

River Voices

Spring 2022

River Voices Spring 2022

Editors

Shauna Hayes
Sean Colcleasure

Student Editors

Gypsy Bates
Adrianna Espinoza
Sydney Nelson

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.

This year's theme, *Now What?* was chosen by the Liberal Arts Network for Development (LAND). LAND promotes the development of the liberal arts for all Michigan's community colleges and our students have the privilege of participating in their annual statewide Writing Contest and Conference.

As we entered into the 2021-2022 school year, there was a lot of uncertainty about being back on campus after almost two years away. Taking on the theme of *Now What?* and striving to tell the stories of those impacted and influenced by events of this past year, we see a number of honest and raw pieces reflecting where we've been and where we are going.

We are grateful to all of our contributors, and in addition, would like to express special thanks to the faculty and staff members who collaborate in order to make this publication possible: Becky Evans, Mary Tyler, Kevin Kyser, Ronnie Jewell, Diana Casey, Nicholas Palmer, Kelli Loughrige, and Peter Koryzno. Thank you for your encouragement, support and contributions.

We encourage submissions of poetry, prose, essays, art, and photography year-round and are currently accepting submissions for the Spring 2023 edition.

If you would like to submit your creative work or join the *River Voices* student editing team, please visit: muskegoncc.edu/rivervoices for further details.

Cover Art: *Catch*

Cover Artist: Jane Hoppe

Cover Art Design: Kevin Kyser and Jane Hoppe

River Voices Contents

Thank You ~ Sidney Gould

Rewriting a Story over Tea ~ Hannah Jurcich
15

A New Beginning ~ Olivia Fenlon
16

Vinyasa-19 ~ Sydney Nelson
17

A Hand to Hold ~ Candice Kirkendoll
18

Calamitous Night ~ Calandra Bungart
19

Black and White ~ Gypsy Bates
20

Familiar Patterns ~ Gracie Vermurlen
21

The Illusionist ~ Taylor Strand
22

Sour Flower ~ Elizabeth Tuffelmire
27

The Boy I Knew ~ Natali Bradfield
28

All in a Row ~ Sandra Stoner
29

Frozen Powers ~ Harrison Nelund
30

River Voices Contents

Frozen Powers II ~ Harrison Nelund
31

Wave Goodbye to Yesterday ~ Audrey Zok
32

This Perfect Day ~ Sidney Gould
33

The Kool-Aid ~ Donald Moinet
34

Amnesia ~ Karolina Johnson
37

The Other Side ~ Ronnie Jewell
38

Pictured Rocks ~ Ashley Bouwknecht
39

White Flowers ~ Felisha Kidd
40

Blue Flowers ~ Madison Bloom
41

Blurry Bee ~ Leah Johnson
42

Memory Market ~ Alexandria Hedum
43

Acquaintance, Classmate, or Friend... ~ Gemillia Williams
44

Hymn for a Reluctant God ~ Emma Marshall
45

River Voices Contents

The Quiet Home ~ Olivia Fenlon
46

I'm His First ~ Lance Klemple
47

Woman ~ Karolina Johnson
48

An Ugly Carnival ~ Candice Kirkendoll
49

El Diablo Bailando ~ Adrianna Espinoza
50

Introspective of Innocence ~ Angel Wirts
51

Now What? ~ Robert DeRose
52

Now What? ~ Lily Crowell
53

Affection ~ Rebecca Kinney
54

Memories ~ Nena Sipos
55

Hue is it? ~ Natali Bradfield
56

He Calls Me ~ Diana Casey
57

Family Resemblances and a Couch ~ Anna Grace Lubbers
58

River Voices Contents

Flashes ~ Natalie Thurkettle
60

Lost and Found ~ Michalene Collins
62

Suspicion ~ Thomas Bitson
63

Prepare the Cabin for Takeoff ~ Anna Dunigan
64

Prodigal Habits Die Hard ~ Benjamin Skujins
65

Recurrent ~ Kaelen Dean
69

I Can't Breathe ~ Robert Swanker
70

Never Again ~ Nicole Onus
71

Citrus Cobweb ~ Calandra Bungart
72

Dream ~ Alex Near
73

Tulip Time ~ Rebecca Kinney
74

Forecast of Thoughts ~ Gypsy Bates
75

Look. In. The. Mirror. ~ Carter Jones-Hirr
76

River Voices Contents

This ~ Kennadi Dykstra
77

Red ~ Riley Briggs
78

They Said We're the Change... ~ Hannah Jurcich
82

Generation Lost ~ Kyle Olejarczyk
83

Where I Became Me ~ Diana Casey
84

Through the Storm ~ Jolena Suarez
86

Cold Waves ~ Leah Johnson
87

The Dunes in Winter ~ Alaina Bouwknegt
88

Lake Michigan in Winter ~ Harrison Nelund
89

Sunset at Mudjimba Beach ~ Flynn De Luca
90

Temple ~ Allison Prause
91

The Man With Many Shoes ~ Natalie Thurkettle
92

Put your Hand on my Shoulder ~ Lasasha Sharpe
94

River Voices Contents

McQueen's XKSS ~ Erik Nelson
99

Lights, Camera, Bird ~ Leah Johnson
100

Reflections on Commencement ~ Nicholas Palmer
101

Weave and Worth of Word ~ Taitum Brown
102

Cops and Robbers: A Risky Situation ~ Tawon Cooper
103

Distinctly Unoriginal ~ Emma Slater
105

For Chance ~ Lance Klemple
106

My Asthmatic Lungs ~ Kelli Loughrige
108

Pulse ~ Taylor Strand
109

Cause, No Effect ~ Sydney Nelson
110

Something About Tiffany's ~ Adrianna Espinoza
111

In Ten Years ~ Laila Rance
112

Beyond the Classroom ~ Diana Casey
114

River Voices Contents

Congratulations, Mary Tyler ~ The Editors
115

Thank you, Mary ~ Becky Evans
116

Ode to Mary ~ Ronnie Jewell
117

Pseudo (name) [sic] ~ Ronnie Jewell
118

Select Poems by Mary Tyler
120

Contributors
131

English Honor Society Members
139

*Vibrance does one paint the ceiling,
Filled with a curious hue.
So brilliant you make us feel,
Under your soft embrace.
We swim the basements of the shallows,
Even as you fade to black.
We love your warmth,
Despite your cold.
A planet that shines with pride,
When graced by your watchful guard.
So precious and so alive.
Thank you.*

- a poem by Sidney Gould

Rewriting a Story Over Tea

Hannah Jurcich

I'd curse the lovers who came before
or my parents for sleeping opposite ways in their bed.
And maybe I'd curse the movies,
or everyone who didn't love me right,
love me full,
love me honest.
But as long as I was cursing, the walls would stay high,
the firing squad may never cease
and my tongue rot away with bitter poison.
As long as I stay cursing, my heart would stay locked, not only unable to
love,
but unable to breathe,
unable to see the bees touch the flowers,
unable to see your heart extend itself to mine.
As long as I stay cursing,
life would continue to beat against my body until the day the walls turn to
comb,
and my shrub to honey.
May my knees crumble and the ground underneath me swallow me whole,
and push me up through the cracks in the Earth, fragile and fertile.
May it be you towering above me in your magnificence.
May all my cursing be buried in the crevices that bore me.
Melt the metal.
Unscrew the latches.
Build a home from the walls that kept me hidden.
This is your cordial invite for tea.
Will you join me?

A New Beginning

Olivia Fenlon

Flashing red words crossing every news channel in the nation. Signs with mandatory rules covering every entrance to public buildings. Masks plastering the streets like seagulls when a piece of food is dropped. Strange looks passed to those whose faces aren't hidden. Six feet between every heartbeat. This is the new America, get used to it, it's going to be here for a while.

To many this was the worst thing possible. Getting laid off, losing their income, unable to go to the places they love, unable to travel, unable to see their loved ones, and of course, getting the virus. To others this meant the opposite. Making more money from unemployment, freedom from student loans, free time to be lazy, a new learned love to go outside, and, time away from society.

For me, this meant freedom from an entrapping job as a personal slave to a sexist man and his male favored company. Rumors of the shutdown sent my sister and I home to Michigan to my parents' house. For a while I was getting paid full time to help my boss over the phone when needed, but it eventually lead to my escape by getting laid off. I was free to quit this job I loathed so much. Months passed after the lock down, my lease ended, and I moved all my belongings back to Michigan to start all over. A daunting phrase, to start all over, but when viewed correctly, it's really a new beginning or a fresh start, and that's how I viewed it.

Maybe the pandemic was an end to many. But to me, it was a new beginning, a way to spend every day outside, a way to welcome home three puppies who reminded me how much fun it was to simply play, and for a moment to forget all responsibilities, and for that I am truly thankful for the pandemic.

Vinyasa-19

Sydney Nelson

Close your eyes. “All afternoon classes are cancelled, and campus is shut down until further notice.” Breathe in. “Everyone must wear a mask at all times until we know what is going on and how to approach it moving forward.” Breathe out. More people concerned with who and where it came from rather than safety protocol and, people are dying. An election year. In through the nose. One side of the road engages in a peaceful protest to support Black Americans, wearing masks. The other side rallies, unmasked, flooding the streets barking and snarling about a washed-up celebrity and, wearing flags. Out through the mouth. How can a nation call for help when its leader is the one dividing it – how can we be in distress if he isn’t hearing the cries, or worse, revels at the sound. Slowly lower to the ground. Fellow classmates – who never made it to graduation – post about their second pregnancy while sharing “keep homos out of schools” on social media. Move with your breath. Raising the next generation to hate before they even know how to speak. On the inhale, push back up. Our country, like a checkerboard of blue and red that day in November, made a change. Carefully walk your feet to meet your hands at the top of the mat. Miraculous medical advances become government ploys to mutilate and track citizens – too stubborn or stupid to recognize the privilege. Slow breath in as you rise up. The regular background noise is amplified by extremists, drowning out the vital headlines. Long exhale. The road to real change like an obstacle course built for a giant. Open your eyes.

A Hand to Hold

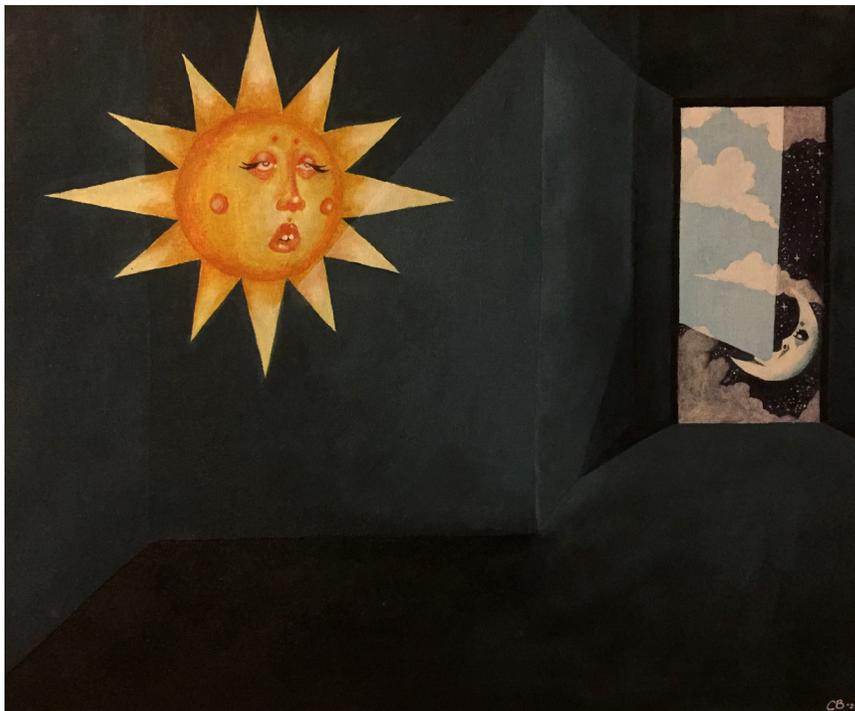
Candace Kirkendoll

For years I have lived in this dark
house, the bulbs busted or popped. I did not want
to see the splintered foundation. The fist-sized holes
in the plaster were a beating to my heart.
I bellowed at the distant shadows
who haunted my house like ghosts in a morgue.
“Oh shadow, swallow me whole!”

Other days I stared out of my window
as the sun shined through. For a moment,
a mere second,
my bones rejoiced in being
home. On those days I did not cover myself
with sheets like a ghost in the dark.
The warmth seeping through the cracks
was like a reaching hand
when there was no hand to hold my own.

Calamitous Night

Calandra Bungart



Acrylic on Canvas

Black and White

Gypsy Bates



Mixed Media

Familiar Patterns

Gracie Vermurlen

She stares through the window,
hands mindlessly fiddling
with plastic dishware
crusted with trepidation.
rinse. clean. dry.

Her husband lounges on
the couch, beer in hand,
a wife beater
haphazardly strewn on his torso.
iron. fold. put away.

She eyes the belt
placed perfectly beside the
husband as the vacuum hums
across the stained carpet.
steam. scrub. spent.

Her son sets the table,
placing the dishes
as to not awake the unsettled Lion
in the other room.
serve. eat. pick up.

Creased and cracked hands
sluggishly soak up the suds
like a dehydrated sponge
waiting to grow to full potential.
rinse. clean. dry.

She flinches as there is
a crack of the belt,
followed by a familiar pain,
a cry and glass shattering.
run. protect. don't fear.

The Lion roars as she shields her
bruised son,
the belt crashing onto her back
like waves hitting the cliff wall
during a storm.

Her son scurries away
as the Lion's attention shifts
from her sobbing form
to the shattered glass.

He drops the belt and
falls back to the couch
“get me another beer.”

She stands on wobbly knees,
staggering to the kitchen and she
knows

tomorrow will never be the same.

The Illusionist

Taylor Strand

I'm bombarded by people the second I walk off the stage, "Outstanding job," "Wonderful performance," "Best show yet," any and every kiss-ass phrase in the book being tossed around like it's nothing.

Someone's shoving a towel into my left hand, and another is slipping an uncapped water bottle into my right. It's a whirlwind of comments, praise, and frantic movement in a compact sea of bodies, and I want no part of it. I've done my job for the night, and that's damn-well enough; maintaining mundane conversations with people I couldn't give less of a shit about isn't something I intend to entertain.

I'm mid-sip when Harris clasps the back of my shoulders, jerking me enough that I nearly spill the water down the front of my vest. "Drake!" He cries, though I can barely hear him over the commotion of the audience. "You did amazing! Absolutely fantastic!"

"Calm down. You're acting like I just shit gold."

I'm trying to squeeze past the circles of people backstage, but Harris is on me like a moth to light. "Now that's a little much."

"*You're* a little much." I nearly elbow some guy wearing a headset as I lift the towel to my head to dab away some sweat. He doesn't seem to care, not even so much as glancing in my direction as I steal into the dimly-lit hallway beside him.

"With a spectacle like that," Harris continues, as immune to my digs as ever, "you'll be booking out venues for *weeks*."

"I already have been."

"Your shows will be the talk of the city."

"They already are."

"You'll gain even more recognition."

"I don't need it."

"Think of the types of-"

"*Harris*," I say firmly, stopping in front of my dressing room and turning to face him. He nearly runs into me, as unobservant as ever, but just barely catches himself and takes a few stumbling steps back. Once his feet are planted safely in place, I lean forward, just a little. "Stop talking."

A smug look crosses his face, but he holds his hands up in surrender. "Alright, I'll stop. *For now*. Wouldn't want the *wondrous* Caligari Drake getting annoyed with me."

"Too late." I turn for the door. "And don't call me that."

"Looks like someone woke up on the wrong side of the stage this morning."

"Aren't you observant?"

"You're a piece of shit, you know that?" I can practically hear the smirk in his voice.

"So you've said."

I just barely catch a glimpse of him giving me the finger as I shut the door in his face. Instantly, the lingering noise of everything backstage drops

to a low, manageable hum.

Thank Christ.

With a hefty sigh, I lean my back against the door and close my eyes, taking in the welcome quiet. Having a private dressing room is a novel concept for me, and community dressing rooms are anything but peaceful, so it's safe to say that silence like this is a rarity. It may not be the nicest room, but at least here, there aren't people walking in and out half-naked or shouting that they need to borrow some foundation.

I only take a few moments to appreciate the stillness of everything before I make quick work of taking off my long overcoat and unbuttoning what feels like thousands of buttons on my vest. I yank off my gloves and toss them over with everything else, then collect a large section of hair and twist it into a half-assed bun, just to get it out of my face. It takes a good few minutes before I'm able to get the explosions of bright yellow and dark blue off of my eyes, and my skin is raw by the time I've scrubbed it all away, but it's such a familiar sting that I barely even notice it anymore.

I've just started untying these God-forsaken boots—the heeled ones hurt like hell, but dammit if they don't pull everything together—when there's a quick knock at the door.

“Not now, Harris,” I call out, fighting to untie the second boot. Of course, he comes barging in anyways, a surge of noise following him into the room. “Jesus, Harris, I said—”

Standing in the doorway is a tall, young-looking kid with swooped brown hair and a stoic face, a denim jacket over a white hoodie with red text scrawled across the front. It's in such a messy font that I can't tell what it says, and his jacket is covering most of it anyways. Hitched up on his left shoulder is an olive-green backpack, and he's holding some type of pamphlet in his right hand. He definitely doesn't look like he belongs back here.

“You're not Harris.”

“No, I'm not.”

Giving up on untying the boot, I yank at it aggressively until it comes off, then drop it onto the floor. “Then why the hell are you just walking into my room?”

“I need to talk to you,” he says simply.

“I don't give a shit. Get out.”

“It's important.”

“Didn't I *just* say I don't give a shit?”

“You should lock your doors if you don't want people coming in. Anyone could get back here.”

“Yet the only one who has is you.”

“My point stands.”

There's a calculatedness to his voice that I pick up on immediately, but his expression doesn't waver. For a moment, I debate whether or not I should just knock him on his ass and get this over with, but it's not like he's a threat to me, despite the gall he must have to burst in here like he did.

As soon as I stand, I notice that the pamphlet in his hand is from tonight's show. My name is written across the front in big purple letters—*Caligari Drake*—wedged right between the names of the other two main

acts of the night. The curious part of me wins over. “Who are you? You’re not one of the performers—not dressed like that, anyway—and you aren’t staff, so who are you? Some stalker?”

He laughs dryly. “Far from it.” When I don’t offer anything in return, he adds, “My name is Taro.”

“Like the cards?”

“Like the cards.”

“That’s an odd name.”

“And Caligari isn’t?”

“Ever heard of a stage name?”

He turns to shut the door, and I can’t help but chuckle at least a little at just the sheer *audacity* of this kid. “You know, you really need to work on your introduction skills,” I advise, crossing my arms and leaning against my vanity. If it were anyone else, this would probably be at least a little creepy, but Taro’s woefully unthreatening, and I’m just annoyed.

When he spins back around, he has a determined look on his face. “I know about your performances.”

“I would assume so, given that you’re holding one of the programs.”

“Not that.” He shakes his head. “I mean, I know about *you*.”

“So does half the city, at least. What’s your point?”

Taro looks about as frustrated as I feel. He’s quiet for a moment, and I can see in his face that he’s trying to come up with the right words. *Who the hell is this guy?* “Jesus Christ, what’s with all the cryptic bullshit?” I finally snap. “*Know what?*”

“That what you do isn’t just illusions.”

Something washes over me in an instant, a feeling I can’t quite describe, and my whole body immediately tenses. “Excuse me?”

There’s no way.

“The things you do on stage, I know they’re real,” Taro says, eyes never leaving mine.

My mind is running a mile a minute. “Are you high or something? Drunk? How old even are you?”

“I’m 21.”

“You look about 16.”

“I’m not.”

“Okay, then what’s the deal?” It takes everything in me to maintain my composure. “You off your meds or something?”

“No.”

“Am I being pranked or some shit?”

There’s no way he actually knows. He’s just crazy.

“You can make things appear out of nowhere,” Taro says, taking a step forward into the room. “You can move things without touching them. I know you can.”

I let out a harsh laugh. “Alright, I hate to break it to you, buddy, but that’s exactly what I’m *supposed* to do: create deceptions that look believable.”

“I know you’re lying.”

“It’s called being good at my job. I do tricks, people see the tricks, I

make money. I don't know what else to tell you."

How the hell could he know?

"You're *lying*," he repeats, his voice slightly elevated.

"Let's say I was," I quickly retort, cocking my head to the side. "How could you possibly know that?"

His answer is immediate.

"Because I can do it too."

The room falls silent, and I can't stop myself from staring at him in shock. "What?"

No. He can't be serious.

Taro takes a deep breath. "I can do it too."

How? I nearly ask, but I just barely bite my tongue. "Something is clearly wrong with you," I say instead, turning to start collecting my things. Despite the urge I have to move with haste, I force myself to slow down.

"What's your name?"

"Drake."

"Your *real* name."

"Drake."

"Liar."

"Is this what you do? Say everything's a lie and hope something sticks?"

My back may be to him, but I can still feel his eyes on me. "You wanna know how I know, right? How I can tell that you and I are the same."

"We're not the same."

"It's your hands."

I freeze.

"You wear those white gloves to hide them." Taro's words are quick and knowing. "To hide the way they glow when you do your 'tricks.' But there's a pulse in your shoulders that gives it away. Nobody would notice it unless they were actively trying, but I know what it looks like. It's the same thing I do."

I don't say a thing. I can't.

"What you do, it's like hiding in plain sight, right? You perform because if you don't do *something*, it feels like your skin will melt off of your body, and your head is going to explode. And if you have to do it, you might as well get paid for it. Nobody will know the difference. They're just illusions, after all."

Silence falls between us for a long stretch, long enough that I'm surprised Harris hasn't shown back up and caught us.

I have a choice here. What do I do?

Eventually, I turn to face him.

"Listen," I start, watching him carefully. "I'm not sure what you think you know, but you—"

Taro lifts his hand without warning, and my bag goes flying across the room, right into his grasp.

Oh, shit.

I look between both my bag and Taro with wide eyes. His hand glows

a soft, golden color, one that's all too familiar, and something twists in my stomach.

“Are you insane?!” I hiss. “Somebody could walk in here at *any* moment!”

“I thought the only one who had was me?”

I don't like the cockiness of his words. “What the hell do you want?”

Taro's face is hard-set and determined. “I already told you: I want to talk.”



Sour Flower

Elizabeth Tuffelmire

“The flower is dying
Honey I’m trying
To keep this alive,
It’s wilting away.”
She’ll say.

“Too many hours
In the booked day
Spent on work and play
There is no time
To water away.”
He’ll say.

“If we move it
It could get more sunlight,
Or is it worth the fight?”
She’ll wish away,
And the wish is overturned
To the gardener next door
Leaving dirty gloves on the floor
“I love the roses,
Especially the thorns.”
He’ll repeatedly groan
To the flower he’s outgrown.

The Boy I Knew

Natali Bradfield

I knew a boy whose kindness ran rampant
Whose helping hand knew no boundaries

I knew a boy who explored many worlds
Who conquered many lands from his forts of sticks and stone

I knew a boy who wasn't afraid to let the girls play
Who treated them with care as equals

I knew a boy whose hands never met an engine they couldn't fix
Whose gifts went beyond his humble self-image

I knew a boy who fished, and swam, and hunted
Whose love of adventure was contagious

I knew a boy, and now it seems he is gone
Who was stolen not by death, but by life

I knew a boy that has changed beyond recognition
Whose choices have been his undoing

But maybe he will choose again
And someday I can see the boy I knew once more

All in a Row

Sandra Stoner



Photography

Frozen Powers

Harrison Nelund



Photography

Frozen Powers II

Harrison Nelund



Photography

Wave Goodbye to Yesterday

Audrey Zok



Photography

This Perfect Day

Sidney Gould

The warm blanket of day clothes her face,
I see the ice everywhere I go,
As the valiant light brings forth all her grace.
As darkness rises and cold turns to snow.

Both flowers and weeds grace her with a wave,
My hands turn blue and my teeth chatter,
As she walks past them in the midst of this Perfect Day.
As the sun hides when life begins to shatter.

A simple laugh sets the summer's ease,
Warmth turns its cruel back away,
And carries her worries along the gentle breeze.
At the empty promise of this Perfect Day.

But sometimes that darkness does call,
For it was a hefty price she had to pay
To forget what she had left after all,
For the selfish desire of this Perfect Day.

I still miss her.

The Kool-Aid

Donald Moinet

The first light of the sun crept above the gray waters to the east, an old hospital sat on the coast on the outskirts of a once populous town. Jagged rocks churned the water beneath, sending a faint mist into the side of the building.

“Good morning, sir.”

“Good morning.”

“Is there something I can help you with?”

“Just looking out the window at the sunrise. Not much to see in this room anymore.”

“I can understand that. Hopefully the test results will come back soon and we can have you on your way.”

The man looked out the window for a second more before sliding the blind closed.

“May I ask you a question, dear?”

“Of course, sir, what can I help you with?”

“What are my chances?”

The nurse looked at the man and took a breath before responding.

“Um...I’m sorry, sir, but I’m not sure I can give you a good answer.

You are more than welcome to ask the doctors about your condition when they get here.”

The man smiled. He lowered himself into a chair on the opposite side of his bed.

“Is there something bothering you sir? Do you think your condition has worsened?”

“The ringing in my ears has stopped.”

“That’s wonderful, sir, I know the tinnitus had made it quite difficult to sleep. Must mean the new medication is working.”

“It has been replaced by whispers.”

“Okay, so the ringing has changed a little bit to sound like whispers. As people get older, symptoms of tinnitus can change. How are you doing with the whispers? Have you been able to sleep?”

“No more than they have.”

“I’m sorry, sir, I don’t follow. Who are they?”

“It’s strange, how different we view those who jump from those who fall.”

“Sir, I don’t understand what you’re talking about. Did somebody fall? Is that who’s whispering?”

“What’s it like - spending so much time on the edge? On the precipice, watching so many fall?”

“I don’t understand, what edge?”

“How many cling to the edge before they fall? How many don’t?”

“Sir, I think you might need to lie down. I’ll go get you something that will help you sleep.”

The nurse brought the man a pill with a small cup of water.

“Let me help you into bed, sir.”

The nurse helped the man over to his bed, he laid down on his back with his arms crossed over his chest.

“Thank you, dear.”

“Here is the medicine, sir. It should help you sleep. The doctor will come by in a few hours and then you can talk to him about what’s been going on.”

The man nodded his head and closed his eyes. He sipped the water before resting the cup between his hands on his chest.

“Okay, sir, just let me know if you need anything. I’ll give you some time to rest.”

The nurse turned and walked towards the door.

“You know, you never answered the question.”

“What question is that, sir?”

“Do you ever feel yourself being pulled towards that edge? The one you watch so many fall into.”

The nurse was silent.

“My wife was pulled. She worked at a hospital just like this one. She was a midwife. “

The man took a deep, jagged breath. He took another sip from the cup.

“She sat on the edge just like you. Watching new souls crawl out of that void. She always asked why they screamed so loud. She believed it was much nicer over there. What do you think, dear?”

“I...I don’t know, sir.”

“I believe it’s nicer over there. So calm are the waters once you pierce the surface. Then there is nowhere to go but down, down away from the light, away from the sounds of your own cries. Such quiet. Do you agree, dear?”

“I think you should rest, sir.”

“Soon enough, dear. I have a bit more to say first.”

The man took a breath.

“I asked about those who fall and those who jump already, right dear?”

The nurse nodded slowly.

“That leaves only one type doesn’t it. What type are those, dear?”

There was a long pause.

“What type are those?”

“Th...those who are pushed.”

“Exactly, dear. Now back to my wife. She had developed quite the fascination with the other side. She said it never got old watching those new souls come into this world. She loved her job as much as anyone could.”

“That’s very nice, sir. I think it’s time for you to get some rest, I will be back with the doctor in a few hours.”

“Just a little longer, dear. My wife grew so fascinated with death it began to haunt her, it grew to the point that she told the doctor on her floor. She was prescribed medication to help stave away such negative thoughts. Or so I thought. Three weeks later, do you know what happened to my wife?”

The nurse shook her head.

“She jumped. Alcohol mixed with her medication and a few others; she was found dead in one of the empty rooms.”

“I’m sorry for your loss, sir.”

“That means a lot, dear. But there was always something about that time that had bothered me. My wife had seen something strange at that hospital before she died. Nothing crazy, but some medicine had gone missing. Now in a place as large as a hospital, there are many reasons a bottle of medication could go missing. It could be an error on the part of the pharmacist, maybe a filling error on the part of one of the doctors. But my wife was convinced that those pills had been taken. With how much she loved her job she just couldn’t bear the idea that someone had stolen a bottle of pills. I tried and tried to convince her to let it go but she wouldn’t have it. So, she reached out to one of her friends, a young nurse who had started a few months earlier.”

The nurse’s shoulders tensed as a shiver could be seen running down her back.

“Two days later my wife was found rotting on the floor of a room not so different from this one. That nurse she had told left that hospital a few weeks later and moved to small town. At the time I was too distraught to ask any questions, but now I have one last one.”

The old man took a deep breath and took a final sip from the cup.

“Now, let me ask you dear, in your professional opinion, did my wife jump? or was she pushed?”

Between choked back sobs the nurse spoke.

“I’m sorry.”

As the words left the nurse’s mouth the paper cup dropped onto the floor, the old man’s arm dangling over it.



Amnesia

Karolina Johnson

it feels as if all i'd ever hoped for us was finally at my fingertips;
that you chose me
just as i chose you.

but that's not true.

why can't i sunset these desires?
why can't i forget everything?

i wish i had the answers;
that i could see into your mind,
and you, into mine.

until i can forget,
my feelings for you are a slow burning fire;
and your words are kindling.

i wish it was easy for me,
forgetting.

The Other Side
(a poem from the heart)

Ronnie Jewell

I was just thinking about how grand it will be on the other side.

I picture a rainbow.

Clouds.

A little bit of light mist.

Some snow.

An autumn-colored leaf delicately floating . . .

from above and landing in the palm of my hand.

And a little bit of sunshine . . .

and music.

Lots of MUSIC.

And of course, Reese's peanut butter cups.

Calorie-free.

But no unhappiness.

No sorrow.

No pain from cancer.

Just eternal love . . . And acceptance.

I hope to see you on the other side . . .

some day.

Pictured Rocks

Ashley Bouwknecht



Photography

White Flowers

Felisha Kidd



Photography

Blue Flowers

Madison Bloom



Photography

Blurry Bee

Leah Johnson



Photography

Memory Market

Alexandria Hedum

I'm selling bottles of the discomfort of not completely remembering an aspect of your childhood that you know meant a lot to you at the time but is now meaningless.

Wait, there's not a market for that? You're saying people already have plenty of it?

What if I sold a cream alleviating the itch of wondering how things would be now if you hadn't lost contact with those old best friends?

Now you're saying that that itch is incurable?

How about a wardrobe that only holds clothes from the people you loved that hurt you?

Oh, you're right, I suppose people shouldn't keep clothes that don't fit anymore.

Maybe there's not good business in nostalgia, after all.

Acquaintance, Classmate, or Friend...

Gemillia Williams

I knew this boy back when I was in middle school.
11, 12, 6th & 7th, these were the ages and grades I knew him.
He'd gone away so suddenly, in a blink of an eye. I hadn't known till the school year came around again.
But he passed away the same week as my beloved cousin. This boy was loved too, by many....
I can't say if I was one of that many.
He'd left this earth on the 20th of August...2017? 2016?
I can't be sure.
I didn't know his family or him personally, I just recognized his soul, walking through the walk, drifting through the sky.
How can I write about a person I barely knew? I couldn't tell you.
I guess this boy was something special. A meaning I could not put together... a meaning I can't put together.
I taught him how to spell his name in cursive if that means anything.
We sat by each other in homeroom.
.... Once he had blue hair and orange eyes. Wait.
Or did he have orange hair and blue eyes?
I don't know but that was in 6th grade.
It's crazy how I remember this guy. We'd both be adults.
My heart goes out to his family they lost a beautiful soul.
Personally, I know what it feels like for a big loss. But he never knew. You see me and him never really talked.
As far as I knew we had no personal issues we had to share.
He was a classmate that appeared as an acquaintance, or was he really a friend?
His eyes sparkled, his smile glowed, and he glided through the hallways, wherever he walked, wherever I'd see him.
People seem to miss him. I feel like I should too.
Is it possible to miss someone you never knew?
I think it's possible. A person's energy can affect you as much as the person.
Back then, time was of the essence.
I should have got to know him.
I think he played soccer, but I don't really know.
I hope this didn't seem too personal.
His name, the boy with the glow, and the grin?...
JaMarion Gomez
He was important. He is important.
He was my friend.

Hymn for a Reluctant God

Emma Marshall

Charcoal horses, wheels of flame
Soar across the sky again
They call to me, they call my name
Those chariots upon wheels of flame

O, send me back from whence I came
I cannot bear to see those rein
that steer those horses that carry the flames
Set fire to the battlefield town
I watch as they all fall down

The armies collapse and the oceans do crash
my great uncle's might here in action.
I know I'm expected to do my part:
to take up a sword and pierce the soldier's heart
and to call on my kin after the burden

My role demands that I do this now

Watch my hands shake and ask yourself "how?"
I never wished that I should bring such pain
See as my eyes cloud with tears and with shame

War at the hands of one who seeks only peace
Reluctantly, forced now to bear my teeth
Compared to the mortals, my strife is not brief
toiling now in eternal grief

How fair is it that all the hands that I've dealt
cannot be dealt unto me as well?

A god of war with sympathy
suffering in eternal hell

The Quiet Home

Olivia Fenlon

It only happened when I was home alone. The moment the house was empty was the moment the noises would start. Mom said she believed me but I didn't think that dad did. I always knew when it was starting because my belly and chest would get that tingle. First it was little things like the feeling of an invisible person sitting down by my feet or the closet door opening by itself. This time it was bigger.

Mom and Dad had left for dinner and Arielle was at a friend's house. I was at the kitchen table listening to some music when a bang came from the basement. I fumbled to turn the music off and became a statue in place with my eyes locked on the hallway. Foster and Ruca's ears both lifted in the silence and then bang, bang, bang. The sound was coming from the basement where I never venture alone. There was a creepy cellar full of cobwebs which I was convinced was the home to all scary things imaginable filling the nightmares of children.

Foster let out a low growl as I crept and tiptoed a little further to peek down the hall where the basement door of doom sat. The hall was dark, but the banging started again getting louder and louder. I stood waiting for a creature or see-through person to open that door at any minute and charge at me.

Then the ten foot tall wood sliding doors that filled my house started rumbling. The rumbling grew stronger and louder like the revving of an engine, until all the doors were physically shaking. Fleeting images of my capture and being dragged down to the cellar were going through my head as I scrambled for a solution. Foster and Ruca were continuously barking. In a split decision my next move was set and I booked it out the side door, running to the driveway as if there were a fire. I sat there until my parents returned to a quiet and deceiving home, which kept all its secrets with me.

I'm His First

Lance Klemple

Your arms are rust
until they wrap around my waist
rubbing skin against skin
smoothing each other like
sandpaper against wood
lips stuck to my shoulder
drawing up the poison inside

of euphoria
dripping down,
my spine,
your faced engraved
behind my eyes
an image of you lasting
for a lifetime.

I tell him,
I'm a vacant village waiting
for you to fill me
with your presence

the slip of my slack's zip
melts off my body as I
begin to remember why
mama said,
stay away from plums
he's too sweet for you to resist

his eyes lift to my lips
glistening with the salty taste of
sweat
he cowers before me
like a lost puppy
batting his eyelashes
he's the nail
I'm the hammer
We make sweet silver rings
sinking deeper
into the neighbor's ears

every minute ticks
slower
after you come
over my way
if only you were built to last
more than just
a few seconds

Woman

Karolina Johnson

soft and supple,
she is the giver of life;
the Mary
that you hail to

so why do you take and
take endlessly from her
without so much as
a single afterthought

you grab at it
with your hands
that mold
and destroy
the confidence
curves and features
that you lust after
and it's easy to see
that you like your women
young and meek
because you've already
reached your peak
and you use your insatiable desires
to rationalize the fire
that you set to their lives
for some sense of power
yet you call it a liar
when it speaks out against you
you frown upon it
and you look down on it
and you say
"it was a misunderstanding"
but what wasn't there to understand
in its helpless silence
and tears so acidic
in hatred
that they begin to burn
and corrode

the skin that you claimed
as your own that day
their bodies,
that you can't seem to remember,
are forever haunted by the way
that you mishandled yourself

you insist that
it's saying it in vain--
it's simply for fame--
or is it for the money
that you obtain
through your deceit
because you are a liar
and a cheat

and in a desperate attempt
to regain and reconcile
with the masculinity
and pride
that you lost along the way
you begin to justify
the unwanted kiss
that you lay upon its lips
as you touch its hips
as if you own it.

because *she*
was asking for it,
right?

An Ugly Carnival

Candice Kirkendoll

The laughter shrills like the hum of a razor,
and her hair is sheared like a lamb ready
for the slaughter. Her head is as nude as the day
she was born. Today, with the symbol of the enemy
branded onto her forehead with red, red lipstick,
she is no longer beautiful. Her body is no longer
clean. A herd of people flock around her,
and the beaming mouths of men shepherd her down
the street. Her bare feet carry her forward,
yet her eyes dare not do the same.

El Diablo Bailando

Adrianna Espinoza

Not rich, but poor she was
Not ugly but beautiful she had always been.

Not poor but rich they thought him to be
Not devil, but only man.

She caught his eye and they danced in the night,
Until he spun her in everyone's sight.

Round and round she spun for him,
Until his legs looked oddly slim.

She screamed in fear, and all could hear,
The woman of beauty had seen the truth appear.

She had been dancing with El Diablo not a man as she thought,
She saw three long toes and claws which had caused her distraught.

El Diablo had exposed his presence to all,
Causing the skin on every skeleton at El Baile to crawl.

Introspective of Innocence

Angel Wirts



Mixed Media

*Now What?
(Cover Artist Finalist)*

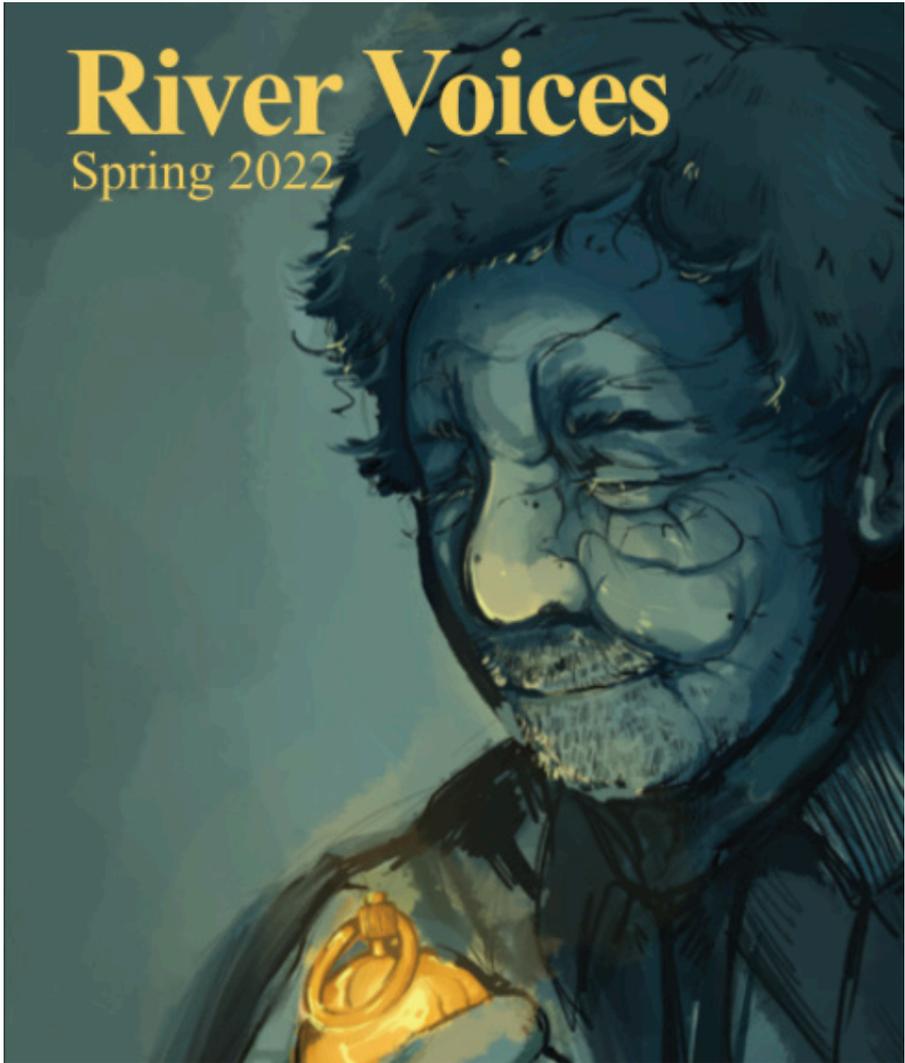
Robert DeRose



Photography and Digital Design

*Now What?
(Cover Artist Finalist)*

Lily Crowell



Digital Design

Affection

Rebecca Kinney



Charcoal and Pencil

Memories

Nena Sipos

The aromas of spring
enter my nose,
beams of light glow
against my skin.

blinded by the reality
of growing up rapidly,
I only hoped
this would last forever.

The dreams fade
and the nightmares rush to breathe,
drowning in silence
as the screams get louder

plunged in this constant cycle,
I reach for her hand
but gravity stood above,
like a knight guarding the throne.

Hue is it?

Natali Bradfield

Anyone who matters is here. Men in their three-piece suits, women also dressed to impress. The thing was, no one knew why they were there, and no one had bothered to ask. It's just what you do. Because that's what everyone did. It is expected. The longer you watched the event the louder the alarms went off, everyone was the same! The men were not all wearing suits, they were all wearing the same suit! The women were all wearing the same dress, just in slightly different shades. In a panic, you look closer to try to avoid the conformity but alas, even the conversations are just as identical as the clothes! The world faded permanently to the awful season when it is no longer fall but not quite winter. You back away and run up the stairwell to the balcony above. The party that had originally seemed so normal, perfect really, now looks gray. All of the colors that should have been, even the sounds themselves are somehow muted. As if you are in an old television show whose film needs to be restored.

But look! In the corner! Something bright! There is a woman. No one else notices, you seem to be the only one watching. How can they not see? The woman is radiant, a welcomed contrast to the rest of the event. She is so bright there is nothing gray about her, not in her sparkling eyes, or her, constant smile, or her unique dress that is such a brilliant red that it looks luminescent compared to the bleak colors around her. But where did she come from? Your eyes dart to her path and you cannot help but gasp, for behind her even her footsteps glow. At first, it is just the silhouette of her shoe, then as if melting, it spreads so the whole tile has a soft lightness to it. Your eyes find her once more as she touches someone's shoulder, her glow leaves a small dot. It jumps! His face lights up when her glow hits his eyes! It soon envelops the whole person. Every person she touches is infected with her vibrancy. But what was that! It shoots across the room! How could it be? Even her words can change the darkness! But then she stops, and she looks, her eyes glittering as they meet yours, a smile, a wave, and then you feel it. As you too begin to glow, you think,

“Why of course! How could I have forgotten joy?”

He Calls Me

Diana Casey

He calls me,
“Can you order the Boost?” I did. It arrives next week.
The Mexican lady, she likes us. Among all these white people of the north.
We look in the closets and the cupboard. No candy.

He calls me crying,
Mother needs socks with the grips. No, not tight. Her legs are swollen.
Mother needs nightgowns. Button or zip front.
They need to easily clean her.

Crying...I'll call you in 30 minutes,
They took her purple crayon. You remember, the one we got at the Crayola
Factory?
Our last trip as we three.
Purple Mountain Majesty! Yes, our mother named a Crayola crayon.

My brother is crying,
I listen. I order from Amazon.
We are the last of us, we three...
The last of one.

My brother and me...

Family Resemblances and a Couch

Anna Grace Lubbers

my dad asked me to help him move a couch into the basement
it was heavy on both ends
we were both out of breath by the time we were down the stairs
when i moved it free from the doorframe after it got stuck he laughed
he was smiling, when it was over he thanked me
i love feeling strong, i felt a wildfire of pride that he asked me to help him
when he smiled i felt solid
we moved chairs aside to make room for the couch
there was a gap near the wall because the chair was angled to make room
a little triangle of space
i'm too big to hide inside that space now, it feels wrong
i could try but my arms would stick out of the sides and my legs wouldn't
bend all the way
my head would peek out of the top
i feel small enough to play hide and seek and hide in that space
unseen from the other players, i would win
i feel big enough to be depended on by my dad to move a heavy couch
my arms ache from its weight
i never had to think about if i liked my dad or not before
he was a symbol more than a person
more of a goal than anything else, he meant safety
i don't think my sister likes him
my nana always told me i was so much like my dad, i have his eyes she said
i don't think my sister likes me either
i never had to think about if my sister liked me or not before
i think i like my dad, and myself
my nana always told me that i have my mother's face
i cut my hair short, my mother's hair is long
my nana always told me that i should have longer hair, it's more ladylike
i look back at old photos, my mother has short hair in them, and i do have her
face
i think it has to be my face, not hers, because my voice comes out of it
i have a deep voice, i talked low in grade school because i wanted a deep
voice
it stuck, but my mother's is deep too, though she forces it to come out in a
higher pitch
if i were a firstborn son, would the resemblance to my mother not be as
striking?

i hope my dad sees my face, not hers
the basement has a couch and soft chairs now
i noticed that a whole family could sit there, when i stepped back to see them
they would drape over plush cushions facing the tv
they would watch movies and sit close enough to touch, not thinking of it
my dad sits there alone, and i'm upstairs
i picture myself in that imagined scene, and my chest hurts
i don't remember ever having that, but i miss it
I curl up in my chair and try not to cry, i don't want my dad to hear

Flashes

Natalie Thurkettle

It was coming back in flashes...

* * *

"You can call me whenever you want... even if you don't have a reason to."

He looked up and gave her a half smile.

"Thanks." He said quietly.

She hugged him, he's so tall, her head fit perfectly in the crook of his shoulder.

* * *

A sappy old country song played over his speaker,

"This is the song I want to sing." He belted out the melancholy melody, a pencil as his microphone. She smiled. They laughed.

* * *

"Boys are stupid" she says.

"Yeah, so are girls," he replies.

The floor is a good place to sit and drink your sorrows away.

* * *

"You're my best friend." He smiles.

* * *

She answers her phone.

"Hey what's up- wha- where are you? What are you doing- OH MY GOD STOP- PLEASE GET DOWN!

DON'T MOVE! I'm on my way."

* * *

She drives 80 down the 55, no one stops her.

* * *

They're crying. He's on the edge. The water moves quickly below.

"Please get down!" She cries.

He jumps.

She screams.

* * *

Sirens. Too many questions. He's still breathing.

* * *

Bright lights. White hallways. Distorted voices.

* * *

She sits in the hallway. Her hands trembling. Her expression blank. Waiting. Listening. Breathing.

Inhale.

"I can't find a pulse."

Exhale.

"We're losing him."

Inhale.

"Clear!"

Exhale.

"He's gone."

Inhale.

"Time of death..."

Exhale.

"Someone needs to tell her."

Inhale.

"I'm sorry."

Lost and Found

Michalene Collins

We took the train from West Germany, where Jack was assigned, and arrived at the Gare de l'Est on a cold, rainy September day in 1988. I had dreamt of a posting to Europe since marrying a soldier. Other Army wives talked about visiting castles, skiing in the Alps, exploring places I had only read about in novels and history books, and here we were, touring Paris!

We buckled our children into their double stroller and noted the many war memorials inside the station. There was no escaping them. On one wall hung a huge painting of young men boarding a train from this very spot for the trenches of World War I. Other smaller memorials ringed the periphery. Jack translated while I focused on the plaque marking the deportation of "70,000 French Jews, including 11,000 children, to Nazi extermination camps. Never forget."

Later, we walked down the Champs Elyse as our four-year-old chattered happily, asking random questions. When we got to the Arc de Triomphe, Jack pointed out the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier to her, our two-year-old son oblivious to it all.

"And those words carved into the walls," Jack explained, "they're the names of all the places French soldiers fought and died for their country."

"Daddy, did you kill anybody when you were in Vietnam?" our daughter asked.

"I don't know for sure that I did, Nikki, but it was my job to try."

"Well, next time, you'll just have to try harder."

"No one wants a next time, sweetheart. Especially soldiers. We're here to prevent a war."

While the kids were distracted, I turned to Jack. "What would it be like, a war in Europe?" He started to laugh. "You really want to know? It would be a shitty mess. Try not to waste your energy worrying about that. I don't think anyone on either side is stupid enough to start another war."

The next morning, we were back in the station for the return to Germany, passing dusty flags flanking the monuments to past wrongs and miscalculations.

I secured the children as the train pulled away from the platform and turned to Jack.

"Where's the stroller?"

"I thought you had it."

"We must have left it on the platform. Well, the kids were getting too old for it anyway."

Suspicion

Thomas Bitson

Balanced on the razor-thin tightrope
are eyes focused forward on truth.
Hawk-like vigilance
maintaining the perch.

Skepticism reigns
the way the prey skillfully evades
a cold-hearted qualmless hunter.
One missed step plummets to paranoia.

A sticky vat of sour grapes
seeping in with wild conclusions.
A Kraken enveloping wayward ships,
dragging them to the crushing depths.

Steel thoughts struggle to return.
Chimerical schemes lead astray
as a rabbit darts to evade demise
at the whim of indiscriminate claws.

Keep your balance.
Control conjecture. Once you
slip off the line,
there is no net.

Prepare the Cabin for Takeoff

Anna Dunigan

Elevated 33,000 feet above all that was known.

We were never that lucky; snowed in for days
but never Christmas. Doors frozen shut kept us
glued to the hearth where we thaw our icy fingers
with endless mugs of love and cocoa. Trapped indoors,
we result to eavesdropping on hushed conversations of
lost mittens and shrinking coats, debates over the thermostat.
Temperaments are controlled by temperatures,
and we are left with a burning desire for release.

Finally the mountains of white and gray slush melt to reveal
soft patches of green and the beginnings of blooms.
Bulbous flowers form rainbow arrows to the city center,
crowded with regulars and visitors alike as we worship
our ancestral ties. Foreign dresses, wooden shoes,
and seven layers of socks to prevent the stubborn blisters
who never fail to form anyway. We come together for a week
before the cracks in the sidewalks are obvious again.

Then the sun stays with us longer, beating down as beads
of sweat trickle down backs and pool into the bands
of crisp denim cutoffs. Red flags never stop us
from hurling our bodies over the cresting waves,
little dolphins screaming in glee. The water reflects the
explosions of red white and blue and we stay out
later than we should, comforted by the heat we always rely on.
Sunrise and sunset pass with the blink of an eye, so we
savor every last moment, a sweetness no candy could replicate.

The leaves begin to change, however, and the shore becomes
too cold to enjoy. The fallen feathers of orange and brown keep
the forgotten apples hidden while we race to find the maize's exit.
The peace won't last forever. We watch armies of men and their
mini-me's head into the forest, clad in plaid and neon to stalk their prey.
Our bones chill in anticipation for what's to come, the cabin fever we can't
escape. One last masked hoorah before we transform into hermits reluctant to
hibernate. I looked out the window to search for those moments,
but all I found was a million grand canyons.

Prodigal Habits Die Hard

Benjamin Skujins

A voice that once invoked passion and comfort now sprays a flammable stream that catches rapidly. “Which excuse is it this time, hun?” The nickname birthed from a place of love now launched at me in battle. It’s beautiful, historical significance dismembered. Watching the staining tears of hurt roll down her cheeks I spin around, “I’m going to Three Oaks!” Subduing the lump in my throat I sneer and march out of our, once, dream home. With the keys plunged into the ignition, the tires squealing out of the driveway, and my white knuckles clenching the steering wheel, I make the quick drive to the casino. I feel blood surging to my face, melting my brain. My ears start to ring and everything around me begins to sound as if I’m underwater. I notice tears forming in the corners of my eyes, I often have allergies this time of year...

A knock on the car window draws me back into reality. I’m awake. “Your keys sir,” the valet in a red suit and cap holds out his hand at the car window. My muscle memory had taken over and now I’m in the casino’s parking lot, under the entrance’s drive-thru canopy. I exit my car, handing my keys over to the valet and allow the familiar ambiance to blow my burdens away. Under the massive marble archway, the darkened windows and teasing light fixtures whisper to me an ardent plea. I answer the calls. Upon entering, a blue wristband is shackled to my left arm. My hand brushes down my faded jeans to the indent of my wallet in its pocket. I am drawn in by the overwhelming noise of digital bouncing coins and gunfire of spinning wheels. The combined smell of nicotine and rotting buffet food bounces through my nostrils. Such sights and smells welcome me home.

My eyes browse the seemingly unending lines of glowing slot machines until one vacant area catches my eye. The presence of a wafting cold breeze enough to deter anyone over 60 years of age surrounds a cluster of machines. One unoccupied Wizard of Oz machine draws my attention. On the machine’s screen, Judy Garland stands in the center of the yellow brick road with the lion, scarecrow, and tin man surrounding her. The brick road transforms into a cascading waterfall of golden coins spilling all the way down the computer’s screen where, at the bottom, an animated munchkin greets me with instructions. I dig my fingers into my pocket and pull out my leather wallet. I make a loud creaking sound as I plop down on the cracked leather stool. I slide out a fragile fifty-dollar bill from my wallet and finesse its limp body into the machine. 5000 credits and a grinning munchkin.

Every credit fed into the machine is another step closer to wealth. To happiness. No longer is it bordonuas to convert my cash into credits, it’s just a routine as simple as making ice cubes. I begin spending my credits more generously. Each bid higher than the last. The flashing messages of “Try

Again” and “So Close” coupled with the mocking laughter of the munchkin starts dismantling my hope. The machine frustrates me until I bang the armrests, all while feeding it more bills. I realize that Judy has no intention of cashing out, so I move to the next machine. And the next one. And the next one. Repeat.

My temper at its peak and my wallet the opposite, I make my way towards the bar. Among the bar chatter and rattling machines, I let the bourbon wash through me, isolating my mind from the surroundings. Its familiar, burning sensation like sticky magma weaves its way through my ribs. It burns away the frustration.

The anguish.

The futility.

The lights of the machines begin to blur and melt together. The bar chatter becomes indistinguishable, and the noise of my surroundings feels as though I’m trapped in a fishbowl. I briefly stand up and I’m drawn to the earth at terminal velocity. I clutch the edge of the bar table and retreat back to the stained wooden bar stool. My head pounding, I know the best decision would be to get up and leave, but leave to where? To my car? To my house? To her?

Once again, I awake to the knock of a valet. I must have fallen asleep in my car. In the very faint light of the sunrise, I can see the valet and, at his side, a security guard with an embroidered badge, armed with a small baton. The valet gestures me to roll down my window. Briefly acknowledging the stench coming from my car, he continues, “First they tell me they have to kick you out at close and now you’re still here! We don’t open for another 4 hours!” I look at my wrist expecting to check the time on my watch, but all that’s remaining is my damp, blue wristband. “My wat-”

“You gotta leave,” he interrupts.

I start my car and roll down the windows, despite the coolness of the morning air. My car’s clock reads 5:34. I maneuver out of the empty parking lot and roll my windows back up. My head is pounding, and every small noise is funneled through my ears, perceived at ten times the decibels. My mouth feels stale and dry. I pull into the nearest gas station. After parking in one of the few well-lit spots, I peel myself out of the seat of my car, leaving a deep imprint. My clothes stick to my back. I notice the corners of my eyes start to shrink and go dark, and I start wobbling. I clutch the roof of my car to stabilize myself before I walk inside. I immediately make my way to the bathroom.

After gargling water and washing my face, I look at myself in the cracked mirror and begin to see myself as she does. “Did that satisfy you?” I think. I always remember the suffocating feeling of dread and regret following these impulsive trips, but the memory never outlives the hopeful desire that returning one more time will absolve all my burdens. I look down at my blue wristband and back at the mirror before leaving the bathroom. I open the door and, out of the corner of my eye, catch the employee quickly spinning around to pick up and place a couple of items in the aisle adjacent. I didn’t

realize I had been in there so long. I gather several items and bring them to the register: a Coca-Cola slushy, a Mounds bar, a bottle of water, a bag of Doritos, and a pack of mint gum. "That'll be nine sixty-five" I open my wallet and I'm greeted with seven dollars and a wet wipe. "That's all I've got," I put the water back.

In my car, I devour the snacks and drain the slushy relentlessly. I embrace my brain freeze while continuing to drink, almost as my punishment. After finishing my breakfast, I move towards the back of the car to open the trunk and stow my jacket. Inside, I'm greeted with a sizeable mound of green paper. Money! A warm shower of relief and hope wash over me. Luckily, there was nobody in the parking lot to hear me shouting, and dancing, and weeping on the ground. "Where had this come from?" I thought, "I was on a losing streak last night!" I start counting each bill, giving each one a devoted second of my attention. After counting until the sun was nearing its highest point in the sky, I bundled the last bill. I knew I had around 15,000 dollars in my trunk. I hadn't really contemplated where this money came from until I left the gas station parking lot and headed for the bank. Had I gotten lucky after falling into my drunken daze? Had I been generously gifted the money out of pity? Had I stolen it?

On my way to the bank, I see a billboard for the "Three Oaks Casino." Almost instantly my left arm feels heavy, and I look down at it and the blue wristband. Instinctively I get into the lane over and pull into the casino parking lot. I don't consider the conversation to myself in the cracked, gas station mirror and, instead, become blinded by the desire to double, triple, quadruple my winnings. Fifteen-grand might be enough to prove her wrong this time, but with one hundred-grand, that'd be enough to justify every trip to the casino throughout our years together.

I frantically gather as many bundles of cash as I can into the pockets of my pants and jacket and I enter the casino. The employee at the front desk replaces my weathered, blue wristband with a brand new one. "Back for another lucky night, huh?"

"I guess," I reply avoiding eye contact.

Again, I browse the aisles of machines. The loud machine racket and the smell of nicotine and stale food appear even more welcoming. I walk with my shoulders back at a purposeful, powerful pace.

The minutes and hours blend together just as the munchkin laughter is lost in the ambiance of noise. I hop through different machines each one tempting me, telling me it's the one. As I ran out of the first set of cash bundles I brought in, I make another trip to the car without contemplating. Just a moment later, I make another. And another. Finally, I'm once again sitting at the bar wondering how fifteen-grand was just as easy to blow as a few hundred. How could I have possibly been going for that long? I look at my wrist with the blue band, and then up at the clock. 9:26 P.M. I try to let the comfortable burning of the bourbon and the complaints of other bar-goers mitigate my brooding. But this time, however, I had made it, I was there. I made it to

my goal and threw it away, but there was nobody else to blame except myself. No excuses. Her voice bounces around in my head insufferably. I have to get out.

I roll off the tarnished bar stool and briskly weave through the different machines, past the front desk forgetting to wish them a good night, and out into the darkening parking lot. I'm hit with the daunting realization that even if I had a destination in mind, I had no money left for gas. I run out of ideas and I begin to feel trapped as if my conscious is stuck in an eternal loop. My left arm feels heavy again. I run back inside and ask an employee for a pair of scissors. "Here ya go." I walk back outside towards my car and steady myself against the hood. Raising my shaking left arm parallel to my eyes, I carefully position the scissors around the blue wristband. I slowly squeeze cautiously with my right hand. Why had I returned? I account for my overall instability and trembling hands. Where can I go? The scissors creak and slowly start to close. What now? The blades of the scissors come apart and fall to the ground. I do the same.



Recurrent

Kaelen Dean

Pure, falling
Melting, fallen
I lie on the ground
Waiting for change, again.
Waiting to become
Hail, I am strong and cruel
Weak, as a soft sheep, raining from the clouds
Or sleet, and asleep in my world.
I am waiting for change
Might I feign?
The falling from the clouds,
Back to Earth,
In the crowds,
In the dirt?

I Can't Breathe

Robert Swanker

beautiful brown bodies
turned black and blue because
their skin color doesn't match the white supremacy
like standards of a corrupt and horrid society that we all call
the united states of america
yet there is nothing united about this divided

nation where using a fake twenty-dollar bill
has the same result as a serial killer
on death row
for a shot to the head would have been more peaceful
than nine and a half minutes of suffocation
dealt by the man in blue who can't stand the color

black as the night where she lay asleep
only to be awakened by three unannounced plain clothed men
breaking into the home so he calls emergency services
and fires his licensed firearm it is she who is unarmed and in bed but
it is she who was shot eight times by the men who serve and protect
but only if you are fifty shades of

white privilege is shooting a little brown boy after just two seconds
of witnessing him play with a toy gun and holding the power
to take his life and tackle the little brown girl screaming
after seeing her brother shot dead in cold blood but
there is no blood on the officer's hands
as he was in imminent danger

Never Again

Nicole Onus



Digital Art

Citrus Cobweb

Calandra Bungart



Magazine Collage

Dream

Alex Near



2D Digital Painting

Tulip Time

Rebecca Kinney



Watercolor

Forecast of Thoughts

Gypsy Bates

I find myself longing for a brighter day
Watching the fronts come and go
Cloud formations in my brain
Blocking the sun of tomorrow
Thoughts freeze over
Eyes become misty
Emotions accumulate
And my ideas become
unstable
I begin to fight the frost
of forgetting
who
I
am
The cold comes
My fingers numb
I find myself lost to the season of sorrow
Life
a whirlwind of pressures
Is it whether the weather will pass
Or whether to bring an umbrella

Look. In. The. Mirror.

Carter Jones-Hirr

Look in the mirror.

She hears the voice from miles away. All she can see
are her Dumbo-sized ears, big nose, pimples, and moles.
Every imperfection that she wants to efface from her face.

Look in the mirror.

She compares her body with every
sexy model on the cover of Vogue.
Like an addict she craves the lethal
curves, tits, lips, ass, and slim waist,
photoshopped with adobe.

Look in the mirror.

The truth is sex sells. In this world sex excels.
Like a false prophet, they quote wise words like Confucius
to deceive us, confuse us, and keep us
salivating like the Pavlovian dogs we are.

Look in the mirror,
embrace your body,
nose, toes, ears. Your lips are beautiful
because you can smile
and spread joy.

This

Kennadi Dykstra

This does not define me
This is not all that I am
I am so much more than this
Without this I am still me
Without this I will be okay
This without me will be okay
So why doesn't it feel that way

Red

Riley Briggs

“What is your name?” Emily, my close friend and my brother’s high school sweetheart, urgently interrogates.

The tattered planchette swiftly glides to the R. We utter in unison, “R,” then to the E, “E.” Lastly, to the D, “D.” The tan colored heart shape game piece finishes moving. “RED.”

“Well, that’s a weird name,” Damion, my best friend of many years states. “Now which one of you are moving it?” His piercing blue eyes light up with excitement.

“I’m not. I want this stuff to be real, but I still doubt it,” Emily remarks menacingly. Taylor, wide-eyed, nods.

BANG!

“Whoa! What was that?” I blurt out, frightened.

“Let’s ask the Ouija board!” Emily giggles, tucking her curly, dirty blonde hair behind her ear. “Okay, ‘Red’ what just made that noise right outside the garage?”

Our fingers tense as the small piece begins to wiggle. The board spells, P. O. S. S. U. M.

“Damion!”

“What?”

“Go look!” Emily demands.

Damion scoots back in his slightly torn camping chair and stands up. He makes his way through the candlelit garage and opens the back door.

CREEK.

“Oh my God!”

He quickly slams the door and runs back to the chair attempting to maneuver through the many obstacles hidden in the dark garage.

“What was it?” Taylor eagerly questions, still wide eyed.

“It,” Damion clears his throat, “it really was a possum!”

“No way,” I mumble as I slide my white, plastic patio chair out from under me. “I’ll go see for myself.” I grab my phone off the table, swipe up, and turn on the flashlight. I proceed to the door that leads to the overgrown back yard and slowly crack it open.

SLAM!

“Oh yeah, I’m not dealing with that mean old possum,” I say lightheartedly, trying to figure out whether I should be scared or fascinated by the board’s prediction.

“Show us a sign that you are with us,” Emily says. “Like, something creepy.”

“Emily, you’re not supposed to be rude to the spirits!” Taylor

responds. “What if he comes for us? What would we do?”

“Oh, come on guys. It’s fine,” Damion announces, obviously directed towards Taylor.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ.

I reach for my phone and it reads, “No Caller ID.” I swipe to answer the call and place the phone between my hair and my head.

“Hello?”

BOOP BOOP BOOP.

“That was weird,” I announce to my friends. “I got a call that said, ‘No Caller ID’ and when I answered, they hung up.”

“Hm.” Damion responds, seemingly intrigued.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ.

Taylor searches for his phone. Left pants pocket, right pants pocket, his jacket. He could not find where the buzzing is coming from.

“Taylor, it’s right in front of you,” I tell him.

“Oh,” he says as he lifts his phone, also reading “No Caller ID.” He answers the phone on what seems to be the last ring.

“Hello?”

BOOP BOOP BOOP.

The same thing.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. Emily’s phone.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. Damion’s phone.

“What the hell is going on?” Damion utters as he places his phone back onto the table, this time in his line of vision where the rest of our phones all lie in a row.

We all make a similar “uh” noise as we try to think of an explanation as to what just happened.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. I answer. The call ends. BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. Taylor answers. The call ends. BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. Emily and Damion answer, and their calls end.

“Was that the exact same pattern?” I say, eyes scanning the room. It went through the phones in a systematic order, one after another.

“Uh,” Taylor says as he puts on his jacket, looking like he is on the brink of tears. “Guys, can we be done now?” His face was as white as the spirits that we were communicating with.

“What do you mean?” Emily replies angrily, “It’s just getting good!”

“I mean, I don’t really care what we do,” Damion adds.

I shrug. Emily puts her hands back onto the planchette. Damion follows. I look to Taylor. His green eyes seem to be looking dark and black, watery. He looks unwell. Aside from that, he reaches his shaky hands to the table, onto the planchette. I do the same.

“Are you calling us?” Emily asks, “And if you are, why do you keep hanging up, bro?”

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ.

The pattern of No Caller ID calls continues to be the same as it has been all night. We answer; the calls end.

“Okay guys, can we say goodbye? I think I want to be done,” Taylor requests.

“Fine by me. Maybe we could go for a walk? It is only like,” I grab my phone, “Yeah, it’s only 1:30am. We should go for a walk.”

“Alright, bet!” Damion quickly states as he blows out the candles and grabs the Ouija Board box. He quickly throws the board and the planchette inside. The closed box is left on the table.

“Damion!” Emily yells. “We didn’t even say goodbye!”

“Whatever. Let’s go,” Taylor says, rolling his eyes while packing his pockets with his wallet, phone, and keys.

“Bye, Mom!” I yell as I slam the front door, just to make sure she knows that I left.

“Are you sure it’s okay if we go through the cemetery? I know the Ouija board has you a little freaked out,” I ask in attempt to comfort Taylor.

“It’s fine.”

We begin to walk through the cemetery. Nothing out of the ordinary, we always go for walks along this route. This time of night always gives me a weird feeling, though. The streetlights are shining through the droopy pine tree branches. The wire on the flagpole is banging against the metal, BANG... BANG... BANG. It almost sounds like a grandfather clock that is running low on batteries. The aroma of dirt fills the air. The cemetery always smells of soil, a wet, earthy soil. I get goose bumps as we walk. On an autumn night like this, it can reach temperatures as low as forty degrees.

We make it through the eerie cemetery, back onto the road where I reside. It’s nearly silent as we walk, almost peaceful. We embrace the quiet journey.

The sound of Taylor’s footsteps pitter patter behind me, until they don’t. I turn around to see him twenty yards behind us, slowly curling into a ball on the ground in the middle of the road.

“Um, guys, stop walking,” I say to get Damion and Emily’s attention, “Taylor? You good? What are you doing?”

“Burn it,” he responds quietly.

“What?” Emily giggles.

“Burn it. Burn it. We need to burn it. Burn it. Burn it. We need to burn it,” Taylor chants as he begins to slightly rock back and forth.

“Um, what is he talking about?” I say. I can almost hear my accelerated heartbeat.

Damion plops onto the ground next to Taylor and begins rubbing his back, trying to soothe him.

“Uh, it’s okay buddy. It’s okay,” Damion says, attempting to calm

him further.

Minutes pass. *What the hell do we do?* Suddenly, Taylor's intense hyperventilation stops.

"I feel empty,"

"Taylor?" I respond.

"I feel empty, Riley," he says, staring through my soul.

We gather Taylor up off the ground as he is muttering about Holy Water. I assure him that first thing in the morning we will get him the Holiest of Waters. We have only a short walk back to my garage, yet it feels like miles against the chilly fall breeze.

At last, we enter the garage, but it feels different. The air is heavy, and it smells of men's cologne. The ragged Ouija board is no longer where we had left it and the pumpkin spice candles are gone. In unison, we gasp.

Taylor, shaking uncontrollably, announces, "I'm going to go find a Priest."



They Said We're the Change They've Been Waiting For

Hannah Jurcich

Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
I pushed my shoulder into the door,
unsure what wrestled from the other side.
feet slipped,
anxiety gripped.
Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
resistance turned to wilted stance
dust to dust
ashes to ancients
softness plunged within.
Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
river meets domestication
mastication
detach my mandible
blubber behind bars
we'll wait and wait and wait until ...
Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
chosen by birth order
built on brick and mortar
sewn in the tapestry
in the royal family tree.
Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
key and key and key
yeah, okay, come in for tea
i'm sure we've met before
oh right, the dreamland door.
Salt from the earth, or by the earth, or was it for the earth?
honey and biscuits
light lungs and orange joy
it's mine, it's our, and so it's theirs
because the salt
stashed in jars, jugs, and jasper
now sprinkled on june jalapeños
gasping, gaping, gulping for breath
ages in the making to free us all
me? You.
Picked up the phone
and answered the call
before it went to the voicemail i still have to fix
for yet another double helix
to remain there for god knows how long.
from the earth, by the earth, and for the earth -
Hello?
Hey...

Generation Lost

Kyle Olejarczyk

We were born into a cursed world.
What we were taught up and down seems to be left and right.
We conquered giants. We were kings and queens.
At the end of the day, we turned off our screens and it all went quiet.
We were left in silence, thinking
Now what?
We have no dreams; we have no ambitions.
This cloth we were cut from was pulled from under us,
And we fell into the void, reaching.
We did everything we were supposed to, and we still ended up here.
We stopped and stared, as if to say
Now what?
Time kept moving so we moved with it.
Most of us.
We did what we knew how to do.
We embraced our boulder-rolling idol, and we were consumed.
There were those of us who couldn't bear the thought.
Those of us who made it sit up at night in our beds unable to sleep.
A voice speaks to us; this is not how it was meant to be.
And we wonder to ourselves, what is it that's missing?
We lie awake all hours of the night, thinking
Now what?
But this is it.

Where I Became Me

Diana Casey

“The edge of the sea is a strange and beautiful place.”
Rachel Carson, 1955

House

The first on stilts, shower water through lattice and below the house
Mother was a good teacher
The government moved us to a cement house, with a bathtub
Weekly our beds were sprayed with DDT

School Bus

The only white kid to and from school
When I fell asleep, the other kids gently touched the blonde hair on my head
and arms
The bus driver tied a chair to the front pole of the bus
My seat, singled-out, alone

School Field Trip

What did you do in fifth grade?
We hiked with our sack lunches to the top of the volcano that made our island
We sang loudly the whole way back to school reveling in our adventure

Emergency School Drills

Bombs from WWII at home and at school
Earthquakes, we have too
Every class had a place to go, to lay out on the playground

Food

Pickled papaya passed around under our desks
School lunch every day of a mound of rice and ...
Weekend feasts of lumpia, keleguin, and always SPAM

USO Day Camp

Three, four, four, two in the front
Each summer our parents took us to USO Day Camp
Every day began with swimming
Coral, jellyfish, baby sharks

The Boy from Majuro

He lived with us as to go to high school and begin at the university
Twice a week he took us to the boonies
We learned to “hunt and gather” our dinner
Wild chicken, crab, citrus, peppers, and tang-a-tang wood for cooking.

Boonie Stomping

The plants were thick and grew so quickly in our jungle
The oldest kid carried the machete
We learned to husk the coconut with a stick
Don't poke the coconut crab, he can hurt you

Vietnam

It was the late 60's, each school day we learned the news
Most all wore the POW bracelets
The soldiers came from the war and lived in our classrooms
We kids sat with them the outdoor theater to watch movies

The Cave

That holiday of coloring eggs in saltwater, not so brilliant
Our giant bunny of sand
We kids swam collecting seaweed to make his shorts
This was our playground, our place to be

“The edge of the sea...”
Where I became me.



Through the Storm

Jolena Suarez

A roaring storm of bitterness and overwhelming winds ahead,
You stop in the calm. Viewing. Breathing. Taking in all the lies ahead.
Clouds of thunder rumble, Lightning strikes with no hesitation.
Pause.
God give me the strength to push forth to my destination.
But am I? Am I strong enough to fight what I will endure?
Or is it too little too late to run for cover?
It is clear. A need for change. But how are you so certain?
What if's race through my mind when I am clearly running out of time.
Woosh.
Loud swirls and clashing twirls.
Here I am swept into this storm that I had no desire to enter in the first place.
What am I supposed to do?
You have given me no road map.
Feeling more lost than ever before.
Feeling drained through and through right down to my core.
Deep breaths.
As I tear down each obstacle thrown my way.
I remember one thing you would always say.
What is coming is better than what is gone.
In the distance, there is something.
I cannot see you, but I can hear you.....soft beats.
Rhythm and melodies....
Baby hold on your halfway through the storm everything's gonna be all right.

Cold Waves

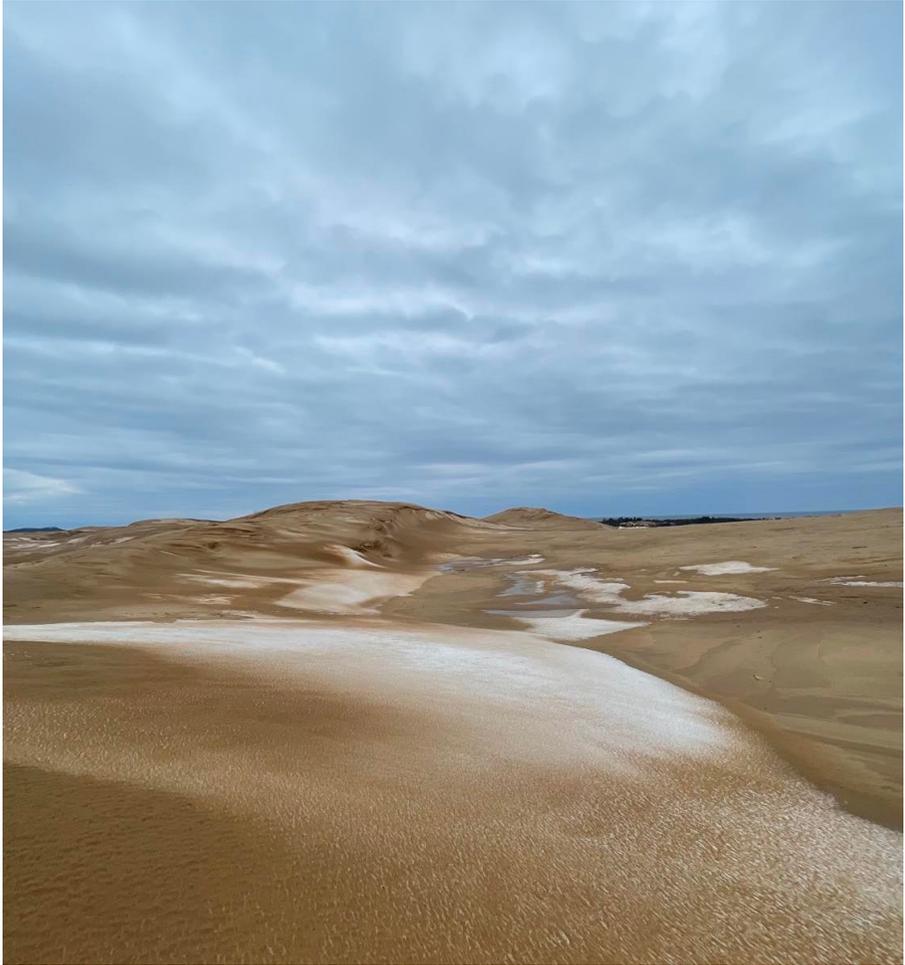
Leah Johnson



Photography

The Dunes in Winter

Alaina Bouwknecht



Photography

Lake Michigan in Winter

Harrison Nelund



Photography

Sunset at Mudjimba Beach

Flynn De Luca



Photography

Temple

Allyson Prause

He spends his waking days
Building a temple from the graves
Of his grandfather and son
And now that he is done
He asks, "What now?"
Now he looks to that flat sky
Asks the age-old question of why
For clouds to only spit waste
And his eyes in passive haste
Waste no time to cry.
Now the sky looks to that boy
While the boy looks to the ground
Endless rows of faceless mounds
He faces, and feels none
Now eyes wet in a yellow haze
He looks down to his faceless babe
And he is bothered with another ask
"How does it feel to no longer be a slave?"

The Man With Many Shoes

Natalie Thurkettle

The man of many pieces
wore many different shoes

You have time to figure it out, they said
for now just pay your dues

His shoes were different colors
and all had different destinations

So many lives he wanted to live
damn his imagination

The man sat down on the sidewalk,
put his head in his hands and said, 'I give up!'

No matter where I go or what I do
it never seems to be enough

I have too many pieces
that all want different things

I'm being pulled in every direction
God, why wasn't I born with wings

Where do I belong
is it this or that way

Am I being called to go
or being called to stay

The man received no answer
he sat on the ground distraught

No one out there was listening
then the man had a thought

Throughout the man's life
he had always felt fear

And the best way to deal with it, he learned,
is to simply disappear

So he put up a sign
next to a rusty old pale

And on that sign he wrote
'Many shoes for sale'

Put your Hand on my Shoulder

Lasasha Sharpe

The rain fell hard outside, filling the air with an uneasy chill. The crash of thunder caused my heavy eyelids to open and with it, a pain throb to my temples. The haze of sleep filled my vision, making the room a mixture of darkness and blurs. I heard the pitter-patter of raindrops hit glass and spray me with droplets.

My body was unnaturally stiff as I became aware of the concrete I laid upon. I blinked and found myself seeing my unfamiliar surroundings more. The glow of the outside world illuminated little of the room I occupied yet not enough to see the remaining space. It was swallowed in the darkness bringing goosebumps to my already cold skin.

With pain, I turned my neck looking further upward and surveyed the room. I noticed a small pale hand of a woman, barely touching the edge of the light that surrounded me as she was placed further away from me near a set of wooden steps. She and the rest of the room was swallowed in the darkness save for the light illuminating from under a crack of a wooden door at the top step.

The first strings of fear gripped me. I croaked as I tried to form words, but the dryness of my throat and tongue kept me from doing so. I felt weak and tired as I lay there, with a sense of helplessness.

I did not remember how I got here and listening to the falling of the rain trying to push my panic down. Closing my eyes, flickers of memory enter my mind.

The road was dark as the rain was pelting faster by the minute. The News stated this was going to be the worst storm of the season, but I didn't care. I was heading somewhere at the time I felt was important. I drove down the road that had many harsh turns but I knew it was the fastest way into town. I did not know why I was in such a hurry.

My thoughts were cut short at the sound of footsteps thumping from the floorboards above me. My eyes snapped open and followed the sounds as if I could see whom they came from. After a few moments, I heard the opening and closing of a door and silence once more.

A breath I had not known I was holding, drew out as my heart thudded in my chest. I focused on the hand and tried my voice once more resulting in the same dry croak from before.

Raindrops slid innocently down my cheek forming an idea. I painstakingly turned my head towards droplets and opened my mouth wide. I felt a cool copper tasting liquid slide past my tongue and dampened my throat.

Once finished I looked closer and noticed the broken window above me. Broken glass mixed with blood and water sprayed me and dripped

along my neck. My stomach and I turned away trying my best to ignore what I had done.

“Are you awake?”

My voice barely a whisper, was loud enough to seemingly ricochet around the room. The woman remained motionless. I tried a few more times before I decided to stop. Not knowing what to do, I rested my head on the concrete and closed my eyes trying to make sense of my broken memories.

I remember the rain getting worse as I drove down the dangerous road that sloped above the tree lines. The night weighed heavy as the only source of light being my dull headlights. I tried to focus on the path before me while vigorously wiping my tears as they blurred my vision.

My phone had rung. I reached over quickly, snatching it from the seat beside me and answered it. A few words were exchanged but as I lay there trying to recall them, I could only hear a muffled buzz.

The wack of a hammer brought my heart to my throat. My eyes flew open, darting around the room to pinpoint the source of the noise. Another wack brought my attention to the light that surrounded me and I watched as it grew smaller. I turned my head in time to see the final board placed from outside the window, blocking the drops that fell on me and snuffing out my comforting light.

The hammer continued to fall and with each wack another memory came violently towards me.

I thrashed and banged my fist onto the dashboard of my car as tears fell uncontrollably. The salty pools blinded my visions and I shrieked and whaled. My sleeve came up towards my eyes and wiped the tears and my shrieks of pain turned into a hollow of terror at the sight before me.

A woman, dressed in a flowing, white cotton dress dotted with red, met my tear-soaked eyes as we both stared in horror towards one another through the light of my headlights.

With a jerk, her body collided with my car, smashing and breaking my windshield. I heard her banging and rolling on the roof of my car then crashing on the road behind me. I tried to stop but felt my tires swerve, and before I lost control of the vehicle despair hit me like a tidal wave as I could only watch my car veer off the road towards the tree line. The last thing I remember was the feeling of floating before my car collided with a tree.

The pounding of the hammer stopped.

I heard the wet receding footsteps walking away from the window. I tried to still my racing heartbeat, but with the mixture of my broken memories and the intimidating danger, I found it difficult to do so.

My leg twitched quickly, tearing my attention from the rising panic and towards the unresponsive limb. I tested my mobility feeling as my leg began to respond to my movement but wasn't enough to even stand. Moving a bit more I heard the sound of rattling and stopped all movement

ceasing the noise as well, allowing a new sense of dread to fill my stomach. I painstakingly surveyed my body and I noticed the iron chain clasped onto my ankle. My heartbeat raced as I followed the chain. A few feet of it was pooled a bit away from me and was connected to the cement of the basement wall.

I heard a door opening and closing and the thumping of footfall could be heard above me. I once more followed the sound but this time towards the corner of the room before the person stopped. Silence was heard before the sound of music filled the space. I listened to the song.

Put your hand on my shoulder.

Hold me in your arms, Baby.

Squeeze me oh so tight.

Show me that you love me too.

The footfall began again and with terror, I followed the sound until it was at the wooden door. Slowly, the door creaked open, and small amounts of light seeped within my space. I became blinded by the light as it washed over me, forcing me to squint my eyes at the stranger on top of the steps. The shadow of a man stretched menacingly down the stairs and I felt his eyes bore into my disheveled form. A joyful, meticulous, voice touched my ears.

“I see you’re awake.”

Music poured into the room as if encouraging the man onward.

Put your lips next to mine, dear.

Won’t you kiss me once, baby?

Just a kiss goodnight, maybe.

You and I will fall in love.

The man began to slowly descend the stairs, each step echoed throughout my being and dread climbed my spine.

The joy was deathly as I heard it seep from his voice.

“I was so close.”

People say that love’s a game

A game you just can’t win

If there’s away

I’ll find it someday

And then this fool will rush in

He walked past the hand and the person still swallowed in the darkness making his way towards me and when he got close enough he carefully squatted down. I pressed my body on the cold wall wishing it would swallow me.

A smile graced his lips, one only reserved for people in love and gingerly, he placed his hand on my matted hair and began to stroke it, as if trying to soothe me.

“All I wanted was a family.”

A memory suddenly flashed and I no longer saw the man petting me. I was watching the news as I sat on my living room couch. My phone rang

beside me and without thinking anything of it, I answered it.

I remembered a few words of what the person had said.

“Is this.....Do you know a man by the name of....”

I remember answering the caller with a feeling of worry in my stomach.

“We are sorry Ms... your fiancé was hit by a drunk driver...He is in the ER...”

I was brought back to my reality as I watched the man take my hand and lay a soft kiss on it.

“But then she ran away.”

Another memory flashed, this time I was behind the wheel of my car, crying. I had the phone towards my ear again this time remembering what the person had said to me.

The man holding my hand, spoke softly, “Today has been eventful, and you did take on a lot of injuries. It may not look like it, but I was a doctor before and I will make sure you get the treatment you need.”

It was too late when I noticed the small glint of the metal. I felt the prick enter my hand before the contents of the needle entered my bloodstream. I stiffened my muscles and the man slowly took the needle out.

“There is no need to be afraid, rest is the best medicine. I will help you heal.”

With one more kiss to my hand, he placed it gently back in front of me and stood. He turned and began walking once more towards the steps.

“And you can help me get the family I want.”

Put your head on my shoulder...

I felt fear but could do nothing about it as my body once more became unresponsive and my eyelids grew heavy. He then stopped at the hand of the woman and looked down at her.

“It’s okay my sweet, I will just have to try again. Thank you for trying.”

I watched through tear-filled eyes as the man bent down, took the pale hand and placed a kiss on it, then he clasped the wrist in an iron grip and stood. With one last look at me, he gave me a smile and turned towards the stairs. As he walked the woman came more into view. I fought to keep my eyes open as I watched the horror before me. The first thing I saw was the trail of water and blood making a path from the darkness to the stairs.

...Whisper in my ear, baby...

The second thing I saw was the once white dress now a deep crimson.

... Words I want to hear, baby...

The memory flashed again to the phone call with the crack of thunder.

“I’m sorry...”

Eyes once staring at me with horror through the glass of my windshield were now glossed over from death. They stared at me, condemning me

to my fate.

“We did all we could...”

I closed my eyes and felt as my body began to unwillingly relax. I let a few more tears slip as the door softly closed. Through the patter of the rain and the now muffle song, I laid on the concrete floor and felt as the music lull me to an unwanted sleep.

...Put your hand on my shoulder...

“...Your fiancé died during the operation...”

McQueen's XKSS

Erik Nelson



Photography

Lights, Camera, Bird

Leah Johnson



Photography

Reflections on Commencement

Nicholas Palmer

The college crowned the year in the pandemic way:
Cars processed through a tunnel of black robes,
Litters carrying the future's royalty,
Uniform shiny black trucks deferring to the imagination seated inside,
More than one Lincoln delivering the newly freed,
un coche del Cinco de Mayo, red, white, and green, bearing dreamers,
a red Mustang filled with rap and dancing, bling on masks, caps, and upheld
phones,
a trolley of revelers,
a massive, converted touring bus tagged with "Princess inside" like the Intel
logo,
a green, well-maintained 1980 Suburban carrying farming genius, I imagined,
 or maybe it was an actor
 or a philosopher
 or a biologist
 who discovered new soil to cultivate.
Unmasked joy, shy or bold, framed in black,
faces replacing faces, smooth, bearded, clean, soft, hard, old, young,
multi-generational families enjoying the 15-minute rite
no doubt grateful to be spared an hours-long ceremonial rack.
It was the solitary graduate driving himself, solemn,
who embodied this strange time,
the grit of those coming of age in it,
and the reason we teach.

Weave and Worth of Word

Taitum Brown

There were times with people and no written word.

No pen or paper. No chalk and board. No concept of dirt and stick.

Who would I be, missing a bedrock of my being: how would I live, how would I love, how would I learn and explore?

I would have one less limb, one less sense, one less will, one less dream, one less love.

And after all of that is taken, after every aching of my hand is removed and uninvented, I would have one less life.

I'm sure for a second, a blink, or speck of time I would survive by stringing words from my artist's mind, past my teeth, and finally to float briefly in the air; maybe to silence in my exile or in a hearty circle of family from afar.

Whether these words ring, linger, or stain the minds, souls, and hearts of wind and comrades is not up to me.

Fleeting prose would leave cracks in my ribs as my heart and soul both left to immortalize the passion and bareness of temporary testimony.

To be a preacher of woven words, to pull the living and nonliving into life staining prose, is an impact I pray will seep from me.

When they are moved or my words follow them, stuck to the bottoms of their shoes, it stains me.

My being is woven tightly within the stain, like a sacred lace, held together by fine strands of remembrance, broad-brush strokes of the human experience, and maternal tears of understanding.

In the inevitable isolation of my individuality, my form brandishes solidarity, compassion, and connection like a direct connection to divinity.

My stains of shared word are a religion, a being, a purpose. They scream, "I am here," with a congregational echo, "We are here."

If there is written word to reflect, I can cling to my holy text of stains.

I can recite staining comforts: we are human, we are here together.

Cops and Robbers: A Risky Situation

Tawon Cooper

On a calm summer evening along the Lake Michigan coast of Chicago, a patrol car slowly comes to rest behind a red luxury Sedan. A nervous cop steps out of the patrol car and cautiously approaches the sedan. The driver's side window slightly lowers as the cop scans the vehicle for passengers and suspicious activity. In a stern voice, the cop says, "Lower your window!"

#Break

Meanwhile, on the west side of town, a luxury yellow sports coupe pulls into a crowded shopping center and parks near the entrance. Suddenly, a masked gunman approaches the occupant as the door opens. The masked gunman hisses, "Get out of the car!"

#Break

Through the barely cracked window, the occupant coldly stares at the cop and sarcastically says, "Why did you pull me over?" The cop frowns and growls, "I can't understand what you are saying. I'm going to need you to slowly get out of the car with your license and registration."

#Break

Gun in sight, the driver yells, "OK-OK," and quickly exits the car as commanded. The gunman speeds off in the sports coupe while the unharmed, frightened owner calls the police to report the carjacking.

#Break

The dispatcher is heard reporting a carjacking across the cop's radio as tension rises. The occupant demands, "It is my right to know what I did to be pulled over." The cop, disgruntled, yells, "It is your right to know you are disobeying a direct order from a peace officer."

The angry driver lowers the window all the way down and says, "What is your badge number and name?"

The cop sternly says, "All of my information is reasonably visible. Now, slowly retrieve your documents and exit the vehicle." A backup officer arrives and walks over.

The driver exits the vehicle and yells at the approaching Sargent, “Why do I have to be harassed like this?”

The Sargent calmly says, “Calm down, I’m not sure what’s going on, but your anger and loud voice is enough to rattle anyone’s cage. I don’t understand why you would even talk if you felt harassed by a cop. Use your right to remain silent. Regardless of who is right or who is wrong, it is better to be arrested than to endanger your life or the life of a Peace officer. Cops are human beings, too. Cops have emotions, too. Cops’ lives matter, too. Why would you want to upset someone with a gun? Would you delay or upset an armed carjacker? Doesn’t make good sense, does it?”

The driver remains silent as the Sargent continues to talk, “Do you think cops are perfect and free of error? Can you imagine a day in the life of a beat cop? All the trauma and danger they face regularly to keep us safe, and you chose to conversate with the one you claim harassed you? Doesn’t make sense to me!”

The driver calms and hands over the proper paperwork. The Sargent continues. “True enough, a cop is a sworn peace officer and is expected to serve and protect but you have a duty to keep yourself safe. Be safe and use your right to remain silent before you use your freedom of speech to upset a peace officer. Again, it is better to get arrested than to endanger your life or the life of a peace officer.”

The driver remains silent as the Sargent writes a ticket. The Sargent hands over the speeding ticket and says, “Slow it down and get your tail-light fixed. Pay this ticket with honor as you remember the power of authority and the sacrifice each cop makes to keep our country safe. Without police, this country would be in total anarchy like the animal kingdom. Remember, cops have emotions and feelings too and most just want to end their shift in peace.”

The civilian gets back in the vehicle and merges back into society.



Distinctly Unoriginal

Emma Slater

Sometimes I think about how my life wasn't supposed to turn out like this,
sad, lonely and heartbroken...
and then I remember,
my life wasn't even supposed to last this long.

I'm sorry I get sad,
I'm sorry I take my life for granted;
an irrelevant grain of sand in a beach of
bright oranges, dusty yellows and golden browns.

However,
I am not orange, or yellow, or brown.
I am transparent; clear.
The most common of colors in a beach of sand.
Orange and yellow and brown are stained,
in more need of waves to rinse away their tainted surfaces.

I am unseen,
indistinguishable in a crowd.
I am completely invisible;
unless you know what you're looking for.
Patterns of light and dark
creating an aura of individuality
yet the clear grains making up my existence
are completely undetectable
when poured into a bucket of sand.

Unoriginal.
Unimportant.
I am transparent.
I am irrelevant.
But that my friend,
is fine by me.

For Chance

Lance Klemple

We were children
before Death
We were children
before we knew what
Love was

I was a child before
the nightmares of his
skull slick with blood
sunk Death's sickness
down into my stomach
I was a child before
I was taught bitterness
is how we get through
untouched
by bad things because
bad things don't happen
unless you care

but when I was a child—
rosy nosed with warm cheeks
from Mama's goodbye kisses,
a boy with bouncy brown curls
in his blue eyes like
wet sand sliding back into the ocean
asked me if I'd play on the merry-go-round
and since that day
we spent every recess together

for years he was every star
shimmering in the sky
we wanted to explore
he opened the door to my unscathed heart

I was still a child
when he asked me to go
sledding on New Year's Eve
but I couldn't make it

I was still a child
that night when I told my friends
he's my crush

I was still a child
when they told me
they caught him staring

But Fate laughed in my face,

I thought there'd still be
a Chance tomorrow

but the stillness of the snow
crashed into the ground
stopped me from making
a sound because I knew
there was no reason
to be a child
when Love himself died.

My Asthmatic Lungs

Kelli Loughrige

heredity
environmental
secondhand smoke
don't smoke

it's just a cold
bronchitis
pneumonia
exacerbation

appointments
doctors
specialists
tests

meds
nebs
steroids
bed

atelectasis
scar tissue
collapse
never coming back

hate
frustration
need

...just breathe.

Pulse

Taylor Strand

June 12th, 2016. A man
opens fire. A club
devolves into chaos.

He holds her. She holds him.
The weight of the world warps
their weary figures until they're
contorted into incorrigible frames.

We can't see her face, but we can
see his, tangled into a grief-stricken
knot. Three long, white candles
are clutched in his trembling fingers.
The veins in his arms pop, and the
desperate yearning inside him buckles.

Breathing is a chore. Heavy gulps,
rough and thick and much too brief,
saw in and out of his open mouth.
Still, his lungs struggle to maintain.

The audience looks on, transfixed
with the vigil lain before them. They
read the names, one by one:

Franky Velazquez...
Juan Guerrero...
Luis Vielma...
Akyra Murray...

Three hours.
Twelve minutes.
Forty-nine bodies.
One night.

Cause, No Effect

Sydney Nelson

To her, writing is a selfish act
For coddling memories and organizing thoughts
For apologies or desperate justifications of behaviors
For making sense of the admiration or disgust
For planning the next step

In her personal journal, opposed to obligation for classes
For her eyes only, not intended for the masses

I write selfishly because
the pages do not question me
paper swallows the ink so each line reads clear
In the confines of the binding
no one is listening
I write selfishly so others will not hear

Something About Tiffany's

Adrianna Espinoza

There is just something about Tiffany's that I cannot describe.

Something about it that creates this feeling inside.

When I am at Tiffany's I know my worth, I know what I owe myself, I know what I deserve. When I am at Tiffany's, I feel on top of the world. I feel as if I can conquer anything with designer heels and a little bit of lipstick. I feel as if I should be walking strongly, independently down the streets of New York or Paris. Like I should own every ounce of who I am. A woman. A strong, beautiful, elegant woman. I am not sure what it is about Tiffany's but when I think of Tiffany's I think of what pair of earrings a man would buy me...because what earrings a man buys for you says it all according to her.

"I don't know what it is, but there is just Something.... Something About Tiffany's," she said.

In Ten Years

Laila Rance

A student has her whole life planned;

Except she doesn't get into her dream school,
Flunks math class,
Finds out her friends are toxic,
And then her cat dies.

Now what?

She fails human anatomy,
And realizes biology bores her.
Guess being a doctor is out of the picture now, isn't it?
How disappointed her parents must be,
But she refuses to go into a career she doesn't love.

What does she love?
She's in love with words.
The act of creating something for others to read brings her exhilaration
Except her stomach twists when people read her work,
So maybe being an author isn't going to work.

She wants to go see the world
A 9-to-5 job is the last thing on her mind

She rejects the idea of ending up like her parents with unfulfilled dreams
Who are unhappy in their careers, but won't do anything about it.
She thinks about being a teacher,
But kids gross her out.
She's too impatient for that job
And she tends to laugh at inappropriate times.

Therapist is next on her list,
But then she asks herself
"Do I want to *be* a therapist, or do I *need* a therapist?"
That's out. She's too bad at listening anyways.

She's too passive to be in law enforcement,
Too emotional to work with animals,

Too impatient for the criminal justice system,
And too honest to be in politics.

She lacks any artistic ability
And can't draw a recognizable picture to save her life
She did take some theater classes in middle school,
But can't remember lines for more than a few minutes.

Don't even ask about sports.
In fifth grade, she tried out for the soccer team
And on the first kick, she missed the ball and broke her ankle.

She even thinks about being an astronaut,
But she gets motion sick too easily.
Every road trip as a child, she would get a sprinkled donut
And throw it up an hour later
Every. Single. Time.

She'll figure it out eventually,
As long as everyone stops asking. Or telling.
No, she doesn't know where she sees herself in ten years
And at this point, she'd rather talk about the weather.

Beyond the Classroom Door

Diana Casey

They come with **knowledge**.

So often they think I am an **expert**.

They comment on my level of **confidence**.

They **recommend** me to their friends, their peers.

They are my **therapy**.

I am not the **owl** with **sage advice** - I am their teacher.

My **wisdom** develops as we, teacher and students, learn together.

What I **prescribe**... we always foster this relationship.

This is the heart of education.

It is all there beyond the classroom door, a magic that needs no **warning**

Congratulations, Mary Tyler

The following pages are dedicated to an educator, a leader, a poet, and our dear colleague, Mary Tyler.

We thank you for your love and dedication to MCC, the English Department, and, most of all, your students.

As you begin the next leg of your journey, let us share some parting thoughts, appreciation, and the gift of your poetry.

Thank you, Mary

Becky Evans

The English/Communication Department thanks Mary Tyler for thirty years of guiding and inspiring students, colleagues, and the Muskegon community.

Her passion for language and literature is contagious, and her students are transformed by their semester with her, many beginning their own journeys as writers.

Mary has said that teaching is her calling, and in this most noble of professions, she hopes she has done her countless students, MCC, and the community at large a good service. We have all witnessed her incredible service.

Now, it's Mary's time; we hope she can now enjoy her nights and weekends without having to grade papers until "the edge of doom".

She will be deeply missed.

Pseudo (name) [sic]

Ronnie Jewell

We first met in August of '93.
Two English Professors-- I was just 23.

Crossing paths Monday through Thursday
in MCC's lobby.

With a smile on your face,
You always called me Robbie.

Too bashful to "correct" you, though mindful indeed.
I blushed at the pseudonym . . . you had given to me.

It could have been worse.
It could have been Donnie.

But after 30 years you should know . . .

My real name is Ronnie.

Poems by Mary Tyler

Teaching Shakespeare (Not)

Mary Tyler

I cannot teach
you to love poetry
with a mouth
as open as Romeo's,
all those "O's" of awe
and passion and then
protest and pain.

I cannot teach you
to twitch at the owl's shriek
or tiptoe into the blood
tide where the Lady
and her Lord wade.

Did you not speak?

When?

Now.

As I descend?

Ay.

Hark!

You either do or do not
hear.

I cannot teach you if
you don't want to be
the blanched flower
driven through the heart
with color. You must want
to bleed purple for Cupid.
You must let him dictate your love.

I can only show you how
to root yourself
into Shakespeare's
earthy belly, to bathe in Verona's sun
but avoid the scorch, to
sweep through the fields of Illyria
quietly enough to feel Titania's
wings beating. Just enough
so that you will someday say,

I need Shakespeare words today.

Just a strand of them,

just enough to lace my shoes,

or tie back my hair,

or wrap around the wrist of this

new lover. I need some good old iambic

Shakespeare, so those who are listening

will look at me and say, "Thou, thou art

translated!"

10th Grade Chemistry with Mr. Hansen

Mary Tyler

We never quite knew what was wrong
with you, why you couldn't seem to bend
at the waist and so walked as if three-feet of rebar
had been shoved up the center of your spine. Your
long arms hung almost to your knees, and they'd swing
at your sides like the mechanical arms of a tin soldier.
They were the only part of your structured walk that
had any sway. You were 6' 4" tall and older than sodium,
your skin the color of porridge, of chalk dust,
of bone. And you simply couldn't go unnoticed
anywhere, that massive hump on your upper back
making you a freak at every turn. We called you *Homer*
Big Foot behind your stiff back, and I can see you
even now pacing in front of the board in front of us,
your bald, pasty head as large as a globe. Man,
how you loved that Periodic Table, Mr. Homer
Hansen, the way some people love a country
or a collection - your long wooden poker tap-tap-
tapping all those crazy elements that meant zilch to me
then. Couldn't you see that I had more
important things on my mind and that your class
was a room full of ether to me, the last hour of an already
four-fathomed day? Couldn't you see that I had dances
to dream about, parties to plan, three cases of beer hidden
behind the ping pong table in my parents' garage, and the new
guy from California to remember kissing? What the hell,
Homer? How many times did you say to me, in front
of the entire class, *Hey! You! Shut! Up!*
And you, who didn't even own one pair of blue jeans,
never noticed that, on my expensive, faded pair, I had inked
the entire code of metals and noble gases into mosaic patterns
of black and blue so Steve Wilkins and Josh Larsen could steal
all the answers for the final exam off my tight Levi's.
I would have forgiven us all that, as I am a teacher
myself now, Mr. Hansen, though I've never walked
in your big shoes. Still, I swear on my own oxygen that,
if we ever meet again, I will sit in the front row, well
dressed and feet flat on the floor. I will listen to every
word you conduct out of your large mouth, and I will

memorize all that stuff I couldn't understand, and I will tell you *I'm sorry, I'm sorry*. I'm sorry if I was one of the faces you remembered that hot summer day, two days before school was to start my junior year, when you reached your boiling point, closed your garage door, turned on the ignition and folded yourself in the back seat. And I'm sorry, really, sorry, that the paramedics reported that it had been a fitful finale, that the carbon monoxide made you sicker than a puking dog before you finally closed your small granite eyes and forgot my name forever.

Three Questions for Gustav Klimt

Mary Tyler

I

This Kiss is not Just

a Kiss

“Who ever wants to know something about me . . . ought to look carefully at my pictures.” Gustav Klimt

They say you always painted
at home, cloistered, wearing nothing
but sandals and a long, loose robe,
the luxurious fabric rubbing until even
your flesh ached and swelled for curious
colors. Sometimes you hired as many
as five young women to traipse and drape
naked in your rooms as you yourself
moved under the cloth and were finally

moved to paint. You told these dames to lie
with one another, to lie
with you, to lie alone, and each
longed to become one of your
paintings, yearned to be the golden gal,
eyes shut. (How many women you must have
told *Shut your eyes. Shut your mouth.*)

And every one of them wanted to be
Danae for you, the Greek woman
Zeus knocked up when he disguised
himself as a wide band of glistening semen
and rushed between her heavy white
thighs. You show her with deep red hair,
body curled inside a large oyster shell, her
fingers clenched, a shower of gold-leafed
sparkles gushing into her, her ecstasy
unmasked. And you made one girl
a dark-haired Leda moments before
Zeus, a swan this time, raped her, only
you’ve painted her rump high in the air,

her face down on a bed of flowers, serene
and lovely, eyes (of course) closed,
while a timid black swan inches his neck up
the swell of her fine back. Leda's a femme fatale
for you, tempting poor Zeus up the slope of her.

Well, I do want to know something
about you, Gustav – and I have been looking
with great care: for instance, is that love, the reverence
you had for the nude woman, and
was she really the only thing
that ever brought you to your knees?

II

You two kneel on the lip of a new place
pressed on a mound of spring green and crazy
make-believe flowers. Her limbs look lazy:
the poppies on her dress have flushed her face.

You've pulled her down to her knees, and she's crushed
into your solid dark body. Her bare
feet curled at the cliff's edge. Her nest-like hair,
braided with snowdrops and violets all rushed

around her white neck and chin. She's small in
your hands that hold her face like some divine
book and you kiss her to save your own life.
But she's sleepy or bored, her smile fallen.

And something else, Mr. Klimt Painter Man:
if she were to drop, would you let her drop
far and find another beauty to top,
Or is she the one who brought you to god
through that stiff brush in your large painter's hands?

III

The women you paint have

dark hair
fair skin
closed eyes

shut mouths
red lips
flushed cheeks
tiny hands
and legs that want
to open more
than roses in June.

So what I really want
to know, Mr. Sexy Painter
Guy who fathered 14 children
with no wives, did you paint
their faces to prove that they
had some fun too?

Forgiveness and Banksy and Me

Mary Tyler

So many forgivenesses are bigger
than mine. The black cat, for instance,
the one at the shelter yesterday, the one
with two ears and one tail sliced off by

his previous owner, the very same feline
that pressed his most fine and silky head
into my open palm. Or today at the hospital,
the woman who showed me her magenta lotus

tattoo, inked into the puckered scar where
her right breast used to be. ("I had to ease
this disease," she said, "before it took more
than just my breasts.") And how about almost

every ironic Banksy painting? The young boy
placing a yellow daisy into the snout of the
soldier's rifle. *The Pulp Fiction* dudes dressed
in their black suits and ties, each pointing

a yellow banana at someone, out of frame, some
guy they no longer want to kill. Or yet another
militant thug dressed in all black with a bandana
tied over his face. He cocks his right arm far back,

ready to launch, you guessed it, a bouquet of
flowers! To whom, I wonder. The mother
he no longer blames? The driver who jumped
the curb and almost slammed into him? A new

lover after their first spat? And look just once
at that sad, lone zebra, standing idly by as a woman
peels off and hangs more than half of his black
stripes on the clothes line. She seems absolved. Mostly,

though, I can never forget Banksy's "Suicide Girl"
who blows off her own head in an explosion of red
butterflies. Forgiveness in bright wings. Forgiveness.
We are such stuff. And me, right here and right now,

in this poem, where I have not written your name,
not even once.

Palate Cleanser -

aka: "You Asked for It, Gabrielle"

Mary Tyler

Gabie wants something happy
"Keep it sweet; make it snappy."
We could talk pudgy puppies,
baby squirrels, gooey guppies.

Instead of teens, drugged and hazy,
we'll discuss double daisies,
whales in birth, kitties tumbling -
forget about the races rumbling.

We'll read stories - clean and sweet -
no storms or fights between *those* sheets.
Gabie's tired of babies dying,
dead-beat dads and mommies crying.

All those rotten dames and men -
Smoking ganja, drinking gin.
Devils in and devils out -
tainted tales make Gabie pout.

So I'll review our syllabus
Remove the lit that's filled with pus,
dismiss the dudes with cheatin' hearts,
cut out the deep, depressin' parts.

We'll just read how love goes *right*.
Plain and pure. Luscious light.
But when we remove all pages scabby
the book will flatten – *and all for Gabie*.

You Will Be Missed



River Voices

Contributors

Gypsy Bates is an English major with a passion for dabbling in the arts. Her time is occupied with reading, cooking, and playing with flowers. Not only is she part of Sigma Kappa Delta, but she is also the Social Media Coordinator, allowing her to keep her Internet obsession strong. Her piece “Black and White” won 3rd place for Art in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Thomas Bitson is a broadcasting student looking to perform and write while sharing his love of movies. In his free time, he is either firing up a grill or weaving dream catchers.

Madison Bloom is an amateur photographer who enjoys sharing the world’s beauty through a camera lens. Her piece “Blue Flowers” won 3rd place for Photography in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Alaina Bouwknegt grew up in Grand Haven and would watch the sunset every chance she got. Her photos bring back so many good memories.

Ashley Bouwknegt is majoring in business administration, but she also has a love for art and photography. She spends a lot of time in nature and loves to capture the serene moments.

Natali Bradfield is a current MCC student and her piece “Hue Is It?” won 3rd place for Fiction in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Riley Briggs fell in love during quarantine with board games and “ghostly” things. Some of her experiences are too exciting not to share. The fact that “Red” is a true story makes it so much more intriguing. Her piece “Red” won 2nd place for Creative Non-Fiction in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Taitum Brown is an Early College student graduating in May of 2022. She enjoys poetry, going to Gender and Sexuality Alliance meetings, as well as learning about and discussing the social sciences. She finds inspiration through people, society, and personal experiences, with the purpose of connection and voice through writing.

Calandra Bungart is a psychology student looking to reach new horizons, expressing her love for aesthetic values through her artwork. She loves to focus on the little details and hidden meanings of life, and she loves having thoughtful conversations with friends. Her piece “Calamitous Night” won 1st place for Art in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

River Voices

Contributors

Diana Casey is an MCC Geographer with over 30 years of classroom teaching experience. Her mother was encouraging and is the one who encouraged many of Diana’s writings. Diana never imagined it would be poetry that would be her first writings shared with others. In this year, she put on her ‘brave and daring’ shoes, packed her dog Paloma, and two pieces to audition for the Overbrook Theater production of *Awaken Beauty*. Listening, learning, and interacting with the cast and directors, she composed three pieces which were integrated into the show. Teaching and now writing are crafts that her mother taught to many, but particularly she gave these gifts to her daughter, Diana.

Michalene Collins is a retiree enjoying taking college classes just for fun. One of her goals is to attend the Stratford Shakespeare Festival this summer. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction. Her piece “Lost and Found” won 2nd place for Fiction in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Tawon Cooper is a writer and filmmaker who is determined to bust into Hollywood and display some of his work on the silver screen. He finds inspiration from learning about many trailblazing artists of the world and their work, animals, art, and gadgets. He is also a member of Sigma Kappa Delta.

Lily Crowell is a current student at MCC, and her piece “Now What?” was a finalist for the *River Voices* cover this year.

Kaelen Dean is an engineering student who enjoys art, writing, and anything creative. Kaelen also enjoys spending time with her three cats and playing chess.

Flynn De Luca is a student-athlete who is currently on the men’s soccer team, with hopes to finish university and move back to Australia to live by the beach and play soccer full time.

Robert DeRose earned an A.S. degree in electrical engineering from William Rainey Harper College in Palatine, IL. and transferred to Western Michigan University where he earned a B.S. in Manufacturing Engineering. For work, he’s been to Brazil, Mexico, Spain, Japan, and all over the USA. Eventually, he married his wife—an orchestra teacher at Mona Shores—and became a Stay-At-Home-Dad where he began working on websites and social media campaigns, leading him to pursue an A.A.S. Web Design Degree at MCC. His piece “Now What?” won 2nd place in Graphic Design in the 2022 statewide Liberal Arts Network for Development student contest.

River Voices

Contributors

Anna Dunigan is an MCC alumna who is currently studying creative writing and publishing in Ontario. She looks forward to bringing her new skills back to West Michigan where she hopes to help others become published.

Kennadi Dykstra is a dedicated student in her second year here at Muskegon Community College and hopes to pursue either a path in nursing or psychology. She enjoys spending her free time hanging out with family and playing sports, which have had a big impact on her and how she views the world. Kennadi is also the treasurer for Sigma Kappa Delta.

Adrianna Espinoza is a student at MCC who plans to transfer to GVSU to further her studies in Speech Pathology. A lover of living life and sharing experiences, while learning about new perspectives of life, she believes that the best inspiration comes from feeling the moments of life in front of us. Adrianna is also the Vice President of Sigma Kappa Delta and a student editor for this year's *River Voices*.

Olivia Fenlon is a student who loves photography and being outdoors. She's a great listener and wants to be a therapist. Her inspiration comes through hiking with her husky. Her piece "The Quiet Home" won 3rd place for Creative Non-Fiction in MCC's Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Sidney Gould has been writing fictional and realistic poems and stories since she was nine, finding it to be the stitching that keeps a broken world together. She plans to get a degree in psychology and travel the world, helping, through her writing, those who are struggling to find themselves. She is also a member of Sigma Kappa Delta.

Alexandria (Ali) Hedum is an aspiring tattoo artist who wants to payroll deduct something at every Menard's location. She touches pillows on display for sport and judges them by their "touchability." Within the next few years, she hopes to have her own big dog so she can have a body pillow that she can walk, with the added bonus of finally utilizing the fancy lint brushes she impulsively bought off an Instagram ad.

Jane Hoppe is a Graphic Design student at MCC, attending through the Early College program. Jane graduates this semester from West Ottawa High School and plans to transfer and continue studying art. Storytelling is Jane's favorite way to approach any art, be it writing, drawing, or acting, and she hopes to apply these skills to a career in illustration or animation. Jane's piece "Catch" won 1st place for Graphic Design in this year's Liberal Arts Network for Development student contest, earning her the cover for both *River Voices* and the LAND conference program.

River Voices

Contributors

Ronnie Jewell is originally from West Virginia and has been teaching English courses since 1993. He loves the diversity of his students, faculty, and staff. In addition to spending time grading papers, preparing lessons, and teaching classes, Ronnie enjoys collecting memorabilia from the 1970's: records, 8-track tapes, toys, books, posters—anything seventies. He has an eclectic taste in music and remembers when he was 4 years old receiving several records for Christmas: *The Partridge Family*, *Gordon Lightfoot*, and *Alice Cooper*. Ronnie has three cats, writes music on the piano, and is trying to learn how to cook. He hopes everyone is staying safe and being optimistic.

Karolina Johnson is an avid knowledge seeker who is interested in furthering her education in the fine arts and psychology. Her love and passion for writing started at a young age, and she has been writing poems and short stories ever since. Her piece “Woman” won 2nd place for Poetry in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Leah Johnson is in her second year at MCC and will be graduating with her Associate’s in 2023. She enjoys learning different languages and plans to become fluent in Spanish, French, Korean, and German. She loves being in the kitchen, spending time with family and friends, and taking photos. Leah’s piece “Cold Waves” won 2nd place for Photography in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Carter Jones-Hirr is an ordinary student who hopes to spread joy to others. He enjoys writing poetry and hopes his words can reach the hearts of his readers.

Hannah Jurcich is deeply inspired by nature. Her first language is dance; the movement of nature, people, places, and ideas captivate her. She believes that nothing ever ends, feeling one thing inspires the next which inspires the next. To inhale, leads to exhale, leads to inhale. Outside of art, Hannah teaches yoga and dance, studies local medicinal plants, and is involved in all things birth work. Her piece “Rewriting a Story over Tea” won 2nd place for Poetry in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Felisha Kidd is studying Early Childhood Education. She enjoys taking pictures with her iPhone and loves taking pictures of animals and plants.

River Voices

Contributors

Rebecca Kinney is a student pursuing her nursing degree at MCC. She is blessed with multiple talents and uses her creativity in everything she does. Through experiencing life, she stumbles across inspiration while admiring God's creation around her. Her piece "Affection" won 2nd place for Art in MCC's Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Candice Kirkendoll is currently pursuing a transfer degree and has a deep love of words and finds her place in the world within her poetry. She's inspired by everything, knowing even the smallest of things can bring forth change, beauty, and humanity. Her piece "A Hand to Hold" won 3rd place for Poetry in MCC's Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Lance Klemple, with a notebook in hand, armed with only the finest ink and pen, writes day in and day out. Along with being a student and the editor of *The Bay Window*, he finds moments in his day to read, go hiking, and play games. His poetry covers a wide variety of topics from gender to mental health and even the occasional silly love poem scratched on a sticky note. His goal is to share his passions through writing to motivate and inspire others. He is also the president of Sigma Kappa Delta.

Kelli Loughrige is an MCC Educational Support Staff member, Muskegon native, proud military family member, and alumnus of RP, MCC, and WMU. She enjoys spending time with her hubby and fur kids. Nature is her solace, she can never live without creativity, and Jeep is her ride.

Anna Grace Lubbers is trying to get back into self-expression, for writing is the only way she feels like she can make herself understood. She gets inspiration from wanting to romanticize mundane moments. Her piece "Family Resemblances and a Couch" won 1st place for Poetry in MCC's Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Emma Marshall is a junior at Spring Lake High School attending MCC as part of the Early College program. She has a passion for classic literature and enjoys writing poetry, fiction and composing music.

Donald (Don) Moinet enjoys hiking in the Upper Peninsula and traveling. He hopes to one day travel to Alaska to do some backpacking. His piece "The Kool-Aid" won 1st place for Fiction in MCC's Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

River Voices

Contributors

Alex Near is a graphic design student working to fully write and illustrate his own graphic novel. He loves to spot the tiniest of details in life.

Eric Nelson has a Bachelor's degree in film and is currently studying to be a registered nurse. He loves retro-futurism, modernist design, and pizza.

Sydney Nelson is an English major who has always found solace in the written word but only recently started sharing pieces with friends and family. She is also the secretary for Sigma Kappa Delta and a student editor for *River Voices*.

Harrison Nelund loves hiking, fishing, hunting, and anything outdoors. Whenever he can, he brings his camera along on hikes and documents his travels throughout the wilderness.

Kyle Olejarczyk is a student aspiring to hone his literary skills and become an author someday. His favorite book has to be Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

Nicole Onus is a graphic design student who loves using visual art to convey emotions and messages. She is often drawn to causes or events for inspiration. She is a member and graphic designer for Sigma Kappa Delta.

Nicholas Palmer is an occasionally sentient being spiraling through space, clinging to a very pretty blue ball that sprouts all kinds of improbable things like a Chia pet, while being pulled along by a hot ball of gas. He is glad to be accompanied by many similar beings and some slightly less sentient ones who tolerate his company when he's awake, talk to owls when he's sleeping, and eat his furniture when he's not at home.

Allyson Prause is a student studying humanities who hopes to travel the world and pursue a career in journalism.

Laila Rance is a student who uses writing as a form of expression, and in everything she creates, she does so through her relationship with Jesus.

Lasasha Sharpe is a creative individual who takes enjoyment in the art of writing, stretching, and any other medium that will allow her imagination to thrive. She finds inspiration through her dreams and the studies of different cultures and artwork that promote inspiration and reading. Her piece "Put Your Hand on My Shoulder" won 2nd place for Fiction in MCC's Winter Creative Writing and Art Contest.

River Voices

Contributors

Nena Sipos is a current MCC student and wrote “Memories” as part of the poetry writing seminar class with Mary Tyler. Nena is going to college to become a Veterinarian Technician and hopes to travel the world one day and visit her family in Italy.

Benjamin (Ben) Skujins is a student musician who enjoys the challenges that come with writing. He discovers inspiration for writing through people-watching and listening. The short story included in this edition was written about the time his aunt took him to a casino after he turned 19. It was a surprising experience, where seeing all the different people with different stories, inspired him to write a story in that setting. His piece “Prodigal Habits Die Hard” won 1st place for Creative Non-Fiction in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest and 3rd Place in the 2022 statewide Liberal Arts Network for Development student writing contest.

Emma Slater is a Nursing major who has had a passion for poetry for most of her young adult life. She finds her inspiration through her day-to-day life and experiences.

Sandra Stoner is a first-year college student who enjoys being in nature and taking photos to capture its beauty. She finds herself happiest when exploring the world and enjoying the amazing views. Her piece “All in a Row” won 1st place for Photography in MCC’s 2022 Winter Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Taylor Strand is an MCC student currently working on her Associate in Science and Arts degree. She has an interest in pursuing an English degree in the future, and she often finds inspiration listening to loud music and laying on the floor, just letting her mind wander. Her piece “The Illusionist” won 1st place for Fiction in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Jolena Suarez is studying to become a Respiratory Therapist. She loves writing and drawing just for fun and as a stress reliever. In her free time she loves spending time with her two daughters.

Robert Swanker is a current MCC student.

Natalie Thurkettle is an art student who dreams of traveling the world. She loves writing in cozy cafes and drinking way too much coffee. Her piece “Flashes” won 3rd place for Fiction in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

River Voices

Contributors

Elizabeth Tuffelmire is a business student who enjoys the artistic side of life. Her piece “Sour Flower” won 3rd place for Poetry in MCC’s Fall 2021 Creative Writing Contest.

Mary Tyler Shall retire. (That’s a couplet, y’all.) Mary has taught the Literature of William Shakespeare, Creative Writing, Poetry Writing, Film, and English 102. She was also the chairperson for the Muskegon Writers’ Center. Mary earned a BA in English from the University of Michigan, a Master’s in English from Western Michigan University, and a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree in Poetry and Creative Writing from Western Michigan University. Mary will miss her students and teaching very much. She has three adult kids who she adores, and she lives in North Muskegon with her husband, two beautiful collies named Rosie and Finnegan, and a Calico Cutie Cat named Rory Morning Glory.

Gracie Vermurlen is a creative person who loves to help people, whether it be through words or a simple smile. Inspiration is found in the late hours of the night and absorbing the words of a good book.

Gemillia Williams is 19, and her piece “Acquaintance, Classmate, or Friend...” is inspired by and in memory of an old classmate, JaMarion Gomez, who passed. He made a big impact on her life even though she never met him. This piece won 1st place for Poetry in MCC’s Winter 2022 Creative Writing and Art Contest.

Angel Wirts is a science and art student who hopes to continue doing what she loves the most.

Audrey Zok is a first-year student at MCC, pursuing an Associate’s in Graphic Design. Upon graduating from college, she plans to work at a local graphic design company and pursue what she loves to do. In her free time, she enjoys hanging out with family and baking or cooking for others.

National English Honor Society Members

Sigma Zeta Chapter

Lance Klemple
President

Adrianna Espinoza
Vice President

Sydney Nelson
Secretary

Kennadi Dykstra
Treasurer

Gypsy Bates
Social Media Coordinator

Members

Tawon Cooper
Sidney Gould
Brendan Harris
Garrett Hook
Sarah Johnson
Megan Kraley
Jennafer LaVette
Griffin Michelli

Mia Munding
Nicole Onus
Megan Rachow
Haylee Spicklemire
Hannah Thumser
Zachary Van Buren
Katherine Weesie

Faculty Advisors

Sean Colcleasure
Shauna Hayes

