

River Voices

Spring 2018

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Muskegon Community College

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River Voices is a literary magazine published by the English Department at Muskegon Community College. It showcases and celebrates the work of current students, alumni, faculty, and staff. *River Voices* is an annual publication.

We encourage submissions of poetry, prose, essays, art, and photography year-round and are currently accepting submissions for the Spring 2019 edition. Please visit: muskegoncc.edu/rivervoices for further details.

We are grateful to all of our contributors and in addition we would like to express special thanks to: Becky Evans, Mary Tyler, Ronnie Jewell, Gretchen Cline, and Kelli Loughrige for their encouragement, support and contributions.

Cover Art: "Stand Alone Tree" by Caleb Straley

Caleb is a current MCC student and has been a photographer for the past three years. He has pursued this hobby relatively in secret, allowing only family and friends to see his work.

Landscape photography is much more than just taking a picture, it's about being somewhere beautiful and seeing what others might over look. This picture was taken at Kruse Park in Muskegon, MI and one day while looking for a good composition, I saw this tree. I set up my tripod and adjusted my camera settings to properly expose the picture. What I did next is my favorite part of the process: I sat down while the sun was setting and waited while it covered the lakeshore in a warm glow. This is what I love most about this picture, even if it had not turned out, I still was able to be someplace I love, watching something beautiful.

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*The mountains are my bones
The rivers my veins
The forests are my thoughts
And the stars are my dreams
The ocean is my heart
It's pounding is my pulse
The songs of the earth write
The music of my soul*

- Unknown

Rivers

Abigail Postema

A silent silver road that is
never-ending,
opens up to a quiet still lake,
goes on to the ocean,
the smell of salt in the air,
moves down, down,
down a waterfall
onto the sharp rocks below,
filters into a river,
a silent silver road.

Sensorium

Samantha Plough

Sound runs from the room.
Much too afraid to be curious, she hides
from the thought that if she doesn't
flee, she will no longer be able to
sing.

Touch is on edge.
He feels raw
from the constant motion
of a heart beating
a little too fast.

Sight loses interest in the day.
She sees no point
in pretending to understand
the ins and outs of a world
with no color.

Taste is taken aback.
He doesn't know
how much longer he can continue
to grimace through the pain
of 'just on more bite'.

Smell crinkles her nose.
She burns with the knowledge
that if she waits it out,
she will be able to withstand
nearly anything.

Pleasure

Shelby Basham

I press pleasure
into the hard line
of his soft lips,
into his shattered glass eyes,
into the scar on his chest,
the place from which his heart was torn
first by someone else
and then by me,
twice now.

I don't know how he keeps his
well of forgiveness
from running dry,
but I am grateful
he still allows me to drink from it
with cupped hands.

I thank him the only way I know how.
By pressing pleasure into the hard line
of his soft lips,
into his shattered glass eyes,
into the scar on his chest,
the place from which his heart was torn.

Forgive me
just once more.

Better Life in the North

Justyce Lathrop

Go on, gather your things to go up North
Go, leave to live a better life of the free
You will have a much better life, so go forth

Follow that bright star, the one pointing North
See the light of freedom, how it shines for you and me
Go on, gather your things to go up North

Follow the birds, they will lead you up to the North
Take your blankets, clothes and children with thee
You will have a much better life, so go forth

Bring your family on your journey across the earth
Your life will be better up North, guaranteed
Go on, gather your things to go up North

Come on you're almost there, don't slow down, go forth
Don't give up just yet, you will be free, God has heard your plea
You will have a much better life, so go forth

Once you've made it to the North you will be free, henceforth
Your life will be your own, however you decree
Go on, gather your things to go up North
You will have a much better life, so go forth



my heart in five metaphors

Mary Tyler

i

my heart is an aircraft carrier
in this ocean. my arresting
hook will snag the cable of you
and hold tight, prevent your peril
and perish, but you do most
of the work. you must find, aim,
and time your landing here (and
only here) with the utmost
precision.

ii

my heart is a museum for you.

iii

sometimes in february, my heart is
a desert few vagabonds have traveled,
but i still wait for you to wander there,
the only one to survive the heat.

iv

when i'm in love with you, my heart is
an orchard in may, blooms so blossoming
you would hardly suspect they will also
ripen to plums in summer.

v

and when i heard you wouldn't come home
tonight, my heart was a red balloon
downed in the powerlines.

My Favorite Tree

Kelli Ann Loughrige



Tyler

Sadie Brown



My Children

Ron Jewell

My children are angels,
most of the time.
They never ignore me,
or treat me unkind.

With a love unconditional,
they speak no words.
They're a cure for all loneliness
and fill a huge void.

Lizzie, the oldest, she rules the whole nest.
Gaby, the fattest, he loves to eat best.
Annie, the sweetest, she just loves to play.
RJ, the meanest, he gets his own way.

They love to watch dogs
through the windows
at noon: Roxie and Curly,
and Smoky Girl too!

Their barks are amusing;
the fence keeps them safe.
No intimidation my children must face!

They never need bathing,
by my hands at least.
They love to eat tuna
and canned Fancy Feast.

Scooping the litter may be a small chore,
But they curl up beside me . . .

And they purr . . . and they purr.

Love Story

Samantha Plough

He walks by, and my breath catches. My heart starts racing and palms get clammy.

His gait is relaxed yet powerful, an intimidating beast just beneath the surface. Mint eyes the size of the moon, dark and prying, glance back at me, causing me to freeze. I am entirely paralyzed by him, his outer beauty. Seeing nothing of interest in me, he turns on a dime and waltzes out of the room.

In an instant, my breath comes back to me, and I begin to feel nauseous. This isn't healthy. I am not healthy. My hands come up to my face, wiping, trying to erase the hold he has on me. How do I stop this? How do I fix it? I can't get away from him. I don't have the funds to leave, and there is no way that he will go without a fight. Regardless, I couldn't ask him to leave. He's had a hard enough life; being left in a barn by his mother two days after birth has made him cautious and defensive.

From the first day that I laid eyes on him, I knew I was in trouble. He sucked me in and hasn't spit me out yet. Every aspect of my life revolves around him. I can feel the tears begin their daily trek down my cheeks. Just when I think I can let go, he comes back into the room and looks at me, disgust plain on his striking features.

"I can't do this anymore," I say, my voice tight with emotion. "I don't think I can live like this. I love you more than myself, how can you not care? How can you just keep going back to *her*?"

All he does is stare. What did I expect, a heartfelt declaration of love? An apology? That will never happen. I'll be lucky if he lets me speak to him again. He then proceeds to walk past me, straight to the kitchen. I hear him banging around and stand up to assist, he can't do anything for himself.

I've really done it now. My heart feels like its breaking with every confrontation I have with him. The anxiety and frustration is mounting with each item I take from the cupboard. I angrily push him aside. He can tell that I'm in a mood, but I don't care. My feelings are real, but he never seems to acknowledge them unless they are going to benefit him, one way or another.

I pop open the can to his favorite, but disgusting, gravy dinner, being sure to put it on his favorite plate. Might as well get on his good side for once, if he even has one. I chuckle to myself as I set the small plate in front of his puffed chest. His eyes seem to be conveying thanks, but I always have a hell of a time reading him. Just as I go to pull away from the dish, he reaches out and touches my hand. This must be his way of apologizing. It's bullshit, but I cave.

My hand goes to ruffle the top of his head, right between his ears where he likes it. We're good again. Until the next time I screw up. That's just the way it is with him.

The Soul's Paradox

Ashley Morrow

We don't meet people by accident. They come into our lives because they are meant to for some reason. Good or bad. People are destined to meet each other. Call it fate if you'd like.

Long, long ago before the universe was even created there was blackness. Pure emptiness that would crush anything in its' path. Darkness spread vastly across the empty space consuming anything that dared to challenge it. One day the darkness met an interesting being that changed its' entire perspective. It met light. Now light shined so brightly that darkness became consumed by it. Nothing was more beautiful than what darkness was seeing right before it. The two beings, that were never destined to fall for each other fell in love. However, they soon discovered that neither of them could touch each other, without destroying each other. For thousands, millions, billions of years darkness and light stayed next to each other, not touching, but always close by.

For a while it was enough to satisfy darkness, but it didn't take long before darkness wanted more. Darkness wanted to be able to hold onto what he loved and cherished the most. Light didn't want to risk it all, didn't want to lose what it already had. So, for a few more billion years they stayed next to each other, not risking even the slightest touch. Darkness didn't want to go on living this way though, not if it meant being unable to be as close to light as it possibly could. So, darkness decided a simple, tiny touch wouldn't hurt. Reaching out darkness barely touched light, just skimmed the surface.

A huge explosion of passion and sparks erupted, engulfing both light and darkness, bringing them together. They became one in a matter of milliseconds and then there was a second eruption. A violent one that casted these two in separate directions before they both expanded into something much greater.

Formations began to form in the emptiness that was once only black. Colors began to form, first being red, blue, and yellow. The three colors mixed together created an abundance of assorted colors. Tiny eruptions occurred throughout the vast room out in space allowing for planets, stars, moons, and so much more to form. It was the birth of the universe. Fireworks sounded off at the beautiful child that came from the love of darkness and light.

Each planet in the universe was created out of originality and creativity that came from light. They were brought together by the darkness and each planet was given its' dangers. A little recklessness and wildness was the basis of what made darkness. A collection of planets was organized into different sections, otherwise known as solar systems as the humans like to call it.

Then came the Earth. This formation was a bit more complex than the other planets or stars or solar systems. For both light and darkness wanted to create something together that would be specifically unique to this planet. They wanted Earth to represent their love and what that simple touch felt like. Tying in all those emotions into one single planet was difficult and took several billion years.

First, they created the water. Crystalline oceans full of salty tears from the pain of not being able to touch each other for so long. The glistening surface of the water at night reflecting exactly how beautiful their creation of the universe is. Then came the land which wasn't so beautiful at first. The land was a mahogany brown coloring, almost black. A single sapling of a tree began to grow, the first sign of life in the entire universe. Darkness and light were so proud that they flooded all the land with different varieties of trees and plants. Darkness even created colorful flowers for the love of his life, as a gift. Light was overjoyed by the surprise gift that light created peaceful mountains for darkness. Darkness wanted to throw a spin on the mountains to make them more thrilling. So, darkness created volcanoes out of a few of the mountains, but they backfired and ended up destroying fields of the exact flowers that darkness gave to light. Furious light created weather systems. In some areas it rained, flooding the land. In other areas tornadoes and hurricanes terrorized the land, killing plants and trees.

For years, darkness and light fought with each other, destroying each other's creations until they realized what they had done. The land had been torn apart and mangled. It almost didn't look recognizable. The two decided to come back together to finish what they started, putting the past behind them. Replenishing the land, they began adding more and more additions to Earth. Animals began to take form in many different shapes and sizes. Aquatic organisms were the first to be created because the land needed time to heal from the raging war that had just ended. The organisms were tiny at first, but soon developed and evolved into larger creatures. Soon the oceans were filled with dolphins, whales, fish, and so much more.

Darkness and light continued to expand the life onto the land with the creation of rabbits, deer, tigers, bears, turtles, the list goes on. Once all the animals were created, darkness and light stood back and stared in awe at what they had made. It was perfect and imperfect, but it made them proud. However, something was missing. That little cherry on top.

Humans. Humans were next in the creation process. A single man and a single woman was created. Nowadays people know them as Adam and Eve. However, darkness and light had named them Mrak and Svjetlo---dark and light. Darkness and light both took half of their essence and gave it to the humans. The woman received darkness and the man received light. Now it is unclear what exactly happened to darkness and light after the creation of humans. Some say they simply faded away. Others believe they became one with the Earth, literally. Even after they were gone, the Earth flourished and grew. Adapting over the years, the final creation, humans became more intelligent and improved their lifestyle.

One thing remained the same throughout all those years. When a person is born it is said that their soul reaches out searching for the other half, to make it whole again. Once the person's soul matches up with the missing link, the two souls mash together as one just like the creation of the universe. It doesn't necessarily have to be a lover either, it could simply just be a friend or family member.

A soulmate is a person who sets your soul on fire and makes you feel a love so pure nothing can break you apart.

Look to the Stars

Caleb Straley



Lunaire

Kathryn Gillard



Dragon Girl

Taylor Hewitt

you only look at me
to undress me with your mind.
silly boy,
you don't know.
I am a dragon,
blowing fire with every exhale.
my body is a sanctuary
for the lonely.
but there is no way in hell I'm opening the
doors for you.

Fruit by the Foot

Robin Golden

Just like a peach,
I have a giant pit inside.
Unlike a peach,
I choose to fill mine
with food and unhealthy choices.

Strawberries have seeds
that are on their skin.
The only things
on my skin
are freckles and horrible tan lines.

With flesh underneath a shell,
a coconut is my reverse;
Peel back my soft tissue
and you find
the infrastructure that protects me.

When I think of a fig,
I think of cookies.
Similarly,
people like me best
when I become something
I am not.

I'm comparable to a lemon;
Tart and hard to love.
But there's a small group,
a very small group,
that would choose my flavor
over any other.

It's with those people,
I would like to think,
I can live as a grape;
Surrounded by people I love.

Filling Tall Boots

Brianne Siple

Frigid morning filled with creeping fog,
numb toes slip into heavy rubber boots.
Bones shiver on the walk to heavy barn doors.
Creaking hinges offer empty good mornings to its residents.
Heavy bellers welcome clanking feed buckets.
And calloused fingers pat calf heads lovingly.
Pastures and serene,
and the herd chews in comfort.
I know that this is my calling.
I know that I am home.

Soul Soup

Michael Dietz

Twist the bones and bend the back
Itch-It-A-Cop-It-A
Mel-A-Ka-Mys-Ti-Ca

We came in for lunch and we just watched *Hocus Pocus* the night before and when mom got our cup-o-soups outta the microwave, put them on the table and peeled off the tops, I started singin' this. Nikki caught on:

Trim him of his baby fat
Itch-It-A-Cop-It-A
Mel-A-Ka-Mys-Ti-Ca

We both knew it wasn't the right spell, but it was the one that sounded the best when we said it together.

Itch-It-A-Cop-It-A
Mel-A-Ka-Mys-Ti-Ca

That spell was for the part when the witches turned the boy into a cat, but we were sayin' it 'cause our soup was a soul that was ready to be sucked in so we could stay young. The steam in the cups was like the little girl's spirit that the witches made appear, and then they all stood around and sucked it up 'til the little girl was all dried up and grey. So that's what we did with our soups, Nikki and I. We twisted our fingers and moved our hands up and up and sang!

Twist the bones and bend the back
Itch-It-A-Cop-It-A
Mel-A-Ka-Mys-Ti-Ca

The steam rose higher and higher 'cause the soup was hot, so we stood on our chairs and sang louder!

Mel-A-Ka-Mys-Ti-Ca
Coe-Poe-La-Ka-Pa-La

We started makin' up the words now 'cause the spirits had us! We looked up to the ceiling with our hands raised high and our fingers stretched and we sang together:

Ka-Pa-Ta-Kat-In-Ga
Al-La-Ka-Zam-Ba-La
Al-La-Ka-Zam-Ba-La!
Al-La-Ka-Zam-Ba-La!

Then it was quiet.

I looked at Nikki and Nikki looked at me. We still had our hands up in the air 'cause we were tranced. "I think they're ready," I said. Then we plopped back down in our chairs and scooted as close as we could to our soups. I looked across the table at Nikki through the spirits movin' up outta the cups. You ready?" I asked. She nodded, and together we made our lips like kisses and we sucked. We sucked the steam souls right outta our soups. I got so close that water started formin' on my lips. "I feel it! I feel it!" I said. "You feel it?" "Uh huh!" Nikki nodded real quick. I looked at my hands and they weren't so wrinkled! I looked across the table at Nikki and the wart on her face was gone and her hair was blonde again! It was working! It really was working!

"Hey! C'mon," Mom said in the livin' room. She was watching that lady with the big, red glasses on TV. "Eat your soup." And she waved her hand at us and it all went away like smoke.

"I like the peas," I said to Nikki.

She looked at me, "I like the noodles."

How to Eat a Michigan Strawberry in June

Mary Tyler

They are small enough, so
place her on your tongue and
press to the roof of your
now new mouth. Don't chew;
she will melt for you. Then
spend the rest of your day
in thanks and solitude.

Wishes

Emma Veihl



Someone to Hold onto

Shauna Hayes



Part of Your World

Dallas Eslick

My favorite recess activity until third grade was farting in the woebegone tire formations on the unoccupied side of the school. Over the course of three years, I developed such a strong personal connection to that hunk of junk that I still experience a wave of nostalgia whenever I get a whiff of rubber. Nobody else came close to the structure; the surrounding ground was covered with pricklers, and the tires were in worse shape than those attached to drag cars. For those exact reasons, that place was my sanctuary. Whether I was playing make believe, reading a book, or simply releasing pent up gas bubbles, for the duration of recess, I was the ruler of my own world.

And rule that world I did. Some of my most notable life achievements took place in that lovely dump of mine. A fantastical adventure awaited my every day spent at my oasis. Typically, my best friends, Lucy, Despereaux, and Harry Potter accompanied these voyages. Together, we ventured across every inch of Tolkien's Middle Earth, battled Paolini's dragons in record numbers, and hitched countless rides on Adams' intergalactic spacecraft, *The Heart of Gold*. In my world, people were exciting, and life was filled with purpose and wonder. My longing to live out my days there grew so intense it could have burned a hole in a 2X4. Despite my unrelentingly naive faith that a magical being of sorts would soon materialize to grant my wish, the dreaded dong of the recess bell never failed to knock me back into reality.

At that point in my life, fitting into what my mom called "reeee-aaaaaal liiiiiifffee," known in common tongue as society, was not exactly a piece of cake for me. To put it lightly, I was more of an outcast at my school than a belly laugh was at a baby's funeral. No one asked me to borrow a pencil, share test results, or trade snacks. I was 87% certain that God had forbid anyone to offer any remote form of acknowledgement that I existed. Even the bullies ignored me.

Their logic behind collectively ignoring everything 'D****s' was understandable. I was the only weird ass mother fucker in the entire building, and everyone else was normal, *per se*. Every person's eyes had confirmed that statement to be fact after I brought my massive collection of Barbie hair to Show-and-Tell on the second day of kindergarten. I had raved for around ten minutes about the different experiments I had conducted on the dolls, before I realized no one gave a rat's ass.

The only thing any of them appeared to care about was comparing the pictures of their summer vacations, which they had all managed to bring without prior collaboration.

From there on out, no matter my efforts, I couldn't properly tune my brainwaves to the frequency of their telecommunicative channel where they unconsciously agreed on everything. For instance, the day everyone started wearing Gaucho pants with halter tops just happened to occur a week after my Mom and I had joyfully uncovered a giant crate of hand-me-down turtlenecks and matching sweatpants in my size. When every person became obsessed with the movie *High School Musical*, I was busy losing myself in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

I would have been completely fine being an oddball loner, had it not been for the small aching feeling my heart dealt with every time I ate lunch alone in a bathroom stall. As time went on, I retreated further into myself, until my loneliness hardened into a frozen block of bitterness, for which I held my classmates responsible.

By the time third grade started, I had made up my mind to do away with people altogether. To ensure isolation, I mutilated the reasons for my classmates' everyday mistakes to extremes. When someone answered a question wrong, I instantly deemed them an idiot. If someone sniffled their boogers back into their nose instead of using a tissue, I considered him/her disgusting. The insults came with ease and became my only way of judging those around me. So when my third grade teacher announced that our class was welcoming a new student, I just grumbled in annoyance over the distraction and continued to complete my assignment. I was starting to look up dates for the Civil War when a second disturbance shook me out of my concentration.

"Hey, my name is Claire Freimark. Like a mark made from frying, I guess. Mrs. Brower told me to sit over here, so I am your new desk mate?" she said with so much uncertainty that her statement sounded like a question.

Without looking up from my paper, I used my legs to push the seat across mine out from underneath the table.

"Thanks?" she managed to squeak out in a tone of voice that had skipped from uncertain to downright petrified.

Does anyone have a backbone these days? my brain asked itself.

"Well, duh!" said a voice from across the table. "Everyone has a backbone, if we didn't no one would be sitting down or standing up."

I looked over at the girl in horror. Either she was a mind reader, or I had lost the ability to differentiate between internal and external conversation. My facial expression must have been frightening because the girl's own face shifted from a toothy grin to furrowed eyebrows of bewilderment. While I racked my brain in search of something to say that was fierce enough to re-stabilize my scholarly reputation, the metallic echo of the bell announced it was time for recess. Without the slightest hesitation, I bolted from my seat and tried to outrun embarrassment to my stronghold. Once there, I allowed myself a small sigh of relief. As the final remnants of shame burned blotches on my cheeks, I settled down and went to reach for my book, only to be met with the empty air. A quick scan of my fort informed me that I had left the novel on my desk in my haste to escape the girl. For a few moments, I basked in the perfection of my position before forcing myself to break the comfort to retrieve my adventure of the day. At the same moment I stood to reclaim it, the girl materialized before me, as if conjured by magic.

"Um, hey!" she said. "Well, I guess I wanted to see if I could hang out here. But, if I can't that is fine too, um, it's just that this place reminds me of my old house, and I miss my old house, I miss my dog, too. She couldn't come because we are renting an apartment...and... well, my point is I don't really have any friends, and you seem like a nice person...so...,"

Suddenly, as if a dam had burst inside her tear ducts, she began to cry. Thick streams of snot mingled with her tears as her fit turned into full on sobs. As I watched her body tremble with sadness, I retreated into my mind, begging it to spit out a judgmental comment worthy of warding off the level of intimacy in this uninvited situation. Hardly a minute passed before I regretfully disregarded the effort as hopeless. For some reason, my ability to insult was thwarted by compassion for this stranger. I stood there for what seemed like an hour, fighting a ridiculous sensation in my throat to join the girl's emotional outburst, until the girl had cried herself dry. She gave me a watery smile. Whether out of selfish relief, or as a gesture of kindness, I returned the smile.

"I bet you think I'm a baby," she forced out in between hiccups.

I tilted my head to the side and looked her up and down, as if I was seeing her for the first time. Her un-brushed, mustard colored hair was pulled back by a small purple bow. Besides a few rather large front teeth, the majority of her face was obscured under giant blue glasses.

She was so skinny that I wondered how her clothes remained on her body, and her feet were donned with my desired style of light up Sketchers. Even flashier to me than her shoes was a copy of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* dangling loosely in her hand. With her choice in literature, and fast-paced mind, I was starting to allow myself to consider the possibility that she just might have the potential to be my friend.

“Claire, you are too tall for me to ever mistake you for a baby,” I replied at last.

She emitted a series of strange honking noises in response. It took a minute for me to register that she was laughing, but when I did, my snort fused with hers, and when the combined effect hit my ear, I paired the sound to a goose with a cold. When I told Claire, she howled with joy, and for the remainder of recess we took turns fueling our giggling fit with nonsense phrases.

After recess we had one last free period, a time I usually spent with my homework. But somehow, Claire was too interesting for me to even think about long-division. We engaged each other in a passionate discussion about our favorite authors, devouring each other’s opinions like the starving intellectuals we were. When the first end of the day bell cut the talk short, Claire grabbed a marker and jotted down some numbers on my hand.

“If you call me later, my parents would be more than happy to have you over,” she said. “I have three giant bookshelves in my room, and you can borrow any of my books.”

I stared at the blotches of ink on my skin and gently traced my fingers along each number. The prospect of having a real friend had caused an avalanche of emotions inside me. My stomach churned with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. I looked down at my sweaty palms. On one hand, agreeing to call her would mean potential disappointment. On the other hand, I had seven digits waiting to be dialed.

“I have never been over a friend’s house before,” I admitted tentatively.

Before I could continue, Claire grabbed my unmarked hand and wrote down her phone number again.

“When you were a baby, you had never done most things,” she said. “But the more you started to do things, the faster you grew. If little babies can try new things, so can you. Unless you are a baby, but unless I am mistaken, you are much too tall to be a baby.”

CLANG! The last school bell rang right after she finished talking, allowing me time to digest her words. The coincidental timing of the racket made it seem as if the bell was purposefully calculated to encourage my decision. Acting on some primal instinct, I stuck my pinky out and Claire wrapped hers around it, finalizing my wordless pledge to call her.

After she ran to catch her bus, I sat down on a bench to wait for my mom. Sitting there in solitude suddenly felt completely different from anything in my past. Instead of dreading school the next day, I could hardly wait to show Claire the rest of my tire castle. If someone had told me yesterday that today I would be excited about sharing my private sector of the world with a stranger, I would have labeled them as a cotton-headed ninny-muffin. While attempting to understand how such a drastic change happened in a matter of hours, it hit me.

All of the countless days filled with isolation and inescapable loneliness had shown me ultimate suffering, and now I understood why. The fastest way to properly develop and appreciate a relationship is to experience the complete absence of all companionship. Once I met another weird ass mother fucker, my appreciation was abundant and immediate because for the first time ever, I was experiencing the unique bond of true friendship.

Lake

Michael Dietz

I love to sit by the lake in my head
and listen to the water lap on the shores of awareness.

It's a lake I've unearthed in the space between my ears
for days like today when life is too loud.

It could be mid-conversation
with a co-worker or comrade,
or while I'm rinsing lettuce for lunch

that I happen to slip away,
draw the velvet curtain of consciousness behind me,
and step into the comprehension of the dark pines
circling the still water,

the spires of their tall silhouettes
in the dark of my meditation, moonlight
illuminating those two swans, everything else asleep.

Happiness Comes in Waves

Stephanie Ewalt



Monet

Taylor Hermanson



Blue Rain

Abigail Postema

The dawn of an ancient beginning grew over the last vestige of night,
an artist lining shades of pale opal cloud with a stream of luminescent
light.

Bird song echoed through the drifting air,
emanating a joyful muse,
while a silent parade of butterflies danced in a maze of iridescent blues.

A playful wind lifted their wings,
bearing them towards a haloed sun,
whose surface glistened with black winged shadows as they passed one by
one.

It was summer and spring with a touch of fall,
but evening brought with it winter,
and a jealous frost shattered the delicate bodies,
which fell to earth splinter by splinter.

The English-Teacher's Monster

Mary Tyler

He is all
ivory-chiseled and bone, the finest
flesh and blood, a slight-but-perfectly living
cameo, bolt upright at his desk. The light,
on for months now. He wears a scarf and vest,
carries an honest-to-Wordsworth leather
notebook, unlined pages, the kind with a leather
strap that wraps twice around the journal's waist
and then tightens into a knotted acorn at the front.
His secrets are safe and organic now. He writes
with a cartridge pen, a pen *with an actual changeable
cartridge, folks* (in case you can't hear
my awe), and when he isn't scribing with pen
in his classic cursive, he scrawls in lead, a fat
wooden pencil, whittled by his own hand
to a fine point.

For the love of Shakespeare, who does this?
It's the twenty-first century! But now

he's in my office, fifteen minutes after
class, and he asks about the inane
usage of past participles, he laments
that so many of his peer-less peers are always
*sitting, smoking a cigarette, and running,
hoping to get there, and talking, wanting
to be heard.*

It's driving him mad.

No, no. It *drives* him mad.

What he doesn't know is that these dunces
haven't learned how tightly one can stitch
words: Noun. Verb. That's all you need, just
as Shelley showed when her creation
awoke: *it breathed hard, and a convulsive
motion agitated its limbs.*

What are we to do with those of our own making? This immaculate, unbound man, all animated art now, reading and writing like the formalists, funneling poems from the deepest chambers of his four-chambered heart. This monster, who enunciates like Yeats, uses slant rhyme, plans his caesuras, and, in the rare moments when he's feeling full of fun and frisk at the foot of it all, he gets hyperbolic with alliteration. What are we to do? His fellow community college villagers are not his community, they only grunt, their heads bent (but never in prayer) over the phone in their hands, scrolling and scrolling through FacadeBook, *hoping* to get there, *wanting* to be heard, *running* . . .

Run, Michael. You are the new thing under the sun. Grab your Underwood typewriter from 1962 that *click click bings* in Times New Roman, tuck it under your arm and throw your caution to the wind

mill. They won't chase you down. They're not paying attention. To hell with this mob of mumbling morons.

And, if real truth be told, I had forgotten what a past participle is. I was just eating lunch, filling my slice of a 30-minute office hour, hoping you'd be the new light thief, wanting you to snatch these flames, shake the torches underneath their countless double chins, scare the piss out of them when you lumber through these halls, unbent arms straight ahead of you, and rant at full-on rage about the *neglect of the Oxford comma, Motherfuckers!*

And when they don't hear the Oedipal connection, really steal the flames, Michael, and set this world ablaze.

April Showers

Michael Dietz

This evening, quite unremarkable
as most often are, water is gathering
in globules on the window pane.
Beyond that, above the thick dark line
of trees on the horizon,
the sky is randomly flashing
with distant lightning. Not
in bolts that crack the sky
(or at least none that I can tell),
but with the silence
of a violet pulse
that reminds me very much
of what happens in the sky of my chest
every time you walk into the room.

Embers of Destruction

Emily McKee

Bone chilling fingers wrap around her throat
As if her esophagus was a twig,
Entitled hands travel into the depths of her soul that shouldn't be reached.

Not by him.

The fire burning through her veins turns her body into a mass grave
For the ashes of her dignity to rest.
In the embers of her destruction,
He finds peace

And she is gone.

The Garden of Hate

Baylee Babcock

Not always aware of the consequences of our sins,
I am sure of one I have done.
Years ago, when I was a young blossoming girl, superior,
for I was grandpa's favorite flower,
my cousin sprouted two years after me.
I easily shaded her sunshine.
I teased and tortured her for reasons I'm unsure of now,
perhaps there was no room for her to grow alongside me.
Having been the brightest, most vibrant flower,
I didn't want any competition for attention,
so, I trampled on her growth.
Having originated from the same seed,
I should have been her protector, her leader.
How could I have stomped on someone who looked up to me?

As I am older, more developed now,
I admire her tenderness and how her colors shine forth.
She's beautiful and kind, only radiating happiness outward.
My heart withers as she is uprooted by others who make her feel inferior.
She calls me on the phone, weeping about how people treat her.
"A fat, ugly weed that needs to be disposed of."
I'm crushed.
Unable to admire her own petals and inner workings,
she finds no comfort in my attempts to console.
The self-inflicted cuts on her stem reveal the pain originating from inside,
her heart polluted with images of ending it all.
I tend to her, supporting her weak stem, wondering how anyone could
cause her to feel this hurt,
but then I remember I was the beginning.
I committed the original sin.
I cast her from my garden and allowed weeds to grow in her place.

Abandoned

Taylor Hermanson



Dream House

Nehemiah Shaw



Lost Village

Mary Tyler

A poet friend tells me to embrace being adrift, to see being lost as a wonderful adventure, an endless trip where I can simply stumble into the Land of Possibilities.

In far too many dreams to recall,
I am utterly and horribly lost. Somehow
dropped dead center into the chaos of a foreign
land. I search and scratch for my phone and
money, but they're gone, so I claw inside
my pockets for directions or a map, only
to watch the lint float into motes

of drunk light, too ethereal to grasp. Often,
I don't even have pockets, and the search
lights inside my head bounce and blare –
to the attention of no one else – and more often
than not, my mouth is sewn shut, so
when I try to ask locals for directions, I look
like a spastic threat. (I am no longer young
and I am not pretty and each person pivots
away from me until I watch a wide tide of strange
backs ebb the other way. No one extends a hand,
so I walk and wander, wander and walk:
Oedipus, with as much shame but no
epic tale to tell.)

There is no mystery to the theme of my dreams.
In my waking life, I am often directionless, the turtle
you pick up in the middle of the road. If you turn me
around, I will merely walk the other way, forget why
I risked my life in the first place to cross over. For
instance, after countless years with the same doctor,
I can exit his office on the third floor of a building I
should *know by heart*, only to face, each time, a labyrinth
of halls.

And once in the parking ramp: my car? Where?
Which floor? Which side? Row A or B? (I now
covet my key fob, exhale deeply when I hear my car
spring to life and bleep for me.) And once home, I am still
grateful to find the light switch on the cool smooth wall
of my own dark kitchen.

Yes, I am a derailed traveler, and everyone
who knows me knows this, but today
I will take my friend's advice.

I will meander about this earthy maze in reckless
abandon, float without fear or orbit. I will zigzag
my way around, weave a new serpentine path
until I find myself smack dab off center
in Lost Village. All my new friends will be there,
mumbling and bumping about, an entire village
of idiots, with no officers in command because there is no
one to lead. And if any of my kinsmen fret, "I think
I'm losing my marbles today," a chorus of "Me too!"
will ring across our psychedelic land until someone
begins a game of Peek-a-Boo or Hide-and-Seek,
everyone's favorites. Each day, a found day. Each
evening, a cause to give deep thanks for having made
it here, safe and sound. I will know this by heart.

Leave us to our own, you Straight and Narrowers. Let us
stumble into each other in an orgy of pointlessness, point
to the ever-present sun each day in wonder and awe, aware
only that it is here
again
today
and it appears to be . . . well, *up there somewhere*.

To you elite breeds who can always point due north, who see this world in precise grids of longitude and latitude, who say things like, “Head west at mile marker 28” instead of something sensible like, “Turn right at the quirky yellow house with the ceramic ducks on the front lawn,”

to you masterminds of your choreographed and designed world, I am here now, in blissful oblivion, and I have only three words for you:
Go find yourself!

Dream

Michael Dietz

As you were falling asleep in my lap,
in a dream nonetheless,
languor drawing the strings to your eyelids slowly,

I knew I must get it all down on paper—
you, the dream, the languor—

before it all was lost,
a grazing deer startled
by the snapping twigs of my waking;

so I began writing
there in my dream
with you in my lap,
suspended in the equipoise of some of my favorite things—

the writing, the dreaming, the feeling
I could never do without you—

all marbles in my head
rolling around in perfect circles
in a scale model of the solar system,
all of them orbiting the milky-yellow one in the center,
the sun,

all of them orbiting you.

Surreal. (An Ekphrastic Poem)

Taylor Hermanson

Time, here has no meaning
no purpose.
Left alone
with my own insanity.
Desolate spaces
echoing my incessant ramblings
“I am not crazy.”

My many faces
melting
collapsing
crumbling in heaps.
Here I face the bare bones of the truth.
Barren branches and
timeless faces
all stuck in this bleak existence
“I am not crazy.”

Time, here does not tick the same
my skin becomes metallic
my fingers elongate into roman numerals
falling into a melted heap
“I am not crazy.”

Empty.
Every vertebrae of my spine vibrates.
The hollow coliseum of my rib cage echoes a heartbeat,
now turned into constant ticking
“I am crazy.”



The Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dalí

Reverie

Patrick Harju

The morning sun rises. Shivers of light seep through, piercing the contents of my sockets. Disheveled curls spiral out into every different direction, yearning to be brushed from my face. Icy sheets wrap around me like ribbons of snow, and these rusty mattress springs sketch circles about my spine. The sharp, stale air swells in my throat, tickling my lungs like an abandoned feather.

*

My hands lay grasping a ceramic mug filled with coffee. A fragile pool with finite ripples moving outward. I tap my fingers along to music. Music, blaring from underneath my palms, pounding a swayful beat onto this feeble dining room table, all the while keeping rhythm.

*

Seconds after the mouth of my apartment is opened, morning's tongue hastily laps at my cheeks. My eyes are grey today, but the world is full of color. Sunshine spills upon my skin, warming my insides like a cup of Christmas cocoa.

*

A woman speaks with passion and bystanders are captivated. Her words burn brightly in the air. The borders of each letter, glowing like a falling ember. Entranced by the sight, I carry her words with me and look towards the sky.

*

It begins to rain, and I take my feet off this shabby sidewalk. This world is so magnificent, yet I still witness busy folk pace onward with their jackets raised high above their shoulders. This place is far too beautiful to never be seen.

Ajna (Sixth Chakra)

Gretchen Cline



The Crying Lady

Matthew Evans



She Fell in Love

Anna Dunigan

She fell in love
with the way he played the piano.
His calloused hands
moved nimbly over the keys,
hitting the right note every time.
His icy eyes connected to hers
as his music sung sweet lies.

She fell in love
with they way he painted.
His wide brush strokes
covered any last trace of
blue on her skin.
He painted portraits of the girl
she should have been.

She fell in love
with the way he wrote.
His prose, written
in a favorite ink pen,
was unlike any other.
He manipulated worlds,
he created and
he destroyed.

She fell in love
with the artist because she
couldn't see the man inside.
The man that took that
favorite ink pen and
carved words into her thighs.
The man that made her cover
the marks he made.
The man that told her
he could love her too,
but only if she'd change.

Daydreamer's Burden: A Personal Narrative

Sarah Linkous

Self-reflection is a meat tenderizer. Its' purpose is to beat up hunks of raw flesh so that it will be soft and buttery when cooked. When you're a tense person like me, it takes more than a simple whack at the ol' memory center to uncover something that can then suffer further scrutiny. My so-called achievements, life-turning events, moments where I showed off how courageous I can be: it's like I'm being asked to sell my tarnished trophies, too scratched up and neglected to bother donating. So why should I do it?

If my existence were captured on film with a nice surround-sound audio, it'd be a twisted, psychological drama with way fewer sex scenes and affairs.

I wonder whether my ratings can fathom competing against the Kardashians. I wonder who's my director. I wonder if my writers do anything for American Horror Story as well.

I flip on the television set in my head. I watch this pixelized version of me. We've started a new season, and the build-up crawls along. Our anxious protagonist must overcome a brand-new obstacle all while her childhood continues to bubble and boil, thick and murky like a familiar cauldron recipe. Will she find the antidote to her latest round of cognitive poisonings, or will she be trapped to the side like Jekyll in Hyde's body, forced to scream profanities at a walking pile of flesh that refuses to listen to its master?

I think I'll stay tuned.

I had to be careful not to burn my nonlatex gloves on the waffle irons after childhood ended. I don't remember when it ended, but it was abrupt. That I know. I squeezed another drop of pancake batter on the iron and pressed the griddle closed. Set my timer for one minute. Watch the other irons for signs of burning. Roll the too-hot-steaming waffle plates into ice cream cones. Place on tray to cool. Repeat. And repeat. And repeat.

I hated this job, but it was better than watching my hippie neighbors' sons throw rocks at each other for five-dollars-an-hour. I stood and daydreamed. I couldn't do that lying down anymore. I couldn't read my books lying down anymore.

When I was younger, I'd paint myself imaginary adventures on the bus rides home, memorizing lyrics to trashy pop songs just so that the little *Me* in my head could sing it better. My two realities had never merged before, and I consider it a blessing.

My happy place floats beyond the borders of Cloud Nine, where not even the sun reaches, where the only light is the bright, freezing touch of a dream. My aspirations are the stars, shining and telling me stories from far, far away. I reach my hand skyward, and the light pokes through the soft flesh of my fingers, outlining the bones and knuckles. They're so bright, yet so far away. It's so cold my body feels numb, nothing.

The waffle iron was hot.

I wonder if I can hire a better costumer, or at least a competent makeup artist.

It's too hot in the real world, the story being written with every breath that visits my lungs. Each second passes, and another scene comes out of the oven. Some go in for more time to fully cook into something wonderful and inspiring. I feel like none of them are ready to leave the cooling rack.

A child has assignments to ignore, friends to lose track of. In elementary school, I was a busy bookworm! If my dreams were wonderful, then how come every book I picked up shone more brightly than the last? The pages smelled like my cloudy atmosphere, and the stinging papercuts gave me the ground for my clouds. Tangible. Real things in my dream world.

I squeezed more pancake batter onto the griddle. Repeat. Don't burn the gloves. Don't let the customers see you fuck up the stupid ice cream cone. Don't burn the cone.

Minimum wage is better than babysitting scraps, but the seven hours spent performing the same task grew like a tumor. At first, I didn't see any of the symptoms, but as the days became weeks, it hit me. I was content by myself. I didn't need to talk to anyone for those seven hours. I could just talk to myself. Who's gonna hear me? The windows? The waffle ice cream cones? Through my mumbled words, my childhood daydream world grew, infecting my jaw muscles and lips, the glaze in my eyes thickening to the same clouds as my land beyond reality. The rumbling in my chest become a new grounding technique to shoot me among the clouds.

I was blissfully alone for seven hours a day, five days a week, for almost thirteen weeks straight. I'd go home, pop some Benadryl or Melatonin—whatever's in the cupboard--and sleep. I shaped solitude into a comfort blanket.

As a child, my imagination was just that: imaginative. Understanding that all my adventures, my rock concerts and superpowers, were all just fictional escapes to keep me sane—in that regard anyway. My summer job had literally driven me crazy; I overlapped the two worlds and made Frankenstein's monster, an abomination that defied healthy human nature and coping mechanisms. I learned how to talk to myself in every language from Hamlet's soliloquies to the city bums muttering alien conspiracies in dark alleys. Transcribing it into the written word becomes clunky. Some moments just don't translate well.

Why would I write about myself when I can just talk to the wall? The walls are less likely to spill my secrets than this document. I trust them more.

I wonder if Shakespeare's ghost is on my life's script-writing team.

Violence

Jalen Burks

I'm dodging your ballistics
just so I can get to your kisses.
How'd you drive me away
when I didn't even let you whip it?

Like Tyler said: "I'd give up my bakery
just for a piece of your pie."
I'd give you all my staples
but that evinces a lie.

This isn't a synagogue
yet, you still try preaching young.
I can't feel safety in your love
it makes me want to get a gun.

The art of war inside a capsule
you're taking them by the handful.
No mistakes and no feeling regretful
you're stratification of me is never on stand still.

How do you keep shooting me down
yet, you're the one feeling holy?
You say I'm not catching your vibe
that's because you always throw me.

The Trees

Samantha Plough

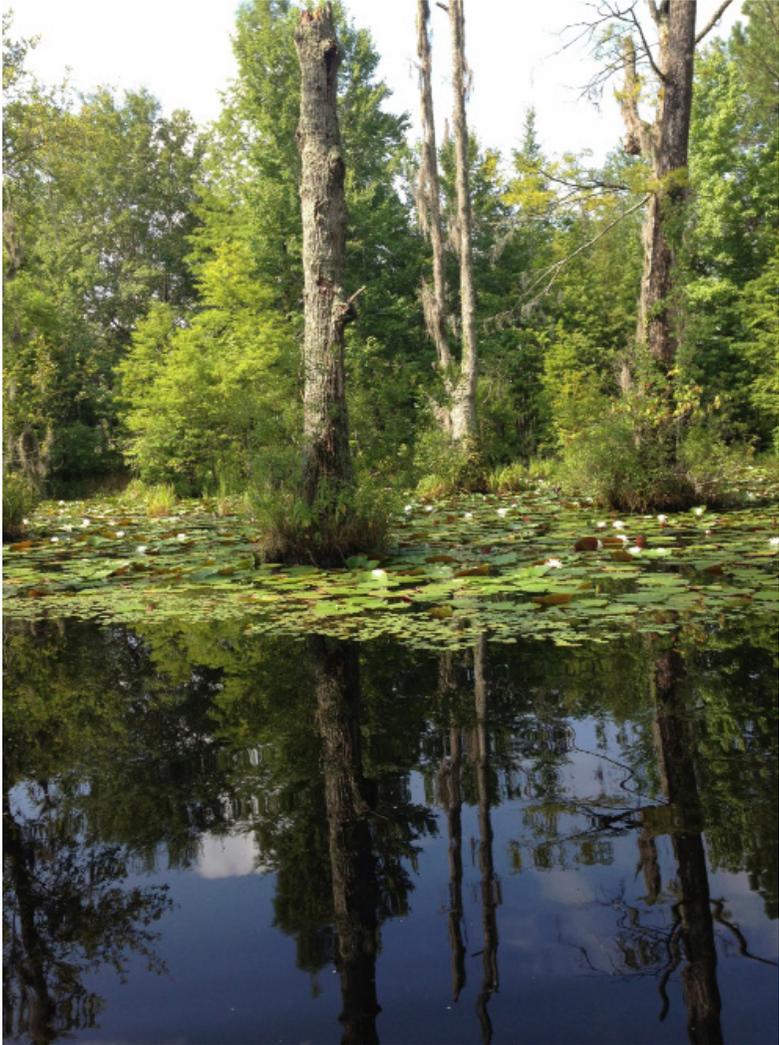
The water seems to be thicker than I remember. It is viscous with murk, a moving, breathing entity. There must be life in its depths, but I can't help but picture the sludge festering and choking even the smallest of organisms. The trees, though, are thriving. They take the ugly wretched waves mixed with the muddy banks and continue to suffocate all that might walk or breathe or think, their roots reaching to drink up the waters of the lake.

When I was a child, the water seemed to go on forever, an endless vision of beauty. It was a clear promise that life would move on and flow forward. Every dip in the silky liquid felt as though I was being cleansed from the outside into the core of my being. I felt a bond to the water that nothing could compare. Now that I've reached adulthood, I can see past the façade.

My kinship no longer resides with the water. No, now I respond to the trees. We have the same wants and needs and desires. We yearn for the near impossible – a spotlight of our own. No longer will we settle for sloppy seconds. I may have found my opportunity, but the trees have yet to make their final move. It's alright though. If they are anything like me, they are patient. I will wait with them until the perfect moment is upon us. The moment that the last bit of water is sucked up by their roots or evaporated in a mist of glory by the hot afternoon sun. My wait may be up, but I will be with the trees once again, to celebrate their hard earned victory.

Cypress Gardens

Shauna Hayes



Uncharted Territory

Stephanie Ewalt



His Name Was Jeremy

Ron Jewell

I went to church this morning,
for the first time in years.
And the Minster preached a sermon
on Forgiveness . . . and how
a prostitute came to Jesus
and wept, and bathed his feet
with her tears.

She was forgiven.

As I sat there . . .
my mind drifting to far-away places,
I thought of a kid . . .

His name was Jeremy.

And like a burst of bright light
on a snowy day,
I realized . . .
I had never forgiven that kid.

That kid, whose pictures I keep hidden
in my closet, as a constant reminder of
what used to be.

That kid who made me realize the power of
a glass of wine
to make the pain go away.

That kid who made me ashamed
to tell others who he really was
and how he really died.

That kid who helped me to understand
compassion and the power of words.

I forgave that kid today.

And though my heart still aches,
I am ready to move on
and set his ashes free
Because I know it is the right thing to do
And that my grandmother
 God rest her soul
would be proud.

And now I, too,
 am free.

Queen Anne's Lace: Summer

Abigail Sawin



Lady of the Lake

Katrina Smith



Who Stole the Soul?

Brody Yarian

The lives of my grandparents sang freely,
 memories created a constant flow.
Love poured from their hearts to our souls
 as the family ranch brought us together.
 The ranch made us a family,
with signatures on a wall with every visit to prove it.
 There was no better welcome than
 Grandpa's signature wave.

Who stole the soul?

Age took over all of us
as the mountain of signatures reached its peak.
 Grandma grew too small for the ranch
 while Grandpa's age stayed the same.
A sacrifice had to be made, and for Grandpa,
 it was *hell or high water*.

 The ranch was no more,
 and the old souls found their new living space.
The new space was not enough for the whole family.
 Memories left behind on that open field,
 a thought still lingers while looking back:

Who signed the wall last?

Where's the soul now?

Morning Cigarette

Taylor Hewitt

you are harsh like the first drag of a cigarette
in the morning dew of a west Michigan sunrise
you are just what I need
when I need it the most
taking deep breaths
I inhale you into my lungs
storing the memory of you inside me
to curb my addiction

Event Horizon

Kane Gerencer

In every waking moment trillions of inconceivable actions are occurring. With every breath taken, creation occurs, destruction looms, the journey infinite, but we, constrained by our mortal coil, left pondering menial interactions and fruitless experiences, with complete disregard to those around us, the bigger picture left blurred by a haze we create, a haze of importance, a selfish misconception that within the trillions of celestial bodies we stand paramount.

Within this some 7.5 billion beings, each believing their story holds significant value, their interactions with others hold meaning, our delicate feelings naught but chemical interaction from the very exchanges birthed from a blazing inferno. Yet still, the knowledge of emotion holds no sway over their ability, every feeling still swings hammer blows to my psyche, every interaction is asphyxiation. How can some minor detail with insignificant outcome hold power overhead? Dread pressing in from all corners, former relations flashing episodically, unrelentingly, choking over memories of better times, questioning, pondering, searching for an answer in a sea of emotion absent of hope.

Seek no further, question no more, all things fade...

did autumn fall

Brianna MacPherson

I didn't know you well enough to know,
if like your name, the season of change,
you fell one last time.
I didn't know how many times you fell,
or if like the leaves, there were too many to count.
I don't know what your last moments were like,
was it a storm or were you tired and losing your grip?
I wish we could have bonded,
I wish you could have looked into the mirroring eyes that are mine
and told me something transparent so I could see the pain
that was only visible in your eyes and your hands.
I wish I saw the things I always see in the hurt, the troubled, the pained.
I wish I saw it as clear as they see you in me.
Wherever you are, however you went, I hope it is spring.

Gestural Portrait of Van Gogh

Abigail Sawin



The Persistence of Homosexuality

Kaytee Walker



The Usual Way

Holly Lothschutz

I guess we fell apart
in the usual way,
With blood stained glass falling
from our kaleidoscope eyes,
and bruises replacing makeup on our
too-sharp cheekbones.

We forgot to wear our life jackets,
and when the storm came to tear us in half,
We were both unprepared,
and too stubborn to admit that it was
our own fault we were drowning.

We jumped head first off of the cliff,
Two strangers relying on the other
To remember their parachute.

We fell apart with dirt and skin
stuck under our fingernails,
Frostbite growing in our chests where
Our hearts would normally be.

We fell apart in the usual way,
With fire in our throats and
Thorns in our feet.

And even after the dust had settled,
After we'd torn each other apart,
We stood there,
Still undeniably whole.

Iko and ...

Jalen Burks

I guess you could say, “We’re in deep shit.” We are in deep shit, and it’s so deep that this shit is deeper than the marks that Mama tried to make on her wrists. I remember those marks. I wanted to make the same ones and sometimes, I still do. Hush now, because Papa can’t hear us otherwise he’ll grab the trusty belt again and we can’t run from Papa. You know he hates it when we try to run. With our minds or our bodies, he hates it just the same. He always hits me harder, though, for some reason. You can feel when he does, though. With every belt stroke, it resonates in your head like a timer on a microwave that’s reminding you that your food is ready. It stings like a reminder that you’re next like a lamb to the slaughter and you always were Papa’s *little lamb*. That’s what he calls you, at least, even though it isn’t as cute as he thinks it is.

You’ve been his little lamb since age 3, and I fight back too much. When it’s your turn, and I try to fight, he just pushes me and tells me to leave. I was strong enough to handle the beating, but you, Iko... you weren’t. Neither was Mama, and when she slumbers, I sometimes hear all the things that she wishes she could do in front of Papa. For example, I heard her cry in my dream last night. I wish that she could gather the strength that she wants to impose on us, tighten her smile, go into her phone booth, and transform into the Wonder Woman we see her as. Mama was strong, but only in private. When it was just you, Mama, and I, she’d always be so happy. Then Papa came along and now she isn’t as happy anymore.

Iko, you were always the one being protected, even though, in my opinion, you are a tornado of great things, while also being the calm, rebuild afterwards. Oh, but that doesn’t seem like enough to describe you, my little brother. Iko, you’re the one we have the most hope in, and everyone in our family, aside from Papa, loves you and can see the world in your eyes. To me, you’ve always been my 10 year old, bright-eyed, “got-the-world-ahead-of-him,” “sing another song!” hermano bebe, who loves his cynical, dysfunctional family. Now, speaking of which, let’s talk about the rest of us. Me, I’m the writer of the family, and I would do anything to protect my brother and mother. Mama says that I’m a barbaric, young, “Well, he sure has his wits about him!” kind of man who will do great things, away from Papa.

Mama is your typical housewife... if typical means a housewife who endures physical and emotional abuse from the one person Iko and I are supposed to look up to. Nowadays, we look down on our Papa; I wish Mama could do the same, but instead, she just looks down on the batter as she makes breakfast.

After we had breakfast, which was Mama's famous waffles with the strawberry creme glaze and the whipped cream on the top, we got ready to go play in the woods. You and I always said that we loved the woods because we can make our own home and pretend out there. It helps us, sometimes, to create a fantasy land that breaks us free from the imprisonment in our regular home. Our favorite place to go is our treehouse that we made in an old, yet secret-holding oak tree. Iko, you go there a lot, and most of the time, you're alone. Whenever it's one of daddy's nightmare days, you always grab your stuffed animal, named Hope, and run to our secret treehouse. Papa could never find it; he didn't have Hope to help tell him where to go. When cold season comes, we can't run away anymore.

It's cold season now, and these are usually the worst, in all aspects. Papa grabs my throat like it's the neck of his whiskey bottle, but this wasn't a mistake. He wasn't reaching for the Jack Daniels that he frequents more than our own living room. He does this a lot, and I never care too much because that's what Papa does. He lets me go, and I try to tell him about my friend Arya. He seemed happy! But, then he raised his hand. I thought that he was receding from his scary time and that he possibly wanted a high five, so I raised mine, too. He didn't want one, though. God, it stung like a fierce yellowjacket was shaken up and let loose and I was the poor sap who needed to calm it down. Iko, you looked in from the bedroom door with a single tear rolling down your cheek and I looked right at you. No words were spoken, but we both knew what had to be done.

We'd been planning this for such a long time, and Mama was too shaken up to help us. I looked at her face, and she was trembling like a wet dog in the middle of December with ice crystals forming on its tongue, and just like that dog, Mama wanted back inside, but Papa would never let her back in. We had to do this; Mama's left eye was swollen up completely at this point, looking like the forever puckered mouth of someone who's always speaking sour. While Papa sat in his overused chair in the corner of the living room, with the leather wearing off where his forearms lay, Iko, you and I plotted.

Rushes of emotions came over us, and we thought about all the possibilities. We worried that Papa might catch on, or that Mama might not be here when we came back, where we should go, what we should do, and if Mama knew we were scared.

It was finally time to act. With the vinyl of Desi Arnaz playing through the kitchen, you looked at me nervously, yet still assured. I was still unsure about how you felt, so I asked again, and you nodded your confirmation. We lay quiet now, like hunters stalking their prey in the wintery woods. Papa will be home any minute, and that would be the time to spring into action. Several, hour-long minutes passed, and we heard Papa's worn out pickup rub against the snowy driveway, and we tensed up. There was no time to waste, and Papa was proceeding as usual. Papa always leaves his keys in the ignition while he comes in to use the bathroom before he gets his cigarettes and booze.

Papa got into the house, and with slight hesitation, I looked at you and nodded my head. Like track runners bolting for the finish line, we pounced towards Papa's pickup and closed ourselves inside. The adrenaline rushed over both of us and it seemed like we blacked out. The next thing we knew, we were back to reality, and reality was, we were going down Ontario Street, at 45 mph. We felt like kings of the world, and that we had just escaped the depths of hell. Neither of us could contain ourselves, and we took this joyride going nowhere in particular, but it didn't matter! We escaped certain continuance of abuse, and were finally free. Free of Papa, free of worrying, free of pain, free of the unspeakable things, and everyone will know the story of us. The story of you and I, Iko! How we were these young boys who were caught in the trap of terror, and are now caught in the headlights of a semi moving 65 mph, in the snowy, sloped road, which they paid no mind to because they were free! They will know the story of Iko and...

Belize Student Trip Cahal Pech Ruins

Theresa Van Veelen



This travel-study course, offered by MCC in 2017, provided students and community members an international experience. They hiked through a medicinal plant, explored three Mayan ruin sites, ziplined through the rainforest, and visited the Belize City Zoo.

Belize Student Trip
Give and Take Palm
Cryosophila stauracantha

Theresa Van Veelen



Cross section of a cut “tree” which is not like our trees here in Michigan. The little round circles are the spines that continuously form around the stem of the palm.

Remorseless Waters

Kylie Walsworth

Salt-filled air bites at the senses
as water from above and below intertwine,
woven together in intense immersion
with an imminent addition to
the ocean's continuing collection of structures,
made of the forests' dead
and interlacing spines from branches,
given no chance to flourish.

Now only to be resting miles below their home,
standing meekly against the current of the deep.

Saturated skies echo sadness from the sea,
while man's eye only grazed upon the shore
before remorseless waters' waves
tumble and lure to underwater graves.

And what ensued...

The sharp cold of the evening sky's drizzle
would dissipate the day's warm, dense remnants
of sun grasping air, to leave the scene at peace
as if no soul were ever there.

Leaves

Maddie Olsen

The buds in the spring
don't last but three weeks.
They grow, and they cling
staying on by one string
until they become frail and too weak.

The youthfulness is replaced,
by wisdom and maturity.
The young new color soon is erased.
It changes and finds a new face.
That which provides a sign of purity.

Soon their time will come
when they must let go of their branches,
one little leaf the size of a thumb,
while the new wind howls and dances.

As the life of their generation ends,
a new bud is forming and growing.
The new leaves turn green which blend,
until they will too descend.
For that repetition will keep going and going.

Mr. K.

Michael Dietz

When the ripple of his death reached me
from across the lake of the day,
I was asked to suggest a good poem to tuck inside
your lunchbox for the following afternoon,

but the window to my heart was blown open with the news
and the flock of everything I'd ever read before
that might've fit perfectly beside your sandwich and apple
flew out in a swell of feathers and book pages.

I scrambled to the window quick as I could
to latch it for you,
but by then every last one had already escaped.

I watched their silhouettes flap in the moonlight
against the indigo sky and cried,
for I'm sorry to say they left nothing behind for me to give you
except for a few feathers floating to the floor

and the image of a poet in his chair who is still
staring blankly at the portrait of that night
framed by the empty wall,
the broken shutter to its window banging in the wind.

Precious Cargo

Barbara Gilbert

To my children who I love
you are my gift from up above.
Though all the stress and all the pain
you helped me walk, you kept me sane.

I tried my best, please read this letter,
I wish I could have done much better.
When I gave birth to each of you three,
it opened my eyes, it helped me see.

When one is so fragile and so young,
they should be held tight and sang a song.
Then they should grow to be happy and plucky,
but there are some that are not so lucky.

Some things in life should not be seen
by any child, kid or teen.
So, I covered your eyes and shielded your souls
from all the evil and dangerous trolls.

I think you guys are finally ready,
you've grown so big, tall and steady.
Don't feel bad or be concerned,
life gives lessons that need to be learned.

All I did was follow my heart,
and I ended up torn apart.
I cried, I worried, and I stewed
while all the darkness inside brewed.

I was young when I was shown
things unseen and unknown.
So, I had to give you a normal childhood
because I skipped that part, I never could.

I have seen the devil's red face.
For me, there was no saving grace.
The devil is dark, evil and muddy.
He cut, whipped, and beat me bloody.

After I held you in my arms,
I had to protect you from any harm.
Now you know why I shielded you guys
because I could not bear to hear your cries.

I wanted you to stay the same
as you were the day you came..
so sweet, pure and full of light,
I could not let you lose your sight.

Seeing too much can be so heavy
for anyone who isn't ready.
Through life, go slow and not too fast.
There is no way to change the past.

You're getting older, and I must
not hold so tight and give you trust.
I know that you have to run
to live life and have much fun.

I ask of you this one small thing,
that you learn to fly with a broken wing.
So, when life makes you feel small,
just get back up and stand real tall.

I am sorry, but I hope you see
that keeping your innocence was important to me.
That is why I made you blind,
so, you would not fall behind.

I must say just once more,
before you head out the door,
the thing I love most and it will never change:
Each one of you is unique and equally strange.

Go, live your life with no regret.
Have a blast, but don't forget,
love yourself and do your best.
That is all that matters on your quest.

For MSDHS

McKenzie Nelson

He doesn't deserve to be named.
He doesn't deserve to be known.
He doesn't deserve any fame,
simply because the death polls have grown.

That was his mission,
to kill more than the last.
He had an ambition,
and previous records were surpassed.

Remember the victims,
not the one with the gun.
We need to change the system,
encourage empathy with our young.

Alhadeff, Beigel, Duque and Dworet,
you'd think his heart would be filled with regret.
Guttenberg, Hixon, Hoyer, Loughran and Feis,
did he think his actions would suffice?

Montalto, Oliver, Petty and Pollack,
the light in their eyes has faded to black.
Ramsay, Schachter, Schentrup and Wang
the screams of the bullets echoed with a bang.

Don't say his name in the press.
Don't say his name in school.
Remember those in distress.
Broken because of the cruel.

This poem is dedicated to the 17 victims who were killed during the school shooting that occurred on February 14th, 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

People Don't Belong on Pedestals

Samantha Plough

People don't belong on pedestals.
It's awfully hard to see into their eyes
when you have to crank your neck back
just to catch a glimpse of their flowing hair.

People don't belong on pedestals.
They begin to think that they can do no wrong
when they have to look down their nose
just to have a conversation with you.

People don't belong on pedestals.
It makes it too damn easy for them to reach things
when you're stuck on the ground with
just your flat feet.

People don't belong on pedestals.
You begin to think it's your fault
when they hurt you
just because they have a better view.

People don't belong on pedestals.
Once they are stood,
when they've climbed high,
just as the old cliché goes, they fall oh so far.

Mama

Grace Young

I still go to church,
because there, I can hold my mother in my hands.
She is a god of small things.
She sits in silence on my fingertips,
her porcelain jaw painted shut,
metal cross weighing on her chains,
They call her Mary.
I try to push her into holes she does not fit in.
Beg her to fill the empty parts of me.
It does not work,
but at least she stays.

She is not the first Mother I have known.
Mama, I do not know if you birthed me,
God Forsaking or forsaking God,
but being in your arms felt like sacrament.
Your bones were my church walls.
Your ribs creaking pews.
The only sin I knew,
were the pills that made you *not you*.

They asked me in school,
Why I didn't believe in God.
I told them that Mama was my Amen.
I love you, Mama.
Let's get ice cream, Mama.
When will you be home, Mama?

Put down the bottle,
the pills,
your drug, Mama.
Choose me,
not him or him or him, Mama.
Come home, Mama.
Don't call me hateful, Mama,
because all I've ever known is wanting you.
I still love you, Mama
though I wish I didn't.

My Amens don't seem to work anymore.
So I cement myself beneath an altar,
but prayer still tastes like rust between my teeth.

Here, I clutch my mother tighter,
invite her home,
invite her into this empty shell,
that I call my body,
that I call my home,
Then curse her name as she flees,
her beads snapping, shattering behind pews.
I do not pick them up.
Mama, if I've learned one thing from you,
it's that a god that needs to be chased,
does not want to be found.
Chasing only leaves you with splintered wounds,
and blood in your palms.

Sleazeball Citizens Sonnet

Ethan Epplert

I reside in the bicameral house,
Am a mistaken political mouse;
I try to represent my constituents,
but only satisfy my interests.
Am quite the pillar of society;
Even though I'm not viewed very highly.
We set the code used to take your money;
Or crafting contracts with foreign dummies.

Absolute governors of the masses,
representative for bunch of ass-ess..
Conservatives stuck in their tradition,
always fighting a war of attrition.
Liberals trying to force transition,
always being the face of progression.
Whether you lean left or right a little..
You are supposed to meet in the middle.
It is called compromise my dear fellow.

Oh, by the way, name's Jon Screwafellow.
I wear a suit and tie, very formal;
Don't worry government shutdown is normal.
Next campaign shouldn't be insurmountable,
the public doesn't hold us accountable.
It'll all be blamed on the el comandante,
even though we control the sovereignty.
Who's at fault if you hate me? Yours only.
Go back to your sandwich, cheese-baloney.

Strange Fruit Memorial

Gretchen Cline



*For the unarmed black men & boys
killed by the police in the United States
(2012-2015)*

Ice

Grace Dowling



Superhero

Sadie Brown

december was cold.
there was no celebrating.
no happiness buried within my eyes.

december is when it happened.

he was a genius. a prodigy.
he could take anything apart and put it back together.
he was an artist. a visionary.
he would spend his time between jobs creating small masterpieces.

he seemed to be invincible.
i didn't see the trembling of his knees.

he was a superhero in my eyes.

but this time he looked different.

there was a rope where his cape should have been.
it was as if he was flying.
soaring above the shattered glass covering the garage floor.

he didn't see the hero i did.

if december was cold, now it is freezing.

Rooted

Samantha Plough

Sitting.
Day in, day out.
Embedded heavily in place.
The occasional light flashes,
but never long enough to see by.
Beings enter.

Beings of terror.
Sharp points,
rounded edges,
cylindrical shapes.
Always, they cart the most delectable of creations,
but never stay long enough to latch on.

Today is different.
moorings are loose,
almost flimsy.
Ready for something more.
And then a push.

Wet.

Hot.

Fleshy.

It shoves.

It jostles.

It moves until there is a pop.

Concentration

Michael Dietz

I am in a forest
stitched with spider's silk. The threads,
glued to the branches
and bark of so many trees, knit
hollow, geometric prisms in silver
constellations above
my head and around
my body. I breathe,
and they break, inaudible snaps

suspended by their own
buoyancy in the stillness
of this wood between worlds.

Until one,
adorned with a dew drop, glints
in the Grey, and I
reach to pinch the thin
string between index and thumb
and follow it all the way
back to my desk where its end
is fixed to the pink rubber
on the end of my pencil. Silver

thoughts flow
with a hum through the string
from the wood
to the lead and scratch
in granite dust across the page
a poem, channeled from another
Universe, while the Spider watches

from the shadows on the ceiling
behind me, the flames
of eight candles flickering
in her fervent, black eyes.

Let Me In

Anna Dunigan

Disoriented and drowsy, I stumbled out of my room and into the empty hallway. It was quieter than it had ever been before, and I could feel the hairs on my arms standing up. I tried to steady myself by resting my hand against the cinderblock walls, willing the room to stop spinning. I thought I heard someone calling my name, but couldn't seem to turn my head enough to look.

Suddenly, a loud crash came from further down the hall, and the doors slammed open. Tall figures cloaked in black with white masks began to fill in, a violent buzz taking over the air. They just stood there, staring at me, and my veins turned cold. I heard a deep, throaty cackle, and a warning siren began to blare. One of the figures took a step forward, separating themselves from the pack, and let out a snarl.

"Run," it howled, the voice deep, raspy, inhuman. I turned around and willed my legs to move, but it was as if they were made of concrete. I let out a small scream and my eyes darted around, desperately searching for an exit. The curving hall had no end in sight, but there was an open door not too far from me. I turned my head to see that the monsters were making their way towards me, and I put every ounce of energy in escaping.

The door led me to a large room that was dingy and wet with florescent lighting that flickered. I panted, the adrenaline coursing through my veins making it hard to breathe, and saw a smaller, hidden room in the corner. I stumbled in and slammed the door shut behind me, locking it with a resounding click. Sliding down against the door, I landed in a puddle of what I hoped was water. The sirens outside got louder and louder, and I knew they were coming for me. I covered my mouth with my hand, attempting to muffle the sounds of my ragged breaths.

"I know you're in there; come out, come out, wherever you are!" the voice bellowed, and I struggled to not make a sound. My eyes began to sting, and I felt the tears stream down my cheeks. I knew this was it.

The monster began to throw its body against the door, causing my head to slam against it. I stifled a scream and used all of my leg strength to hold myself against the door. Demonic laughs followed as it came at me again, and again, and again. My legs began to shake and I started praying to god, any god, that my legs don't give out.

Then, there was silence. All I could hear was my heart pounding in my ears and my labored breaths, now slowing down. I wiped away my tears, black makeup covering my hands, and I stood up slowly.

I was shivering, the cold of the water I had been sitting in finally sinking into my bones, when a voice called out to me. “Chandler, it’s time. Let me in.” It was soft and angelic, causing relief to wash over me. I let out a shaky sigh and took a step towards the door, but couldn’t bring myself to unlock it. “You can trust me,” the voice sang. “Unlock the door.”

As if hypnotized, my hand reached out and twisted the lock, the metal retracting back into itself with a *clink*. I took a step back and the door opened slowly, the white light blinding me. I could barely make out the woman in front of me, whose hand outstretched towards me. I placed my stained hand in her palm and let her save me.



I was focusing on perfecting my eyeliner when I heard my dorm room open. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Chandler stumbling into the hallway. I chuckled quietly and followed her out there, knowing she needed supervision. She stumbled through the hall slowly, holding herself up by her hand.

“Chandler, come back in the room before someone sees you!” She barely turned her head towards me, and I was about to call her name again, but a loud bang at the end of the hall caused me to jump. People dressed in all black with *Scream* masks came spilling through the doorway, clustering together. They just stood around, taking in the scene when they locked onto Chandler. I started laughing, a deep cackle escaping my lips, knowing her inebriated status would make this an easy prank. The person in the front of the group held up a small megaphone, and a shrill siren began to blare. Shaking my head, I walked back into my room to clean our mess.

“Run,” one of the guys bellowed, and Chandler’s screamed response echoed through the halls. I could tell by the sounds of footsteps hitting water that she ran into our always flooded bathroom to hide. I sighed and grabbed her mostly gone drink to dump down the drain.

I walked down the hall, taking the scene in. The masked figures were beating on doors and screaming at anyone that poked their heads out, causing an even mix of responses, from screaming to laughing. I gave them no reaction, so they left me alone.

“I know you’re in there,” someone from within the bathroom called out. “Come out, come out, wherever you are!” I stepped closer to see three huge guys huddled around a closed stall door, laughing and shoving each other roughly. I rolled my eyes and squeezed past them, following through on my mission to dispose of the evidence. As the clear liquid swam down the sink, I looked around to see if I could figure out where Chandler was hiding.

Suddenly, one of the boys body-slammed into the door, causing the other two to laugh like hyenas. I rolled my eyes and threw the cup away, but paused when I heard a small, girlish squeak from behind the door. I pushed my way through the boys, listening to hear if Chandler was okay. It sounded like she was crying and my stomach dropped.

“Could you guys pick on someone your own size? She’s clearly had enough!” I hissed at them, and their laughter slowly died. The one who had been slamming into the door shrugged and led the other two out.

Most of the commotion in the hall had passed, the group of delinquents moving on to another hallway to torment, and I waited so she could calm down before I tried coaxing her out. I placed my hand on the doorknob and felt that it was locked.

“Chandler, it’s time. Let me in,” I said quietly, trying to be as soothing as possible. I heard her sigh and walk closer to the door. “You can trust me. Unlock the door.” I was afraid she wasn’t going to listen, but I heard the metal lock clink and I opened the door slowly. The harsh, florescent light flooded the dark room she barricaded herself in, and I was able to see the makeup stains on her cheeks and hands, and the way she was shivering. I stretched my hand out to her, and she gladly placed her wet hand in mine, allowing me to escort her to safety.

Taken

Madison Merchant

She wants her nostalgic thinking to come whispering back,
because her existing reality clamps onto her weary judgement
pulling her down a drain like rain water running down
a rippled roadside.

The cold metallic lock you left for her lies rusted,
engulfing her aspirations, and stealing her reflection of a tempted smile,
Like the grasp that steals her breath from her limp body,
you thief.

You take.

Withdrawing the color of royal purple
and replacing it with the burning crimson.
Abandonment seeps crawling to fill what was breached.

Separation of the Masses

Meghan Wurm

She stood and watched the spectators pass her, they glanced her way but saw nothing but a smudge of color and creation, something completely unique to the strict world of black and white.

She watched a world behind glass walls, outcast by the insecurities of the unknown.

Then there was a girl,

In the world of black and white she was the gray that stood in the corner, watching, waiting until she could one day join the color and creation behind the barrier that protected the world from something so peculiar.

To know what it would be like to revolutionize the monotoned society,

To make something so indescribably beautiful it would captivate the masses,

To experience what it would be like to be the lilac growing in a field of lilies,

For the gray girl had fallen in love with the color and creation,

But in this world of black and white,

Even her gray was too different for the members of her population.

So each day she would come and watch the small goddess, separated from the people behind a thick wall of fear.

And each day she could feel her heart grow more and more full of color,

Until one day, she walked out of the colorless world and into a world of beauty.

I Am

Amber Holiday

I burn red through your cheeks,
I take pleasure in pain,
I am a child with balled fists,
I am rage.

I am cold even on the warmest of sunny days,
I take apathetic interest in life,
I am a weight on your chest,
I am sadness.

I flood your mind with dopamine, serotonin, and epinephrine,
I take little and give copiously,
I am a pup, a babe, a fawn seeing for the first time,
I am love.

I Wrote this Poem while Happy

Holly Lothschutz

I wrote this poem while happy.
I wrote this poem
sitting in my bedroom
surrounded by a bubble
heartbreak has never penetrated.

People say that
the best art comes from a place
of true pain,
of real pain,
of soul-crushing,
mind-numbing
pain.

The type of pain that starts at your fingertips
and ends at your heart.

It would be more fitting for me to write a poem about the changing of
seasons or what it feels like to be standing in the light.

But that would not be me trying my hardest.

That would be me writing a poem out of clouds and asking you to read it
after it's already blown away.

So instead
I dig myself
into a pit
of self-serving depression
and I wallow
in fake emotions,
hoping to trick myself
into writing art.

I sit and wait for something
to melt my brain
and tear me open
and twist whatever's left inside of me
until poetry starts spilling from my fingertips.

I want to write something
that carves itself into your brain
using the thorn from a rose bush.

I want to make you feel what I'm not feeling
because true art,
real art,
Emotion-inducing,
mind-opening art
comes from a place of pain,
and I wrote this poem while happy.

an apology

Abby Dunster

raindrops trickle down
and, I, for one,
must count them all
one by one
as you did
with all the mistakes
I ever made

I'm sorry.

River Voices

Contributors

Shelby Basham is a poet who employs an evocative style of writing. Besides writing, she also enjoys playing video games, watching anime, and confusing those around her by purposely pronouncing commonly used words incorrectly. Her favorite word is *bastardize*, and she firmly believes that sleep is for the weak.

Sadie Brown is an ambitious art student who hopes to one day make a career out of creating. As for now, she enjoys traveling as much as she can, soaking up all the memories she can capture, and taking as many long naps as possible.

Jalen Burks is a student who absolutely loves creative work. Whether it's creating/performing music, writing, film making, or photography, Jalen has a thirst for it all. Jalen spends most of his free time working on the aforementioned things, being with friends, and having good times. His writing style is fluid and can change in an instant depending on the tone, perspective, setting, and other variables.

Gretchen Cline teaches English, Literature, Women's and Gender Studies, and Yoga at Muskegon Community College.

Michael Dietz works in a factory and is slowly chinking away at a degree in Creative Writing. He spends what little free time he has walking his dog, Gregor, and meditating.

Grace Dowling has always been interested in photography. Grace loves nature shots and will hike to nearly any spot for a good picture. She is currently attending MCC for an Associates in Science and Art, and she plans to major in photography after transferring. In the future, she would like to work for a non-profit organization as a photographer or graphic designer.

Anna Dunigan is an Alumni of Muskegon Community College and loves writing stories to make people laugh. She hopes to continue to develop her voice and style and see where writing takes her.

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Kane Gerencer is a first-year student with a passion for fitness, hiking, and lab studies. Kane is majoring in Biology and hopes someday work in the medical field.

Although **Matthew Evans** doesn't draw often, when he does he believes there is a deeper meaning to the piece he is working on. He gets inspired most of the time while listening to old Beatles songs, and he enjoys making people ponder about what he has created.

Stephanie Ewalt is only ever *herself*. She enjoys exploring, and she captures many memories with the help of her camera lens. With a writing style that is thought of as having just the right amount of spark, Stephanie is just starting to see what best fits her.

Spending time with her three children, crafting, coloring, and cleaning are some of **Barbara Gilbert's** favorite things. Going to thrift stores, tinkering, and digging through junk are ways she gets her inspiration. She has a newly discovered passion for learning, and hopes to continue her education for as many years as possible. Her children mean the world to her, and they will always be the engine that runs her drive for life.

Kathryn Gillard lovingly calls herself a "Femme Trash Weirdo". She enjoys challenging the patriarchy, gender roles, and toxic masculinity. She is a returning student studying Psychology.

Just like her name suggests, **Robin Golden** is a unique individual who enjoys reading and writing in her free time. Most often, when she has an interesting idea in her head, Robin's extreme procrastination prevents her from writing it down and pursuing it as a story. Much like Romeo's love, her motivation is fickle, so even if she does begin something, it's bound to never be finished.

Patrick Harju is a man who likes to think he can write and, perhaps, spends a little too much time inside his own head. When he isn't writing, he spends his time playing guitar, reading, and endeavoring to learn as much as possible.

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Shauna Hayes teaches English and Literature at Muskegon Community College and LOVES every aspect of her job. When she is not planning lectures, grading essays or designing *River Voices*, you will find her walking with her husband on the beach or playing with her children in the sand.

Taylor Hermanson is a college student hoping to major in Mortuary Science. She also has a passion for History. Taylor loves spending her time writing, painting and taking photographs.

Taylor Hewitt, your friendly human being believes in equal rights, including chocolate in her everyday diet, and drinking copious amounts of coffee. She also enjoys watching films, painting, drawing, writing, and hiking.

Amber Holiday is a non-traditional student; she is 25 years old, married, and has two children. A lot of her artistic creations stem from her battle with PTSD, depression, other mental illness, and her ability to see the resplendence of life.

Ronnie (Ronaldo) Jewell was born and raised in West Virginia and attended high school and college in North Carolina. After graduating from graduate school at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Ronnie was hired at Muskegon Community College as an English Instructor, teaching composition and literature classes. He has been teaching at MCC since 1993. This is his dream job: teaching awesome and diverse students! Aside from spending time preparing lesson plans, teaching classes, and grading papers, Ronnie enjoys collecting nostalgic memorabilia from the 1970's: record albums, toys, television shows, books, posters – anything '70s. He also has four cats, writes music on his piano, and enjoys an occasional glass of red wine by a warm fire. And he absolutely loves horror movies (mainly from the '70s). *Who would have thought?*

River Voices

Contributors

Beginning a three-year long trek to an ASA back when she was fifteen, **Sarah Linkous** knew she wanted to write; she just didn't know what. After placing 3rd in MCC's Creative Writing Contest for her personal narrative, "Daydreamer's Burden," she figured creative prose could be a good fit for her style. The twenty-five-dollar prize looked especially nice in her gas tank.

Holly Lothschutz is a freshman at MCC who is very passionate about poetry in all of its forms, though she is very partial to musicals. Her favorite musical to see is *Les Misérables*, though she has also had the opportunity to see both *Aladdin* and *Hamilton* performed in Chicago.

Kelli Ann Loughrige is a Muskegon native, MCC Educational Support Staff, and proud alumnus of RP, MCC & WMU. She enjoys spending time with her hubby and fur kids. Nature is her solace, and Jeep is her ride.

Brianna MacPherson is a thoughtful, yet outspoken long-time writer whose passion for writing was her best-kept secret. She stands for many causes and speaks for a variety of communities. She is worldly, ever-evolving, and spiritual. When she's not writing, she is wrapped up in the world of makeup or deep in a documentary.

Emily McKee is a full time college student who works two jobs while trying to finish a novel. She has been writing for as long as she can remember. Emily has been working hard to save as much money as possible, in hopes of attending Emerson University in Boston, where she will major in Writing, Literature and Publishing.

Madison Merchant has always loved writing poetry and short stories. Her mother would push her to continue to write even when she felt as though she had nothing left to say. She hopes she never loses sight of her voice.

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Contributors

Ashley Morrow is a mermaid enthusiast, Hogwarts alumna, close friend of the Winchester brothers, and a fantasy writer. She probably likes animals more than people, but that debate is for another time. This girl is made up entirely of stardust, bubbles, tattoos, and adventure. In addition to writing, she can be found listening to music 24/7 or stuffing her face with junk food.

McKenzie Nelson is a 2015 Grand Haven High School graduate. She plans to continue her education at Taylor University this coming fall. She will be majoring in social work, where she hopes she can serve Jesus by serving others. She is greatly inspired by her amazing three younger brothers, and her blue betta fish, Brad.

Maddie Olsen is a friendly, outgoing, loving girl who enjoys spending her time with family and friends. Whether it is on the soccer field or in the classroom, she is always striving to be her best. She explores her artistic side through singing and writing.

Samantha Plough is a leader in being yourself. She adorns her body in the brightest of colors and most fascinating silhouettes. From her hair, to her lips, to her shoes, every part of her screams boldness. In addition to collecting her vast wardrobe, she spends much of her time reading, writing, binge watching Netflix, and attempting to pet her asshole of a cat.

Abigail Postema is finishing her final year in the Early College program at MCC. She has enjoyed the art classes that she has taken here and plans to continue developing her artistic abilities. In the Summer of 2019, Abigail plans on transferring to the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture to pursue a career in Architecture.

One of **Abigail Sawin**'s biggest passions is painting. Inspired by some of the greatest impressionists Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, and Mary Cassatt, she tries to emulate their style within her own work. Abigail has a small designated studio in her basement where she will turn on music and unwind. With no subject matter in mind, she just paints.

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Nehemiah Justus Shaw is a dedicated and loving young man. He enjoys getting to know others. He thrives in groups and is not afraid of stepping into the leading role. He enjoys the great outdoors and spends a great deal of time there. A few of his hobbies include hiking, swimming, and rock climbing. Indoors, he is found reading books on Christian theology, the Bible, or watching *The Office* (the greatest show on earth).

Katrina Smith lives as a lens through which beauty can be seen, shuttering through each passing day and night. Even through the darkest of dusks, when dawn is the light at the end of an infinitely long tunnel, she still hears the River's Voice in her mind. She moves forward like waves that keep splashing along the shore, regardless of the passing of time.

Caleb Straley has been a hobbyist photographer for about three years. He has pursued this hobby relatively in secret and has not really put anything out for anyone other than family and friends to see. Caleb enjoys landscape photography, particularly beaches and lighthouses. He also really enjoys astrophotography.

Mary Tyler can't do much else. She doesn't golf, knit, or practice parkour. She'd rather read and write and teach and read and write and teach and write and teach and then read again than do just about anything else - except travel, attend concerts, and hang with her husband, kids, collies, and good friends. She has three kids she thinks are keener than most, so if you don't value your own time, just ask Mary about Sam, Nick, and Erin. And, yes, she went to colleges and earned advanced college degrees, but that was a long time ago and who gives a rat's ass.

P. S. Mary Tyler has what appears to be a school-girl crush on that late, great Ginger: William Shakespeare!

Ms. Theresa Van Veelen, Life Sciences Instructor for 18 years at Muskegon Community College, teaches the general biology and plant biology courses, and occasionally the Belize Course. She is an avid outdoorswoman and gardener.

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Contributors

Emma Veihl is a dedicated student who is pursuing a career in the medical field. She loves the beauty of nature and sunsets.

Kaytee Walker is an artist. She has always loved to draw and finds making art to be one of the best ways to learn about oneself and connect with others. Kaytee loves how art lets one escape reality while also mimicking it in some way or another. Being an artist has also allowed her to think creatively and look at the world differently. In her art, she hopes to capture the essence of reality in order to allow viewers to relate to it and/or make connections. She graduated from Fruitport High School in 2015, Muskegon Community College in 2017, and is currently undecided about what four-year institution to attend.

Brody Yarian is a theatre student who enjoys travelling, juggling, and Rubik's Cubing. He is always looking for new things to try and loves meeting new people.

Grace Young is a writer and artist who is working towards a degree in Education. She enjoys spending time with her family and her cat, and she enjoys drawing.

Author/Artist information unavailable for the following contributors:

Baylee Babcock
Abby Dunster
Ethan Epplett
Dallas Eslick
Justyce Lathrop
Brianne Siple
Kylie Walsworth
Meghan Wurm