WALL Literary Journal is created and annually published by the students of Saddleback College.

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All communication should be directed to:

Saddleback College
c/o Liberal Arts Division
28000 Marguerite Parkway
Mission Viejo, CA 92692
www.saddleback.edu/la
(949) 582-4788
WALL is a student-produced literary journal of Saddleback College.
All entries were submitted by students of Saddleback College.
Submissions to WALL are reviewed, selected, and edited by the students on the journal staff.
We accept entries that embrace all viewpoints and walks of life. However, the opinions and ideas contained here in no way represent those of Saddleback College or the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees; they are solely those of the authors and creators of these particular works.

To submit your work for the 2015 edition of WALL, please see the guidelines for submission on the WALL website at http://www.saddleback.edu/la/wall. The deadline is February 9, 2015.
WALL is a community space for creative displays.

It is a fresh canvas, a blank surface begging for decoration, a vast white page awaiting our words and images....
WALL 2014

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Sterling Arthur Leva
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Gina Victoria Shaffer
FACULTY ADVISOR
Every year, writers and artists at Saddleback College are given the opportunity to have their works featured in our award-winning campus literary journal. If they are fortunate enough to be chosen from among the many worthy entries we receive, their contributions become the raw materials from which WALL is constructed. As the supremely talented staffers of this year’s magazine know well, this creative transformation involves focused and intensive efforts. The results are clearly visible on the pages that follow.

Less visible but no less vital to the creation of WALL is the support of administrators, faculty members, campus staff, and community contributors. It is through their generous sponsorship and encouragement that our literary journal continues to prosper. The staff and I would like to thank South Orange County Community College District Chancellor Gary L. Poertner and the district’s Board of Trustees: T.J. Prendergast, III, Nancy M. Padberg, Marcia Milchiker, William O. Jay, David B. Lang, Timothy Jemal, James R. Wright, and Keefe Carrillo. We greatly appreciate the stalwart support of Saddleback College President Tod A. Burnett and Kevin O’Connor, Dean of the Liberal Arts Division.

Special thanks goes to professors Suki Fisher, Bill Stevenson, Jennifer Hedgecock, Bruce Gilman, Marina Aminy, and Shellie Banga of the English Department for encouraging student contributions to WALL and helping to promote the journal on campus; Christopher Claflin, Chair of the Graphics Department; and Rudy Gardea, a graphics instructor whose students provided the graphic illustrations for the journal. Other supporters include Giziel Leftwich, Khaver Akhter, and Karen Yang of the Liberal Arts Division; Larry Radden, a speech instructor whose students performed works from WALL in a public reading; and Ali Dorri, instructional assistant for the Lariat. We would also like to acknowledge the creative inspiration and dedication of Fatemeh Ayoughi, a previous WALL staffer who served as a volunteer for this year’s staff. The work of Edgard Aguilar of Orange County Commercial Printing and John Hesketh of Photomation is much appreciated. In addition, we are very grateful for a community benefactor who (under the cloak of desired anonymity) has generously continued to support our efforts to produce a superb literary journal.

The staff and I invite you to open the “window” to the literary adventures inside this year’s WALL.

Gina Victoria Shaffer
Faculty Advisor
WALL 2014
I have read my fair share of Editor’s Notes, but this is the first time I have had occasion to compose one. It seems pretty straightforward. They all follow pretty much the same format, really: First, I’ll slyly reveal some interesting personal tidbits about myself while at the same time emphasizing that this publication has nothing to do with me and is really all about the staff and contributors. Second, I’ll stress how much hard work this all was, even though it really wasn’t because it was such a labor of love. And last, I’ll tell you all about the exceptional quality of the content and why you would be out of your mind not to read it from cover to cover.

Actually, I’m not going to do any of those things, although they’re all quite true. Instead, I’m going to let the stories, poems, personal narratives, photographs, and artwork speak for themselves, as they are more than capable of doing. Indeed, I suspect you’ll like what they have to say a great deal more than what I have to say, which apparently isn’t much.

In all seriousness, it was a true honor to serve as editor-in-chief for WALL. I could not have asked for a better staff, and everybody labored very diligently (and lovingly) to bring this all together. I am especially grateful to Professor Gina Shaffer for her infectious enthusiasm and experienced direction; and Anibal Santos, who has got to be the hardest-working graphic designer I have ever met, as well as one of the most talented.

I guess I did cover those things I said I wasn’t going to, after all. Oh well. Even if my Editor’s Note is pretty standard, I assure you that the rest of the material contained herein is anything but. However, before I forget, and for the sake of thoroughness, uniformity, and consistency:

You would have to be out of your mind not to read WALL from cover to cover. And with that being said, I present, for your perusing pleasure, WALL: Volume XIV.

Sterling Arthur Leva
Editor-In-Chief

P.S. I neglected to reveal any interesting personal tidbits, but if you’re interested in that, please see page 25.
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I’m from Potterville, Indiana. I was from Potterville. From what it seems, I’m probably the last person in the world who can say that. If I had said that two months ago, people would just smile and pretend like that was nice or in some way interesting. Today, it makes me famous. Or infamous. Either way, I just feel like an endangered animal.

People look at me like I’m supposed to be something special. They stick microphones in my face and follow me around with their cameras like I’m going to do a trick or offer them some great truth that will make everything better. Some of them think it’s my fault -- family of the victims, friends usually. They ask the same questions. What happened in Potterville? Why you?

I don’t blame them. Potterville wasn’t the kind of place you’d expect to find people like me. It’s one of those small towns where everything revolves around Main Street, where the buildings are all short and everybody knows everybody. It was just the sort of place I wanted to live when I got out, but I never thought it’d work, not with larceny convictions around my neck.

Then I met Ms. Conroy. Crazy old gal, no kids, no family, hair like a tumbleweed. Ms. Conroy didn’t mind my tattoos, didn’t care about my conviction. Offered me a room, vouched for me with the owner of the garage, bought me some nice collared shirts that cover the ink on my neck and arms just perfect. She made it all work, made me feel like I wasn’t who I was.

It happened at the end of spring, when we tore out that big tree at the center of town. That old silver maple that had been sitting on that slab of patchy grass in the town square. The community wanted to build a stage. Start doing more community events, maybe something that might bring tourism. There was a vote at the town hall. The tree was old, and it showed in its skeletal branches and cracked gray bark. The stage was a new idea, something fresh, and well, that was that.

They cut it down on a Sunday. I invited Ms. Conroy to come watch. She hadn’t been getting out like she used to and I was...
fishing for a chance to turn that around. She refused.

“That tree is as much a part of Potterville as its name,” she told me. “It’s the founder’s tree.”

She called it a bad omen.

I went by myself. Watched it fall, get diced up, fed through a chipper and driven away in a garbage truck. It took them hours to pull the stump. The roots seemed to stretch out forever, and they had to keep cutting them away as they went along. They got it out, of course, but not before it had torn out damn near half that plot with it. That’s when they found the hole.

It was barely a foot wide then, nothing like it is now. Just a black spot that ran down forever. People will tell you the hole doesn’t go on forever, that I’m exaggerating and that that is impossible. I am not. We dropped rocks, chunks of wood, a flashlight down there. They all just went into the black. No sound. Gone. We lowered a fifty-foot rope down there with a camera. After about fifteen feet there was nothing. No sound, no dirt. Nothing. Sheriff Michaels taped it off and told us all that we’d had our fun and to leave it alone.

“Nothing special about a hole, now is there?” he said to everybody, but he was looking at me. He always had something to say to me. His own little way of letting me know he was watching me, I suppose.

It started to rain that afternoon, hard. I told Ms. Conroy about the hole. She told me about a boy she knew and how he’d fallen out of that tree when they were in grade school, broken his arm. She didn’t once look away from the window and the rain. I still don’t know whether she knew what was coming or if she was just sad about outliving another piece of her life. I let her be and went upstairs to my room.

It was still raining the next day, straight and strong. I passed by the hole on my way back from work. It was bigger. Almost two foot wide, and despite the rain it had still managed to gather a crowd, mostly school kids huddled under a rainbow roof of umbrellas. They were taking turns tossing whatever junk they’d gotten their hands on down the hole, pretending like they were going to push each other in. None of them seemed willing to get any closer to it than the yellow safety tape would allow.

There was a flood warning that next day, so I had to stay late and get the store ready in case it came to be. It was already dark by the time I left, still raining. It was a long walk back to Ms. Conroy’s carrying all those groceries. I ran in to Sheriff Michaels right before the town square, setting up a road block sign in the most stereotypical yellow rain slicker I’d ever seen.

I asked him if I could cut through, which would’ve shaved ten or fifteen minutes off my walk, let me stick to the buildings so I didn’t get too soaked. He hadn’t noticed me, I guess, ’cause he spun on me like I’d been shooting at him. I thought he was going to fall right on his ass.
I asked him if it was a car accident. He waved me off, told me they were having a situation with the hole, just being safe. I knew better than to test a cop, so I turned back.

Something cracked behind me, sharp and loud enough over the rain. Sheriff Michaels shouted and stomped back to the square. He said something about there at least being somewhere for the water to go now.

Ms. Conroy was sitting out on the porch when I got home. I don't know how long she'd been out there. I think she was waiting for me. I told her she should go inside, that she must be freezing.

"That makes two of us," she said. She'd made two cups of hot chocolate. Hers was sitting on the small wood table between the porch chairs, next to an old yellow photo album, empty. She gave me the other one. It wasn't hot anymore, but it was still warm enough that it felt like fire in my soaked hands. She asked me to sit with her. I did.

The view from Ms. Conroy's porch was one of the best in all of Potterville. You could look down the road and see right over the town. In the daylight, before we cut it down, you could see that silver maple poking out over the buildings. That night it was just lights, fireflies floating on black, outlining every street and window.

"Did I ever show you these pictures?" Ms. Conroy asked, sliding the photo album over to me. She hadn't, and I know that she knew that. I took it and started to flip through it. There were pictures of Potterville. Decades of Potterville. Black and whites with missing buildings, color photos of old restaurants and stores that aren't there anymore. Every page was a different place filled with different people that got more and more familiar as I went. Slick curvy automobiles gave way to boxy town cars and SUVs. Kids in button down shirts became teenagers with bell bottom jeans who became adults with slacks and dresses.

Ms. Conroy pointed people and places out as I went. She told me who lived, who died, who got drafted, or moved away, what my old boss used to look like when he had hair. She told me how there used to be a movie theater, and how it burned down and got replaced with the pharmacy. How the Old Stone Church had to be torn down after the flood of '61, how they rebuilt it but kept the name.

That silver maple showed up quite a bit. As a shield for a young freckled boy trying to not get tagged by an older similarly freckled boy, smothered in red, white, and blue streamers at Fourth of July cookouts, or with paper ghosts while a witch stirred a cauldron of apples beneath its branches, beckoning costumed children to her with a long bony finger.

Muffled cracking shook through the storm. I looked up from one Potterville to the other. The pool of fireflies was still there, but a spot in the middle was vacant, black, like somebody took a scoop out of it. I thought we were looking at a power outage.

"If you could go anywhere, anywhere at all, where would you go?" she asked me, looking at the same dark spot I was.

I had no idea. I just told her Machu Picchu. I'd read a book about it when I was in prison. I asked her the same thing.

"Potterville," she told me. "If I could go anywhere, I'd go to Potterville."

Another crack and that dark spot in
Potterville grew. Ms. Conroy pointed me back down to the photo album. There were pictures of Ms. Conroy’s house. Even in the black and whites the home was bright, every line smooth. Every shingle and shutter perfect. It must have been painted white then. I’d only ever seen it gray and wrinkled with dirt-lined cracks.

There was another of a couple, a dark haired young man in an army uniform and a thin blonde woman. I would have mistaken the woman for Ms. Conroy if she weren’t pregnant.

The cracking came back louder, slow, but steady like somebody banging two rocks together over and over. I went to the edge of the porch and looked at Potterville, trying to see what was doing it. I thought maybe transformers were popping. That’s why the lights were out, right? The lights weren’t all just going out. Some of them were sinking. Dropping down like birds to buckshot.

At first it was like watching a car crash from the top of a skyscraper. You know, where you get that you’re looking at something bad, but it doesn’t really mean anything to you.

At first it was like watching a car crash from the top of a skyscraper. You know, where you get that you're looking at something bad, but it doesn't really mean anything to you. The flashes of lightning made it real, replaced the falling fireflies with buildings and homes. I was watching Potterville get flushed down that hole, with a cup of hot chocolate.

The dark kept growing faster, pulling in the lights faster, more violently. It hit the edge of the town and started pulling in the neighborhoods, the trees, the roads, the rain, everything in one big wet mess. I only looked away when I realized that this thing was getting closer, and the ground started vibrating. It ran up through my feet and rattled through the windows and wood planks of the porch. We had to leave.

I turned around just in time to see the front door shut. I tried to follow Ms. Conroy inside. I was going to grab her and haul her down the road on my back if I had to. She locked me out.

I knocked, banged, pounded on that door. She never opened it. I kept yelling for her to open it, to come out, but the roar of everything being pulled away, rushing towards the house, drowned me out. I tried kicking the door open, like you see in the movies. Had I been calm, taken my time, I could have lined it up right. Nailed it right below the knob and got it open, grabbed Ms. Conroy and got her out of there. But I didn’t. I gave it a few tries, kicked it until it felt like I’d broken my foot. I didn’t do it.

I ran. I ran right off the porch, around the house and down the street. The ground was shaking so badly that the rain water was jumping right back up at me. I tripped a couple times when it shook real hard. Broke two fingers on my right hand, split my knee open. I didn’t care. I just kept running until the shaking stopped and then
some, and when I finally did turn around, it was gone. It was all gone. All of it but me. I did see Ms. Conroy one last time, when I ran past the house. She was sitting by the window looking through that old photo album, one last time.
I stood at the head of a room filled with adolescents, watching them stare with varying degrees of apathy, seemingly more interested in their desks or the pencil holes in the ceiling than the person in front of them. It was difficult to tell if they were waiting for me to begin my presentation or if they were already so bored that they were waiting for it to be over. To avoid making eye contact with anyone in the room, I chose to focus on a motivational poster with the image of a man scaling a cliff. The words “Believe In Yourself” were stamped underneath. Honestly, I would have given anything to be free-climbing at that moment if it meant avoiding my current predicament.

We were to each give a fifteen-minute presentation on various topics to the class. I chose the disorder I had grown up with: Tourette’s syndrome. My balding, polo-wearing teacher, Mr. Brown, had suggested I take the full class period for my presentation after hearing my overview. At first, Mr. Brown’s offer seemed inconsequential, but as I stood before the class that day, I was overwhelmed. I’d never been fond of public speaking, let alone revealing intimate details about myself. I knew I shouldn’t be ashamed of who I was, but as my time to present slowly arrived, the idea of revealing my inner demons began to seem like an utterly foolish idea.

Growing up, I experienced firsthand how cruel other students could be. Earlier that year, while playing basketball at lunch, another student knocked me down while blocking my layup. Instead of scoring two points for my team, I scored a face-full of hard concrete, a chipped tooth, and a gouged lip. The opposing team cheered and laughed, while my own teammates swore at me for bleeding on the court. Somebody threw me a small Oreo bag to bleed into as I was ushered onto the grass. All but one student, a friend of mine who helped me to the nurse, went back to playing the game. Those kids were no different than my peers today. Why expect them to care about who I was when they couldn’t care less when my fleshy facade was cracked. It wasn’t me that was broken and bleeding that day; it was just...
my body. How could I hope for acceptance of my internal damage when my classmates wouldn’t even pause a game for something as simple as broken skin?

My classmates must have realized there was something wrong with me, of course. It would have been hard to miss my constant twitching, squeaking, and squealing over a three-year span, despite my persistent efforts to hide it. I couldn’t help asking myself, Why am I doing this? Who am I even doing this for? My thoughts bounced from one reason to the next, trying futilely to delay the inevitable. If I didn’t start talking soon, I doubted I ever would. The impatience permeating the room was palpable. Why did I do this to myself? I could have chosen any other topic and been just fine! Trying desperately to control my breathing and ignore the incessant drumming of my heart, I began.

“Today, I’ll be discussing my disorder: Tourette’s syndrome.” I could see the looks of puzzlement rippling across the room as my sweat glands all conspired to drown me. Admitting I was faulty, different, defective was about the worst thing I could imagine myself doing right then.

“As you may have noticed, I... twitch a lot. And do other... odd things from time to time. Tourette’s is the cause of that. It’s a neuropsychiatric disorder that is responsible for the majority of my oddities.” At this I paused, smirked, and added, “Though not all of them.” I hadn’t planned to include any humor in my presentation, and after tossing that line out, I immediately regretted it. Would anybody even realize it was a joke? My brain berated itself. They’re going to think I’m an idiot!

To my disbelief, however, I observed smiles break out across the room. A few kids even laughed. Not exactly hysterics, but a reaction, nonetheless. Still, I didn’t know whether or not to take that as a positive sign. I pushed on, explaining as best I could what Tourette’s was and how it had impacted my life growing up. I had to get this over with before I died of shame.

The burning hunger of my humiliation grew the longer I went without looking anyone in the face. Between staring at the poster of symptoms I had brought in for my presentation and the various objects around the room, I was rapidly running out of things to look at, except into the plethora of faces before me — only then did I begin to regret the decision to skip note cards. I knew the topic inside and out, and while I was confident I could speak accurately about my experience with Tourette’s, I was less certain that I could look anyone in the eye while doing it. I couldn’t bear the idea of looking anyone in the face, fearing what their expressions would say to me.

As I neared the end of my presentation, I started describing a particularly challenging episode from my past, one in which I’d had to strap my head down to the back seat of my family’s car with a seat-belt in a vain attempt to stop myself from bashing my brain into the walls of my skull. I lay there for half an hour, holding the belt as tight as it would go, blind from my own tears. Shit. Don’t cry now. Don’t think about those tears. I ignored myself. I wasn’t mentally or emotionally prepared for this entire situation. I tore my eyes from everyone and spun around. Stop. Don’t. Can’t —

Clapping. Applause.

What? Why? I didn’t understand how sharing something so intimate and
personal, so potentially damaging, to a group of people could receive such a reaction. I expected snickering or an awkward tension in the room, not applause. I made a desperate attempt to dry my eyes before turning around. Seeing a sea of shimmering eyes behind countless clapping hands hit me like a hammer. They weren’t hiding their eyes. They weren’t afraid of expressing themselves. I didn’t need to be either. I didn’t need to fear being cast out. They don’t hate me! They don’t think I’m a freak! They could admire my ability to confront my fears and share what haunted me publically. By revealing who I was, I gave my peers an opportunity to show who they were: caring and compassionate human individuals who could relate to the pain I felt. Mr. Brown saw my dumbfounded expression and stepped in to save me.

“I’m sure some of you have questions for Mr. Green. Any takers?”

Easily two-thirds of the class had their hands in the air. One after another, they asked questions about my disorder: from when I was diagnosed as a child to what the urge to tic felt like to how I was able to hide the more expressive tics from being noticed. I couldn’t believe they were so interested. My classmates weren’t being malicious or cruel in any way. They genuinely wanted to know more about my condition.

For the first time in my life, I stopped feeling like an outsider to the group. They were having fun and I realized I was, too. I enjoyed sharing who I was. With so much energy in the room, I should have expected the logical next step in our conversation. Inevitably I was asked, “So, you could completely get away with swearing at a teacher? Like, just randomly call them a pig-fucking-monkey-lover and blame it on your Tourette’s?” This obviously sent the classroom full of adolescent boys into a fit of hysterics.

“Oh, probably,” I paused for effect. “If Mr. Brown doesn’t tip them off first, of course.”

I was starting to see hints of how to handle these more sensitive subjects: humor. I didn’t have to be ashamed if I could laugh along with them at some of the more absurd aspects of Tourette’s. Immediately after my remark, the classroom exploded with noise — each student competing to suggest new profanities for me to get away with, simply by adding, “I’m sorry, I have Tourette’s.” At long last I felt in control. The class was having a good time and I finally felt comfortable in my own skin. Mr. Brown didn’t let the uproar last for too long, however, and promptly got the room back in order just in time for the period’s end.

I stood there as the class packed up and left around me, replaying the last 45 minutes...
over in my head. Mr. Brown, insightful as always, asked if I would be willing to repeat my presentation to his other classes. After some hesitation, I accepted. That decision, in addition to the ordeal I’d just been through, likely altered the entire course of my high school career. Each subsequent presentation went better than the last, until I had the entire discussion down to a science. I always suspected my disorder played a significant role in the negative reinforcement I received from other kids. It never occurred to me that nobody even knew I had the disorder in the first place. I thought that by sharing my disorder, revealing who I was with my peers, I would only reinforce whatever arbitrary labels they had already assigned to me, further pushing me down the social ladder. On the contrary, I found that I didn’t have to let them define me by superficial judgments, but — rather — by knowing who I actually was. I didn’t have to restrain myself or be ashamed of who I was or what was wrong with me. People could accept me for me, regardless of what I did or said. To most, it seemed I was just another random person, albeit one with a few quirks. Learning to accept myself for who I was, and being able to laugh about it, made it possible to not only acknowledge but to willingly accept my high school moniker: Twitch.
A Jazz Heart

• Sheryl Aronson

deep inside
recognition beats
  pumping splendors heat

language flows
designs
  rhythmic background

words
punctuate
  mutual tempo

imagination explodes
possibilities
  improvisations
two music souls
    play
    intermingling laughter
the sound
    wanting to know more
taking turns
    riffing life stories
love's artists
    composing
the pulse
    of a living jazz heart
I am a grown man and I collect clowns. Statues, dolls, paintings, photographs, knick-knacks, flower vases, ashtrays, coffee mugs, music boxes, picture frames; anything having to do with clowns, I dig. Now, I am fully aware that this is not typical behavior for somebody my age, and if I had one clown item for every time a friend, family member, or girlfriend has voiced this sentiment, well, I'd probably have the same amount of clown items that I do now. Which is a lot.

I keep clowns everywhere. I have so many clowns in my room that people who know me have dubbed it “The Clown Room,” a title that I probably find more endearing than it is intended to be. I even have a couple in my car: a painted statuette of a magician clown nestled in my center console and a clown on a swing that I rigged up from the rear passenger window so that it actually swings while the car is in motion. The latter is an exceptionally cute little conversation piece.

“I just love your Cadilla—Is that a clown on a swing?”

“Yes. Yes, it is.”

“You know, where I’m going isn’t too far of a walk. You can let me out here…”

A lot of people seem to be put off by clowns. Creeped out. Terrified, even. Case in point: My clown collection has served as a pretty spot-on litmus test for potential romantic interests; if they can’t take the clowns, then they probably just aren’t the one for me. It’s worked out pretty well thus far, although my romantic life has suffered long spells of inactivity. With clowns as with women, I’m picky.

Because I don’t like just any clown. No, I’m very particular. They have to have a certain allure to them, an indescribable mystery that captures my interest. I need to look at a clown and think to myself, “I wonder what’s going on behind the make-up? Did this guy just win the lottery or did his dog die? What’s the score here?”

That’s why I especially like the sad clowns, the pasty-faced entertainers who seem to be hiding something inconceivably tragic behind a painted grin and red rubber nose. Maybe it’s that old (but certainly
not outworn) comedy/tragedy dichotomy incarnate that grabs me, but when I see a melancholy clown, I want to take it home and name it. That’s right. I name my clowns, too, tragically comic names like Punchinello and Rigoletto and Morgan Grinder. They look so lost and forlorn that I feel like it’s the least I could do.

For a long time, I never knew where my clown obsession came from. There wasn’t anything that seemed to account for this admittedly strange psychological obsession that I developed sometime in my late teens. The noble profession of clowning was never on my career radar, and I don’t recall ever wanting to run away to join the circus when I was kid. Hell, I don’t even think I ever went to the circus as a kid. Indeed, it all seemed like a random manifestation of some borderline personality disorder or something to me. That is, until recently.

Last October, my paternal grandmother was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer and given six months at the most to live. Grandma Mary was the only grandmother I ever knew, as my mother’s mother passed before I was born. I spent many days of my youth at Grandma Mary’s home in Corona del Mar, which she had lived in since 1969, swimming in her pool and reading old literary editions from her collection. As I got older though, we drifted apart. She was old school, of proper Italian Catholic aristocratic stock, and I was an upstart, left-leaning academic with atheistic tendencies. We clashed. Some things are genetic, I suppose, and I imagine that I inherited a bit of my outspoken brashness from her.

When she got sick, none of that seemed to matter anymore. If Grandma were to be allowed to stay in her home and avoid spending the last of her days in a hospital, she was going to need around-the-clock care. I immediately volunteered, and along with my Aunt Linda (Grandma’s eldest daughter), I suddenly found myself a caretaker. You see, Grandma hated having strangers in her house, and the prospect of having nurses there appalled her. Proper old school, she was.

For the next four months, I was with my grandmother nearly every single day. Since I couldn’t really leave her side, we had to find ways to keep the both of us entertained, and one such way was for her to answer all of my pesky questions about her life and what I was like as a kid and her family history. In this way, I would also begin to understand my clown fascination.

Grandma has a painting of a clown in her family room that has been there as long as I can remember. She says she made my grandfather buy it for her in Chicago sometime in the late 1950s because it “fascinated” her. Grandma didn’t share my clown obsession; she just liked this one particular clown painting. And I don’t blame her: of all the clown items I’ve come across, it’s definitely one of the best I’ve seen. It’s about two-and-a-half by one-and-a-half feet done up in vivid acrylics, the real good stuff they used to use with all the toxic chemicals that made the paint shine but also probably poisoned a lot of painters. The main subject of the painting peers in from the left side and is only visible from the chest up. He’s wearing red frills trimmed in blue, with his mouth and nose painted the same hue as the trim, and he’s got a little red hat perched atop his head at a gravity-defying angle that should have a really comedic effect but
doesn't. Perhaps this is due to the singularly disconcerting way in which the clown's blue eyes stare straight at you no matter which angle you view the painting from. This clown's visage takes up the majority of the canvas, although there is another clown visible walking in the background: this one doesn't look human, rather more like a child's effigy of a clown. The painting is signed R. Waite, and I sincerely hope that he didn’t meet his demise as a result of acrylic-related toxic shock.

Grandma said that I used to stare at that painting for hours when I was little, and even though most people were scared or put off by it, I didn't seem to be. Grandma also related familial anecdotes that I had never heard before, stories that my father couldn’t even recall. How accurate they were I can't say, but they make perfect sense to me in regards to my proclivities. For example, she told me about her cousin with the glass eye who would be carrying on a conversation with you and then take his fake peeper out, drop it in his water glass, wipe it dry with a handkerchief, and plop it back in his socket, keeping eye (singular) contact with you the whole time. And then there was her uncle the gambler, who got so overwrought with excitement over winning big on an underdog longshot at the track that he keeled over dead of a heart attack, the lucky ticket pried from his fingers and cashed in by another with better luck and looser morals. Her sister’s husband was a real character, too. When he died unexpectedly, his wife went to collect on the insurance policy, only to find that there was another woman claiming to be the dearly departed’s spouse. Both spouses had a son with the same name of the same age and had been married to the same man for around the same amount of time. Apparently, it was much easier to be a bigamist back in the good old days, and the man had merely split his time between the two households by telling each wife that he would be away on business a few nights a week.

All of these figures would have made fantastic clowns, at least the kind that I’m fond of. Comedy in the tragedy, a mysterious air evoking a funny feeling somewhere between tears and laughter. I would listen to Grandma talk about these would-be clowns for hours while I mentally painted their faces with sloppy garish colors and put them in torn frilly costumes. She always entertained my questions, although every once in a while she would pause and wave a petite, dismissive hand at me.

“Nobody cares about this stuff, Sterling. This is old news. Why do you want to hear all this?”

“Because it’s comforting to know that I may be able to blame all of my eccentricities on genetics and family history.”

And Grandma would roll her brown
eyes and scoff and likely think to herself, *Maybe I shouldn't have let that kid spend so much time in front of that clown painting…*

Grandma passed nine days ago, on February 24. She went peacefully and comfortably in her home, and I am proud to say that I took care of her until the end. I will never forget the time I had with her, and I will never be able to thank her enough for all that I got out of it. I’m still a grown man who collects clowns, particularly sad ones, but I like to think that it’s a little more excusable now, or at least more explainable. Grandma must have agreed, because she willed her beloved painting to me, saying “You’re the only person in the whole world who should have that painting, Sterling.”

Thanks, Grandma.
I have the most beautiful ballerina. She wears red velvet, and she dances to happy music. Up, down, up, down, back and forth, and then around she goes, over and over again. My ballerina is stuck inside a bottle, the gold snowflakes meandering down all around her while she dances. I used to wish I could get her out, but now I know she would never be the same, she would never be as beautiful, and she wouldn't dance.

I came to have her when I was five years old. We had gone to the white rancho-style house where the comfortable people lived. A brick sidewalk curved up to the red-framed door. They were friends of my grandparents. The voices sounded big and loud in the house even though no one was shouting. The man's laughter boomed down the dark-wooded hallway where he led my parents. The ceiling high and higher with thick wood beams crossed the room to display a wall of mostly windows. But the thing that captured me the most, the thing I couldn't stop staring at, was the Christmas tree.

It was taller than any I had ever seen in a house, the lights twinkling their welcome. I didn't want to stare at it because I didn't want the grown-ups to think I thought I was getting a present. I knew better. I didn't know these people. Why would I get a present? So, I tried to sneak peeks at the tree, long peeks while the grown-ups refilled their clinking glasses, and extra-long peeks at one particular present. It was a shiny red-foiled package with a gigantic gold ribbon and bow. Oh! I wondered who was going to get that one. I had never seen a present so pretty, and it sat right in the front, reflecting the dance of twinkling lights.

I was embarrassed to be caught staring, but somehow the man's way of echoed

My ballerina dances all around. I watch her and whisper, “Please, Daddy don’t do it. Don’t break any more.”
laughter put me at ease. When the lady walked me over to the tree, I thought it was so I could better see the lights. But she bent over and picked up the shiny red package instead, handing it to me. I was horrified. I looked at my parents to plead my apologies. I had not meant to be staring at other people’s presents.

I stood there with the box in my arms unsure of what to do. The man with the big laugh and his wife had given me a gift. The grown-ups looked at me expectantly. I didn’t want to open it. Usually, I loved to open presents, but not this one. I wanted to be alone with this one, to look at it again as my own, to feel the paper so soft and the bow, stiff and crinkly. But they made me open it.

That is how I came to have my ballerina. My ballerina in a bottle of Bols Gold Liqueur, 60 proof. Turn the key and hear “The Blue Danube” while she dances and dances, the small gold flakes falling all around her, settling beneath her feet.

“Ahh, looky here,” Daddy said. “You’ll want to take good care of that.” He stood beside the bar, next to the black and white pictures of a flower-wreathed racehorse. He turned to the man with the big laugh and said, “Where did you get it?”

The man’s laughter boomed again while he poured another golden drink into his short glass. He shrugged. “You’ll have to ask Trudina. She’s in charge here.”

He laughed again. “Pretty little thing though, isn’t it?”

The grown-ups spoke about how special it was. They didn’t have to tell me. I could see that she was special. The bottle shaped almost like a woman’s body, it had an elegant neck, a silhouetted bust, a gold cord around an imaginary waist, and a ball-gown skirt, all of it made out of thick glass. But on the inside, there appeared to be an upside-down cup, and there stood the dark-haired ballerina. The cup held her captive, but it also kept her dry and safe from everything around her.

For a long time, I kept her on the shelf by my bed, and when I heard the voices get angry, the voices get sharp with an edge and finally escalate into shouts and muted crying—when I heard that, I turned the key. Then, I heard “The Blue Danube.” “The Blue Danube” and… crash! That must be Mama’s little teapot, the one that sits on the dining room hutch.

Mama crying out, “No, please don’t… That’s not what I meant! You take everything the wrong way!” She’s always desperate.

My ballerina dances all around. I watch her and whisper, “Please, Daddy, don’t do it. Don’t break any more.”

Crash! Oh, that sounded like the little rooster salt or pepper shaker. Which one would we have left? Tomorrow I would find out. Please, please stop, Daddy. I’ll tip the bottle again, see the pieces fall again.

“You don’t like that, do you?” And the sound of boots crunching through the shattered glass. I don’t have to see it to know
he’s holding her tight by the hair. I can tell by the sound of her cries, stifled low and near the floor. “What’s it going to take to teach you anything? The next time you think I’m not good enough for you, maybe you’ll keep your mouth shut.”

Up and down, up and down, back and forth. My ballerina’s always on her toes. And Mama sobbing.

“It’s you. You! You make me do this.” He has released her. I can tell by the way his voice is free to move around.

Crash! Another knick-knack? A plate? I can’t tell. What would be next?

“Tell me what I can’t do now. Go ahead. Tell me.”

More sobbing.

Please, please stop. Please, please make him go away.

The music is getting slower and slower, the pieces falling all around, falling at her feet. What is she going to do? How will I keep her safe?

I wrapped my little ballerina in a bag of old clothes, pushing her as far back in the closet as she could go until she pressed up against nothing but walls, completely buried. I hid her so well, I couldn’t find her again. For years I couldn’t find her. She was lost and I mourned that I would never have her again, figuring she’d just been broken along with so many other things in the house.

It was a long time later, and I was a grown-up when I found her. I had just moved again when the box of old mementos turned up. How did she make it out of that house? And how did she make it out without me knowing it? I marveled that she had been with me all along, existing in an unmarked junk box. The labels on the bottle have yellowed and the tag that hung on the gold cord around her waist is missing, but the girl on the inside, the ballerina—she’s okay. I tried the key beneath the bottle, not expecting anything to happen. And what joy when the ballerina creaked, and then began to move. She still danced and the music still played.
I Sea

Beautiful Ocean, please stop the chatter
My mind is making about things that don't matter.
Let the sound of your waves be all that I hear
And the spray on my face wash away my tears.

Beautiful Ocean, remind me of how
All we build up is so easily knocked down.
Carefully constructed castles dissolve in an instant
And all that is left is hurt feelings and resentment.

Beautiful Ocean, so deep and so strong
Share your strength with me as I go along.
This path unfamiliar I tread on with fear
Toward a light in the distance I begin to see clear.

Beautiful Ocean, tide in and tide out
Remove from my mind all traces of doubt.
Anchor my feet in wet sand, cover my body in white foam
Seaweed garlands in my hair, feeling closer to my home.

• Shirley Eramo
Escape

• Iman Moujta hed
Photograph
Water Lily Pond

• Yoon Lee
  Oil 18” x 24”
Reflections

• Dotti Barnes
Watercolor 18” x 24”
Joie de Vivre

- Francine Zorehkey
  Oil 6” x 6”
Under the Knife

- Linda West
Watercolor 16” x 22”
Balconies

• Christopher Reza
  Photograph
Mouser

• Alexander Kusztyk
India Ink and Watercolor 18” x 24”
Unmasked

• Susan Brown Matsumoto
Photograph
I always knew when she lied.
her face made this expression
as if her very existence was a
balancing
act
upon her very own bridge,
yet she never seemed to
budge.
she continued to
walk
forward
despite the wind, rain, humidity

I always admired that about her.

the day will come though
when the cables supporting her
bridge
collapse
and leave her f

a
l
i
n
g
into thin
air.
nothing to catch her
nothing to hold her
nothing to tell her
“darling, it’ll all be ok;
it’s just the shadows,
darling”

and that day came
sooner than anyone
expected.
“I miss you.”
“I miss you, too.”
“Six months down. Two more to go.”
“I’ll be home soon, babe. I love you.”
“I love you, too. I’ll be waiting.”

I thought I knew the definition of waiting. I thought I knew the meaning of what it meant to miss someone. Hell, I even thought I knew what it meant to be sexually frustrated. That is, until deployment. And let me tell you something: Deployment sucks. Deployment redefines the definition of patience and frustration and tells a different story when we say, “I miss you.” Deployment brings up all sorts of fears I didn’t even know existed; deployment tests us in ways we didn’t know had to be tested; and deployment just plain fucking sucks.

This is my second deployment with my Marine. The first one was six months; this one is eight. We had just gotten engaged when he left the first time. I planned the wedding while he trained for war. We prepared for marriage with video chats, instant messaging, and care packages. We read books given to us by our mentors on “The Beautiful Wife” and “How Not to Screw Up Your Bride’s Wedding,” and we shared our discoveries with each other through e-mail and handwritten letters. We sorted through our baggage using words. We got real good at using words. There wasn’t any shoulder-to-shoulder time, no afternoon bonding over the TV, no quiet evenings at the dinner table, and no intimacy under the sheets. We relied solely on our words to communicate our deepest fears and our wildest dreams.

This time he left a week before our first-year wedding anniversary. You can always rely on the Corps to screw up dinner plans. This time was different though. He was my husband now. We shared a home together. We’re separated from the rest of our family -- no big wedding to look forward to and now no man to make the entire apartment smell like his body wash as he steps out of
Deployment Sucks • Kayla M. Perez

the shower. It’s just me, the cat, and a bed that seems a little too big now. We are back to relying on our words to keep our marriage afloat (and of course that bouquet of roses he had delivered on my birthday). Now I watch TV by myself, eat quiet dinners, and I can only think about those times spent under the sheets. We’re back to using our words to communicate our wildest fears and our deepest dreams.

I was reading an article the other day about how a marriage must have physical intimacy for it to be successful. Oh, and it also has to have equal chores in the household, quality time without any distractions, and we must cook together (yes, these are essential!) According to the article, deployment is a recipe for a failed marriage. Thanks for the great news, civilian columnist.

What the article doesn’t mention though is the importance of trust, honor, and communication. We have chosen to trust each other regardless of the time spent unaware of the other’s activities. Those other couples may cook together, but they may not be able to talk about their whereabouts just an hour earlier. What about honoring one another while being patient, remaining above reproach, staying pure and faithful in our marriage? What about using our words to communicate and grow in intimacy, outside of the bedroom? My husband and I use a lot of right words – and sometimes a lot of wrong ones, too; but when we can’t use our bodies, we have to use our voices, our pictures, our words.

As far as I know, that civilian columnist doesn’t know a thing about marriage. I’m the only one taking the trash out and cleaning the litter box right now. I’m only cooking for one. Distractions include training field operations, failed Internet connections, and different time zones. And we sure as hell aren’t having any physical intimacy – unless you count that video I sent him for Christmas, but somehow that just isn’t the same.

Deployment sucks, but that doesn’t mean our marriage is doomed to suck, too. Lonely nights do begin to take their toll. Dinners for one somehow make leftovers harder to eat. And I sure wish someone else could clean the cat box once in a while. “I miss you” begins to lose its meaning yet somehow gain a whole new one at the same time. Our “I love yous” don’t begin at the dinner table and end in the bedroom -- they begin with an emoticon and end with a lipstick kiss at the bottom of a letter. The quiet house seems to be the loudest noise in my head – until the sound of an incoming email breaks the silence.

Hey Babygirl, you there?

Hey love, I’m here. About to go to bed.
It’s 1 a.m.
I just woke up. Been a long night. I’ll be in the field for the next 10 days. I won’t be able to talk to you.

All right, babe. I got you. Where are you going?
I can’t say, but I’ll make sure to tell you all about it next Saturday. I might have wifi.
I would love that. I miss your face. Skype date when you get back? :) You got it. I love you, kitten. I’ll talk to you soon. You’re perfect for me.

Deployment Sucks • Kayla M. Perez

Thanks baby. I love you, too. Go get ‘em, tiger.
Two more months. Just two. It seems that the last two months are always the longest – even though it’s already been six. It’s like sitting in the last five minutes of a class before the bell rings – or like the last day of school. Even though you’ve been in class the past hour and school the past nine months, it’s always the last bit of time that seems like the longest. At this time, is there even a point? Can’t we just go home already? Yeah, he needs to come home already.
They are much closer now,” I said to my concerned husband. I blew out a long slow breath as I rubbed my firm abdomen in a clockwise direction. Little feet danced inside of me. The sound of a bomb went off in the distance. One hundred yards? Two hundred? It was hard to tell. Echoes of machine gun fire and screams sounded much closer. This was nothing new. Christians killing Muslims. Muslims killing Christians. The attacks have been going on for days, months, centuries if you wanted to go back to the Crusades or even further into antiquity. But this is not a history lesson.

I shifted uncomfortably on the wooden floor of the abandoned building we had been hiding in for the last twelve hours. We had been traveling since the previous night and had navigated our way in and out of empty buildings searching for adequate shelter. We had settled in this particular one not because of the availability of running water or food supply -- this place had neither. We stayed here because my body could not take us any further.

“Aaayaa....” I cried out as I rubbed my tightening belly.

“Narineh, it’s all right. I am here. I will protect you.” His hand reached out to my overgrown belly and another squeeze ripped through me.

Ahmaad Charif. My beloved. My habibi. We had met at the Beirut Arab University six years ago in our English class. He was a former soldier in the Lebanese Army before he decided to go to law school. I was going to school to do what all attractive Lebanese women do: get away from home and, of course, find their husbands. I was bint ayleh yaani, from a well-respected home. I was full of sweetness and had dreams to travel the world. Ahmaad had already seen the world, fought in its wars, and had only seriousness and urgency left. I melted his cold exterior with a brush of my hand. Marry me, he said. Of course, I replied. Everything was perfect. But that was a less dangerous time.

Ahmaad calculated the distance from our shelter to the car across the street. His carefully trained eyes stalked the streets for
any Christians. This area of town had been gutted by groups of militia a few weeks earlier. The streets had been empty since then. But Ahmaad was always overly cautious. It was beyond the street that scared me. Rumors flew that roadblocks had been made to stop Muslims from fleeing the country. Men with guns would ask for identification and if your name was Christian, you were allowed to pass. If your name was Muslim, you were shot on sight. Charif means *honorable* in Arabic. It also meant certain death if we were caught.

“It’s time,” Ahmaad said, still staring at the streets.

“No,” I gasped. “It’s too dangerous.” I clutched my pendulous belly as it tightened around the baby.

Without a word, Ahmaad opened the door and swept my tiny body off of the floor. He swiftly moved in the dark to the car across the street and began to drive out of the abandoned neighborhood. I continued to breathe through my contractions, my heart pounding with every turn down a dark road. Ahmaad navigated the side streets to make the safest way to the hospital.

Ahmaad turned down a silent road and immediately my heart sank. Up ahead were two armed men with bright lights and barking dogs. The sound of the tires slowing on the gravel road was deafening. The slow stomps of their boots as they approached either side of the car crushed my spirit with each step.

“No,” I gasped. “It’s too dangerous.” I clutched my pendulous belly as it tightened around the baby.

“Identification, please,” the man closest to Ahmaad demanded. A gold cross around his neck caught the light. The barrels of the AK-47s rested on their shoulders. Ahmaad tried to stall. He motioned to me so they would notice my condition and perhaps have sympathy.

“What’s on your wrist?” the one closest to me demanded. My throat tightened as I felt the beads around my wrist. *My wooden Allah, my prayer bracelet. I have killed us both. I have killed my son.*

As realization washed over their faces, they held up their weapons and started loading them. I threw my Allah in the eyes of the man next to my side of the car and caught him off guard. Ahmaad sped off while the trunk of the car became riddled with rounds from the men. I buried my head in the seat as I winced with every assault made on the car. Shards of glass from the back window sprinkled my body. The sounds of swearing and gunfire eventually faded away. I heard Ahmaad shouting something to me that I couldn’t make out. He shook my body with one hand and shouted again.

“Narineh! Are you hurt?”

I shook my head furiously. All I could do was pray as I clutched my bare wrist where my Allah once rested. The car drove on and I began to focus on the movements of the baby again.

We reached the hospital after almost another hour of driving in fearful silence. I had felt my water break during the drive,
but I did not tell Ahmaad. I did not want him to worry about anything else. He carried me in and felt my wet garments. His eyes met mine and I could no longer hold back my tears as ripping contractions shot down my body. In the lobby we were met by nurses and hospital personnel who put me on a gurney to take me to the delivery room. So many people, so many voices. I looked up at the man who introduced himself as my doctor. My eyes widened when I saw a small silver cross dangling from his neck. I squeezed Ahmaad’s hand and pulled back in fear. The doctor saw my panic and put his hand on my shoulder.

“We are here to take care of you and your baby.” He smiled a gentle smile. His touch calmed me and I released my grip on Ahmaad.

“Mr. Charif, your wife is in good hands. We will be out to get you momentarily.”

They whisked me away to the delivery room. My body shook from hormones and writhed in pain. Sweat and tears rolled down my face and I felt the baby move down and out of me with a force I could no longer bear. And then I heard the sweet sound of his cry as he announced his presence to this world. He was beautiful. He was perfect.

You were amareh, my moon.

And so, you see, my son, although you were almost killed in the name of the cross … you were born under it as well.
But I don’t want to leave!” I stammered, tears streaming down my cheeks. “You’ll have to go with your brother,” ordered my father. “Your other two brothers will leave tomorrow, too, to join the fishing boat. Your mom, your little brother, and I will meet you the next day.”

He added, “This is for your own future as well as your brothers’. And make sure you tell no one.”

Despite my tears and begging, my father was immovable. His decision had been achieved two and a half years ago when our capital had fallen under the Communist regime.

With a heavy heart, the next day I left my childhood home, carrying one change of clothes and my favorite doll in a small bag. Via regional bus I traveled with my brother to My Tho, a small town south of Saigon.

In the morning, I followed my brother, who had been briefed on what to do, and took a bus to Ben Tre. We met my parents and my younger brother at a church. I lit up at their sight but dared not say anything. We then walked towards a dock where several dozen people were standing, dispersed in small, silent groups.

A soldier of the new regime standing nearby suddenly addressed me: “Where are you heading, miss?”

Stunned, I looked to my Mom. “We are going to a wedding,” she said, coming to my rescue. Luckily, he did not press on.

A motorboat approached and docked. The boatman called out, “Anyone going to a wedding?”

Cued, my dad led the way and we followed. Except for the soldier, the other people boarded the boat, too. They had paid for their passage. The boat wound its way in the small river, passing several military posts.

As we reached the estuary, a lone fishing boat came into view, and our boat quickly went to rendezvous with it. The waves slammed our small boat against the fishing boat and then pulled it away, making the transfer impossible. Finally, someone jumped down with ropes and lashed the
two boats together. Everyone rushed to climb up and was promptly herded below deck. It was wet from the ice that had been stocked to preserve the catch but dumped overboard earlier. The hatch was shut. Our boat headed toward the open sea at full speed. It was Sunday, October 30, 1977, and my brother John’s birthday.

That night, our sixty-foot long boat encountered a big storm. Below deck, in darkness, seventy passengers sat on the floor and swayed with the boat. As more waves washed over the boat, we all got drenched. The boat slammed down hard several times. I became very sick and whimpered, a bitter taste in my mouth. Mom tried her best to soothe me. Around me, people got sick and started to worry about capsizing. Amid the crashing sound of the waves people started to pray out loud. Miraculously, the winds died down and the waves diminished afterwards.

With the sun dawning on a new day, we emerged from the hold, which now reeked of sea water and vomit. We had reached international waters and no military boats were pursuing us. To celebrate the momentous event, Dad opened a bottle of champagne that he’d stashed onboard. We all took a sip from the bottle, elated.

“We could go all the way to Australia now!” he exclaimed. “We have enough provisions.”

This was a fishing trip after all. The ship, bought by Dad and a partner and crucial to their plan, had been held captive in the docks for the last six months after some locals had reported to the officials that it was planning a getaway. Finally, with the ship released and awarded a fishing permit, Dad and his partner decided to seize the opportunity to flee.

Life on board moved slowly, punctuated by simple meals. Occasionally, some dolphins jumped ahead of the bow, bringing smiles to all. The ocean, immense and quiet, gave us a sense of freedom and lurking danger at the same time. Two days had passed and the decision had been changed: we would try to make landfall in Malaysia, hopefully avoiding the Thai pirates who were swarming in these waters and had attacked numerous Vietnamese refugee boats. Once, a big Thai boat quickly approached ours. We watched in silence and apprehension. Thankfully, it was a fishing boat, and the fishermen donated some fresh fish from their catch. They also pointed us to the nearest Malaysian coastline.

On the third day, we spotted land and arrived at a coastal Malaysian town in the afternoon. However, the Malaysian officials would not allow us to disembark. They gave us water and food and ordered us to continue our journey. Our boat headed out to sea again, never too far from the coastline. As the sun was setting, the overall morale was falling and we wanted to get on solid ground. The plan was to sneak back and disembark anyway in the dark. While
the boat bobbed precariously close to the shoreline, one of my brothers, Pascal, a good swimmer, swam toward the beach, towing a long rope. We jumped into the water and, holding onto the rope, made our way to the sandy beach.

“Stop, stop!” yelled some Malaysian soldiers. They could not halt the tired refugees who had flocked to the beach. “Sit down! Sit down!” they commanded, pointing their guns at us. Arguments, reasoning, and pleading in three languages ensued.

By then I had been doubling in pain with a big stomachache. My Mom pleaded with the soldiers and finally they agreed to get me to a hospital. But no one was allowed to accompany me, not even my mom. Barefoot, carrying nothing with me, and wearing the same clothes for the last few days, I got in a car. For the first time in my twenty-one years of life, I was separated from my family, all by myself, heading toward the unknown. Would my family be all right? Would I see my parents again?

Ten days later, my mom managed to locate me and visited me in the hospital. We cried and hugged and kissed. But I was not released yet, for I was still under a doctor’s care. Finally, after two weeks of being hospitalized, I was discharged and driven to the refugee camp where I got reunited with my family. Oh, the happiness of seeing my parents and brothers!
The Life of the Man on a Bench

• Dylan Noceda

A cold, crisp air surrounds the land with its captive embrace,
The obscure leaves of the new trees softly whisper in the wind,
Opportunity of a new day’s half-light fills the air,
On a bench, he sits, watching the shadows move.

The sun has risen from her kingdom in the East,
Until, finally, the whole of her head peeks over the mountain range,
And at last, her blinding hue is in full view,
On a bench, he sits, watching the shadows move.

The sun, now highest in her sky of blue,
Forces on the trees a greener hue,
While gray clouds clash with a blue sky,
As more people begin passing by,
On a bench, he sits, watching the shadows move.
The Life of the Man on a Bench • Dylan Noceda

The air has turned musky, polluted,
Opportunity seems to fade away,
As does the Sun and her everlasting shine,
Slowly, she sinks to light another day,
While to his, there comes night.

And just like that,
The shadows disappear,
As the sun has escaped to her Westward Kingdom,
While he, on the bench, remains wondering.

On a bench, he sits, covered in Night’s darkness,
The shadows visible no more,
And longing, promising,
To begin the next day with morning’s optimism,
An eternal shadow covers his World.

On a bench, he sits, waiting for the Shadows to move,
But they never reappear.
The crack it glistened; the crack it gleamed, spreading crystalized webs of broken glass across my windshield. The destruction radiated under the sun, obscuring the vast assortment of life in the city streets. It had been a week since it happened, and a peculiar apathy had settled over me like the haze of a familiar storm. Winter was looming over the barren trees, and I didn’t know just how much more I could take.

I parked my truck in the alley behind my building, not in my usual spot. From my apartment there was a clear view of the alley’s narrow stretch. I grabbed the files scattered across the front seat and felt my hand linger on the door handle, as it often did now. And I realized then, that my truck had been the only thing she ever touched. I breathed in all the misery and madness I could take and opened the door. I grazed the evergreen hood delicately and felt the crinkled metal under my palms. My hands traced the ridges of the accident, the landing spot of a descending soul who by God or grace struck my car as I drove down 9th Avenue. My daughter’s birthday cake buckled in the front seat as her humble body came hurtling down from the high clouds that loomed above the rooftops. I closed my eyes now, my hands still entranced with the terror I had been given. The sound of the crash was still so clear, how her limbs were propped so poetically in their lifelessness. In that moment, my entire life was taken from me. I had seen my fear articulated and alive, and now I longed for the unknown darkness that once followed me.

As I walked to the elevator, my neighbor Grant caught a glance of me through the closing doors and quickly reversed their motion.

“Hey, hey Jordan,” he sputtered, patting me on the back, his tall frame hovering over me, his other hand gripping a bag of groceries.

“Hi there.”

“You catch the rest of the game last night?”

I didn’t bother to respond. I felt trapped in his shadow and the ignorance that surrounded him.
“How are you doing? You look a little, uh, a little distant.” His light eyes searched for relief in mine, one I knew I couldn’t offer.

“Long day,” I lied. I had spent half the day reliving the horror of her death, the images haunting me relentlessly. We both gazed upward at the shifting digits, hovering in the awkward air.

“So, I heard that girl, the one who jumped, was schizo. Totally out of her mi---”

“No she wasn’t.”

“Well, that’s what I hear---”

“You don’t think I would know? For god sakes, Grant, don’t you think I would fucking know. She landed on my car!”

I was angrier than I could’ve predicted. Grant turned away, ashamed of his callousness, and I turned envious of his detachment.

When I crept inside the apartment, a stillness resonated throughout. Slowly I walked to the kitchen and found a note stuck to the cabinet. They wouldn’t be home until 8, it read. I poured myself a drink and untucked the photograph from my history book. As I drank, my eyes met hers, Mrs. Alice Grey, the young wife of a successful banker. Her beauty emanated even through the glaze of film. Mrs. Alice Grey, the woman I had seen once on the corner where our two buildings met, who smiled as she walked down towards the subway, who was now gone to this world, but everywhere to me.

By 7:30, I was sufficiently drunk and gazing out the window, down towards my wounded truck. I couldn’t absolve myself of the constant ruminations, the confusion of this tragedy that was plastered all over my life. I felt prompted to move and to shake myself of this horror. I sat down at my desk and gazed at the ungraded papers of my seemingly former life, one consumed with students and family, not the corpse of a lost woman. Once in the elevator, the anger I had gathered was waiting there for me to reclaim it. I found myself furious at the circumstances of fate, of the future’s awful uncertainty. She must not have been happy, I pondered. Her husband didn’t love her as she should’ve been loved. How I could’ve loved her.

The elevator doors crept open and standing there were Amy and our daughter.

“Hi honey,” she cooed as she leaned in to kiss me. She pulled back and glared at me. “So it’s every night this week?”

“Let’s go, Jessie. Daddy’s got dinner plans.”

I swiveled in the haziness of my ambivalence toward them as Jessie waved goodbye. Her innocence to the sinister world she was coming to know left me with a hollowness I’ve yet to forget.

There I was again, idling down 9th Avenue. Small groupings of candles were arranged around the site. The candles should really ordain the front of my car. Together Alice and I could drive around the block like the ghosts of lives past and remind the ones we knew how much we
used to feel, how much we used to assume.

Then I saw him. Mr. Grey walking solemnly down the street in the opposite direction of her burial ground. I watched him with an animosity fueled by liquor and injustice. Why couldn’t he save her? Why did he leave it to me? My grip on the wheel tightened. I followed him three blocks before I watched him turn into a small, colorless diner. I contemplated my actions and considered turning back, going home to people who loved me and were living. Then the reflection caught my eye, and I covered the glaring cracks as they shadowed across my face and hand.

I sat in the booth just behind him and the two men he had joined. I ordered coffee and determined whose voice was Mr. Grey’s. I had no idea what I intended to do, but I wanted to know her better. I wanted to understand the man she had chosen to give her life to.

“I can’t be alone there. All her drawings everywhere make me so sick and sad.”

“Why don’t you come stay with me and Kelly? We have an extra room for you.”

“I can’t leave her. I can’t.” Mr. Grey started to sob.

I hung my head and felt his tears on my skin. I walked outside into the rain in the midst of all my mournful sorrow. I still had a wife. I still had a heartbeat. I inserted the keys to the truck and stopped. I decided to walk in the rain and drench myself in the moment etching its way into the past.

When I finally made it home, I quietly came inside to find Amy asleep on the couch, the fuzz of infomercials filling the room. As I walked to the bedroom, I stopped and peered into Jessie’s pink room. She, too, was sleeping, her arms delicately out beside her as if she was falling through her dreams. I sat and gazed at the smallest part of me and felt the life I had lost creep back through every exhalation. I stood to leave and as I leaned to kiss her forehead, I tripped and knocked the shelf above her bed. The collision forced a small angel statue to fall from its place, and it hit me atop the head.
Mona represents pineapple chlorine mango sunsets, vertical smiles and winding coast hips. Her kiss kiss kiss starburst lips, palm tree eyelids and red lint cardigans make Ziggy’s forehead slick, his legs like a honey jar tipped. With necks bent the two look over the edge, both remembering warm purple skies, farmers markets, cherry-shaped car scents and Central Coast drives. Below, rocks are pounded to sand. Above, lightning cracks illuminate ragged cliff terrain. Suicidal lovers sting. With fingers linked, the two leap into the earth’s breath and fly like little kids.
Poem

Don’t Leave Before Me

• Jimie S. Cespedes

And if you hear me
Once in a lifetime
Maybe get near me
And find that I’m okay
I’ll always wait here
Stand right beside this way.
My words can’t offer
What I think and feel inside
So, come to my awkwardness
Rub my hair and say it’s alright
For I’m just a pauper,
broken, torn -- hung out to dry

And all I’m asking
Is just to step above this foolish pride
Cuz I may not have a chance
But it’s the one in hell I’ve got to take
For if I turn my back,
stay deep inside or run away
I might be missing out
On seeing what you might find today
Yeah, I might find myself missing out
On seeing you free inside this grace.

So, if you ever need me
Just that once in a lifetime
Look hard believe me
It may just be me you’re hearing of
Don’t leave before me
Don’t leave before me, no
Don’t hurt yourself alone in the dark
Don’t stumble upon those stairs
Don’t hate me when I care
And please don’t stop me when I share
So should you need me
I’ll be there to hold your cares
So don’t leave before me, love.
Lilian stood in front of her mom’s walk-in closet door, terrified. There were plenty of reasons she hated the closet. Monsters were one of them. She clutched her stuffed kitten to her chest, taking a deep breath. With her other hand, she touched the door knob. A shiver slithered down her back — not just because it was cold, but because she almost expected the door handle to rattle. Turning the knob, she cracked the door open enough to peer in. She eased her stuffed partner’s head into the crack to scout ahead. After a moment she pulled him back and looked into his eyes.

“What did you see, Mittens?” she whispered.

Even though he said nothing, she understood.

“Okay. I’ll look, too,” she said, reluctant.

Light seeped through the small crack into the closet, not providing enough visibility to see all the way to the back. Lilian scanned the closet, trying to make out what shapes she could. Her eyes stopped on a larger object.

“What?”

The object shrank into the shadows, knocking a few hangers off the racks. Lilian leapt away from the door and raced out of the bedroom with Mittens. Once in the hall, she turned and stared back into the room, her heart pounding. They sat in silence together, waiting for something more to happen.

“Is that you?” she asked.

Silence answered back.

Lilian inched her feet, one in front of the other, until she finally reentered the room. As she reached the closet, a creak from the wooden floorboards echoed through the half-open door.

“Hello?” Her voice quivered.

The closet door flew open. Lilian shut her eyes and screamed as she was picked up by her arms and whisked upwards. Released, she fell and bounced onto her mom’s floral bed. Lilian opened her eyes and began to laugh. Her mom stood at the foot of the bed, grinning at her.

“One more!” Lilian cheered.

“We’ve been playing hide-and-seek all
night, Lily. Don’t you think we should take
a break?” Mom asked.

“No, you’ll just make me go to bed,” Lilian replied.

Mom paused to think. “Well, I guess I’ll have some ice cream by myself then.
Mittens, do you want to join me? Lily doesn’t want to take a break.”

Lilian hugged Mittens tight against her, waiting to call her mom’s bluff. Arching a
brow, her mom left the room. After a few seconds the pressure became too much.
Lilian jumped off the bed and raced after her. She ran through the tan hallway and
toward the wooden staircase, passing her mom as she thundered down the steps.

“You don’t need to worry about things in the closet. The only thing hiding in them is me,”
Mom joked.

“Lily! Don’t run down the—”

Catching her toes on the last step, Lilian lost her footing and crashed to the
floor. She looked across the living room in shock, reaching with one hand to cover the
bruise on her head. A faint object darted across the corner of her vision. Startled, she
looked over to the window. Nothing.

“Lilian, are you alright?” Mom knelt beside Lilian, pulling her into her arms.

“I’m okay, Mom.”

“I’ve told you a million times—” Mom paused, looking into Lilian’s apologetic eyes. “It’s alright. I’m glad you’re okay.
Come on.” She helped Lilian to her feet and ushered her into the kitchen.

A small oak cabinet beside the fridge contained exactly what Lilian wanted:
three spoons, one for each family member. Jumping into her place at the dining
room table, she watched as Mom finished scooping the rainbow sherbet into two
separate bowls, placing one of the bowls in the microwave for a few seconds. After she
waited the longest ten seconds of her life, the half-melted ice cream was placed in
front of her.

“Thank you, Mom!” She smiled and stuck in two spoons, propping Mittens up
near one of them before starting to eat the ice cream herself.

By the time she had finished, she had forgotten all about the bump on her head.

“Go get ready for bed while I clean the dishes,” Mom told Lilian.

Lilian climbed down the dining room chair and pushed her way back through the
door leading into the living room. As she started towards the stairs, she noticed that
the front door was unlocked. She quickly turned the lock, and then bounded up the
stairs towards her room.

A little while later, Mom joined her and sat on the edge of Lilian’s pastel pink bed.

“Sleep well tonight, we’re waking up early tomorrow.”

“Okay, Mom.” Lilian smiled as Mom tucked in the sheets around her. “Will you
leave my nightlight on tonight?”

“I thought you didn’t need it anymore,” Mom said, tilting her head.

“Just for tonight, and leave my door cracked. Can you check my closet, too?”

“You don’t need to worry about things in the closet. The only thing hiding in them
is me,” Mom joked.
Lilian still felt uneasy and offered Mittens to her Mom.

Mom flipped Mittens over to slide open a zipper on his stomach. Unzipping it revealed a small box with batteries. Pressing one of the buttons near the box, Mom said, “I love you, Lily.” Then she sealed it back up and handed it back to Lilian.

Lilian squeezed on Mittens’ paw, causing him to coo out in her Mom’s voice, “I love you, Lily.”

“Does that help?” Mom asked.

“Thank you,” Lilian said as she hugged Mittens tight.

“Sweet dreams, Lily.” Mom leaned over and kissed Lilian on the forehead. “Sweet dreams, Mom.”

Lilian’s eyes jolted open. She recognized the sound that had woken her up. Her closet doors were rolling open. Lilian’s heart began to race. Taking silent but deep breaths, she listened as the doors glided along the track. The floor creaked just outside the closet door. She placed her hand on Mittens’ paw and squeezed.

“I love you, Lily,” Mittens said into the silence.

The movement stopped. Lilian refused to turn her body around to face the closet door, too afraid of what she might see. A moment passed as she tried to assure herself her mom was right, that nothing was in her room. Another creak told her she was not imagining things.

“I love you, Lily,” Mittens said once more, bringing in another wave of silence.

“Lily?” her mom called from down the hallway. “Is everything okay?”

Lilian shot up in her bed and turned to face the center of her room. A man loomed over, glaring at her.

“Mom!” Lilian screamed as she jumped out of bed, trying to run past the man and through the door.

The man pushed her back against the floor and slammed her door shut.

“Lily! Hold on!” Mom yelled, slamming against the door. The man pressed his weight against the door to keep it shut.

Lilian picked herself up and ran to the window. Grabbing Mittens, she climbed out onto the ledge of the roof. She crawled across the slanted roof toward her mom’s window and peered inside. Lilian knocked on the glass to get her mom’s attention.

Mom glanced toward her, eyes wide. Abandoning Lilian’s room, she raced into her own and slammed the door behind her. She popped open the window and pulled Lilian inside, placing her on the ground. Reaching behind the dresser under the window, Mom pulled out a small black box with “Colt 1911” written on the side. A solid black gun rested inside.

With a few quick motions, Mom loaded the gun and moved towards the door. “Lily, I want you to stay here. Close your eyes and cover your ears. I’ll be right back.”

The door burst open, knocking Mom backwards and to the ground. The gun slid across the ground and under the bed. Mom got back up and rushed towards the man. He met her rush and pushed her back against the wall.

Lilian dropped Mittens. She crawled under the bed and searched for the gun. She felt cold metal with the tips of her fingers and pulled the object closer. Gun in hand, she crawled back out from under the bed and pointed the heavy weapon at the
intruder.

Her eyes met the man’s before he yanked her mom by the hair and whirled her in front of him. He pulled a knife out of his pocket and set it against her mom’s throat.

“Tell her to put the gun down and come with me,” the man said.

Lilian’s heart hammered. She knew that without her mom, she couldn’t escape the man. Her mom would never let her be taken away by anyone. The gun shook violently in her hands, the mixture of weight and terror taking its toll.

“Shoot him!” Mom shouted.

Lilian swallowed and pulled the trigger. A loud shot echoed in the room. The gun went flying out from Lilian’s suddenly numb hands. The man’s knife clattered against the floor, and he fell after it, lifeless.

Shaking, Lilian looked at her mom. She stood motionless over the man’s corpse. Placing a hand on her lower chest, she took a step forward and then tumbled to the ground.

“Mom!” Lilian sprang to her side.

“It’s okay,” Mom whispered as she reached out to hold Lilian’s hand.

Lilian felt the warm blood slick her fingers. “I’m sorry,” she said, her voice trembling. “I’m so sorry!”

“It’s not your fault, Lily,” Mom said, taking deeper and deeper breaths. “You’re safe. That’s all that matters.” Her eyes started to close.

“No, Mom, please.”

“I’ll... be... here...” Mom reached up and tapped Lilian’s heart. “I...I....”

“Mom?”

Mom’s hand dropped and slid against the ground until it met Mittens’ paw. She gave it a weak squeeze.

“I love you, Lily.”

“I love you too, Mom,” Lilian said through her tears, as she watched her mom’s eyes close.
Potential Vessel

• Anibal Santos

Lying on the floor, I look up at the creature.
It hovers above me looking directly at it.
I close my eyes shut, but it is still visible.

I try to escape reality this way, too.
But now the manifestation – what was once a life – blocks that path.
This is how I used to run away from myself.

I was never going anywhere, I know.
Stagnation is my fault and my fault alone.

The creature easily peels me open to enter.
I hear it inside.
I feel it inside now,
Twisting and contorting.

Men are supposed to be strong.
Men are not supposed to cry.
Its presence is stronger when we are alone.
My stomach always feels unbalanced when we are visited by the malformation.

Stagnant, I allowed it to grow.
“It isn’t real,” I tell myself.
“You don’t exist,” I tell it.

The creature opens its mouth and through its ragged teeth it echoes,
“You don’t exist.”
The Creature

• MaryKay Keehn
  Photograph
What Life Is

• Kyoung Park

Photograph
The City

• Paul “Jeep” Eddy
  Dry Point 8.75” x 9.75”
Color Pop

- Jason Ra

Photograph
Lavender Days

• James Phan

Photograph
Phases of Dalton

• Jayne Osborne-Dion
  Graphite 8” x 10”
The Invisible Chairman

• Bernard Echanow
  Charcoal 16” x 22”
Heavy Rope

- Lhoyczel Marie Teope
  Photograph
Because Daddy Loves Me
• Paige Organ

Bath Day, Bright Sun,

I pee-peed my bed instead of the bucket last night, and Daddy wasn’t happy. At least it was Bath Day, and he didn’t have to bring up the washtub again, he says. I get to play with the bubbles while he scrubs me. I giggle when he pokes my tummy and tells me to finish the dinners he brings me. I’m getting so skinny. I poke him back and tell him to eat, too. I tell Daddy his hugs are pokey and hard, and I can feel his ribs sticking out. I think I said something bad, because Daddy looks sad. He says there isn’t enough money for the two of us, Sasha Sweetie, so I have to eat Daddy’s share. Daddy says he’d work, but he can’t leave me all alone in My Room. What if something happened and the Bad Men came? I would never want to be alone without Daddy. Who would keep out all the Bad Men and Witches and Big Bad Wolves?

Daddy picks me up out of the washtub and dries me off before setting me on the bed. I sit on my favorite blue-like-the-sky sheets and wiggle my toes while Daddy uses the leftover water to clean the pee-pee sheets. Daddy’s sitting in the little round circle of bright light from the higher-than-my-tippy-toes window that shows The Outside. I like that circle. On Sunny Days like this, it’s warm and soft, and I nap there until it slowly moves away. It’s awfully nice for something that comes from The Outside.

When Daddy finishes, he plops me on his lap and starts to brush my hair. It’s down to my ankles now, but Daddy only cuts it when I start to trip on it. Daddy likes my hair long. It’s pretty and dark just like Mommy’s, he says. Daddy says I look just like Mommy. Just like her, just like her, just
I cover my ears with my pillow to keep out the noise until the yelling stops and only the crying is left.
For dinner. He makes a frowny face. The world is dangerous, he says. There are a lot of Bad Men that are going to take me away from Daddy. The other story is about a girl named Ruh-pun-zul. Her name is funny, but she has pretty, long hair like me. She lived in a tall, tall tower her Daddy built to keep all the Bad Men out. She loved her life in her Room, and her Daddy would climb up her long, long hair to bring her all sorts of treats and they’d laugh and play and read stories all day. The End. I ask him if she ever went to The Outside. Maybe she wanted to because maybe The Outside was fun, too. Daddy didn't like that. He starts to get loud and growly and his lips get all snarly and show his butter-yellow teeth. No, Sasha. Outside is bad. Even the good things are really bad things pretending to be good. Don’t you ever think about going outside again! His eyebrows are almost touching and the big dark circles under his eyes get deeper and he’s scaring me, but I don’t say it. Stay inside where Daddy can take care of you, understood? I nod and he goes back to being Daddy. He hugs me tight, so tight I can’t breathe. I tell Daddy it hurts, but he keeps holding me and tells me he won’t let them get me. I hug him back as much as I can. Good thing I have Daddy to keep me safe, just like the Daddy in the story.

Play Day, Fluffy Clouds,

Daddy gave me paper and crayons to draw with until he comes back from running errands. I worry a little when Daddy leaves, but he always comes back around Orange Light to make me dinner. I think about what I want to draw today: my bed or my blocks or Daddy and me. I usually draw those, but today I get an idea. I want to draw The Outside. The window is too high for me to see through on my tippy-toes, but I have help. I scrunch my face and push as hard as I can and the toy box finally moves. It’s big and heavy, half as big as me, but I push it under the window. Then I take my chair and put it on top of the toy box lid and climb up. It’s wobbly, but it’s high enough for me to see.

I gasp at the sight. It’s bright and as colorful as my crayons, not at all dark and scary, but, more importantly, The Outside is HUGE! No wonder Daddy says it’s a big, dangerous place. I can still see the blue sky and the poofy clouds from before, but there’s so much more. I can also see a big something across from us. I think it’s a house, like in the stories, but I’m sad it’s not made out of candy. Still, it’s way bigger than I imagined. There’s green on the ground all around it, with thick white lines breaking it up. And there’s a big black line with yellow dashes all the way from left to right at the very bottom of the window. Then, something strange happens. A Beast walks into view on the white line that runs along the side of the black line. Only it’s not a Beast. It’s not huge and scary like a Witch or a Big Bad Wolf. It almost looks like Mommy, but with yellow hair, not dark brown. It’s talking and pressing something rectangle-shaped and shiny and bright against its ear when it turns a little. It sees me out of the corner of its eye. Uh oh. It makes a face like it just saw a spider, pointing at me and making big mouths while it grips the thing in its hand closer to its ear. I’m so startled, I flinch backwards and fall off the chair and fall all the way down to the ground onto my butt. It saw me. Oh no. I have to tell Daddy.
Please, Daddy, please. I’m sorry; I’ll never look at The Outside again.
Because Daddy Loves Me • Paige Organ

of the game; don’t worry Clarice. The rules are just a little different this time. You have to hide better than ever before; don’t move, don’t make a noise, and don’t come out until I say so, no matter what happens. I won’t let them take you away.

I don’t wait for him to start counting or cover his eyes, the voices are so scary. I crawl under the bed and press far back into the corner and lie flat against the ground. If I put my cheek on the wood, I can see up to Daddy’s ankles. I hold my breath just in time to hear the loud crack and see chunks of wood fly up from my door.

There are two large Beasts, each as big as Daddy, crawling out of the hole in the floor where my door was. But they’re wearing navy blue shirts and pants with belts and shiny gold things on their chest, not rags like in Daddy’s stories. They start howling again, even louder and scarier than before. Where is she? Where are you keeping her? Daddy keeps yelling back, stay away from her you bastards! You won’t take her from me! I hear POW POW POW POW and I close my eyes and press my hands against my ears as hard as I can, but they still keep ringing. They ring, ring, ring even when I take my hands away and open an eye to peek out.

I see the Beasts heaped on the floor. They look like Daddy. Not all hair and fangs and claws. Maybe they’re like the Big Bad Wolf that dressed up like Grandma to eat the little girl, looking nice to fool me. I would have fallen for it if Daddy wasn’t here to get them. The floor around them is a dark, dark, glossy red puddle like the time Daddy spilled my nail polish, only much darker. It’s the darkest red I’ve ever seen and it’s soaking all the chips of door-wood all over the floor. I almost reach out to touch it, but I remember I’m still playing the special hide-and-seek. Daddy hasn’t told me to come out yet. I wait and try not to sneeze at the smell of dust, burning, and pennies.

The ringing slowly goes away and I hear something hit the floor near Daddy’s feet. It looks like a big black L, shiny and metal. He tells me it’s safe to come out now, that the Bad Men aren’t going to hurt me anymore or try to take me away. I wriggle back out and run across the puddle to him. It’s warm and sticky, and I leave wet footprints behind me. He wraps me in a big hug, squeezing me tight. He smells like burning and pennies, too. I hear his voice rumble through his chest that we have to go. They found me and there will be more soon. When he looks at me, I can see the big, wild eyes again. His hands are shaking. He has red splatters of paint on him, speckling his shirt and pants and skin. I look down and see he got the red on me, too.

We need to go away, he says, far away where they can never find us. He tears the blanket off my bed and wraps it around my head before picking me up over his shoulder. I can feel him running and breathing hard. We’re bouncing and moving down before moving forward again. He says we’re going for a ride, but I’m not allowed to see the evil Outside World and keep quiet in the Trunk, okay? I hear the chirp-chirp I always hear when Daddy goes to do errands, then the sound of something opening. I’m thrown against rough fabric and I hear a slam all around me. There’s a rumble of a big machine starting, followed by a loud screech as I’m pressed against something also made of rough fabric. I can feel myself going fast, even though I’m not moving at all.
Bath Day, Dark,

I don’t know how long I’ve been rolling around against walls and scratchy fabric in the place Daddy called a Trunk. I couldn’t breathe through the blanket, so I took it off, but I still can’t see anything, just black as I’m hit hard against the walls. Sometimes I heard loud sirens. Sometimes I heard screeching. Those sounds have gone away now, and all I hear is the roar and rumble all around me. I’m scared. Scared of the dark and the noises and all the Bad Men after us. But I tell myself it’s okay; I know I’m safe as long as I have Daddy. Daddy will protect me and keep me in my nice warm Room with a soft bed with blue-like-the-sky sheets and tell me stories and keep all the scary out. Whatever happens, I know I’m safe because Daddy loves me.
Keep It in the Family

• Presley Gorr

I keep my hands at hand,
In case I feel my defenses slipping.
I know you want to help,
But you should get back to that bottle I’ve seen you sipping.
Sipping? You finished a little fast;
I guess you didn’t know that I’ve given you a task.
And you’ve given me one, too:
“Stop getting higher than the moon.”
And you actually expect me to follow through?
You drank away seventeen years of marriage
And still didn’t stop.
I guess it didn’t matter
’Cause you made it to the top.
It’s where you want me to go;
You don’t want me to falter.
Now I’m off to the moon,
Because like father, like daughter.
The concept of time is one that dates back to the beginning of the earth's earliest hour. Time is not the prolonging of fate, nor is it the possibility to stop an inevitable event from occurring. It is a force that drives us into a future hazed by uncertainty, dragging us along its path whether we want to accept it or not. I was eight years old the first time life's full force of cruelty was unveiled to me, and there was a moment when time seemed to have stopped. I quickly learned that not everything in this life is beautiful, and with life can come tragedy. The day had come when I had to say my final goodbyes to my mother, a woman who had shared so much goodness in this world and who had helped me to shape mine.

It began on an afternoon in early September as I stepped through the double doors to the waiting room. The room was welcoming and cleaner than any of the many other lobbies I had been in. There were big windows at the front over the entrance doors that ran the length of the wall and let in the sunlight from outside. The freshness of the lightly colored walls helped make the room feel spacious, making it look bigger than it actually was. The hospital was small, and the room units seemed to match. I felt my childlike patience begin to rapidly diminish as I sat in the waiting room with my mother's boyfriend, unable to sit still. I was drawing on a napkin with a pen he happened to have on hand as we both sat on chairs across from each other in silence. I could overhear nurses and doctors conversing in the halls behind me.
although it had become nothing more than white noise as I was busily immersed in my artwork. It was only a few minutes after we sat down that I saw my aunt emerge from a room and tell us my mother was ready to see us. It was strange to me that my aunt was there because I was almost always told ahead of time if she would be coming to join us, but I just thought they might have forgotten to mention it.

As we walked towards the door of what I guessed was the new room my mother would be occupying for a while, I felt something in the air change. I felt a sense of knowing something horrible was about to be revealed to me. My aunt pushed the door open and I was ushered past the threshold into a room full of my relatives. I felt their eyes switch from each other to me as soon as I stepped inside, but all I could focus on were the two golden eyes of my mother fixed on mine as she lay in her hospital bed, summoning me to come to her bedside.

It was then that I looked at my family around me. Their eyes were full of sorrow as tears ran down their faces. I turned my attention back to my mother and for the first time I let myself truly see the full effects that the breast cancer had had on her body. She couldn’t have been more than eighty pounds, and the light that was on in the animation of her facial features was hardly visible through her hollowed cheeks. Her skin looked paper-thin and ghostly pale, and in her fragile state she could barely move her arm from her side as she raised her hand in an effort to call me to her. The cancer was killing her right in front of my eyes.

Each step I took closer only made it more evident. As I began to close the space in between us, I already knew what was coming next. Her eyes, although tired, and her voice, although weak, were the same I'd always known. What didn't make sense to me was that when I reached her bedside and laid my head on her chest as she embraced me, her heart sounded like it always had, completely normal. It sounded strong as if it were never going to stop, even though the reality was that it wasn’t going to beat much longer. I sat up as my mom took my hand and looked me in the eyes and told me she loved me, and in the seconds that followed, it really did seem as though time had stopped. The unspoken words of the moment finally passed her lips as she whispered to me, “Mommy’s going to die.”

My body went numb and all I could do was watch as my mother started to sob, but I knew she was trying to hold it in to be brave in front of me. What she didn’t know was that she no longer had to be brave for me because, from that moment on, I felt something inside me turn on like a switch in the same instant I felt my heart shatter. I didn’t want her to feel sad or scared anymore, and I didn’t want her to worry about me either. I had to be brave enough for the both of us even when all I wanted to do was break down.

After those few intense moments passed, my mother had my grandma hand a stuffed dog to me. My mom said she had gotten it especially for me on the way to the hospital. She always tried to make light of situations, be silly, and have fun. I knew that better than anyone. As I knew someone else had stopped and gotten it for her, I couldn’t help but smile at her story. I held the stuffed dog in my hands and ran my fingers over the soft fur. Then I noticed the bracelet
she had added on it as a collar that read CASSANDRA. She told me that this dog was meant for me to know she was always thinking of me, that if I needed to hug it, cuddle it, play with it, or just to simply love it, she wanted me to know that no matter what, even when I couldn’t see her, she would always be there with me.

Looking back now, I can see how much I have grown as a person and how this helped me become the strong young woman I am today. I have come to learn that even though I may not have been able to stop time as much as I wish I could have, the time that has since passed has given me a chance to heal, a chance to grieve, and a chance to pick myself up and want to do my best and succeed in this life—not only for my mom, but for myself as well. The weeks following her death were a blur, but that day at the hospital will forever haunt my memory although I’ve also learned to let the good memories override the bad. I know she won’t be here in the flesh to see me graduate college, or be there on my wedding day to see me walk down the aisle towards the man I love, or be here to meet my kids and be with me to watch them as they grow, but I do know that she’s always watching. As far as seeing who I become, what I choose to make of the world around me, and seeing the events of my life as they start to unfold, she’s not missing one second of it. For I know she has a front row ticket to it all, from the best seat that heaven has to offer.
We are reveling in the mediocre meter maid
Who, standing wildly, feeds the state
The crumbs of peasant hands and tv dinners.

The debt collectors rolling their eyes
And turning their martini glasses.
Street people in sidecars racing,
The policemen in back street corners.
Solicitors out to brunch and
Herbie Hancock dead, like jazz.
Dracula and the flying circus play on Saturday,
And Los Angeles is burning.
There are people walking through the schoolyards screaming,
“The tabloids are here.”
“The tabloids are here.”
And “230 Billion dollars. You can have my sneaker.”
The orchids playing in the ashes,
Sitting in the cesspool.
Synthetic men, women and children
Singing merrily in the shadow of the sun.
Daniel Boone,
The High Rise Fat Cat,
Decadence in culture.
Luxury in life,
The suicide in the closet,
All the little dogs,
The Holocaust Museum,
The Cold War,
The Black Plague,
Communication,
The Apollo landing,
Language,
Declaration of War,
Love,
America,
And I, turning grey.
High Society is dead.
The Stock Market will crash.
Because of the constant short change,
Boredom and no solution,
Pious nobodies.

I’M NOT BUYING WHAT YOU’RE SELLING.
He showed up on her seventieth birthday. She was sitting by the open window on an antique floral armchair made for one, overlooking the lake and trying to remember all she had forgotten. It was a lot. And it was exhausting. But he appeared by the dock and even though she couldn’t remember much, she knew his face.

“Jose,” she said, pointing. Her caretaker, Rosa, looked up and smiled sadly. It was a smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

“Do you miss him, sweetie?”

Louisa didn’t reply. She knew that Rosa wouldn’t understand. How could she? That was her husband, who she missed, who she loved, who she could feel in her bones, but how could he be here? He had left years ago, not because he had wanted to, but because he was snatched from her. Their fútbol and cerveza nights stopped. She hadn’t even remembered those nights until now, and she couldn’t believe he was here. Why was he here? And why wasn’t Rosa doing anything about it?

“Sweetie, did you hear me?” Rosa asked and again Louisa pointed to the dock. “Jose.”

Rosa looked outside and again smiled her “I’m-sorry-for-you-because-you’re-old-and-because-you’re-sad-and-alone-and-can’t-remember-anything” smile. All she could see was a beer bottle buried in the sand by the boat Jose had once taken them out on for picnics, buzzed with love, the sun, and youth. But that was a long time ago.

“I don’t see anyone, Louisa.”

“He’s there. Outside. Can’t you see?”

Rosa’s pulse raced and her hands chilled with the thought of Louisa’s hallucination. “He passed away last year, sweetie. He can’t be outside. He’s gone.”

“Jose! Jose!” Louisa began to get excited. He was there. She knew it, he missed her, he had danced with her after they finished making dinner, he made grilled cheese sandwiches for her before she left for work, he loved her, he would wrap her in his arms whenever she was upset, he loved her, he wanted her to be happy, he was so sick before he left, all he said was sorry, he loved
her, but she couldn’t remember why, but he was here, was he here, she wanted Rosa to see him so she could remember, the nights were so long without him, he was hers, she was his, he loved her, and he was here, was he here for her, he was here, he loved her. Dammit, the Alzheimer’s, why was he here and why couldn’t she remember?

It had started off slowly. First, it was small things like forgetting where her keys were or what the name of her old real estate business was or her witty one-liners that never used to disappoint. Then, it progressed to when her birthday was or how old she was or how to read her favorite novels. Now, she could barely dress or feed herself because sometimes she forgot how her mouth moved or what jeans felt like and it was all disconcerting because all the thoughts were trapped in her, screaming to be heard, and she couldn’t articulate a single sentence most of the time.

But one thing she could never forget was the love she had for her husband. When he left, she screamed and tore the quaint kitchen apart looking for her cerveza so she could watch fútbol with him, but he had left and there was no more beer because he had drunk it all. So she was left with her thoughts, or whatever was left of them, swirling around, begging to be understood, and her head hurt. And now, with him outside sitting at the dock waiting for her, her thoughts made sense for the first time in years. All she needed to do was remember.

“Sweetie, do you want lunch? I’m going to make you a cake.”

“No. I would like a beer.”

“You can’t. It will make you sick.”

“What if I want to be sick?”

“You can’t have a beer,” Rosa said as she walked to the kitchen, with the floral drapes and ornate wooden door obstructing her line of vision. “Enjoy the view, sweetie,” she called.

“I wouldn’t drink it anyway. Jose wanted a beer,” Louisa whispered and shuddered.

Jose appeared at the open window, leaning in and smiling the smile that she had fallen in love with. The glistening roses at the window sill brought out the shine in his eyes that she had adored for forty-five years and definitely could not forget.

“Princesa, princesa, come to the lake,” the apparition called. “Do you remember?”

Louisa stared at her lover, uncomprehending. “No,” she whispered.

“That’s okay. We’ll go and you’ll remember.”

They trudged outdoors and were struck with the beauty of the outside. The beauty of the twinkling lake seemed to soothe instantly. It was calm, without a ripple to disturb its mirror effect.

“What do you think, Louisa?”

“It’s gorgeous,” she said as she stared off into the open water, with her eyes wide in
wonder.

“I miss you every day, Louisa. I promised to take care of you and I failed. I failed and all I want to do is wrap you up and love you forever, just like I promised. Do you remember now?”

And she did. It came flooding in all at once. Her mind was turning and ached from the ebb of thoughts rushing through her weak brain.

“This is where you proposed to me, isn’t it?” she asked.

A smile splashed onto Jose’s face. “Yes, my love. This exact spot.”

“And we went on the boat after?”

“Yes. Let’s go. I want to recreate the happiest day of my life.”

So again, they shuffled to the canoe and slowly he helped her in as the lake shook the vessel from side to side. He rowed them out to the middle as Louisa’s head swiveled from the lake to the house to the diamond ring on her finger. She glanced at his feet and saw the beer can twirling, already finished.

“I remember,” she whispered. Her eyes were glazed but determined. “I remember why you left. I remember why you failed. You hurt me, Jose! All you ever did was hurt me!” And she swiped the beer can and attempted to drown it in the lake. Her strength was zapped and Jose grimaced.

“It was out of my control, Louisa. It was beyond me. I’m so sorry, love. I’m so sorry.”

“The stupid rum. And the whiskey. And the beer. Your alcohol was more important than me. You chose a can of beer over me!”

And Louisa got excited. Her frail body trembled. She was sick of forgetting. Sure, it was easier to forget how the alcohol ran through his veins, how the only way she could talk to him was to grab a bottle and drink with him, how angry he would get at her for forgetting to turn the stove off or his name, how the stupid beer tore their marriage apart, how the stupid beer took the love of her life away from her when she needed him most, how all she wanted was to remember, but she always forgot. And her brain hurt. Her joints ached. And when she looked up, she couldn’t remember.

“Who are you?” she asked as she scooted away from her husband. “What are you doing? Why am I here?”

The panic rose in her voice. She jolted up and rocked the boat. “Who are you, who are you, who are you?”

“It’s Jose, Louisa. It’s me. Your husband. Let me take you home.” And he reached for her hand. But she couldn’t remember and her brain hurt and all she heard was white noise and she heard a splash and she forgot how to swim.

When Rosa ran to the scene, she found the canoe tied to the dock and one set of light footsteps leading into the lake. There was a full beer can bobbing near the shore.
This Is How We Deteriorate

• Solana Price

Fresh morning dew gathering on my eyelids
Full of dreams and sadness for moments never had,
Threatening to roll down the mountain of my being.
But I feel so small now
Hardly a hill when I’m holding the weight of you.
“If only you go a little longer, they will change.”
He can change, I can change
And we do sway, but to nothing more and everything less.
I am nothing more than stagnant air,
Pushed into the atmosphere underneath the soles of your feet.
Now I’m collecting these bad thoughts like change off the table of millionaires.
I never wanted to be rich in this way.
Last night I sat down at my computer to work on an assignment for school, and before I could access the contents of the page I needed, I was required to key in a login name and password, perform a software update, open a browser window, make my way through two drop-down menus, repeat the login process, and then launch an application so I could actually read the homework instructions.

Something is terribly wrong with this picture. I am a child of the ’70s. I was born in 1958, but my full awareness and participation in my own life didn’t actually launch until I was entering my teens. It was as if I had been beamed into my body at the age of thirteen and had to begin the journey of navigating my limbs, thoughts, and actions through a myriad of responses as I learned to experience my daily life. Not once did it require a password or a software update to do so.

I never thought I would become one of those middle-aged women who ruminate about the past while wearing rose-colored glasses, but here I am, unabashedly remembering the simplicity of the good old days. The most complicated device I owned in 1972 was a transistor radio that I carried with me to the beach with a bag of pistachios, a bottle of baby oil, and a beach towel. Growing up in North Miami Beach meant that you rode the school bus in the morning and the city bus to Sunny Isles Pier in the afternoon. That was the meeting place for the masses of teenagers who would gather to exchange ideas, flirt, consume junk food, and frolic in the clear warm water of the Atlantic. There were no smartphones, text messages, tweets, emails, or Facebook to connect with. If you wanted to check in with your friends, you simply had to ride the bus.

In the early ’70s, the most complicated document in my wallet was a library card. When I was fortunate enough to earn a driver’s license, it contained neither my photo nor a hologram or laminate covering. There were no screens illuminating light and letters and information in my classrooms; instead there was the smell of ink coming off the still warm paper that had just rolled.
I never thought I would become one of those middle-aged women who ruminate about the past while wearing rose-colored glasses, but here I am, unabashedly remembering the simplicity of the good old days.

Passwords, PINs, and Pixels • Mirt Norgren

off the winding mimeograph machine. The inky scent would fill the room and in an instant we would know there was a quiz or a test that day. It was our cue to panic, to search the pages of our homework frantically for the last glimpse of information before the ink-stained fingers would drop the smeared and dreaded page before us. I can still see the golden rays of early morning sun filtering through the windows onto the surface of my tiny desk, the wood deeply scratched with initials or with the epitaphs of love or hatred that remained from earlier versions of ourselves who had dreaded quizzes in those same seats.

I don’t believe there was a single acronym in my vocabulary until I was well into my twenties. It began with a PIN. A Personal Identification Number was assigned to me at the bank that held my meager two or three hundred dollars until the inception of the next acronym, the ATM.

I had absolutely no use for my PIN nor did I know what it was for. I regularly forgot my PIN, and because of the stern bank warnings to never write down or store the suspicious PIN in my wallet, it was almost immediately forgotten until I needed it. By then there was virtually no way to retrieve it without countless phone calls to bank officials whose suspicious natures would leave me wondering if I was actually the person I was claiming to be.

The word “access” has taken on a whole new meaning for me since the days when it meant a trip backstage at a Led Zeppelin concert. Access is the gateway to my life, and it is ticketed by passwords and secret questions. I live within a vocabulary of technical jargon, webspeak, and the language of texting. I own more chargers and devices than I do socks.

The electronic age is evolving so rapidly that even the latest and greatest software that I purchased only two years ago can be considered dated and, in some cases, completely obsolete. Our GPS systems need to be upgraded annually, the operating system on my computer changes more often than the seasons, and the number of passwords I require to move through the various websites and devices I use daily grows exponentially. I have become a number, a user of remotes, an introvert, and a computer geek.

Once again I find myself craving the simplicity of an earlier life that I enjoyed prior to the invention of the cell phone. A time when I was forced to engage in conversations with live faces. In the late ’70s I moved to sunny California, where surfers and bronzed beauties adorned the beaches below Sunset Cliffs in the small town of Ocean Beach. For me, that was a
Passwords, PINs, and Pixels • Mirt Norgren

season of communication through art and music. My friends and I would lounge on rattan furniture or floor pillows while we listened to rock operas pouring out of our component stereo systems. We would wax euphoric about the meaning of the artwork on the covers of our vinyl records and wait for the hiss of the needle as it touched down lightly on the first groove, which would begin the familiar notes of our favorite albums. We didn't own MP3 players that could contain an entire music collection, nor could we download new releases with the ease of a keyboard stroke. My music collection was filed neatly in stacked apple crates, the records strategically located alongside the bricks and raw wood boards that were assembled along the wall to create a makeshift entertainment center for my stereo system. It took commitment to enjoy music in the days of vinyl; you had to stick close to the turntable and flip the album when side one ended. It slowed us down; it was easiest just to sit and listen.

About two years ago I realized I could hear but wasn't listening, so I stopped charging my iPod and started to jog without music in the morning. I was ready to have one less gadget to fuss over, and in no time I became accustomed to the quiet. The moment came to me one morning when I was getting ready for a day of skiing in the mountain town that I had lived in since the '80s. I've never strayed too far from Mammoth, and I have maintained my connection to the people that I worked and skied and played with on the hill in the winter and on the hiking trails in summer. On this particular occasion, I was stuffing the pockets of my parka with the various electronic devices that I would be using throughout the day when it occurred to me that I had forgotten what it felt like to be suspended on a chairlift with nothing more than the sound of the wind blowing through the pine trees.

The word “access” has taken on a whole new meaning for me since the days when it meant a trip backstage at a Led Zeppelin concert.

My headphones had been drowning out the solitude and the quiet that had always been the soundtrack of the mountain. I had forgotten about the crunch of snow beneath my skis and the sound of powder spraying in tandem with my turns. I knew in that instant that I was slowly allowing technology to filter and distort my connection with nature and other people. There had to be at least one activity that neither required a charger nor a password. It was time to get back to riding the bus.

My chosen profession requires me to log in daily. The list of digital cameras, computers, card readers, external hard drives, and software that I use in any given day as a photographer and a graphic artist is continually evolving. To stop moving with the floodwaters of new releases in an ever-changing culture of technological improvements is to drown. There is no way to stop what's coming, so I conform by plugging myself in. Today I will update, upload, download, export, save, log in, and
log out. I will enter countless passwords and PINs and navigate through a dozen different websites before half of my day is completed, and after lunch I will do it all again.

My images may be digitized and I will speak about pixels and megabytes and resolution, but I still miss the smell of the darkroom chemicals that have long since dissipated. I will not be rolling exposed film onto reels in pitch-blackness or cutting negatives into strips or listening to my vinyl collection. These days I can store the same information on a drive the size of a car key, and although the technology is fantastic, in many ways the magic will be forever lost to me.
In 1972 one of the most famous photos of the 20th century was taken. It is the Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of “The Girl Running” or “Napalm Girl.” This black and white photograph graphically depicts a frightened young girl of nine, completely naked (having ripped off her own burning clothes), madly running down a street in a village of North Vietnam. She, along with other villagers, is seen crying out with pain from burns sustained in a brutal incendiary attack, causing the viewer to pause, gasp, cry out as well for this unfortunate victim of 20th century brutality.

Recently I viewed this photograph at its 40th anniversary retrospective. It immediately brought back certain alarming memories from my own childhood. I grew up in the era of the not-so-uncommon “duck and cover” drills, those drills that were to save us all in case of a nuclear attack from a not-so-imaginary enemy. Upon hearing a repetition of ear-splitting sirens, we kids would rapidly file out of our classes into the school hallways, swiftly crouching below our lockers onto our knees with our arms covering our ears, eyes, and heads. The entire elementary school had to do this within a three-minute time period, thus most of the smaller children were literally running so as not to get trampled by the older and larger students.

That era was the early 1960s. Living in Texas, we were well aware of the atomic threats being leveled against the U.S. from Fidel Castro, the leader of Cuba, a neighboring country located not far from the...
borders of the southern states. Dire warnings were issued not only by him but also by the Soviet Union, our Cold War enemy and greatest military adversary. So intense were these threats, so credible, that many of my friends’ families decided to build fallout shelters, structures built underground for the sole purpose of housing a family in case of a nuclear attack.

One of the wealthier families on our block had constructed one that could sustain their family for five years. We kids would go play in these life fortresses and investigate the array of space-age containers for keeping food and water safe from any radiation fallout. We would make up games of what life would be like “after the bomb” and pretend to be the characters in the classic James Bond flicks, be it Bond himself or one of the bad guys in such popular movies as Goldfinger or Thunderball.

I remember asking my mother if we needed to build a shelter. My mother commented, with miffed and muffled mumblings, about how we Americans were building our own metal coffins, our own underground prisons, and she wanted no part of this insanity. Mom felt we need not run and hide from our troubles but should figure this dilemma out and quickly.

In October of 1962, the Cuban missile crisis became the real deal of nuclear threats. We began having drills on a weekly basis, sometimes more. The federal government had ordered all public schools to be in strict adherence with the national policy for possible nuclear engagements. Thus, they issued a proclamation for schools to send home with their students, a questionnaire for their parents to fill out for precautionary measures. This official-looking paperwork consisted of only three questions for our parents to read, answer, and sign, beginning with the premise: *In case of a nuclear attack, what do you wish to do?*

1. **Pick your child up from school yourself.**
2. **Have an arranged carpool or authorize someone else to take responsibility for your child’s safety.**
3. **Have your child remain at school under adult/teacher supervision.**

I took this document home for my mother to sign. After reading it, she paused. Very calmly, she handed it back to me … unsigned. She then looked at me straight in the eyes, informing me in no uncertain terms to “please tell the school authorities if there is to be an atomic bomb that levels Dallas, Texas, we will most likely all be vaporized, along with this most ridiculous paperwork.” That was that.

She then lifted my chin ever so gently, looking again into my eyes with her own soft brown ones. Shaking her head slowly, with a bit of a tortured expression, she mused, “Dear Annie, my only advice to you is if there is an attack, run like hell. Just run like hell because Hell will be at your heels.”
The Children from the Deep

• Fatemeh Ayoughi

I’m a child from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered.
Pick me up, take me off the streets
during the Human Rights Watch inspectors’ formal visit,
dressed in Christian Dior suits and ties,
so you won’t be embarrassed.

I am a child from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered.
Pick me up, take me off the streets.
until your flabby wives
dressed in satin clothes pass there,
So they won’t be offended
Whispering, “Icky, thank God not mine!”

I am a child from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered.
Pick me up, take me off the streets,
until your chubby children
with a Mother Biscuit
in their backpacks pass there.
So I won’t be a bad role model.

I am a child from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered.
My mat is a Mother Biscuit carton.
The span of the bridge is my comforter.
Pick me up, take me off the streets,
put me wherever you stoned my mother
for selling her young body for my milk.

I am a child from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered.
Pick me up, take me off the streets,
put me wherever you hung my father for stealing bread.

We are children from the depths,
disheveled, dirty, tattered,
but full of an inner storm.
No matter where you take us away,
we’ll pick up the flag of freedom anthem’s singers
when they marched toward the rifle
for sharing the butterfly’s dream
in the time of execution.

We are children from the depths,
one day used as disposable soldiers,
for cleaning minefields,
as suicidal bombers on another day.
No matter where you put us,
one day you will be buried
under our uprising tsunami rubble.
All I see is black. Black and bleak is all I see. My father holds me close as the noises get louder. Louder and louder the booming noise becomes. So close they sound. I finally wiggle my way out of my father’s death grip and sit up. I am stuck in this small nook with my father and four other random strays living off of the streets, seeking shelter from the shelling and doing other things I have been taught not to speak of, for it would be impure of me to think of their actions.

This version of the Arab Spring is supposed to break the centuries-old rust and crust shingles that clank and creak more than a loose step. I am fifteen years old and seeing the cracks blow through the barricades around me. People lie parallel to the gutters. Men and women yell at the top of their lungs as if the stone walls of this Damascus villa will crumble at their roar. Crumble to the ground and be done with already. No more waiting for the end of this blood cleanse as it has become. But the shingles continue to fasten.

My father still holds my hand as we pass the hallway, or what is left of it, along with the strays in the room. The youngest man gives me a look that can only be described as a cross between a gleam and a glare. What this blond man wants is evident as he looks over my tremor-filled form from head to toe, but I know my father will never leave my side. Sensing my uneasiness, he tightens his grip: a vise.

“We need to find your mama,” he whispers in my ear as we pick up our small leather-torn briefcase.

As I pass the aisles of benches that form an endless maze, I cannot help but look at those on the floor. One man covers his daughter, who looks to be about fourteen like me, with a burned presidential banner. I must stop and see this. I cannot leave. There is nothing I can do to stop this man’s silenced tears. My father turns mid-step to walk over red-covered porcelain glass and catches what caught my eye. He quickly pivots, holds my head to his chest, and walks faster through the gates that lead to the outside. I feel him turn his neck back towards the father and his deceased.
daughter, and my father’s grip turns to a clamp. He begins to murmur some words inaudible to the human ear, but I can tell he is frightened.

“Step over gently, but you must keep your eyes on me. Okay. Do not look anywhere but at me.” My father keeps repeating this over and over. I keep my eyes on his blue depths. I keep my eyes on his chiseled nose. I keep my eyes on him, as his grip loosens around my arm. I have to cross this bombarded street alone. Security forces allow only one person to pass at a time. This is my time. I walk, yes, but not far.

Like a fiery inferno, with embers illuminating the blackout, another bomb goes off. The noise continues again, but this time louder. My ears wail from the pain. Beeping machinery continues in the blackness. Why can I not get this ringing to stop? Please make it stop. A wet and coarse hand yanks me up from the pit in the middle of the street. I kick and kick against this form as my father taught me years ago. But those hands tighten and become a clamp. I give up. I have no more strength in me to fight. I am alone. Except for those rocky and ridged hands. Those hands guide me into the clearing. I still see dark except for those hands: a stranger’s hands. As the smoke begins to clear and the one ambulance arrives, I finally see whose hands dragged me out. It is the youngest of the strays with the glare and gleam in his eyes. I jump back, frightened.

He keeps repeating, “No. No. Father. Father. Help.” As this stranger pushes his bloodied blond hair back, I see another hand brace over his right shoulder. It looks like anything but a hand, pierced by glass, the fingers split open.

His mangled hand at his side, my father continues repeating my name, “Laura, Laura,” as he is laid on the street over the blond man’s t-shirt. The blond man saved him. That stray blond man with a glare and gleam in his eye saved me.


But he answers with a smirk, “We people. We fight. But we people.”

“People?” I ask.

“People,” he answers.

The blond man carries what he can of my father on his left side and holds my hand tightly on his right. I see my mother bursting into tears. I see the blond man shake her hand, turn to me and nod.

I cannot tell you what that nod was about because years later I still do not know, but clearly it meant something to him. We both understood one thing: in this bleak second in war, we are all still people.
The clock reads 9:25 p.m. I lie on the couch facing the television. My whole body vibrates and the vibrations seem to spread throughout the room and shake the floor, which shakes the table, which shakes the glass, which shakes the water it contains.

The news is on and my ma is in the kitchen behind me cleaning. She hasn’t told me to go to bed yet. She scrubs away like a madwoman. Ever since I was real little, I would watch her do the dishes and notice how she pays so much attention to every glass and mug and pot and pan, not missing a spot or a corner or a crack, like a robot. That is what she is doing behind me now, and it worries me.

The clock reads 9:28 p.m. I can’t stop looking at the clock. Every time a digit changes, my heart skips, and my breath gets stuck in my throat. I really do like the news, but all I want to do is leave and I can’t because my body has melted to the couch like a green army figurine that has been set on fire. I can’t bear to have my ma see me slink to my room, so I just listen to the television. My favorite news anchor, Rick Chapman, talks into the camera. A million excuses for leaving run through my head like a long freight train and each car is a different excuse that hits my brain and flees just as fast, and I’m looking at the train and my pupils are moving left to right, left to right, trying to capture one of them to give myself a good reason to sneak away, but the train moves too fast and eventually it passes by and all I can see is it rolling off into the distance and I didn’t even get a solid glimpse at any of the cars. I try to get off the couch and go to my room, but my back is still green blowtorched wax that sticks like glue to the leather, and I can’t move.

The clock reads 9:34 p.m. I think it’s weird that my ma hasn’t told me to go to bed. When I came home from school today, she was moving real fast around the house, trying to clean up. Yesterday, late at night, the house had got real messy; I heard it happen, and today some things were broken when I woke up. Nights like these scare me.
One day I will get big and strong. I swear I will; I want to tell my ma that. I want to tell her that this won’t happen forever because one day I am going to stop it. But right now I am only eight and I am scared.

The clock reads 9:39 p.m. My eyes won’t leave the clock alone. I’m sweating so much now, and my heart beats its way into my throat. My hands are tingling and I can’t stop the T.V. from spinning in front of my eyes. This whole time I have been breathing through my nostrils, but now I can’t breathe unless I let my mouth gape open like this fish I used to have named Stella.

When I was four, I remember one time I took Stella out of the water and put her on the floor because she looked so bored inside her little bowl. When I put her on the ground she flopped around and I tried to grab her, but I couldn’t because she was so slippery and moved too fast.

When she ran out of energy and I caught her, she laid in my palms twitching and opening her mouth wide like she couldn’t breathe and that didn’t make sense to me because there was so much more air out in my room than in her little bowl. I remember I screamed for my ma to come and help me. She said that fish can only breathe in water and she took Stella from my hands and put her back into her bowl. Stella stopped making her mouth gape and twitching, and started acting normal.

And now I am sitting on this couch gaping and twitching and wondering why my ma hasn’t picked me up and put me back in my bowl and why she doesn’t know that I need to breathe the air in my room where I belong, I don’t belong out here with all this air. I belong in my fish bowl, away from the things that happen at night.

The clock reads 9:45 p.m. I flop off the couch like Stella and rise to my feet and turn around and walk in the direction of my room. I step into the hallway and begin to quicken my steps. Over my shoulder I hear my ma whisper goodnight. I can’t tell if she said it or if I am just hearing things. I don’t say anything back and I run down the hallway to my room, shutting the door quietly behind me. Once I’m in my room I run across to my closet door. I go in and shut the door behind me. My closet shares a wall with the living room, so I can still hear the news playing. I listen and I hear my ma’s footsteps across the living room floor as she walks to the T.V. and turns the volume up. Usually when I leave the T.V. on, my ma will turn it off. She doesn’t like television. But on nights like this she leaves it on as loud as it can go. She does it so I can’t hear what else happens in the room. I press my ear to the wall and listen to news story after news story. Rick Chapman talks about the stock market, then about an accident that had occurred two towns over, then about a new scandal at a fast food restaurant chain, then about a woman who got sick from a new diet craze, then about a new and faster way...
Fish Out of Water • Kyle Cabrera
to file your taxes, then about something the president had done with some woman, which Rick Chapman and other news anchors had been talking about for weeks.

I have no idea what time the clock reads. I don’t have a clock in my closet, but by the time Rick Chapman started talking about that woman who ended up suing the company that made her diet pills, I figured forty minutes had passed. Right now I’m focusing on the sound of the television. I like it. It is comforting to me for some reason.

I hear a noise that I recognize and I try to focus on the television now. I know how he slams his car door. Oh God, it’s starting. I listen to every word that comes out of the television, but I can still hear what else is happening. Rick Chapman speaks through my wall.

A woman in the Bronx has filed suit against the Metropolitan Transit Association...

The front door opens violently and a toxic smell fills the room and drifts into my room as if it were looking for me.

An eighty-foot tree fell in the middle of a road and landed on an electric line, causing power outages...

My ma speaks to him, but his booming, slurred voice drowns the muffled high-pitched voice of my ma.

A fire erupted in a small apartment in upstate New Jersey...

Things start to bump the walls and hit the floor, and feet scuffle all around the living room.

A man is sentenced to twenty-five years in prison after killing a flight attendant in a hotel room...

A slapping sound penetrates my ears, followed by a soft whimper.

This concludes our broadcast. To all those watching, have a goodnight and God bless.

I put my hands to my ears and begin to cry. I can’t move. One day I will be big and I will be able to stop this, but right now I’m eight and I’m scared. There are muffled sounds of a body being thrown against the walls, and then the furniture, and then the couch. I imagine the vibrations spread throughout the room and shake the floor, which shakes the table, which shakes the glass, which shakes the water it contains.
Brandon Gracie, a nine-year-old psychopath whose mission in life was to torment the hell out of other kids, told my friend, Steve Barnes, he had three seconds to get off his bike and fight him or else he was “going to get decked.” It was a sweltering hot sunny day at De Portola Elementary School, where my siblings and I spent most of our time playing on the green grass fields, kicking or throwing around a rubber ball, or riding around on our BMX bikes pretending to be like Evel Knievel. My brothers, Jimmy and Bobby, and I pleaded to Brandon to leave him alone, but it was to no avail. Brandon wouldn’t have heard us if we told him that his entire collection of devil-worshipping records was on fire. He was having way too much fun with Steve. He just stared at him with an evil smirk on his face, hoping upon hope that Steve would give in to his demand. It was the summer of 1979, and on that day I learned that sometimes standing up to tyranny was the only way to victory, no matter if I won or lost the battle. Brandon could usually be found patrolling the school grounds after hours on his bike, dressed in his red O.P. shorts with a comb sticking out of his back pocket and a worn-out rock band T-shirt. (He had two, both Black Sabbath). His size wasn’t exactly intimidating. He wasn’t much bigger than I was and that wasn’t much at all. He did love to fight, however. He was one of those guys that when I saw him coming, I went the opposite way. I tried to avoid him at all costs whenever possible to evade the inevitable beat down or humiliating tease session. Pretty much all the kids in my grade regarded Brandon
the same way. He fed off other children's fear: as soon as he sensed it, he was in control. He held so much power over me and put so much fear into me that I would sometimes lie awake in my bed at night for hours, unable to sleep. Such was my life under Brandon's rule.

That day of the bike incident, Brandon counted to three, but Steve, frozen with fear, did not move. Maybe he's just taunting him to get a scare out of him. Maybe he will leave him alone, I hoped in much anguish. But that wasn't the case. The sound of Brandon's knuckles slamming into poor Steve's cheekbones was what came next.

Crack! The force of the blow knocked Steve off his bike and he fell to the ground. I felt so much pity for Steve as I watched him slowly get back up to his feet. Tears spilled down from his eyes. He still was not about to fight this savage. I wanted to kill Brandon at that moment, but I, too, was paralyzed with fear and couldn't even utter a word. God, I wish I knew karate! What happened next planted a seed of hope in me that would one day grow into a belief that would change my life.

I absolutely despised bullies. As far as I was concerned, they belonged in prison for life with the mass murderers, bank robbers, and burglars. They beat up on kids like me who were weaker than them just to get some thrills. My brothers hated bullies too, but we were always too scared to stand up to them -- until that moment.

My brother Jimmy, who was ten at the time, a year older than me, had seen enough. He jumped in and fought Brandon, the Goliath of our neighborhood, rescuing Steve in the process. I couldn't believe what I had just witnessed. Jimmy actually fought Brandon Gracie! I'd like to say that he went on to give Brandon a beating that he would never forget, but that's not how this story went down. What Jimmy did was stand up to Brandon. He didn't win the fight, but he didn't lose it either. Watching my brother courageously fight this brute gave me a ray of hope that one day I could do the same, as eventually I did. After that day, Brandon never picked on Jimmy again although he still had fun terrorizing Bobby and I. But those days were numbered, too.

Not long after Jimmy's "David and Goliath" moment, I had had enough of Brandon's terror and I stood up to him, too. As I remember it, I didn't give Brandon the beating of his life either, nor did I win the fight, but I also did not lose. In the process of standing up to him, I actually won a different battle: I had triumphed over my fear of being beaten up and picked on.

After that, Brandon never picked on anyone in my family again. As I look back on that day, I wonder how my life would have turned out had my brother not fought Brandon. Perhaps I never would have learned the imperative life lesson that I believe every person must learn: sometimes it is necessary to stand up and fight. I learned that if I ever wanted to overcome an obstacle that I was afraid to face, the only way was to face it head on; there is no going around it. I may not always conquer every bully or every situation that is holding me down, but I know that when I stand up to it, I become free of the fear that imprisons my being, giving me room to grow so that I can move forward.
I used to believe that fire was an element too wild for me to wield,
Too wicked,
Until I was given a trial by fire
And realized that I had always been burning.

Burning shame, burning embarrassment, burning hope,
Burning rage.
A heart under pressure burst into a spectrum of molten colors
Brimstone blood and a ribcage of white-hot steel.

Lungs like bellows exhale ash and smoke and embers
That no waters could ever temper.
Look into my eyes and you will see not an ocean, but a caldera
Ready to erupt in fury.

I have rekindled my spirit
And will lie dormant no longer.
Sirens blaring in the near distance, music blasting distastefully loud, my best friend sitting aside me, yelling to revive the last bit of conscious attention I had left as I ran the red light that would bring me face to face with justice. It was just another Friday night, fresh and full of endless possibilities. My friends and I were drinking copious amounts of alcohol just as we did any other weekend. The overwhelming feeling of softness, safeness, and comfort that I had grown so fond of instantly took over my sanity and consumed every inch of my body as the alcohol took control. I felt invincible, free, and reckless.

I got into my car without a slight bit of remorse as I turned on the ignition. As I placed my foot on the pedal, an exhilarating feeling of relaxation took control of my hands as well as my brain. I began to fade in and out of consciousness. I let the blasting music take control of any negative thought. The sirens blaring in the background approached quickly behind as I attempted to distinguish them from the lyrics of the song playing. In a jumbled fluster, I looked to my right to see the horrified look on my friend Madison’s face as a police officer opened my door and assisted me out of my rolling vehicle. I woke up in a bitter, cold, dark jail cell. In this moment of weakness, I felt as though my life was over with no turning back. However, receiving a DUI would soon become the blessing in disguise that turned my life around forever and challenged me to face my mistakes and weaknesses by growing from them.

As I woke from my typically expected drunken stupor, I was shocked to find myself pressed against the corner of a bacteria-infested, depressingly cold ten-by-ten foot jail cell. Wearing nothing but a short sparkly dress and a bright orange wristband I had acquired the night before that read my full name and the letters DUI, I instantly jolted up to find my worst nightmares to be undoubtedly real and in my face. I asked a weeping woman sitting next to me where exactly we were. She replied, “Goleta County Jail.”

I could not believe the news I was hearing. I had absolutely no memory of the
previous night’s activities as well as the time and day I was currently wasting away in. Cold tears began to slide down my flushed cheeks as I instantly felt raw, real emotion for the consequences of my alcoholism. I had never been in trouble with the law in my life and was being charged with a DUI. I was confused, scared beyond belief, and had no idea when or how I was getting out of this. Twelve hours passed as I sat there blankly waiting until finally a light shined through the dark abyss of the cell and the officer standing behind the door called my name.

I swear I felt God, for the first time in years, reach his arms out to me and pull me up and out of what the officers called “the drunk tank.” I was free at last with nothing but my dead cell phone and a ticket outlining the arrest process as well as my court date. I had no idea what was to come.

A month later my court date arrived like a slap in the face. With my attorney, my sobbing mother, and my deeply disappointed dad by my side, I faced what is now the most memorable day of my life. As my clan sat through the various cases called, anxiety and fear consumed every inch of my body. When my case was finally called, I stood up to face the judge. She began her delivery by telling me that I had blown a .34 (almost four times the legal limit for someone of age and more than halfway to my pronounced death). Here I was, an eighteen year old with the drinking pattern of a lifelong alcoholic. She told me that I would be attending nine months of drug and alcohol counseling as well as AA meetings two times a week.

Her words hit me deeply. This was not the first time someone had mentioned to me I had a problem, but it was the first time I actually considered what I was doing to myself and the people surrounding me. I was killing myself and leaving my loved ones devastated. When all the cases were adjourned, I hugged my parents with a firm grasp and told them how much I loved them, how sorry I was, and how badly I wanted to change my life for good.

Walking into a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center for the first time was humiliating. I carried the “I don’t have a problem” mindset high and mighty as I met doctors, lawyers, mothers, teachers, and individuals from all demographics. I figured these people were much older than me and had been alcoholics all their lives, which caused their DUIs. As the months flew by, I began to really enjoy the time spent at Zona Seca Rehabilitation Center. As the individuals attending made honest, raw confessions of their own alcoholism and drug use, I began to accept my own

The overwhelming feeling of softness, safeness, and comfort that I had grown so fond of instantly took over my sanity and consumed every inch of my body as the alcohol took control. I felt invincible, free, and reckless.
addictions and came to terms with the fact that my life, up until my DUI, was a ticking time bomb spiraling downward straight towards death. On the last and final day of my nine-month-long program, the faces I had grown to enjoy seeing every day passed around an opaque-colored gem as they took turns standing up to speak sweet words and encouragements about my progress. This overwhelming feeling of belongingness made me thankful to be exactly where I was and, for the first time, encouraged me to keep striving on this path.

As my one-year mark without drugs and alcohol approached, I began to feel like a human again. With the help of Zona Seca and all the fabulous individuals I had encountered along the way, I began to see my life in a new light, a light filled with purpose, direction, and conquest that I had been missing out on all the years wasted with drugs and alcohol. Getting a DUI brought reality to the things I wanted to hide most in life. It became the biggest blessing in my eyes as I now see what could have happened. I am so thankful to be where I am today and continue to remind myself how this event shaped my life. Without this event I would have continued down a dark path leading to permanent outcomes. Before this incident I was numb to the world and now I am here in the now, living every moment. This mistake, which at the time felt like a chain that would hold me down for the rest of my life, is what I am most thankful for today for setting me free of a wasted life.
Sometimes when I walk into a church, I feel like I’m walking onto a nude beach. What I mean by this is the vulnerability that comes with it. I find myself becoming emotionally strained, as if I shouldn’t be there because someone might see me living carefree and up to no good. On a nude beach, strange hairy men walk at a distance up and down the shore -- at least this is what I remember in my one-time experience, an awkward moment. The Catholic guilt blankets me like a beach towel because I am being stared at by these men, even though my clothes are on. I admit that I find myself craving a penalty because I dared to go there in the first place, not realizing that I might not find the beefcake I was hoping for.

I start to see that I’m not exactly the center of everyone’s universe and that most people revolve around their own planet.

I question my existence as I walk into a church, glancing at the stained glass cross above the pulpit. As I look down the pews at the familiar faces looking at me, I’m reminded that being part of a church comes with serving and getting involved, so not being there to help out with childcare or handing out donuts once a month leaves me disconnected. It’s overwhelming to find a place to sit down among the long rows of seated people, and the awkward stare of my fellow brethren increases the barometer of embarrassment. All the wrong I chose to do rather than right the past month comes to the surface.

For instance, I should have put that fifth glass of wine down before I fell asleep fireside in that fancy restaurant while entertaining my husband’s boss’s wife last Friday. And running out of dog food last night left Cabo starving this morning. I kneel down on the seat in front of me during a somber worship song.

“Hi, God. I need a moment with you.
I’m feeling the shame: the shame of not giving it my all, the shame of choosing to be lazy, the shame of giving into wrong rather than right. Can you forgive me? Oh, Mighty One, the one I adore and the one I bow down to. Just say the word and I shall be healed.”

The awareness of my wrongdoing, which has been hanging over me, suddenly stops after the prayer. I start to see that I’m not exactly the center of everyone’s universe and that most people revolve around their own planet. Like the men at the beach without any clothes on: they don’t seem to be bothered one bit.

Besides, the guilt got me through the door and it’s the conviction of my wrongdoing that keeps me in check. I recognize my strengths and weaknesses by praying and recognize my imperfect self, leaving me relying on something more powerful and less dumbfounded than me.

Church is where I allow myself to let go of those things I cannot change, and so often I lose sight of this. When I walk into a gathering place of worship, I gain respect back for myself and for humanity by bringing my nakedness out into the open. There is no need to hide out. It is a giant mirror for me to see where I am at: pure exposure. I adjust and go out facing the world again but more loving, more patient, and more kind.
Poem

Back to the Beginning

• Miguel Botello

The sun rises and the sun sets,
Not knowing when it will be my last breath,
As I inhale the sea crisp air,
Remembering what could have been,
Reminiscing as chains of memories drift away,
Going back to the vast unknowing sea,
Where the sun drifts away,
Sipping this cup of brine turned into red wine,
Remembering it’s just another sea day,
Reminiscing as my smile fades away,
With the neon-colored sun,
Setting anyway.
Editor-in-Chief
Sterling Arthur Leva

Sterling Arthur Leva is a writer, poet, artist, composer, and nightmarist. He is currently finishing his first novel, *Prank Calls From Outer Space*, as well as his first solo album, *Picaro* (under the name Sterling Wormwood). In addition to his creative endeavors, he enjoys collecting clown items, fawning over his Cadillac DeVille, and tap dancing. His muse used to be Dionysus, but now it’s Anastasia (although she prefers "girlfriend"). You can view his work at www.letterstodionysus.com.

Graphic Designer / Layout Editor
Anibal Santos

Anibal Santos is a student illustrator and graphic designer. Anibal has won several awards for news page layout and illustrations for *Lariat* news articles. He also contributes his editorial cartoons to *USA TODAY COLLEGE*’s website. He finds inspiration from life experience and the many people around him. You can view some of his illustration work at anibal.santosart.com.

Fiction Editor
Ryan Vann

Ryan Vann is an incoming transfer student to UCI. His fiction has been published previously in *WALL* and *Mobius*. He enjoys horror movies, pinball machines, and complaining about James Patterson.
Kayla M. Perez is pursuing a degree in psychology in family and marital counseling, and currently works as a personal fitness trainer in San Clemente. Kayla was born and raised in Northern California and moved to Orange County in the fall of 2012 after marrying her Marine. Her interest in writing led her to the staff of WALL Literary Journal as a personal narrative editor. When she’s not writing, she enjoys spending time at the beach, fitness, and practicing wifehood. You can follow her on Instagram, username kaymperez.

Sarah Anderson is an aspiring artist, currently pursuing a degree in creative writing. She resides in San Clemente, where her creativity flourishes under the soft sun. Her poetry has been previously published in WALL. In her free time she enjoys alliteration, photography, the ocean, and the titillating notion that the world is ending every solitary second.

Bridgette Castleman is an aspiring artist and writer. The close proximity to Disneyland that comes with being born and raised in Southern California has fueled her passion for animation since early childhood. However, she considers herself a “jack of all trades, master of none,” often dabbling in different kinds of traditional and digital media. After getting her General Education requirements taken care of at Saddleback, Bridgette plans to transfer to a four-year university to pursue a degree in art.
Presley Gorr is a first-time poet but cultured yoga practitioner. This is her first publication, but she has many half-finished stories. She hopes she finds it in herself to complete them and grace the world with the “real-shit-worst-case-scenarios” she relives in that fertile imagination of hers.

Chad Stephen Leslie is a short fiction and poetry writer and an occasional picture-taker. He is working on a book of poetry, *Squirrel’s Branch in a Falling Tree*. See his photographs and writings at mindingmisswokawile.tumblr.com.

Miguel Botello is a shy guy who has been writing since childhood. Working on WALL really taught him how to connect with his inner writer, and Professor Shaffer taught him how to focus on his writing more. In his free time, he surfs and learns about Jesus. He’s just another man searching for wisdom.

Laura Bouzari focuses on scenes of realism in her writing, which often depicts characteristics of both her native land of Saudi Arabia and her current home in Aliso Viejo, CA. Swept up in the scenes before her, she makes those sights visible on a typed page. “Vise” captures images of chaos and havoc but also illustrates a single, minimal slither of light for humanity. She is a voracious reader and known bibliophile. She believes everyone has a story and literature has a way of bringing that story out on thin black and white pages. You can contact her at lmbouzari@yahoo.com.
Poetry, Art & Publicity Committees

**Dylan N. Stratton**

Dylan N. Stratton is a professional cashier, fisherman, “Jumping Jack,” and nuisance. He has no credentials to date, but Tom Thumb was his great-grandfather and he’s working on it. He lives for education. Where the pen meets the paper, where events become history, where men and children sing, where demigods rule the underground, and people change: he wants to live here. He does not have a website at the moment, but you can look up his name or another.

Publicity Chair & Personal Narrative Committee

**Elizabeth Ortiz**

Elizabeth Ortiz works as a DJ and news reporter on FM 88.5 KSBR, Saddleback College’s jazz radio station, and has written for the *Lariat*, the campus newspaper, for the last two years. Her love of journalism has landed her a spot on Channel 39 with feature community news segments that were written, produced, and filmed independently. Awarded for her excellence in photojournalism, Ortiz has been recognized by the South Orange County Community College District Board of Trustees. WALL has given her a chance to let her inner soul flourish as her desire to write continues. She thanks Saddleback for hiring great teachers to guide her to deliver news in all three mediums: print, radio, and film. You can contact her at elizabethortiznews@gmail.com.

Faculty Advisor

**Gina Victoria Shaffer**

A professor of English at Saddleback College, Gina Victoria Shaffer teaches composition and creative writing. She previously worked as a newspaper reporter, theater critic, and magazine editor. Shaffer is also a playwright whose works have been performed on stages throughout Southern California and off-Broadway. Her one-act play “War Spelled Backwards” was published in *The Literary Experience*, an anthology for college students. It is deeply rewarding for her to work with such talented students to produce WALL.
Mahnaz Alemtar, who has been studying graphic design at Saddleback College, created the scratchboard illustration for the short story “Cerveza” on page 89.

Sheryl Aronson, who works as a marriage family therapist, is a freelance writer, poet, aspiring novelist, screenwriter, and playwright. She has had articles published on jazz musicians Herbie Hancock and Maynard Ferguson in the magazine Modern Recording and on Terri-Lynne Carrington in Black Teen Beat. She has also written psychology articles on couples’ relationships and women’s self-esteem issues for local magazines in Orange County: Orange County Metropolitan, Awareness Magazine, and Beach Cities/Valley Magazine. She is a contributing writer for MLM Communications, Inc., an online publishing company, and writes humorous commentaries on writers writing about writing.

When she’s not writing, she’s dreaming about being the first female baseball player. Although she’s 60, this author can still slam the softball pretty well. In the meantime, she’ll have to settle for writing a novel on the first female baseball player, called Striking Out. You can read some of Sheryl’s writing and writing experiences on her Facebook page, Sheryl Aronson.

Fatemeh Ayoughi served as a volunteer assisting the staff of her favorite literary journal, WALL. She is an Iranian novelist and poet who survived a dreadful prison of the Iranian regime and immigrated to the US in 2001. A well-known author in Iran, she has published poems, short stories, and articles there, and has continued to do the same in the US. Her first short story in the US, “My Attorney Smart Caterpillar,” was published in the International Voice Journal in 2005. Her article “Judge Sholomson and My Garbled English” appeared in the 2013 edition of WALL. Her book The Silent Clamor is a collection of poems, short stories, a novel, and a play, and was published in 2013. She is also a songwriter for Hilltop Records, which will soon release an album containing her songs.

After Dotti Barnes retired from working over twenty years in the performing arts (most of the time at the Los Angeles Music Center), she began concentrating on her interest in the visual arts. First working in oils, she developed a severe allergic reaction to turpentine and switched to watercolor, a medium she absolutely loves. She has exhibited her work with great success at various locations in Southern California. When not dripping paint all over her studio carpet, she keeps house for her two Norwich Terriers. She can be reached at deannbarnes@gmail.com.
Bill Baum is a full-time student at Saddleback College majoring in human services. He is a veteran of the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division and a former member of the National Scholastic Surfing Association’s National Team. When he’s not on campus, he can usually be found surfing somewhere in Newport Beach or enjoying his true passion: playing with dogs.

Photography has opened Susan Brown Matsumoto’s eyes to an amazing world of color, design, and beauty. It is a journey of wonder and passion, one she hopes to continue for many years to come. Susan’s most recent competition ribbons were 1st Place at the Orange County Fair Photography Exhibit 2013 and 1st Place, 2nd Place, and Public Choice Awards in the April 2014 Spring Juried Show of the San Clemente Art Association.

Her photographs have been published in WALL every year since 2010. Her quote would be … “Never stop learning. Never stop dreaming. And never stop believing in yourself.”

Kyle Cabrera has a three-year-old daughter whom he spends most of his time with. In his free time he pretends to be a writer.

Jimie S. Cespedes, aka Jimie Alton Hayes, is a student at Saddleback majoring in English. She is one of the WALL staff alumni from 2012’s award-winning issue. Formerly published on Poetry.com, her poems are often lyrics from her own music. She transcends time. Originally hailing from the ’80s San Francisco punk rock scene/era to bravely confront new up-and-coming generations through avenues such as WALL, she aspires to transfer to university and graduate school into an eventual career in teaching these future generations. Right now, her website www.jimie.net will guide you to her Facebook page, but soon it will refer you to “Dog’s Best Friend,” which is her secondary career of walking and sitting the dozens of doggy clients she cares for in her area.

Andrew T. Chaffee Jr. is always on call for work. The road is his master, and when the road calls, he answers. He loves his pen because he believes it is the medium between his mind and his mouth, allowing the truth to be converted into ink. He would love to see a revolution happen in his lifetime -- a revolution in which love wins.

Ann Coffee is a Texan who met her first love again after many decades, married, and now lives in California’s scenic para-
dise of Laguna Beach, CA. Most of her adult life, she worked and drew breath from the energy-driven world of high fashion as a personal shopper and buyer for Dallas stores such as Neiman Marcus, Stanley Korshak, and Lilly Dodson. The art of writing is new to her; she found this artistic adventure though the Emeritus Institute at Saddleback. Thanks to positive feedback from her classmates as well as her professor/mentor, Susan Hecht, she now happily explores and documents her life in words. In addition to “Run Like Hell,” “Keys to Freedom” has appeared in WALL. You can contact her at anncoffee4@cox.net or find her on Facebook.

Rachel Dellefield will be transferring to UCLA or Cal State Fullerton in Fall 2014 as an English major. She has completed the Saddleback Honors Program and is a member of Phi Theta Kappa. This is the first short story she has ever completed and submitted, although she enjoys writing songs. She hopes to become a teacher and currently works at Laser Quest, which she is sadly very, very good at.

Bernard Echanow transitioned from directing landscape architectural design projects to . . . artist in 2008. He has explored portraiture, plein air, open form, and still life drawing and painting. In Saddleback College’s 2014 Annual Student Art Competition, his charcoal drawing “The Invisible Chairman” won a second place award. Bernard considers himself fortunate that every day he sees beauty in nature, people, and the man-made, and is able to convey that beauty with words, paint, pencils, and pixels. His artwork is posted at http://dabblerteer.blogspot.com.

Paul “Jeep” Eddy is a graphic designer and artist who would rather know a little about a lot than a lot about a little. You can view his work at Jepeeddyart.wordpress.com or Instagram.com/Jepeeddyart.

Shirley Eramo is a student at Saddleback College studying acting, film, television, photography, yoga, and writing. She has a love of the sea, which is reflected in both her writing and her photography.

Arriana Figueroa is an aspiring graphic designer who recently graduated from San Juan Hills High School in Spring 2013 and is currently at Saddleback College, where she is taking classes to further enhance her skills in the design field. When she’s not trying to communicate a message through an image, she’s pampering her new pit-bull puppy and hanging around in coffee shops with her besties. You can contact her at figueroaarriana@gmail.com.

Stevie Friend created the scratchboard illustration for the short story “Fish Out of Water” on page 102. Stevie’s acrylic/mixed
media painting “Cosmic Thoughts” was featured in the 2012 edition of WALL.

Adam Green has been programming commercial Internet applications for as many years as there are sentences in this blurb. He has had a passion for writing since a young age and hopes to maybe one day get a degree or something ... in something. It’s been said that his mother loves him and he once won seventh place for kicking a ball farther than nine other people. Despite building applications that live on the Internet every day, Adam does not have his own website, citing, “I’ll get to it eventually” as the primary reason.

Corinne Gronnel is a freelance graphic designer, wife, and mother. After earning her BFA from California State University, Long Beach, she enjoyed a career as an interior designer for ten years. She then decided to stay home and raise a family, leaving the workforce but never her desire to be creative. For the past two years, she has been attending Saddleback College to sharpen her artistic skills and get her certificate in graphic design. You can see samples of her work at www.corinnegronnel.wordpress.com.

Natalie Hirt graduated from UC Riverside’s MFA program in Fiction. She has short stories forthcoming in East Jasmine Review and the anthology Orangelandia. She lives in Orange County with her husband and children, where she is working on a novel.

A lifelong learner, she enjoys taking classes from local artists and at Saddleback College.

Mary-Rose T. Hoang is a professional student, an occasional writer, the yet-to-be-award-winning editor of Cameraderie (the newsletter of the Camera Club of Laguna Hills), and an avid amateur photographer. “The Escape,” based on her father’s master-minded plan to escape Communist Vietnam, is part of an ongoing, muse-dependent, multi-media project that tells the story of her family spanning two continents and is intended for her nieces and nephew. She has combined her passion for photography and world traveling with her husband Bao. You can contact her at imrhoang@yahoo.com.

Megan Jacklin was born and raised in Reno, Nevada, and moved to Orange County in 2003 to attend the University of California, Irvine. She received her Bachelor of Science in nursing in 2009, with a specialization in perinatal nursing. She currently works as a labor and delivery nurse at University of California, Irvine Medical Center and as a postpartum nurse at Saddleback Memorial Medical Center. Her first child, Jacob, was born on May 2, 2014. “The Crescent and the Cross” is dedicated to his father, whose own birth -- and the events surrounding it -- inspired the story.
MaryKay Keehn is a certified nurse midwife with her Master of Science in nursing and a California realtor. She developed “The Creature” in her initial photography course and chose it as her first publication. She shares a passion for photography with her daughter and enjoys exploring her vision through different perspectives. Her images of artistic and creative jewelry designs are featured on www.bellarochecom.com.

Mi Young (Jaime) Kim graduated from UC Berkeley in 2013 with a degree in film studies. Now she is pursuing a graphic design degree at Saddleback College. She has done internships at St. John Knits and Brower, Miller & Cole as a graphic designer. She loves mystery novels, taking pictures, and traveling. Please visit jaime1118.wordpress.com if you want to see more of her work.

Alexander Kusztyk is a musician and composer who writes short stories and dabbles in the visual arts in his spare time. His compositions have made appearances in the Western Regional Honors Journal, Scribendi, and have seen performance debuts in the United States and Europe. Having recently completed his final semester at Saddleback College, Alexander is transferring to University of California, Berkeley, where he will pursue a degree in art history. You can visit him at http://alexanderkusztkek.blogspot.com.

Jim Langford is a full-time photographer who enjoys the solitude of wide-open spaces and has won numerous awards for his landscape photography. Jim’s work has been displayed in Popular Photography and Digital Age, and it has been shown in Orange County galleries. Jim is crazy about surfing, off-roading, and camping. Jim is a son, father, husband, friend, and the proud owner of a golden retriever named Angus. You can see more of Jim’s work at www.flickr.com/photos/andthekids/ and www.500px.com/jimlangford. He’s also on LinkedIn.

Yoon Lee is a retired architect who is now an artist. He likes to draw and paint with different mediums.

Cassandra Michalak-Frey is the author of the personal narrative “Passing Time.”

Iman Moujtedahed, artistically known as EvenDeathLies, has many varied interests that have led her to many different fields. She first and foremost, however, identifies herself as an artist and a writer. She has been published in the 2011 edition of WALL with her piece “Illusions of a Different World” and in
the 2013 edition with the cover image “Writ-

ing on The Wall.” She loves being outspoken

and unique via performing, public speak-

ing, and standing out from the crowd by

taking action and initiative in things she’s

passionate about. You can find more of her

work throughout the web, including www.


Behance.net/EvenDeathLies.

Dylan Noceda plans to transfer to a four-

year university to obtain a degree in Eng-

lish and eventually attend graduate school.

His poem in WALL is his first professionally

published work, though he does enjoy writ-

ing poems, prose, and songs for the private

enrichment of his own soul and the hearts

of his closest friends and family members.

Dylan’s best friend and protégé is his Labra-

dor retriever, to whom he recites most of his

poetry every Tuesday night at 10:43 Pacific

Standard Time, usually in a spontaneously

encountered region of the vast Californian

wilderness. Unfortunately, Dylan has no

website domain to his name, but he would

gladly accept inquiries to his e-mail address:

dylanspc@yahoo.com.

Mirt Norgren is a freelance photographer

and graphic designer with a passion for

storytelling; sometimes her stories are told

with images; other times they are told with

words. Her goal is to connect the viewer or

the reader with at least one element that is

familiar to them. The vehicle for that expres-

sion is usually a camera, but she is not

opposed to the sketchbook or the page, as it’s

all about conveying a message, an opinion,

or an emotion. Mirt worked as the graphic

designer and layout editor for WALL 2013,

1st Place winner of the American Scholastic

Press Association’s national competition for

college literary magazines. Her logo work

was selected by Saddleback College for its

Annual Day of Respect and she placed in the

Saddleback Student Art Show for Photog-

raphy in 2012. Mirt lives with her husband

and three dogs in Capistrano Beach. You can

visit her website at: www.mirt.co.

Paige Organ is a pre-medical biology major

with more experience in writing tedious

scientific papers than stories of any inter-

est although both incorporate her signature

writing technique of slopping words on paper

and hoping for the best. Her aspiration is to

become a forensic pathologist, if only for the

punny title of “Dr. Organ, Medical Exam-

iner.” When not agonizing over schoolwork,

Paige enjoys skiing, reading, being a sarcastic

and self-deprecating man-child, and getting

too emotionally invested in fictional works.
Jayne Osborne-Dion is an award-winning artist with a passion for charcoal and graphite. Also an accomplished muralist and set designer/decorator, she was featured in Orange Coast Magazine in December 2012. She draws her inspirations through clairvoyance and dream interpretation. To see more of her work, visit www.jaynedion.com.

Kyoung Park is an amateur photographer who had group exhibitions in 2011 and 2013 in L.A. She gets very excited when she gets things into a camera frame. She wants to photograph things that are beyond what human eyes can see; the camera is an energy booster to her, a medicine to all her sicknesses, including headaches and stomach aches. She goes hiking with her husband, Simon, and when she gets tired he says, “I should have gotten you your camera bag on your back.” She is very happy when she imagines herself being a professional photographer after ten years. It will be a long but joyful journey.

James Phan is a photographer who has been shooting for the past five years. His work mainly consists of portraiture, fashion, lolita fashion, and cosplay. His “Lavender Days” photo featured here was a collaboration with Cyril Lumboy of indie fashion label DollDe-light. On off days (if there ever happens to be one), he enjoys spending time with close friends and discussing recent film releases. A compilation of his recent works can be found at https://www.facebook.com/James.Phan.Imagery.

Solana Price is a theater major at Saddleback College. She is addicted to fiction books, vegan food, and good conversation. She is also terrible at writing about herself.

Jason Ra is a restaurant manager, a wedding photographer, and a freelance minimalist photographer. His work has been shown at amateur galleries such as Noh Weekend and After Dark, and he is currently working with another gallery called Noah’s Arcade and Noh York City, a collaboration with Yoma. Many call him a hipster, but he denies being judged as one. Follow him at www.jasongrowl.vsco.co and add him on www.instagram.com/jasongrowl.

Megan Reynolds is currently a full-time student at Saddleback College majoring in fine arts. Megan has stage-managed and assistant stage-managed Saddleback’s productions of Legally Blond: The Musical and Fiddler on the Roof respectively. She is also
actively involved in the astronomy club and partakes in astrophotography.

**Christopher Reza** has worked as a photographer on the staff of the *Lariat*, the newspaper at Saddleback College. The photograph featured in this year’s WALL was taken just moments before he had to leave the quaint seaside town in Italy depicted in the frame.

**Lhoycel Marie Teope** is a published photographer. Her work, which includes fashion, music, and fine art, has appeared in various online and print publications and will be featured in the upcoming issue of *Local Wolves Magazine*. Besides photography, Lhoycel Marie loves going to concerts with friends, collecting vinyl records, and traveling to new places. You can visit her work at www.lhoycelmariephotography.com.

**Linda West** is a certified hand physical therapist by profession and has been studying art since attending Long Beach City College. She is a native Southern Californian and has documented her personal travels with a particular interest in representing them using watercolors. She has traveled with the Otis School of Design of New York in Africa, taken classes in botanical illustration at the Huntington Gardens in San Marino, and attended classes at Saddleback as well as from various professional artists. She is an award-winning poet and is currently writing a book of poems entitled *They Triumphed over Demons and Other Survival Stories* based on her experiences with her patients who have met evil and hardship, persevering and finding strength through them. She can be contacted at lindawest1@gmail.com.

**Chelsea Wurlitzer** is currently a communications major. She is a creative free writer with big hopes to write for *Rolling Stone* one day. In her free time she enjoys all things music, traveling, and living happily.

**Francine Zorehkey**, Ph.D., LMFT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist with a Ph.D. in psychology who, in 2009, finally began pursuing her lifelong dream of becoming an artist. She absolutely fell in love with creating art. Francine has since opened The Co-Z Artist Studio in Lake Forest, not only for her personal sense of expression but to offer a place where artists can come together to work, share, heal, learn, and experience the world of art. With all that life has brought her way, she feels a better sense of connection to the universe whenever she puts brush to canvas. For that, she is deeply grateful. Please come visit her at www.cozyartiststudio.com.
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