
Reedy Branch *Review*



Volume 6 ~ 2024

Reedy Branch Review



Pitt Community College

Volume 6

2024

Number 1

Editors

Christine R. Bates

Scott Temple

Nonfiction Editor

Joy Moses-Hall

Office Assistant

Evie Kelley

Web Content Coordinator

Ashlyn Bennett

Senior Advisors

Dr. Stephanie Rook

Josh Matthews

Reedy Branch Review

Reedy Branch Review is the online literary journal of Pitt Community College. *RBR* is especially interested in publishing the work of Pitt Community College students, faculty, and staff, but we also accept work from writers associated with other community colleges and from anyone who supports the mission of America's community colleges.

Cover art: "Reptilian Nature"

By Terrance Hilliard

Graphic design and layout

By Christine R. Bates

Copyright © 2024

Pitt Community College

Contents

<i>Editors' Notes</i>	5
<i>Peacock Spider by Caitlin Swearengin, 5 x 7 inches, felted wool</i>	6
<i>Igneous and Snow by Aniyah Perkins</i>	7
<i>Lead Water by David Nash</i>	8
<i>Tent-ative Sister by Joy Moses-Hall</i>	9
<i>Thawing in Place by Steve Brisendine</i>	14
<i>Chrysanthemum by Katie Hugbanks, 4 x 3, digital photography</i>	15
<i>How the Monarchs Thrive by Steven Gowin</i>	16
<i>bruised reeds and smoldering wicks by Jill Crainshaw</i>	19
<i>June Bugs by Joyce Compton Brown</i>	20
<i>Uncertain by Charity Jules, digital photography</i>	21
<i>A Frigid Winter's Dark by Elissia Fisch</i>	22
<i>Leaving the Lake by Jordan Emerson</i>	23
<i>In the Forest by Ann Privateer, digital photography</i>	25
<i>Twister by Gary V. Powell</i>	26
<i>Nature vs Nurture by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, 11in x 11in, wood</i>	30
<i>Familiar by Michael Moreth, 4-1/2 x 6, gouache on paper</i>	31
<i>There Ain't No Gold on Mount Jasper by Elizabeth Gauffreau</i>	32
<i>Face in the Mirror by Chloe Wilson, 2000px by 2000 px, digital</i>	40
<i>The Friendly Barbershop by Astrid Shaw</i>	41
<i>Story of the Different Socks by Claudia Rassinati</i>	43
<i>Self Portrait by Quinton May, 18 in x 24 in, on drawing paper</i>	45
<i>Kinship by Carla Cherry</i>	46
<i>Untitled by Irina Tall Novikova, ink, gouache & gel pen, 30x40 cm 2023</i>	48
<i>Shadows of Love by Huina Zheng</i>	49
<i>A Portrait of Hisoka Marow by Elissia/Shaneka Fisch, 11 X 14, graphite on bristol board</i>	56
<i>A Portrait Of Touya Todoroki (Dabi) by Elissia/Shaneka Fisch, 11 X 14, graphite on bristol board</i>	57

<i>Dromedary by Yi-Wen Huang</i>	<i>58</i>
<i>Ode to Ahmaud Arbery by DeShane Short.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>An Ideal Life by John Tavares</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Cardboard Shoes by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, cardboard,15in x 5in x 9in</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Guarantor by Michael Moreth, gouache on paper, 4-1/2 x 6</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>A Trip to North Carolina by Rakhima Imanaliyeva</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Pinto Beans by Joyce Compton Brown.....</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>What's Left Behind by Odette Inoa, drawing.....</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Let's Smile by Alex Clark, digital paint, 11x17.....</i>	<i>80</i>
<i>Taiwanese Ghosts by Yi-Wen Huang</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Your First Kill Kills You by John Grey.....</i>	<i>82</i>
<i>What Kind of Bird Doesn't Fly? by Chelsea Pinneo</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Sailor by Abby Newton, graphite on watercolor paper, 5 X 7.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>The Unveiled Whispers: A Deep Dive into the Depths of Self by Karla Ibarra-Morales</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>The Face of Venus by Eliza Norman, pencil sketch, 11 in x 8.5 in</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Grimmer Fairy Tale Physics? by Gerard Sarnat</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Brushstrokes by Sharda Persaud</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>Lost Dream by Joan McNerney.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Hallmark by Michael Moreth, gouache on paper, 4-1/2 x 6</i>	<i>92</i>
<i>A Girl by Daesha Duenas.....</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>What's in my bag? by Erika Salvador, oil on canvas, 10 x 8 in</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Remembrance by Daesha Duenas</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>Playground by Christina Ruotolo.....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Beach Serenade by Wayne Russell</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>The Songs I Play for Love by Jala Tyson-Kelly.....</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>The Music My Heart Plays by Ariana Duvall</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Limerence by David Brown II, gouache on paper, 8 in x 6 in.....</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Maybe We Should Call It a Night? by Cat Dixon.....</i>	<i>101</i>

<i>4 am by Melissa Morlock</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>My Sun by Victoria Ibarra-Morales, digital art</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Afternoons in the Neighborhood by Joyce Compton Brown</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>Muscle Memory by Steve Brisendine.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Doo-Wop by David Nash.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>This Body by Melissa Morlock.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Here in This Moment by David Nash</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>The Poet by Joan McNerney.....</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Kitty by Abby Newton, acrylic on watercolor paper, 5x7.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>A Song of Bare Trees by George Eklund.....</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Confidence by Jade Ham.....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Love by Jade Ham.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>In the Moment by E.J. Uecker.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Wood DLXR Camera by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, wood 5.3in x 1.5in x 3in</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>The Vision by Catherine Broadwall.....</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Neck Turn by Les Epstein.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Card of the Day by Dakeim Smith, construction paper/paint, 11x14</i>	<i>121</i>
<i>Forgiveness Prayer by D. Jones</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>The Mighty Oak by Shelly Ford.....</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Millersport, 1967 by Les Epstein.....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Echo of a Shadow by Samantha Grady.....</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Hope Springs Forth by Chad Horn, pen and ink on layered acrylic, 5.5 x 8.5</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>Discovery by Carl Scharwath.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Contributors</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Call for Submissions.....</i>	<i>130</i>

Editors' Notes

We could not be more excited to publish *Reedy Branch Review's* Volume 6. The number of visual arts, creative nonfiction, poetry, and fiction submissions we received is truly impressive. What a talented group of creative artists and writers we have in our Pitt Community College campus community and in the communities that support our college's mission.

Volume 6's cover art is from one of our own PCC students, Terrance Hilliard. Terrance's "Reptilian Nature" is work accomplished for a 3-Dimensional course where the subject was reconciling differences. Terrance, who is a 20 year-retired Air Force veteran, said, "I wanted to express a living creature of nature while using nature itself as the medium." Another PCC student, Jade Ham, has two poems published in this issue; Jade attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School and owns her own business, "All Made by Jade," where she sells her crochet art. Terrance and Jade are two of many PCC students, faculty, staff, and alumni who are published in this issue. Others are highlighted in blue at the end of this journal.

You'll also find in Volume 6 "The Poet" and "Lost Dream" from Joan McNerney, whose poetry is published worldwide in over thirty-five countries in numerous literary magazines; Joan has also received Four Best of the Net nominations. We're also honored to have "Discovery" from Carl Scharwath, who has been published globally with more than 175 journals, in this issue.

Putting together a journal of this length requires months of preparation and a lot of support from our campus community. We want to recognize Ashlyn Bennett, who served as Web Content Coordinator for this issue and helped with all *RBR* marketing this year; we also want to extend a very special thank you to Charity Jules, PCC's Fine Arts Department Chair, and PCC Professor Regina Garcia for their guidance on several pieces within this issue. We are also grateful for the continued support from our advisors, Dr. Stephanie Rook and Professor Josh Matthews.

We have more than fifty contributors in this issue, so we especially want to thank all of you for choosing *RBR* to publish your work and for recognizing that *RBR* is such a special collection, where a high-school student who is just finding a creative voice is published right next to someone who is a seasoned widely-published author with years of creative writing experience. Albert Einstein said, "creativity is seeing what others see and thinking what no one else ever thought." *RBR's* Volume 6 has a lot to say, and we hope you enjoy it.

Until next time-

Christine R. Bates, Scott Temple & Joy Moses-Hall

Peacock Spider by Caitlin Swarengin, 5 x 7 inches, felted wool



Igneous and Snow by Aniyah Perkins

We are likely to live in a world of igneous and snow

For now, the world is warm and freezing over, destroying all that we know.

Our thoughts and opinions, the lands, and the business

This influence really shows.

“What will be left for the future generations?”

I ask this question, but who truly knows?

Until our brains defrost, we’ll look over that Arctic fire and the brown fox.

To the sun's sizzling rays

And the red and white gaze of the mountain

Completely unaware of the world’s tragedy

And our past, present, and future demises, yet like the fountain.

Lead Water by David Nash

After the river crests, I confide in myself

if my life is anything, it's a blue canoe

resting on the edge, tentatively ashore

not intending to shove off into leaden currents and unburden this land load.

My world is full of aerial roots twisted dangling

between stranglers and propagative, modifiers

off the swamp oak that takes pleasure in being

a tree above mud and moccasins and mosquitoes.

The river swells and shrinks,

it transports and impedes -

demanding a fare from all approaches.

I know there are snakes, an ancient killer,

a lie, that keeps me from throwing off

when I most need to be caught.

Tent-ative Sister by Joy Moses-Hall

You might think a blaze-orange tent would leap from the landscape like a blaring traffic cone.

It did not.

I had pitched the tent in the woods. It wasn't my tent. I borrowed it from Cadet Services at the US Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut, where I was a sophomore cadet, and drove with it in a Plymouth Horizon hatchback to the Cadet Outdoor Education Center a few miles away to go camping. It wasn't my car, either. I borrowed it from an upperclassman. Distracted, I felt around for the headlight dimmer switch, and the gearshift for reverse, and the set-and-release for the parking brake, but to no avail.

A night out in the wilderness together was to be a treat for the new Little Sister I was mentoring. I had just joined as a Big Sister in an organization that matches kids with young adults who can spend time with them and be there when they need a shoulder or a hand. We would spend the time roughing it and building rapport over a friendly fire and some pillow-side chats. It was to be a night close to nature, so close we would feel the tree roots growing beneath our shoulder blades and the boulders springing granite cushions under our cheeks. We would laugh at the skitters of night creatures and crisp in the coolness of the air, writing a new history together.

Ethel had been a Little Sister for years. I was advised to select a younger girl with high spirits and no expectations, but, instead, I promised to champion Ethel when her cadet Big Sister left the Coast Guard Academy.

I was no Sister Kelly. Kelly was a classmate, bubbly, vigorous, and full of midwestern charm. We waged a friendly rivalry over who could carry the biggest cymbals in the marching band, and every inch she lacked in stature was triumphantly wielded on the largest cymbals. She had befriended Ethel the very first week of swab freshman year, and Ethel, a shy, fatherless pre-teen, never seemed to stop giggling. What a fun pair of sisters they made! They went to pumpkin festivals and ice cream bistros and skating rinks and nature museums. Kelly didn't have a car, either, but she made things happen. Every weekend they were adjoined and joyful. Kelly cherished Ethel like -- well, like a little sister. They were nearly inseparable. If you knew Kelly, you knew Ethel.

In March of the following year, Kelly realized the Coast Guard was not for her. She held out as long as she could, but her grades were falling, her shoes went unpolished, and her military

bearing slouched. When her favorite aunt fell seriously ill, she realized she needed to go home to Illinois. Regretfully, she set aside the cymbals. Heartbroken, she took Ethel to see a final movie, and over a last bucket of popcorn, Kelly told Ethel she was leaving. They were both in tears as Kelly promised I would step into her shoes and Ethel's heart.

My shoes at the Ed Center were not bound for anyone's heart that day, and were not even following any kind of marked trail. There were no paths or designated campsites, just 200 acres of isotropic woodland, but I eyeballed a 45-degree angle with my arms and headed away from the lodge until it was just out of sight, and raised the tent. Surely I would be able to make my way back without breadcrumbs. The blaze-orange tent would stand out like a fluorescent buoy in a placid gray sea of wintery underbrush.

After setting it up, I stowed my sleeping bag, a can of Sterno, and a bag of marshmallows inside for later. I had no trouble at all finding my way back to the placid gray lodge from the tent, and drove back to town, somewhat gingerly as I wasn't familiar with the ins and outs of the car, to pick up Ethel. We exchanged pleasantries, and patted the cat as we said goodbye to her mom, who, if she had qualms about entrusting her daughter on an overnight trip featuring wilderness and boulders with this new and untested cadet, hid them well behind a friendly wave.

I tried to converse with Ethel, chatting about hot dogs on oak sticks and cool cats in top flicks and black bats eating crickets. We discussed preferred condiments as we parked beside the lodge and headed out at 45 degrees. She was quiet, not giggly at all, no doubt longing for jovial times with Kelly. I blathered on about how to build a fire, and the ideal ember temperature for roasting hot dogs. I detailed for her the variety of natural barks and grasses that could be used for kindling...

Hmm. The tent should be right over here. Hmm. Or maybe over there.

The landscape was devoid of blaze-orange.

We turned around to back away and start again. The lodge was right where it should be, next to the car. Carefully, I chose a path outward from the lodge at exactly 45.00 degrees, according to my arms. Nervously, I peered ahead, swiveling neck and torso in a Coast Guard search pattern looking for a hint of orange.

No tent.

Surely I must have left some kind of tracks on the way out: smudged footprints, crushed grass fiber, a broken twig, a shifted pebble. But no; however I'd gotten there the first time, I was

stealthy as a hawk. And quiet Ethel was giving me a sideways glance, or maybe she was just noting the blazing orange of the downing sun. I checked my watch. We would never find it in the dark. We went back to the lodge, back to the car.

The blaze-orange tent had disappeared into the forest like stripes on a tiger.

Ethel was thirteen now, a tiger cub no longer, really too old to be reassigned to a Sister, and she was also too old to spend a Saturday night campless in the dark with a geographical moron. The void left by the departure of Kelly was growing with each fading lumen.

I stared off at the barbed trees silhouetted against the horizon. No blaze, no orange.

Thirteen-year-old girls are known worldwide for their aversion to grown-ups, especially grown-ups who lose the tent in the middle of a camping trip. She smirked sideways, snapping silently, "I hope I never fall overboard if you're what the Coast Guard sends."

I should have taken her back home, but I was determined to be like a real-life big sister and totally ruin the experience for her. In the loomed darkness, we set up an alternate camp.

She'd already had dinner, fortunately, since there was no chance for roasting the hot dogs over an open fire. We spent the last minute of twilight bushwhacking the bushes. I had planned so much camaraderie, trying to compensate for Kelly's gigantic absence and a silenced set of cymbals, and now we would have to sing around the dome light and swap ghost stories over bucket seats.

Maybe there was a tv in the lodge?

It was locked.

Maybe we could play tic tac toe in a puddle of dirt?

Don't bother.

We stared around stonily.

We tucked ourselves into the car like foam briquettes, folding around the rugged console and craggy seatbelts that cradled like granite. Ethel slept fine in the hatch with the back seat folded down and the sleeping bag I'd brought for her, but in the front I was cold and cramped and an

uptilted bar that seemed suited for the centerboard on a sailing dinghy was knifing me in the small of the back. Around dawn I bumped the horn with my foot from the front seat when I tried to release the baffling uptilted bar, but I couldn't figure out how. The only car I'd ever driven was my father's 1969 Ford Falcon, where there was no center console or bar to uplift; where the headlight dimmer was a little foot button on the left; the reverse gear was on the shifter down and away from me on the steering column; and the emergency brake was a pedal released by tugging a small handle under the left dashboard. I had spent the drive over to Ethel's absently opening the hood, certain that the little lever I was lugging must be the parking brake set-and-release. I had deliberately refrained from pressing any pedals or buttons when I picked her up, but after we arrived at the Ed Center and I had mulled the landscape again, I found she had yanked up on that centerboard bar on the center console.

Fed up with the uptilt and shivering with frost, I lurched from the car all askew and bent, bent only on seeking the tent. I used a pattern the Coast Guard calls the expanding square in searches for missing boats, straight-spiraling out from the last estimated position. I also tried a sector search pattern shaped like a three-pronged bow tie, and even put my ear to the ground to try to hear any orange blazing.

Nothing. Not even crickets. The tent had vanished, a phosphorescent orange prism sucked up by some alien invader.

I returned to the car to find Ethel awake, and as perky as a bear prodded from hibernation. Silently, I cooked a packet of instant oatmeal over the cigarette lighter until it congealed, which brightened her mood to intense hostility. We shared a granola bar and I offered her some powdered milk from an emergency rations kit in the hatch. I suggested a refreshing morning hike, pointing down the last known angle to tent oblivion. She ignored me, turned the ignition key to ACCESSORY, and released the up-bar for a moment so she could get to the radio tuner, then reset it before I could see whether she had pressed that mysterious little button in the door jamb or the tiny handle on the steering wheel to do so, and lost herself in a teenage funk listening to the car radio.

I hiked off, returning tentless once more. At a loss for words or giggles or marshmallows, I finally turned on the engine to take her home.

The car wouldn't move, as if the parking brake was on.

Aha. So the mysterious uptilted bar had set the parking brake.

“Ethel, Sis, how do I get the parking brake off?” I had been driving for 2 years; she had never driven at all. She rolled her eyeballs so high up into her head she must have seen her hair follicles, and cleared the brake.

Fortunately, it was now full daylight and I did not need the dimmer switch, and I could get by without the reverse gear.

Her mother, always cheerful, invited me in, but I had a tent quest to pursue.

I raced back to the Ed Center, faced 45 degrees from the lodge, and walked just far enough to be out of sight of the building. Bazinga! Wouldn't you know, there was the tent, leaping from the barren landscape like a life-vest from a locker.

It was blaze-orange. The aliens had returned it to exactly the same spot where I had pitched it.

Thawing in Place by Steve Brisendine

Four hours in the same chair, watching thin
light fail, and I have become the afternoon:

head full of low clouds, the color of concrete
just spilled from a torn yellow paper bag.

Perhaps promised rain will set them, and some
sure foundation pour itself, if I can keep stirring.

(nothing moves – not winter-sluggish air,
not branches of bare trees, not the pages
of this new book)

Chrysanthemum by Katie Hughbanks, 4 x 3, digital photography



How the Monarchs Thrive by Steven Gowin

Every summer's full moon, Leanne Lafleur drifts out of the Fairmont Cemetery towards Milkweed Lane plugging the bloody hole in her forehead with her little finger.

When we pulled onto the same track that night, The Old Man said he'd only be a minute. Out for a bite of supper, he'd polished off a couple pints. Well four.

I didn't like it. This was the exact same spot where Leanne Lafleur and Billy Weaver had parked that murder night when Billy was already 22 and a deputy for his uncle, and Leanne had just finished high school.

At the time, Leanne was meant to be going with Daryll Keyser. She played bells in Mr. Davis' marching band, and Daryll played tuba. On the bus home from Tulip Festivals, still in their uniforms, they'd do things to each other in 10-minute turns. Daryll believed in fair play and counted precise time. Leanne always kept a tissue handy.

Deputy Billy had met Leanne in May when he'd pulled over a bunch of girls for underage drinking. He'd not been able to get over Leanne's jet-black hair and the red headband that matched her ruby lipstick.

He let the girls off the hook, and in a couple of weeks had begun rendezvousing with Leanne out here on Milkweed Lane. Leanne knew she'd be breaking up with Daryll the minute Billy asked her for that red headband.

She did surrender it voluntarily but asked Billy for his collar brass in return. He'd hung the headband from the prowler's rearview mirror, and Leanne carefully fixed the collar brass to her purse.

Leanne's girlfriends all said that a breakup with Daryll was about right. After all, Daryll's dad, the whole family in fact were off, weren't they? Didn't they all practice nudism or something, and wasn't Daryll crazy anyway? Why he'd collect all those old broken clock springs and crowns and worthless pocket watches? Why?

I don't know; maybe Daryll really was mental. The winter before the tragedy, Mr. Davis had had the band out marching all over West Jesus, in February, freezing cold, and two months early for the Tulip Festival.

As we crossed, the Raccoon River, Daryll'd had it. He'd yelled that his fingers were frozen, that he'd had enough, and he would chuck his tuba over the bridge, and so he did. The clattering instrument cracked the ice and sank down down down toot da sweet.

And by that next June, with the Leanne situation and all, Daryll was worse and said he wished he'd followed that tuba below, plunged under the ice, trapped, hopeless, never again to surface.

He talked suicide all the time and reckoned that freezing was the best way to go, gun blast the second. Boom, straight to the brain pan. In the end, with the warm weather and all, firearms won out.

The day he snapped, Daryll knew exactly where to look and found his Daddy's .38 under a stack of American Naturalist magazines. Once he'd pulled on some mildewed clothes from a heap, he fired up his Dodge, and exactly 20 minutes later, rolled into Milkweed Lane.

The lovers were there in the moonlight alright but separated by radio gear in the patrol console. Revolver in hand Daryll calmly walked in front of the prowler, squared up, pulled once gently, and shot Leanne through the windshield.

For his big date that night, Billy'd dressed in a brand-new lawman's uniform with bow tie, shiny collar brass, braided epaulets, and red leg stripes. The shot had startled him, and he'd peed his pants a little, but after a quick check, he was relieved that no single drop of urine or blood had stained his new outfit.

Outside, Daryll was leveling the pistol's muzzle to his mouth. Since Sheriff Uncle Roger'd never gone over anything like this, and without knowing what else to do, Billy flipped on the red rollers.

At that moment, in that ruby strobe, both he and Daryll made it out. Leanne was dead alright, but always fastidious she'd poked her pinky finger into the hole in her skull to stave the bleeding.

The deputy struggled out of the prowler and around to Daryll who'd already dropped the .38. He stared back and forth at Leanne and at Daryll and at Leanne and finally bumbled around to get the cuffs around Daryll's wrists. Daryll'd had to help him, but the two finally managed.

After Billy'd called it in, the boys leaned on the prowler's hood waiting for Sheriff Uncle Roger and the ambulance. Wind rustled the ditch weeds, and big moths bumped the patrol car's

headlights. Billy said if they were smokers now'd be the moment, but neither did. Billy asked Daryll for the exact time.

By Fall, when the trial came up, most of Dallas County felt sorry for Daryll, what with his odd home circumstances and all, so Judge Bishop Thornton ruled him insane and sent him on down to the Asylum at Clarinda.

Daryll studied lapidary and jewelry work down there, and when released became a watchmaker. Then he moved to Nome, Alaska where he practices that vocation to this day.

In the end, Deputy Billy married Leanne's sister, Laureene, who he'd met in court. They now have two daughters both with jet-black hair.

The Weaver girls wear red headbands to keep the bangs off their faces. The older, Leanne, plays cymbals, and the younger, Lafleur, plays flute in Mr. Davis' marching band.

Leanne's grave at the Fairmont Cemetery overlooks the Raccoon River Bridge. Thousands and thousands of orange and black butterflies flit around her headstone all summer.

They say that as she walks at night Leanne sometimes forgets her wound and carelessly soaks the foliage, weeping as she realizes what she's done.

When the old man has finished his whiz, I say again that Milkweed Lane gives me the heebie-jeebies and wonder why in hell do we always have to stop here?

The Old Man will say anything and now claims it's because those butterflies need milkweed, and milkweed needs tears to grow up strong.

You betcha, he adds, mostly tears but also blood, and now and then a little pee. Tears and blood and pee. That's how the monarchs thrive.

bruised reeds and smoldering wicks by Jill Crainshaw

a butterfly prayed for me today
or so I imagined
when I saw her fold her wings
and open them up again as she danced
over a fuschia azalea blossom
in our backyard

i wonder--

did the air around her flutter
as some scientists say though
i couldn't hear the faintest whoosh

who even notices a bent stalk
in a tumultuous sea of reeds
and yet butterflies push through
cocoons to commune
even with wounded ones

we are dust and ashes
smoldering wicks
straining to hold the light

and a butterfly prayed for us today

June Bugs by Joyce Compton Brown

They're like a pin your mother
might have worn to church
if they hadn't wiggled.
They hover, metal-green,
glisten gold-sided and chunky.
So little time to live,
to reaffirm their kind—
topsy-turvey in the spring, bungling
bumpy in the summer breeze.
They crashed into our hair, fell
into our hands, wiggled their tickly
legs. We'd reach and grab, open
our fingery doors. They'd tumble
free, reset their crooked course.
June bugs are a rarity now,
their green buzz lost among sprays
and powders. Their soft white grubs
might eat the roots of plants,
chew brown spots on green lawns.
Full grown, they may nibble
at figs, cling to pears.
They come from beetle royalty,
children of the scarabs in pharoahs'
tombs. We finger their hardened
ancestors, pocket one for luck,
remember the bumbling buzz
of our childhood as we plucked them,
fragile, like Eden's fruit, defenseless
from our relentless grasp.

Uncertain by Charity Jules, digital photography



A Frigid Winter's Dark by Elissia Fisch

Yet again, another frigid, winded night.
Hopeful one without much a-fright,
logs to be bountiful to keep the fires glowing.

A burning blaze to keep out the night's cold.
Insured to keep human's blood a-flowing.
A chill so strong, enough to make a human fold.

Days spent waiting for spring, a dash of warm to set the soul.
The falling snow fall like a dancing rain,
slow, pretty and fluttering away, taking a toll.

Mother natural's cruel ice decline,
bouncing throughout the planes of a brilliant white, ah—so bright.
But that will have to wait a couple more days.
When finally, with the cold that kept pressing on,
may this plight come to its end, another year, for yet another rite.

Leaving the Lake by Jordan Emerson

I swam around in the water, somewhat mournfully. It was late October, and the temperature was starting to drop. I hated when it was cold, but I felt as though I had no choice but to swim. After all, it was my last time. As I treaded water, I looked around at the cove. I gazed at each of our neighbors' houses and piers, some of which had been there as long as I could remember. The late afternoon sun shone between the trees. It made everything look so golden. The leaves on the trees in the neighbors' yards became beautifully brown. This time of year always held a cozy place in my heart.

I remembered the many Thanksgivings my family spent together here. For 15 years, I took part in this tradition. I had no siblings, but I grew up with my cousins and the rest of my family here. It was fun to see them for once. After Thanksgiving, it seemed like an eternally long time before we ever saw each other again.

I never put much thought into the actual concept of Thanksgiving. In fact, it was kinda stupid that we were supposed to be all thankful when my family felt like it was its own reality TV show. But I couldn't bring myself to be thankful for some things until they were gone. I've always been good at taking things for granted.

That's what I realized the day we had to empty the lakehouse.

I still felt exhausted from the constant back-and-forth of loading items onto trailers. There were many 20-minute drives to the landfill, where we threw familiar furniture in dumpsters. The amenities we wanted to keep went in a big U-Haul truck. I didn't realize just how much stuff we had. My parents and their friends worked tirelessly over the weekend to complete these tasks, but eventually they were finished. One by one, all of our helpers left. My parents and I stayed. We were the only ones left to care for this place. There was no way we could handle this on our own, so with a heavy heart and decades of memories, we had to pass the torch to another family.

I dashed out of the water, bracing myself for the cool autumn breeze to strike my wet skin like a baseball bat. I scurried towards my towel and quickly tried to dry off as much of my surface area as possible. I hunkered down on the edge of the dock that was still in the sun. I felt myself quaking like a leaf. Over time, I started to warm up. I continued to watch the cove. This time of year, there was no one around. The area seemed completely peaceful, yet I did not feel at peace.

I heard a familiar voice. It was my dad calling me to come up to the house, but it wasn't time to go just yet. I figured my mom was busy taking pictures of every square inch of the now-empty cabin. I wrapped my towel around my waist, put my flip-flops on, and followed my dad up the gravel path to the house.

I felt a little bit warmer inside the house. I was mostly dry by this point, so I changed into my regular clothes. I found them in a bag, located in the middle of the otherwise empty bedroom. I went to leave the house and found my parents sitting together on the front porch. My mom was crying. I opened the door, walked out and sat on the brick steps alongside my parents. There was a long moment of silence, interrupted by my mom sniffing. "It's time to go," she said reluctantly.

We gathered our bags and put them in the car. As we were doing so, we made sure to do one final walkthrough of the house. Then we took the keys and locked the front door.

My mom got in the car and started it. She began pulling out of the driveway. Meanwhile, my dad got in the U-Haul and motioned to me. I walked over and opened the passenger side door, with my phone and earbuds in my pocket. I was ready to tune out and attempt to escape this situation. But no matter how hard I would try, I had to face reality. My dad started the U-Haul and backed out of the driveway. I glanced at the house one last time. Then we went on our way.

In the Forest by Ann Privateer, digital photography



Twister by Gary V. Powell

Before heading to the basement, we watched the Easter Sunday tornado flatten White's barn and house. Passing a mile to our south and traveling east, the twister snaked black and mean against a greenish sky, moving on to finger Amish and Mennonite farms along Cable Line Road. Our only damage suffered, a branch from a big willow downed in the yard and shingles helicoptered off our roof.

Got off easy, my dad claimed.

Missed out entirely on the double funnel, famously photographed for national news, that ripped up Highway 33, mobile homes on one side, Sunnyside Estates on the other. Tossed those trailers like toys, the newscasters squawked. Swept those little houses off their slabs and rolled them up like bales of hay, the local paper reported.

Never seen the like, my mom observed.

They counted over one hundred dead men, women, and children, in a community where everyone knew everyone like beer knew pretzels. The bodies lay broken in the wreckage of their trailers, crushed beneath the collapse of their homes, or like Billy Wiedemeir, our all-star third baseman, nailed to woodland trees by two barn boards like Jesus Christ on the cross. Others were described as Missing: Tanya Wenger's baby sister peeled from her mother's arms, Tim Schumacher's grandma last seen crocheting in her rocking chair, Annie Hostettler, a pretty blonde girl I'd lain with in the tall grass behind the football stadium just the week before.

Sorry about Annie, my best friend Randy White commiserated.

The twister took his bike, phone, electric guitar, and yellow legal pad on which he'd composed original songs for a rock band we'd hoped to form. Rendered homeless by the storm, he and his family moved in with us; four adults and five kids jammed, biscuits in a pan, into a three-bedroom, one-bath ranch. Late at night, the anguished rasp of Mr. White's voice carried through thin walls. Would he still have a job? How could they afford to rebuild? What did God have against him?

Sorry about your stuff, I told Randy.

After suspending classes indefinitely, they used our high school for an emergency morgue, stacking corpses in the gym where the month before we'd hosted a regional basketball

tournament. One of the Governor's representatives made an appearance, FEMA pledged assistance that was slow in coming, and the President and First Lady, unable to visit in person, kept us in their thoughts and prayers. But with local police otherwise occupied, looters, undeterred by thoughts and prayers, proliferated, helping themselves to liquor, canned foods, and dry goods.

Businesses and factories temporarily shut down, allowing working men and women to participate in the clean-up. Older boys like Randy and me pitched in. The first week we helped on the farms and in the fields where tractors mounted pick-up trucks like stallions mounting mares. Automobiles perched atop upturned silos. Chickens, their feathers blown clean off, decorated bare-limbed trees like Christmas ornaments. Randy and I plucked swollen carcasses from bare branches, redeemed wallets and purses from the Yellow Creek marsh, and rescued family Bibles amidst the ruin.

After the men cleared bodies, we helped at the trailer park and Sunnyside, sifting through piles of twisted, tangled debris for salvageable valuables, hoping survivors would recognize their precious things.

Second day at Sunnyside, Randy found the metal case, not a mark on it.

Kneeling in the dank earth, broken glass and splintered wood, bits of clothing, and mangled Kens and Barbies all about us, Randy opened the case. Inside, a Colt.45, US Army issue, and three full clips grinned up at us.

We knew the rules: supposed to turn it in, right? Supposed to have it catalogued and photographed, right? But maybe the owner lived, maybe not. Maybe he recovered in a hospital, tubes down his throat, an IV in his arm. Or maybe his bones, picked clean by crows, lay scattered and unidentified in an adjacent cornfield.

Never miss it, Randy suggested.

Probably forgot about it, I agreed.

Our first kill with the .45, Miller's decomposing Hereford cow come to rest in the thicket behind where Dickie Griewank's house once stood. Next, Randy fired on Detweiler's commode which sat upright on the site formerly occupied by our local Dollar Tree. The following week, we took turns finishing off broken windows in the musical instrument factory no one expected to re-

open. When the initial thrill of destruction passed, we hid the metal box and its secret in a corner of my dad's garage.

First of May, parents returned to work and their offspring to school. Randy's family relocated to temporary housing flimsier than the Sunnyside homes the double funnel had taken out. Our classrooms featured empty spaces once occupied by departed classmates. What had been Mr. Kelly's PE class merged with Mr. Philibert's class. The seniors, especially hard hit, asked that prom be cancelled.

As for Annie Hostettler, we continued for a while to hope. Her locker and what was left of the family's homestead became magnets for flowers and handwritten notes. I donated a pic of her I'd captured on my phone to a poster plastered on buildings far and wide. The selfie of us kissing on her porch I kept for myself.

She was something, I remembered.

We all lost something, Randy commiserated.

As spring turned to summer, a sickly scent of death rose from the ground: body parts of folks and the remains of livestock and critters caught in the vortex and left, despite our best efforts, unclaimed from wood and stream. With the onset of summer heat, the scent ripened into a stench that lingered like an odious fart far into fall. We celebrated when the first snow arrived, cleansing the air and covering our losses with white fluff. We couldn't believe it when the next spring's sun re-awakened the stench, and yet another summer cooked it through.

They're still out there, Randy noted.

Still out there, I replied.

His dad, prone to both public and private displays of anger, lost his regular job for lunchbreak-fighting, fisticuffs in the factory's parking lot with the new foreman. When Mr. White lost his next job not long after, Randy's mom took his little brother and moved to be near a sister in Ohio. Randy stayed behind with his unemployed and angry father but spent more and more time at my house, mooching dinners and lamenting the rock band we'd never form.

Come that second September following the storm, on a warm, sunny day fit for fishing the river or playing soccer, a dry creek bed two counties over yielded Annie Hostettler's alabaster bones, tattered pink dress, and silver necklace I'd given her when she turned sixteen.

I guess that's that, Randy announced.

I guess so, I conceded.

But later that same week, while our parents slept, Randy and I reclaimed the Colt .45 and slipped out into the world. We cut through a chain link fence intent on embellishing the town's water tower. A clear night, late summer leaning into fall, Randy kept watch while I fashioned a crude heart and swore out my forever love. Below the heart, I spray-painted Annie's name and the dates of her short life.

After that, we took to the streets, cruising Main in the Ford Explorer borrowed from Randy's dad. At the Harris Street stoplight, I brandished the Colt at a carload of Latinos from up the road in Michigan. While waiting in the all-night McDonald's drive thru, Randy flashed the muzzle at the young black woman collecting our money. Cruising Cable Line, we squeezed off the last few rounds, murdering Staley's easy chair where it continued to invite the weary to rest next to a pile of boards that once was Shipley's shed.

Reported as armed and dangerous and the subject of an all-points bulletin, the local sheriff and state troopers caught up with us in the parking lot of Mt. Pleasant Baptist. Bullhorn blaring, rollers flashing, they took us down like sugar ants taking down a cinnamon roll. We threw the .45 to the ground and surrendered without resistance.

Lord have mercy, my mom exclaimed.

The local paper described "Wild Teens on Violent Rampage," but the judge took all circumstances into account. Assigned to community service, we cut grass, pulled weeds, and otherwise tidied up around recently erected memorials to those claimed by the twisters, one memorial at Sunnyside Estates, another at the trailer park. Her status finally confirmed, Annie Hostettler was listed among the dead, her life cut short by what I've come to embrace as a random act of nature in an arbitrary, capricious, and dangerous universe.

Got off easy, my dad concluded.

Nature vs Nurture by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, 11in x 11in, wood



Familiar by Michael Moreth, 4-1/2 x 6, gouache on paper



There Ain't No Gold on Mount Jasper by Elizabeth Gauffreau

Berlin, New Hampshire, 1983

Early one morning in April, Rolf rattled down High Street in his old Dodge. The air was dank with melting snow and the smell of the mill, but he could sense the sun. He opened his side vent a little wider. What he liked best about warm weather was not having to wear so many damn clothes. In the summer, he could wear a thin cotton shirt and roll the sleeves up to the elbow. His forearms were still strong and as smooth as when he was twenty.

He didn't usually start out this early, but he disliked staying in the house when Mary wasn't there. Although she no longer screamed at him when she left, slamming doors until every knick-knack skittered on its shelf, her leaving was inconvenient. Today, though, he didn't care. Today he was going to look for gold.

He had discovered gold on Mount Jasper a little over ten years ago, after the accident, when he began walking in the woods to keep his leg from stiffening up. He'd sat by a stream to rest, taken off his boots, and eased his feet into the icy water. As he watched the sunlit water waver over his feet, he noticed a tiny pebble that seemed a different color and shape from the others. Reaching into the water, he held it up: a gold nugget, just like in the movies. He'd carefully placed the nugget in his wallet, rolled his pant legs higher, and waded into the stream. Although he patiently sifted the gravel and sand of the streambed with his fingers, he found no more nuggets. When he got home, he told Mary about finding the gold but didn't show it to her. He put the gold nugget into a small deerskin bag, which, ten years later, he still kept locked in a strongbox in his bottom bureau drawer.

Rolf fumbled in the glove compartment for a tape, shoved it into the player lying next him on the seat, and turned up the volume. Waylon Jennings sure could sing a country song. Rolf sang along, very loud, with one hand on the wheel and the other fingering the frets of an imaginary guitar. He stopped playing long enough to roll his window all the way down, so that people passing by on their way to work who saw him driving his car with his mouth working would know that he was singing and not talking to himself like some foolish old man.

Near the bottom of Pleasant Street, he slowed down and peered into Woolworth's to see who was there. The counter looked almost full, so he drove out of town, slowly, watching the mist rise from the Androscoggin and looking for new leaves on the trees. When he reached Gorham, he made a U-turn in the middle of Main Street and drove the five miles back to Berlin. Most of Woolworth's customers had left for work, so he parked his car out back and went into the store.

He sat on a wobbly orange stool directly in front of the grill. Chris, who worked the breakfast shift alone, stood pushing onions around the grill with a spatula, her other hand on her hip.

"Hey!" he said, slamming his hand down on the counter.

Chris continued to push the onions. "I'll be with you in a minute, Rolf." She didn't turn around.

"What are you cooking them onions for this early in the morning?"

She still didn't turn around. "Lunch."

"Yeah, well, it ain't lunchtime yet, and I want my breakfast!" Rolf slammed his hand down on the counter again.

Chris scooped the onions into a bowl and set the bowl in the warmer drawer before turning around. "Coffee and a doughnut?"

"I need two doughnuts, no, three. I'm going into the woods this morning."

Chris brought his coffee with two creamers and a Sweet 'n' Low, the way he liked it. The doughnuts were wrapped in cellophane and stacked on top of each other like tires. Chris moved away, going for the carrots on the salad bar, it looked like. Rolf took a bite of his first doughnut and said, "Chris." She had the vegetable brush out. "Chris, come here."

She turned her head. "What is it, Rolf?"

"Come here. I want to ask you something."

Chris scrubbed the carrots. "I can hear you."

Rolf raised his voice. "I'd like to know where you get these stale doughnuts. Then I could buy them myself and eat breakfast at home. This place is a dump."

Chris continued scrubbing carrots.

Rolf started on his second doughnut. They didn't taste much like doughnuts, but at least they were sweet and easy to chew. Chris did make good coffee, though. As she rang up an order at

the cash register, he caught her eye and pointed to his cup. She poured the coffee with one hand and dropped the creamers and Sweet 'n' Low on the counter with the other. Rolf grabbed for the hand, but she was too quick for him. "Do you know what day it is?"

She paused with the coffee pot in her hand. "No, what?"

He peeled the foil off his creamer. "Today is the first day of spring." He poured the creamer in, watching the light swirls become dark, then disappear. "I'm going up on the mountain to pan for gold soon as I get done here. First day of spring every year, I start looking for gold."

Chris shook her head. "No, Rolf, the first day of spring was last month. On March twenty-first. It's always on March twenty-first." She moved on to another customer.

Rolf watched her flirt with the new customer, a young guy with curly hair. Without thinking, Rolf took his green felt crusher off his head and passed his hand over his white stubble. Then he took out his jackknife and scraped black circles of dirt from under his fingernails.

When he had finished with his fingernails, he lifted his cup for a last drink of coffee, but it was empty. The curly-haired guy was gone, and Chris was feeding coins into her tip box. Rolf put the money for his breakfast on the counter, along with a sixty-five-cent tip for Chris, and, settling his hat on his head with both hands, walked stiffly outside. The air had become warmer, and the sun was shining. He got into his car and put it in drive, listening to Waylon as he drove up Main Street.

He got the Dodge up to sixty-five on Route 110, smiling at how easily he left the smell of the mill behind. He turned off 110 onto the road leading to Mount Jasper, the car's back-end slewing on the loose gravel; he gave the car a little more gas. The road was much worse than when he'd been on it last fall--nothing but washboard and ruts. His leg began to throb, and he took his foot off the gas.

Soon he came to an old logging road. Parking the car, he let Waylon finish the last song on the tape before he got out and dug both hands into the muscle of his aching leg, trying to get to the bone. After a few minutes, he pounded his fist on his thigh and reached into the car for a small knapsack. He shrugged the knapsack onto his shoulders and began walking.

The air was cooler in the woods than in town, and he was glad he'd worn wool pants, even though he generally didn't like wearing them past March. As he walked, he scanned both sides of the path. It was too early in the year to find anything--there were still patches of snow under

the trees--but he looked anyway. Once, a few years back, he found a huge chunk of pink quartz. He'd picked it up, then sat down on a fallen tree and turned the quartz over and over in his hands, holding it up to the sunlight and running his fingers over the facets. At home, he put it on his bureau, and when he woke up the next morning, the sun was on it, making it glitter and glow and sparkle, more beautifully than any diamond. He woke Mary, and she liked it, too.

The path leading to the stream was on a downhill grade, and he had to walk slowly, favoring his leg, grabbing at saplings to keep his balance on the wet leaf mold. The stream was high, rushing white, bubbling, and cold with melted snow from the top of the mountain. Rolf walked downstream for a few hundred yards, looking for a spot where the water was shallow and calm. Finding one close to the bank, he dropped the knapsack on the ground, rolled the sleeves of his heavy sweater over his elbows, and tucked the sleeves of his shirt and thermal underwear underneath. He took a pair of waders out of the knapsack and, shaking out the folds, put them on. Next, he took out the deerskin bag. He hefted it in the palm of his hand, shook it, and without looking inside, buttoned it into his shirt pocket. Last out of the knapsack was the pan, a blue-enameled one he'd bought special.

He waded into the stream, feeling the coldness of the water through his waders. Stooping, he dipped the pan into the silt of the streambed. He sloshed the water out carefully in a gentle, rotating motion. When most of the water was out, he tilted the pan one way, then the other, watching the silt slide slowly down. Nothing. He leaned out toward the middle of the stream and let the rushing water empty the pan.

He panned for fifteen minutes, and when his hands turned red and stinging from the icy water, he climbed onto the bank, rested, then waded back into the stream and panned for another fifteen minutes.

He worked the rest of the morning. Still no gold. He set the pan on the moss next to his knapsack. After a few minutes, he took off the waders and laid them in the sun to dry. He put the deerskin bag into the knapsack, after a few more minutes the neatly-folded waders, last the pan.

The air felt cold as he walked back to the car; he pushed his sleeves down over his arms. He would have to take a couple of painkillers for his leg when he got home. It took a few minutes for the car to warm up, and as he waited, he turned on the tape player. He listened for only a moment, then ejected the tape. He found his Hank Williams tape--Hank, Senior--wedged between the seat cushions. It was odd, he thought, that he played the tape so seldom. Hank Williams was the best.

*

Rolf had almost gone to the Grand Ole Opry once, in '69--long after Hank was dead, but the Opry was the Opry. He'd been drunker than usual that night. It was six months since he had nearly killed himself driving into a tree at the bottom of Gorham Hill, three months since he'd gotten out of the hospital. He was now officially retired from his loading job at the mill.

Although he'd had trouble walking out of the club to his new car, he was having no trouble driving. With automatic transmission, power steering, and power brakes, the car almost drove itself. He drove forty miles an hour up High Street so the car wouldn't have a chance to veer off the straight course he had set it on when he'd turned onto the street.

Mary wasn't there when he walked into the kitchen. He braced himself against the door jamb and looked around the room. The stove was white and shining, empty of pots. The table was also empty and wiped clean, the bowl of plastic roses setting in its exact center instead of on top of the refrigerator where she put it when it was time to eat. There was no food anywhere. He couldn't figure it. The dish drainer was full of dishes, the big skillet balanced on top. Gradually he became aware of the sound of the television.

He took a deep breath and launched himself across the kitchen to the jamb of the doorway leading into the living room. "Where's my supper?"

Mary didn't turn her head. She would ignore him for as long as she could, then bitch at him for being drunk, until he ran into the bathroom in self-defense, hoping he'd puke, which he usually did.

"Where's my supper?" he repeated, louder.

Mary turned away from the TV. "Supper's over." She picked up something she'd been working on, something brightly-colored, and turned back to the TV. "I don't know what you're worried about supper for. You're too damned drunk to eat it."

Rolf slammed off the TV with his open hand, grabbed her wrist and jerked her out of her chair, stumbling backward when she didn't try to resist him. Before he lost his balance, she straightened up and grasped his forearm to steady him.

He followed her out into the kitchen when he heard the refrigerator door open and the clank of the skillet on the burner. He sat at the table. "Them roses," he said.

"What roses?" Mary said, without turning around.

"Them roses. On the table. It's suppertime."

Mary crossed the room and put the bowl of roses on top of the refrigerator. Rolf could hear fat sizzling in the skillet, the slap of meat. Mary laid his place with a napkin, knife, fork, and spoon.

Fat sizzling. Louder, as she turned the meat. Steak. A china plate from the cupboard. Steak. Sizzling on the plate in front of him, medium rare, it looked like. As he picked up his knife and fork, he looked up to see Mary still standing next to him. "I can't eat this." He dropped the knife and fork. "I can't eat this."

Mary didn't move. "Why not? What's the matter with it?"

Rolf stood up and threw the plate against the wall. "I ain't got no teeth!" He'd lost all but six while still in his thirties. "You know I ain't got no fucking teeth!" Mary had her back to him now, headed for the living room. He reached out and grabbed her by the hair, then pounded her head against the wall, two, three, four times, as hard as he could. Again, she didn't try to resist him, but when he let her go, her fist smashed into his nose.

When the pounding in his head had subsided enough for him to see, a few seconds later, Rolf was alone in the kitchen. Alone in the house. Mary's coat and purse were still draped over the stool in the corner.

He didn't know where she could have gone. He took a beer out of the refrigerator and went out on the porch. The car was still in the driveway. He looked up and down both sides of the street. There weren't many streetlights this far up the street, so he began walking down the sidewalk, pausing to peer into the lighted windows of each house that didn't have the curtains drawn. In front of the fourth house, he stumbled and fell. He would have to take the car. After driving around town for ten minutes without seeing her, he figured Mary must have left town, so he might as well just keep going.

By the time he was into the mountains, the six-pack was gone, which was lucky because he needed both hands on the wheel to keep the car straddling the yellow line. Downstate, out of the mountains, he turned on the radio. The announcer said something about Vietnam and a church rummage sale. Then he announced Country Gold. Hear that lonesome whippoorwill . . . He sounds too blue to fly . . . Hank Williams. The midnight train is whining low . . . Rolf's eyes began to blur. I'm so lonesome I could cry . . . Oh, he was lonesome. His wife had punched him

in the nose. What had she done that for, anyway? It wasn't right, it wasn't decent, it was . . . unnatural. It was unnatural for his wife, Mary, to hit him now, after twenty-some years of marriage when she was forty-six years old. In the beginning, when they'd been hot for each other, it would have been all right, but not now. Did you ever see a robin weep . . . Rolf gently blotted his nose with his sleeve. He hoped he hadn't hurt Mary when he hit her tonight. He didn't think so. Once he broke her nose, and when it healed, she didn't look any different. Her nose was just a little thicker; that's all. What changed her looks was having the first kid. When they got married, she was pretty. Two years later, when he went to the hospital to get her after she had the boy, she was ugly. Just like that. She come out of the hospital, and she was ugly.

He began to pass signs for Boston. He'd gone almost two hundred miles since leaving Berlin. Now that he was this far, what was to stop him from driving all the way to Nashville to see some of them boys at the Opry? He'd stay in Nashville and see 'em all, and after that he'd drive to Florida. Then to California.

He needed some sleep first, though. He pulled over, lay down on the front seat, and slept until a state trooper woke him at dawn and sent him on his way. When he took out his wallet to buy hot coffee at a little roadside store, he discovered he had only ten dollars. He paid for the coffee, put a full tank of gas in the car, and drove home.

He would have made it to the Opry if he'd had more money with him.

*

The smell of the mill seeped through the closed windows of the car as Rolf reached the outskirts of Berlin on his way home from his morning on Mount Jasper. He ejected the Hank Williams tape before it ended and placed it in the glove compartment. He wondered if Mary would be at the house when he got there. Although it usually took her two or three weeks to come back, sometimes she came back after only a couple of days.

When he pulled into the driveway, he could tell without getting out of the car that the house was locked and as he'd left it that morning. He sat for a few minutes with the engine idling, then put the car in reverse and drove downtown.

Chris was on her break, sitting on a stool at the end of the counter, drinking coffee and chain-smoking. Rolf sat on the stool, put his arm around her, and squeezed. "How's my girl?"

Chris pushed him away. "I'm not your girl." She called to the girl working closest to the grill, "Fix Rolf his Steakumm, will you?"

Rolf pushed his sleeves up and smiled at Chris without parting his lips. "Wouldn't you like a nice, strong man like me?"

Chris knelt on the stool and leaned over the counter for a napkin and silverware, which she arranged in front of him. "I've already got a man."

"I know," Rolf said, trying to hold her gaze. "But he's not good to you. I'd be good to you."

Face in the Mirror by Chloe Wilson, 2000px by 2000 px, digital



The Friendly Barbershop by Astrid Shaw

A swirled red, white and blue pole held my attention as my father pulled into the cracked asphalt parking lot. We lived in a rural town, untouched by many corporate presences, and this particular local business had been dubbed "The Friendly Barbershop". Seatbelts unclicked, my father was shuffling to gather his wallet while he exchanged a few words with my older brother. I was informed this errand didn't include me, that I was to behave, and that it shouldn't be a long wait. Boys had their own salons, apparently.

Cued to empty our snug one cab truck, we entered all at once, announced by a jangle of bells. There began murmurings of "walk-ins" and "availability". Shortly after, I saw my brother hoist himself into one of the many pedestalled workstations. My father sat himself nearby, right next to the cash register that looked an awful lot like a typewriter to me.

I could have taken a seat beside my father in the row of monotonous metal chairs, but a single, enormous armchair laid empty. I gave my father a look, and greedily claimed such a spot instead. My dad crossed his arms and gave an amused smile of permission, just keen to be able to keep track of my whereabouts. It was positioned far back in the rectangular building, like an end chair at a dinner table. The authoritative positioning of that seat is funny now, what I'd imagined to be a game of finding ways to make the time pass unfolded into my most outlandish fourth grade show and tell.

There was a burst of commotion all of a sudden, a masked individual making himself known with abrupt profanity and orders not to move. Why was it that my first instinct was to stand up? Not only stand up, but seek the nearest phone? I had seen too many heist movies over my mother's shoulder, too many where robberies went bad, and yet I sought outlets for remedy immediately. To everyone's shock, the stranger pulled a gun out from his coat, and pointed it at me. I saw my father jerk forward with instinct.

"I said, don't move."

It seemed my body registered the threat in front of me at that point. I froze in place, hands awkwardly held out a couple of inches by my sides to show I wasn't up to anything. The robber made his way to the cash register, deciding to reposition his gunpoint beside my father's temple, hastily stabbing the fingers of his free hand into the device's keys to gain access to the cash inside. Everything moved simultaneously in an instant and in slow motion in those moments. I never had time to catch gazes with my father or my brother.

Instead, my eyes raked furiously over this individual's form, absorbing any information I could garner. Brown eyes. White skin. Lanky. With a fistful of what I could only imagine now as a petty amount, the gunman fled the scene, exiting the building, headed west. The memories that followed are choppy snapshots of the cordless phone I grabbed right after, the beige flooring, and the sounds of all the patrons with their varied responses. The police's response time was near immediate, black vested men asking for clues, to which I blurted out which direction the male had gone and what I remembered of his appearance. The crime and arrival of police had happened so close to one another that an active pursuit had ensued.

I was given many pats on my nine-year-old back by those present that day, many words of being brave and helpful. The individual was unfortunately not caught that day, but within a week, by the hanging of his own bragging. It was one of the most surreal experiences I'd ever had, to be faced with the threat of loss in the most mundane of places. My dad relayed to my brother and I during the car ride home, what he had thought about doing in those moments and why he decided not to. My brain was still reeling, my emotions still processing, and I could only think to comment my main take away:

"It really shouldn't be called The Friendly Barbershop."

Story of the Different Socks by Claudia Rassinati

This is the story of the many socks.

There were many pairs of socks in the house.

The socks were similar, but the colors were different. With pom poms, striped unique color, red, black, white, orange and blue all together in the drawer.

Each pair was in a small ball.

In the drawer there were many multicolor balls.

Boy, girl, mother, father, baby every person had colorful socks.

Every day the socks were washed in the washing machine. Tall and short, blue and black, pink and orange socks, all together in the machine.

Socks united and divided in the wheel of the machine. Water and soap, water, on the glass of the washing machine. I saw colors, and colors, soap and water.

When the washer cycle was finished, I looked at the socks, red, pink, pom poms, striped, tall, short, but someone was missing from the roll call.

There were pairs of pink, striped, red, blue, black, but one orange sock and one pom pom sock weren't in the machine.

Where did the socks go?

I looked inside the machine, but there were no socks.

I looked again, for the socks, but nothing. They were left alone.

One colored sock and one pom pom were missing their companions.

Where were they?

Two days later, more socks entered the machine to be washed.

Water and soap.....water... soap and water, the wash finished, I opened the door. I saw one pair, two pairs three pairs, four pairs and the fifth did not have a mate, what?

Where is the one sock? I looked inside the machine. No! One sock was gone.

Inside the machine there is a parallel world, where my socks go together.

Inside my drawer there are socks not in pairs, but now they have formed new pairs, orange with green, stripes with pom poms, tall with short.

New companions and multicolored.

I'm looking at the new pairings, they go well together because in the end diversity helps us see the world from a different perspective.

Self Portrait by Quinton May, 18 in x 24 in, on drawing paper



Kinship by Carla Cherry

Kinship

Like many of us, the raven
steals,
has a taste
for dead flesh,
and like us,
it sings,
it plays,
it trades.

The caw,
the blackness of its body.
Some of us
look skyward,
wonder what,
or who,
we may lose,
ask if our own time may be up
as ravens soar above our heads,
call out to one another.

Not me.

Human names
for a group of ravens—
Unkindness.
Rave.
Treachery.
Conspiracy.

Not me.

I use flock,
a prettier word
for birds as
black and beautiful

as me,
who never forget a face
or a grudge.

Untitled by Irina Tall Novikova, ink, gouache & gel pen, 30x40 cm
2023



Shadows of Love by Huina Zheng

Yu, quiet and reflective, curled up on the couch, her eyes following the familiar scenes of “In the Mood for Love” with a soft smile. Beside her, Ming’s laughter filled the room, his eyes sparkling with each romantic twist of their favorite movie. In the shared warmth of their embrace, the cold evening outside seemed worlds away.

The sudden knock at the door shattered their peaceful bubble. The unmistakable voice of Yu’s mother sent her heart into a frenetic dance, as though it might leap out of her chest. Swallowing hard to steady herself, she called out, “Just a moment, Dad, Mom. I’m on my way.”

Turning to Ming, she whispered, “Quick, hide in the bedroom closet!” She nudged Ming toward the bedroom. Ming said, “But why am I hiding?”

That’s when it struck Yu – they were married, with her parents’ blessing. The absurdity of the situation struck them, and they both erupted into a fit of laughter.

*

Yu and Ming’s story commenced in 7th grade. Their homeroom teacher arranged seating based on monthly exam rankings. Given that Yu and Ming consistently ranked first and second in their class, they frequently found themselves sitting side by side.

Yu was a slender girl. Her eyes, deep pools of thought, hid behind a pair of oval glasses. She had a habit of pushing those glasses back up her nose when deep in thought. Yu had a meticulous way of tying her hair into a neat bun, ensuring not a strand was out of place. Mathematics was her true passion. While her classmates engaged in lively chatter during recess, she hunched over her math problems, pencil scribbling furiously, lost in the intricate world of numbers. The occasional frown or raised eyebrow was her only outward sign of emotion during these mathematical battles.

Ming, in stark contrast, was a burst of sunshine on even the gloomiest of days. He was of average height with an athletic build. Ming’s dark eyes sparkled with mirth, his warm smile revealing a pair of charming, slightly crooked canine teeth. He had a head of raven-black hair. The girls in his class often commented on his tousled hair, finding it endearing.

One day, while Yu was immersed in a challenging geometry problem, Ming leaned over and asked, “Can you help me figure out this geometry puzzle?” Yu nodded, her explanation

flowing effortlessly. Ming's response was a radiant, warm smile, his cute canines peeking through.

Ming's words lingered in the air, "Your explanation is so much clearer than the math teacher's. Can I ask for your help again sometime?" Yu felt a blush creeping onto her cheeks and nodded.

From that day forward, their recesses were filled with discussions on various problem-solving methods in mathematics or critiquing each other's compositions. Their camaraderie deepened as they studied together.

One night, as Ming called Yu's landline, an era when mobile phones were a rarity, Yu's mother picked up the phone. Her eyebrows furrowed upon hearing a boy's voice, and she said, "Please hold for a moment."

When Yu took the receiver, her mother's expression was tight, as if she were handing her a live grenade. Once the call ended, Yu pivoted to find her mother's gaze drilling into her.

"Who was that on the phone, and why was he calling you?"

"Just a classmate. He asked about a math problem, and I hung up after explaining it," Yu said, her voice quivering.

"You're entering puberty, and it's only natural to be curious about boys. But remember, puppy love can be a detriment to your studies. Countless examples prove that most students who delve into romantic affairs see their grades plummet. Focus on your studies."

"But, Mom, he's just a classmate."

"He's a boy," her mother's voice sharp.

Yu lowered her gaze, fingers twisting the hem of her pajamas. She contemplated asking Ming not to call her, fearing her mother's wrath. However, the sight of Ming's innocent smile the following day gave her pause.

Ming called again, but Yu's mother told him that Yu needed to concentrate on her studies. Yu, tears welling up, overheard the conversation from her room.

On the following school day, Ming acted as if nothing had transpired. Yu struggled to find the courage to apologize to him. Yet, they continued to discuss academic matters between classes, as though nothing had changed.

*

Following the midterms, Yu's mother attended a parent-teacher meeting. As students engaged in outdoor activities, parents sat in their children's seats.

Upon returning to the classroom, Yu overheard her mother conversing with the homeroom teacher, Teacher Chen.

"Teacher Chen, I just found out that Yu's desk mate is a boy. No wonder her grades dropped so significantly in the midterms. Please change her seat," her mother said.

"I arrange seats based on the students' most recent rankings, which I'll do tomorrow."

"No, from now on, Yu can only sit beside a girl."

The whispers of her classmates, like a gentle undercurrent, grew louder as they spread the news. Yu's heart was pounding, beads of sweat forming on her nose, as she grappled with her inner turmoil. She longed to speak up, to defend her connection with Ming, but fear held her captive, and she dared not meet his eyes, dreading the disappointment she might encounter.

Upon returning home, her mother berated her, exclaiming, "Why didn't you tell me your desk mate was a boy? Is it the same boy who called you before? Is that why your grades suffered? How shameless can you be! I've told you countless times to steer clear of love. Why don't you listen? I'm utterly embarrassed."

Tears welled up in Yu's eyes as she said, "Mom, we're just classmates. I told you yesterday I filled out the wrong exam paper, and you trusted me."

Her mother slapped her. "You're a liar. Break up with him immediately and never talk to that boy again! Do you hear me?"

In a daze of shame, Yu nodded in silence.

*

The following day, during the morning reading, Teacher Chen approached Yu. "Please come with me."

Baffled, Yu followed Teacher Chen into the hallway away from the classroom.

"Your mother called me early this morning," Teacher Chen said.

"Teacher Chen, I explained to her last night that Ming and I are just classmates."

Teacher Chen smiled. "That's not the issue. Your mother woke up and found you weren't at home. She worried you had run away due to last night's confrontation. She noticed your school bag was also missing from your room, so she called me to check if you were at school."

Yu, looking down, mumbled, "We have an English quiz today, and I came early to study the vocabulary."

"Your mother shared her concerns about what happened last night and regretted losing her temper and hitting you. She genuinely cares about you. It's a common trait of parents. I explained to her that teenagers often develop an interest in the opposite sex. However, with guidance from parents and teachers, students can avoid getting embroiled in puppy love. Becoming interested in boys will only affect your studies and bring harm. Focus on your academics, aim for a good high school, and eventually a reputable university."

Teacher Chen's words were gentle and convincing. She didn't blame Yu, but Yu's embarrassment left her at a loss.

"Your mother is right," Teacher Chen continued. "I'll continue seating students based on their academic rankings, but from now on, boys and girls will sit separately. I'll announce this in our class meeting later this week and reiterate the school's prohibition on student romantic entanglements." With that, Teacher Chen patted Yu on the shoulder and left.

For the next two years, Yu and Ming never spoke again. Though they were accepted into the same high school, they attended different classes. When they crossed paths in the school corridors or on the playground, Yu averted her gaze and walked past Ming.

Throughout her secondary school years, Yu refrained from befriending boys out of fear of triggering her mother's wrath. Her self-esteem had become a formidable barrier, and she could no longer tolerate such humiliation.

*

While college was the breeding ground for young love, free from parental oversight, Yu remained immune. Even at university, the shame associated with love weighed heavily on her.

Yu and Ming crossed paths once more during a high school alumni reunion in the summer of their sophomore year.

"How have you been?" Ming approached Yu, his face adorned with that same warm smile.

"Fine. How about you?" Yu sounded restrained, a mask of polite detachment.

Upon learning that they were both attending universities in Guangzhou, Ming took the initiative. "Can I have your phone number?" His voice, though composed, betrayed the nervousness.

Yu's eyes searched Ming's. Memories of their shared past and the unspoken feelings that had gone dormant resurfaced. At last, she nodded. The simple exchange of phone numbers felt like a fragile bridge spanning the chasm that separated them.

Ming began to text Yu regularly, sharing details of their daily lives. He even visited her twice. Slowly, their relationship rekindled.

Yu couldn't help but wonder how her mother would react if she discovered her relationship. During her weekly phone calls, her mother consistently pushed her to study hard and prepare for the graduate entrance examination. She couldn't bring herself to utter the word "love" or admit that she was in a stable relationship. The shame associated with the mere concept of love was overwhelming, and she dreaded her mother's harsh judgment.

To keep her relationship hidden, Yu altered Ming's name in her phone, disguising it as a girl's name to avoid arousing suspicion. At home, she meticulously deleted all text messages exchanged with Ming. Whenever she went out with him, she lied to her mother, stating she was meeting a girlfriend.

Over the course of her graduate studies, her mother began urging her to find a boyfriend. Each time they spoke, her mother would emphasize, “It’s difficult for girls to find a partner after the age of 25. It becomes even harder at 27 or 28. After turning 30, you may only be able to marry a divorced man.”

“Mom, don’t worry about me.” Yu still couldn’t bring herself to disclose her enduring relationship.

The year following her graduation from graduate school, Yu informed her parents of her intention to marry Ming. That was the first time her parents learned that the daughter they had been worried about, with respect to finding a boyfriend, had been in a committed relationship.

“Your father and I don’t know him well. What if he’s unreliable? We should take more time to assess his character.” Her mother’s serious expression suggested she had long forgotten Ming’s seventh-grade status as Yu’s desk mate.

“We’ve already registered our marriage,” Yu said.

“Do you really like him that much?” Her mother’s voice raised.

Yu still couldn’t bring herself to say it, to admit that she loved a man. She merely nodded.

Thankfully, after their marriage, Ming and Yu’s parents grew close, and Yu’s parents developed a fondness for Ming.

Despite having found love and getting married, Yu continued to find it challenging to discuss her emotions. When her friends chatted about their romantic escapades, she’d offer a tight-lipped smile, concealing the embarrassment she felt.

*

As Ming’s laughter filled the room, a stark reminder of their journey, Yu inhaled deeply. Holding Ming’s hand, she summoned the courage to head to the door and welcome her parents. For the first time, she exhibited such an intimate gesture in front of her parents.

Approaching her 30th birthday, Yu stood at the threshold of a new chapter in her life. Her perception of love had gradually transformed, shaped by years of struggle, understanding, and

Ming's unwavering presence. The remnants of old shame still lingered, but she felt them slowly fading, like the morning mist dissolving under the sun's warmth.

Yu realized that love was not a burden of shame but a source of enrichment and strength. The time spent with Ming had taught her the true value of love. Each day, the weight of her past embarrassment lessened, becoming a distant memory. She began to envision a future where love was not a source of embarrassment but a pillar of strength and joy.

In that moment, standing beside Ming, ready to face her parents, Yu embraced her feelings fully. She allowed herself to feel the freedom from the shame that had constrained her for so long. She understood now that love, in its truest form, was not just about being with someone, but about being true to oneself.

As she opened the door, Yu smiled. This was more than just a physical threshold; it was the passage into a life where she could love openly and without fear. A life where Yu and Ming could be together, not just in secret, but in the full light of day.

A Portrait of Hisoka Marow by Elissia/Shaneka Fisch, 11 X 14, graphite on bristol board



A Portrait Of Touya Todoroki (Dabi) by Elissia/Shaneka Fisch, 11 X 14, graphite on bristol board



Dromedary by Yi-Wen Huang

You are just a little dromedary camel, but you gave me so much hilarious memories
I saw you in the pet thrift store with more hand-made decorations on your hump
—different from the one I brought back from Tangier traditional market
where The Bourne Ultimatum and James Bond's The Living Daylights were shot

The walk guru gave us a tour around the old town
I was so sick that day that I could not speak
He thought I was mad at him whose Taiwanese wife I met on a plane in my dream I
remembered

Two vendors chased you to sell you a t-shirt, a red hat, and this small wooden naked caramel
camel without any decorations on it
It looked like it wasn't finished

You bought hamsas from the vendor
I pushed you with my elbow walking behind you, and it shocked the vendor
after we bumped into the same vendor who wanted you to buy the camel again
on the steps in the small winding alley in this old town facing the Mediterranean Sea
with the cruise to Almeria Spain where the most beautiful beaches in Europe were located with
white fish with black dots

Ode to Ahmaud Arbery by DeShane Short

The cold, dark, twisted clouds cover the sun.
Are the hot bullets going to shoot you?
Ahmaud and I want to go for a run.

Should certain civilians possess a gun?
Ahmaud Arbery, people scared to know who:
The cold, dark, twisted clouds cover the sun.

His big tainted world just close and begun,
praying is what we all can only do.
Ahmaud and I want to go for a run.

Those racist townies know what they have done.
You were young black, gifted, and so so true,
the cold, dark, twisted clouds cover the sun.

Know you can look at me and everyone.
As the rain falls, there's no time to be blue.
Ahmaud and I want to go for a run.

Submitting is the curse not yet been won,
there is still more activism to do.
The cold, dark, twisted clouds cover the sun.
Ahmaud and I want to go for a run.

An Ideal Life by John Tavares

I was born and raised on a reserve in Northwestern Ontario, twelve years after these events helped shape my life and led me to pursue a career in social work, after I was admitted to the University of Manitoba. In 1999, though, Prince was my favorite music, and I played his hit singles, including “1999,” obsessively and listened to his compact disc on my Discman on the reserve as I walked to school. I had never travelled to a city, nor had I visited a metropolis, especially a regional capital that impressed me with its flatness, a city surrounded by the vastness of the prairies and bisected by the broad city streets and boulevards of Main Street and Portage Avenue. Despite the fact I considered myself an adventurer, I was only a veteran of the outdoors in the Canadian Shield. I had simply never visited a metropolis that looked built on the flattest place on earth, where the sky was huge, looming overhead with a bright clear azure blue. I was from a First Nations community accessible only by bush plane and a winter ice road, in Northwestern Ontario, where the terrain was rugged and constantly changing, hilly, rocky, with swamps, muskeg, lakes, rivers, creeks, bogs, and millions of jack pines and black spruce trees—as far as the human eye, and even the pilots in bush planes, jet airliners, and space satellites, could see.

In Winnipeg, in the flat prairie suburb of Transcona, the streets and neighborhoods, straight and orderly, were unlike anything I had ever seen in my ten plus years on earth. My parents in my home reservation allowed me to visit my uncle and aunt, to whom I was related on both sides, my mother’s and father’s side, biologically. My uncle and aunt wanted me to stay with them in Winnipeg during the school year and attend Pierre Elliot Trudeau school; so, I could attend the French immersion school and thoroughly learn French. I would become trilingual, in Winnipeg.

My uncle, who worked as an automotive mechanic at a car dealership on Regent Avenue, was my mother’s brother. Her uncle also had been born and raised on the reserve in a remote part of Northwestern Ontario. My father’s sister, my aunt, who worked as a social worker at an Indigenous social services organization in the inner city, was also born and raised on my reserve. But my aunt and uncle had no children of their own, for deeply personal reasons, which both my father and mother did not wish to discuss, as I probed and pried with my deeply inquisitive mind. For that reason, my father said, my uncle and aunt had plenty of money; they had no children to look after and towards which they needed to devote time, energy, resources. Yet, when I asked, my father again accused me of possessing a deeply inquisitive mind that would send me straight into the arms of trouble with a capital T. Again, I laughed and heckled my father. In my mind, my uncle and aunt lived in the land of milk and honey, but they chose plain vanilla lives.

I loved the takeout stands, fast food restaurants, and food trucks at the intersections in suburban Transcona where my aunt and uncle lived. From the frozen dairy stand, I could buy soft ice cream cones, which went down extremely well in the summer. Most of all, I loved the 24-7 convenience stores, open 24 hours a day, with their bewildering selection of snacks, and drinks, of which my favorite by far was the Slushies.

Meanwhile, my uncle and aunt led steady, predictable, and boring lives. I loved them, but I could barely tolerate their snug, stodgy, boring lifestyle. My uncle and aunt went to bed far too early for me; I wanted to stay up late at night, especially during the summer, to visit the 24-7 and watch the many television shows and dramas available on cable television, none of which I could watch on my reserve.

I also could not stand certain aspects of their comfortable, strait-laced lives off the reserve; they went to bed so early. Still, I was looking forward to another day at the suburban public library and the swimming pool. I was still thirsty from all the physical activity of the evening, which included allowing the dogs off their leashes and encouraging them to run loose and chase them around the park.

Then all I could think: I was still thirsty and hungry. My aunt didn't want me to eat or drink too much because diabetes ran in the family. Still, all I could think of was a blueberry carbonated slushie. So, I slipped out of the house in the middle of the prairie city night.

Soon I found myself walking behind a tall, well-built man. A Molotov cocktail, though, was the last thing I expected someone to carry, even on a suburban city street, in Transcona, on a fair summer night. I did a double take, but I realized he was indeed brandishing in his large leathery hand a Molotov cocktail. Even though I was twelve years old, and lived on a reservation in Northwestern Ontario, I had read enough and watched enough movies and documentaries on satellite television on the reservation to recognize a Molotov cocktail. If not for that improvised weapon of urban warfare, the tall blondish man with wavy blonde hair going white and grey could have been simply walking down the street on his way to the street corner 24-7 for possibly not a Slushie, but a coffee or an energy drink or spicy chicken wings. I also visited the 24-7 convenience store for a comic book or novel, although in my case, the clerk gave me the Stephen King novels he read during his graveyard shifts in the store when he finished them.

I had seen the house from which he emerged. I thought I recognized his silhouette as that of a neighbor, who lived close by my uncle and aunt. Then, as he neared the 24-7 at the intersection, he turned and entered the side door of a neighboring house. I shrugged; even for a curious,

inquisitive person like me it was really none of my business. I bought a Slushie, using all the quarters, dimes, nickels, I earned from picking up empties, liquor bottles, beer cans, and refunding these recyclables I picked up in the park and in back alley recycle bins around the block. Then I spotted the man exiting the side door of the house, but I thought nothing of him because I was enroute to my favorite 24-7.

Then I left the 24-7 store with my super-size Slushie, which felt like Nirvana in my warm hands. I sipped the frosty drink on a warm humid summer night, ecstatic. Then, as I continued to walk down the street, I noticed the house the man entered appeared on fire. Flames leaped and danced behind the windows, and then smoke emerged from a window left open because of the hot, humid night. The windows broke spontaneously from the heat and pressure and the flames licked the outside of the building and climbed higher. I set my Slushie down on the sidewalk outside the front doorsteps; I did not want to ruin my liquid gold.

“Fire!” I shouted. “Everybody get out!” I stormed into the house and screamed, “Get out! The house is on fire.” I went upstairs to the bedrooms instinctively and helped two sleepy, drowsy children in pajamas to the sidewalk. I returned to the burning house, from which flames leaped and danced through broken windows. I headed through thick smoke and flames in the kitchen and living room to the upstairs and the makeshift bedrooms. I found a woman in the upstairs bedroom with a child sleeping in a small cot at the end of the room. I woke the child and carried him to the sidewalk.

With the strength and endurance I gained from hunting, fishing, and trapping with my parents and relatives on the reserve, I dragged the woman outside as well. The woman shuffled, seemed to be sleep-walking, like a zombie, barely coherent. I plunged back into the smokey, burning house, shouting for occupants to leave because of a fire. I checked all the rooms to make certain there was nobody left behind. The fire was growing larger, consuming the sturdily constructed two-story house with huge orange flames, and white smoke that turned grey and black intermittently.

I ordered the children to the sidewalk at the other side of the street. Amazed fire department rescue vehicles had not arrived yet, I also wondered if anyone called emergency services yet. I went back upstairs when the children asked about their oldest sister and found a teenager, but I found her difficult to arouse, and I wondered if she was on drugs or intoxicated, but I learned later she was suffering the effects of smoke inhalation. Finally, I aroused her, but she seemed barely conscious and sentient. I helped the tall, slender woman to a safe spot across the street, near the newspaper boxes, the pay telephone, the fire hydrant, and the post office boxes. Then I used the pay telephone to call the fire department, using the emergency number, despite an

uncooperative operator, but I refused to give any information about myself, saying I could not understand why they needed my name and phone number; a house was on fire at Regent and Lakota.

I gave the address of the house on fire again and hung up the telephone. Then I told the kids to stay where they were until the firefighters or paramedics arrived. The woman lay comatose on the sidewalk, but, when I checked and double checked, she had a pulse and appeared to be breathing properly. Then I realized I needed to get the hell out of there before my uncle and aunt discovered I was making late night excursions to the 24-7. If my guardians discovered my late-night larks and antics, they would send me back to Northwestern Ontario on the next commuter airline flight to Sioux Lookout and then on a connecting bush plane flight straight north across the Canadian Shield and tundra to my First Nation.

As I retreated, though, I hesitated and paused when I noticed the man watching the fire from the house a few houses down the street from my uncle and aunt's house. I returned to the other side of the street. The tall, broad-shouldered man had been drinking more than a can of beer, or else he was so pleased and content with his destructive efforts his act of arson left him intoxicated. I followed him back down the street and watched him enter the small bungalow he rented through the front door. He turned off a porch floodlight, a hallway light, and he muted a living room until there remained only dim lighting and darkness inside the house.

I decided I was not going to allow the house fire and psycho beer drinker ruin the night and my consumption of the Slushie. I sat in the backyard, in the swing in the gazebo, reading my paperback, Stephen King's *Carrie*, until I tasted and sipped the last drop of the delicious drink.

Out of the corner of my eye, I eyed the pile of rocks, which I collected on the sandy shorelines of Grand Beach. I painted these smooth rocks I diligently collected on that amazing beach with oil paints and permanent markers. Disappointed with the clutter in my bedroom, my uncle had piled her blank rocks beside the composter and recycle bins outside the garage. I was thinking about my colored collection of permanent markers I bought from the stationary section of the 24-7 convenience store.

In the morning, over Bannock and pemmican, leftover from the pow wow, on my reserve, I asked my uncle about the tall, formidable man who wore cowboy boots and a cowboy hat, with worn out, torn blue jeans, who lived several doors down. He stomped his cowboy boot at a neighbor's dog, I said, which was a lie, but I needed some excuse to make my inquiries about the large, strange man.

“Oh,” my uncle said, “that’s Gustavus. You don’t want to mess with him, or he will mess you up.”

“What business would he have with a house further down the street, near the 24-7?”

I realized it wasn’t the first time I saw him visit the house, as I sallied forth on my excursions for Slushies, chewing gum, and reading material from 24-7, when I went to visit the local branch of the public library, or the outdoor swimming pool. I overheard him arguing with the woman.

“That’s Gustavus arguing with his ex. She lives in the house they rented, and when she kicked him out, after the social workers and a judge said she could do this, he just rented a house further down the street.”

“So, he could torment her further?”

“Yes. You’re a smart girl. Now no more questions about Gustavus.”

“What does he do?”

“Torment his wife, or his ex. They were never married, but she is looking after all his children. I hope he pays child support because he makes good money.”

“Why isn’t he in jail?”

“Because he’s a freight train engineer. I hear he does his job well, and he can afford good family law lawyers. Now no more questions about Gustavus.”

“So, he works at the rails yards just down the street?”

“Transcona Rail Yards is where he boards the train. He’s a Winnipeg cowboy: he drives the freight trains to the hub of the north and back. I wouldn’t mess with him, even if his badness needs someone good to straighten him out.” My uncle glanced at the psoriasis starting to form on his arm again.

I thought my uncle’s statements were curious. He claimed he didn’t know, but I intuited he did indeed know. “So, he can walk to work?”

"Yeah, but I told you before: everybody drives in Winnipeg, even the people on welfare, or the homeless, drive."

"And they live in their cars?"

"Yes. Now no more questions about Gustavus."

That night I took out a red Sharpie marker pen and wrote a warning on one of the flat rocks, which I was using as a painter's canvas, upon which I already painted a sturgeon skeleton. I found the rock while combing the long sandy beach at Grand Beach for arrowheads and spear points, and ancient artifacts, indigenous relics, after my uncle and aunt drove me north of the city for a visit to the vast freshwater beach on Lake Winnipeg in the provincial park.

"I know what you did last night," I delicately inscribed with my Sharpie.

Then I snuck out of my uncle and aunt's house, crept through the backyard, and skulked down the back alley until I turned onto Lakota Street where it met Regent Avenue. I went to the 24-7 store, bought my Slushie, and then walked to Gustavus' rental house.

As I passed the front yard of Gustavus' house, I threw the rock at the picture window and the large glass pane smashed as the flat oval rock crashed into his living room. I remained calm, fearing that to run was to give myself away. Then I strolled along the sidewalk to my uncle and aunt's house and went into the backyard gazebo. I finished sipping the Slushie in the light of the lantern as I read Stephen King's *Carrie*.

(Meanwhile, I started to realize I was having an inappropriate relationship with the clerk at the 24-7. I visited him each evening and night at the convenience store at the corner of Lakota and Regent. I talked loudly with the store clerk about our favorite horror fiction and movies, so customers glanced at us in annoyance, and the Stephen King novels we considered the most suspenseful, compelling, and engaging. Sometimes, when there were few customers, and he didn't expect a visit from his manager, he would also offer me free Slushies. Either way, each evening, or late night, when I visited the 24-7, he offered me a new used Stephen King novel, from his personal library. The clerk would give me the novel to keep forever, and I still have them in my personal library.)

Then, during the day, I went to the city parks and recreation swimming pool. I read the Stephen King novel while I wore my two-piece swimsuit, which left my uncle shocked and my aunt aghast, and sunglasses with red heart-shaped frames. I bought the swimsuit and sunglasses at a

thrift store in the Exchange District downtown, while I went hunting for used and secondhand books. I sunbathed on the cement pool deck, and then I swam laps in the pool, or played games, including board games and cards, with the neighborhood kids. I also went to the library, where I bought more paperback books from the book sale shelves, for pocket change, which I also used as a cover story when my uncle asked me where I obtained the well-thumbed Stephen King novels. I even cased Gustavus's house, when I saw him drive to the railyards down the street.

Later, I even entered Gustavus' house through an unlocked door. I scrutinized the crude repairs he had done with plywood, masking tape, and duct tape. I helped myself to a few twenty-dollar bills for comic books and novels and Slushies from his basement office desk and thoroughly checked the premises. I even read his mail, his bills, and pay stubs, and thumbed through his girlie magazines and porn.

The next night I wrote "Turn Yourself In!" on a rock, upon which I already painted a bison. With the rock clenched firmly in my hand, I took my walk down Lakota Street. As I passed by Gustavus' window, I heard him arguing with his ex on the telephone.

"Who did you send to smash my window?" Gustavus shouted. "What the heck is this? Psychological warfare?"

Psychological warfare, I muttered, thinking I loved the term. I felt delighted with what I overheard, the torment and anger I triggered in Gorgeous Gustavus. I continued to the 24-7 and bought my Slushie with a handful of pocket change. I finished the Slushies in the backyard gazebo by the light of the camping lantern, as I started to read Stephen King's *The Shining*, which the night clerk gave me. As I read the novel and sipped the Slushie contentedly, I saw Gustavus' bedroom light was still lit.

After I read a chapter, I walked to his rental house, and threw the rock into his bedroom window. Then, excited by the police cruiser approaching from the intersection, I ran back into my uncle and aunt's house. Later, my uncle asked me about the noise in the house that night. He said he hoped I was not slipping off to the 24-7 at night. I coughed and hacked and for the first time during the trip I was silent.

The following night, though, Gustavus was waiting for me. "The police are ready to arrest you," I wrote in red Sharpie on a smooth rock I hid in my hoodie pouches before I skulked out of my aunt and uncle's house.

When I returned with my Slushie and weapon, I threw the rock into the bathroom windows. Gustavus slouched in his Mustang, watching what he construed as vandalism and destructive shenanigans, while I drank from a can of beer in the dark driver's seat, parked across the street. He sped in his car after me, but I fled through a neighboring house yard to the back alley. He resumed his chase on foot, so I was forced to sprint and ditch my Slushie, to my curses and lingering regret.

Gustavus continued to chase me along the boulevard of the avenue until I could run no further. So, I huddled in the pay telephone at the intersection with Regent Avenue and called 911. With my face concealed by my hoodie, I informed the dispatcher a deranged man in a Mustang chased after me. I dictated the license plate number of the perpetrators' car as if I was a police commander and was in control of the situation, even though I felt afraid.

Then I bought another Slushie. I took a long and circuitous walk home, sipping through a thick tall red straw my Slushie as I strolled the suburban street on the long straight sidewalk. I was disappointed when I bought another Slushie and finished it in the gazebo and saw there was no police vehicle in Gustavus' driveway or on the road. The police had let me down and disappointed me again.

The following evening, I took my walk and bought another Slushie. Then I went to the telephone booth and called the police on the payphone. I called the police headquarters. Without once giving my name, I spoke and argued with several officers, laying out my evidence and outlining the prosecutorial case for arson, having watched, and read enough law and crime books and movies. Still, one police officer threatened to have me arrested for harassment; another police officer threatened to have me arrested for mischief. The police did not believe me, when I called them from the pay telephone, at the intersection of Lakota and Regent Avenue, in the middle of a Winnipeg summer night. I spoke into the receiver about the information I possessed about the violent incidents involving Gustavus I personally witnessed.

The next night I threw a rock at his window. This time I rode a bicycle my aunt insisted I use. Driving his sports car recklessly, Gustavus chased after me as I sped away on my bicycle. As Gustavus pursued me in his Mustang, I drove through the intersection at Regent and Lakota on a red light. A vintage car, a fifties Thunderbird in mint condition, cruising the Winnipeg city streets on a Saturday night, barely missed striking me, in a head-on collision, but Gustavus was not so lucky.

He was struck by a city transit bus, the last bus, empty of passengers, speeding on its last run through the west end of Winnipeg for the evening. The collision between the bus and Gustavus

created the disturbance of smashing glass and crumpled metal and a noise like the boom of a bomb. I surveyed the scene at the intersection near the 24-7 convenience store and bought a Slushie. I savored the luxurious sight of the wreckage as the fire fighter struggled to extract the broken body of Gustavus from the mangled wreckage of the Mustang sports car, coupled with the Winnipeg city transit bus.

The driver of the wrecked city bus was uninjured, unhurt. Astonished, the driver stood alongside her empty city transit bus and viewed in stunned amazement and horror: Gustavus trapped in the wreckage of the sports car, whose crushed metal, crumpled front end and fenders, and smashed windshields merged and coupled with the front end of the solid and steadfast front end of the city bus. The paramedics and fire fighters extracted a bloodied, unconscious, and gory Gustavus from the car wreckage. When the bloodied, injured form of Gustavus was finally free from the twisted metal and shattered glass, they laid him on a gurney gingerly and sped to the hospital.

I was delighted with the mayhem and chaos of the accident and felt pleased as punch, believing I caused the accident. After all, Gustavus was an injured perpetrator. I enjoyed and savored my Slushies and as I cherished the punishment I had wrought on my unsuspecting prey.

The following morning my uncle told me Gustavus was seriously injured in an automotive accident on Regent Avenue. He was also under the influence of alcohol and marijuana and was arrested for impaired driving and arson. Although Gustavus was also seriously injured from the injuries when his sports car was struck by the fast-moving city bus, he was expected to survive.

When I walked by his place, I was delighted to see the house was surrounded by yellow crime scene tape with a police department forensics vehicle in the driveway and cruisers parked around the yard. I went to the 24-7, bought a Slushie, and went to the phone booth. I pleaded with my parents to allow me to stay in Winnipeg to go to school, French immersion school. Hadn't they already said they also wanted me to be proficient in French, aside from Oji-Cree and English, to help me find good jobs, say, in the federal or provincial government, or for a big corporation, or in the band office or band council, after I graduated?

Also, in Winnipeg I could go to the pool, the library, the mall, and obtain used novels from secondhand bookstores. I was disappointed and heartbroken, though, when I discovered the seventeen-year-old night clerk, whom I was confident had a crush on me and gave me his Stephen King novels when he finished reading them, was fired from his position. The owner

and manager of that 24-7 discovered he lied about his age to get the graveyard shift job, and he wasn't a legal adult.

"And the 24-7," my mother warned me during the long-distance telephone call. "Your uncle told me about your late-night adventures. Next time, when you sneak out of the house in the middle of the night without permission, don't leave your empty Slushie containers where your uncle can find them."

Later, my uncle and aunt again discussed my prospects of living in Winnipeg and my future and my wishes and desires for an ideal life. When I sounded determined to live and stay in Winnipeg, my uncle insisted I argue my case during my regular weekend long-distance calls to my parents on the reserve. I pleaded with my parents to allow me to stay in the city. My parents back on the reserve agreed they would think about it, but they told me they were worried about the hard drugs, the illicit substances, the drinking, the street gangs, in Winnipeg, and they were concerned about me losing my culture.

"I'll just become an urban Indian, or, since its Transcona, a suburban Indian."

"That's not funny."

Mindful they were struggling to provide a good, wholesome home for my six siblings in a crowded house, mindful of the rundown house they lived in on the rez, and how they could not afford or find a larger one or get the band's help to get a larger one, they said they would think about letting me stay in Winnipeg and attend school in Transcona. Their belief the city and its environment and culture might satiate my appetite for adventure, books, and learning also worked in my favor.

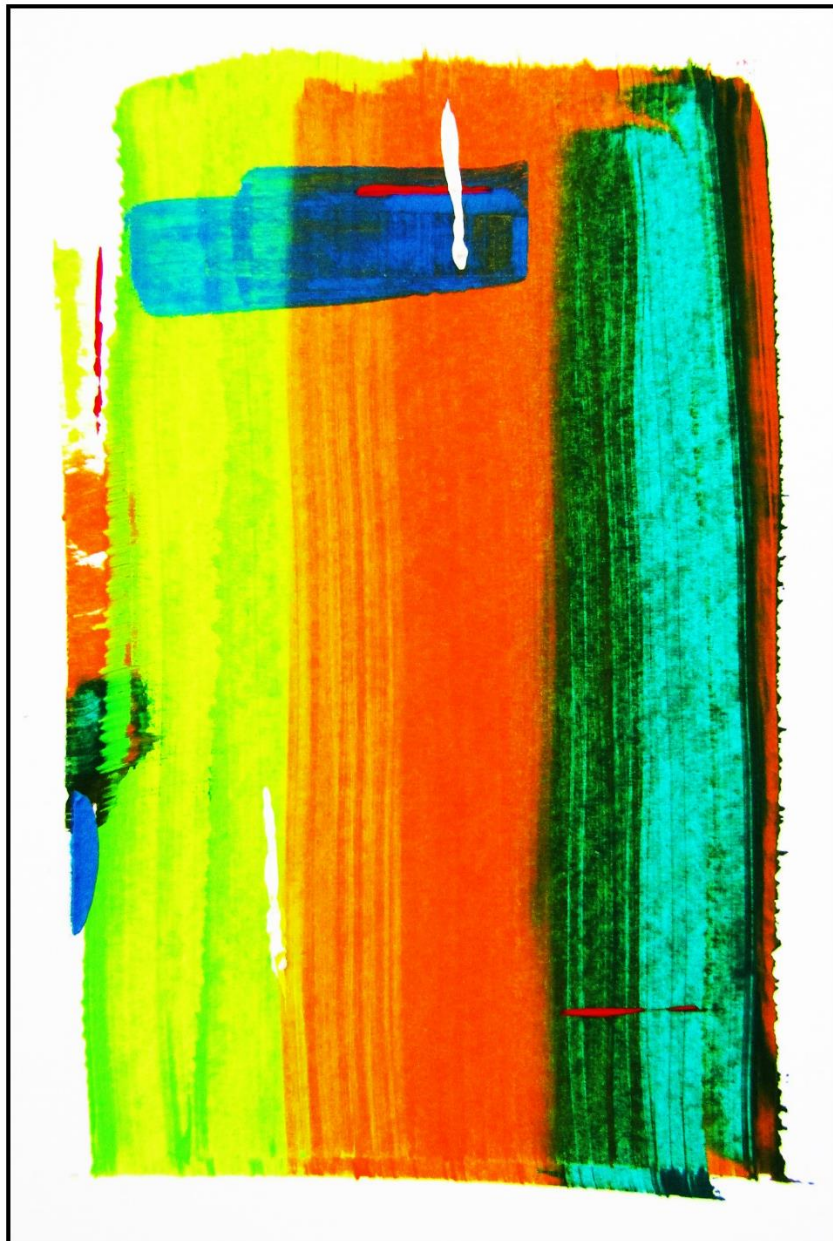
Later in the week, on a sweltering summer night in August, towards the end of my stay, my uncle came to me where I hid in the gazebo late at night, finishing the Slushie I got from the 24-7 and a Stephen King novel the night clerk gave me. (Later, the night clerk was rehired when he turned the age of majority.) My uncle was smiling, when he normally bore a stern expression; he had caught me red-handed - out late without his or my aunt's permission. Anyway, my uncle said my mother and father on the rez in northwestern Ontario decided to allow me to stay with them as guardians in Winnipeg. My uncle and aunt would have me transferred to the Pierre Elliot Trudeau School so I could attend the French immersion school and become fluently trilingual after the school paperwork from the residence school arrived.

My uncle adamantly insisted I curb my urban explorations and engage in no more late night and 24-7 adventures, or he would send me back to the rez. Looking back these many years later, a life span for a few friends and relatives with short longevities, I realized that original summer stay in Winnipeg built the base for me to eventually attend the University of Manitoba, the Faculty of Social Work, where I acquired my bachelor's degree. I became a registered and licensed school worker, who conducted research on trauma and former students at residential schools for her master's degree. Having acquired enough experience in real life, I had to admit I no longer had an appetite for drama, in real life, or on Netflix; I no longer enjoy Stephen King novels, horror fiction, crime movies and serials, or appreciate true crime books and documentaries. I still have a weakness for Slushies in which I indulge only on the hottest summer days.

Cardboard Shoes by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, cardboard, 15in x 5in x 9in



Guarantor by Michael Moreth, gouache on paper, 4-1/2 x 6



A Trip to North Carolina by Rakhima Imanaliyeva

The smile of a woman is an enigma because it keeps secrets hidden far away from anyone. It is a banner, which she holds firmly throughout her life to win the life battle. When I saw Stacy for the first time, she seemed to be an ordinary woman. She was middle-height, slender, with big hazel eyes and brown hair loose up to her shoulders. She wore a brown skirt and jacket and, what I noticed at once, there were bags under her eyes. She did not do any make-up to conceal them and was natural in her manners and conduct. Quick in gestures, she spoke quite distinctly and intelligibly in English, which was a pleasure for my foreign ear. Her smile did not resemble the wide American smile, it was quite natural and friendly, and she was hospitable. She was a professor at the local University and headed the International Relationship Department. That was the main reason why she met me at the airport. The airport was pretty far from the city, so I noticed with approval that she arrived in a big business-like car, a jeep. She invited me inside and so we went.

We were on a highway, on a lane where the cars moved with the highest speed. Fields, groves, and oncoming cars streak off swiftly so that I even could not rest my eye on anything. The pictures changed at a terrible speed, and soon I felt not well. I asked to stop and got out of the car so that I could have a breath of fresh air and a short rest.

"You are a smart driver," I said.

"It's my habit. I don't like speed, but time is precious," she answered.

Time is a precious thing for everyone, I thought, I could observe the real picture of American life, where time is money and it is appreciated everywhere and every time, even when it borders danger.

We took our seats in the car and, in a while, got to a small, but very green lovely-looking city. She immediately took me to my apartment, usually rented for coming foreign professors. It was quite close to downtown and the university, and the provision store was quite near. I was a new tenant, so she acquainted me with a proprietor and explained to me numerous requirements, among them the strict rules for throwing garbage into different containers. Then she took me to the store to buy some food, and, ultimately, invited me to the Chinese café, where one could have any kind of meal in any quantity for \$5 only, but at a definite time limit, say from noon up to 3 p.m. All this information and dinner served in the Chinese café I took with great interest and appetite. During this hour of tasting Chinese cuisine, she told me about her impression of my application form and research and added that she would like to see me the next day at the

Department at 10 a.m. Before leaving, I asked her if she was married. "Oh, yes," she answered with her usual bright smile and added that she was married to a Czech, had three daughters, and quite a lot of jobs, connected with research and administrative work. She apologized beforehand that she would not be available at any time, but at a necessary moment, I could see her and consult with her.

*

The next day I was in the International Relationship Department at 10 a.m. sharp and acquainted with co-workers and the secretary of Stacy. She showed me into her study with a big computer on the table, which was rather "slow", as she remarked, and then mentioned her secretary as her "right hand", who was very proficient and knew her job as her five fingers. I suspected that she did everything and even more than what was in the field of her duties.

Indeed, Stacy was a very busy person and represented the type of self-made American woman. Despite her comparatively young age, she published three monographs in Linguistics. "Worked at nights", as she said with a joyful smile, and participated in numerous projects and conferences otherwise she said, she could lose her position at the university and not be able to supply for her family, her three daughters, two of whom were of school age and one in a nursery. I wondered whether her husband worked. She informed me that he had not worked anywhere since he moved with her to the US, because his knowledge of English was rather poor.

She seemed to be quite alone in her life struggle. However, she proved to be a prominent scholar in the field of her research, and many scholars knew her, she was in contact with most of them, they met at conferences and she appreciated them highly. That was mutual respect. She felt at home with most of them and participated in these conferences with unflagging interest, taking part in discussions and conversing during the breaks. I never saw her tired; she continued communicating with people in a friendly, open way everywhere, at conferences, in the library, the Department. She was the source of energy and shining optimism, and nobody could notice her family's predicament and the out-coming problems of it.

*

Once she invited me to her house. She proudly informed me that her husband found the announcement in the newspaper about house selling, and they were lucky to take an installment plan for 20 years, or so. Again, I wondered who would pay for it. She regretfully

admitted that it was her responsibility, and she had to pay not only for the house but also for both cars, which she and her mother-in-law possessed.

“She justly simply comes when she wants, eats and drinks, and then leaves for her friends,” she remarked, with a merry voice, and in a moment added, that her husband made a path towards the entrance of the house. I looked down and saw the path made of stones.

“It’s a hard job,” I said. “Where did he find these stones?”

“Why? One can buy these decorations in any store, here you can find everything you like,” she answered laughing. In a moment for me, the result of her husband’s work turned into nothing, because it did not take him so much effort to do it.

Still, I wondered how she would solve the financial problems, and she, as if reassuring me, said, that she managed to find a job as a guard for her husband in the local bank. The salary was little, but at least it would be a little source of income for the family.

The house she showed impressed me. It was a huge, two-story building built from stone and wood. It looked solid and rather comfortable; there was much sun in it, flowing through windows, which lacked curtains. It was located in the forest among the trees, and there was not any other path, except that mentioned, leading to its entrance. No fence, no special parking place. Only a wide balcony behind the kitchen. It had a well-equipped kitchen, but there were very few pieces of furniture in other rooms: some armchairs near the fireplace in the sitting room and the piano on the opposite wall. Sleeping rooms were upstairs and were not furnished. The house was almost in the forest, the nearest cottage was at a one-kilometre distance, and they had not been acquainted with them yet. It was a beautiful lovely place and when it came the time of twilight, one could see fireflies flittering in the darkness among dark branches like little lanterns.

The little housewarming party went on very well. We had a good evening, communicating with the kids and eating a dish, prepared by her husband, who turned out to be a good cook. He cooked the dinner, navy pasta with minced chicken. Their little lovely six-year-old daughter showed how she played computer games, the middle daughter played the piano, and the eldest one helped her father in cooking and laying the table. It was a wonderful family and I was completely charmed by them all and by the house. However, I never heard her husband’s voice; he did not speak English and never tried during the whole evening.

*

Months passed. Soon came the time for me to leave. Stacy could not accompany me to the airport, so I found other people who kindly agreed to assist me in my departure. I returned to my country and kept the link with her for a year or so, but then, busy with my university administrative work, lost any connection with her. Years passed. I remembered Stacy and wrote to her. To my utter astonishment, she answered, that she moved to Sweden because she married to Swedish colleague and got the position of a professor at Swedish University. Her former husband died soon after he got the position of a guard at a bank. He never learned English, and his salary did not increase. She said she was glad to hear from me after so many years. I asked her whether she was happy. She asked me in return whether I remembered the conference, we were both taking part at one private university. There were prominent scholars from Europe, the most outstanding ones. Her current husband happened to be at that conference and I remembered that she consulted with one of the professors about the new coming research paper she was going to publish. He was the presenter at that conference, a good-looking, professional man, open and sociable, friendly and supportive, and the sole of the company. "The winner takes it all", I thought to myself, and asked her a provocative question:

"And you know Swedish?"

"Of course, here in the letter you will find the attached reference to my article in Swedish," she answered, sending me a smiley and the reference to her article.

Pinto Beans by Joyce Compton Brown

Pintos ... are the most popular bean
consumed in the United States.

Camelia Brand/Pinto Beans

Consider the lowly beans—
Not Jack's beans of course,
leading to goose's golden eggs
and evil giants. No—think
of the beans your mother
worked through to pick out the rocks,
lest you break a tooth in the devouring
of her near-daily supper, the bagged

little spotted ones, the cheapest
and most familiar, most comforting—
the ones your grandmother loved.
When they simmer, you recognize
the smell. It's a comfort smell.
Now you want chow-chow,
maybe onions, maybe a little ketchup.

It wasn't always like that,
this soothing easy aroma
that meant you wouldn't starve,
meant you might have cornbread,
even a little margarine.
Now they're easy to forget,
these pintos still stacked

in plastic bags on grocery shelves.
After all, the lentils tempt,
an array of colors— the tiny yellow,
green, red, brown—a touch
of the exotic, and now, bags of little beans,
some black, some green, some white.
There's fashion in beans.

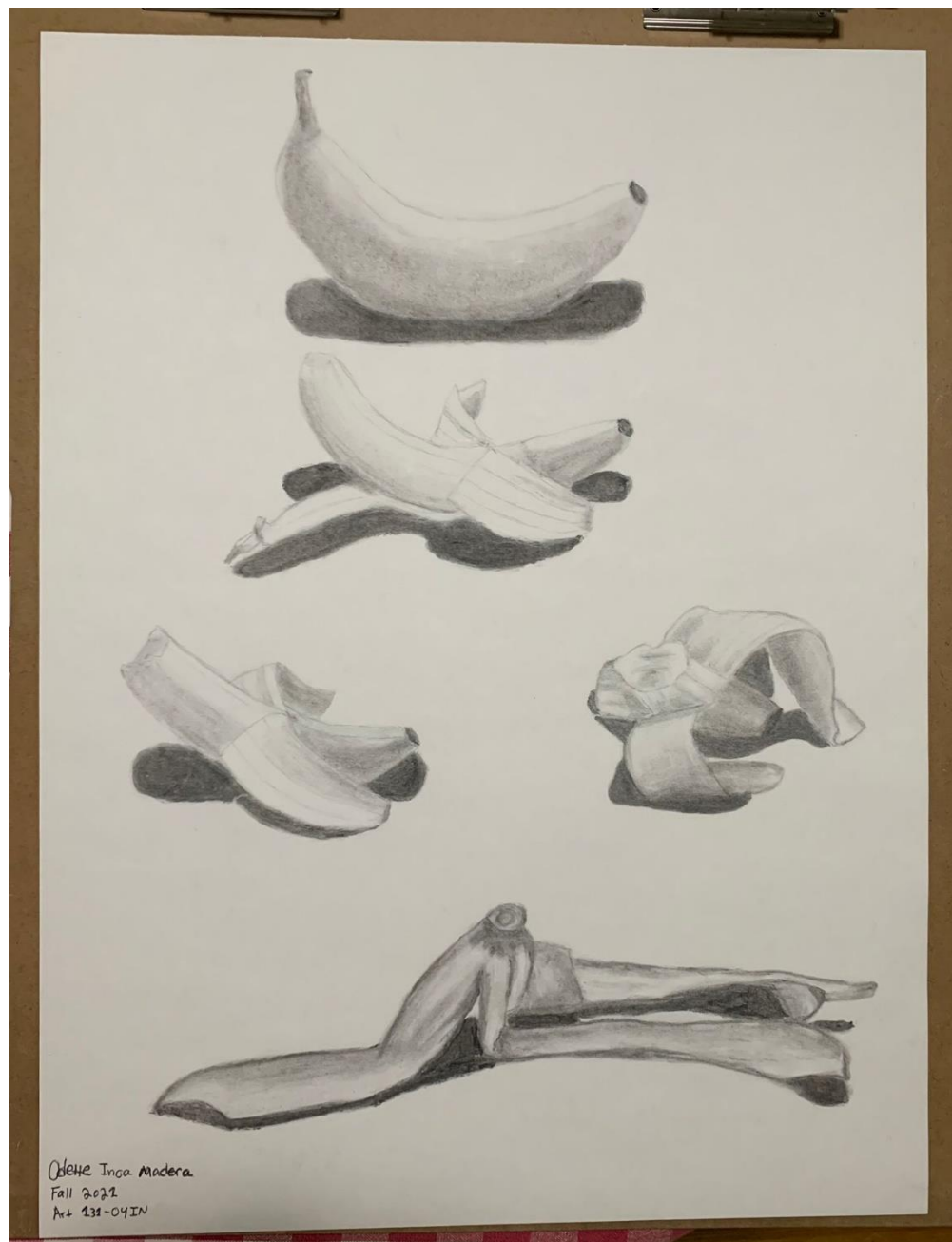
We've improved our pintos
from their deep viney origins within the
mountains of South America. They
stand, officially registered, upright
for easy picking, though it took
some breeding and inbreeding
to bring them under control.

Five thousand years of pintos, they say,
to get to this point, upward from Peru,
through the Andes, the North the great
American Southwest, onward, moving
across the ocean to Europe and back.
Pintos travel well, are easy to carry along,
easy to grow easy to cook, to eat.

Some refried them into paste,
some added meat, chili,
some added extra water, called
them soup beans. Poverty encourages
stretching the beans. Consider
the beans that kept you alive
when all else was shambles.

Remember your mother's hands,
how they sorted and shelled the rocks
and trash, soaked,
washed and cooked,
and cooked and cooked for hours
without burning,
without wasting a bit.

What's Left Behind by Odette Inoa, drawing



Let's Smile by Alex Clark, digital paint, 11×17



Taiwanese Ghosts by Yi-Wen Huang

Funny that Taiwanese ghosts only come out in July based on Chinese lunar calendar when
hell's door is open

They all go back to hell after July ends

Foreigners in Taiwan said that “They are the ghosts who listen”

I guess in Western culture, ghosts come out anytime they want

They never listen

Your First Kill Kills You by John Grey

The death you came for is a mess of half-severed deer
head, chest blown open, legs bent and twisted. Out comes

the winch strap. The beast's still kicking. A back slap,
a "well done" tally nothing. They become insults or,

if praise, not meant for you at all. Your father's hauling
tarp as you sink down beside your kill, knee almost

bathing in the blood of its gut, its one eye staring
from out of the wilderness into that place where

you're most civilized. Its nose is black and soft.
Pink tongue is wedged between protruding teeth.

It's the color of your skin. Between the two of you,
you wrap and drag her, hoist then bind her to the

rooftop of the car. All the way home, hoofs jiggle,
father smirks, your day drains like the sun's.

What Kind of Bird Doesn't Fly? by Chelsea Pinneo

The approaching stomps and jangling keys let me know the moment arrived. "Release cell door Frank 313," she mumbled into the radio. The lock screeched and the door popped open. She said, "Derry, pack and stack. You are leaving this morning. Don't fuck it up. Again." Officers love to share their vacuous advice about things they could never comprehend.

It was 6:55 am when the desk sergeant handed me the release papers. Heel-and-toe I started towards escape, lured by the radiant light coming from the end of the hall. A booming, "See ya soon!" and chuckle followed me out. In all fairness, history validated that assumption.

Stepping outside felt like the downhill slope of a roller coaster. Despite my skepticism, my whole heart was standing there as he promised he would be. His bloated eyes and anguished stance let me know that he had not dosed yet. Still, he beamed at the sight of me. A legion of anxieties rushed through me as soon as my feet hit the pavement. Fighting the urge to throw my arms around him and sob, I rushed him to the car. I did not want our first greeting in six months to be under the eaves of the sheriff's department.

The familiar aroma of cigarette smoke and leaked power steering fluid flooding my nostrils eased my nerves a bit. Before I went to prison, the two of us were living in this Honda, though it was a sore excuse for life. All we needed was each other, heroin, and a parking spot to be content. This morning, we had the keys to a more suitable living structure in our names. With running water and power no less!

As we entered the trailer park a dust blizzard engulfed the car and we almost hit four stray chickens. Pulling into the driveway of our new abode made me instantly apprehensive. The house number was spraypainted on the side like a blazing white trash banner, and the shutters were scattered by the front steps. It was not much to look at, but it was home. The trailer was empty, omitting the mice, our two used twin-size mattresses, and a trash bag filled with other people's clothes. We did not have any food, but we had candy, and that is what mattered.

Nothing had changed yet everything was mutated. Being with my fiancé sober was not something that we had experienced often. There were several graceless days as we got reacquainted. He was going to the methadone clinic instead of shooting up all day. This meant that he had time for a job. He got his driver's license back and even had the car inspected. He followed through with every promise he made during the six months I was gone. This man in my partner's clothing was not the man who narrowly evaded a heroin overdose by doing a half-nude Butterfly dance, in a Walmart parking lot.

The following days brought struggles undreamt of, constant reminders of inadequacy and failure. Applications to get access to community resources alone were embarrassing enough. Do you have a job? No. Do you have a criminal record? Yes. Do you have health insurance? Surely you jest! Age? Too old to be starting over again, thanks for bringing attention to that bit. Then, there were the job interviews where I explained my record at great length to complete strangers and was still denied a minimum-wage position. Equal opportunity my ass.

The emotional damage that peer judgment can cause is astounding. My husband held me through many emotional breakdowns that resulted from these interactions with society. Still, I scheduled and attended every meeting, class, program, and interview. Anything that I was allowed to take part in, I did. People began to understand that I was prepared to work hard for success, and opportunities crept up more often.

As time passed, I have been able to repair many relationships with my family and community. I am now a Peer Support Specialist and can constructively share my experience with others. After frequent close encounters with a broken system, it is evident that more support and structure are needed. For once, I want to be part of the solution. I aim to someday open a local nonprofit organization specializing in community enrichment and networking.

The most important relationships I have been able to develop are the ones with my children. My two stepsons moved in with us last year and have brought immeasurable joy into our home. In active addiction, my two sons went to live with their grandparents. We are now in a transitional custody arrangement, preparing for them to come live with us permanently. They have come to trust me as their mother again and love our new family dynamic.

All of my dreams are coming true; but when life gets hard, and believe me it does, I start to hear the jangling of keys echoing through the cell block, followed by a disembodied, "Don't fuck it up."

Sailor by Abby Newton, graphite on watercolor paper, 5 X 7



The Unveiled Whispers: A Deep Dive into the Depths of Self by Karla Ibarra-Morales

There was a girl who ripped her skin off
She forced herself to endure the stifle
She was contempt with her image, she coughed
She was sick, under-control an eyeful
During the day she jogged and ran forth
At night she laid on her bathroom floor.
She paced in anxiety she was coarse
Vomit engulfs her and tears submerge

Forced to endure the starvation and purge
She was exhausted, done with self-capture
She closed her eyes and jumped waiting to merge
Never hitting the floor she was recaptured
Now by recovery an endless battle
Will she ever be free will she ever travel

The Face of Venus by Eliza Norman, pencil sketch, 11 in x 8.5 in



Grimmer Fairy Tale Physics? by Gerard Sarnat

Reflecting on 53+ years together
She gave me so much greater gifts
Than Gerardo could have imagined

That warm close extended nuclear
Family of 14 with equal & positive
Forces radiation into all directions

...After incubation well as birthing
3 dearest children then shows you
How not to be such a cold fish fool

Like in the aquarium where raised...
But now as we each age with nearly
Inevitable entropy state infirmities

Every dawn brings new experiments
In d/evolution's lab of living --which
Anti-witch gratitude's gravitas begins

Test if mug of princess's brewed Java
(Once visited when still in our cups)/kiss
Wake this lucky frog's Sleeping Beauty

Remains apple of my Newtonian eye.

Brushstrokes by Sharda Persaud

She only owned a few tubes of paint and a handful of brushes. These brushes, though worn and frayed, always served their purpose. Careful strokes turned into messier swirls, until the glass was enveloped in the darkest of blue. Translucent faded into opaque in the most beautiful visual rhythm. It was not what she expected, but the moment she saw it, she realized it was exactly what she wanted.

Meticulous threads of golden yellow wove through the blue, flowing effortlessly, masking the darkness in some areas, blending with it in others, and making transparency scarce. Perfection.

The final embellishments, tiny glimmers of copper, gold, and silver danced along the curves in the form of scattered stars. Completion.

She sat there, staring at the finished piece, as it dried into permanency. Proud of her work, she thought fondly of its new owner.

He was always on her mind, and had recently become the reason behind her smile most days. She didn't see him often, but he introduced a happiness into her life that she had never quite experienced before and it excited her beyond measure.

While the happiness was new, there was also an element of sadness seeping in, slowly and steadily. She ignored it; surely it would go away- there was no need to worry. The sadness remained though- subtly wrapping itself around her heart. It was only a tiny layer to begin with; something that was easy to shrug off and ignore. But it became so much more than that. Within weeks, it had developed from a thin veil into a heavy wall. It weighed on her heart, but she fought back. She fought back with denial. She fought back with excuses. She fought back with the façade of happiness that she had been showing to the world. Her efforts were futile.

The wall grew heavier and heavier, and with each passing day, it took more of her strength to curl her lips into a smile when she faced others. The pain had turned her warm, loving heart into just another organ- an icy, miserable organ that she wished she could rip out. It would have been easier to live without it- without feeling, without the unhappiness and the pain, without the constant sense of self-doubt, without the incessant feeling of dread, and the empty, sick feeling that was taking over her entire existence.

She continued to put up a weak and almost insignificant fight; it was all she had left in her.

She watched as the salty, wet drops streamed along the glass until they reached the bottom, where they puddled into a larger drop, and then spread across the surface as the level began to rise. They nearly reached the brim when she realized that she had no more tears left.

Once more, she sat there staring at the opaque blue, tracing the swirls of gold with her eyes, and lackadaisically counting the stars. Only this time, the jar wasn't empty.

She thought about the new owner of the jar's contents. He was always on her mind, despite all of the heartache and despite the fact that she knew she was rarely in his thoughts. These drops signified her emotions, her hope, her optimism, her faith, her ability to love, and her tattered heart.

Emotionless, she gazed upon the artwork she had so ecstatically created only weeks ago. Securing its lid, she held the jar with both of her hands and hugged it close to her body, careful not to let it fall. Her eyes dropped as she studied it once more before she turned to face the fence that lined the yard. The warm summer breeze grazed her cheek and wisped through her hair, fluttering her dress along the grass. Not another moment had passed before she found herself pulling her arm back as far as she could over her head. She screamed as she hurled the jar forward with every bit of strength she could muster.

It was strangely satisfying, the sound of the glass shattering into pieces as it made contact with the heavy oak boards. The contents splashed along the fence and began to evaporate almost instantly in the heat. As the atmosphere lifted her tears, she also felt a weight lifted from her heart. She walked away from the shards of glass that now scattered the ground, from the broken brush strokes she'd made so confidently, that seemed so permanent. And although she was still far from being content, she was not going to let him own her happiness. He may have contributed one version of it, but he was no longer in control; she was.

Lost Dream by Joan McNerney

I am driving up a hill
without name on an
unnumbered highway.

This road transforms into
a snake winding around
coiled on hair pin turns.

At bottom of the incline
lies a dark village strangely
hushed with secrets.

How black it is. How difficult
to find that dream street
which I must discover.

Exactly what I will explore
is unsure. Where I will find it
is unknown. All is in question.

I continue to haunt gloomy
streets in this dream town
crossing dim intersections.

Everything has become a maze
where one line leads to another
dead ends become beginnings.

Deciding to abandon my search,
I return for my automobile...
nowhere to be found in shadows.

Finally I look up at the moon's
yellow eye...my lips forming
prayers to a disinterested god.

Hallmark by Michael Moreth, gouache on paper, 4-1/2 x 6



A Girl by Daesha Duenas

There is something so heavenly about loving another girl.
I worship her pink and luscious lips and the way they leave me breathless,
leave me wanting for more.
Her hair so soft that I can't help but want to run my fingers through it,
and her eyes.
Oh, how I love her eyes.
Beautiful and crystal blue like the heavens.
I could just fall into them and stay there for eternity.
Her soft skin that feels so delicate under my fingertips.
A touch so rare and hard to find.
A treasure that I'll cherish forever.
Tracing the beautiful freckles on her skin,
looking for the bigger picture.
And yet, somehow, there is still not enough of her to quell the fire that burns inside me when I
gaze upon her divine beauty.
I am on my knees admiring her, and only her.

What's in my bag? by Erika Salvador, oil on canvas, 10 x 8 in



Remembrance by Daesha Duenas

Forgetfulness and hazy memories fill my mind and soul.

Ironically, I can still remember the way you looked at me when you said that you loved me.

A look so full of love and affection.

I can still remember the way your hands caressed my face when we laid together.

A touch full of passion and care.

I can still remember the way you would envelop me in your warm embrace.

An action full of "I missed you" and joy.

I can still remember the way you looked at me when you left me in your room all alone.

A look full of indifference and solitude.

I can still remember the way your hands traced every feature of my face before you left.

A touch full of torture and reasoning.

I can still remember the way you enveloped me in your cold embrace.

An action full of "goodbyes" and closure.

It comes to mind as clear as crystals.

As if it just happened yesterday,

And maybe it did.

Maybe,

I'm stuck in the past.

Playground by Christina Ruotolo

The recess bell rang
as rubber-soled shoes
raced down floors
slick and shiny with our futures.
We ran toward the playground,
where seven year-old dreams
are made of on jungle gyms,
swinging rope bridges that lead
to sliding fireman poles and swings
that took us close to touching clouds.
My first friend...boy...crush
with sweeping brown hair,
a cowlick pointed north and
cheeks a constellation of freckles.
We were two peas in a pod
feet firmly planted in childhood.
We played Oregon Trail, Jumpin Jacks,
shared First Communion, played Atari
drank Coke from plastic wine glasses.
We chased bunnies in your barn,
grew our feelings until,
you switched to public school
and I stayed back,
lost without my best friend.
We never forgot those
cherished days of youth
where anything was possible
the sun was always hot
and the playground
set us free.

Beach Serenade by Wayne Russell

Worthless poetic soul,
seaside and strangled,
beer soaked; and a death
wish.

Insanity in the DNA, and
the waves pound sugar
white shorelines into; finite
submission.

Seagulls jostle for the early
morning refrain, passed out
again, wake up slowly, wake up;
walk it off; start it again soon.

The woman from the drunken
ricochet, has flown the coop,
beachside, pseudo chateau; we
have seen this play out; again
and again.

Pink pubs and restaurants, whisky
shots, in Margaritaville, karaoke
heroes in the salty night, the sand

is so soft and acts as a pillow,
underneath; it cradles the skull
from the tide; incoming.

The Songs I Play for Love by Jala Tyson-Kelly

When I play the song “While We’re Young” by Jhene Aiko,
it reminds me of the love we share.

The youth of our relationship overpowers all trials and tribulations we may bear.

We bathe in the moments where we express our care but are shadowed by our pasts so we
bury, our true feelings in the fear of being hurt.

I can’t love him the way I want to so I love him to an extent because it’s the only way I believe
works.

Despite the pain, I refrain from rejecting his love.

But when he holds me, there’s nothing above that can stop me from feeling his worry.

I pray that God will heal him from all things he does not speak of.

Because within his quietness, I speak through Him in the hopes of love.

The Music My Heart Plays by Ariana Duvall

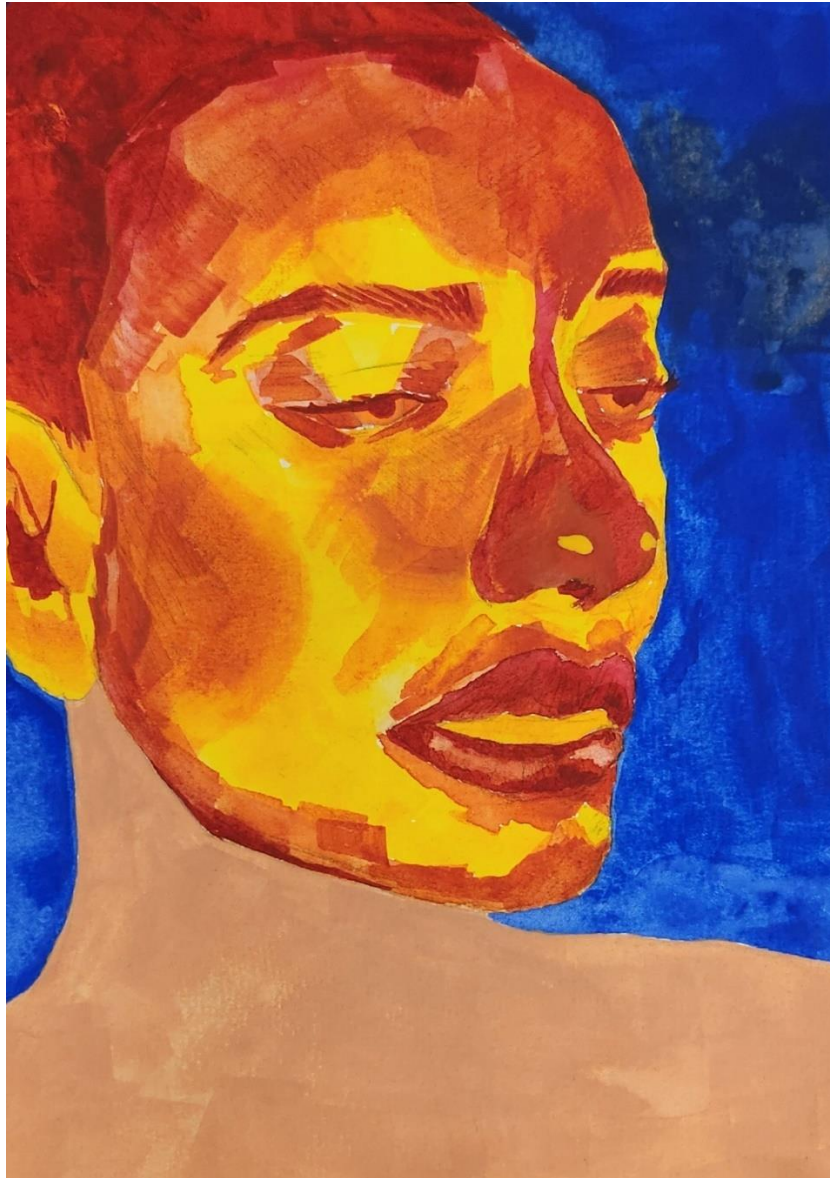
When the music starts to play
My heart begins to dance away,
The rhythm takes hold of me,
And I'm lost in sweet harmony.

The beat pulsates within my chest,
And I feel alive, completely blessed,
My worries fade, my troubles gone,
As I let the music carry me on.

The lyrics speak to my soul,
And im filled with a sense of whole,
The melody sings to my heart,
And I'm swept away, right from the start.

With every note, I feel renewed,
My spirit lifted, my mood imbued,
I close my eyes and let it take me,
To a world where I am free

Limerence by David Brown II, gouache on paper, 8 in x 6 in



Maybe We Should Call It a Night? by Cat Dixon

we're shaking hands with honey
after that shaky landing on
the cliffside—the hemisphere
isn't dependent on the menu
the champagne's expensive

We're still out?

we're hitting foul balls
collecting mustard packets
rioting against a chain link fence
and counting pushups—you get
to 47 when the swat van arrives

Do you love anything or anyone?

we're catching rides from
veteran chopper pilots
who steal thunder, lightning
and clouds from the sky—good
call on the diamant bleu

4 am by Melissa Morlock

Why they made us be here at 4am
To shiver in the dark of February, I can't fathom.
The stillness is broken by trucks idling
Quiet conversations, and hushed sobbing.
My arms are locked around you
My cheek pressed to your starched uniform
Right over your heart. I hear you breathe.
"Come back to me," I whisper endlessly.
You rub my back and don't say anything.
"Come back to me," I say to the empty space where you were.

It's 2:37 in the afternoon when the phone rings
Startling me, even though I've been waiting, one hand on the receiver,
For over an hour for you to call.
I'm so happy to talk to you that I don't notice.
Time is nearly up before I hear it
The shuddering and shaking of the building
Punctuated by alarms in the distance.
"It's mortars," you tell me. "Closer than yesterday."
I grip the phone, our connection already fading
"Don't know when I can call again."
Come back, oh God, come back to me.

Dusk is falling when we turn into our neighborhood
After a tense meal that you didn't really want.
I'm staring bitterly out the window
As you slow way too soon for the stop sign.
I open my mouth to argue, to complain
And see a piece of trash – a two liter bottle half out of a plastic bag -
On the side of the street.
Your eyes are glued to the spot
Seeing a desert road outside of Fallujah.
I swallow, blink, exhale, touch your hand
"It's okay," I say. "You're safe." I hear you exhale.
I close my eyes, as you drive past, and whisper a prayer
"Come back to me."

My Sun by Victoria Ibarra-Morales, digital art



Afternoons in the Neighborhood by Joyce Compton Brown

We ate small sandwiches of granulated sugar
and store-bought bread, “lightbread” — we called it.
My mother stretched margarine on the pale slice
and sprinkled sweetness from the green glass bowl
she’d got in a laundry soap box. Sometimes
a little water held the mixture in place.

My brother remembers a leftover biscuit,
buttered, and drizzled with clear-white crystals.
As an old man, he still smiles at that pleasure.
Our mother would make them for all of us,
our tiny teeth felt the power, biting the porous slice,
crushing through sugar granules.

Sometimes Carol’s mother dealt slices of Merita Bread,
portioning the sugar in little white piles while we watched
to see what sized heap we’d get this day.
She’d spread it out with a case knife,
folding the bare half over the pale concoction.
She never played favorites though I wasn’t her child.

Our mothers bought five-pound bags at Neil’s
grocery. They were too tired to think of rotting
teeth and empty calories. Another war had ended.
The harvest flow resumed as it had through time,
as it had once come to the Portuguese from Brazil,
as it came to us from Mississippi and Louisiana.

But mostly from Hawaii, where Queen
Liliuokalani had been deposed long ago
Hawaii Americanized for sugar and other bounty.
Men, women, children chopped
the sharp-edged cane, bloodied their skin,
for cane’s sweet harvest.

Our mothers were too tired to worry about human
degradation. They'd lived through war and grief.
They knew only the red, white, and blue of things.
Here, within our fragile circle, they could offer a sweetness,
a gritty morsel shared with makeshift friends,
a taste of certainty in sun and ever-shadowed days.

Muscle Memory by Steve Brisendine

It
comes back
the first time
you make a sharp turn
with a stack of two-by-fours,
swinging the forward end *justthisclose*
to taking a gouge out of somebody's wall –
but no closer, because you know just where to pivot,
how low to drop the back of the load, even after months away from
the work. Stack and repeat. Stop only to pull splinters. You know those movements, too.

Doo-Wop by David Nash

When I began I wrote in fours
in beats in lines, stanzas
with alternating cadences
like my hip-hop gangsta heroes,

But I rhymed on the rich quiet feel
under a strand of hemlocks mid
on the mountain's westerly ridge
and sent it for submission when I'd bent it

to fit the measure, muddling its meaning
twisted in the fantasy of plentiful solitude
slowed as I trudged through the needles
of my life that came back to pierce me

like the idiocy of those poems, without
regard for my need for souls for mates.
Now I don't know if I'm up to it or if I ever
was but I beat on like the busker on the corner.

This Body by Melissa Morlock

This body, my body
Flesh, bone, ribs, earth
Beautiful enough to sail a thousand ships
To be chained to the rocks by the sea
And yet, somehow, never quite enough
To overcome Creon's golden promise

This body, my body
Worthy of Solomon's reverence
Damned by the Serpent's temptation
Mother to saviors, prophets, killers, idolaters
A paradox, a sensual confusion
To the minds, to the world
Offering succor and violence
My hair a weapon, uncovered, in the sun and heat

This body, my body
A map of territory
Lines drawn, disputed, upended
Wars over boundaries and ownership
Pieces parceled out to victors
Only to be replaced, repudiated, disputed again

This body, my body
Holding a tiny world within
A galaxy swirling, piecing together dust from a millennia
To create systems within systems
A type of magic and biology
A cradle for my child
A source of sustenance, comfort, lullabies

This body, my body
Shared, spread thin for all
Mine, but never really
Belonging always to Everyone
Subject to statutes, to fear, to hope
To uninvited touches, whispers, questions
Powerful, pushing humanity into perpetuity
This body, my body
Never really mine.

Here in This Moment by David Nash

An afternoon with a thunderhead
billowing darkening approaching
but not arriving
you call for me to lie down
with the leaves fluttering flapping
we smell the sharp air before the rain
a kid is bouncing around his trampoline.
Sleep will follow like rain after thunder
I gather on your nape
billowing at your lobe
You heat up with a whisper
Wait...Wait...
A white flash sharp crack base boom
right outside our room....
and later when we drift off
to the splatter pitter-patter
I will never love you more.

The Poet by Joan McNerney

It is the white hour
between deep night
soft dawn.

I have found no sleep but
my eyes blazed back at
stars this night.

Walking by riverside
soft murmuring
long poems
intricate exquisite
shaped themselves
gliding across her mind.

Faint indistinct---like
a love known long ago.
Quiet passion, gentle smooth.
Feathery clouds in a blue sky.

Haze of hours, half-forgotten
melon moons amid sunflowers.
This is a kind of dream
in a way, enchanted.
Half in and out of this world.

Another sun will rise bringing
more golden memories.
I am waiting for all for
all the miracles of morning.

Kitty by Abby Newton, acrylic on watercolor paper, 5x7



A Song of Bare Trees by George Eklund

The brain is the first subject.
Then bring what you must into the mud pen.
I will walk toward the sun-lit grave.
I will stutter with my baseball cards
And a rosary.

The brain is the first sacrifice
And there one lives
Or not at all.
For we are dropped into the virginal gasp
Of our impulse, afloat
In the upper realm of nerves
And the flurry of wings
We cannot see.

The morning star burns the eye,
A dead fly on a dusty sill.
The song of the bare trees
Holds the cold magic of the woods,
The darkness behind us
The darkness ahead
The melting ice within.

Confidence by Jade Ham

It's a blessing to live in confidence.
It's more to it that we realize;
Some people get intimidated when you look them in their eyes.
A confident one can put their flaws in disguise;
Proud people embrace them
'Cause insecurities are put aside.
To stand up straight with your head to the sky,
It's a statement of your character
'Cause your confidence is high.
To feel comfortable in your skin,
Is a precious thing.
Realizing your worth and the beauty living within.
There's power in how someone carries themselves;
Confidence has personality;
It's a way of life within itself.
Walking in confidence can mean so many things;
With acknowledging your worth,
You'll realize what self love and appreciation brings.
If someone is too blind to see what you can be,
Always keep in mind:
"If God is for me,
Then who can be against me?"
Then that confidence will be displayed for you and all the world to see.

Love by Jade Ham

Love,
The reason why we're here;
God's greatest command;
My purpose in life became clear.
Love,
Without it, where would we be?
I wouldn't wanna know.
Overwhelmed by the world, perhaps condemned, I guarantee.
Love,
Don't take it for granted,
Although we often seem to.
Thank God we don't get punished if we miss the seed He planted.
Love,
From the sacrifices that were made,
And from the price that was paid,
We can live life in peace.
It's a powerful thing.
Only if it wasn't for love...

In the Moment by E.J. Uecker

I have been thinking recently
About some old man songs
For, being both these past few days,
Again, I want to sing along.
“Crazy Mama” is the first
I haul up in my memory nets –
I hear it as I drive around.
I visualize the frets.

And so tonight, right now,
A second breath of song creeps thru the haze, in fact,
It forms; I hear the tune
I see the chords,
But then, invaded by demands of form
I stop to seek out pad and pen . . .

I return to find the string is gone,
And with the string the words, the tune, the frets
. . . all gone
And sadly too, the whole idea and essence of the song.

The message deep in all of this?
Take down that box of strings from off the wall or stand
Right now, and often, and play.
Work on your own “Crazy Mama”
And it, or another or one so very much like it
Will grow into your string of newly filled in days and tunes.

Wood DLXR Camera by Juan Gomez-Rodriguez, wood 5.3in x 1.5in x 3in



The Vision by Catherine Broadwall

Only twice have I woken up crying.
The first was when I was very young—

I dreamt my mother died. The second
was in my late twenties—I dreamt my cat

Luna was large enough to ride.
Larger than a horse. Larger than a house.

I climbed on her fluffy back like a tiny
doll on a dragon's spine. Her warm hair

smelled of milk. Together, we pounced
over neighborhoods, her delicate paws

dodging fences. I clutched her fur,
so soft in my hands, and felt perfectly

safe. I think I am searching for this
all the time. When I woke up, my eyes

were streaming. Nothing could hurt her
or me, you see. The small, fragile body

elevated. That cradle, so sturdy and un-
attainable, it unscrewed my heart like a cork.

Neck Turn by Les Epstein

Stepping into an evening senior water aerobics—where Esther bobs daily on her white noodle—I am certain our collective warms these waters

just so for our pulpy bodies in floral bathing suits, to jiggle jowls, stretch hams, calves, before a wiry, gray-eyed class leader barking exercise commands in a raspy contralto

sending padded feet tapping against the bottom, on the hour, pool suicides forward, backwards, sideways, one end to another zipping full throttle past Esther bobbing.

At five minutes, when in contralto she calls for jumping jacks, so goes the wet half dozen, in their own special place, making waves with ‘front’ jacks, praying not to make bubbles at the row behind...

kicks stretch sinews better suited for chairs, these earthbound, fading flower children, running in place, wiggle sagging buttocks in a twist that would make Chubby Checker blush.

A life guard peers over, bored, perhaps dreaming of ice cream. Which might he need save? From speakers Jerry Lee falsettos ‘great balls of fire’ this not to be said of any men in the pool...

‘Don’t forget to breathe’ shouts the contralto commandant fifteen minutes past...

‘Rocking Horse,’ she calls. Tommy whinnies. He sings, haggardly, tone deaf, slicing the Drifters’ Boardwalk romance. His skin droops from his bones... Extra flesh earned by pained parentage

Thirty minutes done those barefoot cringe... their large toes burn raw, flesh threshed off by an uneven floor--pool raspberries giving an exceptional glow. Crowding... a neck turn assures not to kick, slap or roll into one another...

a call to switch legs with thirty-one minutes done... and Tommy lets go a second whiny, his back a constellation of brown splotches, mountainous moles—all gleaming in the fluorescents,

his head a whitened ballet arabesque.

Forty-four minutes in (one to go) with a neck turn and you can see at the pool’s edge, Esther still bobbing in place, others stretch arms above the water’s above a collection of multi-colored

heads. My elbow feels shattered for the night... we wiggle down an imaginary rope shouting WOOO!

The collective leaves, Esther remains... bobbing. A whirlpool hiccups out hot water nearby.

Card of the Day by Dakeim Smith, construction paper/paint, 11x14



Forgiveness Prayer by D. Jones

From a person with Autism

Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
For every stripe is a different act to forgive
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Forgive from within your inner self
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Allow past acts to melt away
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Allow new stripes to grow brightly upon the orange rays of energy
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Educate others as new stripes appear
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Embrace each step along the umbrella of healing Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes
Letting go of the pain caused by others
Forgiveness is Orange with stripes



The Mighty Oak by Shelly Ford

Like the mighty oak, you stood tall, proud and strong.
The quiet confidence of your love spread out like a canopy of branches over us,
Shading us,
Protecting us.
You weathered many storms -
Some that bent you low, yet you did not break.
Your roots of faith stretched down,
Drinking deeply of the Living Water that sustained you
In days of drought, famine, and disease.
Now the Mighty Oak stands no more...
Or so it seems,
Yet he is still as tall, proud and strong as ever before.
I hear the echoes of your wisdom guiding me
Like the rustling of leaves in a gentle breeze.
In my mind I see your branches stretching Heavenward,
Roots deep,
Growing in me,
Beckoning us Home, as evermore your love has done.

Written 1/13/2024 in honor and memory of my dad, James William Cox.

Millersport, 1967 by Les Epstein

Then came the Beatles...
My brother rolling about
Ears covered by a mop top,
Wobbling over carpets
since he just learned
To walk

while I ambled through
the 'Summer of Love'
being only six years old...
I swanned about
donning a gentlemen's cut
thinking home was love.

I had the Don Mossi look —
With my ears lowered —
Just like that Detroit pitcher
known as the Sphynx or just Ears
he who sported behemoth auricles
and whose sinking fastball
effectively did the job
or so I heard my father
say for I missed out on Mossi too —
and then never lived up
to my father regarding ear girth
He heard far more than I ever did
Or so he told me.

Then how much did he hear
from the diners surrounding us
at the Millersport Corn Festival of '67
Packs of people eating sweet corn
Unaware that my brother
Mop top and all
Disappeared, wandering

Through crowds and mazes
On two year old legs

Could my father hear any sound
but his heart pounding
panic throughout his chest
much like Poe's confessional organ
until my brother at
the missing persons booth,
became a festive refugee found.

Then came this Wednesday,
a Carlos Santana riff
drifts through the building
worming into mine own drums
It's a driving riff my father's ears
Rejected time after time
His pulse burning from an anger
in defense of Mozart or someone

of that ilk. He surely
sealed off his Mossi-like ears
shocked by any notion
of becoming lost within
Woodstock sounds. Down the hall
students strain through algebraic rapids.

Echo of a Shadow by Samantha Grady

A father's love
Bright and bold,
Darkness lingers
Truths untold.

Sorrow ensues
From burden to bottle,
Choices made
Plea and grovel.

Tears he makes
Forgotten by morning,
Ears half deaf
Toll bells warning.

In bitter taste
Words are made,
Harsh and cruel
Love's the trade.

From his eyes
Flickering desperation,
A hole's been dug
His own creation.

Hope Springs Forth by Chad Horn, pen and ink on layered acrylic, 5.5 x 8.5



Discovery by Carl Scharwath

Mending a fracture within times' embrace,

Like a haunting silence, etched in memory's expanse.

The sign of eponym, unfolding metamorphic patterns a

Mythical narrative, where tales unravel and scatter.

Contributors

Blue indicates Pitt Community College affiliation.

Steve Brisendine lives, works and remains unbeaten against the New York Times crosswords in Mission, KS. A 2024 Pushcart Prize nominee, he has appeared in Modern Haiku, Flint Hills Review, I-70 Review and other publications and anthologies. He has no degrees, one tattoo and an unironic fondness for strip-mall Chinese food. Write to him at steve.brisendine@live.com.

Catherine Broadwall (formerly Catherine Kyle) is the author of Water Spell (Cornerstone Press, forthcoming 2025), Fulgurite (Cornerstone Press, 2023), Shelter in Place (Spuyten Duyvil, 2019), and other collections. Her writing has appeared in Bellingham Review, Colorado Review, Mid-American Review, and other journals. She was the winner of the 2023 Paula Svonkin Creative Arts Award and the 2020 COG Poetry Award, and a finalist for the poetry categories of the 2021 Mississippi Review Prize and the 2021 Pinch Literary Awards. She is an assistant professor at DigiPen Institute of Technology, where she teaches creative writing and literature. Her website is www.catherinebroadwall.com.

[David Brown II](#), 18, was born in North Carolina's coastal plain and is a student at PCC with the ambition to transfer to NC State University after finishing an Associates in Fine Arts.

Carla M. Cherry is a high school English teacher, a vegan, and Chicago-style stepper. Her work has appeared in Random Sample Review, Anti-Heroine Chic, La Libreta, ISLE, and Raising Mothers. A Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee, she authored five books of poetry, Gnat Feathers and Butterfly Wings, Thirty Dollars and a Bowl of Soup, Honeysuckle Me, These Pearls Are Real, and Stardust and Skin (iiPublishing), and two chapbooks: Clap Your Hands, Stomp Your Feet (Grandma Moses Press) and Sundays and Hot Buttered Rolls: A Granddaughter of Harlem Speaks (forthcoming from Finishing Line Press). She holds an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the City College of New York.

[Alex Clark](#) is a PCC art education student. In his free time, he collects retro video games when not creating art. Art is something anyone can enjoy looking at no matter who you are.

Joyce Compton Brown has taught at a small university and both taught and taken classes at Cleveland Community College. Joyce has published Standing on the Outcrop and Hard-Packed Clay. "We are never too young or too old to write poetry."

Jill Crainshaw is a poet and professor who lives and works in Winston-Salem, NC. When she is not teaching at Wake Forest University School of Divinity, she and her two pups, Bella and Penny, look for poems in their backyard. Sometimes Jill writes them down.

Cat Dixon is the author of *What Happens in Nebraska* (Stephen F. Austin University Press, 2022) along with six other poetry chapbooks and collections. She is a poetry editor with *The Good Life Review*. Recent poems published in *The Book of Matches*, *North of Oxford*, *hex*, and *The Southern Quill*.

[Daesha Duenas](#) attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School and has been writing poetry for the last few years.

[Ariana Duvall](#) attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School and plans to become an English/reading teacher for elementary school students. Ariana enjoys sports and romantic literature and movies.

George Eklund has published widely in North American journals; most recently his poems have appeared in *The Lindenwood Review*, *Poetry Fix*, *Red Booth Review*, and *Rio Grande Review*, as well as *The Heartland Review*, *Descant*, *Redactions*, and *Adelaide*. George's full-length volumes include *The Island Blade* (ABZ Press 2011) and *Each Breath I Cannot Hold* (Wind Publications 2011). Finishing Line Press published his chapbook, *Wanting to Be an Element*, in 2012, and also his recent collection, *Altar*, in September 2019. His translations from the Spanish have appeared in *The Rio Grande Review*, *In Translation/Third Rail*, *Merida Review*, *Circulo de Poesia*, and in the anthology *Sólo una vez aquí en la tierra: Cincuenta y dos poetas del mundo* (Only Once Here on Earth: 52 World Poets). His translations of poems by Mario Bojórquez recently appeared in *Tupelo Literary Review*. Eklund has been recognized as an Al Smith Fellow by the Kentucky Arts Council. In 2014 he was invited to represent the U.S. at the *Encuentro Internacional de Poesia* in Mexico City where he was a featured reader. George Eklund is Emeritus Professor at Morehead State University. He shares studio space with the painter and poet, Laura Eklund, on thirty acres of wooded hills in eastern Kentucky.

[Jordan Emerson](#) is a Pitt County Schools Early College High School student currently working on an Associates in Science degree. He lives in Winterville, NC, with his parents and his dog Roscoe. His interests include piano, writing and journaling, graphic design, and video games. He has previously written for the *What's the Howl?* Newspaper at the Early College. He is interested in expanding his sphere of genres and finding new ways to fuel his passion for writing.

Les Epstein is a poet, playwright and opera librettist. Les's books include *Sleep Cinematic: A Golem's Quartet* (Gnashing Teeth), *Kip Divided* (Finishing Line) and *Lorenzo by the Ghost Light* (Gnashing Teeth). Gnashing Teeth will release his new book, *Teddy Orloff and the Three Onions* in February 2024. Recent credits include *Slant*, *Empyrean*, *Otherwise Engaged*, *Clinch Mountain Review*, and *Jelly Bucket* as well as the anthologies *Heat the Grease* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing), *Pain & Renewal* (Vita Brevis Press) and *Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology* (Local Gems Press). He teaches in Roanoke, VA.

[Elissia and Sheneka Fisch](#) are a mother-daughter duo who both love to create artwork. Elissa is a fine arts/visual art major, while Neka is both a horticulture technology and business and marketing major. Together the two plan to do incredible things.

[Shelly Ford](#) is a returning [PCC] student in the Education and Child Development department who has been happily married for almost 25 years. She has one son, and he and his wife are expecting their first baby in May. Shelly has had a book and several poems published in the past, but this is the first poem Shelly has written in many years.

Elizabeth Gauffreau is a New England fiction writer in poet's clothing. She has published fiction and poetry in literary journals, including *DASH*, *Remington Review*, and *Woven Tale Press*, as well as a novel, *Telling Sonny*, and a poetry collection, *Grief Songs: Poems of Love & Remembrance*. Find Liz online at <https://linktr.ee/egauff>.

Steven Gowin is a substitute teacher in San Francisco. His fiction has appeared in *The Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Literary Orphans*, *Flash Frontier*, and others. Gowin is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

[Samantha Grady](#) lives in Western North Carolina and is working towards a [PCC] degree in Nuclear Medicine Technology. She's a mother to one son and works as a certified nursing assistant at the local VA hospital. Despite her career in healthcare, Samantha has always harbored a passion for storytelling. Samantha's fervor for writing ignited in childhood, and she has been crafting stories ever since. Samantha is excited to continue her journey as a writer and hopes to touch the lives of readers with her tales. This is Samantha's first writing submission.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Stand*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, and *Sheepshead Review*. His latest books are *Between Two Fires*, *Covert* and *Memory Outside the Head* and are available through Amazon. His work is upcoming in the *McNeese Review*, *La Presa* and *California Quarterly*.

[Juan Gomez-Rodriguez](#) attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School working towards an associate in fine arts.

[Jade Ham](#) currently attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School. Her major and associate's degree will be in engineering. Jade currently owns a business, "All Made by Jade," where she sells crochet products and wreaths. Three of her poems called "Africa", "Life as a Young Black Woman", and "Dreadlocks" have been published in Reedy Branch Review Volume 5. "The Afterlife" and "Tempted" are published with the America Library of Poetry.

[Terrance Hilliard](#) is originally from Maryland and currently attends PCC majoring in Visual Fine Arts. Terrance is a retired Air Force Veteran.

Chad Horn is a Beat poet and mixed media artist from Kentucky.

Yi-Wen Huang is from Taiwan and a Professor of English and Linguistics at UNM-Gallup. She lived and attended universities in New York and Pennsylvania. Her research focuses on language and affect. Her hobbies include Zumba, winter hiking, thrift shopping, edm, and traveling as a foodie and tea aficionado.

Katie Hughbanks is a writer, photographer, and teacher whose photography has been recognized internationally, including two honors from the London Photo Festival. Her photos appear in various publications, including in Peatsmoke Journal, In Parentheses, L'Esprit Literary Review, New Feathers Anthology, Glassworks Magazine, Azahares, MAYDAY, Moonday Mag, and Black Fork Review. Her poetry chapbook, Blackbird Songs, was published by Prolific Press in 2019, and her short story collection (It's Time) will be released by Finishing Line Press in June 2024. She teaches English and Creative Writing in Louisville, Kentucky.

[Karla Michel Ibarra-Morales](#) attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School. When she wrote this piece, she made a point to not give a name to the character because Karla wanted to emphasize this human story, and how it applies to not one specific person but is the experience of millions. It deals with the real distortion that is anxiety, but the story itself has many interpretations in its lines so that anyone can see themselves in it with whatever they deal with. Even if only one person reads Karla's sonnet and feels comfort, it will have been worth it.

[Victoria Ibarra-Morales](#) finds great appreciation in the little things like rain, and she loves to draw and do anything creatively.

Rakhima Imanaliyeva is a writer from Kazakhstan. She was a participant of the Regional Scholar Exchange Program at North Carolina University in 1997. Now she is a retired teacher and a professional philologist. She taught English Language, Methods of Teaching, Lexicology and Style, and Creative Writing at the university. She is the author of a motivational book for teachers "Aspiring Me: A Memoir of Teaching", published in Kazakhstan. Her stories "Lollipop" and "A Birthday Present" were published in the online journal "Fairy Chatter" (Canada). You can find her @ rahimaimanalieva

[Odette Inoa](#) is 23 years old was born in the Dominican Republic; English is her second language. Odette is majoring in graphic design at PCC and plans to transfer to ECU.

[D. Jones](#) is a PCC student and an advocate for others with disabilities. They are capable of doing many things just like others often in different ways. They serve on the S.G.A. (Student Government Association) Executive Committee, P.T.K. (Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society) and Bruiser's Crew Mentor Program.

[Charity Jules](#) is a visual artist and Department Chair of the AFA programs at PCC.

[Quinton May](#) is a PCC student majoring in fine arts. He plans to transfer to ECU.

Joan McNerney's poetry is published worldwide in over thirty-five countries in numerous literary magazines. Four Best of the Net nominations have been awarded to her. "The Muse in Miniature", "Love Poems for Michael", and "At Work" are available on Amazon.com. A new title "Light & Shadows" has recently been released.

Michael Moreth is a recovering Chicagoan living in the rural, micropolitan City of Sterling, the Paris of Northwest Illinois.

[Melissa Morlock](#) is a veteran educator with a love of Walt Whitman.

[Joy Moses-Hall](#) teaches physics and astronomy at Pitt Community College and oceanography at East Carolina University. She has a PhD in oceanography and is the author of the novel Wretched Refuge. She writes a monthly science column for the Daily Reflector in Greenville, NC, and enjoys traveling with her family to see rocks all over the world. Her science/travel/memoir blog is often under repair but can be found at [APieceoftheContinent.net](#)

Dave Nash likes to write on gray trains to rainy Mondays. His work appears in places like South Florida Poetry Journal, Bulb Culture Collective, Jake, and The Hooghly Review. You can follow him @davenashlit1.

[Abby Newton](#) is a PCC student getting an associates in visual arts. She works at a local print shop in Greenville, ASAP Photo. She is starting to build an art career by friends and family commissions and sharing them on instagram (@art.byabigail). She enjoys drawing, painting and photography but has interest in all art forms.

[Eliza Norman](#) is an art education major at PCC. Originally from New Bern, NC, Norman lives in Greenville with her two cats and her jungle of house plants. As an artist, she enjoys working in the real world through 3-dimensional art but can enjoy all forms of art.

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

[Aniyah Perkins](#) attends Pitt County Schools Early College High School and runs the creative writing club. Aniyah is working on a poetry book and novel. Aniyah will graduate with an associate's in art and plans to major in English and/or journalism.

[Sharda Persuad](#) works in Human Resources at PCC. Sharda loves writing, all things Disney, and spending time with family and her corgis, Captain Jack Sparrow and Captain William Turner.

[Chelsea Pinneo](#) is a Peer Support Specialist and a full-time student working towards her English degree. She lives in eastern North Carolina with her husband, four sons, and cat. Though this is Chelsea's first publication, she has been passionate about writing fiction and

creative nonfiction since she was young. Her long-term goal is to become a grant writer for nonprofit organizations and start a local community enrichment program.

Gary V. Powell, a revised lawyer, lives with his beautiful wife near the shores of lovely Lake Norman, North Carolina. A nominee for Pushcart and O. Henry prizes, a 2023 deGroot Foundation Writer of Note, winner of the 2022 Press 53/Prime Number Fiction Prize, and a finalist or honorable mention for numerous other fiction awards, his work appears or is forthcoming in Bull Men's Magazine, Carvezine, The Thomas Wolfe Review, The North Carolina Literary Review, Ocotillo Review, Prime Number, Atticus Review, Smokelong Quarterly, Best New Writing 2015, and Sleep is a Beautiful Color: the 2017 National Flash Fiction Day Anthology.

Ann Privateer is an artist, photographer, and poet. She grew up in the Midwest and now lives in California.

Claudia Rassinati is Italian and worked as a fashion designer for 32 years. She recently moved to the United States for her husband's job.

[Christina Ruotolo](#) is a poet, creative writing instructor at PCC and editor of Her Magazine. She was shortlisted for the 2019 James Applewhite Poetry award, runner-up for the Heart of the Pamlico Poet Laureate in 2021 and a long list finalist for the 2023 Fish International Poetry Award. She is author of the poetry collection, The Butterfly Net and the nonfiction book, The Day the Earth Moved Haiti. Her poetry and nonfiction have appeared in Wednesday Night Poetry, Petigru Review, NC Bards Poetry Journal, Gyroscope Review, Heron Clan, and in various other magazines and journals.

Wayne Russell is a creative jack of all trades, master of none. Wayne is a poet, rhythm guitar player, singer, artist, photographer, and author of the poetry book Where Angels Fear via Guerilla Genius Press, currently available on Amazon.

Erika Salvador is an 18-year-old native of the Philippines and an incoming college student in the USA. While currently on a gap year, she has veered away from STEM fields and has fully engaged herself in artistic endeavors, including writing, painting, and graphic design. Because of this, she is contemplating whether to continue with her initial plan of pursuing a major in Mathematics.

Gerard Sarnat, poet and aphorist, is widely published internationally in print and online. He has been nominated for the pending Science Fiction Poetry Association Dwarf Star Award, won

San Francisco Poetry's 2020 Contest, the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize, and has been nominated for handfults of Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards. Gerry's publications include 2023 San Diego Poetry Annual, 2022 Awakenings Review, 2022 Arts & Cultural Council of Bucks County Celebration, 2022 Rio Grande Valley International Poetry Festival Anthology, Ocotillo Review, Gravity of the Thing, American Writers Review/ San Fedele Press, and many others. He is a Harvard College and Medical School-trained physician who's built and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised as well as a Stanford professor and healthcare CEO. Currently he is devoting energy/ resources to deal with climate justice, and serves on Climate Action Now's board. Gerry's been married since 1969 with progeny consisting of four collections (Homeless Chronicles: From Abraham To Burning Man, Disputes, 17s, Melting the Ice King) plus three kids/ six grandsons — and is looking forward to potential future granddaughters.

Carl Scharwath, has appeared globally with 175+ journals selecting his writing or art. Carl has published three poetry books and his latest book "Ebb Tide Reflections," features poetry, short stories and photography (World Inkers, NYC.) Carl has four photography books, published by Praxis and CreatiVingenuity. His photography was exhibited in the Mount Dora and Leesburg Centers for the Arts. Carl is currently an art editor at Glitterati and former editor for Minute Magazine. He was nominated for three The Best of the Net Awards (2021-23) and two different 2023 Pushcart Nominations for poetry and a short story.

[Astrid Shaw](#) is a student at Pitt Community College, a devoted wife, and "bonus" mother to one. She is known for her tenacity, candidness, and devout studying of Hellenistic astrology. Her presently applied personal mantra reads, "That which you most need will be found where you least want to look." - Carl Jung."

DeShane (Shane) Short (He/ Him) is a proud Afro-American male from New Kent, Virginia who is a graduate from Longwood University, where he obtained a degree in English with a concentration in creative writing with an interest in poetry and non-fiction. DeShane currently teaches at George C. Marshall High School in Fairfax, Virginia. DeShane hopes to pursue an MFA in creative writing.

[Dakeim Smith](#) is a PCC Fine Arts student who one day hopes to get into animation and work on cartoons.

[Caitlin Swearengin](#) works for PCC as a Fine Art Administrative TA and is currently a student at ECU majoring in Art Education.

John Tavares was born and raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario and is the son of Portuguese immigrants from Sao Miguel, Azores. Having graduated from arts and science at Humber College and journalism at Centennial College, he more recently earned a Specialized Honors BA in English Literature from York University. His short fiction has been featured in community newspapers and radio and published in a variety of print and online journals and magazines, in the US, Canada, and internationally. His many passions include journalism, literature, economics, photography, writing, and coffee, and he enjoys hiking and cycling.

[Jala Tyson – Kelly](#) is a sophomore at Pitt County Schools Early College High School. Jala, who started writing creatively at 13, loves to write poems and sing R&B songs. Most of Jala's poems are written from life experiences.

E.J. Uecker recorded and released two "protest songs" in 1967 while in the Air Force, where he spent three and a half years; he married his wife of 53 years after knowing her for only three weeks. E.J. taught for about 22 years and was inducted into the Oregon Speech Coaches Hall of Fame in 2015. He holds a BA in Lit/Writing from UC San Diego and a master's degree from Pacific University, though he dropped out of high school and NEVER passed an English class. His poetry has been published in The Helicon (San Diego), The Portland Review, Top Drawer (Oregon) and The American Poetry Anthology, 1988 (Honorable Mention Award).

[Chloe Wilson](#) is a second semester fine arts in visual arts major at PCC and is hoping to transfer to Appalachian State University to continue her studies. Her work has not been published before, but she does do commission work from time to time. Besides illustration, Chloe also enjoys playing bassoon in the PCC Symphony Orchestra. In her free time, she loves to read, play games, and relax with her cat.

Huina Zheng, a Distinction M.A. in English Studies holder, works as a college essay coach. She's also an editor at Bewildering Stories. Her stories have been published in Baltimore Review, Variant Literature, Midway Journal, and others. Her work has received nominations twice for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She resides in Guangzhou, China with her husband and daughter.

Call for Submissions

Submissions for Volume 7 are open from September 15 – January 31. Visit our [submission guidelines page](#) for more details. We look forward to seeing your work in the next issue.

