rebecca's mother summoned her daughter to the stairs. The girl stuck her skinny face through the railings to look down, her long blonde braid hanging limply by her ear. A voice called up from below for Rebecca to come down, now.

"But Mom," she whined, "why do they have to go get their haircut? Can't I go with them?"

"I thought you didn't want to spend time with the two of them," her mother replied, "and anyway, we're having family dinner tonight and you, young lady, still haven't cleaned your room."

"But—"

"Come down, now."

The pale face withdrew from the bars in an angry thrust of blonde hair. Rebecca marched back into her room. Elle looked up from playing with her dolls and said, "Well, why don't you do it anyway?"

The blonde blinked, bewildered, "Do what?"

"Come with us."

Rebecca took in a deep breath, ready to shoot down Elle's suggestion. But then, Elle's eyebrow cocked. Her brown eyes looked straight into Elle's blue ones, and she sneered, "Oh, I forgot. You and Laura are babies. I bet you couldn't even do it if you tried."

Rebecca stared out her window.

"All you have to do is get in the car when Mom pulls up. Hide in the back and she won't even know you're there. Or are you too scared?"

Silence fell. The air became heavy with as much tension and suspense that could be contained in a room of three young girls. Laura looked back and forth between her big sister and her best friend, her eyes wide and unbelieving.

"Well?" The mocking sneer was back. "Are you going to do it?"

After a few impossibly long seconds, Rebecca gathered up her pride and looked back from the window. She looked at Elle.

"Rebecca, yes or no?"

"Yes."

The look on Elle's face made everything that was about to happen completely worth it to Rebecca. This was her chance to show Elle she couldn't be the boss anymore, she couldn't walk all over her little sister and her friends just because she was bigger.

A car door slammed in the front driveway and all three of them jumped slightly. Elle looked at her challenger and smirked, "Here we go."

The two sisters ran down the stairs before Rebecca. She stood, shaky, on the top of the steps that led down into the trial ahead. Slowly walking down, she could hear her heart pumping in her ears, and she wondered how she would get out of the house without being seen.

She reached the bottom of the staircase and there it was. The perfect opportunity just waiting to be taken advantage of. Mrs. Johnson had already entered the kitchen and the mothers were whispering in hushed tones with their hands over their mouths. Elle glared down the pathway to the idling vain, free and clear. Rebecca hesitated briefly. Elle cleared her throat and smirked at the timid blonde with a mocking look of I knew you wouldn't do it in her eyes. Shoulders squared and little heart determined, Rebecca took a small step over the threshold, briefly glanced back at her unsuspecting mother, flew down the hot sidewalk, and threw herself into the car. She slowly pulled the sliding door shut behind her. It closed with a subtle click and she ducked around, half-walking, half-crawling through two rows of plush individual seats. She squeezed her body out of sight, still being small enough to fit between the last two rows. She tucked her head against her smooth knees and waited, allowing herself to be momentarily distracted by the crisp smell of a new car and half-finished apple juice.

*Shoulders squared
and little heart
determined,
Rebecca took a
small step over the
threshold ...*

*Laura fumbled
down the
sidewalk,
giddy with the
excitement while
Elle followed
mechanically.*

Scarcely before Rebecca had time to catch her breath, Mrs. Johnson's heels marched down the sidewalk toward the car. Even over the hammering of her own heart, the unfortunate rebel could hear Elle and Laura calling fake goodbyes up to her empty bedroom. Laura fumbled down the sidewalk, giddy with the excitement while Elle followed mechanically. Their brown curls swung as they buckled their seat belts. Laura sneaked her friend a sideways smile. Rebecca could see Elle's face in from the front seat in the reflection of a mirror. It was blank. When the girl saw this expression, her chest swelled. She had done it; she had shown Elle that even though she was younger, she had more guts. Then, she felt the car shift into reverse, heard the blow of the air conditioning, and felt it slowly back out of the driveway. As her bright blue eyes peeked over the seat and out the window, she caught a glimpse of her house disappearing down the street. The car rolled to a stop and then merged out onto a main road towards Kidz Kutz. Rebecca's neighborhood disappeared behind her all too quickly. When the sign that marked her neighborhood was no longer in sight, Rebecca realized she had really done it. The pride that filled her was instantly gone. The thick black lashes that lined her cheeks became wet; the street blurred. She didn't want to leave. It was scary out here. She liked being in her room. It was safe. It was home.

As the van stopped at a red light, an overwhelming urge to pop up and tell Mrs. Johnson to turn this car around came over Rebecca. But she stayed frozen in place, fearful of Elle's menacing gaze and listening to that small part of her that wanted to be rebellious. The car moved forward. The ride seemed never ending; with each passing second the little girl's throat began to close up as the sobs of terror and homesickness silently catapulted up her chest. All the while, the mother and her two daughters were chatting away blindly, never realizing the terror of their unseen stowaway. After the eternity of the six-minute car ride, the van pulled off the road into a parking lot. Two speed bumps jostled Rebecca and she squeezed her eyes tight, praying that when she opened them she would be back in her bright, round room. When the van finally came to rest between two white lines, the sisters and their mother disembarked, slamming the doors behind them. Silence fell. Suddenly, Rebecca realized she had no idea what to do next.

On shaky legs, Rebecca unfolded herself from the back and inched forward to the middle of the van. Already she was starting to sweat. Water now both oozed out of her eyes and marked her underarms; the van was heating up. Moving to the window, the girl stared at the backs of the family. The sobs she had silently barricaded inside came out in a torrent of the raw fear of being left behind. None of the girls were looking back, not one of them even thinking for a moment about the child sitting inside the locked van resting on hot July pavement. Just before entering the door, the shortest hesitated and turned to look back at the van in which her best friend was confined. She paused, then grabbed her mother's hand and whispered something in her ear. As the mother turned back toward the car with an exasperated look on her face, Rebecca saw her own terrified expression mingled with the accusatory gaze.

She watched as Mrs. Johnson walked towards her and pulled her keys out of her purse. The sliding door rolled open and the girl stepped out into the suffocating, sweltering sun. The bright light burned her eyes and she squinted, trying to see not only through the bright light, but also the tears that were now coming fast and thick down her face. Rebecca sobbed quietly, following her friend's mother toward the store. They entered. She sat down in a chair against the back wall, watching as Elle and Laura silently climbed into tall swirly chairs and Mrs. Johnson punched a number into the phone. Her mother was coming to get her.

As she waited, Rebecca stared at herself in the mirrors that lined the walls—a small, frail girl curled up in a chair made for a much bigger person. Her smooth arms wrapped around her legs as she pulled them towards her chest and hid her chin behind them. Her long blonde hair spilled over her shoulder, having come completely out of the braid. Her eyes were bright amidst her splotchy, tear-stained face. As she stared, Elle's voice cut across the room, full of self-pride at her opponent's downfall, "Hey! Why don't you come get your hair cut with us? You can look like me!"

And to this the girl said, "No." ☀





Photo by David Coons

INTEGRATIVE PHYSIOLOGY

BY NEVIN WHITTEMORE

We, as modern people, take the human body for granted. We jump out of airplanes, do harmful drugs, ski down mountains with active avalanches, and endless more activities that risk our lives and health. But what is life without adventure and excitement? This is the sole thing that makes us human in the first place. We are imperfect like the very networks that dominate our lives in the form of growing technology. We stare at flashing screens, hoping to... what? Escape from the real world? Look into someone else's life? While in the process, we miss our own lives that are gifted to us since conception. We constantly wait for an update for our phones in order to make them work quicker, with a reduced amount of flaws. And then we eventually need an upgrade for a faster processing speed and a bigger screen. And meanwhile the human body needs no upgrade. It needs no upgrade. It is a perfect system working for an imperfect being.

Perfect is of course an overstatement. The mere idea of perfect is unimaginable in itself. Yet we strive to find this so

called “perfection” and miss life as it goes by. Not the life that we make, but the life that was set for us by none other than... The universe? Evolution? God? The brain composes what is thought to be the most complex system in the known universe including the known universe itself. The human brain is said to have about 100 billion neurons. It is a mystery. Most of the brain is undiscovered territory. We have yet to even come close to spotting the new world. It is there though, waiting deep within the cloudy webs of neurons within the squishy pink mass of an organ.

*Not the fake, double lobed,
ooey-gooey, Valentine's Day crap,
but the real deal with ventricles and
atriums and a big juicy aorta.*

By far my favorite organ is the heart! Not the fake, double lobed, ooey-gooey, Valentine's Day crap, but the real deal with ventricles and atriums and a big juicy aorta. On average the heart beats 100,000 times per day pushing 2,000 gallons of blood through the body. Upon each pump of the heart, the 1.25 gallons of blood incased in the human body is pushed throughout the 60,000 miles of blood vessels within. It is a magnificent muscle, the heart. It is the go-to organ for the feeling of love (so I'll give the “ooey-gooey” one a little credit), when in fact it's all the brain. But we feel it in our hearts with a change in heart rate, an increase in respiration, a rush of blood flow delivering oxygen through every limb to compensate for the nerves involved in the feeling itself. It brings new meaning to the organ responsible for pumping blood, serving the rest of the body and connecting it with the outside world. It acts like its own body. It is the glue. It is the base. It is the source. When in doubt it is the silver lining. The heart is the provenance of hope where courage is born and bursts out with adrenaline as a sidekick. It is.

Consider the drum. It is known by musicians as a rhythmic instrument of precision and foundation. It leads the rest of the band to hit the climax together. It is also

known as an instrument of free will. Improvisation cakes the walls of the drummer's mind. Where society sees the drum as the background, it is constantly evolving and yearns to solo, bringing everything to a halt, except the music itself. The beat of the drum is the beat of the music, which is the internal flow of the rhythm of the body. Sitting in complete silence, put your fingers to your carotid and feel the funky swing of your body in motion. Feel your popliteal in your leg and undergo the sensation of the beat moving your legs. Place your hand on your chest and seek the origin of your pulse that is directing the eternal, internal dance that defines nature. Like a highway your blood moves to and from the music of your heart.

When I was younger, I was afraid of horror films like any normal kid. My older brother took me to a movie, Cloverfield, involving a giant alien, little tiny aliens that came off the bigger alien. There were dark and twisty subway stations where people would cry blood and explode after getting bitten by the tiny aliens. It is easy to imagine my fear as a pre-pubescent boy witnessing the apocalypse when I would have much rather been watching Scooby-Doo (now I am a post-pubescent guy who would still rather be watching Scooby-Doo). Lame excuses for entertainment such as this lead to a misconception about blood. Upon sight, some people will gag, throw up, become nauseated, and have to avert their eyes from the bad associations that come to mind when people see blood. Blood is the big, tall, bald guy with a scar across his eye and an angry look on his face who works at a bakery, professionally designing cakes. Blood is the creepy, old, witch-looking lady from next-door who invites you over for tea and sugar with a kind smile. Blood is the mean looking Rottweiler chained to a rickety fence who pants and rolls on its back and licks your face when you get the courage to say hello. Blood is a healer with the face of a killer. Blood is a miracle. It is a messenger delivering oxygen to everywhere in your body. It carries immunity and fights infection. And it is everywhere, ready to seal exposure to the outside world. It clots and protects the wound while the damage is repaired. And when it is done, it will fall away having done its work, and perfect, new skin either as a scar or not will be left in its place.

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Arthur Brisbane said it. A photograph can recall an event. A painting can tell a story. A stain can direct a play. A group of freckles can write a book. But a scar, a scar is an epic poem. It is Dante’s Inferno rewritten to the individual’s personal experience. Scars hold the memories of the good and the bad. Within the layers of scar tissue is the emotion that weaves through the history of the event. It is a constant reminder that follows you everywhere you go until the scar has finally faded and the memory is gone. Beneath every scar is the personality of the wearer. What bones make up their body? They are the same by core but different by shape. They are physically grown the same but are shaped anew by adventure. They exist to give us purpose, enough shape to walk, to dance, to point and laugh, to hug with passion, to throw a punch, to . . . live. Without them we would be bags of Jell-O.

We take the human body for granted. It is a system of perfection. It is perfect in its own way. It works together for every part of the system. For the most part it can sustain itself. It has a flow, like a flawless factory. Look at your hands and marvel at the fact that your eyes, connected to your optic nerve, connected to your diencephalon, allow you to see with such clarity. Acknowledge the sensation of smell. What is it? What does it feel like? Consider the human body as you take on life and give it credit for its remarkable system that brings you everything you experience. It is integrative physiology. It is integrative life. **QQ**

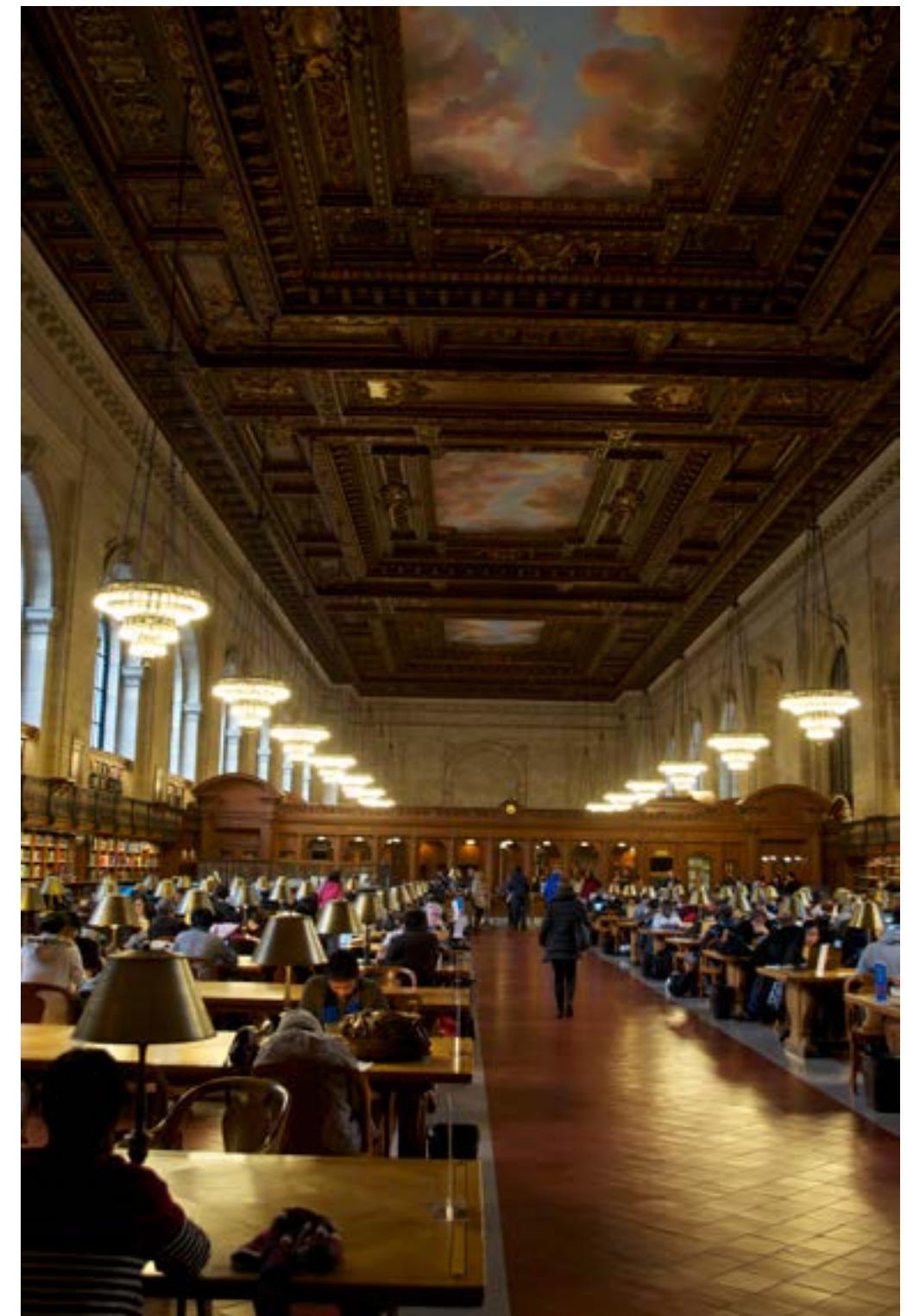




Photo by Sofie Davis-Kos

ON BEING ALIVE

By Luke Lemons

I have often wondered if somewhere there is an infamous and mad architect who travels the world and designs only hospitals; instituting the same film of teal light in white hallways, the same rooms paired side by side like cells, the same furnishings that try to dupe the patients and visitors into believing that they've entered somewhere else, where life goes on like home. Over the span of a few months, when I was younger, I used to visit numerous hospitals following my grandma's radiation treatment and surgeries. Of course, I was too young to be the leader of these expeditions, but my parents dragged me through bustling hallways of fake white light, fake flowers, and fake scents of lilac, all used in order to cover up the smell of latex. Looking back, I can still remember how sick I felt when I entered a ward.

As my family and I charted our way through each hallway, I frequently managed to pass by someone alive in their fancy hospital bed, eyes glued to the television as they sat back breathing in their canned oxygen and eating their pre-blended food.

Some of these souls had windows to look out and watch the world below tread on like worker ants. From the ground, looking up, it seemed as if the rooms remained hollow and empty; they never appeared to have residency. My grandma had one of these windows no matter what room she recovered in, and my siblings and I had decorated it beautifully with colored wax paper, giving her room the feel of a sanctuary in a church with stained glass. We brought the wax paper with her to every new room she had. So while the framed thrift shop paintings and mundane wallpapers changed, she at the least had the constant glow of blues and reds falling on her white linen sheets to comfort her.

I was not old enough to understand completely why these visits became more and more frequent, and not until years after her passing had I realized that she personally battled her own type of struggle in that labyrinth of doctors and nurses. I imagined the pain she must have felt, not from the surgery to rip out her cancer, but from the repetitive clacking of doctors' business shoes on the tile floors (pulsing rhythmically with the occasional roar of sorrow coming from someone who's loved one had finally died). I imagined that she questioned when we would come in one day and let out the same shriek of sadness and loss from the doorway of her opened room. I imagined the nights, when all her wax paper lost its color and the only way to spark thought resorted to listening to the musically coordinated coughs. I imagined while she slept she dreamed of square dancing with my grandpa or long walks with him through the mountains. It must have been thoughts like those that caused her to finally snap and decide to leave.

While the hospital staff advised against her idea of recovery, she chose to get well at home on the luxury of her back porch where she could watch my grandpa's garden flourish with Indian paintbrushes, wild roses, and the rest of his flowers. My grandpa had, in fact, built a whole new porch for her made of wine-red bricks and positioned it so perfectly that my grandma could watch the sun rise and set. He got burnt and bronzed from the sun due to the long hours outside laying down brick after brick. He would not mind though; he grew up on a farm far off in Nebraska and was used to the labor. Even after moving to Colorado in the sixties to work on computers night and day, he was used to the labor. Even after finding a cute, catholic secretary, my grandma, and working overtime to pay for a wedding

He got burnt and bronzed from the sun due to the long hours outside laying down brick after brick.

His newly built patio would be my grandma's hospital room, . . .

ring, he was used to the labor. And now, when my grandma had grown sick and depended on him to carry her up and down the stairs when she grew too tired, he did not mind, he was used to the labor. His newly built patio would be my grandma's hospital room, except that she breathed effortlessly on that back porch surrounded by blooming flowers. No longer would the claustrophobic walls of the hospital swallow and constrict her humanity and life.

Though she looked frail and weak from the hospital, she still went out with my grandpa, shopped at stores, and drank beers at restaurants. I preferred the ten-minute drive to her and my grandpa's house over the long walk through echoing corridors. I found her refreshing new recovery more pleasing than the hospital because my family no longer had to stand over her bed to talk to her--gazing down upon her like at a wake right before we lowered her into the ground. What an agony it must have been for my grandma to feel pronounced dead, but still fully awake and conscious in that damned hospital.

However, at home in her house my grandma was alive. The freedom that she chose made her skin glow more than the fluorescent lights ever could. Our entire family headed over to her house frequently for barbeques and family dinners, and again my naive younger self never saw the red flag. I never took note of all the self-healing books that surrounded her bed. A flashlight and a pocket knife were found neatly on my grandpa's side of the bed while her side juxtaposed; riddled with crosses, prayers, and holy water for rubbing on her scars. I know today that my parents, grandpa, and even my grandma knew that her choice to live at home was going to kill her quicker than the hospital. Yet, when death seemed so close, she wanted to live her final days in the sun with her family versus deteriorating in a stale hospital bedroom. My mother told me years later that on the phone, in between her sobs, my grandma had told her that she never wanted to go to another hospital again, no matter the situation.

One summer day in her quiet neighborhood, my grandma began to have problems breathing. Not willing to risk losing the person for which he had sacrificed a life of leisure for, my grandpa went into an instant panic. She told him that she did not want to go back to the hospital, back to the facemasks, back

to the coughs, back to the oxygen tanks, back to her slowly creeping grave. After my grandpa threw her into the car and began to drive, she slumped over, gently resting her head against the car window with the midday summer sun shining through. My grandpa pulled over, picked up his dead wife and ran with her to a neighbor's front lawn, and used all the energy left in him to attempt to revive her. She had more than enough life in her during her final days, she was humored and free; tanned and smiling; talkative and witty.



My mother had yelled from our living room that she wanted to talk to my siblings and me. Quickly we headed to the couches, the seats that no one wanted to sit on; the couches used only for talks of serious, horrible, or important issues. These couches were not the kind that one simply rested on after a hard day; one came to these couches and returned with something shattering. Without any warning after we sat down, without any time to catch our breath from the sprint to the living room, my mother let it fly.

"Noni died today."

Even though we all knew she was sick, even though each time I went to her house I could feel the presence of death suffocating me, we all cried. Everyone. The funeral would be in a week; her body, cremated.

I began to break down; how is it that someone living a full life yesterday is suddenly gone for eternity today? I still remembered her voice, and her warm skin. The funeral and its environment made my deep quarrel for explanation worse. The countless speeches all starting with, "I knew Kathy when—", or "I'm sorry to be here today—", and my favorite, "I remember—"

While the adults humored themselves with stories that proved that her life was not in jest, I focused on the tiny wooden box in front of a giant picture of my grandma. That box contained her laughs, her voice, her smile, her hair. It contained her glass figurines as well as her marinara sauce. Everything that was my grandma found itself contained in that small oak box no dimension bigger than a foot. As the light broke through the stained glass murals all around me

*That box contained
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marinara sauce.*

in the church, I became reminded of the wax paper. But I know that if my grandma knew that, she would hit me. I could hear her saying, "Why would you think of such an awful place? The place where I barely managed to escape?"

It scares me, that wooden box surrounded by patches of color. It scares me that there is no use in escaping the box, or avoiding it. We all end up a memory of someone in one way or another, but it is until we make that memory one to remember. It had been six months since my grandma had died and her house grew much darker. Spending his days in silence, my grandpa lived alone. After his wife's death, he woke up each morning on the right side of his bed and manage to get up and pass a dresser full of jewelry and perfume. He showered and got his clothes from half of his closet while trying not to eye the dresses and blouses so close to him. After eating breakfast alone, my grandpa went to the basement and watched TV from an unbalanced love couch.

After my grandma's death, entering the house became challenging; right when I stepped foot on the carpet, I began the search for my grandpa. I never wanted to find myself alone in a room staring at dog-eared pages of healing books and notes shoved in drawers. Until I found my grandpa, I treaded lost in the void of past life caused by the vacuum of death, the same void my grandpa mucked through each day alone.

More months passed and my grandpa— began to chart the void, and my family began to realize that he acted differently. He no longer remembered when we last came over to his house or how to tell time. His eyes went from a sky blue to a storm gray, locked in the constant position of confusion. His garden had died and he lost his pocket knife. He no longer labored around the house. He just sat and watched TV, trying to dilute his confusion and mistakes.

"Kathy, can you come here?" He shouted to my mother, Karri.

"Dad, my name's Karri, you know that," she replied with an undertone of understanding.

"Oh yeah!" He laughed, looked to me with a grin and rolled his eyes as if it made up part of a big joke to irritate my mom. I laughed like it was the joke he wanted me to laugh at. Yet, after more time passed, the errors he committed became harder to redirect as jokes.

It has been over a few years now and my mother still receives constant phone calls from him. I recall one going like:

“What do you mean?”

“No, look at the button . . .”

“The button.”

“Dad—”

“Dad, I ca—”

“I can’t just drop everything here and leave . . .”

“I know.”

These types of conversations came up frequently in my household. My grandpa calls, forgetting how to do something, in this case use the microwave. My mother gets annoyed. He becomes embarrassed, and thus annoyed. She will yell then storm out to drive to his house to help him. It has gotten to the point where he is unable to live on his own. He cannot cook, drive, or dance. My grandpa only sits and confuses himself with ideas that he cannot grasp. His memory and mental health had died in the void that my grandma had created. He is now a walking shell full of ricocheting thoughts that will never come together.

I do not consider myself an evil or demented person, but each day that passes that I see him lost in a pursuit of pointlessness, I see one of those people in the hospital beds, looking out their window towards the world around, wanting to live there, but now too far to reach it. Sometimes I question why he isn’t a memory in the back of my head yet, because each day good memories are replaced with sad and pitiful ones. I love him still, but I catch myself thinking back to my grandma and her choice to leave the hospital, her choice to live. I will enter his house and find myself lost, flipping pages of the self-healing books and looking through old jewelry. While my grandfather sits at the dining room table trying his hardest to read the newspaper, I think of my grandparents both and wonder: who really outlived whom? ☀



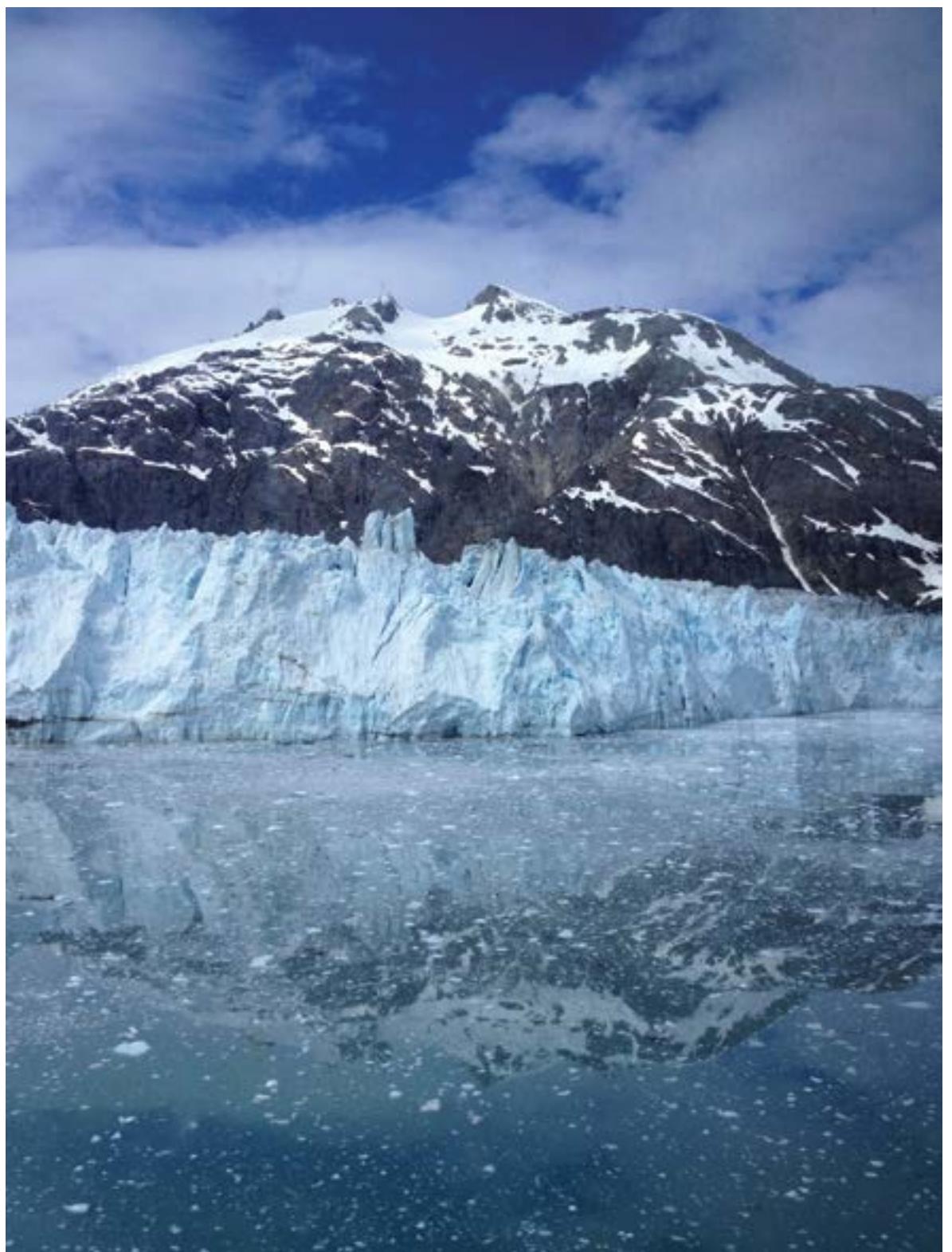


Photo by Kelsey Ruggard

TOOTH FAIRY VS. JESUS CHRIST

By Sarah Hershman

As a young girl it was easy for me to believe in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy¹ (especially the Tooth Fairy), so in theory believing in God—who arguably has more believers than the aforementioned childhood superstars—should not have been difficult for me at all. To counter my naiveté and willingness to believe, I had to actively refuse to learn how to be a Christian. Right now you might be asking, “Why did you—in your infinite wisdom—decide to reject our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Don’t you know He died on the cross for your sins?” Well, yes, I am aware, and to be honest, I was uneasy about my decision at the time, but I chose to reject Christianity to support my mother. I realize that it may seem strange that my parents tried to raise me to be a Christian and I returned the favor by rejecting that same religion to support

1. Whenever I lost a tooth, the Tooth Fairy would give me \$100.00 bills. No, my teeth were not made of gold, but this made me really keen on the Tooth Fairy. I didn’t stop believing until all my baby teeth had fallen out, and Dad sat me down and came clean about the pile of lies he fed me about the Tooth Fairy’s existence and such. That was a hard day.

them. So allow me to explain the interesting situations that led me to the decision to not-learn Christianity.²

My maternal grandfather is a born-again Christian preacher. (Un)Naturally, his relationship with God is more important to him than anything else in life—including his family. It's important to note that before he became the Magnificent Being who has been washed clean of his sins in the blood of Jesus Christ, he was actually kind of an asshole.³ When my mother was growing up, my grandfather was an abusive alcoholic—meanwhile, her mother was suffering from multiple sclerosis, which resulted in a long stretch of her mother being in a medically induced coma. One story I vividly remember hearing about is the time my grandfather pinned my mom to the ground and shoved his dirty gym socks in her mouth in front of one of his drinking buddies just to prove that he could. Needless to say, no one was there to support my mom through the traumas of her teenage years. So for her sweet sixteen, legally emancipated and finally free, she moved out of her parents' house, away from the abuse. All of these stories were passed down to me from my mother, and at first they were hard to believe. I had only known my grandfather as an overly self-righteous Christian who actively would not harm anyone because “hurting others is sin.” The worst he did was insist that my brother, sister and I attend Sunday school, and sometimes when he would visit, he would read us stories from the Bible. I couldn't see how my good, God-fearing grandfather once was a drunk who beat his daughter for fun, but as time went on and I grew older his sour streak became more and more pronounced.

During one of my grandfather's visits, he read us the story of Abraham, who was asked to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, to prove his loyalty to God. At the time, I was seven, and when you're at the ripe old age of seven your parents are your world—the thought that God might ask one of my parents to kill me to prove their

2. Not-learning is a theory developed by Herbert Kohl in his essay “I Won't Learn from You: The Role of Assent in Learning.” Not-learning is an active refusal to learn from somebody. It should not be confused with an inability to learn, despite the fact that both types of not learning are characterized by an extremely flat learning curve.

3. For lack of a better word. And to be honest, this is probably one of the kinder words that could be used to describe him, but we won't go into that. Although this sentence suggests that he might somehow have become less of an asshole he has not.

devotion terrified me. How could God love me and ask my parents to kill me? This was all too much for me then, and frankly I began to prefer the all-benevolent Tooth Fairy, who would leave me money for all my lost teeth (even that one tooth I swallowed when I ate a hotdog), as opposed to this God who might make the people I loved most in the whole world cut my heart out to prove a point. So as any curious child would do at that moment, I looked up at my grandfather and asked, “If God told you to kill us, would you?” He looked me dead in the eye, and without a moment's hesitation, his voice boomed a big “YES.” It absolutely crushed me and it was at this moment in my life that I first began to doubt my grandfather's sanity and, subsequently, Christianity.

Later, in my early teens, after hearing one too many horror stories about who Grandpa used to be, I asked Mom if he ever apologized for everything he did to her after he found God. To my surprise, she answered, “No,” and continued on with whatever task she was doing at that time. I was appalled that instead of apologizing to my mother for all of the pain he caused her growing up, my grandpa wielded his religion as a tool to break others down—not unlike a hammer emblazoned with Jesus Christ's name hitting you in the clavicle until it shatters. On multiple occasions my grandpa would scornfully judge my mom and make her feel like a bad person, as well as an inadequate parent. My grandpa's comments varied, but “you are living a life of sin! What do you think will become of your children if you live like this?” was always at the core of his arguments. Every time they had one of those conversations I could see the pain that erupted in my mother's eyes that then slowly cooled into anger and hollowness. I realized my grandfather never stopped being abusive; he simply switched out the belt for the Bible. For me, knowing that Christianity was routinely used to hurt others, particularly people I loved, made me promise myself to never learn how to be Christian.

Not-learning to be a Christian was really rather easy for me—I didn't have to develop any techniques or procedures to inhibit my learning; I simply didn't try. I found that a lack of effort is actually a very effective tool to use when not-learning Christianity. One reason that lack of effort was so poisonous to learning Christianity is that the biblical language is difficult to understand. If you do not put forth adequate effort to learn what the scriptures mean, you won't understand the message. Simple. As. That.

I realized my grandfather never stopped being abusive; he simply switched out the belt for the Bible.

Just to be safe and sure that I would not learn the Bible, I also employed the simple tactic of not reading it.⁴ In Sunday school, when the instructor read the Bible to us and asked us questions about God, I preoccupied myself with creating a mental masterpiece-of-a-list that contained all the reasons why the existence of God and Jesus Christ are implausible. If and when I was finished with my magnificent list, I would busy my mind by contemplating the sanity of all the members of the congregation.⁵ The more challenging aspect of my not-learning mission was convincing my family, particularly my grandfather, that I was indeed becoming a faithful Christian. To do this I simply avoided him altogether. If he called, I would not answer. If he wanted to come for a visit, I would be busy. Unfortunately this could not go on forever. When he and I finally did end up talking, I tried to avoid the topic of religion at all costs. Sometimes he would force the subject on me and I would smile, nod and pretend as though we were on the same biblical page. And thank God, it worked! I, the awkward prepubescent teen with a gap tooth and a high propensity to get sunburned, prevailed.

Some of you may be wondering if I kept my promise... Well, sort of. In my late teens (maybe 17 or 18 years old), I had a little fling with the New Testament after my best friend, Lo, introduced us. Lo was one of the really cool girls in high school—the kind of girl who got drunk with Malcolm and the Oi Oi Boys⁶ after cheering at the football game. Lo went through her punk rock phase and then transitioned into more a psychedelic period, and then made the transition to raver/molly-fanatic,

4. Not understanding the words in the Bible + Not reading the Bible = Double whammy against the word of G-O-D!

5. Most of whom I concluded were f***ing mental. This helped fuel my passion and determination to not-learn. I convinced myself that the believers were insane, which meant I had to protect myself from the onslaught of psychiatric issues that were being forced into my brain by not-learning their faithful ways.

6. Malcolm and the Oi Oi Boys were Elizabeth, Colorado's own personal version of The Sex Pistols. They played punk rock shows at this little shack/building at Casey Jones Park once a month, and if you were an immature high-schooler who drank a little too much of that cheap Keystone, that one of the meth heads (let me be honest, it was most likely one of the Komar Brothers) bought for you in exchange for drug money, it was the place to be. Lo and her boyfriend, Tyler, the lead singer, were like Elizabeth's rendition of Sid and Nancy.



Photo by Natasha Collins

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which was pretty brief.⁷ My memory of this period is a little foggy, but I am pretty sure it was a bad trip that led to a suicide attempt that ended up sparking Lo's Christian phase.⁸ I didn't partake in all the drugs that Lo did, but when she found God I thought, "This might be something I could actually do with her, without destroying my brain."

As Lo dove deeper into her newfound Christianity she kept inviting me to church, and I kept going. She bought me my very own copy of the Bible, and I read it. Hell, I even prayed! I really gave the whole Jesus thing a shot, but no matter how hard I tried it just felt wrong. I felt like a kid who knew their imaginary friend wasn't real, but still kept talking to them because they weren't ready to let go and grow up yet. After a few months of this I stopped lying to myself and acknowledged that even if I wanted to, I couldn't learn to be a Christian.⁹

Oh, how Lo cried! "Sarah, it breaks my heart that when I die and go to heaven, you won't be accepted into God's eternal kingdom with me, but instead you'll be burning in Hell." Sometimes I worry that I might rot in the fiery pits of Hell forever with the rest of my family, but I easily brush the feeling away, unaffected by the thought. Occasionally I fear that the Bible could be true, which would mean that I am a horrible sinner whose soul is damned for eternity (which isn't the most optimal end to life, but hey, someone's gotta burn, right?). With all the horror, insanity and nonsense religion has brought to the world—even if it means my soul ends up as nothing more than a fiery ember in the depth of underworlds—I just can't be a Christian. I refuse to allow any sort of semblance of the man that is my grandfather to exist in me, and this includes his religion. ☕

7. I had a conversation with Lo one time that went a li'l something like this: "Sarah, come over, the ceiling is melting and the spiders are crawling all over me." My response: "... Um? What?"

8. This "phase" has yet to end. She met a boy and married him at 19 years old. She is now a mother of a beautiful baby girl and she is still deeply involved with the church. Despite my qualms with Christianity, it has been good for Lo.

9. I think trying to be a Christian just felt wrong to me because of the magnitude of anger that I had for my grandfather. Despite my attempts to find God and believe in a higher power I couldn't because my hate-fire that burned for my grandfather was (and still is) more powerful than my will to be "saved".



RETURNING FROM DARKNESS

By Clare Fairchild Baker

I have suffered from ten concussions. None of them were from one sport, but rather from multiple sports and activities. Of the ten, only three have been truly “diagnosed” by a doctor.

Researchers have discovered that once you have suffered one concussion, you are one to two times more likely to receive a second one. If you have had two concussions, then a third is two to four times more likely, and if you have had three concussions, then you are three to nine times more likely to receive a fourth concussion. It does not take much for me to get a concussion. If someone accidentally elbows me hard enough, I could receive a concussion. It is hard to always be on guard as to avoid situations that could cause one, but sometimes, accidents happen. Confusion is a character that makes increasingly more appearances throughout my life. After each concussion, I can feel the absence of something. This “something” is not always easy to discern, but I know that it has left me. Sometimes it is something small that I will not miss, but other times it is something I will miss terribly.

Spelling was never a difficult task for me. I always laughed at my friends' inability to spell, but now I am the one at whom they should laugh. My math skills have also crumbled away. It is hardest to know that I was once great at math, and had the ability to spell very well, but now, no matter how hard I will myself, cannot seem to do either without great effort.

I loved math because my mental sharpness was incredible. Every math problem would enhance my intellectual capabilities. Logarithms and derivatives were simple aspects of calculus that I could do with great ease. My great mathematical abilities also aided me in other elements of my life. I was able to remember dates for history more effectively, read more analytically for English, and focus without becoming too distracted. I did not always like math, but as the years passed, I began enjoying it. This enjoyment led me to become passionate about math, and eventually excel in it.

That is not the case anymore. My skills were stripped from me after my last concussion. Now, simple multiplication and division problems are difficult. It is arduous, and grueling to try and fail miserably over and over again. My frustration grows each time that I must solve a mathematical problem. The prior ease has now shifted to tiresome difficulty. I long for a day when I will return to that exceptional skill level at which I once existed.

My dad always tells me that if I work hard enough, and do enough math problems, I will be able to return to that expertise. And I will endeavor, but something seems to be missing. I hope that time will heal this invisible festering wound.

There are stories of people who were hit in the head just right and developed savant-like abilities. Some become math geniuses, while others become musical prodigies. With each concussion, I hope that the concussion will give, rather than take. Wishful thinking.

I used to be able to run for hours on end. Running was my bliss: an environment where the world melted away for a while. I could get away from my fears, apprehensions, worries, and simply be free. I loved to feel the earth under my feet, and smell the forest around me. It could transcend me into another realm where everything was beautifully cheerful. But it was soon shattered like glass breaking into countless razor-sharp pieces. The concussion I suffered from wakeboarding changed all of that. Running jostled my brain. I could feel it bounce as I took each

step. The headaches induced from running became unbearable. My former escape from the world grew into another aspect of pain and eventual sorrow.

Lists, I am always writing lists. All of my friends joke that I go through more Sticky Notes than all of them combined. But I can no longer retain information as I once could. It slips from my mind when I am not paying attention. Writing lists allows me to visually see what must be accomplished, as well as to relieve my mind from the stress of remembering tasks. Each day, I write anywhere from five to twenty lists. And yes, the tediousness is dreadful, but it is something I must do.

Each concussion steals something from me: its greedy hands snatch parts of me without my knowledge. Some take a part of my intellect, and some a part of my life. I have always been a very adventurous, daring girl; however, each head injury lends itself to more people saying, "I don't think you should bike or run." Every time a person says that, a part of me dies inside. I want to scream out, you don't understand how much these activities mean to me! It is easy for them to make such suggestions, but most things are easier said than done.

I am going to die, was my only fleeting thought. The green of the leaves below me was all I saw as I fell headfirst towards the ground. The branches and leaves were hitting my face, and there was no pain as they slapped me, but rather numbness. I surrendered to the tree, hopelessly plunging. I bounced off bigger branches that did not budge as I toppled to the ground. As was my instinct from being a gymnast, I put my arms out in front of me to protect my head...

The water was scorching hot. The intense heat that almost felt cold was rushing down my body. What had happened? How did I end up in the shower? Why was I showering in the first place? After drying off, I went to bombard my dad with the millions of questions filling my head. I crinkled my forehead and asked, "Dad, did I fall today?" His eyes widened in disbelief and he said: "Yeah, you took quite the tumble out on the Reservoir today. You fell so hard that your feet came out of the wakeboard."

One of the most important people in my life is my dad. He has been my greatest teacher and friend. I love him more than words can express. If I were to suddenly lose him, depression would overcome me so that it would seem a part of me has

*Each concussion
steals something
from me: its greedy
hands snatch parts
of me without my
knowledge.*

died with him. His knowledge seems infinite, like the stars that fill the night sky. There has never been a doubt in my mind that he is the most intelligent person I know. Every day, he enlightens me with knowledge. I am a product of his love and nurture. Most people are blown away to learn that he is a ski instructor: they are dumbfounded as to how he is not a lawyer, or a doctor. Yes, he could have been either, but his heart knew neither were his true calling. The mountains have been his home for thirty years, and he always says that the mountains have been his greatest teacher. The knowledge he gained from living amongst them is superior to that of any medical school or law school. And just as an active lifestyle has led to my concussions, the same can be said for him.

My dad has a lot of experience with concussions. Playing rugby for twenty-five years, avid mountain biking, and extreme skiing all lend themselves to inevitable head injuries. He jokes that his brain still functions properly, as far as he can tell. But there is an underlying fear in his voice. Over time, his brain may turn to mush, much like Muhammad Ali's. Researchers have found a link between dementia and multiple concussions. Will my dad end up brain dead like the many boxers, football players, and rugby players before him?

I have a terrible fear of losing control over my brain, and an even greater fear that my dad's mental capacity will dwindle to nothing. I dread that one day he will no longer be the infinite source of knowledge from which I have learned so much. He is an apple tree; each apple contains information about the universe. I can go and pluck one off, and that apple will fill me with knowledge until I am hungry for more. He willingly hands out his apples to those who wish to learn.

My dad and I love to mountain bike. That is something that we could do forever. We never feel a desire to go fast, but rather enjoy the day and its beauty. He taught me how to mountain bike when I six. I started on a small inclined dirt road, and progressed from there. Each ride would get more difficult. By sixth grade, I could ride almost anything, but there was one problem. I did not have pedals in which my feet could clip. I was much too afraid to ride a bike with my feet clipped in.

The frustration and fear mixed together all too well. I couldn't do it because I was afraid, but I wanted to do it. My mind was torn; is the reward worth the risk? Biking downhill on

*He is an
apple tree; each
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information about
the universe.*

such a steep incline that my butt was behind my seat, thinking to myself, what the hell have you gotten yourself into? My dad was waiting for me down below, yelling encouragements that sounded like mumbling from my distance far above. I had only just started to use clipless pedals. The key is to keep moving just enough so you don't lose your balance, and try not to get going too fast. I knew that with normal pedals, I was perfectly capable of riding this downhill. I kept saying under my breath, these fucking pedals. They're going to be the end of me. That mindset was not the best that I could have had. And sure enough, as I was attempting to navigate my way down to my dad, my foot slipped from its place on the pedal. My body went flying over the handlebars. I landed on my head then tumbled down the hill. Instantly, I grabbed my head, unaware of my shattered shoulder blade and broken ribs. God damn it, Clare. You can't fucking fall on your head. Before you're twenty, you will be brain dead.

These thoughts seem to have made more and more appearances as I have grown up. How can thoughts influence someone's life? Each time I get hurt, or hit my head, I always detest myself for it. And in truth, a part of me wants to die when I get hurt. Everything I love to do involves being active. It is hard for me to sit idly and heal while all of my friends are out doing what I love. I oftentimes begin to hate my body for constantly being injured. But one day, I came to the realization that healing begins in the mind. Positive, healing thoughts are a great panacea for injuries on the inside and the outside.

Although each concussion has taken a lot from me, I now know the best way to heal my mind and soul. Each negative thought that escapes must be replaced by positive, encouraging notions. I only have one brain, and if I do not do my best to restore it to its former level of function, I will slowly slip into oblivion. But this oblivion is not like the darkness I have gone to before: I have always returned from the darkness. This oblivion, however, is permanent. ☀



Photo by Chad Henderson

MERIDIAN

By Max Owens

At last I was comfortable. A camp stove, happily purring, sat in the snow in front of me. The water in the pot was nearly boiling, and I had a package of oatmeal ready for when it did. I munched on a bagel, scooping out globs of peanut butter as I went along. The snow had stopped falling and I was hungry.

It was still cloudy and I could not see the rocky ridge in front of me, nor the one behind. The map told me they were there, but I only half-believed it, like one half-believes the varied recreations of an image seen in a dream. The forest was quiet. Each tree limb carried a heavy load of snow, but this snow did not have that branch-crippling density that can make a forest look stressed or weary or sad. These trees carried a golden load. They were not over-exerting themselves, but they were proud of their efforts. A dead skeleton of a tree next to me in this proud forest carried a lively burden. A gray jay—fat and round like he had just swallowed a softball—peered at me from his needleless, weathered perch ten feet away. I froze because I did not want to scare him away, but I don't think I need to have worried. The

way that he stared without stirring or blinking even during my startled double-take suggested he had been there watching me for a while and was interested in how long it would take for me to notice him. He was a patient host and I was very happy for his hospitality. He had the right sort of eyes for spectacles and he sat and watched me while I made hot chocolate. If he was confused or curious, he did not betray it and only showed me friendliness and what was probably mild amusement.

In those moments it was amusing to me, too. Funny, even. Earlier it had been stupid. Unsatisfying. The whole business was unsatisfying and I should not have expected less snow, bluebird skies or contentment. I wanted adventure. Solitude was foreign, exotic. That's a nice, romantic way to say it. Actually it was loneliness that was foreign and exotic, but solitude is what I called it when I described it to other people. I expected solitude and got loneliness. I was lonely some of the time, but there were times that, even in the thick of the snow and the low clouds, I found sunshine.

The first rays of light appeared that morning. The map showed a hairpin turn that I was sure I would miss because of all the snow covering the trail. Every coincidental gap in the pines looked like the trail, but finally I found a gap that was too coincidental and bent in just the right way. I followed it and was relieved when the gap did not shrink. My dreary mood began to clear even as the clouds thickened.

The second shower of sunshine came when deer tracks appeared in the snow that covered the trail. They made nice company as I slogged along and it was funny to look back at my snowshoe tracks beside the deer's. My tracks looked like a big-footed robot's, and I imagined my friend, the deer, leading such a stranger through the woods. I smiled because this was not far from the truth. The deer did not wander and several times I trusted her when I couldn't tell which way the trail went. She was right all of the time until her tracks diverged purposefully through some thicker underbrush off to the left. I was sad to see her go.

Up and up I climbed through the woods. For a while the spruce gave way to aspen. On some of the aspen trees couples had written their initials. The letters were very low on the trees and I guessed that the couples had carved them during a snowless, sunny time. As I trudged through the snow alone, I

*I expected
solitude and
got loneliness.*

imagined they were probably watching the wood in a fireplace crackle and spit from under a blanket that they were sharing. Every once in a while one of them got up to add a log to the fire or brew a little more coffee but always returned to the blanket where together they watched the fire and the slow, large snowflakes falling outside.

In the aspen forest the snow fell differently than in the pine and spruce forest. The spindly bare aspen branches did not collect snow like boughs of needles and so it fell heavy and unhindered. It amplified the loneliness if you let it. After the deer went her way and the sun stopped its momentary bright burns, I let it, and I was lonely.

With all relationships set aside, I was confronted with my own bare bones. This true aloneness is uncommon, but it's a common fear. We often go to great lengths to avoid it. Why? Perhaps we're afraid of what we'll see when we look at our very cores. When everyone else is gone, will our skeletons be enough?



Early in the afternoon I arrived at the notch in the ridge. Heavy snow concealed much of the green of the trees, and thick flakes in the air dulled the remaining color. It was the snowy forest of a black and white film: a silent, slow-moving picture. I would camp on the flat of the notch but I knew I could not complete the rest of my planned route, which would have carried me 1,500 feet higher out of the trees and into even deeper snow. I did not have the gear or the time. I was disappointed at my failure to set reasonable expectations. I did not make the decision so much as I sensed what was right. Factors like current conditions, forecast, pace, and equipment had been algorithmically churning somewhere beneath the level of conscious thought all day long. At intervals they had surfaced and I had acknowledged them, but at the notch the equation spat out a solution: I would not be going any higher. It was entirely practical but it still tasted sour. I didn't want to dwell on it, so I focused my attention on making camp.

It felt good to pant and sweat as I turned a patch of snow between two sturdy spruces into home. I laughed in surprise when I stomped through the snow to the ground for

the first time. Buried to the hip, I had to squirm awkwardly to get out. I shoveled out a rectangular pit a couple of feet deep and stomped it solid. My design was good and the open ends of my A-frame tarp fit snugly against the edges of the pit. To keep the wind out, I built up walls of snow around the tent and then turned to the feature that made this site so inviting in the first place: a large spruce 30 feet away that had fallen earlier that season. It was held off the ground at an angle by another tree and I could reach many of the branches. These I tore off and carried to my shelter. I stuffed the inside of the tarp with boughs full of needles and piled up branches at either end. I left a large enough hole to wiggle through and I knew I would sleep well that night.

Production had made me happy and hungry so I built myself a kitchen and that's when I had my encounter with the softball-shaped jay. The snow started falling again and it felt like the right time for a nap. I crawled through the hole and into my sleeping bag but at that moment the snow began to fall heavier and wetter. It rapidly accumulated on the walls of the tarp. The nylon crept closer to my face with the weight and I used my arm to shake it off, but always the snow built back up.

The wet nylon pressed in and I felt suffocated. I banged the walls every four or five minutes to prevent a collapse, but the snow would not give up. A few times I went outside to shovel away the banged-off snow that was inching up the walls from the ground. Finally the snow defeated me and I convinced myself that it was letting up so that I could sleep and just forget about it all.

It was not letting up. There I lay, and the walls were much too close and getting closer all the time. The forest was inches away but I could not see trees or birds or tracks and so I forgot about it. I stared at nothing for a while, then fell asleep.

• •

I awoke to light. It was not light that burned feebly behind a layer of clouds but the genuine light of a clear sky. It had a softness and subtle warmth that comes only from a sun sitting low in the sky. I moved quickly to put on my boots and did not shiver or care when my bare neck rubbed against the

cold, damp tarp walls. I crawled out of my hole and stood on my doorstep for several minutes, transfixed by the beauty of the evening landscape. I strapped on snowshoes and explored.

*Over the reaching spires of
spruce and fir
the sky extended . . .*

For the first time the low clouds and fog had lifted and I could see my surroundings. Above me to the east and west the rocky outcrops towered, taller and rougher than I had imagined. To the south stretched the mountains beyond mountains of the eastern flank of the Rockies. Over the reaching spires of spruce and fir the sky extended, a sea of blue interspersed with wisps of white clouds. It lightened towards the horizon to match snowy mountaintops. A lenticular cloud, lit from behind by the sinking sun, sat like a stationary zeppelin above Mt. Evans. The fresh snow billowed in the glades like a sail in a shifting wind, unbroken except for hare tracks that bounded from tree to tree. I stood for a long time, watching the clouds move without hurry across the sky. As the light faded I knew I was alone, but still I had the woods and I had myself, and I felt fuller than ever. ☙



FOOD FOR DEATH

By Matthew Thomas

“The ancient Egyptians believe everyone has two deaths. The first death happens when you take your last breath. The second one happens when a person says your name the very last time.”

••

Sean ate the yellow sweet tart without hesitating. After about two minutes, Smiley was smiling uncontrollably. That was the only way Smiley knew how to smile, from the soul. The kid had a lot of names, but my favorite was Smiley. Once he started, everyone in the room couldn't help but join in. Most people smile, but they're not really smiling. They think a smile is just a motion one makes with the facial muscles. But only those who are divine, those who have been kissed by the spirit of the Moon, know that a true smile comes not from the face, but from the bottom of the stomach. A true smile comes from a place in one's body where the spirit is taken from the spring air into the warm summer waters.

“Smiley, what the hell's so funny?”

"I can't believe you did that."

"Did what?" Sean was finally starting to suspect something was amiss.

"Dude, you just ate acid."

••

Part V. Additional Studies

"The crab is symbolic of possessions and retention; it carries its house on its back. Although it has land travel faculties, the crab is a creature born of water. The Egyptians represented this sign with a Scarabus. They made much out of this emblem, not because of its beauty, but because it was a figure of the zodiac, a star-sign of perfected being; symbolical of progress from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, from death to resurrection, from the vicissitudes of time to secure possession of the treasures of eternity."¹

••

Smiley was found in his room with a nitrous tank and a balloon over his head. The paramedics said it was a suicide, but anyone who actually knew him was well aware that Smiley wasn't trying to die. In fact, I'd say it was the exact opposite situation. He wasn't trying to die. He was just like the rest of us—another lost soul searching for belonging.

But belonging on his terms.

And if I'm being honest, that's all anyone ever really wants—the ability to belong to a family who loves you no matter how bad it gets; the ability to wander freely in the world, but to always know where home is. Wherever Smiley was, wherever Smiley is, that is home. Home is where the heart lies, and that kid's heart was a vast ocean. Every 28 days the full moon would pull the tide upward, and release that water onto all of us.

Towards the end of his life, it seemed like everyone was trying to save him from himself. It's pretty clear to me now that we were really just trying to save ourselves.

1. Llewellyn George. *Llewellyn George's New A to Z Horoscope Maker and Interpreter*. Llewellyn Publications. 2004.

Home is where the heart lies, and that kid's heart was a vast ocean.

A week after Smiley died, it started to rain. Within about three hours, the small creek outside my house had turned into a river. The flood was coming.

••

"Cancer is the exaltation of Jupiter, the detriment of Saturn (Saturn), and the home of the moon. Moon is mot, Maya, mother, mutter, mater, ma, Monday, and relates to pure, undefiled water, virgin mere, holy water used in the ceremonies of Isis and those of the Catholic Church."²

••

Out of my anguish, I reach into the shower stream and try to grab on. The harder I squeeze the faster it slips through my hands. I have nothing left to hold onto. Everything is collapsing. The water is rising. It's time to either float atop the flood or to be swept away with it.

The linoleum surface of the bathtub presses against my cheek. As the icy water runs over my back, I cry out from the frozen tundra of hell, begging for this pain to stop.

But one does not stop pain.

One must learn to feel that which hurts.

The flood is here.

It's time to build a boat.

••

There were twenty hits of acid last night, now there were four. All and all, twelve of us had participated in the madness. The full zodiac. I fell asleep at about five in the morning; Smiley woke me up at nine.

"Matty, we're going skiing."

"No way, dude. I feel fucked right now."

"Nah, it's cool. We're going skiing. Go take a shower; I'm gonna get Willy's car keys."

2. Llewellyn George. *Llewellyn George's New A to Z Horoscope Maker and Interpreter*. Llewellyn Publications. 2004.

I get out of the shower and meet Smiley outside the dorms. The air is so cold it makes the hair inside my nostrils freeze. He hands me a lit cigarette and then lights his own. We stand there, comfortably silent, and watch ourselves release the warm air within us into the frigid ice we've been thrown into.

"Well, I got to hand it to you. You got our whole dorm high on acid last night."

His watery blue eyes catch hold of me. He chooses not to respond right away but instead to smile. Then, at the last possible instant, he pulls the cigarette away from his mouth.

"Matty, life's really beautiful sometimes."

"Yeah man. Thanks for waking me up." I watch as my warm cloud of smoke mixes with his beneath the backdrop of frozen, reflective crystals glimmering in the rising sun. "I needed this."



In Vedic tradition, water is ubiquitously referred to as "food for death." Out of the four basic plutonic elements, water is feminine, and it is symbolic of emotions. Throughout history, there have been countless tales told of a flood, which God sends to cleanse the Earth of its sins. A few examples of such tales are the Epic of Gilgamesh, Noah's flood in the Old Testament, and Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston. One who understands water is aware that we all must one day face a "flood of emotions." One who is born into water is able to fill whatever environment he or she has been placed into. The three water signs of the zodiac are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces. All of these signs are heavily influenced by the Moon. All of these signs are able to adapt to great change. All of these signs involve great secrecy.



Jack the dog is looking for something which cannot be found. He has lost his boy. All of his other puppies are here, but the most important one is gone. My tears flow like the raging creek that runs parallel to me. It's too sad not to cry when a dog outlives his boy. I put my cigarette down and reach out to the wandering pup; Jack collapses into my chest.

*Home isn't just
the place you put
all your stuff.*

"It's okay, buddy. We did all we could." The wet nose of the dog gently brushes the side of my cheek, "We'll see him the next time around."

As I look throughout the room, I realize this was the party Smiley had always wanted. Unfortunately, the only way he could attend was omnisciently. Everyone was here; it was the family Smiley had created.

It's three in the morning on a Thursday. The whiskey bottle makes it around the circle of infinitely unique children who have come to pay their respects. All of us have class tomorrow morning, but none of us could care less.

Home isn't just the place you put all your stuff. No, home is much deeper than that; home is a mindset one must constantly master. If you're trying to go home, you're never going to get there. Smiley was a crab; he carried his home on his back. But the home he carried all on his own was big enough to hold all of us.

Now that he was gone, it felt like we were homeless.



Pleasant Street is pleasantly flowing. There are various news trucks lining the road that have come to document "The Flood of The Century," but from where I'm standing, it looks exactly how it was supposed to. There is a 3-inch thick layer of soot on the steps of Smiley and Willy's apartment. Me and Wes have come here to go make sure Willy's guitar has made it through the storm that destroyed the apartment where Smiley was found dead just a week earlier. Or at least that's the lie we told ourselves.

We really came here on a whim; we came here because we had lost our home; we came here because the water had swept the earth away and we needed something to hold onto. I had been swimming blindly in the dark for a week; the current was becoming too strong. I needed a raft—something that could make sense out of these dark, unfamiliar waters.

But I've lately found that it is senseless to make sense out of senselessness.

His room has been stripped of all of its previous possessions—even though I'm sure that if I looked hard enough,

I would undoubtedly find a small bag, probably covered in little blue dolphins, filled with some form of upper, downer or in-betweener that would make me feel different. It might even make me feel okay.

But it wouldn't make me feel better.



"Those graced by Water love to take their sense of the world and translate it into the artistic. They desire aesthetic beauty—and for everyone to be happy as a result of that beauty. Much like still water can become stagnant, however, an inactive Water Sign person is not a Water Sign person at their best. Water Signs feel most fulfilled when they are helping others, and they do so in an enchanting, considerate and even romantic way."³



Every single one of us has an addiction; every single one of us is an addict. We have all, at one point or another, relied on something outside of ourselves. Television, when consumed in mass quantities, can be just as sedative as Heroin. People take Adderall to study, but I call that speed. We are all afraid of death, yet most of us continually choose to involve ourselves in activities which will probably kill us. But there is such a twisted irony in that fear of death. 'Cause it's something we all share.

Because despite the infinite differences between people, everyone is still going to die. It doesn't matter if you were a famous person or a homeless person, a black person or a white person; it doesn't matter what car you drove or if you couldn't afford a car to drive; it doesn't matter who you slept with or who slept with you. "We all go the same." When we are born, everyone comes out of their mother's womb crying. When we die, everyone cries for us. At birth, we are thrown into a very fast river. One day, the river will pull us under. But until we get pulled down, the only choice we really have is whether or not we want to swim upstream or with the current.

3. Dr. S.P. Bhagat. *Love Astrology: Compatibility of Signs*.

Most of us swim upstream.

But those who have learned to swim with the current understand that by swimming with the river, we become the river. When we stop clinging on to the side of the shore and let go, the water will take all of us to exactly where we are supposed to be.



Me and Smiley get on the bus going to Denver. It's the first Friday of freshman year, and the world is changing faster than it ever has. I've only known Smiley for four days, but I get the strange sensation that we've known each other much longer.



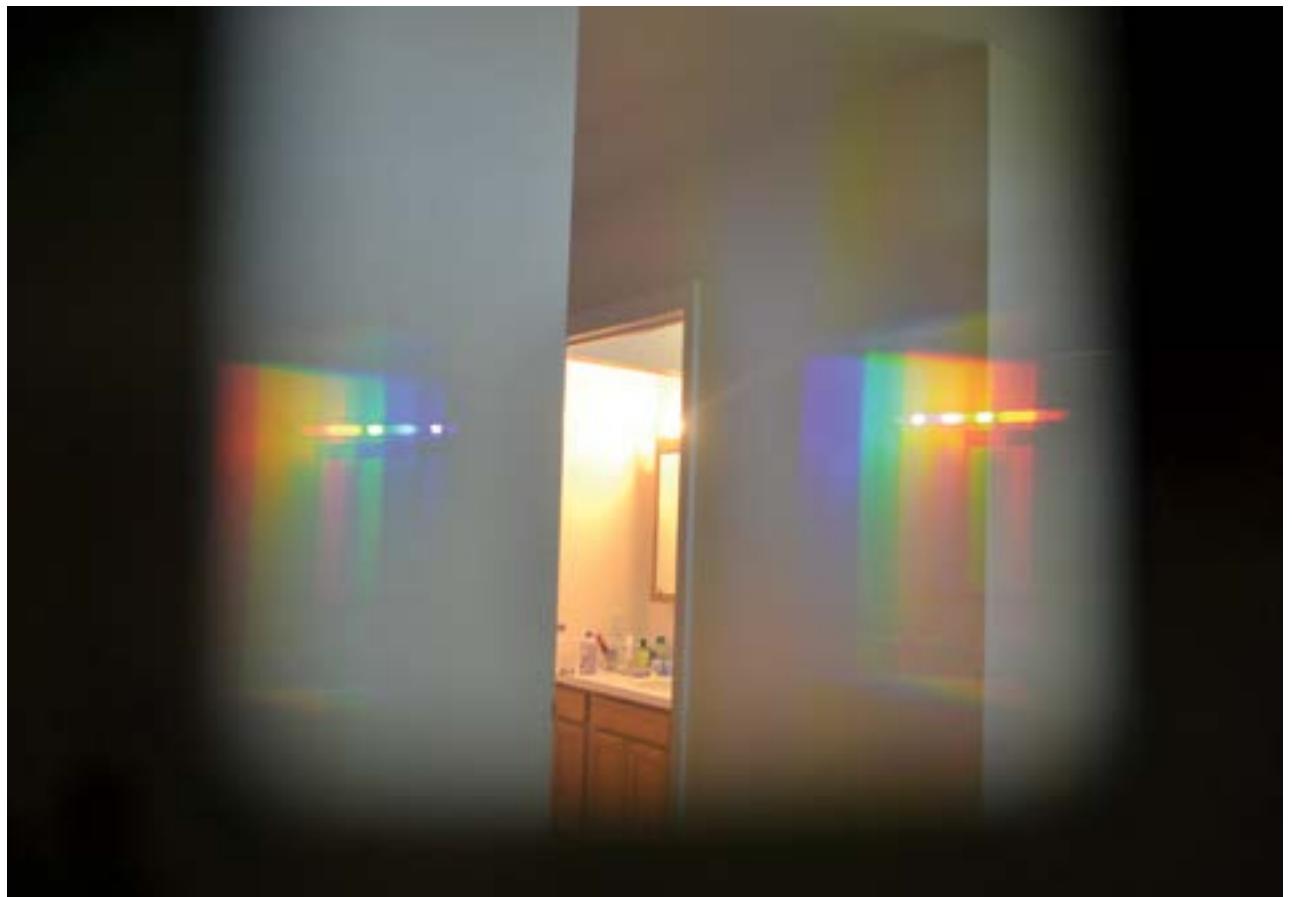
"It is told that when two Zen masters meet, they do not need to be introduced. For two thieves need no introduction. Those who are Zen do not steal for personal gain; rather, they will steal your watch and sell it back to you, simply to remind you that you had the watch in the first place."⁴



We sit in the same row of seats, and begin to talk about nothing in particular. But the conversation is far from boring. Blissfully, we flow from topic to topic like the creek bouncing between rocks. Suddenly, he turns towards me and speaks from the bottom of his stomach:

"We're going to be friends forever." ☘

4. Alan Watts. *Zen Bones and Tales*. Lecture. Web. 1960.



MONARCH

By Marie Martin

Just like her thoughts, the monarch fluttered aimlessly over the dewy, wet grass. I sit here, alone in a meadow, watching the yellow monarch make its way, dodging flowers and long grass strands. This beautiful animal is a symbol of hope, but to me, it is a symbol of finding who you are.

I was born hotheaded, driven, and exuberant about life. She danced into this world gracefully with a golden aura beaming in every direction of the room. We shared laughs, threatened lies, and forced tears in the dirtiest of ways, but most of all, she was my other half. A sister is someone you love unconditionally, but a common misconception in sisterhood is “why” we love them. Do we love so deeply because we are sisters by blood or sisters by bond? It took me eighteen years to find the answer to this question that seemed to be fluttering in front of me every time I looked at her aimlessly wandering, hazel eyes.

Growing up, we were inseparable. The longest we had ever gone without seeing the other was two weeks, due to my mandatory fifth grade camping trip to the Redwood Forest.

Like most relationships, we went through phases of being distant, but because we were so close, that distance would quickly diminish into an enthusiastic conversation over our love of food. Which would then lead to our love of the arts, the ocean, and then inevitably, it would come back to food once we got hungry from talking. Maybe it's the twinkle in her eye, or the dimple on her cheek, or the way she walks like she has fifty things going on in her head at once, but somehow, she can always make me smile on my worst day. They say everyone has that one person in your life who makes everything bad worthwhile. Sarah was my person.

Every morning I would wake up to the sound of my mother's chirping grow closer and closer. The sound of her steps growing louder as she approached my room, knocked, and continued her morning ritual. Once she finished with me, she pranced out of my room, still humming the same tune as she cautiously approached my sister. The humming would stop, followed by, "OKAY I'LL GET UP," and a loud exaggerated sigh from my mother's end.

Waking up, washing her face, brushing her teeth, putting on the right outfit, eating breakfast, getting in the car, driving to school, and picking a parking space were all extremely difficult tasks that took Sarah triple the amount of time it normally would for an average teenager. Washing her face was a lengthy process that went like so: she would turn on the sink, then wrack her brain to remember where she washed her face last. She would go to that room, grab her face wash, rush back to her room with the water still running, splash her face and half of the counter with water and proceed to wash her face whilst getting distracted by what she wanted to eat for breakfast.

She would walk into her closet to pick out her outfit, forgetting about the face wash still on her face, and then get the scrub on a shirt she accidentally touched. She would then rush back to the bathroom to wash it all off her face while simultaneously getting more water on the counter and on her shirt. It was a task that would take an average person two minutes, it took her fifteen.

"It's not that hard to just get in the car and go to school, Sarah," our mother said. Sarah's perfect ballerina posture turned insecure as her shoulders sunk into her body and her eyes flut-

*They say
everyone has that
one person in your
life who makes
everything bad
worthwhile.*

tered down resting on her hyperactive twiddling thumbs. Then she would roll her eyes and shake off every dagger directed at the fluttering monarchs that were her thoughts.

I used to take my mother's side, completely baffled at why these simple tasks were so difficult. It would take me thirty minutes, at most, to get ready, eat, and get out the door. So naturally, I never understood the apparent difficulty of these tasks. Instead of trying to understand why she was this way, I would support her attempts to mask her hyperactive thoughts. But who she is was inescapable.

I refer to my adolescence as inconvenient. My sister and I would call ourselves "custodial kids" since our parents constantly bicker over having joint custody over us as if we were items, not their children. Each Christmas, Thanksgiving, spring break, and summer we would move from the picture perfect suburbs of San Francisco with our mother, to the small island of Oahu, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, with our father. Just like going to school, traveling was always a huge ordeal for her. Our trip usually began with me waiting in the car, ready to go, while Sarah struggled to get everything together last minute. Once we left, it was almost a ritual having to turn back around at least once because she forgot something important—usually her ID. My mother would disguise her rage and instead show her disgust for the organization Sarah lacked.

Trying to describe your parents in a few phrases is nearly impossible, so I'm just going to tell you that while we are blessed, every family has its problems. Our problems just seemed to have happened earlier in our lives than we would have liked. But life has its way of not letting you chose your fate—life is funny that way. My mother moved to California when she wanted nothing more to do with the conflicting values in their marriage (him not wanting to move from the small, social bubble of Hawaii, political and financial differences, etc.). This would usually end in my father drinking until he fell asleep. This pattern continued most summer nights: waking up happy in the morning, then proceeding to accentuate our flaws loud enough for the neighbors to undoubtedly hear, finally passing out while murmuring sad-nothings to himself. These flaws usually consisted of attributes we could never change, like the fact that he saw Sarah

as a spitting image of our mother and because of this, he could never love Sarah like a real daughter because in his eyes, all he saw was how much he hated our mother.

As a young teenager, I was insecure, ignorant, and did not realize how these direct attacks on who we were made such an impact on my relationship with my sister and who she became to me. At the time, her fluttering mind seemed like such a distant concept, completely out of grasp to what seemed like everyone, especially me.

Denial kept me from thinking it possible that I could not see who my own sister was. Blinded by the manipulative fighting words from my mother: Why can't you be more like Marie? Where did I go wrong with you?

It wasn't my sister, but me. I masked the person she really was.

Growing up, you look up to your parents and think that everything they do, say, and believe is right. So naturally, hearing those words from my mother only convinced me more that what I hesitantly thought at first was right.

After living on opposite sides of the world for over six months, we were finally back in the same house and in our favorite room where we shared our fondest memories: the kitchen. It seemed surreal for us to finally be back in the same state, or even the same country. When we first set foot on our respective paths in life, I didn't know how to live without her. Life as a single child was as much a foreign concept to me as the language she was about to be immersed in. I didn't know what life without her was like. However, I had no choice but to find out. Naturally, we grew apart.

We sat at the counter telling stories about our past semester and her many adventures traveling abroad in Italy. She became frazzled—cleaning the dishes, making tea, running to her room to grab a sweatshirt, running back to the kitchen, then back to her room again to get sweatpants, then back to the kitchen just in time to turn off the whistling kettle pot. She grabbed a cup from the cupboard and rustled her hand around in the tea drawer to grab her favorite black tea with five pods of cardamom, her favorite spice. She poured hot water from the kettle into her mug, spilling some on the counter. She yelled out as some of it splashed on her leg and raced to grab a paper towel to clean it up and soon after, hustled to the

refrigerator to grab the milk and then to the cupboard to grab the sugar. "Sarah," I addressed her, "what's wrong?" I could sense she was trying to mask something by distracting herself.

Silently, we walked into her room and out the French doors that led to a small grass lawn. We sat on the edge of her door with our feet in the grass, looking up at the clear starry night sky, soon filled with the smoke and scent of the spiritual herb. There in silence, comfortable in each other's presence, we absorbed the time we shared now, and making up for the time we had lost.

Repositioning, we faced each other cross-legged. She began to vent about the problem that really bothered her: living in a foreign country for a semester, away from the pressure and conflicts with our parents, had allowed her to accept herself unconditionally. Being home brought back repressed emotions of when our mother had once made her feel incapable of anything and of our father's relentless rejection.

It is easy to feel inferior stuck in a bubble where reality is at the tip of your fingers, just out of reach. Being back home reminded her of that feeling of inferiority. It was in that moment, gazing into her hazel eyes, and her into the deep blue of mine, endorphins flowing, and mind wide open, that she let me see her—in every sense of the word.

*A beautifully magnificent mind
appeared behind the fog . . .*

A hole in my stomach formed. Something in my gut that made me feel empty: guilt. It flushed over me—a feeling I had never before felt for her. I felt remorseful for believing the unintelligence and incompetence our mother saw. A beautifully magnificent mind appeared behind the fog that I could never see past. She had waited eighteen years for me to come full circle and see her for the glorious fluttering monarchs that were her thoughts.

We sat there in silence for what felt like an eternity. She had so many thoughts hovering in the hazy abyss before her—some easy to grasp, and others just out of reach. She could catch a few thoughts at a time, and to her, this was simply how she worked. But she tried to conform to outside pressures of our

small bubble of reality, where she was not the norm. She smiled just barely, letting me know that she knew I understood—she let me in. I smiled back and we hugged. In that moment, we both knew that we are the way we are, and no one could change us or change what we meant to one another. All the conflict that had clouded her mind diminished and the thin string that had tied us together at the hip, that had cocooned during our time together that night, transformed into a thick rope that couldn't be worn down.

Her mind works like a swarm of these monarchs, hovering in front of her, just out of reach, but just close enough to grasp only one or two at a time and hold onto it. That is, until it slips out of the cracks of your hands. Not to be confused with foolishness, as she is one of the most intelligent women you will ever come across. It is more like a practice, or a game rather, of how long she can hold onto this small unit of her mind before it flutters away and she is on to the next one. Even still, it is a mystery how long these thoughts stay in her mind, if they stay at all, or if they never really leave.

Our past experiences make up who we are, but she showed me it is how you take those experiences into your own hands and whether or not you let them affect the person you want to be. The pain I felt realizing my lack of appreciation for her unique mind ultimately led me to a greater understanding of people and for that, I will be forever grateful. Some, like my mother, will never understand people like Sarah, but that is another funny thing about life—some people will just never understand you no matter how hard they try. So here I sit, in spirit, alone in a meadow, toes in the dewy grass, watching a fluttering monarch hover aimlessly above a flower. To some, this monarch is a beautiful symbol of hope. I chuckle to myself and remember that it is who she is. ☙





LIFE OF A TWINKIE

BY SERENA L'DARA

“Why don’t you date someone your own age?” Those words take a moment to register as I am caught unaware by the accusation. The hostility was palatable as it dripped from the waiter’s tone. He is addressing me. I feel caught, as if I have done something terribly, horribly wrong. Emotions cloud my mind as I think frantically of how to respond. A hush descends on the table as I silently struggle.

I was at a nice restaurant with my father. It was not for any big occasion or for something special, just a simple catch-up session. Since my parents had divorced and high school had started it was increasingly harder to keep in touch. Therefore, it was a rare and kind gesture for my dad to take me to a restaurant. However, I underestimated the effect of the “Asian timeless look.” At the wholesome age of fourteen I never would have suspected that someone who saw us together would assume anything other than that I was my father’s daughter. This reality had never been challenged up until now and that sent super-charged thoughts through my mind like flashes of lightning. Each flash lit up a new thought crackling with confusion, anger, and mystification.

I am adopted and, for as long as I remember, I was aware of that fact but it had never impacted me directly. I was simply happy with living in the moment and getting in and out of various childhood scrapes. It was not until my teenage years that my biological heritage started to affect my self-identity. My hometown of Boulder, Colorado has a very strong Asian population, and as such it was during high school that I learned of the term "Twinkie."

Many of my friends at the time were Chinese-American and this metaphor hit home for all of us who were raised here in the United States and thus upheld American ideals but were encased by a Chinese exterior. It was easy for my friends with Asian parents to identify themselves as Chinese (or not), but because of my Caucasian family and upbringing, I have always identified myself with White American culture. Although I connected with Asian people on several levels, I still felt distanced from them; I had none of their cultural background. Where did I belong if not with Chinese Americans? If I look at a family photo I feel instinctively that I belong, all the smiling faces identical in expression, but my appearance contradicts that. This has led to many awkward situations where I was the inadvertent target of some unintentional snap judgments.

I was with my mom and my best friend at the bank. We went up to the teller and said, "My daughter would like to open a bank account." On autopilot, the woman turned to my Caucasian friend and asked, "May I see your driver's license?" Time screeched to a stop. I did not want to make the poor lady feel bad for a simple mistake. At face value, anyone could make the assumption that I was in fact, the friend and not the daughter. There was a complete lack of ill intent and I did not want to make a scene for something that had not actually hurt me. Time resumed as I slowly and calmly opened my wallet and discreetly placed my license on the counter. I gave a small nod and pretended to ignore the teller's panic-stricken face.

At family reunions on my father's side, I am never recognized as part of the family. I am always referred to as "oh, the adopted one" by my aunt. At my cousin's wedding, my grandfather thought I was my father's new girlfriend. Cousins have asked me if I really am part of the family because I'm "just adopted, not really my parents' daughter." To this day, those words evoke tears that prick through eyes.

It was not until my teenage years that my biological heritage started to affect my self-identity.

Emotionally I was in turmoil. For me, family is composed of those who you love and care for and who love you back, regardless of relation. If my parents were able to open up their home to someone not of their blood, was it just that big of a stretch for others to at least acknowledge that I was part of the family? The lack of recognition of who I was evoked a self-criticism of how I viewed myself. I lacked the background to fit my physique. As far as I was concerned, I came from a perfectly normal family, went to school, did my homework, and played sports. There was nothing to differentiate me, nor any real reason to treat me with disdain. From the "white" side, I had the pity of those who looked on my life as unfortunate. From the Asian side, I had the criticisms of not fitting in, not understanding my heritage, or having bad blood because I came from a dishonorable family that abandoned me. Yet some of these doubts about my character were true. I had no comprehension of Chinese tradition or any notion of my heritage. However, it was not my intention to commit this heinous crime. I simply was not born into it. But I felt guilty for this fact, why did I not care more about where I came from? Why did I not recognize it in proportion to how I appeared?

Throughout the years I had been in contact with other girls from my adoption group. We met several times over the years and attended some heritage camps founded by our adoption agency. At these camps, I felt like I belonged. We all shared the same backgrounds, the same persistent, gnawing feelings of inadequacy and a desire to belong somewhere. It was during one of the camp talks that it hit me; we had carved out our own niche. We were a different group altogether. We were our own distinctive fusion with Chinese biological roots but with an American upbringing. This epiphany made me realize that everyone could, or even should understand me on that level if that was the way in which they viewed the world. The only acceptance of my true identity I needed was my own. If I could be true to my own ideals and beliefs of what made me, well, me, others would eventually follow that lead.

My mind snaps back to the restaurant and I pause to make sure what I say to the waiter is accurate to what I wish to convey. It is not enough to take everything in only at face value. Even though the waiter had several years on me, at the solemn age of fourteen, it was apparent I knew more about identity than he could ever begin to comprehend. I let the question trail off into silence. ☀



THOMAS

By Stephen Patterson

Yesterday, a homeless man told me he was an angel. He said the streets were already paved in gold, the kingdom was come. His name was Thomas. He was smoking a cigarette and asked if I had any whiskey. He'd been hit by a car and didn't want to sue the woman behind the wheel. It wasn't her fault, he said. I wanted to believe him. I wanted to believe all of it.

I asked him to pray over my body. He took my hands, held them tight over my kitchen table, I bowed my head, closed my eyes, and tried to remember faith. On Sundays, I pass on my regards to the big man through a roommate. I'm afraid of priests. I used to have a wooden cross necklace, long since lost.

I feel sick all the time. Sometimes, I imagine a snake, long and scaled, and it slides through my body, scraping, slithering, rough angles catching on my insides, begging to be coughed up and choked up and vomited down a drain. I imagine a couple of my teeth will come out with it. The blood from my gums; the afterbirth.

A couple teens stole his tablet while he was rolling a cigarette on a bench. He didn't mean to chase them, but it was instinct. Natural. He got up, they ran, they made it across the street, he didn't. The car hit him right in the middle and he saw the Kingdom opened. It broke his body. He lost his job, then his home. He calls himself Iron Man, says he's indestructible. He looked so tired.

He was holding my hands, kept shifting them, maintaining contact. I didn't want to let go, even when it seemed he was done praying. He could sense it. He would stop for a moment, then start again, more fervently each time. He asked if I knew what "amen" meant. I said "I agree". He said no. So be it, or Truth.

*He said there was something
living inside of me, that I'd picked it up
when I was abroad and that
it had been there ever since then.*

He guessed South America.

He said he'd died before, five times. Someone kept sending him back. I thought he was high. He told me a story. He stayed up all night locked in the art building on campus, painting with a woman half his age. He said it was weird, but not like that. He scared me, a little. I locked the door after he left.

I wanted him to be an angel. I wanted to believe in angels that smoked and drank and cursed like a woman giving birth. I wanted an angel who would bum a cigarette, who would shoot whiskey with me at two in the afternoon.

I wanted an angel to give it to me straight. I wanted an angel with dirt on his knuckles and under his nails.

My hands smelled of dirt and smoke and booze for the rest of the day. I washed them, but it didn't go away. He prayed for my stomach. He said there was something living inside of me, that I'd picked it up when I was abroad and that it had been there ever since then. He guessed South America. I've never been south of the border. But South Africa, three or four years before. He told me to have faith,





WHEN YOU'RE A STRANGER

By Semayah Post

I've been driving for about an hour. I have four more to go. A few minutes earlier, I noticed the 100-miles-from-Colorado marker. When an endless sprawl of naked land points off in every direction, the imagination does an interesting thing. All proof of mammalian life goes extinct. I wonder if UFOs visited Earth during the Jurassic-AKA dinosaur-Period. What if dinosaurs still existed somewhere in the galaxy, kidnapped as proof of earthly dominance? I look over at my friend Emily who drifts in and out of sleep on the passenger side next to me. My thought of extraterrestrial life is interrupted by her cata tonic nod into the headrest, which is usually followed by baby elephant-like snorts that make me giggle. Zack and Megan are asleep in the back seat. The upper half of their bodies take up the entire seat and their legs and feet dangle over the head rests or poke out the window like an octopus's tentacles. I have my music, my thoughts, and a six o'clock setting sun that makes me consider, for the first time in 300 miles of ambivalence, that Utah is a beautiful state after all.

Photo by Hannah Vine

Only a few minutes later the back of Roxy (Emily's mother had given their Subaru Outback a rather stripper-esque name) is shaking like an earthquake snuck up on her. You'd think the rapture was happening at this very moment and every Mormon in all of Utah had made it in this round of saints. I slow to a solemn forty miles per hour and Roxy still fishtails drunkenly across the right lane of I-70. I pull over with the hope that I'll witness thousands of white clad Mormons being snatched up into the sky. I discover instead that the right back wheel is as loose as the first tooth I lost. Had I tried to grind out two more minutes of this Martian-like desolated landscape, we would be in a far more dismal place.

Let's make a few things clear: ignorance about cars runs rampant within our crew of gals; Zack knows a smidge more, but even he awkwardly confesses to having never been forced to change a tire. We pool together our sparse car sensibilities and agree that some unidentifiable sharp object didn't poke the tire. Its guts are intact. The rubber isn't shredded into spaghetti, and we aren't shrouded in plumes of smoke. But that right rear tire is definitely loose. For the sake of knowledge, I will discuss a sparsely informed Wikipedia understanding of tire science. The rubber tire—what we call the black covering—fits snugly around the wheel. The wheel then mounts to the hub by the studs. Now before you write this off as a Dr. Seuss rhyme about cars, just know that the lug nuts tighten and hold the wheel onto the studs. Ta-da! There lies our problem. Each tire is held to the wheel by five lug nuts. Within the last hour, that one problematic tire had lost four of its nuts! If you aren't already convinced that cars and their associated language were created by men, and for men, just consider this simple formula: nuts come from studs that mount hubs. Roxy lost four of her twenty nuts. Enough to make the girl go crazy.

One thing about the desert terrain of southwest Utah is the coldness that seeps into your bones after the sun waves goodbye. Hard to feel anything but the permeating darkness. Eighteen-wheelers come bombing past us at high speeds, rattling the only cocoon we have, an injured Roxy. A series of phone calls tell us the AAA tow truck is one hundred and twenty miles away. We spend the time reenacting techniques we perfected as children, the ones we learned when our mothers sent us into the backyard to entertain ourselves. We play cards, and humbly

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consider our possibilities as packs of coyotes whip, yip, yap and hoot across a blanketed echo.

Emily, who is wearing three sweaters at once, begins, "You know, when we stopped to get gas at that last place..."

We all nod. I remember sprinting for the ladies room. Handing the cashier forty dollars for pump number three. Telling Emily she was all set to fill Roxy up. Zack, Megan, and I, feeling the pangs of "doing absolutely nothing but sitting for five hours" hunger, decided our only option was the fast food joint across from the gas station.

She continues, "...there was a guy who came up to me while I was filling up gas. He told me I needed air in the tires, and said he would do it for free."

I look at Megan, she looks at Zack, and our eyes grow big with this new information. Megan offers, "I knew I was meditating over that veggie burger, but I didn't know I had entered a trance."

Emily is no frills. "He starts talking about how tire pressure increases as you get higher in elevation and I admitted we were heading back to Colorado. I mean, he sounded like he knew what he was talking about."

The burger is souring in my stomach. Emily ended up pulling Roxy into the mechanic's shop that was attached to the gas station. He tried to convince her she needed a whole new set of tires. But before she waved an entire summer's worth of grocery money goodbye in Utah, she called her mom. The tires were fine. They'd been inspected, along with the car, two weeks earlier. She argued with the shifty-eyed mechanic for three minutes before peeling out of there. That's when the three amigos waddled out of Burger King.

Our faces turn red with anger. Foul play; we can smell it like a rotten rat. Thinking our unfortunate luck is owed to some wheeling and dealing stranger at a gas station makes us all cranky. Just then the tow truck pulls up. A big-hearted, small town mechanic who talks in a rusty southwestern twang greets us. With Roxy in tow, we cram our four bodies into the passenger side of his truck.

Green River, Utah boasts a population of 973 people. Back in 1876, a man named Blake set up a ferry and a way station on the east side of the Green River (an actual river) to support the U.S. mail station. Seven years later, a train station was opened.

The population boomed by eighty-four percent that year, owing mostly to workers who came to lay the tracks for the railway. For many years, Green River was where the train stopped to fill up on fuel and where passengers went to fuel their stomachs. Up to the 2000's, the townspeople supported themselves by mining uranium, growing cantaloupes, and launching missiles with the U.S. Air Force. The Green River of 2013 has one double lane road dividing it in half. The first street we see juts to the right, home to most, if not all, of the municipal buildings. The post office is a white, Lincoln-log-style house. Ray's Tavern sits in a sunken brick building. A little farther down lies the Melon Vine Grocery store, which happens to be the largest building on Main Street. I catch sight of Cathy's Pizza & Deli and momentarily feel comforted. Our sweet, hillbilly tow truck driver drops us four Despairing Dorothy's and a beat up Roxy at the only mechanic garage in town. We're not surprised to see the "closed" sign on the door. Stashing whatever sense of hope we have left far away, we haul our bags and exhausted bodies to the Book Cliff Motel. My disclaimer is that it is conveniently right next to the mechanic's shop.

Due in part to an abnormality I call excessive curiosity, I visit the Travelocity reviews during the pecking away of this piece. In my defense, I was seeking out visual cues to magically stir the cauldrons of a year and a half old memory. I don't mind calling that a mistake. Maybe we were experiencing a heavily drugged bout of sleep deprivation and stress hypnosis, but walking down those forbidding and ghostly hallways didn't as much raise the hairs on our backs or heads. We spent several minutes haggling with a rust encrypted keyhole, entering our room four minutes later. Each wall is painted a different color—red, yellow, orange, green—hinting perhaps to an insanity-induced period of painting psychedelic vomit on the walls. Minimal sixties kitsch furniture consisting of two beds, two nightstands, and one table from when the motel first opened still exist there today. And the carpet looked like a dish sink that had marinated in food scraps for years.

But a bed is a bed and sleep is sleep. I dress myself as if I'm a resident of the North Pole. My hope is that the thicker the layer is between my skin and the sheets, the more resistant I am to the cooties, that without question live deep within this bed. Morning returns with the sun and a diagnosis of Roxy's health. She is going to survive, but it will be a day before the part she needs arrives from several hundred miles away.

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I'm on the phone with my mother, who every year has grown more paranoid and fearful of my whereabouts and doabouts.

"Isn't Green River where the Green River Killings took place?" She quizzes, as if this statement alone warrants a long scream followed by a frantic sprint to the hotel to grab my bag, fumbling over my words as I tell Emily, Megan, and Zack that we HAVE to leave this very second. We're damned. This place is full of killers and people stuck in 1950.

"No, Mom, that was in Washington or California . . . I think. And isn't he in prison anyways?" I demand dryly.

"Well you be careful, just stay in your hotel room," she replies.

"Let's go get food and check out what this town is all about!" I humor the gang after my mom hangs up.

We walk in the direction we had come the night before. Four lost ants shuffling alongside a road the width of a football field, in search of coffee and bagels. Humans do this weird thing where they just stare at other humans who look like they don't belong. And stare they did. Ignoring our obvious displacement, we all look at each other in thankful disbelief when we come upon the Green River Coffee House, as it doesn't resemble anything else in this town. Sure, things are fairly cluttered—the whole coffee shop is filled with books, jewelry and local craft things for sale. But it is also dressed up with wooden tables, pastries, bagels, breakfast sandwiches, and coffee roasted-in house.

Emily is curious about why the town is named Green River. No one in the coffee shop knows, which is odd, seeing as they all live in Green River. It probably shouldn't have taken me a year and a half to find out that the town was named after the river that ran alongside of it. If we had driven that half mile more, we would have inevitably crossed over the bridge and found the answers to our own questions. I'll give them the benefit of the doubt that they thought it was some existential question like this: "Was there a river before there was the color green, or vice versa, and was it man, beast, God, cosmic force, or a bang that created it?"

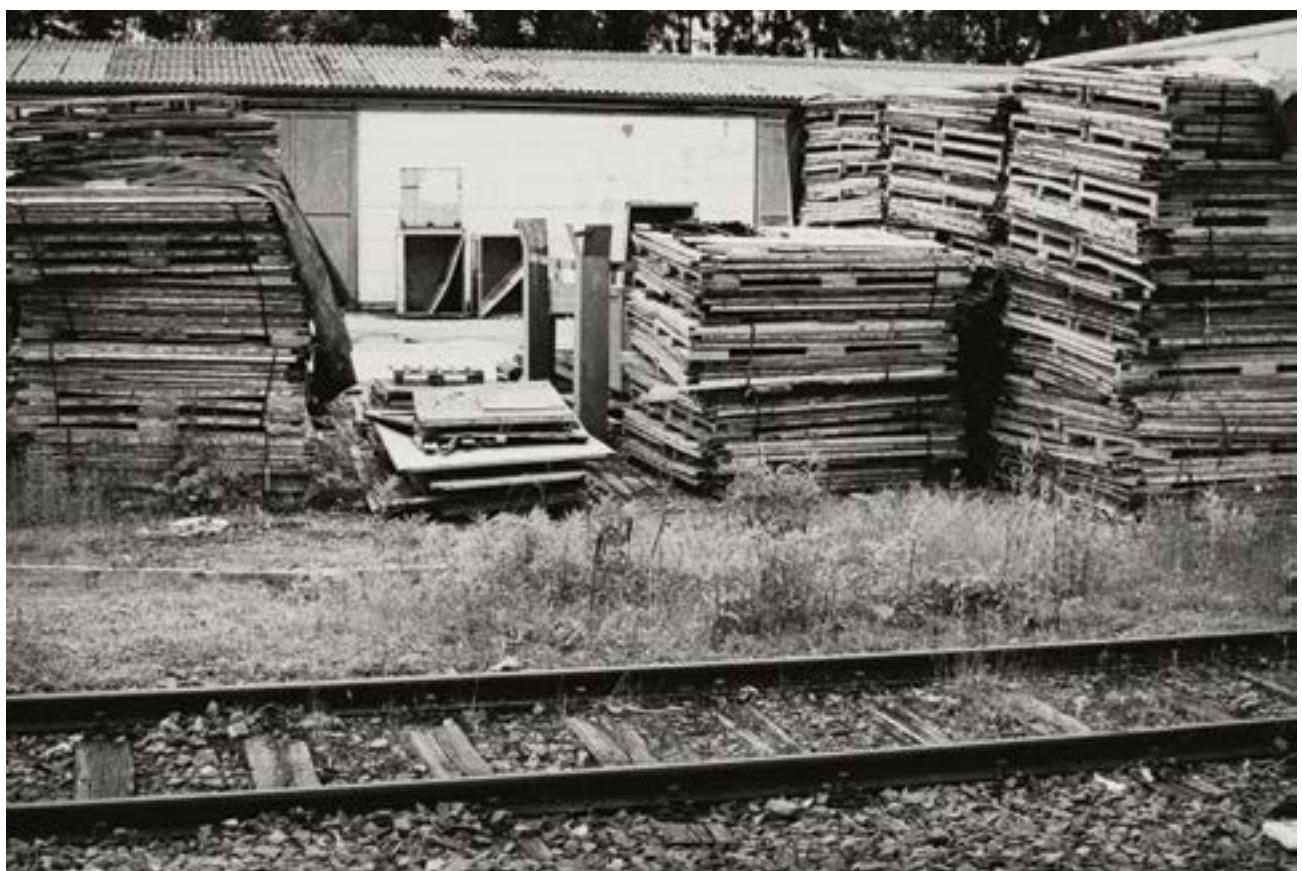
We guzzle our coffee and remain curious about this answerless place. Zack is a jack of all things weird and collected. He looks like an earthy oddity himself. He wears bones, wood, and other miscellanea that he's found off the ground as jewelry.

His clothes resemble rags; strips of fabric held together by silver safety pins. Obviously his interest is piqued by the thrift store next door to our breakfast oasis. We enter and find this town's compost of displaced "things" interesting enough to help an hour pass by. Then Megan convinces us a trip to the Melon Vine Grocery store should be next on our agenda.

Megan has wavy strawberry cream hair that hangs down to her waist, deep moon-brown eyes, and tightly pursed rose lips. She looks like an otherworldly goddess. She is horribly addicted to sleeping and third generation feminism, and nothing goes unnoticed, and uncommented, at least in the realm of gender relations. Being a vegetarian with limited options, Megan paces the grocery store grabbing every processed food in sight. Bagel Bites, Cream Cheese, Skittles, Doritos . . . I wonder how all that junk could possibly be better for her than a few strips of bacon. We head back along the road to the motel and make curious notes of everything: the man with waist-length dreads who is humming along to Bob Marley as he cleans the shop windows, the women with Mickey Mouse eyes who waves at us from inside the barber shop, and then the man at the front desk of Book Cliff Motel who lets us stay an extra night at no extra cost.

Time passes. We blow bubbles into an empty crumbling pool and soak up the sun as it moves overhead in the middle of the day. We wander down the streets that seem to disappear into nothing. Emily sees a swing set and leads us all to it. These are long swings, the ones that let you go as high as you can pump. For a whole hour we swing back and forth, brushing the tips of our feet against the branches of a willow tree. All the trees and the miniature single-story houses and the lonesome, run-down, abandoned buildings that speak of an exuberance long gone—all shimmer with dusk-ridden opulence. In this park, we give a middle finger to the crummy nature of humanity, the woes of being dealt a dose of reality, the grown up B.S. of this spinning life. Today we returned to the simpleness we knew as children, when time was endless and our imaginations grew fast and fanciful. The small town singing its sad country tune seemed to subdue our adulthood long enough for us to notice the strange, untimely, and beautiful wholeness—when the curious rhythm beat of the world lets you break down just long enough to be still.

By nine AM the next morning, Roxy is ready to take us home. Our bags are huddled together near the door of our grungy hotel room. Emily does a once-over of the room to make sure she hasn't left anything. She opens the drawer of one of the nightstands. You know how some hotel rooms come with Bibles? There was no Bible sitting there, just a Bhagavad-Gita, the ancient scripture on Hindu mysticism and theology. Smiles pass over our faces. Things we didn't know about this place surprise us. As Green River became a speck of buildings and then nothing, I think of the strangeness of entering and leaving a place. We pass through, expectedly, and unexpectedly, and hope we're changed in the meantime. ☀



CONTRIBUTORS



Photo by Natasha Collins

RENÉE BLEVINS is a freshman who just recently made the move from the humidity of Germantown, Tennessee out to this wonderful city in the shade of the Flatirons. She is currently studying Spanish, Psychology, and the mountains. Writing has always been one of her passions and she is honored to have her work selected to be in this journal. In her next years at CU, she hopes to further develop her writing skills and become more involved in the creative community.

AMY HELEN CHU grew up in Boulder in the old days when she was allowed to cross the fence, lock up her bicycle, and wander all over the Open Space lands. She remembers returning from hikes to find grasshoppers chewing the Styrofoam inside her helmet to get the minerals and salts left from her sweaty forehead. She loves color and painting. She has a BS in Biology from Colorado State (1984) and is pursuing her BFA in Ceramics at CU. She worked at the MCDB in Recombinant DNA of Cystic Fibrosis when DNA had to be processed by hand. Catching butterflies at the age of 12 for a lepidopterist author who lectured with his live specimens and then released them back into the wild was the pinnacle of her love of the outdoors. She still counts butterflies as a volunteer for the Open Spaces every summer. Painting is still great therapy—as long as she doesn't get too much of it on her mother's curtains. Her story, "**GOTTA LOVE THAT DIRT**," is written in memory of Tino Cuellar, who put her and her family up in his house for more than a year.

B. JAMES DOUGHERTY is a writer and malcontent who grew up in Chicago, Illinois where he began writing poetry and short fiction at an early age. His work often features themes of existentialism and minimalism. James also sometimes performs music under the pseudonym White Bells.

CLARE FAIRCHILD-BAKER hails from Vail, Colorado. She is a freshman majoring in Integrative Physiology at CU Boulder. She has two older brothers; one of them attends CU Boulder as well and is in Air Force ROTC. He intimidates and scares away any boys who try to talk to her. She loves trail running, mountain biking, and baking.

JONATHAN FEDYSCHYN was born and raised in several U.S. states, as well as Japan. He is a junior at the University of Colorado-Boulder studying Political Science. His travels

across the world serve as the inspiration for this piece. This piece was submitted at the behest of a professor to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY. It his dream to continue traveling throughout his life, eventually winding up back in Japan.

DAVID GRIFFITH, author of “MEANING IN MEMORY,” was born in Colorado. He enjoys playing sports and spending time on the ocean. He majors in Finance and hopes to one day find a beautiful wife. He has four siblings and a few close friends. An optimist, David wants for everyone to be happy.

DANIELLE HAWLEY majors in English as a Junior at CU. She grew up in Golden, Colorado with her parents and younger brother. She now resides in Boulder with four roommates, but would much prefer to live with a puppy. She enjoys reading, writing, rock climbing, traveling, and other soul-feeding—but financially worthless—activities. Around campus she can often be seen staring off into space while lost inside her head and walking into things.

SARAH HERSHMAN grew up in a small Colorado town before graduating from University of Colorado at Boulder with a degree in Integrative Physiology in May of 2014, after writing **TOOTH FAIRY VS. JESUS CHRIST**. She plans to start medical school in the Fall of 2016 with hopes of pursuing a career in medicine. She spends her spare time adventuring outside with friends and her scruffy rescue dog.

SERENA L'DARA, author of “LIFE OF A TWINKIE”, is a Freshman at CU majoring in Integrative Physiology. She is an avid watcher of *Bones* and enjoys writing in her free time. She hopes sharing her experiences will inspire other internationally adopted children.

LUKE LEMONS is a freshman at the University of Colorado Boulder with no plans for the future besides just being there. Born and raised in Colorado, Luke enjoys hiking and exploring the outdoors with friends and family. Aside from all things social, he also enjoys playing guitar and occasionally writing. Currently, he is working on creating an amateur album and writing a new short story. Luke wrote “ON BEING ALIVE” for his First-Year course in **THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC**.

MARIE MARTIN was born in Hawaii and raised on both that tropical island and in the golden state of California. At the University of Colorado at Boulder she studies Accounting and Mathematics. She submitted “MONARCH” on a whim after the suggestion of her writing professor and continues to write in her free time, when she is not consumed with numbers. Along with creative nonfiction, Marie is passionate about writing music and traveling around the world and hopes to travel around Europe and South America after graduating from CU.

MAX OWENS is a Senior in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. Originally from dreary, flat Ohio, he is a lover of the sun and the mountains. He spends his weekends either climbing rocks or thinking about climbing rocks. His appreciation for the communication of his ideas and experiences—through writing, photography, and film—grows every day. If he could, he would like to spend every night of his life dancing with friends around a campfire in his fleece leopard onesie (or, if the fire’s warm enough, nothing at all).

STEPHEN PATTERSON, author of “THOMAS”, is a Creative Writing major at CU Boulder, originally from Colorado Springs. He usually focuses on fiction, mainly, but he’s also pretty down for real life. Sometimes. Currently, Patterson is working on a sci-fi comic series with a buddy and is 2,794 words into his first novel. He likes the X-Files (a lot) and really wants to believe the reboot will go well.

KEIREN PIRIE studies Computer Science student here at CU. He enjoys swimming, meeting new people, and flying kites. Born in Morristown, Tennessee, Keiran has lived in Georgia, Illinois, and now resides in Colorado. He plans to study abroad in Scotland at some point during his college career. His dream for the future is to become as beautiful as his mother and as strong as his father. He listens to all kinds of music including country, classic rock, and EDM. He claims to be a shy guy, but his friends will tell you otherwise. He has always loved to write because he feels there is nothing better than being moved by a good book. He aspires to one day move others with his own stories.

SEMAYA POST is many things. An aficionado of biographical writing is not one of them. The version of her life that induces the least amount of fatigue and still leaves the reader capable of operating machinery goes like this: she comes from a family of seven (and she’s not even Catholic), will have Psychology and Creative Writing degrees come May (knock on wood), and is in the beginning stages of planning her own post-graduation Hobbit adventure in New Zealand (or learning to talk like a Kiwi).

LAURA RIDYR writes mainly novels and short stories, but occasionally strays from her usual topics—androids and aliens—into the realm of nonfiction, driven by her adoration for her home state of Colorado. When she’s not up to her neck in editing the manuscript for her first novel, she spends her time working towards her Political Science and International Affairs degrees and graduation in May of 2015. She can be reached through her website, *lridyr.com*, or via a brief search in her natural habitat—Starbucks—where she can be identified by her tendency to mutter at her computer.

MAJA SOLBAKKEN is an international transfer student from Norway. She was recruited to the CU Ski Team by the head coach in 2013, and is currently a sophomore majoring in

Integrated Physiology. Her dream is to become a doctor, and to use her education to travel and experience the world. Besides her interests in cross-country skiing and medicine, she also likes to climb, back country ski, travel, and write. Her writing professor encouraged her to submit this personal narrative, which is dedicated to her grandfather, Harry Solbakken (1924-2012), to JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY.

BRIAN STREETER is a Junior in Anthropology from Southern California. Born and raised in the little suburb of La Cañada Flintridge, Brian was drawn to the Rocky Mountains by the clean air, big mountains, and smell of adventure. Rafting on the American River, and sleeping outside along millennia-old Giant Sequoias in Yosemite National Park, are two places Brian would rather be. Orangutans and *Raiders of the Lost Ark* are among two of his favorite things. Along with his personal favorite, Disc Golf, Brian has also been known to enjoy wrestling, fishing, foosball, and the occasional round of regular golf. Highly competitive—having grown up with three overly-athletic sisters—he has always tried to be the best he can be at the things he works at, whether it be wrestling or writing. He enjoys writing because it can express thoughts in a way that speech cannot, and communicate thoughts and memories in a meaningful way.

MATTHEW THOMAS, author of “LOVE IS IN THE EARTH” and “FOOD FOR DEATH,” is twenty-two years old, and grew up in the area surrounding Aspen, Colorado. His hobbies include: skiing, slacklining, hacky sack, designing new Kool Aid recipes, and praising Jah. He currently works as a burger chef for CU Boulder’s Farrand Hall Grab-and-Go, and has a long history of careers which involve the serving of “rich and helpless” people. After college, Matty plans on growing a beard and becoming a ski bum. He would like to dedicate his work in this journal to the memory of his sister Emily, and his beloved friend Rocci.

NEVIN WHITTEMORE began racing road, mountain, and cyclocross bikes at age thirteen and has ridden for Boulder Cycle Sport, Tokyo Joe’s Mountain Bike Team, and Clif Bar Development Racing. In 2014, he finished top fifteen at the Cyclocross National Championship in Boulder. A freshman in Engineering and Applied Science, his passion for medicine was sparked by family members who worked in search and rescue and the fire service. He loves slacklining and snowboarding; playing guitar, ukulele, and drums; and everything about coffee culture.

PAULINE ZENKER was raised in both New York City and Seattle, Washington. She is a graduate of The Brooks School in North Andover, Massachusetts. Her interest in creative nonfiction developed during her gap year traveling around Europe. Other artists, musicians, and expressive works found in her surroundings also influence her. ☙

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