

MIRACOSTA COLLEGE

TIDE POOLS 2020

VOLUME 34

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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Tidepools publishes original art, poetry, fiction, and essays exclusively from MiraCosta College students, staff, and faculty and awards cash prizes to students in each category.

The submission deadline for the next issue is **Friday, December 4th, 2020**. There is no entry fee. You may submit a maximum of 3 entries in each of the categories below.

VISUAL ART

Black and white and color drawings, prints, photographs, paintings, mixed media, and graphic design

FICTION

1800-word limit, double spaced

POETRY

1000-word limit, double spaced

CREATIVE NON-FICTION AND ESSAYS

1800-word limit, double spaced

COMIC STRIPS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

5–10 panels

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Do not put your name on your entry.

Cover sheets are available on the *Tidepools* page at: www.miracosta.edu/tidepools. Click on “submit now” to fill out a cover sheet for your entry and attach your work.

If you have questions about submissions, contact Becky Kessab at (760) 634-7879.

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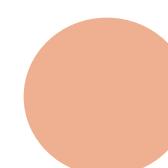
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AWARDS

FICTION

MISSLIE
ALEXANDRA MARTIN

ESSAY

MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER
SHERRY MANDE

POETRY

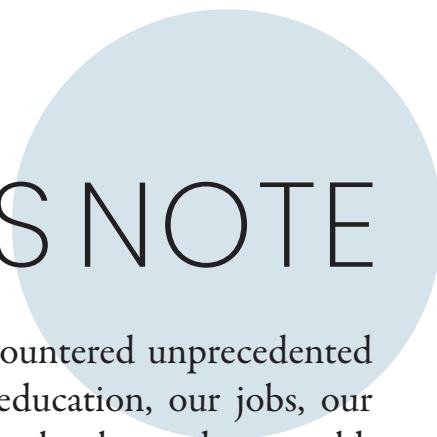
WISH YOU WELL, SORT OF
DANIELLE BUFORD

ART

TIME FOR TEA
COBY BURNS

HONORABLE MENTION

SOIL AND SALT
DIANNE PRECIADO



EDITOR'S NOTE

This year alone, we have encountered unprecedented changes to our health, our education, our jobs, our families, our relationships to each other and our world. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we now speak a language of “social distancing” and “self-isolation,” and we have seen shelves emptied and faces masked. It is the role of writers and artists to articulate, to lend color and shape, to oftentimes seemingly ineffable change. Within these pages, each creative voice will tell you a story of this issue's theme: *transformation.* ●



BLUE GIRL
JOHN SLOWSKY



BROKEN LYRICS FROM SPACE
EVAN OROZCO



CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION
SHELBY ROSSMAN



CHLOE, THE BENGAL NIGHT WATCHER
JOAN HO



A CONSPIRACY OF LEMURS
JONATHAN BROBERG



CREPUSCULE
SYDNEY ROSSMAN



DESERT TRANSFORMATION
DELORES LOEDEL



END OF A PERFECT DAY
SHERRY MANDE



THE EPIC
ELIZABETH COOK



FIREFALL
SUSAN CORLEY



THE FISH WERE FREE
CORAL MCDUFFEE



FROM LAND TO VANS
TEREZA ZAFRA LOPEZ



FULL CIRCLE
ROBERTA VAN HISE



GENTRIFICATION OF OCEANSIDE
SHERRY MANDE



THE GETAWAY – A TEEN’S FANTASY
COBY BURNS



**A GHAZAL: MOTHER EARTH TELLS
US TO STOP, BUT WE PROCEED**
GIBRAN MUSTAFA



**HIP, HIP HOPE HOORAY!
IT’S PRESIDENT’S DAY!**
BRIDGETTE ROBERSON



JUST A LITTLE HAZY
CORAL MCDUFFEE



KEEPING THE PIECES TOGETHER
AMANDA CASTRO-JONES



THE KIDNAPPING OF ANDROMEDA
JONATHAN BROBERG



LA LUNA
GABRIELA JIMENEZ



LITTLE FROG ON A COLORFUL DAY
MARIA RODRIGUEZ



LOST
YOUNGMI BOMBACH



**LOVE SHOULD BE
WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE**
BRIZA PEREZ



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HELEN HIGHLAND-COSLOW



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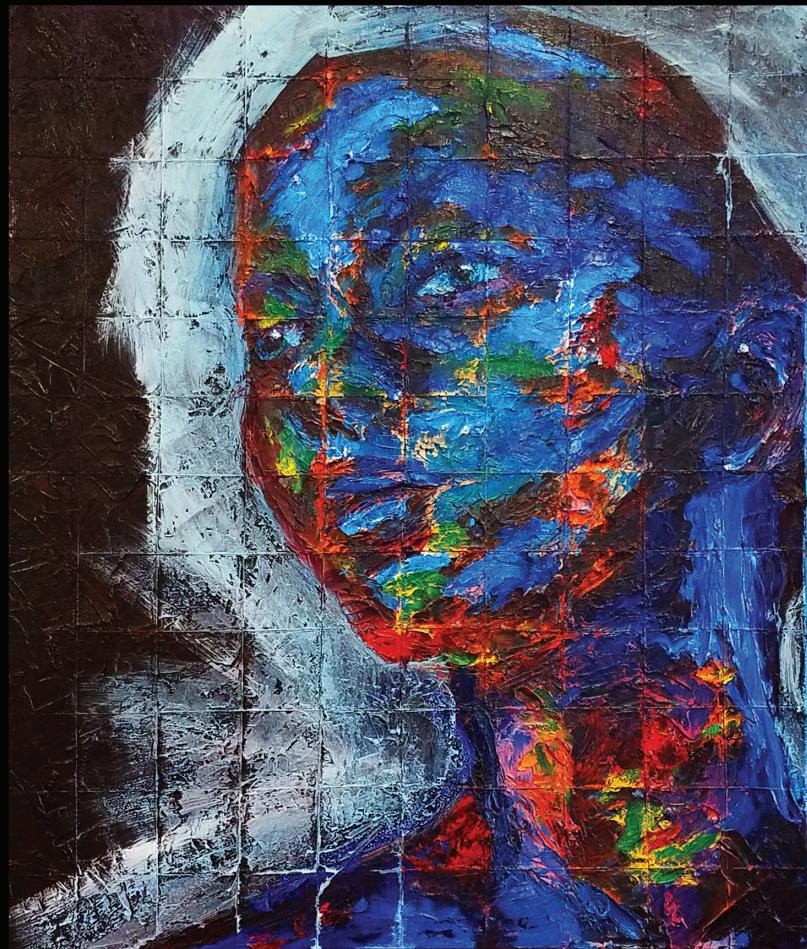
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KYLIE NECOCHEA

JOHN SLOWSKY

BLUE GIRL

John credits his grandmother "Punch" for instilling the passion for art. She introduced him to oil painting and sculpture in his youth.

We carve and create our own likeness as we grow over time, each stroke of our being is shaped by the choices and decisions we make.



EVAN OROZCO

I'm a California native who loves writing and words in general. My main influences are Lorde, Lydia Night, and Stephen Jenkins. I love the way they write songs and how they put words together in a truly magical way. With this poem I wanted to try to create something magical.

BROKEN LYRICS FROM SPACE

The music pushed,
The melody claimed itself to me,
It was now mine.

The universe pushed me,
She said I was a ship to wreck,
But I didn't listen.

The moon pushed me too,
I took the leap and fell,
Crashed and burned.

The stars pushed me too far,
The pressure can create diamonds
Or it can create dust.

The ocean pushed me too far in,
I drowned, overtaken by the waves,
Swept away from everything.

The constellations pushed me
too far in
that I broke.

My song now skips.

**SHELBY
ROSSMAN**

Shelby is a fine artist and digital designer who is pursuing a career in Graphic Design. This piece represents her transformation into a full-fledged designer. Thanks to MiraCosta courses, she went from no illustration experience to creating this hand-drawn, layered piece with Adobe Illustrator in just a few weeks.

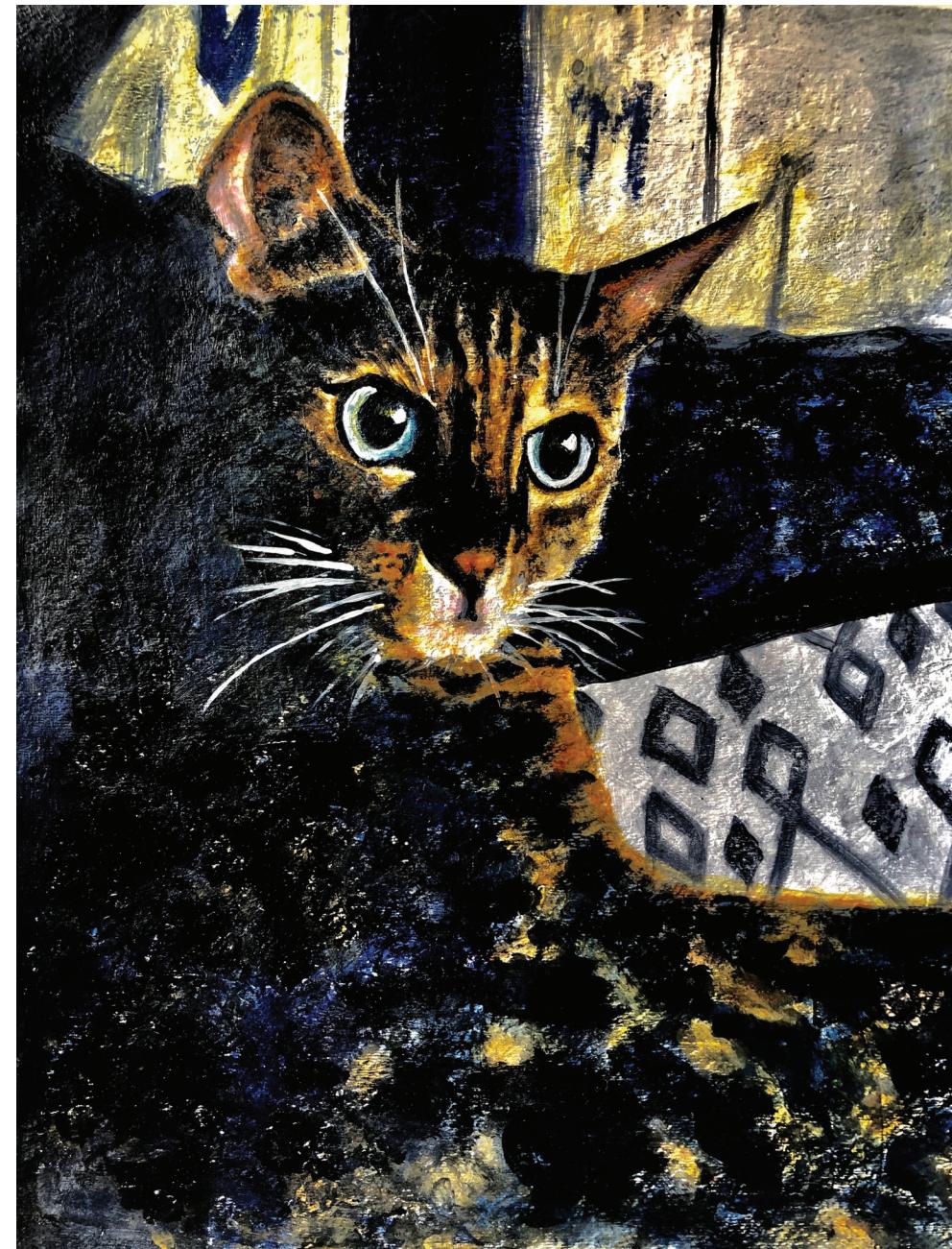
CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION



**JOAN
HO**

This portrait was inspired by my desire to capture my daughter's delightful encounter with Chloe during her arduous medical school training. Emulating Rembrandt's mastery of delicate strokes, it reflects my transformation in a new medium from aspiration to fruition. I dedicate this to you, Dori! Keep dreaming BIG! Love, Mama

CHLOE, THE BENGAL NIGHT WATCHER



A CONSPIRACY OF LEMURS

JONATHAN
BROBERG

As an aspiring biological illustrator, I place equal importance on imagination and factual knowledge in my paintings. My two pieces reflect the theme of "transformation" in that they represent the evolution of gendered power dynamics in primate societies. Thank you, Josh and Andy, for throwing grapes and modeling for me.



CREPUSCULE

**SYDNEY
ROSSMAN**

Sydney is a recent graduate of the MiraCosta Biomanufacturing Bachelor's degree program and an amateur photographer. Her pieces represent her transformation as a photographer where she found her style. She always considered herself a scientist rather than an artist until creating these photos, which transformed her definition of art.



**DELORES
LOEDEL**

This photo represents the continual transformation of the desert landscape. For millions of years the Anza-Borrego Desert has been changing, adapting, and transforming. There is a feeling of peace and solitude that can be found amongst its open roads and landscape.

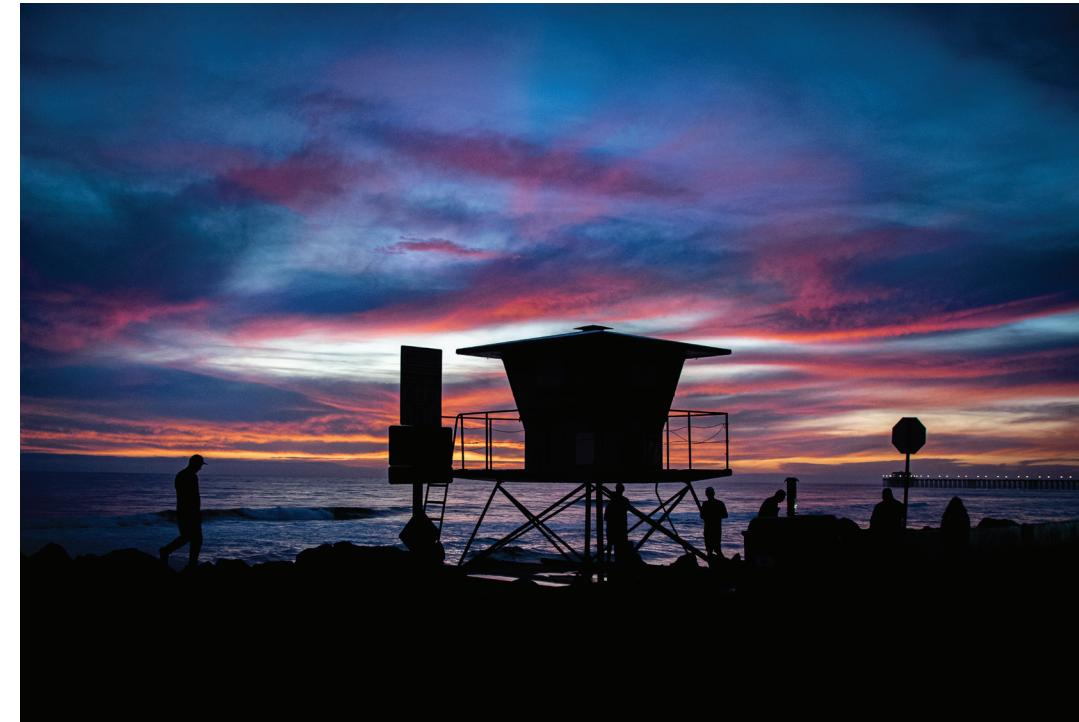
DESERT TRANSFORMATION



**SHERRY
MANDE**

Life is full of transformations that span from the role that your parents play in your life, to how time transforms the place you live and, just like a sunset, happens one day at a time.

END OF A PERFECT DAY



**ELIZABETH
COOK**

This piece is inspired by Tibetan warrior masks and dragons. I was inspired by the transformation that somebody goes under when they take on the role of a warrior. I am fascinated by warriors from different cultures and eras and the initiation process that they undergo.

THE EPIC



**SUSAN
CORLEY**

As an amateur iPhone picture-taker, beside many photographers with telephoto lenses, it was with bated breath that we waited for the moment that the setting sun would hit Horsetail Fall. Then the dry craggy cliff transformed into a glowing water cascade. It lasted only minutes, but the image is eternal.

FIREFALL



CORAL
MCDUFFEE

As writers we have the capacity to focus, divert and transform stories. Words are infinitely malleable. They will shape us all every day of our lives. So it is best to understand that and return the effort.
—Inspired by Octavia Butler

THE FISH WERE FREE

Our mirrors were cracked
Just like our lives in a way
Pulled at the roots
And cast into a shadow
Far far away
But we found serenity
In that dark hollow place
Night after night
Poles in hands
We escaped
The barbed wire would try to hook us
But we were wiser than the fish
Staying close to earth
We found a piece of home
It would seep between our toes
And run through our veins
We longed to drift with it
But the weights dangling at the ends of our poles
Forced us to stay
One by one
We watched them plop
And searched the blue for silvery scales
Instead we found our reflections
Luminously clear as day
The dark of our eyes like shackles
At our feet
Our small height
Attire of a jailbird
Put on trial
All the things that drove us back through those menacing gates
And forever kept our freedom
At bay

TEREZA
ZAFRA LOPEZ

As a third-year student majoring in Business Administration, I want to vocalize the importance of environmental justice within my community. Born and raised in Vista, I recall going on childhood walks around lush green areas that are now covered with dealerships and tourism, thus representing a transition in my community.

FROM LAND TO VANS

Vista, throughout the years, has gone through many changes the city considers to be improvements, in order to have the city to be recognized on the map. As I was growing up in Vista, California I would always walk by this street filled with small shops, large parking spaces, trees, and plants. Flash forward fifteen years later and we see a Norm Reeves Honda Superstore which houses about 400 cars. The construction of this car dealership leads to the destruction of history, nature, and childhood memories that many cherish. One of my childhood memories is standing with my sibling in front of a small restaurant supply store that was surrounded by lush green bushes, pink flowers, and palm trees. According to my grandparent, Cireño, who came to the United States before much of the urbanization took place, “Vista used to be very rural, it was very much a lot of land with plants and trees.” With the Honda Superstore in place, there are fewer plants and trees that are growing in the area. The only plants are in small portions of land that were added to take away from the blacktop of cars that have taken the place of family-owned businesses. Many people who would walk by these areas were families and locals of the Vista area. We now see people who are coming as tourists during the summer and winter months usually causing more traffic and extensive street alterations. Recently there have been more cars passing by and heading into the Honda Superstore which brought much

more attraction to commerce for those who are searching for car deals. The change from being a small family-owned business to a dealership shows the influx of larger corporations taking over smaller ones, causing the economic system to rely more on these larger corporations and their so-called assistance to the community through tax revenues.

Once these large corporations are implemented, they try to offer promises. The Honda Dealership promised the City of Vista that the “sales tax revenue [will be] used to support city services such as fire, law enforcement, streets, senior, and youth services.” This is significant because we see that money is a driving force and without it or its distribution we see no progress in the community. This contributes negatively to both the smaller businesses and the environment in which the revenue is not enough for the impact.

As I saw in my community, change is not avoidable, even if it is considered to be negative to the community. Some of the changes made in Vista have benefited some members in the community while others have not. The evolution of the community of Vista has not improved the lives of all members of our community. It has affected our neighborhoods and politics. I live in an area called Townsite, which is known for its park and a formally high percentage of gang activity in the area. It has come a long way, but there is no improvement of the street itself to

guarantee the safety of drivers and pedestrians. Some areas have little to no improvements compared to other parts of the city. Areas with more tourism are given faster services and improvements to help continue the flow of the business. This shows that areas that are largely business-oriented and are rich receive more benefits compared to those on the outskirts of the city, leaving these areas at the end of the list because they are not bringing in much traffic or income.

The City of Vista's web page provides information on different topics such as the mayor, Senate Bill 946, funding or grants for infrastructure within the Townsite area, economics, and legal actions taken to determine the improvement of the community. The Director of Economic Development, Kevin Ham, and Mayor Judy Ritter accepted the dealerships and larger businesses, creating disparities in a community that is dependent on the city chairs who are supposed to represent their interests.

In recent news, the City of Vista hesitated to pass Senate Bill 946 because it allows street vending; the opposition to this bill would create inequities for the whole community. This bill would let those who can't afford a brick-and-mortar location to be able to still bring in revenue to their community. In my community, there is a large percentage of individuals that identify as Hispanic, Latinx,

and Mexican and, according to statistics, there is a greater probability that they could also identify as Undocumented or Mixed-Status. Regardless of their immigration status, they have the opportunity to open their own business and be independent contractors. With an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) they are able to maintain their business. For many, their small businesses are their source of income for themselves and their families. The city's hesitation to implement Senate Bill 946 and its resources creates inequitable practices for future business owners, regardless of their immigration status.

Vista leaders want greater changes to make Vista a "better" place. We see that there are people who are living in areas such as Townsite that are considered to be lower-middle class. We are leaving these areas behind because of their economic status, delaying projects to fulfill others, and leaving money in unknown locations. After doing this research, I have become more aware of my city, my street, and the supposed improvements that are being made while leaving behind areas with lower socioeconomic status and resources. ●

ROBERTA VAN HISE

Roberta (Bobbe) has written for many years, blogged to thousands, published three books, and taught Bible studies for women and writing for veterans at the Vista Detention Center. She has traveled to many countries, volunteered as a tennis coach for Special Olympics, and experienced great joy in MC writing classes.

FULL CIRCLE

"No trumpets sound when the important decisions of our life are made. Destiny is made known silently." Agnes DeMille

A small house, a shack really, resting on an island shore provides protection from sun and rain; we make do.

Turquoise water surrenders a daily bounty of fish. Mangos and bananas drip from trees. Plumeria blossoms fall like snowflakes.

And then, tourists come – a sea of strangers. Hotels and restaurants burst forth numerous as spring rabbits. Our parents find work and speak

of "educating the children." A college degree leads to an immense city of sidewalks, subways and buildings so tall they hinder the sun.

A frantic, but fruitful life; marriage, suburbs, a car to impress, children to follow the pattern set.

Life wanes, work is done, passions of youth subside. Memories draw me back. I yearn for that time in the little shack that rests

on the shore beside turquoise water - to fish, dine on mangos, bananas, and to watch plumeria blossoms fall like snowflakes.

GENTRIFICATION OF OCEANSIDE

SHERRY
MANDE

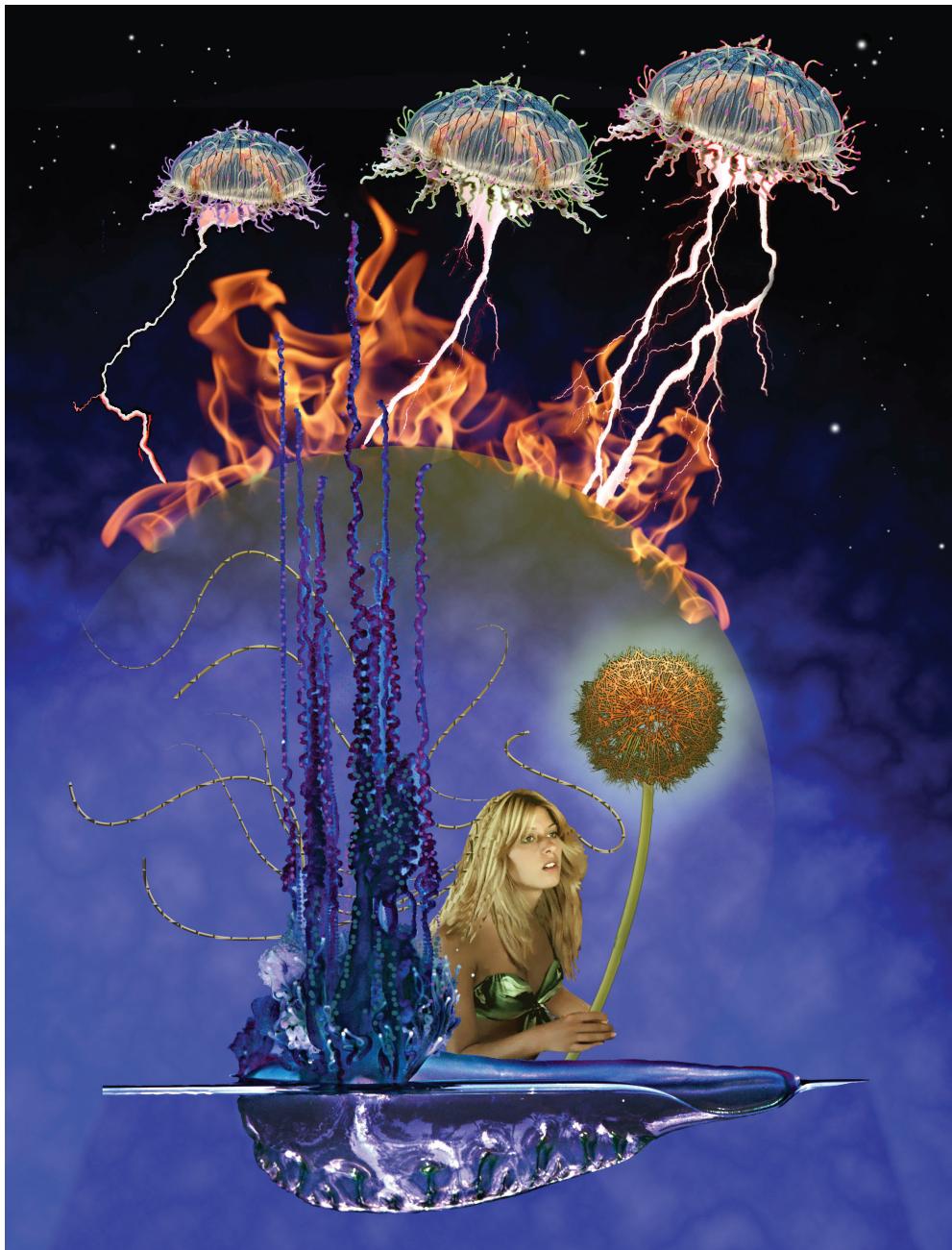
Life is full of transformations that span from the role that your parents play in your life, to how time transforms the place you live and, just like a sunset, happens one day at a time.



**COBY
BURNS**

THE GETAWAY – A TEEN'S FANTASY

When my parents split up we moved from Scotland back to California. I wanted to escape to my Scottish friends. My jellyfish family tries to stop me. The lobster tentacles are a protective forcefield around me. The dandelion is my spirit helping me find my way back home to Scotland.



**GIBRAN
MUSTAFA**

Gibran Mustafa is a student at MiraCosta studying film and television. Currently pursuing a career in the entertainment business, he plans to transfer to UCLA in Fall 2020. He enjoys walking his dog, watching movies, and now writing poems. This poem deals with the forced transformation of Mother Earth.

A GHAZAL: MOTHER EARTH TELLS US TO STOP, BUT WE PROCEED

We are unable to reduce waste of single use plastics, I see
There's no more reusable space for fish in the sea

Recycling isn't even within our *great* nation's vocabulary
We must investigate and see

Our mother doesn't want us to stay and enjoy her company
We've hurt her - she is salty like the sea

Regulating temperature, she does unnoticed and humbly,
But climate change is an affect we must see

She agreed to our stay reluctantly, but now it seems endlessly
Our AirBnB rating would be a C

I wrote "Hip, Hip Hope Hooray! It's President's Day!" because I wanted to bring poetry and politics together. I also wanted to show each president's concept of how to transform America with Obama's intention of keeping hope alive, and Trump's idea of making America great again.

HIP, HIP HOPE HOORAY! IT'S PRESIDENT'S DAY!

Hip, Hip Hope Hooray! It's President's Day!
Hip, Hip, Hope Hooray!
It's President's Day!
Here comes the Savior
Three Cheers for *Songs of My Father*
All together we say:
Hip, Hip, Hope Hooray! It's President's Day!
He gon help me keep my house.
Fly 'in big shots in on a jet plane.
Just a Ponzi scheme.
Ain't no shame in that Nigga's game.
Hip, Hip, Hope Hooray!
It's President's Day!
Got celebrities on his side.
Entitlements about to end.
Thank you for the free phone
Even though it can't roam.
Won't be calling you no time soon.
You go high
We go even higher
How about we both just meet in the middle.
Speaking with eloquence but lacking substance.
Trayvon Martin could 've been your son?
What about Sandra Bland is she kin?
Oh, that mother fucka be selling shorts.
There goes the Savior
Two terms done come and gone.
Still a lot of work undone.
Gotta keep incarcerating Black, Hispanic and poor White men
For selling dope because that deters hope
Never mind, corporate drug dealers

Prescribed opioids are the villains.
So glad your time is up.
There goes the Savior!
See ya later alligator
After a while crocodile
Don't let the doorknob hit ya where the good lord split ya-
Adios.
Bye, Bye Sweetie Pie.
Here we go again-
Another Savior who will make all well again.
Fannie Lou would boo hoo and Kaepernick would take a knee too.
Trump, Trump a Pence!
He's the Savior of White privilege
Hip, Hip, Hope Hooray!
It's President's Day!
Fences that need to be amend
Stomp out Affordable Health Care,
Will make America great again?
Build a wall?
No such luck,
Just an apprentice fuck -up.
Impeachment on the rise,
You better hide.
Hip, Hip, Hope Hooray! Make America great again!
It's President's Day!
See the babies cry,
As they Fall to sleep in cages.
Dreamers, having nightmares instead of having sweet dreams.
It's an immigration sty.
Make America great again.
It's President's Day!

As writers we have the capacity to focus, divert and transform stories. Words are infinitely malleable. They will shape us all every day of our lives. So it is best to understand that and return the effort.

—Inspired by
Octavia Butler

JUST A LITTLE HAZY

Bang! Bang!
My dad's knuckles crash against my door.
A systematic alarm clock
that I chose to ignore.
10 minutes later clucking
Pierces my window
Bringing me to my feet
All those damn birds want to do
is eat!

I muffle a not so good morning to my mom.
Then escape to the kitchen
like a bandit
with nature valley bars in both arms.
I open the truck door
To my dad's heavy sigh
With equal enthusiasm
I roll my eyes.
The car's cool leather licks my thighs.

We enter the harbor
Greeted by the same old Oceanside touristy sign
The warm colors of the phony sun mock me
As the temperature gauge reads 55.

After parking I take out my rubber wetie
Sand is woven between its seams
Like velcro it rubs my raw skin
I pray to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
"Oh God, please let my rashes somehow subside."

The last nature valley bar is stuffed down my face.
Its crumbs plague my wax.
But I wipe them off my board
leaving no trace.
The sand might as well be snow.
It pricks my vulnerable toes.
The offshore wind pulls back my blond streaks
for the first time today.
My face is free.
I stop for a moment.
To look to the sea.
And inhale the bittersweet salty breeze.

KEEPING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Even before the breakup, parenting will be one of the most challenging responsibilities you'll ever have. Single parenting will trump the challenges you faced when you were still a duo. You just have to remember that these tiny humans are counting on you to, at the very least, keep them alive. It is time to put yourself last because now you're solo. I can't say "in the end" because it never ends, but soon you do realize that every steak dinner you gave up so those three would have enough to eat or not buying that cute black suspender skirt you've had in your Windsor online cart for a full month, debating on whether you should buy it for yourself or save the money for your \$1,700 a month rent, *is* worth your three angels' safety, stability, and happiness.

How did you become a single parent? Let's go back to the beginning of the end. Your husband will come back from this last long one-year deployment to Afghanistan, and he will be almost unrecognizable to you. Over the course of that year after he came back you'll slowly notice him change from his normal loving, kind, and patient demeanor and turn into this mean, impatient, and hateful monster. At first you won't understand why he stopped looking at you and started looking almost through you, but you'll start finding clues everywhere.

You'll find five empty handles of Popov vodka hidden in the water heater closet. For two seconds your brain will try to protect you with a

lie, but your rational self won't be able to think of a valid excuse besides the real truth. Yes, he has been drinking that cheap vodka. A handle a day for the last five days. You'll ask yourself, *has the man you've trusted with your life and heart for the past six years been drinking all of these gallons and gallons of vodka by himself and then driving your children to school?*

PTSD is the name of the culprit that will come back with your husband or maybe it was always there. He'll try to drown that beast with the alcohol, but will end up drowning himself instead. You will give him an ultimatum: cheap vodka or your wife and kids. He won't think you'll actually pack up your kids with one bag each, get on that one-hour-and-sixteen-minute flight back to California, and leave him with his choice in Utah. But that's exactly what you will do. Don't worry, there's a semi-happy ending where he's five years sober after only two relapses with alcohol.

It will take him another year to get better and you will fall out of love with him while waiting. You'll end up single. You'll feel almost jealous when he finds a new woman to love him. Not because he found someone new, but because you had to suffer for him to get clean and back to his old self and now she is living the life that he took away from you. I promise you won't be bitter forever. You, him, and his new girlfriend are actually friends now.

After a failed attempt at a new relationship, you will still be single. Being a single mother was not part of your all-so-well-planned-outlife, but that'll be your reality. Your raw emotions are going to make you feel like you are going to explode into tiny pieces and you're going to feel like your stomach is falling over and over as if being dropped from the very top of that Superman ride at Six Flags that you swore you would never ride again.

While you are still trying to navigate through that heartbreak and learning how to be a single parent, one of your close friend's little girls will be diagnosed with leukemia. You will be humbled from watching that baby fight for her life. She'll go through spinal taps, endure chemo, have a bone marrow transplant, suffer through severe pain, and fight her for her life the entire time. Best life lesson for you: "it could always be worse."

You will get stronger and learn to put on a happy face, even when you are the furthest from that. Especially in front of the kids. When it comes to talking in front of them you will have your best word filter on. Even when you're upset because he relapsed again. You

will never call Dad a "drunk loser" in front of them, although that is what you're thinking. That will confuse them. You will often think back and remember how hard it was when your parents divorced and Mom would tell you that Dad left us to have a new family just because she was hurt or angry at him. Clearly her filter was nonexistent. Yes, it was a painful and confusing time for you. Make this tran-

He won't think you'll actually pack up your kids with one bag each, get on that one-hour-and-sixteen-minute flight back to California, and leave him with his choice in Utah. But that's exactly what you will do.

sition as smooth as possible for them starting with watching what and how you talk about what is going on with Dad. Remember, you too have come from a broken home. You will protect those innocent babies and keep them from having the same resentment that you know so well when it comes to your parents.

After uploading your resume to every job search engine, you will be hired as a med-

ical assistant. You'll have health benefits and vacation/sick time. Not to go to the Bahamas like you planned before the beginning of the end. You will use that time to take paid time off when the kids are sick or need to go to the dentist for their six-month checkup and teeth cleaning. You will try to keep your mental health stable and follow up with your psychiatrist, although that will be last on your long list of things to do. They will always come first. It will be hard to not be able buy every toy truck your son sees while window shopping since money is now only for necessities. You need to save as much money as you can in case of an emergency like when you ran over a sharp nail with your car tire and had to replace it.

You will figure out a routine and be as organized and timely as you can be. The routine will start the night before every weekday/workday/school day. You will get them fed right when you get home from working after picking up three kids at three different places: daycare, elementary and middle school every weekday. Make sure they get showered and are in bed by 9 p.m.. Then get four outfits for the next day and pack yourself a lunch for work. Of course

they will eat the free lunch at school because you only have enough money for bills and a few groceries. Make sure to be awake every weekday by 5:30 a.m. before the kids wake up. Take this short-lived quiet time to get yourself ready for work. When they wake up at 6 a.m. they will need to get all hygiene and grooming tasks done before 7 a.m.. Make sure everyone is out of the house and on the way to all four destinations by 7:10 a.m.. Your kids will thrive when they have stability and structure.

They also need love and affection. Remember to hug them at least eight times per day because your second-grader read somewhere that people need at least that many to survive. Saying "I love you" will be a constant phrase. Showing and telling them they are loved is almost as important as eating nutritious meals and drinking water. You want them to be smart, polite, honest and genuinely caring humans so you have to teach them early in life.

All these things are what you did as a two-parent gig. But it will only be you after the divorce. Your family has never really been helpful so you need to plan on being mom and dad. When the kids come to you with a broken heart you'll be their counselor. When they are happy because they made the volleyball team you'll be a confidant. When they bring you a test to sign because they failed you'll be the disciplinarian. This is not even

half of what is still to come. You will wear every hat and it will be impressive how well you do it.

Just know that you will make it through and will grow everyday with your babes. It will take time, but you will become content with the fact that you get that whole king-size bed to yourself and are completely independent! Go, you! Give yourself a pat on your back and remember, *it could always be worse.* ●

JONATHAN
BROBERG

THE KIDNAPPING OF ANDROMEDA

As an aspiring biological illustrator, I place equal importance on imagination and factual knowledge in my paintings. My two pieces reflect the theme of Transformation in that they represent the evolution of gendered power dynamics in primate societies. Thank you, Josh and Andy, for throwing grapes and modeling for me.



GABRIELA
JIMENEZ

LA LUNA

“La Luna” was inspired by a conversation about machismo and toxic masculinity. Women too often forget their power and its contrast to the overly celebrated mediocrity that we have accepted for men to embody. This poem was meant to empower and acknowledge women and their influence on the world.

La Luna

You look down on us
But
Do we look up at you

We are
So concentrated on El Sol
No where near aware of your
Power & Beauty

You sit up in the sky
Brave enough to keep the darkness away

La Luna

Equal force to El Sol
You shine too

La Luna

At peace with herself
Balanced
High in the sky

Serenity
& Love

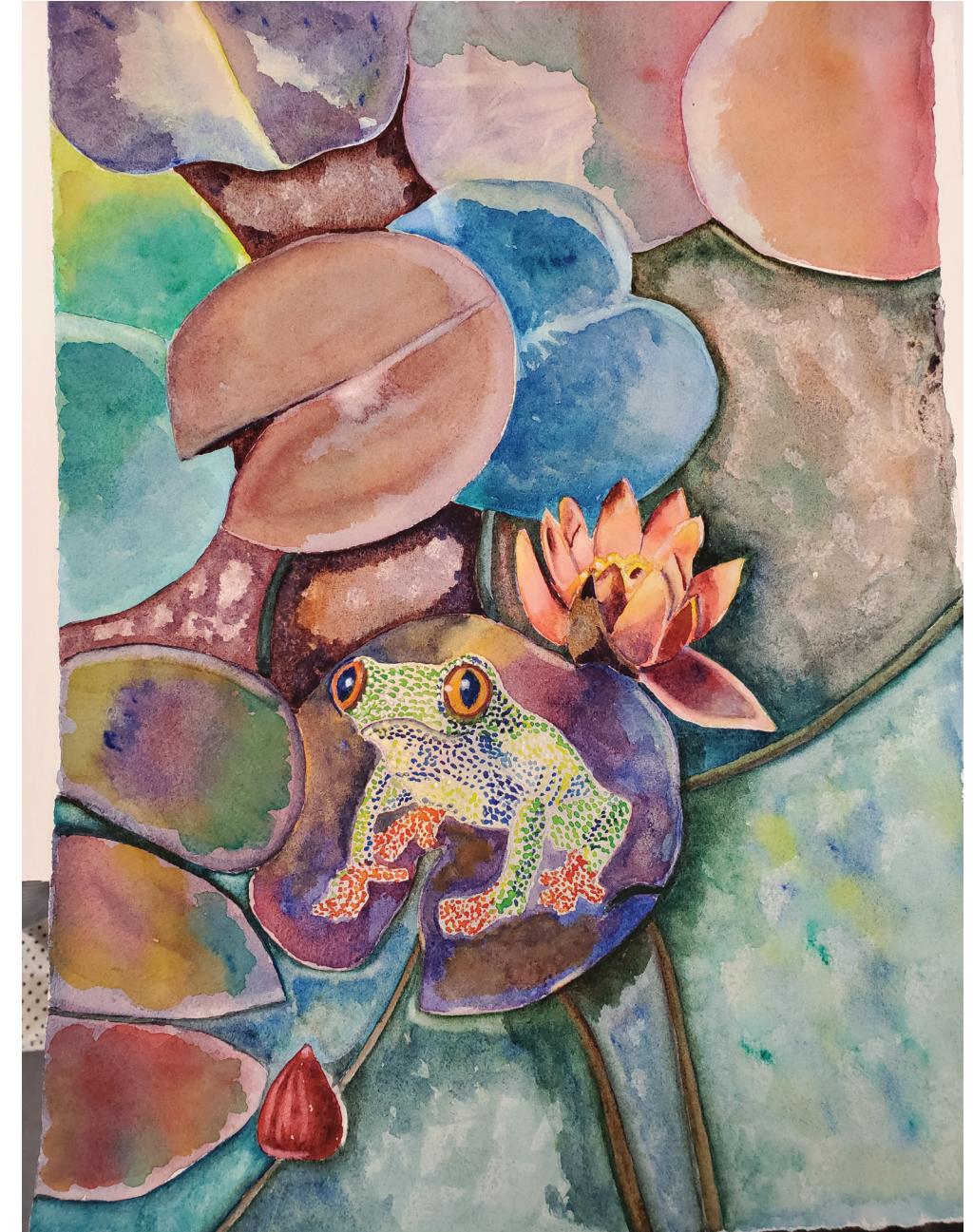
If one day
You decided never to rise again
That would be the end of our story

Yet you rise time and time again
Keeping us alive

MARIA
RODRIGUEZ

LITTLE FROG ON
A COLORFUL DAY

My name is Maria Rodriguez. I live in Oceanside. I have been working as a freelance artist for several years. I like working with different mediums. When I painted *Little Frog on a Colorful Day*, I realized a transformation occurred not only in the painting but also in me.



YOUNGMI BOMBACH

Lost is the first political piece I created, and the idea came from the brutal tragedy called “Se-wol” from South Korea in 2014. Loss of humanity, guilt, morality, and responsibility led to a cost of 299 lives. *Lost* is a symbol of the ignorant society that we currently live in.

LOST



BRIZA PEREZ

I’m turning twenty this year, and all I want to do is tell my truth. This piece does that, and narrates how love has transformed me over the years, and how I have learned that love is the most frightening verb to know and do.

LOVE SHOULD BE WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE

There is a constant ringing noise in my ears; it sounds nothing like the morning chirping of birds. It’s like choking on cold beach water; it feels like it’s seeped into the pores of your skin and found residence in your bones. My ears hum with his words; my skin burns with the palm print of his hands. For seventeen years, I thought love was supposed to feel this way. But three weeks before my eighteenth birthday, I had my heart broken for the first time. The morning after my mother’s birthday, she attempted suicide on my bathroom floor. She had almost overdosed on sleeping pills, the same ones I kept alongside a few other over-the-counter medicines in the drawer of my bedside table.

After a few too many sore eyes and busted lips, my mother, for the second time, had attempted to end her life because of love. Before I knew her to be, she was under the thumb of my father and his vicious violent tantrums. She thought he loved her; after all, he bought her gifts and told her how beautiful she was, always the morning after spitfire arguments and nasty bruises that couldn’t be hidden by the grey and color-consuming uniform my mother wore for work. She tells me all she ever wanted was to stop the heartache. Her heart was broken, even if he had done it for the millionth time. Mom never stopped to think about her four kids, or her five grandkids; she only wanted to stop the pain, stop him from leaving.

That morning, I held my mother in my arms, pleading with her to tell me how much she took. I begged her to throw it back up, I pleaded with her and tried to talk some sense into her. But you can’t console a heartache; you can’t even numb the pain. I held my semi-conscious mother, crying out to my father to let me call 911. He didn’t seem so phased; he got ready for work and told me to force milk down my mother’s throat, said it would make him feel better. He’d already done this before.

Even though my mother was mostly at the center of his abuse, over the years, some of his special attention had fallen onto me. I had grown up in a house that fueled his need for violence, his obsessive compulsive desire to control every aspect of your life; it should have made me soft and obsolete, but I didn’t turn out as he had hoped.

Even before I learned to read, I was always disobedient and always talking back. Every hand he ever laid on me only nourished the need to be everything he hated, everything he told me not to do. I gave him every reason to bruise me and hurt me. I used to think, it didn’t matter how many classes I missed or how many palm prints I was covered in; I would always heal. But he taught me more than just how to hide nicks and scrapes; I learned that love meant worthlessness, despair, and self-hatred.

That night, when I sat on the hospital floor, when I pictured my mom as bones in the ground being consumed by the vast earth, I for-

got to breathe. I wondered whether I would grow to be a thorn or a rose in my mother's garden of dreams. So I ran away from home, away from her reach and away from his hands.

For seventeen years, love meant anguish to me; my mom taught me that love always has consequences. Her love for me and her love for the only man I've ever hated led me to a lifetime of resentment and endless doubts. And now, nearly two years later, I still keep pieces of her stuffed in my wallet as reminders that it can happen once more.

I never wanted kids, I never wanted to get married, not if it meant having to love someone like him. I thought that's what love was: a suicide attempt and years of anguish. I didn't understand how anyone wanted a life like that, but the year after her suicide, I knew better.

It wasn't just abuse that taught me how to love, it was how I saw others love. Even my brother who tried to be the immaculate opposite of my father, gentle and kind, saw love as raw. It meant picking up girls at bars, unconsenting open relationships, and his misconstrued way of seeing women as objects. It means to him that love is not enough, even with three kids and a wife undeserving of his pain.

Just like him, and my father before me, I saw love as raw and always never enough. I never wanted to love someone, never wanted to be hurt like my mother.

I had never even had a boyfriend until I got out of high school, never uttered the words "I love you." If this is what love feels like, if it means hands that have no places on my skin, if it means senseless words that degrade you to nothing, then I wanted no part in it.

But there I found myself, a few weeks

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For seventeen years, love meant anguish to me; my mom taught me that love always has consequences.

after my mother's attempt, falling in love for the first time. And I would be lying if I told you it was just like the movies. I was unsure and apprehensive of how I felt. I didn't know if I wanted to be in love; I knew I didn't want to hurt someone or be hurt. I fell in love, completely and utterly in love. I'm still in love, but when we first started dating, it was always heated and argumentative.

I don't mean he's heated like I would describe my father. We loved hard; it left no room to breathe. My anxiety over love created

pockets of doubt and insecurity in the beginning of our relationship. He may deny this, for the sake of my feelings, but I know it's true. I manifested the need for constant reassurance and instigated many of our arguments, coincidentally always about whether we loved one another or not. At first, it confirmed my fears. But the longer I stayed out of reach, the clearer it became.

I used to doubt that what my father did was wrong, but I no longer had him to tell me how to feel. Even if she stayed, I needed to leave to help her; I needed to know how to be better for me and for her. I did that; Miguel taught me that.

Miguel loves me, I know that much. He knew where I came from, where I had gotten these ideas of love from, and was adamant to teach me otherwise. He listened to me cry and cry, and while he learned what the world was really like, I learned to love. We didn't always meet in the middle, but we always came back with some sort of understanding for the other, and slowly, piece by piece, we fit. If you ask why we kept trying, the answer is I don't know. Maybe I subconsciously knew I already loved him, or maybe I just wanted something in my life to work out. So I kept trying, and maybe he already loved me, and just wanted to try. Because isn't that what love is? Trying and trying, even if it doesn't always work out. Just like my mother wanted to.

After the year spent agonizing over why and how, I think I understand now. I used to tell my mother, if you love him, you don't love me. A part of me still believes that, but I know now why she loved both of us. I know why she never left. Months after her attempt, I still couldn't forgive her, not just over her attempt, but for the years she stayed with him.

My mother's suicide attempt showed me what love was, while teaching me what it isn't. Love should be without consequence.

But her fears and doubts, the ones she taught me from a young age, still don't just disappear. Like a cold you can't get rid of, it lingers with me everywhere I go. You don't just unlearn habits; they die hard.

Sometimes, I still see it at home. Even after I came home and he didn't, she still copes with it. The effects of love, how it led her here. How we are one year later, still apprehensive, still learning what it means when someone loves you.

I'm sometimes afraid of love and where it leads me. I don't always know how to love someone, but I've started by telling them, by telling him I love him. It's not always perfect, but I can tell you what love is now. Love should never hurt, never bruise or scar. Love is knowing how he likes his coffee, if he turns the water off when he brushes his teeth, or if he sleeps with socks on. Sweet mochas, fraps,

and he only drinks it when he feels like it; always; and only when it's cold out.

I'm no expert; I'll always be a few hundred steps behind everyone else. I don't know if I'll ever be able to catch up, but I like to think I don't have to, that maybe love is enough.

I relearned that skin is meant to be kissed, not scarred; that hugs don't mean repercussions; and talking back doesn't equal abuse. I don't always remember love, but it's a work in progress, just like most of the poems I've written.

So I'll leave you with this:
to you.

*privileged enough to kiss someone i love,
to hold him in my hands and tell him
he feels soft and warm in this embrace*

*he makes me burn bright
feels a lot like a loose sun between our
chests*

*i want to show him this love,
that i carry with me,
not like the strands of hair he finds all
over his clothes
where have these blues gone?
the grass is even greener,
glasses a little cleaner,
i say to myself staring at him*

*privilege is this kiss,
this – i don't feel so shy anymore*

*i'd write him another few poems for him
to know that i am the sun under his gaze.*

*he's the color of my pink and white sheets,
the light seeping from outside fills me
with rosy feelings*

*i tell him,
he makes me taste the calm skies and
that i am every bit grateful for the
hurricane tides
that he sailed for me.*

*i tell him i love him,
once, twice, maybe all day.*

b.p ●

Helen LeiNani Highland-Coslow resides on a small family farm in Vista, California. She is a forty-five-year-old wife and mother of four. She is working to get her PhD in English as well as her dance and yoga instructor license. Her goal is to become an English professor.

MEMORIES OF THE PEPPER TREE

I have lived in Vista for a decade now. It has become the place where all four of my kids have gone to elementary school, junior high, high school, and college. It remains a stable home for all of our family to live together. Over the years, Vista has given us new traditions, such as the Strawberry Festival, Viking Festival, Scottish Highland games, and Vista Christmas Parade, which my daughter will be in this year. She won the first runner-up, (First Princess) of Miss Teen Vista Pageant 2019. Proud mom here. My husband was born in Oceanside and grew up there. His grandfather and grandmother owned the property we live on in Vista. So he had been coming here and going to the Pepper Tree for years. At one point he thought his mother worked there, they went there so often. She assured him that she never worked there, but that they did go a lot because they loved the ice cream so much. I myself totally agree; their shakes, flurries, sundaes and dipped cones are really scrumptious.

The Pepper Tree has been around since 1953. I love how they kept the integrity of the building the same and didn't add on more structure. Instead they just added an outdoor eating area that was semi-covered. Also, the sign is pret-

ty much the same. The fact that they kept the original colors, the same blue and white, makes it feel more authentically hometown. It's pretty neat to see how much the foliage and trees behind the Pepper Tree have grown from then to now. I know it takes time to grow trees, but it's really cool to see that a lot of them sprung up right behind the building.

Since the 70s, new buildings have sprung up everywhere. The most recent is the entire block of North Santa Fe. The Pepper Tree sits almost smack dab in the middle of it. This area has been changed by the building of three apartment buildings with stores underneath. They run in three sections down North Santa Fe. They tower large, modern,

and ominous. However, where there was once just a dirt lot they have made a path and a small park with lots of art sculptures along that path. All of downtown Vista, which is right behind the Pepper Tree, has become very trendy and accessible. It now boasts many different breweries, wineries, and restaurants, as well as three different theatrical playhouses. The Strawberry Festival, which happens right in the heart of the downtown area, is my favorite time in Vista. Our entire family loves walking up and down

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**All in all, I feel like
our community has
definitely grown in a
positive way.**

the streets and looking at all the vendors and smelling all the yummy food. We get to listen to the different bands that come to play for the festival. One time I was even in the parade for Crunch Gym as a Zumba dancer. It was so much fun. And now it's a family tradition.

All in all, I feel like our community has definitely grown in a positive way. There are fewer vacant lots now. With all that construction underway it makes it hard to commute. You just have to plan ahead and leave earlier. It's a small adjustment. Fortunately, some of the construction is already finished and looks very appealing—nice and clean, but probably very expensive. Vista had a large shortage of single-family dwellings and low-income apartments. Now with the introduction of a few different communities and apartments, Vista will be able to accommodate its growing population. That, to me, sounds like an upgrade in housing. So in this instance I believe that it is a positive step towards improving the way of life in Vista. I also believe that because the business of the Pepper Tree is still able to be relevant and make new traditions for all the new families that are coming into the neighborhood. It's important to have some history in a city. The Pepper Tree is definitely a landmark and should be patronized regularly by all the community members from cities surrounding Vista. It's not to be missed. If you're looking for ice cream, it won't let you down. ●

Misslie, adj. Alone, lonely, solitary because of the absence of a usual companion. Much like how impactful life events tend to shape us as the people we know ourselves to be, the character in my story finds herself in a transformative period in her life, both physically and emotionally.

MISSLIE

Shamu whips his tail just close enough to the side of the enclosure, sending a tidal wave that drenches her hair and sneakers. Her little water parka clings to her body, but she's unbothered. She grips Daddy's hand as they file through the crowds. The sun is hot, and her shoes make little squishy sounds as she jogs to keep up with his long strides. *I'll get you that pretzel you wanted*, he tells her, *but only if you give Mommy and me a break*. She certainly likes the idea of that pretzel, but she doesn't want to stand still long enough to risk missing out on the shark exhibit. She looks like a stray, with her soft curls plastered to her forehead and the vision of Dora on her shirt obscured by lunchtime mustard stains. She can't picture herself in that way, though. All she can see is him. He is the tallest person she knows. And the funniest. He gives the best hugs and understands her drawings in a way no one else can. She sits on a long bench, feet dangling over the asphalt, taking in her warm pretzel in tiny bite-sized chunks. She listens to Mommy and Daddy laugh about things she doesn't understand, but then they look at her and ask questions about all the different types of sharks she's learned about recently, which she is happy to oblige. Daddy says something funny, and Mommy rests her hand, ever so slightly, on his forearm. Even at her years, she senses a deep and knowing connection, but also knows, despite the intimacy between them, that this moment was made for her too.

She's bigger now, both physically and in that she takes up a little more of the world. Her computer screen flashes images of boys she'll dream about but never meet. To her, the world is as open as it is mystifying. Her hair is different now. She straightens it every morning, because that's what the other girls do, and that's what the boys like. Pulling her stick-straight hair back into a tight bun, she focuses on the music filling her space, thinking that maybe if she closes her eyes and focuses only on the beat of the music, she can get lost in her own fantasies. Mom's home now. Her voice is heard muffled through the floor and Daddy's is heard too. She knows they're fighting again, but rather than confront that topic she finds her headphones to be of greater preference. There's someone at her door. She knows it's Daddy, because he's the only one who knocks. She opens the door, and he's there. She doesn't remember him being so old before. He's been losing weight recently, she notices, and his hair is whiter. *Your mother is going to be staying with some friends for a while*, he tells her, *She told me to tell you she loves you*. His smile and his tone are genial, but his eyes betray him. She's never seen Daddy cry before and would swear he doesn't know how, and yet the deep lines etched into his brow coupled with the puffiness of his bloodshot eyes stirs something dark and unsettling within her. She feels anger well up inside of her. Anger at Mom, anger at the world, and anger at herself and how powerless she feels.

Daddy's gone now. They tell her that he'll never really leave her, but the world is darker now, like he was the sole supplier of all things warm and with him left the sun. That's how she knows he's gone. And in his place is left a poor imitation: the portrait they've hung on the wall of her home. A cloud of black shapes pass in front of her vision and its perimeters. Some touch her elbow and the small of her back, murmuring words of comfort she cannot hear. Some touch the picture frame, as if its mere existence might bring them closer to his light. But she knows better. She knows for a fact that this sickly man grinning in a hospital bed, eyes tight with the confrontation of his own mortality, is an imposter. Her father's self-assured, easy smile. His booming laughter that still echoes through the house like a phantom. His smell, which could not be described in any way other than how it made her feel to have his strong arms close around her body and rest her face on his chest. These things are gone from this man. She feels a sudden tightness inside of her, like she's either going to scream or cry or throw up. The audacity. They took a man, whose spirit was as bright and complex as stardust, and they turned him into this. She would not remember him this way, it would

not stand. Her trance breaks, and she sees mom leaned against the back of the couch, half eclipsed by the mourners, as if they might swallow her up with condolences. Mom looks pretty, which makes her angrier, although she can't figure out why. Daddy's best friend is there too. He's there beside Mom with an arm secured around her waist like she may wilt without him. Mom looks up to him with

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She looks smaller now, like the weight of her thoughts has made her smaller. She peers down over the edge and watches the traffic of passing cars like ants on the sidewalk.

a look that conveys deep meaning. She looks away, feeling like she's intruded in something intimate. The bile rises in her throat.

Things are different now. To her, the world no longer carries excitement and the spring of her wonderment has run dry. She feels the weight of things now. She cut her hair two summers ago, it now lies limply past her shoulders. She doesn't straighten it any-

more, because what's the point? She's been forgetting the sentiment behind most things now, struggling to find any rhyme or reason in this world she's in. These days, things only look better to her through the fumes of her mind's artificial distortion. Mother doesn't like the smoke though, bad for the baby. She tried to love it once, the baby, or to even tolerate it. But its nose reminds her too much of its father's, the father that's not her father, and she's disgusted by it. The child was born out of betrayal, she decides, and therefore she can't love it, or else Daddy's memory would fade from her and be replaced by this new family that's usurped her home. She's sitting with the baby now. She watches it sleep peacefully, given the protection from the harshness of this world that she was denied. What gives it the right? She lifts it from its gilded bassinet and holds it out in front of her, studying

its features. Its smooth skin and angelic blue eyes. The tufts of fine golden hair sprouting off the top of its head curl against its forehead. *This must be Mother's great victory*, she decides, *To have the perfect second chance at her perfect only child*. For a moment she considers dropping it and killing Mother's family just like she's killed hers. But the baby opens its eyes and looks at her, and she knows she won't do

it. Looking at the child makes her heart swell, and suddenly she's disgusted at herself, at the self-betrayal. The baby starts to cry, and Mother is there, scooping it away. Mother is yelling things she doesn't care to hear, and suddenly she's outside, and the front door slams.

A breeze passes through her and she shudders from the impact. She's high up now, very much so, and thinks that maybe she's looking at the whole city from her perch. Her hands are cold, balled up in her armpits, but her cheeks are hot and wet. Her resolution to act is minted, yet she hesitates at the edge. She looks smaller now, like the weight of her thoughts has made her smaller. She peers down over the edge and watches the traffic of passing cars like ants on the sidewalk. She wonders about the people in those cars. Where are they going? Her guilt intensifies, because she knows they shouldn't have to be affected by her own selfish decisions. *This will be a very bad night for them, she thinks, but not for me.* She backs up a few paces, thinking that getting a running start might make it harder for her to be a coward, to stop. The sun begins to rise, peeking amber rays over the edge of the skyline. *It's too early, she thinks, it can't be time yet.* She backs up one more step, ready to run before she loses her window of opportunity, but something stops her. It's not something inside her, rather something in her periphery, something which she cannot detect

that pulls at her. And suddenly he's there. She feels him in the air. The surges of wind carry the whispers of his voice. The stars become his eyes. And the sun, the glorious sun, is his soul. She previously thought she might be out of tears, yet they flow freely now. How could she have been so blind? How could Daddy have left her, when he was in every stroke of the clock, every sprouted seedling, every crack of thunder? The budding rays of sunlight flow into her as the breeze pushes her hair back and nestles into her chest. She knows then, that the last physical representation of him in this world lies not in some box in the ground, but in the curls of her hair and the stars in her eyes. She would not let him die twice. ●

SYDNEY ROSSMAN

Sydney is a recent graduate of the MiraCosta Biomanufacturing Bachelor's degree program and an amateur photographer. Her pieces represent her transformation as a photographer where she found her style. She always considered herself a scientist rather than an artist until creating these photos, which transformed her definition of art.

MIST FEVER



MY LAST BREATH

Taking my last breath of air, I began to sink, no longer having the strength to stay afloat. Thinking back to the beginning of the day, if only I had been able to control my stubbornness I would not have been in this situation at all.

Looking into the great, deep labyrinth of the forests of Peru, I saw the life of the jungle in every direction. I heard the sound of all different kinds of animals all around me, as I stood in a tremendous flower garden that my mother had planted. The freshness of the flowers and the forest filled my nose as water droplets dripped from the tall trees, a sure sign of a recent storm. Being only four years old, my friends and I quite happily plucked away at my mother's precious flower garden. With arms filled with flowers, we scampered away with our cakes we had made. I wanted to decorate them with the flowers we had gathered because I was so proud of our great cakes made of clay, water, and dirt. No sooner had we begun to decorate the cakes than I heard my mom shout from our small jungle house, "Ryan, Andrew, Toby, and Ashley, it's time to come in." In that moment, I felt great anger that my mother had chosen this exact moment to call us home. I wasn't finished with my mud cakes. I did not want to stop playing with my friends and miss the opportunity to decorate my cakes. I let my mother's flowers fall from my arms, and with great stubbornness, I began to walk back to our house, leaving my mud cake undecorated.

My little legs carried me at a crawling pace to my mother, and on the way, I soon began to observe how hot it was. Drops of sweat began to drip from my head, reminding me of the little droplets I saw falling off my mother's flowers, and I thought to myself that when I arrived at the house I was going to get a glass of water before returning to my friends. I prepared myself to protest to my mother for disturbing me and calling me away from my cake-making activity with my friends. As I neared my house I glimpsed my mom coming out of the house with towels in one of her hands and in the other hand, a basket full of dirty clothes from the previous day. Oh no, I thought to myself, it is time to go down to the river to take a bath, and that meant I would not be able to continue to make my cakes.

"Bath time," my mom called out to me, "Let's go down to the river." I looked up at my mother with the realization that playtime was over, and it would be dinner time soon. "Mom, I don't want to take a bath today. Can I keep playing?" My mother's dark blue eyes roamed from my head to my feet, inspecting how dirty I was. Just from her eyes I knew what she saw: a small little girl with white-blond hair and sun-kissed cheeks from being out in the sun all day. My hands were all muddy and the rest of me was also covered with dirt and sweat. I was completely dirty; admitting this to myself, I knew what her answer would be. My mom then said, "Honey, you have been playing all day in the hot sun; it is

time to get all cleaned up." I knew that nothing I would say would change her mind. "Fine. I will go with you, but I won't go in."

Close by lay a swiftly moving river. As we walked down to the river, I heard crunching under my bare feet, leaves sticking to my feet from the dampness. It was a peaceful walk to the water, and along the way my friends joined us. I relaxed, decided to have fun, and thought that I would possibly go in the water after all. When I arrived at the water's edge, the beauty hit me. The light blue water was shimmering from the sun that was seeping through the trees. I most definitely was going to jump in the water. The water looked cool, and although my mother said it was time to get cleaned up, I could also play with my friends in the water.

The cold freshness of the water surrounded me from head to toe, and my body was cleansed from all the dirt and grime. I was overjoyed to be playing with my friends in the water. All was forgotten. The memories of being disrupted by my mother and never getting the opportunity to finish my cakes were drowned out by the laughter of my friends and splashing one another in the water. At the shore of the river, my mother was nearly finished washing the dirty clothes by hand. All was good. I never remembered having such a fun time taking a bath before. I was quite content with the way the day had turned

out; nothing could go wrong. Then I heard it: the same voice who called me away from my cake-making was now calling me again.

By the shore, my mother called me, "Ashley, can you come over here?" With great sadness I moved toward her and thought, what could she possibly want to know? Drawing near to her, I heard her humming to herself, but could not figure out what song she was singing. "Mom, what do you need?" I asked with great haste, wanting to return to

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The water was up to my ankles as I slowly began my attempt to cross the river.

my friends as soon as possible. My mother looked at me. I looked back at her. I saw her beautiful, long brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. I was thinking that, in the process of her washing the clothes, the ends of her hair had ended up in the water. The water slowly dripped from her hair back into the river, returning to its rightful place. "Ashley," my mother said, returning me back to our conversation, and I responded, "What did you say?" My mother smiled and laughed a little, "I said

I am done with the laundry and am going to head over to the other side of the river and was wondering if you want to come with me?" On the other side of the river lay watermelons that my family and other families had planted. We were waiting for them to grow big enough to pick and enjoy the sweetness that they would have to offer. I thought to myself, I would like to go and see them, but I still wanted to play with my friends. "No, thank you. I still want to play with my friends," I said to my mother, and so she began crossing to the other side.

I was content with the decision I had made to stay with my friends, but as I began to turn around, I noticed something. Everyone was on the other side; they had all left me! My mother, also realizing that, turned around. "Ashley, do you want to come with me?" I was so angry at my friends for leaving me that I told my mother "NO" very harshly and stomped out of the water, not waiting for a reply from her. How could they leave me? I thought to myself. I had made up my mind that I was not going to get back in the water. But after a few long minutes, still rumbling in my anger, I became bored. Looking to the other side, I glimpsed all the kids having so much fun without me. A few more minutes passed and I finally made up my mind that I was going to cross over to the other side of the river all by myself.

The water was up to my ankles as I slowly began my attempt to cross the river. I remembered that the rainy season had just finished up so the river was quite fast, but falling into my stubbornness, I was not going to ask for help from anyone, so I continued on my journey. Soon, I was at the point where I could hardly touch the bottom. My heart began to quicken at this point. I was unsure that this was a very good idea, but I continued on my way. All of a sudden, the current of the river swept me up farther away from my family and friends. My little legs were frantically kicking, trying to reach the other side, trying to make it to my mother. Slowly, I came to realize that I was not going to make it. My legs and arms become numb from exhaustion. I filled my lungs with air, thinking to myself that this was going to be my last breath of air.

Recalling all the events that had happened that day, how I had let my stubbornness get in my way, I began to sink into my consequences. My head completely submerged in the water, I had come to accept my fate, but then something brushed my bare toes. In that instant, I remembered not only it being the end of the rainy season but also being alligator season, when they possibly could be somewhere nearby. All of a sudden, my numb arms and legs began to move again. I did not know where I got the energy. Using all my power, I began to move again. I did not

want to wait around and be eaten by an alligator. Only having moved a few feet, all my energy was gone. I had nothing left. Again, my head began to submerge underwater, but this time I decided to try to see how far the bottom of the river was. I began to stretch out my feet as far as I could, but I didn't get far, for the thing that had previously brushed my feet again touched my feet. A shock of realization came to me that what I felt earlier and thought to be an alligator was actually the bottom of the river. I could stand. This whole time I'd thought that I was drowning, but all I had to do was stretch out my legs and reach for the bottom of the river.

Purely exhausted, I stood and made my way to the shore of the bank feeling stupid. Never had it crossed my mind that I could touch the bottom of the river. I brushed my anger away because I knew nothing good would come of it. As I reached the other side, I fell to the ground, no longer having any energy left. I closed my eyes and breathed the smell of the forest behind me, the smell of the growing watermelons all around me. I made it, I thought to myself. Still with my eyes closed, I heard someone come up to me. Slowly, opening my eyes, I glimpsed my mother at my side. I leapt into her arms, hugging her like there was no tomorrow. Whispering into her ear I told her, "I love you." She whispered right back, "I love you." Then we both began to

walk back to the rest of the group, who had already begun their journey back to the other side of the river. I didn't care anymore that I had just made it across and now we were going back. I was ready to go back. I was not afraid to cross the river knowing I was not alone. I had my mother. Reaching the other side of the river, my mother said, "Are you ready to go home or do you want to stay and play with your friends?" Without hesitation I spoke, "I am ready to go home with you." I learned how life can so easily slip through one's fingers that day and knew I was ready to go home and spend a wonderful evening with my family. I knew then and there that I would never forget how, as a child, my stubbornness had almost caused me to take my last breath. ●

JACLYN
CRAIN

We spend our lives attempting to turn lead into gold, when the only true alchemy is love.

MY LEFT SHOE

Springtime in Alaska, the days are getting longer, and life is responding to the warmth of the sun. In like manner, my family is responding to the birth of spring by shedding our winter garb much like trees shed their leaves in fall and excitedly replace them in spring. We too enjoy a similar cycle with more human-like attire of jeans, tops, and dresses.

This is where this story begins: on a spring day in Alaska with me and my daughter Susan, then age five.

Susan couldn't wait to cast off her coon-like snowsuit for something more girly. She chose a pretty pink dress and pink ribbons for her golden hair, and to finish her ensemble: *The Coup De Foudre* (to die for), new pink Converse high-tops, still in their original box since Christmas.

It was a busy morning, as all school day mornings are, but it felt good to put away the layers of protection needed to survive the freezing temperatures and the biting winds of Alaska. Susan came skipping into our sun-filled living room, bright eyed and talking a mile a minute, so excited with the idea of wearing her new outfit. The fragrance of the vinegar rinse from her hair filled the room as she pirouetted around our living room and then stopped in front of me so I could finish buttoning the back of her dress and tying the pink ribbon in her hair. With the clean waft of vinegar, her hair sparkling in the morning Alaskan sunlight, and the sunbeams dancing

through our windows, the rush of a school day morning seemed to stand still. That moment became a timeless reverence to my soul as I began reverently recalling my blessings while buttoning her dress and tying the pink ribbon.

Turning my little girl around to face me and to finish the ritual of primping, and making sure everything was just so (it's a mom thing), and of course, lacing the unending shoelaces of her high-tops, this was when I noticed . . . Susan, in the excitement of shedding her bulky winter snowsuit and clunky winter boots had inadvertently put her new shoes on the wrong feet. Of course, I didn't notice until after I laced up both shoes: her left was on her right foot, and the right on the left. It is not uncommon for children and adults living in freezing climates to get shoes mixed up from time to time after wearing heavy winter boots all winter. Unfortunately, this is where I lost it. My patience evaporated. Snapping back to reality, I realized we were running late. I needed to get everyone out the door, in the car, let the car warm up enough to drive, and then battle the Alaskan roads to school and work on time.

I quickly removed her shoes, put them on the correct feet, and relaced the never-ending laces to "the very tip-top" of her new pink Converse high-tops. By now my patience had departed, discarded into an abyss of frustration. Alas, this is where I learned perhaps the most important lesson in my life.

In the frustration of the moment . . . without thinking, I grabbed a Sharpie marking pen and in a single stroke . . . without the slightest hesitation, put the letter “L” on the new shoe that was to my left . . . “There; now maybe you’ll remember which is which,” I growled.

It was in that split second that I tasted those ugly words retching from my angry lips, and I realized what I’d done. My loving daughter looked at me with her big tear-filled brown eyes, crying . . . “Mommy, you put an ‘L’ on my right shoe, my new pink shoes.” I looked down . . . my left was her right. Instantly, in defense of my ego, I recused myself from this trial of insanity—swearing, “I’m left handed . . . life is always backwards for me,” but inside, I was shattered.

Not only had I crushed my little girl’s heart and her joy of spring and new shoes, but I also crushed the fragile fortress that religiously guarded my own ugly ego.

That day in spring is forever etched in my soul. I will never forget the stabbing pain of the lessons I learned that day. The power of forgiveness and repentance.

The grace I received from above, that of learning the importance of a paradigm shift that changed my life forever. A paradigm shift is to look at a situation from a different perspective. A different perspective always brings clarity, allows space for honesty and healing in

tense situations: it makes life so much richer and more understandable.

You must be wondering what finally happened that fateful day in spring and with my daughter and her pink high-tops. Well thankfully, we all recovered. I asked for forgiveness and on the way to school, we stopped at the store and got *new* pink Converse high-tops. I was late for work . . . but, oh *sooo*, much wiser.

Many years have passed since that spring day in Alaska. We moved back to warm and sunny Southern California. My daughter Susan is grown now, with a family of her own, and has long forgotten the pink high-tops. She’s become a great teacher; it comes naturally . . . just look at the life lesson she taught me! As for me . . . I make it a point to never forget the pain of those sharp words spoken in anger so many years ago and the pain of my bleeding ego.

Thankfully, through forgiveness, and the love my daughter and I have for each other, and with grace and humility, we were both salvaged from self-annihilation. As for that shoe? It has a prominent place on my desk. All laced up, still sporting the letter “L” on the toe—a constant, life lesson reminder, that when ego shows its ugly face . . . it’s time to look at life from someone else’s perspective. It’s time for a paradigm shift.

Occasionally, someone will ask me, “Why is that ‘L’ on the toe of that right shoe?” My reply . . . “It’s my life lesson. That’s ‘My Left Shoe.’” ●

SHERRY
MANDE

Life is full of transformations that span from the role that your parents play in your life, to how time transforms the place you live and, just like a sunset, happens one day at a time.

MY MOTHER’S DAUGHTER

It took decades for me to realize that I am my mother’s daughter. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that I thought I was adopted, but I did think that aside from maybe kind of looking like her, I was NOTHING like her. I had other role models I wanted to be like, like Joan Jett and Wonder Woman; my mom was neither of those women. Growing up I heard “Oh, you look just like your mother when she was your age” or was called “little Renee” so many times I wanted to gag! I felt like screaming at these people and telling them that I was her daughter not her mini-me. Okay, okay, so yeah, I kind of do look like her, but I am an individual with different tastes and different drives. We live totally different lives. This is what I felt and thought for a very long time.

When I was in my teens, in my mind, my mom was a goodie-goodie. She went to church, had an office job, did ceramics, crocheted, sewed, and was into girly things that I was just not into. For example, my mom wore flowery things with wild patterns on them. She had that hippie thing going on back in the day. I remember seeing a picture of my mom when she was maybe sixteen. In this picture, she had long, wavy, almost straight hair down to her waist and she was wearing these bell-bottom pants that had embroidered flowers that covered the bottom edge and traveled up the side of her leg almost to her knee. I admitted that the embroidery was cool,

but bell-bottoms? Pfft, I would never be caught dead wearing bell-bottoms, never!

Something unique to my mom is her giggle. It always reminded me of Wilma and Betty on *The Flintstones*; her giggle would fit right in with their giggles. I remember when I was in my teens my mom would do her little giggle and I would roll my eyes because it was just so cute. I really got into punk and heavy metal music back in high school. I wanted to be seen as a bad girl, kicking butt and taking names, and cutesy girls with cute giggles don’t kick butt and take names.

Another thing that annoyed me about my mom is that she was always so social. I dreaded when we would run into people she knew at the grocery store. I would stand there and listen to people say “This is your daughter? You don’t even look like you’re old enough to have a daughter this old” and then they would get this beamy look in their eye and say to me, “You look like you could be twins! Or sisters!” My mom would giggle and graciously take their compliments. Me? I would just groan and feel like I wanted to crawl under a rock and hide.

These are all things that I thought and felt, and then one day when I was thirty-three years old that all changed. I was at my sister’s wedding. My mom flew out from Florida. It had been about three years since I had last seen her; I remember looking at her and thinking, “Wow, my mom looks so beautiful!” My sister had a small wedding at the Hilton in Del Mar.

She wanted to incorporate our Filipino Hawaiian culture into her wedding and show her friends and new family a bit of who she was. She hired Polynesian dancers and had a Hawaiian-themed wedding that came as close to a Hawaiian wedding as she could get. The dancers were fantastic, and their performances left our spirits high. After the dancers, we did the toasts. The best man did his toast and I did mine which was basically a poem of sorts. I remember being so nervous; I was shaking so hard that I couldn't read the paper. I stumbled through my words. I felt like every eye was looking at me because they probably were, and they were all definitely saying, "Don't screw this up, this is your sister's wedding!" I couldn't wait to get done with my short little toast. When my mom made her toast, she looked calm, cool, and collected.

Her demeanor commanded the room. If she was nervous, I never would have guessed. She was her usual self: cute, bubbly, and absolutely beaming from ear to ear. She was radiant. I know that this was supposed to be my sister's day to shine, but for a brief few minutes, in my opinion, my mother stole the spotlight.

Her toast was simple, and she explained that in Hawaii we do several different toasts. The obvious regular ones—Cheers, Salud—and then she moved on to ones the wedding

attendants didn't know. I remember my mom teaching them all how to say, "Mabuhay" and "Banzai," and they of course butchered the words. She giggled and corrected them. We went through all the different toasts, and she had the crowd laughing at themselves; the guests were happy and, most importantly, my sister and her new husband were happy. I remember that in that moment I was awestruck by my mom—her ease and comfort in the limelight, her ability to command the crowd.

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These are all things that I thought and felt, and then one day when I was thirty-three years old that all changed.

And I even liked her little giggle and wished my own laugh was more like hers. At that moment, I wanted to be just like my mom. I was proud to be my mother's daughter.

In the years to follow I would have little realizations. Things I kind of knew but would never have admitted outright. For instance, back in the '90s bell-bottoms made a comeback. JNCO "raver pants" were baggy and didn't bell out from the knee like '70s bell-bottoms; instead, they belled out from

the waist and were therefore different from bell-bottoms. That's the argument I told myself for years, but the truth of the matter is, they are bell-bottoms, I wore them long after they went out of style and I will openly say I can't wait for them to make a comeback again. Another time I had the realization that I dressed like my mom was when I was twenty-three and my daughter was still an infant. My mother and I went shopping at Walmart. We separated while looking at clothes. I remember seeing this paisley covered top; it was really cute, the cut, the print, everything. I wanted it, so I started to look for one in my size and my mom came around the corner holding this same top. I'm not sure what happened after that, if my mom bought the top or not, but I do remember one thing: even though I admitted to her that I wanted the

top, I stopped looking for it in my size. My denial back then was so bad. Last year in 2018, I mentioned to my mom and my sister that I needed some office clothes, so my mom sent me a care package of the office clothes she didn't wear anymore. Opening that box was like opening a Christmas gift and getting all the things I wanted. It was a huge box packed full of clothes, jewelry, and other goodies. If you see me wearing some bright colored top

with some crazy print on it, there's a good chance it was once my mom's.

In 2017, my mom, my sister, and I started using an app on our phones called Marco Polo, which allows you to make and send video messages. It's perfect for us because we all live in three different time zones: my mom in Florida, my sister in Hawaii, and myself in California. Being able to see and hear my mom and sister was great! Getting to hear my mom's cute giggle, even better. It's weird how when you get older the things that annoyed you about your parents become the things you miss the most. Hearing my mom's giggle made me wish I had my own cute giggle. I mean, I have a laugh, but it's not a cute giggle. I cackle. Like a witch on Halloween brewing up some foul potion, I cackle. I remember being at the Boys & Girls Club with my son who was eleven at the time when I let out one of my cackles and out of the corner of my eye, I saw him shift his eyes away from me. You know the one you do when you want to crawl away from embarrassment, that eye shift, and he was doing it to me!

I have always been a social butterfly, but I never realized that it has the same effect on my kids as my mom's socialness had on me. I have a bunch of different social circles as most people do; however, my social circles go beyond the norm as I am also very involved in my recovery and rock/metal mu-

sic communities. I know a lot of people and I can't go anywhere without bumping into people that know me from any one of these social groups. If I am with my daughter, who is in her early twenties, people look at her and tell her how we look like we could be twins or sisters. I have seen the expression I must have had on my face on hers when people were telling me, "You don't look old enough to have a daughter that age." I also can't help but cackle to myself when my son rolls his eyes while people tell him how cool his mom is when he meets people that know me from my concert photography. I see my children's eyerolls and looks of embarrassment and hope that someday my children will see me the same way I see my mom now. I hope that they will look back and think, "Wow, my mom is amazing! I hope that I can be half as cool as she is!"

Until then, I will keep striving to be as cool as my mom. She might not be a rock-star like Joan Jett or a superhero like Wonder Woman, but she is the strongest woman I know. She has walked through hell, worked an amazing career, and retired to become a motorcycle-riding great-grandma. If that's not kick-butt, I don't know what planet you're on! I'm proud when I hear people say, "You look just like your mom" or "Your mom is so beautiful." It's like inspiration to me, because today I strive to be my mother's daughter. I am proud to be my mother's daughter. ●

Writing for me has been a way to move past grief. You can't escape it, but you can give it a story so it can flow out of you and you can move forward in your life remembering fondly and sadly what was lost and learning to live again.

NEW WORLD

A woman sat at a desk in a dark office, head down with her hands clenched in the lap of her black dress. Her mind was in a fog with the weight of the recent events weighing heavily in her mind. She had long stopped trying to hide the dried tears she wore constantly on her face as she tried to make sure his wishes were upheld during the festivities. Betty was so beaten down already by the new world she faced. The director came in to discuss all the options she had available as they organized the upcoming events. "Hello Betty, my name is Allen and I'm going to be helping you with the arrangements that need to be made," he said delicately so as to not overwhelm the al-

ready frayed nerves of the woman who currently sat at his desk. She was startled by his words and looked up quickly with terror in her eyes as if unsure of where she was at the moment. "Thank you so much for helping me with the plans. We had never actually gotten around to talking about what he wanted so I am at a complete loss

for what I should be doing," she responded forlorn at their conversation.

"My assistant has informed me that you have brought your own container," Allen inquired gently. Betty shifted her right foot subtly to ensure that she had remembered to bring the glass container along with her to this meeting.



As the shimmering path began to open into a clearing, she saw Allen waiting expectantly for her party to assemble along with him so they could begin . . .

When she heard the tell-tale sound of ceramic rattle quietly, she nodded her head in confirmation. "Yes, I came here a couple days ago with my sister and as we were looking at the wares, I saw that I actually had a container at home. We received it as a wedding gift if you can believe it." She reached down to grab the jar in question and brought it up to the desk. It was a

large thing of glossy white porcelain with beautiful navy blue flowers swirled up and down the outside. The top was a matted navy blue with a gold knob on the very tip. It rattled as it came to rest on the desk and she gave a small somber smile at the memory of opening this jar on her wedding day to him. She remembered being dumbfounded when she received it as to why

this tallish jar would have a lid and, when she posed the question to her mother who had given her the gift, her mother said that the jar just had a lid and she could remove it when she put flowers in it. Betty had never dared to put anything in the jar, though. Since the idea was just so outrageous, this concept of using this lidded vase was so ridiculous. Therefore, after her wedding, Betty had tucked the lidded jar into her cabinet above the fridge and promptly forgot about its existence until just a few days ago.

Allen and Betty discussed the arrangements that were needed for the upcoming event, and Betty was very emotional when she finally handed over her jar. Sadness over the need for it, relief that this event would be over soon, and fear of what the future now held swept through her simultaneously. As she departed the office, she was not looking forward to the events ahead but knew that, once these experiences were over, Betty's whole life would be completely different.

The day finally arrived. The paradigm shift was to occur once the events were through but she wasn't ready yet. Betty clung desperately to her jar as she led the procession of his closest friends down a long stone path that was glistening with the morning dew as the sun began to peek its head over the horizon to signify the commencement of the occasion that everyone had gathered for.

She walked slowly so she could clasp onto her jar for as long as possible. As the shimmering path began to open into a clearing, she saw Allen waiting expectantly for her party to assemble along with him so they could begin . . . It was finally time to say goodbye.

Allen went through the service quickly as the group was despondent over the circumstances of their gathering. After Allen had said his words, he led Betty to the graveside. She clung fiercely to the jar in her hands, but Allen reached out his hand to give her the okay to let go. She glanced up, her eyes a bit wild and unfocused from their fixed place on the ground as she tearfully pleaded silently to Allen for more time. He nodded sympathetically, knowing that this time was the last time she would hold her husband so close to her body. He said that he would give her a minute. As Allen turned away from Betty, she collapsed beside the grave. She took her right hand and covered her face as tears began to flow freely down her face. Her hair was wild as she clung tightly to the last piece of him she still had. She just wasn't ready to move forward.

They were supposed to have more time together. They'd had plans for how they were going to enjoy the rest of their lives together, but cancer ripped their future away and now she was left with a stark reality. She was now a part of the widows' club and it was not a place she ever wanted to be. They were meant to live

the rest of their lives together but she only got 20 years before he had to go and now, once she put him in the ground, Betty had a new world to learn to navigate.

Allen returned and she tenderly handed her urn to him as she picked herself up from the ground. As Allen emptied the contents into the grave, she watched the planned future they had together get swallowed by the cold damp earth and, once Allen had completed his task, everyone came and gave their condolences to the grieving woman.

Now Betty needed to learn how to live again. ●

As writers we have the capacity to focus, divert and transform stories. Words are infinitely malleable. They will shape us all every day of our lives. So it is best to understand that and return the effort.

—Inspired by Octavia Butler

NOT A FLOOD

When I was little, my mom told me about a rainbow that promised the waters would never rise too high. But she never said anything about these people.

The most depressing part of my day used to be dinner time. Subtle attempts at maintaining a somewhat normal conversation were made, the topics varying from grades to victories at my swim meets. A fake smile was always plastered on my mother's face, accompanied by excessive eye contact from my father. Not to leave out the side of delicious meatballs. It was all an act to mask their decaying marriage. I saw right through it. Nevertheless, I applauded their valiant efforts, rewarding them with my undivided attention. The second we ran out of hollow discussion topics, I would clean my plate and follow my father to the living room. He routinely watched the news. The most entertaining part of the night was watching him curse at the TV, as if the president himself was standing in our living room. Each and every day I watched more protests, more bombs explode, and more

people die. These calamities seemed so unrealistic through my eighty-inch flat screen TV. Consequently, I assumed invisibility outside of the screen in my safe urban home. My assumption couldn't have been more wrong.

Just yesterday, things were looking better. My parents attended their weekly marriage counseling at our neighborhood church. Like every sad story, just as things take a turn for the better, life goes up in flames. Amidst their arrival,

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**Deep down inside I know
it's not just a dream;
dreams don't hurt, dreams
aren't so articulate, and
they sure as hell don't end
in the hospital.**

a wary pregnant woman confronted them asking for food. As soon as my father ran to the car to offer the stranger his lunch, she pulled a knife from her dark, ominous veils and thrust the blade into my mom's stomach.

My dad didn't even have time to turn around before she shot him in the back. Her lips mouthed a few words before she exploded. The church of Jesus Christ fell beside her. Its marble walls covered my parents' bodies.

For what it's worth, my day didn't start that way. Earlier in the morning, I breaststroked my way to a division one championship title.

With a damp bathing suit still hidden in my school outfit, I skipped all the way home, my teammates' congratulations and high-fives still fresh in mind. Entering an empty house was bizarre; usually by that time my parents were home. Last night was supposed to be special. My grandma was visiting, and I always looked forward to talking to her. When my parents' relationship first faltered, she eagerly agreed to let me stay with her. Our conversations were real. She never aimed to hide touchy topics from me. Over time we developed a strong bond; I trusted her.

I decided to avoid solitude by turning on the TV. As it flashed to life, I witnessed my parents die on the very same eighty-inch flat screen TV that previously granted me invisibility. Its rehearsal on every channel made it hard to miss. I didn't completely lose it until I saw them holding hands. This small gesture tugged at my heartstrings as if it were a beast, thirsty for blood. The salty tears coming down my face seeped over my eyelashes and stung my eyes. They reminded me of a chlorine-filled pool. So I held my breath, longer than I ever had before. That's when my world turned dark.

About ten minutes ago, I regained consciousness. It wasn't that hard, maybe I just refused to wake up for awhile. To the right, a nurse monitors my vitals. I haven't the slightest clue to what she is meticulously writing on her

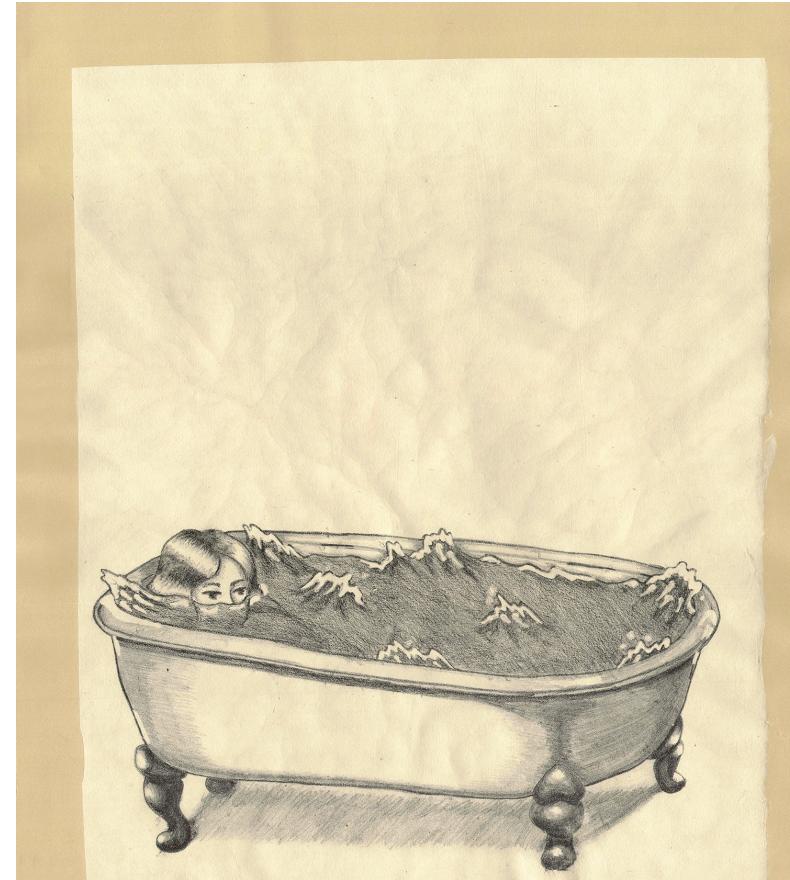
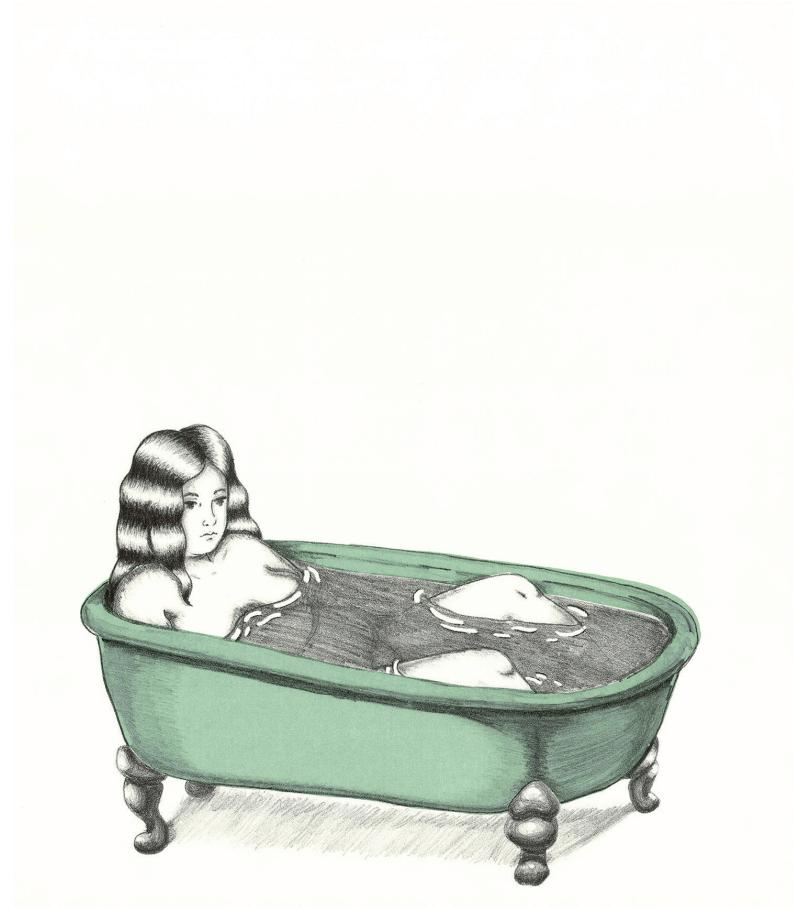
notepad. The thought to ask what's happened crosses my mind. But I bite my tongue before words escape my mouth. Deep down inside I know it's not just a dream; dreams don't hurt, dreams aren't so articulate, and they sure as hell don't end in the hospital. Hearing her pathetic attempt to sugarcoat my tragic circumstances would reopen my already fatal wound. The nurse leaves and my grandma enters the room. I cringe at the grotesque picture in my head of her finding me passed out face-first on the carpet. Her crimson nails comb my tangled hair. "It . . . s okay sweet . . . ie," she says in her best soothing voice. Well, what else are you supposed to say to a person who saw their parents die, then tried to drown themselves without any water? I can't bear to see a stain on her aging cheek, so instead of looking, I turn my head to the hospital tiles and whisper, "Grandma, please leave. I don't feel like talking right now." As soon as she's gone, I search the sky for a star. The same star that I wished my parents would love each other on. But all I find is yellowish drywall with a few dim lights. I pick the flickering one. Upon that hospital light I wish for just one more awkward family dinner. *My mom also told me about a savior.*

I will wait for his angels to come for me. ●

PART OF ME

CASEY
RUBENFELD

A recent UCSC graduate, Casey utilizes printmaking as a medium to allow unexpected transformation to occur. She creates work about her many identities and how representation comes into play. In this print you see the progression of becoming one with the water. To view more work, visit caseyrubinfeld.com.



**SUSAN
CORLEY**

One of my passions is digging my fingers into soil and planting. To see something grow not only changes the plant, but yourself. It's almost like you give your breath and, in turn, they transform. With the Passion Fruit Flower, you only experience this beauty for one glorious day.

PASSION FRUIT FLOWER



**SUSAN
KOGAN**

Every spring our pomegranate trees begin their transformation process, from dried out, prickly branches to flowering buds, ready to change into fruit. The fruit develops tough rinds, protective pulp and abundant seeds. Every spring, I hope for a better world—tough resilience, protection of humanity, with abundant generations saving our planet.

POMEGRANATES



RECLAIMING MYSELF AND MY STORY

I wrote this essay as a means of sharing my own story, and to tell anyone suffering from an invisible/chronic condition that it's okay; I believe you, and I recognise you. "Reclaiming Myself and My Story" is my real experience in self-discovery.

I was going to start this off with some long summary of my medical history to show how long and difficult a journey this has been; that idea went south when the background alone was almost three pages. Instead, I've decided to fast forward to the day I was diagnosed with the most problematic issue in my life: a rare, genetic connective tissue disorder called Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. After I explain what the heck that is.

Connective tissue is not only the most abundant type of tissue in the body, it is also the most distributed type, existing in mammals' tendons, ligaments, cartilage, fat, organs, skin, bones, bone marrow, and even blood. Ehlers Danlos Syndrome affects the body's ability to produce the most prominent substance in connective tissue, a protein called collagen. Collagen constitutes between 25-35% of all protein in the body. Individuals with EDS lack the ability to create collagen that the body can use, if they can produce any at all. There are thirteen subtypes of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and every single case is different. I have EDS type three, or Hypermobility Type. This means that collagen produced by my body is even more lax than other types, and this commonly leads to higher dislocation and gastroparesis rates, as well as more fragile tissue. If a "normal" person's collagen is a rubber band, those with this condition have collagen consistent with a chewed piece of gum, which often results in common subluxations, lack of structural support, stretchy or saggy skin,

herniations, and organ issues (tears, ulcers, gastroparesis, and many more). Likely the most common and most frustratingly excruciating symptom of EDS is chronic pain. This may include joint pain, muscle aches/spasms, back pain, leg pain, any type of pain really. Most of the time the pain source is undetermined and those with the disorder are forced to adapt. Unfortunately this is what has impacted my life the most.

I was formally diagnosed shortly after my sixteenth birthday, but I had no idea at the time the potential severity of this condition. Around the same time, it was also discovered that I have a mild spinal deformity called Spina Bifida Occulta, and suddenly I felt like Raven Baxter having a vision, except my "vision" was actually multiple huge realizations hitting me at once. I have had back pain ever since I can remember. A normal person with my level of this deformity would likely not display any symptoms or major pain. But because of my weaker tissues, I have very little support in my spine, especially at the base where the deformity is. For a while it seemed my condition rapidly progressed while doctors kept making new discoveries that could only be managed, not cured. At the same time I also was being treated for chronic depression and panic disorder, and while therapy did help, coping was still difficult.

About a year and a half later, I was surviving. I'd managed to fail or barely pass most of my junior year classes, I was in constant pain and

misery, and almost all of my (very few) friends had gone on to college. I could deal with the loneliness, and I was not really worried about my grades going into senior year since my classes were easy. I struggled, however, dealing with the physical pain disguised as Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. It was a really nice evening, so I called an old friend to see if she wanted to catch up in an attempt to distract myself from all of the aches, pains, cramps, and insanity.

Sophie and I aimlessly drove south down the coast from Oceanside and eventually found ourselves passing a sign reading "Welcome to Leucadia," something I did not know at the time would soon haunt me for years.

The car was parked in the dirt spots just off of the unprotected north/south Amtrak railroad. With the rear facing the tracks, the front of the car faced a tiny cafe across the street.

The sky was so beautiful that day, and I remember it was golden hour. A train was about to pass and I will never forget how loud and how rapidly the engineer sounded his horn. Still facing the opposite direction of the train, I leaned over to my friend and said to her jokingly, "Can you imagine being hit by one of those things? You'd be dead in an instant." Quicker than I could ever explain I saw a flash of some uniformed body running behind the car in the rearview mirror. Across the street I saw parents shield their chil-

dren's eyes and civilians open their mouths to scream, and I was positive of what was happening. I opened my mouth and attempted to tell Sophie that someone had been hurt, but I couldn't do much more than mumble. My first instinct was to get out of the car and help. My right foot was planted in the dirt with the rest of my body maneuvering out of the car when I actually turned and saw the scene

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It wasn't until halfway through the silent and traumatised ride home that I realized it was July, Friday the 13th.

that had occurred behind us. No more than a few feet away from my own feet was a severed arm, partially charred and still steaming from the force exerted from the train. I got back in the car, hyperventilating, and told Sophie to just drive and get us out of there. As she was backing out I made the mistake of glancing up again only to see a whole bodiless leg which was also blackened from impact. With snot running down my face and uncooperative

lungs, curiosity took over my foggy mind and I found my eyes once again glued to the scene. As the car pulled out of the makeshift lot, the last thing I saw was the aforementioned uniformed figure attempting to keep a steaming torso and head conscious. I saw directly into the man, literally. Where his left leg was gone I saw his femur, muscles, tissue and all.

It wasn't until halfway through the silent and traumatised ride home that I realized it was July, Friday the 13th. The clouds had shifted and appeared almost nimbostratus, except for a single hole of sunshine still gleaming through. It was genuinely one of the most beautiful things I had seen, ever. I've never been religious, but I thought to myself, if heaven was real, that was it, and the man at the train must be trying to leave Earth. I did learn later that the victim amazingly did survive because first responders arrived and took him to the hospital. I was never able to find a news story mentioning anything more than that, besides that it was believed to be an attempted suicide, but if I had found that he lived for even a day more I would be surprised.

The weeks following were extremely difficult, and I still today experience significant post-traumatic episodes from that day. Even though this may sound quite selfish, as I obviously was not the one torn to shreds on railroad tracks, I consider this one of the worst days of my life because of the emotional

toll it has had on me. I am a firm believer in the idea that everything happens for a reason, and that good can be found in all situations. Despite the terrible events that took place on that day, I sincerely believe I was meant to witness it all. Before this all took place, I had convinced myself that plain *surviving* was enough. I wanted to live, and I realized that being alive and living are two completely different things. I existed; then I chose to do everything I could in order to be happy, despite all of the physical pain I dealt with. Witnessing this horrible, tragic event without a doubt damaged some pieces of me. It also made me realize that I had two options. I could sit and be sad and wish I didn't hurt all the time, or I could use my disease to my advantage, instead of letting it take advantage of my body. I found solace in researching more about my condition, and I began documenting stories of my medical journey on social media, not only because it was therapeutic to talk about it, but also because I learned how uncommon EDS is, and how few people know about it. On top of this, I also was brought closer to my brother because of the train incident. Despite us both living with chronic depressive disorders, negative emotions like sadness, anger, or fear were never addressed or acknowledged in our household, and not for the reasons you would think. It isn't that my parents view these emotions as weak or inconvenient; we all worry

immensely about each other, so much so that we habitually hide our tears in order to avoid worrying anyone else. The night of the train I came home and cried openly in front of my brother for the first time since tantrums. I think it made us both realize that instead of trying so hard to avoid upsetting anyone else, it is more important to check up on each other and let it be known we are there.

When people learn about my condition, they often tell me they're sorry. Now I tell them that there is no need to be. I still continue sharing my daily Ehlers Danlos struggles on Instagram and Snapchat, and I've even been lucky enough to give presentations about EDS in order to educate others. Some say that I talk about it too much, but I don't think I talk about it enough. No one does! That's why nobody knows what it is. And until this invisible illness is treated like visible illnesses, I will continue to unashamedly share my story. I want to help others and show people that there is hope, that they're not alone no matter their situation, and that no one singular trait, aspect, or moment defines their life and their story. ●

BECKY
KESSAB

When I think of how this succulent transforms into a beautiful myriad of colors and blooms, Mary Ann Brussat's quote seems rather meaningful: "Nature often holds up a mirror so we can see more clearly the ongoing processes of growth, renewal, and transformation in our lives."

RED & GREEN SUCCULENT



You are who you are if
you're fed right!

This is for my parents
Kalani Ohelo and
Kawahine Kamakea-
Ohelo, who taught us to
stand in truth and right-
eousness. Waimanalo
Mau a Mau.

REMOVING ME FROM MY HOMELAND

While I was in her womb, the start of sovereignty, resistance of government, was embedded in my umbilical cord. My birthday was a clear dark still night, with just a touch of wind, that slightly swayed the banana leaves, so the name Pamaikamakani-*aheahemalieokalani* was given. While pregnant, my mother told me stories of the Hawaiian Movement. So, I too underwent many trenches, mountains, and oceans, and I became a political activist before I saw my first light of day. My pro-creation day probably was on a beach, under the stars, with the wind gently blowing the sand as the genealogy of my ancestors was introduced to one another.

Both of my parents were Pro-Hawaiian. I can proudly say that my father was one of the few that started the Hawaiian renaissance in the '70s, whereas my mom was a seeker. She was a seeker who stood in truth and realized at a young age that her grandmother and mother were disciplined for speaking their native tongue. I remember my grandmother talked about going to the Catholic Church every fourth Sunday, just to hear the sermon in 'Olelo Hawaii. At a young age my mother's gut feeling was "This is not right. It doesn't feel right," especially the way that our Kanaka was being treated in our own homeland.

My parents instilled in their children to never be ashamed of who we are. They said, "You are Kanaka. Don't let anyone deny you

who you are, and make sure you claim your identity as only Hawaiian." Throughout my school life, a news clip used for educational purposes periodically popped up. The video captured my mother in the front seat of a Honolulu Police car, as she yelled out, "We Hawaiians, this our land, this our way of life." This video was played over and over.

The video was taken in 1985, 34 years ago. It continues to play especially in the current uprising of our nation of Hawaii. My parents stood alongside many Native Hawaiian families who, at that time, were told that they would be removed from their campsite for the beautification of Waimanalo Beach Park, being evicted from the partial land trust that was set aside for our people . . . At that time and still today, Kanaka Maoli are being removed from their Homeland because they can't afford housing or "affordable housing" as the state would like to call it. The housing market for our Kanaka is unreachable, even if you qualify for a house on Hawaiian Homeland. A median price range for a typical house in Hawaii today is about \$677,000 and up. Due to the unaffordability, we see more homelessness or families who are forced to sell their home or land.

According to the Department of Hawaiian Homeland, "Hawaiian Home Lands were created by our late Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole who spearheaded the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act in 1921. The United States set

aside approximately 200,000 acres of land to establish a permanent homeland for Native Hawaiians." This act is very similar to treaties offered to Native American Indians, which allotted partial lands to live on but the government still had the last say to these lands. The government can hire private corporations to build and disturb our native lands. The similarity that we have with Native American Indians is that we are indigenous people, and our land, culture, and language were stolen and stripped away from generations.

In 1985, my mom was asked to come down and help organize these families because they simply did not know what to do or how to go about things. At the time, the state was looking to evict 107 Kanaka Maoli which included families whose members' ages ranged from infant to 80 years old. Many Kanaka in the camp asked, "Wea we goin go? And how can they do this?" Another aunty asked, "This is Hawaiian Home Lands. How can they evict me off the very same land that was given to us?" As months passed, the families were given thirty days to leave the campsite and find somewhere else to live. This sparked my parents to heed The Call. About four months into organizing the families, they built a simple thatch hale, and some choose to stand their ground and believe in the reason of why they were there.

One early June morning, HPD mobilized about 60 officers, 30 city and county workers, and observers. As these Kanaka got ready to make their stand, they prayed pule and sang songs before they walked into the hale. Many of my cousins had no choice except to watch this trauma unfold before their eyes. They heard the voices of their parents and the others that had joined together for the cause, shouting from inside the hale while HPD broke in. My cousin Crystal screamed at the police officer, "Wea we going, we no moa

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**We all were sent out
to stand for truth and
find our mauna.**

house . . . you like us camp in your yad?" In the background the rest of the children chanted, "Shame! Shame! Shame!" Then as the video wrapped around to the back of the hale, I heard my dad's voice: "You broke my arm!" Then, Uncle Tuk Wong Lee, an observer from the outside, told my mom to calm down and to do as the police said. My mother was the last to come out of the hale, with many officers surrounding her as they couldn't hold her down. Uncle Tuk Wong Lee came around the police officer and said, "Kawahine lawa!

Lawa! Stop!" My mom continued to be boisterous and said "Unko, this guys take us away from our land. This is our way of living. Tomorrow, they children will be homeless and what?" As Uncle Tuk Wong Lee tried to calm her down, my mom yelled out, "You Hawaiians, you sellouts! All you Polynesians are sellouts." By then the Kanakas were carried out into the paddy wagon, while all the Wahine were put in police cars. Then the legendary voice of my mother will speak out to all of Hawaii: "We Hawaiians, this our land! This our way of life!"

From 1985 to today, the flowers continue to bloom from both my parent's roots. It was destined for all of their children to keep up their legacy but also create our own identity for Hawaii. We all were sent out to stand for truth and find our mauna. My parents gave us tools to prepare us to face our mauna, whatever or wherever it may be, but never forget home. After the eviction of Waimanalo Beach Park, it was drilled into all of their children that we must take action in our community, heed the call of the Lahui, participate in vigils that represent us as Kanaka or other cultural resources that are just as important as our jobs, families, and religions. Being involved in these actions made us aware of the current movement.

My younger brother Kuike's flower bloomed at a time when the Native Hawai-

ian language was reborn into our school system. He went to Ke Kula Kaiapuni (Native Hawaiian Charter School); his kumus were also young and fresh graduates of University of Hawaii. They helped open his eyes to a wider lens through education. There was no textbook history. This generation was taught how to educate and mobilize in truth. So when this generation of students graduated from high school, many of them sought out higher education, and some, like my brother Kuike, stayed with the 'Aina, which sparked a revitalization of the Aloha 'Aina movement. In 2019, Kuike's mauna is Hunananiho.

This land is about 77 acres. It has been documented that our 'Iwi Kupuna was founded in these areas and science documented that these bones date back to when our ancestors first landed when they discovered Hawaii. These are the oldest carbon dated bones in all of Hawaii. Our Kupuna landed right here on this very 'aina. In the early '90s, a group of Kanakas fought for these bones to be returned to their rightful place. When these bones were returned home to Hawaii from the Smithsonian Institute, my mother participated in the repatriation of these 'Iwi Kupuna to Hunananiho.

Many years later in March of 2019, a Master Plan from the City and County Mayor's Office of Honolulu, with phase 1 in plan, started to excavate areas of this land. The com-

munity came out to speak against this project. At that time Save our Sherwoods (a.k.a. S.O.S group) was formed. It wasn't a surprise that Kuike was voted president to spearhead the project and lead the people of this community. The Koko of my parents and many ancestors flows in him. He will achieve what he was destined to do.

The City and County of Honolulu wanted to clear these 77 acres to create a sports complex for adult play and land recreation. Many spoke out at community board meetings and through social media, advising the Mayor that we already have five existing play fields in Waimanalo. And having this 77-acre sports complex would not only create traffic, increase population in a small community, increase tourism and overcrowd our pristine beaches, but most importantly it would desecrate our Iwi Kupuna.

The mayor stated in a private meeting that "he wants to heal the division of this community, but by the way we're going to continue with phase 1, Monday morning at 0700am." Waimanalo residents took that as a slap in the face. So, a kahea went out to all Kia'i on Oahu to come and join in solidarity with the people of Hunananiho.

The Kia'i's answered the call.

Four days later HPD showed up and used their bikes as barriers. I heard my husband's voice call from the living room: "Mai,

Mom is on the frontline." I jumped out of bed, ran to my husband's phone, and there I saw my mother sitting down on the road blocking the machinery from entering. Within a split second, worrisome tears turned into calmness. I wiped my tears away and prayed. I explained to my husband why they were willing to get arrested. Their stance is simple: this place is where our 'Iwi Kupuna is buried. With that same breath I asked him, "Would you allow anyone to come and build on your family's graves?" In 1973, this area was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This land is deemed significant and this land is protected by federal laws. Since this place is on the National Register of Historic Places, it holds just as much clout as Plymouth Rock, the Lady of Liberty, and Pearl Harbor.

The live feed was the only connection that I had to rooting on all kia'I and especially my mom. My mom, just like in 1985, continues to stand in her truth and what she believes in. All her life she fought and sacrificed for her community and family. She will continue to fight for her land and the people, until her last breath.

'Aloha 'Aina . . . ●

Glossary:

'Aina - Land

'Aloha - Love

Aloha 'Aina - Love of the Land

Hunananiho - A place located on the windward side of O'ahu

'Iwi Kupuna - Ancestral bones

Kahea - The Call/Action/Alert Kane - Men

Kanaka - Native of Hawaii

Kanaka Maoli - Native of Hawaii

Ke Kula Kaiapuni - Native Hawaiian Charter School

Kia'i - Protectors

Kupuna - Elder

Lahui - Group/tribe/nation

Lawa - Stop/Enough

Mauna - Mountain

Wahine - Women

“Resistance” is about acknowledging how society sees you yet daring to challenge the majoritarian narrative. This poem is for those who feel othered by institutions that have upheld the outdated and inequitable status quo, to remind them of their capacity and the beauty of being everything that others aren’t.

RESISTANCE

Born in the USA
no blue eyes or blond hair
Instead my eyes and hair
Brown
like my skin
Beautiful shades of what I used to think was
The ugliest color in the crayon box
The color of the earth right before it blooms
I am a first generation American
By chance
My blood was never meant to be claimed by these United States as my own
These United States don’t claim me
They stamp the minority emblem on my forehead
And they forget... I forget
I exist
Lady liberty turns a blind eye when it comes to me

My birth was an act of *resistance*
another soul condemned to mongrel culture

My birth was an act of resistance
I am a proud first generation college student
Never meant to access the ivory tower
As I walk the halls
With every footstep I hear
Stop
We don’t understand you
You don’t belong here
Who do you think you are
My education is an act of resistance
I am a Woman
Never meant to hold power
Told to stand back and let the men talk
What if
What if
What I would say wasn’t valid because I have two X chromosomes
Born into
Machismo & Compliance
Born into
Boys will be boys
Born into
A world I do not accept
My womanhood is resistance

I

Am

Resistance

When I speak English

My roots hold a grip on my tongue

in an embrace so majestic yet chaotic

They hold tight and cause a change in flavor

*Un sabor a
Michoacan*

*Un sabor a
Oaxaca*

*Un sabor a
California*

A unique flavor

Bitter from the sacrifices in order to live out the American dream

Infused with hard work

Lacking of a reason to give up

Smothered in rebellion

*My Existence Is **Resistance.***

*My Existence Is
Resistance.*

DELORES
LOEDEL

SANDS OF TRANSFORMATION

This photo was taken while on a Mother's Day walk with my family. To me it represents the transformation that I'm witnessing as our children prepare to leave the nest to begin the next chapter of their lives. Transformation can be beautiful and messy all at the same time.



HEIDI
GERTZKI

Heidi Gertzki is a first year student at MiraCosta who enjoys spending her free time learning new things, playing instruments and advocating for science-based dog training. Though she doesn't play roller derby anymore, she credits it with being essential in shaping who she is today.

SCARLET FEVER #158

Monroe, Washington, June 2nd, 2018: the last time I would step onto a banked track. It was the National Championship competition weekend, known as "Battle on the Bank" by the roller derby community. We had won first in the nation in 2017, the year prior, so the pressure was on us to uphold our title. After our months and months of hard work, and my now five years of experience skating, I felt I was ready. Though we were champions, the odds were against us. It was on a new banked track in a new city and new state and we had just overcome one of the biggest losses to our league: our Dollhouse.

I remember the first time I walked into the Dollhouse, just twelve years old, anxious, and curious. I had just barely begun to understand the concept of whatever this "roller derby" thing my dad was trying to explain to me. The concept of an all-female, extreme contact sport full of witty names, people from all lifestyles, and the stuff of old '70s movies honestly seemed a bit strange to me, but I gave it a shot. Taking those first steps onto that hardwood floor riddled with the vibrations of wheels from San Diego Derby Doll skaters would be the beginning of my new world.

Before my entry into the roller derby community, I struggled socially with my interactions and feeling like I belonged anywhere. In just fourth grade, I had started to develop intense acne which made it very hard to try to

fit in with other kids; I often felt like I was being treated and seen as a monster because of my acne. We did everything possible to try to get rid of it, but nothing worked. It was only in seventh grade when I went with my dad to the Dollhouse in search of a new sport that I entered a community of people who would make me feel like a normal and accepted person.

There in a downtown San Diego building, countless others and I fell in love with this unique sport. In April 2017, just five months before "Battle," the city of San Diego notified the owner of our league that we would no longer be allowed to use the space we knew as the Dollhouse. This left us mourning for the place where most of us grew up, the place where we all found community; this left us without a place to put our banked track, the very same type of track on which we were to compete. Refusing to give up, we turned to local basketball courts and practiced as hard as we could, with what we could.

By the time we arrived in Washington, we all knew that we had done the best we could, given all circumstances. We geared up: lacing our skates, sliding into our characteristic turquoise jerseys, pulling on our sweat filled armbands, and clipping our white helmets that held our individually unique names and numbers. On the first day we played our first game, or "bout" as we call them, and won, but we knew there were many more challenges ahead if we wanted to make it to the top again. The following day

was going to be the hardest; we were to play against the Arizona team. Knowing it was going to be our hardest play yet, we prepared ourselves mentally, but we were not prepared for what was to come.

Our strongest players were sent out all first quarter as we knew that the other team was especially rough. It was just before half-time that one of the Arizona skaters took out one of our strongest girls, who would later be in the hospital. All of us were physically and emotionally exhausted with the tight score and seeing her injured by an illegal move infuriated us. The Arizona skater wasn't given any penalties. We continued, but this time, in the third quarter, another one of our strong skaters got injured. Pushing through, we made it to the end, but we lost by only a second's worth of points. We placed third.

The bout was a roller coaster of emotions for everyone, but I am thankful that it happened. I knew well that it might be my last time playing in "Battle," but I had no idea that it would be my last skate out. I skated my last bout with my teammates that day. I had finally reached a level of skating that I was happy with, and I put out my all on the track with support from my family on and off the track. I had struggled for a long time on and off, feeling as though I wasn't improving and that I would be stuck on a plateau of mediocre forever. With the help of my derby teammates

and the consistent (and sometimes extreme) tough love from my coach, I was able to improve my skating.

I realized that it was my own mental block standing in my way, stopping me from physically approaching my challenges properly. It was when I finally made myself overcome my mental limits that I saw my coaches putting me out more, referring to me as a stronger skater, and pairing me with the more inexperienced to help them. I started to believe in everything I did, whether it be on or off the track. I was put in more than ever that game, putting those abilities to the test.

When it came time to recognize that I wasn't going to be able to participate in derby any longer, I worried that I would not only lose my skating, my team, and my outlet, but also my mental view of my capabilities as well. I found it hard transitioning into not having something to fill up those times I would spend at derby and trying to find something to do that wouldn't agitate my healing injuries. Not only was I unable to participate in derby, the thing that had caused my injuries, but I also wasn't able to participate in another big part of my life: violin. For a long while, I felt unable to do anything and that I wasn't good at anything any longer. I had nothing to do.

I came to realize how much derby had helped me and how it truly impacted my life.

Though I wasn't able to play, I was able to go to bouts and show my support, I was able to skate outside of the contact sport, and I was still able to be a part of the broader skate community. After months of recovery, I was able to return to playing violin, finally rewarded with my other outlet. Sometime after that as well, I was finally able to fully grieve my loss of the sport and come to appreciate my contribution to it by watching footage of bouts I had played in. Though I am still in recovery for my injuries now, every time I feel a bit of pain in my back or my hands I am thankful. I am thankful because it reminds me of who I am, how strong I am, and the time I spent being "Scarlet Fever, #158" of the San Diego Derby Dolls Juvenile Dollinquents. ●

ANONYMOUS

My piece reflects transformation because I learned to love my body despite the scars. I learned that it's okay to not be okay, but not every day is a bad day so I have to appreciate the good days and be happy.

SCARRED

I cut myself. Or I used to. More than thirty scars remind me every day of the person I used to be. I struggled with many issues my eighth grade year, due to family problems and being in a toxic relationship at a young age up until my sophomore year of high school.

For most of the world, staying put is normal. For me, every three years, if I don't move to another city or country, it is out of the norm, and even worse, my dad is going in and out of my world. Since 2002, I have moved over five times to two countries, two states, and several cities. That's not to mention how many times my dad has left me for his deployments to harm's way.

It's scary not knowing if I would ever see him again. It never gets easy. I just wanted to live a normal life. No moving around or temporary people. I wanted my dad to always be around because he is my best friend. Moving around started to take a toll on me as I got older because I would become attached to people and actually have feelings about leaving or never seeing them again.

I did not have a relationship with my mom until my senior year of high school, so I could not count on her. Growing up, there were

always family problems with my dad's side of the family. My grandma brainwashed me at a young age to the point where I hated my own mom. I found out about a lot that I shouldn't have that is still a secret to this day. High school was hard for me because I was always "slut shamed" for wearing crop tops or wearing tight clothes. It was hard fitting into school and trying to love myself.

When I was fourteen years old, my dad found me in my bathroom. It was that moment where the blood was coming down my thigh and he was the only one there to take care of me and carefully clean up my cuts. He wanted different for me. He did not want to lose his best friend, nor did I want to lose my best friend.

I learned that in order for me to move on I had to forgive. Maybe I won't ever forget, but that is okay...

Learning how to love and accept myself was the greatest life-changing experience. It was not easy; however, I am still learning today. I started to love myself by accepting the past and the pain. Self love really is the best kind of love. I truly did realize that you cannot love someone until you love yourself. The people that love you will love you for who you are as a person. I learned that in order for me to move on I had to forgive. Maybe I won't ever forget, but that is okay; I like my story.

I thought cutting was the only solution to my problems. The pain that I felt cutting masked all my other feelings. I never thought about seeking help. I hated asking for help because to me that was a sign of being weak and not independent enough to solve my own problems. There are so many resources out in this world: suicide hotlines, school counselors, therapists. I learned that it is okay to ask for help when we truly need it. We are never alone; there is always someone there for us, believe it or not. We are going to have problems, but there is always a solution. Cutting is NOT the solution.

I started going to a therapist (not by choice) and started slowly opening up each appointment. I had to get used to my dad taking away my razors before every shower, constantly annoying me until I finally told him what was wrong, my therapist repeating herself about mindfulness, and hearing my siblings asking what was going on with me. These were the start of change. I had to learn how to trust my parents and to cope the right way instead of harming myself. I found ways to distract myself by coloring, playing with my dog, being more involved in school, and having a better relationship with my parents.

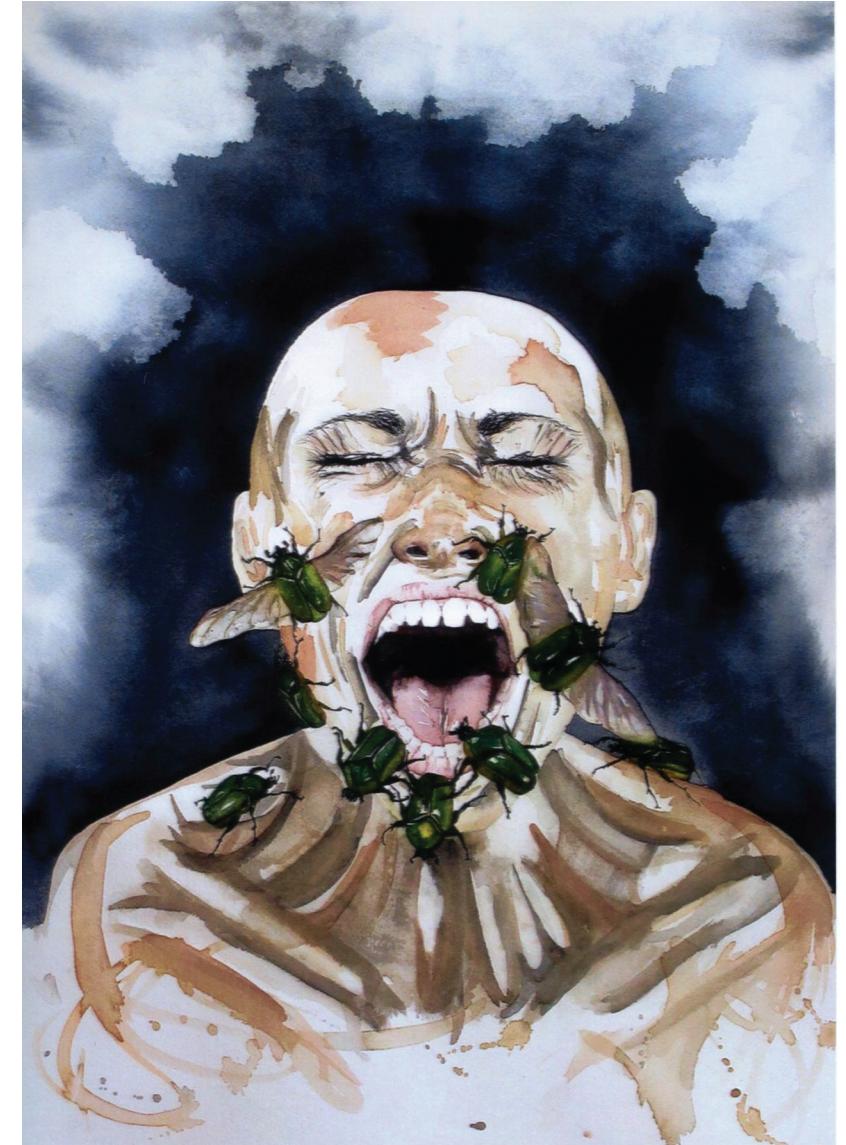
Over time, I did not feel the need to cause myself harm. I learned to love my body despite the scars. I learned that it's okay to not

be okay, but not every day is a bad day so I have to appreciate the good days and be happy. ●

ILLA
JOHNSON

When I create art I am constantly trying to reach a reaction in the viewer and correlate expressions with living things. My work will continue to transform, and I hope it induces changes in emotions. Art is deeply ingrained in who I am. I will forever express myself through art.

SCREAMING BEETLES



I work as a cashier. I often think about what the lives of different customers look like, but it was a transformational experience when I realized that others may wonder the same about me. We're all interested in others' stories. Furthermore, Paul Simon, my favorite poet, inspired my short story.

SLEEPING IN A DOORWAY

I remember the signs and I remember ignoring them.

Gnats bite my calves as I listen to Paul Simon's *Graceland* over the phone. Henry plays it in his Volvo 200 miles away. He holds his phone to the car speakers, I listen.

I can hear muffled, quiet tears being reluctantly released beneath the bass of "Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes" and I thank him silently for his last gift to me: this.

Whatever this is.

Wherever we will end, which maybe is here, in this moment. As if he senses it, I hear the muffled cries stop. Or maybe it's the aluminum. We listen to silence, terrified it might be disrupted by something that disrespects the quiet.

Eyes closed, I feel the caked dirt and rocks rub raw the skin on my ankles, blistering my toes, angering my flesh and the wires of blood swimming beneath its surface. I sense the ebbing hum of blood pooling where my nails used to be, a mysterious fiery wet driving down my leg, or up it, I can't sense direction anymore. I imagine my whole body a pink, swollen blister, drowning in on itself. A body that broke its promise just like the earth did.

Paul Simon can heal everything, I used to think.

Maybe, I still hope.

"She makes the sign of a teaspoon, he makes the sign of a wave."

Henry sings to me from the other end of the phone, quietly, like the river that he is, only a millisecond behind the recording, *"The poor boy changes clothes and puts on aftershave."*

I jump in, soft, like a bug swept up with the current, *"To compensate for his ordinary shoes."* "Ev—" he says, muffled against the crack of the bad connection and everything in between.

I listen to a verse in silence as I picture his eyes soft and his face tinted gray from the ash. I imagine him gathering his words, trying to make sense of it, trying to console himself and pretend as if he's consoling me. He's the brother, isn't he. How is he supposed to make sense of it. What is there to think. It's gray and dust and melted and gone and what are we anymore. Is there life even if we survive.

I hear his breath: tired, full, heavy, alive. Moving, despite everything that isn't.

Click.

The music stops right after, *"As if everybody here would know exactly what I was talking about."* I used to know what everybody was talking about.

I used to think I knew.

I can hear Henry take in a breath, then let out a rushed "Ev—"

"How close are they," I say, less of a question, more of a knowing. Because I know they're close. I know they're almost to us now.

To him.

To me.

I wonder who they'll find first. I wonder, but I don't worry anymore. I can't worry about the inevitable.

I imagine the river and the bug, drowning in on themselves, swallowed up by the earth that broke its promise. ●

DIANNE
PRECIADO

Born and raised in North County San Diego, Dianne is passionate about her community and creative expression. Storytelling, like many people, is embedded in her roots. Through art and writing she hopes to communicate those thoughts and ideas that aren't always easy to explain.

SOIL AND SALT

Does it scare you that I know so much about myself?

That I'm not a damsel in distress?

After all what does it mean to save someone,
when you've got to do it by yourself.

I have too many answers for one question,
because my thoughts simply flow.

You can't stop a rose from blossoming,
you have to simply let it grow.

Yes it's true I lose my patience over things that don't make sense

To be honest, everything my momma gave me,

I don't think you'd comprehend.

I'm a woman and a girl
who's been given the chance,
to think and speak in ways that
only wounded women understand.

Speaking in waves

Dancing with tears

Laughing until there's no more rage

Year after year.

This is how it goes.

PATRICIA
SMORZEWSKI

The essay "Straight Enough" tackles a female teenager's trauma during a medically induced body image transformation. The pain of being ostracized, and her physician's lack of concern, are explored. The experience changed how she perceived others. Patricia Joy Smorzewski is a mother, wife, and registered nurse who enjoys writing.

STRAIGHT ENOUGH

Fifty years ago, well-meaning physicians wanted to straighten the curvature in Patty's thirteen-year-old spine. Their treatments were successful in curtailing further progression, but the oath doctors take to do no harm wasn't lived up to. The management of Patty's case resulted in prolonged psychological harm. She had been self-confident, athletic, and a good student who had girlfriends. Alarming, she transformed into an anxious, introspective teenager with no friends.

Patty remembered herself as a younger girl filled with joy and few worries. But this was before her first application of a heavy plaster body cast. No longer was she the girl who got straight As and won a hula hoop contest and first place in the standing board jump. She had become an object, ostracized in stores and busy sidewalks. Adults pulled their children away and told them to avoid her. This behavior wasn't because of her color, race, or religion but rather because she was different, considered a freak. Friends she had known through elementary school didn't want to be seen with her in the corridors of junior high school. Patty walked alone.

Long blond hair could not camouflage the white plaster resembling a Queen Ann frill around her neck. She wasn't hiding a hickey, as so many asked. Patty's first cast was applied in seventh grade and reapplied every four months to make room for her stick thin body and budding breasts. When her cast became painful

around her chest, a male doctor sawed a hole to expose one breast for further expansion. Embarrassed, she wore thick, baggy clothing. In the hot, humid New Jersey summer, she remained in her house without air conditioning to avoid stray eyes peering.

Eighth grade was spent recuperating from an experimental spinal fusion surgery that used a cadaver bone. Cared for by her mother and taught by tutors, Patty lay flat in bed for a year, weighed down by a heavy body cast.

Staring at the ceiling, time went slow. Patty was grateful when she received the news the next cast would be for walking. With intense physical therapy she regained her strength to walk again. Distressed, she had to return to school. She cried. Her cast looked like a typical white plaster cast on a broken arm, but no magic marker signatures ever adorned her. She didn't have a broken arm or leg. Her plaster cast encapsulated her whole torso from mid-ear to below her buttocks.

If only her parents had moved to a new city after they removed the body cast, Patty would have begun tenth grade in a new high school where no one recognized her. But they didn't move and she remained known as the turtle girl.

After three years of plaster casts which had held Patty stiff were removed, she wasn't allowed to take gym. So half the year she spent a period in detention and the other in a study hall. To her surprise, a group known as the greas-

ers befriended her. They were boys in leather coats and girls with heavy eyeliner. Patty didn't wear makeup, but they accepted her. In grammar school she had known them as the slow readers. Yearning to fit in, she walked with them in the halls, though they only shared a study period. She found her new friends kind and caring. They were definitely less critical and less discriminating than those she had thought were friends, who now were the cheerleaders and class officers. To her old friends she was invisible.

In the eleventh grade, her English teacher asked the class, "How would you describe the person sitting across from you?" A popular football player stared at Patty and said, "She reminds me of a turtle, her head popping out of its shell." The ruckus laughter cut her like a knife.

At follow-up doctor visits, the always male physician would ask Patty about pain and look at her x-rays. Not once did a doctor question her about how she perceived her altered body image or state of mind. Or about the frequent nightmares her mother told the doctors about where a man in a black coat and top hat chased her wanting his bone back. Once, Patty told the surgeon she felt her brain wasn't as quick in thinking as before her six-hour surgery. His response was without further inquiry: "Oh, you're fine. You can feel your toes, walk, and talk."

Thank God for college and the passage of time, because on Patty's first day, no one knew her. No one knew her story. There in the stimulating environment of learning she had another transformation. Like a butterfly that feels liberated from its cocoon upon the first flutter of its wings, she thrived. She walked the corridors with a few new friends, dated, and grew accustomed to her asymmetrical breasts. In this setting she became different yet again, gaining confidence, although still frequently being self-deprecating. Her new independent self was cautious of others and always cheering the underdog. ●

COBY BURNS

My watercolors tend toward realism, but this piece underwent a metamorphosis. My very brown reference photo was of my tea-drinking husband in a cafe on a sunny day in England. In the very colorful style of Roland Petersen, I transformed Dave from a gray-haired guy into a ginger.

TIME FOR TEA



TULIP FIELDS

MARIA
HUERTA

Over one million bulbs are planted during Washington's annual Skagit Valley Tulip Festival. Tulip, iris, and daffodil bulbs grow in Skagit County, more than any other county in the United States. "A flower does not use words to announce its arrival to the world; it just blooms."
-Matshona Dhiwayo



**ELIZABETH
COOK**

UNION OF BEAN AND WATER

I'm inspired by religions and cultures from around the world. I wanted to transform a classic piece into my own modern version and include people who aren't just white. The woman is a coffee goddess and the man is Neptune. The angel is transforming the ingredients into a coffee river.



**SUSAN
KOGAN**

WATERCOLOR PALETTE

This photograph of my watercolor palette is my screensaver. I look at it daily, reminding myself that the mixing of colors constantly changes how I paint and see life. I love how blues and reds change into purples, reds and yellows into oranges, blues and yellows into greens!



Giselle Esquer is working towards a career in education and teaching. She loves all things creative and spends her days working on all kinds of art projects. She enjoys writing as a way to express herself and find clarity. This piece is a reflection of her personal growth.

WHO I AM

I am five foot almost two inches, and I have brown hair and brown eyes. I like to dance, make art, and watch Netflix. I learned how to tie my shoes before my brother, who is two years older, did. I've been a florist and salesperson at my grandparents' flower shop since I can remember. I would do anything for my family. I am passionate about education and working with kids. I have A LOT of opinions. Most of these small facts can be gathered just by following me on social media. At this point in my life, I am not afraid to hide any aspect of myself. It's been a long journey to self love, and through it, I have begun to accept what makes me . . . me.

One of my greatest struggles has been learning to accept different aspects of my identity and how they fit me into this world. One of the most influential parts of my identity is that I am third-generation Mexican-American. I always felt the need to balance both sides of that. Ever since I was a kid, my family told me I was being "too American" when I was around any Latinos. "She doesn't know what she's talking about; she goes to school with those gringos" is a phrase I've heard in all kinds of variations at family parties. My family would make jokes about the fact that I went to school with kids who were significantly wealthier and whiter than us. They thought I didn't know what it took to be Mexican, and I think that's why I never got on the dance floor at any quinceañera. My cousins were just way too cool for me. They knew the lyrics to

the Mexican music that was played and all the right dance moves. Meanwhile, I'd be the one in charge of making sure the baby cousins didn't run off into the streets. I was okay with that, or at least I thought I was. I felt so isolated and unwanted from relatives my age. They thought that because I went to school in a different neighborhood, I had absolutely nothing in common with them. No one seemed to think I cared about sitting out on the sidelines.

No matter where I went, I was always sitting on the outside because I wasn't relatable enough to the people around me. The kids at my school weren't any nicer. It certainly didn't help that I looked nothing like them either. I had the bushiest unibrow, much browner skin, and according to the popular boys, a family of drug dealers. They were the ones who introduced me to derogatory terms for "my people." In eighth grade, I had no idea what it meant when they called me a "wetback," but today that word makes my blood boil. Even if I did know the meaning of that word, I didn't know how to defend an entire group of people that never made me feel like I was one of them. I didn't know how to fight back when they were stereotyping me as "the type of Mexican who eats Hot Cheetos for breakfast," but the minute they said something about my family, I was out for blood. I let the bullying go on for months before I stood up to them. I said some very questionable things, and I probably could have handled it a little better, but

they never bothered me after that. Yet again, I was the kid sitting on the bleachers, away from everyone else.

At eighteen, it was finally time for me to create my own identity, without anyone criticizing me for being myself. After graduating high school, I spent almost a whole year in a different country living with a host family. This whole experience gave me a new perspective on who I was. "Do you celebrate Christmas? What do Americans eat on holidays?" were two of many questions my host family asked to learn about American traditions and norms. I didn't know how to answer these questions. I could only describe a "traditional" American Christmas meal from what I had seen in movies and TV shows. I did, however, tell them that my abuelita and I sat in the kitchen on Christmas Eve making all kinds of tamales. I told them about her delicious posole and arroz con leche. I told them that my family stayed up almost all night drinking, dancing, being loud, and eating an unhealthy amount of food. I knew this wasn't the norm for most Americans based off what my classmates told me about their holidays, but it was what my family did. Every time a stranger asked me about my family or our traditions, I realized that my answers were al-

ways rooted in my Mexican culture and heritage. It wasn't until then, when I was removed from the two cultures I struggled to balance, that I realized and acknowledged how much of my Latino side was really there. It was in these moments that I finally started to let go of the assumptions and expectations that other people had about me.

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I have spent the longest time hating myself because other people didn't know how to see me. I was too brown and ghetto for the white kids to play with and too whitewashed and uncultured to hang out with my cousins. Every time I stepped into the different worlds of each culture, I had to put on a different face. I despised the duality in my life and the fact that I had to switch back and forth between my two worlds. I just wanted to do whatever it was that I did and not have to prove myself to

be like anyone else around me. It was exhausting, and it still is. I know I have experienced so much that I haven't even acknowledged, and I'm barely starting to unpack the experiences that have shaped me into who I am now and who I will become.

I am a proud Latina who was born in the US. I love going to sports games even if I don't understand the rules of it all. I love tacos de carnitas con todo. I am an artist who can't stick to one particular art form. I can watch *Hercules*, *Mulan*, and *Tangled* any day of the week. I am so many things. There's no one on this planet who can tell me what I am or what I can't be. My identity isn't just influenced by where I was born or where my family came from, but it also includes everything else that has brought me to where I am. I know

now that I have the liberty to choose who I want to be in this world. I am no longer that little girl who is complacent with sitting out on the sidelines. ●

I grew up as a non-athlete in a family of jocks. My loved ones are still surprised that I've transformed into a runner. After retiring from a corporate career, I also became a public librarian and an aspiring writer. These activities make me happy. Change is good.

WINGS ON MY HEELS: MY TRANSFORMATION INTO A RUNNER

One second I was up and the next I was down—literally. I was flat on the ground. Dirt clung to my front side from top to toe, grit ground into my palms and elbows, and eucalyptus leaves stuck to my exercise tights. The mid-morning sun beat down on the back of my T-shirt, which was damp with perspiration. Salty sweat dripped from my hairline, stinging my eyes. This was not what I had bargained for when I took up running ten years ago.

I had just run down a rocky fire road in the chaparral-covered hills surrounding the town of Avalon. It was the final stretch of the 2019 Catalina Island Eco10K. Five miles were behind me, and I had less than a mile to go, all of it flat or downhill. A couple hundred other crazy runners were scattered along the six-mile race course, but I was probably the only participant at that particular moment who was completely at one with the trail.

I had made a huge mistake—one that I made as a rookie runner, and it looked like I had yet to learn my lesson even now that I was more experienced—Do Not Take Your Eyes Off The Trail. Yep, I had gotten too cocky. Because I was finally on level ground, I thought I could gaze ahead and scope out the competition. My partner, Ken, the reason I had gotten into running in the first place, was exiting the road that skirted the bottom edge of Avalon's municipal golf course. He was less than two hundred yards in front of me, turning onto the main street to-

ward the finish line. The race ended on Crescent Avenue, which paralleled Avalon Harbor, where white sailboats bobbed in the azure water and orange Garibaldi fish swam in the clear shallows.

My ability to see Ken at this point in the run was a first. Usually, I was several minutes behind him in every race, but now I was pretty darn close. He was the hare and I the greyhound, but only temporarily. When I was looking ahead and not paying attention to my path, I tripped on the uneven surface. Hmm. Sounds like a universal life lesson, doesn't it? I try to avoid pain, as well as learn from others' mistakes, but this time my runner's education came the hard way. Again. It wasn't my first fall, but I hoped it would be my last. I prayed this lesson wasn't something I had to keep learning over and over, just like in the movie *Groundhog Day*.

My running career began when I was fifty-two years old and living in the Bay Area. I had just started dating a man who loved to run on trails—he hoped I would learn to love running, too. I already liked hiking and cross-country skiing, and was by no means a couch potato, but I wasn't sure I'd like running. I wasn't a natural athlete—I was the only uncoordinated person in my family of jocks. I ran with my father as a kid, but Dad liked to work out on tracks. I found jogging in big circles to be incredibly boring and mind-numbing. Hmm. Yet another life lesson, courtesy of running. However, traveling along a trail through meadows dotted with oaks, or

along steep slopes hugged by tall redwoods, was much more appealing.

I progressed slowly, step by methodical step. We started by running and walking the trails together. Ken would say something like, "Let's run to that manzanita bush," or "Keep going until that white boulder, and then we'll walk for a bit."

Our budding relationship kept me going even though I thought Ken wasn't as patient as he could've been. After all, he'd been running for thirty years by the time we met and had experienced the feeling of "being in the zone." I thought I was entitled to express my thoughts about running once in a while, but he'd ignore my complaints. "This trail is too rocky for me," or "You want me to run *how* far?" I'd whine.

Over time I graduated to running whenever the ground was level or the trail ran downhill. I'd walk only if the path climbed uphill. That's a pattern I usually hold to today. And of course, when on the trail, I needed to keep my eyes focused on the ground in order to avoid hidden roots, rocks, or other tripping hazards, while sneaking peeks skyward to spot overhead dangers.

"Watch out for tree limbs hanging over the trail," Ken warned. "That's why I wear my

cap backwards—so the bill doesn't block my view of branches."

"And I thought it was just a fashion statement," I joked. "Tree limbs aren't a problem for me since I'm not as tall as you, but I'll keep it in mind."

Soon, Ken was no longer running and walking with me for the entire route. If he was training for a race he'd run ahead, then loop

... I started running again, down Avalon's main street, past quaint beach cottages and small shops, to the cheers and encouragement of clusters of residents ...

back to join me for a while. That worked well for about six months until I forgot the Golden Rule of Running (DNTYEOTT) while jogging in the Oakland Hills from the equestrian stables to Lake Chabot. The hillsides were covered with dried-out, non-native grasses, and wildfires were a concern. Basque sheepherders would sometimes park their trailers in the middle of a grassland area and let their charges

graze the meadows to cut down on fire danger. Other shepherds, entrepreneurs with herds of brown, white, and spotted goats, would fence off sections of the steeper grades, moving the fences as areas got chewed down by the creatures. "Mountain maggots" is what John Muir called the hooved beasts, but they were a natural form of vegetation management.

I was rounding the bend of the trail one weekend, with Ken running far ahead of me, when I heard the tell-tale tinkle of the lead goat's bell. Spread alongside me on the uphill slope were over one hundred goats munching on pale yellow grasses. Distracted by the bucolic scene, I lifted my eyes to watch the mountain maggots eat, but I did not lift my feet in a similar fashion. All of a sudden, the ground rushed up to meet me, and I smacked hard onto the dirt. Ken hadn't yet taught me the method of how to fall properly, so I FOOSHed, as the doctor in the emergency room would later tell me—Fell-On-Outstretched-Hand.

Once I caught my breath, I picked myself up and surveyed the damage. My left knee and right hand had taken the brunt of the fall. Both were swelling rapidly, and I knew I couldn't run any farther that day. Limping slowly, I started back to the car, which was parked at the stables.

“Lori, what are you doing? I thought we were going to do the loop,” Ken hollered behind me. When I hadn’t reached our agreed-upon fork in the trail, he doubled back to look for me.

I pivoted, holding my hand above my heart, because I knew elevating it would help prevent swelling. I didn’t have to say a word. When Ken saw my dirt-covered front, puffy hand, and grapefruit-sized knee, he understood what had happened. We walked back to the car, our running rudely interrupted. The trip seemed at least twice as long now that we were moving at what seemed like a turtle’s pace.

Since it was a Saturday, my doctor’s office was not open, so we had to go to the emergency room to get my injuries evaluated. “Please, let’s go home first,” I said. “I want to take a shower and change my clothes before we go to the hospital.”

X-rays showed my hand was broken, but it was only a small bone that fractured. My knee was fine. For follow-up treatment I got sent to an orthopedist who treated the Oakland Athletics baseball team, so that was my claim to fame for a bit. “I have the same doctor as the As,” I bragged to my friends and co-workers.

You can’t do much for a broken bone that’s just below and between the pinkie and ring fingers. I wore a soft splint to immobilize the wound, but since my job required a lot of

keyboard work, I had to suffer through the twinges of pain as the tiny bone healed.

And now here I was again, several years later, with another FOOSH on a different trail. But this time, my mind watched myself fall in slow motion before I hit the ground, much as time slows down in the split-second before an unavoidable car crash. This time, I was able to slow my fall and hit the ground with more of my body and less of my hand.

I heard some passing runners slowing down to ask, “Are you okay?”

Mustering as much dignity as I could in my prone position, I replied “I’m fine.” Then I scrambled to my feet. I was in a race, one that I had trained for and was determined to finish. It took me several precious seconds to check out my scrapes and brush the leaves and dirt from my T-shirt and tights.

Then I started running again, down Avalon’s main street, past quaint beach cottages and small shops, to the cheers and encouragement of clusters of residents and of runners who had already finished the race. My elbow throbbed and my knee ached, but this time I didn’t give up. This time I ran.

Ten years after I started running, and despite my fall, I took first place in my age group, beating out eleven other women. I cut eight minutes off my time from the year before. What I learned from the experience was persistence and practice do pay off. That you

can teach an old dog new tricks, and it’s never too late to try something you didn’t think you could do.

While I’m not sure I’ve ever reached the fabled “zone” when I’m running, I’ve had some pretty special experiences. Earlier this year, when millions of painted lady butterflies were migrating through San Diego County, they swarmed through the local wildlife preserve where I was doing my daily run. I had transformed from a walker into a runner—they had transformed from caterpillars into beautiful black-and-yellow butterflies. We traveled along the path together, those painted ladies and I. Just like them, I felt like I was flying. ●

DANIELLE
BUFORD

Throughout my poem, I go deep into how it is to be in an abusive household and how children really do absorb everything. As the poem progresses it’s revealed that the abuser is the one that ultimately lost.

WISH YOU WELL, SORT OF

I wish you well,
sort of

You were my nightmare
in the shape of my father.

Constellations were painted across her skin
in the shape of bruises.

Your apologies were just empty thoughts
begging to manipulate my mind.

Your empty promises that you changed
meant nothing to me.

You were the sole thing you swore
you’d protect me from

I wish you well,
sort of.

You were my walking fear
disguised as someone I love.

I wish you well,
but not really.

One day, you’ll realized
You lost something important.

I wish you well,
sort of

I write myself out of my own head and imagine what others are feeling and living. I've had to learn the powerful transformational process of telling the truth to myself. I like to write about characters at the moment when they realize and accept who they actually are.

WONDERING THE SAME

What is it like

I wonder as I watch them quietly from behind the checkstand
her hands sticky with syrup,
her shirt checkered in marked colors that don't belong to its design

What is it like

her dad picks her up on his shoulders
her mother loves her with shoulders and chest
unscarred by loss
unafraid of less
unfettered by absent worries known to me
this way it's best

I look to the left

A woman in chiffon looks at me
Wondering the same.

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