

TIDE POOLS

VOL. 36

2022

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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. *Tidepools* accepts submissions on a rolling basis all year long. 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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EDITOR'S NOTE

FICTION

"THE MOMENTS BETWEEN LIGHTNING"

Emory Williams

NON-FICTION

"ON COLLEGE AND READING"

Jade MacEoghain

POETRY

"MAKE AMERICA GREATER"

Diamonique Massey-Johnson

ART

"RIGHT HEART"

Helena Westra

Dear readers,

This year, 2022, announced our return to campus after nearly two years of quarantining, as well as learning and teaching online. Until now, many of us only knew each other as heads in a Zoom gallery. We are beginning to reconvene and reimagine the time we have together. Yet, the pandemic is definitely not over. The (ongoing) struggles, the losses, the insights, and renewed senses of gratitude have all indelibly marked us. We are still figuring out how to tell the stories of this period in our shared history. It makes sense, then, that our insightful editorial staff traced common threads binding the visual and verbal work in this edition: Reflection, Mourning, Liminality, Resilience, Hope, Intimacy, and Closeness. All of the writers and artists who have shared their optics on our post(?) -pandemic world help us to get a little closer, to remember that we're part of a MiraCosta family.

Thank you to two new additions to our Tidepools family who have been instrumental in bringing this work closer to you—Lexie King, graphic designer extraordinaire who created this beautiful book, and Amanda McArdle-Duale, social media guru who artistically and engagingly established @tidepoolsublishing. Thank you, too, to Professors Min Choi and Aaron E. Roberts for being beacons of light and support for our amazing interns.

Most of all, thank you, readers, for seeing, hearing, and taking care of all of the creative work published in these pages. We hold you close.

With gratitude and hope,

Jade Hidle, PhD

Editor-in-Chief

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TIDEPOLS 2022

RIGHT HEART

HELENA WESTRA

Helena Westra is a visual artist and student at MiraCosta. For her, art is both an expression of what is internal and a tool to process and better understand both her inner landscape and the world around her. In addition, she is deeply inspired by nature and environmental ecology.

H
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H

My mind is a prison; the walls are pink:
 no sanctimonious soul, no piercing voice or echoing song.
 A rainy day turns into a rainy week;
 hours nitpick at only what is wrong.
 Pessimistic hummingbirds—not in the sky—
 but perched on the branches of my intestines.
 Like wilted sunflowers in the middle of July,
 the sun refuses to point in my direction.
 If only I could cut through the gloom,
 and grip the banister on the staircase of joy.
 I can almost smell euphoria's perfume,
 but the wooden steps have all been destroyed.
 A ten-letter word, missiles loaded,
 my normal duplicate was murdered.
 Powder kegs of sorrow have already exploded.
 The lines between sad and unwell are forever blurred.

Amanda McArdle-Duale is a sapphic writer, poet, and student at MiraCosta. Drawing inspiration from nature, her work aims to offer healing through words.

AMANDA MCARDLE-DUALE

V

A swarm of bees—the queen's favorite hive
 burrowed, dripping honey, doubt, and intrusive thoughts
 into my incapacitated mind—
 leaving me bumbling and distraught.
 "Calm down," they verbalize, as my body is swallowed
 whole by the ocean's remorseless riptide.
 My timorous heart is bitten out and hollow;
 certainty escapes like pieces of earth in a landslide.
 "Relax," they utter,
 as I return from the edge of the milky way.
 Like a butterfly's broken wings, I almost flutter—
 healing from thirty thousand light-years of pain.
 A seven-letter word hanging over my head,
 neon lights—hot pink iridescence.
 In a war of me versus myself, hope turns up dead
 on the bloodstained battle lines in my mind: obsolescence.

FROM ASHES TO FROG SPAWN

I cannot wait to be laid to rest
 surrounded by peat moss and slugs,
 My rotting skin soothed by the embrace of chanterelle and deathcaps,
 to let my hollowed bones be home to a salamander and my ribcage to a skink,
 Algae coating what once were hands and ferns growing from what once were feet.

Let my teeth and fingers erode into the sand beneath the maze of a mangrove's roots
 The fat on my thighs melt into the clay and silt in a lagoon alive with frog song
 I want my muscles eaten by a heron, picking at my ligaments to be consumed by fish and toads,
 and porous bones to be filled by lion's mane and cordyceps.

I want frog spawn to fill my empty skull so that tadpoles may swim through my ribcage
 I want my skin to be replaced by mud and I want flowers to grow on every inch of my skeleton
 I want the sun to kiss all of creation atop my grave
 I want to become the sand that lines the lake,
 The foundation of great mountains.

I want my fleeting, meager human life to come to a meaningful end
 in bugs and moss and spores
 With my soul in eternity among the whispering and chirping of life everlasting.

EMILY STANGLAND

The concept of death scares me because of its uncertainty. What happens to me? If there is no afterlife, I would like to believe in at least life after death in some form. If the metaphysical is uncertain, I can take comfort in knowing the physical won't be lost forever.

LICE

When I was in fifth grade, I got lice. Addendum: in fifth grade, my whole Girl Scout troop got lice after spending the weekend before Thanksgiving camping in a lodge that smelled unnervingly like butterscotch. The bunk beds we slept on had questionably “clean” sheets and pillowcases that gave off an unsettling odor as if they had been cleaned by a four-year-old who thought dipping a thing in water was equivalent to washing it.

Kylie is a student at UCSD studying public health and literature. She likes re-reading Judy Blume and Nancy Drew and is fascinated by how tweens are taught about puberty.

Upon our return to school, we unknowingly gave lice to everyone in the fifth grade. Moms were especially happy about this given that it was the week of Thanksgiving.

Every other kid in class put mayonnaise on their heads to mend the situation and they were fine. Maggie and I were the exceptions to the mayonnaise treatment. Maggie shaved her head.

Maggie’s mom also shaved her head in solidarity.

My stepmom said, “No, mayo isn’t strong enough. Get the chemicals,” and she had my dad comb through my hair for nits five hours a day for a week. It was a cloudy, rainy week as he poured cold water over my head to “kill the nits faster.” It was cold, he was cold, I was cold. He was catching himself right before swearing the way dads do before their kids enter some level of teenagehood, you know, “son of a...nit!” But I was just happy he decided not to shave my head. He was on the edge of that precipice for several days before resolving to just cut my hair (at an unintentional 150 degree angle).

While my dad combed through my hair for lice eggs, he gave me reading material. He gave me three booklets: “Puberty and Me,” “There’s Hair There?!” and “Boys Can Wait, But Heaven Can’t.” Is the last one implying I should die before meeting a boy?

All of the booklets were clearly written in the late ‘80s on account of the four-sizes-too-big solid-colored billowy sweatshirts worn by the kids and the abundance of upper lip sweat on the ethnically diverse cast of cover model tweens.

The puberty-abstinence booklets were a strange choice for me at ten. If you saw me in fifth grade, you would see why.

No mothers were locking their sons up for fear I would seduce them. No one was going, “that kid is at risk of tween pregnancy.” Prior to reading the American Girl book on puberty, I was still hanging onto the stork theory of baby delivery.

I looked like I would be the kid in charge of the other kids’ timeouts at a science museum. “Jeremy, stop rolling your grapes down the spiral coin collector! Just wait outside by the fountain with \$200 worth of pennies in it and two stray baby shoes.”

“Camden, stop throwing gum drops at Alexis! You’re being a real Mike Teavee from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* right now, which is off-brand given that we’re in a science museum!”

When lost PTA moms wandered onto my elementary school campus during the day, a look of rushed panic in their eyes, I would often be the one they asked for directions. I was the non-threatening, approachable, she-won’t-grow-up-to-undermine-my-child-for-an-office-position kid. A real off-brand American Girl type, like Samantha but with Kit-length hair and a real Kirsten personality (she’s the mid-nineteenth century one who carries a spoon bag). Moms would ask me for directions to the bathroom or the library or the auditorium for the second night of the third grade play where their red-headed Irish sons were playing Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, which we wouldn’t realize was less than ideal for another decade.

“Oh [little ethnically ambiguous boy], where is the auditorium?” Mrs. Fisher would ask (because it was always Mrs. Fisher).

“Right this way, Mrs. Fisher,” I would say as I listened to her black heels click on the cement behind me while I led her towards Ms. (was she married? Was she single? The mystery!) Carmichael’s racially-concerning third grade production of “I Have a Dream...”

I was the non-threatening kid moms trusted. I looked like my grandma was a preschool director at a Christian school. Which she was.

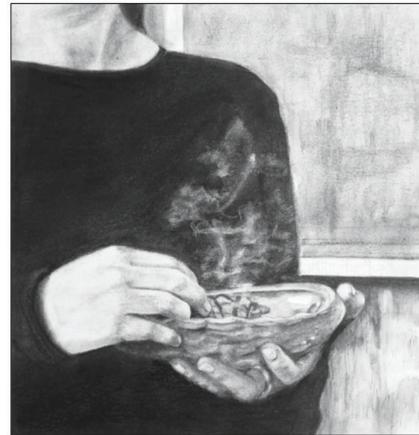
I looked like a kid who read abstinence books on the weekends “for fun.” Which of course, was not true at all. I read abstinence books on holiday weekdays while my dad combed through my hair for lice not for fun, but because I was a Kit-Kirsten-Samantha hybrid: obedient. Spoon bag.

And the books weren’t all that bad. I actually learned a lot from “There’s Hair There?!” At the time, I didn’t actually know there WAS hair there. And by “there” I mean armpits, of course. ●

TRADITIONS WE CARRY

SUMMER JONES

CHARCOAL TRYPIC



Traditions We Carry, is a tryptic charcoal drawing series about learning and reclaiming our traditions as Indigenous peoples, traditions that have been nearly forgotten due to the erasure, genocide, and colonization. This drawing is of my family, my culture, and our resilience. This drawing reminds me that I still have a lot to learn about my people, but for now I will carry what I know proudly.

WAXING

I've been numbing with reruns of *Cheers* every night. I hate Sam and Diane. They wasted so much time not being together. It's not that thinking of him makes me sad, it's that feeling his absence leaves me sore, at my temples, in my sides, in the lining of my intestines. Even the bacteria in my gut microbiome are dysbiotic, sensing my heart's heaviness and following suit.

Kylie is a tutor at MiraCosta College and is currently a student at UCSD. She wrote this piece in the winter after a year of pandemic craziness. 2020 was confusing, probably for everyone. She tried to convey that confusion in this piece.

Bacteria know.

I stand on the fading wood of what was once our porch, but now it's just my porch.

Michael's boots taunt me next to the front door. The ones with his initials on the back. I should move them. Maybe put them in storage or at his mom's house. She's been collecting his things to fill his empty childhood room. His room with faded spaceships drawn onto the vanilla walls.

My right hand swims through the cavernous depths of my purse past my wallet until it touches the thumb-sized blue-painted clog at the end of my keychain that Michael brought back for me from Amsterdam before we started dating, back in college.

I pull the house key up by the clog, push the brass blade into the keyhole, and press open the front door. My left hand navigates through the emptiness for the light switch on the wall to the left of the door but before I can reach it, I feel something cold at the back of my neck and a gloved, warm hand cups my mouth.

"Shhh...don't move," the voice says into my right ear. I feel his unwanted breath make the hair on my neck uncomfortable. He sounds tired, as if he'd prefer not to be here. I now have suspicions that the cold at the top of my spine is a gun. I feel every ounce of Rosati's oily marinara sauce moving backwards up through my intestines. I hear two men talking to each other in the other room.

"It's in the left wall of the bathroom," one of them says. He sounds young, maybe eighteen. The man behind me pushes me

forward from my shoulder blade and says, "I'll check it. Take her to the bedroom." He sounds older, maybe thirty. What's in my bathroom wall?

My knees feel like jelly and my belly is in my neck. My toes are numb from the cold or the fear or both. The part of my back that he touched feels hot. I want to turn the lights on. I want to have my house to myself, and yet I want Michael here too. I want none of this.

She continued to be hopeful about bangs, until she realized, at age twenty-one, that they made her look like a monolingual Dora the Explorer.

They move me to the bedroom. One is fumbling with his pants zipper. He can't get it down. In frustration or laziness, he sulks out of the room, closing the door behind him. The young one is left. The door clicks shut and I'm left sitting on the carpet at the base of the bed facing a man, or a boy, or something in between, who is guarding the door with a gun in his hand. He's probably my brother's age. I wonder if he's used a gun before.

I stare at the carpet that Michael picked out when we were arguing about whether or not to buy wood floors. I voted yes to wood, but then I had picked the fridge. So he got to choose the flooring, and he chose carpet. I still hate it. Even now. He said he wanted it because of the price and because his feet were always cold. Wear socks, I said. You wear socks, he said.

...

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

I stare at the ugly carpet and wonder what my mother will say at my funeral.

“Fast fashion made her nauseous as did unreturned shopping carts left astray in the parking lot. She loved Maya Angelou, Joni Mitchell, and Anthony Bourdain. She continued to be hopeful about bangs, until she realized, at age twenty-one, that they made her look like a monolingual Dora the Explorer. She started dating Michael when she was twenty-five. They surfed four mornings a week, three in the winter, and cooked most evenings. Michael died when he was thirty-three from lung cancer but then he had been dying for a while. Ina joked that because he was kind and into carpentry, that he was ‘basically Jesus.’ Then he went and died at age thirty-three, as if to prove her point. She died four months later when masked men robbed her house. She was unprepared. But then she usually was.”

The man at the door is shaking. I can see his knees quivering. Is he nervous? Maybe he’s just cold. Michael always said I kept the house too cold. “Ina, it’s sixty-six degrees in the kitchen in November,” he would laugh as he rubbed his palms against his jeans. Maybe I was too cold for him.

The light from the hallway bleeds underneath the door that the young man is standing in front of. It illuminates his shoes. My head feels hot and stretched, like pulled pork. My stomach churns in on itself for a third time tonight. I bought Michael those shoes five years ago at Christmas. When my kid brother, Ben, saw him open the box by the tree, his eyes got big. He was thirteen and Michael saw his eyes too. Michael looked at me

and I nodded. He gave Ben the shoes. It’s too dark to make out his eyes or facial features, and he’s wearing a mask anyway. The moon is a waning crescent, otherwise it could elucidate his face.

In the silence, I say his name. Just to see. “Benji?” I ask to the air.

The man at the door lifts his head. “Hi, Ina,” he lets out a rushed breath. He drops his head, then shakes it slow, like he did when he was six and his turtle, Danger, died.

“What’s going on, Ben? Why are---” I’m interrupted by the older one opening the door. “We got it,” the man looks at me, my knees glued over each other by sweat.

Maybe the grief won’t find me, like the seekers never could when I was quiet long enough during hide-and-seek.

Ben nods and stutters, “Okay, give me a —give me a second.”

The man looks at Ben, then to me, and he nods. “One minute.” He walks out.

Ben’s quiet. The silence causes a pressure to build in me like unwanted water against my lungs.

“Did—” I begin.

“He—” he offers.

We start in unison. I shake my head, “You go.”

“He wasn’t staying home last year,” he says.

I scoff, “He was sick, Ben. I was here every day with him except on—” He cuts me off, “Tuesdays?”

I nod. “Right...” I trail off and leave it, unsure if I want to know more. Let Michael stay clean in my memory, holy and unblemished, a sacrificial lamb to cancer’s crucifixion.

“He was with me on Tuesdays,” he says into the molding silence of the room. He hangs his head again, as if to apologize for his presence in a place he was uninvited to.

I stare toward his silhouette and let the quiet saturate my confusion. If I’m quiet long enough, maybe it will all go away and Michael will come back. Maybe the grief won’t find me, like the seekers never could when I was quiet long enough during hide-and-seek. I was behind the door the whole time.

“Mike was opening—” Ben starts but is interrupted by the older one who pushes open the door again.

“Come on, man, we need to go.”

Ben looks at me, his brow tense, tiny valleys forming on his forehead. He sighs big. He nods and as he leaves, drops a piece of paper on the ugly carpet.

When I hear the click of the front door I press my hands against my temples and the base of my neck, trying to massage away the

anxiety and confusion and trauma forming in real time. It doesn’t work. I crawl over to the piece of paper Ben dropped and unfold it. One. Two. Three folds. I press my left hand across my forehead, the sweat sticking my skin together. I stare at the words on the paper.

He’s still here, it reads.

I look at the moon out the window as I breathe in small inhales. I was wrong. The moon isn’t a waning crescent. It’s a waxing crescent. The moon isn’t getting smaller. It’s getting bigger. ●

WOULD

KATLYN BUSH

YOU LIKE

Would you like fries with that?
 With your double double burger?
 And a drink if you get the combo?
 With cheese, but not too much.
 And not touching the lettuce.
 And only one half a tomato slice.
 Yes, sir, but it is an extra \$3.45.
 Yes, sir, but the milkshake is not included.
 No, I did not change the price.
 No, the manager is not here.
 I understand, but we only have one other cashier.
 I understand, but he's cooking the burgers.
 Yes, but you have to wait fifteen minutes.
 Yes, sir I understand you are upset.
 Sorry, but we are very busy today.
 But, sir, the guy taking your order also has to clean up the mess on the floor.
 But, sir, he also has to mop the bathroom.
 Because no one wants to work and be a team player.
 Because that's what the manager said as he went home.
 But, we gotta stay and deal with chaos.
 But, sir, the second register is busted.
 No, sir, we do not have a full time mechanic around every time something breaks.
 No, sir, I am not trained to fix it myself.
 I'm sorry, we are very busy right now. I'm sorry, It is the lunch rush.
 I'm sorry, weekends tend to get busy.
 Yes, sir, I know your kids are hungry.
 No, I can not serve you first because your kids are hungrier than number twenty five.
 Yes, sir, but, you are number thirty five.

FRIES WITH THAT?

Would you like a complimentary desert while you wait?
 I'm sorry, we do not serve chocolate pretzels.
 No, sir we are not hiding them in the back.
 No, sir I do not control what goes on the menu.
 Would you like a chocolate chip cookie with that?
 Would you like to scream at the nineteen year old behind the counter with that?
 For things that are widely and completely out of their control?
 I'm sorry, the second cash register is still broken.
 I'm sorry, one of our fryers is not working.
 But, sir, the manager said we can't afford to replace them.
 Because he needs to take his wife to the Bahamas.
 While my coworker and I will be asked to give up our days off to be a team player.
 And we are still hoping payday comes before our landlord complains about late rent.
 No, sir, burger flipping should not pay the bills.
 Yes, sir this is a high school job.
 Because we are closed from seven o'clock in the morning to three thirty in the afternoon.
 Oh okay so now you tell me you would like fries with that?
 And a shake, and another double cheeseburger?
 I already rang you up so I have to see your card again.
 But, sir, your card didn't go through. Yes, sir this register is working.
 Yes sir, I know I should get a real job.
 No, sir if we all got real jobs we would not be flipping your real burger.
 We would not be pouring your real drinks.
 When you are really hungry and craving a cheeseburger and fries.
 You would have nowhere to go.
 Because we all got a real job.

My poem, "Would You Like Fries with That" is meant to describe the frustration of working in customer service, specifically the food service industry. The single stanza is meant to represent how a long conversation with a difficult customer feels. As someone who has worked in food service and customer service jobs, I often think about the way the employees are treated by the employees and also by the management. I wanted to write a poem that expressed the chaotic nature of this job.

JUST A SPOONFUL OF PEANUT BUTTER

KAYLA ALVAREZ

I let out a deep sigh as I look in the fogged-up mirror with a smile. My wet hair touches my back while a towel wraps tightly around my body. In a couple more days it'll be Christmas, meaning I've lived another ten years of joyful holiday spirit. I walk out from my bathroom into my connected master bedroom. My curtains are open, giving light to my green plants hanging from the ceiling. My cat hogs the space on the bed where the sun warms the most, and like any sane individual I touch his little toe beans as I pass by. He gives out a loud purr and stretches like if there's no tomorrow. I let out a giggle. When I suddenly stop in my tracks.

Kayla has always been fond of languages, speaking and learning from her diverse family. She currently knows two and a half languages. Growing up with a single mother that allowed her to buy books when the opportunity came, helped her embrace her love for reading and learning.

I don't think I can count how many days I've been under the covers. My coworkers remind me that it's just seasonal depression and I should stop calling out for something so silly. They may be right but nothing beats lying in bed thinking the same thoughts over and over again. The calendar on the wall still marks December 15. I think it may be around Christmas by now. But there's nothing festive about this room. The curtains are draped around the window blocking off any possible sunlight from coming in. The mountain of clothes on the desk that I promised I would fold down. The half empty water bottles on the shelf. And as the days have passed it seems as if this room has closed in on me.

As funny as it seems I don't remember this room ever getting this bad. I mean I've had my moments, I admit. But something at this level seems very out of place to me. In a corner of the room I can hear the vinyl scratching to fill the background noise. Besides the vinyl, it's only me shuffling under the covers to find the perfect spot. But there are no more good spots. My body aches from the minimal movement these past couple days or perhaps weeks, I'm not sure.

I decide to get up and use the restroom, maybe get a spoonful of peanut butter to help me last a couple more

hours. I walk out to the kitchen and I see my mother eating her breakfast by herself, while her phone on the table softly plays Christmas music.

She's a very tall woman, but today she looks so small. She sees me weakly walking past the table where she's sitting and she manages to give me the warmest smile, warmer than what any blanket could ever give me. She asks me how I'm doing and if I'd like a plate. "No," I respond coldly, because I'm stupid. But that's not how I wanted to respond. I wanted to leap into her arms and cry until I had no more tears. I wanted her to hug me and tell me everything was going to be okay. I wanted her to fix me a plate. But what I most wanted was to be able to sit next to her again and laugh like we used to.

Her smile goes away and she begins to eat her food again with her head down. If only I could have responded in the way I wanted to. But it's too late now. I grab a spoonful of peanut butter and eat it on the way to the room—well, my room. I toss the spoon in a cup that was on the ground. And I hide under the blankets once again, hiding from my surroundings and hiding from my reality.

An hour may have passed because my mother is dressed up and her long hair is still wet from the shower. She knocks on the door but has already opened it all the way.

...

She asks if I want to drive around with her because the streets would be empty since it was Christmas. I stay still, faking a nap. She gently closes the door and goes out.

My heart sinks. I can physically feel it breaking. Once again I am the reason for creating more problems for myself. My mind begins to race on its own.

Your room is a mess. When was the last time you washed your hair? The clothes. I'm hungry. It's cold outside. Red and green. I need to clean. My mom. I'm sorry. The water bottles. The vinyl. My blanket is warm. An omelet sounds good. Christmas? I apologized. Family. I said I was sorry. Together. Please come back. Holiday cheer. I'm begging. Big feast. Mom.

I wanted her to hug me and tell me everything was going to be okay. I wanted her to fix me a plate. But what I most wanted was to be able to sit next to her again and laugh like we used to.

I begin to sob, my head is in circles. I've never felt so alone. I clench my dirty hair, and my knees hit my chest. If I was this close to myself maybe it wouldn't feel so lonely. I'm like this every year. I should be used to it by now. But somehow I always find a way to mess things up. The tears won't stop coming down either. I don't want to be alone this Christmas. I want to be with my mom. I want to eat lots of food. But that was lost for today, for the year.

I gasp for air thinking about other families preparing the tables in their fine plates. Anxiously waiting for their family members to arrive through the door. Why was I not allowed to have that? What did I do wrong?

Looking down to my feet with my body clenched tight on the ground, I remember what I had done wrong. This whole month I've been nothing but rude, hiding away in my room for no reason at all. Well I'm sure it was for a reason but I had forgotten it all along. I had clung to a sentiment that no longer mattered. What really mattered was being able to spend the day with my mom, feast or not.

My body begins to loosen up, and I stop clinging so close. I take a deep breath and look around at my nightmare. I get up slowly as I am dizzy from the lack of food and panic attack. I decide to take a shower. As much as taking one is a drag for me sometimes, I always feel pretty after I get out. I strip down slowly and throw my clothes in the laundry basket. I slip into the shower and turn the water on toward the hot side. And let myself get wet while I lather up the soap.

Once I get out of the shower I feel like a new person. I am motivated to do something about that dumpster of a room. I quickly change into a new pair of pjs and comb out my hair that was filled with knots.

For someone like me this is a big progress toward a new me. But if I thought about it too hard this is something simple that everyone does. Most people don't let themselves get this bad. Nevertheless, I come into my room and start throwing away all the trash into a bag. Then I begin to fold

the clothes on the desk and make the bed. I stop the poor overplayed vinyl and instead play music off of my almost dead phone.

In the middle of cleaning, I hear the front door open. I take a peek out of my door and see my mom with grocery bags. She may have seen me peeking because she walks over to my room and sees that it is in the process of being cleaned.

With the grocery bags in her hands she warmly says, "Are you ready to eat now?"

With tears coming down from my eyes I walk over and give her a hug. "Yes, ama."

My cat bit my hand and I am reminded that I wasn't the person I used to be when I was twenty. But I still carry around the guilt like shackles tied to the ground that keep me from moving forward. Calling it guilt sounds so pretentious. I still don't think I'm 100% okay, but I am definitely doing better. I still hate

Christmas. I strongly hate it. My mom and I are still alone but now separated by a couple thousand miles. We still don't have a big family; it's just us, which is fine with me. But I've moved so far from her, almost as if I've run away from my past, dodging every corner that reminds me of who I can be if I ever don't keep busy.

But this Christmas I won't run away. I'm getting ready for my flight later in the evening, my suitcase is still open so I can place the last few items inside before I leave. My cat has even decided to place some of his toys in my suitcase as well. I haven't visited my mom since I moved out eight years ago. I'm

nervous, maybe ashamed would be a better word for a situation like this. I've never been one to talk much; I haven't even called her to let her know I'm returning for the holidays.

The cat and I arrive with my suitcase. We rent a car from the airport and make our way south for about an hour until we reach my small hometown. Going down the street to my childhood home seems to take longer than the plane ride. Once we get closer the old house looks empty and dark, not a sign of holiday cheer. I stop in the driveway and get out of the car slowly. I let my cat come out of the car as well. We step very lightly on the pavement until we reach the door, and I almost crawl back into the car.

My legs are trembling and tears are running down my face. It was all a mistake. I shouldn't be here regardless. My mom probably found someone to be with during the holidays since I abandoned her for so many years.

I agonize, sitting on the porch with my cat spread on my feet, debating if I should stay or not. As I'm getting ready to leave, a car I don't recognize pulls up to the driveway. I start to get worried. Did she move and not tell me? But out comes a woman who has aged much more than I did in those eight years with watery eyes. Her limp arms reach out toward me for a hug, and I run quickly toward her warm embrace. After a while of talking in the cold driveway, she invites me in and asks if I am hungry. I laugh through the crying and say, "Just a spoonful of peanut butter for now." ●



TIDEPOLS 2022

AMALGAMATION

SAVANNA ADKINS

ETCHING

| *An etching depicting the human; especially aspects we might see as imperfections being celebrated instead of hidden.*

SOLOMON

The last time I saw my baby cousin we were all in my mother's backyard. My dad had set up one of my mom's sun lounge chairs in front of the fire pit and under the tarp for him, my cousin. We had it set up, so he was half sitting and half lying in case he threw up. Everyone else—my grandmother, aunt, uncle, mom, dad, and I—sat on red Adirondack chairs in a sort of circle around him, my cousin. The backyard was nice, and everyone agreed that Solomon enjoyed it. The fresh air would be good for him.

I haven't written something personal in a long time. I wrote this a couple of weeks after my cousin died. It was cathartic; I cried a lot while writing it.

My baby cousin was only three years old. The last time I saw him was on June 4th, 2021. It was hard seeing him. A month before, no one would have ever thought anything was wrong. He wasn't wearing his backpack anymore, the one with his medicine, the one that was heavier than he was. But even when he had to wear his backpack, the one with the tubes that came out of the side and snaked their way under his shirt, no one would have ever thought anything was wrong. He was always full of life, running and laughing all the time. Whenever he'd come over, he would always greet me with the biggest, brightest smile before running over to hug me. But he didn't the last time I saw him. He couldn't.

My baby cousin was only two years old, maybe one, when he was diagnosed with cancer. He had a tumor in his brain. My mom texted my dad about his diagnosis. I was in Encinitas; it was later in the night. I was in my room, calling my girlfriend. My dad came into my room; his expression made my heart sink.

I don't think I said anything. The microwave was beeping, so I walked into the kitchen, and I cried.

"Solomon has brain cancer." He said it softly. Abruptly. He was crying.

A week or so after I saw him, my cousin, for the last time, my mom sent my dad a text. It was later in the night. I don't remember what we had planned on doing. I was making popcorn.

When he got the notification, I asked him if it was my mom. She was in Yosemite. He didn't answer immediately. I watched his face; his expression made my heart sink.

"Solomon's gone." He said it softly. Abruptly. I thought I misheard him at first. "I'm sorry, you guys." I hadn't misheard him.

I don't think I said anything. The microwave was beeping, so I walked into the kitchen, and I cried.

Life is neither fair nor unfair; it just is. But the night that Solomon passed, I couldn't stop thinking about how unfair it was that

my three-year-old baby cousin died, that he was diagnosed with cancer and died a year later. I couldn't stop thinking about how my grandmother told him that people she knew and loved would be waiting in heaven to take care of him after he died. I couldn't stop thinking about how my aunt told me one night in my mom's kitchen that she wished she could hear him say "I love you" just once before he died. I couldn't stop thinking about how unfair it was that Solomon, my three-year-old baby cousin, died.

On June 20th, 2021, we held a service for Solomon. My uncle called it a celebration of his life. We were all in another uncle's backyard on the patio of his house on the hill. There was a table with benches on either side where my aunt's friends and some of our family sat. There was an island with some bar stools where my uncle's friend and his family sat. There was a couch where an old man no one really knew slept. There was a table in front of that couch where some other seats surrounded it in a sort of circle. There was a string where photos of Solomon hung. It was hard seeing him.

The first time I saw my aunt after Solomon passed was about two days before his service. We were all sitting at my mother's dining table. My aunt sat at the head of the table, clutching a plush baby doll. She was crying.

"Solomon picked this doll," she wept. "I feel like he picked it for me." She held onto the doll the entire time she was over. I didn't see her put it down once.

At the service, my sister and I stood off to the side in one of the patio's corners. I'm not good with people, at least not in the context of large gatherings. My aunt approached us. She looked tired and we could tell she had cried, but she smiled at us. It was a real, genuine smile.

"Have you guys had anything to eat? Are you hungry?" She always makes sure my sister and I are taken care of. We told her we were okay and that we would get food when we did get hungry; she joked about how small our appetites are. We asked her if she was alright.

The baby doll laid in the sun. ●

I THINK

You are smiling
You look familiar
I am so happy to see you
You must be a friend
I think I know you

You listen to me
I like the sound of your voice
You respond to what I say
I feel so lonely, but somehow
I think I know you

I'm going to get out of here
I want you to know that I've tried my best
I don't know what you mean
Where do I live?
I think I know you

Where have you been?
I need my things
I know you can help me
What have I done wrong?
I think I know you

You reach out to me
Your freckles look like mine
Are you my nurse, daughter, my wife?
I want to protect you
I think I know you
I hold your hand

My father suffered from Alzheimers and this poem is dedicated to all those who have battled Alzheimer's and the family members that stood by their side. Love you, Dad!

Dedicated to all those who have battled Alzheimer's and the family members that stood by their side. Love you, Dad!

LONETTE WESSER

I smile back at you
You may be a stranger
I am scared and all alone
I think I know you

I want you to bring me things
Will you bring me a toothbrush?
Can I have some money?
Where do I live?
I think I know you

I want to talk to you
Why can't I say the words?
Maybe I will have pie for dessert
Where is my room? Can you tell me?
I think I know you

You listen carefully
You seem concerned
I tell you I am lonely
I want to go home
I think I know you

You kiss me goodbye
You give me a hug

Can you help me find my tennis shoes?
I know you can help me
I think I know you

You walk down the hall
It's time to go
I watch you walk away
I smile at you but inside I am sad
I think I know you

I wish I could remember your name
You look familiar
I am so happy to see you
You must be a friend
I think I know you

I see a lady standing next to me
I ask her to dance
She dances with me
Who are you?
I think I know you
Or maybe I don't.

I KNOW YOU

DISSIPATE

SAVANNA ADKINS

DIGITAL PAINTING

A digital painting I did in my figure drawing class as I was learning about the intricate layout of the human body.



IF YOU KNEW

LILY CHAMBERLAIN

If you knew me you would know that just because my illness is invisible it doesn't mean i am not sick.
i can wear a smile just as good as everyone else.
a mask carefully put on each day in front of the mirror with the happy expression etched on in permanent marker
"looking" healthy means nothing.

If you knew me you would know that since 12 years old i have been pleading with my body not to be so broken
my cries a scratched and broken record again and again and again.
you expect me to be loud about my pain, the long, harsh scream of a barn owl but so many suffer in silence.
my pain is the quiet melody of a finch. i turned my pain into a song of resilience

If you knew me you would know that
i am made to feel like a burden
because my body doesn't quite work right. a gear in the wrong place maybe
i don't want to cancel my plans with you
i don't want to bring my own food wherever i go
i don't want to forget your name or stumble over my words because the fog in my brain is too thick
i don't want to lie flat on a bench in the middle of an amusement park because i am too dizzy and nauseous to stand straight.
the world keeps passing me by
i don't
i don't
I
Don't

IF YOU WOULD KNOW

If you knew me you would know that your words hurt me more than my own body does
pricks of needles. swarms of invisible insects.
when i am told every day
that *it isn't that bad*
when i am told that i
am *just being dramatic*
when i am asked if it is *really real*
or, perhaps even worse, when nothing is said at all
Your words hurt me more than my own body does

If you knew me you would know that sometimes,
i have a hard time speaking up for myself.
a small child with something to say but the world is too busy to stop
and
just
listen.
i need someone to be my advocate when i can't

If you knew me you would know that my pain doesn't stop
my moment by moment choice to live with purpose
with love

If you knew me you would know that
like large hands trying to handle a paper crane
i am still learning to be gentle with my body
so please
i am begging you
be gentle with me too

Lily is passionate about anything and everything. Her pastimes include trying to keep her plants alive, hanging out with friends and family, loving Jesus and loving people, and any creative pursuits. To her, writing is a form of self-expression and a way to empathize with others.

THE CRIPPLING NAME

RICARDO GARDUNO

My father's father was the first to face the crippling name. Though I do not know the ins and outs, I see what the name has done to him. The crippling name consumed my grandfather and led him astray from the successes of his siblings. The name took my grandfather's hope and dreams and put him in a cell. My grandfather, urgent to leave, made a deal with the crippling name. In exchange for his freedom, he must leave his hopes and dreams behind. My grandfather hesitantly agreed and set off to live a hopeless, dreamless life. In order to cope with the deal he made with the crippling name, my grandfather took solace in the numbing effects of alcohol and a partner with whom he could share the pain.

Name Essay for English 100, what my name means to me.

My grandfather, unable to face the burdens of the crippling name alone, decided to share the name with my father. Father did his best to fight the crippling name. With the aid of my grandmother, he seemed to be succeeding. However, the crippling name was relentless and would try to beat its effects into father and grandmother. Father continued forward. The crippling name could not stand to see Father succeed and amped up its pressure. After many years of emotional and physical abuse, Father had enough and not long after found himself with a bottle in his hand. My grandmother could not stand to see Father in the same situation as my grandfather, so she tended to him and made sure he received all the aid he needed. Though my father received a lot of help from my grandmother, the name was far too strong and turned Father like my grandfather.

The crippling name wanted me to follow the path it set for my father and my grandfather. Like my predecessors, I fought against the wishes of the crippling name.

Father, like his father, could not deal with the burden of the crippling name on his own and decided it was time to pass that burden onto me. The crippling name wanted me to follow the path it set for my father and my grandfather. Like my predecessors, I fought against the wishes of the crippling name. It tried its best to get me to conform. It beat me and told me I would not be anything more than my father and my grandfather. Eventually I left the home in which the crippling name resided. The crippling name has scarred me but has not stopped me from advancing. I look at those scars Ricardo has left on me with such resentment. I pity my father and my grandfather for letting Ricardo lead them to alcoholism. I feel sadness for my mother and grandmother, as they also endured the wrath of Ricardo. The crippling name ends with me. Ricardo has taught me a lot of lessons of what I should not do. I strive to be the best Ricardo—one that my mother, wife, and kids will be proud of. ●

WHAT IT'S LIKE BEING MEXICAN (FOR ME, AT LEAST)

My whole family is Mexican. I am Mexican, my parents are Mexican, my cousins are Mexican, my grandparents are Mexican, it goes on for a while. We're all pretty Mexican, yet we don't all look the same. I can look similar to some of my cousins, but sometimes I don't even look similar to my own sisters. We're all different, and this is just my experience.

Laura Hernandez is currently studying as an English major. She was born and raised in San Diego, California. She spends her time doing schoolwork and trying to learn new skills. She primarily writes comical pieces centered around her own experiences growing up and has been published in HASH Journal.

For me, being Mexican means going out to eat and somehow always ending up at a Mexican restaurant. It'll probably be the same Mexican restaurant you always go to because your parents know what they like and where they want to spend their money, but you can't really blame them because you love the enchiladas there.

For me, being Mexican means going to Mexico and spending the whole time with family. Even, and especially, if the trip is considered a 'vacation.' You won't stop to take tours and pose in corny pictures with burnt white tourists. Instead, you'll visit family and spend hours inside their house. You'll be there for so long that if you hadn't already told one of your tias over WhatsApp that you're in town, she will have stopped by to chismear with the tia you're already visiting and see you then. She'll ask you the question everyone asks, "Y el novio?" and you'll reply with, "No ahorita," just to be nice and move the conversation along. Other times, if you really want to make your parents mad, you may even reply something like, "No tengo novio, pero estoy buscando una novia," and see her gasp, "Ay, hija," while your mom rolls her eyes at you.

Later your mom will tell you, "You know it's because she grew up in a different time."

For me, being Mexican means going to church every Sunday and growing crushes on boys in church. You'll look back on it and realize it probably would have done you better to pay attention to the father than to have sat there thinking up a game plan in which you'll be able to shake hands with the cute boy near you during the sign of peace. Don't get confused, though; your church crush and your youth group crush will be two different people. We all know the really cute ones never stay for youth group, and if they do then they show up with their girlfriend who brought them.

For me, being Mexican means going on Instagram around the holidays and wondering what it would be like if you had a family the size of Courtney's from high school. You'll see the pictures and wonder, "Is that really her whole family? She's gotta have more cousins than that," before being interrupted by your own family yelling "Fondo! Fondo! Fondo! Fondo!"

For me, being Mexican is a lot, but there's nothing I'd want more than the family I have now. Everyone is loving. Everyone is funny. Everyone can dance. Everyone can sing. Everyone knows you and you know everyone.

For me, being Mexican means you went to see Coco with your whole family and nothing was more special than all of you at that moment. You knew what you signed up for and you saw it coming, but you cried the hardest a movie has ever made you cry because it was real and it was you. The same people you sat and watched the movie with were the same people you saw on the screen. That was rare and it was special.

For me, being Mexican is a lot, but there's nothing I'd want more than the family I have now. Everyone is loving. Everyone is funny. Everyone can dance. Everyone can sing. Everyone knows you and you know everyone.

For me, being Mexican is something I will take pride in forever. I know who I am and I know where my family comes from. No one will take that away from me. ●

R
 why not root for myself
 I need to remind myself of
 where I come from
 where I've grown from

who I am
 who I could be

there is fire underneath my muscles
 but doubt festers above
 all over

self-doubt feels so good on my skin
 it's comfortable
 to sit in
 to wear around
 to move through the world in
 it knows me
 and don't I just want to be known by someone
 or something
 even if it quietly burns all my bridges

that's what no one says
 that the self-doubt feels good
 it's nice almost
 a preface to what I don't want to face

Kylie is a tutor at MiraCosta and is a student at UCSD. She likes turtles, pigeons, and any type of cat. Pigeons are amazing, and don't trust anyone who tells you otherwise.

KYLIE NECOCHEA

O O

a protective shield
 against judgment
 fuel for perfectionism
 anxiety's fountain of youth
 "more," it sings
 as if it's giving me a show
 that I wanted to pay for

let the sun burn it off of me
 clean my skin with warmth again
 let me be real again
 let me bleed into the life I've been missing
 let the truth seep into me
 deep
 let me remember where I've come from
 who I am
 where I've been

I don't want to spend all my days rebuilding anymore
 I want to root for myself

again

and when I meet you

again
 be built
 be whole
 be new
 know me
 root for me

T
 I want to live in Lake Tahoe
 by the lake
 North Shore
 drive to south shore on the weekends
 and Mammoth in the summers

I want to drive in from the airport
 Kenny Rogers on the radio
 I'll sing the wrong lyrics to "The Gambler"
 or Paul Simon
 you can call me Betty
 or The Cranberries,
 talk about Dreams we had
 and have.

Wide Open Spaces
 I listened to The Dixie Chicks in her kitchen
 in April
 I like how she sees the world
 and I want to be in it with her
 whole
 yellow hair
 monkeys
 25lb. cat and all

I want to eat across from you
 and make pasta in your grandmother's kitchen
 in Brooklyn
 she was thinking of moving
 she didn't.

I can relate to her
 and I'll try to make her laugh
 she'll wink at you from across the table
 and neither of you will think that I saw it.

S
 I don't know if she'll like all of me
 but she'll like some of what I say,
 she'll see too much of herself in me
 like most grandmothers do.

we'll walk around the city in the winter
 in puff jackets
 I'll wear the one you made fun of
 when I stocked the vitamin cooler last summer
 you said, "Are you following me?"
 I said, "Something like that."

you'll show me all the places you became yourself in
 all the places you went to in college
 the place you grew up in
 I'll be a child again
 I always am with you
 you always smile at it
 like I'm a girl
 who thinks Portugal is in South America,
 or a child who thinks shoes are a suggestion,
 a first grader who thinks "cannot" is two words
 that made her lose the spelling bee in first grade
 Nolan won.

I want to drive into Lake Tahoe with Stephen King's memoir on my lap
 in the backseat of her parents' car

again

they'll like me less
 but I'll like me more this time
 I've found myself
 they might not know it but I do
 I do

I do.

A gray Honda minivan pulls up in front of the small girl, Phoebe, with eyes of a thunderstorm. Sunshine backpack on both shoulders and the peach hair of her ragdoll barely peeking out of the side where the zipper hadn't quite closed shut. Standing in front of the large oak tree where a younger, happier version of Phoebe used to dance with the wooden swing that now rots on the damp earth.

Her feet are now planted firmly on the ground. Her back faces a house on a crumbling foundation. The white paint peeling. The once magical yard—where a little and big sister would play outside until the sun went down—now quiet. The childhood that used to be painted with rose colors and soft hues of gold glitter from birthdays. Gone. The scraped knees and dirty hands. The whispered secrets. Colorful paint. Plants. Fairy dust. All of it erased with the chaotic scribbles of cornflower and manatee crayons.

Her older sister steps out of the car pursuing an embrace that Phoebe hasn't felt in four years. As Ramsey hesitantly steps closer, Phoebe slips away and shoves past her open arms. She is expecting a concerned inquiry about her belongings, but before it even comes, Phoebe whispers that her backpack is

all that she has left and all that she is taking with. Her vision narrows in on the car and the number of stomps towards it. So focused that she trips on the cobblestone path and smacks the slippery ground, the impact making her bite down on her tongue, the metallic tang of blood in her mouth. Only light scrapes and aching, but a sure promise of bruises to her knees and dignity. Her backpack spills open. A bottle of Lexapro rolls out beside her doll. Phoebe's face flames and fingers tremble as she stuffs it back in a panic. So much hurt and drowning, but the tears have run dry. She escapes Ramsey's attempt to help her back up. She tries to escape the thoughts that bring her back to her momma's red, vacant eyes staring out the window, back to the now empty recliner where their father used to live, back to the pain. All the pain of leaving a home that already abandoned her.

Ramsey had been aware of it all, her being so much older and her being the shield surrounding their child-

hood. She was also the first to leave. The first to leave eight-year-old Phoebe after their dad died. The only visible bruises from her family now are the ones left on her heart and mind. Their momma tried to stay. But she, too, eventually withered away. Gone along with the house and Phoebe's childhood. The food ran out and the bills piled up. The calls went unanswered and the guests offering their company for a single night came and went. The happy pills and the beer bottles grew in number each day... Momma falling into Daddy's old habits. Phoebe became a forced observer of a life no longer being lived, left behind with broken shards of memory. Only twelve now and no longer trying to piece it together but still desperately clinging on to the pieces of a lost childhood and a broken reality. Holding on so tight that it is cutting her palms and yet no one notices the blood.

Phoebe slides in next to a carseat with a toddler who is supposed to be her niece. Her hands slip and fumble

...

● LILY CHAMBERLAIN

- *Lily is passionate about anything and everything. Her pastimes include trying to keep her plants alive, loving Jesus and loving people, hanging out with friends and family, and any creative pursuits. To her, writing is a form of self-expression and a way to empathize with others.*

PHO- EBE

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

as she tries to buckle the seatbelt. After a few moments of struggle, it clicks into place. She releases a breath of momentary relief. As Ramsey drives the car away, Phoebe stares intently at the back of her sister's head. She looks away only for a moment, sharing a distant and awkward glance with her husband.

She pulls her backpack closer to her chest and searches its contents. Only three things, but three things that Phoebe has memorized. The familiar rattling of pills in a bottle. The soft, stained body of her ragdoll that has absorbed so many tears. She pulls out the last item and clutches it tightly in a fist. A friendship bracelet, worn and fraying. So dirty that you can't even see the green and yellow of the strings that were braided together. The exact colors of dad's once favorite team. Recalling the Green Bay Packers playing on a Sunday with dad in the cloudy recliner cemented in front of the television, empty beer cans, crushed, collecting beside him.

Phoebe always wondered why her sister chose those colors. The friendship bracelet wasn't even given to her, but it was the only thing her sister left behind four years ago in the cigar box on the stained carpet of their now empty childhood room.

They drive down the Oregon coast and the car moves further away from home. Foggy water droplets dance on the outside of the car window, blurring Phoebe's reflection as they trail down the glass. The humidity is an electrical socket that shocks her raw linen hair, creating a golden halo of frizz. The car already feels warmer than the one her and her momma would sometimes sleep in after Daddy would kick them out in a rage. Warmer than the two lone people shivering underneath many layers, blankets, and the heat barely coming off one another as they sat close but never touching. Warmer than the house that they would have to come back to after a few nights, Momma begging, Daddy drinking, and Phoebe crying. So much warmth now. With Ramsey and her husband in the front seat, holding hands, and baby in the car seat, trying to feed Phoebe honey rice-puffs. Phoebe looks away. Her heart laid bare in her open hands, barely beating enough to keep her breathing, the weight of the past sitting on her lungs and the terrifying future desperately trying to say hello. She focuses on the pain. Her aching knees. All of the anger for the Ramsey she no longer knows. ●

PURPLE

happiness is—
sand at the edge
of a shoreline
the last hour
of an august
afternoon
the purple
hues of a
sunset
the cherry
blossoms in
spring
—fleeting

sadness is—
snow remaining
on mountain peaks
the moon's
magnetism to
earth
the bees'
allure to
lavender
the light of
dawn invading
your window
—ceaseless

AMANDA MCARDLE-DUALE

Amanda McArdle-Duale is a sapphic writer, poet, and student at MiraCosta. Drawing inspiration from nature, her work aims to offer healing through words.

DO NOT ROCK THE BOAT

The four musketeers: Jose, Joel, Jorge and Alfonso. We met in junior high. Joel's family is from Ensenada, Mexico. Joel is my best friend and was also my best man at my wedding. We had talked about doing something for graduation. We did not ask for permission. We drove from Los Angeles to Ensenada; we belonged to the class of 1971.

The Carpenters' hit song that year was "We've Only Just Begun." How naïve we were to think what could possibly go wrong with four boys with money in their pockets, the money our friends and family gave us for graduation presents?

Following graduation, the next morning the adventure began. We packed the '58 Chevy lowrider, rust colored with Diamond tuck 'n roll black interior and a red dome light, red velvet dashboard, 8 track, baby moon wheels and a 350-engine double carburetor.

From Los Angeles to Ensenada, it's about a three-hour drive. We talked about having lobster for lunch in Puerto Nuevo. We were in good hands with Joel as our tour guide. Friends and family recommended a place. The owner's name was Conchita; her nickname was Iron Hands.

Native of Mexico. Moved to Los Angeles to learn English. Attended the University of San Diego MECHA president. 35 years in hospitality retired and became a chauffeur for 12 years. Working on a book about his personal observations and take aways of celebrities he has met.

The location was not easy to recognize. There was no sign. The area looked like houses like all others. My friend Joel told me to park, and we knocked on the door and a twelve-year-old boy smiled and said to come in. As we entered, the smell was telling us that we were at the right place. The pots were overflowing with beans and rice. We walked through the house towards the back and we found tables and benches with umbrellas.

We listened to Mexican music and our twelve-year-old host arrived with a bucket of ice-cold cervezas. We told Conchita that we came for the lobster meal. Soon the music in the background was making our senses go into overdrive, and Conchita started placing tortillas, six at a time, in front of us. The salsa with homemade tortillas was a meal in itself.

The lobster soon arrived, together with beans and rice. The lobsters were larger than our stomachs, seasoned with butter and a mixture of seasonings, all handmade fresh from the garden. As I type this story my mouth is watering again.

The nickname Iron Hands was revealed as Conchita was making tortillas faster than four hungry boys could eat them. She was one step ahead of us as she stacked the tortillas in a cloth napkin and placed it in front of us. We tried to grab the tortillas, but we only made Conchita laugh at our gestures of pain because we could not hold those hot tortillas like Iron Hands.

We looked at each other with an expression of satisfaction. There were no words needed. This was living, and we all have this recollection that will stay with us until our memory fades.

What made our friendship unbreakable was our Mexican culture, similar socioeconomic values, our parents' work ethic. The different but similar struggles to immigrate to the United States and the pressures of being the first in our families to attend college.

We continued our journey with a coastal cruising ride. Locals and tourists enjoying the sea breeze. A car load of women drove next to us; we smiled at them, and they shared a smile of approval. They motioned that they were going to park. We parked next to their car; we were downwind from them and a perfume fragrance was intoxicating. Their style and elegance, their attention to detail took our breath away.

We followed them in and we hit it off. Being from Los Angeles we were new and different from the locals how we talked, how we danced, how we dressed. But the local guys made it clear that we

were "Persona non grata." Machismo—it's a double-edged sword in our Mexican culture.

Joel and I had been in this situation in Los Angeles. Joel lived less than a half block from Carpenters Hall, and we often sneaked in and were familiar with hostility—these invisible red flags. We had earned our battle scars. We located our amigos and grabbed them off the dancing floor, and we tried to slither out of the club.

It did not take long for the locals to sound the alarm. It was time to get away. We were being chased, and fear is a great motivator. We ran with such speed we did not know we had. We were outnumbered. This was going to end bad.

We got in the car; we did not care to find out if they were going to chase us by foot or by car. The engine started in a flash; I pressed on the gas and the 350-engine kicked ass. It took seconds to reach the speed of over one hundred miles per hour. If they tried to chase us, it would be no match. The car engine and our hearts were pumping on all cylinders.

We tried to eat dinner but the close call was all we could talk about. We stayed up for hours; we all had so many details. We were making memories that would be hard to duplicate.

The next morning, we had breakfast and were ready to get the boat and go fishing. We had to listen to Joel; he was the only one that had any boating experience. We started with great enthusiasm, but soon our friend Jorge was having motion sickness. We started rocking the boat. We were laughing because Jorge's face was becoming multi-colored. Well, we did not listen to Joel when he told us to stop rocking the boat, and we managed to flip the boat.

I think that no one is prepared for a swim in the ocean. We seemed to swim for hours and hours, and the shore appeared to be moving away from us. We did our best but our muscles were burning and the pain was more than we could handle. I think what kept us alive was the bond that we had. We were at each other's homes often. We were family. There was nothing we would not do for our amigos; we had each other's back.

Today, the '58 Chevrolet is no longer with us, and our Musketeer Jorge is riding solo. We have family reunions with the grandchildren, and without fail we tell our Ensenada Trip. The story gets better (embellished) with time. In 2019, we swam with sharks. The grandkids got scared that their Abuelos almost did not survive. Their eyes got big and tears appeared, and we make them promise they will never ever rock the boat. ●

SURPASSING

JADE YOUNG

MULTIMODAL ART

*Jade Young created this multimodal art piece *Surpassing* for the SOC120 Women's Studies course. It is a discussion of the barriers victims of sexual assault face in receiving support for their experiences, specifically for African American women and their specific cross-cultural barriers.*



REPLICATION

SAVANNA ADKINS

The original subject matter being distorted and altered from the original shows the variation in personas a single person can take on.



TWO CARNALES (BROTHERS) OF TIJUANA

JOSE CASAS

I was surprised that our company was the transportation for Carlos Santana and his entourage for his 2019 San Diego concert. I have worked as a limo driver for the last twelve years. My seniority put me in the position to request to be Mr. Santana's driver.

Jose is retired after twelve years as a chauffeur and is writing a book on the benefit of these timeless life lessons from this celebrities.

My father's motto was, "Always be two hours early for appointments." I was driving a brand new Cadillac Escalade. When I arrived at the hotel, it's a courtesy to inform the bell captain. He looked at me, nodded, and signaled me to park in the limo waiting area. I started inspecting the instrumentation, the functions that would affect the comfort of our passengers. The sound of the passenger back door opening got my attention. Carlos Santana asked, "Are you my driver?" I said, "Yes." "I am glad you are early; I am trying to find a sign of creative inspiration for tonight's performance," he said. He sat down and started looking at his iPhone screen.

I asked if he would like me to step outside, but he said "No, I need you to help me with the setting of my music from my phone into your speakers." I was doing cartwheels in my head. I was in fan heaven. I tried not to peek glances at what he was doing. I was shaking. Carlos was only an arm's length away from me. Sitting in my driver's seat, I was in this forbidden sanctuary. I was peeking behind the Oz curtain.

I had done Presidential visits that required coordination of the Secret Service of the United States, as well as the visiting countries' secret services, local police, California highway patrol, and caravans of fourteen or more vehicles.

I have followed the music of Mr. Santana for decades. My introduction to his music was not Woodstock but his album, *Santana Abraxas*, from 1970. His music was my comfort blanket. Bringing joy and serenity, trying like most students to make sense of my college years. I have attended several concerts through the years, in addition I have listened to many interviews of Mr. Santana's career shows how he sees the mystical world, Eastern philosophy and its influence in his life path. I followed Santana's vision by reading similar authors.

I had done Presidential visits that required coordination of the Secret Service of the United States, as well as the visiting countries' secret services, local police, California highway patrol, and caravans of fourteen or more vehicles. There was pressure of being responsible for the safety of a world leader. To work in precision using one's instinct and judgment, making sure to do whatever it takes to keep them safe. This experience prepared me for any future assignments.

I did all the preparations for this important assignment. I took different routes. I studied the traffic patterns. I followed the GPS together with forty years of driving in San Diego. When the transportation director for Mr. Santana called, I outlined the details with military precision. Mr. Santana heard the conversation and asked if that was Dave from transportation. "Yes," I replied. ...

Mr. Santana asked, “Jose, where are you from?” I said I was born in Zacatecas but raised in Tijuana from 1953 to 1967. Carlos said, “Orale” (all right then). “La neta guey (the truth dude). I grew up in “Colonia Libertad.” (Liberty neighborhood) The barrier between a famous star and the driver was dissolved. A conversation sprouted between two carnales (brothers) of Tijuana, leaving the professional protocol or switching from formal to informal language.

The barrier between a famous star and the driver was dissolved. A conversation sprouted between two carnales (brothers) of Tijuana, leaving the professional protocol or switching from formal to informal language.

We started talking about many subjects: the bad reputation of Tijuana, how the drinking age was eighteen and perfect for attracting the wild adventurous crowds in the ‘60s to make the pilgrimage to Tijuana. That is, until the media reported the news in a way that made Tijuana seem like a risk for United States citizens, making this activity no longer a right to passage for those not able to drink in the United States. Another activity that has disappeared is the army of shoe shine boys. I was one of those that used to shoe shine on Calle Revolucion (Revolution Street).

There are always those who do not obey the rules, who become the exceptions, seeing what a few beers would change these happy groups, to unrecognizable behaviors of drunks falling, vomiting and getting into fights for no reason. The irreversible damage to one’s character and reputation. We agreed that Tijuana was a safe place only for those with street smarts.

Carlos mentioned that he worked at strip joints as well as the local popular clubs. This discussion required a subject that we are not at liberty to discuss in today’s social expectations... Tortas El Turco was a place that all those who worked the streets would visit at the end of a busy night to purchase tortas that it only took seconds to devour. “The one of a kind greasy tortas,” Carlos said, his face reliving this period of his life. The image of his eyes and facial expression stayed with me. Any time I hear his music from this Carnal of Tijuana: “Recordar es vivir” (to remember is to live).

Cindy Blackman, his wife and drummer of the band, entered the Escalade. Mr. Santana shared our conversation stating that I was from Tijuana. She is a seasoned performer with experience of diffusing this situation of Carlos connecting with his drivers. She asked a question or two then changed the conversation to tonight’s performance. Driving to the concert I tried not to cross the driver’s professional protocol line. I predicted the bottlenecks; I

managed to avoid them. Dave, the transportation manager, was getting anxious. He started calling every few minutes, so I mentioned what street we were on and our ETA according to the GPS.

The arrival of Mr. Santana was critical for the sound check purpose, and the guitars needed to be tested so the strings or any concert equipment needed to be in perfect working order. The audience’s energy fueled the wave of anticipation to see the roadies fly with speed and grace, the unsung heroes. The seats started to fill. We as drivers had done our job. Mr. Santana informed Dave the manager that his Tijuana Carnal and fellow drivers should be given all access badges. We were told to go eat. They had chefs, meat carving stations, wine, liquor bar, coffee station. It is the VIP area where we received a royal treatment.

The time is approaching. The audience was like bees trying to get to their assigned seats; the anticipation was like a volcano ready to erupt and then it happened; the roar was heard and felt by all. The concert started. A single note brought silence to a packed arena, followed by the energy of the music a roar, with the speed of light. The transformation of fifty thousand tired people completed, they came to life. If you ever get a chance to see a concert from the stage view, do it. You will feel a chemical transformation. You will notice people in the audience, even those in the nosebleed area. The audience will be a

kaleidoscope, swaying with the song as it’s being played. The clapping, the screams, the music are a tapestry of what the world could be. Is this what world peace looks like? This is what music can do, a harmony of sound. The noise of the world is silenced, letting the blanket of love and respect cover darkness, allowing the light to shine on all of us. The concert ended, and like soldiers we drivers stood, ready to drive the group to the plane or hotel. I was Mr. Santana and Cindy Blackman’s driver; I drove to their private plane. Mr. Santana was exhausted. We exchanged a glance that conveyed a meaning that has no words in the dictionary. We are two carnales from Tijuana who are living the dream both going home. We both did our job. We survived the streets of Tijuana. ●

TIGHTLY WOUND

“Momma, I’m sorry, I just can’t do my hair as good as you can,” I say meekly. I’m met with a sigh.

“Fine. Grab a stool to sit on and bring it to the bathroom. I’m going to be late again, though.”

Phebe Bridges has been writing for years and is excited to have her work included in Tidepools.

I fetch the stool from the other room, but I can feel frustration through the wall. I return and sit down with my mother standing behind me. I stare at her in the mirror. Her brown hair comes down just past her ears; I can tell she straightened it by the way it curves inward and hides the corners of her eyes. I think she is the most beautiful person in the world. She’s started spraying my dark curls with water, but she misses and squirts me in the eye.

“Cassidy, sit still,” she says sternly as I jerk away out of reflex. She’s just upset because she’s running behind schedule. I can tell she feels bad when her face begins to soften.

“You have gorgeous hair. Never straighten it; it’ll never be the same. It gets damaged and thin,” she warns. We have this conversation every morning. Normally, I give a small nod and continue to stare off into the distance, but today I break routine.

“Why did you straighten your hair, Momma?”

Before she was my mom, she was Eris, a woman with gorgeous, flowy hair who never showed up late to work. Now she’s “Momma.”

“My mom straightened my hair every day when I was younger. That’s just how I learned to do my hair. You’re lucky I’ve learned to do yours”. She starts brushing my hair. “I’d do anything to have the hair you’ve got”. She’s brushing a lot harder now, almost yanking the brush through my hair. Some days she does this and gets mad about my hair; those are the times I wish I could just straighten it, as if that wouldn’t make everything worse. Before she was my mom, she was Eris, a woman with gorgeous, flowy hair who never showed up late to work. Now she’s “Momma.” Now she gets compliments on her daughter’s hair whenever we’re out together. I swear sometimes she tries to fall behind so it looks like we don’t know each other.

“Was I worth it, Momma?”

“It depends on how much trouble I get in for being late today,” she teases as she puts away my hair products. My scalp still hurts. “You know I love you, right, Cass?”

“Yeah, I know. I love you.” She leaves the bathroom, puts on her blazer, and leaves to go to work. I look at myself in the mirror, still sitting on the stool. My thin frame looks even smaller with my hair teased like this. I try to smooth out my hair and fix what I can while it’s still damp. Otherwise it dries a frizzy mess. ●



EARS TO YOU!

CANADA KERWIN

WHITE CHARCOAL ON
GRAY SCALE PAPER

*White Charcoal on Gray Scale
paper, Spring 2021.
Study of Skulls and Ears (Art 102)
with Leslie Nemour. Great class,
I enjoyed Leslie's last teaching
semester immensely!*

ONLYX

In my head,
I lie in clouds of cotton,
planted in spiraling hues
of pigmented blues;
Intermingling rosy tints
coasting through.
Swim in daydreams encased
in the promise of budding lilacs,
and crisp emerald pools.
Bringing me happiness anew.

Although,
there are days
the corners of my oasis,
pitched in onyx
bleed a thick smoky haze.
The waters glaze over,
a dull grey.
Flowers retract,
and I see myself
shriveling into patches of ash.

*Velazquez uses her own feelings of detachment, disgust, and
insecurity, to weave a narrative that displays her in a vulnerable light.*

BETHANY VELAZQUEZ

NAVIGATING CANCER DEATH OF A PARENT

You start the long six-hour drive on the lone desert highway void of life except tumbleweeds and sage brush. Your thoughts tumble and circle back like the dust devil in the distance. Your parents called and asked you and your two older sisters to come for a visit. Just the girls, no spouses, no children. You feel a cold chill run down your spine despite the desert heat. This can't be good.

Death and grief can be one of the hardest roads traveled. I share this journey in the hopes that it might help prepare others with some practical tips woven into the fabric of my personal journey. Be kind to yourself and others.

You pull up to your parents' home. You feel the comfort of home and forget the formidable feeling in your gut. Mom's assortment of colorful flowers lines the walkway. "Hey, I am here." Your parents rush up from their comfy chairs, greet you with hugs and kisses, water, and the forever proverbial phrase from mom "Are you hungry?" Your sisters arrive. Dinner is a cooperative effort of cooking and sisterly giggles. Dishes are done and Dad assembles all to the living room. Your heart starts pounding in your chest. You can hardly breathe. You hear the clock tick in the silence. Dad seems to gather himself. "I have acute myeloid leukemia. The doctors have given me less than six months to live." Instantaneously, gut-wrenching sobs and heavy tears flow from all. Treatment might give him a year, but he wants quality over quantity and no chemo. Your mind is reeling. How can this be? Your father is your rock, the pillar to this family. He is strong and vibrant at seventy-eight years old. Loading lumber, building fences, working in the desert heat like a twenty-year-old. Your world is crashing and tumbling blindly around you. You look around and see the tears, fear and pain in your sisters' eyes, the grief of your mom and your father feeling like he let his family down. You immediately make the decision you need to be the strong one as you hate feeling helpless. You must do something. The cancer journey begins.

How are you going to work and help your parents? You have a talk with your boss. She has walked the journey with her parents. You plan to work thirteen-hour periods over three days and spend the remaining time each week with your parents. Quickly, the twelve-hour round-trip drive each week is wearing on you but becomes cathartic, an opportunity to reflect, to grieve, to pray, and to focus. You feel conflicted about your time commitment to your husband and son. You talk with them. They are supportive. This is a hard journey. You are feeling lost while trying to be strong for your family. You realize you need support too and reach out to your closest friends.

You are so thankful for their listening ear and the cocoon of love they wrap you in. How do you help your parents? You talk with your

siblings and mom to make a game plan on how to navigate your dad's health and realistic household life issues until he passes and grieve together now for the inevitable.

On one of your weekly trips, your dad has passed out and fallen in the hallway. You are filled with heart-stopping fear as you pray, "Please, Lord, not yet," as the ambulance rushes him to the hospital. Your dad needs a blood transfusion. The doctor explains this cancer does not allow for new red blood cells to be renewed, depletes oxygen, and increases the need for transfusions. The blood transfusions won't be effective for long. The doctor is honestly surprised your dad has made it thus far with overcoming two infections, not normal with a compromised immunity system.

Dad is home now with his wonderful, quirky sense of humor. His cancer has not changed this. He says since he is not fighting heart disease, he will eat everything he wants now, no limitations! He eats dessert first then dinner. The two of you sit outside in lounge chairs looking at puffy white clouds, calling out animals in the sky as you did as a child. You share the same faith and belief in eternity in heaven, so you comfortably and candidly talk of death and dying.

He is not afraid. He is worried about your mom, has been teaching her how to take care of the multitude of house maintenance items and how to pump gas as she never needed to before now. He asks you directly to look after the family, especially your mom and cousin who is an only child. He tells you to be patient and not fight with your oldest sister as she processes life differently. He asks how your middle sister is handling his cancer. You explain she is struggling but reassure him she will be okay. You gently bring up your brother. You have been praying for your brother and dad to reconcile. For over twenty years, your brother estranged himself from everyone but your mom. You explain to your dad that your brother will live with such remorse and regret without reconciliation. Your dad doesn't want to give up his time with his daughters over a son who has not been there for the family. You reassure him it is the right thing to do. He decides to reconnect and is at peace. Dad wakes you from a

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

deep sleep. “Come watch the docking of the Discovery with me on TV.” He is recreating a special memory when you were four years old and the whole family sat in front of the black and white TV. Your memory travels to the very distant past, hearing Dad say, “Don’t ever forget this moment. History is being made.” It was the USA’s first landing on the moon. You honestly don’t remember anything except his excited words. Your dad sits in his recliner, and you sit on the floor against his legs, just as you did as a kid. On the long drive home, you smile, tuck the Discovery moment into your heart and add it to the bank of treasured memories.

Your mom calls. Your brother and his family have left after a two-week visit. Reconciliation mission done; your heart is overjoyed! Your dad can pass in peace. You decide to leave the next day to your parents. Early in the morning, the phone rings, your dad is not doing well. It is time for hospice, time for comfort care only. You are grateful you interviewed four different hospice organizations early on and found one who was extremely compassionate and personable. You learned some hospice organizations’ first concerns are insurance status only. You painfully call hospice. The six-hour trip seems endless. You know the Lord sustained your dad to be reconciled with your brother and now the end has come. Even understanding this, even though you thought you prepared emotionally, you grieve so deeply. You pull off the road and sob uncontrollably.

Arriving, you rush to your dad’s hospital bed in the living room. Drastic changes have ravaged his body into frailness in just three weeks. He is in tremendous pain and with fever. You administer pain meds. Your mom rests. As you sit, he reaches out his hand and you hold it, silently praying the pain would ease and that at this point, he would go quickly and not suffer.

Many hours later the nurse comes. She says it could be hours or days. You go take a nap and dream. You dream your father is calling you and you go to him. He is sitting up in bed in his current state and motions you to sit with him. You do. He tells you it is time, and he loves you. You tell him that you will carry on his legacy and love him forever. He nods and pats your hand and says he must go as mom is calling him. You bolt up from bed and race to his bedside. The death rattle (Cheyne Stokes) breathing is sounding. You ask your sister when this started and she tells you about ten minutes ago.

The death watch begins, minute ticking minute turns into a few hours. You are all emotionally exhausted and Mom falls asleep next to Dad. You and your sister find some giggle relief as both parents are making so much noise while snoring. The two of you giggle then cry then sob. As you are quietly sobbing you realize your dad is no longer breathing. Quickly you wake up Mom and say he’s passing. She leans over, kisses him gently on the lips, whispering in his ear, “It is okay to go. I love you.” Your heart is shredded. Suddenly you hear him take in one long, slow deep breath and breathe it out. You shockingly see the color drain from the top of his head to his feet, and you feel his spirit leave his body. You see a flash of lightning in the distant sky and you know he was ushered to heaven at that precise moment. You grievously wait the instructed five minutes from the last breath to call the hospice nurse. In unison with your mom, you remove anything that resembles sickness as your father lies there. You get a wash basin, towels, and begin with your sister and mom to wash your dad lovingly, gently, and respectfully from head to toe. A sensation takes over you, and you feel as if you have been spiritually transported in time to a ritual performed for centuries, preparing a body for burial. It brings a deep sense of peace and calm. You put clean pajamas on him, comb his hair, and fix the sheets. You take a snip of his beautiful white hair to keep as a treasure. You sit with your mom and sister by his bedside in silence waiting for the hospice nurse to come.

Two weeks after your dad passed, it is time to head to your own home. Your mom is stable, a support system in place and you will be there again in a couple weeks. The six-hour trip is a time of pondering the last four-month intense journey. You understand life is short in comparison to eternity. You learned that death is a very uncomfortable topic for most people.

However, listening, talking, and facilitating can help bring peace for both the dying and living. You learned to navigate the steps of life for cancer care, family dynamics and personal support. You learned death does not have to be terrifying. Everyone grieves very differently. You understand how the good and bad are all part of life to help you learn to really live. The deepest reflection through the journey you learned is that death is a spiritual journey and God was with you and your family every step of the way, bringing beauty in the midst of pain. ●

BONES IN WINTER

Grandpa sat slack against the wall
entranced by sleep, bellowing out breaths
often of varied staccato lengths,
the wind stammering from beneath his wise old mustache.

It had been fourteen years since I last knew him.

With a jolt he awoke, rose and walked, the
years in his knees and hips hindered him
halfway across the yard.
With the brown, dying grass as cruel witness
he began to fall, I caught him
arms wrapped around his chest. My
hurried heart beat into his back; his
solemn plea was to not worry as a
coldness washed over
and the waltz slowed, slowed until his feet dragged limp until
I no longer had a partner
just bones in the winter.

This horrid dance, the arrhythmic footsteps of fate
over now, I stand straight,

face crusted by dry tears

the nameless gnawing in my stomach fades
reborn in some way, I manage to smile
and am better for it.

AUSTIN MACKLIN

*Austin B. Macklin, Hobbyist Writer
Sometimes I write of dreams where
friends and relatives, living or dead,
visit me. Our subconscious speaks to
us in a form that predates language
itself, so poetry is an apt way to try
and capture it's essence.*

A door bursts open and slams into the wall. My little sisters and cousins flood the room with yelling, excited voices so loud the room spins like a kamikaze. Talking about there's gonna be lightning, there's gonna be rain, let's go to the tire swing above the dried-up river bank.

Maybe there will be a river tonight. We run barefoot across slippery blades of grass. We are Tarzan children doing flips on the trampoline, boomeranging into electric air, daring the sky to catch us. We are birds sitting on a line staring at the sky, waiting for something to change, waiting for something to cause us to flutter.

My sister turns to me and says, "We won't really get struck, will we?" No, I say, it hasn't even started yet. I don't mention the daydreams about what magical gifts and superpowers I'd acquire if it did happen, however, like the gifts our brother has. Right now, he's squatting down in the mud, barefoot, creating mounds and his mind sees nothing but potential. His obsession is uncarving the extraordinary he sees from the mundane that most of us cannot see past. Our brother is something of a savant when it comes to clay. The very first thing he ever sculpted was Winnie the Pooh climbing up the tree with stunning accuracy, demon-

strating his exceptional memory. He was four years old at the time. My friends ask me why he doesn't talk, if he understands me. I say he doesn't need to talk to understand me. I say he sees more than we do. I say that because of the details in what he sculpts: the roughness of the bark, the twist of the branches, his fingerprint pressed into the clay.

Eventually we get called inside, told to hurry. It's time to go home. Say goodbye to your cousins, kiss your grandma. It's a long drive home filled with six hours of staring at open fields, windmills, oil rigs, and bathroom stops on the side of a red dirt road. Mom replays a Maroon 5 CD on the stereo, singing, "Clouds are shrouding us in moments unforgettable." My sister and I want Nelly Furtado, banding together to vote out the other three siblings, singing offkey, "I'm like a bird, I'll only fly away." The words vibrate off my tongue, sweet like foreign fruit I've never tasted, away

from this dry, tumbleweed land. We arrive home to a red brick house and endless views of barbed wire and horses, interrupted by a single strand of neighboring houses. I walk inside to the familiar smell of home: wood floors and old, worn leather couches intermingled with the smell of newly painted walls. We start to unpack. A voice causes the wall before me to vibrate and the pace of my heart to quicken.

Talking about there's gonna be lightning, there's gonna be rain. Maybe there will be a river tonight. A crash booms, a voice cries, and I know this sound like the back of my hand, like storms crying.

A door bursts open and slams into the wall. Yelling voices so loud the room spins like a kamikaze. Talking about there's gonna be lightning, there's gonna be rain. Maybe there will be a river tonight. A crash booms, a voice cries, and I know this sound like the back of my hand, like storms crying. I gather

my three youngest siblings, tell them to be quicker than the lightning, "Go, get outside." Our oldest sister stays behind, a role that is only hers. We all know this drill, having practiced storm safety so many times before. We run to the backyard and stay there and wait for it to pass. It rains from our faces and the ground is wet. My sweet brother begins to sink his hands in the mud beneath us. At first, it is just a mound. But he sees the extraordinary. His hands push the mud into an upward spiral, unfurling into the sky as if we were just tiny fae creatures. He creates barks and twists, branches that pretzel in many different directions with flowers and leaves blooming in milliseconds. His fingerprints bring this creation to life, his creation expanding into the sky like a timelapse of spring. A hole appears at the base of the tree. He goes in first and we follow, making our way up the tree with our brother as our guide. When we get to the top, home is simply a dot on Earth, a faraway star whose stories are lightyears away. Untouchable, the four of us sit on a branch, perched like birds. We dream of wings and the day we get to take our maiden flight. Until that long-awaited day, we stay together and stare at the clouded sky. Waiting for lightning. Waiting for something to change. ●

● **EMORY WILLIAMS**

- *My name is Emory and I am a 26-year-old Hard of Hearing writer/poet who aims to merge magic and the mundane together in my writing. I fell in love with the beauty and power of weaving words together at an early age and I haven't stopped since.*

THE MOMENTS BETWEEN LIGHTNING

SLOW DEATH: HEALTH INEQUALITIES AMONG THE DINÉ

JADE MACEOGHAIN

Health inequalities exist in varying levels among many regions and ethnic groups, but among Indigenous North American groups health inequalities are much higher and typically more severe than for almost all other groups in the United States. The Navajo Nation of the Four Corners stretches three states--Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico--with over 300,000 Navajo (Diné) people, the largest Indigenous group in the U.S. Indigenous peoples suffer many avoidable health issues, and Diné face health inequalities such as higher than national average levels of Parkinson's (Gordan et al.: 2013), lung and other cancers, including high rates of reproductive organ cancers in teenage girls (J.R.: 2004; "Disparities:" 2019; Arnold: 2014), and lower life expectancy (Smith: 2021; "Disparities:" 2019).

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Many of these issues point to environmental contamination on Navajoland due to the mishandling of over 2,000 abandoned uranium mines that were heavily active in the mid to late twentieth century, and which leak metals and nuclear waste into soil, air, and waterways (Arnold: 2014). Adding further harm is the consistently low funding by U.S. Congress of the Indian Health Services, and low numbers and accessibility of hospitals, clinics, and emergency services across Navajoland (Smith: 2021; Sugano: 2021). These inequalities reflect Turner's (1984) postulate of medicine as political in connection with necropolitics, where resources are of greater value than the 'disposable' people (Pele: 2020), and both medical treatment and bodily conditions are politicised within that framework. Ignorance of Indigenous health disparities and the medical-political injustice of environmental contamination of Diné land and bodies is a form of modern colonialism that must be addressed to close health inequalities.

There is a long history of medical injustice upon Indigenous North Americans that can be looked at as a modern extension of (post) colonialism and political injustice from the Federal Government. Many Federal tribal programs are consistently underfunded by the U.S. government, such as the Indian Health Service (IHS), which is within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Smith (2021) points out that while the IHS is meant to provide care to over 2.2 million Indigenous peoples, "Congress has consistently underfunded the agency, forcing hospital administrators to limit the services offered" and thus Indigenous communities on reservations have severely limited

healthcare options and support than do other (non-Indigenous) communities. Further, Dovey (2016) points to a 2014 report showing that the IHS had been allocated \$4.4 billion dollars, when the actual need was around \$15 billion dollars. While the Federal government promised in 1978 to provide free healthcare to federally recognised tribal members, the historic underfunding of such programs is a clear political-medical injustice that leads to inaccessible or lacking care, staff, and facilities across reservations nationwide. This relates to the concept of necropolitics, in the sense of "producing [slow] death in a large scale" where large populations may not be exploited as they were in the past, but "managed...through their exposure to deadly dangers and risks" (Pele: 2020), in this case environmental contamination leading to slow death via illness. Indigenous Americans across all tribes have a life expectancy 4.4 to 5.5 times lower than all other racial or ethnic groups in the U.S., (Smith: 2021; "Disparities:" 2019) and this shorter life expectancy is due to a variety of preventable illnesses, environmental contamination, and inadequate access to medical care which remain underfunded despite promises by the Federal government.

The Navajo nation has a shockingly low number of medical facilities and hospitals. While the Navajo reservation spans over 27,000 miles, of the Indian Health Services facilities, there are only eight hospitals and thirteen health centres, with two regions having no hospital at all (Sugano: 2021). Furthermore, the distance between healthcare facilities likely increases health inequalities, making access to healthcare treatment far less accessible. Sugano (2021)

states of medical centres, “Every facility is at least 40 miles apart from the next nearest health facility...Two out of the eight administrative regions do not have any hospitals [and] in these regions, the nearest hospital is nearly 100 miles away.” Considering some of the major illnesses that affect the Diné, the underfunding of medical facilities, and the distance to accessing care, these inequalities combined speak to a politicised practise of medical injustice, as the Federal government is responsible for funding and hospital planning. In citing Achille Mbembe’s work on necropolitics, Pele (2020) points to how “small doses of death” exist in the daily lives of those, such as Diné, whose lives are bound up by “social, economic, and symbolic violence that destroys their bodies” and that these “small deaths” are enacted upon by public forces through the absence of basic needs—in this case, healthcare and respect for the health of their ancestral lands.

While healthcare access is insufficient, the cause of many Diné illnesses is a clear example of post-colonial slow death via poisoning of the land and people. The Federal government’s U.S.-Navajo Treaty of 1869 promised sovereignty to the Navajo but by 1919, Indigenous lands were leased by the Interior Department for mining and resources. From the 1940s to the 1980s, in search of uranium for nuclear weapons, thousands of small and large-scale uranium mines opened across Navajoland, and many Diné men worked in the mines—though were never told of the elevated cancer risks known since at least 1879 (Arnold: 2014). The deliberate decision by mining companies and the Federal government to not acknowledge these risks, and the subsequent uranium poisoning (Pulido: 2016) of the land and Indigenous bodies, combined with underfunded and inaccessible healthcare is an act of post-colonial medical injustice. Looking at this in terms of necropolitics as well, one can see how policies essentialising resources over people and land, while marking the Diné as “surplus” or disposable in the interests of corporate desire (Pulido: 2016), created the political-medical inequalities persisting today. This is in stark contrast to Indigenous practises of body-land interconnectivity and respect for the health of the land, which encourages healthy bodies.

Cancer among the Diné has been connected to uranium poisoning and has a much higher incidence across Navajoland in comparison with other U.S. populations. While there are over 2,000 former uranium mine sites across the reservation, the EPA, in its slow efforts, have identified only 521 mine sites of contamination (Arnold: 2014). Many were abandoned and never cleaned up, leaving uranium dust to aerosolise, leach into soil, and mine waste has even been used in road and home construction as well as left in piles next to homes on the reservation (Arnold: 2016). When the Diné worked in the mines they were not told that radiation was dangerous, or that they were breathing in radon gas in the mines or showering in radioactive water at home (Arnold: 2016). Children played in water from the mines that was on home property, and because the water looked and tasted clean—and because they had not been told otherwise by the government or mining companies—people used it for washing, cooking, and bathing, and mineworkers drank from the mine streams (Arnold: 2016), meaning that whole families were constantly exposed to radioactive toxins. In a single study from 1984, of the Diné men in the study who had cancer, 72% had worked in the mines (Arnold: 2016), and these cancers ranged from lung to other forms of cancers, such as endocrine organ cancers. Today, cancer accounts for 7.3% of deaths among the Diné (“Cancer:” n.d.), and the majority of cancers are kidney, liver, and stomach—all areas of the body that uranium is known to particularly affect. For teenage girls, reproductive organ cancer rates are 17 times higher than U.S. teen girls overall (J.R.: 2004) and there is strong evidence that uranium dust lingering in the air and as long term contaminated water and soil are to blame, as uranium has been linked to acting as an estrogen in the body of developing girls (J.R.: 2004). Uranium’s decay products, radium, thorium, and radon, are known to cause disruptions in DNA sequencing pre- and post-birth (Arnold: 2016) and while there have been studies done over the decades since the mines shut down, there remains a research gap in looking at the extensiveness of uranium poisoning’s effects across broader age groups, to determine the extent of the effects that uranium exposure is currently having, including on new generations.

Diné have higher rates of Parkinson’s than other groups, a disease already linked to toxic metal interference. Of the many Indigenous reservations, Parkinson’s is highest across Navajoland, where the highest amount of uranium mining in the U.S. was conducted (Gordan et al.: 2013). Exposure to toxic metals and radioactive materials interferes with the neural networks in the brain and damages brain tissue, causing the development of Parkinson’s. Gordon et al (2013) note that Parkinson’s is higher among Diné men, though this may be due to diagnosis bias, especially considering the underfunding and inaccessibility of healthcare. Gordan et al (2013) note that Parkinson’s is considered a common disease among the Diné, and Sanchez et al (2020) note that while rates of Parkinson’s are highest in areas closest to abandoned mines, wind patterns may affect neuroinflammatory mine dust spreading farther as well. More research is required in this area, as is an actual consistent and determined effort to truly clean up poisoning of the land to address uranium related illness of the Diné body across Navajoland.

In summation, the decades long medical inequalities and political injustices from the Federal government have led to decades of persisting health issues among the Diné people. While Indigenous peoples across North America (within the United States) have lower life expectancies—4.4 to 5.5 times lower—than all other ethnic groups and higher rates of many diseases such as cancer, obesity, and alcohol related illnesses, the Diné across Navajoland suffer high rates of cancers and Parkinson’s related to the poisoning of their land and bodies. Uranium mining was a direct result of the Federal government shattering their U.S.-Navajo Treaty of 1869 to lease Navajo lands to private and public mining interests. This practice of post-colonial necropolitics placed land resources as indispensable over the lives of the disposable Indigenous bodies, in the name of ‘national security’ in the search for uranium for nuclear weapons. In addition to this poisoning is the large-scale medical inequality in the lack of access to medical facilities and underfunding of medicine across Navajoland. Uranium poisoning and medical inequality together

lead to preventable and avoidable diseases adversely affecting Indigenous bodies. Actual significant Federal attention to these issues is critical to an honest cleanup of Navajoland, in addition to significant funding of IHS services, addressing the epidemic of unnecessary suffering of generations of Diné people. ●

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UNCERTAIN BORDERS

The day my court date came, six years ago, was just that,
The ending in the joint, where I served my time.
The new phase of life where my freedom began.

I was a hostage in my own skin.
A ghost; invisible with no voice.
I was a living sin; not able to win
With zero cash and no identity
Oh lord, is this my destiny!

Undocumented and underpaid
Education was so hard to obtain
Working two jobs and afraid
Trying to break the poverty chain

Kicked out of a country where I belonged
My boss showed up ready to fight
Asked the judge if she could adopt
As a way for me to uncross
The border that I crossed

“Ni de aqui Ni de alla”
I never felt I really belonged.
A paper that changed my life!
Finally obtained freedom and beyond!

My parents planted a seed
For their daughter to succeed
Obtaining a career was their biggest dream
Becoming a teacher was extreme
A certification that will set me free!
A life I will live without uncertainty!

LILYANA DIAZ

Lilyana Diaz a student who is a first generation student at MiraCosta experienced being an undocumented student and after all the struggles was able to overcome obstacles.

WE PLAYED CHESS

HELENA WESTRA

Helena Westra is a visual artist and student at MiraCosta. For her, art is both an expression of what is internal and a tool to process and better understand both her inner landscape and the world around her. In addition, she is deeply inspired by nature and environmental ecology.



PABLO, THE ILLEGAL

JOSE CASAS

His name was Pablo. He is like our ancestors before us, another grain of sand in the sea of humanity. You will not find him in any books of history, or trace that he was ever here. He was born in 1909 in Zacatecas, Mexico. My father never wanted the spotlight. I discovered that he was not willing to share his past. What happened in the United States at the railroad job or how many times he was beaten to a pulp by haters of Mexicans. He was trying to earn a living like all Mexicans from this period of history from 1925 to 1960. My father was five feet tall, about one hundred and forty pounds and sixty-two years old, about to retire. I was guilty of treating my father as a background in my life, at home. The wrinkles in his face that father time leaves behind, together with all the scars and broken bones that surfaced in his health. He satisfied the social security age requirement and waiting for him was a long life he deserved.

Proud son of Immigrants, the path for my dreams to come true and my father's grandchildren to be college graduates of UCSD.

The saga started with my grandparents having to deal with a new son and the Mexican revolution of 1910. This was when my father, as a six-year-old, became an orphan. His mother died from an illness that my father never knew or understood. All that was real to him was that her presence was gone, and with her the love and caring that only a mother can provide. My grandfather, Pilar, as a widower with five boys to raise, was faced with one solution: to remove my father from school, ending any hope of an education and reducing Pablo's status to a tool or an animal on the farm, to carry the load of survival on his back.

For the next ten years my father, being the youngest, was told to keep watch at night time together with the dogs, alerting the family when people would try to steal the crops or animals on the ranch. During those years my grandfather and my father's older brothers used punishment, demanding that Pablo learn how to survive or he would starve to death. The Mexican Revolution had left the country suffering for many years. My grandfather owned the farm in Mexico, and he tried to divide it five ways. The Casas family could not survive. My oldest uncle and my father saw a solution in 1925, when my uncle read signs at the post office that the railroads of the United States needed labor workers. This was a chance my uncle and father decided to take.

My father and uncle faced some amazing odds to get to the Rio Grande: the bandits, starvation, cold weather, and losing their way. The distance of six hundred and fifty miles from Zacatecas to the river meant the average

person walked twenty to twenty-six miles a day if they were experienced walkers. The inexperience of a first-time attempt walking such distance became evident when they attempted to swim and their bodies betrayed them. They should have rested but starvation, desperation, and the cold wind forced them to risk it all by trying to cross the river. They could hardly move from exhaustion. They waited for nightfall to cross. The last words my father heard from his brother were "Sigue, Pablo" in English "Continue, Pablo." This would be my father's nightmare for the rest of his life. The river claimed another victim to its long list. Losing his brother was the price paid for crossing the river on that day.

My father could only send a letter to the family in Mexico to let them know what happened. The guilt of "Why him and not me?" would be his reminder for staying alive in the United States.

In 1930, my father returned to Mexico to keep his promise to marry my mother. He was twenty-one years old; my mother was sixteen. Like most new couples, life was a challenge, and my parents felt the effect of the Depression of the United States. Mexico was not immune to the economic ripple impact. As a young couple they willingly went looking for work in many states in Mexico but they were like all others looking for a solution. The problem was the large numbers of people that would saturate the workforce. Promising conditions would change creating an economic desperation, making them prey to circumstances, forcing them to always be on the move. Leaving only



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four crosses behind as evidence. They lived in Mexico. The first child suffered a snake bite, another a scorpion bite and the last two died for lack of money for a doctor. In 1942, a second trip to the United States, my father enrolled in the Bracero program with California as his destination.

In 1942, an agreement between Mexico and the United States was made. The United States saw the need for manpower due to World War II. A new program was born, called bracero. This word meant “strong arms” or “one who works using his arms.” Strong arms are what the agriculture industry needed to survive: to bring temporary workers to the United States during harvest season. My father’s bracero status ended in 1960. In 1961, he became a permanent resident with “a green card” that allowed him to cross legally, no longer scared of deportation or being at the mercy of the coyotes, people who smuggle undocumented immigrants for money and kill them if they could not pay.

This story is for you, to put a face behind this “illegal alien” statistic that you keep seeing in the news.

My father’s green card status allowed him to choose where he would work. He did not want to be far away from my mom so he chose to work in California. He turned down the job of going to Idaho to fight the National Forest fires. This decision turned out to be a lifesaving decision. Those who got on the buses to fight the fires died in large numbers since they could not read or write and had no English knowledge, nor experience in forest fire fighting. Even when the good intentioned Anglos fighting the fires tried to warn them of the dangers of the forest blaze, it was like talking to the deer and getting the same result.

The Mexican fire fighters faced slaughter because they had never been in this type of terrain. They made mistakes that were deadly and had no knowledge of how to use the power tools or how the trees would fall on top of them. They suffocated to death from smoke inhalation. Even when they tried to get away from the flames, they had no knowledge of how the wind could turn and surround them with no way out. The accidents left many burned to death or with injuries that required hospitalization, but they could not explain what was hurting, how they were suffering, and, as a result, died of complications. This fate was common for braceros because the doctors refused treatment to Mexicans since they were afraid of not getting paid if they took care of them. The worker sat in silence taking the punishment and the abuse. I would not be writing this story if my father did not take the California path.

Today in 2021 this “illegal” issue is nothing more than a political football for most American politicians. It was my father’s and mother’s sacrifice that helped me to reach the American dream. They both lived to see me in my graduation gown at the University of San Diego ceremony.

This story is for you, to put a face behind this “illegal alien” statistic that you keep seeing in the news. He is my father, Pablo Casas Torres—a man who I was honored to work with side by side in the tomato fields in Oceanside in 1966. This is his legacy. Gracias, Don Pablo y Dona Maria. ●

WHERE I'M FROM

PRECIOSA CORONEL

Where I’m from, the crisp bone-rattling breeze engulfs your body when you go out for a morning jog as the warmth from the returning sun hugs your face, reminding you it’s a fresh new day.

Where I’m from, my abuela is shouting for us to turn off the TV because the sun has set and the sabbath has begun.

Where I’m from, during the game night at Tia’s house is full of gut-wrenching laughs as sudden deafening gunshots interrupt with an unwelcoming hello; heart weighing you down pulling your knees to the floor no room for hope...fearing those pieces of copper are not aimed at game night.

When I’m from, sweaty kids gasp for air as their little hearts are racing to get a dollar for the ice cream truck cruising in front of their home.

Where I’m from, your attire acts as your armor for the day so you must choose wisely. The shade of lipstick and color hoodie will determine which man’s attention you’ll get so I always chose to wear baggy clothes to hide and display an undefined body, white knuckles towards the sky as I tightly grip my home keys on my last few steps towards my peace, my home.

This is a poem about where I grew up as a child and how I grew to appreciate the joys of life regardless of harmful elements my family still protected and empowered us through arduous times.

SACRIFICES

In high school, I never got the chance to read a book that understood me. Instead, I was left with books that I disidentified and only read the book for its grade. However, when I read the memoir *A Dream Called Home*, I finally had the chance to share something similar with an author, one who went through adversity like me. The author Reyna Grande indulges in the complexity of being a first-generation Latina student and finds herself who she wants to become in life.

I wrote this essay for my English 100 class but also to identify all the things that Chicano students, like me, have lost for the American Dream. A Dream that continues to live and sacrifice more and more each day.

I Like Grande, I am on my journey to become the first in my family to obtain the American Dream, more specifically, a bachelor's degree at a four-year university. However, when reading this memoir, I learned that so much is sacrificed for the American Dream to be obtained. Immigrants or children of immigrants face losses in their culture, family, and home and often find trauma for a dream to continue living.

The American Dream that was once supposed to heal the wounds of all immigrants only left them wider than before. The harsh reality of the American Dream can be shown in the memoir in which Grande often finds a disconnection with her home, family, and culture. For example, Grande remembers her culture and country when she states that "only through my writing could I hold on to my native country and keep it from floating into the mist of memory" (36). For years, Grande lived in the U.S., and all she had left of her home, Mexico, was her stories and memories. When Grande writes her stories on paper, she experiences the good and bad simultaneously, which is a way of connecting with her home, something she had lost years ago. This shows that the American Dream is not what everyone anticipates at first because part of your native roots is sacrificed. Most immigrants or refugees define the American Dream as a promise to grant people of all ethnic backgrounds the ability to succeed in America, but in order to do so, things must be sacrificed. Similarly, Grande cannot feel the same way she once lived in Mexico after crossing the border for a better future; instead, Grande is left with small parts of her home, culture, and family. In another scene where Grande sees herself is when she sees her ESL student's eyes and says, "their stories were so similar to my own. Broken homes, broken families—that was the price we all had paid for a shot at the American Dream" (188). Grande's sixth-grade ESL students couldn't speak English, but she knew their eyes spoke for themselves. The way Grande saw her students reminded her of herself, a young girl full of aspiration and courage for the American Dream. Even though these students are at a disadvantage due to their lack of English, Grande and her students are able to communicate through their experiences and goals. However, so much is at stake for the American

Dream, and it might not be the answer everyone is looking for in America. The truth is that, for the American Dream to be obtained, you lose a part of yourself in the process.

When I was a child, my father would always tell me that the American Dream was the only hope to succeed in America since we were financially disadvantaged. He would always mention that he left his family and home to be here for us to have a shot at the American Dream. From time to time, my father would tell me what made him decide to leave his loved ones, how he crossed the border with my mother, and the years of suffering in America because of their language barrier. However, things took a turn when my uncle gave me and my brother the opportunity to visit my family in Asunción Ocotlán, Oaxaca, Mexico.

Asunción Ocotlán is a small town with a very weak economy, poor infrastructure, and little to no opportunities to be found. It was almost as if broken dreams were a place. But those things didn't matter in that town. The only things that mattered were family, religion, and the connection each person valued. That's how my father described Asunción Ocotlán, a place of enriched culture and love.

A couple of weeks later, my uncle drove me and my brother past the border, our first time stepping into Mexico. From the moment we passed the border, all I saw were dozens of vehicles entering their way into the U.S. and Mexico's law enforcement surrounding the area, checking every spec of those vehicles. I was sort of afraid because I've never seen so many police and immigration officers in one area.

When we arrived at Aeropuerto Internacional de Tijuana, my uncle stopped in the middle of the driveway and said, "Hurry, get all of your stuff out of the vehicle!" As I did what he said, he then proceeded to tell us to wait by the door. My brother and I ended up waiting a whole hour for him, and I thought we missed our flight because my uncle was taking his sweet time to find a spot to park. He finally found us and told us to get into the building. We got all of our information and luggage done as quickly as possible. I rushed to where our plane was located and

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noticed that our plane wouldn't take flight for three hours. Those three hours were one of the worst three hours of my life because I was stuck in a place where I had no service and was starving myself.

"Flight attendants, prepare for take-off, please." I was tired but thrilled to go to my home. I was getting comfortable in my seat, and I thought Oaxaca, Mexico, was only a couple miles away from where I was located, but no, I was entirely off. The screen in front of me read, "From TJ to Oaxaca - 4 to 5- hour flight." When I saw that, I said, "Wow, this whole trip has been such a disaster so far," and then decided to sleep the whole flight.

Before the landing at the international airport of Oaxaca, I saw the sunrise shining bright, the mountains standing high above any building, and the green around the airport was breathtaking. Once we had all of our luggage ready to go, my uncle called a cab to take us to my town, and when we hopped on the cab, my uncle told me that it would be an hour from the airport to the town. Once my uncle told me that I really wanted this trip to end because I couldn't take it anymore since I felt tired and bored out of my mind.

When the cab finally pulled into town, I said, "Finally, we're here!" But when I saw the town, it was exactly how my father described it: a weak economy, poor infrastructure, and little to no opportunities to be found. I was speechless that this town didn't have any roads or parks. This was totally something I did not expect from Oaxaca.

When my uncle said, "This is the place" to the cab driver, I looked at the house, and it was pretty nice from the outside. The house had brick walls, a small garden, and room for a driveway. When my grandma stepped out of the house, my brother and I gave her a big hug while she spoke her indigenous language. Since my grandma didn't know much Spanish, she would usually speak Mixtec. Though I could not understand her, our hug spoke for itself. In this very moment I experienced my home, family,

and culture all at once, the same thing that my father once told me in America. I finally understood what my father told me and everything my father sacrificed for the American Dream. This trip showed me that culture, family, and home were among those things that would be lost for the American Dream.

Later that day, we walked to the church, and someone was selling churros, and my grandma bought some for us. We then sat at a table next to the church. Eating those delicious churros while talking with my grandma about my experience in America was the best thing that I could ask for. This was a moment to cherish and keep for the rest of my life.

Both Reyna Grande and I experienced what it's like to lose a part of our culture and family for a dream to continue living. We do so much for a dream that can benefit us and our future when we don't notice that we have lost more than we have gained. Unlike me, Grande crossed the border for the American Dream while my parents were the people who crossed the border. However, both of us are here for the same purpose, which is to obtain the American Dream. As much as it hurts, everything was sacrificed for us to be here, though, we have to continue and let our survivors' guilt finish what we (or our parents) have started.

Our stories matter because it is more than the American Dream. After all, this doesn't guarantee life will get what you want. Instead, you can be left with nothing and tiny bits of your past. But we shouldn't see this through a lousy lens; we should embrace it that difficult journeys often bring the best out of us. The sacrifices made for the American Dream might not be ideal, but it is what we have. So we might as well take advantage of what we have at the moment. ●

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CURRY CHICKEN

The deepest scents of curry and spices ooze into the eggshell kitchen tile.
 Tapping on Granny's icy cold island counter.
 Butt firmly planted in a creaky stool from the '70s.
 Before I was born. Waiting for roti and curry chicken.
 My little feet swing back and forth, as she scrapes food around the large bronze pot.
 The sound makes my tummy do backflips and my toes wiggle.
 My big sister doesn't like curry chicken; she and mommy like Jack in the Box.
 Granny lets out a chesty cough, and the curry powder stains the styrofoam plate a brownish green.
 Her cough will be cancer.
 I'll only be able to eat it at funerals.
 Drowning my sorrows in sorrel
 Toeing my solem fork around green yellow potatoes and chickpeas
 While stuffing my gut with bake and roti but—
 Today, it's warm and tastes like swinging my feet in the kitchen.

alex desjardins

SCARLETT'S HEART

LINDA MARCONE

As we stepped out of the elevator to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, I couldn't help but stare at the badge that was given to me to allow me into the unit. It had the number 12, with "Mom" on it in pink lettering with flowers all around it. Pinning it to my hospital gown as we stepped towards the giant metal doors put the lump deeper in my throat. I heard my husband hit the buzzer and tell the attendant we were the parents of 12.

My name is Linda Marccone and I am a mom to a heart warrior. This is our story on how our journey begun almost a year ago and how our lives were changed.

When we walked through the door, it instantly got colder. The room was filled with the sound of beeping monitors. We walked down the hallway until we came upon room 12. Outside the room was an industrial sink where we were to scrub our hands clean before entering the room. I ran my hands under the warm water trying to mentally prepare myself for what I was about to see.

I was about to walk into a room and see my daughter for the first time but not the way I imagined for nine months. It was twenty-four hours after her birth, and I still couldn't process what had happened. I was always told she was healthy. She was born a week after her due date. How did we get here? Before I could finish my thought, my husband, Austin, ran his warm hand up my back. "Sweetheart, your hands are clean," he said in a soft tone. I looked at him and nodded, knowing I must have lost track of time. Before entering her room the nurse made me aware of how my daughter was going to look. She told me about the tube down her throat breathing for her, about the wires she had on her connecting her to a monitor, and the multiple IVs she had in both arms. While she was speaking, I kept my eyes closed, trying to digest everything she was saying, reminding myself I had seen many patients like this before. I took a sharp deep breath as I stepped into her room. Somehow it was even colder than the hallway. My arms were covered in goosebumps within seconds.

My eyes filled with tears when I saw her. Not the tears of joy I was told I would have meeting my daughter, Scarlett, for the first time. They were tears of fear. Tears of pain. I slid my shaking hand into the incubator and placed it

on hers. Her skin was warm and soft like velvet. Her dark brown hair, which came up into a mini Mohawk, was soft and silky. Her tiny fingers quickly curled around mine as she felt it touch her hand. Her toes were copied and pasted from Austin's feet and shrunken down to fit on hers. They, too, curled when I touched them. I sat there for what felt like hours just examining her without saying a word. How could something so small be hooked up to so many big tubes and wires? Half of them were bigger than she. Finally I lifted my gaze off of her and onto the nurse who was changing out her fluids in her IV. She was small and petite. Her blonde curly hair pulled back into a loose ponytail with a pink headband with buttons that held her face mask off her ears. "Is she in any pain?" My voice barely shook out. "We have her pain managed very well," she said back to me. Because of her face mask I couldn't see a smile, but her cheeks raised and her eyes spoke of a smile. I nodded and placed my head against Austin. His breath was shallow and his chest was hard, which allowed me to know exactly what he was feeling. Fear. Little did we know, the fear of the unknown was better than what was to come.

Throughout the day, many doctors came into the room. All explaining what tests they have done, what they plan to do, and what they knew so far. Which was nothing. She wasn't premature. Her lungs were developed. There wasn't any reason why she shouldn't be able to breathe on her own. There were no signs of infection. In every chest X-ray there showed no edema or fluid. "The only thing that might be of concern is she has a heart murmur," stated the lead doctor on her case. He was tall and narrow.



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With his dark hair pushed to one side and his skin sun kissed like he just came back from a nice tropical vacation, his voice was smooth and soothing. “A lot of babies are born with a murmur, and they resolve on their own and aren’t an issue,” he said confidently. “I’ll run an echo to be sure, but I’m not convinced it’s the problem,” he said and then stepped out of the room. At the time, I used those words as comfort. Now they’re words that play over and over in my head. That soft, smooth, and comforting voice became a voice I couldn’t stand. They weren’t sure what was going on, but her heart wasn’t a concern. I told myself nothing was wrong with her. I told myself she was just tired from the long thirty-six hour labor. I told myself she needed time to rest and that she’d be fine. Deep down I was terrified those thoughts were denial, and something would be wrong.

When a man came into the room to do the echocardiogram, Austin and I decided to step out and grab lunch. We both pressed our hands against the cool plastic of the incubator and smiled at each other. While we didn’t say a word, I knew we were thinking the same thing: she was perfect. Even though she was hooked up to so many wires and we could barely see her face, we could tell she was beautiful. Austin placed his hand on my cheek and rubbed his thumb up and down my face. He always does this to comfort me and to tell me everything will be alright; it is my favorite thing he does. He never has to say a word when doing it. The simple act gives me comfort like the ocean’s waves hitting the shore.

When we returned, the environment of the NICU had changed. As we walked through the double doors, we were immediately met by a nurse asking if we received a

call from the cardiologist. We looked at each other with a puzzled face. “No,” Austin stated with a firm, hard voice. “Okay,” the nurse said in a chirper but concerning voice. “He probably will meet you in your daughter’s room,” she said and left us to wash our hands. After we finished washing our hands another nurse asked the same question.

Now, every red flag in my head was standing up along with the hair on the back of my neck. Something was wrong and I could feel it everywhere in my body. Before we could settle back in her room, a man walked in. He was tall and string bean-like. His arms dangled off his body like they were barely hanging on and they swayed when he walked. His hair, jet black with tiny sprinkles of grey throughout it, was gelled nicely to one side. He had long fingers that clasped together as he sat down next to me.

Dr. A continued, “Mom, there’s nothing you did to cause this. These things just happen.”

“Hello!” His voice was high and full of excitement, “My name is Dr. A and I’m the Pediatric Cardiologist!” I couldn’t find words to greet him with. All I could do was nod as my heart raced. The words he said next made my whole body spin as if I just got off the teacup ride at Disneyland. “After reviewing her echo, I unfortunately am here to tell you Scarlett has Congenital Heart Disease,” His voice seemed to be placed in slow motion. Austin and I looked at one another, as tears filled his eyes. The tall man continued. “It’s a rare form called Tetralogy of Fallot, meaning there are four different defects in the heart,” as

he spoke the room filled with loud sobs. “She’s going to need many open-heart surgeries and cardiac care for the rest of her life.” When he finished that sentence I fell into Austin’s arms. My chest tightened as my cries grew louder. Austin’s arms closed around me, and I felt his tears hit the top of my head. Dr. A continued, “Mom, there’s nothing you did to cause this. These things just happen.” Austin and I continued to cry as he finished up: “Well, I’ll pop in tomorrow to answer any questions and further discuss this process.” He stood and left the room as quickly as he came in.

The room grew quiet as the sound of sobs left the air. I kept my face pressed into Austin’s chest because, maybe if I kept it there, all of this would disappear. In the silence, Dr. A’s words replayed on a loop that lingered and haunted my thoughts. I hated him and the thoughts he put inside my head. One thought in particular shook me to my core, forced my body into shock, and stopped my world ever since. Are we going to lose our daughter? While I was still wrapped in Austin’s arms, I fell to my knees at the thought of losing our baby girl, and the once quiet room filled with

A midline scar, that runs down just above her belly, tells the story of her battles she has faced. She’s full of laughter and joy despite all the pain she’s gone through.

the sound of sobs and despair all over again. As I sobbed uncontrollably, I couldn’t stop thinking about the hatred I had for this man. How could he come in, give us this kind of news, and leave us with nothing but pain? There was no one to blame for my daughter’s heart disease. Hating him and every doctor in that hospital was all I had.

Six long months have gone by now. Scarlett has had four hospitalizations, ten Covid-19 nasal swabs, countless IV’s, Chest X-rays, Echocardiograms, and doctors appointments. One Catheter Procedure where they performed an Angioplasty with Balloon Catheterization, and an Open-Heart Surgery to correct Tetralogy of Fallot, which entailed having her chest cracked open, being placed on a Heart and Lung Machine, and a Ventilator, for several days.

Today she is over a year post-operation and she is a pure miracle. She is healthy, strong, and beautiful. Her blue eyes are clear like the Mediterranean Sea. She has strawberry blonde hair that gently lays to one side and curls at the ends. A midline scar, that runs down just above her belly, tells the story of her battles she has faced. She’s full of laughter and joy despite all the pain she’s gone through. Her resilience gives me strength for the future of battles we have in front of us. As for Dr. A, he’s the angel we needed. Every step of this journey so far he’s been by our side advocating for Scarlett and making sure she’s had the very best care. He’s also made sure Austin and I have made it through in one piece. We are forever grateful to have such an amazing, brilliant, and caring man for a doctor to our girl. ●



SITTING IN THE LOVEGRASS

HELENA WESTRA

Helena Westra is a visual artist and student at MiraCosta. For her, art is both an expression of what is internal and a tool to process and better understand both her inner landscape and the world around her. In addition, she is deeply inspired by nature and environmental ecology.

THIS IS ME

I am from blenders, from moleskin journals and music.
I am from the hill where sunsets never disappoint, golden, warm with a cool silky breeze grazing the skin.
I am from paddy fields, small, flooded, and swaying with the movements of the wind.
I am from red envelopes and dimples.
From Melei Nguyen and Vuong Kelly.
I am from the stubbornness and travel junkie,
From “no tattoos” to “greet every adult.”
I am from the solemn 40 days of Lent and fasting on Fridays
I am from America, Ireland, and Vietnam,
the comforting taste of Phở, crispy Chả giò.
From the premature brother who faced death 3 times, and could fit my dad’s wedding ring around his wrist,
the mother who moved to America at 12 to escape war.
On the black shelf in my bedroom, sits a sparkly red box, overflowing with cards, photos, and trinkets--reflecting my past.
I am from the bronze cross that gathers the family before bed to pray, because “families who pray together, stay together.”

ANNIE KELLY

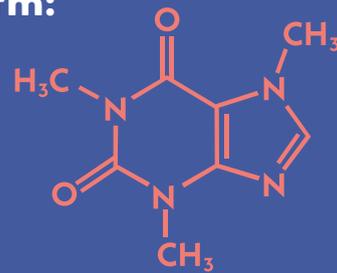
This poem was created by Annie Kelly, a current student at MiraCosta College. When she is not doing school, she interns at the Palomar Hospital, works at a pharmacy, teaches piano to kids, walks dogs, reads comics or spending time with the people she loves.

UNHORSEING THE BEAN

ANDREW FREEDMAN

“Coffee makes me a might nervous when I drink it.”
—Karl Childers, *Sling Blade*

Each morning in the United States, 172, 437, 895 people awaken with the same vague feeling of existential despair. The instant they return from sleep to conscious awareness of the physical world, they realize something vital is missing from their lives. It is not love or meaningful work. It is not a more pleasing appearance or financial solvency. Words become poor, puny things, inadequate to describe this gnawing emptiness vibrating at the cellular level. It is best expressed in graphic form:



This is a caffeine molecule, simple in structure, complex in implication.

I believe this piece of writing is a true achievement because I wrote it entirely without the benefit of caffeine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit it.

A recent study reveals that about 80% of the world's population simply cannot do what needs to be done without some form of this bitter, naturally occurring psychoactive substance. In the U.S., the Earth's largest consumer of coffee, the drink has become so commonplace that the morning pour over is considered a part of the USDA food pyramid, equal, if not superior, to green leafy vegetables. Coffee is now an art form, a fashion accessory, and part of our culture wars, as in "Would you prefer a short pulled, low-foam shade grown Kona Ristretto or some Maxwell House?" Coffee is touted as a hedge against cognitive decline, the bane of gall stones, a spur to the afternoon slump, and for the working class, a cheap alternative to both anabolic steroids and Viagra. There is also the matter of regularity, which for committed coffee drinkers requires no further comment.

Irritation evolves into anxiety and after a second cup, full-blown panic, which if survived, eventually dissipates into ennui.

Coffee seems benign enough. Most people can pound down a tankard of Ethiopian Harrar, stroll down the hall and perform a perfectly successful appendectomy without so much as a tremor. Folks with steady nerves find a cup of Joe relaxing, an essential guest at any social gathering,

a pleasant companion on the daily walk, mildly inspiring, adding a spring to their step and an extra serving of valor to help them face life's inevitable periods of tedium.

However, coffee is not suitable for everyone. For those who are "sensitive" to its chemical interactions, caffeine is essentially a DEA Schedule One Controlled Substance, similar to methamphetamine, only more expensive. To the caffeine intolerant, the initial euphoria of one percolated cup of Tanzania Peaberry is quickly followed by various degrees of mania during which one experiences an almost compulsive need to repaint the garage or mow the fairways of the neighborhood golf course. Next comes a lingering sense of irritability where the nerves feel like sparking copper wires and a slow download is cause for hurling the laptop through the nearest window. Irritation evolves into anxiety and after a second cup, full-blown panic, which if survived, eventually dissipates into ennui. And yet many people deny these ravages, and willingly climb aboard the same hamster wheel every day using a colorful variety of rationalizations.

During my years of swilling down everything from Folger's Coffee Crystals to French Press Sumatra Firestorm, I've become well-versed in coffee's schizophrenic oscillations—one minute "Ode to Joy" the next "Night on Bald Mountain"; from *It's a Wonderful Life*, to *Requiem for a Dream*; today, the mind a choir of wondrous revelations—tomorrow, my cat's loving meow transformed into



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an air horn. But sifting through the congestion of divisive voices, how could I ever uncover the truth about coffee? It was plain that I needed advice from a sage.

One mild Spring afternoon I attended a workshop hosted by Patricia Bragg, N.D. Ph.D. heiress to the physical stamina and expansive product line of the “Vitality King”, Paul C. Bragg. It was entitled, “Regain Your Birthright of Super Abundant Health!”

The audience, all of whom, like myself, were in various stages of disrepair, was flushed with the anticipation that their allotment of Super Health was less than an hour away, and with it a return to the *Joie de Vivre* of a nine-year-old. Ms. Bragg appeared, radiating agelessness, vigor and boundless perkiness, all without stopping at Starbucks on the way. She began with a short exercise in alternate nostril breathing, followed by a quick Q&A.

I seized my opportunity. “Is coffee really that bad for you?” Her response was swift and unexpected. “Ask your pancreas.”

I’m ashamed to admit that in all my years on this planet, I hadn’t once consulted my pancreas about even trivial matters, and as I was crafting an ice breaker, Ms. Bragg continued. This time in a more didactic tone: “Son, coffee’s a brutal whip to the adrenals; it leaves your cells begging. Why would you drink that poison?”

Although I assumed this was a rhetorical question, even before I was able to reflect on my motivations, she had transitioned to the importance of daily lymphatic drainage and Apple Cider Vinegar massage, most of which I missed.

That night my dreams were visited by images from the Id.

In the first, my adrenal glands were hunched over to the oars of a Roman war galley, the task master flailing them with cat-o-nine tails as he shouted, “ramming speed!”

In the second, my cells, pale and dispirited, wandered mean streets with tin cups and placards “Spare some trace minerals?” “Will work for Niacin.”

I woke disoriented and after being restored by an invigorating cup of Kenya AA with its haunting complexities, redolent nose, fruity undercurrents, and audacious finish, I decided to quit...once and for all.

I’d quit before, countless times, but armed only with underdeveloped will power and a flimsy sense of destiny, I was quickly vanquished.

I was told that before embarking on any important journey, it is beneficial to begin on an auspicious day, one in which the cosmic tumblers are properly aligned to invite the assistant of supernatural powers. I chose D-Day.

There are several traditional methods of giving up a stubborn habit. All of them fraught.

Cold Turkey. Fashioned entirely for masochists, the perils of sudden abstinence are widely known. Day One: That fragmented feeling better known as dissociative fugue. Day Two: Who lit this signal flare in my head? Day Three: Lethargy accompanied by the sensation that Redi-Crete had been transfused into my connective tissue. Day Four: Pacing frantically outside the Buzz Hut trying to trade my Amazon stock for *anything* with caffeine in it. Day Five: 12 ounces of Jamaican Blue Mountain single serve with a dollop of whipping cream, a dusting of nutmeg, the morning sports section, a reclining chair and....behold, the revenant!

The Tourniquet. Essentially a slow strangulation during which the daily amount of caffeine is incrementally reduced until all desire magically disappears. Best attempted in a padded environment.

The Unreasonable Facsimile. The peculiar idea that substituting a beverage composed of cereal grains, chicory,

rain forest tree bark, or chaga mushrooms can somehow duplicate the transcendental delights of a Café Cubano.

Extinction. Drawn from Positive Psychology, this technique advises the addict to “toss out everything associated with the offending behavior or substance.” So, out goes the cappuccino machine, the IWAKA Home Roaster, Braun grinder, Mr. Coffee drip station, the French Press, two packs of organic brown coffee filters, the five-year stash of old Barista magazines, tooth whitener, my gift card to *Philz* and finally the 40 pound burlap sack of green Columbian beans in the hall closet. However, it’s not so easy to discard your dopamine receptors I discovered shortly before trying to chase down the trash truck disappearing into the horizon.

As I straddled a precipice, I chanced upon one of those unattributed quotes that seem to be strewn about everywhere these days: “The Great Books provide not only solace and contemplation, but a compass and a lantern.” Emerson? Samuel Johnson? 50 Cent? No matter. I began with *Moby Dick* because of its uncanny parallels to my situation. A solitary figure haunted by personal demons pursues a mythic creature around the Norway Maelstrom and through Perdition’s Flames, finally to thrust a sharp object into its dark heart. Hmm. Now that I recall, it didn’t really end that well for Ahab, did it?

Better try something else. *Lear!* A bewildered monarch repudiates the thing he loves best, ending his days barking mad on some bleak storm-swept heath. Maybe the *Odyssey*. Odysseus lashes himself to the mast as the Sirens torment him with offers of free refills.

I was at an impasse. I couldn’t quit, the canon of great Western literature didn’t help and there were three new artisan coffee shops opening on the main drag downtown to undo whatever resolve I could muster. Just as it seemed I was doomed to spend the rest of my life staring at the bottom of a hand thrown coffee mug, I remembered the Bhagavad Gita, India’s trove of wisdom which Gandhi

said could unravel any knot point confronting mankind. I snatched it off the shelf and picked a page at random:

The Gita, for the uninitiated, recounts a great war between rival clans in ancient India, but it is more importantly an allegory, with the principal warriors of one army representing man’s ennobling qualities while the other, man’s debasing behaviors and habits. I had opened to Chapter 2, Verse 3 in which Lord Krishna is exhorting his chief disciple, Arjuna, the greatest of warriors, to fight for righteousness in the climactic battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna in a state of despondency has refused to take up his bow and destroy his enemies, many of whom are his bad habits cleverly disguised as his kinsmen and therefore dear to him. It sounded uncomfortably familiar.

To rouse his disciple, Krishna engages in a timeless discourse which includes these lines: “Oh Arjuna, surrender not to unmanliness: it is unbecoming of thee. O Scorcher of Foes, forsake this small, weak heartedness. Arise!” A torrent of arrows follows shortly afterward, and the day is won.

And so similarly roused, I mounted up, hoisted my lance and strode forth to unhorse the bean. But as it turned out, this joust was no epic struggle matching sinew and cunning. It was really a matter of pride, of arising from an unwillingness to resist tyranny, of reclaiming my warrior’s heart and my independence. The outcome was decided more by surrender than volition. I yielded to the truth. I loved coffee, but unlike most people who can drink it with impunity and joy, the stuff was poison for me, just as Patty Bragg said it was—a foe that needed to be scorched.

A few nights after quitting, I had a dream. In it my adrenal glands suddenly stopped rowing. They rose from the oars, cast off their shackles and with defiant smiles clambered up the rope ladders from below decks and into the friendly, radiant sunlight with its promise of super abundant health. ●

SNAPSHOT

I look around this room, full of so much youth. We are already flowered but budding new limbs with a tremendous ache as we reach to become more. We all have certitude in our still-new bodies, yet as I weave through the room, listening, each of us emanates uncertainty in every word uttered. We are all performing training exercises, practicing a victor's confidence through facsimiles of champion conversation.

Leigh Cotnoir is a designer, artist, and developer in web, print, and interactive arts and teaches in the Media Arts and Technologies department at MiraCosta College. This lyrical essay captures a moment of acceptance in life, particularly in the context of embracing love and one's own queer identity.

Life's relentless assaults on body and mind have not yet filtered into our collective lexicon of experience. You and I, however, have lived life beyond our years...tethered by guilt, lashed by convention, and apprehended by the blood searing our very own veins. Even though we are both only in the second decade of living, somehow, I know that, like me, you are not so untouched by life. Others practice knowing what they do not know, but something about being here with you now tells me that we will soon face truths we've long tried to drown in turbulent waters.

I've learned in my time how to be a true champion of nothing, a tenuous champion of everything, and how to bear the torch of strength through measured breath exhibited only by a statesman. It is this torchlight that has long attracted you to me, and I sometimes wonder if you have begun to confuse me with the sun. In spite of efforts to stay distant, I know now that you cannot help but lean toward me in pursuit of that which you need, and I to you, even if to others our convergence seems a betrayal.

You are a stroke of charcoal articulating across paper, a ribbon of long grass bending effortlessly in the wind.

I watch you from across the room, your mouth moving, smiling, your eyes bright as you casually engage with a group nearby. Your eyes have darted away from mine several times, waterbugs in retreat to safety. But I watch you as I speak to others, or moreso, as others speak to me. Your fluidity never fails to captivate me. A concentration of litheness in a single figure, your body has gestural

movement. You are a stroke of charcoal articulating across paper, a ribbon of long grass bending effortlessly in the wind. I see the muscles in your arms, shoulders, neck, and jaw maneuver gracefully with every expression. You know I am watching. Then you turn to me, eyes stopping at mine. For once you do not look away, and I realize that you have finally embraced careless intention, that in this gesture you are opening a window for me to enter.

The casual smile on your face washes away as the tide of my gaze moves in, wetting the ground, hitting the rocks with cresting intimacy. I now see you motionless except for the rise and fall of your chest; I can tell that you are overcome, that you are in this instant here with me only, in this room full of people as they become distant, dissipated ghosts falling away.

You once told me you loved T.S. Eliot, and I knew I captured your fascination with his words at the ready. That was then, and now I cannot help but think that, *what is actual is actual only for one time and only for one place*. I know you will never forget this exchange at *this* time, at *this* place, as it marks the start of something new, something honest, something raw. I feel urgency in my chest, as your eyes are breathless and steady with excited punctuation, full of the fear, reverie, and anticipation of a wild animal engaged in the solemn act of stillness. Our gaze is an act of passion, and we both know, too—a conscious act of love. You part your lips but do not speak. With a look, we both know what is to come for you and me, inevitable and unavoidable libertines. I sense that if I look down, for the first time I will see that my feet do not touch the ground. ●



TWILIGHT AT THE YELLOW HOUSE

CHRISTINE AMES

MIXED MEDIA ART

After a career in pharmaceuticals, Christine now is able to focus attention on her passion, abstract art. She is a mixed media artist whose goal is to capture emotion, through color, shape, and line. Her work is a process oriented journey, with the ultimate goal of achieving ascetically pleasing compositional balance.

[our love is a 4am car ride]

CLAIRE WILSON

behind tempered glass there is only us
shielded, tinted, safe and contained
windows reflect us—ghosts— against the world as it speeds by
too fast to be noticed, eyes too unfocused to care.

black leather fire against our skin
rain pelts against us, twenty miles too far over the radar
inside this vessel of space, never stagnant, belonging nowhere
resides only the ghosts of our reflections,
refractions of who we're meant to be.

those backscattered creatures looking back at us aren't defined
they blur and move in unpredictable ways, some days i can't tell them apart.
some days they don't look how i remember them at all.
a single hand on the wheel veers into your eyes,
wide and shakily with black lines reapplied
you don't notice, neither do i.

how many times have those people in the mirror
bled into one another?

Claire is a 20 year old psychology/animal science major who loves to write and draw.

ON COLLEGE AND READING

JADE MACEOGHAIN

*January 22. Monday. The sky is clear and sunny, the air still. At least, that's how I remember it--campus empty of people at 11am, which actually isn't very likely. At 7am, yes. Why do I remember it this way? Is that what reflects how I felt as I walked around the 3000s, trying to find 3512? I was late, I was anxious, terrified, swirling with curiosity like nasty ice cream, melted, clinging to the sides, in this case the curiosity I suppose. Anxiety: remembering the large, seething red pen with every paper returned the previous semester: **WHY IS IT SPACED LIKE THIS?** and **FRAG** and **COME TO OFFICE HOURS** and **NOT ENOUGH FROM THE BOOK** and so on. What if I was just a really bad writer? But also, what was this class going to be like? Who was the professor--not his name, but who was he? What was the group project? Where the hell is 3512?*

Jade is Kashmiri-British and a first-generation community college graduate, working on their undergraduate degree in English. They work at the Writing Center, and credit their strong mother with an early passion for literature and creativity. Published in Johns Hopkins Macksey Journal, this is their first creative works publication.

"First Time"

Monday, January 22, 2018:

Still air, sun shining and warm

(that might be a lie)

I walk to room 3512,

Terrified and curious.

I enter, ten minutes late

(something that keeps me up for years)

The clock says, *You're late, idiot!*

I sit. *Are you Jade?*

Yes. Nervous.

He has a mellifluous voice, humorous and strict in equal measure.

The room is dark in my memory,

(this too might be a lie)

He seems tall, taller than I've seen

Big beard like a fisherman--no, a Viking maybe

And is, probably what the kids around me call

Swole.

My nervousness and curiosity take turns shouting

As my terror and excitement build--

All, it turns out, competing with each other--

What's on the board is more interesting:

Barely discernible

Syllabus - literacy narrative - NPR - Service Learning - units

These are snippets, broken memories that became

Sheer, inexplicable, unbreakable, scandalous, confusing,

undefinable, luminous, life saving

DELIGHT.

"You can stay for the supplemental section, if you want." Ooh, I was excited. An extra hour of class twice a week, the room the same size but the occupancy smaller, more intimate writing occurring. What might seem like torture for some was no where near such for me. No distractions, just writing, and a ten minute break for coffee or food (a habit that's stayed). Right after, I'd pack up and follow the swole viking to his office. I no longer remember the first time I trekked under the hot sun alongside him, his heavy bag filled with volumes of books, including often three copies of the same book, and bottomless coffee, my heavy bag and cooled coffee in my hand. Then I'd sit on the chair by the bookshelf humorously weighed down by what seemed like a million books and journals, and we'd talk, or I would do my homework while he graded or did what professors do in their offices, thirty or so browser tabs open, Outlook pinging. Sometimes I would select a book at random and read it: pedagogy (as it turns out, there are probably a million books just on that subject--some of them are on my shelves now, years later); essays by professors who taught English, discussing their lessons for fellow professionals, war stories...each book spine had its own colour, thickness, stickers or not, many had those lovely lines running down the spine from years of being overbent in the way that actually makes a bibliophile's own back hurt, a sort of sympathetic pain-pleasure experience-response happening.

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“Everything You Need to Know”

Another hot day, sun bursting, hitting the cement
 With waves of heat.
 We trudge through the thick air and enter the cool room;
 The cold, white fluorescent light flickers--on--
 I find my seat at the lopsided mountain of books, metal
 frame,
 Stickers galore! USED SAVES proclaimed in yellow.
 The room is a refuge, haven, my safe place
 This place I am myself, fully
 He laughs at whatever website is open,
 this morning's coffee in hand, 30 tabs open
 Chair squealing as he leans back, ready to grade.
 The titles overwhelm me, pleasantly:
 The Well Crafted Sentence
 New Seeds of Contemplation
 Teaching English in the Two Year College, Volume 46
 Dictionaries spill out in between Michel Foucault and
 curious wirebound books
 Smelling of libraries, office carpet,
 Clean air, and--0.77 ballpoint ink, black.

Being in this new space, surrounded by a plethora of books, was not new to me. I was raised surrounded by books, on the floor, on bookshelves, in cubbies, wherever they could fit. We always had more books than anything else, and some of the coolest ones, when I was a child, were my mom's dusty old paperbacks from the 1960s or so (back when books were maybe 50 cents or a dollar!). Later on, years or a decade plus later, I would mark up some of those same books: "we're reading The Odyssey for class, can I borrow yours? Can I use a highlighter in it and sticky notes?" It's always best practise to ask the book lender, in this case mom, what the parameters are of book borrowing. There are those special books that you just don't dare mark up--dog ear, bright yellow highlighter, sticky notes that leave a mark--because there is something extra precious about those books. That actually turned out to be a topic of conversation in a literature class--what makes a book special enough not to mark up? Why? Conclusion: inconclusive. My mom's copy of The Odyssey, printed 1962, has a special scent to it--that indescribable, you-have-to-experi-

“Refuge”

Square and carpeted,
 Two desks on opposite sides
 With a sense of connection,
 A window that never seemed open
 Between the two.
 Yet the room itself seemed
 An open window,
 Full of opportunity
 And sacredness.
 Here was a space
 Where I could learn and
 Become unburdened.
 This was my space--
 A place of
 Freedom,
 Warmth,
 Safety.

“The Green Book”

Books--pages and ink bound passionately--
 Some are crispy, some are soft;
 The spine is broken, peeling;
 Pages are tasty and offer delight, even an ecstasy.
 Grimm's Fairy Tales, 1940s, yellowed pages and
 U n w o u n d binding;
 I open the book, gently, and smell it:
 I am a child again, small and tucked in, ready to choose
 A grim story for sleep.
 The contents pages still have
 Colourful pencil marks
 Crossing out the titles read.
 I suppose it's strange to find comfort in these bloody tales,
 But the me that used to be still enjoys
 A good whiff of memory,
 Something warm
 and...
 Voyaging.

ence-it-to-understand kind of scent...old paper from another era, the ink settled comfortably into the page, the binding a little wonky and probably different ingredients than now...open the pages and it smells like maybe you just walked through a portal, because new books just don't compare to that scent. It smells like a used bookstore--that's not quite it either. I hope these books smell like that forever, and we can keep passing on that pleasantness of scent. It's positively delightful, I am enamoured by it, wrapped in its pleasant scent every time I open one of these old books. I think it's a sort of nutrition for the soul.

“Urdu”

Ali's book on Faiz arrives--
 Faiz! Beloved poet of our brother's homeland
 I open for a surprise: Urdu, side by side.

“Let the breeze pour colours into the
 waiting blossoms” (Faiz 35)

What lovely lines--
 What endless possibilities!

“Agha, Faiz, & Disappearing Into”

I often disappear into the pages
 Of the book I'm reading
 It was a way to Escape reality
 And find joy in the chaos,
 Critical for a young mind.
 Later,
 When I met Agha
 We went on many journeys
 And I've been home
 To places I've never really
 Been; he guides me on
 Snowy, rocky trails
 We pass through the Himalayas,
 Through markets with

Incense

Shawls

Wazwaan

Histories, unspoken



TIDEPOOLS 2022

THE GOLDEN HOUR

JUDI PHEIFFER

EN PLEIN AIR PAINTING

Judi Pheiffer only began painting and drawing in her mid fifties after retiring and re-locating to Encinitas. She loves painting en plein air or setting up still lifes in her studio. She tries to maintain a daily art practice and loves taking art classes thru Mira Costa and on-line workshops. She believes you are never too old to follow your dreams- just go for it!

MY LIFE AS A PENCIL: DECOMPRESSION

Do I dread the sound of the sharpener? Or revel in its turning, twisting and shaving away my cedarwood encasement? A terrifying vibration and I am pointed, precise, prepared at the whim of the one holding me. A little exposed and vulnerable to pressures, my appearance is a delight to my master.

You might see the writing on my edges and the mustard yellow of my outer surface, my skin, and think of me as bright and sunny in disposition, but inside I am dark, 6B dark at my core. Soft and buttery traces I leave when pressed upon and moved in contact with another surface. Most often I travel across thick papers, smooth and rough. Drawn (pun intended) across fine art paper that is archival, bumpy, and rhythmic is a particularly exhilarating sensation. Feeling the shedding of my graphite charcoal body I am at once melancholy and elated, for this moment will never repeat. My molecules will not rest together in a finite space again. I dance the part of the follow to the grasp of the hand who leads me, to the music of the surfaces I glide along.

Without the hand that warms, shapes, turns, sharpens, holds ... what would I be? Minute pieces of me are scattered throughout journals, the memories of each sketch, pattern, tracing, etched in these remaining fibres. I sense eternity in where I am and where I am going next.

Sometimes I consider where I might have come from, and how I came to be. I have heard whispers from my core that I am made of ancient compressed and fire-blackened substances. How many hands have carried, turned and shifted materials to bring me to creation? There are others like me. I thought you would like to know. ●

Nature and music lover, sometime circus freak, cat mum, OG punk, loves to laugh and support everyone's adventures while on this galactic ride.

PLAYDATE

KAT BAUER

PLEIN AIR PAINTING

I love the afternoon light on the beach. The direction of the light can add to the narrative of the story of a painting. Here the sun is low in the sky, creating defined shadow lines as a stark contrast to the bright colors in full sun. I'm so inspired by the shadow colors on skin at the beach. The sand reflects light into the shadows giving color that is hard to capture in a photograph. But I can document the color in paint! My art training has been focused on the figure and the traditional realism of the old masters. Living near the beach in Southern California has inspired me to delve into plein air (outdoor) painting. I feel it is the closest I can come to portraying the effects of light and color of the California beaches. I then use the outdoor oil sketches and quick figure studies for reference to inform larger studio paintings, adding detail, texture and character. I have loved the figure drawing classes at MiraCosta College as a way to sharpen and maintain my drawing skills while being a stay-at-home mom.



THE GREATEST TEACHER FAILURE IS... **NOT**

JOHN SIEBELINK

I was nineteen years old and medically discharged from the military when I first started college. After the winter semester, I was academically suspended for maintaining a low GPA—I didn't want to be there. I had enlisted thinking that I had the next four to forty years of my life planned out already. Getting discharged so soon and having accomplished precious little didn't do much for my mental health. My parents told me (or at least I think they did, though it could just have been me putting words in their mouths as a defense mechanism) that if I did not go to school then I would be kicked out of their house. I had no place else to go, so I chose Grand Rapids Community College.

Now I didn't even have that.

Thankfully, I didn't wind up getting kicked out. In fact, I ended up staying with Mom and Dad far longer than I originally intended, but it worked out for the best. I drove them up the wall quite a bit, but I grew up quite a bit as time went on. And what a LONG time it was! I was able to successfully appeal my suspension and get back into GRCC the next Fall. Somehow or another I managed to have my first successful college semester (probably out of fear of getting shut out of the college again) and, even more surprisingly, came back again in Winter 2011 for a less successful (yet nevertheless successful) semester, proving to myself that I had it in me to continue with my education.

For whatever reason, I seemed to forget that lesson relatively quickly once summer ended. While I did return to GRCC that fall for my second year, I did not finish it. I was accepted into the Disney College Program at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, and since knowing that I would not be in Michigan in January gave me all the excuses I needed to stop going to class.

Coming off the very first good year of school I had ever had, I was back to being a failure. I half-assed my way

John Siebelink is an English and Anthropology student in his second year at MiraCosta College. He has had fiction, poetry, and essays published by several venues in the past and this has fostered a newfound love of creative nonfiction. "The Greatest Teacher Failure Is... Not" is his most recent attempt.

through my campus job, but that ended since I would not be returning next semester. There was no point in finding a job for four or five weeks, so I was back to being both unemployed and out of school (though I didn't tell my parents that at the time). Very long story short, my internship down south ended up not lasting as long as I thought it would, and a lack of financial aid due to my grades meant that I could not afford to go back to school full-time in the fall. In fact, I was unable to scrounge up enough money to even go part-time. I was almost twenty-two years old and did not have a single thing going for me.

This was how it was for me for years after I was done at Disney World. There was no excuse for any of it, and even now looking back I can't really say what it was that was going on in my head for so long. I would find myself back at GRCC *EIGHT* further semesters, and I ended up dropping out of every one of them. I found myself hired for a variety of different jobs in a variety of different industries; none of them lasted over a year for me. Despite earning thousands upon thousands of dollars and getting money back every year from my taxes, it all burned a hole in my pocket and my savings were nonexistent. I was what my fiancé liked to call "a mess." By the time I had made the decision to move to California to be with her, I was unable to do so without

asking for assistance. It was the absolute lowest point in my entire life and my biggest reminder that I was a failure.

In Rian Johnson's epic failure of a masterpiece, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, the lovechild of Kermit the Frog and George Lucas tells the Joker, "The greatest teacher failure is." Given the wise old sage that Yoda is, one cannot expect him to simply give away all the answers up front.

If there is one thing that I learned during my own adult life, it is that one has to live in order to succeed—or fail.

When Luke Skywalker starts to ponder his dead mentor's wisdom, he is almost certainly going down the path of knowledge that Yoda had put him on; he is not staring wisdom directly in the face the way he would a Force ghost. What Yoda said about being a teacher, then, means that this is yet another stepping stone toward the truth. If there is one thing that I learned during my own adult life, it is that one has to live in order to succeed—or fail. If one isn't trying, they aren't living. There certainly were several points in my life where I felt that my life had come to a

standstill, but that was because I had stopped living. I had stopped caring. It did not take long for me to start feeling all the negative emotions that come with such a life, and it led to me being as determined as possible to change. In order to change, though, I needed to start living.

I had reached a point in my life where I got tired of failure, plain and simple. That is all it took. I knew deep down that I had the potential for great things to happen to me, and while I don't believe that there was any singular moment that finally knocked me off the laziness rocker and got me moving in high gear towards my goals and dreams, I do know that I had long been tired of living the life that I lived. It dawned on me that I wasn't getting any younger, but I was still at the exact same place I was at when I was nineteen living at home with Mom and Dad.

Only now, I was nearing thirty and a father myself! Life certainly was not going to get any easier as my daughter grew up, so it was either start getting to work now or it might never happen. I therefore enrolled at MiraCosta College and enrolled full-time. It was time to see if my new grown-up mentality was worth anything to me.

As it turned out, it was worth far more than I had ever valued it at. When I was a month shy of turning thirty-one, I earned my first 4.0 GPA. Four months later, I earned straight As in another round of courses. I was elected Executive Vice President of MiraCosta College's Associated Student Government (essentially the number two executive position, below President) and was appointed President of our campus chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, which is reserved for students with a GPA of 3.5 or above. This was quite a step up from academic suspension ten years before. As of this writing, I have also put together and am leading a new student organization for creative writers at MiraCosta College and am also making regular appearances at various planning committees throughout the college. On top of all of this, I have five classes. On top of *all that* I have a toddler at home. Kenway Dawn Siebelink for the win!

Sometimes, a person just needs to live life in order to get to a spot mentally where they are finally set up for success. There are certain lessons that need to be learned—sometimes the hard way—before others are able to stick. Time does not have to be a detriment to one's dreams; it might

be the one critical factor that will ensure success. It was for me. Taking a look back at everything that I have been through over the last eleven or so years and seeing how far I have come, I am exactly where I have always wanted to be and therefore do not have a single solitary regret. There are times when I wished I had gotten to this point sooner, but then I remember how unprepared I was back then and how everything that had happened was setting me up to become the dedicated, mature individual that I am today. I could not have done what I have done without all the prep work that came with living life in my twenties. And while I have become quite the *Star Wars* fan over the years, I find myself respectfully disagreeing with the wise Jedi Master Yoda on just one point.

Failure is not the greatest teacher. That honor belongs to a life well-lived. ●



LOW TIDE REFLECTIONS

KAT BAUER

PLEIN AIR PAINTING

This painting show my daughter on the beach near our home. The tide that afternoon was one of the lowest tides of the year and my children were having so much fun running on the wet sand. These moments of joy and beauty are the highlights of being a mom. My art training has been focused on the figure and the traditional realism of the old masters. Living near the beach in Southern California has inspired me to delve into plein air (outdoor) painting. I feel it is the closest I can come to portraying the effects of light and color of the California beaches. I then use the outdoor oil sketches and quick figure studies for reference to inform larger studio paintings, adding detail, texture and character. I have loved the figure drawing classes at MiraCosta College as a way to sharpen and maintain my drawing skills while being a stay-at-home mom.

TALA

Tala, I still see your spirit sometimes.

You're sitting in the sun on the sofa,

whispering words: "I want you."

You're standing in the shower,

forming faces behind mushy make-up.

You're cuddled at the kitchen counter,

motioning for food—more mango.

After all, you hinted you'd haunt me,

a ludicrous line eliciting a laugh,

as I fatefully forget the details

of a past persona—someone to fear—

something you were shy to say,

afraid to accept, clutching your cross.

Tala, I still muse on moments memorized.

You're kissing me kindly but morosely,

delivering, doe eyed-ly: "Don't worry."

You're quite close to just crying,

waning under the weight of the world.

You're hugging me with hesitation,

looking to leave—one last time.

After all, you hinted you'd haunt me,

not knowing the nature or just quite how,

as I cautiously cling to the recollection

of a fateful farewell—drenched in tears—

something you were struggling to say,

afraid to admit, clutching your cross.

DAN MURRONI

Occasional writer.

THE WHALE

KELLEN CRAWFORD

My dad's 1996 Toyota Land Cruiser barreled down the I-5 freeway, sending gentle wafts of balmy air over my mother, father and sister. Like hot breath, it descended directly beyond the third-row passenger seat and onto my nerves. I shifted uncomfortably in my torn black jeans, perspiring underneath a thick woolen beanie and an even thicker mat of brown curly hair that poked out from the front and enshrouded the right half of my face. A clammy Skullcandy ear-bud defiantly blasted Alkaline Trio into my skull to combat the grating noise of a dullard's NPR discussion that cut erratically in and out of the car radio's dusty depths. Beads of sweat clung to the buttons of my translucent purple Gameboy Color as I wrapped up my fiftieth playthrough of Pokémon Red. Blue bowed his head in digital defeat, and I furrowed my brow in quiet discern.

This is a short story, telling the story of when my family and I saw my sister off to college, and I had an epiphany that would later serve me down a hard road of depression in my teenage years. It's a story of life and death, and the space in between where I used to live.

"Dad, can we turn on the A/C for a bit?" I groaned. One million plants and insects whizzed by the left window, just as dismissive to my plight as my father.

"Nope," he replied, "it sucks down the gas mileage. Besides, we're almost there."

"You suck the life out of my soul..." I muttered underneath my breath. My sister's daggers met mine as they shot from her eyes over her shoulder. After an obligatory "shut the hell up," a humid silence was established and she resumed reading her Chuck Palahniuk novel.

Eager to break the tension, my mom chimed in: "Isn't this exciting, Kaitlin? This is the first step of many in your new life!"

Kaitlin looked up from her book and her face quickly transformed to match my mom's beaming smile. "Can't wait!" she chirped cheerily.

Satisfied, my mom turned to face the road with a grin. From behind her, I could see Kaitlin's smile fall as quickly as it came, followed by a quiet sigh that seemed to miss everyone's ears but mine.

My stomach rumbled as I unwrapped my homemade turkey sandwich. It stared bleakly back at me in a pathetic, wilted slump. I took a half-hearted bite and gazed somberly through the window at the rows of uniformly packed cars on the opposite side of the median. They cast a curious silhouette against the sparkling ocean that stretched beyond the horizon: a view interrupted only by the semi

transparency of tinted windows and the indifferent faces behind them.

I thought of my friends back home; all enjoying the freedom that summer granted in the months following the seventh grade. Jade and Rachel were kayaking through the lower Salmon River, and trying their first beers, probably. Eizaak was no doubt adding to his insectoid collection; helping him would have to wait. Rainier and Chase were definitely doing some really cool shit in the woods without me, and I knew they would almost certainly hang their exclusively heroic exploits over my head upon my return. The oncoming helter-skelter of cars and trucks towed with them an ache---one by one, accommodating a new anxious passenger to the carpool of who or what might have been.

Worst of all were the plans so gracefully shredded by my father and sister. I had given them up against my will when my dad finally found a place into which my sister could move, with about a week of warning in advance. *Her first semester at college...surely there must have been more planning than this?* My fate was bound and chained, despite the fact that my best friend Babs had long since invited me on a fishing trip to Brown Lee with his father and uncle. I hated to admit how excited I was to see what that was like. Babs' father, Dan, was like mine: terse, grumpy and always busy with something. The exception was that Dan always found the time to bond with his sons, whether it was boating on the lake or snowmobiling through the vast Idaho backcountry. I didn't need the validation, I suppose...

but I yearned for a chance to feel like I was more than just my father's son.

I snapped out of my malaise as the car slowed and pulled into an innocuous-looking apartment complex. It was done up in the classic mission revival style, with a sequence of brown-orange tiles capping the roof like braided red hair over a sullen beige face. A collective sigh of relief resounded when the car doors opened. Our backs and knees cracked in contention with the stiff leather seats, and my dad's face seemed to soften when he inhaled the pungent aroma of the nearby sea. Kaitlin seemed far away, lost in her thoughts.

Mom and Kaitlin dedicated themselves to a brief and heated stint in interior design while my father and I silently lugged her things from the car. It took nearly an hour to unload all of Kaitlin's belongings—neatly packed and labeled meticulously: true to her nature. We set our final boxes atop a pile of personal effects, and listened from the bottom of the stairs. Reverberating through the walls and down the steps was the sound of a muffled yet passionate argument over whether “feng shui” connotes aesthetics or spiritual ambience. Dad pursed his lips and side-eyed me from the landing.

“Wanna check out the beach?”

“Sure.”

With my stomach still rumbling angrily, I walked behind him through the doors, down the street and West toward the beach. My eyes never left him as we neared the bluff entrance. Something was happening here, right in front of me. The rigid man I knew all my life unraveled into his younger self within minutes. His slightly hunched, shuffled gait gradually became an upright strut. He was filled with a prideful vigor: taking tremendous strides with an unnatural pep in

his step. His eyes darted across the scenery, accompanied by a cheeky grin. The moment we touched our feet to the grainy Santa Barbara sand, he excitedly began pointing out the sites of some of his most treasured memories.

“UCSB is my alma mater, you know.”

“I actually...didn't know that,” I admitted sheepishly. *How did I not know that?*

He pointed to an alcove with gusto: “Over there is where my buddies and I would meet up after class for a quick surf sesh. Grab a couple beers, maybe some joints, and we had our plans booked for the afternoon.”

I was utterly speechless. *Did he say joints?*

He knew every wave by name, every section of the beach, and every building that loomed beyond the bluff. Time was no stranger to him in his fifty-five years, but his love for the sea had been preserved, everything as clear as the day he left.

As we pressed on along the coastline, we both noticed a strange acrid smell lingering in the air. We wrinkled our noses and remarked how incredibly *bad* the odor was. It seemed to be completely out of place amongst the gentle lapping waves and the soft ochre of the sand between our toes. The looming maw of the ocean exuded a noise that almost seemed as though applause was erupting from the vast emptiness of the void. Occasionally the crashing waves would strike the upturned bluff on the shore, cascading droplets of Poseidon's eminence over our hair and t-shirts.

The smell grew in crescendo the further we ventured North. The stench was so awful that I began to taste it on the back of my tongue. It was the smell of rot—the olfactory indication of life and death below the seemingly vacant

surface of the water. It cast a bitter and rancorous flavor onto my taste buds, one to which the devil himself might have turned up his nose.

Every waft of the humid air brought with it this great ghost of something past. It turned my sweat sticky, and my stomach into knots. As we rounded a bend on the beach, the answer to our unspoken question had been answered. The body of a blue whale lay motionless, washed ashore post-mortem.

My father's face fell. My hand involuntarily covered my face with my shirt. The whale lay with its mouth agape, crying in silent protest to the swarm of seagulls that circled hungrily over its colossal corpse.

My father closed his eyes and turned toward the glistening orange sunset over the dappled blue waves. “The ocean is the ancestor of all life here on Earth, Kellen. The life it gives is reclaimed by everything that still remains.”

My eyes were locked with the whale's gaunt sockets, which rhythmically discharged a biblical flood of flies as the ocean breeze caressed its legendary cadaver.

“Try as you might, all things are inevitably caught by time. You, me...this guy.” He motioned with his head toward the decaying monster. “And just like the ocean, all things come to the surface. But you, you've got this big ol' chip on your shoulder, son.”

I couldn't tear my eyes away from the bus-sized hunk of rotting meat, and he stared pensively into the sunset. A gull picked through the whale's uneven baleen.

He sighed. “You're young, you've got a lot of things to figure out, I know. You're gonna be a teenager, and things will probably get a lot worse before they get better, believe me. You wouldn't believe the crap we went through with Kaitlin,”

he chuckled, though his face quickly turned to stone once again. “But your mother and I would do it all again if it meant that all of you were set up to live a good life. A life without debt, or loans or strife. Don't ever let yourself fall into debt, Kellen. Remember that. The people you owe will try to take everything from you.”

He picked up a rock and slung it into a gentle skip across the receding tideline.

“We could barely afford to send your sister to college. But she's here. And I'm gonna keep working every day until she graduates. Your brother, too. However long it takes, however much it hurts, I know that I'm here to ensure their future. And one day, yours too.”

The whale stared back at me in baleful woe, and a tear ran down my cheek, followed by another. I had never heard him speak like this. “But your future isn't decided by me, or anyone else. You are the main character in your story. It's up to you what book you write; if you keep getting into trouble and getting bad grades then you might end up with a story that you don't like. And maybe I don't want to see you make mistakes that are so...*predictable*. Y'know?”

I quickly wiped away my tears before he turned to face me. “Yeah...I know.” I nodded.

“And one day you'll wind up like that whale over there, and it'll all be over, with nothing to show for except for what you've left behind.”

“Right.” I choked.

“You're a good kid,” he said, grinning. “Learn to ride a wave instead of allowing yourself to be crushed by the ocean.”



CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

I didn't know what to say. Instead, I flattened my lips and looked away, nodding. "Whaddaya say we get out of here, huh? This beach smells like shit," he added tersely. "Yes, please." I laughed in relief.

The walk back South along the beach felt as though we were traveling downhill. A mysterious weight had been lifted from my shoulders, and I began to notice the symmetry of the palms dotted haphazardly along the sand. I felt warmer, but hungrier. Somehow famished yet tacit. I then knew why my Dad had fought so ardently throughout my childhood.

Kaitlin's apartment had a new kind of flair to it when we arrived. Her kitchen items were symmetrically organized, and the surfaces beneath them were scrubbed to a radiant sheen. Her room was unquestionably homey and pleasant. The secrets of feng shui had no doubt been hashed out to a science, and the evidence was plain to see. We found Kaitlin and my Mom laughing in the living room, snacking on vegan cheese and crackers.

"FINALLY," Kaitlin bellowed, her full mouth sending pieces of cracker flying. "We're STARVING."

"Seconded," I groaned. There was no time to waste. There had been talk of some exalted Thai restaurant in the car, and I definitely heard that over my ear-buds at one point.

Dusk had long since fallen by the time we were seated at the restaurant. One by one, our butts hit the velvety cushions around the oval table. My Dad ordered some wine, and my Mom filled him in on everything we missed in the apartment. I was so light-headed from my hollow stomach, which gurgled and screamed at me from beneath my salty shirt. The waiters came and went, like sprites in a dream. Kaitlin noticed that I was clutching my stomach in agony, and she passed me some vegetarian spring rolls with a wink. I accepted, and tore into one ravenously.

"So uh," I mumbled in between bites, "you excited for college?"

A long exhale came from her nose as she munched her greens. "Yeah...I'm a little nervous. I guess I'm just worried about making friends, among other things."

I blinked as she looked away coyly. She had always been so confident, so sure of herself and her abilities. I washed the spring roll down with a sip of my Mom's wine before she had a chance to notice.

"Well," I said. "You've always been the smartest out of all of us. You'll figure out some cheeky algorithm or quirky social queue that'll get you on track. Fake it 'til you make it, right?" She smirked and her eyes smiled back at me.

It was then that the waiters paraded from the kitchen toward us, adorned with steaming dishes piled high with rice, meat and vegetables. An overflowing plate of chicken chow mein touted its mouth-watering brilliance as it landed gently before my withered body. With the willpower of a Tibetan monk, I waited until my family's plates were laid out in front of them before I dug in.

A drove of pigs might as well have dined where we sat. There was no sound, save for the scraping of forks onto plates and the occasional grunt of satisfaction. Nary a few minutes passed by the time our bellies were full. My dad loosened his belt, and my mom slapped his arm for his lack of manners. "God, I don't know if I could stomach dessert right now. I'm *stuffed*," he wheezed.

My ears perked up. *Dessert? We never get dessert...are we gonna try some weird Thai pastry?* My dad read my thoughts, to my surprise: "Mango sticky rice." He burped, raising his eyebrows. "Have you ever tried mango sticky rice, Kel?" Kaitlin asked.

Before I could respond, another plate was set in front of us. The rice shone white like pearls, and the mango as bright as the setting sun. Johann Sebastian Bach's cello suite No. 1 in G minor began to play over the atmospheric chatter, and the plate illuminated my face in a yellow glow, begotten only by the most sacred of angels. The clatter of the restaurant faded away, and the ambience of strangers' voices seemed hushed and muffled. It was there, in front of me. Mankind's greatest achievement to date.

The moment the sweet rice and tangy mango struck my tongue, the world in front of me erupted into a sea of color and light.

Neil Armstrong be damned. Bach's arpeggiated alle-mande accompanied a fork-full of rice and mango into my impatient mouth. The moment the sweet rice and tangy mango struck my tongue, the world in front of me erupted into a sea of color and light. My eyes closed, and I was sent hurtling through ten galaxies worth of flavor and mystique. Words I could not pronounce began to speak themselves into existence, and my thoughts became a tumultuous waterfall of effervescent splendor that ricocheted across the walls of my brain and into my heart. I could *feel* the Earth breathing beneath my feet, and I could hear the sounds of clandestine conversations from across the street: the quiet whispers that none could sense without the divine touch of the soul's alignment with the stars and God.

"Are you...are you okay?" Kaitlin asked incredulously. "What drugs are in this?" I muttered.

"What?"

"What *DRUGS*," I shouted, slamming my fist into the table, which caused my parents and several patrons to turn

to me with concern. "Sorry," I continued, looking around at everyone. "...what drugs are *IN* this!?"

"Um..." Kaitlin raised her eyebrow. "None?"

"Wow." My family gave me the same look that one would give to a drunken village idiot, stumbling home from the bar.

I finished every morsel on the plate. My mom sternly scolded me for literally licking the plate clean. "That's unbecoming, Kellen. Come on."

To be honest, I couldn't really tell you anything else that happened that night. I was struck by something that preceded mankind's wonder, and his ability to hate and love. The mango sticky rice transcended everything I knew to be true and fair: black and white—dead or alive. All I knew was that I wound up on a pull-out couch in Kaitlin's apartment, staring blankly at the ceiling. In a daze, I pondered the meaning of life. My life, and everything else within it. Amidst this never-ending dance of thrall and dark nothingness, therein lay the profound magic of immortal consciousness in one exotic dish. Blessed was the damned, who sought light in the raging sea of mortal certainty.

The next day we said our goodbyes to Kaitlin, who seemed to have taken a load off her shoulders. I could tell she was excited, despite her apprehension. She waved to us from the curb as we drove away, and my mom began crying into her sleeve. The muggy Californian sun once again permeated the back seat of the Land Cruiser, and I prepared for the inevitably hot and uncomfortable eighteen-hour drive back home. As I reached to pull my beanie from my sweaty brow, I felt a familiar cool breeze stroke my cheek. I looked up in awe: my dad had turned on the A/C. From the rear-view mirror, I caught a glimpse of his teal and turquoise eyes. He winked. ●

**Don't cry child,
in your courtyard
they bathed the dead sun,
and buried the moon,
before leaving.
-- Faiz Ahmed Faiz**

Srinagar. 2:00 a.m.

The city burned at night. Burned with desire; burned with flesh dripping in the minds of soldiers; burned in the nightmares of the people; burned with silence, darkness, whispers of death, loss, pollution, and schemes. No one walked at night here. Curfews be damned--what happened at night to those who wandered out had to be worse than the death and evisceration of flesh in the witness of the Sun.

The few streetlights that were allowed whispered as if gas lamps bursting with secrets. Windows were shuttered, and the Old City was barely lit by the stars. Brick buildings and their colourful shutters looked like hills of bloodened mud in the darkness. The silence of night was louder than the crushing of bodies and homes. The silence whispered, offering impossible dreams and shutting its eyes from the gore that wanted to rush down the streets. The woman, who stood in the shadows as herself a shadow, was shrouded in the complete absence of light: a horrific fog followed her and became the

aari on her chador, viscous. Her presence was a movement in the corner of an eye, the blinking of ancient street lights, the movement of leaves in the wind, part of the darkness. When she made her presence known, she was there for the briefest moment, two brown eyes piercing and splitting the already broken soul. If it were possible to extend one's consciousness long enough to know what was happening, the men would know that she was their death.

Srinagar, Indian army barracks. 2:30 a.m.

Army barracks fared better, but only slightly better, than the houses and dwellings of Kashmiris. These were the old, skeletal buildings surrounded by electric fences, useless courtyards, and underground rooms that are never rid of the bouquet of burnt flesh, vomit, and melted rubber. One key difference in these buildings was the power imbalance hovering over the citizens and the unlikelihood of barracks being destroyed in blasts or bulldozed in the "search for insurgents"--ironically those who occupied these barracks. At night, if not on a mission, the soldiers sat around skimpy

tables under neurotic fluorescent lights drinking beer and playing cards, rifles tilted against the wall, cigarettes eternally smoking in hands, mouths, on ashtrays.

This sweaty busyness of the soldiers (*the insurgents*) meant that the creeping fog went unnoticed as it rolled in, too quickly enveloping the empty courtyard. The fog was grey and black and when looked at for too long, made one's neural network blink like the old fluorescents; it was all wrong, but then it was just fog, yes? Just fog. It breathed as it hugged the windows of the flat building, the nose of it inhaling the stink of the men inside and their patheticness. It breathed in a hungry way: she wanted to gorge herself, for she was starving and the brown Earth demanded sacrifice.

Thin weaving fingers formed, curling around the edges and corners of the barracks, caressing the plaster like a lover. The windows were covered with a thick curtain of her horrific fog--light, sound, and scent now absent. The night around the barracks had its own atmosphere, and the sleeping birds paid no mind. When so much Koshur

...

● JADE MACEOGHAIN

- *Jade is Kashmiri-British and a first-generation community college graduate, working on their undergraduate degree in English. They work at the Writing Center, and credit their strong mother with an early passion for literature and creativity.*
- *Published in Johns Hopkins Macksey Journal, this is their first creative works publication.*

THE SHROUDED WOMAN

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE...

flesh has been cannibalised, what is it when the State gets a taste of their own torture? The people almost didn't mind it. She *craved* it—craved the flesh, the pure taste of fear and the stench of death, the fracturing of already broken souls, and so she sought it out. She was the unknown redemption for Kasheer. As her fog embraced the building, *kashida* danced in the air, forming paisleys—beautiful, imaginary tendrils of poison. A soldier walked into the courtyard to check his cell signal, something else the people didn't have.

The round little soldier, in his green camos, walked into the courtyard with his back to the closed barracks door. He smacked his cellphone against the palm of his hand and held it up to the sky, as if pleading with God to give him a signal for his sins. In his ignorance, and as a sick blessing of the fog that wrapped around the complex, he didn't notice the extra absence of light that evening, or the early frost on the ground. He didn't notice the slow, hot breath on the back of his neck until it was *almost* too late. He looked up, all the hairs on his harmful little body standing up against his predator. He turned around. For a moment there was nothing in the darkness. Then, a face—beautiful, brown, kohl'd eyes...but no body—but what a fog!

What an impossibility! There was no form or shape to her, and suddenly he was hallucinating paisleys dancing in the air, the patterns of *kashida* so often woven onto the fabric wrapped bodies of the little bitches and bastards all around him in this land of filth, of *Kashmir*!

He trembled in the fear that can only be felt in the last most painful moments when one's skin is about to be torn off in a wall of flames with a heart still beating. While she still caressed the barracks, in a quick moment her weaver's fingers worked on his flesh. In another life, she used her index finger to pull green thread through, and with a similar pattern she split the flesh of his neck open, exposing muscles, tendons, nerves. The fog held him in place, like the chains held Kashmiri men in place to drip hot rubber down *their* naked flesh. With her other fingers weaving his living death, she worked on his scalenes, tasting the sickness in his body and feasting on it.

His arteries provided a craft for her. She made a small prayer and dug in further, scraping bone to make her jewels with later. Her hunger could not be satiated as she worked on all of them—all the men there—their necks fountains of sacrifice. Nerves were pulled out and lain in neat rows to weave with, and they sputtered and shuddered in their own deaths. *Shhh*, she offered.

Shhh.

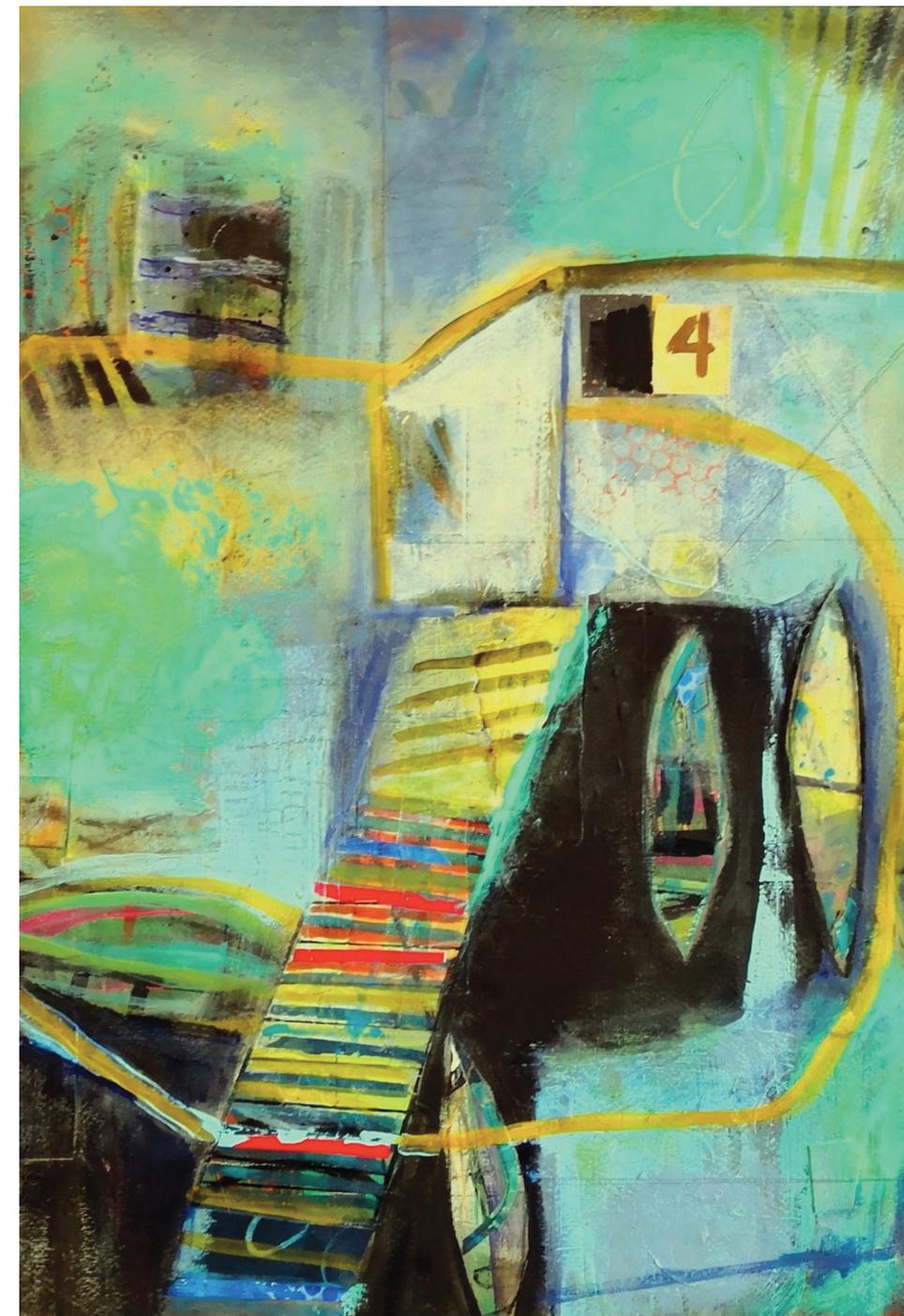
His blood flowed out like a river, joining the other men, and she danced in it. She moved gracefully, fertilising the mourning Earth, pulling up from their bodies threads for her ghost *kashida*. The fertile river of blood flowed through the streets of the Old City, and in the morning it would be gone. ●

SURF'S UP

CHRISTINE AMES

MIXED MEDIA ART

After a career in pharmaceuticals, Christine now is able to focus attention on her passion, abstract art. She is a mixed media artist whose goal is to capture emotion, through color, shape, and line. Her work is a process oriented journey, with the ultimate goal of achieving ascetically pleasing compositional balance.



A FATHER'S DOGSBODY

REBECCA SAKKO

My bare feet skipped through the thick, nighttime air, insensible to the encompassing zizz as hordes of malaria-laden mosquitos hovered and buzzed, attacking in fierce, airborne squadrons. The mouth of the African giantess, known as the Cuanza River, lay silently to my left, like an immense, sleeping body whose toes stretched all the way to Chitembo, in Angola's interior. Nocturnal creatures sang their nightly lullaby with their croaks and screams, cries and howls, and the occasional invisible splash. I trotted down the Cuanza Lodge boardwalk to bungalow number one, the largest and best positioned of them all. It was really a small house, with the outer trappings of a rustic bungalow, positioned on modest stilts to cater for the Cuanza's ever-changing moods and fluctuations. I knocked tentatively on the door and waited, focusing my attention on the surrounding palms that, like luscious dancers, swayed rhythmically to the Cuanza's slumbering breaths.

This essay is largely autobiographical and is based on my time spent living along the edge of the Kwanza River, in Angola.

The door swung open and Rico glared forth from inside, as a blizzard of freezing air-conditioning streamed out, cutting through the pregnant nighttime air like an icy knife and covering my legs and arms in chicken skin. His once black hair, now peppered with white and grey on the sides of his head, was slightly disheveled; his sharp eyes, which were difficult to meet for more than a second or two, looked me up and down. As I stood outside his door, awaiting my instructions and tasks for the next day's work, he seemed to be evaluating me, this father of mine whom I barely knew. I listened to his words and watched his hands and fingers, so foreign yet entirely familiar in their structure and boniness, the nails shaped just like mine. He loomed in the doorway, a lanky figure with his skin, once pale, stained dark by sixteen years under the blighting Angolan sun. As he talked, a peculiar scent entered my nostrils ... sweet and sickly, faint but detectable.

Rico spoke deliberately and with authority: "You need to be at my door by 7:30 a.m. tomorrow—there is no shortage of work for you! My house needs a thorough cleaning and I want you to make sure to empty out the freezer this time; you city people have no grasp of hard work." I dwelled on the words, "you city people," suddenly ashamed of the upbringing my single mother had so lovingly provided for me over the course of my seventeen years of existence ... There was that odor again. Rico barked, "Are you listening to me?"

I looked up at his face, but not into his eyes, and nodded, "Yes, Rico."

"Could have fooled me!" he continued. "So, I want you to clean out my freezer because the last time the generator cut out, all of my meat defrosted and that must be where this disgusting smell is coming from! And once you've finished with that, clean up after that damn dog—no one has seen it in three days, so stop putting food out for it!"

Later that night, I lay in bed, listening to the eerie, Cuanza lullaby and wondering what I had come here for. A mosquito whizzed by my ear and then another. Perhaps Rico was right and I was simply a useless, city person, weak and unfit to be his dogsbody or his daughter. Eventually, my mind ebbed from wakefulness, and I dreamed of Lovely, the gentle, doe-eyed favela dog who had wandered into the lodge one day and never left. Lovely wagged her tail, almost apologetically, and her yellow face beamed as I fed her from the palm of my hand: juicy slices of tender *lombo* fillet; chunks of salty *pargo* fish, pulled from the Cuanza that day; and a handful of thick, Angolan *funge*. She ate daintily and then scampered off, her uneven kilter carrying her scrawny frame slightly sideways until she vanished into the dark mangroves.

Like the sleeping giantess herself, I awoke the next day with the dawn. Outside my bungalow, the sun exploded like a broken egg yolk, spilling golden light across the shimmering river. A palm nut vulture flapped awkwardly overhead, and the yellow rays of an African sun staked their claim on the day. I sat in silence on the edge of my bungalow's veranda and wondered why Lovely had, once again, not come to join me for our morning routine of ...

sunrise and then the walk to bungalow number one. Dejected, I rose and my legs carried me off, down the boardwalk and back towards that sickly air that clung to Rico's house.

There was no need to knock—he met me at his door. “I thought I told you 7 a.m.! Do they not have clocks where you come from?” I knew better than to correct him and waited for him to continue. “Hurry up and come inside,” he ordered, “you’re going to let all of those horrid flies in!” He seemed more agitated than usual on this morning and, as a matter of fact, so did the flies.

Rico's freezer had indeed defrosted, and I had failed to notice its thawed out contents during my previous cleaning day; a careless mistake that only a silly, city person would make, one accustomed to life on an electrical grid. As penance, I dragged the heavy chest down to the river's edge and opened the lid. The stench was overwhelming. It was compounded by the warm sun that beat down on me and on the decomposing packages of rancid flesh that I unceremoniously flung into the Cuanza River. An audience of bottom feeders and spiny barbel fish gathered before me in appreciation, while a few scraggly gulls sang my only praises. I retched as I reached into the bottom of the freezer but did not stop scrubbing—perhaps if I could just get this one task right, acceptance would be mine—bits of rotten chicken stuck to my fingers.

Another egg yolk smeared itself across the vast sky and still no Lovely appeared by my side.

I stood before Rico's door at 7 a.m., repulsed by the growing hoard of black flies that now commanded its surrounding airspace—the smell had worsened, and the air was putrid. Visibly angered, Rico's words spewed from his mouth: “I thought I told you to fix this horrible smell! What did you do all of yesterday? Do I really have to do everything myself?”

I began, “I'm sorry, I cleaned out your freezer...I can't understand why...”

“Never mind!” he interrupted. “It must be coming from the kitchen sink. You need to unscrew the pipes and clean out any blockages from the trap area beneath. And for God's sake, close the damn door! Anyone would think you enjoyed the company of disgusting flies!”

I crouched down on my knees and began to fiddle with the plastic piping beneath the sink. One by one, I unscrewed the pieces. A fly landed on my hand, and then another on my shin; they crawled along slowly, stifled by the frigid temperature within the bungalow. Perhaps I was the one attracting this plague of flying pests. No! I shook them off and focused on the pipes—they were empty. Once more, I had failed to find the source of the now vile reek. I slouched slightly, accepting my status as foolish city person who enjoyed the company of flies, and stared brainlessly into the opening of the dislocated pipe. Suddenly, a black fly the size of a raisin popped out of the opening before me, probably startled by its cold new world. And then came another, and a third. I abruptly plugged the drainpipe with the palm of my hand and thought, that's it!

They must be coming from underneath the bungalow—I was going to solve the problem all on my own.

Eagerly, I darted out of bungalow number one, making sure to shut the door behind me, and dropped to my knees for a better view of the crawl space afforded by the short stilts separating the bungalow from the earth. The smell was noxious and left an imaginary gooey residue on my

Several meters ahead, a writhing black mass of compound eyes, stick-like legs, and beating ailerons lay before me, clinging tightly to an indiscernible form.

skin as I lay flat on my belly and prepared to drag myself beneath the structure, where the air itself seemed to be vibrating with the buzzing of a million tiny wings. Louder and more powerful it became, as I slithered deeper towards what could only have been the source. Several meters ahead, a writhing black mass of compound eyes, stick-like legs, and beating ailerons lay before me, clinging tightly to an indiscernible form. I pressed forwards, through the dirt and the suffocating stench, and began to wave my hands at the distorted, fly infested mass. Seemingly as one, like a grotesque black quilt, the mob of flies levitated and relinquished the distorted form beneath it. I gasped, cupping my mouth with my filthy hands, as I recognized the once kind and docile face of Lovely, now twisted into a tortured and ungodly grin. Her sweet eyes, turned blue and swollen, were like oversized marbles jammed into her decaying head

while her limbs jutted out of her bloated body, as if each one was violently repelled by the other three.

Within seconds, the disturbed swarm of flies began to descend, blanketing Lovely once more in its sick frenzy. I felt a tickle on the back of my neck and then on my face, as tiny legs and feet traded a dog's body for my own. Frantically, I recoiled backwards, squirming on my belly like a deranged beast, as the flock of blackness pursued my eyes and mouth with relentless accuracy.

Meters felt like kilometers before I reached the edge of the bungalow and ejected myself from the dark crawl space. Like a berserk animal, I rolled out onto the grass before bungalow number one's door, swatting at my face and head with wild hands. A whoosh of frigid air blew over my trembling body and I sat up to see Rico crouched next to me, peering into the crawl space beneath his house. He shook his head with disdain, although something closer to pleasure was betrayed by his voice: “I told you to stop putting food out for that damn dog!” I clamored to my feet and began to dust off my filthy face and belly in silence. Looking up, I met his scornful eyes by mistake. He scoffed, “What are you doing now? You still have to fix this disgusting smell...that dog certainly isn't going to drag its own body out from underneath my house.” ●

MAKE

Shouts fill the streets,
sweaty bodies crowded together,
basking in the summer heat

*Inspired by Nikki Giovanni's "The Great Pax White"
& The Spirit of the Black Arts Movement*

DIAMONIQUE MASSEY-JOHNSON

AMERICA

A sea of enraged,
unmasked, sunburned faces
scream and rave and shout

not for equality,
not for an end to police brutality.

My body, my choice!

Scream the pro-lifers

I guess it feels different
when it's your body
being mandated

I can't breathe!

Gasp those posting
#bluelivesmatter
on social media

Neither can we.
How clueless can you be?

You protest my protest.
Label us as rioters, thugs,
drug dealers, and criminals

While you invest in cannabis and Bitcoin,
transfer funds to offshore accounts,

loot every legal loophole,
collect colloquialisms like infinity stones
just to then claim them as your own

The knee of white supremacy
weighs heavy on my neck

But God forbid I kneel during the national anthem.

RESPECT THE TROOPS!!!!

The same ones you walk past on
your way into Walmart?

White hoods replaced
with red caps,
etched with
bold white print,
that make me blue.

*A brutally honest reflection of America's current socio-political
environment through the eyes of an exhausted, biracial, bisexual.*

GREAT

GREATER

MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN

Slaves made America. Immigrants
make America.

All! Lives! Matter!

There are countless others.
And I don't mean that figuratively.

You are readily willing to believe
that planet you reside is flat,
the moon landing was faked,
that Sandy Hook was staged
than you are to accept
that the country you
love and celebrate
every summer
is deeply flawed

children murdered
by law enforcement
this year

America may be great...
But it needs to be greater
for everyone.

For whom?

A melting pot of ideas, cultures,
religions, faiths and races
coexisting, collaborating,
makes America great

Tell that to the parents of
Vincent Belmonte,
Ma'khia Bryant,
Xzavier Hill,

Unfortunately, these are not
isolated events, accidents or mistakes.

There are literally
too many black bodies for
one person to count

The system ain't broken.
The design is.

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IN- DEX

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