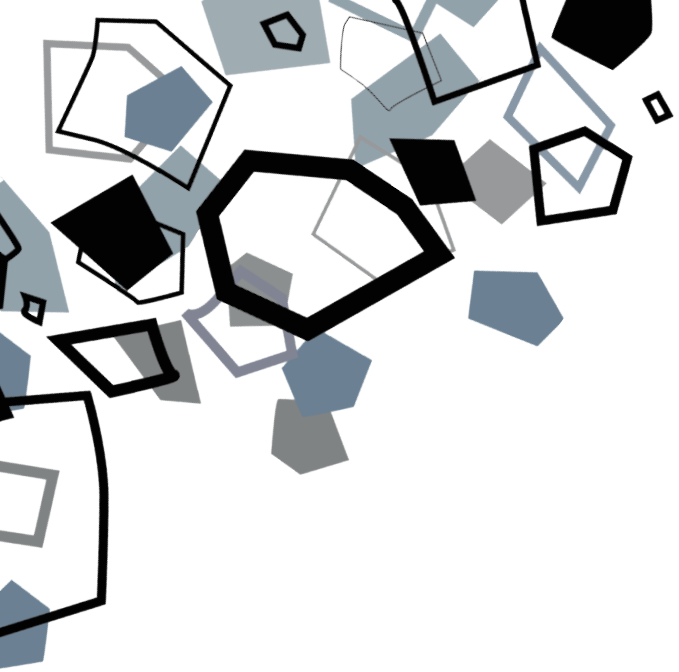


Tell Your Story Walking

A collection of creative work by the Syracuse University Honors community

2021





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

Special thanks to Dr. Danielle Taana Smith, Naomi Shanguhya, Karen Hall, and all the Renée Crown Honors Program staff for supporting this project; to all the students who shared their creative work; and to Michela Brittis-Tannenbaum for allowing her artwork to be used as the cover of this edition.

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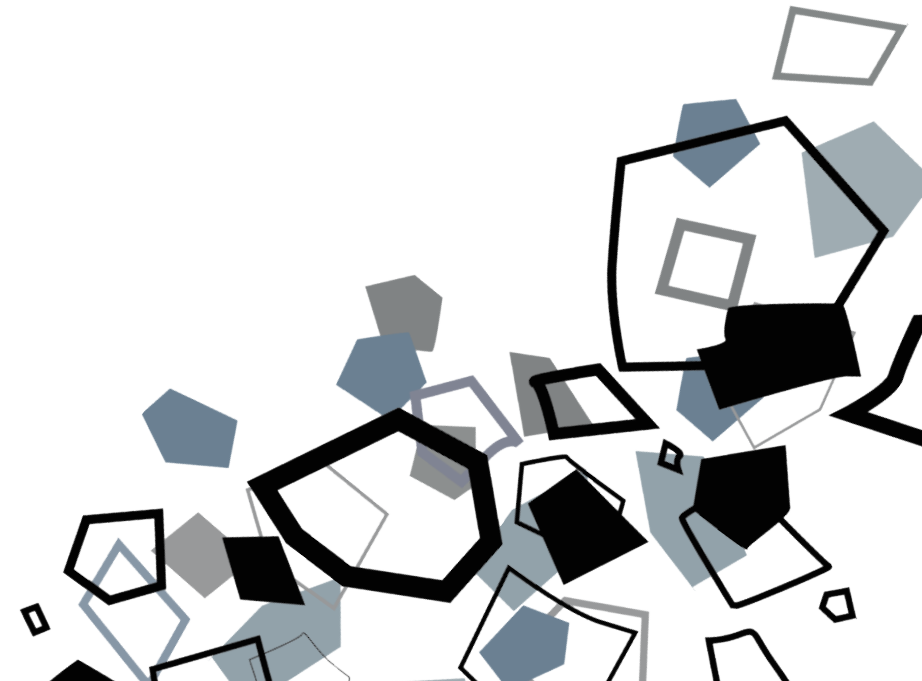
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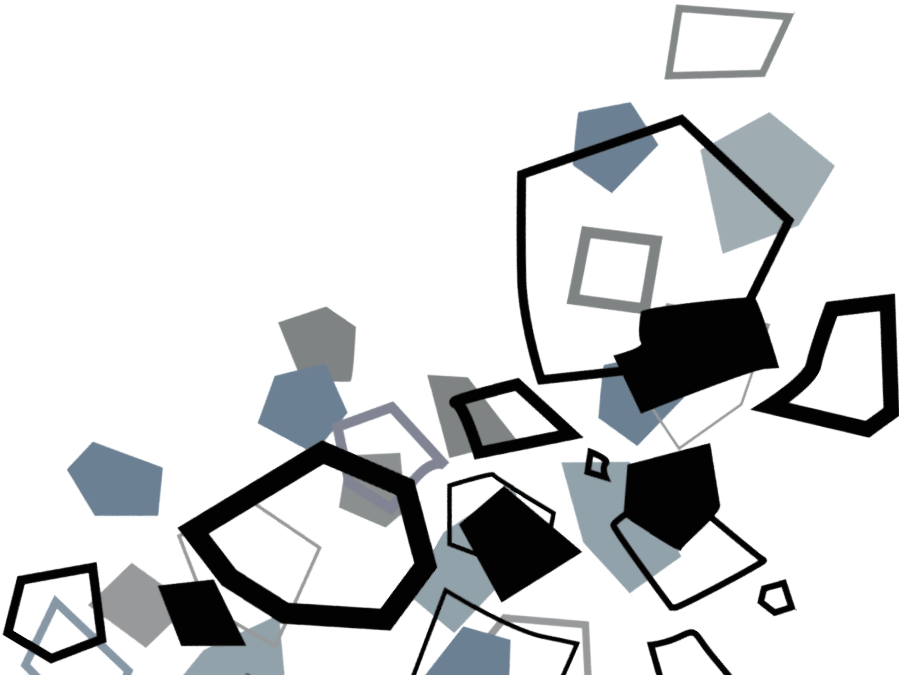
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Dear Readers,

Looking back on the past few years, one of my favorite parts of the college experience has been getting to know people who come from all different backgrounds. It's a remarkable privilege to get to learn both alongside and from people who have had experiences and challenges so wildly different from my own. In the second volume of Tell Your Story Walking, my hope is for readers to share that experience of being immersed in an abundance of stories reflecting an abundance of lives, coming from and headed in all different directions, but intersecting for a moment, here, in this anthology.

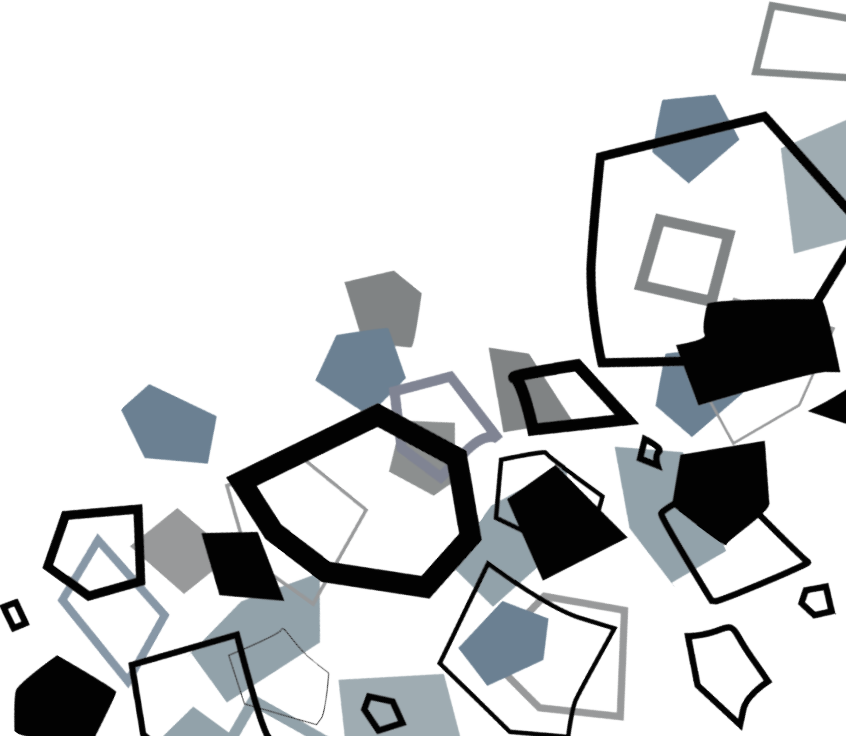
Earlier this semester, students trusted us to care for some of their most personal stories, chronicling first loves, unimaginable loss and deep generational wounds. They've also shared stories about the lighter, more humorous side of life. If stories allow you to view life from a different lens, then reading this anthology is like looking through a kaleidoscope. As you turn it, you'll see the gray skies looming over an author in the aftermath of her biological father's death, the piercing white screen of a COVID alert, and the black and red ink of signs with George Floyd's name. You'll also see jade necklaces swinging on pegs at the market in San Pablo City, the blue and green scales of a lizard's stomach, the lime icing of strawberry margarita birthday cake, and a red barn against a summer sky in Indiana.

As autumn has settled once again in Syracuse, students, faculty and staff have been cautiously settling into this new world left behind by the pandemic that still hangs over us. We've all been figuring out what shapes to make from the broken pieces we've been left with, and what this new world of ours is going to look like. This anthology is a reminder to everyone that there are still colors to be seen and voices to be heard, even after this long stretch of loneliness and loss we've endured. Just as so many of you shared your stories and art with us, we couldn't be happier to share this anthology with the world. We invite you to read it and revel in the product of all these creative minds coming together to share stories, celebrate resilience, and bask in the warmth only felt from a sun that has spent a long time stuck behind the clouds.

Kind wishes,

Kate Brennan

Kate Brennan
Managing Editor, Fall 2021



Chasing Lizards

By MOLLY MATHESON

I never knew color like that could exist in the dusty browns and greens of the Colorado foothills.

"Okay, you have to move really really slow and then really fast," my brother Quinn whispers from behind me as he peeks over the side of a boulder into the rock outcropping that he calls Lizard City. The Colorado summer sun glares off the faded orange sandstones, and I feel sweat beading down my forehead. The heat is not the only reason I am sweating, as I precariously move toward my prey.

"Go now!" Quinn shouts excitedly, jumping up behind the boulder. I pounce forward and my hands close around the little body.

I pull my hands up to my eyes and look between the spaces of my fingers, where a small desert lizard stares anxiously back at me. Two slight ridges extend behind his eyes and circle the back of his head, like a little scaly crown. Checkered squares of black, tan and brown cascade down his back and into his tail, which is longer than his whole torso.

"Quinn, look!" I screech and turn to hold up my prize.

"Wool!" he cheers. "Look at his stomach." I transfer the lizard to one hand and slowly twist it around to expose his soft underbelly. I gasp. His whole stomach is a shimmering mosaic of blue and green effervescent scales. I never knew color like that could exist in the dusty browns and greens of the Colorado foothills.

"You should go show Mom," Quinn says as he turns to make his way down the hill and back towards the house. I follow him, but now I have precious cargo. My feet follow the path that Quinn has taken me on ever since I first learned to walk. I place my weight on the rocks that I know won't slip beneath my weight, and I avoid the cactus fields that leave your shoes riddled with thorns. I am quiet as I pass the tree with a chickadee nest because I don't want to stress out the mother.

At the bottom of the hill, we cut between the trampoline and the fenced-off graves of my dad's dog Chica and my mom's cat Nikki. Before Mom and Dad got divorced, Mom used to keep the little grove planted with flowers, but now it is overgrown with weeds and fallen pine needles.

My mom sits in the scattered shade that the oak trees cast on the lawn. She looks up from the grass shears in her hands. Her newly greying strawberry hair is pulled into a ponytail held by a soft green scrunchy that conveniently matches the color of her yardwork shorts.

In ten years, her voice will sound distorted through the cell phone as she asks me how the weather in New York is. She'll tell me that her hair is really dark now because the stylist covered the grey with brown rather than her natural red, and she'll remind me that I need to call my brother more often. I'll only half listen to her, and then I will tell her about the cactus I just got and how excited I am because it smells like home.

But today, she just smiles up at me and Quinn from the green grass that she nurtures back to life every summer, and her smooth voice cuts through the thick of the heat.

"Did you guys catch one?"



Snapshots of 2021

My "Little" Older Brother

I am 20 years old and I am my 25-year-old brother's "older" sister. I cook him breakfast, lunch, and dinner, help him get dressed, assist him in brushing his teeth, and put on the TV shows he wants to watch—even if it means watching the same *Spongebob* episode for the hundredth time. As I stand in the kitchen calling his name to tell him dinner's ready, I look forward to hearing his twisted tongue exclaiming, "Oh! Tenk you Jenna!" In that moment that he thanks me, all my worries wash away. The assignment due at midnight that I am stressed about leaves my mind for a second. The pots and pans I have to wash after cooking his food don't seem like such a hassle anymore. The hundreds of times he knocks on my door to play don't seem to bother me anymore. He makes everything worth it. Even though he is older in age, I see him as my little brother who I want to take care of and protect at all costs. His differences and little quirks make him so extraordinary, and I love every little thing that makes him unique. My "little" older brother was born with a gift: an extra chromosome.

— Jenna Lee

COVID Communion

By TARA SANDLIN

The Body and the Blood have been different recently.

Body that became Bread becomes Birthday Cake becomes Cereal becomes Brownies.

Blood that became Wine becomes Green Tea becomes Milk becomes Diluted Sertraline Concentrate.

But it's not the first time.

Was the Nile turned to Blood? Was Water turned to Wine? Did Water and Blood gush from Christ's side? Is God not called Living Water?

Everything that is, is everything that is.

How did Bread and Wine come to represent Christ anyhow? Well, it says so in a Book, but why is that what the people in the story ate and drank? Maybe because it was there. Maybe because the everyday is holy. Maybe it always has been.



Maybe my pantry Eucharist isn't sacrilege. Maybe it's the living and active Word.

Strawberry margarita birthday cake with whipped cream lime icing reminds me of what it means to be born, to be born again, to be born each day, to be life. The salt on the Triscuit reminds me to be the salt of the Earth. Honeycomb cereal recalls creation, pollinators, the world that bears the image of Divinity. Stale brownies exemplify God the Rock.

Pondering Green Tea reminds me that I am drinking leaf juice, that this beverage is inherently communal, there is a union here, just like the union between Divine and Human that we all have the ability to access within us. Milk stirs up memories of Bible passages about Mothering God and her nursing. The water in which I've stirred my medication makes me ponder that good ol' fourth grade concept of the water cycle, the idea that all the water on the earth is all the water that's ever been, and this connects me to faith stories of baptisms and flooding and parted seas because I just drank that very same water. And the drug itself... Well, it's a reminder that I'm diagnosed with PTSD, sure, but thinking about that diagnosis makes me think of haunting echoes, and I have appreciation for the haunting echoes of inspiration that I find throughout that Holy Book whenever it's not driving me bonkers.

It's almost like the whole Christ thing, the entire Movement of Rebirth, is all about pulling away from tradition and finding holiness in everyday acts of nourishment.

Maybe it makes me a heretic.

But I don't mind.

Because even though it sometimes felt like hell, my 9:59 dash through the kitchen for some Elements brought me closer to heaven. Or, no, scratch that, it helped me see that heaven was always there. In my fridge and cabinets.

And in the depths of absence,

I found Real Presence.



Essential

Snapshots of 2021

Retail. A job synonymous with exploitation. A weekly slog of penny-pinching that we—my fellow cashiers and I—had endured for years on end. I was the lucky one. Still in high school, I had opportunity. Surrounding me each day were many who didn't. Mothers and fathers stuck in a dead-end job stood aside failed entrepreneurs and corporate layoffs. The reality of working retail indefinitely left most of my coworkers in a state of permanent dejection.

Until the world collapsed.

Then, out of nowhere, we were celebrated. Our heroism and bravery were worshipped on national news all over the country. We had become essential.

But had we? Most of us just proceeded as normal. We were the same exploited workers, doing the same mundane jobs, without any additional reward. It didn't take long for us to see through the masquerade of praise. Even in a literal crisis, we were nothing more than PR pawns for the higher-ups of America. There was still no respect.

But I respected them. I respected them far more than any white-collar executive, because my coworkers had created a new definition of resiliency — one that will always make their roles essential to me.

— Philip Lockitt

The Bubble Pops

By ANIKA CARLSON

I live in a little bubble of strangers who all say hello to each other in the street and put up signs of acceptance and love in their yards.

"Unfortunately, since you guys won't stop talking, you have to have silent recess time," Mrs. Moriarty says. She's a feared second-grade teacher, but in a roundabout way. I like her. Even though she's petite and bordering elderly, she commands respect. The truth is she has a bit of a soft spot, but she sure does not mess around. Her colorful patterned skirt billows in the wind.

I sit gingerly on the wood planks, afraid of getting a splinter on the back of my legs. I lean forward uncomfortably, as I can't lean back on my hands behind me because of the dirt. Everyone around me is doing the same, sitting quietly abashed.

Lydia lays her head on her knees, her face turned towards me. Her brown hair hides her face from Mrs. Moriarty. Underneath her breath, she murmurs, "This is so unfair." I agree with her, but I can't say a word. Mrs. Moriarty is facing me with her eagle eyes. Instead, I just make meaningful eye contact and nod. My eyes then flick over to a couple of people who were being unruly in the first place and now, consequently, all of us had to suffer. I know them inside and out, which is the only way I know people in our small town.

All the other classes are gleefully shouting and running around in the sun. I can hear the balls bounce behind me on the four-square courts. There is something about the air that is inherently fresh. The warmth of the day would just start to make your skin prickle with sweat if it weren't for the cool breeze causing the canopy of bright green leaves to sway. I am supremely jealous of the freedom the other kids have. I look up at the three trees above us and analyze their buds growing. I notice their tiny white flowers littered on the ground by my feet on the asphalt, and I pick their petals off with my nails.

Years later, we pass by that same elementary school. The sun hides behind some clouds at the end of the day. My shoes scuff the sidewalks as our voices all clamor over each other. We walk down Lake Street in an intimidating pack of middle school children.

In our ten-minute walk, we pass the post office, the chocolate shop, the police station, the baseball fields. We walk past strangers who aren't really strangers, as everyone is connected here in this bubble. And if we chose to walk down a side street, any side street, we could probably name almost all the people that live there.

The bell jingles as we walk into Frank's Deli. It's nothing special - the tile is generic and it's slightly dingy. You can hear the buzz of the air conditioning persistently. The same family owns and works at the neighboring pizza place, Bertolli's. This is where we always get pizza: it's the kind that is so greasy, but it sits satisfyingly in your stomach. Inside Frank's, we browse the aisles full of candy, ice cream, and bubble gum.

"Will this be all?" asks the cashier, the same man we see every time. We nod and hand him an assortment of bills and change.

Outside, Keystone Field sprawls before us, sandwiched between Lake Street and the Metra train tracks that head into the city. By the depot building, there's a playground with a structure shaped like a train. We clamber onto the top, leaving our backpacks on the ground, and eat our bounty.

Even later, I pass by that same park on the ride home as a high school student. It's bitterly cold outside. All the trees stand stark in the wind without their leaves. I turn to Lydia in the car. It's a worn Subaru, but it is exponentially better than her last car which quite literally up and died on her. This car is dependable, like her.

"What the fuck was that?" I ask in disgust, knowing there is no response. These past months have been so racially charged with the docu-series of "America to Me" coming out and exposing the racial inequity built into our school system. Today was a tipping point when they found graffiti calling a faculty member a racist slur on the tennis shed outside.

Both Lydia and I are at a loss for what this means in the grand scheme of things. I pick at my seat belt contemplatively. I still think I know everyone in this town. The bubble quivers.

The next day we drive up North Boulevard to school early in the morning. The Chicago skyline is a slate grey cutout against the sky in the near distance. With how short the days are in winter, sunrise was only an hour or so ago and the day feels new. I am expecting something different.

Instead, there are recurring hate crimes that entire week. It is becoming truly unbearable. Rumors spring up of someone bringing a gun to school. I look up from my phone at lunch with my heart clenching in terror, hands shaking, and realize I do not know where I am. I have been going to school here for four years. I get up and walk out the door of the room into the hallway, where I still cannot recognize my surroundings. It is dead silent. No one is milling about.

There is an air of uncertainty and uneasiness laid thick everywhere. My disassociation makes me want to sob.

I live in a little bubble of strangers who all say hello to each other in the street and put up signs of acceptance and love in their yards. They tout on their websites how inclusive the bubble is, how welcoming it is. And yet, there are children raised in the bubble that think it's okay to publicly share swastikas in the middle of an assembly, to scribble racist slander about faculty on walls, to write "white power" all over their school that prides itself on diversity.

The bubble pops.

Snapshots of 2021

George Floyd

In the June heat, we march the quiet streets of southern Maryland. Despite the masks muffling our chant, his name echoes around the block. We raise clenched fists and paper signs with black and red ink, one with a list of names. I recognize about half of them.

Police are stationed along the side of our route, stiff-shouldered shepherds standing in silent solidarity. The county sheriff is there, taking photos with some of the protestors. We finish our first round without incident.

Into the second loop, the police form a barricade. "The license to protest expired," the sheriff says. "Move to the side-walk."

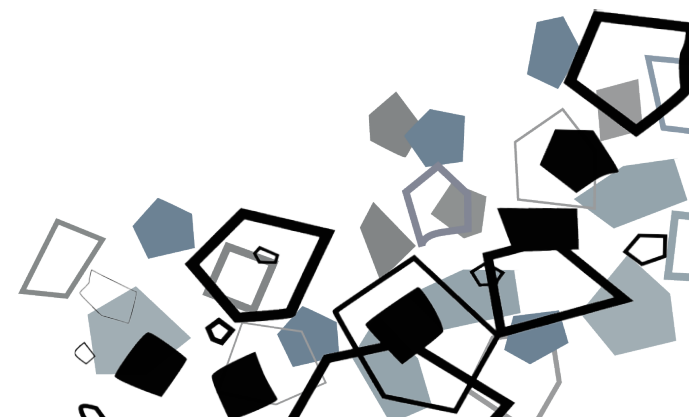
The event coordinator is trying to reason with him. Meanwhile, a SWAT team arrives in full gear, aiming their tear gas launchers at the crowd. We kneel in indignant vulnerability, staring solemnly through their clear shields.

To my right, protestors are shuffling to the sidewalk, signs hanging at their sides, shouting, "Keep the peace!"

To my left, the others are standing their ground, crying out, "No justice, no peace!"

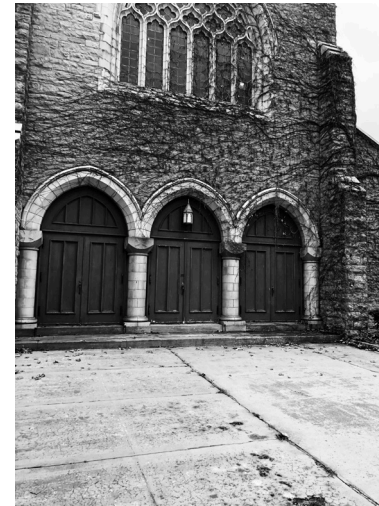
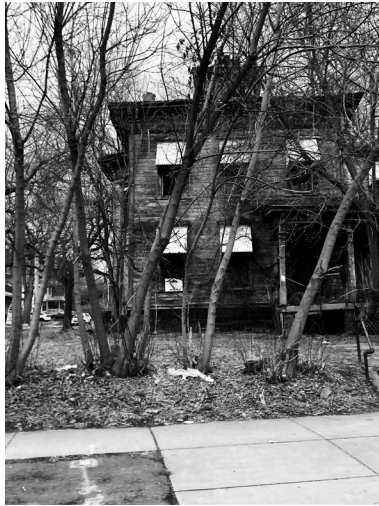
When the first shot is fired, we all scatter.

— Alaina Triantafilledes



The Syracuse You Speak Of Does Not Exist

By MAGGIE SARDINO



"The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."
—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Gray Skies Cry with Me

By EVELINA TORRES

I felt arms surround me as the feeling of emptiness grew.

Today God mourned with me, before I knew I was going to mourn.

Thunder and rumbles woke me up, but it wasn't a bother, rather a comfort. I couldn't fall asleep last night as something kept me awake. I would not yet know. I woke up with peace.

My parents called me to come to the office. I walked in the room smiling. They did not greet me. They told me to sit down. They kept still and silent. My mom was tense. She said she didn't want me to cry. Oh God don't let it be what I think it is, it can't be. My stepdad's eyes stayed on the ground. "You tell her" my mom croaked. I think it is.

This morning rain pelted down from the gray, dreary skies, blurring the window's view. I watched as the disfigured trees were wrenched back and forth by the wind. I heard the trees creak as my mom teared up. I heard the wind swallow my cry as the words "Paul is dead" lay splayed on the ground. Shock numbed me to think that my own biological father died. Last night? I collapsed into my chair. Scalding tears poured down my face, the frog in my throat raged, causing me indescribable pain. My parents drizzled "we love you"s and "it'll be okay"s on my head. At some point my screams and weeps and guttural bawls matched the decibel of the wind. I felt arms surround me as the feeling of emptiness grew.

Today God mourned with me.

The weather did not leave me. It surrounded my bouts of grief. My body stayed laid down on the couch that day, exhaustion filled my soul. The television was on, but I could not hear it. The only noise was the beating rain and my thoughts of hopelessness.

My eyelids would blink. My head would turn to acknowledge voices. My legs eventually took me downstairs for dinner, knowing better than me to just lay on the couch for eternity.

As my arms lifted the fork, and my jaw chewed the food, my eyes stayed steady on the sunset that cracked through the dark clouds. I did not notice my tears falling on my plate. I barely felt my grandmother's hand wipe some away from my cheek. I found myself once more laid down, unaware of how I returned, too busy with trying to solve God's greatest puzzle.

My comfort is only brought that his death was quick, and he suffers no more. If there ever is a more. How could there be "a more" when He ripped Paul from my life now?

There's things I wished I never held back. Even though it has been years since I've uttered the simple phrase, I pray one day maybe, just maybe, Paul will know I love him.

Today God mourned with me. Or did He mock me? How cruel it is that my two greatest fears combined into one: dying from a car and never seeing my biological father again. How is it that I had told every single person I could of how excited I was to talk to him again on my 18th, and now he's gone? How is it that I believed I had time to catch up, time to rebuild a nonexistent relationship? There is—was—plenty of time, he was only 39. And he's gone now? He's gone without a goodbye? He's gone without hearing his "I love you too"? He's gone without seeing his eldest daughter graduate high school? He's gone without seeing his eldest get into college? He's gone—

The next day, as the lowly clouds drifted away, as the wind released the trees from its wrath, as the rain stopped abusing the earth, I was alone. The silence was piercing.

I was alone when my family gave me flowers, when my friends gave me sympathy cards, when the clock struck midnight and our glasses made a toast.

I was alone when I learned he was homeless, that he would not receive a burial, that he died because of blunt force trauma, that it was time to claim insurance. As it has now been almost a year, I continue to mourn. It runs as TV static on the back of my brain. I remember as the skies turn grey again, during the inconspicuous ring of the house phone, when I play my favorite Houston rap songs (which were his favorite too).

While my tears have come to a mere drip and the frog in my throat is sated, the rage in the questions of how and why still burns in my soul and every passing day without an answer adds kerotin to the flame. I am branded by a death that came too soon, an unsatisfactory solution to a broken relationship. I am insulted by my own social activism to help repair a broken system, which unbeknownst to me held him down, while I could not help him.

I pray that he has now found the peace that I so desire. I hope that there is a future for our broken relationship as daughter and father. I hope that it is as sweet as the cotton candy he bought me when I was three years old at the Houston rodeo, as wonderful as the rides we went on together, and as everlasting as one of the few photos I have of him of us on that day at the fair.

The world keeps moving no matter how much I would like it to stop, but maybe it's a good thing that the flowers continue to bloom, that the sun continues to rise, that I continue to walk through life as it comes.

A Little Longer This Year

By KATE BRENNAN

In my head, Poppy is still alive. He's young and he's ice skating.



Dinner at Nana and Poppy's house was like watching an athletic bickering match. Nana would make fun of Poppy's bad hearing, he'd make fun of her poor eyesight, and she'd fire another shot his way because he hadn't heard the first one. They loved each other for sixty years, and insults were just their way of expressing it. She always called a truce by saying, "I'm his ears, he's my eyes."

One time, Poppy told a story about a business trip from back when he worked for the record label.

He met Lita Ford in London and she signed a picture for him, writing: "Jim, thanks for showing me a good time" with hearts, x's and o's. He was so worried that if his plane went down on the journey home, his luggage would be recovered from the wreck and Nana would see the picture, forever thinking that he had an affair with Lita.

So he wrote a note explaining that it was only a joke and stuck it to the photo before putting it in his suitcase.

Nana, whose shoulders barely came above the tabletop, rolled her eyes.

"Oh, like you could get Lita Ford."

* * * * *

Amanda and I have been going outside every forty-five minutes to drink from the whiskey bottle we hid in the trunk. Our uncle is in the bathroom cheating on our aunt with his golf partner. Ed Eastmond is patting Dad's shoulder and slipping a joint in his pocket. My family sucks at funerals.

In my head, Poppy is still alive. He's young and he's ice skating. Dad and his siblings first got him to try skating when they were kids back in the seventies, and he liked it so much that Nana bought him his own pair of skates.

I feel her absence too. Aunt Claire and Uncle Jim had to tell her they were going to a wedding when she asked why they were dressed up. She asked if Poppy was going too. They said he was at a doctor's appointment.

The parking lot is cold and the whiskey burns. Winter is lingering a little longer this year, or maybe it just seems that way.

I close my eyes and I see Poppy gliding across the pond on winter mornings, his ice skate blades zipping like airplanes over the fish who swim below, patiently waiting for spring.

* * * * *

I was just about to leave the hospital when Nana asked if I could get Poppy on the phone. I stood up, pretended to dial on my phone, and held it to my ear as she looked on, twisting her oxygen cord around her pointer finger like a ribbon.

"He didn't answer," I said. "But don't worry, he's just at the store with my dad."

Before leaving, I pulled her thin, white blanket up over her shoulders. A full moon shone through the window, making her face look like a grey jetty rock submerged in seawater. "Poppy will probably be here later," she said. "He visits me around this time every night."

She smiled and squeezed my hand. Then she closed her eyes.

I took a look around the small, dark room and wondered how it happened that she ended up here. I looked at her tiny fingers intertwined with each other, and the long shadow her bed cast on the bone-colored linoleum. Then I turned around and left.

Dumpling Recipe

By RACHEL LIN

I was conflicted about determining which dominates more—my Chinese roots or the American culture I grew up in.

The aroma of sizzling pork belly and sesame oil enter my nose, waking me before my alarm clock. Stumbling into the kitchen, I find my grandma reaching over a large silver bowl, mixing the seasoned pork with freshly grown chives, sesame oil, and crushed ginger. Today is the day. It's my favorite time of the year: Chinese New Year.

Every year, the dinner table is filled with traditionally made dishes, such as jiaozi. Jiaozi are dumplings most commonly eaten during festivals and are considered a part of traditional Chinese cuisine. Every year, my grandma would insist that I make them, and every time I would fail. What comes naturally for a Chinese native was foreign to my hands. My hands were incapable of rolling the dough into the perfect shape. Just like rolling the dough, I was conflicted about determining which dominates more—my Chinese roots or the American culture I grew up in.

Carefully, I follow the steps of my grandmother's jiaozi recipe.

Step one: make the dough.

Hesitant at first, I grab the bag of glutinous flour and pour it into a large bowl. As I empty the flour bag, my mind wanders. I can't help but think about how much the flour bag resembles my arduous journey to America. Even though I was born in America, I grew up in China with my family. Bringing my culture and traditions to one of the largest mixing bowls in the world, the United States...an experience, to say the least. Continuing to follow my grandma's recipe, I gradually add water to the flour and knead it until it is smooth. Assimilating into American culture and its way of life was not easy for my family and me. I struggled at first with what felt like two identities trying to merge into one but found ways to manage it. My parents weren't fluent in English, so I had to teach myself the language through watching shows like *Blue's Clues* and *Sesame Street*. Little by little, the water is absorbed by the dough, and American culture embeds itself within me alongside my Chinese roots.

Step two: roll the dough into a spherical shape.

Grabbing small amounts of the dough, I begin rolling it into a perfect sphere and flattening the dough between my hands, shaping it into the ideal jiaozi wrapper. Similar to how I have a predetermined idea of how I want the wrapper to turn out, I tend to reflect on how I want my future to turn out. No matter how much effort I put into making the ideal wrapper, the wrapper tears. Like the tears and rips the wrapper faces, I find myself facing these obstacles as well. My parents always worked hard to financially support our family. Continuously working long hours, my parents were never home to spend time with me. As a child of immigrant parents, I had to learn to take responsibility for myself and my family at a very young age. I have been my parents' right hand at our family restaurant, working late nights alongside my parents, having less time to study and do homework. However, I have learned not to let these circumstances bring me down.

Step three: fill the dumplings with filling.

I grab a pair of chopsticks and add the filling to the wrappers. I fold the edges of the wrapper together to seal the jiaozi. As I close the dumplings, I watch the doors of my high school coming to a close. All these years filled with hard work, finally making the dumpling full. My parents continuously pushed me to strive for the best and value education as they were not given the chances that are given to me. I have learned to take all the opportunities and put effort into everything I do. While my friends would go out to have playdates, I would spend countless hours studying from a high-level workbook while I was only in first grade. Despite that, I never let situations keep me from pursuing my goals. I was not only making the jiaozi for the lunar celebration, but I was shaping the jiaozi into how I want my life to be shaped. Will I be the jiaozi that looks like every other one? Or will I be the jiaozi that is specially made and distinctly shaped?

Regardless of all my failed attempts of making jiaozi, I have discovered not only the key ingredient of making dumplings but the ultimate ingredient to life: determination. If making dumplings has taught me anything, it is that it's not about the shape of the dumplings that are important but the taste.

Finally, don't forget, enjoy!



Nothing Behind Me, Everything Ahead of Me

By AQUINNAH CROSBY

Omega, Viizy, and I, with nothing to do this summer, decided to go on the road. In my '65 Barracuda we drove throughout New England exploring whatever we could find.



Lola

By TESSA PULGAR

How could someone I look so similar to be so different from me?

The market in San Pablo City is an overwhelming collection of vibrant odors, colors, and vendors shouting deals in Tagalog across their stalls to the passerby. Every few moments, my cousin Lana and I stop in awe. There are tilapia flopping out of their tin buckets, jade necklaces swinging haphazardly on wooden pegs, and fruits I cannot name laying out in vivid spreads. I remember my dad telling me that the market was my grandfather's, or my Lolo's, favorite place to go in the mornings. The chaos is comforting in the sense that for a second, I forget the reason why we are in the Philippines.

The further we walk through the narrow aisles, I'm reminded of the shipping ports in the adventure novels I used to read. We watch as several men, their clothes and skin weathered from the sun, heave a roasted pig over their shoulders. One of them with smiling eyes winks at us and jokes *Ano ang tinitignan mo?* as they pass under the next tent. What are you looking at?

Amidst it all is Lola, my grandmother. She strides confidently ahead of us, sunglasses on, eyes trained forward and unfazed by the din of the crowd. In the current of people moving around her, eyes follow her. She wears a 1960s shawl draped around her wavy hair, a burgundy sundress, and heels that click on the stones slick with God knows what. If we were in one of my novels, she would undoubtedly be a queen undercover, making rounds in her kingdom.

In some ways, I guess she is royalty. She owns the only hotel in the city and her father was the first person to put tilapia in the lake, the main fish eaten in the area.

She notices the same man with smiling eyes. She gestures at the pig and greets the man as if they're acquainted. I struggle to understand my mother tongue as words and laughter snap between them, dancing in the air. Lana notices and nudges me as she translates.

How much?

5,000 pesos.

With a pig that skinny?

The man laughs and gestures to the stern woman standing behind him, clearly the one in charge. They go back and forth so quickly that Lana can no longer keep up.

Lola is fierce, when she wants to be. Lana and I watch nervously. Her tone changes, any semblance of joking long gone, as she haggles more seriously, finally settling on a price of 2,000 pesos — around 40 US dollars. The men hoist the pig once more, wrapping it and putting it on their truck to bring to Lola's hotel at night.

Salamat po. She says curtly. Thank you.

Before we leave, she lets us each pick one thing from an old lady sitting at the edge of the market on a red blanket. Lana chooses a bracelet and I choose a children's book in Tagalog. When I see Lola shoot me a look, however, I opt instead for a bag of vivid, reddish-pink rambutan fruit. The old woman cuts one open for me, her eyes crinkling at the corners. *She looks like you*, she says.

I understand because it's something that has been repeated to me in Tagalog before. Lola looks over to me, as I struggle to wipe the rambutan juice oozing down my chin, and laughs. I stare at the ground in embarrassment.

Before they retired back to the Philippines, I used to visit Lolo and Lola's home in Staten Island every weekend. 32 Ladd Ave.

Everything about the house, from the red carpet to the disco ball, modest for Lola's standards, screamed: "Look at me!"

And for good reason. Lola threw parties fairly frequently. All of my Titos and Titas would stream in, characteristically, an hour after the party was scheduled to start. While I referred to all of them as uncles and aunts, to this day I have no idea how many of the people at those parties were my blood relatives. I would stand by the door, greeting them, as they smothered me in embraces and pinched my cheeks. *Kamukha mo siya!* You look so similar. She looks like you.

I would stand awkwardly, smiling as Lola proudly passed on my praises to them.

She could be a flight attendant, ano?

She'd beam, while my dad would grumble, *Mom, she's not going to do that.*

If Lana and my other cousins weren't there, I'd find a corner and curl up to read one of my books.

One time, when I was around nine years old, Lola found me behind the bed in the guest room, immersed in the third Narnia book. The confusion I know too well crossed her face again, as she urged me to go downstairs. She didn't understand books, and in her world, social anxiety was as mythical as the ghost stories from her childhood. *Ay nako. Stop being so antisocial.*

She scolded me when I cried.

It was always Lolo, who would rescue me from my purgatory at the table, chomping glumly on the leftover egg rolls. He'd creep behind me, serenading me with a Frank Sinatra song and sit, cracking jokes until I couldn't stop smiling even after he left. He was always happy when I laughed at his impressions, even though he could never fully copy Morgan Freeman with his thick Filipino accent. When I cried, he would sit with me in a peaceful quiet.

Lolo collected stories. I knew about everything from his childhood to the winning shots he made at his basketball game his senior year of high school.

When he told Lana and me stories of the Aswang, a vampire from Filipino mythology, we were intrigued. The vampire looked like a human during the day, and at night, its top half would fly away in search of victims. He told us about how butterflies were the ghosts of ancestors and loved ones, coming back to visit us. After these stories, my cousins and I would sit in the dark during our sleepovers, giggling and screaming at the slightest noise in the living room.

I remember after two weekends of this, Lola scoffed, *Why are you filling their heads with nonsense?*

I talked back once, innocently, but enough to warrant Lola's wrath.

Why are you always so mean?

Her eyes widened. A sign of the coming storm. Talking back to elders is something that is never tolerated.

Lana wasn't even part of the argument, but we both threw our heads back and ugly cried for an hour. Lola continued to berate us, chastising me on anything from my frizzy hair to my shyness. It was always Lolo who calmed her down. He'd whisper her nickname. She'd simmer down and reluctantly take us to Toys R Us. As cliché as it was, they were the perfect opposites. Even then, I began to wonder: How could someone I look so similar to be so different from me? As a child, I secretly hoped that I was more like Lolo. I didn't want to be the fury and the gale that was Lola, regardless of how beautiful and strong I could be if I emulated her.

As we zip through San Pablo on a tricycle taxi, her shawl remains snug around her shoulders, containing every stray hair. Back at the hotel, the staff is already preparing for the final day of Lolo's wake.

For seven days Lola has halted business, and people have been coming in and out of the sunroom where Lolo's casket is. For all seven days, the body is not allowed to be alone, so there is someone with him all twenty-four hours of the day. Sometimes, his friends will catch up with each other and play cards. Sometimes, people will sing songs. I think Lolo would've liked to see it — all the people reuniting and dancing.

When Lana and I finally go inside, she is still moving between the sunroom where the vigil is being held and the hotel. She directs the men, who have just arrived with the *lechon*, the roasted pig, to place it on the table in the hotel.

When the final night of the vigil approaches, everyone is in the room. All of Lolo's friends and family. I see relatives from Calauag, the seaside village where he proudly scored the final point for the basketball team in high school. I see his coworkers from the mill. I even see the mayor of San Pablo City along with ex-convicts Lolo sent care packages to.

As people go around the circle telling their final stories about Lolo, Lola stands up.

I'd like to say something.

We were both twenty, in the heart of Manila, she speaks, her voice shaking as she pushes her hair out of her face, damp with the humidity.

I met him at the church. He had only gone to service once. But once we met each other, he would keep going to church to talk to me on Sundays. He started courting me after.

She went on to talk about his humor and his stories. The way she had been a quiet girl in San Pablo, who kept herself busy by organizing things and building. The way he brought *puto* home from Brooklyn every time he came home from his accounting job. The way he'd make pancakes and coffee, singing good morning in his vibrato.

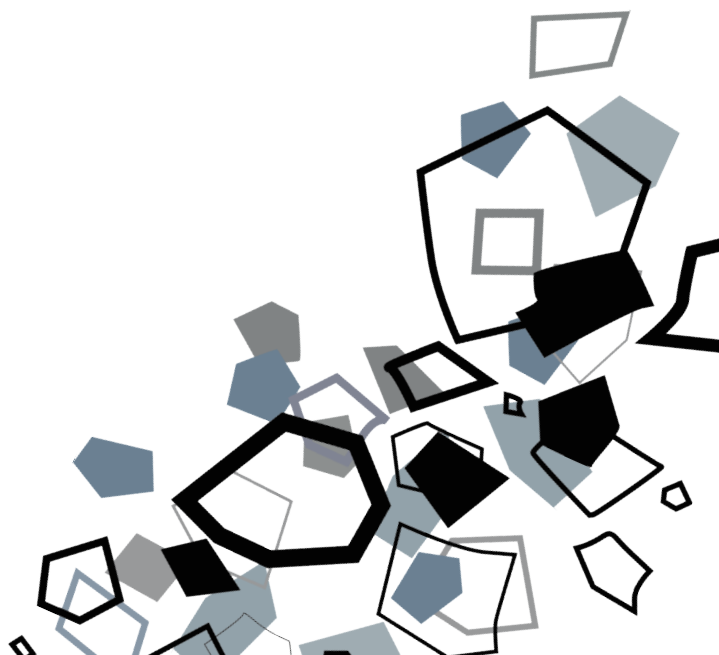
The surges of memories hit me. The processing I had been trying to distract myself from takes hold and releases something inside me. Lana and I stand shocked as we watch Lola's strong facade crumble. She looks small and delicate in front of the crowd.

She searches the room as if looking for something and not finding it. Her eyes settle on my cousins and me. We stand up and hug her for a long time, storming together, all the rain, clouds, stories, and memories.

When everyone leaves, and it's just us in the room preparing to sleep on the floor for the final night of the vigil, a white butterfly floats in the room. It lands on a frond above Lola's head.

Lola, look!

I think that's him. She looks up and smiles the biggest smile I've seen since Lolo was alive. We all lay on the floor staring at the stars through the sunroom roof, holding each other to fall asleep. The butterfly stays on the plant the whole night in a peaceful quiet. I fall asleep, with the realization that Lola and I are not as different as I thought.



A Timeline of COVID-19: From a Skeptic to Catching It

By SAMMY LINDELL

Snapshots of 2021

Disappearing Toilet Paper

"This is so ridiculous," my dad starts, "Why the hell is your mom such a freak sometimes?" he questions as we stand side by side in the CVS aisle.

"More importantly, why is this shit all sold out?" I reply.

My eyes are switching between scanning the shelves for hand sanitizer and looking down at my phone to the text message my mom sent: "Bring home as much hand sanitizer as you can find. This virus is about to hit us."

"Eh, what can we do...she's a nurse...of course she's going to be paranoid," my dad remarks.

After a long weekend of ski racing at Easterns, my dad and I stroll through CVS, looking for anything that might resemble a disinfectant. We have been disconnected from civilization for five days and this happens? A virus? We were just at a ski race with thirteen states. There's no virus?!

"Would you look at that, all the toilet paper is gone!" my dad exclaims.

Snapshots of 2021

The Longest Half-Hour

My vision blurs as a tear slowly falls down my cheek. I am supposed to go home in two days, but it doesn't look that way anymore. Home to my boyfriend who paid extra money to fly home from college early to see me...I haven't seen him in 100 days. Home to my mom's cooking and my dad's piano playing. Home to my sisters coming in my room to tell me the latest high school gossip or to steal my lipstick.

My palms are now moist with the anxiety that my body is releasing, and my heartbeat is louder than the commotion around me in the test results waiting area. I already know what the result is. A dull yet persistent pain surges through my body...starting at my toes and pulsing its way to the top of my head. I have heard from my friends that getting sick like this is not that bad, but maybe I won the gene lottery...In a bad way... I gasp each time a nurse walks by, as they said my results would only take 30 minutes; it has been 45.

The nurse taking care of me approaches my cubicle with the doctor behind her.

"I'm sorry, Samantha..." she starts.

Snapshots of 2021

Wishing I Could Smell Home

As I stand in the shower, I shove my nose deeper and deeper into the extra-large sweet pea body wash from Bath and Body Works. Expecting to instantly get a rush of serotonin paired with a sweet symphony dancing in my nose, I am met with anosmia.

I turn off the shower and run down the hallway to my room, where I pull out every possible liquid, tear off the caps, and sniff into the bottles.

Hot sauce? No, but my nose tingles.

Perfume? No, nothing at all.

I don't believe this is happening, so I spray my perfume onto my pillow and bury my face more and more. Still, I smell absolutely nothing.

Hand sanitizer has got to work, I think. I take a deep inhale inside the bottle, and the ethanol immediately begins to sting. It pricks the sides of my nose, like thumb tacks being pressed into the walls.

I lie back, feeling defeated. I twitch my nose like a bunny rabbit. It still hurts. I pull out my phone, send a selfie to my family group chat with the caption: "I'm officially nose blind." I don't forget to add the thumbs-up emoji at the end, though. On the outside, I don't want to worry my mom or scare my dad. They had already sent out a care package for me the previous day to remind me of home. On the inside, I feel diseased. Guilty. I'm longing for home.

Lunch Hour

By SOPHIA MOORE

You and me and your first BBQ chicken pizza.

I remember the sweat on my palms as I shook, concealing my phone in my backpack. I had never broken school rules like that. I remember how slowly the menu loaded and how frantically I looked from screen to screen. Sr. Reyes was teaching us about the subjunctive; I just wanted to order my damn pizza. I remember thinking that Sr. Reyes caught me fiddling on my phone, but he said nothing. His eyes kept my secret. I know the bell rang, but I don't remember hearing it.

Lunch Hour.

I remember how I had never had a real first date like this, how confusing my relationship with J was. Were we? Weren't we? I remember wanting to know what we were. I remember feeling so stupid. So *seventeen!* Gangly and terrible and the oldest I had ever been. Then I remember seeing him standing, hands thrust deep in his hoodie pockets waiting for someone to arrive. He was shy, nervous. He ran his hands through his hair, scanning the crowd departing for lunch hour. I remember meeting him with a smile, and I remember the way his legs carried him effortlessly towards the pizza parlor when the conversation would not. I remember struggling for words, stressing how *busy* or *interesting* my life was, desperate to prove my worth to him. My tongue got in the way. So *seventeen!* I remember looking up at him, at his freckles, and wondering what he was thinking.

Pizza Parlor: You.

He remembered holding the door open for her, the warmth of the parlor alleviating the brisk December day. Southern California had never looked so gloomy, she had never looked so flushed? Why was she wearing that coat? He remembered her shaking hands and the way she gripped her pink wallet. She insisted on paying for him, rambling about being able to carry her weight because he was paying for movie tickets after all. He remembered smiling at her absurdity, her frizzy hair and overwhelming trench coat, why was she wearing that coat?! He remembered sitting at the counter. She was so close. Eye contact.

The Walk Back: Me.

I remember the walk back to school, with the pizza box in his right hand and the left hanging loose at his side. (*Should I hold the box? His hand? Would I be able to take the leftovers home?*) The pizza box would become remnants of where we had been. His left hand would become my favorite to hold. I remember coming so close to his face, so near to the warmth of his breath, red onions maintaining their hold on his tongue. I remember wondering why it was the barbecue chicken pizza that I chose, was that selfish of me? He said I could pick, but what if he didn't like cilantro? As I panicked next to him, silently, I wondered: Would we have been closer to kissing if I picked the pepperoni?

Our First BBQ Chicken Pizza.

I remember feeling so young. Perhaps the youngest I'd ever be. I remember loving the way his arm pushed up against mine, and the contentedness of his easy conversation about Rhode Island and *How I Met Your Mother* and squirrels. I remember loving the way I had to look up at him, letting my serious resting gaze slip as I tilted my face skyward, so vulnerable to someone I hardly knew. I felt different with him, and I liked it. I remember thinking that I was in love with him, and if not now, eventually.

Something Dark

By ALAINA TRIANTAFILLEDES

Apparently, Rosie finds something 'off' about me.

Sarah is in the passenger seat of my busted 2008 Subaru Forester—busted as in the tires squeal when I make sharp turns, and there is a dent in the back left bumper from when I backed into a brick pillar at the movie theater. Nothing serious. Her hand is surfing the wind and we're talking about her mom, who I know to be a homely woman named Rosie, always with a wine glass in hand, only ever speaking in sweet melody or venomous critique. Apparently, Rosie finds something "off" about me. I laugh, but Sarah doesn't.

What is it about me, I wonder from the driver's seat.

The metal stud in my nose, perhaps, or the holes in my jeans. Or because when I pick her up, I wait in the driveway, parked in the grass next to her dad's truck and the lawnmower. I stroke her cat's matted ginger fur until she comes out, and her little sister, Grace, waves goodbye from the porch. Sometimes they invite me in, but I'm no good at small talk and we have somewhere to be. Usually, it's just a Coldstone parking lot or my bedroom, but Sarah's phone buzzes all night.

Maybe it's because I don't believe in God.

When we saw the sun setting over the Potomac River, Sarah said to me, "That's how I know heaven is real." All I saw was light bending, bending toward her and turning her skin orange-pink. My mom calls her "Little Miss Sunshine" for her wide smile and yellow nail polish, and in moments like that, I feel her warmth.

Maybe it's the rainbow patch ironed into my denim jacket. It could be my shrugging shoulders, my loose lips and firecracker words, my blatant pride.

Maybe Rosie found the poems I wrote in Sarah's drawers, saw the ink I left on her hands. She frowns when she sees a picture of us on her lock screen.

"She says there's just something dark about you," Sarah says.

There might be, I think, but not this. There are deadlier sins than loving you.



Untitled

By MICHELA BRITTIS-TANNENBAUM

Snapshots of 2021

Big Beary

I run downstairs and immediately squeal with excitement. Balloons cover the floor, pretty lights hang on the ceiling, and everything is shiny.

All of this, just for me!

I look around the room, wondering where my gifts are, and I lock eyes with the biggest teddy bear I've ever seen. I give him a hug and I know he is my best friend.

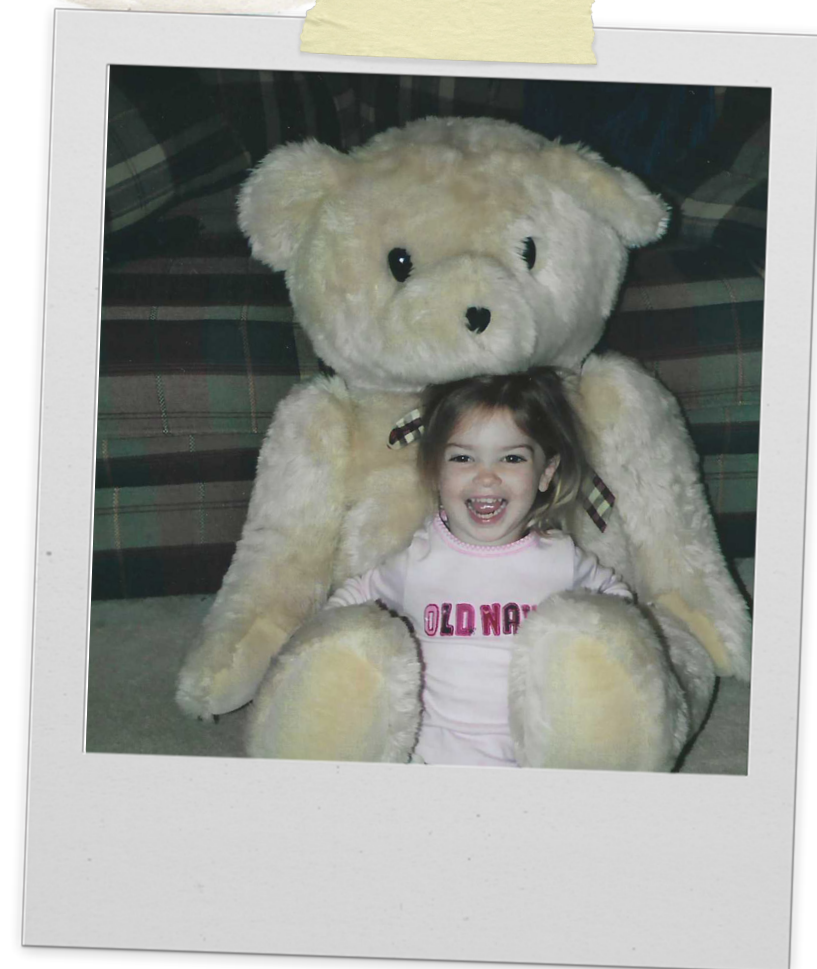
"I think I'll call you Big Beary."

Sometimes I still think of this day. The immense joy I had. The nonexistent worries I had. The love I had. I look at this picture and think to myself how happy this little girl looks.

As I sit and think, worry starts to rush to my brain and reality sets in. There's so much I still have to get done today — homework, projects, quizzes, practice. I can't pause, even for a moment.

Why did I ever want to grow up?

— Mel Wilder



Celebrating Doc H

By HAILEY WILLIAMS

When a person passes, it is our job to honor that person by celebrating their life.

I don't remember a lot about the party, except that we were having a good time. It was a gorgeous night. The stars were out, we had a bonfire going, and everyone was glad that freshman year was coming to an end. My best friend, Eva, and I sat on the patio near the fire pit, the flames casting warm orange lights across our faces as we watched our friends in the pool.

We were enjoying a comfortable silence, or at least I thought we were. I was happy. Eva wasn't. I should've been able to see it on her face.

"I need you to pray for Doc Harris. I think she might die soon," she told me with an unwavering voice.

It was one of those moments when the world just stopped moving. The splashing in the pool had faded to white noise. My heart dropped to my stomach. I couldn't speak. It was like all the wind had been knocked out of me.

Eva stood up and walked away. I couldn't move.

I knew Eva's mom was sick, but not that type of sick. My heart broke instantly for my best friend and her mom, who had become my mom too.

Doctor Joy Harris was one of those people that lit up a room. Not only was she one of the happiest people I've ever met but also one of the most compassionate and loving. The day I started the sixth grade with Eva, she became my second mom. My mom was late picking my brother and I up from school, so Doc H took us into her classroom and fed us popcorn and made us laugh until my mom could get there. Eventually, she and Eva became my closest friends. I could tell her anything and she would give me advice.

From disagreements I was having with my real family to my first crush, Doc H had heard it all. She always helped me with anything I needed her for as best as she could. She called me her third daughter and treated me as if I was her own.

The day after the party, I learned that Doc H had been battling with cancer for as long as I had known her. For years, even after spending so much time with her, I didn't know. I asked if I could visit her, and Eva's dad respectfully told me that it was probably better for everyone if I didn't come to see her. She was spending her last days at home in a hospital bed, had lost her hair, and looked very weak. He said that she didn't want me to remember her that way. All I could do was leave a "Thinking of You" Hallmark in their mailbox.

Two weeks later, in Spanish class, the world stopped again. I got a text from a friend. All it said was, "Did you hear about Mrs. Harris?"

Doc H had passed away earlier that morning. I was numb. I couldn't even cry.

Mr. Harris had planned his wife's funeral to be in Detroit, where she was raised. So, the next week my mom and I flew to Michigan. Before that day, I had never been to a funeral I could remember. Regardless, I knew that they were sad, even depressing. Mrs. Harris's service changed that perspective.

The entire day was a whirlwind of emotions. I just remember being so proud of Eva for how strong she was. I sat a few rows behind her wiping tears, but I don't think I ever saw Eva cry. In fact, out of the fifty people in the church, my mom and I made up two of the five people crying.

I didn't understand why more people weren't.

Near the end of the service, the officiating reverend gave a short sermon that answered that question.

He told us a story about a man and a woman sitting next to each other on a plane. While on the flight, she picked up her bag of cookies she had just bought from the airport and began to eat them. The man reached over, took one cookie from the bag and popped it in his mouth. The woman was immediately confused and angry. What made this man think he could just take her food from her? She asked him why he had taken her food, but the flight was landing and he got off the plane without answering her. The woman angrily got off the plane and threw away the now empty bag of cookies. She reached in her purse, looking for her phone, and found another bag. She had never taken her bag of cookies out of her purse and had been eating from the man's bag the entire flight.

Essentially, the story was a metaphor for our relationship with God. All of us mourning people in the church were the woman, indignant, when a man, God, took one of his cookies that was never ours back. Mrs. Harris was the cookie. We were meant to be grateful for and thank God for the time we had with Mrs. Harris, rather than be mad at Him for taking her away.

Here, I think it's important to note that I have never been religious. Regardless, the story still resonated with me because a person doesn't have to believe in God to see the point the reverend was trying to make. He wanted us to understand that when a person passes, it is our job to honor that person by celebrating their life and being grateful for the time we had with them instead of continuing to mourn them and be angry. That's why so few people in the church were crying. They were there to remember the time they spent with Mrs. Harris and be happy about those memories. They didn't cry because the funeral was a celebration.

The dinner after the service was the best part of the day. I met Eva's entire extended family. They were just like Mrs. Harris, happy and joyous. We sat in the church eating soul food and laughing for hours. Eva's uncle, Larry, and I spent a while discussing the entire Marvel film franchise and trying to decide which superhero had the best movie. Aunt Jeanie and my mom laughed over Mr. Harris's stories from his childhood in Florida. We wished Mrs. Harris could have been there to laugh and smile with us but knew that we shouldn't mourn her anymore.

Snapshots of 2021

What Does It Mean to Mourn?

I am afraid I will mourn for a mother who is not there.
I am afraid I will mourn for a mother who stays up too late, who enjoys daytime television, who has long, drawn-out conversations with the dog.

I am afraid I will mourn for a mother who borrows my glasses, a mother who loves her flowers, a mother who has a little blue car.

I will not mourn for a mother that I do not know, a mother I have yet to meet. I will not mourn for a mother who is attached to tubes, a mother who is unable to open her eyes, unable to hear my voice. I will not mourn for a mother who had to lie on the floor, all alone, presumably dead to the world. It is a miracle in her case. I will not mourn for a mother who looks at me and cries, whose heart is shallow, whose mouth is dry. I will not mourn for a mother.

— Lily Braden

Embers

By HANNAH MEYER

What a shame it is to see a glowing light lose its spark
The second a breath of oxygen is stolen from the embers.
What a shame it is to see arrogance
Take its form in the shape of a boy
Who thought himself to be a man.
Somehow it all made sense at first,
Yet now I am futility left with pieces of ash
Scattered at the footfalls of the door he escaped through.
In the name of lust — this charred passion — or what have you,
I lost my power in the lively methane that was his smile,
To keep him guarded inside my fan of flames.
His fire, his white-hot fire,
Coldly callous, a frozen manipulation,
That which I mistook for incandescent intimacy.
I leave him not with a scorched forgiveness,
But with the dying cinders,
Of my letting go and reignition.
We are built on Love and Hate,
Pride and Heartbreak,
Guilt and Shame.
We are built on Embers of what once was
And what is yet to be enkindled.

Snapshots of 2021

Waxing

As a Persian girl, I can grow a pretty mean mustache. If unibrows were in, I would be the Kendall Jenner of modelling mine. But, from a young age, my mother taught me body hair was ugly, unfeminine, and unhygienic. At 10 years old, I began waxing my entire body. By 11, I went to get my eyebrows and full face threaded every three weeks. By 13, I started laser hair removal.

I vividly remember my first time getting my legs waxed. I walked into the Persian salon where a nice lady smelling strongly of cheap perfume greeted me in Farsi. I laid down on the crinkly paper sheet left on the long chair, just like a doctor's office. I heard a clicking sound and noticed she turned on the burner the wax sits on. She powdered my legs so the wax would stick better to my hairs.

She dipped the popsicle stick into the hot wax and smeared it on my legs, the heat making me flinch. She could tell it was my first time getting waxed, but that didn't seem to stop her from placing the strip down and yanking it as hard as she could, no warning given.

— Odelia Lalehzarian



Puppies and Holidays

By FRANKLIN WANG

This photograph reminded me of such a good time in the summer of 2019. At the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, I walked a stranger's two cute puppies and enjoyed the fairytale-like landmark's neoclassical architecture.



Heart-Shaped Salt

By FRANKLIN WANG

During the summer of 2017, I traveled to Qinghai, China and visited the Chaka Salt Lake for its "mirror of the sky" view. I found this photograph aesthetically pleasing because the salt I threw somehow looked exactly like the shape of a heart.



Bike Ride Around Tibetan Dwellings

By FRANKLIN WANG

This photograph was a continuation of my 2017 summer trip in Qinghai, China. I biked around several traditional Tibetan houses to experience their culture. I also had the chance to admire the colorful landscape in the Qinghai Lake park, which made me appreciate nature's beauty.

Go with the Fro

By DORBOR TARLEY

I was told to wait until
I felt my head on fire
before calling my
mother to wash it out.
I probably have chemical
burns.

It was not love at first sight.
How could it have been?
I grew up being told to be ashamed of
you.

They called you "coarse," sometimes "kinky" or "nappy," and considered you to be bad. Convinced me you needed to be straightened. It was the hot comb my mother placed on the high flame kitchen stove that made you straight. You were straight now, no longer "bad," "kinky," or "nappy." I was supposed to be happier with you this way. It was beautiful. It was beautiful.

When I was 12, I decided to cover you with a relaxer. "Just for Me Soft & Beautiful No-Lye Regular Relaxer Kit." I was tired of our family kitchen smelling of smoke, burned hair, and softsheen jam hair gel every other week in hopes to tame you. I was angry at my mother for spending every other Saturday in our family kitchen straightening out your kinks and coils, investing into the American dream that the straight version of you was better than the natural you.

A relaxer, this solution seemed more permanent.

The creamy crack. It became an addiction. My mother would apply the creamy white relaxer to my roots every six weeks. The sodium hydroxide would straighten my roots. The relaxer was never intended to make me relax, instead, it left me tense. I was told to wait until I felt my head on fire before calling my mother to wash it out. I probably have chemical burns.

You refused to relax. It was intended for you to stay straight from six to twelve weeks. That's what it said on the box. You rebelled. You wanted to be shown. You were the kind of hair that resisted and boycotted every relaxer application my mother applied.

We played tug of war for two more years. What I wanted you did not and vice versa. I got tired of fighting with you at 14. I waited until my mother was at work.

Alone for the first time in our downstairs bathroom I stared at myself in the mirror. I decided I no longer was going to fight with you. That evening I wet you under the bathroom sink. Watching you grow before my eyes. I started cutting. I was not cutting you, just the parts of you I had killed years ago. With every cut, you came alive.

You are high maintenance. Difficult. A learning process.

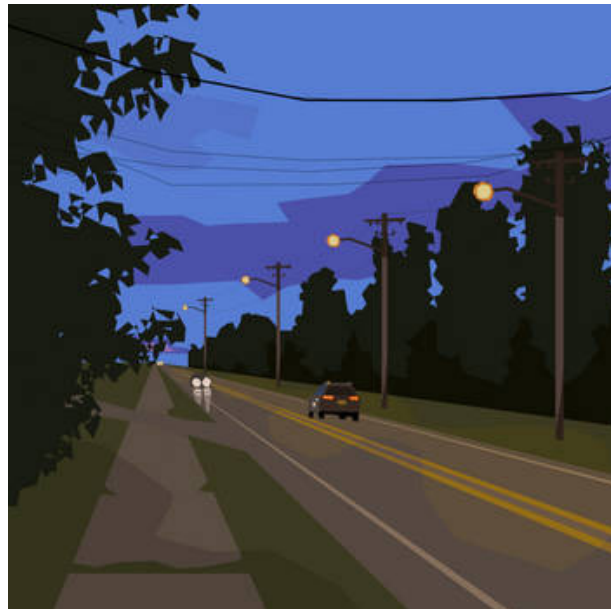
The first year together I had to learn everything about you. As I started to talk to you in the mirror, I began to understand your ways, wants, and needs. My days were filled with consuming content that could better you and help you thrive. You were low porosity, meaning you did not absorb the water and treatments I gave to you. I had to be extra careful with you. Your four favorite things were deep conditioners, liquids, oils, and cream. You were not a fan of cold weather. I needed to protect you from the snow and rain. Your favorite protective style was braids. I reminded you of Janet Jackson in Poetic Justice in the winter. In the summers you liked to be shown off. In the summers you were free from braids, no longer needing protection from the weather. I reminded you of Diana Ross. I had to be kind to you. Speak to you softly. Never harsh. You sense fear. If I spoke to you harshly or was in a rush, you would break off or fight against the style. This would cause us to have to start over again. And when we returned you preferred a mediator, outside reinforcement of the "Denman brush" and wide tooth comb had to be called in.

It is our 7th year together. My time with you has been filled with tears, admiration, joy, and appreciation. I know what to say and do to make you twist, mold, loc, and curl. You have taught me patience, unconditional love, and how to go with the 'fro. It was not love at first sight but when I look into the mirror every wash day, I say I love you.

Lonely Journey Towards Acceptance

By APARAJITA RAO

These are snapshots from my story of denial about ongoing illness and the lonely journey towards acceptance.



He Follows Me

By SID CARLISLE

Trigger warning: mention of stalking

It's the feeling any woman is familiar with when walking home alone at dusk — *I'm being followed.*

A chill runs up my spine, stopping me in my tracks. It's the feeling any woman is familiar with when walking home alone at dusk — *I'm being followed.* I start to walk faster and don't dare turn around out of risk of letting whoever — or whatever — catch up to me.

Just a few blocks from home, my follower decides to speak to me: "Hey Sid!"

I don't need to look to know who it is. That voice is all too familiar to me. I want to face him, but my feet are stuck in the sidewalk as I slowly sink in. With tears streaming down my face, I cry out, "I thought you weren't coming back to campus this semester."

When he starts to laugh, I don't need to look to picture the stupid smile on his face. "No, who told you that?" He asks in a mocking tone, knowing he's lying and knowing I won't call him out for it.

That's when I jolt awake. It takes me a moment to assess my surroundings and bring me back to the present. *It was just another dream. He's not here. You don't have to see him. You're safe.* But normally the dreams aren't that vivid. Normally when I wake up, I can just remember I saw his face. Or not even that, a cold sweat at 4 a.m. tells me everything I need to know if I don't remember the dream.

The next morning, I have to walk past his favorite study spot to get to class. I try to avoid it, but I'm running late and don't have time to take the long route. I keep my head down and walk straight ahead, not daring to look anyone in the eye. With each booth I pass, my heart rate quickens. With each chair that swivels as I pass by, my breathing becomes shallower. The hallway is a battlefield and I barely make it out alive. I'm a survivor.

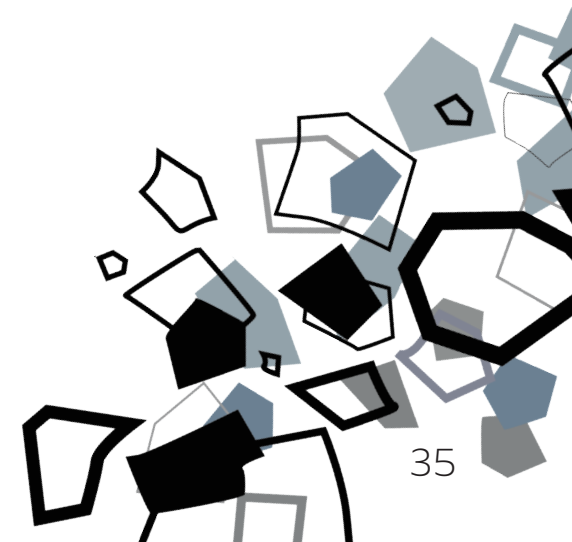
Knowing he's a thousand miles away gives some assurance to know that he can't hurt me anymore. I don't have to see him and relive the last three years of my life every single day. But no time or distance removed from him can take me back to how I was before.

Once I get to class, I sit as far away from the door as possible. Maybe he knows I'm in here. Maybe he'll want to just visit the professor. The distance between me and the entrance assures that if he's really here, I can duck under the desk and go unnoticed.

Avoiding someone you want to avoid is hard. Every man wearing a baseball cap has his face, and I run the other way before checking to confirm. Every door opening has him on the other side of it. Every text I receive is him using a fake number to try to contact me. Every stranger I meet is someone he knows trying to get information about me.

Walking back home, I see a shadow of him in the snow, putting a snowball together. As he forms the ball with his red, frozen fingers, he echoes the same story about his sister that he did in this spot two years ago. Knowing what happens next, I flinch, as the imaginary snowball hits my shoulder and falls to the flurry-covered pavement. I bend down and begin to form my own in the grass, but when I look back up, he's gone.

Bringing myself back to the present moment, I put my headphones in and focus on the feel of my shoes against the pavement, ignoring the ever-present feeling of being followed.





Dear Mom

By ANONYMOUS

Today, I want nothing more than to show my mom the world. To give her the world. To love her. To make her happy.

My mother came to America with my father right after high school. Neither of them knew English, nor the culture. One of the culture shocks, especially to my mother, was how they raise their children. In America, parents tell their children that they are proud as long as they try their best. In Korean culture, due to the devastating effects of the Korean War, generations afterward had immense pressure to improve the society around them. Korea is on the road to hell: the pressure to succeed weighs down heavily on the youth.

* * * * *

Mom, when everyone called you crazy for letting me try out 12 different extracurriculars when I was younger—from ballet to piano to figure ice skating to swimming to volleyball to horseback riding to golf—thank you for giving me experiences and the opportunity to get to know myself.

* * * * *

I've always wanted to become a mother. When we were asked to write down our dream occupation in elementary school, I wrote Mom. I loved my mom. My mom loved me. We made each other happy. Who wouldn't want that in the future? A job where you made someone feel so loved and felt loved back constantly?

Whenever I came home, my mother always had snacks. Strawberries and raspberries were always my favorite. Most of the time it was apples, peeled and cut into equally carved parts. Now, in college, I barely remember to eat a meal a day. I forget that I have to drink water too. When I do eat, it's always junk food. Lots of candy and soda. I miss my mom.

Growing up, my father and I fought constantly. I still remember that time we were on our way to Church for Christmas in Arizona.

My father was in charge of getting me dressed for the carol concert. He didn't know I had a fever of 105 degrees. My teacher told us to wear jeans and a white T-shirt, but my father did not listen—he thought I was lying. I was stuffed into a thick, woolen, pink dress that itched everywhere and heated me like a parka. I refused to leave the house and cried.

Ten seconds before we even left the garage, I threw up. Tears, snot, hiccups, and throw up. Rage was only on my mind. Frustration from not being understood. And for the first time, the feeling of disappointment in a father who did not listen to me.

I still remember. During the concert, I glared down at my mother and father. Pure anger and rage. Thinking, how could you do this to me? How could you not listen to me? I was telling the truth. Aren't you supposed to listen to me? I trust you, but why don't you trust me? Do you see me like this up here? I am the only one in an ugly pink dress. Set on stage sick embarrassing myself in front of everyone. It is all your fault. I hate you.

Mom, I'm sorry Dad and I always fight. I'm sorry Dad blames you when I talk back to him or make mistakes. I'm sorry I didn't understand.

* * * * *

My mother and father got married when they were 19. I thought I wanted the same, but I promised myself I would never marry anyone like my father.

My mother and father always argued. Mostly because of me. I still remember a time when I was in 2nd grade. My father and I were arguing about something. I, angry for his lack of compassion and empathy. Him, for feeling disrespected as a father and ego-challenged by me. My mother took my side. The fight became between her and my father, and we all started screaming. I was angry, blinded by rage. But then my mother started crying. I had never seen her cry. She ran to the bathroom and huddled in a corner. Dad looked surprised. I chased her to the bathroom; I wasn't mad anymore. I was scared. Once she saw me, she recomposed herself. Rather than sadness, it was anger. She marched to the garage with car keys in her hands. I begged her not to go. My father tried to grab her. She got in the car and the garage door opened. I thought she wouldn't leave, but she drove off.

We drove after her. We couldn't find her, so we came home. I remember waiting in the living room for her to return. Terrified. We hurt her, and she reached her limit. But she loves me enough to pick me, right? To come back? Right?

When she came back, she was surprised at how worried we were. I don't remember what happened afterward. I think we pretended everything was okay. We always do that. I think I said sorry. I hope I did.

* * * * *

Mom, I'm sorry you had to give up your job to stay with us. I'm sorry you had to stay with Dad because of us. I'm sorry I got mad at you for not fighting him back. I'm sorry I was too young to know. I'm sorry I called you selfish and a coward.

Mom started opening up to me about Dad when I entered high school. I think she started to realize that the only solution to mending my relationship with my father was when I started to understand him.

Mom knew I was just like her: the minute I fall in love, it is everything I think about, all I want out of life. **Dangerous.**

* * * * *

Mom, I'll try harder to understand Dad. For you. For Richard. For us.

* * * * *

She told me of how she regretted marrying my father. How she wished she kept her job. How she wished she studied something else, like law. How she wanted to run away the night before her wedding, but she couldn't.

She looked me in the eyes and promised me that if I ever wanted to run away, she would grab me, and we would go. She told me that if I ever want to leave, if I was ever mistreated, she will have a bed and warm food waiting for me, always.

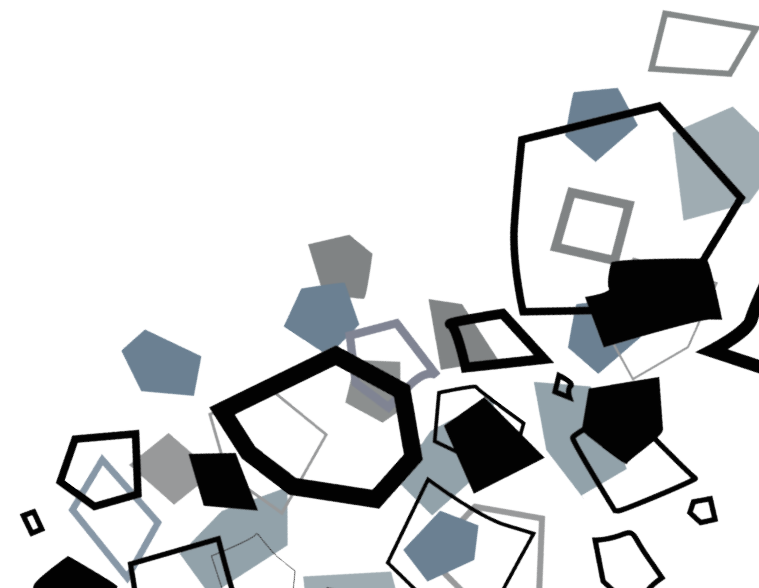
My mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor when I was in tenth grade. She told me casually while on a car ride. She told me that she wanted to move to Korea, to be closer to my father. I was happy about the decision. I was excited to move away. I do not remember how I felt about the brain tumor at the time. Does that make me selfish? My memories are always so selfish.

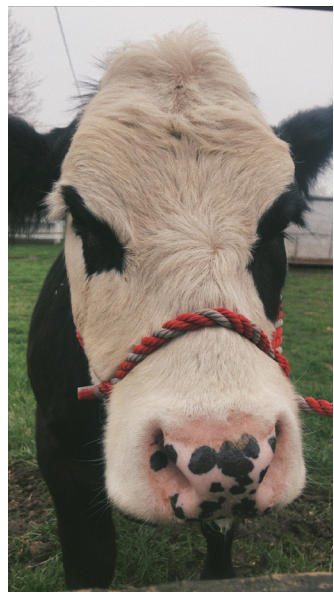
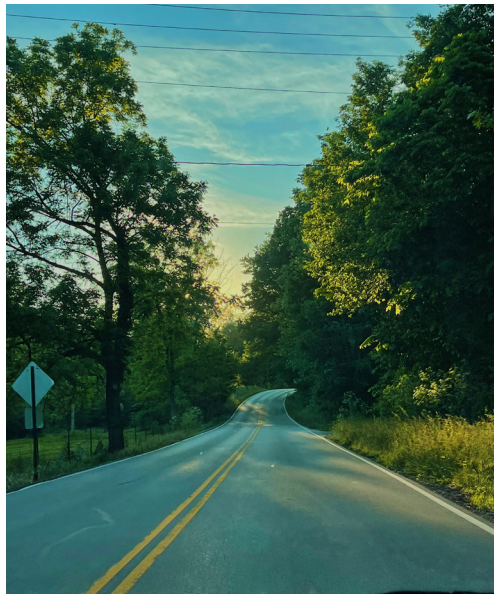
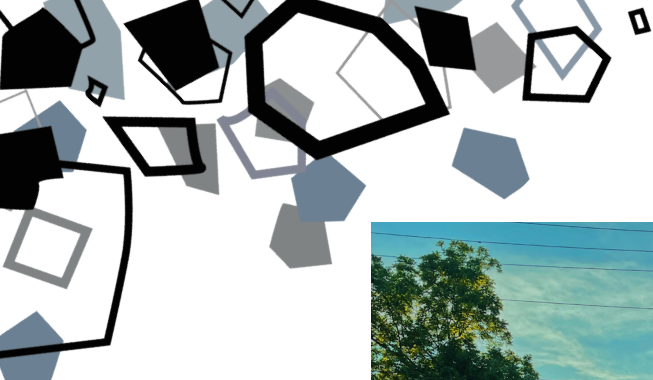
I used to want success. Love. And then money. And then power. And then it was happiness. Today, I want nothing more than to show my mom the world. To give her the world. To love her. To make her happy.

* * * * *

Mom, I love you. Do you know that? I never show it. I am sorry for that. I hurt you in so many ways, but you still love me. Thank you for loving my broken, terrible me. Thank you for giving me a reason to stay long enough to realize this. Thank you for teaching me what love is. Thank you for loving me, no matter what. I'm sorry you never got the life you wanted. I'm sorry.

Love,
Your daughter





Summer Evenings In Indiana

By LACEY KENTWORTHY

All of these photos were taken in locations I grew up in and the way I think of summer in Indiana.

The first photo is a backroad close to the home I grew up in, it's a road that I've memorized due to how many times I've been on it. During the summer my sister and I like to go for drives until dark.

The second is of my brother's Simmental calf, named Panda, who currently lives on his farm.

Next is the lake my parents currently live on. On summer evenings I sit out on the dock and take photos for as long as I can.

Then is a photo taken of my brother's cattle. During the summer, my sister aids on the farm, and I love watching and attempting to help as well.

The last two are also of my brother's farm. This is one of the famous red barns that is somewhat typical of farms.

This, to me, is what summer is about: farm work and sunsets. Sometimes after a light rain we can catch a rainbow in the perfect position.





Sorry

By TESSA PULGAR

I feel like one touch would send her crumbling into dust, leaving me with nothing but regret and an ache for my grandma.

"Where did you go?" My mom gets up from the couch as soon as I open the front door. I rub my eyes, dropping my bag on the ground slowly. "Angela picked me up."

Looking tired, she walks over and grabs my shoulders so that I can't turn away. Her eyebrows furrow. I flinch, waiting for a sharp retort. Waiting for the argument to start again. Instead, her face relaxes as she pulls me in for a hug.

"We were worried," she sighs. She points in the direction of the kitchen. "There's still Jjajangmyeon in the kitchen. Only if you want it. Did you eat already?"

I shake my head.

"Well, it's there if you want it." She moves to sit back on the couch.

The air is thick, like slow-moving molasses. I want to say something, but it's impossible for me to imagine my small words wading through to reach my mom. I let her rest on the couch. We're both tired.

I see the Jajangmyeon on the table. Noodles covered in glistening savory brown sauce. Halmoni had even garnished them with pretty designs of shredded cucumber and scallion. It looks like a movie scene. A beautiful table of food, untouched and unattended.

I hear the silence in the next room, and though I know my mom has forgiven me, I still feel like I've disappointed someone. The floorboards creak as she walks up the steps to her bedroom. She has nothing to say because she also understands. She remembers when her family shunned her because she married outside of her culture and she remembers when they apologized. But her silence is one of responsibility. *You don't have to choose an identity*, I remember her whispering when the church kids bullied me.

If my heart was a wineskin, it had already burst five hours ago, anything of substance drained out of it. Right now, all I feel is deflated. Increasingly aware of the emptiness that's started to fill that space.

The sunroom door is open and I see Halmoni lying supine on the couch. Her eyes are closed and I can see her eyelids quivering all the way from the door.

I'm afraid to talk to her. Her hands, though I know they are strong and sturdy from years of laboring, look delicate and fragile. I feel like one touch would send her crumbling into dust, leaving me with nothing but regret and an ache for my grandma.

"Halmoni," I whisper softly.

She doesn't turn to look at me. Instead she turns to burrow her head into her pillow. She simply whimpers in acknowledgement.

"I'm sorry."

I think about the Jjangmyeon on the table and my angry scream from five hours ago, *I wish I wasn't Korean*. My voice cracks and I kneel by the couch.

"Meane," I cry.

Her native language from my mouth cracks her exterior and she cries, turning to hug me, both of us crumbling.

Snapshots of 2021

Lost and Found

Back at home, I felt like I never found my group of people. As the only Asian growing up in a primarily Caucasian school, I felt lost. When my mom would pack me authentic Korean food like kimchi fried rice or kimbap for lunch I would hide and hurriedly devour it under the stairwell. If my mom spoke to me in our native language in front of my white friends, I would glare at her and tell her not to speak to me in our language. I felt judged by my own "friends" as I did not share the same customs and values as they did. Coming to Syracuse has been the greatest culture shock to me. Never have I been around so many people who are the same color as me. I'm having hotpot and Korean drama nights with friends. As we all sit around the table, our moods are lightened by the delicious food surrounding us—we soak the different kinds of fish balls, various types of meat, and Asian vegetables like enoki mushroom and bok choy in the mala broth. Once we stuff ourselves, we flick on the TV and put on an episode of *Nevertheless*. As we become immersed in the show, I catch myself speaking 'Konglish', a mix of Korean and English, to them as I can't keep the excitement in. It's such a misfortune that I missed out on so much in my early years. It's been a long journey, but I think I finally found my lost self. Komawo, Cuse. Thank you.

— Jenna Lee

Snapshots of 2021

Hair, Don't Care

Soft amber, chocolate, and almond melt from my scalp as my eyes meet in the mirror, reflection almost obliterated by the harsh yellow glare of the bathroom lighting. Smooth glass entombs my image. Hours spent on Zoom staring at my blank face made me realize my bangs had grown too long, baby curls forming a choppy line, shielding lovely dark eyebrows from view.

Scissors snipping, snapping...slicing...piecing my hair together in flat chunks, clipping back the snaking curls to preserve the shag I adore. The snipping of scissors is soothing, a chorus of clicks with hair falling to my toes, loose ends dotting around my eyelids as I blink, determination burning back in my eyes.

Smoothed hair, unshaped from pulling to make my cutting precise drives me in late night desperation to the shower. Warm water beading, steam swelling and filling the room, the coarse smoothness of a towel, and the sweet perfume of almond oil. Soft ringlets and waves cascade down my shoulders, power and self-assurance filling me till I burst. Grey clouds are forced back by the beaming sun of my smile. Always too frizzy, too flat, the jungle of uncoordinated curls was tamed, and I was finally happy.

— Devon Drabick

Enough

By ALYSSA GREGG

How does one find
clarity after loss?
Does it even help?

When I was thirteen, I found my dad's body in the garage.

His parents were on an Alaskan cruise, his girlfriend was in Hawaii, and his sister was across town. I was the last person who spoke to him. Everyone knew this, of course. They walked around me like I was fragile glass — vulnerable to even the weakest blows. In the midst of their own grief, my family's objective was to keep me distracted. To keep me from breaking into a million shards. As reality shifted around me, they shifted around me too.

A more accurate assertion, though, was that everyone shifted for me.

A week after his death, Mom, her parents, and I drove down from Tennessee to Atlanta for his funeral. It was more of a memorial than a funeral since he wished to be cremated. I hadn't known this, but Mom did, and she made sure I told his parents. As his ex-wife, she couldn't exactly take control of the proceedings. So, I was her liaison. Apparently, my dad had wished to be cremated because he hated the idea of leaving behind remains, especially the artificial remains in his chest cavity — his heart valve. I accepted the idea and passed on the message.

We arrived at the funeral home around noon. Knowing that my grandparents weren't very religious, I didn't question the location. We met with my dad's parents, his girlfriend and her children (who had flown in from Hawaii days prior), my aunt, and my great-aunt. There were eleven of us in total. A man greeted us with a dull smile and led us to a room near the back. He asked if we would like to see my dad's body before the cremation.

The last time I'd seen his body, it was lukewarm yet lifeless, slicked in blood from his fall to the floor. He'd been facedown, a fact that continually evaded my mind. I didn't really know if I wanted to see it again, but I knew it couldn't be worse than that.

Mom and her parents were still. They'd divorced from the family, so they had no place to answer. On the other hand, my dad's girlfriend couldn't decide because she wasn't a part of the family. My great-aunt seemed at a loss for words, and my aunt didn't seem eager to answer either.

When she picked me up from the house, they'd asked her to identify him for the record. I couldn't blame her for not wanting to see his body again.

That left me and his parents. I think at this point, they'd already seen him when they collected his things from the funeral home. They too were silent.

Everyone's eyes fell on me. Space moved around me, not because I was fragile, but because I was the only one who had been there. I was his next-of-kin, his daughter. This entire moment was dependent on me. I swallowed a lump in my throat.

"Yeah, I'd like to see him," I said, without knowing whether I really wanted to.

Reality snapped back into place and the man led us to a pair of doors. It took me a moment to wrap my mind around what I'd just done and I shoved it down back into place.

His swollen, makeup-caked body didn't give me any more clarity, but maybe it was enough for someone else.

Broken Dreams

By ALYSSA GREGG

After the phone call to my mother

I slumped onto the couch,

letting my fingers grace the

itchy material I never liked.

Was this irony?

After all my worries,

after all my paranoia,

I had persuaded myself

that I only thought nonsense.

I'd been right to worry

and now it was far too late.

I supposed I might as well

go upstairs, change clothes

before my aunt arrived,

to steal me from this place

that I had once loved.

Where my love was stolen

by the arms of many men

and zipped into a black bag.

In the bathroom, I pulled

a new shirt over my old

and faced the mirror.

I wanted to believe that he was

on the other side of the glass

unseen, listening.

I sat on the counter and rambled,

careful not to weep,

I couldn't let him see me cry.

I told him my dreams

about us, that he never knew:

about how I wanted to live with him

once he found a new apartment

and I'd go to his old school;

about how he'd see my graduation

and we'd go out to eat afterward

and he wouldn't have a beer

with his meal, just as happy;

about how he'd live through

the surgery he would never have,

victorious as always.

They asked for me downstairs

and I left his ghost in the mirror,

cradling my broken dreams.

Snapshots of 2021

Bleached Blonde Hair

I am standing on the outer bank, my waders tight with the additional four sweaters I put on this morning. My feet are numb.

You are standing with your back to me. Your bleached hair is messy and your arms swing back and forth as you perfect the sound of the swoosh of your fishing reel, the line reflecting off the river.

At this moment, I don't know what is to come. I don't know that in two weeks' time, I will sit with you in your mother's living room, the condensation of my cranberry vodka threatening to stain the wood table, with your laughter echoing, your hand on my knee. I don't know that in four weeks' time, I will stand out in the morning cold, barefoot, watching you dash outside, my eyes darting back and forth between the door and your back after a night of clean sheets, stale air-conditioning, and late-night whispers.

I am lucky I don't know; I don't think I would know how special it would be. I don't think I would know how sweet.

— Lily Braden

Snapshots of 2021

COVID Scare

Do you have COVID??

The text vibration seems to echo like a gunshot through the quiet hum of Carnegie Library. My fingers flick over the phone screen with a feverish rush.

No, do you?

Oh god. Please no. Not right now.

I don't know, but someone who was at tennis on Sunday just tested positive.

My friend's response comes even faster than mine. I count back the days in my head. Sunday was four days ago. I just got tested this morning. I'm supposed to go home in three days.

Oh god. Please no. Not right now.

The hush of the study room crushes me into my chair. It is nearly empty except for two girls, each sitting at a lonely table. Their eyes stay focused on the computer screens and notebooks in front of them.

Why aren't they panicking? They should be panicking too. No, they can't know. Oh my god, what if they know? I can't spend two weeks alone in the Sheraton! I just want to see my mom. Oh my god, I have to call my mom.

The chair squeaks across the polished wooden floor as I jolt upward. I shove my things into my backpack and scurry to the sanitizing station. Everything needs to be wiped down. I wipe the table, the chair, the desk lamp, the sticker that warns about social distancing. Neither of the two girls have looked up.

Oh god. Please no. Not right now.

— Molly Matheson

My Angel / My Devil

By ODELIA LALEHZARIAN

My Angel

my cool sheets touch our backs as we lay in my bed,
panting.

i turn over to gaze

at your mesmerizing eyes.

i love how much i love you,

your sweet smile

and smirking eyes.

this moment feels like forever.

you don't move,

laying in bed,

playing with my hair,

leaving kisses

up and down my body.

you look into my eyes,

instigating it is time for us to go to sleep.

you kiss me goodnight,

telling me how much you love me.

i often wonder how i got so lucky.

meeting you out of the blue,

now craving to see you

every day and night.

hoping we will last forever,

that we'll both love each other

for eternity.

i place your shirt over my bare body,

and your arm engulfs me so,

protecting me as i go to sleep,

with you by my side.

goodnight z,

i'll see you again tomorrow morning.

i love you.

My Devil

your cool sheets touch our backs as we lay in your
bed, panting.

i turn over to gaze

at your mesmerizing eyes.

i hate how much I love you,

your devilish grin

and smirking eyes.

i wish this moment could last forever.

you immediately saunter

out of bed,

stretching your clothes

over your body,

instigating it is time for me to go.

you kiss me goodbye,

not out of love and affection for me,

but to satisfy your craving

for human touch.

i often wonder why i do this to myself. coming over,

same time and place, practicing our perfect inti-

mate routine, hoping one day it would change,

that you'd be just as in love with me

as i am you.

i put my clothes back on,

wishing they were yours.

i creep out of your bed,

ready to go lay in mine,

without you.

goodbye x,

i'll see you again

tomorrow night.

same time and place?



10 Mirrors

By SOPHIA MOORE

La Raza doesn't judge because of blood.

In my house, there are 10 mirrors. I counted. Thrice.

I stumble to mirror number 9, the one in the bathroom, and I stare. I rest my hands on the cold porcelain sink and I look into my own eyes, at the rivets in my own skin, and the deep olive covering that sheaths over my veins and bones. I prod at it. The depth of my skin tone is my outlier: it doesn't stem from my name or the area I grew up in. And yet, it's the quality of myself that influences my life, my decisions, the most. In my house, there are 10 mirrors, and in every one of them, I'm brown.

I've always felt uncomfortable with the color of my skin. For a long time, I refused to accept that I was Mexican-American because I never felt Mexican enough. After eating dozens of dishes of tamales and home-cooked enchiladas, after dedicating hours of studying to Spanish or consuming telenovelas, I still don't feel worthy of my ethnicity. I know how deep Mexican culture is, how fluid it runs, like the rivers intersecting its land. I know how Mexico has been claimed and touched by colonizers, the Spanish and the French and the English, and still it is something of its own. Mexico, a magnificent, multi-colored beast, rising and slumbering in my history books. My homeland, but only on paper. I've never visited: early on, I shunned my abuelita's attempts at spoon-feeding me culture. And the mirrors always remind me of that.

When I turn away from my reflection, being brown still modifies my view of the world. As thin as my connection to the culture feels, I've never denied the validity of its existence. As disconnected as I feel from the fast-talking ancianas of my family, I've never stopped thinking about them. I've never stopped fighting for them. Through my discomfort and hesitation to embrace my Mexican-ness, I've championed diversity, maybe without ever knowing it. My struggle to personally accept my culture has not stopped me from wanting to see it shine.

I look for the brown characters on the screen when I watch TV. I look for the women who look like me, often bold and stereotyped: the fiery Latina. I read for the girls who have skin the color of caramel and cocoa, I search for them in between the lines of text.

I feel them, in my skin and my soul, I know that they are me and I am them and my Mexican sisters are of the same blood that I carry. So why couldn't I accept that?

For a long time, I truly felt only half as Mexican as the women I saw rooted in the earth of the country. I had a stubborn, concrete view of what "being Mexican" was, as if there were a cut-and-dry definition of who I had to be to fit into my skin.

Until a dear friend of mine, a Mexican brother, asked me what my culture means to me. I had never been asked that question by another Mexican. I didn't know how to respond, so I asked him back. His response was effortless: "La Raza doesn't judge because of blood."

La Raza doesn't judge because of blood. I read those words, over and over again, goosebumps spiking my flesh. Those 7 words loosened the self-imposed shackles on my skin, loosened the judgment of appearance. His words gave me permission to belong. I had always looked up to him as being so much more knowledgeable about our culture. His words had ultimate power. They gave me the hammer, and I shattered the mirrors.

Being Mexican isn't something skin-deep. Culture is a concept so complex and ever-changing that I can't leave trapped in the mirror, for the sake of my ancestors and myself. I don't have anything to prove, I don't have anyone to please: I am Mexican. It's in my blood, it's on my face, it's in my heart. The moment I realized my culture is a living, breathing part of who I am regardless of how I represent it, I was freed.

In my house, there are 10 mirrors. In each of them, I am a Mexican.

Our Cicada Song

By PEARL CADIGAN

Saying the "L" word.

"I almost told you that I love you that night," he says.

I inhale sharply and my heartbeat accelerates, cheeks blushing a fiery red. I peek over at Will, who sits in the passenger seat to my right. He isn't looking at me; instead his eyes are fixed downward at his hands clasping one another in his lap. The street light above us casts an orange glow on his features. I've always envied his long eyelashes. I'm going to miss admiring them when we're at school.

"Do you?" I anxiously choke out, voice breaking mid-sentence.

I mimic his downward gaze before he can catch my eyes. I fiddle with the strings fraying from my distressed jeans. Jesus, my hands are sweaty — I hope he doesn't try to hold them.

"Yeah, I do," he says.

Suddenly, I'm drawn to look into his eyes, my head lifting as I meet his stare. He always looks at me so intensely, as if he's trying to figure out each and every thought that passes through my head. Sometimes, I think he can decipher them even better than I can.

I see so deeply into the blacks of his pupils, deeper than I thought was possible. I see every star within them, even the falling one we shared that night. The night he almost told me he loves me.

"Do you?" he softly questions back, voice raising on the last syllable.

Do I love him?

I miss him when he goes to the bathroom. I think of him every time I look at the moon, every single time. I'll never be able to listen to George Harrison's "All Things Must Pass" again without my mind wandering to memories of that night. The night we lay next to each other on the cold earth. The night we both somehow caught sight of the same shooting star despite its short life. The night he almost told me he loves me. Oh god, oh god, oh god. I guess I do love him. Yeah, I love him.

"Yeah, I think I do," I say.

He beams a toothy smile, and I can't help but let one escape too (I've always hated smiling with my teeth — he knows that). The deep, dark concavities of his eyes illuminate, and I feel something I've never felt before. He reaches across the clunky console between us to envelop me in his arms. I breathe in and it feels as if I've never truly known the sensation of air filling my lungs until this moment.

Outside, the cicadas chirp. They sing the night song that they serenade New Englanders with every summer, but tonight, in this moment, this is our song. Their high-pitched hums, in combination with the faint thump of Will's heartbeat, have never sounded so beautiful. I wish I could listen to this song forever, live in this moment forever.



Sticky

Snapshots of 2021

Late August is hotter than ever despite summer coming to a close.
Sticky.

We're both sticky from sweat, sitting on a bench in Washington Square Park as the heat surrounds us.

I turn to see a crease form in the middle of his forehead as his eyebrows stick together, irritated by the stickiness.

Darkness sticks to the sky as the sun sets, mosquitos stick to my ankles, and sweat sticks to our skin, but neither of us wants to leave.

Two sticky beings who, at this moment, want nothing more than to stick closer together.

My thighs stick to the bench beneath us.

His hands stick to my neck.

When our lips stick together I feel the hairs of his beard stick to my cheeks.

We meld against each other as much as we can with his glasses in the way, becoming one sticky mass.

When I pull back to see him, I notice the crease has disappeared, a smile sticking to his face instead. I feel myself smile, overwhelmed by how much I feel for the sticky boy in front of me.

He is syrupy sweet.

He sticks his lips on mine again.

And again.

— Alexandra Hodge

We Are Here, Again

Snapshots of 2021

I take the new and improved spoon they laid down on the table and cut into the mango pancake in front of me. As the bite melts completely in my mouth, I look up at him and can't help but smile. I can't believe we are here again. For the first twenty minutes, we take turns laughing about the changes. The grass entrance has been replaced with a plain beige wall. The soft-as-clouds seats have been replaced with hard wooden benches. The brightly lit lights are now dimmed so that I can barely see the place. The food portions definitely got smaller and the bowls and spoons are not the same anymore.

It has been a year and a half; our place has completely changed, just like we have. Although it looks so unrecognizable, it feels the same in his presence. As he reaches his hand out for mine, I stop breathing for a second and my hands lock into his. Each finger rests perfectly the way it used to. As we sit in a modified version of our favorite spot, everything between us remains unchanged.

— Tasfia Sultana

What Was His Name?

Snapshots of 2021

Trigger warning: mention of death

The RA upstairs heard the screaming on my floor before I did. I ran out of my room and found my residents crying in front of a closed door. My co-worker told me they've already called an ambulance. Three hours later, it was 2 am and five children screamed as their friend was declared dead. Three other RAs and I stood uselessly in the hall with them, holding an awkward vigil for someone whose name no one would tell us. It was 4 am when I was told that the dead child was mine. His name was Jack and he lived two doors down from me. I could barely remember his face. It was October.

It is August. A maskless resident sees me in the elevator and jumps in and says, "Hey, Nina. Classes have been going well, but I really just want my writing to get better."

I smile, a little unsure, and tell him about the new creative writing major, the journalism major, the Writing Center.

"I know, I just wanted to chat with you." He waves as he steps off the elevator. His name is William and he lives two doors down from me.

Now, I call my kids by their names whenever I see them, even if I have to ask every time, so I will never forget. Next time, I will not say, "Someone has died." I will say, "My kid has died. They were beautiful and silly and I cherished them."

— Nina Piazza

The American Dream

By IVONNE MILLAN

This acrylic paint on a wooden surface represents my professional and personal accomplishments as a first-generation immigrant student, graduating High School with honors and moving on to pursue a college degree as an Honors student at Syracuse University. This specific piece depicts the celebration of my high school graduation ceremony, portraying the conclusion of my high school journey, and the start of my new journey as a college student at Syracuse University.



Milestones in Life

By IVONNE MILLAN

This oil pastel piece depicts the moment in which my mother became a Citizen of the United States. For my mother and I, having our Christmas tree up all year long has become somewhat of a special tradition. Ever since we moved to the United States, we've never taken down our Christmas tree, as it symbolizes Christmas waiting for the day our family is able to reunite as a whole to celebrate one of our most precious festivities. It is basically Christmas every day in my household! This piece depicts the moment in which my mother gently placed the U.S. flag she was given at her Naturalization Ceremony, on the Christmas tree, commemorating the conclusion of a seven-year long journey, becoming one of the many memories kept on our Christmas tree.



Just Another Day

By IVONNE MILLAN

This color pencil piece reflects what a busy day in my life used to look like while at home in New Jersey. An afternoon surrounded by books, assignments, and responsibilities to fulfill, all with the ultimate goal of getting to where I am today.



How Guns Work

By ANONYMOUS

Imagine firing a gun on someone. Straight through their head. *Bang.*

Here's how guns work. A bullet is loaded into the rear of the barrel, which is a tube connected to the firing pin. That explosion ignites the gunpowder, which is tucked inside the shell casing surrounding the bullet. Then voila, you've fired your first bullet.

Imagine firing a gun on someone. Straight through their head. Bang. Dead. It takes exactly half a second for the bullet to kill you when aimed directly at the head. Unlike the depiction in movies, a bullet to the head would not look nice and clean. In fact, the head would no longer be recognizable as it would be completely blown apart.

The first depiction of a firearm was in the fire lance, a black—powder-filled tube attached to the end of a spear and used as a flamethrower; shrapnel was sometimes placed in the barrel so that it would fly out together with the flames. The earliest known depiction of a gunpowder weapon is the illustration of a fire lance on a mid-10th century silk banner from Dunhuang.

My Mom, who grew up in Gangwondo, a province in South Korea right next to North Korea, told me she used to go down to the beach with her friends to collect propaganda posters. For every 10 they turned into the post office, they would give you small erasers and pencils.

Although, they never touched the balloons or toys. Inside, there would be bombs or acid traps sent over by North Koreans. One of my Mom's childhood friends lost her arm like that.

Currently, there are over 1 trillion guns on Earth. three out of 10 Americans own a gun. Did you know more than 50 trillion bullets have been fired in human history (for the purpose of killing other humans)? Can you imagine that? The bodies piled up could reach the moon.

When I was in middle school, an armed stranger came onto campus. I was in the bathroom. All I heard was from kids outside screaming, "RUN!" So, I did what anyone else would do at age 14: I ignored them. Ten minutes later, I casually knocked on the door of my classroom to return inside. No one answered. Weird. I mentioned my name and knocked harder. 5 seconds later, Ms. Laroche reached her arm out to hurl me inside.

After three hours of hiding, huddled in a corner, waiting for the consensus to come out, we found out two students who had been walking to the yard had gotten hurt.

Since 1968, more than 1.5 million Americans have died in gun-related incidents, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In 2019, there were over 14,400 gun-related homicides.

I touched my first gun in 2018 at my best friend's house. It was a random day like any other. His dad was cleaning a rifle in the garage. I was fascinated. He noticed. He asked me if wanted to try to shoot it, and I answered yes. It was black and shiny with a wooden back. It was a lot heavier than people made it look like in the movies, much too big to properly fit on my arm cocked into position. As I aimed the gun at a glass bottle in the backyard connected to the woods, I breathed in. Weirdly, I remember a rush of panic and the single idea that I must drop the gun. My arms obliged and dropped it with a thud.

I still don't know why I couldn't simply pull the trigger at the bottle. So simple. Bang. Dead.

Classic Chase

By DORBOR TARLEY

It all happened so fast.

2:45 pm.

The bell pierced through the noisy AP Physics class, awakening the sleeping students and halting all side conversations, signaling the end of the day. Pouring out into the hallway and following the stream of students headed towards their lockers, I paused right at my friend's locker. We both shared the same mischievous grin. We had gotten away with it again.

It all happened so fast.

We pushed the double doors entering another set of cloudy blue broken lockers stationed on one side of the wall and political murals on the other side. Walking in pairs or trios, laughing so hard our vision was clouded. As I opened my eyes and wiped away a tear of laughter with the sleeve of my shirt, purse, and phone clutched tightly in my right hand, I spotted him. He never walked this way after school. Why was he on the first floor? We spotted each other at the same time, amongst the sea of underclassmen playfully hitting each other. My internal instincts were telling me to run. So that's what I did. Four years of track practice prepared me for this. I turned around, ending my conversation with my friends, and made a beeline for the door we entered out of.

"Why are we running?" my friend asked cluelessly as she followed closely on my heels. "We've been caught!" I said, pausing for a breath once we were out of his view, letting my guard down.

We originally thought it was a fool-proof plan: How to get out of an AP Psychology exam. Show up to school on time, make sure not to alarm your parents and raise any questions. Miss the homeroom period so you will be marked absent by the office. Do not officially sign into school until the class period before lunch. Avoid Mr. Caccia, the AP Psychology professor, until the next morning, after you spent the night studying for the exam. It was 2:50 pm and we had almost gotten away with it.

We must have taken three short breaths before Mr. Caccia's lanky frame pushed open the heavy eggplant double doors, his finger pointed in our direction.

"Stop! Weasels!" he yelled as I dropped my book bag and jolted towards the main purple doors. If I could make it to those doors and out-side to the open, this high-speed chase would be over.

I was wrong.

We kept running and looking back. Zig-zagging in between bystanders who were in awe watching this happen. Two Black senior students barely over 5'2 being chased by a tall mid-dle-aged white teacher continuously screaming "weasels!" The students parted like the red sea, creating a clear path for us to run and our psychology teacher to follow.

Hide.

My next instinct was to hide behind the tan pillars that supported the school. I leaned against it. Heart beating. Smile permanently plastered on my face. I glanced at my phone and decided to wait behind the pillar for a couple more seconds before coming out. The onlookers had gone back to their regularly scheduled program, signaling the end of this. I poked my head out. Mr. Caccia hurled himself out of his very own pillar.

"Weasels!" he screeched. "Why did you guys run?"

"Why did you run?" I asked him. And we all started laughing.

"You guys are making up the test you skipped tomorrow morning," he told us as he walked away. We sat on the benches sandwiched between the pillars and continued to laugh.



Isolated Power

By ZOE GLASSER

I lean my head back against the tree and look up at the darkening sky. I think about whatever I want. I don't miss Evelyn. I don't miss anyone.

I sit on the cool steel bleachers next to my mother, who's holding up a digital camera to her rectangular glasses. I run my coral-and-teal fingernails across the metal ridges on the seat. My brother is up to bat, but I'm not watching him. I'm gazing across the dusty baseball diamond, past the plastic astroturf fields they say give you cancer if you spend too long on them, at the tie-dye skyline. I'm listening to the hum of the Virginia cicadas, the song they sing on June evenings. The game has been going on for hours at this point, and the sky is beginning to bleed purple into its cotton candy pink.

I slide off the slide-proof bleachers and turn around towards the man-made lake, which has turned into a mirror of the sky.

"Where are you going?" My mom looks down at me from the lens of the camera.

"Just down to the lake," I say.

"Don't go into the tall grass. You'll get ticks." And just like that, her focus is back on the game. I take the first steps on my journey down the hill.

Evelyn isn't here today. Usually, I hang out with Evelyn because her brother Josh is also on the team. Josh is one of Jake's best friends. Evelyn is not my best friend; not even close. Once, she threw a temper tantrum while I was over at her house because her mom wouldn't let us watch TV.

Evelyn isn't here today, which means I have free reign of the park. If she were here, I would have to hang out with her because it's the polite thing to do, even though my mom says I don't have to. She would want to talk to me about the boys at school who she thinks have crushes on her. But she's not here, so I wander down towards the lake by myself, careful to avoid the cattails and the tall grass because I don't want to get ticks.

I park myself between two protruding roots of a willow tree and stare out at the lake.

My legs are folded criss-cross applesauce. I pick an ant off of my blue plaid knee-length shorts and rest my elbows on my knees. I listen to the cicadas hum their early-summer song. I think about how there are only 11 days left of the school year, how excited I am to take my swimming test at the pool so I can jump off the diving board, how I really hope the counselors at camp don't make us play Dr. Dodgeball every day like they did last year.

I lean my head back against the tree and look up at the darkening sky. I think about whatever I want. I don't miss Evelyn. I don't miss anyone. Eventually, I'm roused from my fantastical day-dreams by my mother's voice.

"Zoe Eden!" Oh no. I just got middle-named. I leap to my feet and peek around the side of the tree.

"Right here!" I call.

"There you are," she sighs. "Let's go! Dad's home and he wants us to bring dinner!" She wraps her arm around my shoulder as I approach.

"Mom, Josh just got the Lego Death Star set! Can I please sleep over tonight so we can build it?" my brother pleads.

I don't listen for my mother's response, but I'm sure she'll drop him off later. I begin to plan out what I'll do once Jake is out of the house when I can spend the rest of the evening in blissful solitude.

That Medicine

By JOSE ARTURO VENEGAS

Why? How could something meant to make me feel good be so cruel and foul?

A taste that invokes a blurry and lousy point in my life. That medicine. That purple gel pill that I can never swallow. I am mentally unprepared to take any medication that isn't in liquid form. I can't. I won't. But my mouth aches with so much pain. I look at that pill with anger and fear. Time and time again I've had to take it. Finally, I give in to my mouth's despair and carefully slice the pill to allow its lively purple liquid to slowly squeeze out. I grab the most yellow banana and unpeel it to reveal its soft and funny-smelling interior. I then grab the cold, hard, lifeless case the liquid was held in, and quickly throw both into my mouth.

I'm immediately transported to a putrid, rotting, and oddly spicy taste in my mouth. Why? How could something meant to make me feel good be so cruel and foul? My body wants to both curl and explode at the same time. My eyes are sealed shut, as if closing them hard enough will make the pain dissipate. A burning groan rises throughout my throat and releases out of my nose, roasting my nostril hair along the way. The ticks from the clock accelerate in speed and base, and I cover my ears from the piercing sounds of time.

I'm coughing. I'm gagging. I quickly grab my clear water bottle and chug it, my hand crushing the bottle to get every drop of water into my mouth. It's the medicine to my medicine. All I want to do is turn back time to undo this awful mistake I just made, but it's already made its way down to my stomach. My back hits the stiff cupboard as I slide down and hit my ass on the tile floor. I lay there on the ground, having just experienced an exorcism, as I shed a tear.

But from the outside, all my grandmother sees is a little boy squinting his eyes and doing a funny dance. She comes into the kitchen because she believes she's overheard little squeaks coming from a little mouse, but really, it was just me.

"¿Qué pasó, te ha comido la lengua el ratón? ¿O te encheleaste comiendo los sopos?" she asks, which translates to: "What happened, did the mouse eat your tongue? Or did you get stuck eating the sopos?"

As I lay on the tiles, my mouth wounded from the war, I muster out, "La medicina."

She turns to the left to find the poison sitting on the counter. As she lets out a small chuckle, she notices the banana peel patiently laying on the ground, waiting for its time to strike upon my vulnerable state. She quickly throws it away before I make a fool out of myself any more than I already have.

Snapshots of 2021

Yaya's Potatoes

The potatoes are different now.

They're close, with enough salt, but the ratio of tomato sauce is off.

It's a holiday—maybe Thanksgiving, or New Year's Day—and I am sitting at the edge of the table, the youngests' seat. I share the corner with my brother, though neither of us is very young anymore. On the other side of the table, Papou stares from behind his aviator frames, resting atop a thick mustache and a smile. Next to him, Yaya watches plates gather on the tablecloth, eyes vacant as if she is on the other side of a great divide.

Once upon a time, she would have been behind the stove. She made excellent soup, and the potatoes were my favorite. Since then, the thing eating her brain has swallowed the recipe, so my dad has inherited the apron.

If I could speak the language of my ancestors, Yaya and I would be good friends. Before, we communicated through broken English, the creak of the swing set, and crumpled ice cream wrappers, but now I say the only words I know, the most important ones: *se agapó polý*.

In Greek, that translates to: I love you a lot.

— Alaina Triantafilledes

Snapshots of 2021

Quality Time

An arduous labor for a delicious ending. Prep is the hardest part, somehow taking 30 minutes or even an hour when the recipe card says it shouldn't be more than 15. By the end of it, our backs ache and our cutting boards are filled with minced veggies, the smell of onions and garlic making our noses itch and eyes water. The oven has been fully heated up and is ready to roast now, or the water is finally boiling if pasta is the night's dish. Music is playing, probably whatever DJ D-Nice is spinning on his Instagram Live. The throwback R&B jams act as a background soundtrack to the overwhelming oven fan. We're laughing, messing with the stove that ticks uncontrollably when the flame is too high and seasoning the chicken just a bit more than the recipe asks us to. When it's done, we sit around the table, enjoying the silence while our creation of the day disappears into our mouths. The kitchen is a mess, but the time spent with my mother is priceless.

— Dakota Chambers



Spitballin' Here

By NINA PIAZZA

As a Dungeon Master, you have all the control in the world, and yet you have none at all.

I'm a newbie Dungeon Master.

A Dungeon Master (DM) plays the writer, producer, stage director, stagehands, and supporting cast in a game of Dungeons & Dragons (D&D). It is roleplay, and we are the masters of our fantastical world... except for the characters, which the individual players control as they see fit. It is chaos, and it is as exhausting as it is addicting.

Most people who play D&D have been doing it a long time. In my current campaign, there are people who've been playing for twelve years, eight years, six years. They've DMed for most of that. I've played D&D going on five years now, and yet I've only DMed maybe a dozen sessions.

And yet.

I look out over a room full of freshmen, and I do not think at all of myself three years ago, nervously kneading the hem of my shirt, sitting where they are now. They all bend their heads to look up at me, sitting on a desk, and I do not flinch. I see kids, nervous and eager and trying too hard to be something they're not yet, and I know exactly what to say. I grin as I shout across the room:

Welcome to Syracuse University, Flint 4A.

A session needs a strong opening. A floor needs a sense of community. The freshmen hesitate for only a moment before they begin to clap and cheer. It is mid-afternoon, 4 o'clock on a Thursday, and I run through twenty-five slides in thirty minutes. I hardly close my mouth long enough to breathe. In hindsight, I will feel bad for my newbie coworker, who is doing a far better job than I did last year, but he is still unsure of himself. I make the kids laugh and that is important. *I am here for you*, I have to say, *but I must keep you safe*. I am something between a friend and a warden. They do not know the meaning of 'mentor' yet, but I do. I know how to weave a story in between words. *Wink wink, nudge nudge*, I laugh.

I don't know what to do for my bulletin board, the newbie RAs say, and I suggest a dozen ideas off the cuff. I've spitballed entire paragraphs for player backstories, only for them to dismiss it at a glance. I need to think in advance, ever paranoid, and I collect stray ideas and inspiration like a goblin.

My coworker is an engineering student, and as brilliant as he is, he is not creative. *I'll just do the beach*, he tells me, *I'm from California*. I can't help but laugh at him:

Are you by a beach?

No.

Are you by San Fran? LA?

I'm an hour outside of Napa Valley.

Wine country, then. Do something with wine country.

What, like grapes?

Wine, grapes, vinegar. What was that raisin brand, Sun Maiden?

Okay, okay. I see where you're going.

He didn't. He ended up making a bulletin board with colorful cars running along an 'S' shaped road. *I couldn't figure out how to make all those grapes*, he helplessly admits to me. But that's fine. People need to have their own visions, too.

I've played D&D for five years, but it's different when you're the DM. You have all the control in the world, and yet you have none at all. I open up Discord every Sunday at 8 pm and learn to dream with my eyes open, one week at a time.



Melancholia

By TAYLOR DRABICK

I am an astronaut jettisoned out to space,
floating silently in the distant black.

An explorer in the wilderness,
watching a shaky torchlight dim with each breath.

A wounded soldier in the trenches,
crying faintly into the darkness.

At times I feel so helpless,
overwhelmed by static screaming in my head.
The rage of the world around me.
Impermanence and imperfection looming distantly.
I am swallowed up by responsibilities and pain.

Poison fills my body, stealing it away.

Slowly drifting into black and white,
the world loses its colors,
fading like an old movie on tape
when the cassette would unravel.

And there I'm greeted by a familiar presence,
a paw outstretched in the growing hopelessness.
A long-suffering friend and companion.

She will find her home once again,
laying on my chest as I gasp in pain,
her weight suffocating me.

A dog, as dark as the devil herself,
she barks me awake in the middle of the night,
gnaws my bones until they ache with exhaustion,
stands too close to me at the intersection of the street,
nosing me closer to the edge.

I know that nothing is forever in this world,
but she lingers alongside me.
Always trailing in the distance,
looming ravenously,
larger with each silent footfall.

I gaze into the mirror and see a cage.
The dog stands behind me,
commanding me to look.
Falling to the floor,
my tears stream gently onto her coat,
seeping into the darkness.
She slides me the scissors.

I want to remove some pieces
and disappear.

Living doesn't always mean dying,
alone and scared.

I know when the days grow long,
and the static roars once again,
my friend will creep beside me,
whispering in the dark.

My Anxiety

By ODELIA LALEHZARIAN

Trigger warning: mention of mental health, anxiety, weight, death/suicide

Dear Oxford Languages,

You define anxiety like this:

Anxiety (noun): a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

I propose a new definition:

Anxiety (a monster): Not being able to eat, sleep, or drink. Medications. More medications. Therapy, and even more therapy. Nervous rashes and hives. Panic attacks. Acne. Bouncy knees. A constant lump in your throat. Being underweight, or overweight. Hair falling out in clumps. Not being able to breathe. Feeling hot and overwhelmed. A racing heart. Biting your nails. Picking your skin. Cancelling plans. Absences from school. Broken relationships. An overaware sense of your surroundings. Salty tears. Doctors notes and crumpled up prescription receipts at the bottom of your purse. A constant sense of fear, even when there is nothing to be afraid of.

I didn't "have" anxiety. Anxiety owned me.

It has been four and a half years since Anxiety took over my life.

Four years ago, I wouldn't leave my bed. I had every single symptom I stated above, even more and worse. I weighed 90 pounds and I was a senior in high school. I was miserable.

To this day, I go to therapy. I take my meds. I push myself to do the things I am anxious about just so I can realize, both physically and mentally, they are not as terrifying or deadly as I think they are.

Now, I can freely leave my bed and participate in the world. I'm not saying it's easy, or that I don't wake up feeling anxious, or that I don't experience any of those symptoms. But I am the healthiest and happiest I have been in years.

You are so much more than Anxiety. You are never alone. As the person whom everyone had given up on, the one who was expected to die or end her life before she graduated high school, I can tell you I defeated the odds. I am here today, writing about the very thing that tried to kill me years ago.

We are in this together.

Anxiety doesn't own me. *I* own me.

Lingering Coffee Dreams

By YASMIN NAYROUZ

A favorite café for reasons much greater than coffee.

Each time I open that old, wooden door to my favorite café, I always take a piece of it home with me. The smell of roasted coffee beans lingers between the coils of my curls. The scent sleeps in the stitches of my clothes. Sinks into my skin.

However, it's not their delicious coffee and chai lattes that I remember fondly. It's the moments you and I shared in those tiny wooden chairs with their worn leather cushions.

The local coffee shop was our escape from home. Not that we despised being home, but we gained privacy that the thin walls prevented us from having. Sister to sister, we became vulnerable and honest with each other.

Even more than that, we dreamed. Local artists hung their paintings from the dull wallpaper of the café, and it inspired us to have bright hopes. We talked about our crazy ideas of writing a novel together, opening our own café, or traveling the world. All were seemingly attainable, but we both knew our situation.

Now, we're hours away from each other, but I still hold onto our dreams. Each time I think of our desired futures, I smell the comforting aromas of that café.

Snapshots of 2021

1950-something

"How did it used to be, Poppy?"

Suddenly, it is 1950-something, and today is the 14U baseball city finals. He is the captain of the underdog team.

Every moment is surreal; it's as if he himself is a Yankee. Adrenaline runs through his veins as he hits a curveball and runs the bases. He can hear the stadium of his heroes cheering for him and it makes him feel alive.

He relays all of this with a gripping voice that keeps his granddaughter on the edge of her seat.

"You see? Everything is different now."

And as time changes so does the world around him. It happens rapidly as he stands frozen on the pitcher's mound, watching as life leaves him behind.

Suddenly, it is 2000-something at Babe Ruth stadium, and city finals are only a star in the night sky of distant memories that continue to fade away. But today, he sits face to face with the light of the future.

It is 2000-something and he is sitting on the sidelines, cheering on his new hero, a little redhead girl who has traded in baseballs for volleyballs. And yet, he's never felt more alive.

— Kaitlin LaRosa



Rolling Suburbia

By ANIKA CARLSON

Being there still has a silver lining.

I run my fingers through the carpet. It's not soft, or silky, or even really comfortable at all. My cousin and I pour glue on our legs and sit still so that we can peel it off of our bodies, like a film of second skin. The remains of that gross pastime stay stuck in the carpet. I come to the conclusion that this carpet is quite ugly.

My grandparents' home is in rolling suburbia, with houses and yards so clearly planned it hurts. Everything about it is cookie-cutter and bland. You need to drive to get anywhere interesting, and I don't have a license yet. Their house is cluttered beyond belief, and there's absolutely nothing fun in it. There are stacks of manila folders piled in every corner and rows of rolled change underneath my grandmother's bed. Being there still has a silver lining.

The room with the gross carpet, the bonus room, is tucked in the nook of the house, a crow's nest to the rest of the neighborhood and allows you to look out any window onto the street or the yard. We climb over old armchairs with plastic coverings, while old Bollywood movies and romance novels sit on the shelf. I touch all this gingerly because the dust that comes off is so thick it looks like ash. The opposite shelf holds old pictures of my whole family, including my cousins and I. My grandfather's desk is covered in news articles, mathematical formulas, and diagrams of the stars. This room is unused for the most part unless my brother, cousins, and I are here.

What is interesting to us children is the TV, even though it is old and boxy. Just like the rest of the house, there is nothing modern about it. All we do is watch *I Love Lucy* reruns in black and white on VHS. Every night, my oldest cousin sets it up. We hunker down into our sleeping bags, even though there are enough beds. We talk over the whole show.

Eventually, it is "lights out." The TV zeros out and it becomes dark.

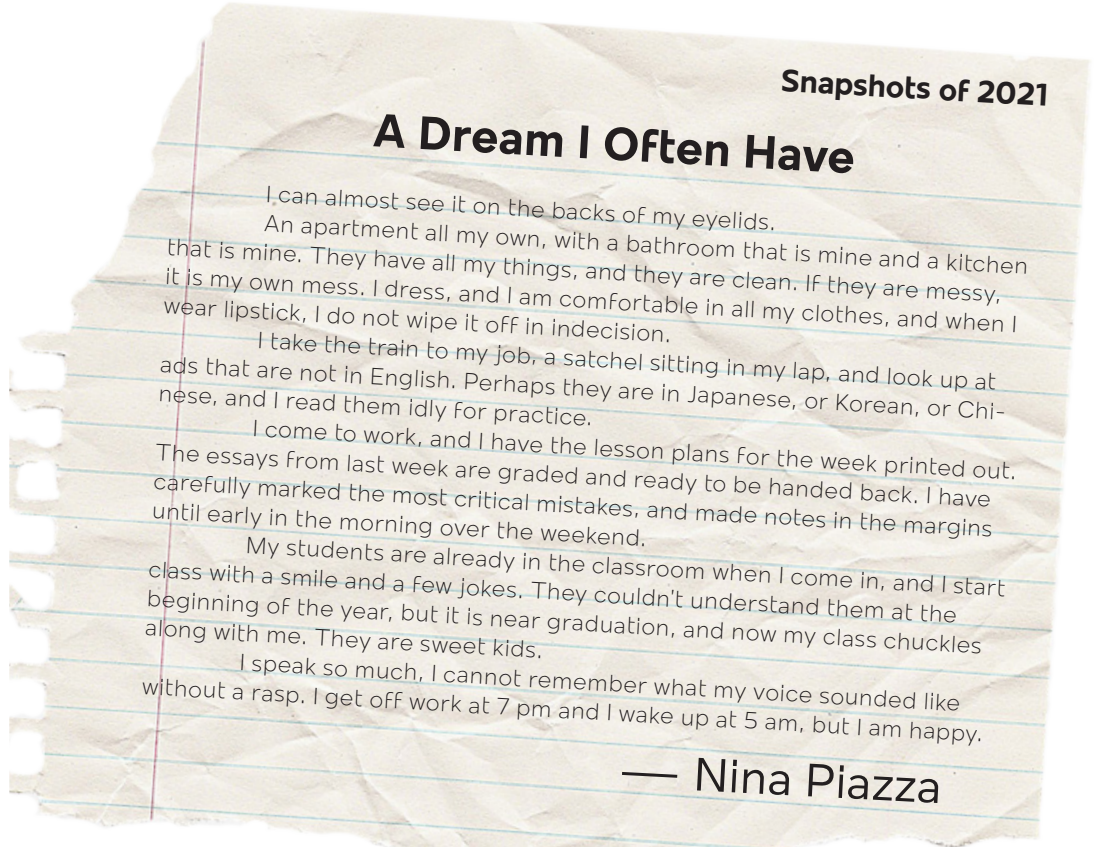
I turn to the side and whisper, "Is anyone awake?"

We chatter, we laugh, and we make too much noise. We each furtively wrestle out of the tangled mess that is the sleeping bag to see who can touch their toes, get to the wall the fastest, or win the thumb war championship.

Like clockwork, our respective mothers come in, looking hassled. We dive back into our positions, feigning sleep.

I would like to think I am a decent actor with all this practice. It's easy at this point. I roll over and rub my eyes to fake the bleariness. Together, we gaslight our mothers into thinking everyone was asleep, and they made it up in their heads. The kicker is giving the performance an annoyed edge because they "woke us up" unnecessarily. Perfection.

It becomes late enough that no one responds to my queries, and I am the last man standing. I have trouble falling asleep right away, and I pick at the ugly carpet with my hands. There's a lot about this house that I don't like. It isn't the most fascinating place in the world, but being there still brings me joy.



Snapshots of 2021

A Dream I Often Have

I can almost see it on the backs of my eyelids. An apartment all my own, with a bathroom that is mine and a kitchen that is mine. They have all my things, and they are clean. If they are messy, it is my own mess. I dress, and I am comfortable in all my clothes, and when I wear lipstick, I do not wipe it off in indecision.

I take the train to my job, a satchel sitting in my lap, and look up at ads that are not in English. Perhaps they are in Japanese, or Korean, or Chinese, and I read them idly for practice.

I come to work, and I have the lesson plans for the week printed out. The essays from last week are graded and ready to be handed back. I have carefully marked the most critical mistakes, and made notes in the margins until early in the morning over the weekend.

My students are already in the classroom when I come in, and I start class with a smile and a few jokes. They couldn't understand them at the beginning of the year, but it is near graduation, and now my class chuckles along with me. They are sweet kids.

I speak so much, I cannot remember what my voice sounded like without a rasp. I get off work at 7 pm and I wake up at 5 am, but I am happy.

— Nina Piazza

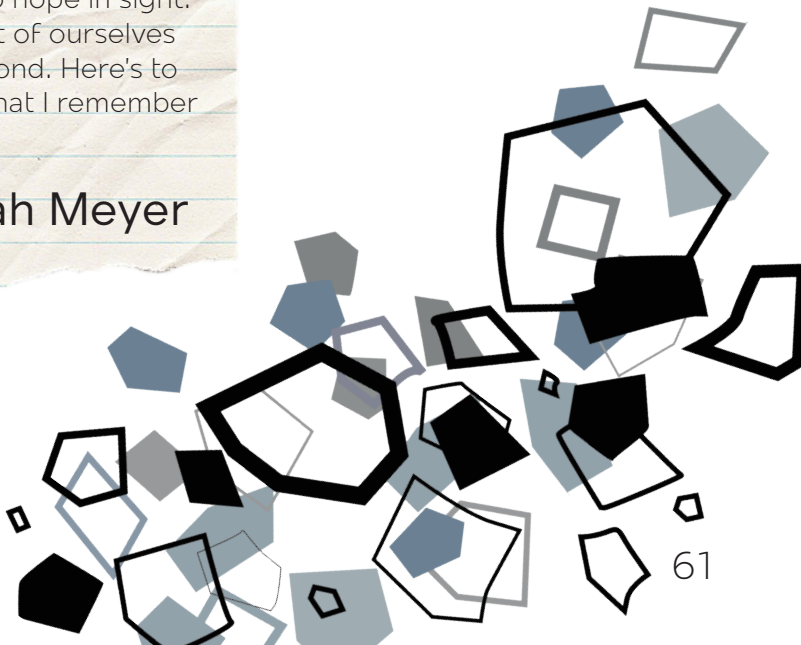


Snapshots of 2021

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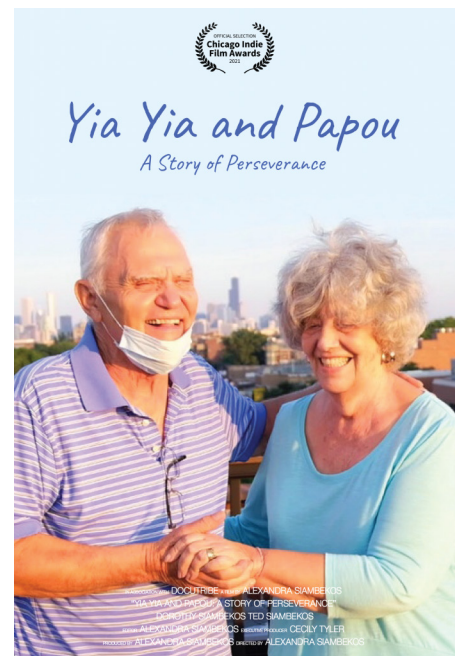
Two hundred ninety-one days of heartache that I leave behind as I run away from the crossfire. Dodging bullets and taking blows, our love was a warzone straight out of hell. You camouflaged your intentions with hidden secrets and private affairs, leaving me at a standstill without any defense. Yet still, through the battlecries I march on until we both surrender, crashing into the sea, with no hope in sight. We fought on the frontlines, losing a small bit of ourselves day by day, minute by minute, second by second. Here's to two hundred ninety-one days of heartache that I remember every time I lay my head down at night.

— Hannah Meyer

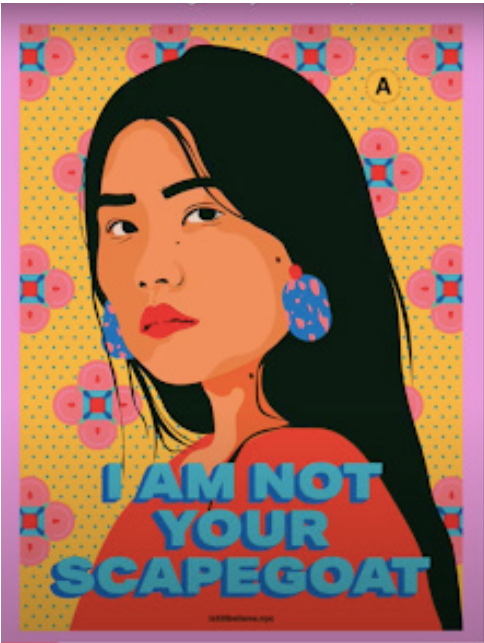


Multimedia

Scan these QR codes or go to the Tell Your Story Walking 2021 website: tellyourstory.expressions.syr.edu/category/multimedia/ where you can view the multimedia pieces we included in this edition of the anthology.



Yia Yia and Papou:
A Story of Perseverance
By ALEXANDRA SIAMBEKOS



In My Armor
By VALERIE MAY GOLDSTEIN



Sharing Heat
By CONNOR JOHNSON



Restrospect
By KATARINA KELLY



Contributors

Lily Braden is a junior studying English Education in the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education. She was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. Lily is passionate about educating her peers on mental health, planning OAD events, and working with first-year students.

Kate Brennan was born and raised by the Jersey Shore. She is currently enrolled in the Newhouse School of Public Communications as a Newspaper & Online Journalism major. She loves writing, rock climbing, snowboarding, and coffee.

Pearl Cadigan is a senior studying Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism at the Newhouse School of Public Communications. She is an avid reader and writer, and is currently the editor-in-chief of *Jerk Magazine*.

Anika Carlson is a junior at Syracuse University majoring in International Relations and Information Management & Technology and minoring in Italian. Anika is from just outside of Chicago, Illinois. Besides school, she is involved with a social sorority on campus, a member of U100, a member of Dean's Team (the ambassador program for College of Arts and Sciences) and she also works in Recreation Services here on campus.

Aquinnah Crosby is a first-year who enjoys art in all aspects. Their true objective with their art is to invoke emotion in people that words cannot.

Dakota Chambers is a senior studying Television, Radio, & Film and Sociology. She's originally from Brooklyn, New York, but lives in South Jersey with her family and new puppy. She loves screen-writing and is working on a TV script for her Honors thesis, but she also practices journalism as an assistant copy editor at the Daily Orangel

Devon Drabick is a senior studying History in the College of Arts & Sciences. In her free time, she can be found outdoors, cuddling her cats, or with close friends.

Taylor Drabick is a senior studying Biology, with minors in History and Spanish. She has two cats and loves plants and gardening. She enjoys writing poetry and creative fiction.

Valerie Goldstein is a freshman Policy Studies major with a passion for performing. She wrote this song in response to the anti-Asian hate she has seen and experienced during the pandemic and hopes that others can find comfort in her submission.

Zoe Glasser is a junior Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism major and U.S. History minor. When she's not writing and editing for *Jerk Magazine* and *20 Watts Magazine*, she's spamming her Instagram story with song recommendations.

Alyssa Gregg is a freshman from Kingsport, Tennessee. She is majoring in Broadcast and Digital Journalism at the Newhouse School of Public Communications.

Alexandra Hodge is a sophomore studying Graphic Design and Information Management & Technology born and raised in The Bronx, NYC. When she's not the design director of the Black and Latinx Information Science and Technology Society here on campus, she's creating nail art and listening to music.

Connor Johnson is a senior Acting Major in the VPA Drama program at SU. He is a student actor, writer, producer, musician, director, and sometimes, a ceramicist.

Katarina Kelly is a junior Musical Theatre major from the Bay Area who dabbles in songwriting in her illusive spare time.

Lacey Kentworthy is from Indiana and majoring in Political Science. She wanted to submit to TYSW because she never had an opportunity to share her photos with anyone, where they mostly just reside on phone. She took this opportunity to show where she's from to people who have never been there before, and present to everyone how simple yet beautiful it is. She finds that most people never go to Indiana in their lifetimes, so she wanted to show the peacefulness especially when in a place like college with stress and a fast paced lifestyle.

Odelia Lalehzarian is a senior studying Political Philosophy and Communications and Rhetorical Studies on the Pre-Law Track. Outside of her studies, she is involved with several Jewish organizations as well as cooking and swimming.

Kaitlin LaRosa is a sophomore double-majoring in Policy Studies and Environment, Sustainability, and Policy from Poughkeepsie, New York. She is a firm believer in writing to commemorate people, places, and things in life.

Jenna Lee is a junior studying Biochemistry on a pre-dental track. Outside of class, she can be found getting involved in a variety of student organizations, especially with her sorority hosting cultural events and doing volunteer work.

Rachel Lin is a Neuroscience and Biochemistry major (undeclared) in the class of 2025. She enjoys watching dramas and eating food, especially dumplings.

Sammy Lindell is a sophomore studying Broadcast and Digital Journalism in the Newhouse School of Public Communications. She is from Darien, CT, and although she is a journalism major, she loves to freewrite!

Phil Lockitt is a sophomore studying Advertising in the Newhouse School of Public Communications. Outside of class, he can be found in a variety of student organizations across campus, such as the TNH student-run Ad Agency or Z89 Radio, where he co-hosts a Friday morning talk show.

Molly Matheson is a sophomore studying Environmental Engineering. She loves anything involving the outdoors, including writing about it.

Hannah Meyer is a sophomore Communication & Rhetorical Studies student at Syracuse University. She wrote her first poetry anthology *Here Lies My Shattered Heart* her senior year of high school and is excited for more of her work to be featured in TYSW.

Ivonne Millan is a freshman majoring in Psychology and Social Work. She was born in Colombia and lived in New Jersey for more than 7 years. She is passionate about making art, writing, filmmaking and film appreciation. She wanted to submit her artwork because she wanted to share my story with others, providing a diverse perspective.

Sophia Moore is a first-year Sociology and Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism student. She enjoys writing poetry and personal essays, though reporting is her biggest passion. In her free time, Sophia is always looking for new music to listen to or scrolling through Twitter.

Yasmin Nayrouz is a sophomore studying English & Textual Studies and Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism. She enjoys reading, art, and exploring new places.

Nina Piazza is a Linguistics Major and a TESOL minor, and she'll be graduating this Spring, a year early. She enjoys writing prose creative fiction the most, but following her participation in the TYSW Anthology class, she developed a new appreciation of creative nonfiction.

Tessa Pulgar is a current Honors undergraduate in the Bandier program at Newhouse, and is set to graduate in 2023.

Aparajita Rao is a senior studying Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Tara Sandlin is a junior classical voice Performance major with a minor in Music History and Cultures. A passionate and compassionate storyteller with an unquenchable thirst to create, she thrives on creating catharsis, connection, and care through innovations in fine arts, spiritual engagement, and community building.

Maggie Sardino is a junior studying Writing and Rhetoric in the College of Arts and Sciences as well as citizenship and civic engagement in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. She enjoys telling stories that invite self-reflection and ignite change.

Alexandra Siambekos is a junior in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, pursuing a degree in Television, Radio and Film with a minor in Anthropology. Through her film, *Yia Yia and Papou: A Story of Perseverance*, she sought to highlight vulnerable communities impacted by COVID-19 and capture an intimate portrait of her grandparents.

Tasfia Sultana is a sophomore studying Computer Science in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. On campus, she is involved with Innovate Orange (marketing), ECS Excelerators, Honors Advisory Board, Girls Who Code, and the WellsLink Leadership Program. During her free time she likes to paint and explore new places.

Dorbor Tarley is a senior Human Development and Family Science major on the pre-health track from Rhode Island. During her free time she likes to read, travel, workout, try new food spots and hairstyles.

Evelina Torres is a freshman Political Science and CCE major from Houston, TX. In her free time, she love to jam out to music, read books, and catch up on her favorite podcast. She also likes to write personal poetry and prose as she thinks it is very therapeutic, and she wanted to submit her story because the moment was acutely painful.

Alaina Triantafilledes is a sophomore in the Renee Crown Honors Program. She is on track to major in Creative Writing along with Writing and Rhetoric. Outside of class, she attends Write Out, the campus creative writing club, and also does undergraduate research to sponsor local reading series and writing workshops. Hopefully, all of this literary preparation will lead her to an editorial career and a freelance writing contract!

Jose Arturo Venegas is from Southern California. He is a first-year undergraduate student studying Civil Engineering and Energy and Its Impacts. He has never been much into writing; however, after taking a creative writing class, he found a new passion in expressing his feelings through descriptive scenes of his memories. Creative writing has become his favorite form of literature and is a great way for him to ensure he remembers core parts of his childhood.

Franklin Wang is a sophomore studying Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism in Newhouse and Information Management in the iSchool.

Hailey Williams is a junior studying Political Philosophy and Policy Studies. "Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another."

Mel Wilder is a sophomore studying Information Technology and Policy Studies. She also loves being involved around campus. She is a Daily Orange Columnist, a student athlete, and is involved in Greek life. Her favorite thing to do in her free time is create.