

VARIATIONS

2015

VARIATIONS

Literary and Creative Arts Magazine
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North Allegheny Senior High School
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VARIATIONS Staff Photo



Breath

Tree, gather up my thoughts
like the clouds in your branches.
Draw up my soul
like the waters in your root.

In the arteries of your trunk
bring me together.
Through your leaves
breathe out the sky.

~J. Daniel Beaudry

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Policy and Selection Process

VARIATIONS Literary and Creative Arts Magazine is published annually by the North Allegheny Senior High School located at 10375 Perry Highway, Wexford, Pennsylvania 15090. The content of this magazine consists of text, artwork, and photographs submitted by juniors or seniors currently enrolled at North Allegheny Senior High School. There is no limit to the number of submissions selected to appear in this magazine. The staff may choose up to five submissions from individual contributors. Cover art is not included in the limit. With the exception of artwork, the staff is not responsible for returning any submissions to the students. *VARIATIONS* is an after-school activity that meets once a month to evaluate pieces and discuss ideas; the staff is comprised of juniors and seniors attending North Allegheny Senior High School. *VARIATIONS* is not affiliated with any one section, group, or organization within the Senior High School.

All work submitted to *VARIATIONS* is judged fairly without bias on the part of the staff and without knowledge of the author's or artist's identity. Members of the staff are eligible to submit entries, but do not participate in the evaluation of their own work, allowing all submissions to be judged impartially.

The Editorial and Literary Departments vote on the literary works submitted to this magazine. Entries are judged on literary content using generally accepted standards of evaluation. The staff reserves the right to edit the literary entries for punctuation, spelling, grammar, and syntax.

The Artistic Department selects works based on their intrinsic appeal and perceptible artistic proficiency. The staff strives to incorporate a variety of styles, subject matter, and genres as selections are made.

All submissions are sent to variations@northallegheny.org.

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Preface

Last year when I walked into the first meeting, barely knowing anyone, I immediately realized *VARIATIONS* was a publication I wanted to be a part of. This year, I'm delighted to call myself the Editor in Chief of a magazine that recognizes the talent and diversity of our students, as the name *VARIATIONS* suggests.

Art is a boundless outlet for expressing and venting, and *VARIATIONS* gives students the opportunity to do so in a judgment free zone. As someone who dreams of being an author, yet never actually shows anyone her writing, I understand that it takes a lot of courage to show people your work, for a part of you goes into every word you write and every stroke of your paintbrush. However, every student who submitted a piece, whether it be a poem, a painting, an essay, or a drawing, realized their abilities as an artist and proudly placed their name below their masterpiece.

Working with the staff for two years has introduced me to people who share my passion for writing and creativity. It is an honor to work with a group of people capable of recognizing the vast amount of talent found here at North Allegheny. I am so thankful for the countless hours of hard work the NASH students have put in to make this magazine a success.

Stories have the power to show us new worlds, so prepare to branch out and explore as you turn each page. Enjoy!

~ Shelby Stoddart
Editor in Chief 2015

Ballet Shoes, Pictionary, and Pencils

I have always wanted to be an artist.

When I was three, I thought that I could be a dancer. My mom signed me up for classes. After months of practice, the big recital day came. I put on my costume; my mom sculpted the crusty makeup all over my baby soft skin, and I tiptoed my way up onto that stage. I was a bird: grande jetè, arabesque, saut de chat—over clouds, gliding with the gentle breeze. I took my graceful bows to the beat of the parents' awes and giggles and half-hearted pats on their thighs, and then I floated my way backstage. Afterwards, I watched the video--watched in horror as I saw my three-year-old ballet shoes firmly plastered to the stage as I squatted, stood, and threw my arms from side to side for two entire minutes, and then waddled offstage, bumping tutus with the other ducks in the line. In that moment, my dancing career came to a close.

When I was five, I thought that I could be a painter. I would draw on every piece of scratch paper and spend hours at our kiddie easel in the corner of the kitchen. I sketched photograph-like snapshots of various foods in the kitchen, painted breathtaking sunsets, and drew an exact replica of the Mona Lisa on a piece of computer paper. My entire career culminated in one fateful round of Pictionary, sitting around my dining room table with my mom's side of the family. The word was chair. I drew the most beautiful chair I could imagine and listened in horror as my grandfather shouted "Giraffe!" followed by a chorus of "Yeah! It's a giraffe!" and "Oh, look! I see it too!" and "Maybe it's a horse?" from the other end of the table. In that moment, my painting career came to a close.

I have always wanted to be an artist. I found out very young that I could dance and paint and sculpt and compose and perform—with words. On my first day of kindergarten, I went to school with an empty notebook in my backpack and came home with two whole pages filled with my own work--work that I was proud of. My inspiration has always come from the desire to take my thoughts and get them out and to tell a new story in my own voice. I am fortunate to have been exposed to the John Steinbecks and the John Greens and the P.B. Shelleys of the world, whose works have proven to me that words are tools—powerful ones. With words formed in books like *Common Sense* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Silent Spring*, the world can be changed for the better. I find it amazing.

I may not have told a world-changing story yet, but I have added my stories to the stories of giants. I have a voice. I plan to use it...just maybe not to sing with it.

~ Charlie Brickner

Criss Cross

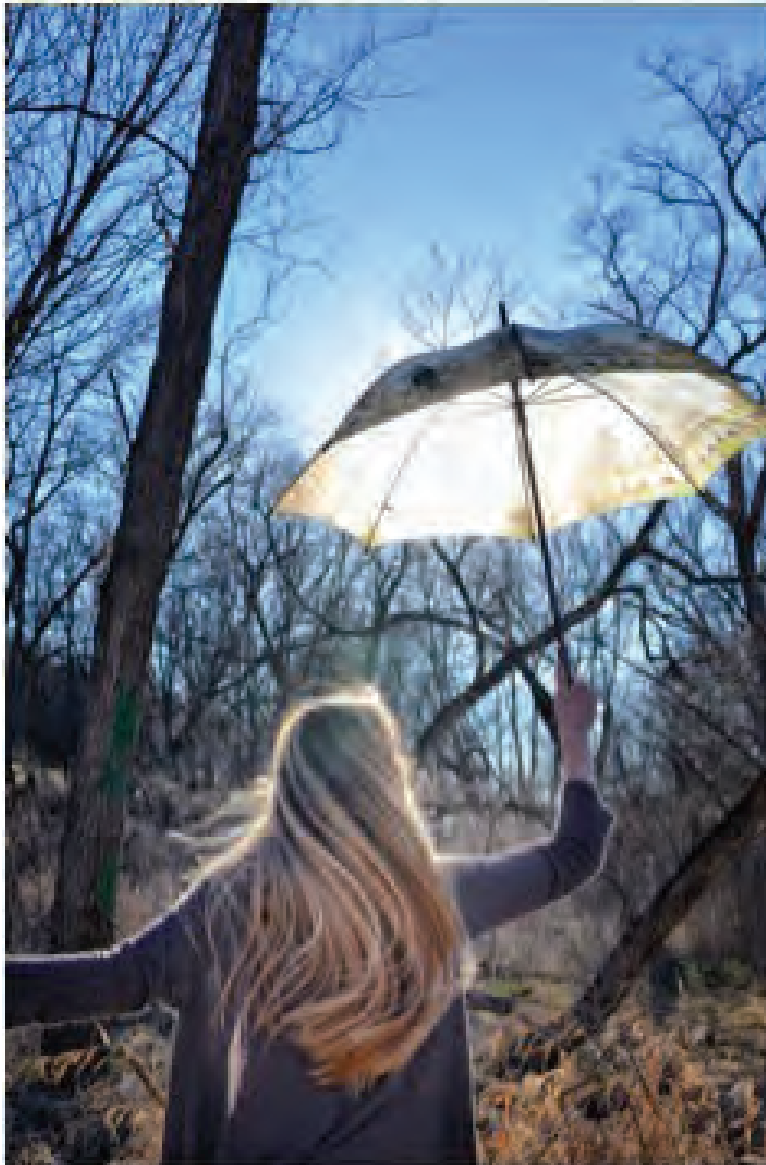


~ Felicia Sunday

“If what I say resonates with you,
it is merely because we are both branches on the same tree.”

W.B. Yeats

Sunbrella



~ Diane Khalil

“It will never rain roses;
when we want to have more roses,
we must plant more trees.”
George Eliot

Laughter of the Rain

Marcy had loved the rain.

Once, instead of wearing her favorite red-spotted galoshes, she had run off from my side in bare feet and sprinted off along the grassy strips, laughing, turning her head to the boiling skies.

At the time, I admonished her, knowing she would catch a cold (she did), but now, now, the rain pattering on the park paths, I couldn't forget her bell laugh, delighted, ecstatic to be alive--

Marcy. Cut like paper on shattered glass, hair dripping with the rain sputtering into my car, gentle, where it was never meant to be.

I paused in the park, hesitating, listening to the laughter of the rain. I bent down, back aching, pulled off my shoes--expensive, buffed, patent leather. I tossed them away, rain kissing the skin outside of my umbrella (hers).

I started slowly, barely able to hear her. The ecstasy of life long drained, but soon more rain touched me than wind, her voice, her laughter ringing in the space between my strides, in the breath of my heartbeat.

~ Lauren Kachinko

Rocky Wonder



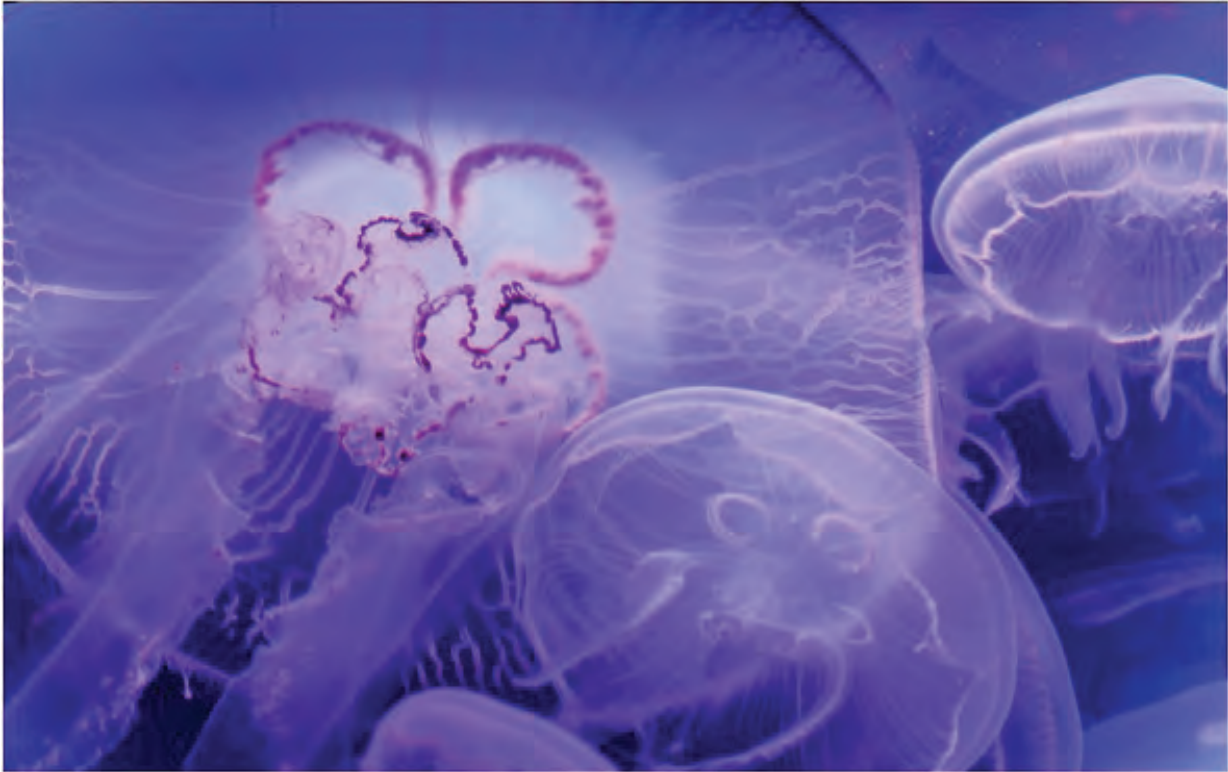
~ Nick Koehler

Breathless

I think of being tumbled, suffocated, and stuck in the ocean.
Having the oxygen pulled out of my lungs
and just sinking to the bottom of the ocean floor.
Just looking up to the darkness tinted with rays of the setting sun.
To be finally resting on the tranquility of peace.

~ Victoria Rombach

Purple Dream



~ Nathaniel Chen

A Drop in the Ocean

I wondered if I would drift away
Amidst the calming sea—
Celebrating satisfaction to stay
With those who are good to me.
Because I have no desire for home
Feeling fine and free,
Going the way that the wind will bow
Swaying like a tree.

~ Laura Sosovicka

Beyond the Portrait



~ Kevin Stiles

“You can’t stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you.
You have to go to them sometimes.”
A. A. Milne

Triple Digits

Mirror mirror
On the wall
Will I grow
To be kind of tall?
I'm sure I'll lose my braces,
Tie my shoe laces,
Learn all new faces,
And follow the traces
Of lingering talent
Left in my genes,
And expected of the
Newly double digits me.

I thought it was cool
To rule elementary school,
But I didn't
Have to be semi pro
At any sport
To warm the bench
And make new friends
Who would be there
To assist with advice
For the kid who during
His first kiss...
Missed.
But I was only twelve.

Pimple by pimple
The days started growing
Because work sucked
And nobody left me roses by the stairs
Which led me to the car
That I couldn't afford
With McDonald's money.
But it's kind of funny, you see
That this worries my mother
Who hates her job everyday
While my dad plays guitar
To send me to college.

I should've bought
A watch at school
To measure the time
As life passed by,
But Alpha Sigma Beta Theta Gamma Zeta

Paid for my friends
That weren't like my
Ones from high school;
These guys marched,

Listened, and conformed
Into the coffee-drinking
"Gentle"men
Made of individuals
At Florida Tech...
At least in the business department,
But I went for something different.

I mastered the universe
And traveled the globe
That never stops spinning
While I keep on grinning
In my rocking chair
With my wife at my side
Who closes her eyes
As I juggle knives
Because it scares her
To think that something bad
Might happen to me,
And I don't care
Since I've lived my life strongly
And walked on steep ridges
While spending my riches
To finally, after all these years,
Make triple digits.

~ Reed Antonich

Coming of Age



~ Nick Koehler

“Branches cannot live without roots.”
David Novak

Stopping the Microwave The Second Before It Beeps

There you are in your kitchen, piecing together the most delicious, savory, beautiful meal known to man. Once every inch of your timeless artistry is put into place, you carry what feels like the universe itself to that magical warming rectangle above your counter. You open the door into a seemingly sort of Narnia, sliding your exquisite masterpiece into your very own microwave. Shutting the door, you breathe deeply, in and out, preparing for what is to come.

You put 30 seconds on the clock...Here we go. This is what you've trained for your whole life. Your shaking index finger finds itself hovering over that forever-taunting button, perspiration dripping off the tip of your fingernail onto the 5 letters of danger: Start. Do it, you tell yourself. Come on, it's like ripping off a bandage, just DO IT.

All of a sudden, BEEP. The mystical rectangle whirs to life. You stare in awe at the palms of your own hands. What have you done? Oh, my God, it's time: THIS IS IT. With a mere 28 seconds left, you embrace your superspeed and press the soles of your feet to your kitchen floor as you sprint from cabinet to drawer, drawer to pantry, pantry to fridge, and fridge to counter, grabbing as much as you need. Your lungs are begging for a break as your cells claw at your veins for just a drop of oxygen--8 seconds left. Can you grab a fork in 8 seconds? Will the galaxies align in order to allow you to reach to that drawer and--BOOM. You look down at your hand, your pointer finger pressed with all its force against the Stop button. Is that really your hand? Is that your own flesh and blood; are you really the one that just buried the beep within the rectangle? That was like detonating a bomb.

Congratulations, kid. You did it. You are ready for the FBI.

~ Emma Barnes

American Kitchen



~ Kevin Dougherty

“If you really want to eat, keep climbing.
The fruits are on the top of the tree.
Stretch your hands and keep stretching them.
Success is on the top, keep going.”
Israelmore Ayivor

1997



~ Alaina Michaels

“Self is the root, the tree, and the branches
of all the evils of our fallen state.”
William Law

another selfie

the
world
around
me
does
not
care
if
I
am
in
it

it's
more
important
to
capture
your
world

I
know
where
I've
been

the
world
is
loathe
to
capture
you

~ Megan Wadas

do
I
need
a
picture
to
prove
it
?

A Literary Letter

My Dear Mr. Melville,

Ishmael is the name of every soul. Not in a literal fashion, of course, but in the spirit of his nature and ours. He has taught me more life necessities than years of schooling ever have and done it all from a ship pages away from my own sodden shore. *Moby Dick* fell heavily into my hands as a rite of passage in the literary world I so desperately long to join, but it turned out to be a journey that benefitted my character as much as it did my vocabulary—perhaps more.

When it comes to ships and sailors, integrity is a word that rarely comes up, but perhaps that is a stereotype as old as the sea itself. Entering the novel as a suspicious islander towering over Ishmael, I assumed he would be a character to watch out for. Queequeg, however, would be the most faithful shipmate of all to Ishmael. Just someone's descriptor or first appearance can so easily sway people to think that dark skin, alternate religious viewpoints, or speech and clothing can easily lead any man to assumptions. This falsity, these masks people create for one another subconsciously, (we admit we know of prejudice but don't believe it is at a corrupting point within ourselves) completely obscures the chance of seeing what is possibly a compassionate person or a best friend underneath. Queequeg, along with many others in the novel, will prove that happiness is often found in humble places. The honest heart, untainted with spoils and the downfall accompanying them, does tend to look at the world with an eye of what can only be described as brighter color. Ahab reigns as captain of the Pequod, but he is the most tormented soul aboard the ship. The humble sailors whose thoughts rest with their island homelands of birth or their families and whose worries lessen of the ominous whale for whom your novel is named ultimately are the sanest men on the ship.

Ahab, on the other hand, bears only the crippling weight of his obsession; the fixedness that stays heavy on him like he himself does upon his wooden leg that bears the burden of his cause. Tormented, enraged, and reclusive, he has shown me the consequences of setting one's sights all too firmly on one thing. Life almost never works the way we plan it, no matter how much manipulating we do. Be it gold pieces and being locked away in captain's quarters like Ahab or extra credit and being locked away studying in our rooms, we cannot always get what we want nor should we hurt ourselves and others trying to achieve it. Focusing on just one desire blurs the rest of your life; Ahab no longer sees the beauty of the ocean and eventually no longer entertains relationships with his crew. He becomes a soul lost at sea even with a thousand ways to escape the fate he brings upon his ship.

And what of you, Mr. Melville? Of course you know to be wary of obsessions, prejudices, and the gluttonous aspects of life that glisten fatty in the sun before us--over-aspirational blubber. *Moby Dick* was panned when you released it, but you did not

let it cut you too deep, and though it may be strange I have found your original failure one of the

most inspiring pieces of your story. A novel that you knew was great was never recognized until long after it had been published. I myself am an aspiring writer, and can only hope that I will handle whatever I take on as a career with grace like yours. For, in this novel you have not only blown wind out on the water of literature, you have shaken in tidal swells, and I do hope that people read your book from cover to cover and take their own journey with Ishmael in the cool fog that lingers on the bay of their dreams. Thank you, truly, for you have proved the payoff of the legacy of words. You have allowed me to realize that each and every person who lives will—in his or her own way—be called eternally back to an unwavering sea.

Adieu,
Shannon Piranian

The Pequod



~ Zain Mehdi

Innocence and Experience

Innocence

Looking up at my dad
A man who truly makes me glad.
His strength—great,
From many years of hard work.
His hair—dark with touches of grey,
From the years of learning.
His experience—worn like a badge of honor,
Always providing the answer
To my curiosity of the world.
I can only hope to grow up quickly
And be as much a man as he.

Experience

Looking down upon my son,
My curious shadow all day.
His hair—too white,
Still unblemished from the filth of the world.
His skin—too soft,
Yet to know the struggle of labor.
His innocence—fragile yet his last defense
Against the truth of this savage planet.
As his eyes peer up in admiration
I can only hope the corrupt ways of our world will not bruise my son
But make him more of a man than I.

~ John Stobba

Chopsticks versus Forks



~ Grace Jin

“He was not merely a chip off the old block, but the old block itself.”
Edmund Burke

Painted



~ Anna Baum

Diversity



~ Eliza Gunn

The Absence of Differences

Believe me, we are all one
Just like the fresh green
Leaves, and the brown dusty
Roots. But you see, they are all part
Of a tree.

Just believe me, there are so
Many things that you could be
And once you finally see
How everything comes into
Being, then you might finally
Realize that there is really no
Difference between you and me.
So, I challenge you, instead of
Looking for the differences
Between silver and gold
Be bold instead, and rather
Look for the similarities
Between the young and
The old.

After all, the similarities
Are what tie us together
As one, and if you can't
See that, well, the baby can.

So give it a chance and
You might finally see the
Absence of the differences.

~ Yusuph Ulomi

A Brain is an Ill-Formed Thing

A brain is an ill-formed thing.
A gooey piece of bubblegum,
molding to the sole of someone's shoe.
A brittle barnacle clinging tightly
to the slippery bow of an ocean liner.
A failure of a pink paper airplane.

A brain is an ill-formed thing,
with little use when we have guns for hands
and large metal tanks for feet,
destroying monuments with the flick of a wrist
or a misplaced step.

A brain is an ill-formed thing.
Who needs a Rubix cube mind,
so easily twisted and manipulated?
A malleable piece of putty,
so effortlessly persuaded away from Truth?

I prefer to have a mind made of clouds and steel,
open to possibility but never deceived.
For I fear a time when all men think the same,
each Rubix cube tottering apprehensively on a pencil neck,
bobbling "yes" without even hearing the question.

~ Natalia Conte

Pinhead



~ Mia Shikora

“The root of mindfulness is the red flesh ball of a decayed tree.”
Zen Master Dogen

House

The ivory was ominous.
The spine of the wooden paneling
tasting the ghosts of intangible flowers,
an allowance of burnt familiarity
far too pure to fathom.
It was the foundation, really,
that curled around your ankles,
stretching the toxicity of its roots
toward a final darkened breath.

~ Emma Barnes

Foreclosed Words



~ Nick Koehler

Visit

In my memories, there is a patch of greenest grass just up this hill and down the next. The ground is prickly from scattered seeds, but the grass is soft, and the dirt is just damp enough to send a thrill up through my toes. Beyond this lovely little lawn is a blue wooden deck; the paint is peeling, and a rusty iron table sits in the center. The statue of an old man rests on one of the worn-out chair cushions; his glasses sit heavily on his nose, pulling his entire face down to bury it in the newspaper he clutches in his trembling fingers. The date on the newspaper changes, but the stone man never does. He is there everyday in my mind, regardless of whether the skies above are a perfect blue or made invisible by a pouring rain.

Moving around these fixtures are exquisite details: birds flitting here and there, rays of sunshine scattering across the grass and the stone man's face, the summer breeze lifting loose bits of paint gently away from the old deck. Most importantly, a beautiful woman steps onto the deck. Her smile radiates, and her hands are so delicate as they carefully slide the screen shut behind her, and she places a tray on the table. Her hands are tiny and wrinkled, the veins so vivid it's as if she herself is a tree, with the tiniest tips of branches protruding from her palms. She's older than the world, far older indeed. She's well into her nineties, which makes her a goddess in my young eyes. That, and the iced tea she pours from her pitcher.

"Can I come visit?" I would call, knowing well enough the reply would always be yes. She knew I would be coming that day. When I was little, I would go every day.

She beckons me onto the deck, and I gladly hop across the stones in her garden and up onto the peeling paint. I've felt the prick of so many splinters from that deck, but each one is a treasure, each one a trophy of my visits to this sacred place. I sit down next to the stone man, and the woman pours me a glass of iced tea. Her iced tea is legendary amongst the children of the neighborhood: more sugar than actual liquid, it's like nectar and ambrosia for my sister and me.

The woman sits down and asks me about my day, and after a time, the stone man begins to creak and crack; the paper slowly folds and takes its place next to the pitcher on the table, and George watches me with his soft eyes, almost listening but not quite there. I never can remember anything the woman said to me, but I do remember what her life gave to mine. I could never make up my mind when I was little--really, I still can't. I always wanted to be happy, but I was so afraid that what I wanted would amount to nothing. But Edie had everything. She had the plainest life of anyone I knew, but I adored every bit of it. The tin of cookies in her kitchen pantry, that old blue carpet in the living room, her paintings hanging on every spare inch of wall, all throughout the house.

To a young girl with big dreams but no plans, Edie was the promise that life could be

beautiful without achieving perfection. She spent her life painting and sculpting; she created an oasis in suburban Pennsylvania, an artist's studio in the middle of that otherwise mundane world. She turned her average life into something extraordinary, and then she let me live it with her.

That blue deck no longer exists for me. The woman and the stone man are gone, but in my mind I see them still, calling in every moment of doubt, "Come visit!"

~ Olivia McHugh

Winter Fur



~ Bernice Yu

Fantasy-Land



~ Frank Fruciano

Six Word Story

Complete solitude from the entire world.

~ Frank Fruciano

GOD

I look out now over the fire glazed pastures
that I once fertilized and
watched flourish.
They smolder now, with
charred bodies of innocent people.
My poor innocent people... What have you become?
I can hardly watch now as
you mindlessly become absorbed into
your technology.

And your lust...

I never meant for
it to be like
this...
You crave everything and,
you use love as an arbitrary word
to describe menial things.

I step over guns and gore
and can barely stomach the capability of
how able you are to brew so much hate on this
Once.
Beautiful.
Earth.

Why?

For oil? For glory?

You wage hate wars over
all people of this planet, and you kill,
tens...hundreds...thousands...
MILLIONS.

And how has it paid off?

The stench of death in this place

I used to call my home
taints my nose, and tears my eyes.
I can hardly watch as you destroy yourselves any further...

My people where has your faith gone...
Have you no faith in me?
In each other?

I suppose it won't matter much anymore...
It's all to relinquish back to dust,
And the final judgment is among us.

.....You will beg for mercy...but did you give mercy where mercy was due?.....

That will determine if I show mercy upon you.

~ Raymo Donch

Mother Nature



~ Elizabeth Wang

Monsters

When I was a little girl, I couldn't sleep if my closet door was open, on account of the monsters that hid inside.

"Mommy!" I would whine from my bed, swaddled in a cocoon of blankets that I had pulled all the way up to my chin.

She would come rushing into my little bedroom, kneel down at the foot of the bed, put a gentle hand on my blanket cocoon, and whisper, "What is it, Boo?"

"Can you close my closet?" I'd whimper.

"Okay, Boo," she'd say, then walk across the room towards the closet. "Wait!" I'd yelp. Then in a much softer voice I'd say, "Can you check for monsters?"

And then she peered inside, sometimes stepping in to get a better look, but she'd always reemerge with a reassuring smile and a, "No monsters here tonight." Then she'd kiss my forehead and we'd exchange our "I love yous." She would leave, and I'd be asleep in no time. And that's the way it always was.

One night after she checked for monsters, she told me something I'll always remember. "You know, Boo, you don't have to worry about the monsters in your closet."

"Why not?"

"Because even if they're in there, as long as I'm here, I won't let anything happen to you."

"So you'll get rid of the monsters?"

"Well, no. Not necessarily. You see, Boo, there are monsters all around us, and not all of them are big and hairy like the ones in your closet."

"They're not?"

"No. They come in all different shapes and sizes and even colors. Some are designed for closets, and some are designed for the hallways of high schools. Some are designed for me, and Boo, there are some monsters out there designed only for you. And while I can always ward off the monsters in your closet, only you can defeat your monsters. But Boo, I promise that as long as I'm here, I'll protect you from those monsters and their menacing looks and sharp teeth and even sharper words. I will protect you until you are ready to defeat them."

“What if you’re not here to protect me, Mommy?”

“Boo, I will always be here.”

“So you won’t leave?”

“Of course not.”

“Promise?”

“I promise that I will never leave you.”

She kissed me on the forehead; we exchanged our “I love yous,” and I was asleep in no time.

When I was a few years older, I’d sprawl across my bed with my legs dangling so that my toes just barely hung over the edge of the mattress, tempting the monsters but still safe. Momma wasn’t around much anymore, so I learned how to deal with them on my own.

I dreamed of the ocean. Sometimes, on quiet days, I would close my eyes and press my hands so hard against my ears that it sounded like the wind was roiling the ocean inside of me. I let the water fill me up and crash against my delicate bones until they were glittering with the salty remnants left behind. The longer I sat like that, the louder the waves seemed to sound, and sometimes I felt like the water would fill me up entirely, and I would burst. So I would stay, waiting for my soft skin to rust and crack and burst open, soaking my sheets and flooding my floor.

When I was in the eighth grade, my closest friends became my monsters. I hated them, but they did things that made my heart beat so fast that it felt like butterflies being set free from my ribcage. I was looking for an escape, something that would allow me to forget the harsh reality that is life as a teenager, even if just for a moment. I would do anything to find it. So I kept close to my new friends. I slowly learned that the beasts aren’t as terrifying when you are running with them.

I also learned that if you run with your monsters, eventually you become one of them.

My grades were slipping. My old friends wanted nothing to do with me. I gained weight, I lost even more, and all of the black eyeliner in the world was not enough to hide the dark circles around my eyes. I was constantly exhausted. My parents worried. I did not care. It took the deterioration of all the aspects of my life that I once valued for me to realize that something had to change.

So I cut off my toxic friends and focused on myself. Music was my new escape. Heavy speakers sent bass waves shimmering through my skin, gathering themselves in tangled ribbons tied this way and that around my spine and coursing through my veins. I was trying to become stone or at least something that shook less when my mother went away again and again and again. I managed only salt.

Two years later, I defeated my monsters. I surrounded myself with positivity and people who made me the kind of happy where I would lie awake in bed at night wondering how I had ever settled for anything less.

I lived for the little things in life, for 5 A.M. sunrises, 5 P.M. sunsets, because I loved to see the colors in the sky that didn't really belong there. I lived for sweaty, summer roadtrips in a dusty pick up truck, for bike rides by the lake, for the music in my ears, and the wind running her willowy fingers through my hair. I lived for days surrounded by my favorite people, the people who made me realize that the world is not a cold, harsh place. I lived for the little things because they are what life is about. Because life is made of the little things.

I liked cancelled plans. Empty bookstores. I liked rainy days, and I loved thunderstorms. Quiet coffee shops, messy beds, threadbare pajamas, and all of the simple joys that life can bring.

I was the orange that traces the clouds during sunset, setting the sky on fire. I was the gray that looms over the city, with its unsaturated rain pouring down, flashing, thundering. I was the bloom of spring, flora bursting at the touch of my heels, and I was the frost of winter, all ice and blizzards and no warmth.

My life was an eclipse. Life was the first bike ride without training wheels; life was the finish line; life was the state of grace. Life was the collection of old CDs and mixtapes I found at that tiny garage sale in Sewickley. Life was the daisies, the tulips, the wildflowers. Life was a Sofia Coppola movie, an Iron and Wine song, a book by Hemingway, a Bukowski poem. Life was afternoon walks and warm coffee. Life was light. Life was the dawn. Life was inertia. Life was beauty when seen; life was beauty when felt. Life was the coming and going of every season; life was every phase of the moon. Life was the muse that artists spend their entire lives looking for.

Life was good.

Until it wasn't anymore.

It happened about six months ago.

My mother died.

For me, sadness came as gently as a single strand of hair, falling softly upon my

skin. At first I did not even notice it there, but once I felt it clinging to my skin, I could not disregard it. It grew and grew until eventually it became a wall for me to hide behind. As weeks passed and this sadness became a part of me, I realized that I could no longer recognize myself without it.

We spend our whole lives terrified of the idea of losing who we are, but what do you do when you lose yourself before you even know who you are? How can you find your way back to the you that you used to be? Is it even possible? Where do you start? By leaving your melancholy behind and starting anew? How do you leave something behind when it is the one thing that will never leave you? Is there a right way to kick depression out of your bed the morning after? What do you do when you have as many mental scars and little tears in your heart as you have skin cells?

In this way, I've found that grief is a lot like cancer. Treatment is frightening. Hope seems lost. But there is more to a cancer patient than the malfunctioning cells, and so there must be more to me than this grief. Right?

In reality, sadness is nothing like hair. Hair is nothing but a bunch of dead skin cells that for some reason are regarded as beautiful or romantic. You can curl and style it any way that you want to make it look pretty. Grief is not a dead cell; it is a dead weight on my soul. No matter what I do, it will never look presentable. There is no way to make a million sleepless nights and days when you do not leave your bed because you just can't get up look pretty. Lacking functionality is not beautiful. Grief is nothing but a black hole, and there is really no way to romanticize it.

So what is sadness? If not what makes up our bones, maybe it is the termites of the rotted, wooden beams inside the chambers of a heaving heart, struggling against the colossal weight brought on by so great a loss.

But that's not it either.

Sadness may feel like a home. It may look and feel exactly like the little place at the end of main street with the white picket fence and red painted door where you grew up, but it is not the place that you have to stay for the rest of your life. There is a way out. There is a Greyhound station on the other side of town, and all the tickets cost is enough strength to strangle your sadness and set fire to the remains, to cremate the remnants of a time when you knew no light because of the hair covering your eyes.

And once you do that, you are left with the ashes, and ashes make the soil fertile. Ashes make things grow. And it may seem that all you are left with is ash and empty space, but it is not just empty space. It is space in your lungs for new oxygen, brought on by the new life that the ashes can yield. Maybe you can take a deep breath. Maybe you can get through a day without crying. Maybe this space will give enough room for the sunlight to shine through and warm your soul, and the light may be harsh against your exposed skin; maybe it will burn; maybe you will feel raw, but recovery is a

process. It is nothing like the cold comfort that is depression. Happiness is a process. Growing up is a process, and letting go of all the pain inside of you is part of it. It just takes time.

I am lying in my bed, wrapped in cool sheets and illuminated by sunlight pouring through the windows. What a beautiful morning.

Today I will get up. I will get out of bed. Yes, every twist and turn will cause me pain, and my feet may burn as they crash barefoot onto the cool, hardwood floor, but I will let that be the fire that ignites me. No matter how long I stay in bed, I will still feel this tired. All that I will receive from under a pile of blankets is pity, even from myself. I do not want to be pitied. I am not pitiful. I have not given up this far, so I am not going to give up now. I know that I am not going to want to do those eleven algebra problems before breakfast tomorrow any more than I will want to do them tonight, so I will do them tonight. I will scream the words, "I AM MORNING, NOT JUST MOURNING." Mornings are about waking up and believing that this day can be better than the last, because it sure as hell can be better. I will not stand in the shower and cry in the mirror and lose all my motivation as the water turns hotter than the air around me. I will wear something nice because it will make me happier, and I will put on red lipstick or maybe just a smile because either way I will feel beautiful. I will ignore the monsters in my closet, under my bed, in the people I care about, and even within myself. I will open my umbrella, and I will walk in the rain, and I will be grateful that I am not falling down with it.

I am lying in my bed, wrapped in cool sheets and illuminated by sunlight pouring through the windows.

I close my eyes. Take a deep breath.

One

Two.

Three.

I open them.

What a beautiful morning.

~ Kayla Romanelli

Trapped



~ Diane Khalil

Pointe Shoes

She chucks her pointe shoes
And takes a deep breath
Reaching her mark
She bows, tilts her head,
And smiles
She moves across the stage
With proportions that should
Be awkward yet
Her movements have a flow
And grace
Rising and falling
With all her weight on her toes
Wishing it was pas de deux
So she might have support.
She chassés
across the stage
Covering her ground
Assembles, steadying herself
And leaps
Trusting
She can catch herself.

And she flashes back
To the beginning.
Her focus is
Strong enough to break boards
Tendu
Plié
Posé
Plié
And with fear creeping
Up her neck
She catches her breath
And holds it
She turns
A single
A double
Thinking
Don't fall
Don't fall
Don't
fall.

~ Maura Sanguini

Successfully defeating
Her first obstacle
She dances on
Step after step
Turn after turn
Jump after jump
She pushes through
Though she is growing
Tired
She knows what comes next,
That while she is becoming
Her weakest,
She must use everything left of her
strength,
Her mind trips

Dancer with a Fan

My mother told me never to hunch.
She believed in putting the best foot forward, always.
I believe in putting the right foot forward, or left,
depending on the choreography.
The hunch, mother,
the hunch that you strive so hard to iron out is molded from pressure--
your pressure.
Five. Suck it in.
Six. Chin up, shoulder lines.
Seven. Turn out, straight knees, rounded elbows.
Eight. Try harder, good grades, home by eleven
(or better yet, don't leave at all).
Forgive me, mother
if, in the aftermath, all I can offer you is a hunch and a fan to conceal the mouth that
wants nothing more than to wrinkle all your carefully pressed lines.

~ Cassie Majewski

Dance



~ Brittany Burmester

Polar Bear



~ Kathryn Graham

“Soak up the sun, affirm life’s magic
Be graceful in the wind, stand tall after a storm
Feel refreshed after it rains, grow strong without notice
Stay deeply rooted while reaching for the sky
Be still long enough to hear your own leaves rustling.”
Karen Shragg

Good Morning

As the sun tumbles up, over the hills
It meets many things, like little squirrels,
Who spin around, their tails a-whirl,
Looking for the oak trees' pearls.
The sun meets birds, up, up and away
As they rush to beat each other this day;
Since the earliest bird gets the fattest worm;
A metaphor that kind of makes me squirm.
The sun finds flower petals unfurling,
Their colors delicately uncurling;
Ready for the day's hot rays;
Ready for the day's poetic praise.
The sun sees doors, and windows, and beds:
All hiding their people, those sleepy heads.
Who, bundled up tightly, all nice and warm,
Are still not quite ready for this day to take form.
The sun meets its goal, its morning-place,
As it shines down upon your sweet face.
So wake up, my sunshine, it's time to arise
And read this, a truly delightful surprise.

~ Sarthak Mattagajasingh

Tea Party



~ Hannah Gauntner

I Live

Opening my eyes, I see a light; I see a face.
I don't recognize it; I don't recognize anything,
but I do recognize her touch, her scent, her beating heart.
I learn *mama*; she is the one who I recognized.
I recognize *daddy* and *car* and *food* and *now*.
I recognize more and more.

I say bye-bye; there are other kids, I don't recognize.
I learn *Mark*; I learn *Sam*; I learn *John*; I learn *George*.
I learn etiquette; I learn A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H.
I learn this is right; I learn this is wrong.
I learn more and more.

I like to learn, but I like even more. I like football;
I like basketball; I like drawing; I like writing;
I like her; I like math; I like science.
I like more and more.

I like to like, but I love even more. I love biology; I love my school;
I love her; I love my sons; I love my daughter; I love my family.
I love more and more.

I like to love, but I like to know to; I know my wife, who she is inside and out.
I know my son recognizes this; I know my daughter learns that;
I know my son likes her; I know they all love me.
I know more and more.

I like to know, but I like to remember even more. I remember my first word;
I remember my kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school friends.
I remember my first kiss; I remember the first time I met my wife.
I remember my first child; I remember his firsts.
I remember more and more.

I like to remember, but I wish it stopped at that because now I forget;
I forget my childhood.
I forget my mom's face; I forget my wife's.
I forget my sons; I forget my daughters; I forget their kids.
I forget to see; I forget to hear;
I forget to recognize; I forget to learn; I forget to like and love; I forget to know,
I forget more and more because the more I live, the more I lose.

~ Zain Mehdi

Your Move



~ Kristofer Robinson

“You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars.
In the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.”
Max Ehrmann

Sand Dollars



~ Carlee King

“A sure cure for seasickness is to sit under a tree.”
Spike Milligan

The Crusaders Sail to Sicily

Sea spray misted the thick, sturdy windows casing the aft compartments of the three-masted sailing ship, and waves rocked her about on the water. Her three white sails were worn, but still sucked in the Mediterranean air like lungs, breathing in enormous gulps of air after a long dive. The rigging was simple—enough to raise, lower, and hold the treated cloth in place that served as their means of propulsion. Crewmen dashed about, unbothered by the sickening lurch of the ship as the rudder man edged her bow into the oncoming waves. The same could not be said for the numerous crusaders also aboard the ship. Some stayed below decks, believing that the lack of windows aided their seasickness—others required the rail.

Shifting floorboards and retching soldiers did little, however, to dampen the mood of Richard I of England. Despite the fact that he joined his fellow men at the starboard rail, he felt a sense of accomplishment coursing through his veins. Count Gaspard V of Aquitaine, a man loyal to Richard since the king's duchy in that province, leaned next to the king and grinned.

"Even your vomit falls gracefully, your lordship," taunted the green-faced Gaspard.

Richard didn't reply, as he was at that very moment leaning over the rail, but a hard slap managed to find his friend's bald head.

"Your praise falls upon deaf ears, I'm afraid. I never did like the type who attempted to advance themselves by means of toadying."

"Ah, so you appreciate nobles with deep purses and shallow heads?"

"I may utilize them, but saying I appreciate fools is an insult to my character. I appreciate a man who will stand up for what he believes in and who will fight when the need arises."

"Well, sir, who else but your loyal servant, the humble Gaspard, has stood by you and fought at your every command?"

Richard chuckled, wiping bile from the corner of his mouth, "Do you mean besides the thousands of men who answered the call and traveled to fight and die for our promised land? Well then, yes, I suppose you are the only one."

The thin Frenchman flashed another white smile.

"Does such a man not deserve the comforts of say, a baron perhaps?"

Richard laughed again, pausing mid bark to wretch over the rail.

“If I remember correctly, when you successfully captured Acre, I offered you the title of Baron of Aquitaine, but you refused on account of—what was it again—there not being enough *excitement* in the role.”

“Aah, pardonnez-moi, it slipped my mind,” and he heaved toward the waves again.

“Yes, if anyone deserved a reward for that battle, it was you, my friend. The use of our engineers was brilliant; I had never seen Saracen forces break so easily!

“I suppose it is a shame that the good Duke Leopold V will be the man remembered for that siege, seeing as he executed some prisoners and called himself a war hero.”

Richard scowled. That greasy little man expected to be treated just like all the other noblemen who had worked to get their armies and fought alongside their men. Leopold had merely inherited his forces when the Holy Roman Emperor Barbarossa was killed in battle.

“Just because a man’s tunic is drenched in the blood of his enemies does not mean that he is brave or that they were killed fairly. Keep in mind, his colors were taken down from the ramparts of Acre; he gained no glory in that battle.”

“Aah, oui! And the man threw a colère—a tantrum!”

“Aye, but now he blames me for his cousin’s death after his coronation as king of Jerusalem, as if I was the only person who objected to claiming a city that wasn’t even ours. The man had enemies. Just because assassins were involved does not mean I had anything to do with it. Aah, well, I suppose I should have respected Leopold’s wishes. Even if he was useless, his army was not . . .”

“I suppose you believe you could have taken the Holy City had you the manpower?”

The pair finished their repulsive business and turned to watch the crew scamper up and down the ratlines.

“I honestly do believe his forces would have let us hold out those last few days needed to break the Sultan’s resolve,” Richard said, massaging the hem of his tailcoat with rough, worn hands, “But that’s behind us now.”

“For the moment, perhaps. But you are, however miraculously, not dead yet, my friend. Years lie ahead of you, and who knows? Maybe you will return to Jerusalem as a

conqueror, not as a visitor.”

“I don’t...” Richard’s cheekbones protruded as he clenched and unclenched his jaw, chewing his words over. “I don’t think I will ever meet Saladin on the field of battle again. At least not by my own doing. I made a contract with him, and for pilgrims and merchants, the Holy City is, well, ours. I...do not relish breaking promises. As long as I live, I shall not challenge the Sultan while he upholds the agreement.”

Gaspard was speechless. The soldiers in the king’s army had begun referring to him as “The Lionheart.” It was an apt title, considering his flamboyant yellow and red trimmed battle dress, not to mention the mane of vermilion hair that framed his defined jaw and frigid blue eyes. The epithet also referred to his hot temper and compulsion to dominate, an attribute that won many battles--and fist fights. The man in front of him, although still Richard, displayed none of the inner fire that drove his men to victory.

“Then again,” began the king, “there are routes of expansion other than south. Some of the Oriental rugs and clothes our men burned did seem quite nice. All that would be required is a connection to an eastern noble, a duke or a king, whom we could use as a stepping stone for more—what’s the word—rewarding ventures.”

The Frenchman felt his apprehension dissipate, and a grin split his face, the white of his teeth sharply contrasting his thin black moustache.

“Well, my lord, your proposal does sound most...rewarding...”

While the two talked about methods of conquering the Far East, James Finke, the sailor positioned in the topcastle, noticed something on the horizon that seeded fear in even the bravest of seafaring men. A large, dark gray cloud was rolling in quickly from the southwest. He immediately alerted the captain, and the rate of activity on the ship increased dramatically. During the noblemen’s conversation, the determined pace that punctuated the voyage thus far shifted to a more alarming tempo.

It was Gaspard who first realized their peril. Richard’s back was to the crew, but the bald Frenchman noticed the frenzied air of the sailors from the corner of his eye. “Come, my king,” the count said, looking up at the darkened sky, “It is not safe here anymore. S’il te plait, please, come with me.”

The count and the king made their way aft, to the creaky stairwell leading down to the king’s stateroom. An hour of preparing for the approaching tempest passed.

Then, all at once, the heavens raised their floodgates.

~ Joshua Thompson

The Travesty of Expectations

We live our lives with baited breath,
on the edge, rigid in our wooden chairs hoping
that the unsolvable enigma will be unfurled one day,
like a Moroccan carpet in a flea market
tempting the famished eye of the ignorant,
with its vivid colors.

Those who say they know the truth, lie.
Fortune tellers and mystics never called Abe,
but instead discarded as common thieves,
seduced by the desperate who yearn to trade their lives
for answers to questions better left unasked.

The forbidden knowledge of the future,
more ripe and more red than any lecherous apple,
taunting the tongue like a siren's haunting song,
yanking sailors by their tattered collars
into the depths of Davy Jones' forsaken locker.

The children stoop, slaves to Fate who act as their master,
dragging them along like limp Raggedy Anne dolls.
Buttons for eyes, they cannot see that anticipation is waste,
stagnant and musty in the presence of reality.

But no trigger perches at their heartstrings
nothing forces a verdict from their tiny painted pink lips
they must learn to expect nothing at all
and nothing will they gain
but, nothing can they lose.

~ Natalia Conte

Silent Knight



~ Melissa Daltner

“The tree is a slow, enduring force straining to win the sky.”
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

The Song of My Movie

Roll cameras. Mark. Action.
That's the starting tone.
One sound, one set, one slant.
People patiently pausing for the procreation of a powerful passion.
Something so stunningly amusing that tickles the most superb senses.
A desire, a wish, a dream, a gateway all in one perfect piece of polycarbonate plastic.
Then, the moment comes...
When with the world's woe we wish for a wind to sweep us away from a crawling
wretchedness.
And then...a lightbulb
A gateway, the gateway, my gateway, a sublime story
It makes you laugh, and listen, and wait, and cry, and scream, and dance, and be
happy, and sad again.
A hysterical yawp comes out, and worried steps are about
It drives the craziest crazy
The pulling of the glue on the ground and the passion of the wind and the way it sounds
There isn't much you can do about it
For the sound of the ground of self cannot be forever fled away.

~ Wanda Ferrara

Lens of Life



~ Nick Blatt

Rainy Reflection



~ Kristin Exley

When It Rains, It Pours

“When it rains, it pours”: that’s what you said, as you rocked me off to sleep
And pour it did, the weeping sky, upon our handsome street

And maybe the rain was a natural thing, when moisture above abounds
Or maybe the rain was our breaking hearts at the thought of a burial ground

So it rained and it poured and we stayed indoors and prayed to the Lord up above
That maybe He’d ease the grief in our hearts that had struck with the death of our love

We awoke the next day and the wet in the grass matched our pillows soft traces of salt
Because it rained and it poured and our love caused us pain,
but this death wasn’t anyone’s fault

So no blame did we give, no guilt did we weave into our great tapestry of grief
But we mourned and we sang to the funeral dirge ‘til slowly pain felt some relief

~ Stephanie Brendel

Attacked by Witches

ZAP! I was thrown backwards three feet from the electric socket on the wall at Carnegie Library. I was in the children's section of the library—a high ceiling room scattered with mythical creatures and bookshelves that soared above me. I had just stuck a paper clip into an electric socket because I thought it was a key and lock that might lead to a secret floor in the library, which I thought was a castle taken over by evil witches (librarians).

I was wrong—I did not open a secret passage, I was just shocked, no pun intended, by the immense pain of being electrocuted. I had woken up feeling happy because the next day was my birthday, and I was going to the grand Carnegie Library for the first time. My brother said it was a remarkable building with thousands of books, movies, and computers. The family got in the car, and my brother, sister, and I were restraining ourselves from fighting; however, having a two year old sister continually drooling on me is not too easy to ignore or to forgive when I, myself, had just left the drooling phase.

After dropping my mom and sister off, the men of the house went to the Carnegie Library; it was a short ride to the library, which was a peaceful building surrounded by many trees on top of a small hill. The building looked very old, and I thought it was a great castle we had come to conquer. As I skipped around hiding behind bushes and other cars, pretending to fend off a great big dragon that defended the castle, other adults told my dad how sweet I was; I felt overwhelmed with all of the compliments. My brother walked glumly next to Dad, feeling unnoticed. Finally, as we reached the door, I jumped in, prepared to fight some old witches; seeing nothing, I proceeded with caution. I somersaulted behind a pillar just in case someone was going to attack me. When the coast was clear, I stood up and scanned my surroundings.

My brother was right; this place was amazing. There were great Greek columns and huge marble walls and floors. The roof reached to the sky, and my footsteps reverberated off the walls. We walked to the children's section of the library on the first floor, and immediately I jumped behind a bookshelf because by a window was a great, green dragon. Throughout the section were many creatures that were as deadly, standing atop the high-reaching shelves. So after I held up my imaginary shield, I charged for the creatures slashing and blocking monsters everywhere. The final creature standing was the dragon, so I jumped onto its back and whacked at its cardboard head, which eventually fell off. Dad scolded me, but inside I felt very proud of myself and walked around with my head held high and a strut tingling in my legs. He asked a librarian to forgive me for my behavior. She was too busy watching me picking my way across the "booby-trapped" floor to the computers to hear what Dad said.

My brother and I played on the computers, and then we started getting books and movies. I picked up all dragon-related movies and books. Whenever I saw a princess book or movie, I would look at it with disgust and move quickly to the next section;

though, when I saw *Sleeping Beauty* with the dragon on the front, I was thrown into a tumultuous, internal debate of whether to pick it up or not. Finally, I had a huge pile that I set down next to me to stare at the cool pictures, incomprehensibly glancing at the words. My dad and brother went upstairs to look at some books and use the upstairs computers. After a little bit, I went to the bathroom; when I was leaving I saw my shoe was untied, so I bent down to tie my shoe by a wall. Apparently I thought it easier to take off my shoes to tie them, and that's when I saw a paper clip. Then I saw a black electric socket with two slits that could easily fit the paper clip. This must be a key and a lock that would probably lead to a treasure room, so I thought. So I picked up the paper clip and pushed it into the "lock" and then, ZAP! I was electrocuted and thrown back from the force. I did not realize what happened for ten seconds. I was stunned, seeing white sparks of witchy magic in my eyes. What was happening? What was that metallic smell thickening around me? Why didn't the key work? Why does my hand hurt so much? Then I rolled over because of the pain. It was like my left hand was in the middle of a blazing fire and filling me with agonizing pain. Then I felt the hot, salty tears pour down my face. I started wailing because my left hand was terribly throbbing. I looked down at my hand, and what I saw was puzzling. Why were my fingers blackened? Just looking at my hand made me sick. My hand looked like someone's hand looks after coming out of a shower—all wrinkly, except my hand was black.

A librarian saw me and came running over. When she saw my hand, she squeaked and ran around calling the other librarians. They gathered around me and asked questions, but I was in too much pain to pay attention. One librarian located my dad and brother and brought them to me. Then the librarians called an ambulance, while my family members stood dumbfounded off to one side. My brother recovered first and told my dad to call Mom to meet him at her work building; he could pick her up and head to the hospital, while my brother stayed with me. It is amusing now how quickly that experience changed; one moment I was happy, living in a world of fantasy and fun, the next I was sitting in an ambulance, crying as I stared at my blackened fingertips. I don't want to mess with witches anymore.

~ Zain Mehdi

Wishes of a Stream

Spitting out hollowed limbs
cultivating a monstrous tree of justifications.
You tremble when you refuse
to meet my waterlogged eyes.

I am a stream with an indefinite path
tickling the shore like an acupuncturist,
dulling the rock until it has lost
the sharp edge once prized.

All for not, I bellow.
These hollow branches cannot float!
But weigh far too heavy,
a dumbbell crushing my stomach to pulp.

Try harder, I screech
Unable to make sense of it all,
a language I can never speak.
A twisting serpent with three cruel heads and a mouth to eat.

Feeding on weakness.
Feeding on dying desires.
Feeding on light sucked from my smile,
vacuum-packed and ready to be sold
to another ruddy, naive puddle,
praying always to be an ocean.
I just wanted to be an ocean.

~ Natalia Conte

Kayaking Madness

My paddle morphs into graceful flippers,
The boat now the majestic dorsal fin,
Even I, no longer human, belong to the wild, watery waves.
A chance to escape from the pressures, stresses, callings, expectations,
A chance to return back to the stark beauty and feel the spontaneous spark,
A chance to listen and to be heard,
A chance to be...
A lonely crane in the distance croons a canticle in the calming silence,
We are both alone, but both belong to one.
I am part of the real world now,
The world free from what we think makes us great,
A world where life is lived, not rehearsed.
Immersed in splendor of water and trees and birds and fish and life,
But slight tugs drag back reality and responsibility,
As I return I know I may change, but my dock is constant,
A dock to a new realm—until I am mad again.

~ Chip Dougherty

Columbian Waters



~ Sebastian Vasquez

Risen



~ Jenny Kraynik

“Between every two pine trees there is a door leading to a new way of life.”
John Muir

Cocoon

Mama took me in there.
The bell rang as the door opened, shut.
The lady at the front desk beamed unnaturally.
I gripped my split ends, eyes darting about the shop.
I held my elementary school years
in the sweat of my palms
but now it was sixth grade
so I had to let go
of the playground tag at recess
and the giggles as boys smashed apples
on their foreheads, and the whispers in the coat closet,
and most of all, the desire to please that allowed my fingers that
gripped the piece of paper to soar out the bus window
and let go...go...go.

and...so
now I let go of the split ends
long dead, tough to comb and to control,
as the cheeky front-desk lady with her perfect trim
sat me down, wrapped my arms,
covered my neck...
what fell
to the floor
still left its roots in my scalp
and what remained after it had fallen
was alive, light, clean, bouncy,
and ready to grow.

~ Charlie Brickner

Sólo porque si

Seguro que nuestras madres nos han dicho esto millones de veces “¿Cómo sabes que no te gusta si no lo has probado?” Y siempre respondemos “Pues, porque no” y ni siquiera teníamos una razón por la que eso no nos gustaba. En realidad sólo era miedo a que algo no funcione, o a que algo nos guste tanto que no podamos vivir sin eso. Es muy fácil y duele menos decir “porque no”. En vez de preguntarnos por qué no nos atrevemos. Aunque no lo pensamos, nuestras madres llevaban razón; no podemos saber si algo es bueno o malo si no lo probamos.

Un ejemplo muy claro es el amor. Muchas veces nos perdemos lo más maravilloso de la vida, que es el poder compartir un sentimiento como el amor con otra persona simplemente por miedo a cómo esa persona vaya a reaccionar. El no saber si esa persona siente lo mismo que nosotros no agobia, nos aterra y nos echamos para atrás. Pero lo que no pensamos es que seguramente esa persona sí que siente lo mismo que nosotros.

El miedo nos hace perdernos las cosas más bellas de la vida, el miedo no nos deja soñar, el miedo nos paraliza y nos mata lentamente hasta consumirnos. El miedo no nos lleva a ningún lado, es como si el sol tuviera miedo a salir cada mañana por miedo a que el amanecer no sea suficientemente bello, o como si la ola tuviera miedo a romper contra e acantilado por miedo de hacerse daño, o como si la flor más hermosa tuviera miedo a crecer por miedo a ser cortada.

El famoso poeta Gabriel García Márquez, dijo una vez “es verdad--la vida es lo mejor que se ha inventado.” Sólo atrevete, vive el momento porque vida sólo hay una.

~ Carmen Ascension

Caballus



~ Bernice Yu

Just Because

There is no doubt that our mothers have told us this millions of times: “How do you know that you do not like it if you have not tasted it?” And we always respond, “Well, just because,” without even having a reason why we do not like it. In fact, it is only fear that something will go wrong or that we will like something so much that we will not be able to live without it. It is very easy and less painful to say, “Well, just because!” instead of asking ourselves why we do not dare. Even if we do not think so, our mothers were right. We have no way of knowing whether something is good or bad if we did not try it.

A very clear example is love. Many times we miss out on the most wonderful thing in life, which is to be able to share an amazing feeling like love with another person, simply out of fear of how that person is going to react. Not knowing if that person feels the same as we do overwhelms us, terrifies us, and we pull back. But what we do not think is that surely this person feels the same as we do.

Fear only makes us lose the most beautiful things in life. Fear prevents us from dreaming; fear paralyzes us and slowly kill us, and eventually consumes us. Fear gets us nowhere. It is as if the sun were afraid to come out every morning for fear that the dawn would not be beautiful enough, or as if the waves were afraid to break against the cliffs for fear of getting hurt, or as if the most beautiful flower were afraid to grow for fear of being cut.

The famous Colombian poet Gabriel García Márquez once said, “It is true--life is the best thing that has ever been invented.” Just dare to live in the moment, because there is only one life.

~ Carmen Ascension

Naiad



~ Robert Kotler

Sleep Deprivation versus High School Graduation

Imagine waking up in the dead of night from a shrill scream coming from near your head. For high school students, this is not a farfetched description of what their mornings are like. Jumping out of bed at 5:30 A.M., rushing through breakfast, and running to catch the bus in the dark are how most NA high school students begin their weekdays. Not only are they launched into the world like this every single day, but they close out the day from exhaustion and anxiety with thousands of questions running through their heads. Did I get all of my homework done? Am I ready for that huge test coming up? Did I remember to lock up the cash register at work? Kids in high school have a tough time as it is getting homework done with their jobs, sports, and other activities, but only a few hours of sleep at night is just the cherry on top of a disturbing cake. This is why the North Allegheny School District should enforce later start times for high school students because they have heavy loads of homework, participate in jobs and extracurricular activities, and often suffer from school related stress and anxiety.

Starting school later in the morning allows high school students a little more time to rest after long nights of completing homework and studying for tests. When students arrive at school well rested, they will be much more alert and prepared to learn. With only a few hours of sleep at night, students are not ready to learn, nor are they able to retain what they are taught when their bodies are trying to tell them that it is still the middle of the night. Students often put off more and more time for sleeping because they are doing what needs to be done--preparing for college and trying to get through high school all at the same time. Research by the National Sleep Foundation shows that "delaying school start times by an hour or more increases the amount of sleep adolescents get and improves their performance in school" (Duval). Because everyone wants their students to be successful in school, North Allegheny should push back the start time for high school students so they may get their work done and still have enough time to get a full night's sleep. With the amount of sleep recommended for high school teens, students will have more energy and time to participate in other school activities and go to work without feeling pinched for time.

Not only will students feel more rested with a later start time for school, but they will also be more energized for their jobs, sports, and other activities if they have a full night's sleep. With a later start time, students will not be thrown into the school almost as soon as their eyes open in the mornings, so they will feel calmer and get more involved if they feel like they can balance everything on top of their schoolwork. If their surroundings are calm and focused, students will feel the same way and be more motivated to work harder and become more involved in things at school such as plays, service projects, and clubs. Also, the U.S. Census has found that "1 in 4 high school students have jobs. That means that about 3.1 million students age 16 and older are working nationwide" (Coppernoll). With these statistics, it is easy to say that we cannot stop teens from working, so why should we make it harder on them by forcing them to come to school mere hours after they hang up their uniforms for the night? Rather than fighting fire with fire, the school district should build a bigger fire pit and give students an extra hour or

two of sleep in the morning so they will have lower levels of stress and anxiety from school.

Finally, having a few more hours of sleep at night will cause levels of stress in high school students to widely decrease, not only in high school but for the rest of their lives. Because some habits established in high school are harder to kick than others, ways in which teens are coping with stress these days are affecting them long-term and causing chronic stress and anxiety later on in adulthood. If we help students now, their 30 and 40 year-old selves can breathe a sigh of relief. According to Sharon Jayson of USA Today, more than 27% of teens claim to experience “extreme stress” during the school year. Jayson also states that the “teen stress level is higher than the adult level much of the year.” High school is a time for teenagers to enjoy live their lives and to enjoy youth while they still can. How can they do this if they are suffering from stress fit for someone twice their age? It is this question that administrators must take into account, and they must push back the start time for these high school teens just trying to be young for a few more years.

Many will argue that an early start to the day means that students can get more done and feel more productive. However, there is a difference between waking up early enough to feel productive and waking up too early. The body’s definition of early and the school’s definition are two vastly different things. By being given the opportunity to sleep a little more, students will be able to think about what they learn in class rather than mainly focusing on trying not to doze off. No one wants to fall asleep in class, but because of the demand for students to get out of bed long before they are ready, sometimes there just is no other option than the uncomfortable session of drooling and snoring and dozing off at the desk. Students are not asking to start school at noon, but they could simply use an extra hour or two of sleep in the mornings. With a later start time in place, students will have the opportunity to not only participate in life, but actually be awake long enough to know what is going on. Think back to that rude awakening in the middle of the night. Now imagine waking up to a warm sunrise peeping in the window and birds chirping in their nest just outside. With a few more hours to sleep in every morning, this cheerful wakeup call is what high school students could be experiencing at the start of each day. With this stress-free morning comes a stress-free day, which seem to be just what every high school student needs when balancing homework, jobs, sports, and more. By simply getting in touch with the school board and the superintendent of North Allegheny School District, the possibility of a later start time for high school students is huge. All you have to do is pick up the phone or open your email and click a few buttons. Do not ask what these kids will do for you someday; ask what you can do for these kids today. The opportunity to make a difference is literally waiting at your fingertips; now is your chance to seize it.

~ Molly Zunski

Breathe

Hold your breath
Count to ten and run into the storm.
Feel the cool rain running down your skin
And let the sweet dew wash away your sin.
Wander lost through the labyrinth of the woods.
In the serene calm, feel the steady beat of the forest coming to life
Feel the pulse of the flowing creek
Breathe in with the fauna and flora, the breath of life,
Hear the leaves rustle and shake, and watch the gentle beast awaken.
When you come across a field of flowers, do not see them—
Admire them, and do not smell them, but inhale their beauty.
Feel the sigh of the Earth rush against your skin.
Go to the water and feel the clay, the sand, the mud, the dirt,
Engulfing you from the bottom up—
Reminding you that it is the stuff from which we were first created.
Know that it is not enough to simply exist in the world.
Know that one must feel it, hear it, see it, taste it,
Become a part of it to fully live.
And hold on tightly to each passing day.

~ Maura Sanguini

Harvest



~ Grace Jin

“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
that brings forth its fruit in its season,
whose leaf also shall not wither;
and whatever he does shall prosper.”
Psalm 1:3

Winter's Bleakness



~ Sydney McDonough

“The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep.”
Robert Frost

Entropy is a Lie

As it starts, you might begin to question yourself
How can a few words act and sound
like prose and still convey a cause?
“Time has come to the end,” he says.
I don’t really know the cause but
“into the future we must cross.”
To me, the beginning sounds like the end
But as you keep listening, the end
Starts to sound like the beginning
And it’s then, where you start to
Realize how profound any last
Moment can be.

When a decaying leaf turns into
A blooming flower.
When a cold, rainy day starts to feel like
A nice, hot shower.
As I keep listening, I start to wonder
If it’s all about love, but then
I realized it could be anything I crave.
I think it makes me want to start over
Even when something is not over.

I don’t know if it is the lyrics
But I like how it makes another chance closer
Half way there, I start to see the end.
The end that makes me feel like
I should say goodbye,
And make the decision to cut all ties.
But why should I? I mean
The sun sets, and will still rise.
Otherwise we would all die
So it will end. I won’t say goodbye,
But on the new beginning,
I will start by declaring entropy is a lie.

~ Yusuph Ulomi

A Definite Infinity

Childhood's simplicity lingers in me.
But much like time, it crawls away
And takes details of my life with it.
An atrophy of my facade shows me into the dark
And the idea of humanity crumbles before me
The aftermath is predictable:
I, innocence, am merely injured, but ignorance is no more.
It was He who told me I will find salvation
But I can't bring myself to ask how.
I now realize,
That I have come to know this world as it has always been:
Continuous and unforgiving.

~ Azam Anees

A Different Perspective



~ Jenny Herrle

Unfocused Future



~ Felicia Sunday

A Chance Meeting

I'm a raindrop
inching my way
down your cold windshield
hoping to reach the bottom
before the wipers get me.
There was only a ten percent
chance of rain today, so
who would've thought you
would be forced to watch
as I race my other speedy
friends to the Earth.
I just want to be soaked in,
to float back up,
and then to find myself once more,
sliding down your wet glass.

~ Reed Antonich

A Tribute to Emma

Lauren passed me a woven basket filled with fabric flowers. I took the basket, and I blindly picked one from the bunch. I passed the basket on, and I looked at the little creation in my hands. It was a rich purple with a large green button as the center. There was a safety pin on the back, so I carefully pinned the carnation onto my shirt. I looked around at my friends. They were all quietly pinning their flowers on as well. Everyone was dressed so colorfully--long tie-dyed dresses, pink polo shirts, patterned scarves. It looked as if we stumbled out of the late sixties. Everyone's outfits were cheerful. Our faces were not.

We all entered the church together, silently walking down the aisle to our assigned pews. The beauty of the church took my breath away. Some stained glass windows followed the ceiling to a point. They shed gorgeous rainbow rays of light down onto the wooden pews. The colored light was one of the few sources of light in the chapel, and it lit the massive space like a bright smile. It was beautiful. She probably liked this place a lot. I broke my gaze from the ceiling windows to file into my pew with a few of my other friends. We were out of place. As the church began to fill up, people dressed in dark, somber clothing seated themselves far away from the altar. Then the organ started playing.

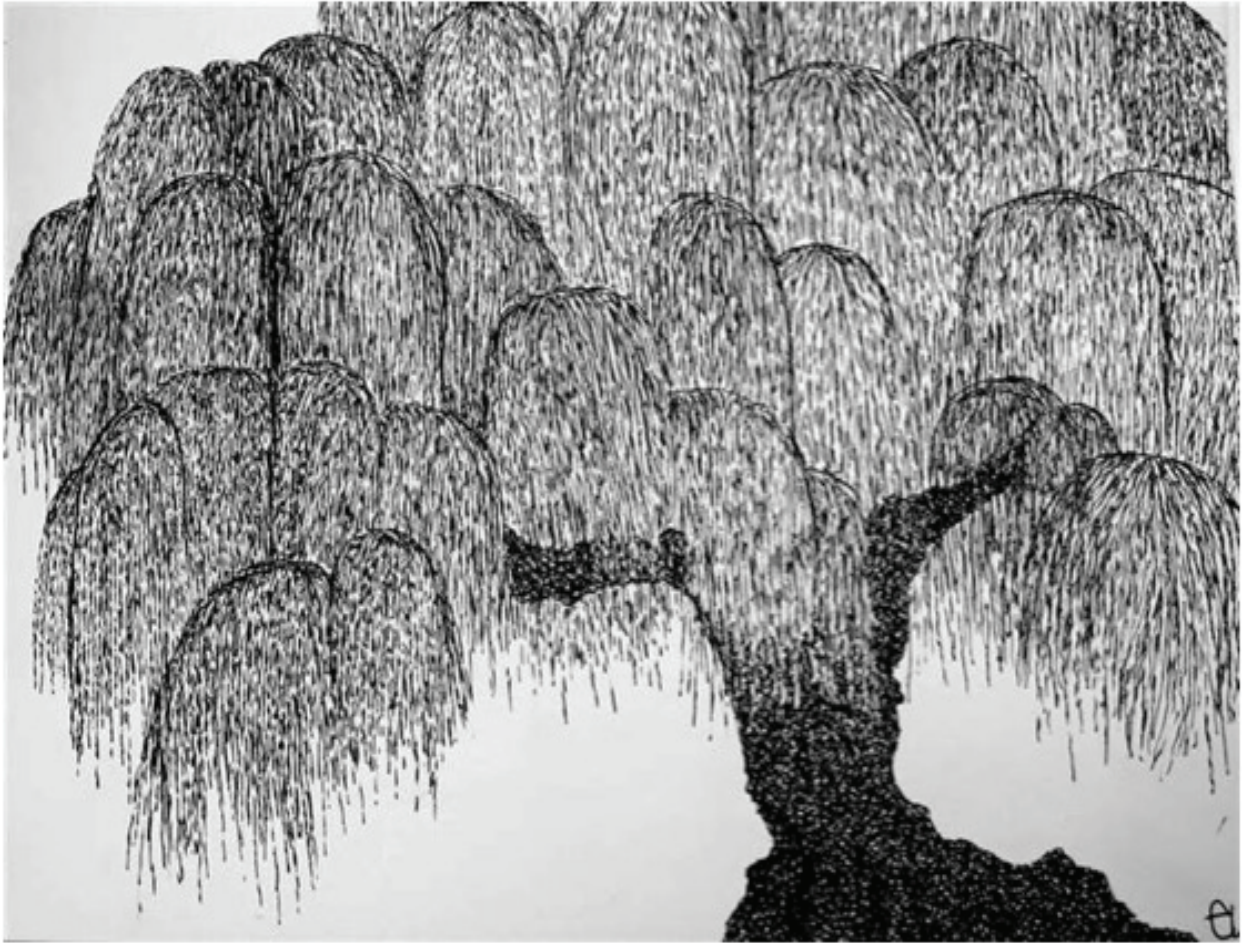
I knew what was coming. I took a deep, low breath, and I looked to the back of the church. There, the women of the family walked in pairs down the center aisle. Once they were seated, the men, exactly eight, started rolling the casket down toward the altar. I recognized one person--her father. His face was empty, his stare straight ahead. His left hand was firmly on the top of the casket. They rolled the casket to the front of the pews and sifted quietly into their seats. Her father was the last one to sit. My breath shook. I knew that at some point during the mass, I would have to walk past her.

The rest of the mass went by in a blurry mess. Tears seemed as if they were being pumped from a water well. The limited amount of tissues available weren't sufficient for the flood of tears. But the tears did dry, and they dried just in time.

A single note played from the piano at the front of the church. It was an E, and it was our cue. One by one, we started singing our song. We made our way to the front of the church, and there we finished the song. I looked out to the pews and was completely taken aback by the packed seats. Every space was filled in the large church. And that was when the beat picked up, and we sang our hearts out for her. And that's when it happened. I felt her. Before the funeral, I was very sure that no god or any kind of spirit could exist outside of what I saw. But as we stood there, I felt her presence with me, smiling at us through the stained glass windows. Her spirit was there, and still continues to be since then.

~ Emily Barbus

Willow



~ Emily Watkins

“If I knew I should die tomorrow, I would plant a tree today.”
Stephen Girard

A Heart Divided

While I hold him
Thoughts of you break me,
Fracturing my soul
In two, equally whole
Pieces.

He holds me in a light, one parallel to
That of an unearthly being,
But you see me as I am,
Shamed, tired, broken, had. Yes, he knows
These things too but
To him, my past is
Gone.

With him the silence has grown
To be anything
But deafening.
With you the silence never
Is.

He compensates by mirroring and
Overpowering my intensity--
You compliment it
With a mild, gentler approach,
Yet both produce
A glowing pair.

Looking before me
I see two different
Paths, two distinct
Futures. "Follow your
Heart" is no longer an option
Because on some level
My heart is lying to me,
And looking down I
See two halves, with two different torn edges
That could both complete

My shattered heart.
I see a scale equal on both pans--
One looks at the other,
The other looks at me

Both knowing I've made
My choice
And I hope to each and every god
It was right.

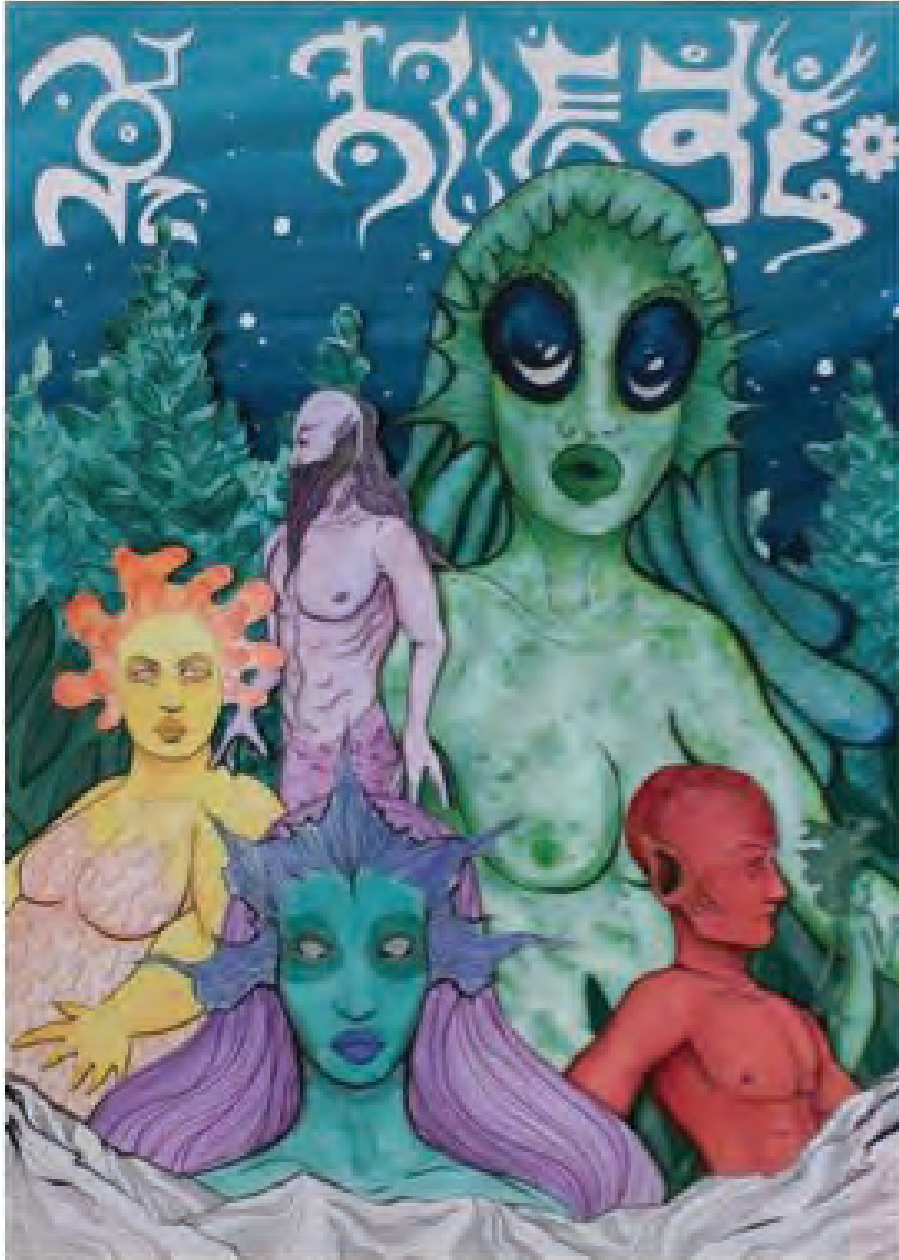
~ Maura Sanguini

Self-Portrait



~ Elizabeth Wang

Under the Sea



~ Curtis Coltharp

“Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets.
To plant a pine, one need only own a shovel.”
Aldo Leopold

In the Beginning

46

A TIME FOR TRUTH

reversed in time, some form of economic dictatorship. That is precisely what happened in the realm of energy production in the United States. Years of incoherent government intervention strangled energy production, domestic supplies diminished, artificial shortages emerged, a foreign embargo on oil precipitated a crisis, there was a violent public outcry for an instant solution, an energy “dictatorship” was established to allocate the rare commodity—and I, incredibly, became the “dictator.”

The American energy crisis is a classic case out of a free-market textbook, and for that reason I shall describe it in detail because unless one sees the planning and regulatory system close up, it is difficult to resist the entrancing notion that conscious planning by the state is a reasonable process. Even so, there is no guarantee that the lesson will be understood, and to this day, in the energy realm, it has not been understood by most people.

To be fair about it, in the beginning I barely understood it myself. On December 4, 1973, with the nation reeling under the Arab oil embargo, President Nixon named me energy czar, the American euphemism for a mini-dictator over a portion of the economy. Throughout the crisis I constantly found myself fighting with one hand to ease the government death grip on energy production and with the other to unify and centralize government control. But my own confusion did not last. I had the kind of education on the subject that focuses the mind. There is nothing like becoming an economic planner oneself to learn what is desperately, stupidly wrong with such a system.

Needless to say, I did not acquire that strange role overnight. I passed through an apprenticeship of sorts. It began immediately after I was named Deputy Secretary of the Treasury under George Shultz. I arrived at the Treasury in November 1972, and I was boning up on financial matters, law enforcement, and the various international issues in which Treasury is involved when I was summoned one evening by Shultz. He told me that he and the President had

~ Mars Garber

Superman

I met Superman today
He didn't wear a cape,
and not once did I
see Him fly.
He didn't know it yet,
but He'd become my Kryptonite.

That smile is my poison,
which kills me beautifully;
each giggle so warm that
it melts my heart,
Leaving me enamored.

But you can't revel in rainbows and unicorns all the time.
And when He cries,
His tears fall like asteroids,
that burn through my soul
like acid,
and leave holes the size of craters
in my stomach.

He entrusts me
with the specifics of his
classified information;
each covert operation,
showing no will to withhold
so much as a Single
Juicy Detail.

He gushes out gossip
until every last drop has been
poured into the Lockbox
that He has Made of my Mind.

Never have I encountered another
"Human"
with such a power to
Clear my Black Sky;
pick me up,
brush off the dirt,
and show me so much
Love

that I can almost feel myself
beginning to float above the ground
from all of the
Butterflies Fluttering
through my stomach, in
Perfect Disarray.

And not once in a millennium
would I have believed
that One Day I would be
Lucky enough
to call this Super Hero
one of my
Closest Friends.

But Miracles can happen,
and Happy Endings do exist.
Of course, he has his King;
which every Fairy Tale must possess,
but He and His Prince Charming
have crowned me
Their Princess.

~ T.G. Lambert

Central Park



~ Emily Watkins

The Last Day on Floor Fifty-Seven

He woke up at his usual time of 6:34 a.m. and proceeded to prepare himself for his big day. He was ready for work at 9:00 and left. He was so excited about the meeting later in the afternoon that, halfway to work, he realized he had forgotten to eat breakfast. Also, realizing that he was out of cash, he pulled up to an ATM and retrieved five twenty dollar bills from the machine. He then got back in his car and drove to the nearest McDonald's to buy his breakfast with one of the twenty dollar bills; he placed the ten dollars and sixty-six cents change into the donation box.

He arrived at work five minutes late at the time of 9:35. He proceeded to his office on the fifty-seventh floor of the fifty-eight story building. Once there, he found a note from his friend: "Hey John, when you leave later today, can I have your office? ~ Paul."

John put down the note, sat down at his desk, and looked around for something to do. He quickly found something to occupy his mind and, before he knew it, it was time for lunch. He heard a knock at his door and looked up to see Paul. "Hey, you coming to lunch?" Paul asked.

"Go ahead," John told him, "I have a few things I need to finish here before I hand over my office to you."

Paul left, and after a few minutes, John left for lunch alone. Again John went to McDonald's and paid with a twenty dollar bill, placing the fifteen dollars and forty-seven cents change into the charity box. He ate then returned to his office.

Soon after finishing, John's phone began to ring. He picked it up; it was the CEO calling him up to his office. John put down the black phone and walked over to the window facing south. This was going to be the last time he ever looked out of his window. After twelve years of working in the office, day after day, he was going to leave it--his second home. The view showed the city below him and the river that cut straight through it. Beyond the city limits, he could observe the luscious forests stretching as far as the eye could see. And in the far off distance, he could barely make out the mountains that would ultimately end the forest but give life to the river that flows through this city.

John turned away from the window and slowly exited the room. He arrived at the elevator to find all of his co-workers there to greet him. All of them began to clap and give him praise. They were going to miss him. One of his co-workers even told him he was one of the best co-workers they have ever had. Paul stopped him and asked him if he would like to stop for dinner later that evening; John accepted his offer this time.

John stepped into the elevator and pressed the button to move up to floor fifty-eight. The ride began slowly just like his journey to this point. The elevator opened, and the secretary directed him to the CEO's office. John entered and took a seat in front of the desk.

“Welcome, John,” he said as he turned his chair to face John.

“Hello, Mr. Noctuma,” John said.

“We both know why you are here, so I’ll skip right to the point. Today is my last day with the company, and you have been chosen to replace me. So without further ado, John,” Mr. Noctuma said as he left his chair, “please take a seat in your new chair.”

“Thank you, sir,” said John.

“John, you can stop calling me that. We have known each other long enough.”

“Okay, thanks Nate.”

Nate left John alone in the room. John walked over to the window which faced north and looked out at the beyond. There was no forest, no river, and no mountain on this side of the building. The entire north side was all industrial factories and the like. But John’s eye was quickly attracted to a small, glistening reminder of his old view, a beautiful touch of nature hidden away. John sat confidently in his new chair reassured that the path ahead of him would be as prosperous as the one behind.

~ Ben Murphy

Skyscraper



~ Jess Hartig

Forgotten



~ Zain Mehdi

“Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong.”
Winston Churchill

Not Here

I have a habit
Of being present
But invisible

I sit and I watch
As the world does turn
And I wait for more

Someone to listen
To talk and confide
Best friends are now

More transient than
Ever before somehow
My friends don't know me

As a quiet person
Yet I know inside
That for all my talk

I'm searching for a
Better friend than the "best"
Friend I've had thus far

~ Megan Wadas

A Van Down by the River

I went out searching for a new car when I came across a Ferrari dealership. The car salesman tried to sell me a Ferrari, saying I could “get any girl” I want with one. He must think I’m stupid. A white van will do the same job, and it’ll cost a lot less than that. Chris Farley, a comedic legend and previous member of Saturday Night Live, was known for many skits he performed over the years. Attempting to be a Chippendale dancer, the creepy bus driver in *Billy Madison*, and the lead role in *Tommy Boy*, Farley had a knack for comedy. But perhaps his most famous work could be viewed as a call to action: Farley suggests that every person should live in a van down by the river, and I think living this lifestyle would make this world a better place.

Living in a van down by the river has many benefits unparalleled to living in a regular home. For example, everything is already in one place. It is impossible to lose things when all of your life savings is contained in a 10 foot by 4 foot area. With the small space, it will not cost very much to heat the van; you do not have to pay any bills besides gas, and vans are much more gas-efficient than motor homes. The financial benefits outweigh any type of negatives that may come with living in a van.

There have been cases of people living in vans for years, and these people did not have to pay for the crippling costs of life. A Duke student by the name of Ken Ilgunas figured out he would have to pay upwards of \$12,000 per year in room and board to attend the university. Looking for a better option, Ilgunas decided it would be much cheaper to buy a van, deck out the inside of it, and use the van for transportation and living. Ilgunas decided he could shower and get water with a local gym membership for a mere \$34 per month. Living in a van for long periods of time has been done before and can be done again. In fact, if you live by the river, you get to save that \$34 every month because the river, or backyard, is your source of water for drinking and bathing!

Living by the river also has many benefits that are often overlooked. For example, many people live by the river in little camper tents. Your friends in the camper tents would be only a few feet from you so that you would never feel lonely. Sometimes the people that live in tents have great life stories to tell. You may never know these tent-dwellers until you try van-living for yourself. Living by the river is also proven to step up your rock-skipping game because of all the free time you have without the access of TV and Netflix. Some say living in a van would be bad because of the reputation that would be associated with this lifestyle; Americans often call these people “creepers.” While this may be true, there are good things that come out of being a creeper, such as not having to give out candy at Halloween. You get to keep all of the Halloween candy for yourself! According to Principal Sieminski, “Creepers are called creepers for a reason,” but the extra candy outweighs any reputation North Allegheny principals assign to creepers. All in all, living in a van down by the river has been done before, is cost-effective, and will provide you with new friends!

~ Jonathan Hydock

Skate



~ Olivia Geisler

“Suburbia is where the developer bulldozes out the trees,
then names the streets after them.”

Bill Vaughn

Behind the Glass



~ Curtis Coltharp

“Life without love is like a tree without blossom and fruit.”
Khalil Gibran

Blink

Pages of confusion
Marked down in green with descriptive delusion
The skunked braid of your fallen cornrow
Nervously twirls from knuckle to knuckle
You took a trip
And never found your way back home

Flash

To the girl in her grandfather's leather jacket
Clenched fists
Slashed wrists
Scribbles of "mommy and me"
Plaster the white washed walls of this holding cell
Everyday forgetting the lines of her own son's hand
Doing her best not to dwell

Pause.
Play

To the man down the hall
Looking for his bottle
To fill the void of an unfamiliar tomorrow
Falling asleep to the dreams of his little girl's third birthday
Praying to God he'll make it home in time for next May

Slam

The doors lock
Separating mother and child
Your hand doesn't feel the same pressed up against a sheet of glass
Wave goodbye--
Get in the elevator--
Tell it
I'm going down.

~ Claudia Toter

A Cold Dusty Room

The empty room,
the empty hands,
the empty soul.
Nothing more to give,
can't take anymore.
Cold blue light casts hollow shadows on the wall.
They dance,
almost mockingly.
Sluggish raindrops streak slowly across the window,
painfully slow,
spelling out secret messages for no one to read.
Thunderous booms echo,
a fleeting disturbance in the unyielding silence.
The clouds form a stained cotton ceiling,
with no end in sight.
Are they coming, or going?

Steam fogs my window,
rising from the fresh hot cup of Earl Grey tea.
I long for its faint aroma,
soft and welcoming,
my only comfort.
A small sip, and I recoil,
my tongue scalded and numb,
leaving a hostile taste in my mouth,
but I return for more,
a glutton for punishment.
The intense heat seems to warm me,
from the feet up,
and then spreads to the air around me,
though only for a moment,
before the creeping cold arms I can't escape embrace me once again,
leaving me chilled,
down to the bone and beyond,
keeping a firm, icy grip on my heart.

~ Alec Christensen

Early Discharge



~ Morgan Linn

“It is best I see...not only the forest but the barren trees without leaves.”
Lawrence S. Pertillar

Today

Early every morning she wakes
And moving silently across the floor
She builds herself.
With a click, snap, and zip she contorts
Her body into something,
Something that simply wasn't there before.
She dresses this form like a
Puppeteer does his marionette.
Complementing and perfecting the piece
He just created.

Moving to her next canvas
She looks in the mirror and takes a deep breath.

With a swipe of her hand she begins
Applying her mask, concealing who she really is.
Moving meticulously she creates an expression,
The one she wants the world to see.
Looking up she sees the person she wants to be.
A sweep over her lashes that frame her augmented eyes.
She colors a pout onto her pale thin lips.

With heat and sprays she twirls and ices her
Processed locks, making herself a perfect doll,
Ready for the shelf.

And slipping on her shoes,
She squishes and squeezes and perfects this image
Of beauty she has crafted.
Then, she goes to meet the boy.

We all know him,
The User
The Abuser
The Dictator of the Deceitful
The Cheater
The Cause for the Scars on so many girls' Arms

But she wants him
She wants him to want
Her, because that

Is what will give her self-worth.
And after the Lust and a day of things lost
That will never return.

She returns.

Stripping down to her own body she steps,
Into the bath.
Water drenching her hair down to
Its natural state and
With a cloth she removes from her face,
The unnatural perfection, revealing her inner self
And there, in her raw form, she finds
The faults in herself, which she will cover again
Tomorrow.

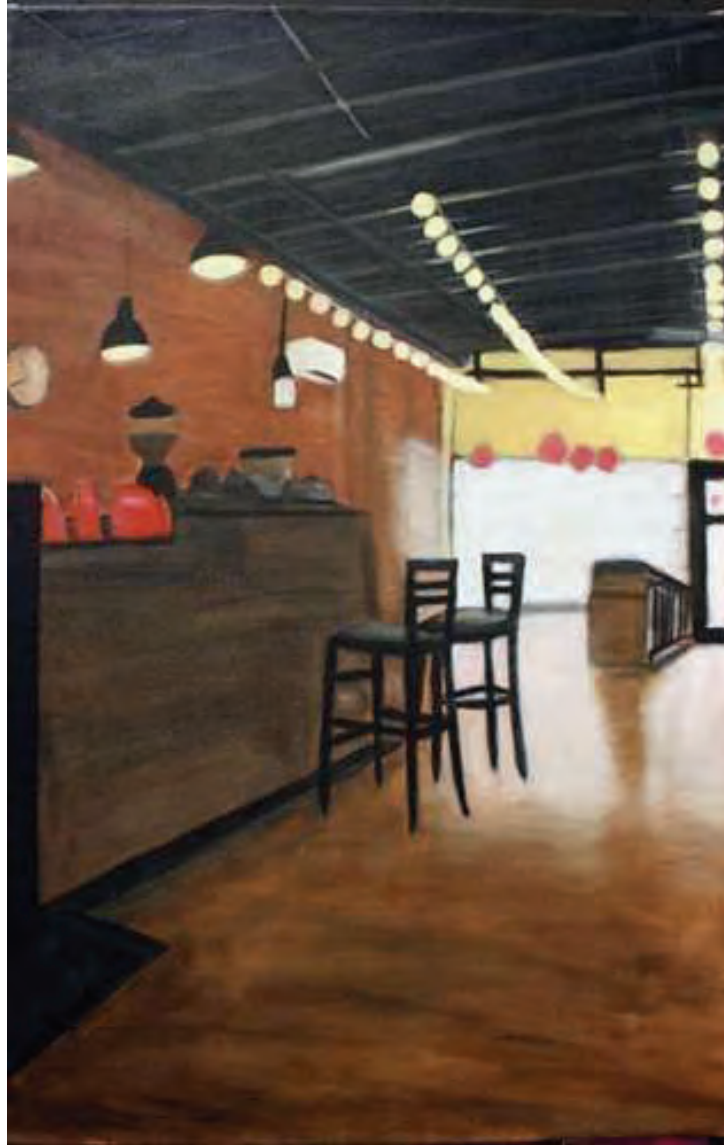
~ Maura Sanguini

What the Color Red Sounds Like



~ Maddie Jack

20th Street Coffee Shop



~ Lauren Doak

“Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.”
Chinese proverb

Destinations

I always hated rosebuds. Over the years, I've begun assuming that my hatred stemmed from something to do with their inability to ever really live up to their standards, though I'm not one to talk. I think that aspect of them remains painfully similar to people; I like to tell myself it's simply a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The soles of my feet met the concrete as I carried out a sort of half-jog through the train station. I like to think the half-jog is an art, and it's one of the lesser graceful things I've carried out in my few short years of life. Nonetheless, I succumbed to the level of the commonly assumed procrastinating human and made my steady way across the platforms. If we're being honest with each other, I wasn't late. I wasn't in any rush at all, in fact. I just liked the portrayal of needing to be somewhere. It gave me a sense of small importance, really, and I liked tricking people into moving out of my way--putting my time before their own, even if just for a fraction of a second. When I found myself in an area of significantly less traffic, I slowed. My lungs were fighting a bloody battle with a couple months of cigarette residue that was still settling in. I allowed myself to cough twice and only twice.

I took my place at a wobbly stool near the left end of the bar, if you even want to give it the privilege of being categorized as such. Train station bars are a grimy sort of escape. You can usually tell why people ended up there based on their general appearance--it's become somewhat of a game I like to play. It doesn't take much effort to differentiate between those who are here to recover from a goodbye, who's rethinking a decision to depart as he or she waits with absurd impatience for a train, and my personal favorite: Who's here getting just drunk enough in preparation for an arrival. I like to consider myself a combination of the three. I'm not necessarily going anywhere or waiting for anyone; this is just somewhere I like to come instead of class, but I, much like every other young person in the world, imagine I will leave someday.

The bartender handed me a glass that contained an apologetic dosage of bourbon and an excessive amount of ice. That's the thing that always got me about showing up to places like this at two in the afternoon--you either look too young for anyone to serve you anything substantial, or,

considering your timing, you appear pathetic enough to be given more than what you can handle.

I buried the tips of my fingers in the toxicity of the glass and dug out the excess ice. I couldn't feel the chill that was supposed to be making its way throughout my knuckles; I never could. The fishing continued until there were two cubes left in the bourbon--the rest were left to soak thinned trails into a tissue paper napkin.

As the sour hit my throat, the cheap TV flicked on, a dim sort of light stretching through the fogged atmosphere. My head turned at a similar angle to the bartender's as we watched the news. Minutes passed.

I fell into my mind, studying the oak surrounding the floors and imagining the stories of those at the tables behind me. I wasn't paying attention until the barkeep's voice shook me from my thoughts.

"Paul!" he exclaimed, setting down his bottle next to the sink. He was facing the doorway, wiping his hands with a tattered cloth as his face was drowned out by a crooked smile. He was addressing someone I immediately assumed to be unimportant, but I turned anyway.

Every cell in my body skidded to a halt.

My professor, a lowly man with white hair and wrinkled forearms, was standing twenty feet away from me. My heart froze in my chest. His class. Oh, my God, I was supposed to be in his class.

Chaos made its way through my reflexes as I threw my bag over my shoulders, pulling my hood over my head as I hunched my way out of sight. I threw a couple quarters onto the counter in a hurry--I felt badly for the measly tip, but it had to suffice. He was walking towards the bartender.

I had to run, now.

My lungs held their complaints as I sprinted through the station, half-tripping over my own feet and looking over my shoulder to make sure he hadn't seen me. I was shoving past people, scanning the crowd behind my heels as I put all of my trust into my feet to take me somewhere far away from here.

The train doors shut behind me. Oh, no. I hit the white paneling with my hands, feverishly looking out the windows for help.

"No, no!" I shouted. I shook the emergency latch to no avail. The doors wouldn't open. There was no way to get the doors open.

Turning to the sides of the cabin in search of an escape, I ran to the nearest door. Locked. My head turned left, right, and back to the left again. I must've looked like a crazed animal trapped in a cage. I was lost.

What the hell do I do?

I froze in my tracks.

Breathe. Breathe.

A woman and her husband from the front of the cabin rose with concern, coming over to me and asking me questions in French that I didn't quite understand. The woman rubbed my back to calm me down. They searched for help.

The door leading to the front cabins of the train slid open. A man in a thin green uniform locked eyes with me, making his way towards my shaking hands. The title on his slightly tilted hat gave away his purpose: He was the conductor. He was a tall Frenchman, clean-shaven with glassy eyes and the edge of a tattoo creeping around the edge of his collar. He stood in a way that would make you think bending over would make his ribs cave in; I imagined them littered in tattoos of skulls and stars.

He stood tentatively as I told him my predicament. He stared at me, overwhelmed with a mixture of boredom and confusion over my ability to screw up so badly. He reached for the walkie talkie strapped to his left shoulder.

As he spoke to the person on the receiving end, he tapped his foot, drilling impatience into the washed-out navy carpeting in the aisle. In the back of my mind, I counted the taps in two's, half-concentrating on the idea of his polished heels sinking lower into the ground as if the navy melted to water. He wouldn't be able to swim in that tight of a suit.

His walkie talkie clicked off, and he attached it back to the loop on his vest with a sigh.

"Wait for next stop," he instructed, not bothering to look me in the eye.

"When will that be? You don't understand, I don't even have a ticket, I need to--"

He shook his head, plainly advising me to save it.

"Doors close, you sit."

I had no choice. Holy crap, I had no choice.

I sheepishly took my place at an empty seat near the back of the cabin. I was alone. I tried to justify my stupidity; this is the freedom of studying abroad, I suppose. It was spring break, and my roommates had gone home after their final class for the next two weeks. I had nowhere to be, except in the final few seconds of that professor's class. Other than that, however, there was no pet, no one expecting me. I was on a train going somewhere unfamiliar, and I had to tell no one.

I traced the stitched seams on the leather seat as they reviewed the usual emergency procedures over the intercom. They were all in French, of course, so I leaned back and looked out the window. I stared into an imaginative abyss and drew a map of my corner of the universe at this given moment.

There were three children a few seats in front of me, sandwiched in between a worn-out mother and father. To my diagonal left were what appeared to be two sisters-cousins, perhaps--who were both laughing at something on their tablets, attached by shared headphones. At the front of the cabin sat the man and woman who calmed me down earlier, directly parallel to a group of German tourists passing around a tin flask.

This was it. I was stuck in a metal capsule destined for the unknown: no ticket, no luggage, no purpose. I made an unfathomable impulsive mistake, and here I was. Leave it to France transit to force you to take an unpaid venture.

I had this space to myself for the remainder of the night, and I was unusually content.

Finally, the train whirred to life, slowly creeping forward out of the station. I left the bar behind me, the fogged TV, the bourbon with two ice cubes.

A girl with hair down to her waist made her way towards me. She was fumbling through a purse she had just thrown onto her shoulder; she scanned the words on her ticket as she looked up at the numbers above the seats. She walked closer to me. I glanced between her and the window, passively memorizing the way she pursed her lips and scanned the digits that held her place for the remaining hours. Her eyes were a deepened brown. She was an ivory sort of pale, sprinkled with freckles that danced in constellations up to the ring on the right side of her nose. It reflected the fluorescent lighting the same way the crest of a wave would hit the light of the sun.

The feeling of her brushing against the edge of my knee jolted me out of my daydream.

I looked up.

Her eyes flickered, extending her hand. "I'm Rose." She had a small, faded heart drawn on the base of her thumb. I shook her hand.

"Where are you off to?" she asked, sitting down in the seat across from me. She crumpled up her ticket and shoved it into a shallow pocket.

I set a half-hearted laugh in her lap as I explained what had happened. She looked at me in silence, the bottom of her jaw dropped down to the center of her neck.

"You're joking."

She asked me about my family, my education, my favorites of films and music. We exhausted our way through the checklist of menial questions, eventually resorting to exchanging silence as we stared out the window. I wondered what she focused on out there, what her eyes were trained on. It was probably the trees.

“How do you feel about sharing secrets with strangers?” she asked me, tucking her right foot under the opposite thigh.

I glanced at her, unwilling to break my gaze from the mountains splitting either side of the train from outside the window.

“What?”

“You know, pouring yourself into a stranger. How do you feel about that?”

I looked at her. “I’m not quite sure what you mean.”

She paused, twisting the ring on her left index finger around in a circle.

“I think one of my favorite things is telling strangers things that nobody else knows. Not my friends, not my family-- forget the small talk. I want to know you, and I want you to know me,” she said.

“Why?” I asked, staring at her. Her irises were tangled in curiosity.

She playfully raised an eyebrow, smiling out the window. “Why not?”

I studied her with awe. I assumed she could taste my skepticism on the tip of her tongue. She glanced down.

“Let me see,” she said, motioning for my hand. I looked at her, quizzically, as she refused to wait for an answer and pulled my wrist towards her. I leaned forward, putting my elbows on my knees and studying her eyes carefully.

She traced my lifeline, her knuckles bending on hinges doused in bruised creases.

She didn’t look up at me as she unlaced my palm.

“Strangers, you know...” she began, “Sometimes they get to know you more than you know yourself. There’s beauty in that, you know. Strangers can’t hurt you.”

It was silent for a long time.

I began to sink into her, a girl on a train going to nowhere, as she moved her index finger along my veins and down my fingers.

Finally, she inhaled.

“I don’t believe in love,” she told me.

Words about her mother, the psych ward, the dusty journals and the poisoned past dripped down her lips. I imagined the words as smoke, curling around the bottom of her jaw and around to the back of her ears. It was unrelenting; as she spoke, the thickened mist sketched a maze down the nape of her neck and around again to her collarbone. I couldn't focus on what she was saying. Her breath staggered as she found words for the boy who left her with no more than skin and bones, bruising her soul in the process. She replaced the intermittent silence with stories as hollow as her lungs.

I listened. She painted the sunset with broken sentences.

Pain made a home at the bottom of her throat. She told me she lined her skin with cigarettes in order to taste it again--him, again--and she looked at the ground when she said this.

I already knew her better than she wanted me to. She wore three rings: one, thick and round with diamonds lining the center all around; two, a line of unfinished triangles, upside-down v's, facing away from her; and three, a silver claddagh ring with the heart facing outwards. Her left wrist was doused in bracelets, all decorated with her zodiac sign and ideas that held her being. She shook her foot when she offered phrases that wracked her nerves, and an aged scar slept comfortably on the edge of her eyebrow. Her forest green jacket slumped down past her shoulders, and her lips held the weight of her doubts.

That's all appearance, though.

As she wrapped her stories in bows and set them at my feet, I felt myself swimming in her.

Her stories continued, and they held what culminated to this: Her waist held cherry blossoms while her legs held thorns, and she dared you to come close to her. She buried herself under people's skin, putting those deemed undeserving on their knees. She cupped their faces and made them beg for her. Sometimes, she put two fingers down past her tongue in order to find the words "I love you" for lifeless creatures. You could see the strings she had tied to the ends of her hands in an effort to connect to others; they were frayed. From this, I know that she let love slip down her walls until they were barren.

The color of her eyes was encompassed by fear that resonated through her breath. She existed solely through shadows, tracing the stems of flowers through gaps in her vertebrae too fragile to be held together by anything else. As she continued to speak, the evening turned to black, and the black turned to puffs of cloud that passed us at one hundred miles an hour.

"Now arrived in Amsterdam," the voice over the intercom spoke, now sounding bleak and monotone.

We looked at each other.

“What have you learned?” she asked me.

What have I learned? What a silly question. What a silly, silly question.

I searched for words as I fell into her darkened eyes and exhaled.

“That you are made of stardust.”

We stood up, pulling our bags onto our shoulders and stretching twelve-hour stiffened limbs. I motioned for her to go out ahead of me. She tucked her hair behind her ear, smiling at her feet and taking a few steps forward as I followed. She paused and turned around.

She took my palm and pressed it to hers, lacing her fingers between my own.

“Do you have anywhere to be?” she asked.

I shook my head. “Nowhere but here.”

~ Emma Barnes

Bliss



~ Selene Wartell

Never Close Enough



~ Felicia Sunday

“Trees are much like human beings and enjoy each other’s company.”

Jens Jensen

Too Short

I look in the rearview mirror, the foggy yellow line stretching far behind me.

He sits there, feet straight out
With the car seat's front edge pushing his knees locked.
His torso is completely turned to the window,
Wide eyes straight down the crack.

It fell down there. Mommy, I can see it.
Honey, I'm driving, wait 'til we get home.

Forehead against the window, he looks at his hand
Before plunging it down the canyon,
Dark, intimidating.
He lets his tiny arm drop
And reaches.

Too short.
He sighs back in his seat.

With a second wind, he turns his shoulders,
Looks at his hand, plunges it down the canyon.
His entire left cheek squishes against the window,
The skin by his eye is pulled upwards,
And he groans, as if that could make it stretch.

I shake my head.
An arm can reach only so far.

I shift my gaze back to the yellow line in front of me,
Make the left, pull into the garage, hop out, open his door.
He beams, holding it in his hand:
A two-dollar Superman toy
Reached by an arm that was too short.

~ Charlie Brickner

Maxims

Those who keep a closed mind should keep a closed mouth.
~ Lauren Swartz

Even a dull stone can skip brightly over water.
~ John Uihlein

Hard work in younger years yields
greener pastures and less chance of tears.
~ Rebekah Funk

Even if your stove isn't working, you can still make ramen in the microwave.
~ Kate Graham

Those who dream never see the darkness.
~ Madi Beining

Due tomorrow. Do today.
~ Elise Huwe

Celebrate today where you are now;
The future is coming like a wolf on the prowl.
Silent, slowly, sneakily it slides in,
And the moment you had is now in the dim.

~ Trent Soyster

That Spring Breeze

Oh sweet Spring Breeze
How you blow with such ease
Yet you always make me sneeze
Oh, you little tease.

Winter made you bitter
Like that nasty babysitter

But enough of these complaints!
Spring Breeze you are like the saints!

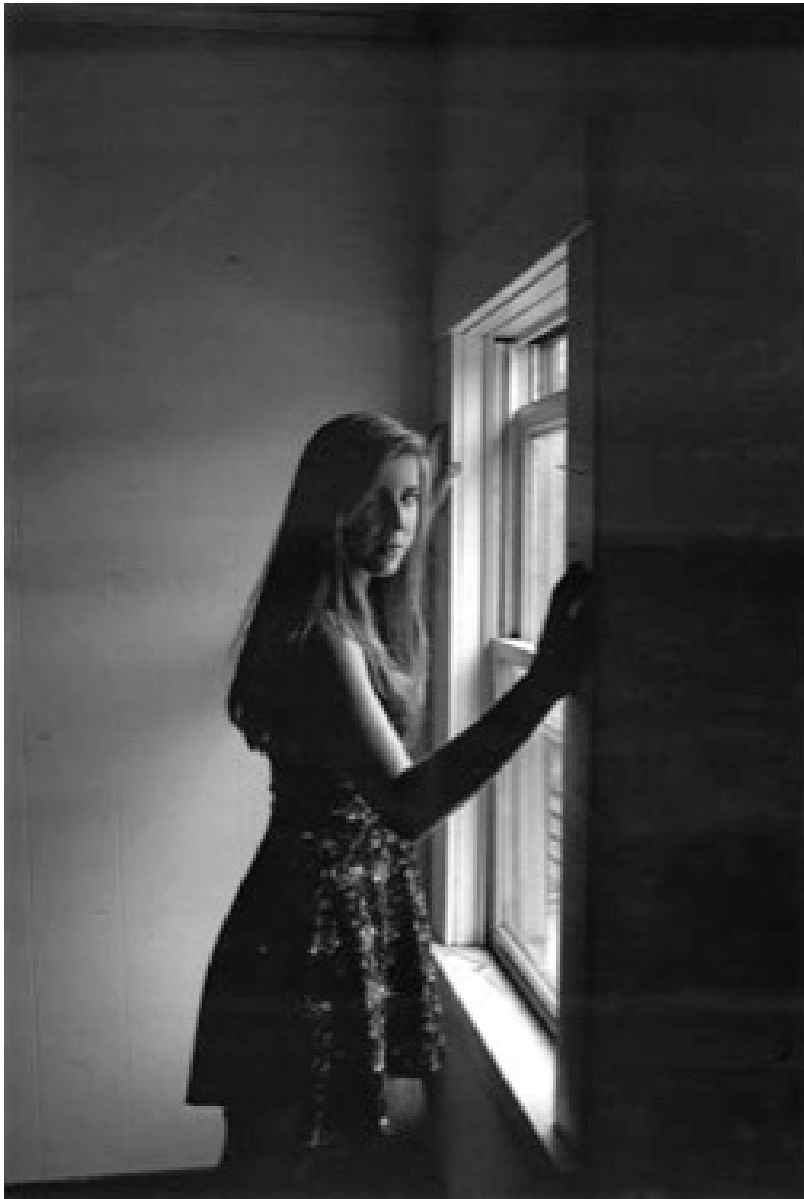
~ Jason Fultz

Strawberry Splash



~ Jenny Kraynik

Seclusion



~ Connor Caruso

“Storms make trees take deeper roots.”
Dolly Parton

Facade

Kids

Suffering silently behind the
Fictitious brick walls that they have built up around themselves.

"I'm fine,"

Is echoed through hallways, and houses.

Until it becomes fact

That the blades and the lighters are their closest friends.

That the pain is their liveliness

And the rivers of their wrists

Are what keep them on their feet.

Upright.

Just as they always have been.

The fear of knowing that

The only thing in the world that is keeping them stable

Is what makes them unstable.

When the monsters from under the bed

Have made their way into the control center of life as they know it.

How is anyone to blame

When nobody but the backs of the bracelets

Are exposed to their pain?

Who is to fix these fallen spirits,

These broken beings?

Who can be their hero

And save their shattered souls?

When their only true, known enemy

Is themselves and their diminutive tools.

~ T. G. Lambert

Ya'aburnee

Life is undeniably beautiful.

There are moments of pure adrenaline when hands shake, palms sweat, and hearts race. There are moments of bliss when no words on Earth can commemorate the splendor. There are moments of fear, joy, anger, peace, and even boredom. But every moment is part of the human experience; we remember them for their finitude.

Life is beautiful only because it ends.

Despite this, there is no beauty in death. We do not dream of cold caskets and wilting roses and perfectly rectangular holes. We know it's coming, a constant whisper in the back of our minds, but we always find ways to brush off such fears. We are humans; we are animals. The primal desire to live screams from within us, conditioned as we are to use whatever means necessary to exist.

Survival instincts rush through our bodies—a million tiny synapses firing the messages to maintain life despite the conditions we submit ourselves to. Humans are programmed to hold onto the tethered ends of life until there is nothing left.

In some ways, though, we are different than animals. We crave life—crave the thrill of the drop of a rollercoaster or the excitement of a first kiss—but tenacity for life comes at a high price. Humans are not solitary creatures, and we cannot exist in a vacuum. Our desire for companionship and love is the only passion that rivals our thirst for life.

The Arabic word *ya'aburnee* encapsulates this struggle of needs. Literally translated into English, it means, “You bury me.” It conveys a feeling of love so strong that the speaker desires to die first, only so as to never live a day without his or her love.

Humans are inherently selfish creatures. The only thing we fear more than death is being left behind by those we love. Death is quiet, easy. We do not lust for death the way we do for life, but when it comes, it will be easy. To slip away from the fight for survival into darkness requires no work, but it leaves a heavy burden on those left behind. To imagine the deaths of loved ones is nearly impossible. In times of hardship, we can plan for the day it will come—try to compartmentalize the pain we will feel, rationalize our fears—but it never takes away the ache of death. Love is not rational, and no amount of planning will absolve us of our agony. Years pass, decades, lifetimes, but the mark that death leaves on the living never fades. Long after the roses have wilted and grass has grown on that perfect rectangular plot, the living still mourn. We do not wish for death, but it is much, much easier to die first.

Perhaps there will never be an English word for *ya'aburnee*. We are taught to live life to the fullest, to find love again without forgetting those who have been relegated to memories and photographs. Time heals all wounds, they say. The world can be good

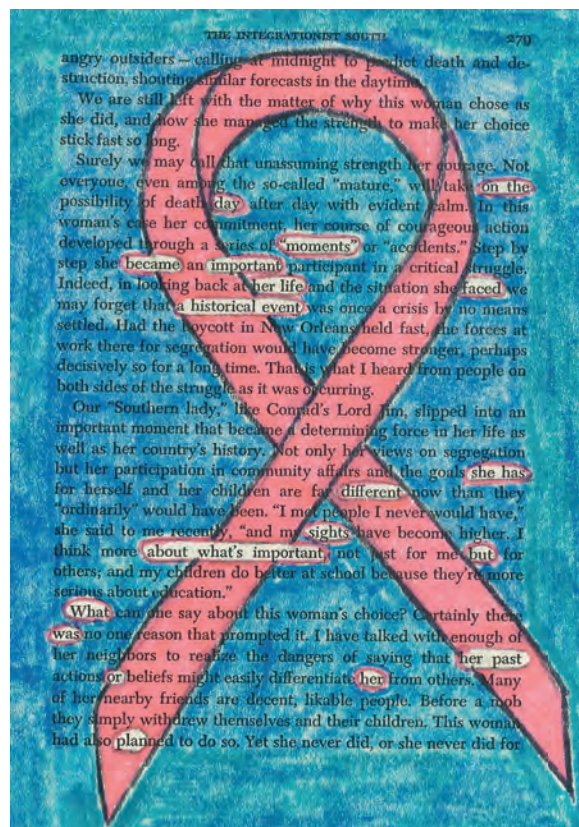
again. And it can, but that does not mean that we forget. Death is the only thing we can count on. And despite the universality of the feeling attributed to ya'aburnee, we will always be taught to find something to live for regardless of the challenges. Everyone will experience the pain of loss, but we cannot be destroyed by it.

We do not translate this word because it is a temptation that we cannot give into. There will be a time when our caskets, our ashes, our funerals are inevitable, but until that moment, we must fight. There is too little time on Earth, too many people who are not given the time they deserve. It would be easy to die before our loved ones do, to never experience the anguish of waking each day to cold sheets and quiet houses, but life is about making hard decisions. We must push on, find our desire to fight, and allow life to scream from within us again.

Life is beautiful only because it ends, but not before we take the moments to make it wonderful.

~ Kayden Rodger

Awareness



~ Ryan McCutcheon

Trapped



~ Grace Jin

“The trees are imperfect men, and seem to bemoan
their imprisonment, rooted in the ground.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Masterpiece

Silence was imaginary
and collided with barren walls
until I was taught that
 the depth of human destruction
 held a pained sort of persistence.

You clouded the silence
until you told me that
 a cherry blossom tree
had been your favorite since you were a child,
At which point
the girl in white and black
 drowned in the hazel of her eyes
 as color sunk into her skin.

I was unaware of your ability to conquer
before I learned

 you are
holding bruises like ornaments
off the tips of your fingers
balancing on the belief that
Bones can be
 a
temporary
 sanctuary.

And with this,
I unfolded the edges
and pinned her to a wall
because she is
 a masterpiece.

~ Emma Barnes

Worth the Wait

Three hours. Three hours waiting, shuffling, and baking in the sweltering sight of the sun. Skin exudes warmth with the promise of sunburn despite gracious amounts of sunscreen applied throughout the day. The people in front and behind act as space heaters, amplifying the June heat like a magnifying glass does a sunbeam—and I'm the ant. Everyone around my old man and me is sweating, and the repugnant vapors of several hundred people hang in the air, encouraged to remain complacent until the absentee breeze returns. As we progress, the walkway slowly angles upward, leading into a shaded pavilion. Here the sun cannot touch us, but the tight gaggle of slick arms and greasy faces filing into unorganized lines, the pushing from behind of those eager to escape the day, and the hackneyed music blaring from wall mounted speakers suffocate me. Awful pop tunes and the hubbub of people's jokes, stories, and complaints aren't alone in the uproar; however, three minutes apart come the hissing of brakes, the monotonous thunk of safety bars releasing their iron grip, and the boarding call for the next group.

The wait will be worth it, I tell myself as an overweight, tattooed man sporting a stained tank top and smoke grey beard traveling to his belt presses forward. I barely squeeze into the space between the rail and my dad. Somehow, the line manages to crawl even more slowly now, as if in defiance of our proximity to its end. Six times the cars trundle through the platform before it is my turn. At long last, fingers tapping excitedly on the bar in front of me, I wait as riders disembark the cars and stagger disheveled to the exit ramp. The bar swings out, and a recording beckons us to the cars over the PA, reciting the same instructions it has given countless times without losing its happy tone. I walk to the car my line feeds into—the first in the line--and sit down in the unfamiliar seat, feeling the warmth of the previous rider and the hot metal of the car. Fastening the seat belt, I lean back so the attendant can lower the padded safety bar into position. It latches with a satisfying click.

The car jolts forward and rolls down a slight slope to a chain continuously rolling beneath the track. Latched on, the car begins its arduous journey up the steep incline to the peak of the ride. Trundling along slowly, my dad and I look out over the entire park. We see the other rides of the park—eight armed whirling contraptions with flashing lights, giant-sized pirate themed swing sets, and pitfall towers complete with screaming passengers—poking through the carpet of trees and buildings. As we near the top of the hill, I feel my heartbeat in my ears, and I clench my fists on the handrails. The drop approaches. I wait.

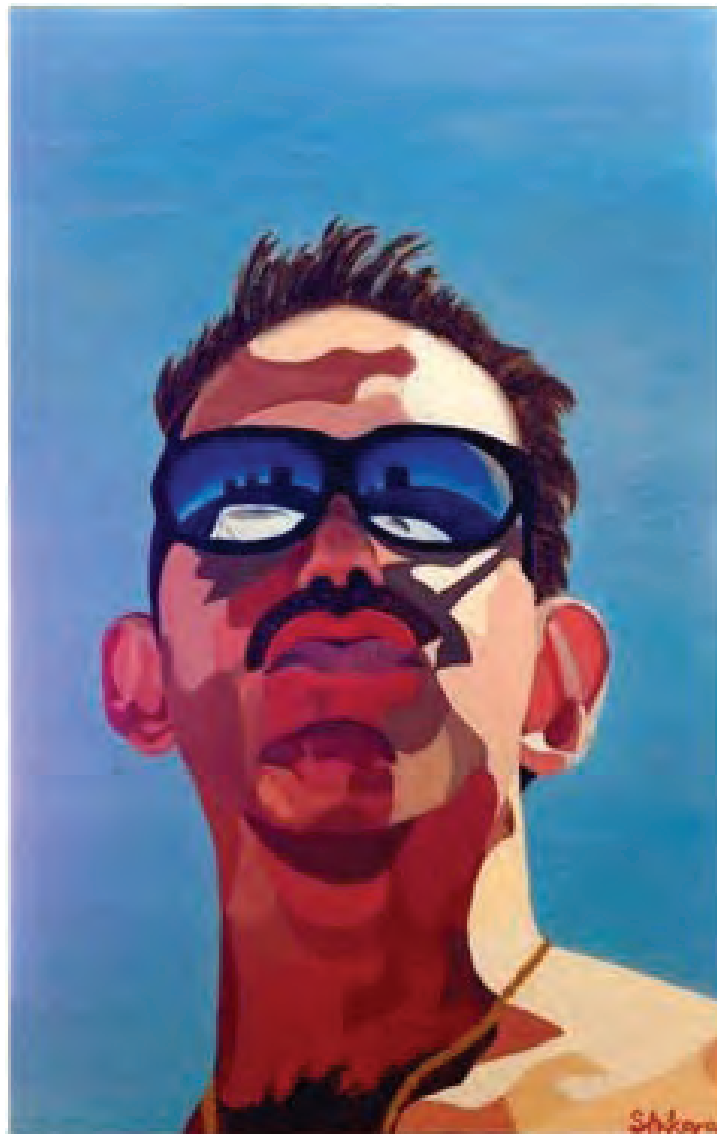
We reach the apex of the hill--the grandest view in the whole park. We choose to get in the front for this moment. Cars behind us hold ours over the lip of the dive for minutes, hours, for no time at all. I stare at the drop down. I can see the beautiful curve at the bottom of the drop, deceptively small from so high up. The people below are miniscule from our vantage. The cliché holds true: They really do look like ants.

Then the wait is over, we are falling—no, flying—down the rails, the absentee breeze forgotten with speed as our air conditioning; no longer needing a reassuring grip on the handlebar, I raise my arms to the sky and bellow my sheer joy to the whole world, but my words are trampled by the thunder of tracks and the roar of wind filching my exultations away before even I hear them; a bend at the bottom scoops us from our plummet and momentum takes over.

Three hours. It was worth the wait.

~ Joshua Thompson

Aba



~ Mia Shikora

Against the Clock



~ Grace Jin

“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is today.”
Chinese proverb

The Clock Mocks Me

My problems are petty and insignificant. I don't say that because people close to me refuse to acknowledge them or because these issues don't cause me many problems, but because I, myself, think they are not worthwhile. I deny their presence with the small pieces of hope I can get to assure myself my life is not a tremendous mess.

I live with the hope that one day my life will be better than it is today. I hope one day I can make up for all these days of my youth that are slipping from my grip very gently, but ever so painfully.

But I know so well that nothing will be able to recreate the youthful days being lost to time.

At this point I don't know if time is taking my youth, or I am giving my youth to time.

Seconds, hours, and days are walking right past me, telling me there is still time.

They are mocking me.

~ Azam Anees

Dream

I dreamed of you last night.
Laughing and smiling together,
kissing and cuddling
we were so happy
nothing mattered.
So in love,
reality could not touch us.

But,
Our castle began to crumble,
the cherished dream had become a nightmare.
I feared that I could not escape,
Being awake left no respite.
Absolutely full.
Fear and anger and nothing more.
I rejected all, trusted none
and worst of all,
I feared I could not escape.
I dreamed of you last night.
I was empty.

In the woods a wolf found me,
lost in the dark.
He helped me up and then he was gone,
lost in the gray.
I wandered alone back to where I had been,
He was there.
In his eyes I saw my own dream.
I helped him up,
we saved each other.
He destroyed my nightmare,
and shared the dream.

So thank you.
For bringing me to the woods.
For leaving me for the wolves.
Without you, he would have never,
Found me.

I dreamed of him last night.
Kissing and Laughing.
Happy again.
Dreaming the beautiful dream.

~ Emmaline Lattner-Lane

Eve



~ Maddie Jack

“From such crooked wood as that which man is made of,
nothing straight can be fashioned.”
- Immanuel Kant

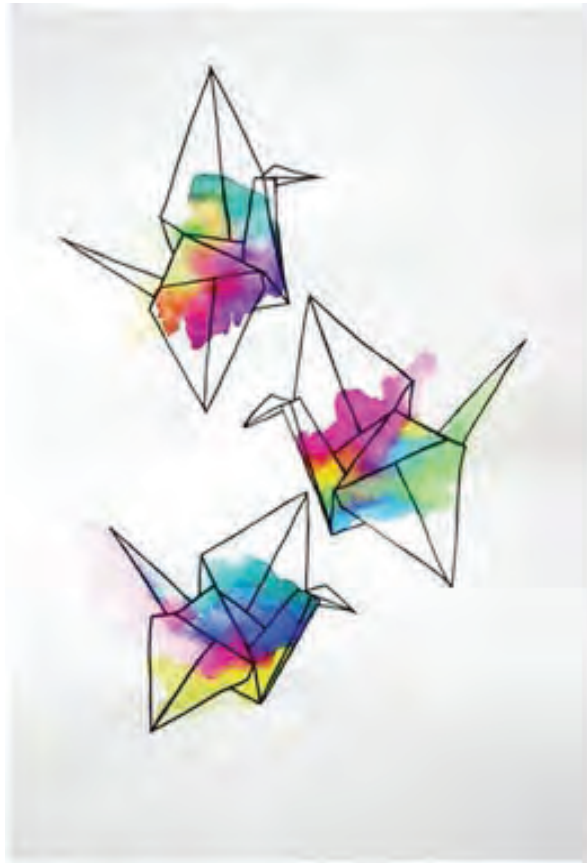
Six Word Stories

Proud but never satisfied, ever forward.
~ Augustus Zamagias

Six speeds. Two wheels. One Rider.
~ Tanner Bagaley

Philadelphia Flyers. Pittsburgh Penguins. Hockey Rivalry.
~ Andrew Golden

Three Birds



~ Casey Ferrara

Weekend Update

Michael: Welcome to the weekend update. I'm Michael Turk.

Joe: I'm Joey Burnham, and here are this weekend's top stories.

Michael: With the Super Bowl coming up in one week, the top story is not the matchup between the two best teams; instead, it is the controversy over how the New England Patriots like their balls. Tom Brady prefers slightly smaller than average balls. His wife, supermodel Gisele, has not commented on how Tom fancies his footballs. When asked about the situation with 11 of the 12 footballs being under-inflated, Brady responded by saying that he had "no knowledge of any wrongdoing." Coach Belichick responded to this by saying--nothing. (*Belichick stares blankly and doesn't say a thing.*) The Seahawks and the Patriots will square off in Phoenix, Arizona on February 1. Both teams were the number one seeds heading into the playoffs, each with high expectations to win it all. Fans of neither of these teams are hoping Bane makes an appearance and sinks the field as he did in the *Dark Knight Rises*.

Joe: In more recent news, President Barack Obama gave his State of the Union speech. He is proposing a free community college plan. The plan states that anyone who holds a C + average or above can have two free years of community college. Wow, free healthcare, free college! What's next? Illegals gaining amnesty? Republicans proposed their own plan of giving away free flu shots and offering at least one week of online courses at Arizona State University.

Michael: This past weekend, British Journalist Owen Thomas humiliated British Airways' first class conditions by calling the highly rated airline "filthy and disgusting." Here to comment is British journalist, Owen Thomas.

Owen: Good evening, Michael.

Michael: Hi, Owen. Now, you called British Airways' first class cabin "filthy and disgusting." I wouldn't call myself an expert in filth, but from what I've heard, British Airways is one of the highest rated airlines in the world.

Owen: Well, Michael, I do call myself an expert on filth, and allow me to be the first to congratulate British Airways on a spectacular service. Their well-placed stains and lack of any cleanliness whatsoever are unprecedented in airline history. They are breaking into the new frontier of properly run airlines.

Michael: Wait, wait, wait. I thought you were insulting British Airways. They were outraged and humiliated by your comments!

Owen: I beg your pardon, Michael? I have never been more impressed in my life. British Airways provided the most untidy and filth-filled flight I have ever experienced.

And their 5 star service didn't end there. The flight continued to improve as the stewardess rolled through with my meal. I got the lemon cornish sole with saffron and pine nut sauce, vegetable tajini, and couscous. I was even more delighted to find out that the sole mentioned in the menu was, in fact, the sole of a shoe. And not just any shoe, Michael. This was a Louis Vuitton Framework Richelieu sole with a glazed calf leather. This leathery delight proved to be more luscious and tender than any meal I've eaten on a flight. To top it all off, they even placed a crying child who repeatedly kicked the back of my chair in the seat behind me. Who was this crying child you ask? None other than the ghost of Macaulay Culkin from *Home Alone*.

Michael: Umm, I'm pretty sure Macaulay Culkin is still alive, Owen.

Owen: No, I think you need to check your facts. I mean, first you mistake my glorification of British Airways for an insult and now this. Never the matter. I mean, this really was the highest class of elevated travel I have ever experienced. Of course, this amount of quality does come at a pretty penny, but I think you'll find that 1200 pounds or \$1900 of your American dollars is well worth it for this level of service.

Michael: Wow, well, I was not aware that this was how quality is measured in the airline business.

Owen: Oh, yes. And I didn't even get to how we measure the quality of the lavatories.

Michael: Well, I'm sure we'd love to hear about it later. Ladies and gentlemen, Owen Thomas.

Joe: On to other news. A mother in Tennessee is outraged over seeing a pentagram on an elementary school bus. When the bus braked in front of her, the lights resembled a pentagram, a sign most associated to devil worshipers. Now here to comment is the mother.

Pentegram Lady: Thanks for having me.

Joe: Well, you seem very upset, and I heard you are receiving threats in the mail.

Pentegram Lady: Yes, I am. It has been a very traumatizing few days for my family and me.

Joe: What are these threats saying?

Pentegram Lady: One I got said, "You are a pooppy head."

Joe: Wow, that's intense! Sounds like whoever wrote that isn't very highly educated.

Pentegram Lady: Yeah, it was written in crayon and signed Jake with a backwards "J." But another threat I received said, "You deserve a timeout."

Joe: These kids are ruthless. How dare one human being say that to another human being? I can't believe people now-a-days. So invidious.

Pentagram Lady: I blame the television.

Joe: Is there anything you would like to say to these people sending you threats?

Pentagram Lady: When you mess with the bull, you get the horns!

Joe: Alright, thank you, Pentagram Lady! (*Pentagram Lady slides off.*) For the weekend update, I'm Joey Burnham.

Michael: And I'm Michael Turk. Good-night everybody!

~ Michael Turk and Joey Burnham

Infinite Times Square



~ Nick Koehler

Dall'ondeggiante oceano la folla

Dall'ondeggiante oceano, la folla, venne teneramente a me una goccia,
mormorando, lo ti amo, tra non molto morirò,
ho fatto un lungo viaggio solo per guardarti, toccarti,
perché non potevo morire sinché non ti avessi guardato,
perché temevo di poterti perdere.

Ora ci siamo incontrati, ci siamo guardati, siamo salvi;
ritorna in pace all'oceano mio amore;
anch'io sono parte di quell'oceano amore- non siamo così separati;
considera il grande globo-la coesione del tutto, quanto è perfetto!
Ma per me, per te, il mare irresistibile deve separarci,
e se per un'ora ci tiene lontani- non potrà tenerci lontani per sempre;
non essere impaziente - un istante - sappi che io saluto l'aria, l'oceano e la terra,
ogni giorno al tramonto, in tuo caro onore, amore.

~ Translation of Walt Whitman poem by Wanda Ferrara

In Bloom



~ Christina Lane

Out of the Rolling Ocean, the Crowd

Out of the rolling ocean, the crowd, came a drop gently to me,
Whispering, I love you, before long I die,
I have travel'd a long way, merely to look on you, to touch you,
For I could not die till I once look'd on you,
For I fear'd I might afterward lose you.

Now we have met, we have look'd, we are safe;
Return in peace to the ocean, my love;
I too am part of that ocean, my love—we are not so much separated;
Behold the great rondure—the cohesion of all, how perfect!
But as for me, for you, the irresistible sea is to separate us,
As for an hour carrying us diverse—yet cannot carry us diverse forever;
Be not impatient—a little space—know you, I salute the air, the ocean and the land,
Every day, at sundown, for your dear sake, my love.

~ Poem by Walt Whitman

Sundown



~ Nick Blatt

replacements

I'm in the dark
not the peaceful dark
but the dark of the black night
with creatures of lies
circling around me
like a hawk over prey.

you throw a blanket over my body
then run to replacements
filling those empty places
that apparently
I'm not fit to fill.

so under my blanket
I lay waiting for you to return
with the pitiful "I love you, only you"
"you have nothing to worry about"
but worries live inside of me.

you slide underneath and hold me
as if nothing else mattered
but I resist
clench
my fist
my eyes
my mind
cause I know you
and your replacements.

~ Tabitha White

Dreamstate



~ Curtis Coltharp

memento mori

memento mori
the eternal truth
absent of thought
maybe maybe not
does a spirit
have a heart beat
does a spirit
feel the cold
is a second
a thousand years
when forever
calls you home?

~ Megan Wadas

Solitude



~ Nathaniel Chen

Melting Ice



~ Will Thompson

“What do the trees know?
Buds can weather ice and snow.
Dark gives way to sunlight’s glow.
Strength and stillness help us grow.”
Joyce Sidman

Finding Myself

Giggling with my friends at our endless practices, painting the elaborate signs, and yelling my heart out on the sidelines. Cheerleading defined me. My entire world revolved around loud football games, perfectly curled hair, bright red lipstick, infinitely long practices, and exhilarating competitions. I made the impossible decision to give all this up two weeks before my senior year started. Cheerleading shaped my entire being. My black and gold uniforms, my bright white Nike sneakers, and my big sparkly bows defined me.

I faced a three-word question every moment of every day after I chose to give up cheerleading; it haunted me day and night. Who am I? My identity over the past five years vanished before my eyes, but after many days of introspection, I realized just how much I truly had to cheer about.

I am a girl who craves knowledge--constantly searching for answers and usually finding more questions to ask. I want to understand how everything works. What does a gallbladder do? Who was the first person diagnosed with cancer? Why do clowns believe they are funny and not terrifying? I want the answers to all these questions and to so many more.

I am a girl who cares deeply for the ones she loves. My friends and family mean everything to me. I assist in picking out the perfect outfit for my friends' first dates, console them after every failed test, and listen to them rant about everything going wrong in their lives. With my family it is simple; I support my dad through his corn hole and bowling leagues, help my mother with the laundry, and dance spastically with my sister. I am the shoulder my friends and family lean on when they need someone to stay strong.

I am a girl who is independent. I do everything myself. I like knowing when I get thrust into the real world without anyone to help me but myself, I will be able to handle it. I mow the yard without any help, study for all tests without any help, and make dinner without any help. I am a do-it-yourselfer with a positive attitude.

I am a girl who works for everything she has. I never expect anything to be handed to me. I do my homework and study to earn my GPA. I made pizzas, taught children how to swim, and waited on crowds of people at my local pool this summer to save money for college. I do not believe I deserve nor am I entitled to anything; I must work hard to earn it. I am understanding of everything I have.

Finally, I am a girl who discovered a newfound confidence. I discovered cheerleading was only a small portion of what really defined me. I discovered I enjoy reading all types of books, from sappy love stories to fantasy adventure novels. I discovered I love baking cupcakes; chocolate, raspberry, rainbow sprinkled, you name it, I have baked it. I discovered there is more to life than tumbling, jumping, and cheering. I discovered

my parents would always support my decisions, no matter how crazy. I discovered I no longer care about what others think or how I am perceived. The best discovery, of course, was discovering my new identity and myself. I am now perfectly confident.

Stripping myself of the identity I carried around for the past five years terrified me. I honestly believed I would be “nobody” now that my cheerleader identity no longer existed. Little did I realize taking away one part of my life does not change who I have always been. Everyone sees me differently now, no longer categorizing me as “cheerleader.” I am Ella, craver of knowledge, loving friend, sister and daughter. I am independent and hardworking Ella. I am Ella, more confident than ever. Most importantly, I am the extraordinarily unique, Ella Choban, and that is something to cheer about.

~ Ella Choban

Free Fall



~ Felicia Sunday

Singing Bird



~ Carlee King

Thoughts

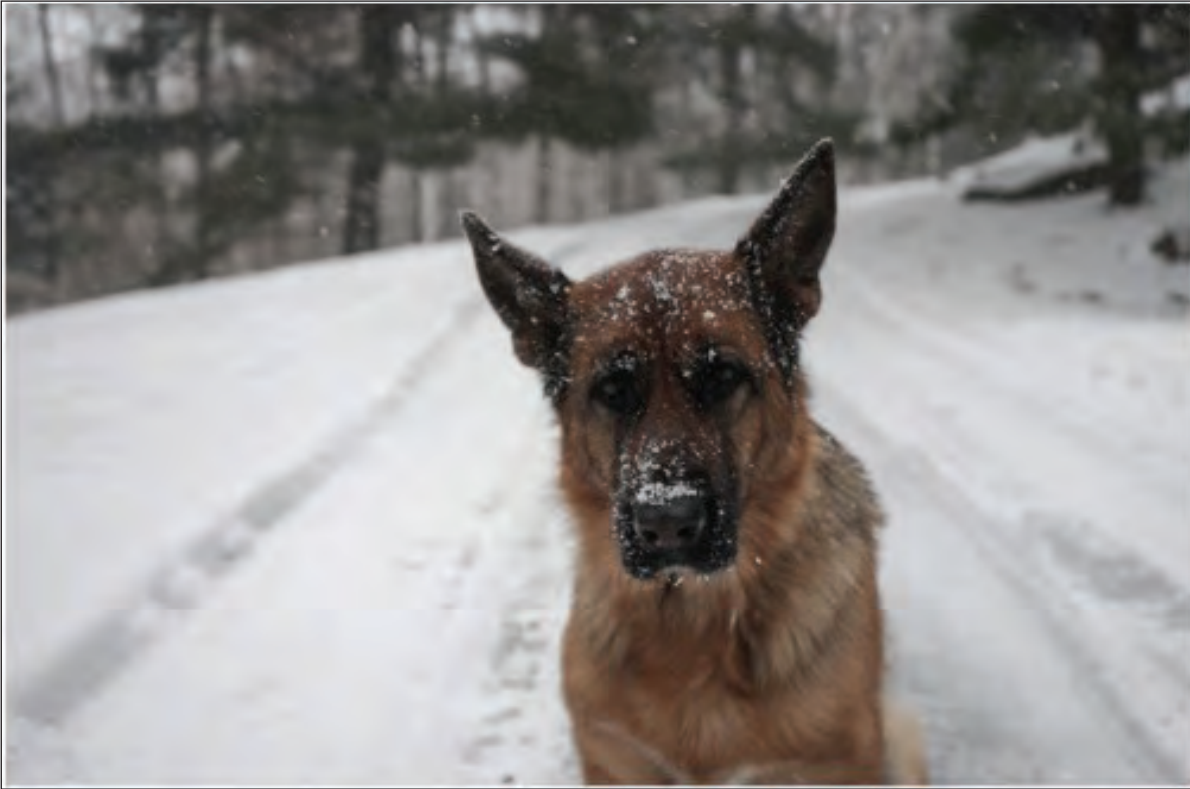
People are not a painting; there is no need to look for color.
Nor are they books, so why just look at the cover?

The mind is a window.
Open the window and enjoy the breeze.
Life is like a field of dreams.

Plant your dreams early and watch dreams blossom.

~ Jacob Sevcik

Samantha



~ Melissa Daltner

Expedition

Embarking on a journey
To another within
A place that could symbolize
Villages that breathe gritty dirt
Or aspire from the roots of many
Gaunt and thick pines and oaks,
A mind cannot help but adapt to its initial home
Like the pack of wolves that only acknowledge
The den from which they're brought up.
A metal giant that roars fiercely, yet only aids,
hums
Off the streets that we all eventually see
Paved over several times as
My brother and I sit in the odd, soft
Patch of grass upon the left hill.
As days progressed, it formed me.
The environment whispered of ambitions

As free as the colored birds
That soared every hour.
I learned,
I developed,
I became.
Fresh air cast
A sense of recognition.
It was the mental pictures that nobody forgets.
Although, the world was only a speck of dust
On the ceiling fan
An eternal, imaginary scenario turns
Into an expedition.
Earth fooled me--it was not just disappointment
But an enchanted surge that calmly expanded
my mind.

~ Seth Barnett

Peace

The sincere silence of blissful peace.
It is flowing all around you like dandelions in the wind.
To be able to escape the treacherous and excruciating world that surrounds us.

~ Victoria Rombach

Conduit



~ Sara Fazli

Virtues

Grant me the virtue of virtues,

One that comes with age.

An aged skill, much like fine wine

Or the dust that hides in the wrinkles of an old farm hand.

Perfected over trial and error,

Hardened through failures

And sparks fly as the fine details are chiseled and filed away

With the surgical precision of experience.

Rich is the man who can

Take a step back...

Breathe...

Take in the cool air of redemption--

Another try--

And let it escort out the hot air

Of frustration and anguish.

Poor is the man who allows

His fears, his demons, his vexes

To govern him...

To eat away at him

Like yellow eyed lizards picking away the flesh

Of a fresh carcass.

That will to fight the urge

To take the fish

But to invest

The time into learning how to feed yourself...

A lifetime of insight,

And of the legacy

That bears the name of wisdom.

Slow and steady to climbing the ladder.

If we could,

For a painstaking moment

Decelerate our self-proclaimed overloaded lifestyles

And study the spear fisher,

That is one with the wash of the sea.

He who takes all day to catch one menial fish

We would learn what our young, naïve

Bodies hunger for...

Ode to that--
--that hawk perched on the overpass
Gazing down at the valley before
Him. Not going for the first meal
To snatch his eye, but the rabbit that will
Savor... and satisfy his hunger.
He waits there in fire blazed radiance.
So Ode to that,
Ode to patience.

~ Raymo Donch

Tiger



~ Grace Jin

My Stars

“Rose, you mustn’t open it until after I’m gone, understand?” As a six-year-old, I didn’t care to listen to my grandfather talk about his death. I just wanted to rip the wrapping paper off that box and see what he’d given me. But because I trusted him more than anyone else in my life, I obeyed. Now here I am ten years later, staring at that stupid pink and white polka-dotted wrapping paper, realizing the worst has happened, and it’s finally time to discover what’s inside.

I used to think everyone had it all. In such a perfect world, how could they not? My parents loved me more than anything, my grandfather even more than that. I lived in the perfect house in the perfect city with perfect, cloudless skies. I’d come to expect the best and nothing less out of life.

That is, until my mom and dad were killed in a car accident when I was four. Grandpap took me in, so I never really learned to be sad. I mean, when you’re living with your best friend in the whole world, who has the time? Sure, there were some major changes, but I adapted pretty quickly with my grandfather there to get me through them. However, the sky was never quite as blue, and the stars never shined quite as brightly after the accident.

Now I’m sixteen, and the only family I had left has suddenly been erased. I am alone in the world with no light to guide my way. I guess you can say that colors seem to fade rather abruptly when the artists are no longer painting.

I’m sitting on my bed, clad in black from head to toe, with the box in my lap. I have a strange emptiness sitting in the pit of my stomach, waiting to swallow whatever else tries to escape from my imagination and creep into what’s left of my heart. Slowly, I remove the bow that sits on top of this decade-old box of secrets, then the wrapping paper that has haunted my dreams these many years, until I am finally left with no more excuses to put off opening the box. Suddenly, all of the emotion that’s been hiding in the dark corners of my mind surges straight to my heart and overwhelms me until I am left with only the slightest of sobs.

Rose--

You can do things that the greatest artists in the world could never dream of, and you will. Let nothing stand in your way, and never forget that you are loved more than all the stars in the night sky.

Mom and Dad

On the back is a note in my grandfather’s handwriting that reads,

“You have always been my little star. Now go light up the world.”

Taped to the letter is a necklace in the shape of a circle with three stars in the center,

engraved, “Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable. ~ Mary Oliver.” The moment the necklace clasps, I know that the sky will be blue again, and that I am not loved more than the stars, but by the stars.

~ Molly Zunski

Never Forgotten



~ Felicia Sunday

Steps



~ Kristofer Robinson

“Climb a tree--it gets you closer to heaven.”
Anonymous

Outward and Upward

It was the class field trip of my eighth grade year, and I walked through the turnstiles of Busch Gardens without realizing the dangers I would face. The fateful suggestion came about fifteen minutes into the stroll along the park's main path: "Let's ride the Loch Ness Monster," they said. I stared up at the track in awe and fear. The first run of the beast on its flaming tracks roared its breath and blew back our ponytails, launching straight down, around, and right back up--twisting and tossing its hostages, then catching them on the way back around. Loop-the-loops and corkscrews, 90 degree drops, and 60 mph dashes...There was no way I was getting on that thing.

Five minutes later I found myself in line, dragged by my friends and by peer pressure. The line inched forward much too quickly as I stood there, shaking and trying to shove the butterflies back down to my stomach as they made their way up my throat. Before long, I found myself strapped in, screaming, and then laughing as I unbuckled my seatbelt. And then, not long after that, I found myself strapped into every roller coaster in the park.

Eleanor Roosevelt speaks of "that which we think we cannot [do]," but what she really refers to are rollercoasters--our Loch Ness Monsters. She speaks of the thoughts that make us shake and cause our stomachs to leap to our throats. She speaks of our biggest worries which, unbeknownst to us, can turn into our greatest joys. We fear and we fret and we cry and we cram. Then--at some point--we strap in, sit back and let life take us through the loop-the-loops and corkscrews. And when it is all finished, we laugh, carrying that high with us to the next ride. It is only through pushing the barriers of our comfort zones that we can allow ourselves to grow outward and upward, expanding our strength, courage, and confidence to their maximums. The greatest accomplishments in our lives come from hopping in line--allowing ourselves the opportunity to "look fear in the face," stare him down, and laugh.

~ Charlie Brickner

Love, Love, And Love



~ Nick Koehler

Ode to a Sunflower

Bubbles of dew float around your skinny green bodies
Coating yourselves in purity
The glass magnifying every inch
Turning stems into trees
and minds to ease
Inhale
Sweet affirmations
A hopeless yesterday
and the
Impossible possibilities of tomorrow
Suck in every essence
Let seeds plant themselves along the lining of my lungs
Let me exhale you in growth
As little yellow questions
Begin to droop and fall
Weighted down by the wonderer
Answers--
Forever secret.
Love me?
Love me not?

~ Claudia Toter

An Experiment Gone Wrong

It was the evening of the tenth day of the experiment. All was quiet as the scientists and test subjects entered the clean, dark room. Soldiers escorted the subjects into glass tubes while the scientists safely waited behind a one way mirror.

“All subjects are in position and accounted for,” informed the general.

“Good! Very good! Jenkins, are the formula’s loaded?” asked Dr. Gusto.

“Yes, we are ready to engage testing upon your orders,” Jenkins replied.

“Excellent!” Gusto screeched in a creepy yet methodical voice. “Let’s hope we can turns these soldiers into temporal agents this time!”

Dr. Gusto has been working on enabling humans to traverse time so his military could defeat its foes without starting a war. The formulas were introduced into the tubes, and the subjects began to scream in pain. Most of the subjects died within minutes, but a few of them persisted. It took almost an hour, but one subject managed to survive. He stopped screaming and placed his hands against the glass. His body began to phase in and out of existence and soon he vanished, never to be seen or heard from again by anyone known to him.

“Subject vanished giving the appearance of time travel,” reported Jenkins. “However, we may never know if our experiment truly succeeded.”

~ Ben Murphy

Slow Hands



~ Nathaniel Chen

Colored Shadows

The textile floors and invisible gleam of a mirror
have offered sanctuary of sanity
for underwear-clad mothers and fathers
worshipping a number,
a blemish,
a fear of rejection.

Salty streams sprint down faucets
as we pluck, pry, pinch, smear, cut, trim, squeeze
the imperfections of our reflections
to give voice to the belief “beauty is within,”
you just need to remove a layer
to find it.

Pastel paintings and oiled, malnourished bodies
thrown at the eyes and minds of small children,
forcing them to take part in the anthem of rape culture
that they don't even know exists
while parents begrudgingly let go too soon.

Far too soon.

Instead of fighting the urge
to push my body until it pushes up daisies,
I'll be lining my ribcage with wilted rose flower crowns
to refill the space in my lungs
used for screaming my name
at the mint green soaked tiles imbued with my mother's tears
and the mirror cracked with looks of self-loathing
from my father to remind my reflection
that it is nothing more than a colored shadow.

Just a shell of a number,
A poor rendition of beauty passed generation to generation.

~ Sarah Ricci

True Colors



~ Alaina Michaels

“If you look closely at a tree you’ll notice it’s knots and dead branches, just like our bodies. What we learn is that beauty and imperfection go together wonderfully.”
Matthew Fox

Dreaming of Koi Fish



~ Elizabeth Wang

In Review: *Pride and Prejudice's* Leading Ladies

When it comes to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, everyone's got an opinion. Maybe it's the book you Spark-noted for senior English or the book that made you fall in love with everything Regency. For some people, it inevitably leads to the argument of which is better, the 1995 BBC mini-series or the 2005 Keira Knightley movie? Believe me, if you pose the question in a crowded room, it's guaranteed to start something.

And if you were to ask people what draws them to a book like *Pride and Prejudice*, they would probably say something along the lines of how charming a life in Longbourn and Pemberley seems in the countryside that feels like a world all its own. Or, perhaps even more likely, someone will begin to wax poetic about Fitzwilliam Darcy, who is basically every outspoken and sarcastic girl's perfect academic sparring partner/husband.

But for some people, people like me, it is possible to see beyond wet-shirt-Darcy or proposing-in-the-rain-Darcy in order to properly appreciate the real star of the show: Elizabeth.

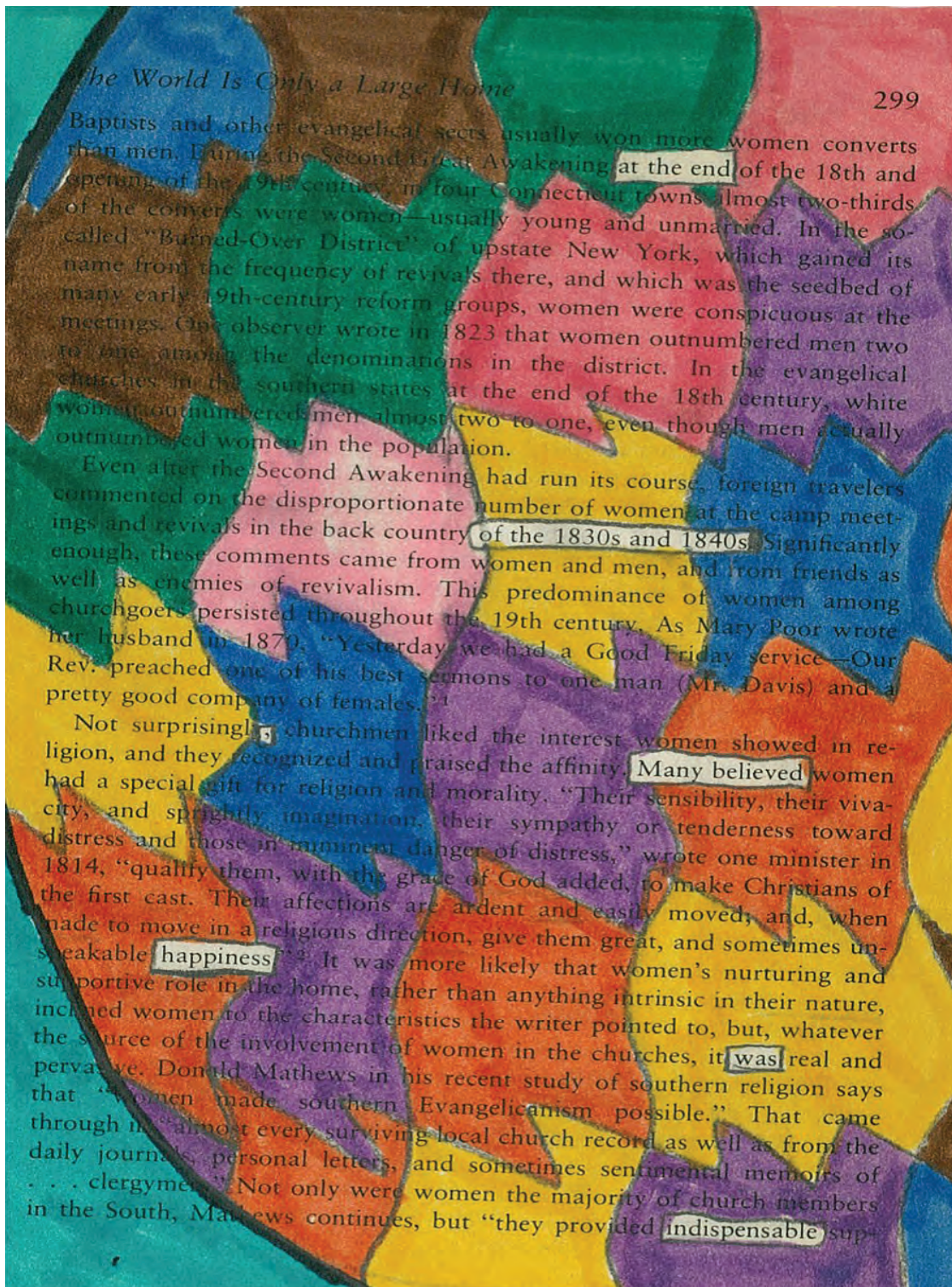
Now, as the main character throughout the novel, maybe it doesn't come as a shock that Elizabeth is the most important. But what is often forgotten is just how impressively revolutionary Austen's women seem in their potentially monotonous lives. Literature of this time period often used women to show varying degrees of purity--from full scale angels like Dickens's Lucie Manette to the fallen women like Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield. Women were forced into terrible situations so that men could save and redeem them, which in turn would give their lives meaning. In stark contrast, Austen's characters lead comparatively boring lives. There are no action sequences, and the closest they come to a true calamity is Mr. Collins's botched proposal to Lizzie that had us all rolling our eyes.

But Elizabeth and other Austen women are impressive in that they are free thinkers. Lizzie knows that without a husband of considerable wealth, her future is bleak once her father dies, yet still she remains firm in her desire to not marry men that are ridiculous or condescending in regard to her station in life. Conversely, Charlotte knows that Mr. Collins is a complete fool, but her decision to marry him is a way that she can liberate herself and begin a life all her own. Austen creates women that aren't afraid to speak their minds, aren't afraid to insult a pompous Darcy right to his face, and aren't afraid to stand up for what they want for themselves.

With a cast of about eight or nine major female characters, the book represents a diverse group of women, all of whom have very different views on how to go about bettering their lives. And just like in the real world, there are some we hate (Lydia Bennet or Caroline Bingley, anyone?) and some we love, but they are all characters with depth and desires. They don't rest on pedestals while the story continues on around them, nor do they exist solely as symbols for English students to analyze. They are every bit as complex and interesting as real women, and, despite the male-driven society that they live in, there is really no confusion that, when it comes to marriage and proposals and love, the girls are running the show.

~Kayden Rodger

Happiness was Indispensable



~ Ben Maniet

A Clean Bedroom

Your bed is made with the pillows in place, and the covers are neatly aligned with the sheets. You can actually see the floor because all of your clothes are tidily tucked away and folded in their proper drawer. Picture it. It just feels (and looks) awesome. You feel like you have everything together when your room is clean. You want to invite all of your friends over just so they can see the beautiful space. You tell yourself, "I will never mess up my room again." That, of course, means it will be kept clean only until tomorrow. You don't even care though. You just want to enjoy your perfect room while it lasts. The thought of not kicking around yesterday's socks and tee shirt while you sleep is exhilarating. Your mother walks by and gleams with joy and hope because she sees you have actually done it. You have thrown away the ten water bottles that were living on your dresser and the Fritos bag decaying under the bed. Throughout the process you found that hoodie you've been looking for and other things you didn't even know you had that were just concealed under all of your other junk. So sit back, relax, and enjoy this lovely sight. We all know it's not going to last long.

~ Madison Dalbow

Tomorrow



~ Zain Mehdi

Fill-Er-Up



~ Kevin Dougherty

The First Night of Vacation

You've been trapped in a car for hours upon hours with your siblings who have had far too much candy from the rest stop vending machines. If you have to watch *Frozen* one more time, you are going to rip the DVD player right out of the car. Your limbs have fallen asleep so often that they might as well just cut them off. You're going on vacation, and you're starting to think it's not even worth it. But then, you pull up to that hotel or house or resort or wherever your home is going to be for the next week, and all the times you played I Spy during the trip, and the answer was, "a tree" all seem worth it. The first time the salty sea air hits you, you know this is what you've been waiting for. When you receive the keys to your hotel room and your mom tells you that you can have your own--this is what freedom really feels like. And then you finally open the door to your temporary abode and flop down on your king sized bed for the first time. Automatically your siblings start jumping on the bed; it's as if some innate force makes all children feel the need to do so. And let's face it, you have to join in. Then, after eating nothing but fast food for the last 24 hours, you go to the first of many feasts and sit back and know that a week filled with relaxation and fun is ahead of you.

~ Monica Bollinger

Impact

I once had a friend with blue eyes
who would pick cigarette butts off the ground
and smoke what was left of them.
I remember watching him, repulsed,
“Why do you put those things in your mouth?”
I did not realize how, sometimes, we need to feel something so badly
that we turn to anything we can get our hands on;
He cried on the way home
and I did the same at his funeral

Frost coated in green
often searched for vulnerability
within solidified obscurity,
Her name was as cold as her spine
as she shook under weighted spotlights
I watched her cripple under the weight of persisted fists
while still trying to remain undaunted
by the blood under her skin

Brown irises were new--
A distraction from a cruel reality
I began referring to her as “moonlight” in French,
A dumb attempt to make her laugh,
wondering if this was really where she wanted to be
She threw me into blackened animosity
coating irrelevant surroundings
in a calming sort of static

Hazel rain
and hollow bones
sat next to me for half a year,
reaching her hand into my ribs and remaining there
as she laughed at my incessant swearing
and stupid jokes

You have suffocated my joints
in such a way that I do not crave oxygen anymore
And I'm not sure if you being entirely unaware of this
is too painful to handle

My reflection swims in gray sight
as I try to submerge within the idea that
to fall into the color of someone's eyes
is to fall into unwavering fear.

~ Emma Barnes

Fever



~ Curtis Coltharp

Peace and Noise



~ Bethany G. Schaelchlin

“The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Lingering Universe

I have an addictive personality. No, not like everyone's addicted to me--stop that--but more like I get addicted to other things. You know. Books, TV shows, movies, food, video games, routines. That sort of thing. I get a taste of something, and I want to hold onto it.

I never thought this was a bad thing. I mean, I probably did, when I was younger, and it's the obligatory reason I give whenever I'm offered something and have to decline, but now it's not something that bothers me. I like things. I get passionate. I feel fire in my fingertips and restless hours creeping up from wanting more and more and more. I like that about me. I like that things stick to me, that I think about how something was well done or how something could have been done better. It helps me grow as an artist, a writer.

TV shows are my go-to. *Criminal Minds*, *Elementary*, *Doctor Who*. I won't give you the entire list, but it's pretty extensive. I'm a medialite—I like characters and backstories and painful situations that show us who they are. And another perk of TV shows is that there are a lot of them, and there's usually going to be more. At least ones that are worth watching.

Again, I don't find anything wrong with that. Appreciating other works, as a writer, opens the horizon for more things, more storylines that people could have never imagined on their own or shows how a character archetype can be swung and twisted around to make something new and interesting. And in writing—any kind of writing—new and interesting are hard words to come by.

There's that old saying that there are no new stories. No new plotlines. No new characters. Sure, you give them a different face and a different name, but here's betting that some jerk out there will find some 18th century gothic French character from a novella that barely sold that matches your original character to a tee. Because that's what happens. We, as humans, see similarity. Categories. Neat and color-coordinated and strict.

And if I know anything about art, it's that it's not like that.

Things should be new and interesting. That's why I get excited when I find something new—something I've never seen before. Because it's new to me. Even if the classic individual but deeply wounded female hacker-turned-do-gooder archetype is now painfully overdone and overused in media today, it's new to someone, and it's an opening to someone.

I've come to think that our jobs, as writers and the general creative hemisphere of the human conscience, is to open doors and ideas to others. To open doors for the new

ones, who will eventually take over our desk and take our place, and also to the ones who don't specifically think creatively. The ones who need something different, some idea in some other context to make whatever they are trying to make work.

It's not our job to create something so devastatingly original that it's almost existential. Because Samuel Beckett tried to do that with *Waiting for Godot*, and I mean, no one knows what he was trying to say. And that's a problem—when something makes sense only to the author or creator.

Art isn't about the creator. It isn't about us, even when it's meant to be. It's about the others whose lives are affected by it. It's about how this art, our art, changes someone else's perception of the world. Even if everything only shifts a little to the left or everything looks a little bit brighter, that's an entirely new universe that was lingering in the edges and spaces between everything else.

We can give someone an entirely new universe to wonder at. We have that power. We can make worlds from nothing—or from the framework that we already know. We can make people, make characters, with names that sound like a fairytale, that ring like bells, with faces that we see only in blurry, indistinct dreams. We make things real.

An addictive personality gives me the opportunity and the excuse to wonder at a ton of different art forms. I wonder over the sorts of shows and books and music that one person generally isn't interested in at one time—for the sake of grades and social life. But I'm an introvert who doesn't have many close friends who live nearby, and I don't like doing things on the weekend, and it's my routine to find something new. It's my excuse to go and explore and search for a new universe. (It's why I love Netflix so much.) My cultivated personality gives me the perfect handbook and tools to find new universes hidden behind the tapestry of someone else's reality.

I listened to *Welcome to Nightvale* recently, and a quotation really stuck out at me. Intern Dana said, "Look past the things you think you see. Move your head just a touch to the left--a glance in the world of perspectives--and then you might see it: an entire universe in the corner of your eye."

Welcome to Nightvale has those sorts of quotations. The ones about black helicopters and dog parks that no one is allowed to know or think about. And the ones about love at first sight and teeth like a military cemetery.

I want to write like that, one day. Maybe that's why I listen to it. I like that universe—the one Joseph Fink and his cohorts created with a voice or two. Writing is all imitation. Imitation of the things we like and avoidance of things we don't.

I am addicted to my ability to pick and choose the universes my mind inhabits. And I write to create one of the billions of universes that linger in the corner of my eye.

~ Lauren Kachinko

Columbian Spirit



~ Sebastian Vasquez

“It is the nature of the strong heart,
that like the palm tree it strives ever upwards when it is most burdened.”

~ Sir Philip Sidney

Wings



~ Jacinda Gilmore

“There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children.
One of these is roots; the other, wings.”
W. Hodding Carter

The Fall

You tell the children they will, someday, find sun
by climbing like great apes in suits:
Up skyscrapers.
Up stiff, gingko dreams.

That they will be Kong almighty,
and the underdogs will rage just like women in Kong's fists
whose rib cages cry for oxygen under their neckties,
whose aspirations were not as mighty as theirs.

But why must we teach our children of successes
that only come to them folded in the bald suitcase?
Like little Indians in corporate reservations they become
stock-scalpers and arrowhead men.

I do not know where the rich men go,
but my father told me it's the better place--
far away from the blue collar Crete
where my elitism will not stay in lame labyrinth.

But I do not need the sun, dear papa, to shine.
I cannot handle these herculean wings you've made molten on me.
Success I do not define by the golds and the greens,
but by where my true happiness lies.

My comrades, my brothers why can you not see?
That your glory is no greater than the heart that beats
bloody, stint-gorged in your own chest's quarry
and buried there six feet deep.

This is my canary to you,
calling the sweet song of irrational conscience
O, Wall Street miner too deep in jaded earth.
O, Icarus of the forty-seventh story, I plead you to fall.

~Shannon Piranian

Reflections

I race through the forest,
my bare feet sloshing through fresh mud.
I run to the edge and back and then rest,
lying on my back on the soft carpet.
I marvel at the vivid life within, the vivid life around.
I spend the day alone in retrospect,
divorced from conformity and the norm it creates.
I spend my day my way,
soaking in the golden sun beams, the puffy white clouds, and the rough gray clouds
when they come, along with the stinging, fresh rain.
I dance in the rain and rejoice in each drop--
each individual drop.
I listen to the crickets and cicadas and the message each has to give.
I talk to the butterflies, all different and completely imperfect.
I walk along-side the trees, the never ending, differing trees whose arms reach out and
embrace me for me.
I spot a beaver in the river and a multitude of fish I know not of underneath the surface.
Again I am stunned, and again I marvel in the beauty.
And I am filled and renewed, for I have found the ancient key to the forever locked door.
Have found that the forest can teach all...
And have realized the exceptional and underrated trait of diversity.

~ Jessie Serody

Twilight Gleam



~ Nathaniel Chen

“It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men’s hearts,
as for that subtle something, that quality of air, that emanation from old trees,
that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.”

Robert Louis Stevenson

VARIATIONS Staff Biographies

Sareen Ali

Sareen decided to join *Variations* because she loves the idea of spreading the original works of her classmates to everyone. In her opinion, the most important life skill is writing; she believes that it is important for everyone to keep their creative juices flowing by writing, drawing, and taking photographs to submit to the magazine. By working with *Variations*, she hopes to assist in creating a magazine that will enlighten and enrich the minds of students at NA and let everyone see the talent that is hidden amongst the NA student body. She also hopes to improve her own skills by editing and viewing various submissions and contributing to the overall creation of the magazine.

Stephanie Brendel

Stephanie decided to join *Variations* because of her love for reading and writing, as well as editing pieces of work. She believes that art is an important aspect of life, and she enjoys fostering the creation of art by working for the literary magazine. Stephanie has gained more experience in editing as well as a newfound appreciation for the talent of the North Allegheny student body. Enjoy the magazine!

Charlie Brickner

Charlie decided to join *Variations* in order to gain exposure to poetry and creative works that you can't find in most ordinary English classes. Often, high school classes suck the creative aspects out of the life of an every-day teenager, with the omnipresent essays and hammering evaluations. And although that style of writing and that quality of discussion does have its place, those high school English classes have failed to do two things that *Variations* does best: enjoy and appreciate. By working with *Variations*, Charlie has definitely gained an appreciation for just how much talent resides in the school hallways, and she has enjoyed being able to help display those talents. With her own talents, Charlie has written a couple pieces for *Variations*, finding her inspiration in the little moments and stories that have so much meaning behind them.

Nathaniel Chen

Nathaniel wasn't really sure what to expect when he joined *Variations*. He had just wanted to find another club that coincided with his interests. Over time, Nathaniel has come to appreciate the process in making *Variations* and what it stands for. From viewing the submissions to creating artwork himself, Nathaniel is amazed with the hidden immensity of talent within NASH and is very happy to experience it through *Variations*.

Zoe Creamer

When Zoe heard about *Variations*, she knew she had to join. She loves to read prose and poetry and to admire artwork and photography. The opportunity to examine the talent of her fellow NASH students was too great to pass up. Zoe is a senior, and she is happy to have joined the staff of *Variations* for her last year. She has had a great time reading the intriguing submissions of her peers as a member of the literary department. Zoe hopes that everyone enjoys this year's edition of *Variations*!

Katie Franc

Katie joined the *Variations* staff based on her fluency in Adobe InDesign. This year, *Variations* transitioned from Microsoft Word documents to Adobe InDesign, allowing more opportunities for creative design. She spent time with several other editors training them with the program, and she is very proud to have contributed to the advancement of the publication.

Grace Jin

Grace, a NASH junior, is excited to be a member of the *Variations* artistic staff. An avid painter herself, Grace loves to view and share the diverse talents within the NASH community. Grace believes that the literary arts deserve as much attention as STEM fields, because writers and artists are thinkers and creators who challenge tradition and push society forward. Grace would like to thank all of the staff members, teachers, and contributors for their hard work and dedication to *Variations*.

Lauren Kachinko

This is Lauren's second year on *Variation's* literary committee, and she has enjoyed every moment reading and appreciating NA's intense and astounding creative capabilities. She is delighted to help the students publish their work and to showcase their creativity, to help them bare their souls--their imagination--to their peers and to their teachers. Her pieces published in this magazine, her memoir and *Laughter in the Rain*, were both written in the creative writing fiction classes she took her senior year.

Kathleen Kenna

Kathleen joined *Variations* at the suggestion of her older sister who was a part of this magazine and now studies illustration. She is an avid reader and thoroughly enjoys all types of art. She likes *Variations* because she thinks it is pretty awesome to see her classmates attempt to find the antidote to the emptiness of existence through art.

Olivia Krause

Olivia joined *Variations* because it was something different. *Variations* was a shot in the dark for Olivia; she did not know much about it besides it being offered to English students at the end of each year. She does not regret it. Joining the magazine gave Olivia a creative outlet that most clubs don't offer. The magazine is a collection of beautiful works created by her peers, and Olivia hopes you enjoy it from cover to cover.

Morgan Linn

Morgan is an artist mostly as a hobby. She happened to find her way on to the art committee of *Variations*. Self proclaimed giver of tough love, she tried hard to put her foot down on pieces when room needed to be made and bent more often than she liked to admit over the many pieces in this magazine. Being involved in *Variations* gave her a chance to meet old friends and show her critiquing prowess. *Variations* was an amazing experience that she is looking forward to for next year!

Jasmine Mahajan

Jasmine joined *Variations* because she has a deep interest in reading books and viewing beautiful, interesting pieces of art. She also enjoys the process of putting the actual collections of work together; thus, she joined the layout team. Through *Variations*, Jasmine has realized the immense amount of talent present in the NASH student body. She loves the idea of spreading the works of these artistic individuals through *Variations* magazine. Jasmine hopes you thoroughly enjoy the magazine!

Connor Mason

After being an editor for NAI's literary magazine, *First Draft*, Connor wanted to continue his involvement in reading, editing, and enjoying works of art and writing. As an avid reader, writer, and artist himself, becoming a *Variations* staff member was an easy choice. He has seen the multitudes of wonderful artistic and literary works that the talented students of NASH create, and he hopes you enjoy the magazine!

Zain Mehdi

After publishing his own work in magazines, Zain wanted to spend time on the other side of the writing process--choosing the best pieces for his school's magazine. However his goals surpass simply being an editor because he wants to encourage his peers to delve into their creative minds and display their imaginations on paper, but he also wants to feature the best of everyone's writing to represent North Allegheny's literary magazine. Not only has he been editing peers' writing and choosing the well thought out and well written pieces, but he has submitted writing and art himself for the magazine. His first art piece, a painting, depicts a ship struggling through an oceanic storm, accentuated by Van Gogh's aggressive painting style. His second art piece, a colored pencil drawing, delineates a Roman figurehead embalmed in aged bandages to show how society often forgets its roots. For all of his pieces, Zain crafted a story and took to a medium that would effectively reproduce that narrative or allegory.

Kaushika Navale

Since her childhood, the marvel of art and literature has inspired Kaushika to reach for those dreams which only come wrapped in expressive colors and beautiful words. By being a part of *Variations*, she gets the opportunity to look through the eyes of different minds, to evaluate their exceptionally talented works of art, and most of all, to cherish the gifts they give to us. This grants her the opportunity to sharpen her own eye for detail, beauty, and depth. Kaushika focuses on maximizing her contribution to this magazine and certainly loves *Variations* from A to Z.

Casey Quinn

Casey initially joined *Variations* in a whirl of club pledging when she entered NASH, but she grew to learn that it was one of the true gems of the school, nestled within the English department. It's been so great for her to have an inside look at the constant, impressive, and wide variety of art flowing through our school. She is glad to have had this opportunity!

Kayden Rodger

Kayden is a passionate reader and occasional writer who decided to become a

Variations staff member in an attempt to see more of the talent within NASH. She enjoys the stories and poems that make her think about the world and people in different ways. Consequently, the pieces she has contributed to the book are about what it means to be human. *Variations* has helped her to grow as a writer and as a critical reader.

Jillian Schmidt

Jillian has very much enjoyed being a member of *Variations* the past two years. She joined the magazine to try something new, and she has loved reading the amazing pieces written by NASH students.

Jessie Serody

Jessie loves to read (even though she has barely any time during the school year for it) and write. She has a profound passion for poetry. She also loves projects. So, combining art in a large project such as *Variations* is right up her alley. In her participation with the literary magazine, she hopes to expand her horizons by reading the incredible submissions. She thinks that it is amazing to see the depth in her peers' writing and to get to know them better through their contributions.

Maia Sowers

Maia decided to join *Variations* because of her love for both reading and writing. She enjoys reading others' works and seeing new styles. She is in the literary department and gets to read many amazing pieces that are submitted. *Variations* is a fun extracurricular activity to take part in that also allows her to read more than her free time may allow!

John Stobba

John has been among the many dedicated staff members of *Variations* for the past two years. His love of art is what initially attracted him to the organization, and he found his place in the art department. John's goal is to make *Variations* the greatest magazine possible and to highlight the creative talents of NASH students.

Shelby Stoddart

Shelby is proud to be a member of this incredible publication. She is continually in awe of the talent found at North Allegheny, and she hopes all the writers and artists are proud of their accomplishments. Thank you to everyone who has worked on the staff, submitted a piece, or enjoyed our magazine!

Melanie Valenza

Melanie became a staff member of *Variations* after enrolling in multiple creative writing classes her junior year and realizing what she loved to do. She would like to thank the brave artists and writers who decided to share their beautiful creations in the magazine. All of the chosen pieces are very inspiring to her and contribute to the diverse style and uniqueness of the literary and artistic masterpiece that we all call *Variations*.

Jack You

Jack is currently a junior on the *Variations* editorial team. Jack would like to thank all who have submitted artwork and writing to *Variations*, for their pieces have shown him

how talented and dedicated his peers truly are. Throughout his time with *Variations*, Jack has developed a profound insight on the selection process of literary pieces. Jack is confident that all of the works presented in *Variations* will captivate any reader, and he urges everyone to keep up the good work!

Molly Zunski

Molly, a staff member in the literary department of *Variations*, is obsessed with the possibilities hidden within blank notebooks. She joined the staff of the magazine after realizing that she wanted to be responsible for bringing many of those possibilities to life. She wants to thank the many writers and artists who submitted their work for believing in themselves and braving peer pressure to do what they love. She hopes everyone enjoys the magazine and keeps making NASH such a safe haven for creativity to come to life and thrive.

Sarah



~ Melissa Daltner

Colophon

Designers
Layout Department
Katie Franc
Jasmine Mahajan
Shelby Stoddart

Design Program
InDesign

Paper Stock and Printing
Text: 8.5 x 11, Color Expressions 24 lb.
Cover: Hammermill Photo White Smooth, 80lb, perfect bound
300 Copies printed

Finance and Operation
Fundraising by *VARIATIONS* staff
Donations from school professional staff and administration

Typography and Fonts
Arial 14 headings
Arial 12 text

