



illuminations

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A magazine of creative expression
by students, faculty, and staff at
Southeast Community College
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE
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Reading is not walking on the words;
it's grasping the soul of them.

Paulo Freire



Illuminations Volume 25

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Illuminations publishes prose, academic writing, poetry, and art by SCC students, faculty, staff, and administrators. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to be an inclusive outlet for artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community.

Illuminations is published in the Spring of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from current SCC students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Prose submissions are limited to no more than five from one contributor; poetry and art submissions are limited to no more than ten from one contributor.

To submit, please complete the submission form.

Written work is accepted as .rtf, .doc, .docx file. For art, please submit high-resolution images as .tif or .jpg files, with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi, and a minimum size of 1500 pixels wide and 2100 pixels tall, or 5" wide and 7" tall. Works can be photographed or scanned for you if needed. Images embedded in Word or PDF files will not be included; please provide a separate image file(s). 3D artwork should be photographed against a white or single, solid color backdrop. **The deadline for Volume 26 submissions is May 31, 2024.**



Contributors should be aware that submitted work may be used in promotional materials, featured on the SCC website, or submitted to literary magazine contests. Contributors retain copyright of submitted and published material.

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AWARD WINNERS

These awards have been bestowed on *Illuminations* and its contributors by the Community College Humanities Association:

“Summit Girl” by Dillon Walker
Song Writing, 1st Place: CCHA Central Region

“Speaking is the Salvation” by Natalie Duchesneau
Creative Nonfiction, 3rd Place: CCHA Central Region

“Snow Caps” by Brittani Salvatore
Photography, 3rd Place: CCHA Central Region

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WHY WRITE

Melanie Heiserman • Student, Academic Transfer

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, POETRY

As I become more aware of my own consciousness,
I can't help but find the feeling of wanting to share.
The uncanny, the wild, the mystical.
All these flavors of Life that I experience.
Screams to be written down, to be seen and heard.
To no one in particular, maybe more for myself.
To find understanding and ground.
To find my wings and soar in my soul.
To feel; To experience.
To know I am alive and well.
I write because the bottle inside me is always shook.
Always on guard; Always listening.
Always there.
I write to release.
To hold onto what is sacred in this ugly world.
I write to hope.
Maybe one day to fly beyond my understanding.
I write to see.
Inside myself; deep within my subconscious.
Where my writing boils from.
Here, my words remain to be unloaded with such velocity.
With my body, heart, and mind finally in one movement of outstanding
experience.

CAPTURING CHAOS

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, POETRY

Seeking to capture chaos in a poem is as futile as trying to comb the rain.
No turn of phrase, no magical mystical combination of mumblings or
string of lofty and enlightened enunciations can hope to untangle havoc.
How does one describe the divine taste of a purple sunset, the aching sound
of a wistful smile, or the haunted shape of a broken soul?

The most transcendental stanzas are lucky to document divine anarchy.
Cold facsimiles cataloguing an ethereal essence that refuses to be defined,
as lifeless and empty as the eyes of waxen Tussaud in the hot summer sun.
How can words on paper ever hope to bind the relentless unruly whims
of a mad god with no moral compass?

We have no claim to chaos, no power over the essence of nature and dreams.
Permanence, codification, and the safety found in predictability are illusions,
rickety pitiful constructs which remain only because they are beneath notice.
Who can make sense of a half-remembered nightmare, change the course
of a hurricane with a scream, or tell a heart not to fall in love?

THE VALUE OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, PROSE

As I sat in the Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln, Nebraska, I watched my peers each walk across the stage to signify their graduation from Southeast Community College. I had received the honor as Student Senate president to introduce the commencement speaker, which meant I had a front row seat on stage, but what gave me the greatest joy was watching each student's stride across. I found myself tearing up, smiling wide, and observing the faces of the hollering families of my peers. The "community" in community college was evident in these two hours; each and every student was unique, as was each family. With the symphonic sounds of families cheering in the background, I faded away into thought. Community college students are diverse. Community college allows every kind of student to grow and flourish within their own timeline. Most of all, community college welcomes everyone with open arms and prepares you for what will come next in life. The value of a community college education is not only academic in nature, but also intensely personal.

I started my journey at Southeast Community College as a twenty-five year old, otherwise known as a "non-traditional" student, with a dream and an intention to achieve that dream. I remember walking into my first class, Intro to Psychology, nervous and noticing all of the young faces around me. Did I belong here? Can they tell that I've failed at this before? After quelling these thoughts, I sat in the front row, because someone once told me that sitting here would aid in my success. I highlighted just about everything on the syllabus that my professor gave us, noting due dates and what was expected of me. After all, it had been over seven years since I was last a student at a four-year institution. My first experience as a college student wasn't a good one, I felt small in such a big pond, failed my classes, and lost my financial aid. I wanted to succeed, but I was scared. That first week came and went. I found myself settling into my classes and schedule, but I still allowed myself to fade into the background. However, my community college was about to offer me so much more.

"There is no representation for the Early Childhood Education program in Student Senate," said one of my professors, "Please consider joining if you can." When I left class that day, my professor's plea kept knocking around my skull. No representation? How is that possible when there is a childcare center on campus? Excuses bombarded; I wasn't smart enough,

my voice wasn't loud enough, no one would care what I would have to say, or worst of all, I'd fail again. Little did I know that Student Senate would become an incredibly large part of my time for the next four semesters to come. Student Senate is one of the many things that my community college offers to the students here. Since community college is diverse and small in comparison to a four-year institution, joining Student Senate allowed me to meet peers that I never would have otherwise and be a bigger part of the community that creates my college. Notably, Student Senate has also aided me in my classes, as I learned to speak in front of people, work within group settings, and better manage my time. In these clubs on campus, I discovered that I can succeed in college, I can advocate, and that I can be a part of both fun and important change. Without Student Senate, I may never have known that I could be a leader, that I could be a speaker, and that I could be a bigger part of what makes community college valuable.

Southeast has numerous incredible resources that I have been lucky enough to use and be a part of. Southeast offers free therapy for students, free tutoring for any and all classes, tutoring for future students in transitional phases, TRIO student support/students with hardship (financial aid, first generation, etc), a food pantry, military and veteran services, free health and wellness centers, continuing education programs, and classes/programs for high school students. I have used many of these resources and was even the first paid student writing tutor on Southeast's Lincoln campus. Southeast has allowed me to achieve in my classes and in my own personal life by offering valuable resources that keep my mental wellness in check, my stomach from grumbling while I pursue my learning, and by supporting me as I step into who I am to become.

Of course, I would be foolish to not mention how incredibly cost-effective community college is. For less than half of what I would have spent for a singular year at a nearby four-year institution, I will have finished my Associate of Arts degree and achieved what I once thought impossible. During this time, I will have met life-long friends, won awards for my academic and personal achievements, been a writing tutor to my peers, held office in Student Senate and the Early Childhood Education Student Group, become a member of PTK, held a 4.0 cumulative GPA, and most importantly, become a larger part of the community. All of this culminates into what I like to call my "academic resume," which shows my dedication to the craft that I happened to find later in life. I would encourage all who are in pursuit of a college degree to start at a community college, but especially students like myself who are unsure, feel as if they don't have a place in the classroom anymore, or who want to build this "academic resume." I promise, you belong here.

I walked into my local community college as a non-traditional student who felt scared, unheard, and under-appreciated. I had a dream that I was stubborn in my pursuit of, but I wasn't sure then if I was smart enough or could fit in with the other students on campus. Community college offered

THE VALUE OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION

me a safe respite as I figured out my goals, my dreams, and my personhood. It allowed me to wade back into college, without feeling overwhelmed by class size or the expectation of finishing a four-year degree while I am here. In my last semester at Southeast, I find myself immensely grateful for everything that community college has done for me and everyone else who chooses the road less travelled. Community college is valuable to each and every person in our respective communities, producing well-rounded people who have had the chance to be seen for everything that they are, and everything that they can become, regardless of wherever they may have started. With its small class size, financial savings, excellent faculty, and resources, how could I have chosen a four-year institution over my local community college? Community college has given me something that no amount of money or time at a four-year institution could give me, and that is the space and patience to find my own path on my own terms.

A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM HOME

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, PROSE

December 2026: A Child Shall lead Them Home

Omnia weaved her way slowly along the narrow path, using the time to focus her thoughts and find her courage for what laid ahead. The Gathering was not set to start until sunset, still an hour away, but most of her people would be there by now. The meeting was important, it would decide the fate of two races; people probably started arriving this morning to argue their opinions.

She imagined Yll, her former husband, had been among the first to appear, arguing in favor of the violence that ruled his thoughts to anyone who would listen. If she were being completely honest, avoiding the inevitable confrontation with him was the main reason for her dawdling pace. They had parted ways shortly after the first human rocket landed, that horrific day when he succumbed to madness and committed the first interspecies murder.

Omnia no longer hated him for what he had done, too many years had passed to hold on to that much malice. There was no way to know it at the time, but they were both suffering from the effects of the human madness. Still, she would never forgive him, or herself, for the mistakes they made that day. Forgiving Yll was especially difficult as he refused to reject the madness once it was understood, preferring to embrace violent insanity over logic and reason.

Human minds were so peculiar in nature. While the species had no intrinsic ability to communicate telepathically, they blindly projected their thoughts and emotions from truly amazing distances, without filter. Martian babies were born with an instinctive talent for separating private and public thoughts, yet adult Earthmen did not even realize there was a difference between the two. That combination of godlike power and animalistic lack of control was inconceivable before the Earthmen came, and that lack of foresight led to the downfall of Mars. If only they had been better prepared, they could have guided the Earthmen and, together, they might have created a paradise. Instead, her fellow Martians watched in shock as their world was destroyed by the uncontrolled thoughts of beings who had no idea of the damage they were causing. At least, they thought the world had been destroyed. If what she had witnessed was real, there might be a chance at salvation after all.

Omma was startled by a shadow falling across her path, pulling her drifting thoughts back to reality. She looked up to find Yll standing before her, clearly looking for a fight by his posture. His silver mask was pushed back to reveal his once handsome face contorted by resentment and disdain. His upper arms hung loosely at his sides, his hands clenched into fists, while his lower arms were crossed over his chest in a disturbingly human show of defiance. He was standing in an aggressively upright stance, his feet planted firmly in her path as he loomed over her.

Seeing him in person, Omma was struck by how much he had changed from the hopeful young Martian who used to dance with her in the moonlight. She knew they had been happy once, she remembered the moments, though she could no longer recall the feelings attached to them. If Yll even remembered what happiness was, he hid it well.

“Hello, Ylla.” He growled, his thoughts tainted with reproach.

“I have not used that name in a very long time, Yll. The fact that you keep trying to force it on me speaks poorly of you.” She replied coolly, standing her ground, and keeping her thoughts detached. Ylla had been her married name when they were together, she left it behind when their marriage ended, reverting back to her birthname.

“How could I forget? You abandoned me to whore yourself out to the Earthmen.” He spat; his thoughts so angry they were barely coherent. This naked rage was much more aggressive than the surly pouting he normally displayed. Omma suspected his attempts to incite violence had fallen on deaf ears at the Gathering; now he was looking for someone to take his frustration out on. Fearing a potentially violent outburst, she took a step back and looked him over more carefully. Unsurprisingly, Yll was armed, he rarely travelled without a weapon these days. What did surprise her was his choice in armament, one of the loud explosion driven Earth weapons hung from a holster on his front right hip.

The weapon, she believed the Earthmen called it a pistol, looked like it had been made of shiny silver metal but years of abandonment in the Martian atmosphere had taken a toll. It was pocked with brown marks of corrosion where the shiny coating had worn away and the grip was stained and chipped in places. Even if the weapon were in better condition, it would be a strange choice for any Martian to carry. Earthman hands were smaller, barely half the size of the average Martian's, and came with a ridiculous five short thick digits as opposed to the proper three. Despite these issues, Yll's long green fingers hovered above the weapon, quivering like a lover attempting to caress a dream.

“I am expected at the Gathering.” Omma told him pointedly while refusing to be baited by his insult. She glanced nervously up the trail, hoping to spy someone she knew who might come to her aid. There was nobody in sight,

but the Gathering was pretty close by, people would surely hear if her ex-husband got too aggressive.

“A Gathering of fools and traitors,” Yll scoffed, “you should fit right in.”

“You calling others such names is rather bold, considering it was your own foolish act that led to this disaster.” Omma pointed out, her own temper rising despite the danger. She had learned to accept his insults as the price for her freedom, but she still took offense when he turned his spite on those she cared for.

“How dare you!” Yll’s golden eyes sparked with rage. “I am the last sane Martian on this planet! If everyone had listened to me in the beginning, your pet Earthmen never would have destroyed our world!”

“Earthmen did not destroy our world, Yll, we did.” Omma replied, refusing to back down to his rage. “But they do hold the key to restoring it.”

“The only way to restore our world is to wipe the taint of humanity from our soil and our minds! Once we have purified our planet, we can finally start to rebuild it!”

“Oh Yll, can’t you see?” Omma said, almost pleading. “You’re not sane, none of us are. That rage you feel, the need to destroy, is the real madness. Martians don’t give in to rage and we certainly don’t commit murder. In trying to destroy the Earthmen, you are becoming one of them, at least in spirit.”

“Stop it with your poisonous thoughts, you deceitful whore!” Yll’s hand dropped to his weapon and Omma realized she might have pushed him too far this time. She should have known not to confront him with the truth, such facts were more than his fragile psyche could accept.

“What’s going on here?” A new voice called out, freezing Yll’s hand before he could draw the weapon. Omma looked past Yll and saw, to her immeasurable relief, a small group of Martians coming in their direction. There were nine people in all, at least three of whom were armed with Martian long rifles. All of them were friends of hers, people who knew of Yll’s violent streak. Clearly, they had followed him from the gathering, believing he might find a way to cause trouble.

“This is private conversation between my wife and I.” Yll growled, his thoughts tinged with a strange mix of anger and shame, as well as a barely perceptible hint of fear that grated unpleasantly against Omma’s mind. She instinctively pulled away as she recognized the signs of the human madness polluting his mind.

“Your wife?” Mnna asked with a deceptive casualness in her tone. The woman, who had become Omma’s closest friend, held Yll in utter contempt.

She was always happy for a chance to needle him. "I was not aware that you had reconciled, much less renewed your vows."

"Our marital status is none of your concern, woman." Yll snarled; his emotions barely contained as they flared along his words. His hand gripped the earth weapon so tightly that his knuckles turned blue; Omma was surprised it did not shatter from the pressure. He did not quite draw the pistol, he was not so far lost to the madness that he would throw his life away, but it was clearly on his mind. The three armed Martians raised their rifles just in case.

"I've decided to make it my concern." Mnna responded, a deliberate taunt in her tone. If Omma did not know better, she would think that the woman was trying to goad Yll into a fight. Luckily for everyone, he found his self-control and stepped aside, giving her just enough room to pass.

"Come along Omma, the Gathering has already begun." Mnna said politely, acting as though Yll were already gone. "People have heard rumors of your discovery, but they're anxious to learn what it all means from you directly."

"Of course." Omma replied, moving to join the safety of the group. Yll reached out to grabbed her arm as she passed, pulling her up short.

"Go ahead and run off with your degenerate friends for now. Once I take care of this Earthman problem, you'll come crawling back to where you belong." He declared quietly, his golden eyes flashing with malice.

"Let go of me." Omma ordered, meeting his angry gaze with one of her own. He held on to her a moment longer but finally relented, releasing her with a slight shove before turning to storm off down the trail, away from the Gathering.

"I'm not sure that one can be saved." Mnna said with cool detachment as they watched the man disappear around a bend in the trail.

"We have to try." Omma replied, though she feared her friend was right. "Maybe, once he sees the truth, he'll overcome the madness."

"Perhaps." Mnna replied, her tone making it clear that she held doubts. "Though it might be wise to have a plan for if he doesn't, just in case."

After the confrontation on the trail, the Gathering was almost anticlimactic. Nearly two hundred Martians, the last of their kind still alive despite the madness, were gathered in a large cavern. At one time, there had been more than a thousand survivors, but many had been lost over the ensuing decades, leaving only these few remnants behind.

Yll was not the only Martian who hated the Earthmen, he was just the most extreme iteration. Nobody else actively sought to murder the scant few who remained, but it was difficult to convince many that an alien was their only hope for salvation. In the end though, that was the real difference between Yll and every other Martian on the planet; they still had hope. It might be a dirty, scuffed, and forlorn hope, but it was not yet lost.

“And you are absolutely sure that what you saw was real?” Rnn asked her for the fourth time since she had finished her story. Omma remained outwardly calm under the barrage of repeated questions, despite a nearly overwhelming urge to scream. She bit back on her frustration by reminding herself that nobody else had witnessed what she had, they could only go by what she told them. It was a sign of how well respected she was among her fellow Martians that they were listening to her at all.

“Yes.” She replied, her thoughts filled with a patience she did not really feel. “I saw it as clearly as I see you standing before me now.”

“Who could have imagined it?” Mnna mused. “An Earth child of all things.”

“We’ll have to be very careful, of course.” Rnn replied, finally accepting Omma’s story. “Earthmen are notoriously volatile, especially the younger ones. If we frighten him, this endeavor you suggest could lead to disaster.”

“Look around you Rnn,” Mnna snapped irritably, “we are already in the midst of the greatest catastrophe our people have ever faced. The time for caution is long buried in the past.”

“This child has a good heart.” Omma declared, silently thankful for her friend’s support. “He is young enough that the violence of his species has not yet emerged. His older siblings are dangerous but, if we get him alone, I believe he can take us home.”

The Gathering continued for the rest of the night and well into the morning, with every Martian given a chance to speak their minds. Despite a few impassioned arguments in the early hours of the morning, a consensus was eventually reached. The final remnants of Martian society agreed to follow Omma and see if the earth-child could really do as she claimed. After all, as Mnna pointed out repeatedly during the debates, what more did they have to lose?

The only silver lining to their population being so miniscule was that it took very little effort to mobilize everyone. By noon, the Gathering was declared adjourned and all of those in attendance were soon on the move. They followed a trail out of the hills in a long line, marching towards a set of massive ruins in the distance. The crumbling structures they slowly approached had once been a city known as Quxitlnom, a place Omma once

knew well. She hoped those memories would be enough to inspire the Earthling when the time came.

"I want you to take this, just in case." Mnna said as the two women led the way down the trail. She pressed a small golden tube into Omma's hand as she spoke, not giving her a chance to say no. Omma realized the object was a Martian Magna-gun and tried to pull away, but the other woman persisted.

"In case of what?" She asked, begrudgingly taking the weapon, and tucking it into one of the pouches around her waist. She quickly wiped her palm on her skirt, trying to clean an imagined taint from her hand.

"Not what, who." Mnna replied, her tone saying that the answer was obvious. "I have my doubts that your ex will let you go in peace."

"I cannot murder Yll." Omma argued desperately. "I cannot murder anybody. I'm trying to escape the madness, not devolve further into it."

"Even if it comes down to his life or the Earth-child's?" Mnna asked pointedly. "I heard what he said to you on the trail; he's planning to kill the Earthmen, all of them."

"He wouldn't, not a child." Omma argued, repulsed by the very idea.

"I hope you're right," Mnna's thoughts were anything but hopeful, "but I prefer you to be ready, just in case. It is not murder to defend yourself, nor an innocent child."

Omma wanted to argue further but she knew her how stubborn her friend could be, she would not pushing until she got her way. Besides, if taking the weapon made Mnna feel safer, it was no real burden to do so, despite the queasiness in her stomach at the thought of it. Perhaps, if Yll did return with malicious intent, the threat of violence would be enough to drive him off.

When the last Martians finally reached the edge of the ruined city, they drew to an uneasy halt and milled about restlessly. Most Martians avoided the ruins, either out of respect for the dead or simply because the buildings felt haunted and unwelcoming. Even the hope of salvation was not enough to overcome the atavistic fear most felt about entering the broken symbol of their past. Omma and the other leaders had expected this problem and planned accordingly. The other Martians would set up camp and wait at the edge of the ruins while Omma went ahead alone. If she found the Earth child in the city again, and if he really could do as she believed, they would be close enough to see the change happening from there.

Omma was not immune to the paranoid feelings of discomfort as she

moved timidly towards the center of town, but she was choked down on her fears and kept moving forward. Unlike her own people, the Earth child had no fear of the ruins. He loved to run and play among the abandoned buildings, seeking out dusty baubles that only a child would see as treasure. He was especially fond of the broken fountain in the center of town, which is where she went to look for him first.

His fearless attitude actually made the child almost unique, even among his own kind. In the years before, when the Earthmen first came, they preferred to avoid the old ruins as well. The aliens even brought in building supplies from earth, rather than using what Mars had to offer. As far as Omma knew, nobody from either planet had found the old crumbling buildings very inviting; nobody but the young Earth child.

She found the boy, for that is what he was, a young male earthling, playing around the fountain as she had hoped. Once upon a time, the fountain churned and splashed as sweet blue wine sprayed up from hidden holes to rain back down to the wide shallow basin. With the city abandoned and empty, public structures such as this had quickly fallen into disrepair. Rusted pipes and crumbled masonry littering the empty basin, the proud statue which had once stood in the center toppled and broken. At least, that was how it had been three days before, the last time Omma was here.

Now the fountain looked like new, all signs of disuse erased. Streams of bubbling wine shot high into the air and flowed down the restored statuary in the middle of the pool before splashing playfully into the cool sweetness below. The stonework for several feet beyond the fountain was repaired as well; cracked cobbles were replaced with new, potholes had vanished completely, the entire area had been reborn.

The entire fixture sat incongruent to the rest of the city, which was still lost in slow silent decay. It was as if, just in this small section, time had been rewound to before the Earthmen brought the madness that destroyed everything.

Perched on the wide edge of the shallow basin, his feet dangling just above red wine lapping against the stone, sat the earth-child. He was built much like a full sized earth-man but in miniature. His hair, which grew wildly from the top of his head, was a yellow in color that almost matched the sun in brightness and was not too dissimilar from her own. His eyes were as blue as the jeweled feathers of the ice drakes that people once kept as pets and his skin was pale with a hint of pink which reminded Omma of the sky on a winter evening. Unlike the adults, who towered over Martians considerably, the child was small enough that his head barely reached her shoulder, making him much less intimidating to approach.

The wonder of the renewed fountain seemed lost on the child, who was far more fascinated with a piece of paper he had folded to look like a boat

and set floating among the streams of sweet red wine. In fact, he was so entranced by his little paper craft that he did not even notice Omma until she sat down beside him.

“Hello Earth child” Omma said, using the standard earth greeting. The boy jumped, startled by her arrival. His surprise quickly turned to joy upon recognizing her and a wide smile stretched over his young face.

“Hello Martian adult!” The boy responded with a giggle. “I hoped you’d come back today!”

“Indeed, I told you I would try to, and here I am.” Omma replied, projecting her own happiness at seeing the boy into her thoughts. Earthlings had a hard time understanding Martian emotions, though the younger ones tended to be more open to them. Some of her cohorts theorized that, given enough time, Earthmen might learn to speak with their minds like Martians, if both species managed to survive the process.

“Do you like the fountain?” The earth-child asked excitedly. “I did just like you told me to! I pretended that it was new and worked until it suddenly did! It was like magic! I bet my brothers don’t have working fountains in their cities yet!”

Omma did not understand everything that the Earth child said, his thoughts sometimes bounced around too fast for her to follow, but she understood enough to feign interest. She did know about the other two Earth children, the bigger ones who roamed different cities nearby. She had felt their thoughts from a distance and saw that, sadly, the violent madness of Earth had already taken root in them. Only this one, the youngest Earthling left on Mars, remained untainted.

“It’s beautiful, I am very proud of you.” She told him, gazing at the fountain appreciatively. This was far beyond anything she could have hoped for, and it left her facing two possibilities, both of which were terrifying in their own right. Either the Earthling’s mental powers were so strong that he was forcing her to see what he imagined, the very definition of human madness, or the fountain was real, and everything else was imaginary. This was the crux of her research for the last five decades, a theory which she had believed but never been able to prove. If she was correct, Mars had never really been destroyed, the human madness only made it seem that way.

The theory held that, when humans came to colonize Mars, they expected to find the planet in a certain way. Those beliefs were something of a self-fulfilling prophesy; the Earthmen projected their thoughts ahead as they approached, overwhelming the minds of unsuspecting but susceptible Martians. The infected went mad, their minds. The belief created a psychic resonance between the two species; a mental bond which devolved into

a feedback loop of sorts. The circuit built in power with every interaction between the two species, brainwashing everyone caught up in it to rewrite reality. Only, what if only a small number of Martians were actually trapped in the loop?

Which quickly “In fact, you did such a good job, I wonder if you can do more?” She suggested mildly. She needed to be very careful in what she did next, too much pressure could backfire.

“Like what?” He asked, happy and eager to show off his talent.

“I was thinking, if you can imagine the fountain working again, why not the whole city?” She asked, keeping the feelings in her thoughts light and whimsical. It was so difficult not to pressure the child, Omma’s body felt as if it vibrated with desire to push for more but she could not afford to startle him and lose what had already been gained.

“You mean like, fix all the buildings?”

“Yes, eventually, but not just those. Imagine how grand it would be if everything was working and all of the people came back.”

“You mean Martian people like you?” The earth-child looked hesitant.

“Indeed, a whole city full of them.”

“Would they all be nice like you?” He asked timidly. She knew from his thoughts that the boy was lonely, Mars was a very big planet when there was nobody else around. His desire for friends was one of the things that had drawn her to him. She felt a pang of guilt for using it to manipulate him now.

“Of course they would., all Martians are nice.” She declared confidently, though the boy still looked unconvinced.

“My dad says that I’m a Martian too! That’s why he blew up our rocket after we landed; because this is our home now.”

“Well, if that’s true, then you definitely need to imagine the others coming back! They’re your people now, too, surely you would want to meet them?”

“I don’t know if I can imagine a whole city at once!” He pointed out, sounding worried but excited at the prospect. “I don’t even know what a lot of those buildings are for.”

“That’s okay, we can do it together.” She said, brushing her long nimble fingers over his head as she would have with a Martian child. “I’ll describe the city; all you need to do is listen and imagine it to be real.”

"I can do that! My mom says I've got a really good imagination!" He jumped up from the fountain and pulled her along towards the nearest building. "What kind of place was this tall building over here?"

So began the game. The whole process was both ingenious and simple. She took the earth-child from place to place and described everything that she could remember about different buildings and what went on inside them. He would picture the ideas and then project them back to her with his amazingly powerful mind, making the changes real for both of them.

Things did move slowly at first, it was sometimes difficult to remember things precisely after so many years of living in the wilds. Finally, it all began to come back to Omma in flashes which eventually coalesced into a steady flood of memories. After a time, she even recalled the name of the city, Chantngg, and then marveled at how she could have forgotten it at all.

As the game went on, Omma realized that the boy was becoming more in tune with her thoughts. Eventually she no longer needed to describe the city at all. She would think of what had been and he would see her thoughts like a Martian would, there was no need for the clumsiness of language.

Even as the city began to reform around them, Omma was still afraid. There was a real possibility that she was wrong about curing the madness, that everything she saw was just another illusion created by the earth-child's powerful mind. She wanted to believe this was all real, but the worry still haunted at her. Until, that is, she saw the first Martian citizen.

It was a man, wearing a golden mask and light summer robes, strolling down the sidewalk, and peeking into a building that they had not yet changed. It took a moment but then it hit her, the man saw the world as it really was, he was not looking at the ruins, he was seeing what the store that stood in that location had on display. As soon as she realized what he was doing, the building shimmered and was like new again, even though the earth-child was looking at something else entirely.

That was when she knew, not believed, knew. It was all real.

Mars had never been destroyed at all; it was an illusion, a perfect storm of madness. Earthmen came to Mars expecting to find ruins and death because the first party had died. They had no way of knowing that their thoughts would overwhelm some Martian minds, like hers, and force them to create a world in that image. The madness was widespread, but far from all encompassing, most of Martians were untouched and continued to live their lives as normal. In fact, Omma theorized that most Martians were probably unaware of the Earthmen at all; the two species were so far removed from one another's reality that they may as well have been living on two different planets after all.

In the midst of such blossoming realizations, Omma was suddenly struck by a wave of rage and despair. Fearfully, she spun around looking for the source of the emotions, knowing already that it was Yll.

Her former husband stood some distance away, lurking in the shadows between two tall buildings which were just beginning to come back to life. There was something disquieting about his appearance, it was as if she were gazing at an object in the distance on a hot summer day. He looked hazy and indistinct, his form fading around the edges like an insubstantial spirit.

As if to make up for his lessened physicality, his thoughts were so solid that she imagined she could reach out and touch his anger, only to end up burned. Even though he did not make a sound, his pain screamed in her mind, loud and terrible, causing her world trembled in response.

"You should not have come here." Omma channeled her thoughts so the child could not hear them, afraid of what might happen if he saw the deranged Martian. A quick glance assured her that he was blissfully unaware as he wandered further down the street, in awe of his own feats

"I will not allow this!" Yll responded, the rage singeing his thoughts. The Earth weapon was in his hand now, though he pointed it at the ground. "You belong to me! The Earthmen have no right to take you away!"

"No, Yll, I belong to myself." Omma responded gravely. The weapon Mnna had given her was hidden in a pocket among the folds of her dress. She slowly reached for it with one of her lesser hands, keeping her main limbs in plain sight as she tried to reason with her former husband.

"Everything was perfect before they came!" Yll railed, choosing to ignore her declaration. "Our lives were perfect, we were happy!"

"You were happy, Yll, I was not." Omma finally admitted the dark secret that she had kept buried for so long. "The coming of the Earthmen caused a lot of problems, but our failed union was not one of them."

"No! That's a lie! We were happy!" Yll shouted, as if he could force her to submit by sheer ferocity. There was a time when that tactic would have worked, but Omma was no longer the weak-willed young girl she had been in those days. She weathered the storm of thoughts as they battered against her mind but held her ground.

"If I had been happy, the dreams never would have tempted me." She finally pointed out. "The man you killed was not dreaming of me, not at first. He dreamt of an idea, of finding something new that he could cherish and be proud to have. Our connection happened because I was desperate to be that thing."

A crack appeared in Yll's wall of rage as her words finally struck home. A flicker of sorrow and pain leaked out, the feelings that he normally tried to hide, even from himself. For that one flickering moment, Omma thought that maybe there was hope for him after all. Then he raised the earth weapon, and she knew the truth.

"You can't leave me! I won't let the Earthman have you!" He pointed the pistol at the boy, who was still facing the other direction. For a moment, Omma was dragged back to that horrible day when the first Earthman came. She had frozen that morning, held back by her fear, and a man she could have loved had died. This time would be different. Omma scrambled to place herself between the boy and his would-be executioner, brandishing her own weapon as she moved.

"I can't let you hurt the child." She warned, pushing down her fear so that he could only feel her resolution. The boy had to live; she doubted her people could ever find their way home without him.

At her interference, Yll lost all semblance of self-control. His emotions pummeled against her, raw and wordless like those of an animal. There was no logic, no reason, only rage and murderous intent. Finally, with a broken heart, she accepted the inevitable.

In the years that followed, Omma could never say with any real conviction, who shot first. She preferred it that way. The clicking of the earth weapon as it failed was indelibly mixed with the sharp buzzing snap of her own weapon's discharge, becoming a single sound in her memory.

Sometimes, Yll's face still haunted her dreams, his features twisted in a mix of shock and reproach as the life faded from his golden eyes. When that happened, she would leave her bed and go sit on the balcony where she could listen to the vibrant current of the living city below. Sometimes, she imagined Yll was sitting there next to her, the rage finally laid to rest.

Other times, it was a tall Earthman with dark hair and blue eyes who kept her company, his smile warm and soothing as he held her hand and whispered his love into her ear. Her mind would calm with his imagined caress and the self-loathing would burn away under his loving gaze.

She knew, even as he pulled her closer, that it wasn't real; he was one last delusion brought on by the madness. It did not matter though, even if their time together was only in her mind, it was enough.

Enough for her to know peace.

A bit of madness to help keep her sane.

Author's Note

In 1950, Ray Bradbury published one of his most enduring works, The Martian Chronicles. The book lays out in chronological order the stories of humans who travel to the red planet to settle it, despite the fact that Martians already live there. It is an amazing book which has been extremely influential across the genre of science fiction. If you have not read it, I highly suggest you do. Unlike most novels, The Martian Chronicles is actually a series of short stories set around a common theme. They were not originally intended to stand as a single novel, but Bradbury managed to make it work for the most part.

I read this book as part of a class on modern science fiction because it is such a seminal work. When we were finished, the class was assigned the task of writing our own chronicle story; something that would fit in with Bradbury's work. With that lofty goal in mind, I set out to fix some of the plot holes the original author created in the course of trying to fit individual stories into a greater narrative.

My story features characters from the first and last chronicle in Bradbury's novel, bringing them together to explain some of the details that do not quite line up and bring closure to the book as a whole. I also did my best to match the feel and tone of Bradbury, using similar language styles and wording. I'll leave it to you, the reader, to decide if I achieved my goals in these regards.

That said, I also tried to create a story that stands up on its own, even for those who haven't read The Martian Chronicles. So, my hope is that you can still take something from this story of loss and redemption in a broken world. If it inspires you to go read Bradbury's work, so much the better.

METAPHOR

Danielle Klafter • Instructor, English

If faith is like a bird—or at least wings—
a soul in defiance of gravity, then
what are we to make of birds left flightless?

the penguin, wings like flippers propelling
its sleek body below the choppy surf

the ostrich, sprinting sixteen feet a stride
laying its head close to earth as if buried

the emu, clothed in feathered camouflage
claws razored to shred a metal wire fence

the rhea, dwelling in grassy lowlands
wings spread like sails to outrun trouble

the kiwi, wings so small they nearly don't exist
skeleton filled with marrow, weighed to the ground

LIZZIE BORDON NEVER HAD BOXING LESSONS

Tara Sue Plasek • Student, Business Administration

Lizzie Borden took an axe,
And gave her mother
forty whacks, When
she saw what she had
done, She gave her
father forty-one.

For me, Lizzie Borden is not just a famous murderer, she is my 6th cousin three times removed. I do not question whether Lizzie Borden murdered her father and stepmother with an axe. Instead, I question why she did it. What must have happened in her life to have driven her to kill her father by lifting an axe over her head and bringing it down with all her might onto his face, not just once, but again and again and again. The infamous forty-one whacks depicted in the popular children's jump rope rhyme are exaggerated, but ten blows were rained down on Andrew Borden's face. Why?

I ask this question of *why* a lot now, but I didn't used to. I never thought to ask this question of my biological father Joe. *Why* did he drink so much that his annual birthday phone call was usually a mere sixty seconds of slurred words, "Halpy Blirfday shweetheart. Don forged.....Daddy Joe luuusss you." *Why* did he spend his paychecks on drugs, alcohol and gambling instead of food for his family? *Why* did he go out drinking and philandering instead of spending time with his wife and kids? *Why* was he so filled with anger and rage that my mother had to lock herself in the bathroom with me when, I had colic as a newborn, because he was going to "Throw that God Damn kid against the wall if you can't get her to shut up!" I never asked him *why* because I thought I knew. He was selfish and immature. He was cruel and heartless. He used his hands instead of his head to solve problems.

My big sister, Jolynn, may have coerced me into going to this family reunion, but she couldn't guilt me into being *nice* to Joe. "He *is* our dad, Tara Sue," she had said, as if this was such an obvious reason to go and be nice. "NO, he's not!" I countered defensively. "He gave up all rights as a parent when he didn't show up at the custody hearing. *DAD is* our dad. *He* adopted

us. He raised us.” She started in on her big sister, I’m wiser and more knowledgeable, speech, claiming I didn’t understand, because I was only three at our parents’ divorce and didn’t remember him.

“Let me tell you what I *do* remember,” I snapped back. “I remember him calling me in college, telling me he was driving through town and was going to stop by and visit me.” My heart rate was starting to increase, and I was beginning to breath heavier. “I sat in my dorm next to my phone ALL day waiting for his call. He never called and he never came.” I could feel the flush rising up my cheeks. “And this didn’t happen just once,” I continued, “It happened Every. Year. for the next. Seven. Years.” My voice had risen to a near shout.

I paused and took a deep breath to calm myself. I swallowed hard as my throat tighten. My voice came out in a choked whisper. “I remember walking into our parents’ bedroom when I was three years old. “ JoLynn lowered her eyes, and I knew she knew what I was talking about. I didn’t have to finish. Had she been with me? I don’t remember her being there. I don’t remember anyone being there. Just me, standing alone in my two-piece button up flannel pajamas, frozen, as my eyes took in the scene before me. Unmade bed, white wall, window with curtains partly open, green carpet, and blood. So much blood. Splattered on everything, the bed, walls, curtains, even leaving dark spots on the carpet. I don’t want to see it, but I cannot close my eyes. I want to run away from it, but I am frozen, until a pair of hands gently rest on my shoulders and turn me as they guide me out of the room.

As an adult I had pushed my mom for more details on Joe. The only thing she had ever told us as kids was that she had divorced Joe because he was an alcoholic. It was later in life when I heard the story of my colic and all the other abuses, he had inflicted upon her and our family. One thing she said stuck out to me. She told me, ““when I divorced him, he said, ‘Don’t go marrying some son-of-a-bitch who’s going to rape my girls.’ It’s the only time he said something that showed he cared about you girls at all.”

The chip on my shoulder was weighing me down, but I had a good reasons for it. All morning I had gone over those reasons in my head. Everything Joe had done to us, to ME! And the rest of them? They didn’t deserve to claim me as a relative either. Where had they been for the last forty odd years? I was finally going to tell them what I really thought of them. They were going to see how well I turned out despite their absence from my life. They wanted nothing to do with me when I was growing up? Well now I wanted nothing to do with them. Nettie was going to regret finding us on Facebook and inviting us here. They were all going to be sorry for not being in my life.

There was a tall hedge surrounding the back yard, but I could hear the voices of the reunion already in full swing. I had timed my late arrival to ensure the best audience. I sauntered into Nettie’s back yard confident and cocky. I was taken aback to only see three women huddled together at a

picnic table; heads bent over a photo album. In slow motion I kept walking as the women rose and came at me, arms outstretched with mouths open and tears streaming. Suddenly I was engulfed in a human triangle of hugs and weeping voices. "We've thought about you so much over the years." "We've missed you so." "We never stopped thinking about you." "We used to babysit you." "We're your cousins." "We love you." My shoulders relaxed as all my anger, my vengeance, my purpose for being here floated up and away. They pulled back, laughing while wiping away tears and asking, "Which one are you?" I laughed too. As one of three little McNurlin girls they had not seen since we were kids, they would not know which one I was, nor did they care. All they cared about was that I was one of them, and I was finally there.

Soon they were pushing me towards the garage where the rest of the family was. Someone was leading Joe out as if he were a little kid. He was dressed in new jeans, and a long sleeved buttoned up white dress shirt. He swiped at his red rimmed eyes with the back of his hands before pulling me into a bear hug. As he held me tight, his head next to mine, he turned slightly to say softly in my ear, "I haven't had a drink in two years."

That is what he said, but that is not what I heard. What I heard was, *the drink is why I had been a horrible father. The drink is what kept me from you. The drink is why I didn't contest custody, why I never showed up when I said I would, why I never got your birthday's right.* What I heard was, *I'm sorry for all I did and didn't do because of the drink.*

Later that day, my cousin Gwen stopped to talk to us. Her words were simple and to the point. "I know you guys harbor a lot of ill feelings towards your dad, but if you had any idea what kind of life he'd had, you might understand him better." She handed me handwritten and typed papers that contained her mother's memoirs. My eyes went over the words. Branding them into my brain.

The Chicken Thief – *We had only lived in Egeland for a few short months before everything inside us that was young was gone. Joe was an old man living in the body of a child and I was an old woman. The Artist- If I live to be a thousand years old, I'll never forget the screams. The sounds of the blows. It seemed they would never end. Even worse was the pleading. I can hear Joe yell yet. "Somebody help me." "Please help me." "Anybody, Mama help me." "God help me." After that he stopped pleading and just screamed on and on. Mama sat on the couch. Her hands folded as she looked guiltily into her lap. The Run Aways- Mama and Eddy were getting into the car. All the Wagners were going to Aunt Esters. Mama, Eddy and the kids. No McNurlins. You could just sense they wished it could always be like this. Only Wagners, no damn McNurlins.*

Gwen and her siblings shared horror stories of our parents' upbringing that had not made it to the pages, but had been told to them by their

mother. They told us about Grandma Bernice remarrying after Glen left her. Grandpa Eddy's hatred and cruelty towards them. How he spoiled and favored the three kids he sired with Grandma Bernice while beating, torturing, and raping Bonnie, Mert, and Joe for years.

In adulthood they all found ways to cope. Bonnie showered her children with all the love and protection she was never able to get from her own mother, but refused to allow mirrors in her house or pictures taken of her because she still believed the words Eddy had shouted at her all her life. You're worthless. You're ugly. Get out of here so none of us has to see your ugly face. Mert hit the bars, hit the whiskey, and hit the other bargoers. Night after night, fight after fight. Taking out his childhood anger on anyone who crossed him, until one night, one fight, one too many blows to the head. He is like a child now and I choose to believe he is living the childhood he should have had, lovingly cared for by his wife and children. Joe, the baby of the McNurlin kids, took boxing lessons as a teen. By the time he was seventeen, he was able to fight back against Eddy and won. Boxing finally stopped the abuse, but the residual effects led him to the bottom of a bottle the same as his brother.

Back in my hotel room that night, I called my mom. "Mom," I said. "Remember when you told me that the only time Joe ever said something that showed that he cared about us girls was when he told you not to go marry some son-of-a-bitch who's going to rape his girls?" "I remember." Mom said. "I know why he said it," I sighed.

So *why* did Lizzie Borden kill her father? There have been a lot of speculations throughout history. The reasons range from wanting his money to abuse, both physical and sexual. But perhaps she killed him... because she never had boxing lessons.

A LAND OF DEATH

Zahraa Fanharawi • Student, Health Sciences

Among the beauty of roses
 with gentle evening breeze
 subtle and fair
 a land of peace
 a world of wonder
 where the rivers f l o w
 a shelter away from the madness of the world
 where the birds chirp
with w a v e s of fondness and calm
 though a land of death resides within

 a field of blurry whites and thorny vines
 not a blooming rose
 not the sight of its pretty gentle petals
 but the vines that twist and grow
 with sharp pointy thorns
 even on cloudy days
the blinding sun is far too bright
 a desert of light
 but the vines reside beneath the dead roses
 by the shades of their withered blossoms
 the vines that grow and grow
 above
 the lifeless grass
below
 the dry roses
where life decomposes.

LIKE MIDSUMMER SKIES

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

When I look at you I see everything I've ever wanted
You eyes are like rivers of affection by which I was once daunted
How could someone as beautiful and kind hearted as you
Ever look at me and say you're mine, that you want me too

Your baby blue eyes
Like midsummer day skies
Golden curly waves
Soft smiles for days

I promise to you that I'll always be yours
Never ever did I desire something like this before
Yet now that it's mine I hold tight with both hands
To the future you are offering with no rules or demands

With your baby blue eyes
Like midsummer skies
Golden curly waves
Soft smiles for days

I was beaten
I was broken
You were the healer
You were the mender

The softness of your smiles
The warmth of your embrace
The tender touches
The loving kisses

LIKE MIDSUMMER SKIES

In the darkness you were the only light
A reason to live and a reason to fight
I was at the end of my rope and ready to hang
I was at the ledge ready to fall and then you sang

Through the blood and the tears
Through the panic and the fears
I was never alone
You are my home

Because of you I'm alive
Because of you I continue to thrive
You are my family and you are my mate
You carry our child I'm blessed by fate

Your baby blue eyes
Like midsummer day skies
Golden curly waves
Soft smiles for days

I will love you for the rest of my life
Through the good, the bad, the joy, the strife
I will be by your side whatever may be
You are my everything, my sweet honey bee

CAVITY

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

My teeth are falling from my mouth.
They are rotting from my skull,
And my tongue hangs in my mouth,
Prodding at those bloody sockets like
A thing winged and wicked.

I clutch my teeth to my chest like pearls
And I cry for my mother to push them back in.
But she looks.
Looks at me.
Looks at me with a smile and a mouth of sharp, sharp teeth.

I behold my festering gums in a mirror,
And force my teeth back into the sockets,
Pushing enamel into flesh.
Push, push, pushing.
Popping, ripping, tearing.
Sinking those roots into the tender spot
Where it is too late for them to take hold.
Where enamel clicks the bone of my mandible.

Few teeth remain,
The old forest growth sparse and lonely, decaying.
My molars wasted into skinny pillars, twisted.
My canines in my hands.
Defanged.

My teeth are falling out.
More and more,
More teeth spill from my mouth.
More teeth than I ever had.
More than I can keep count.

I go to the dentist, penny-mouthed and red,
And the dentist stares.
He stares and stares and stares,
And he sends me away
With teeth falling from my maw.
My pockets full of canines and molars and incisors.

I am sick to my stomach on the blood that slides down my throat.
My father haunts this house like wrath.
He does not smile.
He has no teeth.
But he watches me hold my mouth,
Salty palms against my gums,
Holding and stuffing my teeth into my face.

I can never smile again.

MUSIC, EMOTION, AND DOPAMINE

Eric Rittenhouse • Student, Medical Laboratory Technology

An understanding of how human emotion can be affected by music better helps us to gain knowledge of both music and emotion. An understanding of the relationship of the neurotransmitter dopamine, when involved with both music and emotion, would also be beneficial. This knowledge can also help us to gain more access to the workings of the human psyche, as well as to help us have a better understanding of humans in general.

To discuss the influence of music on human emotion, as well as the involvement of dopamine with both, some terms and background should first be defined and discussed.

Music is considered to be the art or science of sequencing sounds or tones to create a tempo that has a relationship to make a composition that is both united and has a consistency over a period of time (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Musical instruments date back about 40,000 years, but proto-music could date back to at least 400,000 years ago (Killin, 2018). This early proto-music may not necessarily be what is considered modern forms of music, but it had certain qualifications of music making that might have existed in certain early foraging cultures.

Emotion can be described as a conscious intense mental effect (i.e., anger, sadness, happiness, fear, etc.) one experiences, that is often directed toward something, and usually followed by physiological and behavioral changes in oneself (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Though it is difficult to date when human emotion developed, *Homo sapiens* evolved between 250,000 and 300,000 years ago (McBrearty & Brooks, 2000).

Dopamine, which plays a part in emotion, is defined as a specific neurotransmitter—or chemical released by the brain—that has an affect on learning and memory, voluntary movement, and most importantly here, it has an affect on the perception of pleasure (Rathus, 2022). An increase in this neurotransmitter may have played a major role during the evolution of hominids (Previc, 1999). It is theorized that in early hominid evolution an increase in dopamine systems played a role in the development of the species' intelligence. It is also suggested that dopamine played a major role in the development of these (mostly) left hemisphere skills: working memory, temporal analysis and sequencing, motor planning, abstract reasoning, cognitive flexibility, and generativity. These cognitive skills are all thought to be important to both human thought and language.

To summarize, dopamine played a role during early hominid evolution. When *Homo sapiens* evolved, the species evolved with emotions, and

around the same time music was created. Though there is no exact correlation here, it is interesting to note the development of these three items developed around the same time periods. What's more interesting to note is how music can play a role in human emotion.

Studies have been performed to relate human music with human emotion, and the goal here is to summarize those studies.

First, it is important to establish that music has an affect on dopamine. In one study a double-blind test was performed to see if levels of pleasure while listening to music can be affected by dopamine levels (Ferreri, 2019). In this study participants listened to music either selected by themselves or by the ones conducting the experiment.

Different drugs were administered to the participants during the study (Ferreri, 2019). These drugs consisted of: Levodopa, which is a precursor to dopamine and can be rapidly absorbed by neurons, then transformed into dopamine and stored for later use, and can enhance dopamine levels with responses that are stimulus-evoked; Risperidone, which acts as an antagonist to dopamine by binding dopamine receptors; and Lactose (a sugar), which served as a placebo.

Test participants were measured by various means throughout the study (Ferreri, 2019). One method of measurement was using electrodermal activity (EDA).

Using electrodermal activity (EDA) is an acceptable tool in both research and clinical fields (Pabst, et al., 2015). It is a process where external electrical signals (either AC or DC) are detected on the skin and resistance or conductance are measured. EDA which can be used to measure arousal by physiological means (Ferreri, 2019).

Besides EDA, another test method was more subjective and relied on motivation (Ferreri, 2019). This second measurement relied on asking participants the amount of their own money they would spend for each song. Participants were also asked to rate the songs.

The results of the study showed a relation between dopamine levels and musical pleasure (Ferreri, 2019). When dopamine levels were inhibited, there was a noted decrease in pleasure while listening to the music. When dopamine levels were increased, there was a noted increase in pleasure while listening to the music. This study shows a link between dopamine levels and how it affects pleasure, i.e., emotion.

There have been studies performed to link emotion with music. One such study was performed using children that had normal hearing versus children that had cochlear implants (Hoppyan, 2015). This study showed that children can differentiate between happy and sad music, but those with cochlear implants do so less accurately. It's interesting to note that the

study found that those children with normal hearing differentiate happy music from sad music by cues from the mode, (i.e., scales), while those children with cochlear implants differentiate happy music from sad music by the tempo (i.e., pace). It was also observed that children with cochlear implants had decreased response times and they found it more difficult to perform the task. This could indicate the possibility that those children require alternative mechanisms to process emotions from music than those with normal hearing.

It has been observed that musical cues can play a part in emotional responses to music (Battcock & Schutz, 2021). These cues tend to be more prominent in those with formal musical training. These cues tend to be based more on mode (i.e., scales). It's interesting to note that mode plays a role as an emotional musical cue for trained musicians, as well as a cue for children with cochlear implants. Untrained musicians also use mode as a cue, just at a lesser rate, but the difference is thought to be from the sensitivity of training. It is also thought that the emotional response to mode is a result of learned associations. It is also suggested that familiarity should be investigated in the future to see how much of a role it plays (Battcock & Schutz, 2021).

There is some evidence to support that musical training can play a larger part in recognizing expressed emotion in music (Akkermans, et al., 2019). The involvement of music, emotional intelligence, and shared emotion on how the listeners perceive emotion was investigated. Seven different emotions were expressed through three different melodies. Those tested were able to identify all seven of these emotions through the three melodies. Again, the participants were trained musicians, but the ability of these individuals to interpret the emotions through music is still worth noting.

A study was conducted that involved giving participants lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and having them listen to music while under the influence of this hallucinogen (Seeman & Tallerico, 2005). Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is defined as “an illegal drug that causes abnormal sensations, extreme and changeable states of emotion, unnatural changes in the way time and space are experienced, and hallucinations and that may sometimes cause panic in response to the effects experienced” (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) has a strong affinity for the D2 receptors for dopamine (Seeman & Tallerico, 2005). This study found that listening to music while under the influence of LSD can have strong emotional responses, especially the emotions of power, tenderness, transcendence, and wonder (Kaelen, et al., 2015)

It can take as little as eight seconds for a person to have a strong emotional response from music (Fuentes-Sánchez, et al., 2021). It was found

that listening to shorter musical excerpts resulted in a similar emotional response as that of listening to longer musical excerpts.

It has also been noted that emotions brought on by music can cause the same emotions brought on by other types of stimuli (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). Juslin and Västfjäll also discuss how when conducting research on music and emotions, no consideration was given to how these emotions were evoked, or that researchers made assumptions that the emotional response was part of a default mechanism. It is suggested that other mechanisms might be involved in how music can stimulate emotion. These other mechanisms include evaluative conditioning, brain stem reflexes, episodic memory, visual imagery, emotional contagion, and musical expectancy.

As studies have shown, music can have an affect on human emotion, human emotion can be perceived through music, and human emotion can be expressed through music. Studies have also shown that human emotion can be stimulated through music. It appears that these three things—emotion, music, and dopamine—all evolved together during the development of human beings. Further studies investigating the correlation between music and emotion would be beneficial for us to not only better understand music and to better understand emotion, but for us to understand our own human emotions, as well.

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GRANDMA BOO'S HAIBUN

Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

My mother and father would always say I was just like you, a heart of gold, a care for all, an incessant need to call out to the lost or lonely creatures roaming the streets, as if my own safety was unheard of, unneeded. How terrible then, that while you were still alive, I was unsettled by your vacant stare and the slow laborious steps that shuffled you slowly across the living room; I wonder, why had no one taught me that your mind was leaving you? You were not leaving it of your own free will, or that you were losing it at all? When you laid unmoving after the stroke, I didn't recognize you.

But who was it I was missing? Unsure, I watched, unsettled by you and your dying. Forgive my own childish ignorance, I ask after you and the stories that others who knew you would tell me over coffee, with laughter and through tears, or while walking the rolling hills of Kentucky.

I recognize you
in the purring of lost cats
I promise I do.

THE GREEN GATEAU

Danielle Klafter • Instructor, English

At the restaurant I glance up from
plating a slice of chocolate pistachio
cake and think I see your face at the door
standing with two women. My heart
begins a headlong sprint, fumbling
clumsily over an elapsed wedding date,
unpaid debts, unacknowledged liability.
I run hands firmly down my apron
calmly grounding myself. *Irrational,*
highly unlikely, I tell myself—you,
actually standing in this restaurant
eight hours drive from where you live—
but not impossible. I glance again.
You look at me oddly, and I become
aware of my stare as I search to
decipher your facial structure
weighted shoulders, nervous tic. It is
not you, yet I am unsure, must
look again, confirming you a stranger,
unlucky doppelgänger, undeserving
my ire. I cannot tell if I am disappointed,
missing a polite chance to serve
you coffee, my left hand lingering
a half second too long, my ring glinting
in soft morning light, or if I am relieved—
my fledgling forgiveness remaining
untested. I turn away, delivering the slice
of cake, forgetting you were there.

SHOULD THEY ROAM THE EARTH AGAIN?

Connor Myers • Student, Academic Transfer

For years, humans have wondered: what if we could bring back extinct animals? The dodo bird, the thylacine, the woolly mammoth, the passenger pigeon? Even the dinosaurs? Thanks to the advancements made in genetic engineering in the past decade or so, the question seems to have changed from a “what if?” to a “should we?” question. Many conservationists and environmentalists want a clear-cut yes or no answer, but this topic is a more complex one. De-extinction is worth pursuing for some species, but not all. Some environments won’t be harmed by the reintroduction of extinct animals, some species were wrongfully slaughtered out of existence by human intervention, and certain long-lost species could benefit the planet’s environment. Many argue that the result of resurrection methods will not know how to be the species it’s intended to be, but I see this as an opportunity to raise and nurture the revived hybrid species to do exactly what they need to for the environment. Conservationists also argue that focus should be on preserving existing species instead of bringing back what’s been lost, but research and technology into de-extinction can be used to benefit species that still live. To solve this debate, both sides must be acknowledged, with focus being on how best to use this new technology.

Some now-extinct species’ roles have not been filled in their old environment, with some environments actively becoming weaker because of a species’ absence. When the thylacine (also known as the Tasmanian tiger) was still alive, it was an apex predator marsupial (Morton). No other marsupials on the island of Tasmania were big enough or effective enough carnivorous hunters to take up that apex marsupial role, and no new species have come to the island to claim it since (Morton). The closest the island has gotten to replacing the thylacine is the similarly named Tasmanian devil, which is significantly smaller and less effective at hunting, even seeing its own issues after the thylacine’s extinction nearly a century ago (Chappell). According to NPR, professor in epigenetics Andrew Pask reports that the facial tumor disease currently plaguing Tasmanian devils could have been prevented if the thylacine still lived (Chappell). With Tasmania’s apex predator back on the island, it could remove the weaker animals, slowing or stopping the spread of the Tasmanian devil’s disease (Chappell). If the environment has not been changed much since when the animal lived, an extinct species could do well in being reintroduced. In the case of the thylacine, reintroduction to its environment could be exactly what the island needs to restore a more effective and healthier environment.

Humans hunted some animals to extinction, and we should at least try to give them a second chance and undo our mistakes. In the past, the Tasmanian government offered reward money for every thylacine killed (French). They believed the marsupials were hunting and eating their livestock, but it was proven that this was likely not true (French). No one took notice of the dwindling thylacine population until the last known Thylacine died in captivity in a zoo in Hobart in 1936 (Morton). It's believed that the woolly mammoth may have also been hunted by humans ("Could the woolly mammoth"). The thylacine was brought to extinction because of us, the human race. It wasn't natural selection, it wasn't some proof that they couldn't keep up with evolution. It was an instance of human beings wrongly and recklessly targeting innocent animals for their own purposes or for unfounded fears and speculation without sufficient evidence. Our negligence doesn't need to stay a sad story of humans versus nature, however. With recent breakthroughs, scientists now are getting closer to having the means of undoing our mistake and bringing these beautiful creatures back and giving another chance for humans to live harmoniously alongside these animals.

The return of certain extinct species could be beneficial for the environment. An area of the Siberian wilderness is known for the thick permafrost layer that keeps 1,500 billion tons of carbon gas within the earth ("Could the woolly mammoth"). As temperatures rise, the frozen microorganisms and vegetation within are thawing out and breaking through the ice, releasing harmful gasses into the atmosphere ("Could the woolly mammoth"). Scientists believe that reintroducing a newly revived hybrid species like the woolly mammoth to this "Siberian carbon bomb" could be beneficial in limiting the carbon gasses that are released ("Could the woolly mammoth"). Back in the days when mammoths lived, they trampled the vegetation that grew on the permafrost, which significantly slowed the secretion of harmful carbon gasses ("Could the woolly mammoth"). The working theory is that the revived hybrid mammoths on the horizon will refill this role in the environment to rebuild and strengthen the permafrost to save the planet from this potential environmental cataclysm.

A common concern with current de-extinction strategies is that the resulting animal will not know how to behave like the animal it is meant to be. Without parents of the same species, they will not gain the nurture aspect of development (Morton). As they grow, they will not have anyone to properly teach them what they need to survive, especially species that have been extinct for longer (Morton). Many species do not have enough information for us to properly emulate the species' parental behaviors (Morton). This begs the question of how well the animal will fare in the wild. Would it struggle to hunt for food? Could the parent abandon it? Would it even act remotely like the animal it's meant to be?

It is true that many species being considered for de-extinction are rather mysterious to us, the results of these efforts will not give us the exact same species as it once was. The result will be a hybrid from the DNA we have sequenced from the extinct animal, as well as DNA from its closest living relative. For example, the woolly mammoths that the company Colossal is trying to make will be a combination of mammoth and Asian elephant DNA (“Could the woolly mammoth”). This means that it’s entirely possible that the result, as close to the extinct species as it might seem, its behavior could be completely unpredictable. It’s unclear how the parent elephant will behave towards its hybrid child, but scientists would potentially have the chance to make these animals more comfortable with humans and do something quite similar to domestication.

Perhaps the most prevalent claim against de-extinction is that we should be focusing more on preserving the wildlife that still exists rather than trying to restore the dead ones. As of December 2022, there are over nine thousand critically endangered species in the world (Lynn). There are forty thousand considered threatened, and population sizes have shrunk a concerning amount since 1970 (Lynn). There is some concern at how much money and technology is being put into resurrection biology, with many claiming that efforts and funds should be focused more on protecting endangered species (Yin). The main concern is that more endangered species will be lost, that focusing so much on de-extinction will pull resources away from other conservation efforts.

The technology being used in resurrection biology is still helpful in other conservation efforts. While it is true that conserving endangered species is important, by synthesizing embryos and making hybrid species that resemble extinct species, we can learn a lot. Particularly, if scientists can get one of these de-extinct species to survive into adulthood in an unfamiliar time and environment, we could apply these gene-editing methods to critically endangered species. For example, to make a “woolly mammoth” from preserved mammoth genes and Asian elephant genes, the DNA responsible for the mammoth’s shortened ears and thick fur could be added to an Asian elephant to help it adapt to cold in other environments (“Could the woolly mammoth”). This technology could provide an immeasurably beneficial impact on animals who struggle in extreme environments.

The solution to this debate is not an easy one. In order to satisfy all conservationists, funds should be split between conservation efforts of endangered species and efforts to revive certain extinct species. Only de-extinction efforts for animals that have solid plans to be put in an environment should be pursued. I feel that the best way for conservation efforts to be split equally is for some governments to be involved. There should be some form of regulation when it comes to budgeting out both conservation efforts and de-extinction efforts, as well as future attempts to protect the newly revived animals.

To conclude, the question of whether or not we should revive extinct species won't truly end as long as conservation efforts remain unregulated. Many believe that the results of these efforts will struggle to survive, and that funds should be put towards preserving endangered species, but there's no reason we shouldn't pursue multiple projects to protect both the living and the soon-to-be revived animals. Some animals can easily be placed back into an environment they're still needed in, many species were wronged by human intervention that can potentially be reversed, and the planet could benefit from having certain species reintroduced. If a species has a reasonable benefit for being brought back to the planet, it's worth the effort.

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HAVE YOU EVER?

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

Have you ever danced naked in the rain?
The thunder and your heart in sync,
as lightning strobed in the dark sky?
That's what freedom feels like

Have you ever screamed into a storm?
Tears and laughter torn from your
broken soul in equal measure?
That's what passion feels like

Have you ever kissed an angel goodbye?
Tasted heaven on your lips one last
time before marching into hell?
That's what loss feels like

Have you ever watched the sun rise?
The black of night chased away by colors
so bright they scorched your spirit?
That's what hope feels like

Have you ever longed for death?
The taste of cheap whiskey and
gunmetal mixing on your tongue?
That's what hopelessness feel like

HAVE YOU EVER?

Have you ever given yourself to the ocean?
Tidal forces deciding your fate, drawing
You deeper or spitting you ashore?
That's what surrender feels like

Have you ever forgiven an enemy?
Truly let go of the anger and hurt
that you wore like a badge of honor?
That's what inner peace feels like

Have you ever sang your heart out?
Terrible, loud, and off key, the lyrics so
perfect you had to make them yours?
That's what love feels like

Have you ever hurt yourself just to feel?
The razor splitting your skin as the
blood poured out like burning tears?
That's what a broken heart feels like

, AND FREEDOM (PART 1)

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

our words
are sounds of furious light
unspeakable to the wind
and out of sight
giving voices
to those who cannot see or speak them
unto deepening light
we pray to humanity
and sing praises to the undying lands
where our teachers are the sands
our school is the earth
and our country
is our minds

, AND FREEDOM (PART 2)

our words
are connected in more ways than one

they bring hope to the hopeless
and forgiveness to those who need it.
they live on in our hearts and minds
and are precious to those they serve

they live up to expectations
seek truth with new beginnings
bring light unto the darkness and
make us one with our God and ourselves

they reawaken our souls
when this world takes a toll
and teach us to be strong and be bold
without help or guidance it is too much for us

but with time, patience, and inner strength
they will bring the peace
we desperately need
and freedom when it seems
all hope is lost.

EXPANDING ON ANTIBIOTIC STEWARDSHIP TO COMBAT ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

Heather Fischer • Student, Continuing Education

Penicillin began to save the world in 1941. The discovery of its antibiotic benefits changed the world as we know it when it comes to disease. Penicillin cured people of infections such as Strep throat, rheumatic fever, and dental infections. Today if you have a sore throat, you can go to the doctor, get your prescription for penicillin and be back to your regular day-to-day life within 48 hours. Most people do not even think twice about this convenience. The problem is that from the time we first started treating diseases with antibiotics, the organisms we were treating began to develop ways to escape and evade them. Diseases that were once easily treated have now become nearly impossible to treat. In an effort to preserve and conserve the finite resources of antibiotics we must become better stewards of those very resources. In order to achieve this lofty goal, we must diligently educate our providers and our patients on appropriate use of antibiotics. We need to be able to get better data on what is going on in the entire world, not just our backyard. We need to better safeguard our resources and look at alternative ways of treating disease.

ANTIBIOTICS

Principle of antibiotics. First, it is necessary to understand how antibiotics work to see the whole picture of how they then cannot work. The definition of antibiotic according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is “a substance able to inhibit or kill microorganisms” (Antibiotic). Due to the vast array of types of antibiotics, for this paper I will be focusing on the use of antibiotics against bacteria only. Antibiotics are designed to work against a specific target of the bacteria. The way this is accomplished is by preventing the bacteria from reproducing. As Alqahtani discusses in the article “Combating Antibiotic Resistance in Bacteria: The Development of Novel Therapeutic Strategies,” (4-5) this includes inhibiting protein synthesis, inhibiting nucleic acid synthesis, inhibiting cell wall synthesis, disrupting cell membrane synthesis, and metabolic pathways inhibition. By targeting these parts of bacterial reproduction, the antibiotic can stop the reproduction cycle, thus ending the life cycle of the bacteria and theoretically stopping the disease process.

Antibiotic Resistance. To fully grasp the global impact that antibiotic resistance (AR) has, we must first uncover how it occurs. Antibiotic resistance is when a bacteria can completely bypass the effects of

antibiotics or diminish the effectiveness of the antibiotic itself. This is accomplished by either naturally occurring resistance mechanisms that the bacteria possesses or by the bacteria acquiring the resistance through a change in genetic makeup (Alqahtani, 5). Some organisms are naturally resistant to antibiotics by using efflux pumps, which pump the antibiotic out of the organism before it even has a chance to work. There are bacteria, specifically gram-negative bacteria, that have an additional lipopolysaccharide layer in the outer membrane that make the bacteria less permeable to antibiotics. There are some bacteria that produce specific enzymes that inactivate the antibiotic (Alqahtani, 5-6). Bacteria exposed to antibiotics, yet survive, can develop DNA changes that prevent the antibiotic from working against the designated target of the bacteria. According to Akram, “A mutation that presents general fitness under such antimicrobial stress is proliferated in enduring cells and along these lines offers the formation of a drug resistant approach” (5). This really accentuates the seriousness of the issue. By no means is this an all-inclusive listing of the antibiotic resistance mechanisms, yet more of a brief overview to highlight how easily AR can and will occur.

Statistics. The grim situation that we are facing is proven in the numbers. According to Wall, “Every year, 700,000 people die from resistant infections” (2). That is 700,000 people that died from an infection that was once treatable. It is equivalent to developing rheumatic fever before the discovery of penicillin. As we apply statistical models to see where we are heading at this trajectory, the outlook is not good. According to Wall in “Prevention of Antibiotic Resistance – an Epidemiological Scoping Review to Identify Research Categories and Knowledge Gaps,” it is “estimated that, at the current rate of increase, 10 million people will die during the year 2050 as a result of AMR [antimicrobial resistance]” (2). That is 10 million people that could have survived an infection, but because of misuse, abuse, and bacterial evolution the antibiotics did not work against the bacteria. Wall continues with more grim news, “Ten million deaths in 2050 would exceed the 8.2 million cancer deaths in 2019” (2). As the list of available antibiotics shrinks and becomes less effective, if not completely ineffective, the number of new antibiotics entering the market just cannot keep pace. Zanichelli et al. reaffirm this fact discussing that there are only eight reserve drugs listed in the models used to treat multidrug resistant organisms (1). The WHO model list includes a total of 479 drugs in all (Zanichelli et al. 1). The numbers just do not lie. We cannot stick our head in the sand anymore regarding antibiotic resistance. The issue must be addressed not only for our current population, but for future generations as well.

ANTIBIOTIC STEWARDSHIP

Antibiotic stewardship has been examined in depth by many individuals. Primarily because it not only affects healthcare for individuals, but it also affects veterinary science and has an environmental impact. Due to the sheer volume of data, for this paper I will only address this topic regarding the healthcare aspect.

Right Drug. Antibiotic stewardship encompasses a vast array of ideas all with one goal in mind. This is to reduce the incidence of antibiotic resistance, preserve the resources that we currently have, and improve the current antibiotic crisis that we are in. I think that Chatzopoulou hit the nail on the head with her statement “The widely known ‘four D’s’ of antimicrobial stewardship are: drug, dosage, duration of treatment, and de-escalation of therapy to suitable narrow-spectrum agents” (2). This is the clearest, most concise explanation of what the essence of antibiotic stewardship is. It is choosing the right drug, at the right dosage, for the right amount of time, and lastly de-escalating the choice of drug when more pertinent information is available. In the article “The WHO AWaRe (Access, Watch, Reserve) antibiotic book and prevention of antimicrobial resistance,” Zanichelli et al. provides concrete recommendations from the WHO on study proven recommendations for appropriate antibiotic usage. The antibiotics are divided into three categories: Access antibiotics, which have less risk of developing resistance, Watch antibiotics, which should be monitored for use, because they have a higher risk of developing resistance, and Reserve antibiotics, which are considered “last-resort” antibiotics, specifically antibiotics that should be used for the multidrug resistant infections (Zanichelli et al. 2). They are classifying antibiotics in the hopes of preventing bacteria from developing even more resistance, as well as preserving the antibiotics that we do have as a last line of defense against the most resistant bacteria.

No Drug. The WHO recommendation goes even further by providing guidance on primary choice antibiotic treatment for common infections encountered in the primary healthcare setting and in the hospital setting (Zanichelli et al. 3). A key guideline covers infections in which no antibiotic treatment should be used. This includes otitis media, acute pharyngitis, and acute diarrhea (Zanichelli et al. 5). This agrees with the drug, dose, duration, de-escalation concept. We need to not only utilize the right antibiotic, but we must also know when to not use an antibiotic. According to Wall, “The loss of efficacy of antibiotics through overuse and misuse has been labelled a ‘tragedy of the commons’ which occurs “when people in a community squander a limited, shared resource, as each actor pursues her own short-term self interest by exploiting the resource for private benefit” (2). Thus, in some cases, the right drug is choosing to use no drug at all.

Guidance. The question remains, does all the guidance really work to combat antibiotic resistance? According to Chatzopoulou et al, not really.

Chatzopoulou et al did a literature review studying the evidence of the impact on prescription feedback and the effect on resistance within a hospital setting. Concluding that “Most teams behind the studies in the present dataset refer to optimisation of antibiotic practices but do not provide any further clarification of what this means in practice, and what their objectives are, formulated as testable hypotheses relevant to upgrading clinical practice” (8). The hospitals are doing fancy studies to try and highlight how their practices are reducing the global impact of antibiotic resistance, but the studies within themselves are flawed and reveal no good scientific evidence that the program works. Zanichelli et al agrees, at least partially, with this concept. They state that “While comprehensive antibiotic guidance is a crucial component of any antimicrobial resistance stewardship programme, it has a limited impact as an isolated intervention” (4). Guidance is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to antibiotic stewardship. By putting together, a cohesive program to combat antibiotic resistance the pieces will work together to better achieve the goal. There is no one solid, definitive answer to solve this issue, but by developing key strategies we can build a foundation to salvage what we currently have.

CONSEQUENCES

More harm than good. For every action, there is a reaction. The consequences of taking antibiotics are not discussed as publicly as many other topics. The public fails to realize is that every time you take an antibiotic, that antibiotic in turn can kill some of the normal bacteria that coexist within us that help to keep us healthy. Wall discusses this exact concept when he says, “Stewardship programmes may also help prevent the spread of infections caused by damages to normal bacterial flora from inappropriate antibiotic use, which for instance can lead to *Clostridium difficile*” (9). We give ourselves infections at times when we use antibiotics inappropriately or unscrupulously. To further drive home this idea, Wall adds “This (*Clostridium difficile*) has been linked to 14,000 deaths per year in the US” (9). In some of these 14,000 deaths, they could have been prevented simply by not using antibiotics. This fact is not widespread knowledge. Most individuals are completely unaware that the medication given to them to make them better could potentially cause serious harm if not death. Zanichelli et al states “that exposure to almost all antibiotics was associated with an increased risk of colonization or infection with any multi-drug resistant organism” (1). Now we are not only increasing our risk of killing off the beneficial bacteria, but also increasing our risk of developing an infection that is even harder to treat due to the limited antibiotics available to treat.

Overuse and Inappropriate use of Antibiotics. The overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics are potential causes of antibiotic resistance. There are providers prescribing antibiotics when antibiotics are not necessarily needed. According to The WHO guidelines, most cases

of acute diarrhea, sinusitis, and bronchitis antibiotics are not necessary, because they are typically viral (Zanichelli et al, 5). It should be noted that antibiotics do not work against viruses. There are many cases where not taking antibiotics is better for the patient. Avoiding unnecessary antibiotics ties back to the potential development of *Clostridium difficile* and infection with a more drug resistant bacteria discussed earlier. This is not to say that we should avoid antibiotics completely, but instead we need to be more cognizant of our use of antibiotics. The whole clinical picture of the patient must be taken into account. A patient that is immune compromised or at high risk for developing complications from an infection, should be treated differently than someone that is young with a healthy immune system. Additionally, Wall “found that one third of patients did not comply with prescriptions in terms of dosage and duration, and one quarter kept left over antibiotics for future use” (15). Now we are not only in a situation where maybe we do not need the antibiotics, but we are also not even taking them correctly. The negative consequences at this point are compounding and escalating the development of antibiotic resistance.

Socioeconomics. Socioeconomics plays a role in the global issue of antibiotic resistance. Wall highlights an interesting fact about the overuse of antibiotics in regard to socioeconomics. He says “Overconsumption in the developed world is illustrated by the fact that infants and toddlers spend a mean of 42 days on antibiotics in the first year of life, a mean of 49 days on antibiotics in the second year of life [21] and that 85% of children aged under two years who are diagnosed with acute otitis media, are prescribed antibiotics for this condition” (5). The key phrase here is the “developed world.” These numbers are staggering, yet most people are unaware. It is hard to fathom that in the first year of a child’s life they would spend over a month on antibiotics. Meanwhile on the other side of the globe, they are lucky to even have access to some antibiotics, let alone the plethora that are available to Americans. Ancillotti concurs and goes even further on the discussion of socioeconomic impact. “Empirical evidence clearly indicates that socioeconomic factors (e.g., poverty, marginalization, financial vulnerability, precarity) are important determinants of antibiotic related health behaviour” (Ancillotti, 7). I do not think that it is hard to conceptualize that here in the United States the access to antibiotics is much easier than in Africa. Yet the choices we make here will absolutely have an impact on the other side of the globe. Ancillotti eloquently states “This dimension of proximity, in which the consequences of one’s action can directly harm oneself and others, is intrinsic to the problem of AR...” (3). The ripple effect of antibiotic resistance is an unseen consequence until it has a direct impact on an individual. Even though we may feel that we live in a small world, what we do can have global impacts, even when it comes down to antibiotics.

Antibiotics are designed to help heal us from within. But similarly, they can harm us at the same time. The consequences of our actions with the use of antibiotics are of global proportions. The overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics has led to a global epidemic of antibiotic resistance. The guidance provided by global organizations is an attempt to curb the end of the antibiotic era. Though some may say that the guidance is not enough, it is at least one piece to the puzzle to try and put a stop to this epidemic. The death toll from antibiotic resistance is on the rise. To alter our trajectory, we must diligently educate not only the ones that prescribe the antibiotics, but the public. We need to work on a global scale to pool the data regarding antibiotic resistance. We should seek alternative treatments for diseases to better preserve the finite resources we have. With the current technology, we can diagnose in a much shorter time, allowing us to treat more appropriately. Science has given us the ability to genetically type the exact antibiotic resistance factors that an organism has. We must use all this technology to be better stewards of antibiotics. To help curb the antibiotic resistance epidemic, we must use a multifaceted appropriate. There is no one size fits all solution to this problem.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Educating providers and patients. Working together as a team in healthcare is a necessity. To be good stewards of our antibiotic resources, we must help to educate the prescribers and the public about antibiotic resistance. To start with as providers, we cannot succumb to the “instant gratification” philosophy that some patients have. As a society we want to feel better right now. We do not have time to wait to feel better. We want the quick fix, even if it is not. The placebo effect is a real thing, though. By taking a conservative approach to treating illness, as Zanichelli discussed, having a wait and see approach to treatment can avoid unnecessary antibiotic use. In our litigious society, this becomes a fine line for providers. They must weigh the risk of treating versus not treating. This is where educating our patient population comes in. We need to teach our patients that antibiotics are not the end all cure all quick fix. By teaching them the risk of antibiotic use, including but not limited to developing another infection, maybe, just maybe, we can show them how antibiotics are not the quick fix that they need. By allowing our immune system to naturally fight off the infection we stand a better chance of not only preventing another infection, but also building an even stronger immune system for the future.

The pharmacy, laboratory and clinicians must all work together to achieve the greater good, not only for the patient, but also for the entire world. The laboratory can provide the information about appropriate antibiotics for the actual bacteria that is infecting the patient. They can determine all the way down to the specific genetic mutation(s) that confer antibiotic resistance. Pharmacy can be educational when it comes to the level of antibiotic chosen by a clinician. They can question the use of “last resort” antibiotics in an outpatient setting. They can provide feedback about the

frequency and type of antibiotics prescribed by a clinician. This concurs with the guidance provided by The WHO on the AWARe (Access, Watch, Reserve) antibiotics and proper utilization of antibiotics discussed by Zanichelli. The clinician should reach out to either laboratory or pharmacy to seek guidance if necessary to help select the best option for a given situation. This currently happens with pharmacy when there is a drug-to-drug interaction for a patient prescription. It also occurs when there is an inappropriate dosing for certain drugs. As humans we need to rely on the resources that we have around us and realize that there is no way that we can know everything. Healthcare is a system of checks and balances that should all work together in tandem to hopefully achieve what is not only best for the patient, but also for the greater good. The Hippocratic oath says, “do no harm.” We need to abide by that oath in a more global aspect.

There are several limitations to education alone. First, we are assuming that patients will be willing to listen to the information and consider all the implications in the decision. It is possible that if they do not get what they want they will go somewhere else to get what they want. Second, we assume patients are getting antibiotics from actual clinical providers. The global society we live in, people can purchase antibiotics from other countries with less stringent rules. Finally, we are assuming that prescribing providers are aware of the implications of antibiotic resistance. They may understand what it is, but do they understand how to help prevent it? These are just a few examples of the limitations to education alone. When it comes to tackling this epidemic there is no one sure fire solution to the problem. We are going to have to combine several solutions and attack it from multiple sides.

Global information sharing. We are surrounded by massive amounts of information being available at our fingertips. We need to be able to take this information and put it together. By sharing and utilizing global data we can tackle this problem on a much larger scale. This could mean global databases to share bacterial genetic information, antibiogram information, or even looking at statistical models of the incidence of antibiotic resistance. This would allow us to get a larger scale view of antibiotic resistance and potentially detect new and emerging resistance factors earlier. The caveat to this is that resource limited countries cannot gather and contribute this sort of information. Global leaders should help these countries develop the infrastructure to contribute this kind of information.

There are several obstacles to global information sharing. If we learned anything from the events that unfolded with COVID, society is ill equipped to handle such a global crisis. We can hope that we take the lessons learned from COVID to try and apply them to decrease antibiotic resistance. It is difficult to get so many nations invested in and in agreement with a plan to tackle about anything. There must be a willingness among all nations to share the information collaboratively for the greater good. Cultural and ethnic differences could have a direct impact on ideas to

tackle antibiotic resistance. This goes back to what Ancillotti discussed with the socioeconomic impact of antibiotic resistance. The lack of sufficient infrastructure is an obvious hindrance. These are just a few of the limitations to global information sharing for antibiotic resistance.

Alternative Therapies, thinking outside the box. Science is constantly evolving, exploring, and changing. We need to use this to our advantage to combat antibiotic resistance. There are multiple studies regarding alternative therapies to treat infections. Some of these include vaccination, phage therapy, nanomaterial therapy, phototherapy, probiotic therapy, and hybrid antibiotic therapy. We need to continue researching alternatives because as time has shown, antibiotics alone are not going to always work. Again, there will need to be multiple solutions put into place to overcome antibiotic resistance.

Alternative therapy would include supportive therapy. For example, not choosing to treat with an antibiotic, but instead utilizing the tried-and-true method of rest and some good old-fashioned orange juice. Some would consider these old wives' tales. There is legitimacy to some of these notions though. For instance, quinine, an ingredient in tonic water, can be used to treat and prevent malaria (Simonetti). Now it is true that these types of methods do not work all the time. There are instances where this is not an option, such as in the case of a burst appendix, a gangrenous toe, or tuberculosis. In these instances, antibiotics are most likely necessary. Medicine is not black and white; it is full of gray areas. That could be why they call it practicing medicine.

There are several limitations to alternative therapy options. It would be necessary to get the prescribing providers on board with the concept. Patient education would come into play here again, as well. The FDA approval process could be just as extensive as developing a new antibiotic. So, the question becomes, would companies be willing to invest in alternative therapy options? These are just a handful of examples of the limitations of alternative therapy as the sole answer to antibiotic resistance.

CONCLUSION

Antibiotic resistance is a global threat to all of humanity. Ever since antibiotics were first used in medicine bacteria have been developing and acquiring mechanisms to defeat them. The overuse and inappropriate use of antibiotics has led to antibiotic resistance and potentially unnecessary deaths. Ignoring the consequences of antibiotic resistance will have deadly results and potentially bring an end to the antibiotic era. By educating providers and the public about appropriate use of antibiotics and antibiotic resistance, we can help slow antibiotic resistance. The need for global sharing of data about antibiotic resistance is imperative. We must see the bigger picture of the situation to salvage the finite resource of antibiotics. We need to continue to think creatively about new treatments and

alternative therapies for treating disease. There is no one size fits all for the prevention of antibiotic resistance, but by combining multiple tactics we can hopefully conserve our existing supply of antibiotics.

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THE INDOMITABLE HUMAN SPIRIT

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

There is an orchard that I have planted
With roots eroding the foundation of this hearty home
 like blood supply.
It feasts on the blood and sweat I've shed,
And it is with a gentle hand I tend to those fleshy blooms.

There is an orchard outside my home
That undulates and throbs in time with my heart.
That gazes in my bedroom window
 through the blister of day
 and bitter of night,
With gnarls and whorls and knots
 of bloodshot optics.

There is an orchard outside my house
That cries like the body
 of the gallows.
Like a tortured soul it whimpers,
Like Birnam Wood beseeching for uprooting.

There is an orchard outside my home
That propagates against its will.
I graft on my tendons, braid our veins,
And it wails in the wind with the pain of being.

There is an orchard outside your home,
And when the storm billows in upon the Reckoning,
 those blossoms will fruit.
And when they drop,
 the crows will come,
And you will marvel at the glory of creation.

There are orchards outside our homes
With hair hanging like willows,
And someday, we will picnic beneath
 the skin-palled canopy,
And sing in the name of the Lord.

There are orchards on our earth;
Miracles made forth from the hand of man,
And we will harvest and continue
And sever the supply at the final hour.

Is there no one who would not spill their blood for such glory?

THE HILL

Alexis Lundeen • Student, Associate of Science

It was 6 am when the two boys stumbled through the halls of the home. They shushed each other as they bumped shoulders playfully, suppressing giggles. They had not slept yet. Slinking through the old rickety house, socks sliding along well worn wood floors, they made their way to the kitchen. The faintest of light was starting to creep through the red curtains above the sink, which were stained with years of food. Every inch of wall wrapped in gaudy yellow wallpaper that could be spared was covered in old family photos. Photographs of chubby beer bellied uncles with hearty laughs, and curly haired aunts with nasally voices. Pictures of first steps and sleepovers and graduation parties.

The boys slipped on their shoes. A pair of old brown boots caked with dried mud and dust, and a pair of tennis shoes, black and electric blue. The taller of the boys in the boots, the one who had grown up in the home and knew it best, carefully turned the doorknob, pulling it hard at first to get the janky old thing open, and then slow as molasses he opened it the rest of the way, careful not to trigger the creaking it was prone to.

It was not as if they were too young to be sneaking out, they were both in their twenties in fact. But the boy's parents were sleeping, and they never liked him leaving at odd times without knowing where he was.

He held open the screen door which his friend hurried through into the chill spring air, and carefully shut the doors behind him. The pair set off, trailing through the yard littered with old rusting cars and decaying barns that surely were not safe to enter. Once, when the boy was young they had held animals of every variety. Now, no rooster crowed and no cows grazed. The old structures laid unnervingly empty. All that was left was the crops, vast fields of corn stalks and soy beans.

Leaving behind the quaint country home they disappeared into the cornfield. A small path had been cleared by them over the years. They passed the decrepit cross made of twigs that Dan had buried his old dog under, and all the corn had been trampled, becoming one with the ground. The old path led to a tall hill, taller than the others in the area, allowing for a view of the desolate farmland and town nearby. The two boys took their seats at the top as they had many times before to watch the sun rise.

The boy in the black and blue sneakers who's name was Mikey complained lightheartedly that it was freezing outside, pulling his Jean jacket tighter around him. The worn old jacket had originally been the other boy's, Dan. Mikey borrowed it once and it had never been returned to its

original owner, who never complained of its absence. Dan responded with a laugh as he hiked upward, telling his friend he had told him so.

They took their seats unceremoniously in the dirt, reveling in the comfortable silence for a while and taking in the crisp morning air. Dan took a breath and broke the silence:

“Mikey - I’m leaving town.” He tried to state it with conviction, but it came out sounding more uncertain than he’d hoped.

Mikey did not speak for a long while. As the silence stretched on Dan was becoming less and less certain his friend had heard him. The air between them was growing awkward. The scene before him was suddenly of utmost interest, and he stared at the small lake in the distance as the ducks quacked. A loud revving of a truck passed by on the dirt road that laid at the bottom of the hill. It was almost dawn, the sky a dark encompassing purple. The stars prepared to take their leave, and some had already begun to fade from view. He’d long since stopped taking note of the flat prairie surrounded by tall grass that whispered to the wind as it blew through. Long ago, Dan would have never thought of calling anywhere else home, but now he was scared if he spent one more day here the sea of tall grass and corn fields would swallow him whole.

“Really?” Mikey replied, his tone even and disinterested, “What for?”

“I don’t know man. I’m just restless I guess. There’s nothing to do here.”

Mikey kept his gaze forward. From where he sat slightly behind him, the other boy couldn’t read the expression on his face.

“When?” Mikey asked, remaining aloof.

“I think I might leave tonight.”

“Dan, you can’t be serious, right?” Mikey turns around then, and Dan can see his face. He’s smiling, but his eyes look dejected, his tone strained. What would he do about money? A place to live?

“I’ve been saving up man, I figured I would just see where the road takes me for a while. I’ll leave a note.”

“A note?” Mikey scoffs, rising to his feet, “I think you should think this through.”

Dan looks down, toying with the thread coming loose on the knee of his worn out blue jeans.

“It’s all I think about.”

“You can’t just pick up and leave! I mean, what will everybody think? And

you can't just leave your parents alone here, wondering where you've gone, I mean what will they do without you on the farm?"

"Who cares?" Dan joins Mikey on his feet, turning to face the boy who's frantically pacing now along the edge of the hill, "They'll be fine, I don't know, they can hire a hand or something."

"They can't afford that! You know that!"

"If you care so much, why don't you work for them while I'm gone?" Dan's tone became more heated.

"It's not that simple Dan- you know that."

"Well maybe it's time they moved on too! Does anyone in this godforsaken town ever think of doing anything different? I don't want to be stuck here my whole fucking life! If you do, more power to you Mikey."

"You're such a dick, you know that?" Mikey gets close to Dan, his eyes piercing. Their height difference was staggering, Mikey had always been smaller than him. "Do you ever think about anyone but yourself?"

Before he knew what he was doing, Dan was shoving Mikey away from him, seeing red. He just wanted the other boy out of his face. Mikey stumbles backward, losing his balance at the edge of the hill and tumbling into the ditch below.

"Shit," Dan mutters, he follows his friend, gently sliding down the edge of the hill, "look Mikey, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have gotten so heated-"

Mikey was facing him now, face pale and expressionless. His body laid completely limp. His thick framed blue glasses were nowhere to be found. Mikey wasn't moving, god he wasn't moving. Thick red blood began pooling underneath him, pouring out of his skull, spreading wider and unmercifully wider, staining his jacket and clumping his loose black hair together. His eyes remained open, staring blankly. His knees betrayed him as he slumped to the ground next to his friend.

"This isn't funny Mikey," he croaked, giving his shoulder a gentle shove, "Stop playing around." Behind him, a rock at the bottom of the hill sat stained with fresh blood.

"Mikey, I'm leaving town." The words left him before he knew he was saying them.

Mikey was silent for a long while. Though it seemed like he was lost in thought, the only thing he could focus on was the pit of dread widening and crumbling in his stomach. The air around them was growing awkward. The sun had just started to peek over the horizon. Its yellow light bled into the dark indigo of the night sky like a watercolor painting that had not properly

been blended. The streetlights from their hometown twinkled in the distance. A truck revved loudly as it passed below and the ducks from the pond quacked. He looked down, and noticed a small boulder at the bottom of the hill. It was gray, dusty, and stained with a rusty brown color.

“Really? what for?” His voice trembled, he hoped Dan hadn’t noticed.

Dan kept the silence for a moment longer, thinking.

“I need a change of scenery I think. I mean, do I really want to be stuck here my whole life?”

“What’s so bad about here?” Mikey questioned carefully.

“Nothings bad but, nothings that good either. I feel like it’s time for a change.”

Mikey shifts uncomfortably, he asks Dan when he plans to leave and Dan replies he’s hoping to leave tonight, that he’d leave a note for his folks. Mikey reacts with bewilderment, perking up from the safety of the shield that was his legs pressed to his chest.

“So that’s it?” He snaps, flailing his arms wildly, “You’re just going to leave everybody behind?”

Dan stewed for a brief moment, trying to contain the frustration bubbling in his chest.

“You know, I don’t think everybody is really the problem here Mikey. I think it’s you.” He accused, “Why do you want me to stay so bad man? Haven’t you ever thought of getting away?”

Mikey kept his gaze downward towards the dirt, hurt glazing over his eyes. He stuttered the beginning to a few retorts. He wanted to tell Dan that he didn’t want to trap him here, that he wouldn’t know what to do without him, that the world outside their town was far too big, and he was scared it would swallow him whole if he left. Instead, all that came out was jumbled excuses.

Dan shook his head and stood up from his spot. Mikey followed frantically, grabbing onto Dan’s arm before he had a chance to storm off; mouth opening and closing like a fish, pleas of “wait”, and “Dan stop”, and “I’m sorry” spilled forth. Dan ripped Mikey’s hand off his arm and stumbled back a few steps. Mikey made a face like he’d been burned and at the sight Dan felt his hot blood run a bit colder with guilt.

“Look, I get it okay. You’re not good with change, but I can’t stay here.”

“You’re just gonna leave, without any warning?” Mikey implored, eyes forever focused on the ground to hide the welling of tears.

"I'm sorry Mikey, okay? I know we've been friends for a long time, but plans change, *people* change, and I can't live my whole life here." Dan turned his back on the boy he had grown up with, and as he was about to start descending the hill and make his way back home, he felt a harsh shove against his back. Dan suddenly tumbled violently down the hill, small rocks cut against his skull and smashed into his hands as he tried to catch himself. The soft grass did nothing to ease his fall. He bounced one more time and all at once felt a sharp, blunt pain exploding over his senses, then nothing.

Mikey watched from above, all malice leaving his body and being replaced with a coldness he only ever felt when he was sick. His knees gave way beneath him, shivers racked his body as his face lost all color. Dan lay at the bottom of the hill, facing away from him. An awful red leaked out onto the pipe that had gone through his eye and onto the ground, staining his spiky blonde hair and desecrating the freckles that dusted his face. Mikey's stomach churned and heaved, and what little contents were left spilled onto the ground as he wretched.

"Mikey," Dan started, blinking a head splitting pain away for a brief moment, "I'm leaving town."

Mikey was silent for a long while, trying to slow his rapidly beating heart. The air around them was solemn, though neither could tell why. Both boys stared at the scene in front of them. The sun by some miracle had made it past the horizon, gracing the clouds with various shades of deep orange and pink. The last of the stars had said their goodbyes, and so had the streetlights in the distance. The wind blew through, chill and quiet. Mikey didn't respond this time.

Dan threw himself back, his arms resting behind his head. He laid staring up at the new morning sky. Mikey joined him, scooting closer.

"What for?" Mikey finally whispered.

"I think something needs to change. I've been here my whole life. You know no one in my family's even been to college? I don't know if it's for me, but I never will if I don't try."

Mikey turned on his side to face his friend.

"What would I do without you?" He asked, meeting Dan's eyes. Mikey's eyes were filled with uncertainty, and fear.

"Hey, you're tough," Dan smiled and punched his shoulder lightly, "and it's not like I'd never visit. Or call. We both have phones, you know."

"Yeah, I suppose that's true." Mikey smiled back, giving a laugh of his own. "When would you leave?"

THE HILL

Dan hummed. “Maybe in a few weeks? A month? I should probably figure out what I’m doing first. I kind of want to get an apartment of my own. I could probably use a roommate.” He looked over at his friend expectantly.

Mikey’s laugh is heartier this time. “I’ll think about it.”

“You wanna head back?” Dan asks, getting to his feet and offering his hand to his friend.

“Yes please,” Mikey replies, accepting the offer. He felt Dan’s warm hand in his as he pulled him up off the ground. The pair made their way back down the hill as the sun continued to rise behind them.

MOM

Kristine Morris • Staff, Extended Learning

I pretend you’re still here
Your soft fingers running through my hair
Hearing your sweet laugh
I breathe in as the storm comes
I close my eyes and smell the rain
Is that you, Mom?
I miss you
Please, just one more moment
The girls are growing
They need you and I do too
See the red poppies sway
Thinking about seeing you again someday

KILLING TRUST

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Blood trickles from the wound
At the same time both shallow and deep
I used a blade when I opened my mouth
Making way, clearing a path, opening up
Blood ran out, revealing my secrets to you
Had I known you were a vampire
That you would scent such blood
That you'd need to ingest it
That you would devour my offering to quench your thirst
That it would catch your senses and draw you in
I never would have shared it
Took, take, taking, taking selfish

Because now the feeling of your teeth, your fangs
They dig in to the pulsing veins beneath an ivory column
Searing with pain as I remember you shredding the skin
As easily as paper it shredded
You ripped through the layers down to sinew and bone.
Fileted my column, each swallow tasting like iron
Again and again you ripped your way in
You want to pull out more than I can give
You pick at the wounds that are still raw
The scabs are not quite healed from prior feedings
Wounds not yet healed left by those who fed before you
When you look upon my body do you not see the scars
They reside deep in the ivory column
Stretching down the marble appendages
Marring the slab of granite never fully flat
I am a tomb, a tomb, the tomb, entombed.

Could you not see the jagged edges of the marble canvas
See where others pierced the ivory
Piercing over and over and over again
It's scary to me how many vampires
I have befriended over the years
They looked nothing like
Dark creatures of the night
Their aura was enticing and their allure sucked me in
Only to take something that was not theirs to take
Take, taking, took what I did not want to give

KILLING TRUST

This isn't a transfusion not unless you are hooked up too
I thought at the time I was sharing a piece of me
A piece you would not later throw back in face
Like the sun's blinding rays
You should run from the sun
But you stayed as I was fileted
I know you are hoping for even just a drop of crimson
That way you can once again paint your teeth red
I now see how blind I was
I now see the deceptive allure of possibilities
What I see now is they caused me to be blind
Blind, blind, blinding, blinded.

To be blind to the deceit
To be blind to the dangers of those white pearly shards
For all you know how to do is shred the skin.
You want to get to the "good stuff" deeper in
Steal the blood that had you been patient
I would have willingly trickled out over time just for you
But now I find my body is weak
My heartbeat slows
The loss of blood makes me mute
I cannot move my lips
I cough up scarlett rivers
All I can taste is iron thick and suffocating
And I cannot find a reason
To not just let go
It should not hurt this much to open up
But my trust has been shattered
To no one do I matter
My hope has dissipated
And the blood that once trickled
That then gushed from the cracks in the ivory
Has left me empty, brittle and without a feeling at all
Numb, numbing, numbed

Numbness numbness numbness
Has taken over my body
Is numbness a feeling or simply
At its most basic form merely the opposite
Is numbness the antithesis of feeling cause
If you feel numb if you feel nothing
Then numbness is not a feeling...it is nothing
Am I also nothing?
I feel it...the numbness...
Every minute of every day

KILLING TRUST

When I think about the number of feedings
By the vampires of the past
Their fangs imbedded into the pale column
Once bared willingly but now unwillingly bared
They sank into flesh
Flesh, flesh, flesh.

Of the throat
Of the arms
Of the thighs
Of the hands

Pearly daggers shredded my abdomen
Pearly sabers tore out my muscles
Pearly knives shattered my bones
Crunch, crunch, crunching, crunched.

I am a pile of crimson the scent calling out
Anyone in a thousand miles, heed my call
End me, take it, it's not really mine anymore right?
I can see my heart as you bite into it
Red, red, red

The juice bursting from your mouth like a ripe fruit
The poison they put in while making me believe
It was something that I wanted
Now toxic in my veins, it's fire, it's flames
It burns then it's nothing, it's numb
I am nothing, I am numb
I did not know that opening up
Would lead to the death of my trust
Had I known, had I possessed the knowledge
I never would have bled for you
I never would have bled for them
The wounds may be healed
They may almost be sealed
But as long as there is you and them
I will never be truly blemish free again
For eternity the scars will remain
I will never never never be the same

BIRTH BRINGS THE UNKNOWN

Hailey Stewart • Student, Health Sciences

Could you imagine being fourteen years old, still in middle school, and your mom telling you the most important news that could set everything in place for you? It was late at night, and my friends had just left. I was sitting in my room with hot Barbie pink walls and purple concrete floors making my bed. When my mom came down to talk to me. My mom was pale and had been sick for a few days. So to see her walking into my room had me speechless. She had a look on her face that told you it was serious and we needed to talk. My mom started the conversation with annoying questions like: How was school? Or What did you do today? Then it got serious.

“Hailey, why don’t you sit down? I need to talk to you about a secret of mine.” I looked at my mom and just nodded. I had no clue what this could be about, but all the possible scenarios ran through my head. Are Seth and my mom getting back together; they just got divorced. What if he is taking us back to court?

My mom continued, “How would you feel if you had another sibling?”

In my mind, I was picturing myself bearing my mother’s body at that moment. The only guy she’s been with was Seth, but I responded with the most crucial question at the time.

“Are you pregnant?”

“Yes, hun, I am; I just had an appointment today to make sure..”

Everything froze for a moment in time. I could feel the steam coming out of my ears because I already had three annoying sisters; why would I want another monster running around in our five-bedroom house? I was a 14-year-old girl who was the oldest of three little girls still learning their way in life.

Then it clicked. What if I make this one love me? I was too young with the other girls to help with the pregnancy or create a bond when they were born, but this time I was older. I was in middle school, and this baby will love me, like it or not! Everything unfroze, and I smiled so hard my cheeks would pop like bubblegum. I was so happy to be a part of the whole process.

“We are going to do a baby shower or a gender reveal. Oh, and also make your appointments after school. I want to be there for all of it.” I couldn’t stop blabbing about what we were going to do. My mom’s face was booming like a summer sun; I didn’t know it then, but my mom wasn’t happy about

my enjoyment. She was pleased that she had someone who wanted to be there and kept the news to ourselves for a while because divorce papers had her signature on them just a few months ago. And now she has another kid with him.

Christmas was rolling around the corner, and family was coming down from Colorado. They weren't any family, however. It was Papa and Grammy, my mom's parents. The baby bump started to show, but it just looked like she had gained weight, and that was when my mom and I knew it was time to tell them because we didn't know when we would see them in person next. My Grammy wasn't too happy that my mom was expecting another, but she eventually came to the idea. Let's say Christmas that year was exciting and very drama filled. Now my mom is known for ruining Christmas.

A few months passed, and I told my mom I wanted to do a gender reveal party; this baby would be the last, so I wanted my mom to remember it as a tremendous last pregnancy instead of just another kid growing in her. Then a few weeks later, my mom received a phone call, and it was the doctor. My mom handed me the phone, "Are you ready to hear the gender?" the doctor continued. "It's a boy." My heart dropped, and my smile was ear to ear. A boy. After this, the women push four girls out, she finally gets a boy, and I'm finally getting the brother I've always wanted. I can not explain enough how happy I was. I felt like a kid going to the park for the first time.

March rolls around the corner, and it's time to host the best gender reveal party anyone has seen so I thought. Pictures were taken left to right with the house covered in pink and blue balloons. My mom was wearing a black shirt with the words saying, "I swear this is my last." We were all out having a good time, and it came to pop the giant black balloon to state the gender. My mom and three sisters standing underneath popped the balloon. It was so beautiful that it rained down blue confetti all over the family. My mom jumped joyfully, and my sisters were all happy but one. Sophia, the youngest, cried and yelled, "I wanted a sister." I wanted a better sister." No one paid attention to her because it was not like we could return the boy. That's when Papa talked to my mom about the name Anthony Vincent Stewart and his nickname Tony. His first name is after my mom's big brother Tony and his middle name is after Mom's dad, aka Papa.

July 4th, 2021, was the day the little man would welcome the world. These nine months were terrific, watching my mom grow a little human inside her and, going to all her appointments, hearing Tony's heart beating for the first time. It brought so much joy into our lives that no one expected. I wouldn't let anything happen to this little boy, but he did not want to have the same birthday as America. My mom did everything to get him out, jumping on a ball, walking the yard, and nothing. So the crazy woman starts walking the neighborhood nine months pregnant while fireworks are exploding only a few feet away from her. I was running after her begging her to go lay down. All I got back from her was a fat "NO." My mom ended up scheduling her

BIRTH BRINGS THE UNKNOWN

delivery for the next day because Tony was not coming on his own, and my mom was over being pregnant. Who can blame the woman? My mom was in labor for only an hour.

The whole time I was in the room, it smelled of sanitizer and cleaning supplies. The room was bright but not because of the look but because of the energy in the room. My mom was bringing life into this world. The doctors came in all gloved up, and I sat in the front row with the doctor. The doctor told my mom it was time to push. Within three extraordinary pushes, you hear God's creation crying and breathing; I had waited for this moment for nine months, and looking back, I wasn't just happy my brother was born. I was pleased that I was there for everything, from when my mom told me she was pregnant to Tony's first breath on his own. It was the most magical moment. And I had the honor of cutting the umbilical cord. I've never been so happy in my whole life. I felt so proud that I got to help my mom through this entire process, and I wanted to relive it so badly. As the nurses cleaned Tony up and gave him to my mom, I saw the joy on her face; hers and everyone in the room's faces lit up. The vibe in the room was so majestic.

After holding my brother for the very first time, I wanted to do this moment for the rest of my life. I wanted to bring this joy I had just experienced to every family. That's when I knew I wanted to be someone who helped during the whole process of being pregnant. Midwife. I never wanted to be something so wrong in my life. My brother Tony is why I wanted to be a midwife, and little did I know I would proceed in that decision five years later, attending Southeast Community College with the same mindset. Who knew that birth would bring the most unaccepted things?

ICONOCLAST

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

My body is a temple
And I am the atheist entering,
Spitting spiteful sacrilege

She claws at the mortar,
Ripping down bricks.
She loves the way skin rips,
Lifts from the flesh

She is in love with her god,
The Narcissus in the lake.
Hands glide over hips and waist.
Aphrodite wastes in the wake.

And when she lifts the first brick from the peak,
She would study like Sappho the face of divinity.
Tilting her face, pulling skin taught,
Scratching like a beast at any rough spot

She kneels like the worshipping dog,
Wilted with the weight of bricks on her back.
Her fingers are raw and nails incarnadine.
Red, the flesh lingers, on suffering keen.

There is something religious in this pain,
The agony like sacrifice, the cross to Christ.
The hate is pure, wholly self-serving.
Holy is she who is deserving.

God, but if she isn't beauty,
The body the Greeks would aspire to be.
See how she worships her own very being.
How blessed is she, to be so free.

Beneath the weight of temple decay,
Her obsession is morbid and fanatic.
A hedonistic cult, a cruel, sick joke.
Paved with good intent, she is ruin evoked

HENRY

K.L. Riley • Faculty, English

It was a beautiful fall day in Missouri and Henry bounded through the cow pasture, happily chasing a grasshopper. This was only the third time Henry had been allowed to leave the den without Mama walking right next to him. He was amazed at how warm the sun was without Mama's shadow. The grasshopper cut left, leapt between two strands of rusted barbed wire and was gone. Henry stopped his pursuit, sat down and began licking his paw. He didn't really know why he was licking his paw, he only knew that's what cats did when a chase ended without a catch. Personally, Henry was glad he didn't catch the grasshopper, he had no idea what to do if he had caught it.

Mama called and quickly Henry headed back toward the barn. The building wasn't really much of a barn anymore; it was barely standing. The rotting wood would no doubt give way soon, but Mama wasn't worried. She didn't find refuge inside the old structure. Mama made their den in a hole, underneath a rock, between what had once been a healthy gooseberry bush and a big old osage orange tree. Henry hurried home as quickly as his legs could carry him. Henry was the runt of the litter, born late in the season, so he was small compared to his siblings. His fur was the color of wheat, mixed with a few stripes of dry grass. From the air, he was nearly invisible, which kept him safe from the big hawk everyone knew lived nearby. Unfortunately, his coloring couldn't keep him from going unnoticed by Big Rick. Big Rick was an old, angry racoon who lived inside the dilapidated barn. If there was one thing Big Rick hated more than people, it was cats, especially cats who moved into his territory without permission.

"What are you doing here, Runt?" Big Rick's voice was enough to make Henry jump and then flatten himself on the ground and freeze. "You can't hide from me, I could smell you before I could see you." Big Rick's shadow chilled Henry and the ground around him. "I warned your Mama not to let you go running around here all alone. I've been living in this pasture since there were people in that house and this barn was brand new. I don't like interlopers stealing my food and calling attention to my home."

Henry didn't know what an interloper was, Henry didn't even know there was a house nearby. All Henry knew was his den, the barn, the big osage orange tree and the stretch of grass from his den to the barbed wire. But, Henry also knew that when faced with uncertainty, his best bet was to flatten himself as close to the ground as possible and not move. He was barely breathing as Big Rick tramped closer.

"You and your littermates have attracted the attention of Old Redtail. That hawk hasn't bothered with this pasture for years, but ever since your mama moved in, he's been in the sky every day!"

Henry held his breath because Big Rick was right on top of him now. He could see the racoon's eyes and smell the racoon's musky scent. In his head, Henry asked the obvious question: "Why are you worried about a hawk?" It was a legitimate question, Big Rick was too big for a hawk to carry off. But Henry wasn't about to ask his question aloud and give away his position.

Big Rick lowered his head and touched his dry nose to Henry's tiny, wet, pink one. "Tell me Runt," Big Rick's breath enveloped Henry like a cloud, and smelled like Big Rick had been eating cow turds. "Tell me," the racoon said, "will your Mama really cry for you?" He raised one of his long-fingered hands, ready to kill the kitten with a single swipe.

Henry knew he should run, but his legs refused to move. He tried to close his eyes, but his lids wouldn't move either. He watched as Big Rick's hand slashed downward.

Suddenly, a new shape was in front of Henry's eyes. Mama's muddy orange fur seemed black she was so close. Henry heard Mama's skin tear as Big Rick's claw couldn't be stopped. Mama didn't cry out though, instead she hissed and slapped Big Rick in the face with her own claws. The two adults slapped at each other several more times before Big Rick backed away.

"Get your family out of here!" Big Rick growled as he backed himself toward the old barn, "You're bad for all of us. Today it is the hawk. Tomorrow it will be a bobcat or a coyote. Cats and kittens attract predators."

Big Rick was gone and now it was Mama's shadow blocking out the sun. She didn't scold Henry, she simply said "let's go home," and that was that. They walked back to the den together.

Inside their little den, Henry's two brothers and three sisters were waiting. None of them said anything to Henry about the racoon either. Mama went to the back of the den and nibbled on whatever it was that she had found to eat the night before. Then she flopped down in the middle of the den so her kittens could nurse. Everyone had his or her place, as they lined up in order by age. Marie was a nearly white yellow color, Yum-yum was black with curly fur, Eeker was a smoky gray shag, Jean was a calico and Squirrel was squirrel-colored, leaving Henry in last place. After they'd eaten, it was time for sleep. When the moon was in full rise, Mama would have to venture outside and find herself something to eat. That was always the scariest time for the kittens, when it was dark and they were alone. Henry shivered as he tried to sleep, thinking about the approaching darkness and Big Rick's warning.

When Henry awoke it was late at night, and Mama was already gone. Henry was curled up on the floor of the den alone. The other kittens were near the entrance, staring into the night. At first Henry thought Mama had just left and they were still there saying good-bye, but as the littlest kitten approached, he realized it was much later at night than that. The moon told him Mama had been gone at least an hour. He squeezed in between Squirrel and the wall of the den. Once Henry stopped squirming, he realized what the others were doing; they were listening. Somewhere, nearby, someone was fighting. Henry could hear the grunts and the growls, the thumps and the rolls. Whoever it was, they were big.

"Is that Mama?" Henry asked, remembering his encounter with Big Rick.

"We don't know," Marie answered in a hushed tone that clearly said "be quiet," even though she didn't give the order.

Henry held his breath to listen better. The grunting and the clawing went on for what seemed like forever. Finally, it was over. Henry heard it end and listened carefully as the victor walked off, headed away from their hiding spot. He dared not ask any more questions, but Henry was sure his siblings were thinking the same thing he was: What if that was Mama? No one moved, no one spoke, Henry wasn't sure any of them were even breathing. Suddenly they heard the soft steps of someone approaching the den from the opposite side. Alive once again, Henry and his siblings dove back into their hole and huddled together as tight against the back wall as they could get. The steps got closer and closer and again Henry held his breath. When Mama entered the den, Henry felt himself sag and then nearly passed out as he started breathing again.

"Mama?" Marie asked, and there were a lot of questions packed into that single word.

Mama flopped onto the floor of the den so the kittens could nurse. When they had eaten, Mama sat up and began bathing each of them. Not until bath time was over, did Mama speak.

"Big Rick is dead," Mama said quietly. "He was killed by a bobcat."

That was the end of the discussion. Mama curled up at the back of the den, her

kittens curled up on top of her and went to sleep. When the sun rose the next day, Mama and the kittens went outside and found the place where Big Rick had battled the bobcat. The bloody, broken grass just outside the barn was obvious. Mama looked around and pointed out to Henry and the others the tracks of the bobcat, how he had been creeping around the outside of the rotting wooden structure. She pointed to the ground and showed them the signs that Big Rick had been quietly mirroring the bobcat's movements, from inside the barn. When the bobcat crossed in front of the door opening, Big Rick surprised him. They tussled around the grass. "Big Rick did not go down easily," Mama said quietly.

When she found what was left of Big Rick's body, Mama stopped and sat beside him. She put a paw on Big Rick's broken neck, bowed her head and began to sob. The other kittens shrank back, sitting in the grass and waiting. Henry crept forward until he was sitting beside his mother. "Mama?" Henry asked, "why are you crying?"

Mama turned and looked down at Henry with red eyes and smiled. "Everyone deserves to have someone cry for them. That's how we know we were loved." Then Mama stood and began walking back toward their den. "Come children," she said, "it is no longer safe here. Bobcats like to hunt in the mornings and at night. We will wait until the afternoon, when it is too hot for bobcats. Then we will leave this place. Quickly now, follow me."

The kittens fell into a line behind Mama, Marie first, then Yum-yum, then Eeker, then Jean, then Squirrel and finally, Henry. The sun was warm on their backs, but not hot. Henry was nervous about leaving their home, but he knew Mama would find a safe place for them to live. A cool breeze blew across Henry's back and he shivered. Then the breeze screeched and Yum-yum yelled "look out" as the hawk swooped down. Henry flattened himself against the ground, barely avoiding the hawk's deadly talons. Mama yelled for the kittens to stay close to her, but as Old Redtail circled around and started a second attack dive, Henry and the other kittens panicked. Fear drowned out Mama's cries. Henry flattened himself against the ground. Squirrel ran as fast as she could for the safety of the thorny gooseberry bush. Jean froze, unable to flatten or run. Eeker and Yum-yum ran to the shelter of a rock, standing shoulder to shoulder with their backs to the rock they prepared to fight the hawk with their needle-like kitten claws. Marie didn't move, didn't freeze, she simply stood defiant as Old Redtail approached.

Henry risked a look toward the sky, Old Redtail was coming straight for him. Henry knew he should move, but the hawk was diving too fast, there was no way for him to avoid the deadly talons. Suddenly, Mama was there, putting her body between the talons and Henry. Mama hissed and swatted at the air. Old Redtail screeched and pulled up.

"Come Henry!" Mama yelled, "I am not ready to cry for you yet."

Henry and the other kittens gathered near Mama and ran back towards their den. Above them, Old Redtail screeched and disappeared into the clouds. Henry watched the hawk vanish and knew he should feel relieved, but he didn't. Something was still wrong. The others sensed it too, Henry could tell by the way they walked; Mama was nervous. They had just made it back to the gooseberry bush when Mama stopped.

"Kids," she said quietly, "when I say go, run for the osage orange tree. Climb as high as you can and stay out of sight."

"Mama..." Henry tried to argue, but there wasn't time.

"GO!" Mama yelled, just as the bobcat stepped out of their family's den.

Henry couldn't move. His siblings were running for the tree. Mama was charging towards the bobcat. Henry wasn't doing anything. For a long moment he stood, then, finally, his legs started moving. As fast as his runty, uncoordinated kitten legs could carry him over overgrown grass, Henry ran, straight toward the bobcat.

By the time Henry neared the den, Mama had already traded slaps with the much

larger cat. The two adults were growling and hissing as they circled each other. Henry wasn't sure what he was doing, he didn't stop running, he ran straight towards the bobcat. Suddenly, a massive weight struck Henry in the side and he felt himself flying through the air. At first Henry thought Old Redtail had grabbed him, but then he hit the ground and rolled up against the trunk of the osage orange tree. Henry realized the bobcat had swatted him away, like he was nothing. Inside, Henry felt funny. He didn't know what it meant, but he knew his tummy wasn't supposed to feel this way. Henry blinked and saw the bobcat approaching him. The predator had a strange look on his face, it looked like curiosity.

"That was both brave and stupid, Runt," the bobcat said quietly. "I am intrigued; why?"

Henry wasn't sure what the older cat was asking, and his head was spinning too much for him to think about it. Behind the bobcat, Henry saw Mama, limping towards them. He said the only thing he could think to say. "I'm not ready to cry for her." Even as the words came out, Henry realized how small and pathetic his voice sounded, especially in the echo of the bobcat's.

The bobcat laughed, it was a mirthless laugh. "Foolish kitten," the bobcat said, "no one will cry for her, no one will cry for you." His strike was so fast, Henry never saw it. By the time Henry felt the bobcat's paw, Henry was already tumbling across the grass. He fought to keep his eyes open, but he wasn't that strong. The last thing Henry saw before his eyes closed was Marie dropping out of the tree onto the bobcat's back, as the monster raised up to swipe at Mama.

The sun was warm, too warm. Henry kicked his leg against the heat, but refused to open his eyes. It wasn't until he heard Old Redtail screech that Henry opened one eye and tried to raise his head. He was lying in the grass near the barbed wire fence. The grasshopper he'd been chasing was perched on the lowest wire, but it hopped away before Henry could get his second eye open. Struggling against both an upset tummy and a pounding headache, Henry tried to stand; it was harder than he remembered it being.

On his feet, Henry looked up, afraid that the local hawk was about to swoop down on him. Old Redtail was nowhere to be seen. Henry turned around and froze. It wasn't his choice to freeze this time, his mind simply locked up. He could see the tree and the bush and their den, but everything looked different. For a moment, everything seemed farther away, like the pasture had magically grown wider. As the world came back into proper focus, Henry realized things weren't right. The tree had broken limbs and claw marks on the trunk. The bush had broken branches and chunks of fur on its thorns. The den looked bigger somehow, like it had been dug out more.

Henry started walking forward. He wasn't sure he wanted to walk forward, his legs were moving without permission. It hurt to walk, especially his back legs, but his feet shuffled forward anyway. At the base of the tree, Henry stopped walking. His mind tried to fight back against what he was seeing, but his eyes couldn't lie well enough and he knew what he saw was real. Mama, Marie, Yum-yum, Eeker, Jean and Squirrel were all dead. They'd all been killed by the bobcat and then left here to be forgotten. Henry didn't know what to do. He curled up next to Mama's body and cried. He cried for each of them, he cried for himself too. Henry cried until his strength was gone and he slipped back into the darkness of sleep.

Henry awoke to something pulling at his tail. He kicked his leg and whatever was pulling at him disappeared before he could raise his head. Henry pulled himself up and limped around the patch of grass between the tree, the bush and his old den, but he was afraid to venture further into the pasture. He didn't know what was out there and he wasn't sure he could find his way back if he left. After a few minutes of wandering, Henry curled up between Marie and Jean. First he cried, then he slept.

When he woke, it was dusk. Frightened by the sounds of night, Henry pulled himself up the trunk, into the tree. In the dark, he saw shapes moving through the grass, saw glowing eyes investigating the bodies of his family, but Henry could do nothing. His eyes couldn't even adjust enough to tell who was below him. It could have been the bobcat or it could have been a field mouse; Henry didn't know. He waited in the darkness, afraid to fall asleep, until the sun began to rise and gray streaks of dawn helped him see. Mama looked different somehow, Henry didn't know exactly how. He tried to climb down the tree, but lost his grip and fell off the trunk. It wasn't that far of a fall, it upset his tummy more than it hurt his legs.

Henry high-stepped through the grass to Mama's side. He didn't know what was going on, Mama seemed smaller now, flatter. Henry flattened himself beside her and tried to nurse. Mama had no milk, but Henry wasn't hungry anyway. He walked a little ways away, cuddled himself in between Yum-yum and Eeker and cried himself to sleep between the broken bodies of his brothers.

It was mid-day when Henry awoke again. Nothing was moving around now. Henry hadn't learned much in his time, but he knew no one in the pasture did anything when the sun was this high. Henry struggled to his feet and looked around him. He needed to find some shade. Squirrel's body was near the gooseberry bush, it wasn't much shade, but it was something. Henry hobbled over and rested his head on his sister's side. "Who will cry for me?" He asked, but Squirrel didn't answer him. Henry cried once more as he drifted off to sleep.

"What was that?" Henry whispered to himself as he awoke from a fitful sleep. It was a sound Henry had never heard before. He stood on his wobbly legs and hobbled toward the barbed wire fence. Peering through the grass, Henry saw something new. He'd never seen one before, but he knew from his Mama that what he was looking at was called a "car." Mama said that a car was the reason Henry never met his daddy. Henry was fascinated. He watched as a group of humans climbed out of the car. They walked toward the big field, far from Henry's home patch of ground. Even though he was afraid of getting lost, Henry was intrigued by the people, so he carefully crawled under the barbed wire and started creeping through the grass toward the people, away from the only place he'd ever known.

Henry couldn't understand the humans' words, but there were seven of them. One of them, Henry decided, was the dad and another one was the mom. That left five kids and, since Henry didn't know what else to call them, he called the biggest one "Marie," the next biggest "Yum-yum," another one was "Eeker," and "Jean," and the smallest one he called "Squirrel." The humans seemed to be lost, just wandering around the cow pasture. Henry grew a little more bold and started approaching them a little faster. He was getting close, but his legs were starting to argue with him. His hip didn't seem to want to cooperate and was threatening to stop walking altogether. Henry cried out, "help!" he cried, "help! I'm over here! Help me!"

Henry realized, humans didn't understand him. They couldn't know what he was saying. His tummy felt sick again and his hip didn't want to work. Henry started to stumble. Suddenly, he felt himself being lifted into the air. At first he thought Old Redtail had finally come for him, but then he realized he hadn't been pierced by talons, he'd been cradled by arms. The human he had decided to call "Daddy" had found him and picked him up. Before Henry knew what was happening, he was being passed around from person to person. Each of them was hugging him and comforting him. He saw Daddy walk away, over to the tree. The human bent down, close to the ground where Henry couldn't see him. When Daddy stood up, his face was different and even though Henry didn't understand his words, he knew Daddy's hand motions were telling the others to stay away from the area. When Daddy returned to the group, Henry saw, the human was crying.

Then, just like that, they left. All of them left. Daddy, Mama, Marie, Yum-yum, Eeker, Jean, Squirrel and Henry left together inside the car. The one Henry called Marie held him in her lap as they moved without walking. The car stopped and the

HENRY

people left Henry alone but when they came back, they had a bowl of water for him. Henry hadn't realized how thirsty he was until Eeker put the water in front of him. They offered him something squishy, more solid than water, that Henry realized was food. He tried to eat it, but his tummy protested, so he drank more water and fell back asleep. Eventually, they arrived at what Henry realized must be their den. It looked a little like Big Rick's old barn, but in better shape. It looked the way Henry had imagined the barn looked when it was new. Mama had talked about living with people, but Henry never dreamed he would. The family took him inside their barn where there were walls and soft grass and a roof. The one Henry called Eeker carried Henry into his own den inside the family barn. Eeker let Henry sleep with him on a large, soft rock. For the first time in many nights, Henry fell asleep without crying.

The next day, or maybe it was two days. Henry couldn't tell time without the sun shining on him. Marie was holding him in her arms while the people talked. Henry was worried, their faces looked upset. He thought he must have done something to anger the humans. But then the one he called Eeker carefully lifted Henry and held him close. Eeker rubbed Henry's head and spoke in a soothing tone. Henry knew whatever was bothering the humans wasn't his fault. He drifted off to sleep and when he woke up, Henry found he wasn't at home anymore.

The human Henry called Mama, was cradling him in her arms while she talked with a person Henry hadn't seen before. This person was wearing all white and looked a little like a cat herself. Henry decided to call her Cat Lady. Cat Lady looked very serious, like she was upset about something. Mama handed Henry over to Cat Lady and Cat Lady began touching Henry's tummy and his back legs. It hurt, but somehow Henry knew Cat Lady wasn't trying to hurt him. Cat Lady and Mama started talking again, they talked so long that Henry fell back to sleep.

When he awoke, Henry was back home, being cuddled close by Eeker. After a few moments, each of Henry's humans took a turn holding him close, hugging him and whispering comforting tones in his ears. Henry was enjoying the experience so much, it wasn't until he was in Daddy's arms that he opened his eyes and saw that all the humans were crying. Henry didn't know what this meant, but he knew they were crying for him.

The next time Henry awoke, he felt very tired, more tired than he felt that first after fighting the bobcat. Marie was holding him close to her chest and she was crying. Henry looked awkwardly over his shoulder, Human Mama was standing across the room crying. Standing next to Mama, Cat Lady was crying too. Henry purred as he looked back at Marie. He knew why the humans cried, they were crying for him. As Henry closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep one last time, he heard his mama's voice in his head. "Everyone deserves to have someone cry for them."

Henry smiled because he knew he was loved.

THE ART OF NURSING

Cecelia Bialas • Alumna

Her dark hair spills
over the light gray pillow
like the blood that's been
dropped
on the blanket,
similar spread patterns paint
a gory portrait of loud colors
in a silent space with breathing room.
Her inner elbows have tiny pocks, indents,
shadowed scar holes like the face of the moon.
They've seen a hospital before.
A small gleam of silver
and its pink plastic catheter slide
into the purple pipeway of her peripheral vein
to deliver relief to the country of her body:
an arterial map of morbid beauty.
CC by cc, the plunger is pushed
and Dilaudid released.

S l o w enough
to prevent the opioid's squeeze,
to avoid setting her chest aflame,
time to adjust,
to absorb the impact
and send a faint red
into the paleness of her cheeks.

LOOK AROUND

G.C. Hughes • Student, Academic Transfer

When eyes do meet, why dart away from view
the sight to me, most beautiful to see.
A mind for mine to meet, our gaze all true.
So, shine that gaze unto me, whoever I may be.
Or,
Contort your neck downward, and know no fill
of decadent fantasy, pure but still.
Your eyes do live on the sad neon swill.
No fear, No stake, No pain, No wake, No will.
But,
Don't ask about a mind of grey addle,
while a giddy lover's path you cross.
Don't fear hands that shake or lungs that rattle,
For I will say life without them is loss.
So, go out and see what your eyes will see,
and do not fear that joyous gaze from me,
whoever I may be.

Shaima Kari • Student, Secondary English Education

She stares at her reflection in the mirror
Craving for a body flawless and dearer
But it vanishes a dream made unclear.

So she searches deeper, seeking what's true
Time passes by like a blow of the wind through

She peers in the mirror once again
Her body appears as slim as a chopstick pen
She saw it
A smile graces her face; her eyes sparkle when
Her under eyes were brown

As she touches her stomach, feeling her bones
Her heart vibrates with fear; her hands become stones
Despite it all, they say they want to be like her now
A fleeting solace, she wonders why.

WE ARTISTS

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

Feeling blessed when you're next to me
Knowing your safe and resting comfortably
Connectivity is our greatest opportunity,
for all we have is each other.
Here's the song that needs renewal
In the hope of building a future with it
A chance to start achieving our dreams
This is the new language we're speaking
In the silence we will inspire
Wisdom that needs not to retire
Though our minds are still planning for the future
We're ready to light the fire
These last couple years we have gained insight
It is time to rise up and inspire
and we will be admired in our community
for generations to come.
As long as we have peace on our minds and love in our hearts,
never to be undone.

FIVE DAYS AND THIRTY THREE YEARS: THE SHORT LIFE AND LONG LEGACY TIANANMEN SQUARE'S GODDESS OF DEMOCRACY

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

Researcher's Note

My main goal in writing this paper was to learn more about the statue known as the Goddess of Democracy which I saw in several pictures about Tiananmen Square. I ended up learning far more than I expected on the subject and came away with an odd sense of hope and sadness by the end.

My early research led me to some dead ends, but I eventually found several good sources which led me to others. In all of this research my greatest regret is that I was never able to find footage of the statue being destroyed by the Chinese military, they have seemingly done a very good job of keeping it off the internet. The other issue which slowed me down the most was in researching all of the replicas of the statue currently in place around the world. There is no single site documenting the statues en masse, the best I could find were references on wiki pages which led me to each individual statue. I am sure there are others out there I missed but I would not even know where to start looking for them at this point.

Overall, I enjoyed researching this paper as well as writing it, though it was sometimes difficult to set aside the creative writing urges and keep the paper in a proper APA style and format. I also feel like I want to look for a June 4th vigil nearby so that I can perhaps pay my respects.

In late spring of 1989, students from universities across China organized sit-ins and hunger strikes to protest lack of freedoms under the oppressive ruling Communist regime. Learning from previous failed uprisings, the students garnered the attention of news sources around the world, creating sympathy and keeping government reprisals at bay for a time.

The center of the movement was Tiananmen Square, where students lived with the constant threat of violence from the government even as factions of leadership fought amongst themselves for power and prestige. By the end of May, many protestors had become disillusioned and the entire movement on the verge of collapse.

Seeking a solution to this internal chaos and growing sense of defeat, a group of art students decided the movement needed a symbol; something to bring the disparate groups back together as a united front. Three days later, the Goddess of Democracy was born.

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Those students never could have predicted that their hastily wrought statue would reach beyond the borders of China to eventually become a symbol of freedom around the world. Despite her fleeting time standing in Tiananmen Square, the spirit of the Goddess of Democracy still lives on today, both as a reminder of the terrible violence that ended the 1989 protests and as a symbol for freedom from oppression across the globe.

A Goddess of Democracy, a Symbol of Defiance

For a symbol with such a powerful and long lasting legacy, the original Goddess of Democracy statue stood for a surprisingly brief time. It was erected on May 30th, 1989 and destroyed just five days later on June 4th. (Wasserstrom, 1994) As short as that span was, some people at the time, including some of the artists themselves, did not expect it to stand for even that long. By the end of May, the student occupation of Tiananmen Square had been ongoing for several weeks and the Chinese government had recently declared martial law for the entire city of Beijing. The number of protestors were shrinking daily, due to fear of government reprisals and a growing sense of disappointment with the movement's leadership. The purity of the movement was turning into a chaotic mix of backstabbing and glory seeking among the different factions of protestors. (Tong, 2001)

As the protests looked to be fizzling out, organizers were looking around for a way to reenergize the movement. The Student Federation, a coalition of several groups involved in the protests, decided that the movement needed a symbol, something for all of the people to rally around. They approached a group of sculptors from the Central Academy of Fine Arts and offered them 8,000 yuan, approximately 2,000 American dollars, to build a copy of the Statue of Liberty which could be placed in the square. (Kotler, 1994)

The students, who were heavily involved in the protests, agreed to build a statue, though not exactly what the Student Federation had in mind. Early on, they agreed that the statue should be similar to the Statue of Liberty in America, but not an exact copy. The idea was that this would be their own symbol, something uniquely Chinese, while still being familiar enough to Lady Liberty for people to understand the freedom that it represented. They were given only three days to design and build the work, which led to some creative shortcuts as well as an amazing level of cooperation from the fifteen students who took part in the statue's creation.

With such a limited time frame, there was no way to work up an original sculpture from scratch, so they turned to a one meter tall clay statue they had on hand of an old man leaning on a long staff to use as a working model. From this basic design, the students simply cut off the bottom of the staff, place a torch on the top section, and changed the figure so that it stood more upright. They also added breasts and long flowing hair to the model while giving the design a more feminine facial structure, then draped the nude figure in loose robes to help hide the underlying framework of the statue and make it more stable. (Kotler, 1994)

With a design settled on, somewhere between fifteen and thirty students spent the next three days and nights working in shifts to create the full sized final work. They built the statue in front of Central Academy of Fine Arts Sculpture department using large blocks of Styrofoam shaved into the basic shape and then wired together

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with a plaster outer shell to give it more weight and strength. The work, which would stand nearly ten meters tall when complete, was built in four horizontal sections which would be stacked together on site for easier transporting. When it was ready, the sculpture was delivered to Tiananmen Square in pieces, along with the tools and supplies to raise and finish it, by bike carts. The carts were used because the government had learned of the statue's creation and threatened to revoke the license of any driver who helped transport it. (Mu, 1990)

The Student Federation made a deliberately provocative choice by placing their new statue directly in the center of Tiananmen Square, facing a giant banner of Mao Zedong, the deceased founder of the Chinese communist party. They were, in effect, challenging the idea of Mao as a paternal figure in China and turning him into the oppressor whom they were fighting to overcome. (Zhang, 1995)

It took half a day to raise the statue with many of the gathered protestors joining in to help. Cheers erupted as each piece was stacked up and plastered into place until finally the goddess stood towering over the protestors, holding her torch aloft in both hands to light the way to freedom. (Futtermann, 2011) The statue was powerful in her own right, but it was her placement, the defiant way in which she stared down the founder of the very government the students were protesting against, which helped to define what she meant as a symbol to the protestors gathered at her feet.

The statue did not have an official name at first but, when asked by reporters, students simply said that they were building a Chinese Statue of Liberty. The name "Goddess of Democracy" was seemingly coined by a speech writer at the statue's official unveiling on the afternoon of May 30th. (Wasserstrom, 1994)

"Dear Compatriots and Fellow Students:

...At this grim moment, what we need most is to remain calm and united in a single purpose. We need a powerful cementing force to strengthen our resolve: that is the Goddess of Democracy...

You are the symbol of every student in the square, of the hearts of millions of people!

You are the soul of the 1989 Democracy Movement!

You are the Chinese nation's hope for salvation!

Today, here in the People's Square, the people's goddess stands tall and announces to the whole world: A consciousness of democracy has awakened among the Chinese people...

The statue of the Goddess of Democracy is made of plaster, and of course cannot stand here forever. But as a symbol of the people's hearts, she is divine and inviolate...

We believe strongly that this darkness will pass, that the dawn must come. One day when real democracy and freedom come to China, we must erect another Goddess of Democracy here in the Square, monumental, towering, and permanent. We have strong faith that that day will come at last. We have still another hope:

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Chinese people, arise! Erect the statue of the Goddess of Democracy in your millions of hearts!

Long live the people! Long live freedom! Long live democracy!"

There was no mention of the artists during the unveiling and none who worked on the project have ever stepped forward to proclaim their part in the effort. While this was partially due to the cultural ideas of unified vision and cooperation among the artists, it was also for their protection. Many feared that, should the names of the artists become known, the government would almost certainly arrest them. In fact, when the inevitable crackdown finally came, most of the artists involved were forced to flee the country to avoid being arrested or worse. (Tong, 2001)

The Goddess of Democracy statue succeeded in her original purpose far beyond expectations. Protestors returned to the square in droves, many just for a chance to see or touch the new statue. The numbers occupying the square swelled from 11,000 back up to over 25,000 nearly overnight – matching the movement's biggest early turn out. It also attracted the attention of many workers groups who declared their support for the movement, as well as the imagination of the city's general population. June 1st and 2nd were a holiday celebrating Chinese children and many families, who came to the square for the official celebration, were drawn to the statue. This gave the protestors a chance to voice their goals to a receptive audience who had not heard much beyond government propaganda about the event up to this point. (Holland, 2019) (Mu, 1990)

Unfortunately, there was some indication that the symbol worked too well. Hardliners in the CCCP, the communist party in control of the Chinese government, saw the resurgence as a problem and the goddess statue as an intolerable insult which could not be allowed to stand. On June 4th, just five days after the statue was completed, the government used military force to clear the square in an event known around the world as the Tiananmen Square massacre.

A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

While claiming that the erection of a single statue led to the massacre at Tiananmen would be hyperbolic, not to mention serve as an insult to the men and women who took part in the protests, it is fair to say that it was a focal point for the event. It was, in essence, a match tossed onto a pool of gasoline. Just as the goddess became a symbol for the students to rally around, it also gave the hardliners of the CCCP, a target on which to focus their ire. (Tong, 2001)

In the early days of the 1989 protests, which took place all around China, not just in Tiananmen, the government was split on how to deal with the student uprising. In fact, Zhao Ziyang, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, was considered a reformer who planned to give a number of concessions to the protestors, despite hardliners in his party who strongly disagreed with this idea. (Mu, 1990)

Even after the declaration of martial law, the government was loathe to use force immediately. The CCCP removed Zhao from power, but the hardliners who wanted the protests ended by force had little popular support and risked making the situation worse. The fact that the eyes of the world were on the protest also kept them from taking direct action at first. Many grumbled and threatened

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action, calling the protests dangerous and illegal, but there was still hope that the movement would fade away peacefully. Then the Goddess of Democracy was born. (Mu, 1990) (Wasserstrom, 1994)

While the protestors and even the majority of Chinese citizens saw the statue as a beacon of hope, the hardliners of the CCCP saw it as a grave personal insult. The placement of the goddess statue was seen by many party members as a direct challenge to the authority of the communist regime. The statue was declared illegal immediately after it being erected and the students were ordered to remove it at once, which they steadfastly refused to do. Government controlled media declared that the work was an aberration and its similarity to the Statue of Liberty showed that the protests were being driven by foreign instigators, but this did nothing to slow the growing swell of support for the students and their new symbol. (Mu, 1990)

Starting on the night of June 3rd and moving into the early hours of the 4th, the Chinese military stationed around the edges of Beijing, moved into the city to clear the protestors by force. Estimates of the death toll vary wildly depending on the source, but it is widely believed that around three thousand protestors were killed in the process of breaking the movement with thousands more being arrested in the coming days. In this book, *Almost a Revolution*, Shen Tong, one of the movement leaders, recounts his own experiences that night. He was among a group of several unarmed people who tried to intervene in the crackdown by pleading with the troops on their way to the square. The commander of the unit being confronted ordered his troops to open fire on the crowd and a girl standing right next to Tong was shot in the head. The crowd fled but several more people were gunned down from behind as they tried to escape. (Tong, 2001)

At around 4 am, as the last of the protestors were being driven from the square, a tank was used to knock down the Goddess statue and run it over repeatedly. The military made sure to film the destruction, and the video was played across government controlled Chinese media repeatedly over the next few days. The purpose of making the video was the same as that of using extreme force in the crackdown, it was to make a clear statement to the Chinese people that the movement was done, and no further uprising would be allowed. Such shows of force had worked in the past to keep people in line, it has always been a common tactic of oppressive regimes, but this time the video had some unintended results.

While the government controlled media was using images of the statue being knocked down to show their strength, other media sources around the world were showing images of badly injured students and dead bodies in the streets. The two visuals quickly became entwined in the public consciousness and the Goddess of Democracy suddenly transformed from a symbol of hope to a martyr in the fight against tyranny. (Holland, 2019) As the world looked on with growing outrage over the Chinese government's violent attack, the fallen goddess gave them a direction to channel their anger. The students could not be brought back, but the symbol which had united them could.

The Goddess goes International

In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, as it was labeled by the media outside of China, there were cries around the world for retribution and solidarity with the student protestors. Chinese students attending colleges around

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the world staged their own sit-ins and protest marches and memorials to the victims. Paintings or even small replicas of the goddess statue quickly cropped up at many of these events and were often the focal point of the gatherings. People came to burn candles of mourning at the feet of the replicas or drape them in flowers.

These early replicas, like the original, were temporary pieces, built quickly from materials such as fiberglass, plastic, and even barbed wire. (Cheng, 2021) They were usually created by art students or amateur sculptors and sometimes looked very little like the original, yet they still embraced the spirit of the Goddess. For many, it was an act of defiance, a direct challenge to the Chinese communist regime and their attempt to destroy the idea of freedom and democracy.

Before long, permanent statues began to appear on campuses and in parks all around the world. Many of these became shrines where annual vigils were held in remembrance of June 4th while others became symbols of protest in their own right. It was not long before the goddess statue began to take on a meaning greater than that single protest, it became a torch bearing beacon for freedom all around the world. The following is a chronological list of the most notable goddess statues created in the years since the original was destroyed along with some pertinent details about each.

1991

Famous sculptor Thomas Marsh, with the help of many Chinese students who chose to remain anonymous, created a three meter tall bronze replica of the Goddess statue. Marsh was teaching at the San Francisco Academy of Art at this time and the statue was placed in the heart of San Francisco's Chinatown. Marsh's statue was so close to the original that it has been used as a model for other versions all over the world. It was officially dedicated to the victims of the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1994 and still stands in Portsmouth Square today. (Wright, 2022)

Alongside the bronze statue in San Francisco, Thomas Marsh also created several small statuettes using the same design. The National Endowment for Democracy, a nonprofit foundation created in 1983 to support pro-democracy initiatives around the world, adopted the statuettes as the symbol for their annual award. It is given to people who lead the fight for democracy abroad, especially in communist controlled countries. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

A marble dust and resin built by Joseph Caveno and Hung Chung, based on the original design by Thomas Marsh, was placed on the UBC campus in Vancouver Canada. Originally this statue was intended for the Vancouver Chinatown area but pressure from the Chinese Consulate in Canada led to a two year battle which ended with the statue finding a home on the campus, despite protests from the Chinese government. (Vescera, 2018)

1992

Chinese students at York University in Toronto Canada erected a four meter tall papier-mâché replica of the goddess statue in the campus student center. Much like with UBC, the school was threatened with backlash from the Chinese consulate

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in Canada for the display, but they refused to back down. Unlike the Vancouver statue, this work was not a copy of Marsh's, but a unique design by the students themselves. (Keung, 2011) The materials used in its construction were not meant for a permanent installation, but the statue stood for nineteen years before it was finally removed. There were suggestions that the Chinese consulate had been pressuring for its removal once again, but the reality is more likely that it was falling apart and creating a safety risk. It was replaced with a new bronze statue the next year, which seems to run counter to the idea of foreign interference.

1995

A fiberglass replica of the Goddess statue, using another mold of Marsh's original work, was erected at the University of Calgary, Alberta Canada. The statue was erected by the Chinese Students' Society and the Alliance for a Democratic China in memory of those who died in the Massacre and those who continue the struggle. Once again, the statue was met with protest from China but by this point it was not as extreme as the CCCP had moved to a position of ignoring and minimizing any references to the massacre and so did not want to draw as much attention to the monument. (Tasks, 2022)

1999

A Bronze copy of the Marsh statue was commissioned for placement in Freedom Park, Arlington Virginia. The statue was one of several pieces in the park owned by the Freedom Forum. In 2008 it was relocated to the Newseum in Washington D.C., along with other artwork and memorials showcasing first amendment rights and the idea of free press around the world. The museum closed at the end of 2019 and most of its exhibits, including the goddess replica, were placed in storage while the Freedom Forum seeks a new location for their museum. (Goddess of Democracy raised anew, 1999)

2007

The Victims of Communism Memorial was a bronze replica of the Marsh goddess statue placed in Washington D.C., within view of the U.S. Capitol. This statue was dedicated to people who were killed by communist regimes all over the world, not just the students in Tiananmen. In fact, the monument was officially dedicated on the twentieth anniversary of President Reagan's famous speech calling for Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin wall. This is another example of how the goddess statue has become a bigger symbol than the students who made it could have imagined. (Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, 2020)

2008

Chinese born sculptor Chen Weiming created a new Goddess of Democracy statue made of imitated copper which was displayed for a time in front of the U.S. Congress. (Weiming, 2010) Unlike the original goddess statue, who holds her torch aloft with both hands, Weiming's version bears a closer resemblance to the Statue of Liberty. The face and body are the same as the original, with flowing hair, Chinese features and the figure draped in robes, but this version holds the torch aloft with one hand and clutches a book to her chest with the other.

2009

Weiming created a second version of his Goddess statue for the June fourth vigil which took place every year in Hong Kong. In 2010, the statue was moved to the Hong Kong City University campus to be displayed year round between vigils. Despite widespread acceptance from students and faculty, the university tried to block the statues placement, fearing reprisals from Beijing. Eventually they relented under pressure and allowed the statue to be placed on campus until it's removal by the Chinese government in 2021. (Brown, 2021)

2012

Amid public outcry over the removal of the campus' original goddess statue, York University commissioned a new bronze version of the statue to be placed outside of the student center where the first student built statue had been located. This two meter tall statue, created by artist Ruth Abernathy, looks much like the original but more polished. The arms have a more sculpted look and the figure leans back slightly as she holds the torch aloft in a less rigid fashion. (Goddess of Democracy Unveiled, 2012)

2016

Weiming created a third copy of his goddess statue, which he gifted to Australia as thanks and remembrance for that country's help immediately after the Tiananmen Massacre. The government helped over 40,000 Chinese students studying abroad and their families escape persecution by allowing them to defect to Australia. The statue was placed on the grounds of the Ashfield Uniting Church in Sydney, where an annual memorial for the victims of Tiananmen is held every June fourth. (Crews, 2019)

Other versions of the goddess have cropped up around the world over the years, though they are usually only brought out for special events such as annual June 4th vigils. There are dozens of paintings and murals depicting the goddess on campuses, museums, and public buildings all across the globe and her image is often seen at protests for freedom from all types of tyranny.

Where the Goddess Stands Today and Where she Does Not

As of this writing, the Goddess of Democracy has evolved from the Chinese Statue of Liberty the students created, into an emblem of freedom for the repressed around the world. Groups like the National Endowment for Democracy, as well as political cartoonists and activists representing many causes, have used the image of the goddess. She is often depicted handing off the torch of freedom to other symbols of movements fighting against tyranny in an attempt to capture the sentiment her original creators intended and pass it on. Yet, while much of the rest of the world celebrates the goddess statue, the symbol is not so well received in its country of origin. In fact, thanks to the continuous efforts of the Chinese government, it has been all but forgotten. (Holland, 2019)

Thirty three years after the events in 1989 Tiananmen Square, the communist controlled Chinese government continued to repress the history of the protests or massacre, including the banning images of the goddess statue or any form of remembrance in mainland China. The government also reduced the official number

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of deaths tied to the massacre, or the counter-revolutionary riot as it is officially referred to in Chinese textbooks every year. Older Chinese citizens worry about the repercussions of discussing the events publicly while today's college students consider it a mistake by their predecessors. When shown pictures of the goddess statue, most Chinese citizens either do not recognize it or pretend not to for fear of reprisal. (Wan, 2014)

As recently as 2021, the repression on the mainland reached the island of Hong Kong, where well-attended memorials to June 4th are commonly held. Over Christmas break of that year, replicas of the goddess of democracy statue, along with other art commemorating the protests and massacre, were removed from college campuses around the city. The removal was met with widespread protests, especially on the campuses in question. Hong Kong campuses have been a focal point for anti-communist groups in recent years and many have tied the events in Tiananmen to their own protests for freedom. (Brown, 2021)

Around the same time, the June 4th Museum, the only museum in Hong Kong to even mention the Tiananmen Square protests or the massacre which followed, was forcibly shut, the owner was arrested, and the government confiscated every exhibit on display. The seizure included numerous pictures of the goddess statue along with protest paintings and small commemorative statuettes sold in the museum gift shop. The museum was able to go virtual before the shutdown, creating digital copies of their displays for the world to see, but the original artifacts have yet to be returned and were most likely destroyed. (Marcus, 2021)

These efforts by the Chinese government to erase the statue from history do not stop at the borders of their country either. Many of the groups who raised statues commemorating the original faced backlash from Chinese embassies in their own countries. The embassies usually claim that the events in Tiananmen are an internal affair and other countries should not involve themselves. While these efforts are no longer quite as overt as they were shortly after the massacre, the Chinese government is still quick to threaten economic hardships on anyone who draws attention to the event. There were even grumbling concerns when artist Taylor Swift released a clothing line with many of the articles emblazoned with T.S. 1989, referring to her initials and the year of her birth. (Brown H. , 2015) Incidentally, it is a sad testament to how well the Chinese government has erased the Massacre from history in their own country that Chinese students living abroad only understood what the problem was when they started seeing stories in western media.

Discussion

As I have learned more about the goddess of democracy, I have been struck by the purity of its creation and the improbability of its legacy. In today's world of multimedia ad campaigns and scripted reality television, the idea of such a powerful symbol being created almost by accident seems ludicrous somehow. Where are the copyright lawsuits and multi-million dollar movie deals? Why is there no elite marketing team putting out commercials that make me feel guilty for not proudly sporting my own Goddess of Democracy © tee-shirt?

Hollywood lives for stories like this one. A ragtag bunch of students standing up to a powerful regime who could crush them at any moment. Infighting, backstabbing, and intrigue around every corner as the pressure builds. Then, just as

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all hope seems lost, a majestic and magical hero appears, a symbol who focuses the fight and rallies the floundering troops. It has all the pieces of an epic movie, right up until the end, when that powerful enemy comes rolling in with a battalion of tanks to murder thousands of unarmed civilians and grind the majestic hero to dust.

Maybe that's why DreamWorks has not tried to buy the movie rights. Or maybe they just know how the movie would never be allowed to run in China.

The real problem with that Hollywood script is that it only tells part of the story. The goddess statue was not only important because it stood, but because it fell. While the Chinese government destroyed the statue out of anger, they now try to deny its existence out of fear. The goddess is denied in China because the government knows that, should the people ever remember her and erect her in their millions of hearts like the students begged on May 30th, 1989, then the sins and evils they committed on June 4th will come back to haunt them.

This is the true legacy of the goddess of democracy. Even though she only stood for a brief shining moment in Tiananmen Square, her presence still looms in the hearts and minds of people all over the world. The torch she holds aloft shines equally on the hopes of the oppressed and the fears of the oppressors.

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CENSORSHIP

Danielle Klafter • Instructor, English

My characters fight with me in my head
and like a fearful mother I shush them,
pinch their legs when they squirm
in the pew beside me, resisting

they slide away, down the aisle, escape
while I chase after, glancing back
to see who will shake their heads,
cluck their tongues, glare
with disapproving eyes.

Stop, I holler at them,
grabbing each by the ear.
Fuck, they say,
my hand clamping their mouths
pressing soap to tongues as I erase
words from the page.

They bite back,
and I am forced to relinquish,
let them run away, grow up alone
till fully formed they return
asking if I will accept them—
messy, unfiltered—
their voices narrating the story
in a way more redeemed than my own.

BIPOLAR

Madeleine Lewis • Student, English & Psychology

Have you ever been so high, you never feel like coming down? Hyper fixating on every little nook and cranny that comes your way. Spending hundreds and hundreds of dollars on old records that you've decided to collect. Cleaning the apartment from top to bottom, mopping, sweeping and scrubbing every last speck. Trembling from bursting energy, begging to make its way out. A high of all highs. A manic outburst scratching at the surface.

Have you ever been so low, that it feels no high will ever come? Getting out of bed is difficult. Your body, a heavy lump, unmovable. Cooking is too much energy to spare. Eating is too. Hair gets tangled atop your head. Circles deepen beneath your eyes. Ribs poke through skin and lips chap beneath nibbling teeth. Staring at an empty wall, the world gray around you. A bed, your only comfort zone. The only thing that makes any sense through the thickening haze of nothing. A numbing feeling that weighs you down until nothing is left but gray.

Highs mixed in with lows, a tennis match of the psyche.

WHEN I'M A WOMAN

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

I don't think I'm a woman.
I think I'm meant to stay a girl.
I don't think I'm meant to nurture.
I don't think I'm meant to mother.
I don't think I'm meant to be gentle.

I don't think I'll ever be a woman,
But it might already be too late.

I might have been a woman when I was six.
When maternal pangs were the fiercest they'd ever been,
And the warmth of nurturing was the hottest it'd ever be
As I looked after my dolls.

I might have been a woman at nine,
When I had the gall to weep for every slain roadside animal.
When I was tender enough to feel so deeply,
And young enough to indulge the feelings.

I might have been a woman at 11 when fair, new-growth leg hair caught the
sunlight
And my father grimaced, demanded that I shave,
Insisted that it was disgusting and did not belong on a girl,
Much less a woman.

I might have been a woman at 14,
When a coming-of-age stained my garments on Valentine's Day,
And I hid the gruesome death of childhood from my mother
For three months.
When the horror and confusion leached into my blood,
And I was terrified of womanhood,
Certain there was something wrong with me.

I might have been a woman at 16,
When the world shifted and I saw beauty in everyone,
Everything,

WHEN I'M A WOMAN

And I ached to have the world arch and curve under my fingers.
When my hands itched to slide over the delicate skin of a body,
Opposite or congruent.

I might have been a woman at 17,
When I had the good fortune to be catcalled for only the first time,
And lacked the sense to keep my hand at my side
When a dead-eyed man waved at me with a gaze that did not leave my body.

I might have been a woman at 18,
When I helped a customer on the clock.
When the man triple my age would not break eye contact,
Held my shoulder,
Thanked me for such thoroughness, beautiful,
And I was flattered in my disgust.

I might be a woman at 18,
When I see narrow hips that will never be motherly,
And already I may be past my prime,
Because I know where age will one day settle:
In deep smile lines and sagging jowls and mournful eyes.

I might be a women
When I decide whether it is a thought,
Or a feeling,
Or a role,
Or biology.
If it is to nurture,
Or to feel.
If it is a period,
Or if it is love.
If it is a catcall,
Or an interaction,
Or a realization.
When I become all I am meant to be.

Then, I will no longer be a girl.
That is when I'm a woman.

PIRATES OF TOLEDO BEND

Mattie Linscomb Quick • Student, ECED

I blinked my eyes hard trying to fight away my immense anxiety and severe lack of sleep. Three hours is not enough sleep to keep a body going strong. My little sister had laughed about the bright red streak in my eye; an obvious sign that I was exhausted beyond my comfort zone. I took deep breaths in and out, counting to ten, and squeezing my three-week-old baby who I held strapped to me in a sling. She was doing what I wished I was doing - sleeping. I was a mixture of stress, fear, excitement and a bit of PTSD.

As the number on our tickets was called out, I readjusted the baby in her sling and lowered my face into her soft black hair, breathing in her newborn smell and whispered to her, "Here we go, Christina." My sister bounded behind me more like a six-year-old than nineteen. She'd never flown before and was beyond excited. My heart raced as I stepped into our soda can sized flying apparatus. I turned to my sister with a half goofy, half dead serious face.

"Um Bernadette...I'm scared." I said, trying not to burst out in nervous laughter.

"Mattie, stop," she said with a smile. "We're fine."

I had underestimated the speed at which an airplane takes off and the slight nausea it causes. I held tight to my arm rest with one hand and my other remained firmly on Christina's back. Once we were up in the clouds, everything seemed to calm, and my heart rate slowed. I was able to relax and once again notice my extreme fatigue. I made the mistake of asking for a cup of coffee. Airplane coffee was the most disgusting thing I ever tasted, and my sister and I had to find a way to get rid of it quickly. We ended up soaking it up in napkins, placing the soaked napkins in a cardboard box which then leaked onto the tray, and finally we had to call the flight attendant to take it away. The embarrassment of the whole situation added to my stress. I tried to relax, leaning back into my seat, holding my baby tight, and shutting my eyes.

I thought about my grandfather; he was the whole reason for our trip. We weren't shocked when we heard his diagnosis. He had been exposed to asbestos years earlier. Now, all his grandchildren and children were traveling to his home in Louisiana on the Toledo Bend Reservoir to spend one final Thanksgiving with him. I worried about how I would react seeing him; the strong, dapper, southern gentleman I'd always known now being defeated in an unwinnable battle.

I thought about how exciting it would be to see all my cousins. To get to know my aunts and uncles. To tell them things I'd never been able to tell them because we had moved away from Louisiana, all our family, all our friends. We had been isolated and unable to speak with our family. Now, we were adults. The thought made me nervous but excited. I thought about seeing my estranged parents again and wondered how I'd react to their presence. I thought about telling my grandfather goodbye and hugging him one last time. I fought back tears. I thought about the few memories my mind had been blessed to hold of Toledo Bend; memories of playing with my cousins in the woods running after the imaginary creatures my grandfather had made up. I thought about the times we swam in the lagoon, went out to bird island with my grandfather on his pontoon boat, and paddled around with my siblings and cousins on the canoes.

When we arrived, I fought the lump that stuck in my throat. Fighting to take a breath without tears escaping or my lip quivering. I wanted to be strong for my sister and to not appear weak in front of my family. Driving down the long dirt trail surrounded by sky high red wood pines, I could feel the little girl inside me desperately running back to the one place that held magic of her childhood. I rolled down my window and breathed in the warm, humid air. The smell from the carpet of red pine needles was comforting. It reached my heart and warmed me to my core. Home is the word that comes to mind although it was never my home. It was the home I wish I could have had. The sound of the tires on the dirt hit my ears and sent a spark of excitement into my body. Suddenly, there at the steering wheel of the rental car, I transformed from a twenty-eight-year-old mother of six children, desperately missing her husband, to a little girl ready to run barefoot down the familiar trails in search of my grandfather's magic spaghetti trees.

When I pulled up in front of my grandparent's beautiful lake house, I saw my grandfather. He was walking slowly towards the big covered front porch-a staple of southern culture-with his cane in hand and leaning over, as if carrying the weight of all the family sins on his shoulders. His white hair combed, button-up shirt and jeans, masonic ring and wedding band still on his fingers, he was still a picture of southern sophistication. When he saw me, he stood a little taller and held out his arms. I ran over to him and threw my arms around him, completely shook by how easily he fit in my arms. He hugged me like he never had before, squeezing tightly and kissing my cheek. I knew that he knew this was the beginning of goodbye.

"My little sweet pea!" he said in that familiar Louisiana drawl that had left my own tongue after years in the Midwest. "Let me see my new great grandbaby!"

I pulled Christina from her car seat and brought her over to him. He gave her a kiss and held her tiny, dimpled, fresh, pink hand in his wrinkled, scarred, weather-worn hand. He beamed at her and blinked hard, perhaps fighting a tear.

“Hello, darlin’. You are just a precious little thing. I’m your Poppa!” he said warmly.

We visited for a short time before he was too tired to visit anymore, and Christina and I returned to our little cabin across the lagoon.

Over the weekend there were moments of joy, moments of crippling heartache and trauma, moments of anxiety, and moments of warmth brought from the closeness of family. Late nights into morning surrounded by cousins and siblings, calling momentary truces from the battles that had previously raged between us brought extra exhaustion. For me the exhaustion was enough to make me crazy. The slap happiness and revived child inside tempted me into things I wouldn’t normally do at home. For those not breastfeeding a baby, the wild side was brought on by a sip or two or even perhaps three from a bottle.

Thanksgiving brought a heavy rain and a cold wind. The 75-degree Louisiana day was slashed by that cold wind, and we were all reminded that it was, in fact, Thanksgiving and not the 4th or July. I sat on the large covered back deck of my aunt’s cabin trying to breathe normally through the many emotions. My grandparents sat nearby, and my grandmother was holding my grandfather’s arm the way a bride does with her groom on their wedding day. I could tell my grandmother was also fighting emotions. Beside my grandparents sat my parents. No words were shared between them and their children. I sat silently while inside me a hurricane of emotions was raging. I had to leave and sit in my car a time or two to take a break from being strong. The treks from the porch to my car were rough and messy as the heavy rain turned the dirt into red clay.

As the day fell into evening my grandmother took my grandfather home to rest and my parents went back to their cabin. The air seemed to clear, and my aunt, cousins and siblings began to let loose. They drank, and I sipped sweet tea. We all continued to eat. The oysters were running low, so we broke into the Mardi Gras king cake.

As darkness came, we slipped and slid on the soaked wooden decks leading from our cabins to the bloated lagoon. My big brother and cousin, having drank a drop or two, were little boys playing pirates and the idea emerged to jump into the lake. I left my sweet, sleeping baby with my older sister and threw on my shorts and tank top. With bare feet, I carefully ran down the wooden, drenched steps towards the deck. I could smell the wet wood beneath my feet. I felt a shiver of excitement -or was it cold? - as I reached the edge of the water and stood beside my siblings.

My older brother, Jeffrey, directed me, Bernadette, and our youngest brother, Jerome, into a small motorboat. We were too heavy and, as we headed across the lagoon to pick up our cousin from his cabin, the boat began to fill with water. We made it across just before our situation became

dire. Jeffrey, Bernadette and I sat in the motorboat waiting for Jerome and our cousin to get in their canoe. In the silence of the dark night I sat, on the cold wet boat seat, with my bare feet in a puddle of frigid lake water, and shivering. I thought again of my grandfather and this beautiful place that he had sculpted into our fairyland. He would be gone soon. I looked up at my big brother; he and I had had more than our fair share of battles between us and had become acquainted with the idea of not speaking to each other. I looked at him, my childhood partner in crime, my cop to his robber, my cowboy to his Indian, now a man I barely knew, and I wondered...are the battles worth it?

When we finally had our group assembled and had made our way back to the center of the lagoon, we counted, "1, 2, 3!" and leapt from our boats. A sudden moment of fear followed by the thought, "No turning back," and we were plunging into the depths of Toledo Bend. The weight of my body pulled me further and further down into the tar black, ice-cold water. A million needles hit me as the water enveloped me. I felt I would never make it back to the surface. My lungs were exploding and adrenaline kicked in, and I kicked with all my might and reached up to pull on the thick swamp water, propelling myself back to a world with oxygen. When I did crash through the surface with a deep breath and a cry, I felt somehow renewed, baptized by the water.

Back in our boat, I looked up at my brother once again and smiled as he tossed his long black hair back with a shake of his head, sending lake water flying from the tips of his curls. Water glinted in the moonlight on his tattooed arms as he stood ready at the hull, holding the rudder in his hand, and I saw a pirate. We were pirates. We were children on a mission. Tonight, we were not hunting hams, or planting mountains. We were the pirates of Toledo Bend, braving the alligator infested waters, diving for one last chance at childhood.

AN AMERICAN CLASSROOM

Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

School shooter, school shooter

Who are you?

We're in a locked room

Hiding from you

School shooter, school shooter

Why this place?

Huddled all together

In this tiny space

School shooter, school shooter

When will this stop?

It's should be play time

What's going pop-pop

School shooter, school shooter

What have you done?

Singing so softly

To hide the sound of your gun

School shooter, school shooter

Where are you now?

I think I hear you coming

We'll get out alive, but I'm not sure how

Remember what we practiced?

Cover your ears

Close your eyes

Be as quiet as a mouse?

THE GUILTY CHEST

Alexis Lundeen • Student, Associate of Science

Twisted and adrift in the waves
before the light,
the heavy body
sinks
lower in the stream.

His guilty chest was stained
in the twisted light
that hit hard against his back.
The wave wells
heavy
In the sink.

The neighbor boy found an arm
ditched before the waves
in the stream behind his house.
The cops are swarming,
His guilty chest
Sinks
lower still.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

Abriel Williams • Student, Graphic Design

I promise my bed that I'll crash into its arms
as soon as I start to feel like I could sleep in them for hours.
In the meantime, I gluttonously feast on the night
from a plush corner of the couch, alone.

The quiet hours after dusk shuffle along as I ride in wonder
through the pages of my current summer read.

I consult my cellphone in search of a local author
after slinking to the kitchen to cook a late-night snack.
My movements are made with deer-like grace and caution
so that the *clanks* and *clatters* of kitchen things
don't cause anyone in this forest to stir.

As the temperature of my skillet on the stove mimics sunrise,
a photo of my author stares back at me from the glow of my handheld
screen.

I scroll down to find some short poems of his and greedily ingest
each line like drought-stricken land soaks up the rain.

Read them slowly, a voice softly says to me.
I continue to descend, wondering if my admired poet
will write anything grand again, like the work
of his that pulled me here in the first place.

When my skillet's sun has fully risen, I reward it with a thin pale block–
SIZZLE... sizzle, sssiiiiizzzzzzzzllleeee...

Baby-chicken goop sings in hot butter as my mind displays
a conversation I'd like to have with my poet.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

After watching several versions of this nonexistent exchange,
I decide that that is the way it should remain– nonexistent.

When I'm back on the couch, my eyes roam the starry night
on the other side of the living room window. Its calm darkness blankets me
as I savor my salt-less kitchen creation and dream up poems
like the ones I had read just before dirtying the frypan.

Slumber does not cross my mind again until the first
eggplant-colored hints of dawn appear from behind
the neighborhood skyline. Noticing this marker of passing time
makes me wonder if I'll ever feel drowsy again.

I bid a bitter-sweet farewell to the night as
my brain continues to write, piecing together words
and ideas in hopes that it will end up with a masterpiece!
At the very least... something to be mildly proud of.

This tossing of word-salad finally slows
As time slips further into the early morning;
Steadily, decisively, against a backdrop
of rusty pink and purple hues.

As the sun creeps closer and closer
to threading the horizon with its golden body,
my mind prepares to show an original film
as I become sealed in a cozy, dark envelope of sleep.

EL CAMINO

Tammy Zimmer • Faculty, English

The fire started in the engine,
he thinks. The glossy rust-orange
painted hood turned soot
black in the center.

The pattern that lingered
a frayed oval in the paint job.

Before the car could be pushed out
it had to be taken down
off the cinder block pedestal
where it had sat for years—a decade,

Maybe untouched except for bouts
of interest, the El Camino sat.

He said it was an El Camino
it was really one of those-look-a-like
copycats. A Ford Ranchero,
maybe, but the insignias had all

been removed so no one
but a real enthusiast could tell.

Once the tires were reattached, inflated,
he helmed the steering wheel
while mom pushed from the front.
A hiss from a leaky tire taunted.

The garage walls were tarnished black;
the windows opaque soot.

Buckets and buckets of black water
tossed out in the driveway.
He was at the bar drinking away
the sorrow of a torched car

She was cleaning up the mess
so the car could be put back on blocks

ESCAPING MY ABUSER

Chelsea Warden • Student, Health Sciences ADN

Friday, July 23, 2021, at 7:43 pm I heard the most beautiful noise any mother could hear. A baby cried. But not just any baby, MY baby! That was the day I knew what love was. I knew it was my responsibility to protect her. This was the day I could no longer accept getting treated any less than I deserve. Because I would never be okay with my daughter getting treated any less than the best. I knew I needed to be a good example and role model of what she should expect from a man.

Which got me thinking about all the different times I allowed her father to treat me like garbage. That made me think he wouldn't treat her any better. He didn't care about me; much less, he didn't care about his daughter. He showed up at the delivery room higher than a kite. All throughout my pregnancy he would push, kick, and hit me. He didn't care about the danger it put our child in. He was just looking to get even-even though I didn't do anything to deserve it. I knew it was nothing I ever wanted to chance my daughter seeing, let alone risk the chance of something happening to her. She doesn't deserve anything less than all the love in the world.

As I was laying in bed with my daughter her skin was soft like a bunny rubbing against my arm. Her wet hair glided across my face when she moved. It got me thinking. *What do I need to do to provide the best life possible for her?* I couldn't help but think of all the bad her dad has done to me and how afraid I was thinking it could happen to her. There was one particular instance that has always stuck with me, and remembering it made it easy for me to leave and raise my daughter by myself.

It was a cold rainy day. About a year and a half before my daughter was born. I remember I dreaded going to work. Luis and I have been fighting all day. He was too tired so he didn't want to go to work. He was mad that I was going to work (he never understood that someone needed to pay the bills and put food on the table). Of course, he thought the only reason I wanted to go to work was that I had a mysterious mystery man I was seeing on the side. He would come to my work to ensure I was where I said I would be. Then he would accuse me of sleeping with my boss in the bathroom. It was always a lose-lose situation for me.

I remember being at work and feeling just so stressed out. I knew when I went home that things would not be okay. I knew it was just the start of a fight. As I was working I noticed a strange feeling. It felt like someone was shaking my pant legs continuously. That is just how much he was texting and calling me. He still did not get the concept that I was working. I got a moment to check my phone and I remember my heart dropping. "If you

don't come home right now, I will kill myself".

That was the last text I saw he sent. I start frantically calling and texting him. No reply. My eyes were tidal waves moments from crashing down. My manager had come over to me and asked what happened. I told him that my boyfriend and I were fighting all day and then showed him the text I had just gotten. I asked if I could take an early break to run home and make sure he was alright. He said okay and off I went.

Running to my car sludge catching my heels, flying up to soak my pant legs. I was fumbling with my keys when I got to my car. As I sat in my car I could see my breath. I was shaking, I don't know if it was from how cold it was or how scared I was. I rushed home. Even though I worked only three minutes from home, it felt like I was driving across the country. My face froze from the tears coming out. I couldn't stop them. I was so scared. I thought the person I loved has harmed himself. I could not get there fast enough.

Arrived home and I rushed inside. It's quiet and that scares me even more. I call out his name. No answer. I rush to our room, and there he was sitting on the bed playing video games.

Sadness turned into anger. He was fine! I had a million thoughts race through my head.

All he says "Why do you look so mad?" I am shocked.

"Why wouldn't I be mad? You just texted me saying you were going to kill yourself. Then when I tried calling and texting you wouldn't respond".

"You wouldn't respond to me and it was making me angry so I wanted to say something I knew would get a response".

I was fuming. How could someone think that was an okay thing to say? Especially since he knows my past. Dealing with family members trying to commit suicide. Why would he think it was okay? I knew the best choice was to remove myself from the situation and return to work. I turned my back and started walking down the hallway.

Luis yelled behind me, "WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING?"

I didn't respond; I walked quicker. He runs up behind me and shoves me. I hit the wall. I turn around and push him back to put space between us and try to run. He grabs me by the hood of my coat and pulls me back. Rips my coat off. All I could think was thank god I didn't have it zipped up. He quickly reaches for me and shoves me against the wall. I can smell his breath reeking of stale swisher wrapper from the weed he had been smoking earlier. He wouldn't say anything. I tried to just get away from him. He grabbed me by my throat, threw me against the wall, and asked again,

"Where do you think you are going?" I couldn't answer.

I couldn't even breathe. Gasping for air. Feels like razors are at my throat tearing it open. I am so scared. All I could think was to call for help. Before I can even get to my phone he grabs it and throws it at the wall shattering it. That was it. I was going to die.

His nails dug in deeper and deeper. I was gasping for air, knowing that soon it would be the last breath I took. All I felt was *how sad I was going to feel for my family when they found me. I felt bad for the pain they would feel when I was gone.*

"GO! LEAVE", he said.

I was confused; it got a little easier to breathe but it hurt. I run! I run so fast. Get in my car and go. I didn't know where to go. I was still so confused by what had just happened. I didn't know what to do.

So back to work I went. I arrive eight minutes early back from my break and I make a b-line to the bathroom. I knew I needed to clean myself up and look presentable to customers.

I get to the bathroom and that's when I really see the mess. My hair looks like I'm from the fifties, so ratted and all over the place. My eyes are puffy and red. That's when I see it. Black, blue, purple, yellow- my neck looked like someone painted a rainbow across the front of it. All I could think was, *How did I make it out alive?* You could see each finger outline, that's just how hard he squeezed. Five spots had blood dripping down. I start to splash some cold water across my eyes in the hope they look somewhat normal. I take a damp paper towel and start to lightly dab my neck trying to be gentle but also hard enough to clean up some of the blood that has already dried. It hurt so bad to touch. I pull my sweater up as high as I could trying to cover it from my co-workers and customers. I knew everyone would still see it. I was embarrassed.

How am I going to hide this from my dad? I knew if he saw what had happened he would kill him, not that I would blame him but I wouldn't want him to go to prison. I was going through a million different thoughts and tried to come up with the best solution to hide this. I didn't want anyone to see my neck. I was very ashamed. Thought after thought nothing seemed good enough. Finally, it hit me!

The end of shift arrives, and I rush to my car and off to Walmart I go. I rush into the store. I know I have to be fast I don't have much time. Let alone I know if I take too long Luis will be mad at me. If only he knew I was trying to save his butt. I start in the women's clothing section... **Sigh* I don't see it.* Run to the men's clothing section, not there. I can feel my eyes fill with tears. I have run out of ideas. My head droops and I start walking to the door at a turtle's pace. I happened to glance up and I have seen

what I needed! I wasn't even the slightest embarrassed that I was going to buy something in the little boy section I just knew it needed to work. I have no other ideas. I grabbed a black extra-large turtle neck. This was going to solve everything. No one would ever know that I was hiding anything....

That was the day I should have left. He gave me a million reasons why I shouldn't stay but I did. It took me a year and a half later to finally leave. July 23, 2021, was the day I wasn't going to allow someone to abuse me anymore. My baby girl was all I needed to know I couldn't live like this anymore. I had to protect her even if that meant from her dad. I know it's cliché to say this but she saved me, and she will never truly understand how much I love her.

TILL THE LAST RAINDROP

Zahraa Fanharawi • Student, Health Sciences

No need for it to be warm,
warmth isn't what I'm seeking
neither a well-made bed, with soft sheet covers.
For the sky won't allow me brighter days.
I seek comfort in solitude,
someplace I can rest my bones,
where my tendons, and muscles, can loosen up.
In those last cold, dark, and rainy days
I will be waiting.

THE OBLIVIOUS MAN

K.L. Riley • Faculty, English

There once was this man who liked to walk his dog through the wooded area near his house. One day, the man couldn't find his walking shoes. He searched the house but was only able to find one shoe. Finally, growling out some colorful metaphors, the man gave up and put on his hiking boots.

Naïve to the fact that his missing shoe was underneath his chair, with a brown recluse spider in the toe.

The man hooked the leash onto his dog's collar and off they went into the woods. Now, in the woods, the trail came to a fork. The right fork was an easy loop around, which the man usually took on his walks. The left fork was a much longer, rougher trail and the man disliked it. On this particular day, just as the man and his dog were approaching the fork, his dog bolted to the left, tearing the leash from the man's hand. When the man looked up, his dog was nowhere to be seen. Cursing the dog, the man began to hike down the left trail.

Never knowing that at that moment, on the right trail, an angry bear prowled in search of her missing cubs.

As the man traipsed along the left trail he grew madder and madder. He grumbled and cussed his dog. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a cloudburst poured down soaking the man. The man stopped on the trail and cursed the rain. He kicked at a rock and swore about how wet he was getting and how chilled he suddenly felt.

Not realizing that moments before the rain came, his body had been overheating and was close to suffering a heat stroke.

Slogging on around the trail the man finally found his dog. The dog was sitting near a rock-lined pool of clear water; panting. The man knelt down and began to quench his thirst. His dog tried to lap some water but the man pushed the dog away, telling him to wait his turn.

Ignorant of the fact that when the dog arrived, that pool had been an empty pile of rocks and blind to the fact that his dog had sat there while the rain filled the pool. Not conscious of the truth that his dog had sat there, thirsty but not drinking, and had chased away two rabbits and a 12-point buck to preserve the water for his master.

THE OBLIVIOUS MAN

Finally the man stood up and turned away from the pool. As his dog was thirstily lapping up the remaining water, the man noticed a print in the mud; the fresh track of a large buck. The man cursed about not having his hunting rifle and fretted that his “fool dog” would probably scare the deer before he could have gotten a shot off.

Forgetting that deer season didn't start for another week and his deer license was suspended.

The man picked up his dog's leash and they hiked on through the woods. The man continued to curse and swear at his dog, pointing out that if they had made it home earlier he could, right now, be making his run to the store but now he would have to wait until tomorrow.

Unaware that, even as he was speaking, a drunk driver was running through a red light across the man's store route.

The man and his dog eventually made it home. The man stomped into his house, tripped over his once missing shoe.

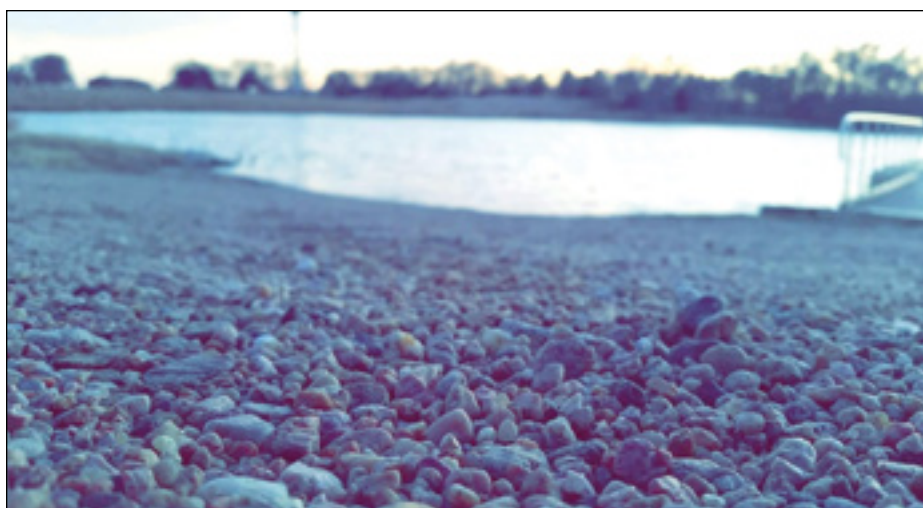
Failing to notice the spider that ran from the shoe and skittered outside, just before the door closed.

After cussing out his shoe, the man sat down in his large, overstuffed recliner, turned on his big screen HD TV, let out a sigh and said “God, what a crappy day, thanks for nothing.”

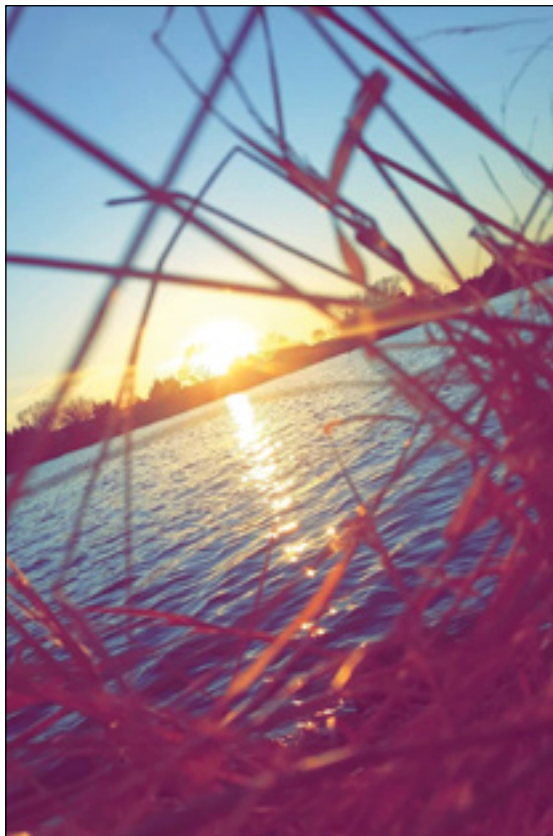
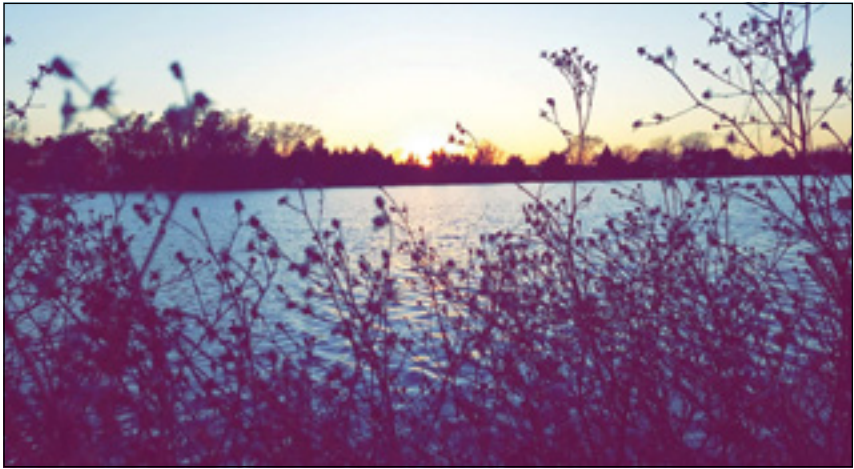
RECHARGE (SERIES)

Sabrina Babella • Student, Academic Transfer

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, ARTWORK



RECHARGE



SPRING SHRINE

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, ARTWORK



MALE HARBISON'S DUN SKIPPER

Angela Cyza • Faculty, Radiology



FEMALE HARBISON'S DUN SKIPPER

Angela Cyza • Faculty, Radiology



CAREX SPISSA

Angela Cyza • Faculty, Radiology



PARRISH

Aidan Chrisman • Student, Business Administration



MIXED COLORS

Patty Haddow • Retired, Registration Tech



TREE GROWTH

Patty Haddow • Retired, Registration Tech



NATURE'S FIREWORKS

Stephanie Fenton • Student, Academic Transfer



ANGEL 1

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



ANGEL 2

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



MOM ALWAYS LOVED A GREAT SUNSET

Linda Hartman • Faculty, Business



A LOVELY NIGHT

Marcos Lopez • Student, Criminal Justice



TAMSUI DISTRICT DOWNTOWN PARK TAIPEI, TAIWAN

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



STORM SHRINE

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



EMPTINESS

Shaima Kari • Student, Secondary English Education



PHUKET BEACH

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



A MIDDAY STROLL

Marcos Lopez • Student, Criminal Justice



DIPPED IN GOLD

Nature Medicine Song Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



BRANCHED OAK

Sabrina Babella • Student, Academic Transfer



BRANCHED OAK

Sabrina Babella • Student, Academic Transfer



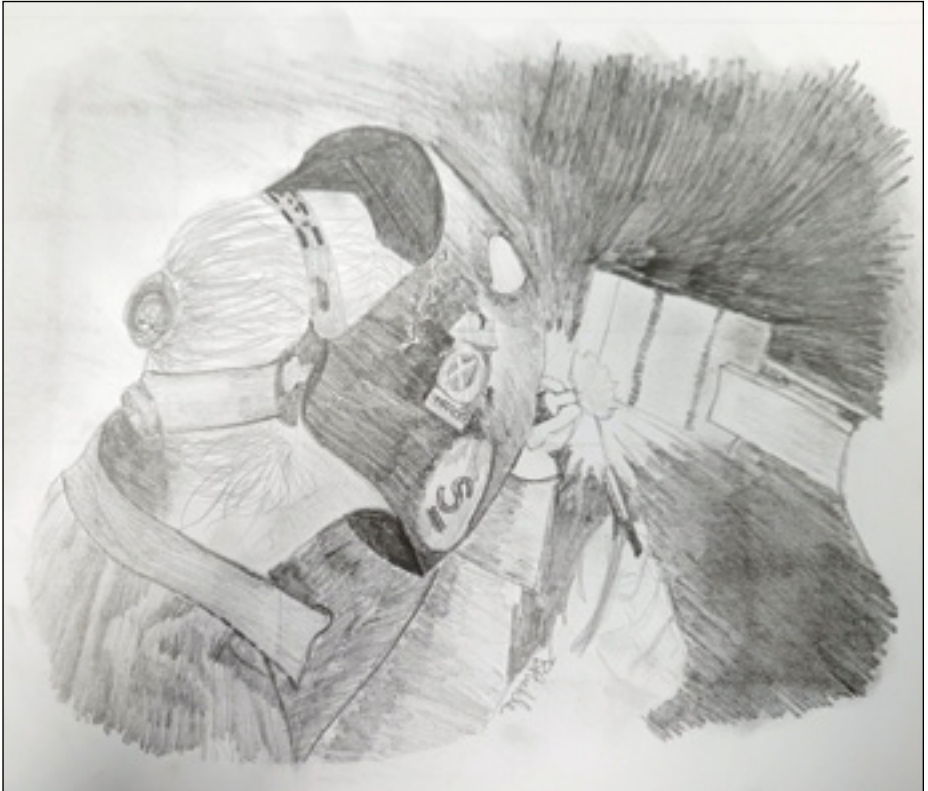
BEETS TASTE LIKE DIRT

Angela Cyza • Faculty, Radiology



SELF PORTRAIT FOR A DEMONSTRATION OF A VERTICAL LAP JOINT TIG WELD FOR STUDENTS

Bonni Riehle • Faculty, Welding



THE SHY ELFLING

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



LIFE OF A SHORTY SHOULDN'T BE SO TOUGH

Nature Medicine Song Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



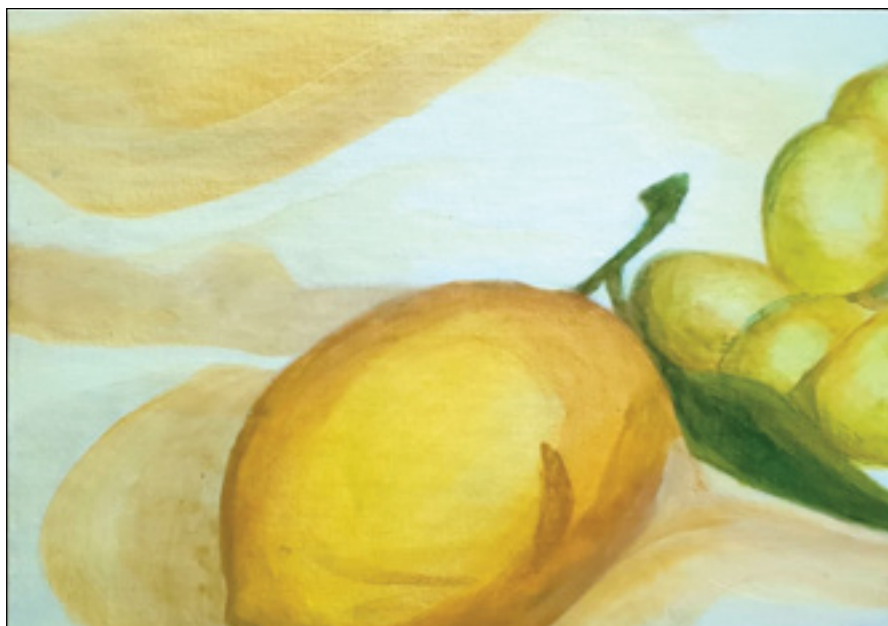
BOLD FLOWER STILL LIFE

Lily Zelt • Student, Continuing Education



GLAZED LEMONS AND GRAPES

Lily Zelt • Student, Continuing Education



ICED TREATS

Patty Haddow • Retired, Registration Tech



PRAYER OF SPRING

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



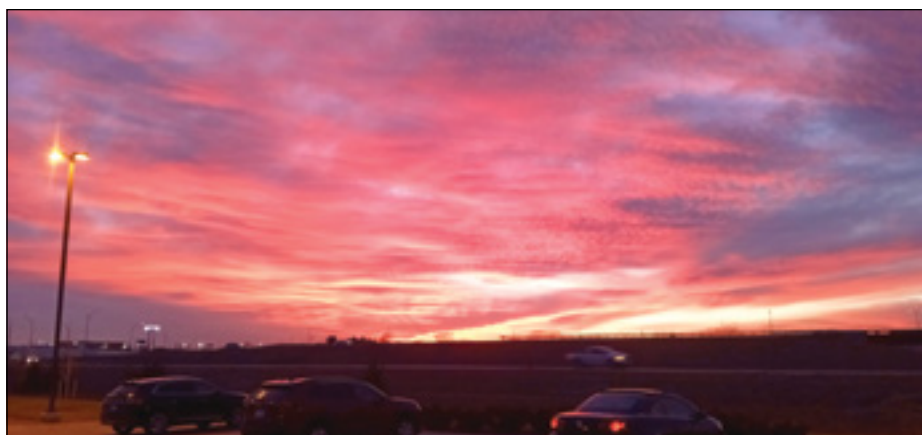
MOON TREES AND MOUNTAINS

Lily Zelt • Student, Continuing Education



BIRTHDAY SUNSET

Sabrina Babella • Student, Academic Transfer



DINNER WITH A VIEW

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



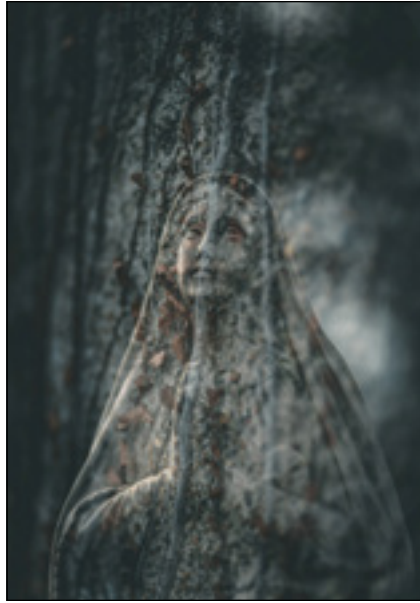
SUMMER DREAMS

Patty Haddow • Retired, Registration Tech



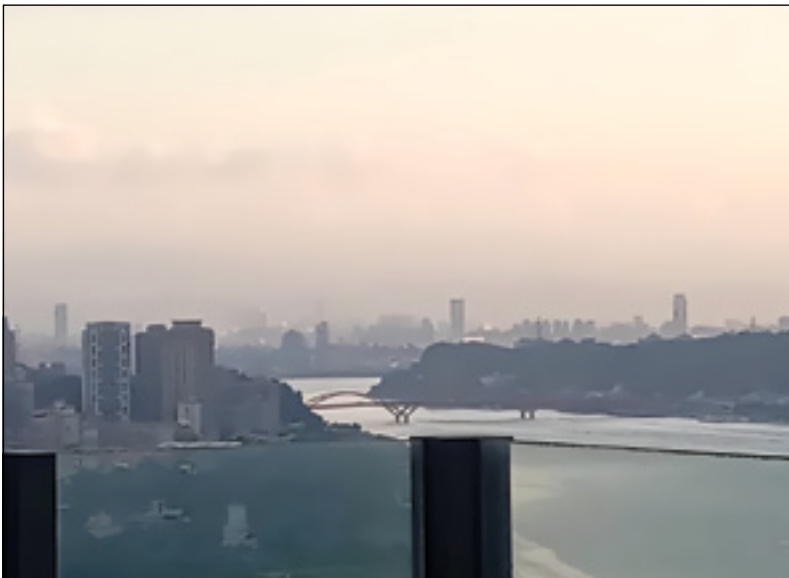
ANGEL 3

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



THE BACKWARD GLANCES

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



ZEPHYR

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business



THE RETURN

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



CALIFORNIA COASTLINE

Lily Zelt • Student, Continuing Education



OCEAN SKY

Lily Zelt • Student, Continuing Education



THE BEACH SWING

Onna Carr • Alumni, A.A.S. Business

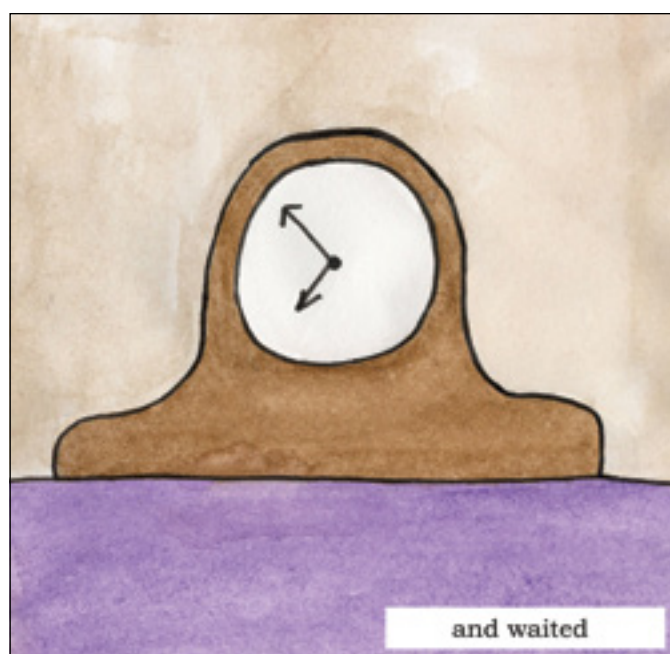


AN UNLIKELY FRIEND

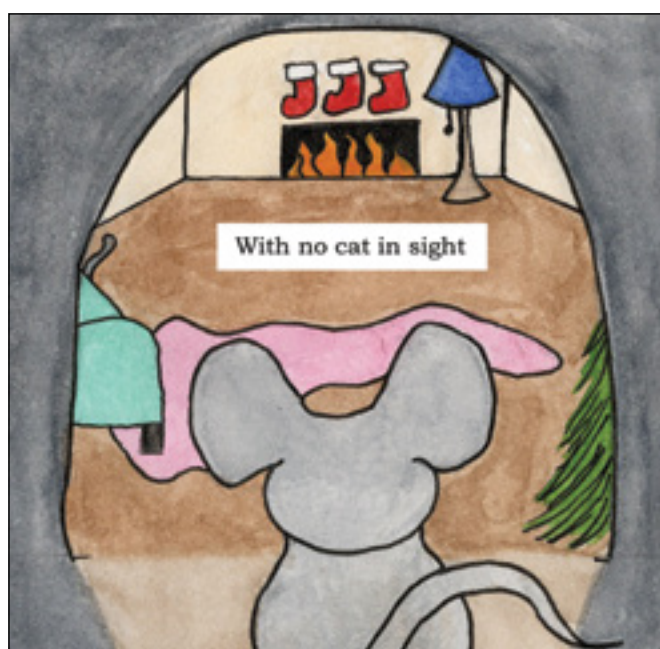
Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

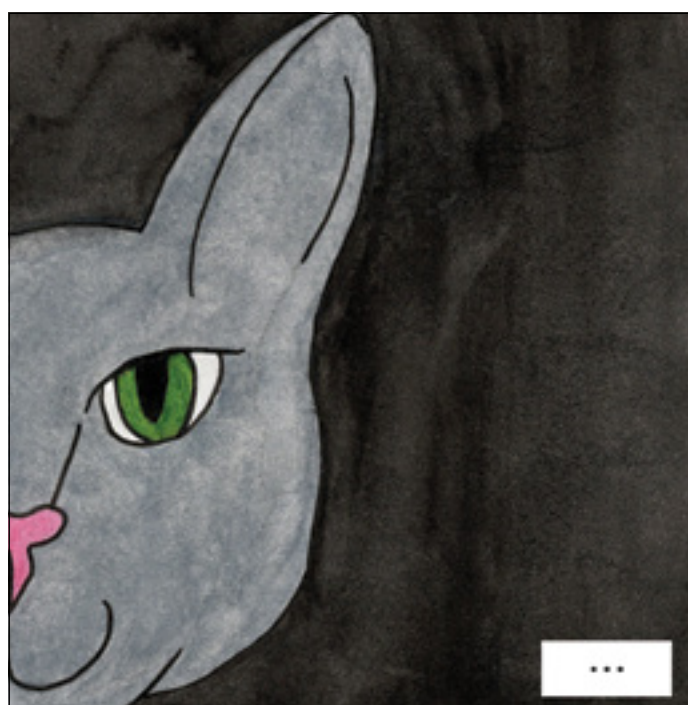
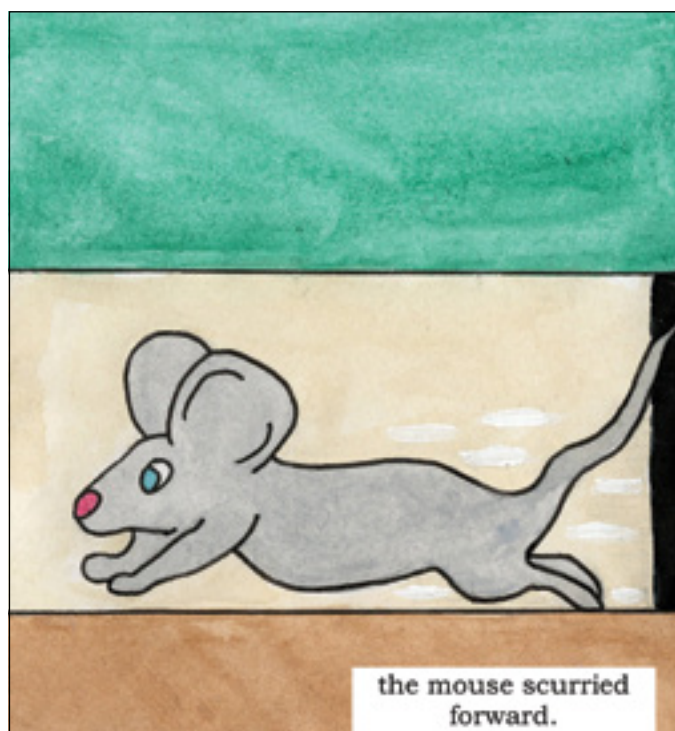


AN UNLIKELY FRIEND

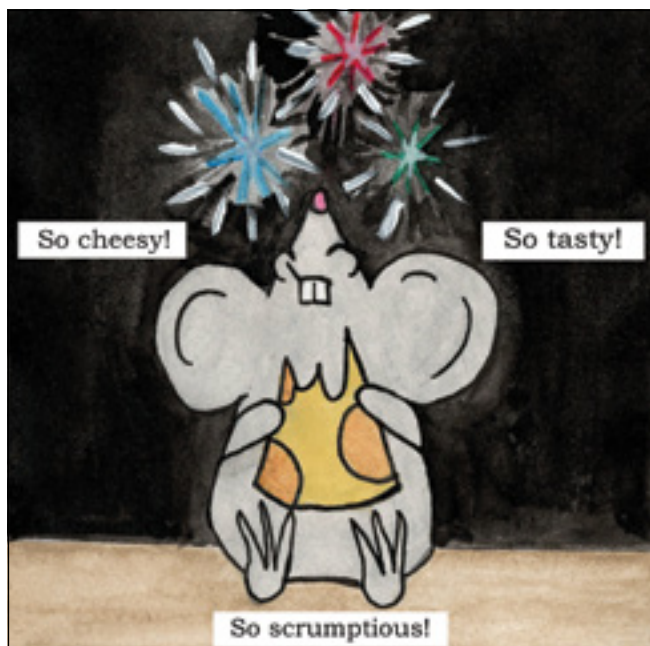


AN UNLIKELY FRIEND

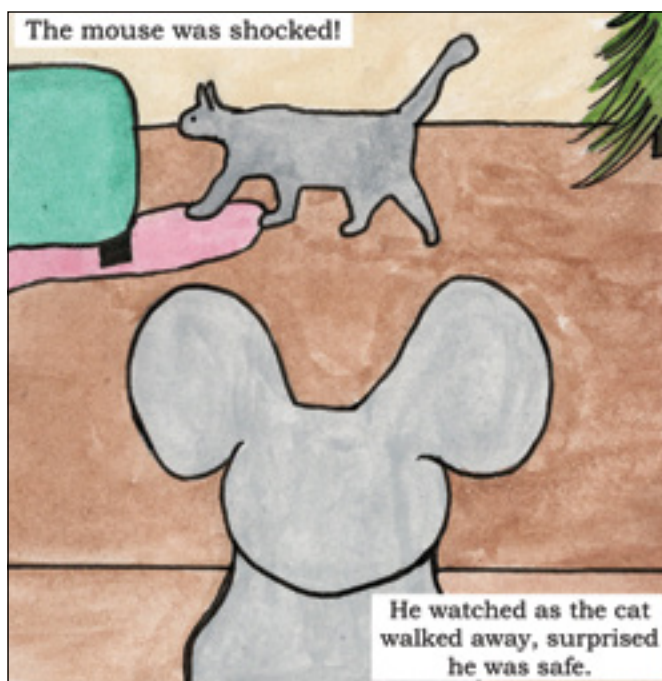
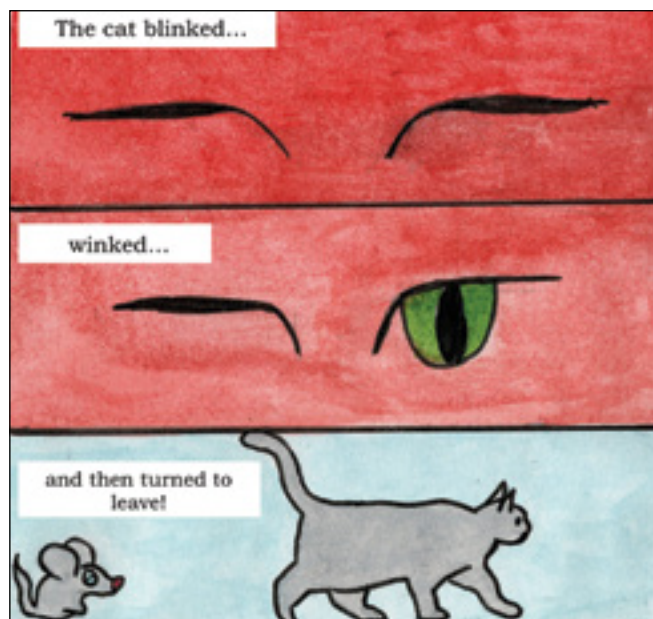


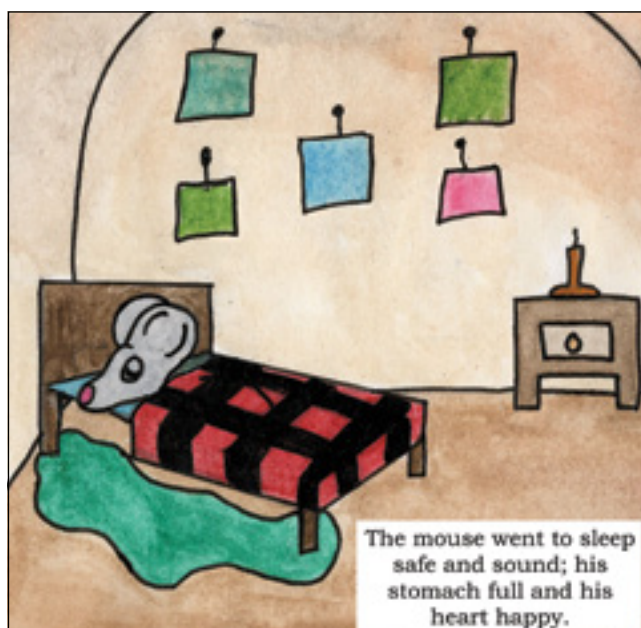
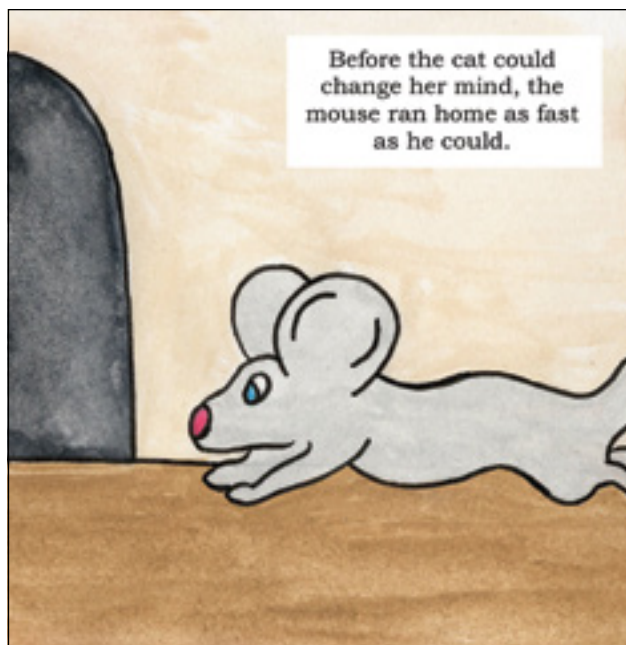






AN UNLIKELY FRIEND





THE LEMON TREE

Celia Taylor • Student, Academic Transfer

The lemon tree was getting so tall now. Small yellow fruits dangled from the far-off branches, threatening to drop at any moment—yet not one of them had. It was peculiar indeed, to me, that they liked to hover there, just out of reach. Perhaps if you shook the tree one would fall, but nobody seemed to have any incentive to. I'd once shaken the woody plant in the corner of the room and a dried leaf fell off.

I'd never dreamed of touching that divine tree, not with my grubby hands. Every morning as the sun rose over the hills I would climb to my window and stare in awe at the huge leaves and creeping branches reaching to dust away sin and sorrow from the grey land that lay below. It never could quite reach though. The branch was always just a tad too far from the windowsill, it seemed.

Each morning like this was the same: sunlight left specks of gold on the mottled leaves and I wished so dearly that I was allowed to clamber down and curl up under the peaceful tree where all the dust had settled and the wretched world was all but forgotten for a few brief moments. If there were ever a paradise, this lovely tree must certainly be it. But mother said I couldn't go down there yet, and she never said when I would. I'm beginning to think she'll never allow me out to caress the silky air flying between the bunches of leaves and budding fruits. I can only speculate she knows I am not worthy of such a blissful experience. I will do better. I will be safe, I promise.

In the afternoons, children from other lands frolicked in the crunchy grass for what seemed like such a long time before they retired to the edge of the hill to look out over their homes as the great ball of fire sank behind the horizon.

Far off, if I really squinted, I saw the cities in the distance burn in the fading light. The sky dribbled into a sludgy orange sunset and then merged into darkness above. An ocean turned upside down, that's what it reminded me of: the watery abyss weeping for those gone and those yet to go. Every night it wept, sometimes violently, others softly. Sometimes so gently one not accustomed would hardly notice. But I was very accustomed, so I always noticed.

Then the children wandered beyond my scope of vision and were gone for the day. I always hoped they would stay a little longer, but they never did. Once I'd squinted so hard, I almost saw where they went.

It was generally best not to squint, however. It was far off and blurry for a reason – we weren't supposed to see it. Lemon leaves partitioned out enough of the dire circumstances to provide an adequate barrier for the naked eye. Like my mother used to say, "If you can't afford to view the scene, then don't look". She'd always wept considerably after saying that.

And after all, she was right, I think. I can't smudge the scenery...it isn't made of paint. It remains the same whether I look or not. But I still look reflexively, if only to feel myself sit in the shade under the tree and watch them trim the branches above me...

one by one, one by one...

They fell so many meters down, slow motion through the thickening air to the rocky cliffs, and beyond that was farther than I would ever see. The stiff, blotchy leaves bashed over the rocks and were torn to pieces before my eyes, branches cracking in the process. Over and over they crashed down to the depths below. I bet there's no lemon trees down there. Never will be.

But why did they cut so many branches? If they left a few, perhaps one could climb the tree again? That's every kid's dream: to climb a tree so tall their virgin hands brush heaven. Who knows what would happen if they ever fulfilled such a dream...maybe they're misery would melt away, washed out by the wailing sky above. Maybe.

Some days I cried out for answers. I beat my fists on the glass and screamed at the branch cutters to stop for just one day so I could come down and climb. I had to know why—why did they do this? Why did they rip away this shot at a dream? At desire? For God's sake was it that bad?

One time I made the resolution that I would slam my head at the glass thinking that would have more success. To think I'd go so far as throwing my skull at the glass over and over in fervent hope of acknowledgement until the pane glistened red and my body went numb—well, I must have had a fit of madness.

No response ever came, though. They were already gone by the time the sounds of words reached the air. They couldn't have heard it.

Then there came a day that no branches fell. No branch cutters harmed the tree and the air hung heavy and silent. In earnest I peered through the pane and saw the children materialize. They were far earlier today. Still the air remained silent.

For a long time they stood staring up at the tree, fresh branches dangling just above their heads, uncut. We were bewildered, all the lot of us. I watched for a very long time and the only movement was the wind toying with the newborn leaves. It was so peaceful.

But they finally got greedy, I guess; decided they wanted to climb the tree, to chase after the dream, so they left me here to watch for weeks and weeks but they never came back down. I like to think they finally reached the budding lemons and picked the pale blossoms in their hot little hands, watching the delicate petals crumble beneath the force of their fingers, but I know better. The many deaths are quickly forgotten in favor of the prize; the bumpy, sour fruits dangling in front of their eyes. There have now been many nights I dreamed of picking the lemons and tasting the tart, juicy flesh on my tongue, and sometimes I even thought I could smell the scent of citrus in the air as I woke. Once, in a dream, I nearly made it up, only to catch my foot on a faulty twig and come tumbling down to the bleak rocks below. I watched as my body hit the ground in a useless lump and in an instant, a spray washed the ground. Not a single lemon, not yet. So close, so close, try again some other time, some other place. For many minutes nothing moved but the steady stream spreading across the slate-colored rocks as the breeze drifted tenderly through the leaves.

Day after day, now, I fall from the tree, precisely the same way till blood soaks the ground. Even when I wake and walk to the window, I am still under the tree, flat as a pancake and still as a broken metronome. I watch the premature lemons fall in the pool, becoming blotched with red and rolling off, lost to the rocks. How ironic that they fall down now.

So when you come across a child selling tarts the color of the tuscan sun, what can you say? These must be false, or butterscotch perhaps, but surely there are no lemon tarts here. How did you wander so far from the urban streets and the musky bodies to the quiet shade of the tree? You dare take the fruits of the fallen soul who gave their life again and again to reach them? May their blood stain your hands and pollute your water and may every morsel you eat taste of iron. Remember this day you ascended the slopes to rob a bloody girl of her only impossible novelty for only to make a dessert. When the mourning sky sheds its tears, I will awake once more to a clean and polished concrete free from the needless blood of the past and the fruits will return to their rightful place high on the tree. So leave me now, this instant! Leave my battered, broken body where it lay, for another day I'll fall again with the sacred lemons at my side and no thieving hands shall take my prize from me.

LET THEM GO

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

You gotta stop caring about what others think of you
Let them think things that aren't true, it doesn't matter
You gotta stop caring about what others say about you
Let them say whatever the heck they want, it's meaningless

You gotta stop caring about the ones who couldn't care less about you
Let them become distant memories never to cross your mind again
You gotta stop wasting time on the ones who don't give you their time
Let them become a barely visible speck on the timeline of your life

When are you gonna let go of all the nasty things they've said and done
When are you gonna say that you have had enough of them
When are you gonna break away from the chains of their judgment
When are you gonna say you're done and walk the heck away

Surrender your feelings of betrayal and anger and bitterness
Push out of your mind the lies and gossip and judgment
Brush off the dust and dirt and shame
Get rid of all the doubts and fears and failures

No one gets to dictate and control who you are going to be
No one gets to change or rearrange who you are now
No one gets to make you feel ashamed of who you were
No one but you gets to control your present and future

I'm done letting my accusers have the last word
I'm done sitting silent while they trample me
I'm done walking in the dust they shake off
I'm done thinking I'm less of a person

LET THEM GO

We have a choice to make on how to live our lives
We have a choice who we listen to and talk to
We have a chance to welcome the sun and the rain
We have a chance to lay to rest all the rumors

It's time to find out what your talents are and use them
It's time to discover your purpose and to fulfill it
It's time to live life not caring who judges you
It's time to let go of the past and hold onto the future

Don't you want to see just what you are capable of
Don't you want to break free of the box others put you in
Don't you want to just be you and not regret it
Don't you want to be everything you can be

Be free of the burden of caring for those who don't care
Be free of all the eyes watching you, waiting for a mistake
Be free of the fear of never being more than nothing
Be free of the shadows cast on you by your enemies

You are not perfect but your imperfections shape you
You are not a failure but when you fail that's a lesson learned
You are not innocent but grown out of your guilt
You are not the best but when you lose be gracious

We're done wasting our tears on relationships irreparable
We're done hating those who were quick to judge and slow to forgive
We're done despising ourselves because we're constantly put down
We're done giving a flying fig about those who destroy our reps

I am done listening to the deafening judgment of those who used to matter to me

A SCRAPING OF THOUGHTS AND MUSINGS

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

A FOUND POEM FROM AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN POETS ANNE CARSON AND TACITA DEAN

You lose as you become an artist with a capital A

I know you're a lover of anachronism

time has a different texture

I mean, what do you do with doodles?

dig a little more into the raw thing

the ability to pasture without steeple-chasing

Frenetic accretions of text

writing seems kind of pointless in the contemporary world

Even in paradise there are unions and bureaucracy

Are you still spraying the dancers with chalk?

I'd love to be someone who can live minimally but I'm not

With the layers and layers of old art ideas piling up on one another?

An oracular figure

There's so much writing in the world and a lot of it just seems like the same sentence

A giant mural of all the thoughts I've ever had in my life

This kind of project completely devours you

But then I couldn't decide how to use the backs of pages

I'm too self-conscious these days, which is a tragedy

There's no such thing. All time is now

Going sideways into drawing

figuration rendered in chalk

ALTRUISTIC

Hailey Stewart • Student, Health Sciences

An Altruistic person is unselfish; if I had to pick one word to describe Rick Stewart, it would be altruistic, and Rick was many things. One of those things is he was my Papa, my grandfather, who passed away. Before he passed away, he was a man of wise words, filled with kind acts, nurturing, and so much more. Papa cared for you no matter what; if you needed anything, you knew he was only one call away. He helped my mom pay bills and cared for Grammy daily; he helped everyone in our family mentally, physically, and financially.

I remember the day we found out that Papa was no longer with us; we were at church, and Uncle Mike was blowing up our phones like the world just ended, and it did, at least for our family. Mom sent me out to answer the phone as quietly as I could. I said, "Uncle Mike, we are at church. We will call you..." and before I could finish, he interrupted me, "Go get your mother, Hailey," in a tone so upset yet serious. I walked back in to get my mom, and I could hear the scary music you hear in movies knowing something bad was about to happen. She walked out with me and answered. The phone dropped, along with Mom screaming and crying on the floor. April, our old therapist, walked in and just sat there with Mom on the ground, holding her. My mom looked up at me, and her only words were, "He's gone, Hailey; Papa is gone." The whole world stopped for a split second; the next you knew, my body dropped to the floor.

After that, we knew it was time to go to Colorado for the celebration of life and be there for Grammy. On our way to Colorado, I couldn't stop thinking about Papa; he smelled of tobacco and mint. Papa was skinny, wrinkly, and had white hair like Santa; he also had a mustache that changed styles very often, from biker style with little loops at the end of each side to circus style and so much more. As my mind wandered about Papa and the man, we were at our destination before I knew it.

After the long, painful road trip, we finally got to Grammy's house, and for some reason, I just ran straight to her room, expecting Papa to be there still sleeping like he always was. As Mom and Grammy hugged and cried, I stood there holding every tear I tried to escape. "His heart just stopped in his sleep," Grammy said, trying to make words make sense, "He went peacefully." That night I couldn't sleep; all I could think about was how this had happened and why God had taken him from me. I never found the answer to those questions. Memories of Papa just kept replaying in my head like a broken record. The time he bought me my first track shoes because my mom couldn't afford them, or the times he would randomly dance to music playing and all the years he and Grammy cared for me when my

mom was away in the military. In the next room over, I could hear Grammy and Mom talking about how the celebration of life would happen. All I could think about was who would be there for me; he was my number one supporter.

When it came to the day to celebrate Papa's life, I didn't want to celebrate that someone I loved left and was gone for good. I watched Grammy greet people at the door faking a smile and non-stop saying, "Thank you for coming," and "It's good to see you." As I stood in the corner, watching people filling in the room. Which had rounded tables covered by black tablecloths; in the middle of the room was Papa and a little space to dance. I watched everyone smile and laugh and have a good time. I just sat there like a spider on the wall taking pictures and questioning everything in my life. While everyone was doing their own thing, I thought about the last time I talked to Papa, he was at the hospital, and I didn't go to see him because of school and work. I called my mom one day when she was at the hospital with him. I was balling my eyes out because of my grades. I felt like I was hitting rock bottom and drowning in school.

I remember Mom handing the phone off to Papa. He sat there and listened as he was in a hospital bed and gave me a little pep talk, and the last thing that man ever told me was, "I'm proud of you" in his deep old man voice. Papa was a guy that cared for people and was never scared of anything. I couldn't wrap my head around that God took someone from this world who did so much for his family and others. He planted a garden for my Uncle in his backyard so that they would have fresh fruits and veggies. He always ensured we all went on vacation together because he knew we all needed a break from life. Papa cared for us no matter what, and I knew he always had the wings of a guardian angel. I didn't expect him to be an angel up in heaven.

As I sat there watching and taking pictures, I thought of all the fantastic things Papa did for all of us. For Mom, he would call her and check in on her no matter what was going on; he would help Mom with bills. He did so much for her, and as I watched her looking at all the pictures of Papa sitting on all the round tables, I wondered who was going to do this for her now. Papa was gone, but I was here, and his blood. At that moment, I knew he would want me to care for his daughter, my mom. I was going to take care of her just like Papa did. Then I watched Grammy and all the times he danced with her in the living room and sent her flowers to show his love. I knew it was my job now to care for her.

For over a year now, I have cared for the two girls he loved the most, and I help my mom with bills and have her talk to me about her day when she gets home. I call Grammy and see how she's doing and what she's been up to. I also bettered myself in school and got my CNA license, all A's and B's, all just for Papa. If I had one last moment to talk to him, I would thank him for showing me how to love and care for people and helping me see what I

wanted to do in life; I would thank him for every second I spent with him.

Papa was one of the only guy figures I had growing up; he taught me many things, like caring for the people you love and never taking that for granted. Also, even when you hit rock bottom, there's only one way to go, and that's up. He taught me never to give up, but most importantly, he taught me how to love and care for people. He showed me how to be human. When was the last time you called someone you love? Don't take life for granted; you never know what tomorrow brings

THE SPRING OF LIFE

Zahraa Fanharawi • Student, Health Sciences

O mother, you are the spring of life
the colors of leaves and flowers
a field of white loosestrife
the dazzling, swift spring showers.

This spring that flows from your favor
your memory is fragrant
the delicacy and kindness of your labor.

Your warm embrace
a sun that shines in my horizon,
the bright soft smile on your face
a spring that last forever, derives from compassion.

Mother, how do I repay you?
Everything is so little,
beneath this sky of blue.

SPLASH MOUNTAIN, SEPTEMBER 11

Danielle Klafter • Instructor, English

We emerged from the briar patch unscathed
but found the world had irrevocably changed.

Magic Kingdom was now closing
the illusion cracked, magic gone
Due to unforeseen circumstances

Loudspeakers said we were *following Plan A*
but nothing about the day was planned

the way we felt stranded in the crowd
waiting for a train to the parking lot
our faces turned to the sky
rumored whispers, *a bomb*.

The rest of the day was useless
collapsed on hotel room beds
staring at the same footage
exploding, exploding, then gone.

Was it Brer Fox who had won? *settin'*
the contrapshun and laying off in the bushes
fer ter see wat de news was gwineter be
Our fists blipping into a war, sticking
deeper because the tar baby *he say nuthin'?*

Leaving the park, turnstile attendants gave tickets
so we could come back another day.

PAIN

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

It takes time for our pain to heal
forever our souls will be concealed
a new awakening to be revealed
to send a blessing, a wish, a message
that settles us down
turns our frowns around
and makes us closer together
with a passion that lasts forever
(...)

Never to say it's too easy
when life rolls in infinity
our love is a new divinity
causing a new upheaval in our spirits
our ears are starting to hear it
while our bodies are getting near it
and our minds no longer fear it
you mean more to me than you could possibly ever know
maybe I can let go of my inhibitions
put my actions into fruition
and write a story into eternity.

DON'T DREAM

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Don't Dream. Do Not Dream. Don't Dream.

That is what my mother said every night after we said our prayers and before we could close our eyes we had to say it too. I was very young at the time, no older than three or 4four But her warning stayed with me even after she died. Because I understood the danger that accompanied any man, woman, or child, who dared to dream.

We Liedersons knew how to keep our minds safe from those who would wish to rob us of our dreams. Through a form of meditation, we were able to lock ourselves in and keep everyone else out. However, as I mentioned I lost my mother because one night my little brother had a dream and because it was forbidden I soon heard the breaking down of our front door. I crawled under my bed and hid, shaking with fear. Then I heard a scream and finally, I heard nothing but silence. I was alone and that's how I've been ever since that tragic night. I later learned that my mother had died at the hand of my brother because they broke the barrier in his mind and told him to kill her, so he did before turning himself in. I knew that there were only two outcomes for anyone taken by the dream snatchers: either they would pass a test proving their dream worth or they would be executed because they had no use or posed a threat to the government.

I still don't understand many things, but one thing is so clear: however strong my desire to dream is, I must never do so. So ever since that night, I have hidden by using the meditation my mother taught me and by staying just beyond the reach of even the most powerful dream snatcher.

How I wish I didn't have to warn against anyone following their dreams. However, when you live in Metropole, dreams just might get you killed. Many who live here possess the ability to dream walk and therefore can take control of any dream they wish, possibly even turning it into a nightmare. They were hired by the government several years ago and have been destroying what we hold dear since. So don't dream. Don't dream because they're watching and any dream that might cause a regular person to become something amazing just might be taken from them and given to someone the government finds much more susceptible to manipulation.

Now, just because I warn others not to dream doesn't mean that I don't ever dream secretly. Sometimes when I summon all of my courage I will fall asleep and for a few minutes, I allow myself to drift into a dream. For almost my entire life the same dream has passed through my head. I dream of a sanctuary where dreaming is not forbidden but rather encouraged. As

long as I am careful, the dream snatchers can't walk in my mind uninvited. At least that's been the case so far.

Now and then I latch onto a small group of people hiding but I never stay with them for long. Sooner or later one of them, whether by accident or not, has a dream. It is then that the dream snatchers can cause them to get up and turn themselves in. It breaks my heart so much to leave when I know someone's life is about to be taken.

During my life, I've read about amazing stories in the very few books I have possessed over the years, where people were able to create glorious things that came from their dreams. One of the most famous speeches that I cling to in times when the fear of dreaming consumes me is Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have a Dream". Though it is not the same as being afraid to sleep and dream it is still very important to me.

Some people are born with a gift to invent and create. Some people are born with the gift of leadership and others the gift of communication and still others are born with the gift of knowledge and wisdom. These days, however, you'll meet so very few who are gifted with leadership and knowledge because they were the first to be weeded out. The government sought to control the knowledge that we could possess and took over every role of leadership by placing someone in it that they could control and manipulate.

My name is Tara Liederson and I am a fugitive from the government of Metropole and the dream snatchers who serve it. I am the most wanted of all the runaways. I still don't understand why I am so important to them. I only know that I'm supposedly special and I can't ever let them catch me.

This was told to me by an elderly man who took care of me after my mother and brother died up until I turned sixteen this past year. At the beginning and end of each day, he told me that I was the only beacon of hope for those who want to dream. His gift was seeing the potential and purpose, albeit vaguely, of everyone he met. I can still hear his words. *'Tara you are special and just you being alive is a miracle. Your gift has been hidden from everyone, even from little old me. So little bit, never give up, because you are the embodiment of hope, and one day you will make it so that everyone can dream again.'*

Because I am no ordinary dreamer, instead I'm a dream protector which makes me enemy number one to the government and the new world order.

Eric Rittenhouse • Student, Medical Laboratory Technology

Cooper nearly stumbled over the rock jutting up from the path but saw it in time to quickly sidestep it and managed instead to hit his head on a broken, dead branch hanging from an old elm that was eventually going to be a major obstacle in the path. His attention was on the girl sitting in the clearing. She was sitting with her back to a dead log, with an artist's sketch pad propped-up on her knees. He couldn't be sure that she was beautiful, but there was something in the way she was sitting that made Cooper know. Besides, she was an artist, maybe in a different way than he himself, but an artist none the less, and that was lovely in itself, right?

She was far enough away, or maybe too engulfed in her drawing, to hear him when he knocked his head. He felt his forehead above his right eye and couldn't feel any signs of injury, just some tenderness. He pulled his hand away and saw that there was no blood, only a small piece of dead bark. He flicked the bark away then began to walk down the path again, only slower. He wasn't sure if he should approach her, he didn't want to startle her, and being that this was such an isolated spot (Cooper couldn't remember the last time he saw another person on his weekly trek through these woods on any of these endless paths) she might mistake him for a psycho instead of the nice guy that he liked to believe he was. Instead, he stopped again and watched her profile, now that he had a better view. She was obviously drawing the scenery and Cooper could understand why. This was one of the most beautiful spots this time of year, with all the trees displaying different colors—red, green, yellow, orange, brown—and the way the sun danced all around when a light breeze ran through. But what caught his eye the most was the way her hair would shine in the sunlight. It was unreal how it seemed to glow a golden color, and being that he was partial to brunettes, even Cooper as amazed at his attraction. She looked like a damn angel sitting there, and a smile grew on his face.

Realizing that staring at a girl in this situation might look horrible to any passers-by, but especially to the girl herself, Cooper began to walk towards her and in some bizarre way, which he would never understand, Cooper wasn't all that nervous.

As he neared her, she still didn't seem to notice, but he could see the intensity at which she drew. It wasn't just the way her eyes were so focused—in fact, she hardly ever looked up from her pad—it was the way her mouth was set so firm, and her lips moved slightly, almost as if she was trying to hold back from eating up either her drawing or whatever she was drawing.

When he was as close to her as the path would allow, about fifteen feet, now more in front of her than beside her, and she still hadn't noticed him. He decided that there probably was no way to speak without startling her and knew that he was committed to saying something now.

"Excuse me," he said, and was awed that she didn't jump or make a peep, like he knew he would if pulled out of such a trance.

"Huh?" She didn't even turn her head or stop drawing when she said this.

"Actually, I don't know." He said with a slight laugh.

That got her to stop and turn, one eyebrow raised. "Are you serious?"

"I am." He made an unconscious move to rub the spot on his forehead again. "I also feel like a fool for not knowing what to say. Did I startle you?"

She set the pad down on the ground and turned to face him better. Her sundress slid up from her knees and higher on her thighs. She pushed it back, and saw that this stranger had noticed, but didn't stare. "No, I heard you, coming, but honestly, I didn't care."

"I'm sorry if I bothered you—"

"No, I didn't mean it like that. What I meant was that I heard you but was too occupied to *really* notice."

"Oh, I see." But he didn't. He thought she was lying. She was being cautious so as not to seem vulnerable. "My name's Gabe Cooper. Most people just call me Cooper. He leaned forward and extended his hand.

"I'm Cynthia," she said and shook his hand.

"Cynthia?"

She closed her eyes and gave a smile that said: "No, not *Cynthia*. It's *Cyntia*. A hard 't'."

The wind blew, and her hair danced. Cooper wanted to smell her hair more than anything. "I see. Are you an artist?" he asked.

She grinned—what a grin!—and said: "What gave that away?" as she lifted the sketch pad slightly.

He looked at the pad and then at her. "I don't know. Must be something about the way you look. I've always been good at judging people." They both laughed lightly. "Look, I'm sorry to disturb you. It's just that I walk here quite often on the weekends, and I never see anyone else. You're the first if my memory serves. I felt I *had* to stop by and say hi."

"I see. It's beautiful here. Why do you think nobody else comes here?"

"Oh, it's not that nobody else *wants* to come here. I think it's more that, for one, not many people know of this place. For another, it's a bitch to get here because you have to park so far off and then walk here just to walk—or in your case sit and draw—here. I also think that it's too early in the day for many people to come here."

"Understandable. Have I ruined your walk?" She looked genuinely concerned.

"No, no. In fact, you made it more interesting. I like to come here right after the sun comes up. The view is brilliant, which I'm sure you've noticed." He pointed at her sketch. "May I see what you've drawn?"

"Sure, but it's not finished." She handed it over and Cooper took it.

He was amazed at the amount of detail and studied it for quite some time. She waited patiently but studied his face. She knew he liked it, and this was something she was used to. "This is amazing. I mean really amazing, Cynth—I mean *Cyntia*. How could you do this with only a pencil? I mean it looks *real*."

"It's not finished yet. As for your question, I don't know. I see, I draw."

"Yeah, but it's only pencil, yet I can almost see the color. It's like you forget that it's all in gray. And the fact that you drew trees in autumn, with the *sun* shining through—all that color—and you didn't even use color. This is just, just amazing."

"Thank you," she said but didn't blush.

Cooper couldn't look away from the drawing, if he had he would have noticed that she took the compliment but was uncomfortable with it. It wasn't embarrassment, but more that she didn't know how to take a compliment. Of course, she had gotten them many times, but if something makes you genuinely uncomfortable, it's hard to get used to no matter how many times it happens. When he finally did look at her, she was impressed by how quickly he moved on.

"Look, I'm sure you hear that all the time, but I'm impressed. I write, but I could never write like you draw. How I wish I could."

When she smiled at him, it lit up her face and he couldn't help but smile back. "Do you *enjoy* writing?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then does it matter how well you do it?"

"I see your point, but doesn't it feel awesome to be able to create like that? Doesn't it give you, I don't know, a feeling of, of—"

"It's orgasmic, Gabe."

Hearing those words come out of her mouth gave him goosebumps. "Orgasmic," he repeated. "Never thought of it like that. And please, call me Cooper."

"Well, now you will." For the first time, her eyes shifted to his forehead. "What'd you do to your head, Cooper?"

He reached up to touch his new wound. A small bump was forming. "I hit my head on a branch when I first saw you. Is it bad?"

"Just a red bump. A little red. Were you stunned by my presence?" she asked sarcastically.

"Something like that. I was surprised to see another person, and the fact that it was somebody who obviously appreciates the beauty of this place," he pointed at her drawing pad, "as much as I do was enough to make me not pay attention to the task at hand. The task in this case being something as simple as where I was headed."

"Headed in life or headed in your walk?" she asked.

That made his eyebrows raise in consideration of the question. "Both."

That made her smile again. "What do you write?"

"Short stories mostly, but I have a novel or two brewing in the old gray matter. As for subject matter, I just write what comes to me. No particular genre, I guess. I've been on a bit of a hiatus lately—writer's block, I guess."

She sat on the log and motioned for him to sit next to her. He did.

She turned to her right to better face him and crossed her left leg over her right. Her calf was visible, and he noticed for the first time that she was barefoot. "Why do

you think you are blocked, if I may ask?"

"I can't say for sure. Loss of inspiration, perhaps. This may sound crazy, but seeing your drawings has inspired me a bit." He looked at her to see her reaction. "I may actually go home and do a bit of free writing."

"I'll tell you what, Cooper, I must get going. Why don't you try your hand a bit at writing. And next week, maybe same place, same time, we could meet again, here, and you can tell me how it went. I like it here, and I think I have quite a bit left to draw here." She looked around at the scenery with a look of serenity.

"Really? Okay." Cooper stayed on the log and watched as Cyntia, still barefoot, walked away into the trees. It didn't occur to him until later that she didn't even follow a path.

Throughout the week, Cooper wrote, mostly just whatever came to mind, and it made him feel good. Cyntia's art—or more likely Cyntia *herself*—had inspired him. He didn't write anything that he felt would get published, but he was writing for himself and the sake of writing. Every time he finished a writing session, he felt alive and energetic. *Manic* would even be a better term, and he felt like he was truly himself again.

He thought of Cyntia daily and couldn't wait to see her again. Would she meet him again, or was he being foolish? He thought not, because he seemed so sincere. And so beautiful.

When Saturday morning finally came around, Cooper was up earlier than usual. He wrote for over an hour (his longest session of the week), ate a quick breakfast, and felt serene as he drove into the rising sun towards his special walking place.

He walked along the paths and felt anxious to see her, yet he was also lost in his thoughts at times. This walk felt different. Usually, he strode these paths not looking for anything; it was more of a head clearing experience. This time, he felt more like a man on a mission, or that there was an actual end to the walk: this time he felt that there was a purpose. The purpose was Cyntia.

She was sitting near the log again this time facing away from the sunrise. She was sketching again. Lost in a two-dimensional world that she gave the illusion of three. He stopped and watched her before leaving the path. He didn't know if she knew he was there, and he didn't care. Cooper envied the passion in her face, the concentration in her eyes, and the talent in her hands. He wanted to feel when he wrote how she must feel when she drew. He needed to feel that way. Was it addictive? Of course, it was. *Orgasmic* she'd said.

"Good morning, Cyntia." He was walking towards her now.

"Morning, Cooper." She never faltered from her drawing. "Almost at a stopping point."

"Is there ever such a thing?" He sat next to her on the ground.

She smiled. "Only when the picture is finished." She paused her drawing. "Don't you feel the same way about writing?"

"You mean that it's done when it's done?"

"Yes." She began to draw again.

"It's different, though, in a way."

She turned to him; one eyebrow raised. He sighed almost as if her look took his breath away.

He smiled. "Theoretically, a story could go on forever. Stories never truly end. As the writer, you just pick the stopping point."

"How do you know where to stop?"

"You just stop when you feel that going on would be senseless. It would be like droning on. Hell, you stop when it just *feels* right." He stopped and regarded his own words.

Cyntia stopped as well, held her sketch up to study it, and said, "Well, *this* just feels right, now." She handed it to him.

He stared at the picture, not speaking, and not breathing. When he finally exhaled and drew in another breath he said, "It looks so lifelike. How can it look so real but only be done in pencil." He looked into her eyes, lost there, as well. "*How?*"

"I draw what I see. I picture it in my mind and then I recreate it on paper. You must see with your mind before you can put it on paper. I could teach you."

Cooper laughed. "I could never draw like that."

She smiled. "I don't mean pictures. I mean I could teach you to do what I do, except with *words*."

"It's not the same thing. You are taking a beautiful scene and recreating it exactly as you see it. When I write—"

She put her hand on his, which was gesturing, open, in the air. She lowered his hand to his thigh.

"You are recreating a scene just as you see it." She raised his hand to his face. "You are channeling the scene through *this*," she shook his hand, "and channeling that through a pencil, pen keyboard—whatever—and making it into words on paper or a screen. If somebody reads these words, they are picturing it in their mind. It has been transferred from your mind to theirs."

He was sitting open-mouthed, staring at her. "Wow." He glanced at her drawing. "Okay, but what you've done is an exact recreation. When I write, I can't give every detail. That would be impossible."

She raised her sketch to his face. "This isn't exact, Cooper. This is my interpretation. Someone else may see it different."

"It looks the same to me."

"Maybe we see things through the same perspective. The question is, How do you know we are seeing either the same way? Are the picture and the real image the same? Perhaps. But how do you know that the way I see both is the same as the way you see both?"

"I doubt that I could ever see things the same as you."

"Well, there you go. Don't you think that writing is the same way?"

"I guess I used to wonder if people ever walk away from a story with different interpretations. I mean, sure the overall story is similar, but the whole thing?"

"Do you ever read or write *anything* where you give every single detail about any one person or thing?"

"Occasionally a great deal of detail may go into—"

"Every detail?"

"No, but—I see what you're saying."

"When a character enters the story, do you always detail their clothing?"

"Not unless it's important to the story."

"So, the reader may walk away imagining a red shirt, whereas you imagine green, or maybe you both didn't even think about it."

"Yes."

"When I draw, I don't put in a detail unless it needs to be there. Don't you feel the same about writing?"

"Sure."

"I would never add another object or line unless it was necessary."

"Just as I would never add another character or word unless it belonged." Cooper stood up as he said this. He was feeling giddy, and too excited to just sit.

He looked down at her and she smiled. He smiled back. A light breeze made her skirt flap like a sheet on a clothesline. It made her hair dance, and Cooper realized that he could love this woman. She was beautiful, intelligent, talented, and he could *talk* to her.

Never before had he met someone that he felt so good about. Never had he met someone who felt as passionate about something as he did about writing. Sure, he does it for the joy of doing it. No, he never made a lot of money at it, but does it matter? No.

Were all those years of loneliness some sort of waiting period? Those years now seemed worth it.

"Sit back down, Cooper."

He did, and he reluctantly took her hand. "This is crazy. How did I find you here. I mean, what are the chances? You've awakened so much in me. Let me take you out, okay?"

She giggled and motioned to the open field around them. "We are out. We couldn't be much more 'out' than this." She grinned.

A sense of humor, too. He grinned in return. "You know what I mean."

She stood up and faced him and took his other hand. Looking down, with the sun on her face and concern in her eyes, she said, "I can't. I'm sorry."

He didn't know what to say.

"I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just something that I can't explain."

"I don't understand, Cyntia. Is it me? Should I not have asked? Is there somebody else? What is it?"

She sat staring down at her drawing. "Cooper, if I could explain I would. Maybe in time you will come to know. In fact, I know you will. Just trust me, okay?"

"Can I see you again?" My god, were his eyes welling up? They were.

"Come back next week. Meet me. I'll let you know then. Can you do that?"

"Of course."

She stood up. Before walking away, she tore the sketch from the pad. "Take this and think of me."

"I will." He took it from her hands brushing her fingers with his. "Will you really be here next week?"

"Keep writing."

He watched as her bare feet rustled the leaves. Cooper could smell the sweet dying leaves in the breeze, and it was this smell that would always remind him of her: it was her smell, too.

Cooper sat a while after she disappeared into the trees. He felt lonely. He felt exposed. He continued to sit until the sun was high overhead. *She'll be here*, he told himself as he stood up. He went home and he wrote to forget the loneliness.

He wrote twice a day—before work and when he came home—every day, all week long. Motivation was the problem. He couldn't gather his thoughts enough to start, but once he did—and he always did—he would get lost in that world, and not think of anything else.

Cyntia was on his mind between writing sessions. She was his first and last thought of the day, and the autumn air, especially in the mornings reminded him of her. On Wednesday evening, before writing, he tried to rake his lawn, but the scent of the leaves was too much, and as he held one in his hand he thought of her drawing. Where had he put it?

He searched his house, then his car, then his house again. Nowhere. Did he leave it at the clearing? He went there, but it was nowhere to be found. He sat on the log and thought of her: Where was she now, might she show up? He heard a sound, but it was only a squirrel running between trees. He sat a while longer before going home to write.

He wrote until bedtime.

She wasn't sitting by the log when he approached the clearing. Maybe she was late. He sat and watched the sun dance between the leaves. There were less leaves on the trees and soon they would all be bare and reaching towards the sun like giant nerve endings. This whole area would be covered with snow. It was beautiful when a clean blanket of snow covered the ground and sometimes the trees. Beautiful when it was untouched. On the warmer days—days when the temperature was tolerable—

Cooper would walk here, he knew. Maybe not. Maybe if Cyntia never came back, neither would he. It would be time to move on. He knew he'd always come back, and he knew that she wouldn't. He wasn't sure how he knew this, but he knew. This place inspired him; Cyntia inspired him. This place would always remind him of her.

Cooper stood up and pulled out his pocketknife. He squatted on the east side of the log and carved her name. The sun would always shine on her as it rose. Perhaps she would see it in time, but he knew this was a false hope.

He admired her name, and smelled the sweet dying leaves, and he remembered her. She didn't only inspire him, she taught him, as well. She taught him to draw with words, and he loved her for that. Cooper finally looked away from her name, and into the trees where she always disappeared. He imagined seeing her one last time.

"Her eyes were as gray as her drawings," he said to the trees.

When Cooper went home, he sat down to write. As he slowly became lost in his creation, he realized that he no longer needed to motivate. The words just flowed on their own. He drifted into that place, and as he typed these words, he finally realized who she was and where she came from. He needed her and that's why she came.

"Cyntia," he said aloud.

A smile slowly crept up on his face and before he was completely lost in that place for a little while, he whispered her other name: "Muse."

THE END

MY SHADOW

Zahraa Fanharawi • Student, Health Sciences

A shadow seemed to follow wherever I went.
Time wasting away.
Everything and everyone kept moving forward
yet this shadow stayed behind
lingering by my side,

Slowly stitching itself
to every fiber of my being

I am where the shadow resides.
Beams of lights appearing every now and then
though this shadow remains close to my side.
It asks me questions from time to time
and I've slowly learned to respond,
to this lonely dark shadow of mine.

EVIL BACKWARDS IS LIVE

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

I leapt into the truck after the guards had thrown two more bodies of my peers onto the bed of it. I squirmed between them and began to prepare myself mentally for what I was trying to pull off. They were dead and if I didn't look and act as dead as them, I was as good as dead.

I slowed my breathing like my grandmama had taught me before we all ended up here. I closed my eyes and went limp, allowing my head to fall to the side. No sooner had I done that then did I hear footsteps shuffling across the dirt road towards the truck. Next thing I know two more bodies are tossed onto the bed of the truck. One lands on me and the other next to me.

This happens a couple more times until I am buried beneath a dozen bodies. I hear the truck start and I think I am in the clear. That is until I make out a shadow towering above the pile of bodies among which I hide. The shadow holds a long spear that he raises above his head before plunging it down into the pile of bodies.

I had seen it done before when I would peek out of the barred window in my cell. I never understood why they did it but as I felt the spear pierce my side and stifled my scream by biting the arm of the body next to me, I knew. As the taste of iron filled my mouth, I knew that it was done to be sure no one stowed away, pretending to be dead.

When the shadow got out of the truck, there was a loud whistle, and I felt the truck begin to move. I pulled my mouth off the arm of the dead man next to me, not bothering to wipe the blood from my mouth. I felt my consciousness fading until I succumbed to the darkness.

OPENED EYES

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

let me know when you're about to go
we can take it easy and take it slow
so our minds don't explode
with thoughts that overcome our emotional sobriety
such is the spice that brings variety

doing more than what we're trying to accomplish
won't take us very far
but now that our scars are healed
a truth has been revealed
no longer will our worlds be concealed

for the dead will rise
and the blind will see
that's what our faith taught us to believe
eyes reconceived as a tool inspiration
sensations of energy being released

overflowing divine
this world is yours and mine
to give up is not in the equation.

TOTALLY NORMAL

Laura Reece • Student, Early Childhood Education

I was laying on what I can only assume was a frigid metal table, though I couldn't know for sure since I was completely numb from the chin down. In front of me was a thin, blue sheet of fabric that was secured to a bar to ensure that I couldn't see what was happening to the lower half of my body. My arms lay outstretched to either side of my body as if I were being crucified. I was surrounded by tubes and wires that were slithering to various machines that all beeped in an odd, rhythmic chorus behind me. The feelings of worry and dread started to swell in my throat as if they needed to exit my body in the form of the most violent scream, but all I could do was lay there while panic spread throughout my body like wildfire.

"Let me know if you feel any pain," the anesthesiologist said from somewhere above me.

"Um, I think I'm feeling something I shouldn't, but I can't tell," I responded in a shaking voice.

"Okay, I'll take care of it," she responded.

Below me people in blue paper jumpsuits and masks were all talking to each other and moving urgently, but I couldn't process anything they were saying or doing. All I could focus on was my baby boy, the baby boy I knew but hadn't gotten to meet yet. I think back to hours earlier when I was shuffling slowly, but excitedly, around my apartment gathering supplies for my future stay in the hospital. I moved from room to room on facetime with my sister-in-law.

"Yes, of course I'll call you guys after he's born! Andrew has to tell me if he's ugly or not." I said, referring to my older brother and only sibling.

"Oh my god, Laura, he's not going to be ugly. He's going to be the cutest baby ever."

"Okay, yeah, I know, but babies are not cute when they first come out. I need someone to tell me the truth."

I scoffed at my own shallow thoughts about my innocent, unborn child whose life was now at risk. I was pulled back to the present by the sudden and overwhelming need to vomit. I turned my head to the side and the anesthesiologist was ready with a pink bowl.

"It's totally normal, don't worry," she said as she patted the top of my head, which was the only part of my body that I could feel. I stared at her in

disbelief and thought to myself, “None of this is normal.”

I was admitted to the hospital just eight hours prior. While I was beyond thrilled to finally meet my baby, I couldn’t help but feel slightly sorrowful. Being pregnant was nothing like I expected. For years I had heard women complain about pregnancy; swollen feet, heartburn, morning sickness, hip pain, back pain, pelvic pain, the list of symptoms is endless. And while this is the experience for so many, it wasn’t mine. I loved being pregnant. It was like walking around with my favorite person attached to me, where I knew he was safe. It seemed like every time I had a hard moment, he would gently kick my ribs or bladder to remind me I wasn’t alone. I had no complications and at the end of every one of the twelve prenatal appointments with my OB/GYN he would say, “Everything looks great, kid. Can’t wait to meet you,” followed by a light fist bump to my stomach. It wasn’t exactly the interaction that would lead me to believe that I would go from being induced, to the doctor on my floor barking statements to the surrounding nurses.

“I have to break her water.”

“Meconium stained.”

“His heartbeat is dropping.”

“Get me an internal monitor!”

“Prep the O.R.”

“One more contraction.”

“Dropped. Move!”

“Wait, how long have I been laying here?” I thought. It felt like it had been hours, though I knew that wasn’t possible. Somehow time had twisted itself around me in a way that I had never felt before; it was standing still while also accelerating forward. With each passing moment I was faced with a new detail or sound that I hadn’t seen coming. I was supposed to be happy today.

Suddenly, one of the doctors below said, “Okay, Laura. You’re going to feel a lot of pressure,” and the next moment he was holding up a wailing, yellow ball of flesh. A quick frenzy of “You did great’s!” and “He’s here’s!” swallowed me as I used every ounce of energy I had to crane my neck to see my baby. But before I could see his face, he was swept away into another room.

“Is he okay?” I asked anyone who could hear me, while simultaneously realizing I had tears streaming down my face. No one responded.

I laid on the table, silent, unwilling to process what just happened. I’m not sure how much time passed while the doctors worked on repairing the damage they caused to my body. I was literally and figuratively numb. The

doctors and nurses continued to work on me as if I were a cadaver instead of a living, breathing, awake human being. I can only imagine that this lack of empathy comes from ripping women apart to save infants has become normalized to them. Why hadn't anyone prepared me for this? Why wasn't I ready? Is this what motherhood is like? For the last ten months I had spent every free moment I had pouring over every article, blog post, video, book, and interview I could get my hands on to prepare myself for pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy was not just happening to me, it was me. I wore my new title of "Future first time mom" like a shiny badge. I beamed with pride as I recited every factoid I had learned to anyone who would listen. So why had I not been ready for this? Why had no one told me about this horrific possibility?

I couldn't say how long it was until I finally saw my son's face. He was brought out to me swaddled in a footprint clad blanket and a blue and pink striped hat. He was asleep in someone else's arms while I lay on the table, unmoving. I watched the fluorescent light bounce off his perfect, long eyelashes and noticed that he most definitely got my nose. As I examined his face, I stopped at his eyebrows. They were lighter than I expected, tinted slightly orange. I gasped and asked, "Does he have red hair?!" As the knit hat was pushed back, his head full of wispy, wild, orange hair revealed itself to me. My heart swelled and broke all in one moment. I was learning everything about my sweet baby, my Oliver, through someone else's hands and arms while mine lay limp and useless on the table, still numb.

The next few days were a blur. The door to my hospital room door was revolving for visitors, nurses, doctors, photographers, and consultants. I was expected to show gratitude as person after person told me "Well, all that matters is that he is okay!" as if because now that I was a mother my trauma should be swept under the rug.

After two days of numbness, it was finally the day before I was scheduled to leave the hospital, and I had to attend a parenting class. As I made my way slowly back into my room after the class, I noticed a machine attached to a pole with wheels near the foot of my bed. My heart sank as I realized the machine was a breast pump. I knew that this meant my baby wasn't gaining enough weight because my body wasn't able to produce enough life sustaining milk for him. When the nurse came in to show me how to use it, she informed me that my newborn son had lost half a pound in two days. My eyes glazed over while she continued talking as if I hadn't just been told my child was quite literally starving to death. After she left, I sat down on the corner of the bed. My body sunk in on itself, my face dropped into my hands, and I sobbed for the next lonesome three minutes before being interrupted by the hospital photographer who was there to "capture some beautiful moments".

It has been almost four full years since the best and worst day of my life, and it is still difficult for me to think about that day and those "beautiful

moments.” I often wonder about how I would have handled this traumatic experience had I been properly prepared for the different possibilities. Would I have been able to produce enough breastmilk? Would I be able to look back on the day that my child was born and feel joy instead of dread? How would being able to anticipate certain aspects of my experience have impacted the kind of mother I was for those first few months? No one is or could be truly prepared for the challenges that pregnancy and childbirth can present. However, what if we regarded them with the honor and respect they deserve? What if we recognized them for the life-altering, soul-filling, body-transforming experiences they are? What if we just talked about it as if it were totally normal?

HEAVEN.

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

We shall meet again in the place
where there is no darkness,
no pain and no more suffering.
No more anguish and no more hate,
no more violence that puts us in an awful state.
Where purity of heart
is a priority from the start
and our world is transformed from within.
To freedom,
to love,
to new beginnings
and to pride,
and to the joy we must capture
above the blue skies.

SECRETS & LIES

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Secrets slither in the darkness sneaky and deadly
What secrets are housed in hearts blackened with hate?

Secrets of fire burn bridges and cut ties
Secrets are words hidden covered up by telling lies

Surrounded by shadows from where none shall return
Don't be so distracted by the beauty of a rose that you are pricked by its thorn

The weight of things kept hidden is like quicksand around your waist
Toxic sludge black coats the mouths from whence secrets emerge

When the tongue drips honey it's so sickly sweet
It disguises the stingers embedded in it

Behind the mask of insincerity lurks a demonic secret
Secrets break the body and burn the soul

They strain the muscles and crack the bones
Tainted by what's withheld inside a shadowed soul

When a liar speaks black smoke clouds the atmosphere for they cannot be trusted
By the time you hear its rattle it's too late to escape the snake

Barriers that define the boundaries of the shadows and the light sport
handprints of blood
Where many a soul has tried to pass between the two before meeting an awful fate

Everywhere you look, in everyone you see, you will always find a secret that they keep
The reasons behind secret keeping are vast and infinite

Many keep them to prevent judgment, while others do so to prevent incrimination
Secrets are also ammunition to wound others while preventing the
discovery of your own mistakes

You can spot a liar by looking where they've come from as the footprints
will be ashy and muddy

SECRETS & LIES

Though a melody may emerge from their lips it is a trap and pretty soon
you'll find yourself sharp or flat

Be careful where you place your foot for some stones are not as solid as they seem
Guard yourself against things that seem too good to be true because they probably are

Secrets and lies go hand-in-hand one cannot be without the other
Secret identities, villains, superheroes, special agents they all have one thing in common

Though the reason for the secret of those differs in each scenario
Please don't gaze upon her beauty and get so lost that you miss the knife
she holds behind her back

You look at a little girl who looks like an angel
But the shadow she casts is nothing close to one

You look at a man with piercings and tattoos, you assume he's evil
But his shadow is that of a praying man

What you see is not always what it is and what it is, is not always what you see
Deception is all around and casts shadows causing doubt

Liars lie because they've been lied to and it's the only thing they know
Secrets don't keep us close but rather divide us making us turn on one another

Secrets and lies are like salt and pepper or two peas in a pod
The pain that remains left from secrets and lies is not easily forgotten

A scar will always taint the skin, the heart, the soul of the victim
Mysteries glimmer in the moonlight beckoning to wandering souls

If you tell me your secret I will tell you mine
An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

Secrets can make us powerful for a time but ultimately they become a weakness
The same can be said for lies, the truth may hurt but is not as lasting as a lie

Maybe you'll escape before your air runs out
Maybe just maybe you'll escape the maze before time stops

Perhaps for today death will pass over you, it's glance upon another

SECRETS & LIES

But sooner or later it will come to a head

Ghosts linger as their business is unfinished and they shimmer with foggy deception
Be careful of things that are beautiful for they hide the most ugly and dangerous of things

Each promise laced with poison making one susceptible to suggestion
Pretty liars are the most deadly for you see them not coming till it's too late

They get close and personal knowing you better than you know yourself
You open up and become vulnerable and that's your biggest mistake

Trust is the biggest most powerful weapon of secrets and lies
Lies are like slivers that stick in your finger and fester

Secrets are like splinters that dig into your skin and putrefy
Lies are like lasers that cut and burn what they touch

When secrets and lies invade your mind you can't tell what's real and what's not
At their invasion you are unable to understand what's true and what isn't

It's like your brain is clouded, your mind is covered in a mist
You can't think clearly enough to find a way out and there's a ringing in your ears

You have been disoriented by what you did not see coming
The warning of which you did not heed

It's numbing not being in control
Those explosions surround you, you don't hear a thing

Suddenly you're underwater and everything is silent
Can you hold your breath long enough to survive

Because Mrs. Secret wants you to die and Mr. Lie wants you to give up and
breathe the water in
Darkness has befriended you, shadows form wings behind you

Smoke creates feathers blackened by evil
You can run but you can't hide, you'll never escape secrets and lies

SECRETS & LIES

They'll hunt you when you're dreaming with torturous nightmares
But don't expect to be saved during the day because they will hunt you there as well

You won't have peace of mind there will be no quiet for your soul
Not as long as the poison runs through your bloodstream

What secrets aren't you telling what lies have you let slip
They will be your undoing they have already begun to wear you down

How long before your skin has gone and you're left with muscle and bone
Then when the muscle atrophies and you're left as brittle bone what will you do

Secrets and lies are how we disguise things that we don't want others to know or to see
But sooner or later our true colors show

I guarantee you are not purely white
There will be patches of black

Secrets are grenades that when shared, blow up friendships and relationships
Lies alter perceptions others have of us and how they interact with us in the future

Walking on a tightrope over a pool of piranhas walking the line between
wrong and right
Some things are better left unsaid for words cut deeper than a knife

But the wisdom to know what secrets to share and what lies not to tell is
not common anymore
Instead of standing in the light we love to bask in the deliciousness of the dark

What we do in the dark cannot be judged and cannot be seen by our peers
We are no longer bugs underneath a microscope but are free to follow
pleasure and desire

Tripping up on secrets and over our lies is like bare feet getting blisters as
you run through a desert
We are like sheep who will so willingly drink the Kool-Aid whoever the
source may be

We are quick to believe lies because we don't want to face the truth
Do not gaze into the shadows if you don't possess the wisdom to discern
their meaning

SECRETS & LIES

Deception is waiting behind every rock and around every corner
Promise me you won't tell a soul the secret I've just told you

Swear to me that you will never lie to me and will always tell the truth
I cannot believe a word you utter for they drip with smoke and darkness
and deceiving hope

Like a broken butterfly wing that will tear with the slightest touch or breeze
Relationships where secrets and lies have dwelt or dwell are just hanging by
a thread

Eventually the secrets become too much, as do the lies
They will be the straw that broke the camel's back

Backs are lined with bruises like a patchwork quilt
Patterns made from the various weights they've born

Ones that never fade because the weight is too much
Others that have rented a space for their recurring presence

A venomous spider that sets a trap, a web to catch its prey
You reach the top of the stairs but where do you go from there

And when you turn back can you see all the blood you spilled
Can you see the people you stomped on and the bruises you left

Can you see the hearts that you broke and the souls you destroyed
Don't let yourself fall asleep for when your ears are unguarded

In crawl the spiders of secrets and the worms of lies
A knife to the heart a needle prick to the finger a wound to the soul

THE PERFORMATIVE LANGUAGE

Connor Myers • Student, Academic Transfer

Synopsis: *After social interaction has been discouraged in society, a lonely young man finds himself faced with challenging thoughts and a storm of ideas. Throughout the next 3 years, he would go through a change, a journey from novice to master in the ways of the stage. From the roles of a student, to a singing and dancing medieval knight, to a bumbling bottom-of-the-barrel comedian, he learns almost all there is to know about the theatre.*

In the 2020-2021 school year, I was severely limited. The plague of Covid-19 kept me holed up in a room by myself. With only myself for entertainment, I finally took notice of my love of voicework, and how often I would change my entire tone, pitch, and quality to sound like a completely different person. Curious, I researched careers in voice acting, with many sites and videos informing me that having experience on a theatrical stage made finding jobs easier, and could be a great way to grow more comfortable with performing in general. My parents had both done community theatre before, and took me to multiple shows and musicals as a child, so I figured: “Why not? My parents must’ve loved it for a reason.” At that moment, I decided to give this theatrical world a shot.

The first semester of my senior year, I chose to take a basic Theatre class, dipping my toes into the vast ocean this world could provide. I was still quite shy and quiet in this class, not really knowing anyone, and not having much acting experience, if any. Going into it, I only knew the basics of the voice: Speaking from the diaphragm, keeping in mind the hard and soft palates (muscles in the mouth). I had no real knowledge of the physicality of acting, or the mental processes used to get into character, but throughout the semester, I was given opportunities to perform with my classmates and test out my own stagefright (which I wasn’t aware I had). I noticed in these early, short performances that my voice was shaky, my movements uncertain. My teacher, Mr. Lambley, taught me the basics of movement on stage. I learned to move with purpose, choosing a part of the body to lead with, and all the different postures a character can have. As the first few weeks went on, I found myself getting more comfortable on this stage.

This Theatre class gave me plenty of updates on my school’s performances, including a performance of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Luckily, I was given an opportunity to usher for this show, handing out programs and checking tickets just outside the bustling auditorium. As a bonus, I was also able to watch the play for free, mesmerized by what I saw on stage, the mystical effort my schoolmates put into their characters. I experienced a strange feeling as I started to recognize the faces on the stage. Some of the most impressive actors were

old friends of mine, from elementary and middle school, some of whom I hadn't spoken to since 6th grade. Watching them, I gained a strange feeling of inspiration. "If they could do this, why couldn't I? In fact, if we had stayed friends, would I be onstage with them?"

Afterwards, I made a decision. The following semester, I signed up for Drama Club, sinking myself knee-deep into the endless waters of performance. On top of this, I took another class, Advanced Theatre, in which I made new connections, and rekindled some old ones. Perhaps it wouldn't be as hard to weave myself into this community as I thought it would be. Throughout the course of my Advanced Theatre class, I was able to almost entirely triumph over my stagefright, learning more about comfortably and effectively portraying a character. I took one more opportunity to usher for a play, this one being much more serious and dark. Despite the depressing subject matter of *The Laramie Project*, I enjoyed the experience thoroughly, once again fascinated by the way my friends and classmates so effortlessly portrayed the anger and heartbreak of the story. It was after this performance that I decided to finally dive headfirst into this world I had been so slowly and carefully easing myself into.

When auditions for the school's musical came around, I had already made up my mind about putting my skills to the test. Regardless of my nerves, I put my whole heart and soul into my audition, hoping to at least measure up to my peers. My classmates were supportive, but the director was silent the entire time, giving us almost no feedback... Was this how auditions were supposed to go? I went through that week doing everything I could to keep my mind off of it, until the cast list was finally posted... and I made it! In LSE High School's performance of *Once Upon a Mattress*, I would be playing an ensemble role! A medieval knight that was often seen in the background, giving more life to the kingdom. I was more than happy to play a role whose only lines were murmurs and song lyrics. It was low-stress, low-effort, and there would be less eyes on me! Or... so I thought.

When the first days of rehearsals came, I was hit with another storm of unfamiliar words and ideas. I was handed a "libretto," which I later learned was the word for a full script and songbook for a musical- not an Italian dessert. Later on, as I got more familiar with my character, I was forced to combine knowledge I already had with something I was completely inexperienced in. *Once Upon a Mattress* is a musical retelling of the Princess and the Pea, with a comedic twist. I had already taught myself how to sing decently enough, but dancing definitely wasn't my forte. Thankfully, my Theatre classes taught me better control over my body, so I was able to squeak by in the first few choreography rehearsals. Later on through the rehearsal process, I was tasked with combining all three aspects of my performance: acting, singing, and dancing. I'll admit that this was a struggle, but I was up to the task.

After months of rehearsing, and a few days of dress rehearsals, opening night came. Everything we had worked for came down to this moment... I could feel the shadows of my long gone stage fright creeping back around my mind as my eyes scanned the auditorium... It was a *full house*... I could spot my friends and family watching me... but despite my nerves, the night went off with no issues. Each scene was more invigorating than the last, and my nerves morphed into pure excitement for my next scene. As we sang the final lines of Act 2, the crowd took no time at all to start the applause. We even received standing ovations on two of the four performances! Needless to say, I was pretty confident in my ability to perform going forward after such a successful and life changing experience.

Once Upon a Mattress wasn't the end for me, not at all. Almost immediately after the musical had finished, my Advanced Theatre class started a brand new project in collaboration with the Theatre Production class. We would be auditioning for and performing four short plays, with Theatre Production students acting as directors. I actively made one of the student directors laugh as I performed the monologue she gave me, which was clearly a good sign, since I was cast in the short play she chose: *Accused of Comedy*. I was given the role of Dobbs, part of a bottom-of-the-barrel vaudevillian comedy duo in a world where comedy has been outlawed. This play was more challenging than *Once Upon a Mattress*, because I needed to do a lot of line memorization, something I hadn't yet learned. With only one week of preparation, we managed to put our production together. Despite a few mistakes and awkward silences, we still got a chorus of laughter and applause from the smaller audience. By now, I could practically see the bottom of the theatrical ocean as I dove even further.

Hot on the heels of *Accused of Comedy*, the cast of LSE's *Once Upon a Mattress* was given one last encore! The Nebraska High School Theater Academy (NHSTA) presented our cast with an Outstanding Musical Theatre Production award! This meant that we were all given *one last performance* at the ceremony. The bus was filled to the brim with excitement as we all eagerly awaited our final performance together. Emotions ran high as we rehearsed, awed by the majesty and size of the Orpheum Theater. It was far fancier and more elaborately decorated than any stage we had performed on up to that moment, and it was truly unforgettable the way the crowd roared once our song had reached its end... but there wasn't a single dry eye on the ride back to Lincoln. Whether you were performing the lead role, or supporting from the ensemble, everyone felt the pride and sadness of the day...

Just like everyone else, I had come to an understanding during my final time on my high school's stage. As we all hugged, shook hands, and took pictures, we all realized that we had to say goodbye to the stage we had spent so many hours on. We had all grown attached to the stage, whether we had spent multiple years there, or just one. As I said my final goodbyes, I realized that I finally understood the final step on my journey. When you put all of your energy and emotion into bringing a stage to life, you are speaking the language of theatre.

[THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK as this once lonely young man finishes recounting his journey on the stage. From studying the basics of acting, to putting them to the test as a musical knight and a buffoon of a comic, he was able to learn the purpose behind every aspect of the stage. As he puts the final touches on his tale, he hopes that his story was at the very least educational, putting into perspective just how much it takes to become a master of your own literacy.]

WAITING ROOM

Cecelia Bialas • Alumna

An elderly man reads his creased BIBLE,	while the analogue clock ticks slowly,
an elderly lady clutches her head,	Black hands move around the face,
cops escort a jumpsuited convict,	warning against sudden movement,
a middle-aged man writhes on the	the fluorescent lights illuminating
floor under	the plastic chairs fill up,
his girlfriend who admires his strength	all waiting for change,
while	
a rumpled parent holds a screaming toddler,	

witnesses to the inexhaustible variations
on the pain experience

ROADTRIP

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

It is hot and smoky and dry.
It stings our eyes and makes us cry.
Hazy water illusions a lie,
This is our limbo when we die.

Shriveled scrubland grass and skeletal leaves
Bow and rattle in the blasted breeze.
Sun-bleached bones urge unease;
Hell-sent omens beckon disease.

It smells of asphalt and dust.
The air stirs still without a gust.
The sun corrupts a metal beetle's hollow husk.
We shuttle on because we must.

The skeletons in our closet rattle beside us,
Memories of sin not to discuss.
But eons of age forges forgotten trust,
And amnesiac forgetfulness disguises disgust.

Yellow plains and infinite prairie
Prompts me infinitely wary;
Trapped in a truck with skeletons I cannot bury.
A man-made mass grave, a transport cemetery.

I hurtle down an interminable freeway,
Atoning without night, at the height of the day.
My skin will shrivel and gray, my hair thin and fray,
And I will join my skeletons in the truck that we all lay.

GOOD TIMES AND TAN LINES

**Kailyn McMann • Student, Dual Credit, Palmyra
Jr.-Sr. High School**

While leaning back in my chair, I dig my toes in the warm sand on the little man-made beach. The wall of cinderblocks around three sides of the perimeter holds the sand in. A father and son duo load up their jet skis on the boat ramp to my left. On my right lies a lazy creek before the steep bluffs begin. The sun throws its rays on me, and I can feel my shoulders start to burn. I close my eyes for a moment and listen to the waves gently roll onto the beach before ending in a soft *crash*. I gaze at the tan bluffs on the other side of the lake with tall trees making up the horizon. It's the only proof that the lake ended. I couldn't see the dam to the east or where it narrowed back into the Missouri River to the west. I watch a bald eagle soar over my head before turning my attention to the children skipping rocks.

The children slowly morph into my brother, cousins, and me as I recall all of the rock skipping competitions between us. It always felt fulfilling when the rock would leave my hand perfectly and dance along the top of the water with a soft *pit pat, pit pat*. I then start to think about the stories my grandpa would tell us. My great-grandparents built the cabin that we stay in now, so he's come up here almost his entire life. He said that he used to come down to the beach all the time and skip rocks for hours. I picture what I think my grandpa might have looked like back then. I imagine a young, lanky but athletic boy with short, dark hair standing at the edge of the water perfecting his rock skipping technique. This lake, Lewis and Clark Lake, holds an abundance of family stories.

My dad, who had brought down all the kayaks in my grandpa's crimson truck, unloads them onto the shore. "All yours!" he announces as I spring to my feet. I gently push off a little before climbing in. I then use my paddle and find a firm spot to push off even further. I pull the heavy water behind me as I race out to meet my cousins and brother waiting for me. Tiny drops of cool water land on my lap in between strokes while small swallows dart in and out of the nests they carved into the sides of the bluffs. I almost feel forced to look up and watch them slice through the sapphire sky, dotted by only a few cotton ball-like clouds. The bluffs' colossal size made them look much closer than they were. I'm reminded of the time my cousins and I swam from our boat all the way to land and etched our names into a giant boulder. I wonder where that was. Has another person ever seen them? Are they even still visible, or did erosion erase any evidence that we were ever there?

We quickly fill the space around us with laughter as we reminisce on all of the memories this place holds. One popular topic is the countless, crazy falls we had while tubing. Our bodies would collide with the cool water

with a *splash!* but no matter how sore it made us, we couldn't wait to do it again. We talk about the time my cousin, Noah, walked right off the end of the dock because he wasn't paying attention. We can't help our giggling as we remember his dad pulling him out by the foot. He only shoots us an annoyed eye roll.

A boat flies past us, maybe a bit closer than it should have, and sends tall waves toward us. We paddle to face them and watch the noses of our kayaks dive into each trough and rise onto each crest. My brother, Carter, doesn't turn around in time, and a wave hits him from the side, which sends him tumbling into the water. After checking on him, we can't help but burst out laughing. Another memory had been added to the ever-growing list tied to this lake.

"Keeka! Keeka!" my little cousin, Ava, calls out from the shore.

I instantly recognized the nickname she had given me when she was two. "What?" I cry back.

"Come make a sand castle with me!" Ava shouts.

I could feel my arms, chest, and shoulders becoming sore and tight from pushing through the water for so long, so I decide to paddle back to shore and join her. I drag my kayak up the boat ramp a ways before ditching it. I watch her work vigorously to dig a gaping hole in the sand. She had carelessly tossed aside all of the sand castle-shaped buckets. Apparently, she had developed other plans in the 30 seconds it took for me to come over there. Ava hauls bucket after bucket of water up to her hole and dumps it in. It would only last a few seconds while the sand slowly drank it. She wasn't discouraged, however, and continued to construct the pool while the others join us back on land.

A large shadow runs across the ground and I looked up to see what I assume is the same bald eagle as before. She seems back on the hunt, and I wonder if she had babies to feed. The children skipping the rocks had since gone home, which leaves only the five of us and our parents on the beach.

I leave Ava to her project, which Carter and Noah now assist her with, and go for a walk with Cameron, the oldest of my three cousins. The beach wraps and snakes around the bluffs. As we walked, the clay rocks crunch and break underneath our feet. We stop a couple of hundred feet away on the smooth, slippery slab of white stone that juts out into the water. Our parents had warned us about this as children because of the drop-off at the end of the platform. We talk about our memories here and our plans for the future. We fantasize about both of us living up here where we could have a beach day or boat day whenever we want.

"We could always join the Amish settlement," Cameron jokes. Lewis and Clark Lake sits on the Nebraska-South Dakota border. A few miles down on

the South Dakota side sat the oldest, active Hutterite colony in the world. They aren't actually Amish, but they share many similarities. Of course, I don't want that lifestyle, but I do envy the fact that they live on wide-open land right on the shore.

A cool breeze blew off the water and made me shiver. This causes us to notice the scarlet sun sinking below the trees, casting its glow across the water. The sky, with its vibrant pinks and yellows, looks so perfect I could almost see the paintbrush strokes.

"We should probably head back. Our moms will want us home before it's dark," I reluctantly suggest. With that, we trek back to where the others waited. We are going back home tomorrow and we all hate to leave. This seems like the happiest and most carefree place in the world. The songs of the cicadas and crickets waking up now join the sound of the crunching rocks. I steal a glance at the bluffs towering over us and see the sparrows settling down for the night. The air has grown heavy and sticky, but now and then a brisk breeze would encourage me to hurry back to the cabin.

By the time we return, my dad, uncle, and grandpa had already loaded the kayaks and left. My aunt makes sure Ava picks up all of the buckets, shovels, and sandcastle molds she had hardly touched. My mom gathers the shoes strewn all over the beach along with any abandoned towels while Cameron and I make our way towards Carter and Noah on the boat ramp. As we wash the gritty sand off our feet, we talk about one more treasured memory that we share with this place. I give my brother a playful shove as he tells the story of me slipping on the boat ramp and having to walk back to the cabin with wet clothes and green algae all over the back of my shorts. My favorite part of this beach isn't the warm sand or cool water. It's having the opportunity to spend time with my family because we can focus on each other and not on the stresses of the world outside this valley.

I take one last full breath of the lake air. It has such a unique smell that's hard to explain. However, whenever I smell it I'm immediately transported right back to this beach. A smile spreads across my lips as I turn to start the climb up the hill back to our cabin. The red rocks make a loud crunching sound as we step on them. Pretty soon we all seem to fall into step and my mind focuses on the rhythmic *crunch, crunch, crunch* coming from beneath our feet. Another memorable beach day was in the books.

EVIL'S SINISTER SEDUCTION

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Frolicking with the shadows in the mud pits of sin
Drinking with the demons in the tar pits of evil
Grinding with the monsters in the waterfalls of devilry
Soaking with the devil in the hot springs of lust

Wine cascading down the breasts of degraded women
Sweat coating the bodies of drunken men in desire
Honey sticking the juicy lips of heathens to evil thoughts
Salt crackling among the flames of white hot passion

Darkness begs me to give myself over to her
Her sweet seductive verses deepen sinful longing
Darkness begs me to surrender to desires of the flesh
Her sweet seductive promises drawing me to such evil

Forsaking my faith to wallow in sinful wealth
Casting aside what I need in exchange for what I want
Forsaking my purity of heart to bathe in sinful riches
Casting aside the narrow path for the path wide open

Life with the shadows of deceit strips away truth
Life with the demons of lust strips away love
Life with the monsters of fear strips away hope
Life with the devil of condemnation strips away redemption

FADED RELICS

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

Memory is a fragile thing.
Vibrancy fades as time echoes away
every watershed and pinnacle lost
moments of import degraded, misplaced.
What color were her eyes again?
the ballrooms of the mind are vast yet
forgotten dreams dance along the corridors.

I can't remember most of my twenties.
A vigorous stranger stood those years in my place
I'm sure he must have fallen
in love with life, the world, himself, a girl.
What was her name again?
I think he would have been disappointed
should our paths have crossed

It's odd sometimes how long pain can linger
a childhood of scabs and scars
fists, boots, belts, and rods; each distinct
punishments for transgressions I can't recall.
Why was I bleeding again?
I spend too much time trying to recover
moments better left forgotten.

As a teen, I remembered everything.
Every person, moment, place, event
Perfection was locked in the vault of my mind
Omniscience hovered at my fingertips.
Where did I leave my keys again?
The fog of war follows us even in peace
turning cherished friends into silhouettes and shadows

Ghostly faded things
Epiphanies forgotten
Echoes in time

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE AND HOW DO WE HELP

Kristen McCoy • Student, Surgical Technology

William Stoehr knows firsthand how devastating addiction can be. He shares his story with the National Institute of Drug Abuse about his sister, Emma, and her lifelong struggle with addiction. Emma struggled with substance abuse her whole life when doctors prescribed opioids for post-surgery pain (NIH: Breaking Down the Stigma). While this helped with the pain, she quickly became addicted. She attended numerous rehabilitation programs while struggling with different substances (NIH: Breaking Down the Stigma). After her husband died, Emma had another back surgery, and she soon became addicted to opioid pain relievers again, however this time, she overdosed (NIH: Breaking Down the Stigma). This story is a reality for many American families. There are many organizations we can blame for this story. Whether it be the pharmaceutical companies who first created prescription opioids to “help” patients while in reality wanting to turn an incredibly large profit, or doctors who over-prescribed these medications at the urging of these pharmaceutical companies. Blame is easily placed, but strategies to overcome this health crisis seem to be ineffective thus far.

The opioid epidemic has been overlooked in recent years, due to the ever present, seemingly more pressing issues that are surrounding the United States. Addiction only grew worse as the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the United States in 2020, leaving many addicts at home, surrounded by their drug of choice. Many addictions worsened during this time, and opioid addiction was not immune to this. The government’s strategies are ineffective as thousands of Americans continue to die from this epidemic yearly. The opioid epidemic is harmful to Americans and should be addressed in more depth and with more resources, because thousands of Americans overdosed on opioids last year when we were “working” to address this public health crisis.

To begin, pharmaceutical companies need to be held accountable for their contribution to the opioid epidemic. These companies are for-profit corporations, and because of that are focused more on pleasing shareholders rather than helping patients who use their products. According to Art Van Zee one pharmaceutical company in particular, Purdue Pharmaceuticals, is where blame can be heavily placed. Purdue Pharmaceuticals is responsible for the creation of OxyContin, a popular opioid prescribed to patients for pain (Zee). But how did it become so popular? Zee continues in his article that Purdue Pharmaceuticals started an aggressive marketing campaign for their drugs and persuaded doctors in a variety of ways to more frequently prescribe their

products (Zee). The tactics for this included taking doctors out to dinner and filling up the doctor's cars with gas. Purdue also held more than "40 nationwide pain-management conferences at resorts in Florida, Arizona, and California" for physicians to attend, all expenses paid of course. (Zee) This is clear bribery by pharmaceutical companies to influence the doctors' prescribing by giving them a good feeling about the company and their products. Although many physicians stated that these conferences did not influence their prescribing it is "well documented that these pharmaceutical companies' symposiums did, in fact, affect prescribing patterns" (Zee). After Purdue Pharmaceutical manufactured this new and expensive drug, they had to turn a profit on it as soon as possible. Because of an aggressive marketing campaign that targeted both doctors and consumers "sales grew from \$48 million in 1996 to almost \$1.1 billion in 2001" (Zee). While promoting OxyContin, Purdue Pharmaceuticals "failed to adequately warn about addiction risks on drug packaging and in promotional activities" (Haffajee, et al.). Purdue Pharmaceuticals knowingly promoted a highly addictive drug in commercials and ad campaigns. Purdue Pharmaceuticals taught sales representatives a very important phrase while marketing this drug: "that the risk of addiction was less than one percent" (Zee). This was soon discovered to be very far from the truth. Patients became addicted to this "non-addictive" drug.

The promotion and success of OxyContin was exacerbated by the fact that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had approved a special label for this drug. This original label stated that "iatrogenic addiction was very rare if opioids were legitimately used in the management of pain" (Zee). This special label made physicians feel like the prescription of this opioid was safer than other class two narcotics, which have been shown to be highly addictive. This label was false and had not been checked properly by the FDA before the release of OxyContin. After the label was shown to be incredibly misleading there were many lawsuits against Purdue Pharma, but the fines levied by the government were insignificant compared to the profits these drugs earned. OxyContin was one of the most widely prescribed opioids during this time of aggressive marketing, but they were only required to pay the United States government \$109 million and to state governments only \$214 million to "settle the allegations of mislabeling OxyContin" after making billions from the product (Nguyen, et al). The profits of OxyContin greatly outnumbered this settlement amount, and is insufficient in terms of Purdue Pharma's overall profits resulting from OxyContin. Although pharmaceutical companies have greatly contributed to the opioid epidemic, there are more contributors to this problem.

Adding to this crisis is the over-prescription of opiates. Doctors need to be more conscious when prescribing opioids to patients. Doctors are regularly paid by pharmaceutical companies to prescribe their medications. A study done researching prescribing practices between 2013-2015 showed that "pharmaceutical company payments increased prescribing for marketed brand-name medications, even when payments were of low value, for example an industry-sponsored meal" and the research concluded that beverages and meals were the most common gifts received by doctors (Hadland, et al). Other

low value gifts are commonplace, so if doctors can be persuaded to prescribe medications on so little, we must ask what high value gifts could convince doctors to prescribe. Even if it is not money directly, other bribery, like trips, are being given to doctors. This happened to me as a doctor was trying to prescribe an incredibly expensive drug for me that was completely unnecessary for the diagnosis I had been given. We later found out that the doctor regularly takes trips on the pharmaceutical company's dime. Doctors receiving kickbacks have impaired judgment when making prescription decisions about their patients. This is a clear conflict of interest, as we must consider if this medication that is being prescribed is necessary for the patient, or is it so the doctor can receive a kickback. Doctors must become more acquainted with the side effects and addictive aspects of opioids. When doctors are well informed about the medications they are prescribing they can make more informed decisions. Doctors pledged an oath to "do no harm." Doctors should be discussing with patients when prescribing all medications, but especially those with adverse side effects, including addictive potentials. Overprescribing of opioids became common practice for post-operative care. One research study points to surgeons specifically as adding to this opioid epidemic. In fact this research study found that "there were enough prescription opioids dispensed in 2015 to medicate every US adult with 5 mg of hydrocodone every 4 hours for 3 weeks" (Thiesen, et al). This statistic shows just how common it is for doctors to overprescribe opioid medications. But again, the study points to surgeons leading this opioid crisis. The study continues saying that for post-operative pain surgeons would usually prescribe a 30 day supply of opioid painkillers to curb pain following surgeries, when, in reality, a prescription of about 5-10 days was sufficient (Thiesen, et al). Taking even a single dose of an opioid can lead to chronic abuse, as these drugs are so addictive, and with overprescribing dosages post-operatively more stories like Emma's are becoming commonplace in the United States.

The healthcare system in the United States is privatized and for-profit. Privatized healthcare in the United States does not focus on curing and wellness, but are instead interested in repeat patients. Pharmaceutical companies know this and focus on physicians heavily when they choose physicians to target with their drugs. Pharmaceutical companies have a database of nationwide prescribers where they can see the highest prescribers of drugs in "a single zip code, county, state, or the entire country" (Zee). Pharmaceutical companies know that the American healthcare system is broken and they found a way to target physicians with the largest numbers of chronic-pain patients. Doctors are trying to see as many patients as possible in a day, to make more money. Since these doctors are being overwhelmed with patients, the easiest solution is to prescribe medication. There are medications for everything today, but people are especially motivated to stop pain. Being in pain is not fun, and people want the pain to go away, and quickly. Doctors knew that opioids do both of those things. As a result the prescription of opioids increased rapidly. Because our system is not wellness based, the business succeeds when they have repeat patients. It is easier to keep an existing patient

and have them keep coming back rather than having to constantly find new patients. The cycle continues.

While the opioid epidemic is clearly a public health concern many may argue that the United States government is addressing the situation appropriately. According to a US Health and Human Services article, just this year President Biden announced that he “authorized \$1.5 billion for state opioid response programs” (HHS: Biden Administration Announces). “The US Health and Human Services is focusing on five different priorities” with funding provided by both presidents (NIH: Opioid Overdose Crisis). The authors of the article continue saying these efforts include: “improving access to treatment and recovery resources, promoting use of overdose-reversing drugs, strengthening our understanding of the epidemic through better public health surveillance, providing support for cutting-edge research on pain and addiction, and advancing better practices for pain management” (NIH: Opioid Overdose Crisis). The NIH goes on to explain that the State Opioid Response (SOR) grant will provide money to states and territories and will work to “increase access to more FDA-approved medications for the treatment of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)” (HHS: Declares Public Health Emergency). While the government has been contributing to all these efforts, there has been no drastic change in the opioid epidemic. The efforts by the government have been ineffective as deaths have risen following these changes the government made. In fact there was “a significant increase through 2020 to 68,630 overdose deaths” in that year alone (NIH Overdose Death Rates). For context the opioid-related death rates from 2017 and 2018 with 47,600 deaths in 2017, and in 2018 there were 46,802 deaths (NIH Overdose Death Rates). This shows that even after the government declared the opioid epidemic a public health crisis in 2017, deaths have only continued to rise. The programming, the money, and research has not been effective enough in fighting the opioid epidemic. More needs to be done by the government to decrease the harmful effects this public health crisis is having on Americans.

In conclusion, the opioid epidemic is a problem that must be addressed in the United States today. Opioid addictions are not exciting or sexy for media outlets to cover. Addiction is not glamorous and public, but desperate and secretive. It is, however, a reality for Americans. If we sit idly by and do nothing to stop this epidemic there is no telling how many more preventable deaths may occur. The story of addiction is a real and devastating one for families. There is more to be done. We can contribute to the solution, and alleviate the ever present issue that is the opioid epidemic. How can you help with the opioid epidemic? Carry lifesaving overdose reversal drugs, such as Narcan in your cars, homes, and purses. Here is a link to find where Narcan can be found in Nebraska. All you must do is enter your zip code and go pick it up from your local pharmacy. Become educated with signs of addiction and be watchful for the signs in loved ones and others. The pharmaceutical companies and doctors may have let these people down, but we must pick them back up. The opioid epidemic is one that is harmful to Americans, but can be prevented by regular people like you and me. We must do everything we can to ensure that more

stories like William's are not happening to addicts, loved ones, and others in the United States.

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JOURNAL POEM #3

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

the music calms my emotions
brings peace to my soul
this life is no longer taking a toll
the energy is bright and bold
and the world
doesn't feel so cold

as long as I stick to the program
and do what I am told
I can maintain the security
have all my amenities
and live every day to the fullest
the ultimate recipe for success

I feel so blessed
I made it this far.
that the scars are now being healed
new possibilities are revealed
my mind no longer concealed
to thoughts of expansion, growth, and rebirth

for God and Mother Earth
give hope and love unconditionally
to be shared among humanity
inspire our destinies
with joy
and prosperity.

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

Kristin Marshalek • Student, Dental Assistant

I remember sitting in that private hospital waiting room for what seemed like an eternity. The room was only 10 by 10 feet, just big enough to fit a few chairs. My father, my friend Alanna, and I sat in silence as we listened to people walking and talking beyond the door. Sitting there, I could feel my heart beating so hard and fast in my chest, I was sure it would burst at any moment. I had a knot in the back of my throat that felt as though I would vomit. A doctor in a white coat entered the room. He had a calmness to him that seemed almost reassuring. He talked us through what measures were being taken to restart my brother's heart. They had to crack his chest and start performing a cardiac massage in an attempt to get his heart beating again. All of our eyes were fixated on him as he demonstrated with his hands what exactly a cardiac massage entailed. He left the room almost as soon as he had entered. We sat in silence again. Tears had begun welling in my eyes. I was scared, probably the most scared I've ever been in my life, but I held my composure. I held on to the hope that everything would be ok. It felt like another eternity, but then a woman in a surgical gown burst through the door and enveloped me in a hug. It took me a moment to realize who the woman was. She was my friend Alanna's mother who worked at the hospital. My heart sank into my chest as if it already knew what was to come.

Growing up, my siblings and I had what I would describe as a sheltered life. We lived in the country and our closest neighbors lived about a half mile away. We had dial-up internet, which would take forever to do anything on. To give an example, we would wait 1-2 hours for a 3-minute YouTube video to load. So, our access to the outside world was limited. There were four of us: Cody the oldest, then myself, my younger brother Nick, and younger sister Haley. My mother had moved back to Wisconsin to be closer to her family, and my siblings and I chose to stay with my father because our friends were in Nebraska. My father worked long days from 7 in the morning till 5 in the evening. When he got off work, he would help my grandfather do things around the farm. We didn't see much of him until the weekend. Needless to say, we spent a majority of our time at our grandparents', hanging out with each other.

When we were young, every morning during the school week my father would wake us up around five in the morning. We did our morning hygiene routines and got dressed for school. My father would drop us off at my grandparents' house around six where my grandma would make us breakfast. Then we would watch cartoons on cable tv until it was time to catch the bus at 7. We would get dropped back off at my grandparents' after school around 4.

Our afternoons when school got out were spent mainly outdoors. My grandparents owned around 500 acres of land we would explore. We had bikes, a UTV, a mini dirt bike, and a four-wheeler we could adventure on. A lot of the time we would make up our own games to play outside. The sky was the limit! We would let our creative young minds take us on whatever adventures permeated our thoughts that day. One particular game we enjoyed as kids was playing hay bale tag. We would jump from

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hay bale to hay bale while playing tag. It doesn't sound very exciting but we would include different elements to spice it up. The distance between the bales could be different or you couldn't tag someone with your hands.

We had other family in the area. My dad's brother Gordon had 6 kids: Brendon was the oldest, then Dylan, Kelsey, Makayley, Logon, and the youngest was Alainey. For some reason, I still have no idea to this day, none of our cousins were allowed to visit us. On the rare occasion we did get to see them, it was an awkward encounter to say the least. Their mother would look at us as though we were the scum of the earth, and talk to us as if we were the most incompetent people to ever walk the planet. It felt as though she thought we were not good enough to even be in the presence of her "perfect" children as we might corrupt them in some way. I remember every time my cousins came to visit their mother forbade any of them to walk on the floor barefoot because it was too dirty. I was glad they stayed away.

Life was pretty consistent when we were young. But as we got older, we all established our own hobbies. Cody, who was now 16, was wrapped up in his video games and we wouldn't see much of him. I was 15, and in a few sports and fine art activities. Nick was 12 and had a love of older music (his favorites were Pink Floyd and AC/DC). He was trying to teach himself how to play guitar. The house was never quiet! Haley was 11. She was also in sports and loved playing with her Bratz dolls. We started spending more time with friends rather than each other. I got my first cell phone, which was a flip phone. Life seemed pretty normal. I was a freshman in high school. Friday night football games, gawking over boys, and late nights with friends became the normal for me. Just a regular teenage girl without a care in the world.

The day started like any other. It was a cool spring morning on April 1st, 2008. The ground was covered with a light frost. My grandmother had left the day before to visit my aunt in New Jersey who had just had a baby. This left my grandfather in charge of us while my dad was at work. My brother Cody had his driver's license now, so every morning my younger brother Nick and I would ride to school with him. My sister had to take the bus because she was still at the elementary school. My father had cut Nick's hair the night before. I remember arriving at school that morning and him asking me, "Does my hair look ok?" I looked at him and smiled. He had a really long piece of hair that my dad had missed right in front of his left ear. I brushed the long piece of hair behind his ear and said, "There now it looks better." We both laughed.

The day went on like any other. I remember going to the bathroom the last period of the day. As I walked down the hall, I saw Nick standing by the entrance of the school.

I asked, "What are you doing out of class? Did you get in trouble?"

He replied, "No, I just didn't feel like sitting in class anymore."

I rolled my eyes and laughed.

"Well, don't let the office people see you or you will be in trouble."

He laughed and said, "I won't!"

I headed back to class.

It wasn't unusual to see my brother doing something he wasn't supposed to. He was always doing something to cause mischief or make people laugh. As mischievous as he was, he also had a matureness to him for his age. I remember my mother telling me when Nick was born, that the nurse said he looked like an old soul trapped in a young man's body. I believe this embodied him as a person as he grew up. He was always standing up for kid's who were being bullied. Such a brave thing to do at only 12 years old. He always gravitated towards things of the past. All of the music he listened to was decades older than him. He loved older horror movies. Some of the movies I remember him watching on repeat were *John Carpenter's, Vampire, The Lost Boys, and Stephen King's, Sleepwalkers*. At just 12 years old, he had already learned how to drive a stick shift truck and a tractor. Out of all these things, I believe music was always Nick's real passion.

That day I decided to stay after school and study with my friends. I remember standing in the girl's restroom when my phone rang. It was a number I didn't recognize, but I answered anyway. The person on the other end of the line was bawling so hysterically and talking so fast I couldn't understand anything that was being said. The only thing I remember catching from the conversation was "He was shot!" I ended up hanging up because I had no idea what was going on. I kind of shrugged it off and just kept talking to my friends. I got to thinking and got a feeling in the pit of my stomach. I decided to call my grandparents' landline. It kept ringing, busy. I called my older brother Cody, and asked him if he was at my grandparents' house because the line was ringing busy.

That's when he told me, "No, I'm not there. I was at a friend's house, but I'm headed there now. Brendan shot Nick!"

"What do you mean he shot Nick?!"

"I don't know. I'm headed there now to figure out what is going on."

He hung up.

At this point my adrenaline was going, and I was freaking out internally. I told my friends Alanna and Amy what was going on. Amy called her mom to give us a ride to my grandparents.

I arrived at my grandparents' place maybe 15 minutes after talking to my brother Cody. My friend Alanna stayed with me. As we pull up, I saw a police car in the driveway. A police officer walked out the front door of my grandparents' house. I saw his once khaki pants saturated in blood, all down the front. I was unsure where Nick had been shot or how bad it actually was. I tried calling my father I'd say a minimum 20 times. It just kept going to voicemail. I called my mom. She had hopped in her car and was headed back to Nebraska from Wisconsin. I waited outside because I wasn't allowed to go in and talk to my sister. Finally, my father called back. The one day ever he had forgotten to take his phone with him to work. I told him what was going on and he rushed over from his house, which was about 3 miles from my grandparents.

The next few hours were a whirlwind of emotions. Fear, anxiety, hope, and sorrow consumed me. It was a day I will never forget as long as I live. My father, whom I had never seen cry, wept. I was the only child who went to the hospital with him that day. My little sister, who was 11, had witnessed the whole incident take place. She had

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to go to the police station for questioning. My older brother and grandfather went with her. Nick was pronounced dead 15 minutes after we arrived at the hospital. I remember them asking us if we wanted to see his body. I couldn't bring myself to see him like that. My father and my uncle Glen (who arrived shortly after) were the only ones who went to see him. My siblings were kept at the police station till 10 that night and didn't find out Nick had passed until then. Four and a half hours after the incident occurred.

So many odd coincidences occurred that April day. My grandmother, our primary caretaker who was never gone, was gone. My cousin Brendan, the eldest of my Uncle Gordon's children, went to my grandparent's house after school that day even though his parents said he wasn't allowed to see us. My younger brother Nick had taken hunter safety twice so he knew the rules of how to handle a gun safely. My father left his phone at home that day. All of the things that day were so out of the normal, and ultimately led up to this tragic accident.

I found out later that my brother Nick had loaded a bolt action rifle and left it behind my grandfather's bedroom door. He did this in case my grandfather needed it to shoot coyotes that attacked the cows on the property. My cousin Brendan pointed the gun at my brother and didn't believe it was loaded, even though my brother told him it was. After all, it was April Fool's Day. My 11-year-old sister was in the room when all of this happened. After the shooting, my cousin fled, leaving Haley to try desperately to call someone to help. She had to call 911 by herself and they tried to talk her through how to do CPR. My grandfather showed up while she was in the process of trying to figure out how to save him and ended up hitting her over the head with a book and remarking, "He's deader than a doornail already!"

We all went through something that should never happen to any family. Looking back on it now, I still feel my emotions are trapped somewhere between anger and forgiveness towards my cousin. I try to keep in mind that he struggled immensely with this also. His parents made him stay in the psych ward of the hospital and also made him pay for the cost of staying there. He was only 16 and just a child himself.

We all deal with grief in different ways. It has been 14 years since the accident occurred. He would have turned 27 this year. I often wonder who my brother would be today. Would he be a farmer like his dad? Would he be a famous guitar player? I have learned that when somebody dies, the people left behind carry parts of the deceased with them every day. I try to do things I think would make my brother proud. He is gone but far from forgotten. Sometimes I can still hear him strumming on his guitar and singing to some AC/DC. I like to picture him somewhere chilling beyond the stars with some of the great rock legends who have passed on.

DARK EPIPHANY

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

1

Epiphanies are funny things. They flash through our minds in an instant, burning away old ideas and scarring our souls with brutal enlightenment. Yet, for as fast as they occur, it can take a lifetime to come to terms with what they reveal.

2

I was just ten years old when it became clear to me that I no longer had a home.

3

There was still a house; a worn out rental with peeling gray paint, ugly green carpet and a broken down porch. The small, cluttered, dingy room I shared with my brother still remained, my books and other belongings scattered about.

4

When you're a child, a house is where you live, while a home is the place where you feel safe. When the house is filled with violence, there is no safe place.

5

I would like to say the violence I suffered triggered my epiphany. It would be easy to claim victimhood and drop the burden on someone else's shoulders.

But it would also be a lie.

6

The moment of unveiled truth came on the heels of violence by my own hand. It was the consequence of self-preservation taken too far. Like a sickness passed through brutal contact, the disease of naked aggression struck me down and stole my innocence.

7

My stepdad was a drunk. Some drunks like to sing songs or wax maudlin over lost youth as they drink away their lives. Some drunks like to hide alone in the dark or ponder the secrets of the universe.

My stepdad liked to hit.

8

When he first lashed out at me, I was young and scared. I would hide in the dark and cry, hoping he would drink enough to forget about me and pass out. Sometimes he would forget, other times he came looking for another fight.

9

He always called them fights. As if we were somehow equals, sparring in a ring or on the field of battle. I think he would have been shocked to learn his deeds were considered abuse. Or maybe he always knew but never actually cared. In the end, it doesn't really matter.

10

As I grew older, I too began to see the near nightly attacks as fights. I no longer cried and hid, refusing to give him the satisfaction of winning. Instead, I learned to egg him on, taunting him when he hit me as if it didn't hurt. As if I wasn't already broken.

11

Then one day the inevitable happened.

I finally fought back.

It was the last fight we ever had.

12

I will never forget the way his fingers smelled of beer and cigarettes the last time he hit me.

I don't remember the pain, though I'm sure it must have hurt, I only remember the rage.

13

I pushed him away once to protect myself, then I kept pushing. I shoved him all the way out the door until he stumbled backwards off the rotting porch and landed awkwardly in the front yard, where the neighbors could see his shame.

14

He stared up from the ground, his face a mix of fear and hate. I liked that look; it was nice knowing that he felt the same way about me as I felt about him.

15

Yet, this was not that moment of my epiphany. This was not the moment of burning realization which would destroy my childhood and send me spiraling into years of brutality and loss.

No, this moment felt like my greatest victory.

16

My stepdad retreated to the garage and I hid in my room, clutching a kitchen knife in case he decided to come back for revenge. I know in my heart that I would have killed him if he had, a part of me always hoped he would.

17

That night my mother came home from work and I knew I was finally safe. My stepdad might slap me around a bit but he rarely unleashed his full anger in her presence. I used to believe she was unaware of the fights. It was not until years later that I realized the truth.

18

My stepdad ranted and screamed when my mother came home, threatening to have me sent away or locked up for attacking him. I wanted to argue but I knew it would be safer to let her defend me, she would never send me away.

19

When the screaming was over and my stepdad passed out, my mother came to me. I expected a mild scolding and maybe a heartfelt lie that things would get better. I was still so young and naïve.

20

"You have to stop fighting with your stepdad and you need to apologize," she told me. When I refused, she started to cry.

21

"Don't make me choose between you and him," she begged me. "Someday you'll grow up and leave but he'll stay with me for the rest of my life.

If I have to choose, I will choose him."

22

This moment.

This was my epiphany.

I knew right then that I was no longer welcome. My mother's house would never be my home.

23

Two days later, I packed a bag, stole my stepdad's stash of drinking money, and left a note saying that I was running away to California. Then I got on a bus heading in the opposite direction and made my way to New York City.

24

I never went back to that small town where we used to live. By the time I saw my family again they had moved on to other towns with other run down rentals, none of which would ever be my home.

25

My stepdad eventually got sober, or so I'm told. He left my mother when her health got bad. Sometimes, in the blackest depths of my very dark soul, I find that fact bitterly amusing.

Mostly I just think it's sad.

26

Epiphanies are funny things like that.

ESCAPE

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

Sitting down with company and having a good time as always
Losing sense of ego, our minds start to bend
Beginning a journey of consciousness
Not knowing where the path will send us
Hoping to make a connection with the universe
Enjoy a break from the daily grind
To envision getting better than worse
Embracing words that bring joy and inner peace
To heal the pain that never seems to cease
We can fix it if we try
Just need to look up at the sky
And at the beautiful auras we glow
Embrace a new direction and
Re open the doors of perception
And reflect on our past lives and who we were
Correct the moments that seemed to cost
To turn around, look up and understand
It was only ignorance we lost.

BEING GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH

Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

Many religious people believe that without religion, non-religious people revel in anarchy and hold weak values. Over many decades, the conversation of morality and religion has raged, both sides often unable to respect the other side of the argument. It's important to clarify that religious ideation and the idea of "right" and "wrong" aren't usually based in fact, but instead in opinions and ideals. However, morality is a larger conversation than it's relationship to religion, and non-religious people are capable of holding strong moral values. Morality is inherent to us as humans, religious ideation can sometimes have a negative effect on one's morality, and morality is biologically based. Some religious people believe that it's impossible to be moral without religion, when in fact many non-religious people believe in being good for the simple sake of being good. Other people believe that atheism will cause the fall of society, however a lack of religious belief has been present for decades and morality has been proven to be biologically based. In order to solve the division, both sides need to see the other side not as the "other" but instead as people moving towards morality in their own way.

Morality is inherent to each and every one of us. Professor and psychiatrist Ralph Lewis discusses this concept in an article written and published in *Psychology Today* (Lewis). Our purpose, meaning, and morality are all pre-determined, it's society and religion that took these concepts and concentrated them or molded them around their own views (Lewis). Within nature we often see these morality concepts as instincts, but with the complexity and advancement of the human mind, many have forgotten this and have instead attributed these moral standings to religious inclinations. When we understand that these components are inherent to us, we can understand that we assign our own meanings to the feeling of "good" and "bad." Meaning that nothing happens because it was predestined by a higher power, but instead happens because of our own choices, values, feelings, or is purely random. In the words of Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate and physicist, "The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless" (qtd. in Lewis). Here, we can see why humans could create a higher being to avoid this thought of randomness, because if everything is random and up to us, then we have the entire world in our hands. So why then are people without religion still choosing to be moral? Humans are naturally purposeful, but without religion we are left to focus on what life means to each and every one of us. Within this lack of faith, we instead are reminded of the meaning behind our lives and with this gift from nature, we are empowered by our fellow human beings and our own values to life fully, as this is the one life we've got. When religion and a higher power are taken out of the equation, we hold our lives in our hands and fully living a good, kind, and valuable life then becomes the dominant force behind our morality.

When there is an existence of a higher power that bestows judgments and gifts upon you, is it really even up to you if you pocket the lost money you found on the sidewalk shortly behind a man in front of it instead of giving it back? In a research thesis by Jackson C. Joshua for partial fulfillment of his master's degree in psychology, he provides studies that show people can think that actions are forgivable if a higher power warrants it and the idea that if you intervene with such an event you are going against the will of the higher power (Joshua 1-50). By believing in these concepts, religious people can often fall into what's known as "passive immorality" (Joshua 1-50). So, what does that look like? From something as

simple as not seeking out a lost twenty dollar bill's owner to something as serious as not speaking up with information that could save someone's career that a religious person is next in line for, "passive immorality" is present and often causes religious people to be less moral in such situations (Joshua 63-68). In instances such as these, religious people are more likely to assign value to something that has none or as Joshua's study reads, "merely capitalize on God's beneficence when capitalized on the suffering of others" (Joshua 63-68). This doesn't mean religious people are "bad" or unkind, but it does mean that because of their religious beliefs, they may not see it up to them to right these wrongs. Religion often turns it's nose up at more egregious offenses, such as stealing or lying, but often these lesser transgressions are permitted to be seen as the higher power's beneficence, so some religious people may believe they've done nothing wrong.

It doesn't just feel good to be moral, it's also been proven to be a biological component within us. In studies conducted by the primatologist, ethologist, and professor of psychology Frans De Waal, researchers observe primates for the signs of morality in all the components that surround morality like sensitivity to others, a sense of fairness, cooperation, and reciprocity ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). De Waal uses a process known as synchronization to test this theory, a type of experimentation that has been used on animals and humans alike ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). For example, when you see someone yawn, how often do you yawn back? In past research, it's been found that people who yawn more often in response to others are more empathetic than people that don't. Like humans, primates show this synchronization in experiments where they yawn in response to animations ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). De Waal discusses his observations on Penny, an elderly and arthritic chimpanzee who was often assisted by the younger chimpanzees within her harem. From helping her climb, assisting her walking, and bringing her water, it's clear that the surrounding chimpanzees are showing sensitivity to the needs of Penny ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). In food reward experiments, primates will take cucumbers as a reward over and over as long as the monkey next to him is also receiving cucumbers ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). Interestingly, when one primate is given grapes, the primates given cucumbers rioted and became upset that they weren't receiving the same "good" food item ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). Not only that, but De Waal found that the primates that received the grapes refused to indulge in them until the other primates were given the same ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). Here, we see another component of morality, a sense of fairness. Though many believe that our basic instincts are wild and in need of taming, several animals, including primates, show these components of morality within their social circles. These observations show morality is biologically based.

The belief that you can't be moral without holding religious inclinations has been held for centuries by both philosophers and religious people alike. Philosopher and professor Gerald K. Harrison muses over this argument, asserting that one cannot be moral without the "commanding" force of a belief in a higher power. Harrison argues that without a higher power, why would we feel compelled or commanded to act morally (Harrison)? For example, should a community agree on murdering someone being right, our feelings of morality still make the act feel wrong, so where would these feelings come from if not from a higher power (Harrison)? He disagrees with morality being self-governed, noting that we cannot convince ourselves as to what is wrong or right, therefore it instead falls to a higher power (Harrison). However, non-religious people don't agree with this sentiment.

This argument is often seen by non-religious people as being convoluted, as it works around how our world and communities truly work. If we follow our values and want to be moral and just, why would we need an outside agent to command us to be good? Many people ask why a omnipresent higher power is necessary to do good? After all, non-religious people believe there is nothing waiting for them

after death, so they are able to treat this one life as worth living to a higher moral standard free from a higher power's oversight.

Many religious people feel that non-religious ideations can cause the downfall of society because of the thought that without religion, morality is lost. Over the decades, the idea that atheism is the opening to Pandora's box has been prevalent within these conversations (Withrow). Some agree with this sentiment. When surveyed, an overwhelming 40 percent of Americans disapproved of people being non-religious (Withrow). Furthermore, 27 percent of Americans believe that atheists do not share their values (Withrow). Expanding on this, creationist Ken Ham comments that atheists and people like them often use words like "good" and "bad" without considering who decides what something is labeled as or where this sentiment has come from (Withrow). Even though some people imagine atheism in this way, it's untrue.

Non-religious people are not the ending of the human race as we know it. This image of an atheist is unfounded and culturally created. People are by their very biology moral and need no higher power to guide this goodness ("Do Animals Have Morals?"). Not only are people moral within their biology, but they also fight to make the world a better place simply because it's the right thing to do for their fellow man. Atheism and non-religious people have always existed, and if this lack of faith is truly an opening of Pandora's box, then how is it that the world and society itself still stands today? Non-religious people believe that there is no option to repeat life and because this is the only life available, they choose to do good for the benefit of the human race, communities at large, and their innate morality.

Religion and morality are tough subjects to speak about for many, and because of this a solution is often hard to find. Both subjects are important to many people, and it's often easy to become emotional when someone questions your morality or the beliefs you hold dear. To solve this never-ending argument, both sides would need to agree that the other side is right, just in their own way. Religious people would need to come to the conclusion that non-religious people can be moral, just, and hold the same values they do without the presence of a higher power. Non-religious people would need to not try to change others' beliefs, respect the choice to be religious, and understand the immense comfort, joy, and morality that oftentimes comes with religion. In this solution, both sides are able to respect the other and their moral values whether believed to be bestowed by a higher power or Mother Nature herself.

In conclusion, the conversation of morality and religion will likely never cease until we are able to argue with understanding, patience, and not make assumptions that the other side is wrong in their idea of concepts that are often not factually based. Some believe that without religion, you cannot be moral and atheism will cause the fall of society however, religion and atheism are found around the world. Though differing opinions sometimes run rampant, it is possible for non-religious people to be inherently moral, religion to passively make one less moral, and to understand that morality is biologically based and not a result of holding religious ideations. Being moral is a human duty, regardless of who or what demands it of us.

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AND HE TOOK A STRONG GRIP

**Spencer Linam • Student, Electrical and
Electromechanical Technology**

And he took a strong grip
Around the edge of the sink, looked himself in the mirror
And spoke to the spirit staring back at him: "It's going to be ok"
Knowing from the reflection that
These were the eyes with cascading visions of dire importance, falling
around him
Waiting to be chased after
Waiting for the chance that this might be where he grips tightly to the life
that saves him
The life that will remind him of his presence of mind
And his presence to the world
Setting aside its complex complications for a moment
Paying attention to his truth that must not change
His life and his will, these things holding of purpose and value
Not of weight and deprivation

WHAT MAKES A HERO?

Kathleen Kerlik • Student, Undeclared

"Tell me what the rules are, kids," Mom says, zipping up my coat as Dad shoves a hat further down over my head. I frown and push the hat up so I can at least see.

"Rule of Two," I say.

"Go to you, Dad, or Piper's mom if we need to," John John, my younger brother, pipes up. Piper is the neighbor that lives next door. She's also in my and Keith's class.

"Come back inside if it starts snowing," Keith, my twin brother, answers.

"Come home if we're cold," I state.

I look between my siblings and they look back. We're not forgetting anything, right?

Mom nods. "Good, now go have fun."

"Okay!" We all yell.

John John and I decide to go off to play in the creek running through the woods while Keith makes a snowman in the front yard.

I carefully look both ways before crossing the street to the empty lot, then make my way through the snow to the woods. Well, 'woods' is a little misleading. On one side is our little neighborhood. On another is the mansion of the owner of the only car dealership in town. And on the final side is Highway 66 leading out of our sleepy town. If I got lost or hurt, I'd just have to walk a few minutes in any direction to find help. It's basically like a city park. But it's a natural forest and not running paths and swing sets.

Anyway, John John follows after me as we drop down onto the highest bank in the dried-up creek. It doesn't get enough water to usually run, but there's sometimes a couple inch deep stream running through it in the summer, just enough to splash around in and for some cool plants to grow.

We hike through the snaking creek, playing with snow, finding ice patches to break off and shatter on the creek bed, and unearthing some of the dried reeds and grasses hidden under snow to swordfight with.

And then I see it. I throw out my arm to get John John to stop. I shush his

protests before they can even leave his mouth and point a mittened hand at a small patch of grey-brown fur peeking through the snow. I carefully advance on the rabbit, trying to be as quiet as possible. When I get within a few feet of the creature, the snow around it starts moving, and I realize it's a lot bigger than I had initially thought.

"A dog!" I yell, part excitement, part surprise. The dog is big, maybe the size of a goat or a sheep. He has shaggy grey-brown fur matted with snow and slush. The dog slowly lifts his head at my voice, turning towards me. He doesn't move much otherwise, and it's clear to me that he's really weak. He has a few inches of snow piled on top of him, so he must've been out here at least overnight, though probably longer if his sluggishness is any indication. I take a glove off and carefully reach out a hand. He doesn't react much beyond slowly blinking at me and gingerly sniffing my hand. Deeming me an acceptable human, he nuzzles at me with his dry, brown nose.

John John runs over to me and the dog. I look at him and we collectively freeze as the situation dawns on us—What do we do now? We're kids and we're barely old enough to be in the third and second grade. But there's no teacher here, no parent, no one to guide us or tell us what to do. Heck, there's no adult for at least a few minutes of a hike through the woods, and that trip could get exponentially longer if we have to carry or drag a dog twice our combined weight through a foot of knee-high snow.

I take a deep breath, steel myself, and think. I've been watching documentaries and shows about animals for years now, plenty long enough to know some basic stuff to do. *I can do this*, I think. *It's nothing you haven't seen before*. With that, I turn to John John. "Let's take him to Piper's house, okay? Their garage door is open and Piper's mom's car is there."

John John nods. I'm his older sister (even if by only 16 months), so he assumes I must know what to do, and between the two of us, if anyone knew how to save a dog, it would be me.

We brush the snow off the dog and find he has a collar. And it has a phone number too! Now all we need to do is get him out of this creek and back to civilization. I cradle the dog's head with my gloved hand while checking his gums with the other. After poking the flesh, it stays white before color slowly seeps back into the skin. He's dehydrated. There's no way he's going to just jovially skip back home with us. We're going to have to force him. John John goes around to the dog's rear while I wrap my arms around his shoulders, and with a quick countdown and a few tries, we finally heave the dog back to his shaky feet. But he's standing and that's what counts. If he doesn't stand, there's no way we're getting him back to Piper's.

I grab the dog by the collar and drag him up the bank while John John pushes from the rear until we finally get out of the creek. Once there, we walk him back out the way we came, straight back to our neighborhood, cooing and petting all the while. He seems to be walking alright, so he must just be tired, cold, hungry,

and thirsty.

“Just a little more, boy,” We say. “Come on, we got food and treats for you. You want treats, right? Treats?” The dog just licks at our faces and we laugh. It’s a good sign though. It means he hasn’t given up quite yet. As long as he doesn’t give up, he has a chance.

After what seems like forever, we make it to Piper’s. Piper’s eyes grow wide. “Where’d you find a dog!? It looks like a stray.”

Keith comes running over from next door. “A dog?”

I nod. “Yeah, we found him in the woods.” I look to Piper. “Can you get your mom? He has a collar, so we can probably call the number and see who he belongs to.”

Piper nods and runs into the house.

It’s less than a few seconds before Piper’s mom comes out of the house. “What’s the commotion—” She pauses and takes in the scene before her. “Where’d you get that dog? You guys aren’t hurt, are you?”

We shake our heads. “We found him in the woods.” I say. “And he has a collar, see? So we can just call it.”

Piper’s mom is quiet for a moment. “Okay,” She sighs. “Here’s what we’re going to do. I’m going to get some towels so you guys can dry him off while I call that number. Piper, get him some of the cat food in the cabinet over there and some water.”

She enters the house and comes back with towels before turning back in the house with her phone held to her ear. We take to drying the shivering dog and trying to get the largest snow chunks out of his fur. Piper comes over with some food and water and the dog gobbles it up, even licking the bowl clean. He must’ve been really hungry. It just affirms my thoughts that he’s been out in the woods for a while. His fur is long enough that he must’ve usually gotten brushed, but now it’s all matted and dirty with snow and grass and slush. And while it’s hard to tell with all the fur, he’s skinny with bones sticking out at his hips and shoulders and ribs. We refill his bowl and he eats a little slower this time, not so ravenous anymore as he drinks some water too. I smile as his tail slowly wags. It must’ve been a rough few days if he’s happy from just some food and water.

A few minutes later the dog is significantly dryer and Piper’s mom comes back into the garage. “All right kids, so the first number didn’t work, but after calling the city, I found out this guy was lost last week by Mrs. Gregor up the street by the ball fields. A friend is going to bring her down here to come get him.”

I feel my chest go warm at that moment. I don’t really know why, but it feels

WHAT MAKES A HERO?

nice knowing that the old lady's dog was found after such a long time and could finally be reunited with her. If I lost Benji, my one-year-old yorkie, for that long, I don't know what I'd do.

After less than 10 minutes a dark blue car rolls into Piper's driveway. A woman stumbles out of the car on her cane, her companion worriedly running after her. "My baby!" The woman cries. The dog perks up at her voice and bounds up to her, his demeanor doing a complete 180 from just seconds before, nearly knocking the poor lady over. She cries and hugs the dog, looking up to me and my brother. "Thank you," She says. "Thank you so much."

Out of everything that happened that day, I'll never forget the lady's smile as she thanked me and my brother. The overwhelming joy on her face was something I've never seen before. I later learned that her husband had died the year she got the dog, and that her kids and grandkids moved away long ago. She was truly alone without her dog.

I was just a kid, and yet, to that lady, I was a hero.

BROKEN

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

I'm broken like my smile
that's missing teeth in a few places
traces of a life I once knew
a token of appreciation
for the meeting of new faces
and a sobriety that replaced addiction
then put me in a position
to be reborn from the ashes
and connect with my inner most being
for it is freeing to realize
it is in my nature to nurture
to love and be loved and to re-create discovery
for what's truly important is up above and
the justice in knowing it's not "just us" and we
are not alone.

THIS 1981 PENNY

Cheney M. Luttich • Faculty, English

At the Five and Dime, a little palm unwrapped its wealth
in trade for something sweet that melts.

It flipped to quell indecision in children's eyes.
Who wins? Who cries?
A hefty task for such a token oft declined.

The coin travelled from purse to dish-the give a penny, take a penny pool.
Before long, it found itself in a loafer skipping school.

With time, this penny aged.
Patinaed brown, it fed our children's wishing-well stage,
and with its splash, the crows beside our eyes engaged
in hope to gleam again, reversing change.

To wrap, I could say the type of muck
Like "this penny brings you luck."

But, no. I won't allow such a shallow note.
But rather say what today evokes.

Like you, this penny holds some forty years of dark and bright.
Of time that shaped you and holds you tight.
Of here and now. Of those you touch.
And like this penny, your worth is oh so very much.

WILL O'THE WHISP

Felicity Ann Neeley • Student, Academic Transfer

Found hiding in cruel squalor,
the spirit hobbled to me.
Snagged in twisted steel
it sobbed.

I lifted it from its snare,
Vanished hide a mirror shone.
Feral delights flood
its eyes.

Coiled to strike the hand that freed,
Hungriely watching me work.
Then to escape
Into air.

Prey to predator I turned,
Schemes like rot began to root.
Helpless wanderer
No more.

Fate a gamboling coin toss,
My hands fall deathly quiet.
“Free me” snarled the
Rabid ghost.

“Only for my life” said I,
Glaring into sightless eyes.
Life for a life
Immortal

Pact sealed I sent it adrift,
wild and wild reuniting,
Swallowed by
The hinterland

LIFE ON THE LINE

Kipp Heidtbrink • Student, Health Sciences

The balance of life and death has never been more personal than in the debate on medically assisted death. As society attempts to strike a compromise between individual autonomy, the sanctity of life, and the role of medical professionals in end-of-life care, questions of ethics come to light. Our focus will be on advocating for improved safeguards to protect vulnerable individuals, addressing the ethical dilemmas faced by medical professionals, and emphasizing the importance of palliative care and mental health support. Some argue that medically assisted dying provides individuals with a dignified way to end their lives, but a more comprehensive approach to end-of-life care is necessary to balance personal autonomy with the potential for abuse. Others assert that restricting access to assisted death prolongs suffering, yet a holistic approach to end-of-life care can mitigate suffering while upholding the sanctity of life. By embracing collaboration between lawmakers, medical professionals, and families, a more ethical and compassionate end-of-life care system can be achieved.

When it comes to medically assisted dying, it becomes evident that existing laws and guidelines surrounding assisted death fall short of adequately protecting vulnerable individuals from potential abuse and coercion. Sonia Sodha, the deputy opinion editor at *The Guardian*, wrote an article expressing some of these concerns. She raises concerns regarding the difficulty of determining meaningful consent and the possibility of vulnerable individuals being coerced into making life-ending decisions (Sodha). She provides examples of cases where family members may have pressured individuals into choosing euthanasia, causing them to question whether they are a burden to their loved ones (Sodha). Furthermore, Sodha highlights the role that depression and other mental health issues might play in influencing a person's decision, which complicates the assessment of genuine consent. Another critical aspect to consider is the potential for healthcare providers and government caseworkers to suggest assisted dying to patients, which could inadvertently pressure them into considering this option (Sodha). As a result, there is a pressing need to ensure that existing regulations not only respect the autonomy of patients but also protect those who may be vulnerable to external pressures and manipulation. By thoroughly examining and refining the criteria and safeguards in assisted dying legislation, we can strike a balance between respecting individual choice and protecting society's most vulnerable members.

The principle of the sanctity of life and the responsibility of medical professionals to “do no harm” are essential factors that must be weighed against the autonomy of patients to choose their own end-of-life care. Dr.

Jessica Nutik Zitter raises concerns about the End of Life Option Act in her article by highlighting medical professionals' ethical dilemmas when asked to assist with medically assisted dying. Doctors may struggle to reconcile their duty to protect life and alleviate suffering with a patient's request for assistance in ending their life. Zitter emphasizes the importance of exploring all treatments for alleviating patients' pain and distress before pursuing medical aid in dying. Additionally, better training and guidelines for healthcare providers are necessary to ensure that medical professionals can confidently practice considering the complexities of end-of-life care while making educated decisions when faced with requests for assisted dying. Medical professionals can help develop a balanced strategy that respects individual autonomy while upholding the sanctity of life and the core principles of medical ethics by having thoughtful conversations and acknowledging the ethical challenges with medically assisted dying.

In order to better understand why some individuals seek medically assisted death, it's crucial to improve both palliative care and mental health support services. Nursing Professors Barbara Pesut and Sally Thorne highlight the importance of addressing patients' concerns related to autonomy, pain management, and financial burden to reduce the number of people who feel that medically assisted dying is their only option. They recommend increasing access to palliative care and fostering open, honest discussions about end-of-life care options to tackle these concerns (Pesut and Thorne). Moreover, mental health support is essential for helping people navigate the emotional challenges that come with terminal illnesses, depression, and the feeling of being a burden to their loved ones (Sodha). By enhancing the availability and quality of palliative care and mental health support services, we can provide well-rounded end-of-life care solutions that cater to individuals with life-limiting conditions, ultimately reducing the reliance on assisted death or medically assisted dying.

Some argue that medically assisted dying provides individuals with a dignified way to end their lives by respecting an individual's autonomy. In her TED Talk, Elaine Fong advocates for the right to die with dignity and shares her mother's struggle with terminal cancer and her desire to end her life on her terms using the Washington legislation called Death with Dignity. Fong argues that legalizing assisted dying can give patients more control over their lives and emphasizes the importance of having open and honest conversations with loved ones about end-of-life care and respecting a patient's wishes. Proponents of this view believe that people should have the right to decide how and when they die, especially when faced with unbearable pain, suffering, and a loss of dignity.

While personal autonomy is necessary, the potential for abuse and the need to protect vulnerable individuals require a more comprehensive approach to end-of-life care beyond simply legalizing assisted death. There is a risk of wrongful death in vulnerable individuals, which must be balanced against the potential benefits to others (Sodha). By focusing

solely on legalizing assisted dying, we may inadvertently overlook other essential aspects of end-of-life care, such as palliative care and mental health support, which can significantly impact a patient's quality of life and decision-making process. The challenge lies in finding an ethical and responsible middle ground that respects personal autonomy while ensuring that the sanctity of life and the well-being of vulnerable individuals are not compromised. This can be achieved through a combination of improved legislation, better healthcare provider training, and a more holistic approach to end-of-life care that addresses the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of patients and their families.

Critics of restricting access to assisted death argue that doing so may prolong the suffering of individuals with terminal illnesses or unbearable pain, infringing on their right to die with dignity. They state that patients should be able to make informed and autonomous choices about their end-of-life care. Elaine Fong shares her mother's experience with terminal cancer and emphasizes the importance of respecting patients' wishes for end-of-life care, including the option to end their lives in a controlled and peaceful manner. By denying access to assisted death or medically assisted dying, these individuals may be forced to endure prolonged suffering, which they believe violates their right to determine the course of their lives.

By improving palliative care and mental health support, we can mitigate the suffering of individuals with terminal illnesses or unbearable pain while minimizing the risk of abuse and preserving the sanctity of life. Addressing patients' concerns around autonomy, pain management, and financial burden is essential in reducing the number of patients who feel that medically assisted dying is their only option (Pesut and Thorne). Furthermore, it's important that we consider all treatment options for alleviating patients' pain and distress before considering medical aid in dying (Zitter). Rather than simply granting access to medically assisted dying, we should adopt a more holistic approach to end-of-life care, including high-quality palliative care and mental health support, to ensure that individuals receive the care they need while protecting them from potential abuse or coercion. This respects the autonomy of those seeking assisted or medically assisted dying while prioritizing the well-being of vulnerable individuals and upholding the ethical principles that guide medical practice.

To find an ethical and responsible middle ground, lawmakers, medical professionals, and families should work together to develop a three-pronged approach to address the concerns surrounding medically assisted dying. First, by investing in palliative care, patients' physical pain and discomfort can be managed more effectively, reducing the need for medically assisted dying. Second, enhancing mental health support services for patients and their families will ensure that emotional and psychological needs are met, potentially mitigating the desire for assisted death. Lastly, developing and implementing more robust guidelines and safeguards in

assisted dying legislation will strike a balance between respecting the autonomy of those who seek medically assisted dying and protecting society's most vulnerable members.

The debate over medically assisted dying is a multifaceted and emotionally charged one, demanding careful consideration of ethical principles and compassion. At the heart of this debate is the delicate balance between honoring an individual's autonomy in making end-of-life choices and safeguarding society's most vulnerable members from potential harm. As we continue to engage in this important conversation, we must ask ourselves how we can foster a more supportive environment for those facing end-of-life decisions and whether our current healthcare system approach truly reflects our values as a society. By encouraging ongoing dialogue among lawmakers, medical professionals, families, and the public, we can explore new perspectives and innovative solutions that prioritize dignity, compassion, and ethical responsibility. The path to a more humane end-of-life care system is one that we must walk together, embracing change and displaying the courage needed to address the moral challenges that come our way.

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COMPANIONS

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

This moment's silence is pious as we run through routine;
A gesture and motion danced and done by my and your mother
prior you and I.

There is sanctity in the pull and shove, the knead:
the olive and dove.

The turn of the earth turned blasphemous,
Contemptuous of the gentle palms of Creators pressing dough.
There is divinity in this art of creation we share.
The Son takes form with every hunch and brace of shoulder and arm.

The bread we knead and bake is dense and sweet,
Laden with the leaden syrup of lovin'.
Sampled by few and craved by plenty.
I add too much sugar and the body of Christ is heavy,
And this is not the delicate wafer of communion.
It is not a taste that fades on the tongue.
It is a flavor that lingers,
A sacrificial sacrilege stubborn in the psyche.
This bread we bake is inimitable;
The feast of life from every domain
Misshapen by young hands.
It is not pleasant or traditional, conservative in its creation.

But I worship the blood and body.
I am the humble apostle weak in the knee,
Fell by the gravity of perfect piety.
I worship indeed,
The starved plenty that looks to the bounty.
I am the Creator blind as Saul in my faith,
And all of me is in awe of what we create.
The gentle reverence is found in the breaking of bread.

SUNSET

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Through an arching window from behind a curtain of red silk she watched the men ride off on their horses. Specks of black dotted the grounds as a warning bell echoed in the church.

“Milady?”

She turned to see a woman her age standing by a secret passage near the wardrobe and knew it was time. She cast a final glance out the window before throwing on her cloak and pulling the hood over her head as she followed the young woman through the passage.

“His Majesty has entrusted me to see you safely to your escort who will see you safely to the border—” She paused as the thundering of hooves sounded above them before continuing as they faded. “—where you’ll be safely welcomed by your uncle.”

“Might I inquire as to who is to be my escort?”

They rounded a corner in the passageway, their faces cast in shadow between torchlights. “Such a right belongs to you, Highness. Though would I tell you his name, I think you shall find it redundant as he is so well known to you that his name will surely make itself known in your mind.”

The end of their journey was nearing as pale moonlight trickled in through a crack in the door at the end of the passage. Her heart leapt into her throat at the silhouette that kept to the shadows prior to their arrival. ‘Nicholas,’ she thought to herself, though she dared not address the man so informally when they were within earshot of others.

“Lord Nicholas. His Majesty has entrusted me to deliver Her Highness safely into your capable hands. I trust I have succeeded in this task?”

“That you have Miss. It will be my mantle now to protect Her Highness and see her safely to the border.” He turned his attention to her and bowed. “Highness,” he addressed her respectfully.

The young woman nodded at the exchange. “You’ll be safe now, Highness. I must go. Tread carefully. Those who are betrayed once knew the bitter sweetness of that friendship.” She turned and fled back the way they came.

Only once she was out of sight did Nicholas cup her jaw. “I feared for you.”

She leaned into the touch however light on her skin, having missed his caresses. “Would the admission that my heart skipped a beat at your acknowledgment make

you think less of me?"

Nicholas shook his head. "Were I but anyone else I should think I would but I am who I am."

The silence that fell between them needn't be filled with such things as meaningless chatter and after but a few moments of assuring the other was okay, they sought refuge in a nearby stable with no visible ties to the kingdom. There they retrieved two horses devoid of royal emblems and colors so as to pass for lowly stations.

Adorned with cloaks, provisions and weapons they set off on horseback for their journey to the border. Nicholas glanced over with a smile as Her Highness secured her bow and quiver of arrows. When she caught him looking, she raised an eyebrow at him before attaching a dagger to each hip. "Did you think I was merely a damsel in need of a white knight?"

Nicholas knew she was anything but, however he knew her better than anyone else simply because she'd allowed him to. "No, Highness. I should be quivering myself if I were to be on the receiving end of your blade." He smiled as her expression softened into a fond smile.

"Nick, how often must I ask that you ne'er use my title or address my station when it is but the two of us?"

"At least a dozen more, Highness for I am still but a Lord to Her Highness's station as princess."

They came to a brief stop at the crest of a hill as the last rays of the setting sun streaked across the horizon. She reached over and placed her hand on his. "Then I'll ask again Lord Nicholas of the House of Bartolomeo. If it but us and no other ears with which we might be revealed, wouldst thou address me by the name I have asked you many a time to?"

Nicholas felt the warmth of her hand upon his own, but could not bear to tear his gaze from hers. "If that be your wish Highness then henceforth in such circumstances as have been outlined in your request, I shall acquiesce and utter the name you have deigned appropriate."

"So, just as I shall call you Nick in such circumstances, you shall call me..?"

"Sapphira," he said in a hushed tone.

"And in the throws of passion that we ne'er breathe a word of, what then shall I be called?"

"My Sapphire," he breathed as he leaned closer.

It was no hardship for their lips to caress as they had done so many times before, but each caress stoked the fires awakened during the fortnight that

followed her twenty second birthday. Her desire to be bedded by the man she loved overwhelmed her and though many may not have understood there was nothing that could hold a candle to the feeling of skin gliding against skin, drowning themselves in the fleshly desires they found they could not escape should they have wished to.

Her heart belonged to him and his heart to her. As far as Sapphira was concerned there was nothing Nicholas wouldn't do and it was with great reluctance that he separated from their caressing. For the protection of Her Highness canceled out desires of the flesh.

"We must make haste. We are still within the boundaries of the land, Highness. We shall make camp but we are far from where it would be safe to do so."

She took off on horseback, knowing he was behind her and keeping pace with her. Yes. Safety mattered to her but only extended so far as the man she loved. Her father raised her but he still saw a child whereas she was a woman now who though desperate for more responsibility found herself hearing her father utter words of her being too weak or incapable. It drove her away and she was no longer interested in his fate.

The same could be said for the young woman who brought her to Nick. They were but mere pawns in a game Sapphira had to learn to play all on her own. So, she did, and unbeknownst to everyone else she was the one who pulled the strings to ensure everyone and everything fell into place. So long as they played their parts and she ended up with Nick, the casualties mattered not.

THOSE WHO SPEAK

Zahraa Fanharawi • Student, Health Sciences

Live, they say, to see misery in all its ways, to experience pain in all of its forms. Live till your soul perishes in the place that you'll learn to call your own. Live to fulfill their needs and purpose, not yours, live till your body gives away to the fighting. Till your hopes and dreams disappear in the place you can't escape. For hope gives a false sense of comfort that makes a person just as lonely, the kind of loneliness that can't be expressed

All that is left, an
empty shell, in a form of
a human figure.

FOUR TRUTHS

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

When I was a child, I feared the dark
I was terrified by all the things
Hidden beyond the reach of
The tiny nightlight by my bed

Monsters hid in the darkness
Slavering, hungering, and violent
Stalking through the shadows
Daring you to close your eyes

Ghosts lurked in the darkness
Haunting, moaning, and lost
Wearing the night like a shroud
Jealous spirits who crave your life

Demons hunted in the darkness
Scheming, plotting, and loathsome
Whispering corrupted offers
Hoping to collect your soul

Villains waited in the darkness
Killing, stealing, and ruthless
Blades held at the ready
To take all that you hold dear

The First Truth

Evil was not confined to darkness
It strolled boldly around in the light
Wearing masks of friends and family
As it stole my innocence and trust

Sometimes evil feared the darkness
Even stumbling drunk and violent
My abusers and attackers would
Hesitate to hunt me in the night

I learned to embrace the darkness
Wrapping myself in shadows
Both outside and within
Until I smothered all my fear

The Second Truth

I became one with the darkness
Turning those monsters into pets,
Ghosts to guardians, villains to heroes,
And demons into angels

There is beauty in the darkness
Freeing, enticing, and seductive
Once the fear is conquered
A whole new world is revealed

There is power in the darkness
Intoxicating, demanding, and dreadful
It is so easy to take revenge when
Your enemies can't see you coming

The Third Truth

Hope is hard to find in the darkness
Everyone looks like an enemy
When their faces are hidden
Behind a cloak of shadows

Danger still lurked in the darkness
Just not the kind that children fear
The line between victim and sinner
was easy to cross without the light

I lost myself in the darkness
Becoming the monster, the ghost,
The villain, and the demon
I was a predator hunting for prey

The Fourth Truth

I spent far too long in the darkness
Until madness crept into my mind
I probably would have died there
If I had not stumbled into a bit of light

You can never fully escape the darkness
Even now, decades removed from that life
I still feel most at home after sunset
The dark of night is a comforting old friend

Now that I'm grown, I no longer fear the dark
But I have learned to be wary of its power
I don't worry about things lurking in the shadows
But I do appreciate the nightlight by my bed

MEADOW GIRL

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Stiles whimpers as he hobbles down a well worn path towards the forest at the edge of the village, the jeers of his peers echoing after him. His ribs ache. His nose is probably broken. *Again*. His eye is swelling shut. He dislocated his wrist and it hangs limply where he cradles it against his chest. His ankle twinges but still he doesn't stop running. He doesn't feel like he's moving fast enough but he has to try. He needs to be safe. He needs a safe place.

Tears slip down his cheeks as he trips, crashing to the ground. Maybe he should just lie down and let them catch him. It's been too long since he's had a friendly touch. He would give anything for one of his mama's hugs. For years he's been beaten, bruised, smacked, punched, hit, kicked and so much more. Maybe he should just let them kill—A breeze ruffles his hair and the scent of wildflowers fills his nostrils. He's tired. So very tired and his body aches.

He feels a soft kiss on his forehead. "Sleep *Mon rayon de soleil doré*," a voice whispers and Stiles does.

When he wakes the sun is still high in the sky and the scent of wildflowers has grown stronger. He expects all the pain to come rushing back but it doesn't. His throat is dry and his stomach rumbles. He feels the air around him shift as a presence draws nearer. He blinks his eyes open drowsily and sees a young woman hovering above him. She gives him water to quench his thirst and food to stave off his hunger. As he eats, he wonders about this strange young woman. "Who are you?" he asks.

"Who do you believe me to be?"

Stiles tilts his head. "I'm not sure. I feel like I should know but I do know that you're gorgeous."

The young woman smiles at him, her dimples standing out. "Thank you, *Mon rayon, de soleil doré*."

He looks over over as he finishes eating. Then he starts to drift off again. "'M s'eeepy," he mumbles. "Y'ur sweet. Giv'n me foo'. Tha'k you."

He misses the look of complete fondness on her face. "You're welcome, *Mon rayon de soleil doré*. Sleep well."

Stiles wonders what '*Mon rayon de soleil doré*' means.

It's a couple days later when she leads him back to the well worn path. He

doesn't want to leave. "They'll hurt me again. I just know it. Please let me stay here. I can pull my weight and share the work." He knows she'll say no just like she did that morning.

Her hand gently cups his cheek, and she smiles softly at him. "Not yet Mon rayon de soleil doré. Just a little longer," she answers quietly.

"Then I can stay?" he asks, leaning into her touch.

The young woman—Meadow Girl—nods. "Yes. Then you can stay as long as your heart desires."

Stiles chews his lip. "Even though it's not time to stay yet..." he trails off. "Can I still come to see you?"

"Yes, but not at the expense of living your own life. If you're in danger just picture my meadow. If you need me, I'll guide you here, but you must still live your life. This is not your home Mon rayon de soleil doré."

"Not yet!" he replies cheekily with a smile.

"Go on you," she says with a soft laugh.

Stiles turns to leave and pauses glancing back. "Meadow girl? Why do you weave flowers through your hair, coated in dew drops and glimmering in the sun?"

"It is part of who and what I am. The petals are my laughter. The dew drops are my tears. The sun is my future. The meadow is my home."

With those words the meadow girl and the meadow fade and he is left alone to make his way home. Though perhaps not as alone as he thought. For when he gets home, he finds pressed flowers in his books, dew drops on his window and sunbeams lighting up his room.

"Thank you, Meadow Girl," he whispers.

A breeze floats through his open window. 'Always Mon rayon de soleil doré.'



French: Mon rayon de soleil doré.

English: My golden ray of sunshine.



THE PARK BENCH

Richard Hadley • Faculty, Communications

They made an unlikely pair. The Old Man and the Young Girl. They sat on the park bench watching the sunrise behind the stalks of corn. Nobody was quite sure how the park bench ended up on the little traveled gravel road in central Nebraska, but there the two of them sat watching the sunrise.

“It’s hard to tell a sunrise from a sunset,” the Old Man said.

“Unless you know the time of day or have the time to wait and see if it gets darker or lighter, it’s really not that hard,” the Young Girl said.

“You’ll never know what sunrise will be the last you ever see,” the Old Man said.

“You never know until you try,” the Young Girl said.

After a moment of silence, the Old Man said, “That makes no sense.”

The park bench, just off to the left side of the courthouse doors, was a great place to watch people hurriedly go to and fro. The Old Man and the Young Girl sat mostly unnoticed as people scurried about in front of them worried about all kinds of situations and specifics that seem to be consuming their lives at the moment.

After a long time the Young Girl asked, “Do you believe in God?”

“I believe in God, but I do not trust the men who created him,” the Old Man said.

The park bench in front of the convenience store was made of heavy concrete and stained wooden slots, its sheer weight protecting against any wayward thieves who would have the unlikely desire to steal such a thing. The ground was speckled with old stains and new cigarette butts. The two sat there and shuffled their feet between the old and new stains on the ground.

“It’s pretty cold,” the Young Girl said.

“If it wasn’t this cold, we might not remember this moment,” the Old Man said.

“So if you could change something, what would you change?” asked the Young Girl.

“Nothing,” the Old Man said.

“Nothing?” asked the Young Girl. “Nothing now, nothing ever?”

“Nothing.”

The park bench in the cemetery was more a memorial to the Tate family than a bench, but it was at the end in the path on the crest of the hill. It was a great marble bench with the word "Tate" engraved in the front of it and the design of angles carved into the side and the backrest. From this vantage point there was the whole view of the cemetery, of the names of those remembered and forgotten.

"It seems like a long time to wait for nothing," the Young Girl said.

"It's not nothing, there is always something, sometimes you just need to know where and when to look," the Old Man said.

The park bench that encircled the giant old oak tree in the park was well kept up, but starting to show a little wear and tear from the oak tree continuing to grow and push out against the entrapment of the park bench. The dark wooden slates were starting to bow a bit and the bench was more of a decoration than a comfortable place to sit. It sat in the center of the park, and was the center of attention for any new visitors.

"How long must we continue waiting?" the Young Girl asked.

"If we stop waiting then it won't happen," the Old Man said.

"What is it?" the Young Girl asked.

"Someday you'll understand," the Old Man said.

"Why can't today be someday?" asked the Young Girl.

The park bench in front of the coffee shop was still covered by darkness except for the faint glow of the four lights above the coffee shop. The brisk wind of the cold winter morning made it seem colder than it was. The additional glow from the windows of the coffee shop gave some illumination to the shadow figures and the fluttering clouds of their breath.

"Why do you think people hate each other?" the Young Girl asked.

"Because we frighten easily," the Old Man said.

"Maybe we have to give more," the Young Girl said.

"Maybe we should," the Old Man said.

The park bench on the mountain trail looked over a deep valley with clouds at eye level and the shape of distant mountains cutting through the bright blue sky. Even with the warm sun beating down there were still snow-capped mountains in the distance. The grass and the vegetation was just starting to get to the point it seemed a bit overgrown.

The Old Man took a deep breath and looked around, he asked, "What's your best thing?"

"I'm not sure I understand the question," the Young Girl said.

"I'm not sure I do either," the Old Man said.

"Love," said the Young Girl.

"I think you understand perfectly," said the Old Man.

The park bench sat at the end of the long dock. The dock went out about 100 yards. There was a rectangular platform at the end of a dock, with a bench made of old planks with curved metal legs secured to the floor. There was barely enough room for the bench or for a person or two who wanted to go fishing.

"Do you like swimming?" the Young Girl asked.

"I do," the Old Man said.

"Do you like fishing?" the Young Girl asked.

"I do," the Old Man said.

"Do you like boating?" the Young Girl asked.

"I do," the Old Man said.

"Do you believe in love?" the Young Girl asked.

"Do you like to give love or get love?" the Old Man asked.

"I wish we had that choice," the Young Girl said.

The park bench sat in front of the warehouse as a light rain fell. Dusk was coming on quickly. Faint car sounds could be heard in the distance, but unless you wanted to hear them, you wouldn't be able to.

"Do you know what I wish," the Old Man asked?

"That you could remember things? What stories you've already told? For a pizza? You had hair? For respect?" the Girl said.

"You think you're very funny," the Old Man said.

They made an unlikely pair. The Old Man and the Young Girl. They sat on the park bench as the sun set behind the stalks of corn. Nobody was quite sure how the park bench ended up on the little traveled gravel road in central Nebraska, but there the two of them sat. As it became increasingly dark, they sat there in silence as the warm glow of the sun slowly slid away, making silhouettes of their shadows between the corn.



CABIN OF CLOSURE

Natalie Gibson • Student, Health Sciences

Monday, December 11th

The day was cloudy and gray and the air smelt crisp. Jake, Ines, August, Betty, Ivy and I all unloaded the packed SUV of our suitcases, blankets, and coolers and claimed our beds inside the smoked-colored cabin. The rooming arrangement ended up with Ines and I sharing, August and Jake, and Betty with Ivy which worked perfectly since we all secretly have a favorite in our little group that's just how it usually works with friend groups.

Our specific friend group has known each other since high school. August and I dated Sophomore year which intertwined our friend groups. After he broke up with me at the beginning of Junior year, no one wanted to pick sides so we all just stuck together. We've grown a lot since then but even at twenty-two we still take our annual trip. This time we decided to stay in a cabin in Colorado. I must say the scenery is quite breathtaking, and so is the elevation.

Tuesday, December 12th

We spent the day playing board games, mainly monopoly, and catching up on gossip. I've missed hanging out with everyone altogether. We all separated for college so it's rare to see each other more than once a year. Ines and I used to call daily to keep each other updated but lately, it's been once a week. I'm pretty sure she has a new boyfriend that keeps her occupied. I'll give it two months before we're back to talking daily again. She never seems to keep anyone in her life long beside us.

Wednesday, December 13th

It's another gray, snowy morning. The snowflakes dance throughout the sky until they reach the powdery snow on the mountains. The mountains are white. Completely covered in snow, it's all you can see for miles. The smell of maple coffee tears through the cabin, no room is left untouched by the smell. I know it's Betty already kickstarting her caffeine intake for the day.

I walk downstairs to the fully wooden kitchen where everyone is seated around the table sipping on the coffee Betty had just brewed. Everyone is dressed in their long johns for skiing and our ski suits are laid out on the couch. We helped each other get our suits on and load up equipment.

Thursday, December 14th

They're missing. Ivy and Jake are missing. We haven't been able to find them since the slopes. Neither of them are answering their phones. We're freaking out. We thought they came back early last night but they're nowhere to be found. Betty's crying hysterically and Ines is trying to calm her down. August has been trying to get either one of their locations to show up on Life360 for over an hour now but nothing.

Friday, December 15th

There was blood everywhere. The once magical, glistening, white, powdery snow is now tainted with deep red. The once creme colored rug is now dyed black. The shower that once dripped clear now bleeds red. They're all dead. My best friends are all dead and I heard nothing.

Saturday, December 16th

"Am I free to go home now?"

"Ma'am you're being charged with murder. Mass murder. The only place you're going is prison."

"I explained everything that happened with as much detail as I could just like you asked me to."

"Ma'am, you left out the part where there were five people in that SUV. There were five highschool friends on their way to a cabin that was rented for five people. There's five suitcases. There's five retraining orders."

"I guess they did pick a side."

EUTIERRIA

Emma Lindsey • Student, Early Childhood Education

Somewhere in a field
the summer wind hums
caressing cat tails,
blowing past the tall grass.
The moonlight glistens atop the pond
beckoning me for a swim.

Easily seduced,
I glide my fingers along the soft blanket of grass
as it envelopes my stride.
The earth squelching between my toes,
the wind unfurling my hair
I stand bare against the black sky.

The water,
warmer than expected,
engulfs my hips, my waist, my breast.
Leaning back, floating on air
I count the stars outstretching
my arms, my smile radiates.

AS THE WORLD CAVES IN

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

She loved her. She loved her with every bone in her body, every breath in her chest, every beat of her heart, every fiber of her being, Skyler loved Aaliyah. She loved her when they met, when they dated, when they married, as they aged.

Skyler loved her now, as they rot together at the end of the world. They were rotting at the end of the world, and the world ended in Phoenix, Arizona, ushered in by a war of powers that ended magnificently with the final press of the red button. The land was scalded into wasteland with fire and brimstone and radiation that salted the earth.

Skyler was dying, writhing in this desecration by the sanctified gurgle of brook and breath, by the mournful cry of the crane, by the devilish toil and bake of the sun, by the grieving bows of the birch. Skyler loved her as they both died, laid up on a riverbank in June, as she kicked and screamed through a savage epilogue. She loved her as she coughed and sputtered and spit, as bile scorched her throat, as she murmured prayers into Aaliyah's ear, a heathen finally clinging to proverbs, and clutched close to her lover's corpse. Skyler loved her as her mucus-laden breath slicked her lungs, as she trembled and shook, as her death laid a feverish crown of sweat on her brow, as her skin flaked off in sloughs of limp flesh, as vessels bubbled and bloated and burst under her skin, as she held the festering hand of her lover.

They were martyrs unto themselves, the collateral of a blind, brutal hand, divine in their love and deformed in their end. They were not some fossilized couple of Pompeii. They were dying and they were dead, like so many others, and there would be no one to remember them, no one to spread a legacy, no history to record, no trace that they ever existed, and that is how it was.

And Skyler wept. She prayed. She begged and pleaded and cried to be taken and to be saved as radiation ate her bones, seeped from swollen pores and stole her lover, her love, and she wept harder with the thought, both with the heartache grief of losing a lover and the cool-water relief of knowing she was not far from joining.

Skyler mumbled and murmured, feverish and incomprehensible as she rot alive, as gangrene ate her alive, as maggots and flies and all sorts of vile, bestial things festered in her open wounds. There was nothing left to be done. She did not have the strength to call out, to beg for the bomb not to be dropped, because it was too late, and it seemed everything was too late.

She met Aaliyah too late, she made a life too late, she lived and loved too late, and the one thing that was too early, as it always is, was the end. That inevitable thing. The thing that filled her lungs with fluid, that left her lips dry and cracking, that forced her lungs to tremble and seize with the effort of extending a life she did not have.

Skyler rotted by water she did not have the strength to drink, by sun she did not have the strength to fight, by radiation from which she had no time to run. But she was happy to die here. If she were to perish, in this grisly, painful manner, she would have liked to die with Aaliyah. Selfish, perhaps. It should always be preferable that a loved one be left to live, but in her final moments, she could not be bothered by the trifle or morals.

She could not blink anymore, her eyelids eviscerated the moment she cast her gaze to the fireball. But she squeezed the decayed, doomed sludge of Aaliyah's hand. She would not die alone.

Skyler loved. Loved, loved, loved, until she could love no more.

A VARIANT OF STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

Cecelia Bialas • Alumna

To the outsiders, it doesn't make much sense,
post-hospitalization blues.

It's a good place to be taken seriously
the limits imposed on your life,
causes of unwell under investigation.

You hold the attention of loving nurses and respectful specialists,
family and friends who visit, concerned, want all the details.

They hug, they care, you chat til fatigue comes in.
Some comforts of home to nourish the soul: Christmas lights strung
over the whiteboard and your fleece blanket with the pink and blue cats
encourage a childlike freedom from pressure.

It's a chance to turn off responsibilities
because your only job is to get well.

Depression comes on discharge day;
you're on your own now to reconcile recovery with "real" life
resumed, go back to passing as a healthy person while sickly inside;
the hospital, disease: unexpected shapers of identity

JAIL – THE REVOLVING DOOR TO NOWHERE

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

the revolving door to nowhere
I call the Lancaster County Jail
psychotic delusions and paranoid confusion
is usually what led me there
lost beyond the pale
stuck without a hope or care
but I wasn't scared
of cold steel bars and doors for eternity
of quiet cells and mediocre food
just knowing self-esteem at its lowest point
and feeling hopelessly misunderstood

theft, trespassing, resisting arrest,
assault, disturbing the peace
off my meds and wasted on drugs
displaced in the sands of time
sometimes a day
sometimes a month
most recently more
so many arrests and detentions
I'm surprised I haven't kept score

since I got out this most recent time
I haven't felt completely safe or free
in a true sense of the word
cause I'm somehow defined
by those stupid and useless crimes
however absurd they may be
at last I finally see

I'm starting to learn from that experience
and can finally relax and be me.

for I'll never let my past take me down
or ever truly define me
transcendence shall be my friend
every misdeed and every action
was just a means to an end.

HIS HONEYSUCKLE

My Nguyen • Student, Academic Transfer

She is his honeysuckle
Found standing voluminously tall
Beside an empty porcelain teacup
Spinning softly as warm sun rays
Lift her corolla
As the clock endlessly repeats

She stared blankly for days
While he lay limply across the marble table
Flies feasting upon his breaking body
His blood soaking through her stem
Forcing her sleeves to stain scarlet
As she swayed drunk on his wine

Sugary cherry flushed cheeks
A once sweet flower gone sour
Yet still she danced gracefully
Along his spirit roaming through mirrors
Inside his quiet loft
Nestled between copses

His unshaven beard tangled
Unifying with her roots
No guilt to take her with him
Until blood seeped from her lips
She could drink no more
She was his honeysuckle

A SURPRISING PERFORMANCE

Austin Earnest • Student, Business Administration

Through the cool darkness of my room, I heard the all too familiar screech of the alarm jolt me from my dreams. As I peered through my half-open eyes, I saw the hazy multicolored digital alarm clock numbers read out 5:45. I begrudgingly sat up to contemplate my choices before the day and to figure out what my next move was. Time was marching by, so I went out to put together a lunch. I started with a few water bottles, a sandwich, orange, and some chips. I then ate a granola bar in the dark silent kitchen. The time now read 6:15 and it was time for me to head out.

I loaded up into my car and heard the engine try a few times before revving alive. I usually sing along to songs in my car, but I didn't give any attention to the music. Half of my attention was on the road, while the other half was focused on the 3.1-mile race that loomed in my head like the hanging fog on the road. As I made the next turn into my high schools parking lot, I saw the yellow bus waiting by the front doors. I climbed into vehicle and got my name checked off before navigating past the athletic bags and lunches cast aside in order to fit everyone. I found a seat next to one of my friends and put in my earbuds. Once the bus took off, the familiar high pitched monotone voice of my coach yelled out, "Silent on the way up!" This was no problem to me; I put on a looping song and began to fall asleep for the hour drive.

The newly risen sun pierced through my sleep, in conjunction with the reflection of the windows. I peered over the seats to see one of my teammates snap a picture of the sun rise on their phone. The taste of dust seeping through the windows meant we were close to our destination. We began to decelerate and the sight of the all too familiar clubhouse jumped into view. Through the front windshield I saw the rolling hills and the unnaturally green grass compared to the dry field adjacent.

The team knew instinctively where our spot was, and we were mindless bugs making our way towards the light; in this case, it was a towering tree that soaked us with shade. Our team always got the most advantageous spots because our athletic director would show up before everybody and kindly claim a spot for us. Next, the team had to walk the course. The grass still retained all the water it had collected from the morning dew. Just by walking to the starting line, my shoes were damp. Green smudges have also been collected on the white foam of my shoes. Admittedly, I used this time to look for stray golf balls that were neglected by past golfers. This time, my efforts were in vain, the course was already picked clean. The course was dotted with multiple packs of students wearing team themed shirts walking jointly. Our team also made sure this time was used to banter with other teams we came across. Usually dumb, sometimes clever remarks were bellowed by the most senior of team members. John, one of the seniors leading the group, spotted a Catholic school we had encountered before. In a familiar rhythmic, dulcet tone, John yelled out: "We know you're Catholic." John did this to poke fun at a flag that was always held high in the middle of their pack; both groups shared a laugh because this joke was made before.

Back at our tree, murmurs of the condition of the course and temperatures could

A SURPRISING PERFORMANCE

be heard; some thought the temperatures were rising too fast. The precious morning breeze that runners craved was being burned away. During that moment, a singular crack rang out. Not even a moment later, the thundering of the crowd rolled into the camp akin to a summertime thunderstorm. Varsity girls were being put to the test first; they would have to run 3.1 miles to see who came out on top.

My stomach felt light in this moment, and time was still marching on as it was in the morning; race time was getting ever closer. Time continued to pass until the second gun rang out. This signified the varsity boys' race began. I took it upon myself to gather up my remaining teammates that were on the JV team. I called out to the members around the tree "I think it's time to get warmed up." A light jog to warm up the body was the first task. We would then participate in some active stretches such as high knees, lunges, and toe touches. After that, we would sit in a circle and go through a set of static stretches at our own pace. A passing onlooker would have mistaken us for a traveling circus. Every boy was trying different, sometimes dangerous, stretches to loosen up the body. As I looked around, the team was cracking jokes and having a good time. I wished I could participate, but I was too preoccupied with the next race. I fell silent; all I could do is focus and think about the effort needed and pain that comes with the territory. I had run this course before; four times to be exact, but I could never shake the pre-race concerns that I had grown accustomed to.

While my coach escorted the team to the starting and finishing line, we were greeted by a box drawn in cheap chalk that could only fit three people across. Each team was given an equal portion of the starting line, and we were starting towards the right end. Only the light fabric of my uniform was protecting me now. I could feel the sun's rays find a home on my neck and shoulders. The team took off into a flurry of heavy footsteps for our last warmup jog to find a spot about 50 yards into the course. Everyone took a knee and instinctively knew our pre-race ritual was coming. The dirt on the ground poked and prodded my knee causing me to readjust. At that moment, my friend David began a prayer. His voice was crackly; it was evident that he was nervous, but he didn't let that hinder the prayer. He thanked God for the opportunity to prove ourselves along with a beautiful day to run. I then proceeded on with tradition and began to speak the breakdown. "We're gonna run, it's gonna suck, but we're gonna do it anyways." As I spoke the last line, the team joined me and yelled for all to hear. I trotted back to the starting line; my stomach felt like it was floating on a bed of clouds. Adrenaline surged through my body. As I took one of the first three positions in the box. I closed my eyes; all I could feel in that moment was the deep breath meant to calm me down. Everything fell silent, and I was ready.

The same instructions I've heard many times were beginning to be recited. "Take one step back, when I say runners to your mark, step up to the line; when the gun goes off, you may start. If you hear a second shot, a false start has occurred or a runner has fallen, come back up so we can restart you. Do we have any questions?" The runners fell silent along with the crowd. The starter yelled "RUNNERS TO YOUR MARK." In the next second the shot rang through my head as I started my first few steps.

The course starts on a 200-meter downhill. I saw a few runners shoot to the front; sprinting during this portion was dangerous. The downhill is deceiving because you don't start to feel tired until the end, then you're in trouble. For a second, I got pulled in and found myself running too fast. I slowed down to my desired pace, and I

waited. At the end lies an immediate uphill; which is the second steepest part of the race. While holding my pace, I got trapped behind a group. I found myself shortening my strides, so I didn't hit the runner in front of me. I needed to get past this group. While going uphill, I ran horizontally to the outside and expelled more effort than I would have liked to run past them. I was put in a bad place and needed to get out to preserve my race.

I slowed down back into pace and noticed there were only five other guys in front of me, and I was in sixth. I thought to myself "If I could keep up with these guys, I will score points and medal." That was the goal, run with them. The hill we just climbed transitioned into a downhill and so we could relax more. By this time, the drone of the crowd was silenced, and the labored breathing and clunky footsteps filled the atmosphere.

At the bottom of the hill, I was even with fifth place. I turned sharply on the next flag to gain some distance, and this put me into fifth. Still holding true to my pace; I climbed up a short hill and heard the crowd on the other side. This was the second place they met the runners, on the steep downhill. I overtook fourth by accident, and I thought I was going too fast. I heard the familiar calls from my team encouraging me while also making me smirk; one friend yelled: "You can't catch the guy in front of you? Go get him!" After a u-bend, my coach was there with water. When I passed, instincts took over and I took a deep breath after my back and chest were drowned in ice water. This felt great in the heat, but it does mess up the rhythm and flow of breathing. It didn't change the goal; finish the race with a medal.

We entered into the loneliest part of the race. Fans rarely ever ventured to this side of the course, it was a slow gradual uphill. Every single step I took up this hill, my calves called out for me to stop. The lactic acid build-up made them heavy and slow. I couldn't lose sight of number two and three right ahead of me. One of them happened to be one of my best friends, Brett. Brett was breathing sporadically, and there was a slight limp in his run. While I was tired, I was still on my original pace. In that instance, I made the call to pass both of them. Up to this point I was just trying to place, but it wasn't until now I realized I could win it. Brett managed to leak out some encouragement through strained breaths: "You go, take it." I was in second at this point, first place was within striking distance. A left turn was coming up, and this signified the end of the hill. I took the left and pushed up to the crest of the hill. I broke the pace I had established all race. With long strides and determination, I passed number one. These were uncharted waters for me, but I knew if I didn't continue, my efforts would be in vain. About halfway through the course, I had a long downhill; I was practically sprinting while taking the longest strides possible to allow some semblance of rest.

The crowd now saw I was in first, my team was doing chants in unison, they sounded like a pack of coyotes harmonizing in the night; their simple and effective chant filled my mind. "MOVE!" Instead of drowning them out, I used them, and continued to push. The steepest part of the course was right in front of me. I leaned forward and dug in on each step. It felt as if I was jumping from one part of the hill to the next as I made my way up. After that, a break, the course was flat for the next stretch, but I didn't want to stop. I kept going, it seemed my pace got faster with each step. I was exhausted, but I couldn't stop, I wouldn't stop for anything.

The stretch was over, and the final push was just ahead. We started at the same

place we finished. I saw the hill where I got trapped. Just over the crest, the finish line. With the ending in sight, it filled me with excitement. I fought my way up and at the top; I slowed down a bit. In that moment I rounded the top with everything, and I was only jogging. That pace wouldn't cut it. I used gravity to my advantage and flung myself down the hill. Each step felt huge and unnatural, one missed step could've sent me tumbling. When I reached the bottom; I looked up in horror. The hill went on forever. I took the advice of my coach and looked down while driving my knees. Climbing that hill was like running in your dream, you never seem quite fast enough. All of my muscles were on overtime. I was working as hard as I ever had, yet I still felt slow. The crowd, my coaches, friends, and family were all there to bring out any energy that could've been hidden. Their yelling and screaming blended together into a constant sound of encouragement. The finish line was inching closer every second. Time was marching on, and every second counted. As the finish line approached, it felt like I was dragging a sled while wearing a weighted vest. I put everything into the final steps and crossed.

I muttered to myself while walking through the finish, "I did it." My vision blurred and I didn't have full balance for a few seconds. My hands were above my head as the people at the finish line tried their best to escort me forward. I took a look behind me, the second-place runner was just starting on the same hill. Through my determination, I didn't even realize I pulled away from him. I was shocked with my run; I didn't expect anything like that when I woke up. At that point, I realized that I shouldn't ever set my goals on sixth, or a medal place. I need to set them higher; I need to strive for the best. I could do so much more with myself even if the goals are unrealistic. I would just have to work that much harder to achieve them.

BOTTLED GRIEF

Kristine Morris • Staff, Extended Learning

How many tears do I have to cry to bring you back
Tears to add to my glass bottle
Moss is growing now
They'll be trapped in the deep
Fermenting until they dry
Today I'll cry on your grave
The bottle can wait
Lifeless stone needs my tears more
Dirt and grass imprint my face

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

John Cook • Student, Academic Transfer

The sprawling city of New Corsica was a crowded dirty place that seemed to run entirely on avarice and predation. Being located next to the only spaceport on the backwater planet Saleccia, some criminality was to be expected, but New Corsica took corruption to the next level. The planetary government had mostly washed their hands of the city years ago, leaving corporate interests to run the city without little oversight and gangs to run the streets with even less. Business tycoons ruled over their own fiefdoms, fighting each other for power, while the average citizen fought just to survive. It was the kind of city where life was cheap and those at the bottom rarely had a hope of making it out of the slums.

Still, from fifty stories up, the place didn't look too bad. Hiding in the shadows, watching the planet's twin moons rise over the spaceport in the distance, Jarnell thought it might even qualify as beautiful.

Jarnell was not a fan of New Corsica. This was not his first visit to the planet but he was hoping to make it his last. He thought of the city as sleazy and broken even at the best of times, and this visit was far from those.

"I just want to point out one last time, I think this is a really bad idea." Dezi's voice crackled in his earpiece, her tone no less scathing for the poor signal strength. Jarnell hated using low grade tech but they were stuck with what they could get. After how badly their last job went, they were lucky to be alive.

"We're fresh out of good ideas, bad ones are all we've got left," Jarnell replied mildly, trying to avoid an argument. Dezi knew this was the only chance they had to escape; she just didn't like it very much. To be fair, Jarnell was not a big fan of the plan either, but desperate times required desperate measures.

"We're burned, Dez, we need to get off this planet ASAP. That means we need a ship and we need a way to get through spaceport security. This job gets us both."

"I still don't like the idea of you going in alone. I can't even hack the security system from out here, the best I can do is piggyback their cameras. If things go sideways, I'm not gonna be able to extract you." Dezi grumbled.

"I'll get myself out, I just need you to be my eyes." Jarnell replied soothingly. "Timing is critical, the access window is sixty seconds. You need to let me know the moment the mark activates his pad."

“Speaking of, I’ve got movement at the front door.” Dezi said, all hints of whining suddenly absent. She might not like the plan, but once it was time to go, she was all business.

A pulse of excitement raced down Jarnell’s spine as readied himself for action. He took a moment to stretch out any kinks from his time crouching in the shadows, his long lithe frame stretching towards the stars far above. He was dressed from head to toe in a snug black catsuit with pockets festooning his thighs and a slim backpack hanging from his shoulders. A matching balaclava covered his short dark hair and, when he pulled the mask up, only his emerald green eyes were visible.

“The mark and his two bodyguards are leaving.” Dezi informed him dutifully as he picked up the long coil of rope tied off by his feet. The line was not quite as good as the monofilament he preferred but it was still lightweight but still strong enough to get the job done.

“The mark is arming security,” Dezi announced. “Go on my word, and whatever you do, don’t miss. Go!”

Jarnell was on the clock.

60...59

Like a runner released by the starting gun, he burst out of the shadows in a sprint. He ran headlong towards the ledge of the building and flung himself over it without hesitation. Twenty feet below, he landed on a wide balcony and tucked himself into a roll to bleed off inertia, ending in a crouch.

53...52...51

The patio door slid open easily at his touch; nobody ever thought to lock their balcony, especially when it was forty-eight stories high. Jarnell slipped into the dark apartment like a shadow coming home. He drifted silently over to the faintly glowing security panel near the front door and checked his time.

45...44...43

Ignoring the blinking access pad, Jarnell slid his fingers along the underside of the panel until he felt a universal access port. He deftly drew a thin retractable cable from the micro-computer strapped to his wrist and jacked it into the port.

The computer was his ace in the hole for this job. It was a compact piece of tech normally used by technicians who worked on alarm systems. Loaded with the right software, the machine could cut its way through just about any alarm system on the open market.

38...37

The micro-comp went to work, attacking the security system from the inside, looking for a pathway beyond the user interface to root access.

31..30

"Full lockdown in thirty seconds." A disembodied voice announced right on cue. It was the standard computer AI voice, always friendly and polite but empty of any warmth or humanity.

"Don't bet on it." Jarnell replied with a smile.

27...26...25

The micro-comp beeped once, telling him that it had found root access and was searching for the admin password.

17...16...15

"Full lockdown in 15 seconds." The disembodied voice announced in that same chipper tone. As before

"All the time in the world." Jarnell replied absently, refusing to give the computer the last word out of spite.

10...9...8

The micro-comp finally flashed green, showed him the admin code. Breathing a sigh of relief, he jabbed the seen digits into the security panel number pad.

"Passcode incorrect." The disembodied voice announced snarkily.

5...4

Panic started to set in and Jarnell debated aborting the mission until he realized he had used too much force tying in the code and one number was entered twice by mistake. Pushing back on his fear, he entered the code again, careful to use a lighter touch this time.

1...0

"Full lockdown initiated." The voice announced gleefully. "Security breach det...Passcode accepted; reboot initiated."

Jarnell stood rock still for a few long seconds, waiting to see if he was really in the clear. When nothing else happened he finally blew out the breath he had been holding with a sigh of relief. He unplugged his micro-comp and went in search of his prize.

It only took a couple of minutes to locate the target's safe, which was hidden in his office behind a ridiculously large analog clock. The timepiece was three feet across with an ivory face, raised gold numbers and hands made of solid silver. It was gaudy, ostentatious, and looked like it belonged in a ballroom.

Despite its ponderous size, the clock swung away from the wall on hidden hinges with a simple tug, revealing the large safe behind it. Jarnell knew his way around cracking a safe but this time his skills were not even needed, it was already open.

Half expecting a trap, Jarnell carefully swung the steel door open to reveal the treasures inside. Four large bundles of cash sat beside a large pile of jewels, three small bars of platinum and several data chips loaded with untold funds. The combined riches were considerable, easily enough to buy a ship of their own, but Jarnell ignored temptation. The goal was to get in and out unnoticed, stealing the mark's hoard of ill-gotten gains would definitely get noticed.

Tossed in haphazardly among the fortune was the real treasure, an unassuming black plastic fob about the size of Jarnell's thumb. There was nothing particularly interesting about the fob itself, there were no markings to indicate its purpose or importance. The device was a glorified IMF transponder; it was the signal it gave off which made it so special. With the fob in hand, someone could walk right through every security checkpoint in the spaceport unmolested, including the gate which led to the mark's personal pleasure craft.

Jarnell smiled under his balaclava as he pocketed the fob and closed the safe, leaving it like he found it. He was about to put the clock back in place when he noticed something he had missed before. There was a motion sensor on the back of the clock. A motion sensor he had tripped when he found the safe.

"You need to get out of there!" Dezi's voice crackled in his ear, confirming his biggest fear. "The mark and his goons just stormed back in and are heading your way."

"How long?" Jarnell asked absently, his thoughts racing as he discarded several different plans before landing on one that might work. Subtlety had failed him, now he needed a distraction.

"They've commandeered the express elevator; you've got forty seconds at best." Dezi replied nervously. "You need to get out now!"

"All the time in the world," Jarnell whispered to himself. "I'm moving to plan B."

"When did we make a plan B?!" She asked, irritation coloring her voice.

"I just made it up." He answered. "Be ready to pick me up in one minute."

Throwing caution to the wind, Jarnell opened the safe once more and began scooping the contents into his backpack. The mark knew he was being robbed at this point, leaving the money behind would only draw attention to the missing security key. Taking everything might buy them enough time to get away.

His small pack could barely hold everything but he somehow managed to zip it closed before swinging it awkwardly over his shoulders and shrugging to adjust to the new weight. Just as he was making his way out, a loud thud echoed through the apartment.

"The bad guys just figured out you disabled the security pad. They're trying to break the door down." Dezi explained helpfully.

"Sounds like it's time to go." Another loud thud punctuated his statement and a quick glance told him the door would not hold much longer. The surface was bowing in and the frame was starting to buckle.

"Gee, ya think?" Dezi snapped.

Ignoring his partners barb, Jarnell slipped back out the way he came in, closing the balcony door behind him. He tossed the long coil of rope over the edge of the balcony, watching long enough to make sure it did not get tangled before pulling a pair of reinforced gloves out of his pocket. Another loud bang and the sound of screeching metal told him that the goons had finally broken through the door. Gripping the line loosely in both hands, Jarnell once again flung himself off the building and into the cool night air.

Knowing time was against him now, Jarnell free-fell for a good distance before clamping down on the line to slow himself. Smoke poured from the gloves and his fingers started to burn even with the added protection as he struggled with gravity. By the time he reached the ground, his hands felt like they were on fire and he could barely hold on.

A nondescript van was waiting where he landed, the side door open. He leapt through the opening just as bullets started cracking off the pavement around him.

"I told you this was a bad idea." Dezi growled from the driver's seat as she stomped on the gas and swerved wildly into traffic. He stumbled to the front passenger seat and buckled in before opening his backpack to show her their score. Her eyes practically bulged from their sockets as she tried to take it all in and stay on the road.

"Take us straight to the spaceport," Jarnell ordered, waving the fob as he spoke. "It's time to steal a spaceship."

A HOLE IN THE WALL

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

A hole in the wall. Not a giant hole as though a fist had gone through it. Nor was it a result of renovations. No. The hole in the wall was barely three inches in its circumference. However, this small hole in the wall was a portal for a young boy. Perhaps it should be creepy that he utilized the hole to glimpse even briefly, something whole. He'd always believed that the world was a broken world. That there was no such thing as whole but when he stumbled upon the three inch hole, he found not only something whole but something wholesome.

That was five years ago. He was now fifteen, the same age as the eldest Feldweg daughter, Arya. She was beautiful and yet he had yet to meet her. His eyes fell on the next eldest Feldweg child, a son named Theo. Then came the twins, a boy and a girl named Leo and Leia respectively. Lastly was the newest addition, a baby girl named Darla. Their parents were named Sara and Arthur Feldweg.

Nathaniel, better known as Nate, knew that he shouldn't pry into the lives of others. He knew it was wrong as his twin sister had once caught him. Natalie had always known him better than he knew himself. One night, after almost a year of watching the family, she had cornered him in her own way by calling him out over dinner. It was just the two of them now and once he began to explain, they ended up crying for their parents whom they had lost when they were only nine years old. None of their so called family had any desire to help them. So, they found a way to make it on their own.

Natalie was against the hole in the wall, her protectiveness coming out ten fold but he assured his sister that he meant no harm. He had no romantic feelings towards the eldest Feldweg daughter, though he supposed it was possible. He wasn't trying to be a peeper. He just wanted to see what it was like to be whole even though he knew he'd never get to experience that feeling himself.

It wasn't until a day in May that it became a problem. Nate had been late to school and the only remaining seat was next to Arya Feldweg. She gave him a shy smile and held out a pencil, seeing that he did not have one of his own. When he thanked her she merely smiled again as she tucked her hair behind her ear. She was beautiful. It wasn't the first time he'd had that thought but it was the first time he'd had it outside of the hole in the wall.

After school he was given an invitation to join her family for dinner. She had explained that she'd seen him pretty much going it alone at school and wanted him to have another friend. He was afraid to accept the invitation.

He knew too much about her family based on his observations through the three inch hole, but as soon as he had the thought, he realized that's all they were. Glimpses through the three inch hole of a whole life he wished to live. Perhaps finally passing by the hole and into the room that lay beyond, would be eye opening. So he accepted her invitation to dinner. Her eyes brightened and she gave him the address. She then gave another smile as she tucked her hair behind her ear. Nate had seen Nat do that many times and he wondered what it meant.

After bidding her goodbye, he rushed home. He wondered how he should dress for such an occasion. Should he pretend he knew nothing about them when in fact it was the exact opposite? Natalie was home soon after he arrived and one look at his face told her that he needed her. Nate began to explain why and he already looked defeated. That simply wouldn't do and the look of relief replacing the look of trepidation on her brother's face when she helped him, warmed her heart. They talked about what to say and how to act.

Nate laughed a humorless laugh at her suggestion that he just be himself. That had never worked for him before in this broken world. Soon though, it was time to leave in order to ensure that he would make it across town in time for dinner. It was a long walk but he was willing to walk even further if he had to. For all he knew, this might have been his only chance to be part of something whole even if only for an evening. He could only hope that all of the time he had spent watching the whole family through the three inch hole wouldn't shatter the wholesomeness he had witnessed and had come to covet.

BREATHE.

Lucy Frenzel • Alumni

breathe in the sweet nectar of freedom, solitude,
love, and peace
breathe out the distractions,
the losses, the hurt, sadness and pain
tune out the emotions
that make you give up devotion
so you can tune in to life's treasures
for the ultimate pleasure
knowing you are loved
in more ways than one.
bring hope for new tomorrows
find joy in overcoming your sorrows
find light unto the darkness
where you meet the hope
and have a moment to call it home.
there's moments that last forever
and some too short to notice
but there's peace to be had in the quiet moments
with no fear, worry, or want.

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Cecelia Bialas: Cecelia Bialas is a former SCC Academic Transfer student, now a graduate of UNL with a Bachelor of Arts in English and minors in Communications and Humanities in Medicine. She works as a full-time project manager and editor for a continuing medical education company. In her free time, Cecelia is a freelance copyeditor and loves to be with her family and friends, read realistic fiction, watercolor paint, go paddling, and hike in the mountains around her home in Virginia.

Onna Carr: Onna Carr lives wherever she happens to be at the moment. She is a bestselling author, educator, and artist.

Aidan Chrisman: My name is Aidan Chrisman, I love the arts and am always trying to find ways to express myself. I am a musician and I just released my debut album (titled "Two Dudes" by Aidan & Ryan). I also like visual mediums for my art, like photography. I enjoy writing so much that he is hoping to someday make a living at it.

John Cook: John is a legend, a myth, an international man of mystery, and, quite possibly, an immortal dragon in disguise. He is both larger than life and yet more humble than a gentle summer breeze. The tales he crafts are plucked from a world of truth, lies, and everything in between. His words can move nations and his actions can change the course of history. Alternately, he is a loving husband and father of two boys who happens to enjoy writing so much that he hopes to someday make a living at it. He invites you to choose which persona you believe is the real one.

Angela Cyza: I am a self taught watercolorist and have been working on my craft since 2017. I enjoy being outdoors in my flower gardens.

Austin Earnest: I grew up in the country and have lived outside of Lincoln for my entire life. From kindergarten to senior year, I went to Malcolm Public Schools and graduated in 2021. After that, I decided to go to Southeast Community College to get a degree in business administration. I also have a twin sister, and she is going to college too. I originally wrote my memoir for an English composition class, but my professor told me I should submit it to Illuminations. I hope my memoir is enjoyable!

Zahraa Fanharawi: My name is Zahraa Fanharawi I'm student at Southeast Community College. I have strong passion in many different forms of art, including but not limited to drawing, painting, and writing. I also enjoy reading books in my free time. My near future goal is to major in English once I transfer to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. In the future I aspire to pursue a career in teaching.

Stephanie Fenton: I am a returning student who has been out of school for ten years due to injury and am returning to achieve my dream to get my degree and work to help young adults who have suffered from addiction and abuse using modern therapy and science. I enjoy art, photography and literature.

Heather Fischer: I live in Lincoln, NE with my husband and two cats. I enjoy being outdoors, spending time with my family, and crocheting. I originally graduated from SCC in 2002. I am currently working on completing some prerequisite classes to complete my bachelor's degree. I have been working in clinical laboratories as a medical laboratory technician since I graduated from SCC.

Rebecca Ford: Rebecca Ford is a high school senior in Adams, NE and lives in Cortland. Growing up as a quadruple, she's acquired plenty of experience navigating the intricacies of human connection with the writing to reflect it. Her work explores themes such as friendship, social justice, and identity. In her free time, she enjoys baking, going on walks with her mom, and, of course, writing.

Patty Haddow: I worked for the college for 38 years and have been retired 2 years. I enjoy seeing the different things in life and the beauty that those things hold.

Richard Hadley: I enjoy looking at the witty observations of life.

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Linda Hartman: After last year's successful submissions for *Illuminations*, I'm hooked. The entire publication inspires me and makes me proud to call SCC my home and family! This college is so much more than a career!

Michaela Hartman: My name is Michaela. I am a writer, poet, actor and singer. The arts, performing and creating both on stage and off are where I shine. I also love sign language, reading and cuddling my cat. Reaching others through writing is one of my favorite things to do as well as sharing parts of myself in doing so.

Kipp Heidtbrink: Taking an unconventional path, I recently transitioned from an IT career to pursuing an education in nursing. Despite being a non-traditional student returning to college after over a decade, I'm approaching this new chapter of my life with optimism and as a chance to challenge myself. I plan on continuing my education by applying for the nursing program that starts next year. Until then, during my free time, you'll likely catch me teaching my dog and parrot new tricks.

Melanie Heiserman: I am a psychology and philosopher major. Meaning, my mind is always rushing with large concepts and breaking down theory to understanding natural patterns. I find the blend between abstract, concrete, and symphonic language as a dance that I cherish so much. I am learning to not know the ending as I write and let my words take me and soar with my passions. Here is my first attempt at understanding myself through written dance.

Logan Henson: No work or love will flourish out of guilt, fear, or hollowness of heart, just as no valid plans for the future can be made by those who have no capacity for living now.

G.C. Hughes: I was raised in Millard, a western suburb of Omaha. I came to Lincoln to attend UNL, but the pandemic and subsequent quarantine merged with mental health concerns and was detrimental to my academic career. I have recently rediscovered myself in many ways and set out to become educated.

Kathleen Kerlik: I'm 18 years old. My favorite subject is English (and my least favorite is math), so I'm going to be an English major with a minor in creative writing. My hobbies are reading, writing, and fishing with my dad. My biggest supporters are my dad and my dog, Benji. One of them reads all my works and the other is moral support (I'll let you guess which is which). I'm at SCC to get some general education courses out of the way before I go off to my 4-year college in the fall.

Danielle Klafter: As Danielle Klafter teaches Composition at SCC. She loves words and sees writing as a form of hospitality. Besides being a mother to two little girls, she enjoys writing fiction, keeping a vegetable garden, spending time outdoors, backpacking in the mountains, and playing board games with her husband.

Madeleine Lewis: I am 20 years old and love to write and have for years. I love to write books in my free time and am currently working on a fantasy story about the cursed ones in my free time. I work at PetSmart with the Pet Care of the animals and fish on the floor and work in cat adoptions and take pride in making sure every animal gets adequate care in having the right living conditions and making sure the animals thrive rather than only survive. I love cats which makes my job all the more fun and I love starting new fish tanks at home. I find abnormal psychology fascinating which is what inspired this poem.

Spencer Linam: I am an only child of two parents, and went to Sheridan Elementary school, Irving Middle school, and Lincoln Southeast High school. I have interest in music, hands-on learning and hobbies, the outdoors, basketball, and cats. No dogs! I chose to come to Milford as a continuation of what I studied for 2 school years at TCA. The electrical program has been challenging and a lot to take in at times, but I've enjoyed it for the most part. I expect to graduate this December!

Emma Lindsey: Emma Lindsey is a SCC college graduate and a current student at UNL. A non-traditional student, Emma came back to college to pursue Early Childhood Education and found a home at Southeast, participating in numerous on campus activities. Emma loves writing and hopes to one day publish children's books, and hopes you enjoy her work published here in *Illuminations*.

My Nguyen: My Nguyen is a first-generation college student of immigrant parents. She enjoys writing and hopes to publish in the future. She also has a Havanese named Bonnie and loves him very much.

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Marcos Lopez: My name is Marcos. My favorite artist is Van Gogh. I've been into art since my first grade art class. In my free time I practice sketching and drawing various things. Someday, I plan to make stories using my artwork.

Alexis Lundeen: I've lived in Nebraska all my life, and in Lincoln for a good half of it. I'm an artist who's always had a love for telling stories. I'm a huge nerd for almost anything in the horror genre.

Cheney Luttich: I am an English instructor at SCC. I enjoy writing, reading about old dresses, going to museums that have old dresses, and watching anything volleyball related.

Kristin Marshalek: Hi, I'm Kristin. I am 30 years old and currently enrolled as a dental assisting student at Southeast Community College in Lincoln, NE. I'm married, have a 14 year old son, 4 dogs, and a cat. I enjoy traveling, kayaking, and spending time with my family. While I'm not considered a traditional college student, I think it is important for everyone to realize that their dreams don't have an expiration. At times, life can throw many obstacles at a person, hindering them from following the traditional path. But, it is never too late to achieve what was once thought impossible.

Kristen McCoy: Kristen McCoy is a student at SCC hoping to get into the surgical tech program and become a surgical technologist in the future. She is an avid lover of books, and movies.

Kailyn McMann: Hello! My name is Kailyn McMann and I am currently a senior at Palmyra Jr. Sr. High School. After this year, I plan on attending UNL on a Pre-Vet path. I was inspired by the days I would spend at the beach with my family. We go up to Lewis and Clark lake several times a year and it is my favorite place on Earth. I never fail to find something beautiful there and I love the quality time with my cousins and other family members. I hope to use my writing to transport readers to my little slice of paradise and let them see it through my eyes.

Kristine Morris: Just a creative soul and always dreaming. Inspired by flowers, mountains, seasons, and the moon.

Connor Myers: I'm Connor Myers, a young man born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. Throughout Elementary and Middle School, I struggled to find activities I strongly enjoyed and did well. That may have been partially due to my inability to focus, a strong symptom of my ADHD. However, as I struggled through isolation and social anxiety in High School, I discovered a passion in creating and performing, with a particular love and talent for writing. Ever since I found that passion, I have made it a point to use my writing voice to share works that matter most to me, both in school and out.

Felicity Ann Neeley: My name is Felicity Neeley, and I am a part of the academic transfer program at SCC. This spring I will be graduating at the end of the term with my Associates of Arts, and this fall I will be transferring to UNL for a degree in Journalism.

I have always loved to read and write. Some of my fondest memories growing up were when me and my grandma would go to our little neighborhood library. We would come home with literal bags full of books, and we would read all of them. Then as soon as I could write, I would be jotting down short little stories that I would share with my family and friends.

I still read like a fiend, and I have been working on my writing. I am nearly finished with a novel that I hope to send out within a year or so.

Tara Sue Plasek: An empty nester who lives in the middle of nowhere Nebraska. Wife of a vintage motocross racer. Mother of a 27 daughter who informed me when she was 17, "My kids will be perfect whether they want to be or not." Mother of a 21-year-old daughter who attends UNL and honestly believes that MATH is fun. (I wonder if electroshock therapy would fix that). Mother of a 19-year old daughter who also attends UNL, and declared herself a vegetarian at the age of 10. Her cattle rancher grandpa is so proud. Grandmother to a 4-year-old girl and a 2-year old girl. These perfect little girls belong to that 27-year old. (This afternoon these two "perfect" children were found hiding under a bed surrounded by candy wrappers from candy they found in my office.) Daughter of two North Dakotans who put masking tape on their computer camera lens so that the government can't spy on them. Sister to three women who had to share one bathroom growing up, and one brother who had to share that same bathroom with four sisters. (He now licks rocks for a living....he says he's a geologist, but we all know that's a euphemism for rock licker.)

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Mattie Linscomb Quick: I am from Lake Charles, Louisiana but after 24 moves, I've settled in Wahoo, Nebraska. I attended Bishop Neumann Highschool in Wahoo where I met my husband. I graduated in 2013 and married my husband in 2014. We now have six children together and I decided I am ready to get my degree and pursue a career in Elementary Education.

Laura Reece: My name is Laura Reece and I am a nontraditional student following my passion of education at the age of 33. I have a firecracker of a 4-year-old named Oliver and I just moved to Lincoln from Ohio last year to live with my partner, Kara. I am a preschool teacher at a locally owned childcare center and I plan to teach first grade after I graduate. I love romance novels and UFC.

Bonni Riehle: Drawing was a creative outlet that was shut down by my dad, so when I was about 8 I stopped drawing. At the end of 2022, I decided that I was going to start drawing things that I'm passionate about again.

Kale Riley: Although this work has never been formally published, I have put it up on Canvas and used it in teaching some of my classes. I have decided I'd like to formally publish it and I believe Illuminations is the best place to do this. I originally wrote this short story in 2012 and have revised it a few times since then. It tells the story of a man who thinks he is having a terrible day. As "The Man" goes about his daily activities, each of which he believes has gone badly, the reader is privy to what The Man doesn't know--that what he views as negative was really a positive for him. The main idea of the story is that sometimes we are oblivious to our own situation, that sometimes those negatives we see in our lives are blessings. I hope you will enjoy and publish "The Oblivious Man." Thank you for your consideration. Attached, please find a DocX file for my short story fiction submission entitled "Henry." "Henry" is my own, original, unpublished work. This is a fiction short story, but it is based on a real event. Roughly five years ago, I took my kids to see my grandmother's old place which by then was just a big cow pasture in the middle of rural Missouri. While there, we found a kitten limping through the field. I found the remains of the kitten's mother under a tree. We took the kitten home with us and named him "Henry." Sadly, Henry had significant internal injuries and died a few days later. I wrote this story about Henry and what I imagined he had experienced before and after we found him. The important part of the story is the ending: Henry died knowing he was loved. I hope you will enjoy and publish "Henry." Thank you for your consideration.

Eric Rittenhouse: I had published a few short stories many years ago and then went on hiatus, but never lost the desire to write. This is a short story I created somewhere during that hiatus--a story about coming out of writer's block while literally coming out of writer's block. A little art imitates life, or maybe this one's the other way around. Eric Rittenhouse graduated from SCC in 1999 with an A.A.S. in Environmental Laboratory Technology. Now, an empty nester (after successfully raising his three kids to adulthood) he is back at SCC to obtain another A.A.S. this time in Medical Laboratory Technology. Eric is an avid reader, among many other things, and enjoys writing when he can. He's hoping his submission here will kickstart his writing again.

Hailey Stewart: My Name is Hailey Stewart. I am getting my Associate of Health Science at Southeast Community College. I am the daughter of Heather Stewart and Leonard Huebner and an older sister to five amazing siblings. I received my CNA license at the age of sixteen at TCA and hope to become the best midwife anyone has ever seen. I am passionate about my career and find so much joy in helping and caring for others. I also love to write about what I have gone through in my life to showcase who I am as a person.

Celia Taylor: I moved to Nebraska about 2 years ago from Colorado and am a happy mom to one cat and a bunch of houseplants. I enjoy illustration, especially with ink, and creative writing and reading in my free time. I hope to pursue further education in illustration and use my skills to work in concept art.

Nature Villegas: Nature Medicine Song is a woman that was taken from her mother at the age of 9 never to be returned. Her unthinkable life journey has her built of an unmatched authenticity. Art (of many genres) has always been her solace-her healing space where she learned the vital importance of healing and knowledge of self. Two elements of life that create hope and purpose in ourselves. If you don't know who you are, they will tell you who you are or are not. Nature is a woman of many hats and you will often find her creatively and innovatively boots to ground turning pain to power. Nature believes "Art is the one perfection in the world as there is no right or wrong." Nature is a trademarked & published Artist/Writer/Poet whom advocates on behalf of human rights. Fighting for freedom of innocent lives pushing for local movements to go national

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(visit sendearnesthome.com). She creates 'Know the Ledge' book gardens in the community for BIPOC youth and discusses the importance of self-identity in our youth. When she is not creating on a canvas she is creating in community doing intersectional & festival coordinating with Stand in For Nebraska. She is co-creator of Roots to Rise/ Eye Am Art, a multi-dimensional arts humanities and environmental studies program. She champions on behalf of people v prisons as a Restorative Justice warrior teaching emotional hygiene and victim impact classes inside all of Nebraska prisons and probation. To further that outreach, she conducts and is teaching others how to conduct healing circles to provide a safe space for people to take their armor off and catch their breath in life. She holds an Associate of Arts degree with Social Justice, Somatic Trauma Therapy training, ASIST (suicide prevention), QPR, WRAP facilitation training, and Intentional Peer Support training. She strives to heal, decolonize and uplift others and it starts with self. As a mother of 6 and the community's "mother nature" it is vital to her that she do her part to change the narrative so history doesn't have to continue to repeat itself. We are sewing seeds for 7 generations to come, what is in our gardens?

Chelsea Warden: I have 24 years old. I have the sweetest one-and-a-half-year-old you would ever meet. She is the reason I am in school so I can provide a better future for us. Being with her is all the sunshine I need. I am a very dedicated person so when I put my mind to something I stay to it until I accomplish what needs to be done.

Abriel Williams: This poem came from an urge to write late one night. Instead of continuing to wait for the perfect idea to float towards me, I just wrote about life at the time. This poem is the result of nurturing the first draft that emerged that night. I was born and raised in Lincoln, NE. Writing and reading have been passions of mine since I was small. I also enjoy cooking, dancing, and laughing with my sister.

Lily Zelt: I am Lily Zelt. I'm taking art courses part time at Southeast Community College to stay active, to continue learning, and to provide structure in daily life. I use course requirements as extra motivation to spur myself on to continue creating art and writing stories

Tammy Zimmer: Tammy Zimmer is the editor of *Illuminations* and an English Instructor on the Beatrice campus. She is a PhD student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln where she studies higher education.



Equal Opportunity/NonDiscrimination Policy - It is the policy of Southeast Community College to provide equal opportunity and nondiscrimination in all admission, attendance, and employment matters to all persons without regard to race, color, religion, sex*, age, marital status, national origin, ethnicity, veteran status, sexual orientation, disability, or other factors prohibited by law or College policy. Inquiries concerning the application of Southeast Community College's policies on equal opportunity and nondiscrimination should be directed to the Access/Equity/Diversity Office, 301 S. 68th Street Place, Lincoln, NE 68510, 402-323-5589, FAX 402-323-3420, or equity@southeast.edu. *The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights enforces Title IX's prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sex to also include discrimination based on gender identity. .

Declaración de política sobre equidad/antidiscriminación - La política publica de Southeast Community College es de proveer equidad, y prohíbe discriminación, en todos asuntos referentes a la admisión, participación, y empleo contra toda persona por motivo de raza, color, religión, sexo*, edad, estado civil, origen nacional, etnia, condición de veterano, orientación sexual, incapacidad, u otros factores prohibidos por ley o política del Colegio. Preguntas relacionadas a la política sobre equidad/antidiscriminación de Southeast Community College deben dirigirse a: Access/Equity/Diversity Office, 301 S 68 Street Place, Lincoln, NE 68510, 402-323-5589, FAX 402-323-3420, o equity@southeast.edu. *La Oficina de Derechos Civiles del Departamento de Educación de los Estados Unidos hace cumplir la prohibición del Título IX contra discriminación por motivos de sexo, que también incluye la discriminación basada en la identidad de género. // southeast.edu/diversity

"The coin travelled from purse to dish-the give a penny, take a penny pool.
Before long, it found itself in a loafer skipping school."

Cheney M. Luttich
"This 1981 Penny"



"No need for it to be warm,
warmth isn't what I'm seeking
neither a well-made bed, with soft sheet covers."

Zahraa Fanharawi
"Till the Last Raindrop"

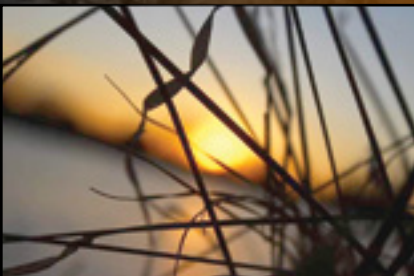
Angela Cyza
"Female Harbison's Dun Skipper on Thistle"

"While leaning back in my chair, I dig my
toes in the warm sand on the little man-
made beach. The wall of cinderblocks
around three sides of the perimeter holds
the sand in. A father and son duo load up
their jet skis on the boat ramp to my left.
On my right lies a lazy creek before the
steep bluffs begin."

Kailyn McMann
"Good Times and Tan Lines"



Onna Carr
"Phuket Beach"



Sabrina Babella
"Recharge"

"I walked into my local community college as a
non-traditional student who felt scared, unheard,
and under-appreciated. I had a dream that I was
stubborn in my pursuit of, but I wasn't sure then if
I was smart enough or could fit in with the other
students on campus. Community college offered me
a safe respite as I figured out my goals, my dreams,
and my personhood."

Emma Lindsey
"The Value of a Community College Education"