



• | TELL YOUR STORY WALKING

A collection of creative work by the Syracuse University Honors community

Tell Your Story Walking is a collection of creative work by Syracuse University honors students and alumni, curated by current honors students. We connect our community by providing a platform for creative nonfiction and multimedia to give a voice to individual experiences and perspectives.

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Special thanks

Dr. Danielle Taana Smith, Karen Hall, and all the Renée Crown Honors Program staff for supporting this project.
Students of the Tell Your Story Walking course, from 2011 to the present, whose writing inspired this collection.

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2020



IN MEMORY OF TREVOR PIERCE

We dedicate this collection to Trevor Daley Pierce (2001–2020).
Trevor wrote this introduction for his honors orientation seminar.

My name is Trevor—I'm a political philosophy major at Cuse, and I'm really excited to be here.

Given that I'm from New Hampshire, which is completely rural and quiet, being at Syracuse is the exact opposite of what I'm used to. I love city life for its energy, its diversity, and all the things to do here. Even so, there are some things I miss from home. I love to hike, and have tons of stories of treks my friends and I have done, like doing the AT from West Virginia back home, or our annual January trek through the Presidential. Weirdly enough, I miss speaking French; New Hampshire being so close to the border has a very strong French-Canadian population, and so where I'm from, many of us know and speak French on a regular basis. I live right next to the second most climbed mountain in the world—Mt. Monadnock—and have hiked, climbed, and ran it at

literally every hour of the day.

I guess you could call it privileged, but being away from home has given me perspective on how beautiful where I'm from actually is. Although you'll be hard pressed to find a place above 3,000 residents, there's always something to look at or admire—something I hope to show you in my photography; I challenge anyone to find a state with a prettier autumn season than New Hampshire. There's a space for most anything outdoors, from things on foot, on boards, or in ropes, all things I also hope to display here.

Even so, as much as I love home, I'm really looking forward to engrossing myself in what everyone else has to offer here, and the breadth of new experiences and backgrounds Syracuse has.



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DEAR READERS,

Humans have been telling stories for as long as humans have existed. From cave paintings to Greek epics to 280 character tweets, humans love to tell stories. And everyone has a story to tell.

Nine years ago, Professor Jeffrey Pepper Rodgers started a class called Tell Your Story Walking. Named after a Deb Talan song of the same name, the objective of the class was to write creative nonfiction first person narratives. Students wrote weekly stories, refining their skills with each assignment and learning how to express their experiences as profoundly as they could. This anthology was born out of a need to tell the hundreds of stories written over the years that the authors never had the chance to share outside of the twelve person class.

While I was stuck in my house all summer, I had the opportunity to read. A lot. Fiction, nonfiction, poetry, anything you can think of—I probably read it. I learned more than I ever had in such a short period of time. Reading about distant parts of the world and people I never would have met otherwise made me feel connected during a time when physically I was anything but. While reading this anthology, I hope you feel the same way I

did: connected and informed. Human-to-human interaction—although through a page rather than face-to-face—is the best way we can find the compassion and empathy we need to survive through one of the most tumultuous times most of us have ever lived through.

In this inaugural issue of the *Tell Your Story Walking anthology*, we explore those connections—both during the pandemic and before, when the author never imagined this would happen. We invite you to connect with our authors as you read. Learn a new hobby on page 45. Discover the St. Thomas that the tourists don't see on page 12. Hug your grandma on pages 14 and 24. And flash back to your childhood on page 48.

Maybe someday we'll tell your story too.



Allie Kaylor, Managing Editor

THE SCIENCE OF WORDS

By **SASHA TEMERTE**

Armed with a notebook and diverse passion, I can intertwine the words and numbers inside me with my dreams.

As I wait for my tea in the dimly lit café, I smuggle my notebook out from beneath the table. I scratch the last word of the stanza onto the page and frown at the ink. I don't feel it in my heart, and I know my readers won't either. Flipping the sheet over, I begin the poem again, letting the words take over. The syllables roll like marbles across a hardwood floor. I slow down the rhythm, build to a crescendo of lines, and let the message beg for an encore. This time, my emotions leap.

When the mug runs dry, I use my teaspoon to trace the harvest moon stains that collected at the bottom. The completed poem fades from my memory, and I daydream about circles, like the rings in my cup. I remember that mathematicians discovered how to turn a sphere inside-out, and my mind trips over itself as it scrambles to imagine how. I ponder what would happen if I were turned inside-out as well. What would I be made of? I imagine numbers and words would tumble out of my being.

These numbers and words are forbidden lovers that found home in my body. As they stumble from my heart, they would twirl on their axes until they topple to the ground and pool into a metaphor. Ink flows through my veins, and even without a pen, ideas surge from my fingertips. To me, words in a sentence are more than beads I string together with a pen. They're vehicles for stories that elicit powerful emotions, raise awareness, inspire generations, and save lives. On the contrary, numbers provide me with the logic to back these messages. Mathematics is the poetry of STEM, with theoretical proofs being soliloquies. It is the code of our everyday existence; every curve on every object is defined by

an equation. However, it is up to us to bring meaning to those numbers in our lives—to take those lines and build them into something beautiful.

Since the day I strolled into middle school, I've been forced to choose between numbers and words. But when you've been taught that the celebrated Renaissance was a rebirth of art and science—a time when man was encouraged to be well-versed in both mathematics and the paintbrush—it's quite perplexing to then be told you're supposed to choose just one.

A delicate dichotomy between STEM and the humanities seems impossible (God forbid I write poetry about perpetual motion machines). But in reality, the chasm between math class and English class is no more than a mere crevice, and by intermixing their elements, I can find narratives in every equation. With each bridge I build between these fissures, a new land of possibility unfurls before me. For instance, my relationship with theories and verse has taught me to dance gracefully with politics. While weaving code together in Java class, I weighed the pros and cons of the Electoral College. Once I ran the program, the jigsaw pieces fell into place, and my opinions melted into a stance. Statistics delivered the facts, but humanity delivered the stories behind them. In every situation, I pounce on opportunities to explore such notions, chasing down the sparks of curiosity that electrify my mind.

I redirect my attention to the notebook before me. Swiftly flipping through pages of poetry, experiments, and business ideas, I search for a blank page. I drift over to the counter to order another cup—green tea, this time—and return to the couch to begin drafting plans of action. Armed with a notebook and diverse passion, I can intertwine the words and numbers inside me with my dreams.

All I need is a page and a pen.

With this, I can build something beautiful.



WORLDS APART

By **THANH THAI**

As an immigrant to the United States, I have undergone a personal metamorphosis. A stark contrast exists between the uniform-clad Vietnamese middle schooler riding a bike that's far too big for her, and the bright American teenager taking her car out for a spin. Life-altering events can truly create polarizing versions of one's same identity. Despite all of this, my heritage is a constant that ties these identities together, even if they are worlds apart.



MERMAID'S CHAIR

By **JENAE RICHARDSON**

Here I stand
wondering where my
St. Thomas has gone.

“Road ends ahead,” read a white, rectangular sign resting on a pole near the winding cement road.

At times like these, you pretend as though you haven’t just trod for 40 minutes in flats despite your parents’ suggestion to wear sneakers. My feet are no doubt blistered, my throat parched. It’s a Sunday afternoon near three in late December. My parents, my older sister Soy, my friend Jo and I are walking toward Mermaid’s Chair on the western end of St. Thomas, United States Virgin Islands. Our car’s parked near the entrance of Botany Bay Estate because the security guard said the only way to get to the Chair is to walk. Jo is panting; I’m afraid she will faint. Her shoulder-length, brown hair is tousled with sweat, her eyes floundering, her shoulders slouching toward the pavement. My mother jokes that she’s probably not used to this much walking in Syracuse.

We meet another sign: “Welcome to Mermaid’s Chair: Use caution. Swimming is at your own risk.” The waves pound the rocks in jest. Facing north, I step onto the narrow strip of land separating two bodies of water. Here I stand at Mermaid’s Chair. The Caribbean Sea is on my left, the Atlantic Ocean on my right. At times like these, you fall to the ground and kiss it, elated to be in the presence of such beauty. There is no other place in the world where these two bodies of water lie

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juxtaposed with only a sandbar separating their union.

“Shhh,” my mother whispers as though I had been thinking aloud. She points to the Atlantic Ocean, white foam surfacing as the water charges at our feet. The ocean is ferocious, bellowing, its salt stinging my pores. Next, I turn to the Caribbean Sea, its waves forming perfect undulations. But the two bodies of water have completely different temperaments. The Atlantic Ocean is like a child wailing for her parents, throwing tantrums until she’s consoled. The Caribbean Sea is like a parent that rests placidly, a Sojourner that has already arrived at her journey — no fussing, no beckoning, with waves coming toward me slowly and submissively. I stoop down to uncover a few coral seashells for my mother. My parents’ heads turn left and right, right and left. My mother presses her palms on her face and remarks, “I can’t believe how differently these two bodies of water behave,” as I, too, stare at both.

Here I stand wondering where my St. Thomas has gone.

A few months after I’d left for college, I called my mother to find out how St. Thomas was. There had been another murder, she said. This was no typical gunshot wound to the head or stab wound to the chest story. A man had been killed, and his corpse had been stuffed in a grocery shopping cart. The cart was found in a highly populated area known as Hospital Ground, or “Round deh Field,” as St. Thomians refer to it.

“What kinda person does something like that?” I asked her, flummoxed and disgusted. She didn’t know. I immediately called my siblings to inform them of the homicide.

“Them man don’t done!” my brother remarked, meaning the extent of the crime had exceeded his expectations and that the murder truly was heinous. My sister and I tried to uncover the symbolism of the murder. Stuffed in a shopping cart to be found? Why was there a shopping cart in “Round deh Field” to begin with? And why was his body placed there? A shopping cart is something you use to temporarily store items you will purchase, but there could be no purchasing of a dead

man. We talked for an hour, trying to reason.

Only several months earlier, while I was still a senior in high school, I’d found out about the death of a 12-year-old girl whose body had been found in a bin in an abandoned shed downtown. I went to school one morning in mid-April and noticed The Daily News on most of my teachers’ desks. Laquina Hennis had been found dead a week after she was reported missing. When a child is murdered in St. Thomas, the whole island is shaken up. The territory explodes with fury and anguish, and the news of the tragedy suffuses every government building, grocery store and laundromat until everyone living on the 32 square-mile island has heard and grieved.

Here I stand facing the Atlantic, wondering where my St. Thomas has gone. Wind stirs my hair, and the ocean’s bitter roar engulfs my thoughts. In 2009, St. Thomas accounted for about 60% of the 56 murders that occurred in the three main islands comprising the U.S. Virgin Islands. Gang violence and drugs were the main causes cited for the increase in bloodshed.

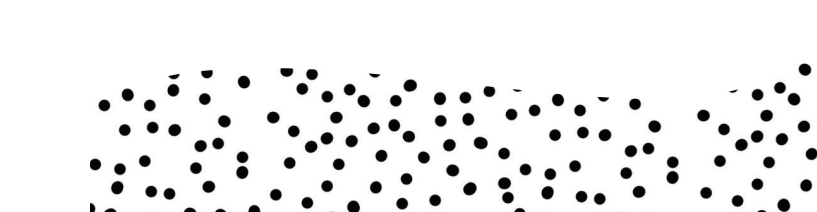
“You must be happy you’re going home,” a woman from Maine had said to me on the flight home from Charlotte, NC to St. Thomas last summer. What she asked next was typical: Where should she visit while in America’s Paradise? I described the ordinary laundry list of activities: go to Cuzzin’s Restaurant for some boiled fish and fungi during the day and Greenhouse Bar at night for a piña colada mixed with Cruzan rum. Shop on Main Street for 14-karat jewelry at a cheap price (and duty free!) and purchase a tamarind and coconut fraco (the St. Thomian version of a snow cone). Go for a swim at the famous Magen’s Bay Beach. Visit the giant sea turtles at Coral World. Call my father for a sweet mango. Catch a safari to get around. They’re \$2 from town to country or \$1 if you travel within the town or country limits. Don’t buy a gallon of orange juice for \$10. Or a pack of 24 slices of cheese for \$8. Oh, and don’t get murdered. I’d thought those last few things, but of course, I didn’t tell her.

I’ve inquired about the meaning of Mermaid’s Chair on the western end, but no one knows. Some speculate

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the area is shaped like an imaginary chair. But that must be one rather large chair or an enormous mermaid

Mermaid’s Chair depicts St. Thomas — present and past. The Atlantic Ocean is the new wave of terror I’ve grown to know. Its ferocity parallels the upsurge of violence by youth. The Caribbean Sea reflects a tranquil island I can’t quite remember; it is St. Thomas in the past tense — the years my mother grew up and went to school leaving the door to her grandmother’s house unlocked.

With sand steeped underneath my toenails, I squeeze the shutter button of my camera, securing the image of the Caribbean Sea, its arms cradling the boulders in its watery blanket. Here I stand in the center of the two temperaments, hoping the Caribbean Sea will spill over some of its tenderness into the Atlantic to calm it, hush it and ensure that another tide will come.



"KAMSAHAMNIDA" AND THE MOO MOO LADY

By SHIHARU YAMASHITA

The apartment buzzer buzzes as Mom opens the lobby. I enter from our room, comforted by the heat of the building. Then, I hear a familiar hum of the lady—the “Moo Moo Lady,” my family calls her.

“Moo moo moooo...,” she sings in a melody that she always sings. As I walk to the elevator, I see her with her back hunched with the white baggy shirt, holding tightly onto the “old lady” shopping cart that all grandmas in Queens own. She is probably doing the laundry; I can tell from a slight scent of ammonia from her bed sheets in the cart.

She looks at me and I smile. Her light brown hair is thin, her green eyes small, her veins showing through wrinkled skin. I wonder if she recognizes me from the previous encounters. “Hi,” she quickly says before going back to humming.

The elevator door opens, and she tells me to go ahead. I press number “1” for her, and then “5” for me. “Thank you, thank you,” she says.

“You go to Halsey?” she asks. We’ve had this conversation before.

“Yes, I went to Halsey, but I’m not in middle school anymore,” I laugh. “Did you?” I ask even though I know the answer already. I know she likes to talk about herself.

“Seventy years ago,” she says. “I’ve been living here since I was born.”

“Wow, really! That’s amazing,” I react as if this is my first time learning this, seeing youthful days in her eyes as she talks of the past. The elevator door opens.

“Kamsahamnida,” she bows with her palms together as she slowly makes her way out of the elevator. I smile while holding the door and don’t remind her I’m not Korean. Her hum echoes in the hallway as she walks to her room.

As my brother, Komei, and I walk out the elevator into the lobby, I hear the usual hum of the Moo Moo Lady far in the laundry room. Komei goes to the mailroom to check the mail. I hang around in the lobby.

Suddenly, I hear a loud noise, and I don’t think much of it. But then I hear the Moo Moo Lady calling: “Can you help me?”

I rush through the hallway to the laundry room and see her on the floor with the shopping cart and sheets scattered all over. “Hey, can you help me?” she asks again. She tells me she’s just fallen. I try to help her stand up, careful not to grab her arm too hard, but she is too heavy for me alone.

“Komei!” I call out, and when he finally comes, we are able to help her stand up again.

“Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?” I ask, but she talks even quicker than usual, saying, “No, no, I’m okay. Thank you very much. God bless you two.” Komei puts the sheets back into the cart. I catch him smelling his hands to check if he’s touched the source of the ammonia scent, and I’m annoyed that’s what concerns him right now.

We help her to the elevator, and I wonder if she has any relatives. If she falls in her room by herself, who helps her back up? My chest suddenly tightens, wondering if she is lonely. But she goes back to her usual humming, and she seems fine.

“Kamsahamnida, kamsahamnida.” She bows to us as the elevator door closes.

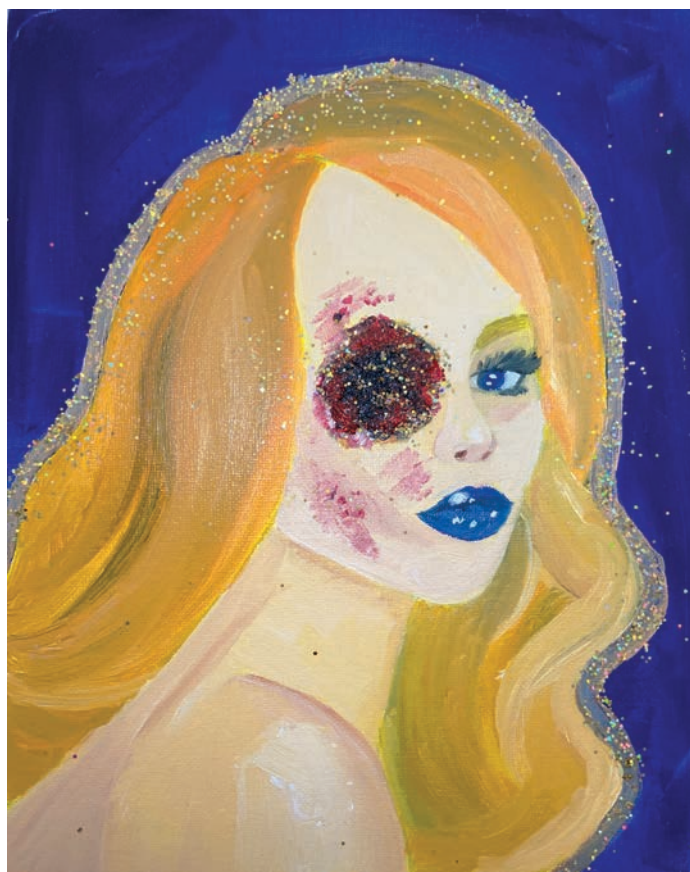
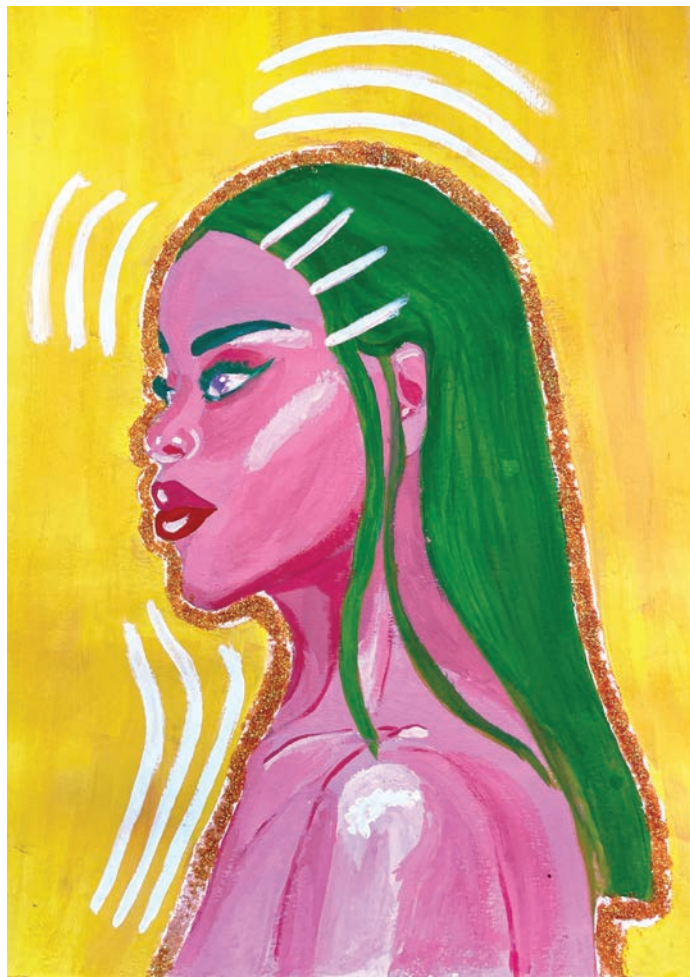
Locked In and Locked Out

Snapshots of 2020

My mom’s cousin Martin stood in the parking lot next to his car, desperately trying to find the right angle to see his mom’s face from the nursing home window. He had traveled up from Pennsylvania to see his mother, who neared age 100. He’d taken this trip before, but this was the first time he’d been up since the pandemic started. Nursing homes feared outside interaction that might lead to COVID-19 entering their facilities. But in the second week of August, Martin had his chance: the nursing home had lifted its restrictions.

He’d hoped to go inside, but on the drive up, he learned that the facility had shut down again. Someone within the facility had tested positive, and, only days after opening up to visitors, they had to shut back down. Martin couldn’t enter the building for another 28 days. There he stood in the parking lot, waiting for his mom to pick out his face through the window. They locked eyes, and she smiled and waved.

— Andrew Crane



QUARANTINE SERIES

By **ZARAH DURST**

Before quarantine started, I had not painted or done anything creative that wasn't related to my major in years. One of the sentiments that I hear a lot about the pandemic is that it gives us a chance to focus on ourselves and our health while the world is on pause. Somehow, over the past few years I forgot what I liked. It didn't seem to matter so much what I liked so long as I could produce something that my professors and peers would like. I forgot how to make something for me and only me.

I spent the entire summer painting without planning to show the finished product to anyone. I spent hours on end--sometimes forgetting to eat--to finish each in one sitting. I found that I like painting in oils, using complimentary colors (my favorites are pink and green), and throwing glitter over them. The best part is that I don't have to explain why I like how it looks, I just do.

The paintings are placed in chronological order with respect to when I painted them. The first was done with watercolors from a tube on a piece of sketch paper. I did this in quarantine at home when I had little materials.

The second was done on a canvas with oils and glitter. I did this at my home off campus the week before school started. It was the last painting I could do when all I had to worry about was remembering to take a break and eat.

The last I did in the first weeks of school. At this point, I finally had confidence in my own style of painting and I decided to branch out and incorporate some of my other interests (which in the case of this painting is horror and horror imagery).

I can confidently say that I now know how to paint for myself. I've started using my newfound interests in this aesthetic in my work for school. I didn't realize that something as small as taking up a new hobby could be so powerful in the development of my spirit. When the world starts up again, I know I will be able to rely on painting to connect with myself and my creativity.

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH MANCHESTER AND ME

By **RACHEL REESER**

I crossed the bridge a long time ago, took a road out of town, and never returned.

The Conewago Creek splits Manchester right in two. Its knee-deep water is easily crossed by wading through using the bridge that spans it above. People do so every day—to go to work, school, the store—but, without fail, they always return home to their side come nightfall. The physical barrier the creek creates doesn’t pose much of a problem, but nonetheless it represents something bigger at play.

To the south of the creek lies Manchester proper, the main thoroughfare lined by streetlights and banners, landscaped with full oak trees and flowers. There’s a lovely park in the square, where the giant pine is lit up for the holidays, just up the road from the grocery store and the cafe favored by the locals. The school is a few blocks away, surrounded by modest but welcoming homes with freshly mowed lawns and clean coats of paint. It’s a picturesque image of small-town America with its peaceful suburbs and white picket fences. Roads lead out of town like spokes on a wheel, offering to take one anywhere else if they so wish.

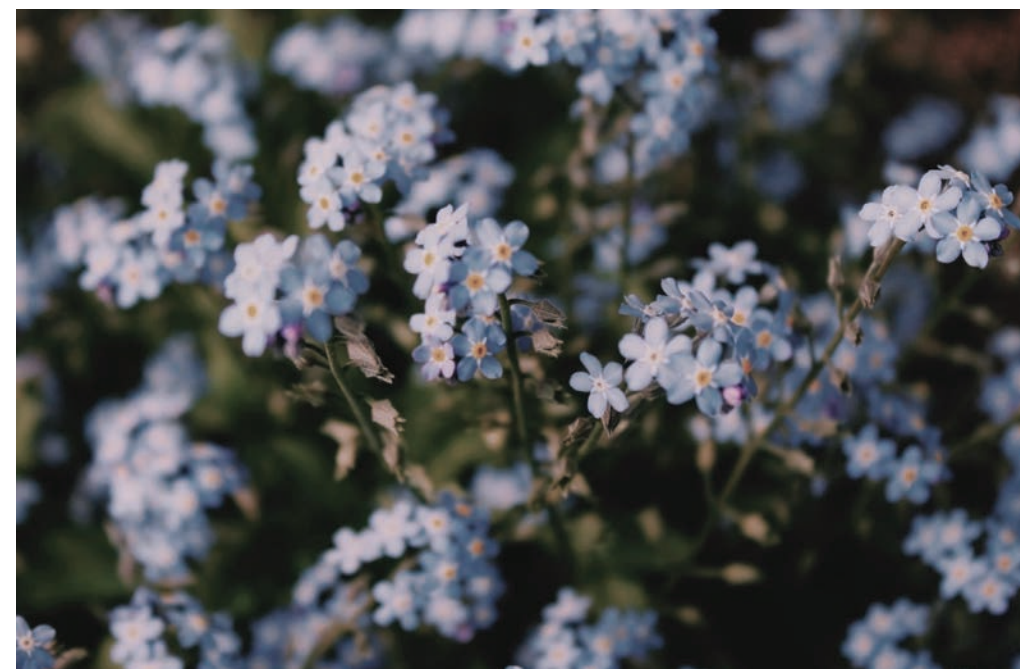
I grew up on the north side, more commonly known by the locals as the “wrong side of the creek.” Here, the roads are lined with only things of nature, for fear that the yearly flooding will destroy everything in its path. Up until about a decade ago, some of the roads were still paved with dirt or gravel. The homes range from rundown old farmhouses to mobile homes to ramshackle little bungalows, with lawns slightly overgrown with long grasses and wildflowers. The only amenity is a little shop that sells groceries at a premium

that is accompanied by an old church next door. Most of the people on our side have been there for generations, living and dying within a mile of where they were born. My own family has been in the area for nearly 300 years, passing the homestead down until we could no longer afford it. There’s only one road that leads you nowhere, with narrow lanes shooting off to remote locales connecting to it like arteries. Of course, there’s also the bridge, but few dare to cross it for anything more than an errand.

I crossed the bridge a long time ago, took a road out of town, and never returned. When I looked back over my shoulder, it became clear to me that going back was impossible. The r’s have slipped out of my “washes,” the Deitsch words I grew up with have largely vanished from my vocabulary, replaced by terms that label me as “snobbish” or “uppity” by those I grew up with. My clothes are no longer hand-me-downs from older cousins or siblings, no longer made from sturdy material ideal for work or play outside. I can’t slip into conversations come holidays about persisting small-town gossip, such as age-old land disputes or who married who from which families. I have everything I ever wanted: education, opportunity, exposure to different people and places. I have everything I ever wanted, but a part of me still mourns for what I’ve left behind, what shaped me in my youth and where my family still resides.

The Conewago Creek meanders through Manchester, carving it and its people in two. It should be simple to cross, its shallow waters calm and welcoming, the bridge above sturdy. But most of us won’t toe that line, content to just exist as we are and have been for generations. We don’t cross for fear of what’s to come and for fear of what we’d leave behind.

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BLOSSOM

By **DAVID WILLIAMS**

My passion for photography bloomed while I was in middle school. I started with nature photography, roaming around the woods searching for the best sights to capture. Later, I began taking portraits of my friends and family at gatherings as the years went by. I have always found my way back to nature, however, as I believe it is in these moments when I’m holding my passion for photography closest to me. They serve as a reminder that many things exist beyond myself, and that I must strive for holistic growth for the collective, rather than solely for the individual.

ACROSS THE STREET

By **ALLIE KAYLOR**

I crossed again to the other side of the street, bad memories haunting every step.

My entire life, I have had one goal: get out of Ohio. When I moved into my college dorm in New York on August 21, 2019, I thought I had finally achieved that goal. No more high school. No more nagging siblings. And certainly no more Ohio.

I was wrong.

On March 13, I was back in Ohio, back in the house I had lived in for 18 years.

“Why don’t you take the dog for a walk across the street,” my mom suggested. I hadn’t seen him in months. He’s old as hell and completely deaf, but there are few things in the world that he appreciates more than a nice walk. The other side of the street has a sidewalk and a wide greenspace, making it the perfect location to walk a dog in our area.

I clip the leash to his collar and lead him out the door. A lot has changed since the last time I took him out.

One step — I’m in seventh grade, trying to bother my friend while he’s doing homework. Another boy, who I had long considered a friend, says “Stop trying. He hates you Allie. Everyone fucking hates you.” Two steps — I’m in eighth grade, sitting alone at lunch. One of the lunch staff comes up to me to try to start a conversation while I’m reading. Usually I try to engage with her, but I had had a bad day that day and wasn’t interested in talking. She dismisses me early. Three steps — I’m in ninth

grade, walking around Magic Kingdom by myself on our marching band trip to Disney. One of my only other friends in the band wanted to spend the day with her mom, and no one else wanted to spend the day with me. Four steps — now I’m waltzing along to a silent tune at the school dances I was never invited to.

The other side of the street might as well be a completely different universe than the place I had spent the previous half year of my life. Gone were all the late nights spent with friends, bouncing from house to house, meeting people we’d never see again. Ohio had no alcohol stained carpets, no sidewalks saturated with the scent of marijuana, no wide-eyed, half-dressed freshmen experiencing their first taste of freedom. I was never much of a partier, but in that moment on the other side of the street, there was nothing I missed more than walking down Euclid Avenue late on a Friday night, living moments I would never get back.

I spent a lot of my freshmen year learning how to be myself. I learned my likes and dislikes, what I like to do in my free time, and how I interact with other people. Prior to August 21, 2019, I was always whatever was convenient to the people around me. This tended to be quiet, passive, and doing everything possible to not bring attention to my existence. At the lunch table my senior year, I never spoke unless spoken to, even when they were making fun of me to each other; if I spoke out of turn, there were consequences.

“I have four times as many followers as you do,” I laughed when someone at the table was bragging that they were “Twitter famous” for getting 100 likes on a Tweet. All eyes were on me, staring like they had witnessed me pull out a gun and shoot him in the chest. I realized that I had made a horrible mistake.

“Well at least I have friends in real life,” he immediately snapped back, each word cutting me like a knife, reminding me that he was doing me a service by even allowing me to sit at the same table as him. I didn’t dare say anything back—there was nothing TO say back. I stared down at my half-eaten pizza and empty milk carton, replaying that brief interaction over and over in my head as the rest of the table continued talking like

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nothing had happened. I couldn’t even try to follow what they were saying. All I could focus on were those nine words. Each one hurt more than the last. And I knew he meant every single one.

Just over a year later, I was at school at a house party hosted by someone that wrote for the school paper, which I was also a staffer for. Everyone here was friends with each other. They had worked together for years. I was sitting around the outside of the circle, listening to the conversation, but, like always, not participating. I didn’t mind listening—I learned a lot about the people that were talking, something that would come in handy if I ever had an actual conversation with them. As I was taking mental notes on my colleagues, someone I had spoken to only once before sat beside me and handed me a beer.

“You don’t talk a lot,” he said. “Have a drink.”

“I’m a much better writer than talker,” I replied, not wanting to dig into my entire high school experience in the first real conversation I had ever had with this person. Not many people had taken an interest in my life before, so someone I didn’t know making the effort to talk me was completely foreign. This was coming a year after someone invited our entire color guard team to an after-homecoming party, telling the invitees “If anyone invites Allie, I’ll chop your fucking head off.” Now, not only was I invited to a party, I was welcome there.

Walking down the familiar streets of my neighborhood, all I could think about was what it was like the last time I was here. Crying in the car while driving home from school. Using these walks to reflect on the horrible things people had said to me that week. The constant pit in my stomach every single moment I spent in this township for six straight years.

“Ohio isn’t the problem, it’s high school,” my mom would always remind me. “You like us, you like your friends, you just want to be independent. There’s plenty to like about Ohio.”

I crossed again to the other side of the street, bad memories haunting every step.

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Snapshots of 2020

An Industry in Turmoil

I was cruising along I-90 West towards Buffalo, the clock nearing 11 p.m., the dark thruway virtually empty and the trunk filled with everything from my dorm room I could fit. Everything started to click. The day was March 12. I had sat inside Booth Hall, at my dorm room desk, and posted what seemed like five news articles that day. Developments kept breaking: the canceled ACC men’s basketball tournament, the postponed NCAA tournament’s, the suspended winter and spring sports seasons.

I had been sucked up in the moment of posting stories, reading and editing as an assistant sports editor at *The Daily Orange*, without considering the monumental impacts of the coronavirus — the reason my trunk was filled and the reason spring break never ended that semester. I was originally supposed to travel to Rutgers that weekend and cover a men’s lacrosse game, to Duke the weekend after, to Virginia, Albany, Hamilton before the season ended. Instead, I spent those weekends at home, behind a computer screen at my kitchen table, wondering what this industry will look like after everything has passed.

— Andrew Crane

TALKING IT OUT

By **SHIHARU YAMASHITA**

My grandma lies on her small, low bed with polka-dot sheets, her hands crossed on her stomach. She is listening to the Japanese voice of the news on the TV.

“It’s time for eye drops,” she says, trying to get up. But I tell her that I’ll do it. I only come back to Shingu every other summer, so this is the only time I can actually do something for her.

I get three of her five eye drops from the shelf that she has to put in three times a day. She always had bad eyesight since she was born, but, as an 81-year-old having had several failed surgeries, even my face in front of hers is just a blur of colors.

I sit on her bed and push the small eye drop bottle until three drops fill up each eye, repeating the step thrice. Once in a while, my grandma says, “one more” as if a single drop is crucial to keep from going completely blind. I finish off by giving her a tissue to wipe her face.

I crawl under the blanket next to her — jetlagged and wanting to nap — and hold her arm. Her body is warm, and her floral shirt is soft.

“You missed me, huh?” she laughs.

“Of course,” I say. “You’re my favorite, Ba-chan.”

“The Yamashita grandparents didn’t treat you very well, right?”

She’s talking about my dad’s parents. It’s true, I had not been very close with them, and they are also the ones who refused to agree to let us emigrate to the states — even when my parents cried, begging. But they both recently passed away, so I couldn’t help but feel some emptiness, especially considering my dad’s reaction.

“Isn’t it crazy, the timing of it all?” I say. Grandpa

died exactly a month after Grandma did — around the same time of day, too. And a week ago, Ba-chan’s sister’s husband also passed away — the day after we tried to visit, but the hospital was closed.

“And the fact that I didn’t cry for any of them,” I whisper. It’s difficult for me to cry when someone dies. When my role model took her own life, or even when my dog Hide died, I couldn’t not cry right away. Even after hearing the news about Grandpa and Grandma, I guess it just never felt real.

“Will you cry when I die?” Ba-chan says and giggles. Suddenly, my heart races, and my cheeks heat up.

“What?” I say. I try to laugh it off, but it’s too late. I can’t stop my eyes from getting watery, my chest trembling. I cannot breathe.

“Of course,” I tell her. “What do you mean? Just thinking about it makes me—” I can’t finish the sentence. This is very unlike me. I wonder if Ba-chan knows that I’m crying. I hope not. Why am I taking a joke so seriously?

Ba-chan laughs again, but she seems startled. Darn, I think. The only things she can see are always the things I don’t want her to. She didn’t think I would react this way, and neither did I. But she seems a little happy, too. I hold her arm even tighter now.

“Never say that again,” I tell her.

EVEN STILL

By **TANNER DEMAREE**

Look me in the eye, God damn

Am I not worth an answer?

For once, for me, say it aloud

Tell all about the cancer

I claimed that you were different

When others spoke against you

Only to see after so long

They knew you more than I do

I trusted you, I cried for you

You held me in the waters

But you’re not what you need to be

So I seek other altars

No honest words? Then please recall

The wage of what you hide

Not yours, but theirs, is what I fear

And that I can’t abide

I know you think this shame is love

This disrespect a service

It’s not, and it hurt me to find

Deceit beneath your surface

I thank you for the...everything

So much potential wasted

Now have the will to see what’s right

It’s far past time you faced it

Do you hear pains reverberate?

They echo, mine and yours

Don’t let them drown the sound of change

Forever at your door

Know that I hope for you and yours

As kin in faith and friend

There is a place He leaves for you

I’ll keep it to the end

Even still, you won’t just speak

You won’t or can’t talk true

Fitting; as before, it seems

Your silence screams it for you

God damn. Just say it.

SHE COMES TO ME IN SUNSETS

By **MARISSA SOLOMON**

I hear Oma's voice in the breeze.

My Oma lives in New Hampshire sunsets.

They start slow, at 8:31 in late July. Mum and I race the setting sun around rollercoaster turns on Route 153 North to get to our neglected-but-once-well-loved summer home. It's hidden in emerald woods on an opalescent lake. Opal was Oma's birthstone, just like it is mine. She was all the colors in one. She comes to me in sunsets, in colors.

The sun sinks lower, staining the clouds peach and gold. We're sitting on the docks behind our house, feet swinging low in the opal water. Clouds, soft pink like cotton candy, float by. When I was little, I'd sit on the dock and wonder what a cotton candy cloud tasted like. Oma would tell me they tasted like a summer day. Looking at them now, I can feel her hands on my shoulders like I'm six years old again. When I taste summer, I taste the strawberries we would pick among the weeds by the garage where we stored the boat. She would give me the reddest ones.

"These are the sweetest, Marissa," she would whisper. I wonder what she tasted, when she tasted summer?

The peach sky lasts a minute before darkening into a ripe tangerine color at 8:32, dripping with dark yellows, plum and cherry hiding behind the crests of the pines on the far end of the lake. Oma hated yellow — it reminded her of sickness. I wish she liked it — yellow roses would look nice at her headstone.

By 8:33 the indigo sky is now periwinkle, offset by blazing salmon colored clouds. Golds and yellows darken to another shade of orange-pink, like the lipstick that

used to stain my cheeks when she kissed me.

At 8:38 those summer-tasting, cotton candy pink clouds have dissipated and the whole sky behind my back is a hazy lavender.

"I've missed you!" Oma would lean in to hug me, even if we'd only been apart for a day. Enveloped in her arms and her perfume, I'd breathe in notes of lavender. Her old crystal bottles collect dust in a cigar box in my room, but today my wrists smell like her.

In front of us, over the wobbly left dock, the sky is burning with rich reds and an orange so vivid, the white water lilies in the lake glow the same color. I used to take the kayak out with Mum and gather bouquets of water lilies, so many that they would spill from my arms like a tangle of vines. Oma would be sitting with her coffee at the kitchen table, and she'd gush over my petaled treasure, arranging the lilies in a glass vase.

"They're beautiful! I love them," Oma said, even as the white petals turned brown.

I brought her all my treasures from my adventures around the lake house. Mica chips from the driveway that glinted in the light. Sassafras leaves shaped like ghosts, whose stems tasted like lemon water. Perfectly smooth skipping stones. Hours' worth of fresh picked huckleberries, holding my bucket with dark, purple-stained fingers.

All but the huckleberries were proudly displayed in Oma's china cabinet. Shriveled Sassafras and dusty stones sat beside priceless German heirlooms. In the evening, we watched the sun go down over slices of huckleberry pie.

"Ach, Marissa! Your teeth are purple!" She'd laugh.

At 8:50 stars are blinking above Mum and me like fireflies, and the trees blend into the horizon. I hear Oma's voice in the breeze, telling me the sky is huckleberry purple.

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Snapshots of 2020

Gagging on Butter

It's five in the morning and I've been in the kitchen since midnight. The countertops are splattered with powdered sugar and the sink is overflowing with dirtied mixing bowls and cake pans. Netflix plays idly in the background.

I'm leaning over the countertop, staring at the congealed custard on my fingers because I can't bring myself to look at the cake sitting in front of me. It looks like something a child would make, sagging sideways like a dead body with bruise-colored blackberry custard streaking through the yellow buttercream. More drools out the sides at a slow gurgle. I would like nothing more than to shove all three layers of it into the garbage can.

It should have been cute, but it's a travesty, and for some reason this is earth-shattering to me.

I run upstairs and wake my mom up like a guilty child. I can't confess quick enough, jumbling my words into a bigger mess than the one downstairs.

My mother nods, dazed, and lets me drag her to the kitchen to bear witness to my failure. She nibbles on the cake scraps while I make her coffee.

"The texture is quite nice," she declares. "We can fix this."

— Nina Piazza

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Snapshots of 2020

Me Time

I knew no one when I went back home. I mean it when I say no one, and you can only spend so much time with family. I hated that my parents had moved from Atlanta to Boston while I was away at college. I hated being away from Julia and Emily.

Everyone I considered a friend was 700 miles away back in Atlanta. The only thing I found comfort in was my long walks through Boston by the Charles River and through Seaport with my dog Sadie. The breeze from the Charles made me feel alive. The salty ocean air around Seaport made me think of the fond memories I've had sailing. Sadie loved these walks too because she got to experience a bunch of new smells like lobster. I learned to love being with myself—disconnected from everyone else. I would put on the latest podcast episode from "The Sporkful" and just walk, sometimes with no specific path in mind. I am always so wound up with needing to have a clear-cut route. It was freeing to not worry about what street to turn or who I had to meet in an hour. I let my mind and body wander—I learned to sit in the discomfort of being alone.

— Daisy Leepson

THE VESPA

BY JUNE FANG



My philosophy professor at SU once told me a story about a soon to be priest in Rome. He was riding on a blue vespa through the winding streets of Rome on his way to church to be appointed as a priest. Suddenly, he made a sharp turn and crashed into a young woman - and that made all the difference to his life. (He was married to the woman and lived happily ever after?)

I was inspired by that story and it resonated with me during one of my most difficult times when I felt a loss of purpose and was looking for a change in my career. I booked my tickets on Priceline one night to Rome hoping that it will provide me with an answer. It didn't. But it opened my eyes to a different world and helped refill my well with hope.

With the pandemic, I started to reflect on my passion and what really made my heart "sing." I am still figuring that answer but I do know that I feel most happy when I paint and write stories.

Snapshots of 2020

Social Cues During a Pandemic

The first week of school. A phrase I have been waiting to hear since March. It's been ages since I have had any connection with people that wasn't through social media. Nerves and excitement run through my body as I walk on campus for the first time in months, taking in all the beauty of Syracuse University that I missed for the past six months. I watch the birds fly in sync off of the Hall of Languages and over what seems to be the never-ending construction of the Schine Student Center. I see the incredible view that every student has witnessed one time or another on the famous Promenade.

"Emily?" I hear a group of my friends yell with an excited voice.

"Oh my gosh!" I scream with the most enthusiasm I have had in months. I throw my arms into the air while my head is tilted and my eyes are all lit up, but I don't move. They walk towards me, confused as to why I am just standing there like that. Then I remember they can't see my smile under my mask.

— Emily Diamond

Snapshots of 2020

Orange on the Quad

Sitting on the quad, I pull out an orange — a kind Trader Joe's employee at the sample station sold to me — and a dining hall butter knife. The spring air smells of damp grass and blooming flowers. My eyes scan the quad. It is filled with students in skirts, open toed shoes, t-shirts, shorts and sunglasses. People hug each other and lay in cuddle-clumps, making sure to stay out of the shade. Just the other day, the now sunny patch of grass I sat upon had been covered in a blanket of snow.

I put on my favorite album and dig the blunt butter knife into the top of the orange, decapitating the nub of the stem. I set the medallion slices I just cut into the grass. When I cut into the orange, a sweet spray of juice hisses and vaporizes into the air. I roll the orange fibers across my tongue. I close my eyes for just a few seconds and let my face take in every ounce of sunlight it could. I can feel the freckles forming on the bridge of my nose and the slight burning sensation on the tops of my ears.

— Lilianna Smith

6:47 AM

BY KATE BRENNAN

Wearing my favorite wool sweater, I walk out into the brisk morning. Stacked houses are sparsely lit in the distant hills like rows of candlesticks in quiet temples

The streets are empty at this hour, aside from myself and the occasional joggers who go by panting, mountain air cleansing their swelling lungs. How alive they must feel, I think to myself, with their cold sweat and pounding hearts.

I've always found comfort in early mornings when everything is fresh. So many beautiful ways the world folds and unfolds itself like a paper swan, and I am the only one around to watch.

By the time I arrive on campus, light is seeping into the hearts of trees where birds nest in shadowy bunches of green and a few yellow leaves blossom like small lemons. The tree bark is weathered like the spines of old books in the library, where the sun is just beginning to paint the top-floor windows in coppery light, not yet reaching the sculpted arches above the creaky wooden door.

Glowing bulbs sit like ravens atop brick walls as I walk along the stone pathway lined in wheatgrass that is cut short and swaying in the breeze like frayed ends of rope. The breeze hits my exposed knees through strands of ripped denim, raising goosebumps on my skin.

I am blinded by sunbeams filtering through the glass of a rooftop greenhouse. The pyramidal structure reminds me of the Louvre, which I've only seen in photographs.

I wonder if early mornings in Paris are anything like this. It's strange to think that in six hours, this same sun will wash over balconies and iron tables for coffee cups, ashtrays and croissant flakes to bake in its warmth.

What a wonderful thought it is that my face is bathing in that same sunlight that, this very morning, will drench the fresh ink of French newspapers as they lay unopened

on leaf-littered sidewalks an ocean away.

Paris is just a fleeting thought—typical of mornings in solitude. I drift back to the present as clouds pump out of smokestacks in buildings downtown, trailing upward against a background of distant violet mountains like tribal smoke signals. It's the urban language for industry, progress—the cold, blade-like sharpness of early mornings.

Through sinking eyelashes, I glance out at white wisps of light and yellow flickers in the hills, drawing me further. As I walk uphill toward my favorite lookout point, I see the old factories and the blue lake painted on the "Salt City" postcards I sent my friends.

And there are so many rooftops. So many rooftops blocking so many sleeping heads from the world as it paints itself in the early hours. Cold blue and passionate sweeps of pearl pink, and birds that swim through it all with a freedom I ache for.

No amount of hurt can ever reach me here. Time is slow enough to daydream but fast enough to make me breathe deeply, so as to savor the pine and crawling ivy as they are dusted with the first flecks of October gold.

What a thing to be alive for.

A PHANTOM BODY

By **ASH ALEXANDER**

The beginning of a new era
through the lens of acceptance
while struggling with understanding
who you are.

A Phantom Body as *The Ending*

There are two of you living inside your body. There is you, and there is Her, and you have both been there for so long, fighting, battling, warring—a body against its host, a brain against its flesh. She is everything that you thought you once were. You are everything that you hope to someday become. But there is not enough room for both of you. One fragile body cannot house two warring forces.

Recently, you’ve been winning. You’ve become more you than you ever have been. But She is still there, a shadow over your face, over your life. Maybe this is how you will finally do it, how you will finally win. Because this is as much an exorcism as it is a memoir, you will write your story as Hers, and then you will write Her out of it. You will write yourself into existence.

This is the ending of Her.

A Phantom Body as *A Prayer*

She is nine years old and does not feel at home in Her own body for the first time in Her life. She hates the way She looks, and begins sucking Her stomach in and slouching Her shoulders, unconscious and ineffective attempts to make Herself smaller, to take up less space, to stand out less.

One night that same year, She closes Her eyes as She lays in bed for another sleepless night and, though She knows nothing of religion, She utters a prayer for a different body.

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She tells no one of it, but every night She prays, desperate tears rolling down Her cheeks, and every morning She wakes disappointed. She knows nothing of religion except that it has failed Her.

A Phantom Body as *A Lesbian*

A long time ago, silently, in the dark of a hotel room long past midnight, She labeled Herself for the first time. The world was crashing down around Her, and She was cracking underneath its weight. But She walked away relatively unscathed, stepping out from Her fractured exoskeleton as something new. She was uncomfortable with it, like a fawn on brand new legs, but She was bisexual.

And then She was confused.

And then She was bi again.

And then She was a lesbian.

And She was a lesbian.

And She was a lesbian.

And She was free.

She was understood.

She was seen.

A Phantom Body as *A Promise*

When things were difficult, sexuality-wise, you used to console yourself with the thought that you would one day live in an apartment with the woman you loved. You dreamt and dreamt and dreamt, down to the smallest details of the food in your fridge. It would be small, and rent would be too high, but it would be in the city of your dreams, and it would be yours, and you would be in love, and that would be enough.

You, a woman, would be in love with another woman. And that apartment would be yours and hers, hers and yours, yours and hers, hers and yours, until you didn’t know who was who and what was what. It would be a sanctuary—green plants against white walls, sunlight pouring through the open shades, a black cat napping in your living room. You would lay on the couch, and you would kiss her, and she would kiss you, and you would not be afraid.

A Phantom Body as *A Girlfriend*

Now, it’s your freshman year of college, and a neon-haired butch has just called you her girlfriend. You remember your promise from so many years earlier, but it leaves nothing but a sour taste in your mouth. Once such a comfort, that promise has dried up and crumbled, nothing more than ash scattered into the wind. A phantom promise made to fulfill the phantom dreams of a phantom girl in a phantom body trying so hard to become something more.

Because she may be your girlfriend, but you are not hers. There is hardly any ‘girl’ left in you, and she knows this, so why would she—

The questions consume you. You rack your brain trying to come up with some alternative. Partner, to you, sounds too permanent, but what else is there? Girlfriend does nothing but remind you of the reality that your physical form will always be what it is. Boyfriend intrigues you, but not within the context of this relationship. After all, she’s a lesbian, and you’re... you.

You start to wonder if maybe you and she are nothing more than two puzzle pieces that look like they fit together at first glance, but once they’ve been connected, it becomes clear that their edges don’t quite match up. You wonder if you’ll ever truly belong with someone who fits so neatly in their own body, who lacks that intimate understanding of such a fundamental part of you.

A Phantom Body as *A Foggy Mirror*

When the first traces of you began to show themselves in Her, you read somewhere that showering in the dark was a way to avoid the jarring reality of your body. After all, if you can’t see it, it can’t see you. It is nothing more than a phantom body—anything you want it to be.

Some people try to explain the struggles of being nonbinary as analogous to looking at oneself in a foggy mirror. A blurred body is full of possibilities, but a nonbinary person so often cannot find themselves in that obscured reflection and cannot imagine a body that fits. You wonder if maybe that foggy mirror and your dark bathroom aren’t all that different.

There is no template for you to accept or reject, to alter or fix. There is no epitome of the nonbinary body. You only have yourself because, even with all of its boxes and labels, society

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has yet to craft one for you.

Look in the mirror. Squint your eyes. Search for outlines, for hints, for vague details.

There is no right way to be nonbinary—that’s the whole point—and yet,

Sometimes, you wish there was something for you in that mirror.

A Phantom Body as *A Buzzcut*

A month before the end of the first semester of your freshman year, you shaved your head over a dorm bathroom sink, scattering strands of brown across white porcelain. A fresh start. When you looked in the mirror, you felt light.

It was with this shaved head that someone misgendered you in the other direction for the first time, seeing your boots and leather jacket and closely cropped hair under the dim light of a street lamp and calling you “sir” as you passed. Somehow, that felt satisfying to you. Not right, but satisfying. A reassurance that someone could look at you and see something other than Her.

A month later, you shaved it again. Shorter.

Somehow, it made you feel more real. Every time you ran your hand over the top of your head and felt those short, prickling hairs, it was a reminder that you were you, that you could be you—that you could be whatever you wanted.

A Phantom Body as *The Beginning*

There is no satisfying ending that you can give this piece because you have not yet ended. There are infinite versions of you to discover—so many questions to replace with answers. So much of you left to find. So, instead, you will go with a beginning, because you have finally done it. You have yet cleansed yourself of the girl that you never were, but that you convinced yourself was the truth of you for so long. But this is not about Her—this is about you and all that lies ahead. It’s about making your body and your life things that are yours. You will leave this piece, not at the ending of Her, but at the beginning of You.



MY DEARLY DEPARTED

By **MARIYA VOLKOVA**

TRIGGER WARNING: sexual assault

This prose was written about a recurring nightmare I had where my ex, who sexually assaulted me, would visit at night with a dead man's face.

The man with a rotting face lies on the edge of the bed
At night he comes to visit
whispering fears and wants and worries
holding me tight
cradling my face with his blackened hands
while I lay there
paralyzed

There's something familiar about his scent
The way he so delicately
almost lovingly
caresses my tear stained cheeks
with his thumbs
smearing them with discolored flesh
While telling me to be strong
for him
and for me

The revulsion I feel
The revulsion I fear
So familiar in feeling
Two inky hands wrap around my throat
constricting me
While the nausea washes through my viscera
drowning me
Bloody animals claw through my mind
tearing away a defensive memory

Back to a night so long ago
Cradled by this man in the dark
We suddenly seemed so far away
and the quiet shadows felt like a warm embrace
comforting me

While his touch,
his stench,
the flesh that hangs so loosely from his skull,
once revolting,
welcomed me in,
And as he fed upon my soul
my thoughts
my love to give
I felt at peace
of sound mind and body
These sheets a soft coffin
and this bed my catacomb
My tears my legacy
and the soft cries that echo across the room
my elegy

A CITY SO DISTANT



By **ABBY JOHNSON**



THORNDEN PARK

By **DAISY LEEPSON**

There's something so freeing about just being goofy with friends and pushing your nearly-due essay off for another day. It's the little moments like these that have shown me the value of relationships and have helped me appreciate where I am at in my life. It could be watching TV with my mom or simply sitting through a typical lecture. Regardless, finding the value in these seemingly trivial moments has allowed me to not feel so stuck in this time of chaos. Going to the park to simply distract myself through a random photo shoot turned into a moment where I truly felt grateful for the people in my life and the vposition that I'm currently in.

One Phone Call to Isolation

Snapshots of 2020

The voice of a nurse comes through the phone speaker as she tries to console me. She tells me, "The test is positive." My stomach instantly drops, tears falling down my face, anxiety rushing through me as I sit on the side of my bed trembling in fear. My body clenches tightly from the news, so much that my face blanches and my phone falls from my hand as I'm overwhelmed by emotion. The white and black polaroid photos of my friends and I smiling through the years that adorn the walls around me feel like a distant memory. I can hear the muffled sound of shuffling feet from my parents downstairs, pacing the tiled kitchen floor, unaware of the sudden news. My door swings open. A mask covers most of my dad's face hiding his concerned expression. He can already tell from the tears falling down my face what the news is.

"We will work this out," he assures me, voice tight with emotion. As he closes the door, the last moments of human contact leave, and the reality of isolation hits me.

— Bettina Harvey

MISSING YOU

By GIOVANNA VEIGA

Long-distance love comes with second guesses too.

“Hey,” his voice vibrates from my nightstand, startling me awake. I grab my phone, unlock it, and am met with the image of his bright hazel eyes staring back at me, crinkling at the corners in a familiar smile. I was mad at him before, for some reason or another, but now the desire to be near him again suffocates any other emotion I might’ve been feeling only moments before.

It was late here in Syracuse, but he was probably just getting into bed now, hundreds of miles too far in Denver. I close my eyes, pretending to be asleep, but I still feel the dip in the mattress as he crawls into bed next to me. The cool air of the room makes me shiver with goosebumps as he lifts the covers and slips underneath them. As if noticing, he wraps his arms around me and pulls me into his chest, soothing me with his warmth. I can’t help but smile against his neck as I let myself bask in the overwhelming feeling of what must be, what could only be, love.

“I miss you,” he whispers into my ear, breaking the silence of the room. His breathing smells like cigarettes but I inhale it in fondly, yearningly. I think I used to hate this scent before, but now it smells like the heartwarming memories I latch onto in the lonely hours of the night.

“I miss you too,” I say to an empty room. But if I reach out I can feel the scruff lining his jaw, the dip in his chin, the crease at the tip of his nose, all my favorite parts of him. I’m sure his hair has gotten too long in the months since I’ve seen him. I want to tell him to get a haircut, but it doesn’t actually bother me enough. He

kisses my hand as it passes over his lips and I wonder how I ever got so lucky.

So, what did you want to talk about? flashes on the screen of the phone in my hand and the bed suddenly feels too big and cold for one person.

I bury myself deeper underneath the covers, smothering the worn stuffed dog that’s gripped between my arms as I remember what I had been planning on telling him. A knot tightens in my chest as I type the short string of words I’ve been rehearsing all week. But when I look up at him again, staring back at me from the other side of the bed, waiting, the words stick in my throat, and my fingers stiffen as they type. Tears prickle at the corners of my eyes as I consider everything I could lose, and suddenly I can’t recall what there is to gain anymore.

I glance back down at the cursor blinking at the end of the message, waiting for me to hit send.

I can’t do this anymore. This distance is too much. |

I stare at the text for a while longer, too long, until the tears that were accumulating at the rims of my eyes had fallen, dried, and gone completely.

I delete the message instead, lock my phone, and place it back on the nightstand before turning to him on the bed. His arms are open and waiting for me. I smile as I snuggle into the warmth of his chest again, so familiar even though it’s so far away.

I turn and whisper into the pillow, “I can’t wait to see you again.”



SIMPLE PLEASURES

By MICHELA BRITTIS-TANNENBAUM

I will never forget the look of pure joy on my friend’s face when she opened a Valentine’s Day card from her mother. Even though we were just standing in a hallway between classes, those couple of minutes of happiness as she excitedly showed me everything were ingrained into my memory, even if people may say that it’s just a card. These moments can be fleeting and easily forgotten when we go through difficult stages, but we need to hold onto these experiences and remember that warm feeling of happiness filling our hearts especially when we’re overwhelmed with life.

MOST FAVORITEST PERSON

By **SARA SHAYGAN**

Every time I call,
you answer.

My mother sits in her reclining chair, weaving a blanket that she has strewn over her lap, our cat nestled underneath it. The cat loves my mom the most. It's tempting to pretend that I am miffed by my cat's favoritism, but I can't blame her. My mom is my favorite, too, and if it was still appropriate for me to wiggle myself onto her lap every time she sat down, then I probably would.

The blanket that my mother is weaving is for my first apartment. She tells me that she won't be okay with me leaving until she's made something tangible to take with me. It is a piece of her to give to me for the days that are so tough I can't even breathe. I can't wait to wrap myself in this blanket. To let it hold me as she is holding it now, with so much care and attention and protectiveness. She loves me more than I know how to love anything.

When I first went off to college, I called her between every class. She answered every time, even when she probably should've been answering the phone at work instead. I think I talked to her more in that first year than I ever talked to her at home. I missed her more than I expected, more than I could've known.

The first month of school went something like this:

"I miss you, Mama." That was an understatement.

"Oh honey, I miss you too. I'm only keeping it together because your dad won't stop moping, and I have to be setting a good example here."

"And our cat?"

"The mopiestic of all. I swear I'm the only one around

here acting like a sane person."

"So everything is exactly as I left it?

"Yes, it's exactly how you left it."

"And you're not sad I'm gone?"

"Of course, I'm sad. But how could I really be sad sad when I know you're off doing incredible things?"

Then, September came:

"I'm having a great time, Mama. The people here are so cool, and I can't believe I actually get to spend my whole day studying theatre. I think I'm really meant to do this." My mom had driven me to every single audition for acting school. She'd been there every time I'd doubted whether or not I was meant to be an actor. When I got into Syracuse, she'd cried and then laughed and then screamed a little and said she knew she wasn't believing in me for nothing.

"I knew college would suit you. You sparkle on stage. And I'm not just saying that because I'm your mother."

"Oookayyy, Mom."

"Seriously, there's a reason you got into Syracuse. Don't question it."

"Okay, Mom."

Then October:

"I'm scared, Mama." Her hip surgery was coming up, and I was almost an entire country away. I worried about being away enough as it was, and to be away from her while she was having a major surgery made me feel almost uncontrollably queasy.

"Why are you scared? I'm not." My mom was never scared of anything. Seriously. I don't think I've ever seen her scared as long as I've lived.

My mom is my person. No matter how much I age or where I go or who comes into my life, I'll always need her.

I'll always need the look of delight on my mom's face when she sews something that she's particularly proud of. I'll always need the sound of her laugh when the cat is doing something stupid. I'll always need her little giggle of excitement when she levels up in the dragon video game she's obsessed with on her phone. I'll always need the first day of December with her, when we wrap the banister in garland and put up the nativity and blast Amy Grant's Home for Christmas album on repeat. I'll always need her gentle frustration when I'm not living up to my best self, and her encouragement when I simply can't live up to my best self.

I'll always need the moment when she says in her silly, trying-to-make-light-of-things voice that I am her "most favoritest person."

The fact is, she is my most favoritest person too.

"I don't know. I just really want you to be okay."

"I'll be more okay once they get this stupid, bad hip out of me and put a new one in. I'm gonna be like bionic woman." And she was okay once they got that stupid, bad hip out of her, and she turned into a bionic mom.

And finally, November:

"I can't wait to see you, Mama."

"I got two of the Holiday Roasts from Trader Joes for when you get back. I had to brawl a Karen for the second one." She knew my favorite thing to eat in the whole world was the meatless Holiday Roast from Trader Joes, and every year, starting as early as October she checked for the arrival of the Holiday Roast like her life depended on it. My mother was willing to brawl Karens, vegans, and anyone else in her way to get me that Holiday Roast, and this year, she'd gotten me two for good measure.

"Wow, brawling a Karen? That's intense."

"So I used the term 'Karen' correctly just now?"

"Yes, you certainly did."

"If I can recognize a Karen, does that mean I'm safe from ever becoming a Karen?"

"You could never be a Karen, Mom. Never in a million years."

"Thank God."

I got home two days before her birthday at the end of November. When she came to pick me up, she hugged me so tightly I thought I might pop and said, "Best. Birthday. Present. Ever."

I think I never realized how lucky I am to have a mom until I went off to college. Like, how lucky I am to really have a mom who does all the mom things and more. I didn't realize that most people don't get "a mom who does all the mom things and more" until I saw that most people at college didn't miss their mom like I did.



THE BRADFORD PEAR TREE

By **GIOVANNA VEIGA**

The everlasting impacts of a childhood tree, from one family to another.

I'm seven years old and my family plants a Bradford Pear tree in our front yard, as tall and skinny as I am and barely sporting any leaves. In the winter, its branches resemble scraggly bare bones, naked of leaves and a phantom of its full potential. In the summer, however, it puffs its dense green chest of leaves and blocks most of the view of the house, along with sunlight for half the grass on the lawn. In the moonlight, its arms cast sinister shadows against the wall of the room I share with my sister and has us ducking under the covers. In the daytime, we climb those branches and race each other to the top.

"Smile!" my mom exclaims as my sister and I stand in the shade of the tree like we do every year, new backpacks strapped on and nervous excitement twisting our expressions. It's my first day of middle school, but the hot Texas sun beats down on us as we pose. My mom finally puts the camera down and plants kisses on each of our cheeks. "Be good, princesses." she says, embracing us one last time before ushering us off toward the yellow monstrosity squeaking to a stop in front of our house. The branches of the tree rustles in the breeze, and I pretend it's waving us goodbye.

There's a storm one night. The wind outside is audible as the rain and debris battering against the windows, the walls creaking against its insatiable force. In the distance, the nasally blaring of tornado sirens play on loop, warning us to take shelter.

I wake up the next morning to my mom's scream. I run outside barefoot to see the Bradford Pear tree that we planted ten years ago lying across the front yard, ripped apart by the wind, creating a gigantic barricade of vegetation blocking the front door. My mom prays with gratitude that it didn't fall on the car or the house, but I can only stare at the carcass in disbelief.

Afterwards, my dad and some neighbors painstakingly dismember the massive leafy body and stuff its limbs into opaque, black garbage bags that line the curb. I try not to watch the massacre whenever I pass by, the sight always leaving a pit in my stomach.

After school one day the yard is finally clean of tree bits, but I notice a stump of light-grey wood jutting up from the lawn, its jagged raw edge reaching like fingers towards the sky. It's the remnants of the tree my dad never finds time to uproot.

"You still haven't pulled that stump out?" I joke from the passenger seat, my first Christmas home from college.

"Do you want to do it?" he argues back.

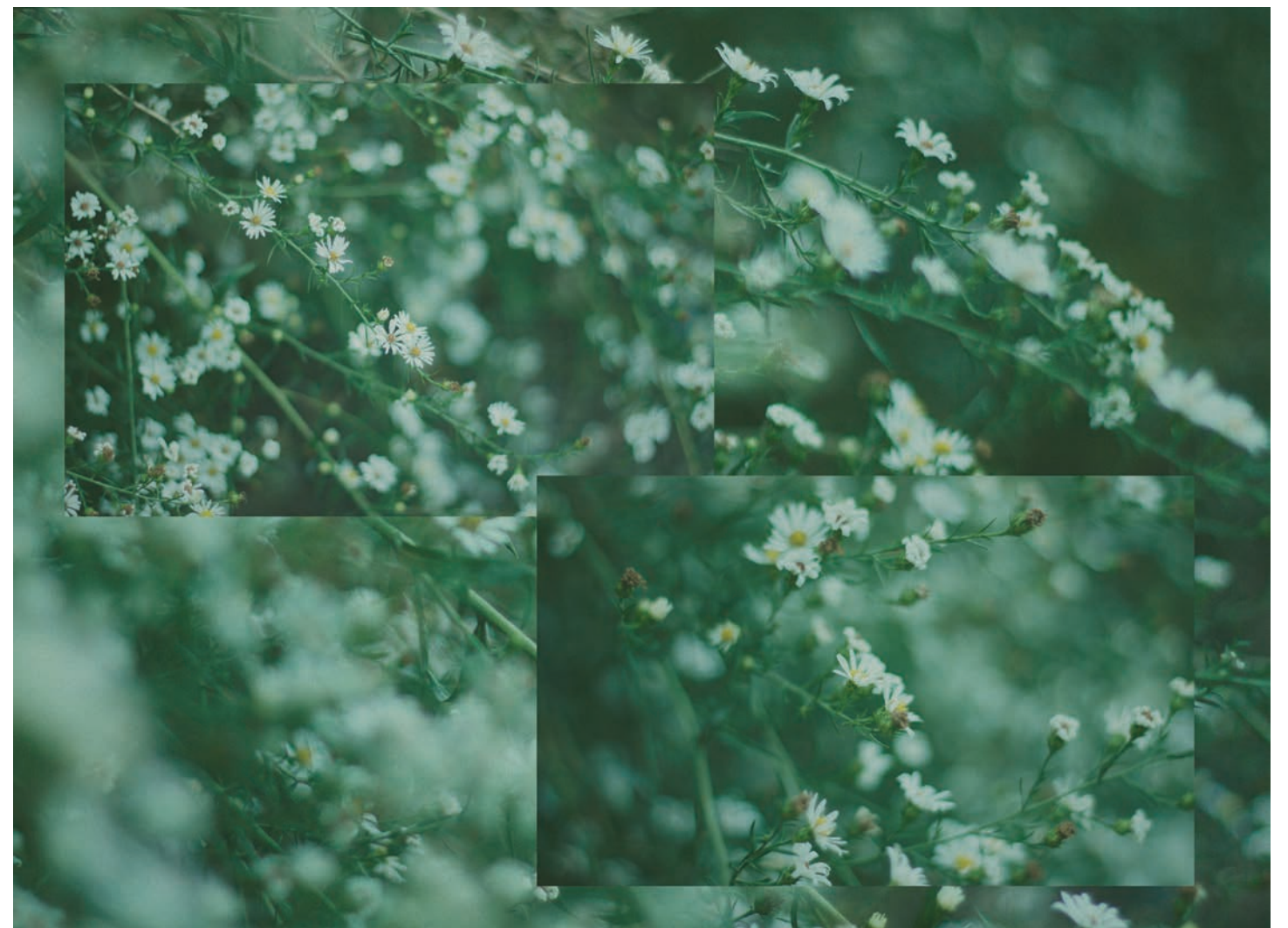
The following summer, my parents decide to move us into a smaller house thirty minutes closer to Fort Worth. I didn't have a say in the matter, so I didn't say anything at all.

I'm unpacking the boxes in my new room when my mom sticks her head in the door.

"Can you grab something from the Singels?" she asks, referring to our neighbors from the old house. I groan, but comply anyway.

The roads and landscape get more familiar the closer I get to the neighborhood I grew up in, but I almost pass my old house not recognizing it, and screech to a stop in the middle of the road. The lawn is completely green and intact, the absence of my family memory somehow glaring at me.

The tree stump is gone without a trace.



BLOSSOM
By **DAVID WILLIAMS**



PHANTOM CAT

By **MARISSA SOLOMON**

Owl eyes that never blink
and heavy paws that thump
forevermore down the stairs.

Owl eyes that never blink and heavy paws that thump
forevermore down the stairs

A phantom cat lives in my house.

Thump, thump, thump.

No matter what house it was she would go down the
steps the same.

Thump, thump, thump down the stairs at One Pleasant
Circle.

Thump, thump, thump down the stairs at 65 Nutter
Island Road.

Thump, thump, thump down the stairs at 65 Cedar
Lane.

Always two paws on the first step and two on the
second.

Thump, thump, thump.

Mom always said she sounded like a baby elephant,
her paws as heavy as lead weights. We thought she'd dent
the hard maple wood of the steps. An eight-pound kitten
shouldn't thump like that. But there she went: thump,
thump, thump.

Coming home from Thanksgiving break, the thumping
was slower, almost pained, and when I beat her to the
bottom of the stairs she looked at me incredulously as if
to say, "Hey, that's not how we play this game." So, I went
around the corner and hid until she reached the bottom of
the wooden steps and yelled at me in a pitchy meow. "I'm
here now," she seemed to say.

Sometimes I still hear it; the thumping. Coming home
from winter break, it was fast and enthusiastic, the
thumping down the stairs, but when I turned the corner
there was nothing on the threshold but empty air.

A phantom cat lives in my house.

For fourteen years she thumped through my life, a
spiteful ball of brown and cream fur with wide blue owl-
eyes that never blinked. I swear I hear the footsteps still.
The last time I saw her, her eyes were still open. So she
must be coming down the stairs then because her eyes
were open and she would only ever stop thumping if her
eyes were closed, right?

I held her when her eyes were still open- when she
was quiet for the first time in her life. It was like she was
sleeping, but her eyes were still wide open. The vet said
it wouldn't hurt, that it was only two shots. She might
still just be sleeping. She'll thump downstairs tomorrow
morning.

If she is sleeping, I know where she sleeps; I knew
where she slept. The wire clothing baskets in the back of
my brother's closet, the open sock drawer in the back of
mine. The window seat in the hallway that gets the best
sun at three in the afternoon. Underneath the rocking
chair on the oriental carpet. The white couch in the corner
of the red room. I still walk into each of these places
expecting to be greeted by an indignant "meh," kind of a
half-hearted "mew." It's quiet in these places now, but I
still hear the "meh" echoing in the back of my head. If her
eyes were closed, I wouldn't hear it, right?

A phantom cat lives in my house.

If her eyes were closed, she would be dead. But her
eyes were open when I gave her to the vet's assistant, and
her eyes were open when they stood on the front porch
and wrapped her in a towel, and her eyes were open when
they got in the van and drove away. Her eyes were open,
so she couldn't be dead.

They gave me a pot of ashes and a card that said, "I'm
sorry for your loss." But my cat's not in the pot. She's in
a laundry basket, or a sock drawer, asleep. She'll thump
down the stairs tomorrow.

Thump, thump, thump.

A phantom cat lives in my house.

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Snapshots of 2020

A Moment of Escape

As the cracked pavement passes quickly beneath the soles of my New
Balances, I attempt to capture and embody the serenity this place holds.
The low afternoon sun shining through the dense green above. A drop of
sweat trickling down my cheek. Some newfound EDM song blasting through
my AirPods. This surge of serotonin has become my only release during a
time of so much fear, anxiety, and uncertainty.

The news anchor on the tiny 1990s television in my kitchen happily
reminds me of this reality everyday as I make myself breakfast. Just this
morning as I simply tried to scramble some eggs: "The number of COVID-19
related deaths in the United States is on track to surpass 100,000 by the
end of next week." Each day is filled with these sobering reminders.

Although this is our new reality, the quiet stretch of road nestled deep
within the trees is oblivious. Running here offers me a moment to join in, a
moment to escape from that reality. For just this moment, I feel at peace.

— Daniel Horan

Snapshots of 2020

Wooly Meditation

I kneel at the marble coffee table for what feels like a year, carefully
watching as the crochet hook ducks in and out of the loops. I count them
silently, as my sisters watch Netflix and my brother dashes around the
kitchen, stopping occasionally to place a couple cashews between his
teeth.

Night comes, and with it, Dad cooking. And with Dad cooking, comes
cursing. While he screams at his raw steak and overcooked broccoli, I
finish a line of feathers, a pattern that loops seven times back into itself.

I carefully line it up with the ruler I have handy. With a gentle stretch
to even it out, it reaches twelve inches.

Finally, a foot. It's not quite a scarf yet, or anything at all. But after
three days, it's a foot.

— Nina Piazza

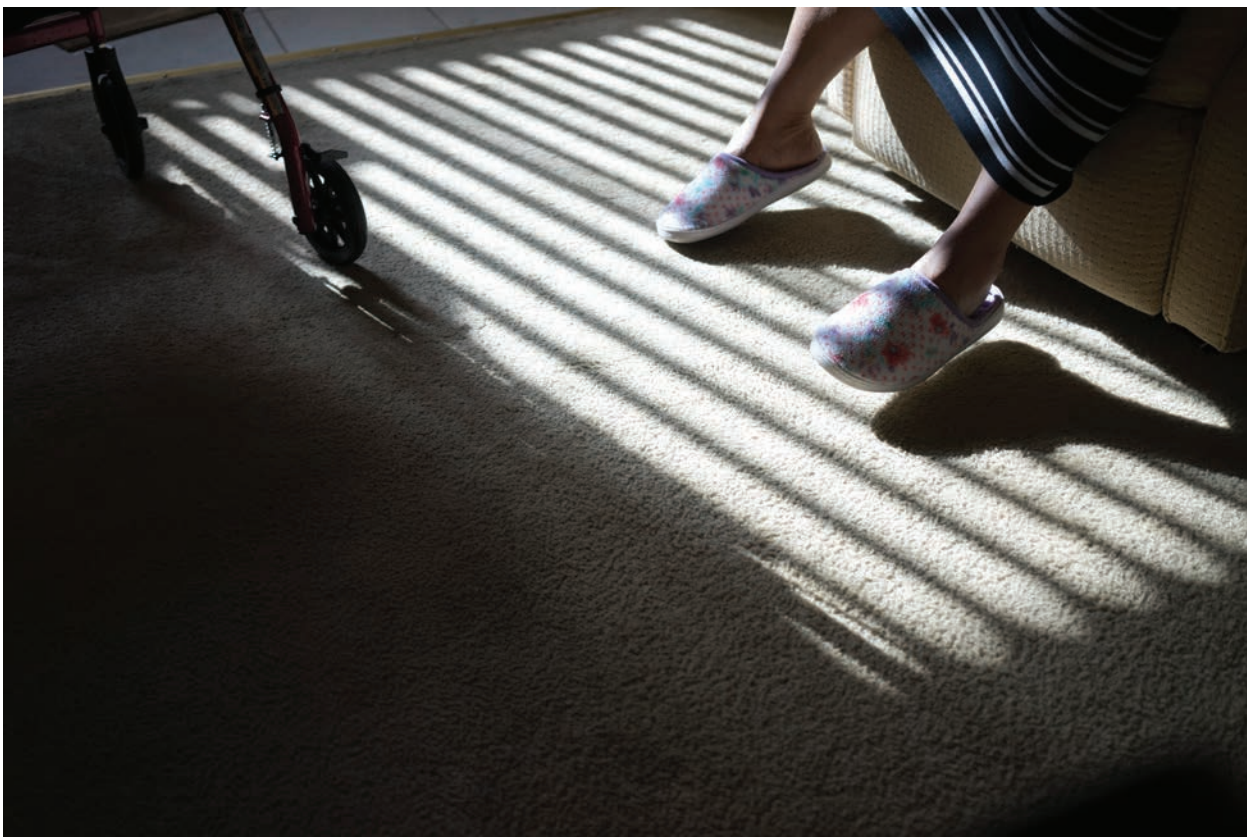


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SHOES

By **NOAH FRITSCH**

Sometimes you can learn a lot about who people are by looking at their shoes. The excitement they feel (image one) or the sorrow they felt (image two).



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Snapshots of 2020

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Finally, a foot. It's not quite a scarf yet, or anything at all. But after three days, it's a foot.

— Nina Piazza

Snapshots of 2020

Bottom Shelf Rosé

We all deserve a little TLC. In this case, it's drinking bottom shelf rosé from Hannah Montana paper cups with Margo and Julia in Prospect Park, Summer 2020. We cry, lying on our cotton picnic blanket, listening to *Cherry* by Harry Styles, and giggle thinking back to the nutcases we were in high school. We reminisce on the carefree spirit we had at the annual Music Midtown festival where pouring vodka into everyday disguisable objects felt matter of fact. Julia says to me "I can't imagine doing what we did then, now." We may be miles apart now, but it's as if things have never changed, and we are back to our old selves—like our bottom shelf rosé.

— Daisy Leepson

VICTORY OVER ADDICTION

By **NICHOLAS HENRY SAWYER**

Inspired by one of my first volunteering jobs with a nonprofit called “Victory Over Addiction.”

Walking door to door never seems to get normal,
 Your blood boils and mind wanders, “What could be behind that door?”
 The act so innocent and the dress so informal,
 But when you reach those steps, they can no longer ignore,
 You ring the doorbell with shaking fingers,
 As the door creaks open a figure appears, “Hi, I’m with VOA, can you talk? Are you sure?”
 Your pitch begins with stats and scores, but that’s not what sells - that’s not what injures,
 Then you take a stab like a grief struck singer,
 Everyone has been affected, your brother, your cousin too?
 Have you seen their lives fall out of view?
 Addiction doesn’t discriminate like the touch of death,
 All we can hope is to bring light of it, opioid to meth,
 Well, can you spare a dollar? Or 20? Or more?
 Or turn your back on them and shut the door,
 Every cent matters when the light seems so dim,
 And then you walk away as though you never met them,
 Then comes the walk to the neighbor next door,
 That walk your mind feels stuck in a quarrel,
 Man, that walk never seems to get normal

Burning Redwoods

Snapshots of 2020

It’s 11:05PM on a Wednesday night, and you’re trying in vain to sleep so that you can wake up for your 8 a.m. class the next day. It doesn’t help that the group chat with your friends starts blowing up as your head hits the pillow. You screw your eyes shut and listen as your phone buzzes incessantly on your nightstand like an angry bee. With a groan, you roll over — eyes still closed — and grope around in the dark for your phone. Finding it, you squint with one eye as you turn on Do Not Disturb, but a text catches your attention. Your sibling sent you the link to an article, and it sends your world spiraling:

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES DESTROY REDWOOD FOREST LEAVING NOTHING BEHIND

Your chest caves in. Your throat constricts. Your eyes burn. All at once, snippets of memories crash into your mind. Floating down a creek on your back. Building forts out of branches and moss. Laughing with cheeks full of marshmallow. You shut off your phone and close your eyes, an emptiness consuming you. A part of you is now burning too.

– Kaylie R. Klotz

Roles Reversed

Snapshots of 2020

“It was a walkout,” Mom said. “For healthcare employees against racism, in solidarity with Black Lives Matter. I was a bit disappointed; there were only four of us.”

It’s an odd thing to tell your parent that you’re proud of them when I am usually on the other side of it. My mom never paid much mind to activism, not out of malice, simply because it just didn’t seem to affect her. As my sister and I grew up, we began engaging in meaningful conversations with her -- challenging her prior conceptions. One wonderful thing about my mother is her willingness to listen and grow, even when challenging her worldview. She began seeking out information on her own and talking to others who didn’t see eye to eye with her. Despite all of this, I was still surprised when she came home this summer and told me she participated in a protest at work.

When she walked in the door and said that to me, I was in awe. What she did was small, inconsequential in the grand scheme, but she stood for what was right while others sat in their offices and did nothing.

“I’m proud of you,” I said. “Momma, I am so proud of you.”

– Rachel Reeser



THE WATER HORSES AND THE MERMAID

By **MEGAN WILCOX**

“Be careful!” Mom calls as I race away. “Please don’t go too deep!”

“I know!” I toss over my shoulder, not even looking back. The ocean is calling, roaring my name with each crash of the sparkling waves. They glimmer like my brand-new nail polish, like the butterfly earrings dangling from my freshly pierced ear. Even the sand under my feet feels new—though I’ve run to these waves hundreds of times before. However, I have never before run into the water by myself.

“Mom, I take swim lessons now. I can swim really good!” I had maturely reasoned with her earlier that morning.

“I know, Meg, but I still think Dad has to go in with you. It’s deeper than you think.”

“Katie, I think she’s fine.” Grandma comes to the rescue. “She’s been swimming like a fish out there all week.”

Grandma’s opinion had convinced Mom to finally let me swim without Dad’s supervision, and now the ocean lies before me, an undiscovered universe waiting for me to dive in.

Seashells scrape the bottom of my feet as my shadow darts across the sand. I stop just as I reach the ocean’s edge, the white foam of the waves tickling my toes as I look out over the water. My heart begins to race as beautiful white stallions charge towards me, crashing over the waves. Their long manes soar over the water—

Is that a unicorn? I think to myself, sea-blue eyes blown wide despite the glaring sun. *These wave horses must be unicorns!* What other creatures could sparkle so brightly? Or leap over waves so gracefully, so weightlessly?

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I slowly wade into the water towards the white unicorns. When I’m up to my knees, I pause. The unicorns spit sea spray into the wind and onto my cheeks. The wind carries their whispers to me, and they are undoubtedly uttering my name. They call to me, the water pulling at my legs, begging me to ride the waves with the beautiful ocean steeds. I take another step, the water brushing my stomach.

Beyond the white stallions, where the water is a sapphire blue, I see a flash in the corner of my eye. Between the sunlight glares on the waves is a deep green shadow peeking in and out of the surf. My heart stops. I squint and see a long emerald fin. It flicks aqua crystals behind it as it dives back under the swell, and I stand speechless, staring at the spot where it disappeared.

I have just seen a mermaid.

Though it was only above water for a second, I know it was a mermaid. What other ocean creature has such a long, graceful, shimmering tail? Come to think of it, I’m almost certain I saw a long blonde braid — and an arm, too. It must have been.

Once my heart starts beating again, I sprinted back up to Mom’s beach towel, my thoughts racing. First unicorns, now a mermaid? I wonder if it means I have special powers, that I was the only one that could see her? I think she might’ve been waving at me...

“MOM!”

“What, honey? Are you alright?”

“Mom,” I gasp. “I just saw a real life mermaid.”

“Really?” Her eyes widen; I know I’ve impressed her. “Maybe you’ll see her again tomorrow when we come back! You can show me.”

I grin. Silly Mom. Spotting a mermaid isn’t that easy. She’s probably already back in Atlantis, the golden city of the merpeople. Maybe next time I see her she’ll take me with....

POWER PLAY

BY **KAYLIE KLOTZ**

Today they will have the power to
choose the game and make the
rules. Today, they will get a ball.

As the tinny sound of the school bell reverberates down the narrow halls of Rancho Romero Elementary, every head in our fourth grade class perks up, ready and alert. As always, the class begins to prepare itself for the mad dash to the playground. Shoelaces are tightened, hair is tied back, and toes are pointed to the door. Some kids are already halfway out of their seats, but Mrs. Maybaum’s hard stare keeps them at bay. We can’t leave until she dismisses us.

Glances are exchanged around the room — silently forming alliances and strategizing — everyone hoping that today would be the day. Today they will have the power to choose the game and make the rules. Today, they will get a ball.

Like my classmates, I scan the room to find my best friend, Caitlin, gesturing wildly with her thin, pale arms to get my attention. Unlike our classmates, the two of us have a system that has never failed: I sprint to the four square court by the gigantic oak tree and claim it. Meanwhile Caitlin, the fastest runner of the fourth grade, charges towards the metal cart located on the other side of the playground, elbowing anyone who gets into her way, and grabs a ball. But today, when we lock eyes, I realize something’s wrong. She nods at the door all the way across the room and scowls. Instantly, I know what she’s trying to communicate. She’s too far from the door. I’m closer, so I have to be the one to get the ball today. It is up to me to fulfill this important job.

My stomach plummets. There’s a reason I am never

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in charge of securing the ball. I am not fast like Caitlin. I don’t like elbowing people. I’m not cut out for it. The boy next to me, Jack, bounces his leg impatiently under the table so that the metal parts rattle and clang against my desk, momentarily distracting me. When he notices me looking, he sneers and scoots forward to the very edge of his seat so that he is just the slightest bit closer to the door than me. I clench my teeth and ball my fists, turning from him to focus my gaze on the door. That’s it. Game on. No way is Jack going to beat me. Not today.

The tension in the room mounts, the air buzzing with anticipation. Everyone is poised, ready to run like nothing else matters. Then, it comes. We are dismissed.

I leap from my chair, crashing through the door and into the hallway, Jack and my classmates close at my heels. As we turn the corner, I can see the ball cart across the playground. I am losing ground. Three of my classmates pass me, pumping their arms furiously. I pump mine harder as I watch them claim three of the four prized balls, coveting them like quarterbacks on a sneak play. Jack now matches my strides, inching his way to the lead. I push myself to run faster, but it’s no use. Jack arrives first and snatches the remaining ball from the cart. I stop short of the cart, panting, with blood rushing to my cheeks. I can hear Caitlin calling me from the other side of the playground, but I don’t answer. My words are caught in my throat. It was my job to get the ball, and I failed.

Jack dances around, taunting me loudly with mock empathy. In a flash of anger, I tear the ball out of his grasp and hurl it at him. It smacks him right on the bridge of his nose, leaving a red patch and an expression of disbelief on his face. I feel vindicated, but only for a moment. I see his chin begin to wobble and his eyes redden, and suddenly every ounce of my anger is gone. He turns and flees the playground, leaving the ball behind. The ball bounces off of the nearby fence and rolls back towards me to rest at my feet. The power is mine for the taking. I feel sick. I stare at it, not wanting to touch it. It stares back, waiting.

YOUR STORY WALKING

By **ALAINA TRIANTAFILLEDES**

Perspective of voices that are commonly overlooked.

He didn't have it easy growing up. But it was alright. He was a Cuney Homes kid, born and raised. Everyone wanted him to get out, to go places, and maybe he did eventually, but he loved The Bricks all the same. He was an athlete. Football and basketball. He was huge, everyone called him "Big Friendly." He went to South Florida State College for basketball and then Texas A&M University. And eventually He went home. He was looking for a job in construction.

Things got hard after that. He didn't have a home. He got into drugs. Selling them, taking them, you know. He stole things, too. He pointed a gun at someone. Five years in prison did him good. He found God. When he got out, he met this guy at a rap concert- he liked to rap. The guy was a pastor, and he ended up helping him in the ministry. Little basketball tournaments, ministry barbecues, grocery deliveries, stuff like that. He liked to talk to the boys, ask them about school and their families.

Cuney was home, it was comfortable, but he had kids and he wanted a fresh start. He got a job as a security guard at a homeless shelter in Minneapolis. His coworkers were the best part. He liked to walk them home, make sure they were safe. They thought his dancing was funny.

Then he was training as a truck driver and working at a club as a bouncer. He wanted to go back to Houston and visit the neighborhood. He did that a lot. But then the pandemic happened and he was out of work. He didn't know how to feed his kids, how to live. He needed a cigarette.

So he bought cigarettes. Then the police were there. His face was on the pavement, his wrists were behind his back,

his knee was on his neck. Spots in his vision, pressure on his throat. They were gonna kill him, he knew it. He thought of his kids, his life, that damn twenty dollar bill. His lungs felt empty. His heart felt weak. He felt helpless.

Then he felt nothing.

His name was George Floyd.

She wanted to be a nurse.

She was an EMT and she loved taking care of people. The inevitable burden of college debt made her nervous, but she wanted a nursing degree so badly. She wanted to help.

She had a boyfriend, Kenneth. They wanted a family.

They were asleep in her bed, but were awoken by a loud noise. Was someone trying to get in the house? Was it her ex-boyfriend? Kenneth grabbed his gun and they explored with caution. The front door burst open and Kenneth shot into the dark. That was the first shot of many.

She was on the floor. She felt hot, too hot, and the air was too thin, and was she breathing? No, she couldn't breathe. It was too loud, too dark. She gasped, choked, and reached for her boyfriend. But he wasn't there. Nothing was there.

Her name was Breonna Taylor.

She's a mother, working two jobs because she wants her kids to have a bigger yard to play in. He's a father, teaching his boys how to keep their heads down and their blood inside their body. They were kids, fumbling their way through a world that assumed that they were criminals.

You get followed in stores, watched by police, scrutinized on the bus. When you get pulled over, your body braces itself. You watch the names of your brothers and sisters fill the headlines and listen to people tell you racism doesn't exist anymore. The president of your country does not stand with you. You shout and you shout and you shout and nobody listens. Nobody listens.

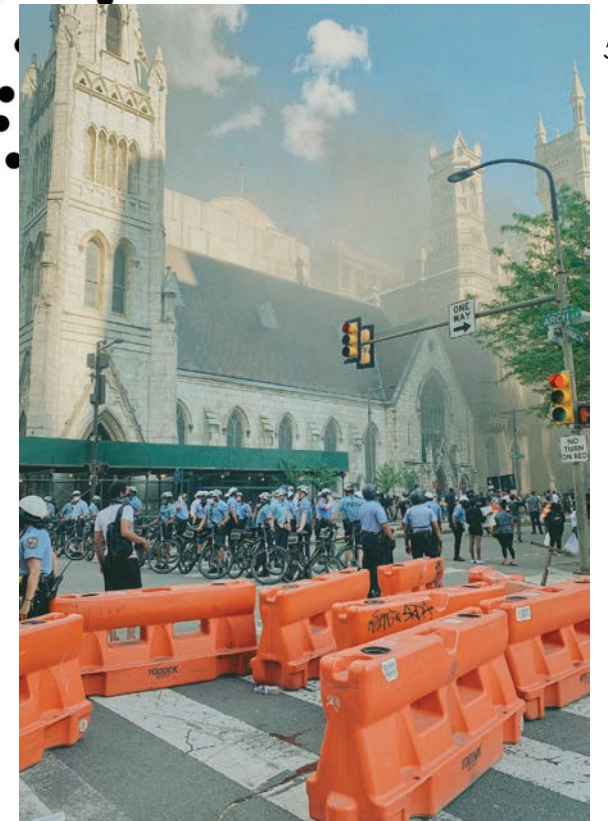
Let me tell your stories walking, because we have heard enough of mine.

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CHANGEMAKING

By **DAVID WILLIAMS**

May 30, 2020
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



5:35 pm



5:36 pm

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The Grey Area

By **ANONYMOUS**

The point is I can't remember.

I don't remember most of the first time we hooked up.

I remember going into the bathroom with you and kissing your mouth and thinking that I wanted so badly to keep doing it because I felt validated by you wanting my body.

I don't remember getting on my knees. Somewhere between my hands on your torso and your mouth on my mouth, I got on my knees. But I don't remember it.

I remember you in my mouth. My mouth felt full and my jaw ached and the cold tile against my knees made my whole body hurt. Your hands were in my hair. I don't remember if you pulled hard enough to hurt. Maybe you didn't and maybe it was my idea to get on my knees.

The point is I don't remember.

All I remember is feeling so very small and young and used when you kept telling me that I ought to go home after what had just happened.

We met up a couple more times.

We were always drunk.

Each time I asked if we were going to have sex, you said no, and I left it at that.

Somewhere around the fourth or fifth time, we were both drunk again.

I think we'd decided on not having sex again. Maybe I'd asked and you'd said no or we'd mutually decided, but I remember being pretty sure that we weren't going to have sex.

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TRIGGER WARNING: sexual assault, graphic depictions of sexual acts

That wasn't how it went.

The worst part is, if you'd asked, I would have said yes. I would have told you that it had been a few months since I'd had sex, and I would have asked you to go slow. But if you'd just asked, I would have said yes.

Instead, you said "Just for a little bit," and then you were inside me before I could even realize what was happening. Painfully and all at once and so quickly that I didn't realize what was wrong. I swallowed my shock like a pill popped blindly - so quickly that I could only register it as shock now, a year later.

I asked you to go slower because it hurt. You gave up, pulled out, and hissed, "Never mind then," as if you were disappointed in me. Instantly, embarrassment bloomed inside me, agitating me.

I was agitated not by the fact that you'd entered me without asking, but by how my physical pain seemed to disappoint you.

"Well, no," I bit back. "Just go a little slower for a minute and it's fine." So, you did and we had sex and I went home the next morning to tell my friends about how good it was.

I don't remember the sex feeling good. I don't remember any physical feelings from that night other than your foreignness inside of me without permission.

I told myself you didn't know that what you were doing would scare or shock me. That you thought entering me was something I would be expecting because I'd asked about it before. That because I'd entertained the idea in the past, it would forever be on the table in the future.

The next time we had sex, I was expecting it. I don't remember if you asked or not this time. What I do remember

saying was, "You should probably put a condom on."

"Yeah, you're probably right. You're more responsible than me, I guess," you said, and you ignored me anyway. I didn't push it. I didn't feel like I could.

Maybe because I didn't explicitly ask you to put a condom on, maybe that's why you disregarded me.

The condom thing never came up again. I didn't feel like I could bring it up, so I just stopped thinking about it.

I asked you to choke me once. It was good for a while, and then it was too much weight and I actually couldn't breathe. It scared me. I grabbed at your arm and shook it and tried to pull it away from my throat, but you didn't let up. I shook my head, but I never actually said the word, "Stop."

I wish I had, so I could stop wondering whether or not you would have listened if you'd heard it. Because now, as things stand, I am stuck in a perfect limbo of wondering whether to credit this to your obliviousness or to your blatant disregard for me.

I will never know, so I feel like I cannot explicitly blame you. The damage is still done.

Once, you told me that it was nice having me as "some random girl that showed up in your bed now and again."

You made me feel small like that a lot. Reduced me to nothing - no personality, no sex appeal, no virtues or faults - just a body in your bed.

I sucked your dick behind a bar once.

You asked me if I wanted to. I said "Sure, we could go back to your room." You said, "No, here, behind this bar." I did it.

I was told I was an icon for that. I was told it was a power move. People said things like that to me a lot. That me fucking you and not catching feelings was an incredible feat.

I liked comments like that. They made me feel not small. They made me feel valid, like I was reclaiming something I'd lost. So I kept fucking you.

What people were unable to see was the sick attachment I'd gotten to you. It wasn't feelings or care or anything like

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that. Somehow, you became a source of validation.

I became addicted to finding a way to make you feel something, anything, about me. Then I would have something to hold over your head when you inevitably made me feel small again.

When I think of you, I am stuck in the grey area. I was not raped by you. I don't feel unsafe in the same room as you, even now, because each time something like this happened, I seemed to have put myself into the situation.

That doesn't stop me from having nightmares about being trapped underneath you. Every time I see you, I can't help but think of how your penis felt when it was pushed inside me without permission that first time.

Still, I question whether or not I was assaulted. If I assume the best of your intentions, then it was your obliviousness that led us here. If I assume the worst, it's that you thought you could do whatever you wanted with me as long as you were given just a little bit of consent.

Some days I am able to tell myself that it was most certainly assault. That I was taken advantage of. That a little bit of consent doesn't give the green light for everything else. I am able to remove myself from the internal battle that is me trying to decipher what your intentions were. I am able to recognize that regardless of your intentions - good, bad, or somewhere in the middle - the emotional trauma happened, took its toll, and that means something.

Most days I believe that I am blowing it way out of proportion.

I know that all of this exists very much in a grey area. I also know that I don't want to come forward about it. I don't want to admit that you hurt me because that feels like a weakness. It feels like a step back from all the healing I have done. That to immerse myself again in the things that happened between us would be to force myself back into the person that I used to be.

So, I sit in my mind. Remembering what happened between us. Working not to let it affect me as I move forward through life. Regaining control by leaving you behind.



BROKEN

By **FTSUM MICHAEL**

Broken
Not even in despair
As if there is no feeling left
Is there such emotion?

Numbness
From all the pain endured
The diagnosis from I, yet no cure

Content
Will I ever be?
Why, is there such a thing?

Depravities
Casted away from my will
Though darkness has crept in
Darkness of my own intuition

The Bartering of my soul
For what, whom?
What do I seek?
Broken

- Dans l'oubli



People say that reading is knowledge, and knowledge will inevitably create a new mold for society. A revolution. But reading has become a necessity for what I have to be. Over time, I realized the characters I read in these novels are what you will meet if you encounter me walking down the street. These actions have become unconscious. Small, developed habits; spontaneous style changes; new, outmoded lingo; all absorbed from “the protagonist of the day.” Fear creeps over my shoulder on the days where I fail to find a new character. Because who do you become when you take the best parts of others but don’t even know the primal parts of yourself? Eighteen years alive, and I am still unaware of what my heart truly looks like. Unaware of how to differentiate what genuinely are my deepest desires, wishes, and thoughts, or what was simply absorbed from the words on those pages. Unaware if any of those thoughts that I create are even truly mine.

THE GOOD LIE

By **ISABELLE LADAO**



UNTITLED

By **ROMI MOLLER**

When I was 7, my parents announced to my sisters and I that we would be moving to Australia. At the time, we were living in Israel. Not knowing a word of English, you can imagine how stressed, confused, concerned, and anxious I was. When I was 11, my parents announced to my sisters and I that we would be moving to France. The feeling of leaving a place I grew to know and love was stress invoking, yet I was excited to be exposed to a new culture where I can use my English speaking skills while learning how to speak French. When I was 14 years old, my parents announced to my sisters and I that we would be moving to America. The feeling of excitement did not leave my mind for

a while. I was looking forward to being exposed to the American lifestyle, big shopping malls, the American food, and the education. Each place that I have lived in has exposed me to a different feeling. Each one of the attached drawings represents the ways in which I felt in every move. I chose not to title the drawings so that the viewer can interpret the feeling they experience when they see the piece on their own.



THE CONCERTS ARE CANCELED

By **JULIA CATALANO**

In three years, when we're at Syracuse and forced to say goodbye again, the concerts will be canceled. But we don't know this yet.

It's the end of May, three years ago. We pass a joint on the ferry and get lost until the line for Terminal 5 snaps into view. We pass through metal detectors, hard and cold in a sea of warm bodies. The guards dig into our bags like bees to pollen. You pull me aside and say let's make sure our kids won't have to walk through radars.

Syracuse is quiet at dawn. I wake before the sun, before the blue jay that chirps at my withering flower pot.

We FaceTimed until my eyelids gave into gravity, smile wearing into the empty house for six.

I fold my laundry.

An ant crawls across the hardwood, an omen of Spring.

We sling back seven dollar rum and cokes and watch the crowd shake below us like riptides. We mock our past selves, who lined up at six a.m., who craved the weight of bodies outside of their own. How we trusted strangers to carry us. How we bragged about our barricade bruised thighs, the rasp of our hollowed voices. Tomorrow your cat will die, but we don't know this yet. We scream the loudest. We freak out at our favorite song. We go back to the bar.

The air dropped thirty degrees overnight.

In Staten Island the day is warm.

In Syracuse sun beams spill across kitchen sinks, illusions of heat planted by a March morning.

I should be seeing you this week. We should be saying goodbye again, cursing time for never leaving room for us to lie in it.

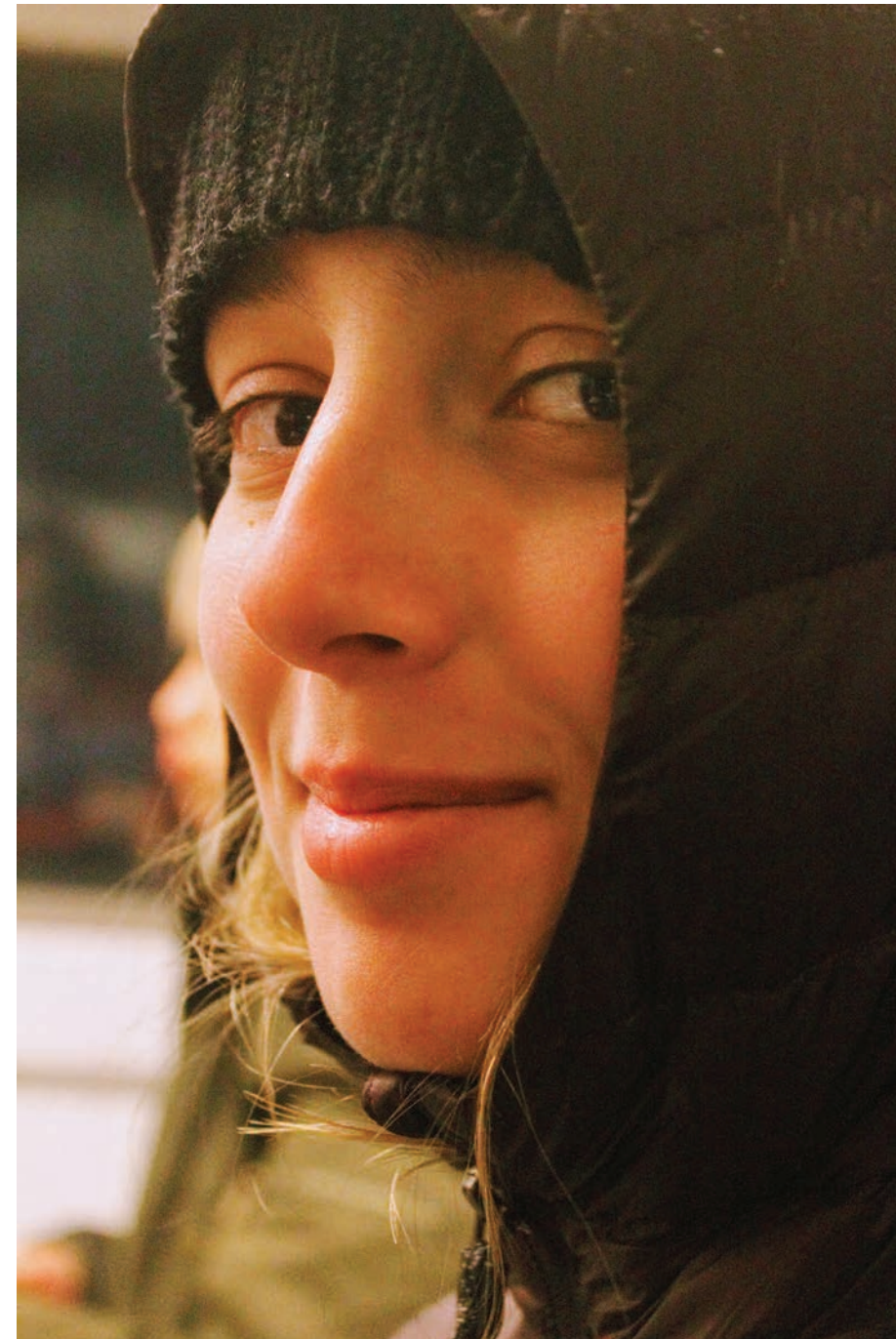
We should be thinking of summer.

We wander past closed car dealerships, red lights buzzing against our skulls. We pee by a dumpster and you overdraw your lips in mauve. In three days I'll have a breakdown, but we don't know this yet. We laugh until we bleed into night, until we're out of blood, until the ferry collides with the dock. In three years, the concerts will be canceled. But we don't know this yet. I fall asleep against your shoulder on the train. The world tumbles on the other side of the window. A man spits out vape smoke in the corner. You kill an ant beneath your foot. Somewhere, our kids are dreaming.

SHARE A SMILE

By **DAISY LEEPSON**

People have become too self-involved that they forget to look up. A candid interaction can be right in front of you, so look up and just observe. This picture was taken on a bus in Copenhagen, Denmark in the winter of 2018. My camera was out and while playing with it, my friend Rachel looked back to say something to me. Without really thinking, I snapped a photo as she looked back. Candid moments like this live on for months without seeing loved ones and transports you back to that time and place.



TAKING A LEAP

By GIOVANNA VEIGA

Studying abroad isn't the easiest thing we sometimes make it out to be.

"This is it," my mom says in English, her accent thickening as it twists and morphs each syllable she utters. I don't even notice it. I try not to look at her.

The airport around us is buzzing with movement — the plastic wheels of rolling bags clacking against the multicolored tile floor; the foreign chatter of different, incomprehensible languages filling the air; the whirring and beeping of machinery grinding in the background. People walk around us, pointing at signs and asking each other questions, the heels of their shoes quickly clicking past, the line in security only getting longer as more of them arrive. Yet somehow, I feel removed from my surroundings, all of this commotion fading into the distance.

"Are you excited? You're going to have so much fun," my dad says in Portuguese. I'm immediately overwhelmed by the materializing fear of studying abroad that's been clouding my thoughts, accompanied with nausea bubbling in my stomach and knotting in my chest. "Make sure you have your ID and boarding pass ready."

I force myself to nod. If my parents notice the unshed tears accumulating in the rims around my eyes, they don't mention it. I can feel my muscles tensing up, my fight-or-flight response kicking in as I size up the exit over their shoulders. The glass doors slide open to let in a gust of cold air followed by more patrons, their expressions charged with excitement, and I look away.

"Do you have anything in your carry on? Any liquids or

anything?" My dad begins to worry, his airport instincts starting up as he searches through my backpack for any illegal items that won't make it past security. I absentmindedly nod along to his questions, the line at security entrancing me as I stare at it, wondering how long I can prolong this interaction before I have to step past those plastic poles with the blue retractable belts that divide the line.

"This is going to be the best time of your life, querida. I promise." My mom jumps in, and I don't wonder why she's speaking English to me. Her hands squeezing tight around me break my staring match with the ropes, and I finally look her in the eyes.

Her brow crinkles with worry as she stares back at me. "If you need anything, we'll be right here for you." She promises, and, for some reason, a heavy, painful ball presses my throat. I swallow it down as best as I can. She kisses my forehead and offers me a sad smile before pulling away.

I turn to my dad, and his expression is absent of any sadness, oblivious as always. His arms are strong and powerful as they wrap around me, and I know that he would've been able to pick me up if he wasn't so short. His stubble scratches my cheek as he pulls back to kiss me as well.

"Se comporta," He reminds me in Portuguese, "Behave." And then he finally lets go.

For a moment I hesitate between them, glancing back and forth, but the goodbye is over. There's nothing left to be said.

"Bye." My voice cracks. I turn around and manage to put one foot in front of the other. The air changes as I walk past the rope marking the edge of the security line, and it's thicker and harder to breathe somehow. But I don't look back.



MY LIFE IN DESTINATIONS

By MICHELA BRITTIS-TANNENBAUM

My life is an amalgamation of experiences from different people and places I have encountered.. From where I was born in Guilin, China, to where my adoptive family lives now in Bedford Hills, New York. From being able to meet the Italian person I was named after, to going on trips with my closest friends down to Puerto Rico. Even including my dreams of exploring the streets of Eastern Asian countries like Japan and South Korea. They've all influenced me to be the person who I am today, and I'm eager to see what experiences I will gain in the future.



AMERICAN HOLIDAY

By **EMILY KELLEHER**

How leaving home made me feel the weight of where I came from.

I pushed aside a plastic curtain and stepped onto the main dance floor, where trees grew through the concrete floor and TVs hung haphazardly off the wall, playing nothing but static. I shivered and crossed my arms, my eyes following the tree trunk upwards until they met the pitch-black sky, unencumbered by a ceiling.

It was the end of my 48 hours in Budapest, one of the last trips of my six months living abroad. By then I'd been to half a dozen countries, but Hungary was the first place I visited whose national language was not offered by my high school, where the Euros I'd become so accustomed to weren't accepted, and where Uber didn't exist. At breakfast that morning, my friends and I typed each price on the menu into our phone and waited for a converter to translate the Hungarian Forint into USD, immediately orderding second lattes and donuts for the table.

We'd read about the makeshift bars established in abandoned pre-war buildings in Budapest's old Jewish quarter, but unlike so many must-see stops along our European tour, walking into one felt more serendipitous than touristy. I hoarded details in my head: the bars tucked in nondescript corner rooms, the hodge-podge of furniture, arranged as though the

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previous owners had left abruptly, or someone had curated it to look that way. I was sure I'd finally entered someplace foreign, untouched by the swathes of American study abroad students who informed which pictures were sought after and which restaurants offered menus in English.

We walked through a half dozen connecting rooms in search of the bathroom. One sold drinks behind a dining room table. Another, visible from across the second-floor balcony, offered late night food. We waited in line for the bathroom behind a pair of Irish girls and marveled at our ability to find a place nobody we knew had been. When we stepped inside, the graffiti covered door swung towards us, and I stuck out my elbow to stop it, landing on a spot where, in pink and orange marker, someone had written the Greek letters of my own sorority.

The signs were there. In Paris, I walked into a pharmacy and got only one syllable of my "bonjour" out before the pharmacist responded with hello. At the Budapest restaurant where we'd eaten breakfast that morning, all I had to do was open the door. Later, at the Christmas market, we walked from stall to stall, drooling over the same churro cones I'd seen sold in Bryant Park. At the baths, we took the pictures we'd seen so often on our feeds, and later ducked inside a Marriot to have someone call us a cab home.

American study abroad programs began in the wake of World War I, the idea being that if citizens could forge connections to foreign places, their native countries might look more kindly on one another and avoid the kind of conflict that had just ravaged the world. Students were encouraged to immerse themselves in their host country's culture, learn their language and eat their food. But by the time it was my turn, I found that wherever I went, the word had already reshaped around me, and adjusted to my American expectations.

I prepared for my semester in Strasbourg, France, by taking a mid-level French class, something I'd done

every year since 7th grade. I spent the summer dutifully tapping away at my Duolingo app on the way to my internship, where I met another intern who had just finished a semester there. But once I was eating dinner with a real French family every night, my skills proved lacking. Still, no matter what collection of incorrectly conjugated words stumbled out of my mouth, my host mom knew what I was talking about. She and the rest of the family spoke fluent English anyway. And German. And Spanish.

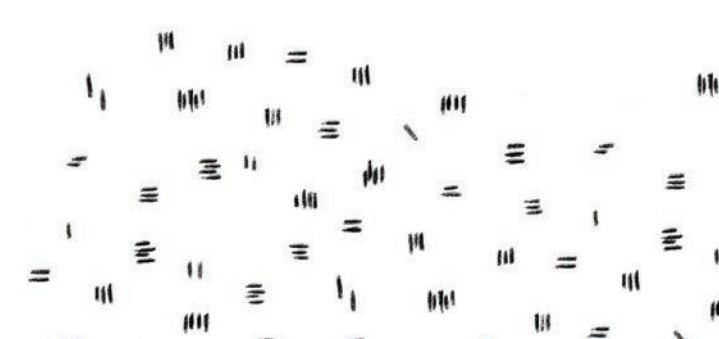
In Italy, we drove our rental car down a route that we realized far too late was more of a hiking path than a road. But a man saw us, knew immediately that we'd been led astray by faulty satellites on our way to a particularly scenic town, and pointed us in the right direction. In Amsterdam, friends insisted on eating lunch at a restaurant called the Avocado Show. I wasn't thrilled, believing I could eat the same overpriced, underwhelming, made-for-Instagram meal back in New York. The wait was too long anyway, but when we arrived, we found six girls in our sorority leaving the restaurant, having also visited Amsterdam from their respective host cities. Later we climbed onto a boat and took a canal tour together, where we passed another boat of students from our school in New York. At the Moco museum, we looked at art from all over the world, and read about it on signs written in English.

Before college, the only people who ever asked where I was from also were from nearby. When asked, I'd tell them the name of my town, about the place near the water with the main street that still had trolley tracks in it, where the chamber of commerce held a parade on the anniversary of the town's founding each year. It wasn't until college that I started being from Long Island. Instead of trolley tracks and waterfront parks I watched people imagine me among bad accents, crowded shopping centers, and commuters drinking beer out of paper bags on the Long Island Railroad. Abroad, I felt the weight of something much heavier. At dinner with my host family on Thanksgiving, I explained how we celebrated back home, leaving out the mythical origins of the holiday but admitting

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that the day of thanks was swiftly followed with a blitz of consumerism called black Friday. In my European human rights class, learning that the US remains the only industrialized nation to use the death penalty felt more personal thanks to my professor's habit of referring to the US as "your country." At the big American sized grocery store in the suburb where my host family lived, I once passed the International section. Scanning rows of rice noodles and Goya seasoning, my eyes stopped on a jar of marshmallow fluff and a can of Heinz baked beans. They were there, I realized, representing America.

When I arrived at my gate in the Amsterdam airport to a crowd of study abroad students dressed in Urban Outfitter jackets and Firenze sweatshirts and the sound of people talking two volumes louder than I'd heard in months, I was already home. Hearing the loud and suddenly obnoxious chatter, I cringed a little, knowing that this must have been what my presence had felt like in all too many restaurants and museums and trains over the past five months. It was as if, for a minute, I could see myself as everyone else did.



I THINK HE'S LONELY

By **LILIANNA SMITH**

He taught me how to listen, ask good questions, and make true connections with people.

Thirty-eight messages from my Dad sit in my voicemail box unheard. I have missed every call and text from him since December 2019. I don't think I can follow that truth with any words other than "I am a terrible daughter". When my dad texts or calls me, the overwhelming feeling of guilt consumes me. I don't know why I don't call him. When I was in the 7th grade my parents divorced and I learned that my Dad's frontal lobe didn't work. I think for a long time I have tried to escape that truth.

I don't want him to die. He lives alone in rural North Carolina in an apartment filled with expensive things. Why won't he help me pay for college but he will buy me a guitar, piano, or anything I ask for? Why does he confuse the names of my sisters when we go to the movies? And why did the court tell us he wasn't allowed to drive? Why did I let him drive me anyways? Was it his trusting blue-gray eyes with the distinct, long crow's feet lines? Or was it the guilt of knowing that my father is sick when he has already forgotten my middle name and I'm not talking?

He must think I hate him. How could I let the man who came to every theater performance, every volleyball tournament, and every choir concert think that I hate him? As I sat and did nothing during quarantine I heard every text

notification and saw every call come in. Every time I would turn my phone over, turn the music up louder, smoke a little more, and drown out the world.

I find myself talking about him all of the time. He taught me how to listen, ask good questions, and make true connections with people. He has always encouraged me to pursue my dreams no matter what they are. When I told him I wanted to be a designer, he offered me his own laptop and bought me an Adobe membership. To this day, even when I don't utter a word to him, he supports my dreams. I don't think I even realize the depth of my own selfishness. Am I a monster?

In moments of clarity, I have had time to reflect and wonder what a future will look like with him in it. When I close my eyes I see him taking pictures on his iPhone, asking me what my favorite color is, and seeing him smile when I say green. I have his eyes. They are blue-gray with a green inner circle encompassing the pupil.

I dyed my hair green the other day, I think I'll send him a photo.



CHANGEMAKING

By **DAVID WILLIAMS**

FAVILLOUS

By RACHEL REESER

It was a beautiful day to celebrate.

As we marched in a line through the gates into the pasture and fields one last time, I did my best to memorize every detail of this place where I grew up. The chicken coop, freshly painted red and white just the year before, where it stood next to my great-grandmother’s garden. The barns, each stripped of equipment and livestock, standing lonely in the overgrown pasture, the water pump and trough gone bone-dry. The cherry tree, where my cousins and I would spend hours picking from to be sold at the stand, along with the ancient walnut whose yield we were told to roll beneath our feet and collect to do the same—finally, the truck patch. My grandfather’s pride and joy, every year tended to diligently by his weathered hands. Dad and I used to help out every summer, a series of formative moments in my life. The best day of the year was when the entire family came out for the pumpkin harvest, the adults cutting and passing them up on the wagon for the kids to price and organize. None of us knew that the previous year would be our last.

As we passed silently through the final gate and came upon Pap’s tractor, the only cloud in the sky moved to reveal the sun, and offered a comforting warmth on the crisp autumn day. I squinted, the sun now shining in full force, and the sky so blue it was blinding. It was a beautiful day to celebrate.

We all started to clamber into the cart hitched to the tractor, the able-bodied hoisting those too young or too old up to sit on the bench. It was a tight squeeze, shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip. I leaned my head on my mother’s shoulder and held my grandmother’s free hand as my uncle climbed into the driver’s seat.

“Enjoy the ride,” he called to us over his shoulder. “This will be the last time.”

When the tractor jolted forward with the cart in tow, the chatter started up. Joe, Jordan, and I tried to uplift the somber mood by telling jokes and recounting old memories, while the adults minded the littlest children who were oblivious to the situation at hand. We took turns trading stories, laughs, and jabs as we meandered our way into the woods to our destination. The leaves fell onto us from branches above, decorating our hair and shoulders in an array of yellows, reds, and oranges. I tried to commit this path to memory, too, the hours I spent exploring it with my cousins and hunting with Dad and Pap. We knew every trail, every nook and cranny mapped in our heads. Given this, when we reached the giant outcropping of rock, our breaths collectively caught in our throats.

Uncle Kyle brought us to a halt, pausing before sliding from the seat. The rest of us followed suit, jumping down from the cart and assisting those who couldn’t. We moved to stand in a circle beside the rock formation, with Gram in the center. She unwrapped the cloth bundle in her arms, revealing the simple urn underneath. I clutched my mother’s arm, and my sister wrapped an arm around me as Dad, his siblings, and Mother slowly began spreading Pap’s ashes among the peaceful place. We stood solemnly until we finished, and Gram led us in prayer. I bowed my head, tuning out her words in favor of my private memorial.

When she finished, we said our goodbyes to my grandfather and the land we all loved, his memory etched into our minds, and the land’s dirt still caught under our fingernails. We piled back on the cart, drove out of the woods, and through the gates, each of us leaving a part of ourselves behind.

Snapshots of 2020

The Return of My Wii

The Wii had an inch of dust from having been untouched in the basement closet for eight years. But I plugged it in as my mom, my two sisters, and sister’s boyfriend — a German international student quarantining with us — gathered eagerly in the living room. The Wii’s startup sound played a melody of bright tones that took me back to the feeling of finished math homework on weeknights in elementary school.

There was only one game we could’ve resurrected to entertain ourselves during this newly mandated stay-at-home period: Just Dance! 2. My sisters, Megan and Bridget, made their best attempt to recall the Rasputin dance moves, flailing their hands in the air while my mom, glass of wine in hand, laughed hysterically at their painfully lousy rendition.

I finally cracked open the case and popped out the game. I’m sure that shiny little disk never thought it would get the chance to see the light of day again. But I never thought I’d have to disinfect the Fruit Loops box when my mom arrived home from the grocery store, either.

— Daniel Horan

Snapshots of 2020

On Graduating During a Pandemic

The sun is shining. My mom makes salad for lunch. My dad cleans up after dinner. A dozen Newhouse alumni get on Zoom on a Sunday to wish the seniors a happy graduation. They tell us how they graduated right before 9/11, or amidst the 2008 financial crisis, or last year, how it was hard for them and it will be hard for us, how we can reach out anytime. The birds chirp, the mail comes, the rejection emails signal that somebody somewhere is at least aware of my job applications. Maybe. My body moves and heals and tastes and sees, remains healthy even when the only thoughts I give to it are about how my stomach protrudes/thighs touch/arms jiggle/acne scars. I came home from college for the last time to a house strung with decorations from four different stores and a table set with all of my favorite foods. My favorite song is playing. One day soon I’ll hug my nieces again. There is so much to be grateful for.

— Emily Kelleher

CONTRIBUTORS

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Ash Alexander

They/Them - Arts & Sciences '22

Ash Alexander majors in English and psychology, and minors in LGBT studies. They are from St. Petersburg, Florida and have loved reading and writing for as long as they can remember.

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Kate Brennan was born and raised by the Jersey Shore. As a newspaper & online journalism major, she loves writing, as well as rock climbing, snowboarding and coffee.

Michela Brittis-Tannenbaum

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Michela is a first-year architecture student.

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Visual and Performing Arts '21

Julia Catalano is a senior theatre management major.

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He/Him - Newhouse '22

Andrew is a junior magazine journalism major at Syracuse University's Newhouse School of Public Communications. He's a sportswriter at *The Daily Orange*, where he was sports editor during the fall semester.

Tanner Demaree

He/Him - Arts & Sciences '23

In his senior year of high school, Tanner Demaree wrote a poem that won \$250, and it went straight to his head. He's been chasing that high ever since.

Emily Diamond

She/Her - Maxwell and Arts & Sciences '22

Emily Diamond is a political science major with a focus in law and courts, from right outside of Boston, Massachusetts. She is interested in going to law school when she graduates. For fun, she likes to exercise and spend time with friends!

Zarah Durst

She/Her - School of Architecture '23

Zarah is in her third year at 'Cuse! When she's not doing homework or working on studio, she's involved in student organizations at the Architecture school. Zarah focuses a lot on mental health awareness and the mentorship program for the first years. She likes to paint, sing, do embroidery, and listen to true crime podcasts.

June Fang

She/Her - Maxwell and Arts & Sciences '16

June Fang is a current Global Senior Research Manager at a investment research company and Founder of Find Art Gallery, an online art blog. She was born in Guangdong and grew up on the island of St. Croix. June earned a bachelor's degree in public policy at Syracuse University. She is passionate about environmental policies, improving education and alleviating poverty.

Noah Fritsch

He/Him - Architecture '24

Noah likes design and architecture. A camera is a fun way to look at those things.

Ftsum Michael

He/Him - Maxwell and Arts & Sciences '22

Ftsum Michael is a first-year transfer and junior studying economics and English literature here at SU. His passions, although, are playing guitar, as well as writing songs and poetry. His fascination behind poetry is in how it resonates with the reader, or rather poetic expression.

Bettina Harvey

She/Her - Whitman '23

Bettina is a sophomore honors student from Massachusetts studying finance and information management and technology. She is very passionate about dance and yoga. Bettina wrote some pieces from her quarantine experience over the summer.

Daniel Horan

He/Him - Architecture '24

Daniel is a second-year architecture major from just outside Philadelphia, with hopes to pursue a career in the field of design. In his free time he enjoys spending time with friends, and exploring all kinds of music and art.

Abby Johnson

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '23

Abby is a sophomore studying neuroscience and biology. She loves to travel and take pictures of the places she's been, which is how her photogrpahy came to be.

Allie Kaylor

She/Her - Newhouse '23

Allie is a newspaper and online journalism major with a sport analytics minor. On campus, she works as an assistant copy editor at *The Daily Orange* and a producer at CitrustV.

Emily Kelleher

She/Her - Newhouse and Maxwell '20

Emily Kelleher is a journalist based in New York.

Kaylie R. Klotz

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '22

Kaylie R. Klotz is a chemistry major from the Bay Area, CA. She enjoys traveling and writing stories in her free time, and she hopes to one day write a novel.

Isabella Ladao

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '24

Isabella Ladao is pursuing a major in communication sciences and disorders. She is usually found binge-watching Disney movies, reading cliché YA novels, or adding to her countless Spotify playlists.

Daisy Leepson

She/Her - Newhouse '23

Daisy is studying magazine journalism at Newhouse and wants to become a food journalist. When not in class, she loves creating her own recipes and sharing the dishes she makes with friends.

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Romi Moller

She/Her - School of Architecture '24

Romi is a student in the School of Architecture. Romi was born in Israel, grew up in Australia and France, and is currently living in the Chicago area. Romi has always loved expressing her creativity through drawing.

Nina Piazza

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '22

Nina is a linguistics major. She's always loved language and writing, and constantly seeks to perfect her craft.

Rachel Reeser

She/Her - Maxwell and Arts & Sciences '22

Rachel is a political science and policy studies major slated to graduate in 2022. In her free time, she can be found doing embroidery or cuddling her elderly housecat.

Jenae Richardson

She/Her - Newhouse, Arts & Sciences '11

Jenae Richardson graduated Syracuse in 2011 with degrees in psychology and magazine journalism. She currently works in Palo Alto.

Nicholas Sawyer

He/Him - Arts & Sciences '21

Nicholas Sawyer is from New Hampshire and loves the outdoors! He is a biotechnology major with interests in genetic therapies and stem cell therapeutics.

Sara Shaygan

She/Her - Visual and Performing Arts '23

Sara Shaygan is an avid reader, theatre artist, feminist, cat lover, and passionate storyteller. She hails from Los Angeles, where she plans to return after finishing her degree at SU.

Marissa Solomon

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '22

Marissa is a junior majoring in english and newspaper & online journalism. She enjoys hiking, skiing, road-tripping and traveling overseas. Her inspiration is her family, with whom she is very close.

Sasha Temerte

She/Her - Maxwell and Arts & Sciences '23

Sasha Temerte is a writer, businesswoman, and avid explorer who chases to understand humanity and the world around her. After publishing her poetry debut, she expanded her horizons to prose.

Thanh Thai

She/Her - Visual & Performing Arts '23

Thanh Thai is a communication design major at Syracuse University. In her spare time, she enjoys painting, watching horror movies, and ruining her sleep schedule (involuntarily).

Alaina Triantafilledes

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '24

Alaina is a fledgling writer in the College of Arts & Sciences. She is currently exploring different types of writing (rhetorical, academic, creative...), but she intends to take advantage of the upcoming creative writing major as soon as it is available. She adores stories of all kinds and would love to share her own someday.

Giovanna Veiga

She/Her - School of Architecture '21

Giovanna is a Syracuse student double majoring in architecture and art history. Although her stories are just nuggets from her personal life, she hopes they're relatable and enjoyable to others.

Mariya Volkova

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '23

Mariya Volkova is a poet and plant parent who is studying biology, history, and Spanish. She believes poetry is a means of expressing all parts of life.

Megan Wilcox

She/Her - Visual & Performing Arts '21

Megan is an acting major about to move to NYC. While at Syracuse, she's been involved with the Honors program, Buddhist Meditation Association, and vocal jazz ensembles. She also loves yoga, reading, and photography.

David Williams

He/Him - Maxwell '22

David Williams is a junior originally from Pennsylvania. He is pursuing a degree in Policy Studies, and is an active member of student organizations on campus. In his free time, you can find him having photoshoots with his friends!

Shiharu Yamashita

She/Her - Arts & Sciences '22

Shiharu is a third-year student studying psychology and music industry. In her free time, she likes to sing, go on road trips, and eat good food.