



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

GO TO
2020



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North Hennepin Community College
CREATIVE WRITING





- Acclaimed, widely-published writing faculty, including the 2016 winner of the Minnesota Book Award
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- Meet the Authors Reading Series brings nationally-renowned authors to campus three times a semester for craft talks, readings, and workshops





2017 Xperience Project interviews on the NHCC campus

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North Hennepin Community College
GRAPHIC DESIGN

nhcc.edu/graphicdesign our graphic design degree program

nhcc.edu/xperience our graphic design internship program

nhcc.edu/underconstruction this book, designed by students*

* *Under Construction* has won 34 regional & national awards across more than 50 years of publication, including 2018's Best Magazine in the Nation award from the Community College Humanities Association: www.cchumanities.org



graphic design internship work



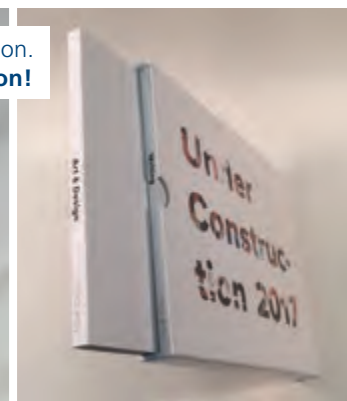
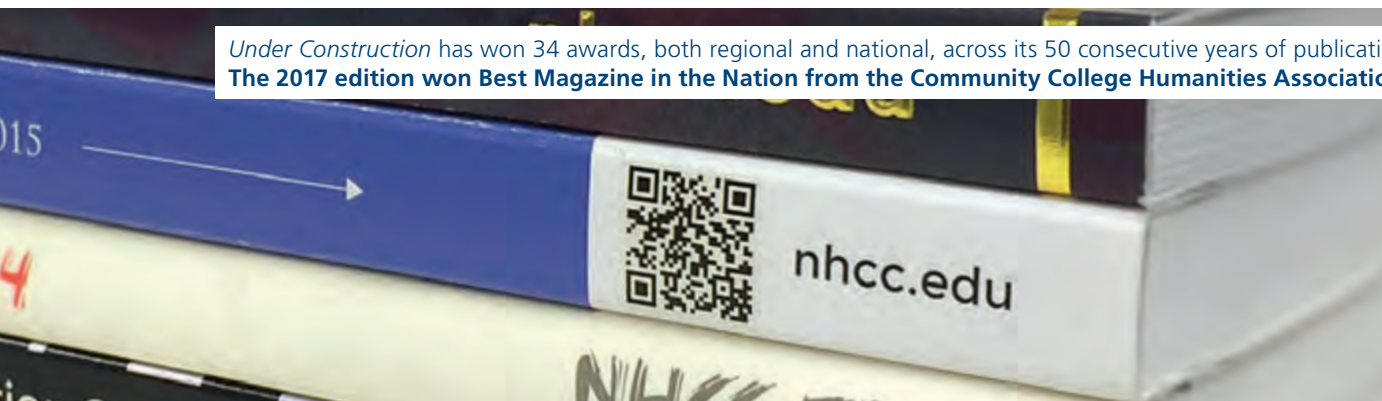


proud student

& the displays she designed during an internship for a metro area employer hosting a trade show

- Experienced, award-winning faculty designers & artists
- Advanced classes include real client work, professional networking & mock-interviews to be job market-ready
- Help design this, *Under Construction*, a 34-time award-winner & 2018's **Best Magazine in the Nation**
- Annual opportunities to compete for paid internships via the NHCC Xperience Project: nhcc.edu/xperience
- Learn a fine arts foundation the design industry wants — drawing, photography, color theory, & more — plus design software skills, resumé/portfolio development, & job interviewing/networking, to help your career begin
- Entry-level salaries for graphic designers in the Twin Cities metro area start around \$40,000 - \$45,000/year
- NHCC has one of the lowest tuition rates in the state, with financial aid & scholarships available

Under Construction has won 34 awards, both regional and national, across its 50 consecutive years of publication. The 2017 edition won **Best Magazine in the Nation from the Community College Humanities Association!**





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North Hennepin Community College

STUDIO ARTS

[.edu/studioarts](https://nhcc.edu/studioarts) our studio arts program

[.edu/finearts](https://nhcc.edu/finearts) our visual/performing arts calendar





➤ The Associate of Fine Arts degree in Studio Arts prepares students for baccalaureate art programs & courses are designed to transfer. The degree articulates to the following degree programs:

- Concordia University: B.A. in Studio Art
- Metropolitan State University: B.A. in Studio Arts
- Minnesota State University @ Moorhead: B.A. in Art, with emphasis in Photography, Painting, Printmaking, Drawing, Ceramics or Sculpture

- Learn a broad range of two/three-dimensional media
- Capstone Experience course helps students prepare for networking & entering the fine arts marketplace
- Annual juried opportunities to have artwork displayed in the NHCC Student Art Show & *Under Construction*
- ThinkArt student art group meets for arts-related field trips & discussions of topics such as artist's work, art industry trends, and art community/market networking





North Hennepin Community College

A member of Minnesota State

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Fiction

The Monster

A Flash Fiction by Kendall Olson

Mommy pulls a monster out of the closet and pokes it somewhere. That must make it angry, because it starts roaring and won't stop. Mommy doesn't seem afraid of the roaring, though. She shoves it around the house, and it eats up all the stuff on the floors that's reserved for me. I even catch it trying to gobble up Mrs. Cuddlekins!

I bark to tell Mommy the monster is dangerous, but she tells me to hush, that she's working. Maybe she is fighting the monster. She's pushing the monster, then pulling it. The monster seems stronger than she is. I run around to see if I can help. If Mommy needs backup, maybe I can bite it.

The battle is taking a long time. I'm not sure if Mommy is winning or not. I'm not sure what to do, so I bark. Maybe I can scare the monster away. But then Mommy conquers it. She gives it a final push, and it stops roaring. She looks exhausted. I wonder what she will do with the monster now, but then she drags it back to the closet. I'm not sure why Mommy keeps it there instead of disposing of its body.

After Mommy leaves, I tiptoe to the closet. I sniff the door to see if I can smell the monster. I don't know when it will wake again, but when it does, Mommy will need me.

I will be her warrior.

Skyfall

Clinton Baodu

Ugh, why are they serving prison food for lunch?

I could already smell the putrid stench of mystery meat in a bowl. Not sure if I wanted to risk eating it rather than starving, I offered it to a stranger beside me. “Want it?”

He snatched it and lapped it up like a dog.

I shuddered at the sight but spoke up again. “The name’s Cole.”

He ignored my outstretched hand but at least answered me. “Isaiah.”

He didn’t thank me or say anything else. Slowly I returned my gaze to the table.

Maybe we were all stuck in this rotten world now, but I would never take slop from someone I didn’t know. But at least some people were still willing to accept help from strangers. At least some people still believed the good in people after the sky fell.

Sometimes I had to remind myself I couldn’t have the same choices I used to. Eat slop or eat nothing, as disgusting as it is. After all, the whole town was staying underground. Like it or not, we had to deal with each other. And slop.

Brringgg! The bell pealed, ending my fruitless lunch break. I pulled myself to my feet and ignored the cries of my empty stomach as I stumbled back to the mines for more back-breaking labor.

As I started working again, my mind swept back to the old days. I could work whatever job I wanted. I could move around freely without being watched. I could fill my lungs with fresh oxygen whenever I wanted. I wasn’t even sure what that smelled like anymore. Now all I could imagine was the tainted air I’d been confined to, filled with the stench of bile and human excrement.

More than anything, I missed my family. My wife and my six-

year-old daughter, Nola. I remembered our last day together, happy and laughing. We were enjoying the life we didn’t know was about to disappear. I felt my heart ache so strongly I could scream. I couldn’t. If I made the slightest of noises . . .

Lord Mac would have my head. He had eyes and ears everywhere. I had never seen him, but he had people who reported back to him, and you never knew who they were. Any word you said would be repeated; the echoes of our gossip marched from the caves to his ears. He was the closest I’d ever seen to a god. (Though why a god would have a name like Lord Mac was beyond me—it sounded like something Nola would have invented.)

After another five hours of mining in the caves, I lumbered to my bunk and collapsed into bed. The knots in my muscles kept me from relaxing, but I’d long since learned to fall asleep in pain.

This had been my life for the past eight years. I woke every morning and worked from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. My only rest was at 5:00 p.m. for my dinner break. Breaks rotated all day, with people taking them in shifts from late morning to early evening. While I resented having my break twelve hours into my work rather than in the middle, it was better than when we first started. We used to work continuously for seventeen hours, until Lord Mac had realized that all of his workers were dying of starvation and exhaustion. He didn’t care about us—that wasn’t it. He was afraid of losing his workforce.

The next night, I struggled to sleep. Sometimes the pain was worse than at other times. I never gave in. Instead, I got up, hunkered down on the floor, and ignored my stomach again. Forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty! That was my best record for pushups in awhile.

As I stood and wiped my grimy hands on my pants, I saw someone by my door. It was the same person I gave my lunch to. Isaiah. He looked grizzly, ragged with scratches and

bruises, sleek with sweat. But his eyes were different. The ordinary brown pools flared with something I hadn't seen in a long time: courage.

The last time I'd felt courage was March 2, 2039. I was laying in my backyard, the warm rays of the sun kissing my face as I contemplated my future. Continue with my nine to five office job? Or delve into the world of writing and finally publish my own novel? I'd always wanted to pursue literary arts. I finally felt like I was ready to take the risk.

That day, the sky fell.

I stared straight into Isaiah's eyes and felt the same courage wash over me.

"You're running," I said. I didn't have to ask.

"Sh!" he said.

Right. Lord Mac would hear.

Isaiah gestured me to follow. We slipped down the long cave corridors, maneuvering past the laser fields. Mac didn't have any guards to watch out for, but he didn't need them. When the sky fell, he'd taken charge, taken advantage of us at our weakest. First he was a leader. Then he was a tyrant. By then, he had all the power he needed.

As we crept around the caves, I realized more civilians were joining us. We were an unspoken rebellion. Isaiah's gait was strong, unquestionable. People saw us go by and fell in line without a word. This was our night.

Isaiah was the unspoken leader of our resistance. Judging by his ramrod-straight back and confident aura, I guessed he had held a military position before the fall. He conducted us with ease. Until what happened next.

An alarm started blaring. Somewhere down the tunnel, I heard the yell of a civilian, surely one of Mac's undercover agents: "Lord Mac! The people are trying to escape!"

Everyone froze. A ghost of silence flew through our army, stopping our hearts and chilling our bones.

Then all hell broke loose.

Our formidable army scattered. Some people dashed back to their rooms, hoping no one would ever figure out they were a part of the movement. Others ran into the dark labyrinths of the caves, hoping to escape on their own during the chaos.

Isaiah had found the agent who'd ratted us out and was in a corner, bashing his head. For just a second, he looked at me, his face a canvas of red.

I stood in the middle of it all, choking. Eight years of hiding. Eight years of trying to ignore the injustice. Eight years of misery. I wasn't going to back to that. I couldn't. Especially after this—now that Lord Mac knew what we had tried to do, he'd punish us with such severity we'd wish for death. I had to do something.

"Everyone stop!" I shouted.

No one stopped.

Frustrated, I whirled around, trying to grab people as they rushed by. "Stop!" I yelled again. "We can't give up now! Mac already knows; hiding won't save us. We have to band together if we want to escape him, to raise the sky again. We can't keep living this way!"

In the chaos, no one listened. They pulled out of my grasp, almost knocked me over. One man stopped as I grasped his shirt. He was a mountain of a man, tall and strong, with thick oak tree arms and a pockmarked face. He paused but only to spit at me.

"It's over!" he laughed. "How do you think we're going to escape now? We might as well try to wish ourselves out of here!"

People began stopping to watch our confrontation. This was

my chance to make a difference. I spoke louder. “Mac knows who we are and what we did. You know what he’ll do to us. Would you really rather stick around and bet your lives on that?”

No one joined me. They grumbled in agreement with the tall man.

“You want to escape?” he shot back. “Go ahead. You’ll suffer a slow, painful death for trying. As for the rest of us, we’ve sinned enough. At least we’ll get a quick end to this miserable life.”

I was too late: The seed of doubt was planted. Whatever had inspired people to rise up with us was gone, and now, so were they. I was alone. I was the only person brave enough to escape Mac and raise the sky again.

Until I turned to walk away and felt a bloody hand on my shoulder. It was Isaiah. His eyes still held courage. “I’ll help you raise the sky,” he said.

I grinned.

We both raced into the unknown, hoping there was still a way out. If we were lucky, Lord Mac hadn’t closed off the exits yet, or at least all of them. There! A light. I rushed toward it, watched it get bigger until it filled my vision. The air . . . I could smell it changing.

Whoosh! A wind blew my hair . . . from behind. I whirled around. Isaiah was gone. In his place stood . . . me.

“Don’t bother; Isaiah’s not here anymore,” he said.

I opened my mouth but couldn’t find words. *What was happening?*

Other me laughed. “Yeah, I know. It’s trippy, isn’t it?”

I inched backwards. “I don’t . . . what?” I choked.

He took a step towards me, and I stumbled backward. “Go

ahead,” he said. “Ask.”

“Ask what?”

“What you’re thinking.”

“How do you know what—”

“I’m you, Cole. But you’re right: I’m more than that. I’m also Lord Mac.”

This was just getting weirder and weirder. Struggling to contain reality, I blurted the first question that came to my mind. *Why Mac?*

Up until now, all I’d heard was mockery. Now he paused. Almost smiled. Despite seeing myself more clearly than looking in a mirror, this was the first time I’d seen anything that resembled me more than physically.

“Nola,” he said softly. “Nola was only four years old. She was scared of the noises the furnace made in the basement. We told her a king lived in our basement, a king who protected us from the darkness down there. Those were the sounds of his army.”

“She named him Lord Mac.” I remembered it. “But that was just a story. We never even talked about it again. And Lord Mac was supposed to be a virtuous hero, so why are you enslaving us and killing us? And why are you me? And why—”

“Slow down.” Other me sighed. “I chose the name Lord Mac. King of the basement, king of the darkness, king of the caves. But I didn’t step out of your little nighttime fairy tales, Cole. I’m not him. I’m you. I’m the part of you that you wish didn’t exist. I’m all of your fears.” He waved his hand. “And this world? It’s not even real.” He grinned. “But I am.”

“If this isn’t real, then where are we?”

He stepped closer. *Inside your mind*, he whispered.

I shook my head. “No. *No*. What about the sky? The people

that died?”

“Unfortunate sacrifices. I’m sure they would have made valuable workers.”

“You planned it?”

“Gotta build an empire somehow, Cole.”

“An empire to do what?”

“To stop you.”

I turned and ran. I rushed toward the light. I was almost there . . . I rushed from the caves . . . finally I felt daylight and fresh air and—

I open my eyes. The grass is below me, the earth holding my weight as I lie there. The sky is above me, blue, stable, ever-present. I’m still in my backyard, I realize. It’s the day the sky fell. Or I thought the sky fell. My notebook sits at my elbow, the pen on the blank page awaiting my command. Awaiting my story.

I see Nola on the other side of the yard, running around with my wife chasing her. I smile as I watch them. This is how things should be. I position my notebook and pick up my pen. Now I know I’m ready.

It’s time to make the sky fall.

Going Home

DeEtta Miller

Tony was no stranger to the dark desolate stretch of road he traveled several times a week. He had lived in the area all his life. He was the third generation over-the-road trucker in his family. After all, it was expected that he would follow in his father's and grandfather's foot-steps. He didn't mind, although it did get lonely on cold dark nights like tonight. Even his company dispatchers had stopped talking and were probably asleep. So when he saw a figure hitchhiking down the road, he was excited to have someone share his secluded cab. Conversation was always welcome on a long haul.

As Tony prepared to pull over, the hitchhiker stepped into the beam of his headlights. Tony rubbed his tired eyes in disbelief. Standing dangerously far into the road was an elderly woman in a nightgown waving both arms.

His foot was still on the brake when his brain began a rapid-fire debate. It would be cruel to drive past her without stopping to check on her. After all, she was an old woman standing on the freeway in pajamas at 3:00 a.m. She had to be a senile runaway, and he didn't want to think of the consequences he might face for involving himself in a runaway senior hunt.

At the same time, the image of his truck-driving father was in his head. He'd spent his whole childhood listening to the many stories his father and grandfather told about helping stranded people on the side of the road. If he couldn't live up to their legacy now, he never would.

Tony pulled over.

He unbuckled his seatbelt, ready to get out and help the little old woman into his cab. Before he even opened the door, the spry elderly person was clambering in and plopping at his side. In the light of his cab, he took a second to look her over again. His first impression was right: she was wearing nightgown, despite multiple radio broadcasts warning of frost. She looked even older without the harsh glare of the headlights—at least in her eighties. And was that makeup she was wearing? For sure she was wearing lipstick—it was

smears across her cheek.

This was it, Tony thought. This was going to be the best rescue story ever told in his family of truckers.

Tony wasn't sure what to do next, so he settled for buckling up again, asking if the lady was comfortable, and when she nodded, guiding the truck back onto the road.

"What's your name?" Tony asked.

Nothing. He looked over at her. She was smiling widely at him, a tooth missing. He smiled back hesitantly. "My name is Tony. What's yours?"

She smiled again.

Tony let his gaze revert to the highway rolling out in front of them. This was definitely not the conversation he had hoped for. Not that it could be considered a conversation at all.

"M . . . Maggggg . . ."

Tony turned his head quickly. The woman was still smiling, struggling to make a sound.

"Mag . . . azine?" Tony guessed. "Mag . . . net?"

". . . ggiiiiiiii . . ."

"Maggie?"

A wider smile. She nodded.

"Maggie. Nice to meet you."

Okay, this was a little better.

It took awhile for Tony to get caught up. Once Maggie started talking, it became easier and she was able to go a little faster. Her sentences, however, turned out to be incoherent and rambling. After thirty minutes, he had a fragmented idea of

the elderly woman beside him.

She had escaped a nursing home that was (now) many miles behind them. This came mostly from her mutters of the “stupid night staff” and how “Flirty Miss Gertie” from a room over never stopped crying. Tony wondered if it was the same nursing home his own grandmother had stayed in when he was a child. It was a small town, so they weren’t many nursing homes around to choose from.

She was looking for someone. She kept repeating “Ted” over and over, weeping as the strangled name fell from her lips. He would ask her who Ted was, only to hear mumbles like “he loves me” or “liars.” Estranged husband, Tony guessed. It took more prodding for her to mutter, “Why? He stopped coming? Liars! Is okay . . . waiting . . . I’m coming . . . ”

Definitely estranged.

Then she began to sob again. “My Ted . . . liars . . . can’t be dead . . . ”

Now this was a turn. “Ted died?” Tony asked.

“No!” This was the strongest Maggie had spoken all morning. Then she fell back to whimpering. “Don’t believe them. Liars . . . ”

“They told you Ted died?”

“Liars . . . ”

She liked that word a lot, Tony thought. The way he saw it, there were a few options. One, Ted was dead. Simple as that. Two, Ted actually was estranged from Maggie, but either she had been lied to so she wouldn’t pursue it, or the information had become lost in translation while swirling around in her brain. Or three . . . something. Ted wasn’t sure what the other option was. What he did know was that this whole situation was more than a little convoluted.

Tony changed the subject. “How did you get out?”

The sobbing lessened. Maggie smiled at him again. “Staff . . . wondering all butter went . . . said toast.” She cackled.

Tony stared out at the highway, brow furrowed. Butter? What did this have to do with butter?

“Door . . . too squeaky.”

Tony looked over at her. “You stole all the butter? To lubricate the doors?”

Maggie smiled at him again.

A few minutes passed in silence. For once, Maggie wasn’t saying anything, so Tony began to talk. He told her about his own grandmother, his childhood, his trials and tribulations and love lost. Maggie still didn’t say anything, but he sensed she understood with her warm smile and tender eyes. It was a strange night, but Maggie was good company, he realized. It was good not to be alone.

In the light of the radio, Tony could see her slender little body shiver. With the skill of a veteran truck driver, he was able to struggle out of his heavy blue down jacket without veering off the road. Tony was glad he realized she was chilly when he did. At her age, the elements could be deadly. As he wrapped his jacket around her boney shoulders, he could feel how stiff the cold had made her skin. He turned up the heater and turned down the radio.

By now they were only a few miles out of the town where Tony was headed. The garage where he parked his truck was on the outskirts, not far from his house. He would be done with his shift in a matter of minutes, although, he suddenly realized, he wasn’t sure what to do with Maggie. The signs for the upcoming exit were starting to appear, the first exit since Maggie had joined him; he only had a few minutes to figure it out.

Suddenly her hand batted at his arm. Tony almost recoiled when he felt how slimy it was. It was still too dark to see it, but Tony realized what it was. Doggone. She really did lubricate

the doors with butter.

Maggie began to wave, pointing at the exit coming up. She knew it? Tony wondered. When he pulled off onto the small road, she became more animated. She peered at the roads, pointing different directions.

She was trying to take him somewhere, Tony realized. He guessed it couldn't hurt to see where, so with each wild wave, he followed the turn. And then she was waving for him to stop, and there they were.

He followed her gaze out the window to see a little house with a picket fence.

Maggie stepped out and nodded her thank you.

Tony watched as the lovely old woman, wrapped in his jacket, walked across the threshold of her home. The embrace shared by the two lovers, in the doorway, made him long to be loved again. One last glance backward and Tony could clearly see the image of a couple swaying and twirling through their kitchen window.

But as he slowly pulled away, he noticed his blue jacket on the floor of the truck.

Lucky

Emma Larson

The first few months after I was made, I was passed around from child to child. I had no true home until Ms. Olsen found me. I had been discarded on the sidewalk earlier that day and had been kicked around by passerby for hours. Even though my fur was dirty, some of the thread from my mouth had been ripped out, and my tail was missing, Ms. Olsen picked me up, smiled, and took me home. She washed me herself, scrubbing with so much shampoo that I looked like a bubble monster.

Fresh, clean, and smelling of flowers, I arrived in Ms. Olsen's classroom the next morning. I was an instant hit with the children. Ms. Olsen said they could choose a name for me, if they could all agree. They decided on Lucky because they felt so lucky to have me.

I took turns on every child's desk. Some of the kids murmured to me as they did the assignments. Some of them just sat me in their lap and let me watch. I liked Ms. Olsen's students. They were smart and kind, just like she was.

After weeks of spending my days in the classroom and nights at Ms. Olsen's house, Ms. Olsen made an announcement. She was setting up a special system that would let each child have a turn taking me to their home for a weekend. Each child would take me home Friday night, take a picture with me, write about what we did, and bring it all back on Monday morning. Ms. Olsen put a list on her desk and said whoever wanted to take part could put their name on it.

The first weekend, I went home with a girl named Charlie. She was smaller than the other girls her age, but she was sweet and energetic and creative. Over dinner that evening, Charlie told her parents and her younger brother all about me. Her mom said she was glad to have me for the weekend.

After dinner I met the dog.

"Look, Roscoe! Lucky looks just like you!" Charlie held me up and waved my arms back and forth for emphasis. Roscoe just tipped his head and went back to sitting by Charlie's little

brother, Braydon. I heard Charlie's mom say he was Braydon's dog.

That night, Charlie tucked me into bed beside her. Her parents tucked her in, said good night to us both, and went to say good night to Braydon.

"Are you ready to see Dr. Davis tomorrow?" his mom asked.

Braydon nodded. He had a hard time speaking. I'd heard his dad say it was something like "pautism." I wondered if it had something with his paws and why that would affect his speech. But at the same time, Ms. Olsen didn't call the children's paws that. She called them . . . hands.

Well, no matter what pautism was and why it made Braydon struggle more than other kids, I was glad he had such a good family to support him.

The next day, after Braydon's therapy appointment, Charlie brought me with her and Braydon to the park down the street. There were several other kids Braydon's age playing on the equipment. When they saw him, they called out.

"Hey Braydon! Come play!"

Braydon just smiled back and tugged on his shirt.

"Braydon, don't you wanna play?" asked Charlie.

Braydon swallowed. "Yeah. But I don't know what to say."

Charlie smiled. "Anything. They invited you. They want you to play. You don't have to be afraid of them."

Braydon still looked uncertain, but he slowly started off towards the other kids.

I just watched and smiled to myself. Yeah. Yeah, Braydon had a wonderful family.

On Monday morning, Charlie brought me back to school. The week went by with me rotating desk after desk until Friday afternoon. This weekend, I was going home with James. James was one of the older kids in the class, and he was the smartest. I didn't think most of the other students knew it, though, by looking at him. He always wore the same raggedy clothes: a stained flannel that was too big and jeans with rips. I rarely saw him in anything else and never saw him in anything better.

His mom picked him up well after the class had ended and the school had emptied out. Ms. Olsen sat with James on the steps in front of the school as they waited. Two hours later, James' mom pulled up and yelled out the window: "Get in the car, now!"

James picked me up, said goodbye to Ms. Olsen, and got in the backseat.

It took awhile to reach James' house; it was on the other side of town, in a run-down trailer park. I was astounded. House? This was no better than a cardboard box with windows!

As we entered the trailer, I heard a man and a girl yelling back and forth.

"I told you to do the damn dishes!" I guessed it was James' dad.

"I already did!" the girl yelled back. She sounded like she was a couple years older than James.

"Then why are they still on the counter?!"

"They're just drying, okay?!"

"Get back out there, dry them, and put them away!"

"I hate you!"

We found them in the kitchen. James' dad had grabbed the

girl by her arm and was shaking her.

"Shut up!" the dad yelled, shoving her into the kitchen cabinet. A bottle of clear liquid toppled off the shelf, smashed into pieces on the floor, and sliced open the girl's leg. Even though it looked water, it smelled bad.

"Marissa!" James yelled.

"Shut the hell up!" screamed his mom. She shoved him into a closet and slammed the door. The lock turned.

Sniffing, James turned the light on. I realized this wasn't a closet but his room. There was hardly anything in it, just a blanket, another outfit that was folded in the corner, and a small stack of books. There wasn't even a bed or anything.

James slowly set down his backpack, pulled out his homework, and began to read his textbook, as though this was what he did every day, all day. No wonder he was so smart.

At dinner time, the door opened just long enough for a paper plate with some crackers and a heel of bread to get shoved through the crack. James gobbled them up.

When he asked to go to the bathroom, his mom yelled at him to just wet his pants. I thought the house smelled bad already; now it was worse. When James started to cry, his mom started to scream in his face.

"Useless child!" she shrieked. "You can't do anything right! I wish we never had you! You should be grateful you're not out on the streets!"

James was still crying, but I could tell from his face that this was an old song. He curled up in the corner and squeezed me. I couldn't believe this. From his behavior at school, I never guessed his life was this bad.

After a few hours, the door slammed open again, hitting the wall. James' mom stormed in, grabbed James by the arm, and

yanked him out of the room.

“Clean the bathroom!” yelled his mom. “I want this whole place spotless in an hour!”

I listened, but there was nothing after that for a long time. The hour must’ve passed because the mom came back and started yelling again.

“What the hell’s this?!” she screamed. “You call this clean?! Get your ass back here!”

“Mom—” James whimpered.

“Shut up!”

Something smashed, and James screamed. A second later, he rushed into the room, slammed the door, and leaned against it, bracing his feet against the opposite wall. His mom started pounding on the door, but when she couldn’t break through, she finally yelled a series of curses and left.

After a few minutes, James started sobbing again. He limped back to the corner, grabbed me, and curled up on the blanket. I saw a gash on his head, the blood drip changing directions to crawl across his forehead towards me. He reverted to sniffles after awhile. Then I heard a whisper: “At least I’ve got someone to hold this time.”

How long had this been going on? Years? His whole life? *You should be grateful you’re not out on the streets*, his mom had said. He’d almost be better off out there. Anywhere except here. It wasn’t like they were doing much to keep him alive. At least someone might take him in.

I had to get him out of here.

As James took me back to school on Monday, I thought about the past couple of weekends. To go from Charlie’s loving, caring family to James’ abusive one was horrifying. And to

think that was only a couple of days

We walked into class, and James set me on Ms. Olsen’s desk. The other kids started to file in, and I heard a few whispers like “What’s on Lucky’s face?” and “Is that blood?”

James said nothing. As Charlie, who shared a desk with him at the front of the room, sat down in her chair, James lowered his head and dug through his backpack. He pulled out the picture he took of us last night, as well his report talking about all the books we read.

Charlie looked over at the paper, then up at James. “You read *Corduroy*?”

James shifted in his seat. “Yeah.”

Charlie grinned. “*Corduroy* was my favorite book when I was a kid. I still have mine.”

James brightened. “My grandma gave me a copy for a birthday present when I was just a baby. It reminds me of her.”

“What other books do you have?” Charlie asked.

As the two kids were chatting about their favorite books, Ms. Olsen came into the classroom. She saw me on the desk and froze. After staring at my face, she picked me up, walked over to James, and whispered, “Can we talk out in the hallway, James?”

James looked scared, but he nodded.

Out in the hall, Ms. Olsen whispered, “What happened to Lucky?”

James stared at the floor. “It was an accident,” he said.

“What kind of accident?” she asked. “James, you have to understand. This looks like blood.”

James swallowed. “I fell,” he said. “I fell and hurt my head. Lucky was right there, and . . . I’m sorry. I should’ve washed

him or something.”

Ms. Olsen set her hand on James’ shoulder. “It’s okay, James. I’m not angry. I was just concerned. As long as you’re okay.”

James stared at the wall, then nodded. “I’m fine, thank you, Ms. Olsen. I’ll take Lucky home tonight and wash him for you.”

“Are you sure?” Ms. Olsen asked.

James nodded and held out his arms for me. Ms. Olsen smiled and handed me over.

“You’re a good kid, James. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.”

At the end of the day, James loaded his backpack and stuck me out the top. He looked out the window, didn’t see his mom, and sighed. The rest of the kids left, streaming out into the afternoon sunshine. As Charlie put on her backpack and prepared to leave, Ms. Olsen pulled her aside.

“Charlie, we got a call from your mom about twenty minutes ago,” Ms. Olsen murmured. “They’re having an emergency at work and she can’t leave until it’s resolved. The principal was trying to call your dad to see if he could come by after he got off work, but he hadn’t gotten ahold of him last I heard.”

The two of them started towards the principal’s office, and James followed. Ms. Olsen stepped inside to check on the situation while Charlie sat on the bench outside. James sat down next to her.

“What are you doing here?” Charlie asked.

“My mom’s not here, either,” James answered. “She’s not usually here on time.”

“Oh,” said Charlie.

“Where do your mom and dad work?” asked James.

“My mom works early morning shifts at the hospital as a nurse, and my dad works for that new office building. You know, the one towards edge of town over there?”

Charlie pointed, and James nodded. “Yeah! That’s over by my house.”

Charlie smiled.

“When does you dad get off work?” James asked.

“Not until 4:30,” said Charlie. “That’s what Mom always tells me, anyway.”

James looked at the clock on the hallway wall. “But it’s only 3:00 now.”

Charlie shrugged.

The door opened, and Ms. Olsen stepped into the hall. “Charlie, we got ahold of your dad. Oh, James. What you are doing?”

“Waiting for my mom and talking to Charlie.” He stood.

Ms. Olsen smiled. “Charlie, your dad is arranging to leave a work a little early, but the soonest he can leave there is 4:00. You and I would have to wait here for awhile.”

James had an idea. “Ms. Olsen? Would it be okay if Charlie came back to my place with me? Her dad works right by my house. He could stop there and get her much faster.”

“That’s very nice of you to offer, James. Her dad would have to agree.” She looked in the window to the office. “I think Principal Freeman is still on the phone with him.” She hurried inside, exchanged a few words with Principal Freeman, then came out again.

“That should work. Will that be okay with your mom, James?” Ms. Olsen asked.

James swallowed and hesitated. “Yes, I’m sure it’s fine.”

Ms. Olsen smiled. "All right, then. Why don't we all go wait outside for her then?"

They sat on the steps for fifteen minutes before James' mom pulled up. She didn't seem to care that James had a friend coming over, just told them to get in pronto. As we pulled away, I saw a shadow of concern on Ms. Olsen's face.

At James' house, James and Charlie sat in his room.

"It's small in here," Charlie said. She looked a little scared.

James rubbed his head. "Yeah, Mom and Dad don't make enough to get a bigger house."

James pulled out his small collection of books, and him and Charlie started chatting about them. For a little bit, that was the only sound. Then the door to the trailer slammed, and I heard James' dad.

"He did what?!" Footsteps stormed down the hall. "Who does the little bastard think he is, huh?!"

James and Charlie jumped as the door to the bedroom slammed open into the wall.

"I don't know who the hell you think you are, inviting people to my house," the dad growled. "Get the hell out. Both of you."

Charlie and James stared.

"Out!"

James snatched me up, and the kids ran out of the trailer. James' dad storms after them. Outside, he shoved them into the gravel driveway. Charlie scrambled back, crying.

"I've had enough of you hanging around, destroying my life. I should've done this a long time ago, you bastard."

He raised his arm.

War Pigeon

Theodore H. Melchior

Ypres, Belgium, 1916. The western front is at a stalemate, and with radio still in its infancy, message runners were easy targets for enemy fire. Dogs were used to some effect, but the best way to send messages was with homing pigeons. One of the most important roles on the battlefield was the carriers - men carrying heavy steel cages filled with pigeons. However, the Germans soon found ways to counter the small moving birds. They brought birds of their own.

"We are without question going to take the trenches owned by the Jerry's with a single, swift charge. We fix bayonets at dawn, now take forty winks, for tomorrow we go over the top." The lean, gentlemen officer stepped down from the top of an empty ration box and began toward his relatively lavish quarters to eat a dinner of steak, eggs, and French wine. The men looked at him with mild disdain as they were handed their hard tack and warm water.

Just before the sun rose, not ten kilometers away at British command, a Sopwith Camel biplane landed. The pilot handed a set of grainy pictures to a messenger, who ran to the large command tent, and quickly handing the photos to the Sergeant Major. The photographs held images of the German trench lines, dozens of Maxim machine guns, freshly placed barbed wire, and light infantry howitzers lacing the enemy line that Allied intelligence said was manned with over-tired peasants and untrained officers. A message was sent through the telegraph to halt any and all advances to the enemy front lines. It was likely that German shellings had ravaged the communication wires, and cavalry messengers were too big a target for German Jäger Corps sharpshooters. Because footmen and dogs wouldn't make it in time, it was quickly decided to use a pigeon. A small note was scribbled onto a piece of parchment and rammed into the capsule on the black and white bird's back. The note read, "Superior defenses, do not attack!"

Germany was an advanced force. Its training and knowledge of combat was unsurpassed by all other western nations. They studied how their enemies fought, and adapted those

tactics against them. In the case of the British, very few commanders had moved on from the idea of using a sheer mass of infantry to overwhelm their enemy. That strategy had worked for centuries against her enemies, so they assumed it would still be effective, even in the face of modern machine gun fire.

"Bayonets forward men," yelled a British major. "On my mark, ready, charge!"

The screams and yells of the soldiers were inspiring. They ran, bayonets forward, making it close to half the distance between the trenches when the whistle of the German three-pound guns was first heard. The blast wave hit, knocking those who didn't die in the initial barrage clean of their feet and into deep beds of razor wire. Then came the steady pops of German machine gun fire, and the sight of plucky young men being cut down in droves. Those who made it to shell craters for protection found little. The holes were filled in with bodies, ricochet bullets, shrapnel, and even bayonets of friendly rifles thrust into the craters. The living hid among the dead in an attempt to avoid the German onslaught. In a few short moments the guns ceased, the shells stopped raining, and the quiet groans of the wounded and dying began filling the air.

The Germans had gone back to their quarters to enjoy a victorious breakfast, giving those few Tommy soldiers that survived a chance find a place to hide. This included six men, all silently watching each other, each wondering what the others had done to survive the barrage. None spoke. Some from shock, some from fear. Just on the edge of the crater was a small metal cage that held three things - a dead pigeon, part of its previous carrier, and a lump of feathers that seemed to be moving. Upon investigation, the British survivors found a live bird inside. The youngest soldier smiled as he ripped a scrap of cloth from his pant leg. Using a pen taken from one of the broken bodies, he briefly wrote what had happened and gently placed the cloth into the capsule on the bird's back. Just as he was about to release it, in the distance they

saw an incoming black and white pigeon, heading for the British trench line. The Germans saw it as well, and rifle fire again filled the air before the commanding voice of a man rang out. The rifles stopped. "Falke!" yelled the man.

A single German soldier ventured into the field of British bodies, though he didn't carry a rifle. He held a small wooden crate. He set it down, and as he lifted its lid a great bird flew from it. The man whistled loudly and the bird bolted toward the pigeon. At the point of contact between the two birds, it was visible even from where the British soldiers laid that the pigeon had been knocked from its course, leaving nothing but a puff of feathers where it once flew. Another whistle, and the large bird returned the arm of the German soldier, who then placed it back in its crate and promptly returned to the trench.

This left the men in a dilemma. They couldn't retreat for fear of machine gun fire, they couldn't release their pigeon because the hawk would get to it first, and they couldn't shoot the large bird because the sound of the shot would cause the area to be shelled by German artillery. The men looked back and forth at each other, as the youngest wrote down another note, proceeded to empty the capsule, and fill it with the new message. These six men who had never met before made a decision that only combat companions could. They released the pigeon, stood and picked up their rifles. The six men charged into the German trench line, shooting and spearing any enemy soldiers they could. All were quickly killed, but they bought enough time for the pigeon to escape undetected.

"Pigeon incoming sir!" cried out a British scout back at the command post. The Sergeant Major came out to receive the bird's message. Onlookers watched as he unraveled the piece of pant leg. Without speaking a word, he walked over a junior officer and whispered, "Fire at these coordinates."

The junior officer looked at the paper, which read, "All dead here, German trench 17, 47."

The numbers were relayed to the artillerymen, and the thunderous sound of a hundreds of vengeful cannons firing down the throats of trenches full of German soldiers rang out, shattering the night air.

Non-fiction

Roll On

Shawn Hogle

At the age of twenty, I decided to join a youth bowling league at my local bowling alley. I loved the sport of bowling, something that spawned from my stepfather. My mom remarried after my biological father left us. My stepfather was working his way through automotive school and happened to be on a bowling league.

Even today, I remember how the nervousness would take over my body. It was as if I was possessed by an unyielding demon that was writhing to unleash itself and its' frustration upon the world. I would sit in waiting, hoping that he would get home from work at a decent time so I could ask him if I could go with. I felt it was important for me to get to know this person I really knew nothing about, except for the fact that suddenly he was my legal guardian. Having been disappointed with two answers of no on past league nights, I was not expecting the positive response I was met with this time around. In hindsight, I think my mom may have had something to do with it. That night I awoke to a whole different realm of uncertainty and splendor than I had ever previously known.

When we arrived at the lanes, my heart beat so loudly in my chest that I swore that it had begun to whisper in my ear: "You got this. You're cool. Don't be a f-ing dweeb and screw this up. You are hanging with the big kids now."

When the double doors opened, I was smacked in the face with the converging scents of lane oil, cigarette smoke, and beer. After the olfactory assault, my ears picked up the sound of the arcade. I had never seen so many games in one spot, let alone the visual cascade of blinking lights. They seemed to follow one another like Tom chasing Jerry across the piano.

I then heard the most remarkable sound. I was not sure what it was or where it came from, but I was entranced. I began searching for this sound like Sherlock Holmes searching for the Baskerville hound. As my epic search was yielding zero results, I had heard my name being called from the lanes

my stepdad's team were rolling on. Everyone was silent as I approached the team. As I stood there quietly, I watched my new guardian slowly traverse the arrow-filled floorboards, then speed up and release his bowling ball like Thor chucking his hammer.

The pins shattered, surrendering a strike. I almost felt a shockwave erupting from the impact and blasting back the cigarette smoke hanging over the lanes. This. This was the sound I had been searching for. It was epic, unquestionably satisfying. I knew immediately that I would be spending much of my time and money in this new haven.

That was another reason that persuaded me to join the bowling league. Location. Our neighborhood did not have a lot of hangout spots, and the bowling alley was less than half a mile away from my house, which made it a manageable distance on my bike. Hell, I could walk there, if need be, in about ten minutes or so.

I started meeting my friends at the lanes after school. However, before we would convene; we would rummage through the furniture at each other's houses for a quarter to use at the arcade, in hopes of saving ourselves from the dreaded "game over" screen. We would gather around and hold up the lone quarter aloft like Rafiki holding up Simba in The Lion King. We'd wish it well as it melodically clinked and clanked its way through the innards of the machine we were transfixed upon.

Inevitably, though, the coin-ingesting overlords would claim their victory over us, giving us nothing in return but empty pockets. Our only option was to pedal home to ask our parents for more money in exchange for doing chores. This did not go well most of the time, since you must do the chores first.

After saving some money for a month or two, I was able to procure myself my own bowling ball and shoes. This is when the arcade took a backseat. I started to focus on the lane activity and the nuances of bowling etiquette.

Sooner than later, bowling became my life. I would find any excuse to make my way to the lanes instead of the arcade, to rattle the floorboards and crush some pins. I was constantly practicing, trying to one-up myself at every turn. I was improving consistently until I was toting at least a 190 point average per game.

Content with my progress, I felt it was time for me to join the youth league. I was tired of being alone, which, as an introvert, was hard enough to admit to. In retrospect, I was never graceful with the act of social interaction, especially when I was young. I thought that this new step could help me become a little less awkward. I was right. I met a lot of cool people, some of which whom became close friends and soon after, a team. Let me introduce you.

There was Joel, a confident and graceful athlete with an unbelievably graceful ball release.

There was his younger cousin, Derrick. He was young but with a salt and pepper idea of confidence. Brash yet naive. However, his pocket shot could rival the few and far-between. He was the king of strikes!

Mathew was the “pacifist” of the group. Despite smelling of weed and having bloodshot eyes, his rolls were strong.

Our practice regime was very strict: at least four times a week, if not more. I remember purposely trying to roll splits to see if each of us could roll and pick up the spares. It could get demanding at times, throwing a sixteen-pound ball repeatedly for four to five hours a day. Towards the end of practice, our arms would feel like pieces of overstretched taffy that one could use to play a game of tetherball with. Our team had a bit of a rough start, with more losses against opposing teams than wins, but every team goes through that.

We became concerned that we had not found our niche as a team and therefore became a bit disheartened. All the practices. Day after day. What was it all for? We were wondering if we were taking our sport too seriously. Was the

fun of it diminishing before our eyes? We had many moments where we talked about disbanding, but we soon realized that we would rather go out rolling than give it all up just because of fear of constant failure.

That was until the day that I helped our team achieve victory by bowling a 245.

It was the highest pin count that I had ever rolled. Surprisingly, I wasn't alone in this triumph. That day, we could roll no wrong. My back swing was on point. I swore the “strike zone” was so afraid of us. Then Joel entered the fray with a ball release beyond fluid, as smooth as wind-swept glass. He was picking up spare after spare and making strikes when needed.

Enter Derrick. Derrick's hook mechanic was beyond impressive. The curvature and hook he would impose upon his ball was the epitome of fortitude. With nothing but a blind dedication and perseverance towards the game, Derrick and his weapon of choice never gave up the battle in their effort for a team victory. The evening's events were more than enough to keep us all in tune. We had all found our own strategic way to locate the pocket (the space in between pins one and three) with unforgiving accuracy.

It seemed like everything was clicking that evening. Was it that lady luck was on our side? Or fate that we would defeat our opposition in the nicotine-drenched bowling alley? Whatever it was, it didn't matter; we had managed to pull off our first victory.

After the smoke-infused haze had cleared, our adversaries had admitted that they had too eagerly counted us out instead of taking the competition seriously. However, their mistake had been made, and we had come out victorious.

There were high fives and knuckle bumps for all with the teams exchanging handshakes and congratulatory well wishes. It was indeed a night for celebration. It was the best feeling that we shared in a long time as a real team. We didn't

want it to fade, but sometimes life has other things in mind for us. We soon came to grips with the fear that accompanied the realization that our first victory was only one win in a five-game series.

Wanting to avoid making the same mistake, our foes jumped on their phones to call in their secret weapon. When the weapon arrived, we knew immediately we did not stand a chance.

Her name was Kristy Herrington. Six-foot-tall brunette, big doe eyes, dark eyelashes, and a smile that made you want to be a better man even though you wouldn't know how if you tried. She had freckles, too. Freckles are dangerous. The freckles on her cheeks would lead you to her hazel eyes. Her eyes would then lead you to her silky hair that she would seductively tuck behind her ear. I was fixated. We were all fixated. Time no longer existed. She was illuminating, perfect, gorgeous, elusive. I still miss her. I still love her.

Everything went to hell after that.

COMMA

Kendall Olson

“What are we doing here?” I whisper to Shayla.

“I don’t know. I want to go,” she answers. She’s clinging to Mom, so I run up beside her. I almost crash into a doctor as he emerges from a pair of swinging doors, and Jared gives me his “big brother” look. He’s eleven and thinks he’s so cool.

I expect Mom to scold me, but she doesn’t. She’s not watching at all. She hasn’t said anything since we got in the car, and she’s been breathing real weird. Whatever Grandma called her about, she must be pretty upset.

There’s a squirmy feeling building in my chest. I turn back to Shayla. “Do you want to play mail sorting when we get home?” I ask her.

Shayla’s staring at the nurses rushing by. She’s still scared of hospitals, even though she’s five. When I speak up, she stops looking around to frown at me. She frowns the same way Mom does. “It’s 8:30. Mom’s gonna make us go to bed when we get home. And I don’t want to play your stupid ‘puter game.”

Something starts beeping really loud and fast. Some doctors rush by, and Shayla squishes into Mom. I stare after the doctors to see where they’re going, but I have to squint because the hallway’s so white.

“Whatever,” I tell her. “I’ll play by myself. Besides, Carla the Cow’s gonna make me her mail sorting assistant.”

A passing doctor smiles at us, but Shayla just stares at him without smiling back. “I thought you were Gary the Goat’s ice cream cone assistant.”

“I can be both.”

Mom leads us into an elevator at the end of the hall. There’s a nurse with a clipboard on one side. Shayla ducks into the corner behind Mom.

“Why does Shayla have to such a fraidy-cat?” I whisper to

Jared.

He gives me the “big brother” look again. “You shouldn’t be arguing,” he hisses. “Mom’s already upset.”

I look behind him at Mom. She picks Shayla up and hugs her. Her eyes are closed, but her mouth is moving. I wonder who she’s talking to, ‘cause I can’t hear anything.

I get that squirmy feeling again. “What’s wrong?” I whisper. “She didn’t tell me why we’re here, but she looks so . . .”

“Anguished.” Jared’s whispering, too.

“Ang-wished,” I repeat and pretend I recognize the word. “What’d she tell you? Like, before we left?”

“Not much. Just something about Great-Grandma and that the hospital said we needed to come quick.”

“Is she sick?”

“Something.”

The elevator opens, and I look down the hallway. It’s darker than the one downstairs, and it’s quiet. I think everyone up here is sleeping. I wonder if 8:30 is their bedtime, too. Grandma’s standing at the end of the hall. Aunt Kim’s there, too, holding Sam. He’s clutching a toy and his blue blanket that stinks like baby.

When we reach them, Aunt Kim sets Sam down and hugs us all. When she wraps her arms around Mom, she holds on for a long time. Grandma hugs them, too, and they rock back and forth. I wonder why they’re taking so long. Then I hear that they’re all breathing weird. I realize they’re trying not to cry. I look at Jared so that I don’t have to watch them, and he looks back at me.

When Mom, Aunt Kim, and Grandma finally pull apart, we walk into Great-Grandma’s room. I freeze just inside the door, and Mom doesn’t make me go any further. The room’s dark,

like the hall, and not big. There's enough room for us and Great-Grandma's bed. There's a green curtain hanging in the middle of the room, but it looks kind of spotted. When I point at it, Jared says it's "discolored." I'm not sure why he would think that. It's definitely colored.

Mom, Grandma, and Aunt Kim walk over to the bed. Sam and Shayla and Jared are still standing by the door, so I stand there, too, and look at Great-Grandma. She's sleeping, like the other people in the dark rooms up here. But Mom and Aunt Kim and Grandma are all whispering to her. Why aren't they waking her up so she can hear them?

I think about the movie we saw a couple weeks ago, where the boy in the car crash was asleep in the hospital and wouldn't wake up. What'd they call it again? I lean over to Jared and whisper, "Maybe she's in a comma."

"Coma," Jared answers. "I don't know."

It would certainly explain why Great-Grandma's not waking up. Mom, Grandma, and Aunt Kim are touching her face and brushing her hair and kissing her cheek. It's hard for a person to sleep through that.

We stand there forever. I stare at my shoes and think about sorting mail or serving ice cream cones. Finally Mom, Grandma, and Aunt Kim hug Great-Grandma, leave the bed, and guide us from the room. But we don't leave. Instead, we stand there and watch while some nurses go into Great-Grandma's room.

I whisper to Jared again. "What are we waiting for?"

He doesn't answer because the nurses come out again. They're pulling Great-Grandma's bed out of the room and pushing it down the hallway. Almost at the end, they disappear through some doors that swing back and forth behind them.

I don't understand. Aren't they supposed to be fixing her? Why are they just leaving? I turn around and see Aunt Kim cry-

ing. She's watching the swinging doors, too. I tug at her hand and ask, "Where are they going?"

Aunt Kim kneels and hugs me. She rocks me back and forth the way she did with Mommy and Grandma. "Honey . . ." she whispers. Then she whispers it again. When I wonder if she's actually going to tell me, she sighs. She sounds . . . what did Jared call it? Ang-wished. "We asked them to cremate her."

Cremate? I stare at the doors again. They're still swinging. Behind them, I imagine Gary the Goat walking alongside Great-Grandma, holding an ice cream cone. "They're going to rub cream on her?" We came here for that? It doesn't seem like it would help her comma, anyway.

Aunt Kim chokes. After a second, she whispers, "Cremation is what you call burning someone's body."

I stare at Aunt Kim. Then I stare at the doors. They're not swinging anymore. Great-Grandma is long gone. I imagine them pushing her down the hallway towards a fiery room. I get the squirmy feeling again, really bad.

The Yellow Playground of a Child

Jennifer Nguyen

A nearby playground is the gateway to a child's vast imagination, opening doorways down paths of heroic adventures and inevitable laughter with a group of friends. Much of my childhood was pieces of memories of an old, yellow playground stitched together with the games that my friends and I would play. I can still remember the moments that I've carried with me all the way to now, and that has helped me put together the person I am today. Although the playground is now only a memory in my head, as it has been torn down, it's still an essential part of my life. The yellow playground is a place of bittersweet memories, and it is a place that has pushed me past the point of childhood and into adulthood by forcing me to realize the reality of time.

There are many little stories in each and every nook and cranny of that playground, like the remnants of a conversation between friends on the creaky, rusty swings, and a faded trail of laughter on the faint footprints imprinted on the red, dusty steps. A feeling of pensive familiarity hits me every time I think of the black sharpie graffiti that stained every inch of the yellow poles, along with the thought of the snickering teenagers marking their existence with petty words. There was a blue tower-like alcove that hung just before a twisty, yellow slide that my friends and I had signed at one summer's end, making silent promises and giving each other grins. We would go there every long, hot summer, walking on the black asphalt road and bouncing whatever ball we got our hands on, the sun barely beginning to set as it cast its golden rays. We would run past the evergreen pine tree that sat at the corner of the street, eyeing the bristle-covered spot where a stray, black cat used to lay, remembering the memory of when we tried to sheepishly take the cat home. Once our footsteps hit the small, wooden chips that layered the floor, the games would start and bright, wide grins with white teeth would form on our faces.

I remember climbing the shiny, blue poles frantically, listening with a tuned ear to the amused voice of my friend counting down the numbers that would lead to our inevitable laughter. My legs would dart between running across the ashy, red

floor and jumping from yellow slide to yellow slide, our shoes squeaking on its glossy surface. I can still feel the blisters that would form on our dry, pink hands, and the soreness that lingered in our muscles till we came back the next day. Everything in that playground felt like it would stay forever; from the nose-wrinkling scent of manure that occasionally slipped through the metal bars with chipping blue paint, to the static that chased the kids as they slid down the sticky, yellow slides. It was a place where childhood lives and thrives, but it was not immune to the passage of time.

At the beginning of my ninth grade year in high school, on a sunny, hot September day filled with warm breezes, I had walked off the steep steps of my bus to see the all too dreadful sight of orange cones and yellow construction tape entrapping the playground within its confines. I had stared at the pieces of a tunnel slide that laid dead on the wood chips, remembering how it was once a part of the tallest tower in the park. I remember how, as a child, I would pretend to be an epic heroine, standing on that tower and raising my imaginary sword with a smile. The circle platforms, littered with tiny holes that we would poke our fingers through, used to connect all the poles and slides together, but now had looked miserably empty without its companions. The echoes of my group of friends sitting and chatting on its floors still lingered within the dust, with games of truth or dare, and hide and seek mingled in with the memories. The construction crew had continued to take the yellow playground down, the yellow on their jackets looking cold and intimidating compared to the muted, darker yellow of the playground. It was in this moment when I knew my childhood was ending, left behind along with the dismantled pieces of the blue, metal poles and static yellow slides.

Who I am today, and even who I will be tomorrow, was shaped by the childhood days I spent growing at that yellow playground. The bonds I formed with my friends in those long, everlasting rays of sunset at the playground will be hard to forget. The conversations shared between my friends and I on the circle platforms will not disappear, they will only hide until

we meet up again with the same grins and words. Every word I write onto my stories and imaginations are influenced by the free creativity I had as a child. That creativity was fueled like air on glowing embers when I entered the playground. I will never forget the childhood I spent growing up there, even with the playground now gone. The memories are still clear in my head. Although there is a bittersweet feeling every time I look back to when I was a kid with no worries and an imaginary sword, I am a bit thankful that the playground was torn down. I cannot go back to my childhood, as much as I would love to, and with no place to go back to, I had to push myself into realizing I can be the adult I knew I could grow up to be, and go forward. After all, there is no exception to the passage of time.

The yellow playground is full of bittersweet memories, and taught me a life-changing lesson about time. It was home to many stories and games, including the ones my friends and I both made up and experienced. After it is torn down, not only does the yellow playground stay with me for life, but I learn about how time works, and how to move on. A lot of my quirks and traits were formed and created in my time at the playground. There's no line for when childhood ends and adulthood begins. The yellow playground stands right in the middle for me, forever reminding me of what it was like back then, and how I can move forward now.

Danger or Grace

Rachel Ormsbee

They say a moment in time can change your life. Joyful events can carry comfort and delight into the rest of your life. There are also damaging events that can severely affect your life, or even take it away altogether. One wrong move and it could all go south. Look both ways before you cross the street. Always wear your seatbelt. What if instead there was such an event that would later save a life rather than endanger it?

It is an exciting spring morning. My family and I have made the extensive 22-hour drive from our Minnesota home to these Idahoan mountains. The drive is long and strenuous, especially on us 13 and 7-year-old kids. The middle seat in the back is always fought over by my younger brother, Allen, and myself; sleep is always the greatest commodity.

But today is the day! With my grandpa along with us, we drive up the winding curves of the forest mountain roads with our trailer fully loaded with colorful quads and dirt bikes—pristine and waiting for adventure. Sunlight filters through the pines, playfully dancing across my young, eager face. Ahead I see the uphill climb met with a radiant blue sky between the tall trees as they gently sway back and forth. The motion both soothes me and calls out to me. I roll down the window to allow the pleasant aroma of pine and spring mountain air to whisk through my hair as the cones and needles snap, crackle and pop under the truck tires.

These are the moments I live for.

Fully unloaded, we prepare to set out. I nervously fiddle with the switch, bringing the hunter-green four wheeler from neutral to drive and back to neutral. I've driven a four-wheeler a few times, but if there is one thing I like to maintain, it is control. I stand out against the serene landscape in an oversized yellow and black riding jersey, along with thick but protective pink and black riding pants that swish when I walk and lightly crinkle as I adjust myself in my seat. I look back to see my mother situated atop the red four-wheeler with Allen and his large, blue helmet and huge excited eyes plopped in front of her. He bounces up and down, ready for the crew to head out. Four engines turn over and the smell of ethanol-

free gas infiltrates the air. It's go time.

We ride along and my mother and brother are behind me as I follow my dad and grandfather, who of course are casually competing with one another as they have done since my dad was just a boy. Soon enough they are far ahead and cannot be seen. The scenery rushes past me as the wind does the same. Soft dirt turns to small and medium stones as we climb higher up the trail.

It is beautiful.

The Ponderosa Pines are rich in color; their needles vibrate with delighted energy, waving, "Hi," as I pass. The mountains hold rich vitality; their fertile grounds springing up new life. Baby ferns line the left side of the trail, their light green leaves bobbing up and down. Patches of blue-purple lupine look like lifted tails of sleepy puppies as they dream, dancing around in a happy chorus. Large white bobs of the blooms of bear grass pop up here and there, amusing me as they look like Q-tips for giants. The peaks of the sky stretch upwards, piercing the veil between heaven and earth. Clean winter snow still lies on the crests of the mountains, but the presence of growth proclaims spring's arrival. Crisp air fills my lungs with each renewing breath, restoring peace and vigor.

These are the moments I live for.

But attention is just like a child: you should not let it wander too far.

In my lapse of concentration comes my mistake. The handlebars jerk out of my hands and off the quad and I fly. We go through the air to the right, the safety of the trail now behind us. The ground steeply drops out from below as my awaiting doom becomes the slope of the mountainside littered with dense obstacles of firmly planted trees, stumps, roots, and the occasional bush. Unbeknownst to my frozen mind, before me in the air wait the merciful arms of a fellow pine reaching out for me.

Now I can surely tell you that my brain did not start processing information normally again until I was seated safely in the soft mountain dirt; however, those outstretched branches, like the arms of a loved one, swiftly scooped me up off of my seat, holding me in safety. They bowed and bent, placing me gently back on solid ground, not a scratch on me.

But in the moment, below me the quad falls, crashes, and bounces its way down the mountain as I sit perched above. Fear flashes through me as the four-wheeler jolts and knocks around. The handlebars, where my hands seconds earlier had been, crack into a tree and then proceed to follow behind the now backwards vehicle before it smashes down into a fragmented, rotting stump below me.

Colorful language flashes through my mind as I struggle with the reality of my stupidity, but not for more than a minute, for as I sit still and silent, pain and fear are breaking out in those behind me. I hear the regular yet awkward beating of running of a small child coming up the trail. I peer up from where I sit concealed in the trees to see my little brother still in that oversized helmet and boots he still has yet to grow into. He is running up the trail as fast as circumstance will allow to the last place he saw his sister before she disappeared. Crying and whimpering fills the air and all else fades around me. There is only his head bobbing with each impact. There is only Allen and his concern for me. There is only his strained running. There is only his young cry. There is only him.

Past that point always remains a blur. I had to have crawled up the slope to reveal myself, safe and as a whole. I had to have given and received the relieved and grateful hugs from those I love. Tears had to have slipped down my face. Many things must have happened, but it is all a fuzz. It is that one instant that is burned in my mind. It is that one image, clear and strong. The image of that little boy, scared, afraid, running after me, and too young to know to do anything but chase after me. In that moment, all he wanted was to see me again.

Safe.

Golden Gloves

German Sosa Loma

I was playing the first soccer game of my life. And I had no clue what I was doing.

It was a cold day in early spring, and my cousin and a few of his friends had invited me to play a game. I wasn't really into sports, but after moving schools, I'd lost all my friends. I wasn't very social, either, unlike my cousin who, despite switching to the school in the middle of the year, had already made a circle of buddies.

It was my first year in middle school, and things had been pretty rough so far. Other kids picked on me for preferring the indoors and keeping out of sports. They teased me, saying that I was Mexican, of course I play sports. Aren't we supposed to be good at soccer? Well, I wasn't. I'd never kicked a ball in my life. Maybe it was my lack of a father. He'd walked out on my family before I'd ever had a chance to learn about sports and their significance. I'd never had a role model to look up to; for sports or anything else.

Whatever the cause was, the end of it found me out in the soccer field, poised in front of the goal as breath spilled visibly from my lips into the cold air. Since my cousin and his friends were all very good at soccer, they had offered me the easiest position: defense.

Well, it might have been the easiest to them, but it was impossible for me. Players from the opposing team came rushing toward the net, and I froze, trying to think of my next move. They kicked . . . I intervened . . . with no luck. I sighed as the players cheered in victory.

We lost the game, but my teammates weren't angry. In fact, they even offered to train me if I wanted to play again. That was the last thing I wanted, though; I was so disappointed in my failure that I swore I'd never touch a soccer ball again.

Years went by. I kept my promise to myself.

I was a teenager who had not touched a soccer ball . . . more than once. I continued to get invitations from my friends to

go play a game at the park. They didn't understand when I turned them down.

"Why wouldn't you want to play soccer?" they asked. "You're Mexican. You're supposed to be good at it."

There it was again. This expectation and disappointment rang through my ears every summer. Sick of hearing it over and over, I finally caved once again.

It was my junior year of high school. Again I was keeping the goal. Again they went easy on me. Again I failed. Well, I didn't fail to keep the ball out of the net. I made an epic dive and caught it . . . right in the jaw. I ended with chipped a tooth and an even stronger resistance to play soccer again.

Then I met my family.

It was summer 2016. I'd been living in Minnesota since I was a year old and had never met my family. They all lived in California and Mexico. I decided I wanted to fly out and see them, so I took a couple weeks off work and flew out to San Diego. After a day in California, my aunts and cousins and I made a four-hour road trip over the border into Mexico.

We arrived at a small town. I was shocked by the change in landscape, which displayed deserts and mountains that stretched into the clouds. It was nothing like the flat, green horizon of Minnesota.

When we finally met up with the rest of my family, they were just as eager to meet me as I was to meet them. I was greeted with hugs from everyone.

We hung out for days. It was on the fourth day when my view on soccer took an unexpected turn.

The Mexican national soccer team was playing against another country. My uncle and a few cousins took me to local bar and restaurant to grab some lunch and watch the game. When we walked in, I was blown away. The restaurant was full of excited townspeople, sporting jerseys of favorite players

and waiting anxiously to see the game. It hit me: Soccer wasn't just a sport to them; it was a way of life. Friends, family, even strangers gathered and celebrated together whenever their favorite teams played. Even the people that supported rival teams knew how to accept a loss, and everyone got along after a game.

That night, the Mexican national team won. The ground trembled from the townspeople jumping and celebrating with joy! I knew sports brought people together, but observing this with my own two eyes was an amazing experience. Overwhelmed with joy, I began to celebrate with my family. We jumped, we hugged, and we sang. And not to mention the drinking!

"Free tequila shots for everyone!" the bar owner yelled.

This day changed everything. Suddenly I understood soccer and how it created communities and influenced societies.

Before I left to go home, my uncle gifted me a pair of golden goalkeeper gloves. They were beautiful. I had to put the gift to good use. So right then, I made a decision: When I got home, I was going to give soccer another try. And this time, I was going to play like I meant it, instead of just pitching in to keep my friends from bugging me.

I gathered up some of my close friends, and we headed to the park. It was a hot summer evening, and I was excited to play again. My friends were shocked. I'd spent years hating the soccer. Now I was the one inviting them to play?

All I had was an old pair of running shorts, a t-shirt, and the golden gloves from my uncle. I borrowed cleats from one of my friends who had an extra pair in my size. I took my place in front of the goal and told my friends to come at me. The nets were full-sized, just like the ones professional players use. Despite the intimidation of that, I felt ready. This was it.

My friend stood twenty feet away. His eyes locked with the goal. Adrenaline flooded me, and suddenly I felt as if I have

played soccer for years. I kept having flashbacks of my trip to Mexico and the game that changed everything.

The goal keeper for the Mexican team had thrown himself without fear, blocking any shot kicked his way. Not a single ball passed him that day. It was a lot of pressure, but he knew that if he messed up, he would let down his team, his fans, and his country. I had paid attention to the way he positioned himself and dove to catch the ball. I was ready.

The ball flew at me. I sprang into action. In a split second my eyes followed the ball. So did my body. Without a thought – about myself, my safety, my fear – I just jumped. I sprang toward the top corner of the net, my hands stretched to the ball. Just in time, the palm of my hand graced the ball. It wasn't the epic collision I was gong for, but it was enough. The ball bounced to the side as I fell to the ground.

My friends stared in shock.

"You actually blocked it!" someone yelled.

They ran over and asked what had happened. How was I suddenly able to pull this off?

I had no answer for them. My view of soccer had changed, and so had I.

We played on the field until the sun set and we could no longer see what was in front of us. I blocked a few more shots that night, but a lot of them still went in. I was better at the game and I was motivated, but I still had a long way to go. I didn't want to go into professional soccer or even pursue it past playing casual games at the park with my friends. But that was enough. My friends were happy that finally I wanted to join in. I was happy to hang out with my friends and actually have some fun playing a sport. I bought my own pair of cleats, and every time I played, I wore my golden gloves.

"Undetermined" For Both Myself and My Sister

Andrea Doop

Wednesday, July 26th, 1989, changed the course of my life. I was 18-years-old and had just graduated high school the month prior. The next month I was about to begin my career education at a technical college. The day started out as a bad one as I had overslept and arrived late at the Rainbow Foods Deli, where I worked. I seemed to struggle through the day and had to catch up with my responsibilities from arriving late. Around 4:00 pm I came home from work to find my 16-year-old sister Sara laying on my bed chatting on my bedroom phone. Sara was discussing plans with her best-friend Lisa to go to the YMCA that evening and what they would wear, and all the details surrounding this event. I was irritated by just seeing her in my room. I had a basement bedroom, and hers was two floors up in our two-story house.

"Get out, go to YOUR room!" I yelled at her.

She hung up with Lisa and reached into my closet, grabbed a red, blue and green striped polo shirt of mine and asked me "Can I borrow this?"

I told her "You can keep the shirt, just get out!"

Sara threw the shirt back at me as she left my room, I threw the shirt back at her, and she picked it up, and she retreated down the hallway and upstairs with my shirt in tow. We were the typical teenage sisters, hot and cold to each other as we were very different people.

I changed out of the greasy fried chicken smelling clothes that came with my deli job, showered and drove to my co-worker friend Dianna's townhouse in Champlin. I always had the habit of telling my parents where I was going to be, but my parents were not home at the time, so I just left. I had never hung out with Dianna before, so my parents did not know her nor her contact information. I went to her townhome for dinner and then we just sat on her front steps chatting. I appreciated relaxing, having a nice conversation and watching the sunset of spectacular shades of orange and pink after the not so great day. Approximately 10:15 pm the phone in her kitchen began to ring. As she ran in to answer it, I waved goodbye,

got in my car and drove off towards home to Plymouth.

As I pulled into the driveway of my brown two-story house, I noticed my best friend's boyfriend Brian's car in my driveway, at the same time I failed to see my own boyfriend's parent's Ford station wagon parked on the street. Being upset by the sight of Brian at my house, I remember hitting my hand on the steering wheel. I was not exactly pleased with Brian at that time as he and my friend's relationship was an unhealthy one, and I did not enjoy being around him much as he was very controlling. I walked through the front door and saw Tony, my boyfriend's father, straight ahead of me sitting at my parent's round kitchen table. As I walked down the hallway and into the kitchen, I saw Brian sitting across from Tony. My parents were nowhere to be seen. That was very odd and just the sight of Tony and Brian, I immediately thought something bad must have happened to my boyfriend, Dan.

Tony said "Please sit down," so I did in the chair between them. Tony continued to say "There has been an accident." I figured that Tony was pretty calm, so knew it was not likely Dan and asked: "Is it, my parents?"

Tony replied, "No, it's Sara."

I asked, "Is she going to be ok?"

Tony replied, "No, I am afraid not."

I sat in silent disbelief for what seemed like forever, and Tony then said that my family was at the hospital waiting for me and that he was going to drive me there. I agreed, but as I was in shock, not believing this news, I did not know what to say and told him that I was scheduled to work tomorrow, and I needed to go downstairs to my room and call my boss to tell her that I will not be in for the next few days. Tony reassured me that they were aware as someone had already called work earlier trying to locate me. I needed to get out of there, so I excused myself and went down to my room. I called work, and they indeed were aware of Sara's accident.

I stood in my basement bedroom and took a moment to reflect on my last conversation with Sara and how sad that was that the argument would be our last. This trauma was happening to my family and me, and although I was still in shock, I headed up the stairs. I left with Tony in his vehicle, and he asked if it was fine with me if we stopped to pick up Betty, his wife on the way to the hospital. I told him that I did not mind. We drove to Tony and Betty's home in New Hope, and I assumed that Tony called her while I was downstairs as when we pulled up in front of the house, she immediately came out and got into the station wagon. I had been sitting in the front passenger seat, and once Betty got to the car, I slid to the middle of the front seat, now sitting between the two of them. I remember thinking that it felt a bit awkward sitting between them in this large station wagon.

What a silly thing to think at that time.

Tony, Betty, and I arrived at the North Memorial Medical Center in Robbinsdale, and it seemed like a long walk through the Emergency Room into a private "Family Waiting Room" where I met up with my mom, dad, and brother. As we entered the room, I immediately walked over and hugged my parents. They burst into tears at the sight of me. Around the room, I saw our Calvary Lutheran Church's head pastor, youth pastor, my parent's best friends/neighbors and my boyfriend Dan. The room was dimly lit and had a calming lamplight glowing on the table in the corner. After hugging me, my parents started to tell me the details they knew of what happened to Sara at the YMCA. Anytime my parents could not continue to speak due to their raw emotions and tears flowing; someone else picked up where they left off. I could not believe what I was hearing.

Sara was at the YMCA, and her best-friend Lisa was teaching a swimming class while Sara was jogging around the track that encompassed the upper gym like a running track with a lookout over the gym. According to witnesses, Sara who was wearing an off-white pair of shorts and an aqua blue Guess shirt was jogging, then walking, jogging, then walking.

One man said that it looked like she was struggling a bit and maybe breathing harder. Another man and his 10-year-old son had run past her a few times and once on the other side of the track, saw her suddenly stop walking. She moved to the edge of the look over half wall as if she was going to look or fall over and then stumbled back to the outside, full wall, hit the wall with her back. That was when she must have become unconscious because she slumped down to the ground.

The man and his son sprinted quickly up to her, and the man started performing CPR while he sent his son ran down to inform the staff at the YMCA front desk to call for an ambulance and to request some help for his father. The paramedics arrived, and no one was able to resuscitate her. Sara passed away around 7:00 pm. Sara was taken to the hospital as a "Jane Doe" because they were unsure of her identity. She was alone at the time and wearing workout clothes, her driver's license sat in her locker. They did not figure out who she was until Lisa was wandering around the bustling YMCA and not having any luck finding her.

Lisa asked at the front desk if anyone had seen Sara and only after they confirmed what Sara was wearing could they identify her. Sara had driven there in my parent's car and now Lisa, also 16-years of age, and now alone with no vehicle to drive was not told that Sara was not likely to make it. Instead, they told Lisa that something happened to Sara and she was taken to the hospital, that they were unsure of Sara's status. The management at the YMCA asked Lisa for my parent's home number and the missing patient's name which they then called to give the hospital staff so they could identify her and contact my parents. Lisa's parents also were called, and they came to pick her up at the YMCA to take her up to the hospital to find out what was going on. Lisa was hysterical with worry and fear.

Back in the hospital family waiting room, we hugged, prayed, and cried as a united group who were in shock and suffering from deep grief and loss. When we collected ourselves

enough to present ourselves outside the safety of this quiet, safe, and peaceful room, we then walked out into the hallway where a nurse escorted us all to the back of the Emergency Room. The nurse held back, as we walked behind a green hospital privacy curtain hanging from the ceiling that defined each ER bay. As we walked in, I thought “This is all a mean joke, and she will wake up at any time. It’s a mistake; she can’t be gone, she’s only 16-years-old.” We all worked to circle around Sara as she lay on the gurney in front of us and tears flowed as a river rushes downstream for some.

I stood like stone, and the tears only dripped like a leaky faucet. I was too numb.

“This can’t be real,” I thought again.

We prayed over her. I looked around the room as if to somehow take it all in, as if for some reason the observed and present, vivid details mattered at that moment. What I noticed was that the room was sterile and bright. I heard others in the Emergency Room talking, laughing, and carrying on. “Don’t they realize what is going on here? Our family member passed away, and she’s SO young,” were my thoughts.

Sara lay face up on the gurney with a bright white sheet over her up to her collarbone, which was speckled a pink and darker blue as her blood was already settling down to her backside. I touched her shoulder, and she was cold. I recall someone in the group saying that she collapsed around 7:00 pm, and it had been several hours, so I guess that I understood why she was colder, as it had been over three hours. I looked at her eyes and noticed that her eyelids were partially open making it so one could see her eyes and, in her blue eyes, I saw that she was no longer with us. It sank into my soul that she and I would no longer have arguments over her borrowing my clothes, having her at the dinner table where she and I would chew our food and open our mouths and show each other our gross food in our mouths, making us both laugh out loud! Sara would not be with us on the family Acapulco trip coming up in August (which was just one month away). For Sara, there would be no prom, marriage or

children. No memories to continue...period. My heart felt like it was breaking as I looked up at the clock on the ER room wall and it said 11:02 pm.

As we walked out the doors of the hospital into the warm, dark, late night, my mom asked my boyfriend Dan and his parents if it was ok if Dan comes back to our house and stay the night. Mom wanted Dan to be able to stay with me through the night to ensure that I had some support and got some sleep. They approved, and Dan came back to our house where he slept, holding me while we slept. Both of us in my little twin bed.

The next few days were a blur of planning the wake and funeral, especially with not knowing why Sara passed away. It was excruciating waiting for the results of her autopsy and having people from near and far coming through the house at all hours of the day. People would ask me about the last time that I saw Sara and about our conversation. I regretted the way that we argued that afternoon, but I think answering this question for people bothered them more than me. I think that they felt sad for me that this was our last interaction. I, however, did not feel as bad about it because I always felt that she and I were like that and one cannot walk around on eggshells their whole life wondering if someone will die today and if you said the “right things.” This is not reality, and Sara knew then that I loved her and would have done anything for her.

“Undetermined” was the reason of death on the death certificate.

“What does this mean and how do I come to understand this?” I thought.

“Undetermined” also became the status of my life at that time.

“What is next in this life?” I pondered. “What is the meaning of life? What is my true purpose?”

These are the questions I tried to answer back then and

continue to do so.

My life changed in an instant. At the time of Sara's death, I had a large support group of friends which became a smaller group of friends for me it seemed overnight. I could tell who was there for me and who was not. I became closer to those who came around and let me "cry" on their shoulder again and again until my wounds began to heal. The other friends who found themselves unable to call and ask how I was or stop by became more like acquaintances. Remember, I was 18 and had just graduated high school the month prior. One month after her death, I was enrolled to start school at Hennepin Technical College for what I discovered in high school: architectural design class was a true passion for me.

My family was in a state of grief, things around me started to change quickly. I started college but could not concentrate on classes, and after starting the second quarter, I quit school. I broke it off with Dan for really no reason, after more than two years of dating. I credit it to all of the changes happening. I hated my job at the Rainbow Foods deli. I was the only child at home (my brother was older and living on his own) with grieving parents who were becoming overprotective when they had been open and trusting before. My "Undetermined" life was a sad existence. But just getting through a day meant that the next might help ease the hurt in my family's heart.

Time ultimately does help to heal.

It's Not You

R.J. George

“December Journal”

Today, this random boy in the lunch line told me I act like I'm white because of the way I talk and the people I hang out with. He asked me why I hang around more Asian people than I do black people. He kept asking me if I was African, and when I said yes, he said I didn't look like I was African because I wasn't thick, and I don't act like I'm African because I didn't use my “African” accent. I froze. My insides started shaking like one of those rollercoaster rides at Valley Fair. I started getting hot underneath my sweater and breaking out in cold sweat. Then another boy next to him asked me if I was gonna let him talk to me like that. I couldn't say anything. It's not that I didn't want to say anything. It's just that I couldn't talk because my heart rate was through the roof. I looked so stupid! Instead of my brain coming up with things to flame the boy, it was telling me that everybody was looking at me, and I should run to the bathroom and lock myself in the stall until school was over. I was praying to God that he saw me get roasted so they don't talk about me. I wanted to say that just because I'm Liberian doesn't put me into a category that determines the way I act, speak, or dress. I don't have to speak in my accent if I don't want to. I can hang out with whomever I choose. I'm not thick because it's not in my family genes. I wanted to justify myself, but I didn't. I just put my lunch tray on the counter and got my food. To make it worse, I didn't have any lunch money, so I had to hear it from the lunch cashier. When I sat down, I couldn't even eat. I just took an apple and dumped the rest of my tray. I went to the library and sat in the cubicle to calm down. Today was not the day for me.

A College Halloween

Andrew Peterson

I tugged at my overtly large costume semi-nervously as the elevator took its time reaching my level. I was on the fourth floor of a six-floor residence hall, even floors housing the men and the odd floors housing the women. Even though it was only six in the evening, my floor was eerily quiet, fitting for Halloween. Almost everyone had left for fraternity parties or other social engagements around campus. When the vanilla colored elevator doors opened, I breathed a sigh of relief, having revealed the space to be empty. I pulled in a plastic blue chair from my floor's lounge and placed it next to the elevator buttons, but at an angle so my vision took in more of the door instead of the boring, vanilla wall. I placed the red plastic bowl in my other hand on my lap and poured both bags of Bit-O-Honey candies I had purchased the day before. Once I felt comfortable in my makeshift work station, I readjusted my golden ears, wiped down the red fabric meant to signify a t-shirt, and got ready for what would be one of the best nights in my first semester of college.

Nobody was in immediate need of my elevator, so I took the time to download creepy organ music onto my phone to play every time the doors opened, adding to the Halloween atmosphere. Minutes after finding a fitting ringtone, the elevator began its descent towards what I assumed was the lobby. Chills raced down my spine as my mind created an either/or situation. Either this was going to be a smash hit, or I would be mocked as the weirdest person in the building. The elevator stopped, doors opened, and I played the organ music. First reaction of the night was a shriek that filled the similarly empty lobby of the building. A woman poked her head in and looked around wildly for the source of the noise. When her eyes settled on me, the man she was with chuckled his way onto the elevator. Slight disappointment came to my mind seeing that my first "victims" didn't have costumes on, but I couldn't let that stop me from hamming it up.

"Hello there! Where can Winne the Pooh guide you tonight?" I asked.

The couple took a moment to get a good look at me; a small

man in a 3XL gold outfit with matching ears and a bowl of candy in his lap. Suddenly, they burst into joyous laughter.

"Level six, my good bear," the man got out between laughs.

I pressed the corresponding button while offering the couple some candy, which they both respectfully declined. When the doors opened on the top floor, I played the organ music again anticipating people on the floor waiting to board. The music caused the woman to noticeably flinch, causing all three of us to laugh. I wished them a pleasant evening and pray that this encounter set the tone for the rest of the night.

Until around eight, I was usually the only occupant of the elevator in costume. I was continuously given awkward, sideways glances by people who were having troubles grasping at why I was doing what I was. They kept asking me if I was high, or if it was a punishment placed upon me by the building staff. Both questions received the same answer.

"No."

"Then why?" was the common follow up question.

"Because I don't have a party to go to, and I wanted to do something fun tonight," I replied.

Many people did compliment me on the genius of the idea, although I didn't get much more rambunctious praise until later into the night. Only once the entire night did I question doing my button pushing, and that was when my building director entered my elevator. One look at me however, and he let out a hearty, belly laugh while asking me how my evening was going. That signified to me that, because of our friendly relationship throughout the semester, I was in the clear to continue my "service."

Once eight o'clock came, costumes flooded my elevator regularly. A group of guys dressed up as Mario, Luigi, Wario, and Waluigi, who all complimented me in the worst impressions I had ever heard. There was an abundance of male and female Pikachu who gave hilarious variations of the

character's signature phrase. There were knights in different colored "armor" and carrying various quality swords; from cardboard and foam to flimsy plastic, some even challenging me to "duels." Of course, being in the Midwest, there were plenty of farmers and barn animals running around that made a good laugh. Being in a collegiate party setting, I did see my fair share of scantily-clad cats, nurses, and police officers, which I mostly rolled my eyes at. Regardless of the costume, everyone genuinely enjoyed my service while depleting my candy supply quicker than I had anticipated, many people even wanting to take selfies with me. My best joke of the night came when a man in one of those full body skeleton suits came into my elevator. What sparked the material was that the man had created an extension to his costume just below his belly button, which honestly looked like poorly formed pipe cleaner. As he exited the elevator, I yelled after him.

"Make sure to see a doctor if that lasts longer than four hours!"

People throughout the lobby and those entering the elevator howled with laughter, many high-fiving me for my delivery. One couple, the man dressed as a demon, the woman an angel, approached me. Both dressed formally, the angel in a tight white dress and the demon in a nice red dress shirt, but they had the cheapest halo, devil horns, and devil tail I'd ever seen. Both took out a ten-dollar bill and placed it into my bowl, beaming.

"That's the funniest thing we've heard all night!" the angel exclaimed. I was uncomfortable with getting her money, and I tried to give it back. The couple was adamant that I keep it however, sprinting out of the elevator once we reached their floor, leaving me with twenty dollars clutched in my fist.

Oddly enough, that exchange kicked off a streak of monetary gifts, the most extreme instance coming from a group of four men dressed in all black wearing animal masks.

"You're still doing this?" a lion masked man asked, flabbergasted.

I recognized the voice from earlier in the evening, so the question made sense, to which I gave a slight nod for the obvious answer. He excitedly switched positions with one of his buddies whom wore a giraffe mask so he could get closer to me.

"First man, I need a selfie with you."

Obviously, I agreed.

"Second, you need to take this, no argument" He then proceeded to take what remained of my Bit-O-Honeys and each of the four animal men added a twenty to my bowl. As they exited onto their floor, the lion man yelled one more thing.

"You're the highlight of our night, bro!" The other animal men yelled in agreement.

Along with the awkward monetary gifts came gifts of food and soda from the residence hall canteen store, people willing to hold my chair if I needed the restroom, and even had repeat riders bringing more people to witness my work. If only I could put costumed elevator operator on my resume.

Eleven came around, and with it my first vivid sexual flirtation experience. My then empty elevator stopped on the fifth floor, and when the doors opened, I was gazed upon Laura and Ruby, two women I had been taking multiple classes with that semester.

"Have you had a break at all tonight?" Laura asked, her blond hair straying in front of her muted green eyes.

"No," I replied confidently, or at least that's what I hope came across.

"C'mon," Ruby said, her light brown hair styled similarly to her taller counterpart. "You're coming with us."

I tried to decline the invitation, but they yanked me out of my chair forcefully and almost dragged me to their dorm room.

Inside the room, the only illumination came from a string of lights that wrapped around raised beds on both sides of the room. A man and younger woman were sitting on the bed to my right and raised red solo cups in greeting. I was marched to a chair at the center of the room where Laura firmly, yet somewhat playfully, grasped my shoulders and forced me to sit. She prolonged her grasp as her hair messed with my vision and my attempt to get as comfortable as I could. Suddenly, she stood up, hands on her hips, and just stared at me; Ruby did the same thing while standing in front of the other vacant bed. For all I knew, she was not sure what to do now that I was in the room. I looked past Laura and saw three half used bottles on a dresser next to the bed occupied by the young couple. Labels revealed to me that there was Fireball Whiskey, Jack Daniels, and Captain Morgan exposed for consumption.

“You want a drink?” Laura asked soothingly, catching my glances and making her way towards the alcohol.

“Do you have any soda?” I asked. I didn’t want my first “drink” to be underaged and in this collegiate setting.

I locked eyes with Laura and saw something no woman had directed towards me in quite some time. I initially attributed it to her drunken state, but a tingling warmth gave me goosebumps as I realized it to be a lustful look, intentional or not.

“Yeah, I’ve got some in the fridge,” Laura answered, a slight huskiness in her response.

She walked over to the minifridge next to where Ruby was standing, and rummaged around for a while. Because of her height, Laura had to bend to a near 90-degree angle that she used as part of her seduction tactics. Catching on to her flirtatiousness with the deliberate pace she was grabbing a Diet Pepsi with as she swayed back and forth, her exposure both scared and excited me at the same time. Everyone else in the room giggled at my obvious discomfort as Laura rose from the fridge, opened the can, and kissed its metallic lip

before handing it to me. She joined in on the giggling as I stared wide-eyed at the shiny pink lipstick coating the can at the exact spot I needed to drink from. After getting the first couple of swigs down, the sexual tension abated and was replaced with conversation for about half an hour. Most of it was questions directed at myself.

“Why did you decide to study journalism?”

“What dreams do you have?”

“Why did you choose Nebraska?”

“What are your hobbies?”

And the one that I’d been answering my whole life “Why do you walk funny?”

Heading back to the elevator with a drunk escort, the tension resurfaced as the questions got more sexual.

“What’s your relationship status?”

“When was your first kiss?”

“Have you ever had sex?”

All of which I did my best to laugh off.

Standing in front of the elevator, I took notice of the costume Laura was wearing. A revealing black piece that she insisted was a vampire, but I saw it more as an intricately connected swimsuit. She reached across my body to call the elevator, her chest pressed against mine, causing me to feel things I hadn’t felt in two years. When the elevator doors opened, my roommate appeared, having saved my seat and bowl for who knew how long. Laura kissed me on the cheek and bid farewell, my roommate having the dumbest grin on his face. He vacated my seat, dropped himself off on our floor, and winked as he left.

Two in the morning and my bowl held the benefits from eight hours of button pushing. Empty king size Butterfinger

and Snickers wrappers, a convenience store cheeseburger wrapper, empty bottles of various Mountain Dew flavors, \$150 with some loose change, and about half a dozen phone numbers I knew I would never call. My last trip of the night was escorting a majority of my floormates “home.” Their minds were blown when they saw the contents I possessed and realized what hour it was. I finally reached my bed and got some much-needed sleep, knowing that I’d need all my energy for the Vikings game that was only ten hours away.

Injury

By: Adedapo Olubakin

It was a hot, sunny day in February 1988. I was in high school.

It was a perfect day to play a soccer game, as there were no dark clouds in the sky. My high school soccer team was about to meet a high-profile soccer team from within the city. We were facing each other at my school, and the stage was set for the epic battle.

In the dressing room, the head coach reviewed tactics and strategies to apply during the game. I listened attentively. The eleven players that would start the game were named. As usual, I wasn't in the lineup. We ran onto the field, greeted by the loud shouts and wild cheers from the home crowd.

The game was about to start. It was at this late stage that we found out one of our defenders was missing. How he was able to sneak out, nobody knew. To avoid starting the game a man short, the head coach signaled to me.

"Get on the field," he said.

I was surprised. I was just a rookie.

He must've read my face because he put his arm around my shoulder. "Ade. I know this call is unexpected, but I know you possess the ability to perform at the highest level. This is an opportunity for you to prove to me that your promotion into the first team is worth it."

These words from the head coach sped up my adrenalin. This was my time.

I ran onto the field.

As the game started, I realized I was nervous. This was evident when a pass was made to me. My leg flew at the soccer ball . . . and went right over it. The crowd jeered. Instead of being miffed, I spun their negativity into a booster. I could do this.

Soon enough I was playing with confidence. I even started enjoying the game. Halfway in, our runaway central defender appeared from nowhere, which meant I could move to my natural position of left back.

I was thinking about giving the home crowd a reason to cheer for me, to make up for being jeered when I started the game. I was waiting and waiting for an opportunity when an opposing player came towards me with the ball. This was it. I was going to make a stylish sliding tackle, take the ball, and make the audience go wild.

Nope. I missed the guy and landed on my right arm instead. Snap!

Huh.

What was that?

Then I saw my arm.

Dangling.

Oh.

My arm was broken.

I was taken off the game and given first aid treatment. The best they could do at the moment was wrap it in a bandage. The injury was a bummer, but at least at the end of the game, the score was a draw. There were worse things to worry about, though, like what my mother was going to do when she found out what had happened.

I wouldn't have blamed my mom if she blew her fuse. I come from a family of six including my mom, which was hard enough for her to manage. On top of that, we lost our dad to a tragic auto accident in 1976, which only added to the pressure on my mom. Since then, she had tried to provide for all of us by herself. We struggled to get by with normal expenses; a medical expense would stretch our budget beyond its limit.

When I got home, Mom saw the bandage wrapped from my wrist to my elbow. I lied that I fell on the stairs at school and sprained my wrist in the process. I only got by on that lie for so long; at midnight I woke up with severe pain in my arm. I tried my best to bear it so as not to alert Mom, but the pain became unbearable. I don't remember starting to cry, but it was loud enough that Mom heard and ran to my room. She asked how I was feeling, but I could only cry. It wasn't just because of the pain; I knew I had to tell her the truth.

I was surprised how calm she was when I finished. I guess her concern at the time was to make me comfortable. She gave me some pain medicine to last me until morning, at which point we would head to the hospital. Despite the medicine, the pain continued all night. The thought of going to the hospital added to my pain. I'd heard a rumor that arm and leg injuries with fractures only had one solution: cutting them off.

We got to the hospital at about five in the morning, but despite how early it was, there were ten people in line ahead of me. Mom shook her head. We were at a government hospital that was supposed to be open twenty four hours. We ended up waiting for four hours before it opened.

I was checked in and asked some questions. Because I could not lift my right arm by itself, they put it in a sling and ordered for an x-ray. The cost of an x-ray was even more expensive, so expensive that I was too ashamed to look my mom in the eyes.

Because the x-ray machine at that hospital was broken, I had to go to another hospital for the procedure. In the meantime, Mom headed home. At the x-ray center, the operator explained the process to me. Most importantly, he told me I had to hold my breath until he finished, which was just a couple of seconds.

"Why do I have to hold my breath?" I asked.

"The radiation emitted by the machine can damage your internal organs if inhaled," he explained.

Afterwards, he came out with the result.

"You are a very lucky man," he said.

"Why?" I asked. He signaled for me to come over to him. He pulled a photo from a big brown envelope, held it against the light, and pointed to a spot.

"You have a fractured bone," he explained, "but they didn't separate, which is good."

I returned to the hospital with the report and handed it over to the doctor. He took a long look at it, then nodded. He said he knew what to do. However, I'd have to wait until the next day because he was on his way out when I came in.

Wait. What? What was I supposed to do now?

I watched speechlessly as he walked out. The nurse suggested leaving the results with them and going home until the next day. I followed her suggestion and went home, disappointed.

I met my mom in the living room when I got home. She took off her reading glasses and asked, "How'd it go at the hospital?"

I was too ashamed to look into her eyes as I explained the situation. I kept my eyes fixed on the floor, only peeking to see her nod.

"You must be in a lot of pain," Mom said. "Can I get you some pain medicine?"

"I'm fine, Mom. Thanks," I lied. I was still in a lot of pain but

I don't want her to know. She probably knew I was lying because she brought me some pain medication later on.

I arrived at the hospital early the next day. When I was called in, the doctor requested my x-ray result.

"I left it with the nurse on duty yesterday," I answered. "She suggested it."

A search ensued without luck. The doctor said the best course of action would be getting another x-ray.

I felt my cells boiling as I thought of all the money wasted on the first one just because I had abandoned the papers. "Who's paying for it?" I demanded.

"You have to pay, I'm afraid," the doctor replied.

"Are you joking?! Something was lost in your hospital, and you're saying it's my fault?!" I yelled. "I don't have money to get another x-ray. We all saw the results. Just do your thing, fix my arm, and let me get out of here."

He looked at me straight in the eyes for a minute. Finally he spoke. "I will help you, but you have to sign a paper of consent for treatment without the x-ray report."

"Fine, whatever. I just want to get this fixed and stop being in pain," I said.

The doctor instructed his staff to prepare a room for my treatment. When it was ready, I was called in. The doctor explained that my arm would be bent at a ninety degree angle and wrapped in a cast up to my shoulder.

He started wrapping my arm with a bandage containing coarse white particles.

Confused, I said, "I thought this was supposed to be a cast."

"Sit back, relax, and watch," he replied with a smile. After he was done wrapping the bandage around my arm, he sprinkled

water on the bandage. He began rubbing his palms across the bandage, and I realized the particles were dissolving into a smooth plaster. Within minutes, it dried up and became as hard as concrete.

I was mystified. "What is this material? What do you call it?" I asked.

"It's called plaster of Paris," he responded. "In the medical world, it's used to stabilize bone fractures and help them heal. Now, in four weeks, come back so we can take it off."

With that, he discharged me by pointing to the door. I thanked him and left.

On my way home, I reflected on my ordeal. According to my mental calculations, the financial impact of my injury would sap up two months of my mom's paycheck. I felt terrible about wasting so much money just because I wanted to look cool. From that point on, I made up my mind. Never again would I do something that could bring such hardship on my family.

Three Guys, A Rusty Bolt and a Pizza

Michael Stansberry

“Where do you want to eat?” I asked Aaron as my stomach growled, begging for food. We had just stepped off the bus and into the shining sunlight of a beautiful spring afternoon in April. It was our lunch break in between concerts for our 9th grade all-day band tour.

We were all hungry, ready to eat anything.

“Let’s head over to the Little Caesars and get some pizza,” Aaron replied.

Knowing Aaron, he would want to get his own pizza. I wondered how much I was going to have to pay because I didn’t have much on me at the time. We walked over to the corner of the strip mall, over by Festival Foods. Ryan was almost jumping on me like he always did, he said he wanted to go where we were going. We got to the door and right when we opened it Chinema yelled our names from behind us. Chinema said he wanted to come join us too, so we said, “Come on over then,” and he sprinted to the door. The four of us walked through the door and got in line. Chance was already there and said he wanted to split all of the money so he wouldn’t have to pay full price. I was thinking that would be better for me too cause I’d be able to pay with the few dollars I had in my wallet.

We left the building and I had the two hot pizzas in my bare arms, Chance had the Mountain Dew and Coke in his, and Aaron carried the breadsticks. Aaron was already opening them and eating straight from the bag. Our next job was find a table and dig in.

We noticed that the Caribou next door had some round tables outside their place but it didn’t look big enough to fit five of us with all our food, so we decided to sit at a table a little further down in front of the Dairy Queen.

We took our seats; Chinema to my left and Aaron on my right, Chance and Ryan on the other bench. We finally dug in, like a pack of vultures with a fresh carcass, feeling satisfied to finally have food in our stomachs. Aaron and Chance had just

started their second piece, so I started calculating how many slices and breadsticks we could each get.

We were all about done when Aaron leaned back to “stretch.”

That’s when we heard the terrifying “CRUNCH” from underneath us.

The next thing I knew the bench on my side of the table started falling back with the three of us still on, and just like that everything felt as if it was in slow motion.

As we lost our balance, Aaron yelled, “Oh my gosh!” and jumped off first, still with pizza in his mouth.

I yelled “Abandon ship!” as if we were in the Titanic.

I got off as fast as possible just before hitting the ground. To my left, I hear Chinema making this weird squeaking sound and I look over and saw he still had a piece of pizza in his hand, about to crash down. But to both of our surprises he catches himself with his hands last second, pizza dangling from his mouth.

We were all so shocked at what just occurred and surprised we were all okay, that we all started laughing like mad men. A good five minutes of busting our guts went by, and we decided to look at the bench to see what caused the crazy stunt. It turned out that the piece connecting the bench to the table had been rusting, so the metal started deteriorating. It was a matter of time before someone would sit on it and break it just as we did.

Shortly after we started telling jokes about it. Chinema said, “Guys, guys, what does it take to break a DQ bench?”

“What?” I said.

“Three guys, a rusty bolt and a pizza,” he said.

We all burst out laughing again. Ryan had a big smile on his face still filled with pizza. Chinema and I held onto the nearby

railing for support while getting teary-eyed. Aaron sat over by Chance still looking at the bench in disbelief. Guts hurting and tears in our eyes, we knew the next thing to do was tell an adult what had happened. So all of us went over and told one of the chaperones what happened and she went inside and told one of the Dairy Queen employees.

Our lunch break was coming to an end ,and we had to get back to the bus to perform at the next elementary school. We walked over to the front of the bus smiling at one another because of that shocking moment. We knew we would remember the day we broke that DQ bench for the rest of our lives. To this day, we still make inside jokes and laugh awhile about the good times we had in band and that broken DQ bench.

Poetry

At the sink

Anthony Vue

Palms over porcelain plates.
The incessant flowing of water.
Nothing crosses my mind as I stare into space.
Nerves rapidly fire as a sharp poke hits my blubbery sides.
Suddenly before me is a smiling bronze beauty successfully
scaring me.
Shattering my masculinity,
she picks up the pieces.
Her aura of lavender blossoms and everywhere disappears.
Arms rest on my shoulders,
soapy hands graze her hips,
eyes find one another,
and souls connect in unity.
Around and around,
slow swaying circles close in
and faces blush strawberry red.
Impulse then kicks us both like a mule and
our eyes shut to let our mouths do the talking.

The Son of a Blacksmith

Anthony Vue

Arms trembling,
Forehead drenched in sweat,
The scorching hot steel bars burn through his gloves,
Triggering the pain and suffering from 40 years before.

Communists wander like blood-thirsty wolves,
Mothers desperately muffle the cries of their children,
And Fathers, Brothers, and even Sisters arm themselves
swiftly wandering like a flock of sheep within mother nature's labyrinth.

Within the flock was a young man and his family.
A son of a blacksmith turned resistance fighter.

"I have to get them out"
These words repeated for him within every waking moment.

He had already lost two sons and a daughter.

He would not bury his last living child.

He promised his ancestors that he would lose no more family.

He vowed to the soil and the skies that he would cross the river even if it meant his death.

And when it came time to cross the river,
No bullets rained.
Only the gushing of muggy water sounded.
Was it a trap?
Were the Communists waiting to fire on the other side?

Grandmother Kong and Grandfather Kong.
I call to you for your strength and your will.
Guide the Communists' spirits to consider an alternate path from ours.
Allow my family to pass without incident.
Please.

An alarm rings,
the once fearful young man is now an aging grandfather
working inside a steel factory.
Eating his lunch of rice and greens amongst tall polychromatic strangers,
He forgets the traumas of before and glances at his hands.
Callouses and burns of struggle.

"go back to Africa[.]"

Mariah Hanson

waxaan jeclaan lahaa inaan awoodo
napenda ningeweza
Ina fatan in iya

the navy-blue bondage you forced our shoulders to bare,
has the taste of vengeance –
we cannot forgive.

we notice our complexion pushed upon your
appropriating face with ignorance. Our skin is no puppet
show for you to walk in and out of the lifestyle we are so
assigned to acquire in the unlikely event of blood wars
and chains.

as for the crazy clueless caucasian:
watch your back; this is no threat but a promise that we
will fully rejuvenate our making in ameri-kkka.

"i told him what/ happened to my body"

For my inspiration, Danéz Smith

one special night, i whispered the secrets of my silky body to him. the secrets were
never before shared and smelled like red roses.

it was scary and easily accepted by him. i never knew why.

one special morning, i spoke the mysteries of my glorious figure to him. the
mysteries that no detective could trace and tasted like sweet liquor on a dance
floor.

it was beautiful and hardly a problem. i think i knew why...

one special evening, i screamed the hardships of having my skin to him. the
hardships that only my hues could comprehend, and they felt like a solid
unsharpened knife sliding across my neck over and over again.

it was unhealthy and impatient. he never understood and i now know why.

Fangs

Kendall Olson

Today I am depressed.
Is it what is on this list that makes me depressed?
Or my depression that makes me what is on this list?
Either way at least for today I am
a bad student
a bad mother
a bad daughter
a bad employee
a bad eater
a bad member of my household.
I am even bad at the video games I play
in a desperation to escape the depression
that is crushing me
but it only makes the depression crush me
stronger
faster
harder.
I grab more and more
something must fill me
but the more I grab
the emptier I become
so I sit in a pile of
textbooks
taxes
laundry
iPhone apps
chocolate
and with each bit of it I take
the harder I cry.
How can the hole inside you become
bigger and bigger the more you fill it?
Or does everything I find turn into nothing more than a pair of fangs that
rips and chews and shreds my heart

Writer

Jennifer Nguyen

The smooth clickity-clack of the keys on keyboard
A tap, a click, and a beat
Before the chorus comes in all of its key smacking glory
The black cursor waits for instructions
Like an ever-vigilant military sergeant
An idea, a jolt, and a smile
Words fill the screen
Like the voices of a choir in an empty room
A letter, a word, and a sentence
Before they're all erased and rewritten over and over and over again

Firecracker

Kevin Jacobson

Luckily the flag waves back blue and red,
many solely salute the white.
Put on a façade to celebrate instead
just as fireworks mask the gunshots tonight.
Women waiting- witnessing wrongdoing in Washington,
pray still those in jail inhale oxygen.
United we stand, so we believe.
Is freedom truly all we'll achieve?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KJ'.

The White House Fire

Kevin Jacobson

The chestnut door slammed shut- mute feet stamping,
My Chief of Staff had just departed me,
Abandoning my Oval Office, swift,
No doubt John's purging 'round his jail cell, square.
This House is now without pilot- Air Force None.
John Kelly is free;...rest are free -falling
Damn - before I play political chess,
I ought to learn politics or chess. *Check-*

I half-hope the U.S.A. seal burns up,
Fine ash specks, olive branch and arrow dropped,
I grovel, pray they don't figure it out,
My gates of Hell yield to the unemployed-
There are but two ways 'cross the White House lawn:
Be either fired or go down in flames.

I sighed the driest sigh, exhaling smoke,
How in the Hell did you end up here Don'?
I focused on each object top my desk:
The small (concealed), red, powerless button,
The small, red hands on the oaken surface,
The desktop mirror I seldom notice.
I authorized a good look at myself:
A poorly painted face of porous pine,
Cracked, crinkling, with head aflame a-top.

Pray voters don't peek behind the curtain,
Above their booths - *I wasn't going to win-*
Fools! Here's what they haven't figured out:
There are only two ways that this term ends:
I'm fired or we all go down in flame

A stylized, handwritten signature consisting of the letters 'K' and 'J' intertwined. The 'K' is written with a large, sweeping loop, and the 'J' is written below it, also with a large loop.

I'm Not Ready

R.J. George

I'M NOT READY.
I want you to stop
Loving me
And loving me in the name of
Love and love itself
And the action
And the things that you love to
Love about me
That I love to hate about me.
Please stop loving me
And making me breathe
That love so intimately
And sensually and lovingly
And insanely becoming so
Immersed and contaminated with you
Inhaling you like air with sweet
Accent that nurtures my soul
And feeds my starving being
I don't know what love is.
Stop loving me for love's sake
Because I will keep hating you
You for love's sake.
I'm not ready to love because love
Means more than what it means
To be in love.
I want you in the ways I can't have
You
and have you in the ways
I don't want you.
You grew on the
Walls of my being
Rooting and sprouting
And blooming around
Like when winter passes
And spring comes again
To know love and show love
And being in love are all
Different things

But with you, they
Are all the same things
I can be naked while being
Fully clothed
In front of you
I don't have to be with
you to be inside of you
You make me want all of you
To be in love with all of you
I hate it.
I love when I'm away from you
Because you keep finding a reason
To love when I don't deserve it.
You love to love like friendship
That was planted on the basis
Of just that
So sweet and innocent it seems bitter
but give me
So much more than the predicament
Of love itself.
Stop loving to love
Me.
Don't be in love with me
Don't love me and not the
Thought of me that occupies your mind
Be infatuated with all of me
That would be a short moment in time
When I marinate into your mind
And lay across your bones
Don't be a safe haven
Let me fall
I am a being who can't be loved yet
You know that like
You know how winter will come
Again and Spring will
Bring showers that covers
This land
And summer will dry it out again

You know that.
You know me.
Yet you don't only want
Me, but you want all
Of me.
And summer will dry it out again

You know that.
You know me.
Yet you don't only want
Me, but you want all
Of me.

Miles from Nowhere

Sarah Shogren

I want to wander this land, immerse myself in her
old growth, her woods of red, to be embraced by her gnarly armed mesquite.
I want to squish my toes in the sands leading to the unending waters,
cross her mighty rivers when they are naught but tiny streams.

I long to learn the history—not of the common places, but of those
uncommon.
To listen to the gurgles and glugs of the San Francisco wave organ,
to whisper my secrets to the Fremont Troll, who hides beneath a Seattle
overpass,
to harmonize with The Singing Tree in New Orleans.

I wish to breathe deeply of air, beyond the piney north
to that of the spicy south, or the salty west
to let the fishy, street vended air of the east
infuse my senses, then roll over my taste buds, like New Year's bubbles.

I want to hunt with my camera, collecting inspiration
to track the pronghorn across the grasslands,
stalk the grizzly into the Alaskan wilds,
to see the sunrise in the Keys and chase the sunset across the burnt sands of
the southwest.

I wish to try the local delicacies found not in your chain restaurants,
but clam chowder from a pub on the wharf, bison burgers from a farmers
table,
even Rocky Mountain oysters after three or four drinks
then I'll swear before the porcelain Gods to never eat them again.

I want to talk with people who'll never remember my name
Hear their twangs, their long ooo's, and dropped letters,
Then I'll give directions to those who think I'm a local
With a wink and a smile, leaving them to wonder at my secret.

I want to take with me a bauble from every stop along the way
and leave a part of myself in return.
I want to record my adventures to remember as I age,
knowing I'd taken the chance to experience something bigger than myself.

Rosie

Sarah Shogren

Rosie read about the need,
For planes, for guns,
For ships, for bullets,
She stood, ready to do her part.

But Uncle said No!

Rosie pulled her bandana from the drawer,
Washed and ironed,
Folded and ready,
She stood, ready to do her part.

But Uncle said No!

Rosie wept with her sisters,
Uniforms at the door,
Telegrams to their chests,
She stood, ready to do her part.

But Uncle said No!

Rosie demanded to help,
As the elderly rose up,
Guns too heavy for their arms,
She stood, ready to do her part.

Uncle whimpered no.

Rosie watched in frustration,
As apple pies turned to streusels,
And Presidents became Führers,
She sat, wishing she'd done her part.

And Uncle stayed quiet...

We Grew up as Graveyards

Kassi Moua

Descendant of oppression
wielding a white flag.
Made nomad, begging to hold

the silhouette of a fleeting illusion.
Cannot stop to grieve, each
step like casket gravel.

Cannot stop to breathe, each
rising chest like dry monsoon
ankle deep in cayenne dirt.

Untilled pillars collapse between ribs
like skipping rocks on bare bones.
A pebbled shoreline absent of shelter.

Inheritance of pure immigrant blood.
Built to endure like our mothers.
Raised unbending like our fathers.

Made to believe we don't belong.
Generations of running feet
yearning for a place to call *tsev*.

Here?

Where the man's knife gorges on
the bounty of tomorrow and buries
the ripened plum into the earth.

Then spits the pit out, violet
dripping from the marrow,
makes for a shallow puddle.

With which, turns the soil,
planting a kernel from a grave —
nourishes the instinct to persevere.

Home.
It is here.
Peb lub tsev, it is here.

2D Design



Siren's Aftermath, Ingrid Helgerson, 14 1/4" x 21 1/8" , carnival paper, gouche, watercolor and ink



Cage the Encore, Mitchell Mehrwerth, 18" x 12", black & white paper



Kue Thao, 18" x 14", illustration board and acrylic paint



Self-Portrait, Carmen Segura, 10" x 11", illustration board and acrylic paint



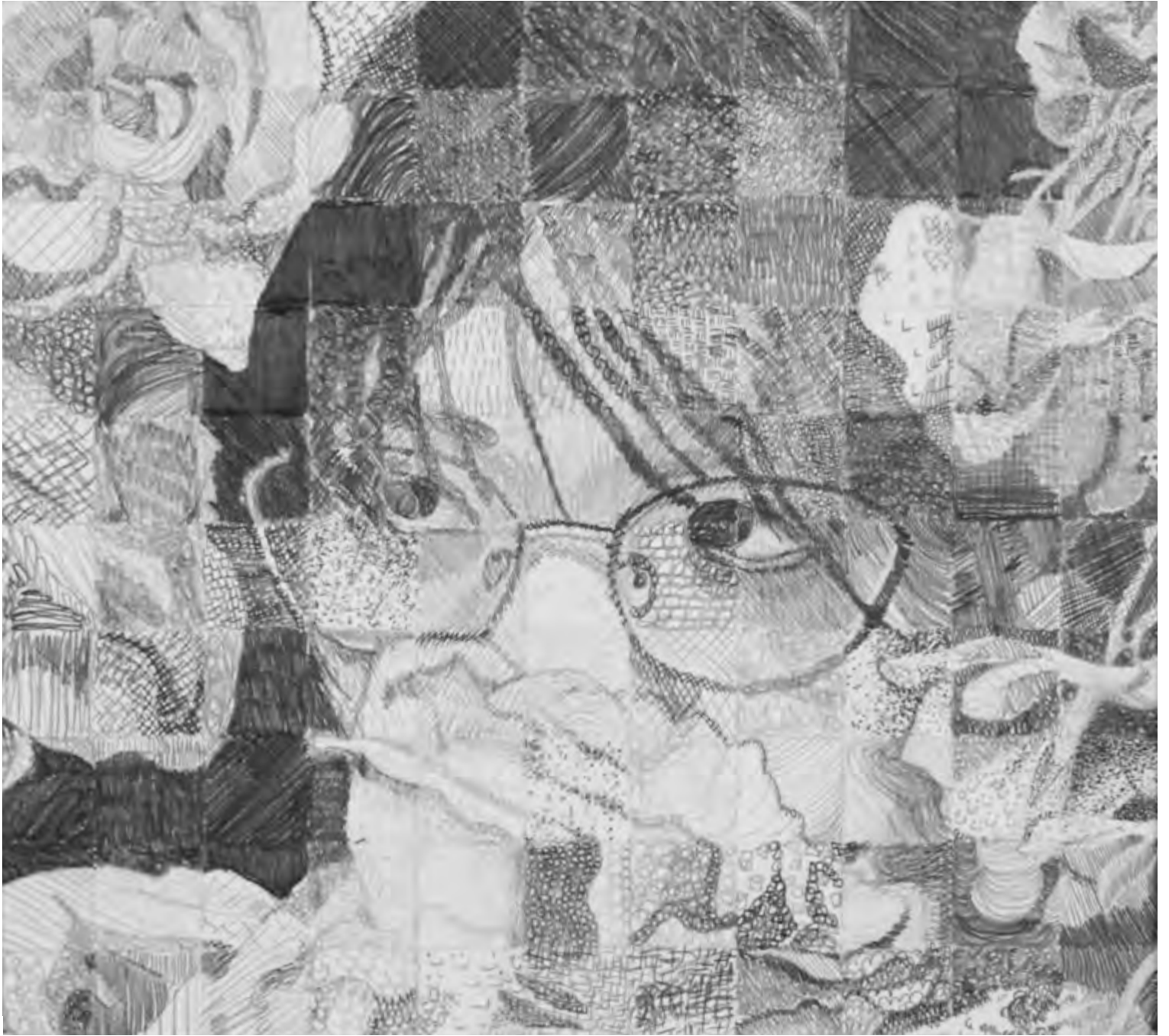
Sun & Water, Lindsay Zigan, 16" x 16", acrylic on canvas



Moody Skull, **Brenna Lauhart**, 9" x 12", collage of acrylic painted bristol paper



Blue Peacock, Vincent Chen, 15" x 15", acrylic and cloth on illustration board



Gwyneth, **Bethany Geer**, 18" x 18", pencil



Kue Thao, 18" x 24", cold press illustration board and black construction paper

3D Design



Dimensional Flow, **Rachel Ormsbee**, paper and glue



The Premium Pour, **Mitchell Mehrwerth**, wire with wood base



Sombrero, Nicolas Diaz Dunas, 2 1/2" x 5 1/2", plastic



A Million Miles An Hour, **Amanda Pederson**, 9 3/4" x 3 5/8", plastic (3D print)



Skullington, Ashley Minetor, 4" x 3", 3D printer & acrylic

Ceramics



Need Coffee, Megan Brennan, clay/glaze



Alison Wonderland, Tyler Peifer, clay



Guard Your Happiness, Heidi J.J. Piphin, 4" x 3", clay/glaze



Pixie Bath, Megan Brennan, clay/glaze



White Revolution Sex, Parker Crutea Robbins, clay/glaze



Rust, Parker Crutea Robbins, 3 3/4" x 5 1/2", clay/glaze

Digital Art



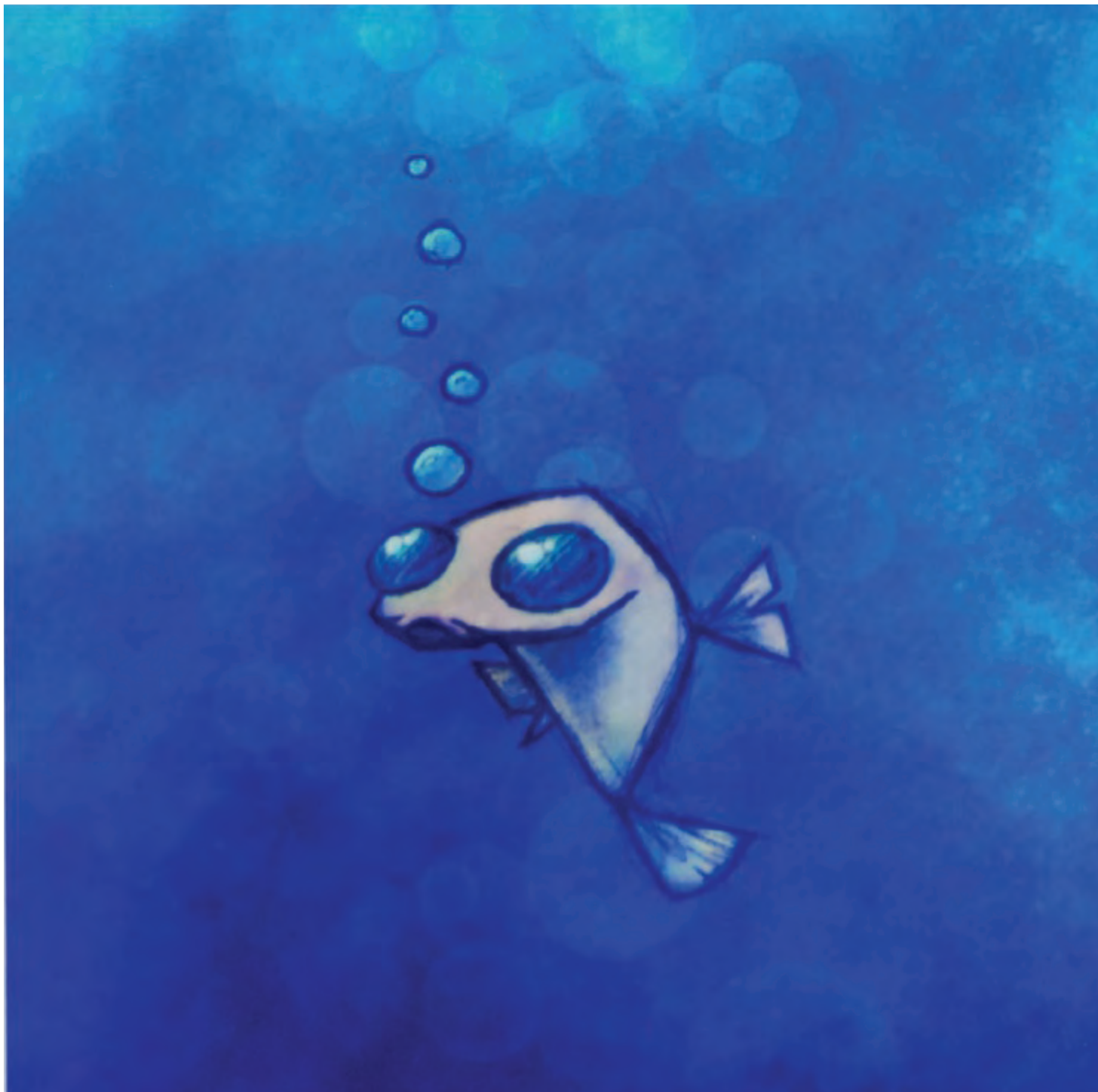
Corrosion, **Teri Iverson**, 8" x 11", Photoshop and photo paper



Cybermask, Nicolas Diaz Duenas, 11" x 18"



Heckler, Nicolas Diaz Duenas, 11" x 18"



Minnesota Goldfish, **Stephen Alberts**, 4" x 4", digital art on inkjet paper



Stay the F**ck Out of the Forest, **Desiree Johnson**, 7" x 7" , Illustrator and paper



i'm here, **leyen trang**, 11" x 17", Adobe Illustrator

Drawing



Blues, Nikki Cheaj Nyenekon, 20" x 12, color pastels



Geo, Taylor Jylha, 15.5" x 16", graphite



Gianni, **Auria Speltz**, 9" x 10", 6B pencil and indian ink



Jimin, **Kenzle Eckert**, 9" x 12", graphite and compressed charcoal



Blinded, **Robins Vue**, 13.5" x 23.5", pencil



Ray, Teri Iverson, 5" x 10", ink drawing



Junior Year, **Angel Lee**, 13" x 24", charcoal



On a Snowy Night, **Angel Lee**, 19" x 25", charcoal



Flower Blue, **Carmenn Betts**, colored pencil



Under the Sea, McKenna Paine, 13" x 16", colored pencil, sharpie and gel pen



The Emporium, Theron Tripp, 11" x 14", pencil and ink



Relassarsi, **Theron Tripp**, 8" x 9", pencil and ink



The Coast, **Theron Tripp**, 8" x 9.5", pencil and ink



The Tram Station, Theron Tripp, 7.5" x 9", pencil and ink



William, **Mee Vue**, 10" x 14", graphite on illustration board

Graphic Design



Smoke Screen, **Amber Greely**, 11" x 17", Photoshop

OVERPRICED AMERICA

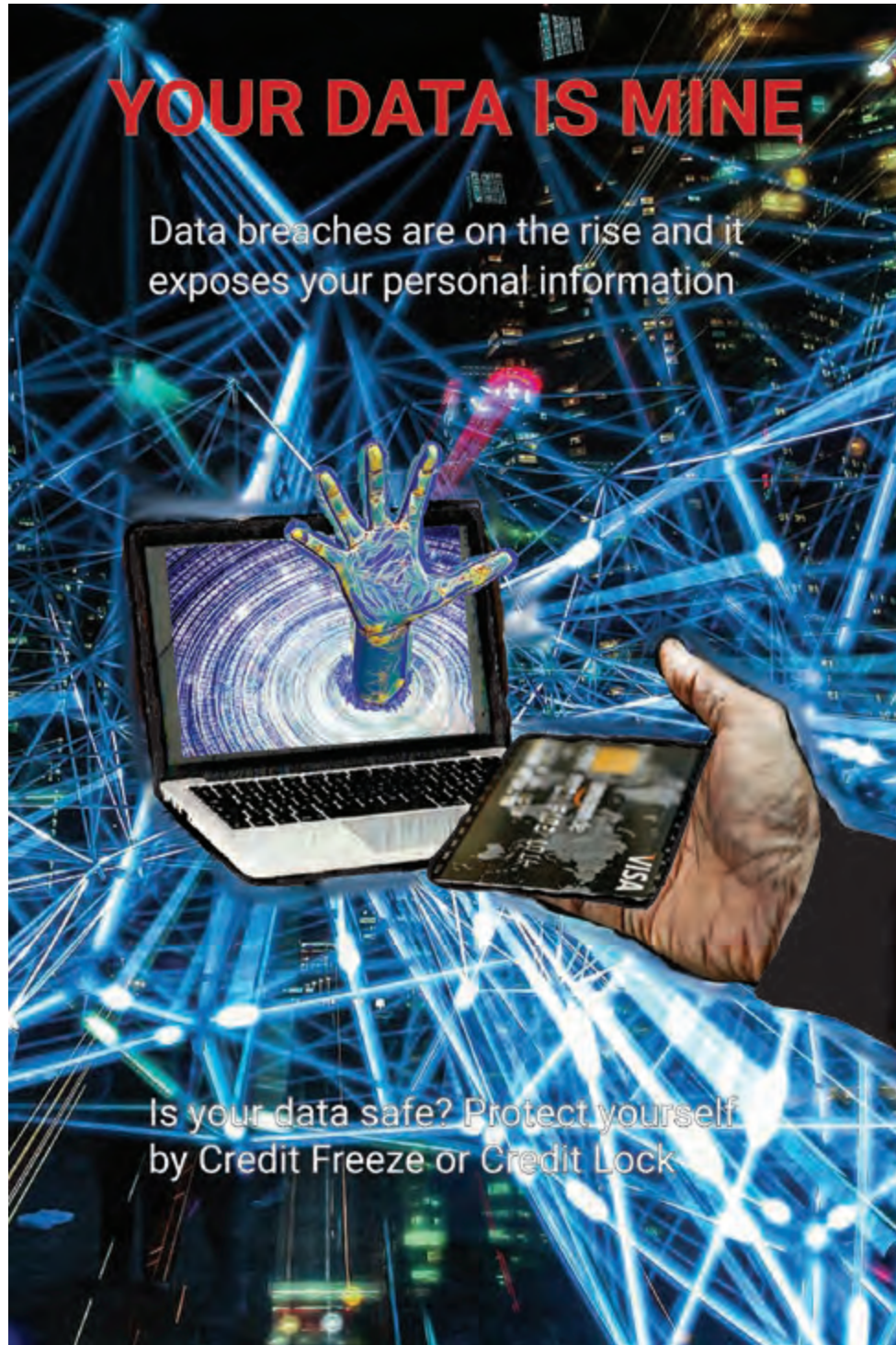


Are We Powerless?

Americans spend more on prescription drugs than anyone else in the world. Eliminate excess regulatory barriers and empower patients to compare prices.

Join the fight to lower drug prices!

Patientsforaffordabledrugs.org



Data Awareness Poster, Victor Xiong, 24" x 36"

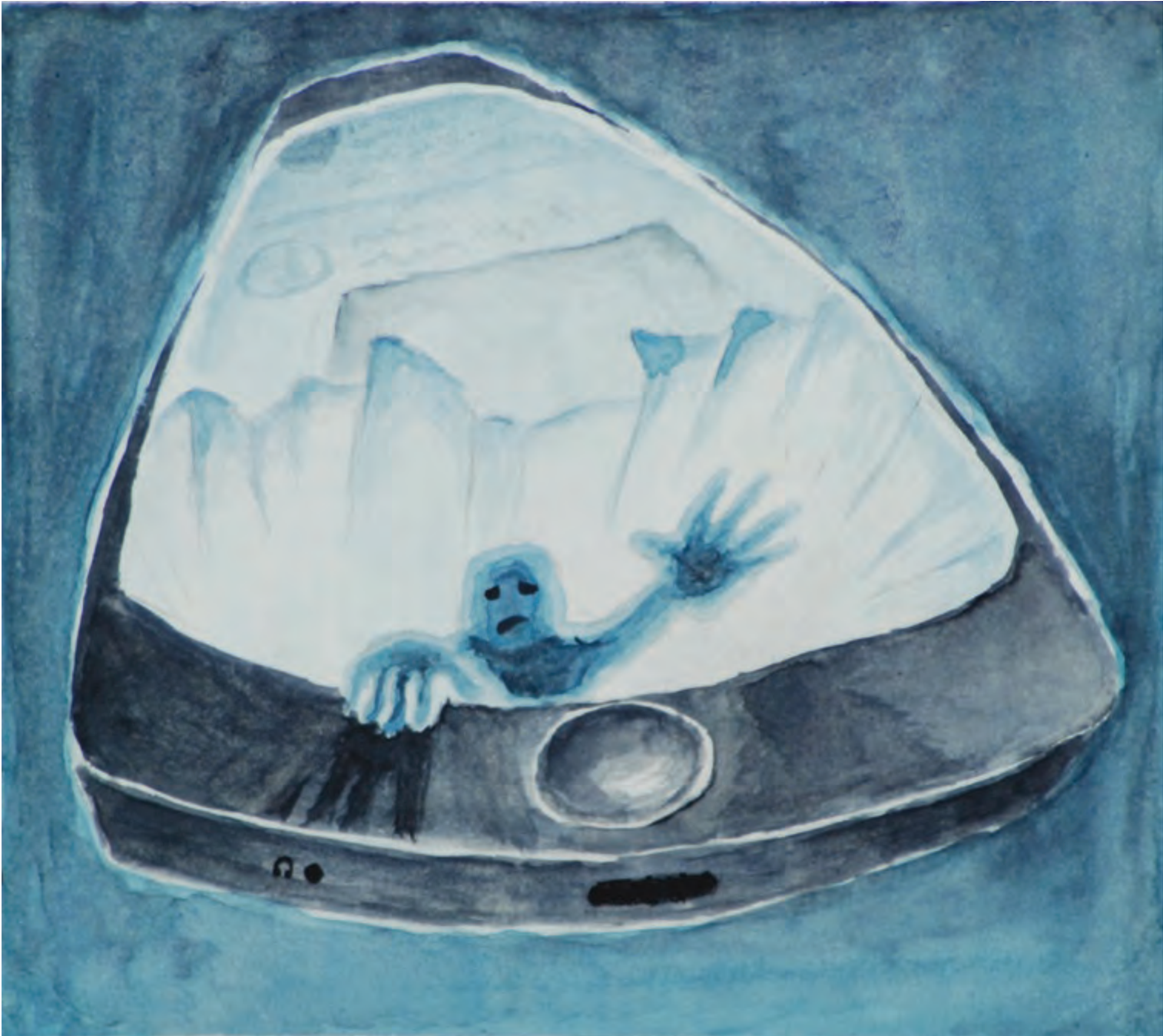


Wags & Whiskers Rebrand, **Lindsay Zigan**, Illustrator and InDesign

Illustration & Prints



frank, Teri Iverson, 11" x 14", linoleum block print and ink



Editorial Illustration, **Amanda Pederson**, 7 1/2" x 6 3/4", water color



Whispers to Odin, **Desiree Johnson**, lino block, ink and paper



Hearth, Ashley Minetor, 11" x 14", ink



Zheng He's Treasure Fleet, Vincent Chen, 12" x 18", ink block print

Mixed Media



Free, Teri Iverson, 16" x 20", paper mache, newspaper, canvas, acrylic paint



The Girl with the Flaxen Hair, **Calvin Graunke**, 20" x 16", ink and acrylic paint



Journey of 1000 Years, Vincent Chen, 18" x 72", gouche on binded scroll



Journey of 1000 Years (detail), Vincent Chen, 18" x 72", gouche on binded scroll

Painting



Serenity, Erica Taavola, 24" x 30", acrylic



Evening Wind, Derek Cheng, acrylic paint



Pathway to Light, Allison Phaokanya, 16" x 20", acrylic



Baby Blue, Megan Brennan, 20" x 16", acrylic on canvas



3, Amanda Pederson, 28" x 22", acrylic



Self-Portrait, Kue Thao, 20" x 17", acrylic paint on illustration board



Me, Myself and I, **Nathan Eckhart**, acrylic paint



Cap at a Thrift Shop, **Hayden Graunke**, acrylic on illustration board



Pisces, McKenna Paine, 18" x 24", acrylic



Run, Teri Iverson, 24" x 36", acrylic on canvas



Snare, **Amanda Pederson**, 36" x 24", acrylic and modeling paste



Blue Abyss, **Frances Joe**, 17" x 20", acrylic on cold press illustration board



Chen Elders, Vincent Chen, 36" x 36", acrylic on canvas



The Rebirth — A Self Portrait, Mitchell Mehrwerth, 24" x 36", acrylic paint



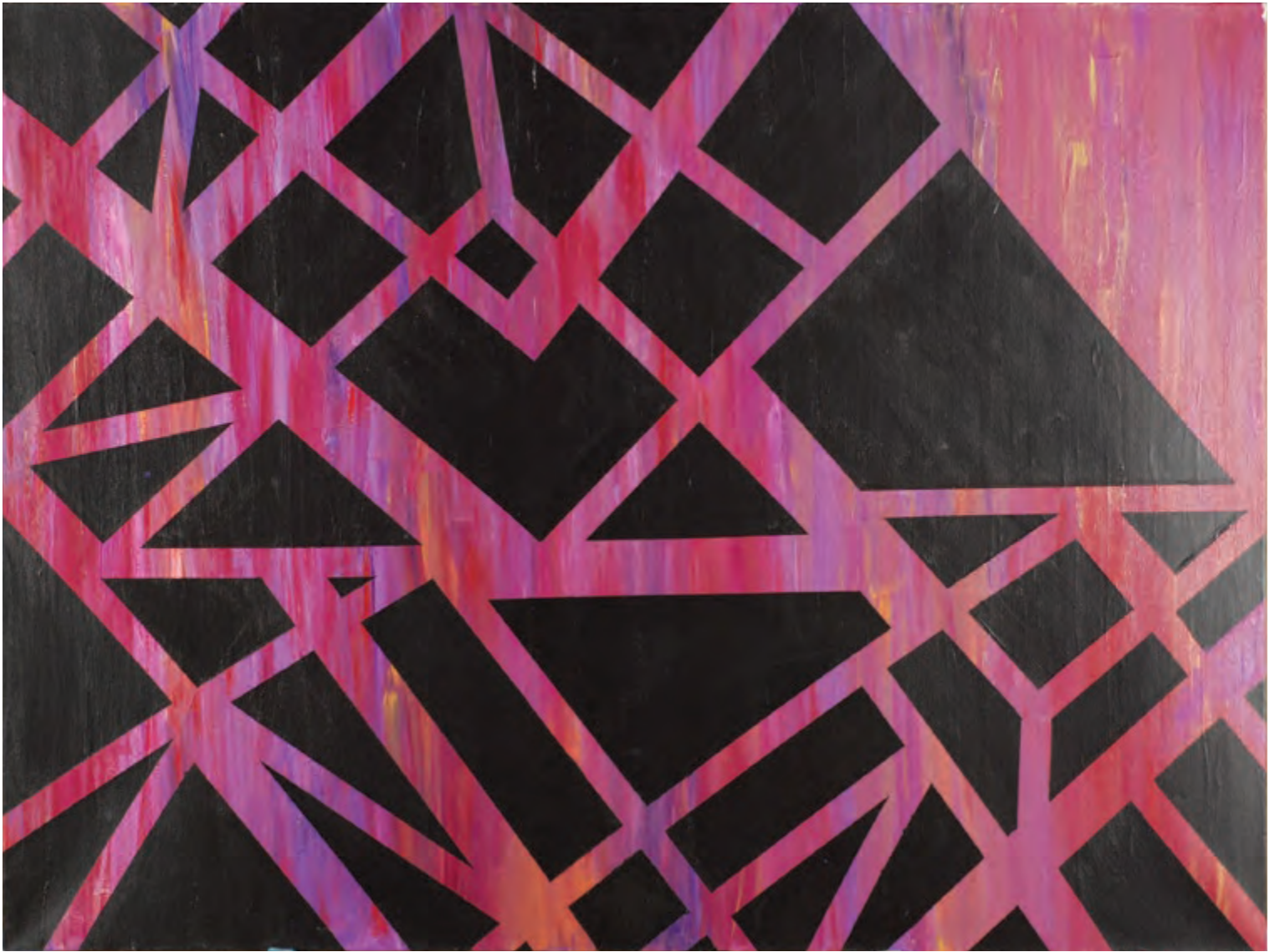
All Apologies, Mitchell Mehrwerth, 40" x 30", acrylic paint



In Bloom, Megan Brennan, 2' x 3', acrylic paint



Greenery, **Lindsay Zigan**, 36" x 24", acrylic on canvas



Below the Surface, **Lindsay Zigan**, 24" x 36", acrylic on canvas



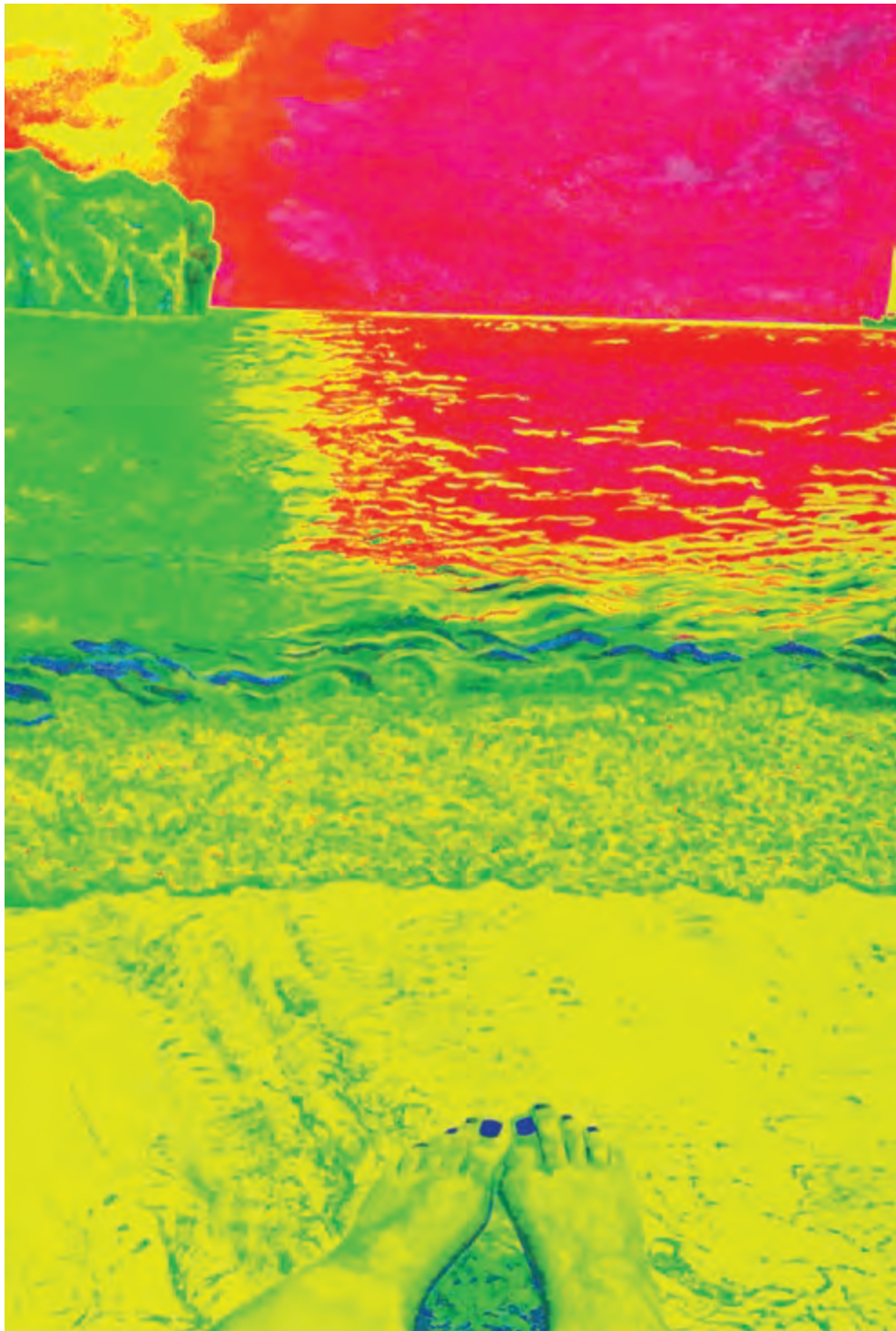
Rain in Gotham, **Taylor Jylha**, 20" x 20", acrylic paint on canvas



Flaming Skull, Tou Fue Lee, 30" x 40", acrylic



Native-Foreign Situation, Nicolas Diaz Duenas, 24" x 36", acrylic



Lax Lax-Relax, **Martha I. Johnston**, 36" x 24", acrylic on canvas



Moody Planet, **Derek Cheng**, acrylic paint



The Crossing, Jewel Seacrest, 20" x 24", acrylic



Voyage, Jewel Seacrest, 20" x 24", acrylic



Covet, *Jewel Seacrest*, 20" x 24", acrylic



The Night Before, Jewel Seacrest, 24" x 20", acrylic



Skeleton Smoking, **Bethany Geer**, 20" x 18", acrylic on illustration board



Lost in Paradise, Cheryl Townsend, 24" x 24", acrylic on canvas



Built for Love, **Greg Sullivan**, 20" x 16", acrylic/water spray and paint

Photography



over thinking, Rachel V. Fraser, 10" x 8", black & white



"My Mother", Fatima Narjis, 8 1/2" x 11", inkjet



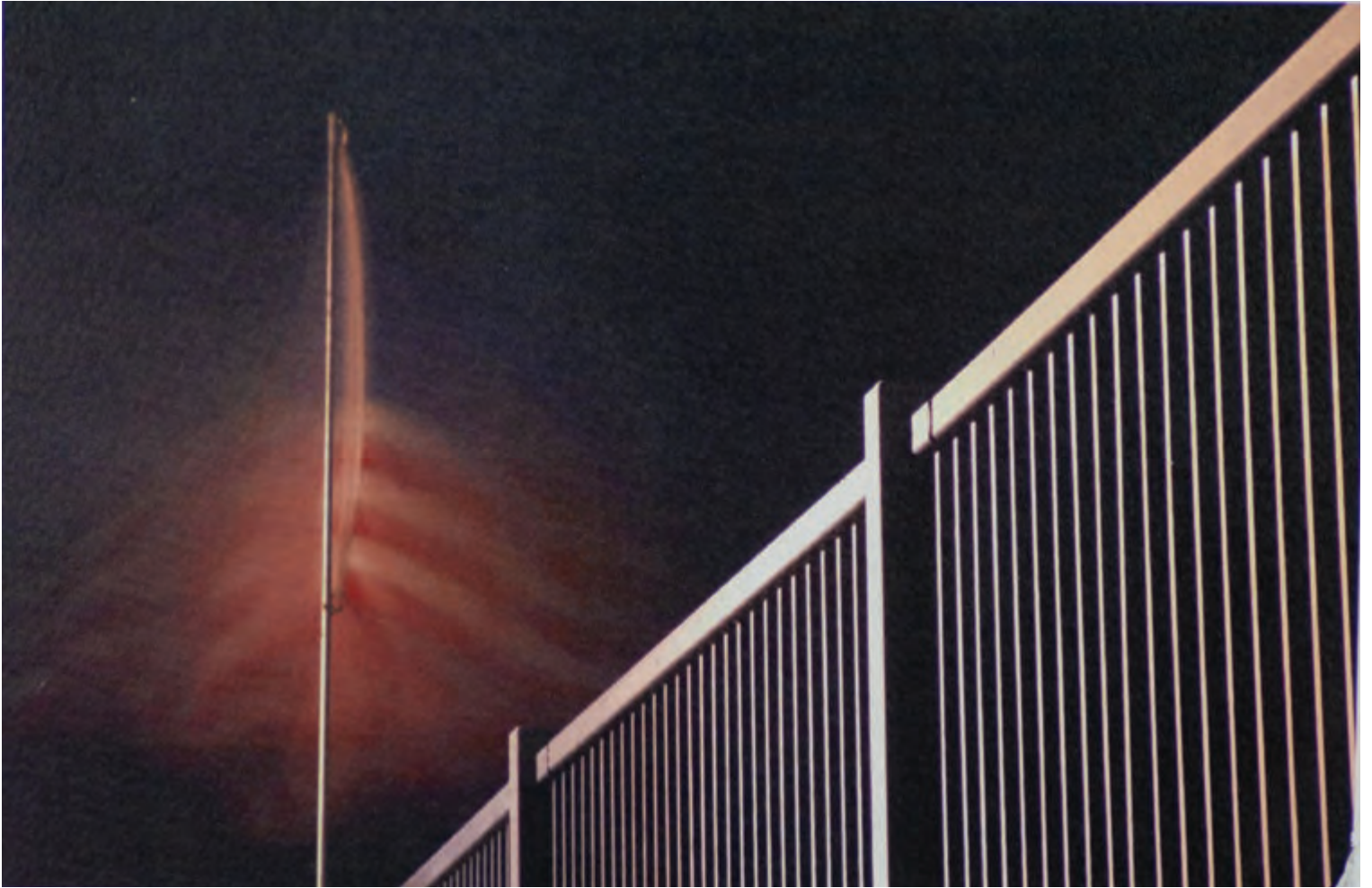
Thirsty, Abbie Slotsky, 8" x 10"



Grasping Time, Michael Stansberry, 8.5" x 11", ink jet



Stages of Conflict, **Adler Burton**, 2" x 16", Photoshop



A Long Wave, **John Bates**, 8.5" x 11", handmade paper



Water Droplets of the Red Sea, **Michael Stansberry**, 8.5" x 11", ink jet



Blast from the Past, Michael Selle, 13" x 19"



Shelter, Alder Burton, 11" x 18", Photoshop



Mirror A Masks, Ta'Kenya Friday



African Festival, Femi Daramoza, 11" x 17", ink jet



Imprint, Alder Burton, 11" x 18", Photoshop



Manillas de Chevilles, **Cale Karge**, 15" x 18", ink jet



Tree, Cale Karge, 15" x 21", inkjet



Blue Creek, Diane Hall, 11" x 17", ink jet



farewell, my love, **Stephen Alberts**, 8 1/2" x 11, inkjet photo



Papers on wall, Yan Lee Kon, 8.5" x 11", glossy photo paper



bubbles in the backyard, **Crystal Allen**, 8" x 10"



New Beginning, **Craig Henry**, 8" x 10", photograph & paper



Chuve Xloiy, 8" x 10"



Seoul, Stephen Alberts, 11" x 17", inkjet photo



Moon over Minneapolis, **Michael Selle**, 13" x 19"



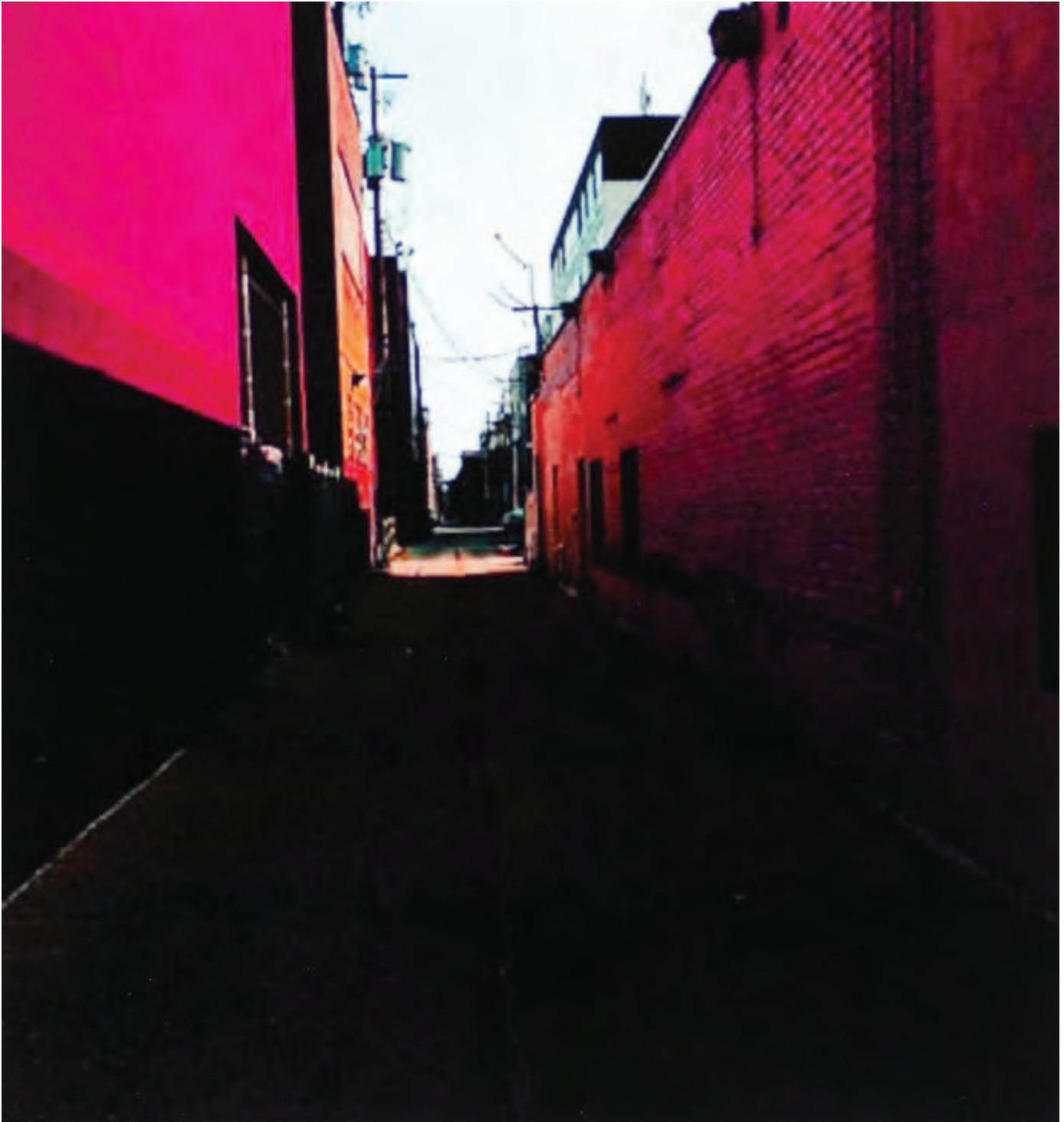
Suspension Bridge in Putrajaya, **Yan Lee Kon**, 11" x 17", glossy photo paper



Viaducto de Segovia, **Maura Muza Aleman**, 8" x 10", ink jet



Sky Company, R.J. George, inkjet



Through & Through, R.J. George, inkjet

Textiles



Undulate, Jessica Forga, 3' x 3', fabric



Paisley Mania, Ingrid Helgerson, 30" x 30", cotton fabric and cotton thread



The Magician, Ingrid Helgerson, 10.5" x 15.25", cotton fabric and cotton thread



The Further, Desaya Suing, 12" x 12", cotton



Japanese Flag, Taylor Jylha, 12" x 12", cotton fabric

Author credits

Clinton Boadu is a PSEO student at North Hennepin. He goes to Cooper High school and enjoys manga, adventure books, soccer and writing. He has started a Wattpad series called Gifted: Awakened, and his profile name is Clinton Boadu.

Andrea Doop is currently a part-time student at North Hennepin Community Center in Minnesota and working towards a Business Management A.A.S. Degree. She is currently enrolled in a College Writing class but also keeps very busy as a co-owner in the family business. She has three children and two step-children.

Kevin Jacobson is an Economics, Mathematics, and Liberal Arts Student Ambassador at NHCC, and is the Moorhead Assistant Debate Coach. He enjoys engaging with our complex political atmosphere in his poetry.

Theodore H. Melchior is a student majoring in the Creative writing program at NHCC in Brooklyn park, Minnesota. He enjoys the works of H.P. Lovecraft and aspires to become a full-time horror author.

Kassi Moua is a student at North Hennepin Community College in Minnesota. She has not had any publications yet. She is a second-generation Hmong-American and drives a 2007 Toyota Rav4 with the check engine light on.

Jennifer Nguyen is an aspiring author in fiction writing, and is part of the creative writing program at North Hennepin Community College in Minnesota. She has been writing for many years, and draws most of her inspiration from the soundtracks of movies, games, and more.

Kendall Olson is a twenty-one-year-old dreamer who is pursuing a Creative Writing degree, for better or for worse. She is grateful for the opportunity to be on the staff for this magazine, as it makes her feel better at what she does than she actually is. She has a Yorkie puppy named Xanthe and is way too obsessed with Hamilton and binge-watching Netflix shows.

Adedapo Olubakin is currently a student at North Hennepin Community College. He is from Brooklyn Park and loves reading, traveling, watching movies and listening to music.

Rachel Ormsbee is an eager student who loves to dabble in many creative areas. Remaining undecided for the time being, she is working to find where her skills, values, and passions align. She delights in the human capacity for compassion and innovation.

Andrew Peterson is a Liberal Arts graduate from NHCC with an emphasis in Creative Arts. He loves watching the Vikings every fall, listening to metal, and reading military thriller novels. While at NHCC, Andrew particularly loved his Creative Writing Workshop classes.

Sarah Shogren writes 98% for her love of storytelling and the written word, and 2% because she's terrified of her muse. She will soon hold in her hands an Associate of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from North Hennepin Community College. When she's not writing, odds are good you'll find her reading or plotting a future nomadic lifestyle.

Michael Stansberry is currently a student at North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, and will be transferring to University of Minnesota Duluth this fall to continue with his Environmental Science degree. He enjoys spending time outdoors, playing drums in the school's community bands and getting creative with his photography.

Anthony Vue is currently a student in the Creative Writing program at North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He enjoys reading fantasy novels and listening to music within films.

Editor credits

Rose Humphrys is in their 2nd year at NHCC. They are studying for the transfer curriculum to go to NDSU. rose enjoys reading science fiction, writing creative fiction and watching mystery movies.

Kennedy Lang has been an editor for Poetry City USA and recently completed her AFA in Creative Writing here at NHCC. When she isn't writing, Kennedy loves swing dancing and making friendship bracelets.

Kendall Olson is a twenty-one-year-old dreamer who is pursuing a Creative Writing degree, for better or for worse. She is grateful for the opportunity to be on the staff for this magazine, as it makes her feel better at what she does than she actually is. She has a Yorkie puppy named Xanthe and is way too obsessed with Hamilton and binge-watching Netflix shows.

Emma Ojeda works all of our NHCC stage productions from behind the scenes as a theater tech. When not building sets or running sound boards, she loves to watch TV and attend drag shows around the Twin Cities.

Andrew Peterson is a Liberal Arts graduate of NHCC with an emphasis in Creative Arts. He loves watching the Vikings every fall, listening to metal, and reading military thriller novels. While at NHCC, Andrew particularly loved his Creative Writing Workshop classes.

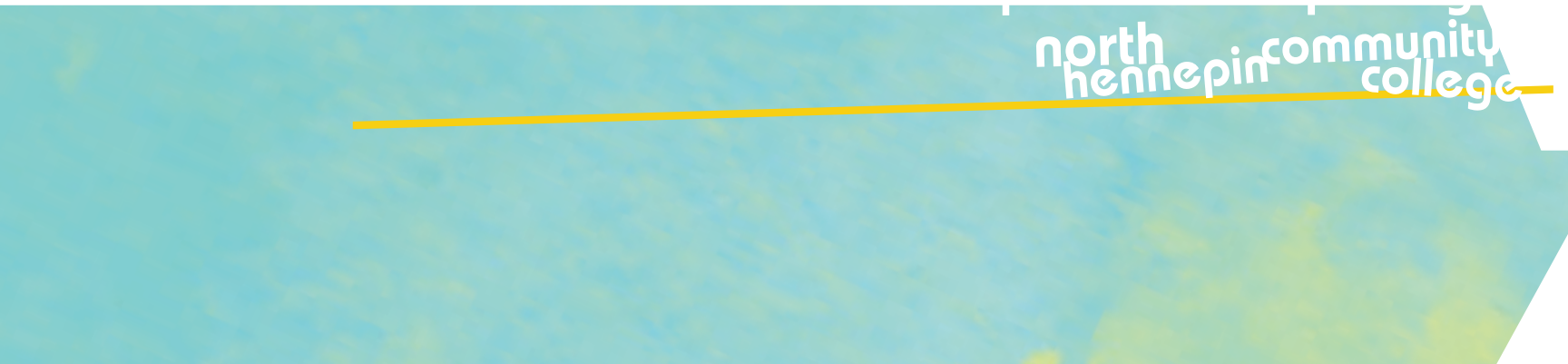
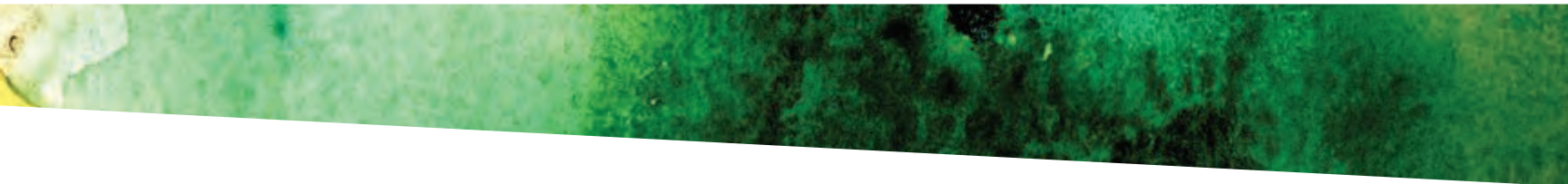
Uzi Qureshi is a PSEO student at NHCC working to complete a degree in Liberal Arts. He volunteers at Maple Grove Hospital as well as by delivering groceries for Store to Door. Uzi's favorite creative writing so far was written when he was in 8th grade.

Solita Reum is an AFA graduate of NHCC's Creative Writing Program. She likes to work on house projects, and in the evenings, she likes to make the 1.6 mile loop around Lake Como. She loves taking as many classes as possible and learning new skills.

Tim Tran is a PSEO student at NHCC who often has classmates asking him to help edit his papers. Whether or not he's been helpful in that capacity, Tran is hopeful, but has never been entirely sure. In his spare time, Tim enjoys longboarding and PC gaming.

Anthony Vue is currently a student in the Creative Writing program at North Hennepin Community College in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He enjoys reading fantasy novels and listening to music within films.

Angie Xiong just completed her Liberal Arts degree at NHCC. She is a fan of Blizzard Entertainment, and when possible, she is known to indulge in 30 occasional minutes of game play. She also enjoys seeking out the best food in the Twin Cities. Her latest passion is Salvadoran food.



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