



illuminations



Volume 24 • 2023



illuminations

A magazine of creative expression
by students, faculty, and staff at
Southeast Community College
Beatrice/Lincoln/Milford, NE
Falls City/Hebron/Nebraska City/Plattsmouth/Wahoo/York, NE

Volume 24 2023

The very act of writing then, conjuring/coming to 'see', what has
yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness
what only the body knows to be true.

Cherríe Moraga



AWARD WINNERS

These awards have been bestowed on *Illuminations* and its contributors by the Community College Humanities Association:

“My Dear Grandma” by Ha Vy Linh Nguyen
Best Creative Nonfiction, 1st Place: CCHA Central Region

“The Umbrella Incident” by John Cook
Best Short Story, 1st Place: CCHA Central Region

“Painted Lady Butterfly” by Angela Cyza
Best Art Work, 3rd Place: CCHA Central Region

illuminations Volume 24

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illuminations publishes creative prose, poetry, and visual art, as well as academic and literary writing. We encourage submissions from across the disciplines. Our mission is to feature outstanding artistic works with a diversity of voices, styles, and subjects meaningful to the SCC community. *illuminations* is further evidence that original thought and creative expression are celebrated by Southeast Community College.

illuminations is published in April of each year. Submissions are accepted year-round from SCC students, faculty, and staff. Email submissions to Editor **Tammy Zimmer**, **illuminations@southeast.edu**, with the following information:

- 1) The title and a brief description of each submission;
- 2) Your name, ID#, and program/position at SCC;
- 3) Your physical address, phone number, and email address;
- 4) Your motivation for creating each submission;
- 5) A brief, informal bio of yourself; mention unique traits, habits, or guilty pleasures—whatever makes you *you*;
- 6) The following statement with your typed “signature”: This submission is my own original, unpublished work.

Written work is accepted as .rtf or Word files. Submit high-resolution images of artwork or photographs as .tif or .jpg files with a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and a minimum size of 1500 pixels wide and 2100 pixels tall, or 5” wide and 7” tall. A digital camera other than a phone is recommended, if possible. We can photograph or scan artwork for you if needed. Images embedded in Word or PDF files will not be included. You must provide a separate image file. Video files of dramatic, musical, or other creative performances of ten minutes or less can be submitted as MPG4, MPG2, MPG3, AVI, MOV, FLV files. **The deadline for Volume 25 submissions is May 31, 2023.**

Contributors should be aware that submitted work may be used in promotional materials, featured on the SCC website, or submitted to literary magazine contests. Contributors retain copyright of submitted and published material.

Questions should be directed to: **Tammy Zimmer, illuminations@southeast.edu**

The content of this magazine does not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Team, the Arts and Sciences Division, or anyone associated with Southeast Community College.

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Back cover images, “Off the Trail” by Logan Henson,
“Dragonfly” by Lynda Heiden

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I ONCE KNEW A PLACE

John Cook • Student, English

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, POETRY

There used to be this place I knew, where the world
could not quite reach
I can't tell you where it was, or when
those details have drifted off like smoky wisps
tangled in the fog of war, leaving only broken remnants
tiny bits and half remembered haunting flashes

I know it was warm in this long lost mislaid place. Perhaps
a soft fuzzy blue blanket or maybe
the summer sun kissing my shoulders as I ran.
It must have been warm there because I can't stand the cold

I think it must have been dark, this perfect missing place
I've lost. A small safe hidden closet or even
a shrouded moonless night cloaking me from my monsters
Sleep rarely ever visits me in the dark, I hide so well it can't find me

I believe magic flowed through that mystical meandering place. Wild elves,
haunted castles and dragons run amok or else
a silver spaceship blazing across the stars in search of glory
The worlds stacked on the shelves around me feel like friendly ghosts

The lost place teases me with fleeting glances unexpected
moments, here and gone before I turn to look
Sometimes I fool myself that if I
gather the broken bits and capture the smoky wisps
Mists of Time will part, and the place I knew will beckon
even if it only ever existed in my mind.

SINGING

Rachel Hruza • Faculty, English

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, FACULTY/STAFF CATEGORY

The division between
heart and home isn't far
for you

or the second heartbeat
that excites the blood in your
veins

to a steady symmetrical rhythm
you comprehend but cannot
control, and yet

you don't want to. The laughter
that lives inside asks nothing
of you

yet, the simple wish that grows
in your mind like a cry
is enough for now.

To pray, push, and hold the head,
limbs, and lips of the child who will
come out singing.

UNSEEN SOCIETY MEMBERS ONLY

Cecelia Bialas • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, POETRY

in the fluorescent grocery store line,
my school science hall, the walking park path,
and work conference calls, among
able-bodied outsiders who pass by oblivious, I see

the perfect golf swing of the woman with her fellow country clubbers,
sports drink on the ground, a little lifesaving insulin pump
revealed under her pastel pink sleeve,

and the brunette cashier who adjusts their purple Coban wrap, squeezing
tightly
the flow of routine peripheral blood tinged with cancer
as they scan my groceries and small talk with a smile. I see

the suit-clad lad running out of class, down the business school stairs,
barely making it to the bathroom in time, amid classmates' snickers
unaware of the wasting muscles that curse him with incontinence,

and the family man hiding the ruins in his mouth from years of brutal steroids,
fearing the vicious "*meth head*" rumors that always follow his weakened form.
United in the extra steps required to live on, they all see me

as a member too, when I muffle my ostomy bag noises, rub the pain
from my joints, slip a nausea pill under my tongue as my Crohn's
stages an internal coup; intestines rutted and bloodied by traitorous cells

marching through, the pain drawing all my attention inward
so that when the weight numbers drop and the eye circles darken,
I cannot see the severity. In this unseen society, we're all just defying
disease's incognito takeover, trying to forget our lifelong membership.

THE SECRET PLACE

John Cook • Student, English

GRAND PRIZE WINNER, PROSE

“I brought a story like you told me to grandpa!” Sandy held up her favorite book and waved it in the air as proof. It was a big book with bright colorful pictures of dragons and fairies and unicorns all over the inside. There were words too, bunches of words on almost every page, and she could read them all.

“Is it a special story?” Her grandpa asked, smiling down at her in that peculiar way he liked to do when he was up to something. Gramma called it his ‘onery smile’ and usually told him to be nice whenever he smiled that way, which only made him smile more. “I told you it had to be a special story if you want to see the Secret Place.”

“It’s my favorite!” She declared boldly. “It is the most special story I have! There’s even a fairy in it!”

“Well, if it’s got a fairy in it, it must be special.” Grandpa declared with a nod and a wink. He took her by her other hand, the one not clinging to her book, and led her out of the house.

Sandy had no idea where the Secret Place was, but she imagined it must be far away if it was as magical as her daddy said it was. He told her stories about the times he spent there when he was a boy, but he would not tell her where it was, he said he was sworn to secrecy!

Grandpa led her up the driveway and she thought they must be going for a ride, but he walked right past his car and into the garage. She was not allowed to play in the garage because gramma said it was dirty and full of dangerous stuff, but grandpa had let her come sit out there with him sometimes when he was ‘tinkering’ as gramma called it. She had been there enough times to know that no magical Secret Place hid among all the smelly tools and garden supplies.

He did not stop in the garage though, instead he took her through the side door that opened into the backyard. Gramma and grandpa had a big fenced in backyard with tall pointy trees lining the whole place, so it looked like a giant green wall all the way around. There was a big patio where gramma liked to cook on her grill, a table and chairs for when they ate outside, and a firepit where they had roasted marshmallows last time she came to visit. Beyond the patio was the big open yard where she played with her cousins or gramma and grandpa’s dogs sometimes. She liked the

yard, but she was not here to play today, she had brought her favorite book.

“Grandpa, when are we going to the Secret Place?” She asked, trying not to whine. The Secret Place was for big kids who did not pout or throw temper tantrums, even when they didn’t get the toy they wanted in the store.

“Right now.” Grandpa replied, winking at her again. He led her off the patio and across the yard to the far side where the trees grew closer together until they turned towards each other and made a big green wall at the farthest part of the yard from the house. A tall narrow arch covered in pretty blue flowers sat to one side and grandpa marched her straight towards it. She had never been through the arch before, grandpa called it the gateway and she thought that meant it led to a gate outside like the one in her yard at home. As Sandy looked closer, she realized there was no gate beyond the arch, only more trees.

When they reached the blue flowered archway grandpa knelt down on one knee and turned to face her. His onery smile was gone and now he looked very serious as he stared into her eyes. She wanted to look away, but she was supposed to be a big kid now and big kids were brave.

“This is the entrance to the Secret Place.” Grandpa announced, sounding very serious. Grandpa never really sounded serious, gramma said it was because he never grew up but she always smiled when she said it so Sandy thought it must be a joke. Grandpa was obviously a grown up, he was tall, he could drive a car, and he even had a beard!

“The first time a person enters the Secret Place, they must go in alone. That’s why only big kids can go inside, kids who are brave and ready for adventure.” He declared the last part loudly, his hand clutched over his heart.

“I’m a big kid, grandpa!” Sandy declared just as fervently.

“Yes,” he replied, tilting his head back and looking down his nose at her “I do believe you are.”

Sandy’s heart raced in her chest as she turned to peer into the darkness beyond the flowers. The dark was strange and scary, she wished grandpa could go with her, or maybe even gramma. Nothing hiding in the dark would dare to mess with gramma, especially if she had her broom with her. The rules were clear though, she had to go in alone. She had to be brave.

“Once you go inside, just follow the stone path and it will lead you through the maze to the special place.” Grandpa explained. “Now, you’re going to see a couple friends of mine along the way. They might look scary at first, but they’re harmless, just give them a wave and follow the path. When you get to the Secret Place, look around and you’ll find a spot

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prepared for you, the fairies might even have a snack waiting. You read them your special story when you get there, and they'll all be your friends for life."

Sandy took a deep shaky breath and wrapped both arms around her favorite book, clutching it protectively to her chest. Then quickly, before the fear could get too big, she walked under the pretty blue flowers and into the darkness beyond. She only glanced back one time to see grandpa still kneeling in the grass, a proud smile on his face. It was enough encouragement to keep her going.

A path of flat stones led off to her left and she followed it just as grandpa had told her to. After a few steps, she realized it was not as dark as she had imagined. Light trickled in between the branches that wove together above her head, allowing her to see just fine. The air was cooler under the trees also, a nice change from the summer heat outside. She relaxed and let out the breath that she had been holding with a giggle. This was not scary at all; it was actually kind of pretty. She followed the path as it twisted around a sharp bend and suddenly, she came face to face with a monster!

The monster was dark gray colored, even darker than the shadows around them both. He was not a very big monster, smaller than her even, but he was sitting up on a stone pedestal which made him seem much bigger at first. He stared down at her with his long nose, pointy ears and a pair of horns sticking up on top of his head. He was sticking his tongue out at her, which her mother always scolded her for doing. After a long silent staring contest, Sandy recognized what kind of monster she was facing, a gargoyle.

Gargoyles were not really monsters, not according to her favorite book, they just looked scary. The longer she stared at this particular gargoyle, the more she decided he was not scary at all, just rude. She waved at him like grandpa had told her, but he did not wave back, he just sat there. So, she stuck her tongue out at him, which was only fair, and walked on by. She thought she heard a chuckle from the gargoyle after she passed, but when she turned around, he was still motionless, like a statue.

A few steps farther along the path, she heard the sound of running water coming from somewhere up ahead. It was not long before she reached another turn in the path and discovered the second monster, a dragon.

The dragon sat just beyond the next turn of the path, staring at her as she approached. The sound of water was actually him spitting a steady stream into a small stone pool at his feet. Usually dragons were mean in stories, stealing princesses and eating people for fun, but this one did not seem to be that kind of dragon. First of all, he was rather small for a dragon, shorter than her in fact. It was hard to imagine him eating a whole person or stealing one for that matter. This dragon had a playful look about him, with bright blue scales, a round belly, and a long tail that curled up around his

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feet. He also had really cute little wings on his back and Sandy wondered if he could actually fly. But he did not fly now, he just sat there, somehow smiling at her even as the water squirted from between his lips.

Sandy sighed wistfully, imagining how it would feel to fly on the back of a dragon, and gave the little one a wave as she turned the corner. Just as she looked away, she thought he winked at her, exactly the way grandpa liked to do. She almost looked back but she knew that he wouldn't do it while she was watching. Apparently, he and the gargoyle were playing the statue game. It was a game they played at her school sometimes where all the kids would stand in a circle and freeze in place. Whoever stayed still the longest would be the winner and get to do something special, like lead the other kids out to recess or help passing out snacks. The gargoyle and the dragon were really good at the statue game, they would win at her school for sure.

Just past the dragon, the tall pointy trees ended, and Sandy found herself looking at the Secret Place for the first time. It was everything she had imagined and more!

The path led up to a small open area with walls on three sides and a giant tree with big leafy branches on the fourth. Sandy could see hints of wood that made up the walls, it looked like the big fence that ran outside the pointy trees, but it was almost completely buried under mountains of long draping vines dotted more flowers than she could count. The flowers were blue, yellow, white, and red, scattered all along the walls like splatters of paint when she would shake her brush above the paper during art class at school. The air was filled with the wonderful perfumy smell, like mommy smelled when she was going out with daddy. At least a dozen small white butterflies were flitting around from bud to bud, clearly trying to decide which flower smelled the sweetest. It looked like a fun game, but Sandy was not there to play with butterflies, not until she read her story.

A long wooden bench with comfy looking pillows for padding sat along one wall, so that it faced the big tree, with a table resting at the far end of it. There was a basket sitting on the tiny table and Sandy could not resist taking a peek inside. She found a peanut butter sandwich, her favorite, along with an apple and a juice pouch. The fairies must have gotten the juice pouch from grandma, it was the same kind she kept in the fridge for all the grandkids.

She was about to sit down on the bench to read when something better caught her eye. A blue and pink hammock chair hung from a thick branch in the narrow space between the tree and the wall, the perfect size for her.

Without a second thought, she clamored into the swinging fabric chair and pulled her leg up to sit criss-cross-apple-sauce with her book in her lap. There was a faint giggle from somewhere nearby and Sandy glanced up,

hoping to catch sight of a fairy. She saw a leafy branch move and a single small brown eye peered down at her, but the fairy stayed mostly hidden.

Sandy opened up her book and began to read aloud. She used her big girl voice, just like mommy had taught her, so that the fairies could all hear her, even the ones at the top of the tree. She hoped it was loud enough for the gargoyle and the dragon to hear too, even if they were too busy playing the statue game to come sit in front of her like they should.

She focused on the words as she read, being very careful to go slow and read them all correctly, mommy said that it didn't count as reading if you skipped over half the words. The fairies might not notice if she made a mistake, but she was not going to take that chance. Even though she had only been in the Secret Place for a few minutes, it was already her favorite spot in the whole world. If the fairies did not like her, they might never let her come back, and that would be the worst thing that had ever happened to anybody in the history of ever!

The book was almost finished when Sandy noticed that something had changed around her. She stole a glance up into the tree as she slowly turned the next page and what she made her gasp. The entire tree was lit up in tiny spots of magical flickering light. Most of the specks were blue or purple colored but there were more than a few pinks, oranges, and greens thrown in for good measure. The fairies were listening, and they liked her story!

Sandy kept going, her voice more confident with every turn of the page. When she finally read the last two words on the final page, she was almost sad that the story was over. She closed her eyes for just a moment and hugged the book to her chest before slowly opening them again, only to find that her audience had grown.

The rude gargoyle had left his pedestal and now sat on the table. His tongue still hung out of his mouth as he grinned at her, and the apple from the fairy basket was clutched in his hand. The blue water dragon was curled up next to him on the bench, his eyes were barely open as he dozed on one of the comfy pillows. Nearly a dozen tiny figures with pale gossamer wings clung to vines, straddled flowers, or sat on the back of the bench, all of them smiling broadly at her and a few even shaking with excitement.

Then there was grandma and grandpa, who stood arm in arm just inside entrance the Secret Place. They were both smiling at her too and she smiled back at them before squirming out of the hammock chair and running over for a hug.

"Thank you for bringing me to the Secret Place!" She said as grandpa scooped her up and held her aloft. "It is my favorite place in the whole wide world!"

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“But I didn’t bring you here sweetheart,” grandpa replied with a chuckle, “you followed the path and made it here all by yourself. Now that you have, you can come back here to play whenever you want. Just make sure to bring a story for the fairies from time to time.”

“I will grandpa, I promise!” She swore solemnly as he put her back on the ground. She was already thinking about other great books that she could bring with her the next time she came to visit as she went to fetch her sandwich and juice pouch. Feeling a bit mischievous, she stuck her tongue out at the gargoyle once more before swiping the apple out of his hand and prancing away. She then piled back into the hanging chair with her lunch and her favorite book and settled in to read the story to the fairies one more time. After all, if they had liked it once, surely, they would love it even more a second time.

SPEAKING IS THE SALVATION

Natalie Duchesneau • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, PROSE

My mother stood in the doorway of my bedroom. She looked exactly how she always did when this happened; her hands were propped on her hips, and her expression was one of utter contempt. “Do I need to take you to a hospital?”

She had found me lying on the floor, crying hysterically, yet there was no trace of concern on her face. I dragged my eyes away from hers and looked at the ceiling instead. We had been through this before, and I knew better than to answer her.

She repeated her question, purely out of spite. “Do I need to take you to the hospital? Is that what you want?” I knew she wanted an answer, but I also knew she would not accept the one I had to give her. I stayed silent. My eyes stayed fixed on the ceiling.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her shake her head. “Unbelievable.” She left the doorway, and a moment later, I heard her bedroom door shut from down the hall. Tears leaked down the side of my face, and my body shook with silent sobs.

I first started experiencing symptoms of depression when I was ten years old. My parents had been raised to believe that depression was caused by a negative mindset, ungratefulness or lack of prayer; medication, hospitalization, and therapy were for the weak; and the term “mental illness” was synonymous with “instability” and “insanity”. Those sentiments were not only strongly held by them, but also openly expressed. I worried what my parents would think if I told them that I regularly thought of self-harm and suicide, so I stayed quiet about what I was going through.

Despite my attempt at secrecy, my parents noticed the toll depression was taking on me. I was barely sleeping. I had trouble paying attention. I had no interest or motivation to do anything I had previously liked. I cried a lot, almost every day. Their reaction to the changes in my behavior was what I had always been afraid of: my father decided the depression was negativity that needed to be cured by prayer, and my mother diagnosed me as attention seeking and ungrateful. Not long after, she began asking me questions about seeking help for me, which I would have welcomed had it not been for the way she asked them: with total disgust.

“Are you okay?”

“Do we need to put you on medication?”

“Do you want to go see a doctor or something?”

“Do I need to take you to a hospital?”

I quickly learned that any answer other than, “no” would only lead to more derision, so I would say nothing at all. My mother would always roll her eyes at my silence, then leave. I always held in my sobs until she was not around to hear them.

Those encounters were so mentally destructive that I began self-harming at twelve years old. I believed that the only way I could endure such destruction was if I was the one in control of it. Like my struggle with depression, I hid my self-harm from my parents. I was beyond worried at that point; I was terrified. If they believed seeking proper treatments like medication and therapy was a weakness, I could not imagine how they viewed the coping mechanism I had taken on. One night, I found out exactly what they thought about it, when my mother saw one of my self-harm injuries.

“Are you kidding me?” The disdain in her voice made my stomach drop. The fear I felt in that moment is something I will never forget. I immediately started lying. I said everything I could think of to escape the situation. I tried to convince her that the injury had been accidental; that she was jumping to conclusions; that I would never have done something like that. The conclusion to that encounter was the most devastating part, because she believed me. My silence had always been a form of protection, but that night, I had needed to use my voice to protect me; and in the process of protecting myself, I had made things worse.

That night sent me spiraling. Telling someone about what I was going through was completely out of the question. I started having violent recurring nightmares, and became perpetually exhausted. I began having panic attacks every other day. I self-harmed so frequently that it stopped helping, so I began dissociating from my surroundings as an alternate coping mechanism. My thoughts of suicide were no longer individual thoughts, but one thought that ran in an infinite, crushing loop. I felt like I was slowly dying every second I was awake. I needed a way to make everything stop, and one night, when I was fifteen, I decided that there was a way to make everything stop; a way that I had thought about so often, but had never truly thought about doing. I decided I was going to end my life.

That night, I went to go to a youth group meeting at a church near my house. I knew exactly what was going to happen that night as I walked into that meeting. I knew exactly how the night was going to end. I knew exactly how my life was going to end.

A circle of metal chairs was set up in the middle of the room, and about half of them had been taken. I sat in one of the chairs farthest away from the rest of the group. One of the leaders of the youth group, Megan, sat down next to me.

Megan had been a leader of that youth group for two years, and she had always been friendly. She asked me how I was doing, and though I knew she genuinely wanted to know, I did not answer her. I could not answer her. I could tell she knew something was wrong, but I was so detached that I could not bring myself to care.

After a brief introduction, another leader decided to move the group meeting to a different place. Everyone started moving. I stayed sitting, and Megan did, too. Eventually, it was just us in that room. There was a long moment of silence, then Megan asked, “Are you okay?”

There was no contempt in her voice. She was not trying to hurt me. She was asking if I was okay because she genuinely wanted to know. She cared about me. And even though I could not bring myself to meet her eyes, I was able to say what I had needed to say for so long.

“No. I’m not.”

I told her everything: my depression, the exhaustion, all the panic attacks, the self-harm, the dissociative episodes, the reason why I was at the youth group meeting that night. There was so much that I needed to say but had not been able to for so long. At one point, I started to cry, and Megan reached over and wiped away one of my tears. I had never experienced gentleness like that before.

Once I had told Megan everything, she told me everything I had needed to hear from my parents: that the depression I was experiencing was not negativity or ungratefulness; that there was absolutely nothing wrong with seeking treatment; that mental illness did not mean I was crazy. It was the first time I had heard any of that, and when I left that meeting, I knew that the night was not going to end how I had planned it to.

A few days later, Megan spoke with my parents about what I had told her. Maybe it was because they were finally learning about the extent of my depression, or maybe it was because the information was coming from Megan, who was a nurse. Whatever the case was, they took what she said seriously and talked to me about seeing a therapist.

A couple of weeks after Megan talked to my parents, I began going to a counselor, whose areas of focus were depression, anxiety and other mood disorders. The first counseling session was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I spoke, and she listened. Occasionally, she asked questions, but for most of that session, she just let me talk. My conversation with Megan had completely changed me. Words flowed out of my mouth like

SPEAKING IS THE SALVATION

a river, and I could not stop them; I did not want to stop them.

I have been free of self-harm for about two years now. I saw that counselor for three years, and my last session was many months ago. My parents' views on mental health have begun to change, and I'm grateful and relieved for it.

The night I had planned to end my life ended very differently, and I am thankful for that. I am thankful Megan sat next to me that night, and I am thankful she asked me if I was okay. For so long, I had believed staying silent was the best way to protect myself, and while it had protected me, it had also hurt me. I had believed that speaking about mental health was unacceptable, and that it would only lead to more hardship, but that could not be further from the truth. Speaking about mental health is incredibly freeing, and the first step in receiving help. Though it can be difficult, ultimately, speaking is the salvation.

LOVE IN SICKNESS

Cecelia Bialas • Student, Academic Transfer

Drifting and ill, we were both too young to
have our sickness seize all happiness, so
the world made it up to us, providing
a pearly, strong love in the shipwreck that's
chronic, life-sucking disease. Your soul saw
mine as battle-toughened too, yet open
to the softness of searching for sea glass
and of whispering under our blanket
at sunrise. Drawn to your gem-like glow, I
dove from my rocky precipice at sea,
built of hardened stoicism into
your arms that hold me like a ship's ballast
in life's storms. I prefer to stand in the
crow's nest with you to the sharp rocks below.

JUNE 29, 2021

Kaitlyn Walton • Student, Business

We were sitting in the back of the pickup bed.

I was sitting between the two girls,
when she jiggled her thigh.

“I’m so fat,”

she said moving up to her arm,
jiggling the little fat she had.

I turned,
we both did.

“What are you even talking about?

You’re not fat.

Not even close.”

“Yes I am.

*I want to be skinny,
like my mom.”*

And suddenly the floor of the pickup bed seemed to swallow me whole.

“Look at my thighs.”

They both looked down.

“You’re just thick.

No offense.

But you’re happy.”

I swallowed as she looked away,
the conversation drifting to a close.

The sting from the backhanded compliment fading.

As I thought back to what junior high was for me.

Skinny girls weren’t meant to feel

fucking insecure.

JUNE 29, 2021

I hadn't had anyone to help me.
I lived in awe of the skinny bitches
parading around in crop tops and short shorts,
so jealous to be them
that I became one.
I just wish that,

she would actually see herself.

-I wish we all would

FOUND FOOTAGE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

“There’s this book, written in 1950, called *The Art of Scientific Investigation*, and ehm, this book, uh, it goes over all the major discoveries of science and technology in the two hundred years prior to 1950: Most, if not all, of the fundamental discoveries were made by people not when they were scratching their heads in front of the blackboard, but when they were, uhh, walking across the park, taking a bath, eureka, uh, shaving, stepping onto the bus, y’know, just moments when your consciousness is wandering or defocalizing—”

I mean the kid never knew when to shut up. Especially when he was on something. It’s like, what’s a good analogy... y’know how like, most children aren’t really any good at telling stories? You listen to a little kid talk, they just go on and on, whatever pops into their head. They never know what information would be relevant to the listener. Well, Geoff never really grew out of that, see. We used to joke that he might be autistic, not in a mean spirited way or anything. Y’know how kids joke about things.

Meanwhile Sara and George are gossiping in the backseat – it’s quiet, but it’s there – “Did you see Liv and Rob?” she says.

He goes: “Yeah.”

“Do you think we should tell Emily?”

He says: “I mean, we probably shouldn’t.”

And they have a little argument about that.

She’s like, “What? What do you mean?”

“I just try to stay out of shit that isn’t my business.”

She goes: “Isn’t your business?”

And he’s all, “Look, I just don’t like drama. I’m not an overly dramatic person. But do what you want, Sara. No one is stopping you.”

But Ava’s the one recording. She was always recording. And so she’s—

I’m sorry. She’s the one you can hear the best. She’s talking to me—

...

She’s talking to me about college. She goes:

FOUND FOOTAGE

“I think Ohio will be good for me. It’s just, I really like some of their programs, y’know. You should’ve gone with me.”

I says why would I go with you. I had no interest in going with her to Ohio, I mean... she says how she really liked their psychology program. She met with the guy there, y’know. Some guy.

She was a people person. She met the guy and that was it. She’s convinced.

And she kinda got fed up with me, she asked me to open the window. Alla’ sudden she needs some fresh air, right.

Geoff’s in the back: “Beveridge describes the process of *intuiting* something – the sensation of, like, sudden comprehension. Umm. He says, generally you’re not thinking about it on a conscious level. But then, *boom!* It hits you. Suddenly you understand... this is how things are, y’know? So: Einstein sitting on a train in 1916. He’s actually *not thinking* about light at all – he’s thinking about the train!”

I mean we’d just tune him out. You had to, that was the only way he was gonna make friends. Some of us didn’t really like Geoff. I liked him. He was definitely the nerd of the group though, you got the sense he was trying too hard to fit in around kids like us. His parents were loaded too, which didn’t help.

And Sara’s getting on George’s ass, what an ass of a man he is, tryna cover for Rob or whatever. And I didn’t catch a lot of that until I heard it played back later. You can’t really make it out but at one point he’s like:

“So now it’s *my* fault that Rob is cheating? That’s on me?”

Like kind of shout-whispering. And she’s still asking me to roll down the window, and Geoff is like:

“K. Coule discovered the structure of the benzene ring as he was dozing off to sleep in front of a fire! He said he saw it *in the fire*, dude. So no, I do not accept this hegemonic, censorious, puritanical tendency of our society toward alternative forms of consciousness! Indeed, all the evidence seems to indicate that these, these *visionary* states – meditation, sensory deprivation, N1 sleep... that’s when everything comes together! So the question is, then, that if Francis Crick was under the influence of LSD when he discovered the helix structure of DNA, and if there are millions of people the world over who are under the influence of LSD right now: What makes you so special? What’s *your* vision?”

I said, “Wow. That’s pretty out there bud.”

“Yeah,” he said. “I’ve just been asking myself, like, what have I been missing? What am I not seeing?”

FOUND FOOTAGE

And that's when I, umm...

I was trying to find the damn switch to roll down the fucking window. Dumbass thing—the goddamn lights didn't work in the fucking thing, and...

...

And the last thing you hear—

...

You can't hear what's going on in the car anymore. Y'know with where they found it.

But there's this lady, and she's going—

...

She's holding her hand and she's going, "Hold on to me," y'know.

...

She says: "Hold on to me, I'm calling an ambulance."

And I can't watch it. I can't. I umm...

... yeah.

...

I'm sorry, I can't do this right now. I have to—

I have to go.

2017 SOLAR ECLIPSE AT THE HOMESTEAD NATIONAL MONUMENT

Elizabeth Noel • Student, Continuing Education

It's Lunchtime!
The clouds moved.
The hush from the crowd was deafening.
Anticipation hung in the air like ripened fruit.
The clouds moved again.
Disappointment was an audible sigh.
Shifting people, praying minds.
Peaceful twilight descended like a soft blanket.
Nighttime noises filled the air.
Stillness and awe, hearts pounding.
The clouds moved once more.
The waning sun shared its story as a mother to her children.
Gasps of wonder, faces of delight
The day returns.
Relief, Joy!

SHOTGUN

Tammy Zimmer • Faculty, English

When my mother threw my father out for good, she hid his 12 gauge in the attic above my room. She sat me down with my siblings and told us what to say if my father asked where his gun was hidden.

She told us to lie.

To tell my father she surrendered the gun to the police; the gun is destroyed. Shredded into a million pieces of metal and dust.

But that was the lie.

The gun sat heavy over my head in the attic. Every so often, when the thought of the gun crept back into my mind, I would go into my closet, move the painted piece of plywood aside and make sure I could see the outline of the gun in its case. Each time, the case was covered more and more with dust as the years passed.

The last time I visited my mother, I stayed in my old bedroom and checked to see if the gun had ever left its dusty mausoleum.

There it sat, more than a decade later, in the place it had always been above my head.

TO BE DIVINE

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

My lady was soft and warm and bright
She urged a yearn in me
To steal into the night
To live as butterflies
Dead, tragic, and beautiful
Darling and mortal and youthful

My lady beckoned
My most intrusive thoughts
How terrible it would be
To die in her arms
In the glory of gunshots!

Oh, how mortal our fate
As star-crossed lovers
Destined to die
In the hands of the other

How poetic, my love
For us to die young
Two sunflowers burned
From the light of the sun

My love, let me die
In your kind embrace
Let's leave, what a waste
For just a taste, just a trace

Can you imagine the prestige
Our absence will leave?
That saccharine mourning
We will receive when they grieve

Let's die young, my dear
I've lived quite enough
My butterfly, my flower
It's lovely and tough

What a terrible thing it is
To be mortal and love
But is it not our survival
The gods dream of?

You love me, for I live
I love you, for we shall die
Love is survival
Life is finicky, slippery, and sly

So let us expire early
Before we're yet to go bad
Let us control one thing
The only life we'll ever have

My love, let's die young
Let's fly too close to the sun
Let the air ring with songs we once sung
Let our lungs ache with air too sharp
With air that stung
My mortal love

Let's be gods, my love
If love is survival
Let's be the dreamers in the sky

Sinful saints with ambrosia breath
Pulsing blood to sweet ichor to paint the sunset
To paint it with our death

HIDDEN CANDIES, CORSAGES, AND LIFE AT THE HEIGHT OF A STEERING WHEEL

Onna Carr • Student, Business

I do not have many early childhood memories, but of those I do have, some of my fondest are from my stays at my paternal, great-grandparents' farm in Kansas. This is the story of Granddaddy and his truck. I could tell the tales of Gramsey's red shoes or the millinery paraphernalia brought over by our English ancestors that were in the attic, or I could elaborate on the antique clown cookie jar atop the fridge that produced cookies after years of barrenness when the great-grandkids arrived, but those tales are for another time, and are other stories. This is the story of Granddaddy and his truck, and how he rode off into the sunset.

When my parents were newly-weds in college, they decided they needed another vehicle. Being like most college students, they did not have a lot to put into a purchase, so my mother suggested that they look for a vehicle the next time they went home for a visit. They found a truck on their next visit, and promptly christened it "Thor," after the Greek god of Thunder. Why such a name? A turn of the key served as a highly audible explanation because of the sound created by this action, which sounded like thunder building as it rolled across the Kansas plains, much like Thor noisily rolled across the dusty roads, building up clouds behind him with sounds to match his namesake.

My parents purchased the truck and took it back to my great-grandparent's farm, where Granddaddy recognized it as his truck from Ford in 1959. It is the same color, year, and style of the truck in the original Parent Trap, but, I digress. He brushed his hands on the truck's tailgate, showing my parents where he had cut out the truck-bed to allow for the installation of a feeder when he had the vehicle. He later gave my father the pieces he had removed, as he and Gramsey kept everything. They figured that surviving the Great Depression had taught them at least a thing or two, one of them being you never knew when something might come in handy. He sold the truck a few years after buying it brand new, in the 1960's to a man who used it to feed his cattle, and then it was passed on yet again to a couple of other owners before my parents purchased the vehicle.

My parents used Thor to carry wood to their house in the country. They enjoyed the vehicle, except for a brief incident brought on by being late for a Christmas party and running over a barbed wire fence, pulling off the muffler in the process. This was one of the rare occasions my father, typically a quiet, economics student, turned the air a bit blue, surprising my mother, a young and vivacious English student, who thought she had

married a man that only said “darn it,” when stressed. The way home to unload the load of wood and to the Christmas party was a very noisy enterprise as the muffler was bent and this made the thunder of Thor roll even more loudly across the prairie.

A few years later, my parents sold Thor back to Granddaddy. He and my parents decided to swap vehicles. Granddaddy traded/sold them he and Gramsey’s 2-door sedan as it was better equipped to be a family vehicle. It did not matter that Thor wasn’t as nice as when he purchased it new: Thor ran and that fact was good enough for him. My parents were preparing for my arrival and a move to Arkansas for my father’s graduate degree, which made the sedan a more appealing choice at the time.

A couple of years later, my mother and I got caught in a blizzard, and the sedan quit working, necessitating a two-day stay in a hotel. When we finally made it home in “Old Blue,” and I was removed from my car-seat with my feet firmly in my driveway, I marched up to the car’s tire and kicked it with my multi-colored, Nickelodeon shoes, declaring, “Bad car, you made my Mama cry!” It was that day that we went out and bought another car, a Ford--Thor had taught my parents some things: it might be noisy, but a Ford seldom left you stranded.

I was born shortly after Thor returned home to his original owner. Granddaddy used the truck to store his one weakness, Brach’s candies, out of the sight of Gramsey. Gramsey, a delightful but very headstrong, opinionated, and a competitive-over-sports-ranging-from-basketball-to-dominos -woman, had got it into her head that candy was bad for Granddaddy. So, to avoid conflict and to still enjoy a sweet treat, Granddaddy would quietly buy a bag of Brach’s Milk Maid Royals, Strawberry Bon-Bons, and Maple Nut goodies which would rest by his Three Musketeer bars in the glove compartment. I always have found this arrangement slightly comical as Gramsey had no trouble with a candy treat for herself, and though she had to know about the “secret stash,” she never mentioned it.

I remember my mother and I riding in Thor’s truck bed: golden fields of wheat on either side of the dusty, country road while my great-grandparents sat in the cab with my father. A Mother’s Day, rose corsage from the previous year hung from the mirror of Thor because my Gramsey, Granddaddy’s Clara, wore it. I remember being slightly shorter than the steering wheel as I stood and grasped the wheel to “drive” as my father sat behind me, managing the pedals and making sure that I did not run into anything as we came up the drive in Thor to the “Gra-Gras” much-loved farmhouse that set on one of four quarters of land that they had about six miles from town.

I remember Granddaddy--a man outstanding in his field (of wheat): a kind, quiet man who took the time to tickle me, to let me sit in his lap, and to explain things because he was not too busy to play or just be. He would take me out in the mornings with him to feed the dog, Snoozer--one of a

line of Snoozers named after an original dog from his childhood who in the winter would feign sleep in order to stay near the stove in the kitchen. He pushed me in the swing that hung in the barn loft where the scent of hay and wood made a wonderful fragrance. He helped me climb up into the seat of a tractor that had hit a tree and the tree had grown around. He never once lost his temper around me or anyone who knew him in the family, and he never, to my knowledge, said anything unkind about anyone. I think his calmness is what I liked best about him as well as the fact that he was always just there, quietly beside me. I think he is the person that taught me the most about presence and care, and I have always been grateful for having known him.

Granddaddy left when I was five. He was fine and then, suddenly, his organs shut down, it was discovered he had cancer, and he was quickly gone. Granddaddy had lung issues and breathing problems for many years after he inhaled too much dust in a farming accident, but he had improved and all thought he was going to live for a long time, but he quietly got into the fiery chariot and rode that truck into the sunset just a year after he and Gramsey's golden anniversary. I am not sure what heaven is like, but I think it must have a few dusty roads and fields of wheat for him to be comfortable up there.

Granddaddy slipped out of my life in the midst of the hush of relatives speaking in clusters in the family home and at the church, swathed in dark clothes and tones, dripping with tears of sadness. That was my first encounter with death and the loss of someone I loved. It was then I realized what death meant: Silence and Empty Space that others never can nor should fill.

I wore a black velvet dress, with triangular lace and white hose to that funeral, and I still have that dress, tucked up in storage in a yellow and white Sunrise Doughnut box. All extended family that could attend came to the funeral, and it is really the last time I can remember seeing everyone together--celebrating a quiet and peaceful man who they all loved and who loved them all: eulogies were said, aunts were hugged, cousins played outside, and all sat down for a meal together afterwards to close out this moment in time with the grace note of a simple dinner and the conversation it brought. I am not sure why I have saved the dress I wore through the years. My mother tucked it away for "later" and then gave it to me when I was in high school. "Later" has not yet come, so I keep it there on the shelf, and I remember the life of quietness and kindness of my great-grandfather that we celebrated at his funeral.

After Granddaddy passed away, Thor was sold again to my father, who used the truck to drive around town and as a party truck to take guests for rides up and down the dirt road our three-acre hobby farm when I turned nine. The kingpins then gave out, and he was always planning to fix them, but never did, so now Thor sits in a spot under "my pear trees" as I used to call

them, awaiting kingpins to help him come to life again.

Sometimes, I wonder what “later” looks like? Will it be in ten years when my own daughter slips into that dress and dances her own dance surrounded by those she loves and who love her at five and that dress and the sad memories are redeemed into the light of a happy moment? Will my grandfather’s spirit sing on the breeze amidst the laughter of my children? Will “later” include Thor, with new kingpins as I teach my teenage boys to drive stick because even though we are now “city” people we are still country at heart? Can you ship a 1959 Ford truck overseas? Who knows? I might check freight costs when we get closer to our departure.

Though Granddaddy and Gramsey have passed on and their land was sold off, the farmhouse and the outbuildings remain in the family, although the house is soon to be demolished. No matter if the original farmhouse is destroyed, or not, I will remember the house as it was with the familiar sight of the “Gra-gras” coming out of their front door with Gramsey’s trademark floral-print top and “Woohoo” shout and Granddaddy’s quiet steadiness as he stood beside her in overalls next to the perpetual red geranium in the flower pot on the porch, waving hello or goodbye: a true Midwest, “Nemaste” of sorts. Thor was there, parked in the driveway near the tire swing swaying from the cottonwood. Thor provided an anchoring point of thunderous reference in the yard and etched within my memory as if by lightning--never to be forgotten, just like my great-grandfather.

ANXIETY IS

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

Anxiety is a prison to which I often misplace the key
Behind these bars is not where I intended to be
Anxiety is a blindfold that robs me of my sight
Darkness surrounds me as shadows shut out the light
Anxiety is a lack of balance between reason and emotion
Fear is overwhelming like I'm drowning in an ocean
Anxiety is a car speeding down a road without brakes
Holding on for dear life when facing such high stakes
Anxiety is being so caffeinated that you can't sit still
Just like an addict feeding their addiction always will
Anxiety is not knowing what it means to not worry
Lacking comprehension that you don't need armor so burry
Anxiety is a constant state of being afraid
Not knowing what's gonna happen to you isn't ok
Anxiety is like being put in a permanent straitjacket
It's possible if someone or something seems threatening I'll attack it
Anxiety is a nervousness in situations outside your comfort zone
Risks seem unnecessary when it's easier and safer at home
Anxiety is when your emotions control your every move
The idea that we can control our anxiety isn't so easy to prove
Anxiety is sadly experienced by thousands of men and women
Very few people are immune to it because we're all human
Anxiety is a real issue that needs to be taken seriously
eXacting a demand to suck it up may cause panic catastrophically
Anxiety is what I experience every minute of every day
Zigzagging through this maze of anxious or not and it'll always be this way

LOVING LUCIFER

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

He's the shell of who he used to be
And he has no more use for me
Now I'm haunted by the ghost
Of the boy I loved the most
There's a black hole where his heart should be
And it's swallowing a part of me
I'd still risk everything
Just to heal his broken wings
He's pretty and empty
Like a porcelain doll
He twisted and bent me
Into a woman so small
The jagged pieces of me
Will never fit again
The next man who loves me
Will cut himself on them
Or could he help them mend?

HYACINTH

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

Cry your anguish to the moon
Sob into the sky 'til Artemis sobs too
With your effortless, mournful drive
The hopeful devastation that brought Typhoeus to life

The rawness in your throat and the tremor in your chest
Are alive and fluttering like the toil of unrest
Slamming into that bronze like a mortal who loved
Like a rabid dog, chasing that loss

When that honeyed heat spilled from a lover
From a fallen love to never recover
The ground quivered with the sweetness of the crime
And the bloodsoaked sorrow that drove blooms from the fists of the divine

Blossoms feast on thick spilled grief and blood
Hyacinths blooming around that grave in the mud
You cage your body over a form that is broken and mortal and raw
There is no honeycomb sweetness to the ichor that drips from your jaw

You tragic, terrible thing
Grief is a selfish song, yet you sing
Disregard fate for your human desire
Drive those spikes into the ground and sound the choir

A WALK DOWN SEVENTH STREET

Brayan Moreno • Student, Criminal Justice

An excerpt from a novel I've been working on for over a year now. It takes place mostly in Los Angeles during the late 1970s. The protagonist, Jose Carlos, is the son of a prominent lawyer in El Salvador, however he is killed for speaking out about the Salvadoran government's human rights abuses. Jose Carlos and his mother, Milena, flee to the United States. In Los Angeles, Jose has a difficult time adjusting to the new American culture and his relationship with his mother is strained when she starts seeing another man. One day, he meets Alfredo Cortes a.k.a. Tiger, the leader of an East Los Angeles gang known as Varrío Boyle Heights who takes Jose under his wing.

Valentine's Day rolled around and Varrío Boyle Heights was throwing a party at Jeremiah Dominguez's house on East Second Street off of Soto. They were going to have carne asada, hamburgers, hot dogs, tacos, pollo asado, just enough food to make the whole city flock to them just for a bite. That same night, Jose met Tiger's girlfriend, Priscilla Murphy. Now, Priscilla wasn't actually one hundred percent Hispanic. Priscilla's mom had a Mexican father but a half-Navajo, half-German mother. Priscilla's dad was full-blooded Irish, his mom's family was from Belfast and his dad's family was from Dublin. Boyle Heights was actually first settled by an Irishman, in case you didn't know. Priscilla was a real blonde beauty queen. When *The Sound of Music* came out in theaters back in 1965, she fell in love with the whole idea of being a movie star at the age of seven.

She would reenact scenes, practice monologues in her bedroom, and she would put up pictures of Rita Hayworth and Marilyn Monroe on her wall. It was no surprise that she got involved in school theater. She was hopeful that one day, a Paramount executive in his Cadillac Eldorado, would just so happen to pass by her on Whittier Boulevard so that he would stop the car, hop out, and tell her that he wants her in his new blockbuster film directed by Robert Altman or something. She met Tiger in 1974 when she was sixteen and walking home from her gymnastics practice at Garfield High School. Tiger was five years her senior. To Priscilla, he was like a Mexican James Dean with his magnetic charisma, his chiseled jawline, nice tan skin, and slicked-back dark hair. "Need a ride?" He smiled. Priscilla looked to her left and then to her right, still worried her parents would come out from a corner somewhere, ready to give her an ass-whooping for getting into a car with a stranger.

Tiger, Priscilla, and Jose pulled up to Second and Soto and the house was already jam-packed with "Keep Holdin' On" by The Temptations blasting out of the speakers, echoing throughout the block. They went inside and

were greeted with daps. Tiger then started introducing Jose to other VBH members. Jeremiah Dominguez, who was playing poker in the living room, had a four-year-old daughter and another baby on the way. He was an avid saxophone player and worshipped John Coltrane. Jorge Cardenas was chatting up some broads. He was the scrawniest out of Tiger's circle, but don't let his size fool you. He once knocked out an amateur heavyweight boxer with a single punch. Luiz Fernandez was playing quarters in the kitchen. He was once a baseball prospect, but the street life became his priority, not the home-runs. Finally, Tiger introduced Jose to Angel Campos, his childhood best friend and second-in-command. Angel had just been released from Central a week prior after serving a six-month sentence for driving recklessly with a suspended license.

"This lil' homie I met was wandering around Hollenbeck Park, took him for a ride in my Star Chief," Tiger said.

"What's up, homes?" Angel dabbed Jose.

"He's cool. He's from El Salvador," Tiger told Angel.

"That so?"

"San Salvador, the capital," Jose told Angel.

"*Órale carnal*. Bueno, hay chelas, forties, and Jack. Take your pick. Have fun," Angel smiled.

"Trampled Under Foot" by Led Zeppelin started to play. A group of people were surrounding Jeremiah's Magnavox television. Jose decided to check out what the fuss was about. The screen wasn't showing a movie or a television show. It was a black screen with two white little bars on each end, a square was bouncing back and forth between them. A scorecard was shown at the top. It was like tennis. The two players sitting at the front had controllers in their hands which they used to move the white bars. It was the craziest thing Jose had ever seen.

"What is that?" He asked this chubby Mexican kid that was watching them.

"Issa game called *Pong*," he answered with a lisp.

Jose decided to come back and play it later and then made his way to the food table. Jose decided to go with the hamburger, he grabbed a patty, placed it on top of a bun, threw on some mayo and ketchup. Then added lettuce, but skipped the tomatoes and pickles, instead he went straight for the onions and that was about it. Then he topped it off with a sesame seed bun. He took a bite out and boy, it was one of the best tasting burgers he had ever had. He grabbed a Coca-Cola glass bottle out of the cooler and popped the cap off with his teeth. Then he licked them to see if they were chipped but nope, he was good.

“You the guy from El Salvador?” He heard a female voice and turned around. It was a good-looking Mexican muchacha.

“Yeah,” he smiled and nodded.

“Tiger told me about you. I’m Elisa, me and him went to Roosevelt together.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jose said.

“How long have you been living in L.A.?”

“Almost eight months.”

“Órale,” Elisa smiled, “how you liking it so far?”

“Es chingón,” Jose said.

Elisa laughed and told Jose that they were playing darts in the basement if he wanted to check that out.

“It was nice meeting you.”

“Hey, Jose,” he heard Tiger’s voice coming from another side, “hey, man, I met this Chilean girl who just moved here to the States like you. You should go talk to her, maybe you guys will have something in common.”

“Dónde está?”

Tiger pointed and she was talking to two other females.

“No telling when you’ll see her again,” Tiger warned.

Jose had his confidence locked and loaded, so he marched up to the girl. “Do you know who you remind me of?” He asked her.

“Who?” She raised an eyebrow.

“Cristina Montt.”

“Who’s that?” The girl didn’t have a clue.

“Oh, she was a Chilean film star from back in the day.”

“Oh, well that’s funny because I actually am Chilean,” the girl smiled.

“Are you? Which part of Chile?” Jose asked her.

“Concepción.”

“What’s your favorite soccer team? Colo-Colo?”

“That’s right,” she smiled.

"That's my favorite Chilean team too. What's your name?" Jose finally asked her.

"Angelica."

"Soy Jose, I'm from El Salvador."

"I've actually been there," she said.

"Oh really?"

"Yeah, my dad worked in shipping, he was a captain, and he would take me sometimes to see Panama, El Salvador, Mexico, San Francisco, Canada."

"What port in El Salvador?"

"Aca-Aca—" Angelica had difficulty remembering.

"Acajutla?" Jose suggested.

"Yes, that one!"

"Eso es bien chevere," Jose told Angelica, "so why did your family decide to move to Los Angeles?"

"Pinochet," Angelica mentioned the bullheaded general who, while being backed by the U.S., seized power in the country, killing the leftist president, Salvador Allende, in the process. Richard Nixon recalled that he did not want a "red sandwich" between Chile and Cuba in the Western Hemisphere. "My dad was a union leader, but Pinochet disbanded them when he took over. My dad decided it was time to get out of there. What about you?"

"Molina," Jose told her, "he took something from me and my mom—"

CRASH.

The LAPD were hollering with their combat boots stomping all over the living room floor all while "Pick Up the Pieces" by Average White Band was playing.

"Police! This house party is getting way out of hand! Everyone disperse!"

There were a bunch of groans, awes, and "fuck you putos!"

"Get the fuck out my house!" Jeremiah demanded.

"You want to take a trip to Central, Pancho?" The officer asked him while dangling some handcuffs.

"Chinga tu madre, cabrón!" A voice yelled.

A shotgun was cocked and you could hear that distinct noise from a mile

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away. The music was cut and there was dead silence.

“Everyone out! Party over!” The officer commanded with his Remington.

“Pigs don’t want anyone having a good time, ah?”

“Let’s get out of here,” Jose told Angelica and she agreed.

They ran out of the back door.

“So where do you live?” Jose asked her.

“Near Brooklyn Avenue, on Saratoga,” Angelica replied.

Angelica held onto Jose’s arm during the entire walk back. A full moon was shining up the night sky, lighting up an otherwise dim walk with a notable fullness. They talked about life in their old countries, joked around, and the moon shone warmly on the two as they enjoyed each other’s company. When they finally arrived at Angelica’s house on Saratoga Street, Jose bid farewell.

“Wait,” Angelica told him. Jose was confused. She then asked if he wanted to come inside. Jose looked at Angelica with his emotions inside bursting like fireworks, trying to maintain his coolness on the outside making it seem like he got laid every Saturday night.

“My dad won’t be home until seven in the morning.”

“And your mom?”

“She’s probably asleep by now.”

Angelica opened the door and the two of them tiptoed.

“Take your shoes off,” she whispered to Jose.

“Angelica?” A woman’s voice was heard.

Angelica pushed Jose into the kitchen which was adjacent to the front door.

“Yes, mother?”

“Oh good, you’re home, how was the party?”

“It was all right, mother.”

“*Ay que bueno*. Well, I’m going back to bed, have a goodnight, I love you.”

“I love you too, mother, have a goodnight.”

Then the two of them went into her room. She turned her little desk

lamp on and told Jose to sit down on the chair, she sat on the edge of her bed and took her Vans off. “So, how has the American Dream treated you, Chepe?”

“I don’t know,” he said, “I go to a private school, but can’t make any friends. My accent makes everyone laugh and people think I’m weird. I already like East Los Angeles more than the Wilson Hills. I feel like I’d fit in better here,” Jose explained.

“No, you wouldn’t,” Angelica countered.

“Why’s that?”

“The girls at Roosevelt High hate my guts because their crushes think that the foreign girl is the most gorgeous thing to come to East L.A., so out in the halls they push me, shove me, trip me. I remember when I first got here, this girl who sat behind me cut a chunk of my hair off with scissors. I ran to the bathroom crying,” Angelica chuckled remembering. “Then again, you’re already friends with Tiger.”

“What do you mean?”

“You don’t know much about him do you? He’s a big-time criminal like Capone and Dillinger. He sells drugs and has connections to mota and heroin farmers in Mexico. He’s a movie star out here. All the kids at Roosevelt want to be just like him because he makes more money than the teachers. If you’re good in his book, then you’re good to everyone else in Boyle Heights, as long as you’re south of Whittier and north of Olympic. Otherwise you’d probably get shot at.”

Jose was baffled.

“Be careful who you hang out with out here, Jose. You never know what they might drag you into,” she warned him. Jose smirked.

“Then what are you going to drag me into?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Angelica smiled.

“How about you show me?”

Then he got into her bed.

Here’s a little bit of lore. Varrío Boyle Heights is based out of the Juarez Courts housing projects near Eighth Street and East Olympic Boulevard. Construction for the Juarez Courts was completed in late 1942. Many of the new tenants were braceros (Mexican laborers who were contracted to work in the U.S. during World War II), and one of them was Tiger’s father, Carlos

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Alfredo Cortes, and his wife, Maria Juana Rivera de Cortes. The Courts were named after the president that ruled Mexico from 1858 until his death in 1872—Benito Juarez. In June of 1943, the historic Zoot Suit Riots took place in Los Angeles. American servicemen who were stationed in the city started getting into street brawls with the Mexican youths. It started off with an argument but then all hell broke loose. The servicemen were beating up any Hispanic kid they could find that wore the oversized “zoot suit.”

Somewhere during the whole fiasco, there was a seventeen-year-old named Jonathan Morelos. He was born in East Los Angeles in 1925, but lost both of his parents by the time he was ten. No other family really wanted to adopt him. He had a violent temper and wanted to fight anything that stood in his way. That type of attitude got him kicked out of schools, churches, and orphanages. When Morelos was thirteen he got sent to the Whittier State Reformatory. He got out when he was sixteen. They were hoping his stay would result in making him a productive member of society. He became a criminal. He was breaking into Buicks, robbing gas stations and grocery stores with a Colt Single Action Army revolver, smooth-talking preachers' daughters, and smoking marijuana.

During the Zoot Suit Riots, he beat a white farm boy, who had just enlisted in the Navy, from Bradley County, Tennessee to death with a metal pipe. Police never found out who did it but every person in East Los Angeles knew who it was and they sure as hell didn't want any trouble with him. Morelos found himself a home in the Juarez Courts. Everyone was afraid of him. But they would much rather have him as a friend than as an enemy. If he liked your girl, you better let him have her. If he liked your car, you better let him drive it. If he liked your cooking, you better invite him over for dinner.

Morelos knew he could use that power for something else though. So he started a gang and that gang was Varrío Boyle Heights. A bunch of the kids joined because they wanted to be like Morelos: macho, loved by women, and powerful. They ran amuck all over the Heights. Then someone up in the Reina Gardens housing projects in Lincoln Heights got inspired and decided to create his own gang. Morelos' reign ended when he got stabbed to death at a bar in 1946 by a Reina Gardens Familia member. Varrío Boyle Heights and Reina Gardens Familia have had a long standing beef with one another ever since. Brooklyn Avenue in East Los Angeles was their demilitarized zone like North and South Korea. If one or the other were to cross the avenue, it was open season on them.

Now let's take it back to 1977. It was a Sunday afternoon, but it was also Don Carlos' sixtieth birthday. The Courts were having a huge party. Cue “Sombras” by Javier Solis. Kids were running around playing tag, the fellas were getting drunk, the women were talking about the latest episode of *All My Children*, the teenagers were playing soccer, the old-timers were talking about how life was back when they were growing up in [insert any Mexican State here].

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Tiger came outside because he got a phone call from someone earlier that day. It was from a Nelson Blanco and he told him that they were going to be parked outside sitting in a Chrysler Cordoba. Along the way, Tiger passed by Luiz who was playing some baseball with his little brother.

“You’re a natural Chente!” Luiz was impressed by his brother’s pitching skills, “you’ll be having a meeting with Tommy Lasorda real soon!” Tiger also saw an old classmate of his, Officer Ramon Gutierrez, standing by his LAPD-marked Plymouth Gran Fury. See, not every kid that grows up in the Juarez Courts ends up in Folsom or Chino Prison. Some of them join the boys in blue, the Army, or go to college on a baseball scholarship.

“Alfredo! How you doing?” Officer Gutierrez smiled.

“Oh, I’m doing pretty good, Barney Fife,” Tiger smirked.

“You got jokes for days,” Gutierrez said.

“I also got wedgies, remember those from school?” Tiger laughed. Gutierrez raised his eyebrows. “Vato, you used to get a high-pitched voice from that! I called you Minnie Mouse, haha!” Gutierrez just rolled his eyes and Tiger kept laughing as he walked away. He then found the Chrysler Cordoba and approached it. The passenger side window rolled down and Tiger saw two men in the car. The man in the passenger seat was a fat little guy with a painters brush mustache.

“Tiger?” He asked.

“Yeah, that’s me. You Blanco?”

“Yep. I got a job for you that’ll pay you eight grand.”

“Well, when E. F. Hutton talks, people listen,” Tiger referenced the stock brokerage firm’s commercial slogan.

“I own a construction company, okay, but I got sued last year by a labor union for reasons that are just not true! I wasn’t trying to screw anybody over!”

Tiger cut to the chase.

“Look, homes, I don’t really care how shitty you treat your workers. Just tell me what you want us to do and we’ll do it.”

“All right. The head of the labor union, his name is Emiliano Santacruz, he lives in Lakewood. His wife and kids will be out of town for the weekend. I just want you to head in there and fuck him up! Let him know that just because he plays with fire, that doesn’t mean he won’t get burnt!”

Tiger just nodded.

“Here’s the eight grand and here’s his address. Thanks a lot!”

Then they drove off. Tiger looked at the money that was inside an envelope. He knew that this was the thing that was either going to make or break Jose. The party was great. A mariachi band even came to play some of Mr. Cortes’ favorite tunes. They baked him a nice cake and his favorite too: devil’s food cake with white frosting.

A couple of days later, Jose heard about a new movie that came out. People were saying it involved these people in space with “spaceships, laser swords, blaster guns, robot people and some grizzly-bear-looking-thing that could walk.” It sounded like an acid trip to Jose, so he decided to bring Angelica along. They went to Huntington Park’s Warner Theatre on Pacific Boulevard.

“So... what’s it about?” Angelica asked Jose.

“I don’t know. Space people, I guess,” Jose said.

“It’s probably going to be the dumbest thing we will ever watch,” Angelica groaned.

Then the blaring horns of John Williams started to play.

STAR WARS.

It is a period of civil war. Rebel spaceships, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory against the evil Galactic Empire. During the battle, rebel spies managed to steal secret plans to the Empire’s ultimate weapon, the DEATH STAR, an armored space station with enough power to destroy an entire planet.

“Now that’s some cool shit!” Jose was in love. Angelica still found it all bizarre.

Pursued by the Empire’s sinister agents, Princess Leia races home aboard her starship, custodian of the stolen plans that can save her people and restore freedom to the galaxy. . . .

“Wha–what?” Angelica was confused. The yellow text disappeared and the movie started off with a giant spaceship attacking a smaller spaceship over a planet. Green and red lasers were flying all over the place. Guys in weird-looking helmets were running around the ship. This door blew up and a firefight ensued. Soldiers in white armor swarm the place and there’s smoke all over. Then someone wearing all black walked through the door. Jose knew this guy was the villain, but he was no Lex Luthor or some Wicked

Witch of the West. His presence radiated evil, he looked like a space version of the Grim Reaper.

“Why does he make that noise?” Angelica was annoyed by the breathing sound effect.

A couple of moments later, a white-armored soldier tells the villain, who was choking a rebel, that the Death Star plans weren’t in the main computer.

“*What have you done with those plans?*” The villain asked the rebel, but the answer he gave wasn’t satisfactory. The villain choked him to death and threw him to the ground.

“*Commander, tear this ship apart until you’ve found those plans and bring me the passengers, I want them alive!*”

Angelica knew that this was going to be a snoozefest for the next two hours, but Jose was immersing himself in it. She just went to sleep. It all started connecting for Jose. The spaceship was the *Millennium Falcon*. The laser swords were *lightsabers*. The robot people were *C-3PO* and *R2-D2*. The grizzly-bear-looking-thing was Chewbacca. Jose admired Darth Vader because he embodied fear, intimidation, and power. Things that Jose wanted to embody too, but he also looked up to Han Solo. Solo had charisma, wit, and a quick gun. He wanted to be both of them. Luke Skywalker and that Ben guy were cool too. When the movie ended, Jose was disappointed that Angelica did not find it as interesting as he did. He nudged her to wake her up.

“It’s over,” he told her.

He walked her back to her place and then he walked back to the Admiral Apartments.

The next day.

The phone rang in the kitchen and Milena, Jose’s mother, picked it up.

“Hello?”

“Yeah, is, uh, Jose there?” A voice she never heard of before was on the other line.

“Yes, he is. Who is this?”

“It’s Tiger.”

"...Tiger?" Milena was weirded out.

"Yeah."

"Wait one moment."

Milena walked to Jose's room where he was reading the latest issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man* comic book on his bed.

"A friend of yours... Tiger? He's asking for you on the phone."

Jose got up and headed for the phone.

"Qubo Tiger," he said.

This started to raise Milena's suspicions but she continued listening.

"Tonight, huh? Yeah, I'm down... all right, homes... all right. I'm gonna head over there then. Bye."

"Why does he call himself Tiger?" Milena asked.

"It's just a nickname," Jose told her.

"Who are these people you hang around with, Jose?" Milena asked.

"Son mis amigos."

"Tus amigos? They're not from school, though, where are they from?"

"Boyle Heights, across the L.A. River."

"East Los Angeles?" She was not happy.

"Yeah, what's the problem with that?"

"Do you know what I read in the Times about East Los Angeles? There's always a shooting, a stabbing, an arrest, another shooting, another stabbing - are these people involved in those sorts of things?"

"Of course not, mama!" Jose tried convincing her.

"Jose, we're here to be the best we can be in this land of opportunity. We're not here to be criminals. If they make you start doing things that can potentially break the law, those aren't your friends. *They are using you.*"

"Oh really? What about Austin? He sure seems to be using you." Jose took a shot at her boyfriend.

"Do not bring him up in this conversation!"

"Ma... I don't need to be hearing esta mierda."

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Milena's emotional temperature was rising. Jose just raised his eyebrows and made his way out of the door. "I let you be happy. So, why don't you let me be happy?" He asked her before shutting the door.

Jose rode with Tiger in his 1956 Pontiac Star Chief as they went down to the L.A. River under the bridges. Great hiding spots for a lot of things. They pulled up to see Edgar Leon and Jorge Cardenas who were leaning against Jorge's 1962 Chevrolet Biscayne. Jose and Tiger got out of their Star Chief and greeted the two, but there was another character who was moving things around in the trunk of his 1971 Buick Electra.

"Jose, this is Marco De La Luna, but we just call him Marco the Mouse," Tiger introduced. Marco turned around and dabbed Jose.

"Tiger told me a lot about you," he said.

"So what do we got man?" Tiger asked Marco.

"Ski masks, zip ties, blindfolds, duct tape, a Louisville slugger, Colt snub-nosed revolvers, and a Remington sawed-off shotgun," Marco pointed at the items.

"It's like we're the fucking Black September," Edgar chuckled, referencing the terrorist group responsible for the Munich massacre.

The whole site made Jose's stomach turn.

"What are we gonna do?" He asked after gulping.

"*Teach someone a lesson,*" Tiger told him.

"I'm ready to go," Jorge said.

"Let's roll," Tiger said.

Jose stood there looking at the items. His heart was racing. "Come on, Jose," Tiger told him. As they drove down Interstate 5 through Downey in the Electra, Jose had a thousand-yard stare and kept tapping his foot on the car floor. He was wondering about his decision. Tiger took notice.

"What's wrong, homes? Why you looking all nervous? I can hear your bones rattling like Shaggy and Scoob. 'Would you do it for a Scooby snack?'" Tiger teased Jose.

The men in the back laughed.

"I'm straight," Jose said, "anybody got a cigarette?"

Marco the Mouse gave him one and a matchbox. He lights one and tells them that he is cool.

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“Now that’s more like it,” Tiger nodded. “I remembered when I popped my cherry: Montebello 1971. You vatos remember that? It was at that body shop and Vic wanted us to steal those Dayton rims. I had all those mechanics on the floor. I remember this white boy pissed his pants too and started crying ‘please, don’t hurt me!’ Haha!”

“Then what happened?” Jose asked Tiger.

“I fucking got caught. Got sent to the Youth Authority since I was still sixteen at the time. It was heartbreaking when I got sentenced. My mama passed out in the courtroom.”

“My first rodeo was ‘73,” Jorge remembered, “it was my freshman year at Roosevelt and Nemesio thought it would be cool to break into this crazy old man’s home on Sixth Street off Euclid. I think he was a World War II veteran because he had all these medals in his house, but he busted us with his Garand pointing right at us!”

Everyone laughed.

“Then he called the cops and we all got booked. It fucking sucked.”

“Hold up, are y’all forgetting about the time I broke into that one house that had the basement full of taxidermied people?” Edgar brought up. Jose turned back to look at him with wide eyes.

“Yeah, they’re called mannequins,” Tiger argued.

“No! I’m serious, ese, they were live people at one point. Some sicko killed them and turned them into taxidermies!”

“You tell a different version of this story every time, I swear. One time you said Monkey Man was with you, another time you said Mosquito was with you,” Tiger doubted him.

Great, it looks like we’re going to bust into the home of some chainsaw-wielding killer like Leatherface or maybe a group of demented hillbilly rednecks like the ones from Deliverance, Jose thought to himself. He knew there wasn’t any looking back. The radio was playing “Nowhere to Run” by Martha and the Vandellas. Jose looked down at his black .38 revolver as the chorus sang:

“Nowhere to run to, baby/

Nowhere to hide/

Got nowhere to run to, baby/

Nowhere to hide/

Got nowhere to run/

Got nowhere to run.”

They arrived at the Lakewood home at around eleven-fifteen. Tiger put the Electra in park and ordered all of them to mask up and to put the gloves on. Without a second thought, they all got out of the car and approached the front door. Marco the Mouse did his thing and put his lockpicking skills to work. The door opened up with ease.

“I’ll hang back, the rest of you move forward,” Tiger told them. Jose was sweating like an activated sprinkler underneath his ski mask. *Are we the Green Berets now?* He thought to himself.

Jose placed both hands on his .38. There were two stories and a basement to this Santacruz guy’s home. Bedrooms should be upstairs, as they generally are. Jorge was at the front with his .38, Edgar was behind him with the baseball bat, Jose was behind Edgar, the Mouse was behind Jose with his revolver, and Tiger stayed on the first floor by the stairs. The rest went up. Jorge pointed at Jose and then he pointed at the first door that was on their right. Jose was tasked with checking that room. He slowly opened the door and immediately saw that it belonged to a boy; Santacruz’s son. He had a television set, some sport-related items like hockey sticks, a basketball, a football, and he also had a poster of Mario Andretti’s Lotus 79 Formula One car. He cleared the room and came back out.

The next room to the left belonged to Santacruz’s daughter. There were only two rooms left; a door that was at the end of the hallway and a door on the right. Jorge checked the one at the end. He came out and shook his head. It was just the bathroom. They finally knew which one was the master bedroom. Jose’s heart was beating as if it wanted to burst out of his chest. Jorge slowly creaked the door open and there was the target. Sleeping on the left side of his king size mattress and snoring. They all crept to his bedside. Jorge kept his .38 up and slowly moved his left hand to clap down on Santacruz’s mouth, waking him up in fear and confusion. He started making muffled noises, then Jorge cocked the hammer, making Santacruz shut up.

“Do anything stupid and we’ll kill you,” Jorge quietly said in a menacing tone.

The Mouse put a bandana over Santacruz’s mouth, then they turned him over and zip tied his hands and then sit him up for Edgar to punch him in the face. “How you like that, you fucking yuppie!” He said, then he turned to Jose. “Come on, hit this motherfucker!”

Then he punches Santacruz again, causing him to cry.

“Stop crying, fucking pussy!” Edgar said as he punched him again, “Jose, stop bullshitting man!”

Jose finally delivered a blow. The left side of Santacruz’s face turned swollen bright red. The muffled cries irked Jose.

“Again!” Commanded Edgar.

Instead of the face, Jose went for the stomach, he figured it would be less painful that way. He punched Santacruz three times in the gut causing him to gag through his bandana.

“Point your gun at him,” the Mouse commanded Jose. He obeyed but his hand was shaking uncontrollably. If he were to shoot the man he’d probably miss despite being only a foot away. Edgar began smashing everything in the master bedroom with his baseball bat.

“His lady got some jewelry!” Jorge was excited as he looked through the man’s dresser drawer. The man would just not stop crying. There he was, sitting on the edge of his bed in pain, watching them destroy his home, crushing and tearing family belongings. Disregarding everything he worked hard for.

“Órale! Check this out, a Cartier watch!” Edgar said gleefully as if he won the lottery or something. He then put it on to see how nice it looked on his wrist.

“Union guy huh?” Edgar said to the man. “Like Jimmy Hoffa? Didn’t the homeboy get murdered by the mob? Shit. You got a nice watch though,” Edgar stared at it. Then out of nowhere he swings his baseball bat and smashes the man’s right kneecap. His scream, though muffled, was bloodcurdling to Jose.

“Home run!” Edgar maniacally laughed.

Jose tried closing his eyes, but that wasn’t enough to block the sound of pure suffering coming from the man’s soul.

BANG.

Then there was dead silence. Jose was startled by the sound and his ears started ringing. Jorge shot Santacruz. Everyone froze. Tiger came running up the stairs.

“What the fuck did you just do?!” Tiger yelled.

“I. I. The—” Jorge stuttered.

“What the fuck, Jorge?!”

“The gun went off, vato!” Jorge tried explaining.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! We need to take him to Downey, now!”

They all just stood there.

“Pick him up!” Tiger commanded. The same devils that were torturing the man were now his guardian angels. They all carried him down the stairs, ran him out of the house, and dropped him in the Electra. Jose had his hands covered in blood and the smell Mr. Santacruz emitted made him start gagging. They all got in with Santacruz laying on their laps. Jose sat in the middle of the backseat staring at Santacruz’s bloodstained silk pajama shirt. Edgar got in the driver’s seat with Tiger in the front passenger.

“Pinche culeros!” Screamed Tiger, “Pinche maricones!”

“I swear ese the gun just went off! I didn’t pull the trigger or anything!” Jorge tried explaining.

The Electra’s tires skid as Edgar hit the gas.

“You dumb-ass motherfuckers!” Tiger yelled as he punched the dashboard, creating dents.

“The gun went off! They go off all the fucking time!” Edgar tried reasoning.

Tiger pumped his shotgun and pointed it at Edgar’s head.

“Open your damn mouth again and I’ll blow your head off!” Tiger threatened Edgar. “Here, here!” Jorge pulled out his flask and poured the alcohol on Santacruz’s wound, making him scream in agony. “The fuck are you doing?” Jose freaked out. “It helps with the wound!” Jorge told him.

“Apply pressure, Jose,” Tiger told him.

“What?” Jose didn’t have a clue.

“Put your damn hands on his gut to stop the bleeding!” Tiger yelled at him.

“Verga!” Jose yelled. He hated blood and started gagging again.

Santacruz started kicking the right side back passenger door with his bare feet. Marco held his legs down.

“Stop it!” Jorge yelled at him “We’re saving your life!”

When they arrived at the Downey Community Hospital, Jose, Jorge, and Marco carried the Santacruz’s body to the ER entrance, then they dashed back to the Electra. Jose looked at his bloodstained hands and wiped them off on his black Dickies work pants, which Tiger made him switch into prior to going on the job.

“We’re gonna drop this car off at Hector’s, it’s evidence,” Tiger said. They raced through Interstate 5 and eventually got to the junkyard. It was three in the morning. They rang his doorbell repeatedly until a fat Hector finally answered with his eyes barely open.

“We need to destroy that fucking Electra,” Tiger told him.

“What the hell? I just fixed it up a month ago,” Hector argued.

“Doesn’t matter anymore, pork chop, get rid of it, it’s evidence!” Tiger told him.

When the group finally made it back to the Juarez Courts, Tiger made them all gather in his living room at attention like soldiers. He examined all of them closely, when he got up to Jose he fumed all over his face. Jose blinked repeatedly and began shaking like a fish out of water, wondering what the hell Tiger was doing. “Stand over there,” he commanded Jose, pointing at the kitchen area.

Tiger then focused his attention on Jorge. “You motherfucker...” he quietly said but with a certain shake to his voice.

“I...I...,” Jorge stuttered.

“You what? You fucking what?”

Realizing he fucked up, Jorge just shut his mouth and prepared for what was to come. Jose felt the air grow cold, stinging his skin like needles.

“Your finger was supposed to be off the trigger, but you had it on,” Tiger told him “and you cost us a lot. This won’t sit good with Blanco at all.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” Jorge said with tears in his eyes.

“This is going to hurt me a lot worse than it is going to hurt you because I taught you better than that. You let me down,” Tiger said as he slowly pulled out some brass knuckles, fitting them on. Edgar and Marco the Mouse turned towards Jorge as well. Jose started to sweat because looking at Jorge’s nervousness got to him too. Jose saw Tiger deliver the first blow, making Jorge stumble back like a drunk. Then Tiger gave him the one-two, making Jorge fall to the ground. Edgar and Marco stomped on him. Jose just stared at all of them beating the shit out of Jorge and hearing flesh being smacked. After the beatdown was over and Jorge was lying on the floor unconscious and bleeding, Tiger looked over at Jose and told him to go home. As soon as he walked outside, he puked on the sidewalk.

BLACK SHEEP

Hanan Smoqy • Student, Academic Transfer

For years she wore shame for being different
Her hair was blonde, her peers preferred Brown
Family of bystanders, she was outspoken

She hid her identity like a needle in a haystack
The fear grew so her differences
opposed the idea of normal

The projection making her rebellious
To be sheltered with hate
That daughter and her mouth,
forever causing a mighty stir!

She believed our mind is an endless journey to create
They believed it was a journey to be controlled
The neglection happened

She embraced her differences
With scars that tell a deeper story
The story of the black sheep

THE 48TH STREET BLUES

Alyson Kay Ahrens • Student, Academic Transfer

I think back to a time before you got so sick. The cruel flow of the traffic on 48th street. We are going nowhere fast. The heat from the exhaust fumes of this long line of cars seems to be adding to the already hot air. I come to a spot in traffic that I particularly hate for its clusterf*ck of lights and cars. Surely one of these days I will meet my fate on this road. It is narrow, busy, bumpy, and has many abrupt stops. Car's will cut you off to get better spots on this road. Others will drive 20 below the speed limit just to get by without incident. I hate this street and I hate traffic. It is at this point the traffic has inched slowly forward. Enough so that I know I should not look up and to the left.

The light is red, and my thoughts begin to wander. I stare blankly out at one spot on the road fixated. I see everything and I am not even looking. I see the sturdy outer frame of the window; how high it sits off the ground. For the rest of my life, I will see that 7th-floor window in my mind. As if I had x-ray vision, I could see right into the room too. Every time I pass this part of 48th street I imagine you looking out the window forever there. Your soul is trapped. Unable to get free. The icy lump in my throat feels hard to hold back, like a tiny dagger tearing the esophagus from inside out. I will always see the anger in your icy blue eyes as you grabbed me with all the strength you had left and you say, "I will never forgive you." I will never know what you meant and for that I am sorry. Hot tears stream down my face now. I wipe them away trying to hide my emotions from other drivers as if they would notice. I am sorry for the relationship we never had. I know I will never know you now, but I will always love you. I remember so many things every day driving down this street. I think about how before this summer the only pain 48th street held for me was the traffic itself. How lucky I was then. How lucky I was to not know what was to come. At the time I just felt stress and anger at the other drivers. Now that doesn't even seem to matter.

The window is so familiar, and no amount of traffic could ever come between me and these overwhelming thoughts. I don't just see the hospital window 7 floors up, the neatly lined walkways with colorful foliage and flowers. I see two months of events all cut and compiled together. It feels like a distant dream. Did it even really happen?

I am jolted out of my thoughts by a frantic car horn. The light had turned green, and the line had begun moving. I was already 4 maybe 5 car lengths behind. I am not quick enough to shake my thoughts and get going before the angry driver behind me swerves into the turning lane to get around me. He is gesturing wildly, yelling and flipping me the bird. I quickly get back into the line of cars and I cry, profusely apologizing to the driver though

there is no use he cannot hear me and I don't even think I am apologizing to him. No, I'm apologizing to the memory of my dead father. The old two-lane road seems overrun with the five o'clock traffic.

Another memory comes through the static of thoughts in my mind as traffic slows again, the angry driver now two cars ahead of me. "You city slickers keep it colder'n shit in there!" You announce entering the garage. We have just started unpacking all your belongings and much of it is still out here. I am going through a box of your things as you make your unjust claim. It is not colder'n shit in my house you just can't regulate your body temperature anymore; you are too sick now. You wear several layers of sweaters, and it is early summer. The garage is humid and sweat rolls off me as I unpack. I am sad thinking about your failing body. It is a cold that not even the heat of summer can cure. Flies swarm you the smell of your imminent death sweat on their tongues. I've watched you go from bad to worse in just a few months. "I like it out here." You say it like you've found your place. Earlier in the summer, I ran string lights along the wood beams on the roof of my garage. I wanted it to be my sanctuary, but I see now that it is yours. In the corner sat an old broken recliner covered in dust. You sit barely able to stand on your swollen, oozing feet and kick out the footrest. The chair is lopsided and creaks and pops under your weight.

Though I am aware the heat is a bit much and the garage is like a giant hotbox, I do not argue your newfound space. I understand to you this shitty garage is as close as it gets to home. I think about home. Where I found you on the floor earlier that day in a pool of blood and vomit. The feeling of this garage is more what you are accustomed to before you got too sick to care for yourself. I had never seen anything so grotesque in all my life and to you, it was all you had left. Some last sliver of life you had to cling to. Your last bit of freedom. The last chapter of your life. I remember the dirt-covered window of your porch with the lace curtain. Spiders and mice had completely claimed the house. Thick egg sacks hanging all around, mice feces in inch thick piles on the counters in the kitchen. It was a good life for them here and they knew it. Had you become a hoarder or did depression win you over? In the corner was an old phonograph no longer in working condition. Probably thought to be a good project one day and had since been forgotten. You loved music. Antique collectibles were tucked into every nook and cranny. Their worth is imagined far beyond their value. An old mercury thermometer hung up reading incorrectly. Several beat-up old lawn chairs sat next to your stereo that had seen better days. It appears you had tinkered with it some to get it working again. Old playboys, condoms, and various women's clothes were strewn about, though there was no sign of any womanly touch in this house. An antique steel tray held rolling tobacco.

I knew looking around that you had lost your mind. You had brought a grill indoors and by the looks of it had tried to start a fire. Beer cans were full of piss and vomit lining the walls and old whiskey bottles are stacked

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in a large innumerable pile. There is almost too much to take in at once. A strong urine scent fills the air. There is also another pile this one much taller and wider than the others. It is a stack of medical bills that no one will ever pay. The last lone cowboy perhaps not worth a dime. Worked to the ground. You have nothing to show for your troubles but this sunken "home" full of garbage, mice, spiders, and whiskey bottles. It is in my garage on your last day of life that you find comfort.

I wipe my tears away quickly. The traffic has dissipated, and I am free to drive far away from the 7th-floor window in the thick hot air of the cluster fuck traffic of 48th street.

KNOW THIS

Kristin Kliment • Student, Early Childhood Education

This isn't about me but
I can't help but feel guilty
For not sharing my peace

I wish I could have told you
How much I looked up to you
Well, I suppose I'm still looking up now
You would tell me not to frown
I wish I could have expressed
My appreciation for your subtle kindheartedness
I hope you can manifest my request
To alleviate the distress, we feel without you
Know that we are trying our best
There are wounds deeper than mine
I just wanted to confess so that you know this.

OLD SICK MEMORIES

Isabel Anderson • Student, Academic Transfer

I saw an old photograph of you the other day
you were smiling despite being told not to
how you held that smile for so long

And just like yesterday I still can't
think and by this deafening candlelight,
I am still unable to dream like I used to
sing like we did, and laugh and glow
like the sun
Was beating down on our freckled cheeks

You are gone, maybe I am too

SATURDAY MORNING AT THE CHOCOLATE SEASON

Rachel Andrew • Student, Business Communications

From the outside, The Chocolate Season looks just like any other business in the newly developed southeast Lincoln neighborhood. Tall brick buildings with peaked roofs, the name The Chocolate Season is proudly displayed in cursive across the front. Walking inside, you are enveloped with the sounds of conversations all around you. The subtle scent of freshly brewed coffee gradually reaches your nose. Making your way past a table of ladies sitting with their coffees long finished, giggling about something one of them said, and through the beautifully laid out floorplan, you pass by shelving with bags of coffee beans and tins of hot cocoa mix along with an eclectic mix of plants and décor.

As you approach the counter, a beautiful display case catches your eye. Delicate bon bons each with hand written labels describing their flavors sit in one case and are almost too pretty to eat. Flavors like Fleur de Sel, which the barista proudly conveys is the café's most popular chocolate and her personal favorite, has bits of white salt coating the dark chocolate exterior and a rich, velvety caramel center that oozes out as you bite into it. The salt on top is almost enough to pucker your lips as you let the flavors settle on your tongue. Poppin Pecan, a beautifully crafted heart with pastel pink and blue speckles has a fun surprise on the inside. Pop Rocks are incorporated into this bon bon, which creates an unusual fizzing on the roof of your mouth as you savor the dark chocolate with a hint of pecan. If you're in the mood for a more grown up profile, Root Beer Whiskey is the perfect blend of a favorite childhood drink with a shot of whiskey that lingers on the tongue. The combination works oddly well together.

Pre-sliced cheesecake, with more than a few slices already sold, is artfully displayed in another case. A bold yellow sign declares that they serve fresh waffles on the weekend, with fun flavors like peaches n' cream, the Baconator, and churro, a little side note saying that you can upgrade to gluten sensitive if needed. One waffle is generous enough for two people to share, with a large dollop of butter melting into the grooves as it's delivered right to your table. These classics have a fluffiness not normally found in gluten free goods.

The baristas patiently wait on customers, taking the time to individually package sweet treats ready to be taken home to loved ones. Looking up, you'll see a chalkboard with a list of beverages The Chocolate Season offers including hot chocolate and a variety of flavorful syrups one can add to

SATURDAY MORNING AT THE CHOCOLATE SEASON

their coffee. Cheery workers greet you with “Good Morning” as you approach the register. In a world full of people rushing around, it’s refreshing to see baristas take the time to write your name and your order legibly on the cup.

On either side of the sign are large windows giving you a glimpse behind the scenes, seeing chocolatiers working hard, and employees bustling about getting customer’s orders ready for them to enjoy.

As you walk through the bustling little shop, you almost miss the delightful children’s area partially hidden behind a half wall. A little family sits on child-sized chairs watching their daughter color at the table, each of them sipping on their artisan coffee. Colorful wallpaper with little yellow trees lines the bookshelves holding an assortment of favorite children’s books.

A long cobalt velvet couch sits across the far wall and welcomes you as you sink into it. It’s the perfect spot to observe the people around you. A large, round metal marquee with burnt orange lights and The Chocolate Season logo meticulously cut out of the center rests on the wall behind the couch.

The generous paned windows let in the glorious Saturday sunshine. There are a couple of young men sitting at a bar top next to the windows animatedly discussing something.

Two ladies sit to the side enjoying coffee flights, four sampling sizes of different beverages, little dishes of popcorn in a bowl to act as a palate cleanser. A harried father attempts to tame four little girls as his wife places their order. Two young boys sit patiently while their mother says grace before dividing their waffle between them.

There’s an abundance of seating, enough for everyone wanting to enjoy a leisurely Saturday surrounded by friends and chocolate. A refreshing sight is that no one seems to be concerned with their phones. The atmosphere here is enough to pull you in and not feel the need to constantly be in touch with the outside world.

Everywhere you look, something beautiful on display will catch your eye. Chocolate covered pretzel rods, which are individually packaged in clear plastic sleeves stand upright in a white ceramic jar. Brightly colored orange and pink ice cream malt balls near the pretzels draw you in. Chocolate covered graham crackers topped with a colorful array of sprinkles and mini m & m’s, each bagged and tied neatly with a cream colored bow, rest in metal container. Cinnamon and sugar coated pecans stacked inside slender plastic tubes an make you want to reach out and try them.

Textured rectangular ceiling panels in grey, green, and blue catch your eye. Matching hexagonal yellow panels float over the children’s area.

SATURDAY MORNING AT THE CHOCOLATE SEASON

The hum of people talking drowns out any individual conversations. A little rolling cart with a black plastic bin sitting on top awaits satisfied customers' cups and plates as they finish consuming their treats. The employees, always with a smile on their face, make sure it never gets too full. Patrons come and go, letting in a little burst of the chilly February air as they hold the door open for others. The occasional customer popping inside to grab their online order.

By noon, The Chocolate Season is mostly cleared out and the subtle sound of the radio can finally be heard. There are just a few people left sitting around tables, carrying on conversations as if they have all the time in the world. This gem of a business is a place that is clearly adored by many.

The Chocolate Season's website professes "Made With Love," and it shows. From the thoughtfully planned out décor, to the arrangement of tables, kind employees, and of course the variety of delicious treats, it's obvious that they hold true to this promise.

MOSAIC OF ME

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

My life is an unfinished painting
Full of every shade of me
I'm not perfect in the least
But I'm still a masterpiece
I have a blanket of memories
Woven so intricately
A little bit frayed and torn
How it keeps me warm
My love is a bittersweet melody
The notes are moments with you and me
We're not always so in tune
But we'll find our rhythm soon
I create a mosaic of me
Made up of pieces of poetry
And parts that make up a whole
Illuminating my soul

NO VIRTUE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

I know of course that impulsiveness is no virtue, but in my uncertain adolescence, our school's fatherless weed dealer seemed like the sort of dude I ought to be around. It's no surprise to me now that in the space of a single second I witnessed him lift his brother bodily and repeatedly drop him on the kitchen floor in a dispute over a piece of bacon, but it was then. I did nothing the first time out of shock. But later, when we were all stoned and my best friend pinned his hundred-five pound little brother to the driveway for his insolence, I did nothing because that was my nature.

"How many times did I kick Cade's ass for you? How many times!" That was their father's name. Cade.

"Mom!" He was silenced, and his face spat on.

"Why did you do that? Huh? Why did you do that? You did that just to piss me off! What did you think would happen, Aaron? This is what happens. All I ask is that you respect me!"

No reply from Aaron. I don't know whether he was still defiant or still choking.

"It's all I ask! It's all I ask."

THE HOUSE OF PIANO

Rachel Hruza • Faculty, English

We once sat three on the bench with six hands
fighting for the sharps and then back to natural,
a sibling rhythm pulsing from a cadence in our bones.
The piano grew larger in lesson, and our mother began to write
melodies we sang back in soprano voices, making
promises that only music can hear.
We learned the notes and we wore down the piano bench
smooth, chopping our way
through easy-play Mozart and Beethoven,
with notes sprawled across the floor,
quarter and eighth to the tricky thirty-second.
It wasn't until years later, after we grew
too large for the bench and the novice
musical pieces, and the piano grew accustomed
to our mother's hands alone, we
knew the home we grew up in was one
full of the music of eighty-eight keys,
of life that would be echoed by song.

HOME

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer

You remind me of the beach, which is one of my favorite places to be. You
have this
sense of calmness within you that reminds me of when the tide is settling
before it
comes in higher onto the shore. And your eyes remind me of the sand,
smooth and
collected but there's more to it than meets the eye. You give me the same
feelings the
waves do. You make me ecstatic. I still remember how it feels to be in your
arms, one of
the safest places to be.

A NEW LENS

Rod Rhodes • Staff, Director of Assessment

Last summer our family vacation took us west to Montana, where our oldest son is working. On the first day we drove to Rapid City, SD, about eight hours away, just to break up the trip, which is 11 hours total, if you don't stop, to where our son lives.

Because we were in Rapid City, we had decided to see Mt. Rushmore, which our youngest had never seen and which we hadn't been to in over 20 years. The first time I saw the monument it seemed inspiring, awesome, and uplifting just like the pictures on a postcard. This time, not so much.

Prior to our trip I had read a book on Custer's Last Stand, since we were also planning on stopping at the Little Bighorn Battlefield, which is something I had always wanted to see. The book was eye-opening: in a nutshell, it laid out the case of how the Native American tribes were basically independent nations and that we—the United States—in essence invaded their country and stole their land.

The Black Hills region in particular was sacred to the Native Americans. It was interesting that General Custer had once led an expedition into the Black Hills, presumably to “protect” the miners who were looking for gold. Treaties were made and broken and the Black Hills were overrun by white settlers.

Thus I saw the Mt. Rushmore monument through a new lens, a more accurate lens, and I quickly saw it for what it really was. We, the US, took their land, and worse, defiled it with carvings of four white men—and, still worse, of which two of them owned slaves.

It was not inspiring or awesome or uplifting in any way. In fact, it was hard to be there.

The next day we headed to the Little Bighorn. The book I read in advance had done an excellent job of laying out day by day and even hour by hour what had happened, and to see the actual landscape in person was truly amazing. I was able to see the hill that is known as the site of the “Last Stand” and I saw the white headstones in the grass and in the fields, signifying where the US Troopers had fallen, including General George A. Custer, his brother, and his nephew.

A NEW LENS

But then I also saw other markers as well, dark maroon markers with white letters, of where different warriors had fallen—the Native American warriors. The description on these markers told the name of the warrior and these words: Died defending their land.

Think about that. Died defending their land.

We, the US, were the invaders. We, the US, were in reality the “hostiles.”

For the first time I was able to see the fabled “Custer’s Last Stand” through a new lens, a more accurate lens. It was, still, a moving and somber experience but different than what I expected simply because I saw it for what it really was. Like the book had laid out, it was really a tale of TWO Last Stands—Custer’s and Sitting Bull’s, for it was in a very real sense, the last stand for the Native American way of life.

I am glad we stopped at Mt. Rushmore, I am glad we stopped at the Little Bighorn. What I am most appreciative of, however, is my profound sense of what really happened—in both places—and the impact it has had on me. I enjoy privileges way beyond what I have any right to, simply because of my race and gender. Many others are not nearly so lucky.

I’m a white male. What I really need to be is a person of empathy and understanding and compassion.

I BELIEVE IN CHANGING THE WORLD

Natalie Duchesneau • Student, Academic Transfer

I believe in changing the world. I know, it sounds like one of the most daunting tasks to ever achieve, much less attempt. When most people think about changing the world, they tend to think about actions that would affect the world on a global scale and impact millions of people's lives, like starting a political movement in the name of justice, redistributing the wealth of the top 1% and ending poverty, or discovering a universal cure for cancer. When I think about changing the world, I think about actions that, while small, could have just as big of an impact on the world, like smiling at strangers, giving or receiving compliments, and extending gestures of kindness and generosity to others.

I believe smiling is one way to change the world. A simple smile can convey happiness, familiarity, comfort, and so many more positive feelings and emotions. When I smile at someone, it lets them know that not only am I comfortable with them, but also that I want them to feel comfortable with me. Smiling at others can increase levels of joy and comfort, and can boost our mood and our self-confidence. I try to offer a smile to at least one person every day, because even if my day is not going so well, the least I can do is brighten someone else's. A single smile can influence our mood, day, and even our life, and that's just one smile from one person! I believe that if we all made smiling a part of our daily interactions with others, it would deeply change the world.

I believe compliments are another way to change the world, not only because they are nice, but also because they are powerful. Being told that someone appreciates something about us is not only a wonderful feeling, but also an essential one, too. We innately crave feelings of praise and gratitude, and when kind sentiments are expressed by others, those feelings can offer us a boost in our mood and self-esteem. Whenever I receive a compliment, I get a warm, soft spot in my chest and a smile tugs at the corners of my mouth. Receiving a single compliment can make my whole day—but so can giving one! Giving a compliment can have just as profound of an effect on a person as receiving one, which means whether you are on the giving or receiving end of a compliment, both you and the other party in the exchange experience an improvement in your mood. Compliments hold a lot of power. Imagine if every single person in the world said something nice to someone else. The whole world would be full of positivity and happiness, all because of a single compliment. Now imagine if we did that every single day! That's the power compliments have, and that is why I believe compliments can change the world.

Extending kind and generous gestures is also a way to change the world.

Doing something kind for another person is a good exercise in compassion and can create a society of selflessness and consideration. Simple gestures of kindness can include holding the door for someone, donating money to a charity, or paying for someone's meal. There are so many ways to extend generosity to others, and some ways might be more obvious than we think. An example of this is listening when a person is speaking. It might sound like a basic social skill, but I believe it is much more than that. There is a difference between hearing and listening, and while a lot of people tend to hear a person when they are speaking, not as many people tend to listen. Listening shows interest in a person or conversation topic, and when a person feels listened to, it can make them feel good. Any gesture of kindness can make a person feel good, and similar to the case of compliments, regardless of whether you are the giver or receiver of those gestures, you walk away from the experience happier.

Originally, I was going to end this essay by recounting what I had previously stated, but while I was writing this, I realized something: maybe changing the world doesn't have to be something you do. That isn't to say that you can't change the world by smiling at people, offering compliments, or extending gestures of kindness and compassion, because I believe you can. I believe we all can. But what if changing the world isn't something we do? What if it isn't an act, a deed or a gesture? What if we change the world just by living? The more I thought about it, I realized that the answer might be yes. Maybe we change the world just by being here, by showing up even when we'd rather shut ourselves away, by believing in ourselves even when others don't accept us for who we are, by holding onto the belief that things will get better even when it seems impossible. And maybe, if we all hold onto that belief, if we persist despite all the hardships we face, if we refuse to be anything less than our true selves, if we continue to live because of the hope we hold for the future. . . maybe the world will change around us.

And this, I believe.

I'LL KEEP YOUR FIREFLIES SAFE

Cecelia Bialas • Student, Academic Transfer

When the stars disrobed privately for us in the alfalfa field
full of kneecap-kissing grass, the katydids sang to a lone train
whistling westbound while we sat in the cozy bed of the farm truck plated
NOT FOR HIRE. Above my head in your lap, you set free fears and doubts
long held captive, softly spoken like lightning bugs glowing, floating down
to be guarded with caverned hands that I cup around your stubbled cheeks
before swaddling us in a scratchy-soft blanket. Gone are your days of
dismay

at longing for someone with whom to share truths
that came when the sick train of fate derailed your life's
plans so early on: Blue sky cockpits turned to gray
hospital walls hiding dark fluids dripping through
winding tubes, your cries of pain at the bellyfull
of foreign scars that stripped you

of your pilot's wings,
pale body laid bare.

No longer do you have to rage in solitude.
I'm here. I hear you.

From under the blanket we rise together and I break my gaze from the sky,
sway, reoriented before jumping into the dark to wade through
the congregation of nighttime dew. I find you
bathed in the cab lights spilling out on your side, barely aware
of the open door dinging like distant wedding bells
among the cicadas as you look at me
with crinkled eyes and send a sweet smile
up to the quietly encouraging stars.

YOU NEVER KNOW UNTIL YOU TRY

Elizabeth Noel • Student, Continuing Education

There once was a house
With a tiny little bird,
Who sat on his perch,
but didn't say a word.

So he thought,
And he sat,
And he blinked,
And he sat,
And he winked,
And he sat,
And he thought "how absurd".

This same little bird
Took a very deep breath,
He opened up his beak,
But the sound fell flat.

So he thought,
And he sat,
And he blinked,
And he sat,
And he winked,
And he sat,
And he said "well, that's that!"

AUGUST 27, 2019

Kaitlyn Walton • Student, Business

One day since you've passed.
I told myself I wouldn't cry,
but I still bawled.
I watched him stick the needle in,
and press.
I watched your body go slack in my mother's arms,
your eyelids drooping.
I desperately wanted to yank the needle out,
watch you snap out of it.
I grabbed your paw and you looked directly at me,
struggling to keep your eyes open.
You blinked slowly,
once.
And then closed them,
for good.
As I heard him whisper,
"he's gone."
I let out a sob.
And wanted for you to sit up,
your ears twitching.
Lick the tears off my face.
But you never did.
I left you in that room,
wrapped in a blue blanket covered in stars.
I just wanted to say,
thank you.
For everything.
And I promise you,
you'll always be everyone's favorite little trooper.

LOVE, LILITH

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

Cascades of blue and green
Is this real
Or just a dream?
Bear the burden of my soul
My body is your vessel
This is my garden of Eden
The crimson apples taste like freedom
I wear the serpent around my neck
I am Lilith in the flesh
In this world
The witch doesn't burn
From this girl
You have a lot to learn
I danced with the devil
An elegant tango
As I'm above
He's so below
If you tell me lies
I won't believe them
I will never be Eve again

THE HUBRIS OF SIDEKICKS: SCENE STEALING SIDE CHARACTERS AND THE THREAD THAT BINDS THEM ALL TOGETHER

John Cook • Student, English

My original inspiration for this project came from our class reading of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and a personal dissatisfaction with the narrative. I felt that Moira, the protagonist's best friend, was the more interesting character with a far more compelling story to tell. If Atwood were to write a new story from her character's perspective, I would be happy to read it.

This got me thinking about other literary works where side characters have outshone the main protagonist and left fans wanting more of their story. I was curious about why this happens and what different authors have done in this situation. What I learned was that, almost across the board, these scene stealing sidekicks all have one thing in common: from fan favorites to the writer's secret darlings, they are actually the embodiment of the author themselves.

While often mocked and derided in the world of fan fic, this literary device, known as self-insertion, is surprisingly common in popular works by famous authors. From the very first science fiction novel to modern classics that have sold millions of copies, authors have dropped avatars of themselves into their works far more often than one might imagine.

To prove my point, I have gathered several examples of self-insertion, and catalogued what the authors ended up doing with these characters. Some of these are well known but others might come as a surprise.

Mary Shelley and the monster:

Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley, is widely considered to be the world's first science fiction novel. It is the story of a scientist who creates life and then seeks to destroy it when it is not what he wanted it to be. (Shelley) Dr. Frankenstein's story is interesting, but it is the monster he creates that people find the most intriguing. Despite being a man-made creature, he is the most human character in the story.

While Shelley herself never spoke on the issue, many of her biographers have found strong resemblances between her and the monster. (UKEssays) Shelley's mother, a famous feminist in her time, had died in childbirth,

leaving Mary to grow up in her shadow. She also lost her first two children while writing *Frankenstein*, a pain that is reflected in the monster's suffering.

Sadly, Shelly never went back to write more about the monster that made her famous, but a lot of other people certainly have. The monster pops up in movies, TV shows and other works where the Dr. is long gone, but the creature he created lives on. If you say "Frankenstein" to most people today, they picture a lumbering behemoth with bolts in his neck, not a mad scientist in a lab coat.

Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn:

Mark Twain, Samuel Clemens to his friends, is considered one of the greatest writers in American history. One of his early works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, introduced us to the titular character along with his best friend, Huckleberry Finn. (Twain1) Years later, when writing a sequel to that work, he turned his focus to Huck as the main character. He never publicly stated why he switched characters, but the semblance between himself and Finn is notable. (Twain2) The sequel was a darker book, dealing with heavy issues like slavery and abolitionism, and Huck's opinions were a direct reflection of Twain's on the subject, as was his personality.

While *Tom Sawyer* is a beloved book, it is the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that stands out as the better work. Many people, including such greats as Hemingway, even declared it the first Great American Novel. (Wood) Much of this is because the titular character is so well rounded and complete that he almost seems to spring from the page at times. It is easy to see how that living vibrancy is a direct reflection of the oft times larger than life character of Mark Twain himself.

J.K. Rowling and Hermoine Granger:

As most fans of the Harry Potter franchise are well aware, Hermoine Granger is the real driving force behind every story. If not for her pushing the boys and the plot along, nothing would ever get done. (Rowling) This is also undoubtedly the most famous case of self-insertion on this list; Rowling has always admitted that Hermione is based on an ideal version of herself. She has even confessed that Hermoine ended up with Ron Weasley because she still had feelings for the man he was based upon. She regrets that decision now, again, because of her real life relationship issues, even going so far as to suggest that Harry and Hermoine should have ended up together. (Wigandt)

Despite a nearly endless demand from her fans, Rowling has not yet taken up the pen to write new stories with Hermoine as the lead, though who knows what may happen in the future. In the meantime, the world of fan fic has stepped forward to fill the gap, the majority of stories in the Potterverse tend to focus on her character, for better or worse.

Orson Scott Card and Bean:

When Card wrote the sequels to his most popular work, *Ender's Game*, he took the character who had been child in the first book and told his story as an adult, creating a strange disconnect between the first book and the rest of the series. (Card1) Years later, when he decided to go back to those early stories, there were several characters he could have expanded on. Fans were especially interested in hearing more of Petra's story – as the only girl in the group and a well-loved character in her own right, she was a great choice for a spin off series. Instead, Card chose to write a new book, called *Ender's Shadow*, from the perspective of Bean.

Bean is the brightest person in a group full of geniuses, while Ender does not understand what is happening until the war is over, Bean figures it out early on because he is so much smarter than everyone else. (Card2) He is always several steps ahead of every other character, he is also arrogant and at least mildly annoyed that the rest of the world does not recognize his genius. If you know anything about Card, the resemblance to the last part is uncanny.

Oddly, instead of writing a sequel, Card actually took the next step, he essentially re-wrote *Ender's Game* but told the entire story from Bean's perspective. The book was successful, and he did a great job of retelling the story while keeping true to the original. I have even heard of people who like *Ender's Shadow* more, especially if they read it first.

Still, Card's unironic back cover headshot features him wearing a black sweater and scarf on a black background. Seriously, the man is just the worst.

Anne Rice and the vampire Lestat:

If ever there was an author who became obsessed with their creation, it is Anne Rice. When she wrote *Interview with a Vampire*, Lestat was more of an antagonist to the plot, he was the progenitor of Louis, her main character. (Rice) Somewhere between the end of the first book and its sequel, she fell in love the darker character and he became the lead for the rest of her series. Originally, she felt Louis was based on her and Lestat was molded after her husband but eventually she realized Lestat actually reflected who she wanted to be. She has also referred to him as "her dark lover" and speaks as if he is a real person who speaks to her. (RiceInterview) When her husband died, she claimed that Lestat came and told her that he had no more stories to tell. Rice temporarily went back to the catholic church after spending her entire adulthood as an atheist and tried to tell different stories. However, when she again parted ways with the church, Lestat reappeared in her life with more stories to tell. (Hatful)

While *Interview with the Vampire* is an excellent book, the follow up stories featuring Lestat are what helped Rice create an entire sub-genre of

fiction, paranormal romance, which is responsible for the likes of *Twilight* and *True Blood*. Her newest works featuring Lestat have put her back on the bestseller list and her fans still hunger for more, it is safe to say he will not be leaving her again any time soon.

Veronica Roth and Tobias/Four:

In the case of the *Divergent* series, Roth gives us the classic Uno Reverse play. The first rough draft of the book featured Four, aka Tobias, as the main character. (Roth1) However, Roth quickly scrapped that idea in favor of a female lead, Tris, whom she related to better. Then, by the end of the third book, she decided to kill off Tris and finished the series with a fourth book Tobias as the main character, after all. (Roth2) She has stated in interviews that Tris was the character she best identified with, while Tobias was the one she really liked. (Robson) One could make the argument that killing Tris was just her way of knocking off the competition.

Roth's final book, simply titled *Four*, featuring Tobias/Four was a bestseller, but many fans were still unhappy with her decision to kill Tris. The books did spin off a movie series, but the last picture was never made, leaving Tris very much alive and with Four in the cinematic version. A lot of fans have said they prefer it that way.

While it is true that writers often put a bit of themselves in their characters, these five instances are clear examples of what can happen when the author decides to insert themselves more fully into the fictional worlds they create. While some may argue that self-insertion falls somewhere between hubris and wish fulfillment for the author, one cannot deny that it has led to the creation of some truly fascinating literary characters.

The world is a big place, you may never get the chance to meet your favorite author in person. On the other hand, if you happen to come across one of these scene stealing, charge leading, smarter than everyone else, bigger than life side characters in their next book, you can probably bet that you've just met their avatar.

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A BABY TAKING CARE OF ANOTHER BABY

Ruth Castillo • Student, Business

Twenty-two years ago, there was a girl named Tania, but her family called her “Estrella.” She was a high school student when a moment in her life happened, and her life changed forever. She has always been an independent girl; she would always find a way to have fun and to enjoy life at its fullest. Estrella really enjoyed playing with the kids from her neighborhood, she would go out to the streets and ride her bike, she would also skate. She loved to skate. Her life was like any other teenager; however, her life was about to change. Estrella was fourteen years old when she found out she was expecting a baby. She started thinking “I’m going to be a mom,” people might think that she was scared and didn’t know what to do next but, she was not scared, she just knew that getting pregnant was the consequence of having sex without any protection. She knew that she was going to be responsible and take care of herself and the baby.

Her parents found out she was pregnant when the school called her mom because she fainted. They took her to the doctor and there they heard the news. Estrella was not scared for what it was about to come, she thought, “Well, I will be having a baby and it’s time to take responsibility for it and take care of my baby.” When Estrella told the baby’s father that she was pregnant and they were going to become parents, all he had to say was, “You should have an abortion,” Estrella did not agree with that idea, she told him that she was going to have the baby whether he was in her life or not, what she was thinking at that moment was, “My baby does not have to be responsible of my actions, I am the one to blame, I will have the baby and try my best.” At the end, the baby’s father agreed to keep the baby and make it work.

One of the hardships she went through was dealing with lack of support she got from her father. Her dad was very upset with her, he started calling her names and telling her he didn’t raise her to be a whore. The father humiliated her by throwing all of her clothes into the street, people were watching and whispering, Estrella was sad and mad her dad at the same time. That day, Estrella went to live with her boyfriend. She felt out of place in that house, it was different to her, and she was uncomfortable most of the time. Time went by and one day her mom went to see her, her mom told her that her dad wanted her to move back home. Estrella was still upset of the way he treated her, and she told her mom, “If he wants me to go back, he can come and tell me himself.” The next day her dad went to her and told Estrella to go back home.

After Estrella’s siblings found out about her pregnancy, one of her sisters offered her to take the baby so that she could be able to finish high school

and keep living her teenage life, however, Estrella rejected that proposal and said she was going to raise her baby. Estrella's mind was already made up and she knew she wanted to raise her baby herself and give her best try even if it was not perfect, she knew it was her responsibility to care for her baby.

Time went by, Estrella decided to get married with her baby's father. Her parents and siblings told her to not go through with it, but she decided to get married so that her baby would grow up in a house with both parents. She grew up in a Christian family and she was afraid of what people would think. Estrella and her now husband moved to another state, they moved to Nirgua where they decided to start their new life. The baby's sex was finally known, Estrella was going to have a baby girl. She was very happy.

When Estrella's due date was close, she decided to go back to her hometown to have the baby there so that she could have her mom's help. The day finally came, and her labor journey started. When she started to have contractions, she went to the hospital to get admitted. Estrella was being strong and fighting the pain like a champ. She was finally ready to have her baby girl, the doctor told her to start pushing so she did. After so many pushes, her baby girl was finally out her belly into the new world. When the baby came out, she was not crying, Estrella noticed it and she started asking why, she was exhausted, but she needed to make sure her baby was ok. The doctor slapped her baby's butt, at the third slap the baby finally started crying, Estrella heard her baby cry and soon after she fell into a deep sleep.

Estrella was finally home with her baby girl, who she named Ruth Alisbeth. Her parents were happy to see their first granddaughter, yes, even her dad. In fact, Estrella's father fell in love with baby Alis (that's the name the family decided to use) because they thought it was unique and sounded nicer than Ruth. After a while, Estrella moved back to Nirgua which is where her and her husband were living. There, she started the role of wife and mother. Not everything was perfect. She would be alone most of the time while her husband was working. Whenever her husband would get home, he would not pay much attention to his baby, it's like she was not there. Estrella and Alirio started arguing all the time, she said, "I did not feel appreciated by him, and he would not give me the respect as his wife and mother of his child." When baby Alis was almost three years old, Estrella and her husband decided to separate.

A new chapter on Estrella's life was about to begin. Estrella moved back with her parents. She decided to get a job, since now she had to provide for her and the baby. Estrella was now sixteen-years old; she found a job as a babysitter since in Venezuela minors can't get hired at any business. After a few months she was able to get hired at a pharmacy, the family she was babysitting for wanted to help her to get a better job so she could provide for her baby. At the pharmacy she would mop the floors and keep

A BABY TAKING CARE OF ANOTHER BABY

everything organized. Estrella decided to go back to school, “Something I always knew was that I wanted to get my high school diploma,” and that’s what she did. Estrella’s path was filled with many obstacles, however, she kept on being optimistic until she finally graduated from high school and got her diploma.

Estrella’s life has not been the easiest, however, she has always been a strong woman who no matter the situation, she would work hard to accomplish whatever her goal is. Estrella is now thirty-six years old; she lives in Nebraska. She is happily married, baby Alisbeth is now twenty-two years old, and her little sister Sinry is fifteen-years old.

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THE LONELINESS

Natalie Duchesneau • Student, Academic Transfer

If I close my eyes, I can picture this room perfectly, from the water stain on the far-left corner of the ceiling, to the dusty curtains covering the windows that are painted shut, to the potted plant on my desk that hasn't tasted water since I shut myself away.

Normal people might find it impossible to stay in bed for hours on end. But it's been three days since I left my apartment, and twenty-six hours since I left this room—and I can't imagine anything more impossible than getting out of bed. I can't imagine doing anything.

A surge of loneliness hits me. Tears roll down my face. I hate it when I can't hold in my loneliness. This crying has been happening too often now, every week it feels like. Normally, I just curl up in a corner and cry until there's nothing left in me, but even that didn't help, not this time.

I swipe at my tears with the back of my hand. What do normal people do when they feel this sad? Reach out to friends or family? I have no friends. And family? For me, that's not an option. I want—I need—someone, anyone, but I can't bring myself to reach out.

Loneliness feels like nothing and everything; it feels like emptiness and the weight of the entire world; it collapses time and hurries it along. I don't mind being alone, but I can't bear being lonely. Not like this.

My tears taste salty in my mouth. I sniffle. A bird chirps from outside, from behind the dusty curtains and the painted-shut windows. I know this bout of loneliness will pass. It has to. Because if it doesn't, then I need to find a way out of it.

The bird continues chirping.

This will pass. The loneliness will pass.

FREE

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer

I'm getting older

I changed my number

Blocked and deleted so I could be me

No setbacks, I just want to be free

I loved you at your worst and you put me at mine

I just want my happiness back, all of it combined

Take me back to when I was me

I just want to be free

SPIRAL ON

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

I set the right intention
I let my light just glisten
Vibes speak so I listen
A high priestess on a mission
I pry my third eye wide open
My spirit guides have awoken
I've been stuck in muddy waters
And still bloomed like a lotus flower
My thoughts form like geometric shapes
Like a mandala with so many paths to take
Feelings are a palette with vibrant colors
Healing is lateral, not linear
Our energy goes on and on
Like a spiral long after we're gone

VIGNETTES OF OUR LIVES WITH OUR POSSESSIONS: THE DRESSER

Onna Carr • Student, Business

Every morning upon waking, I can look over at my dresser. I am greeted by a 1920's-1930's dresser acquired at an estate sale and cleaned but left with its natural patina created over years of good, solid service to its previous owners. To the side of the dresser is the wooden rocking chair I came home to as an infant and spent many hours being nursed or rocked to sleep in. Over the rocker's back is a hand-blocked, traditional, cotton scarf from Delhi, reminding me of my obsession with India.

Ed Sheeran, the British musician, best known for his Grammy-winning song, "Thinking Out Loud," has another song entitled "Photograph." Last year, "Photograph" seemed to be playing everywhere from the hair salon, to the doctor's office, to the box store, to the local grocery. "Photograph" speaks of how we take pictures to record moments when we had both our eyes and our hearts open so that we could preserve these memories of good times and healthy innocence to hold them close throughout our lives. The poignancy of "Photograph" lies in the fact that a such a young man understood so well certain aspects of life's memories and could convey them so excellently in a song only four minutes long.

The dresser top is covered with a linen table scarf embroidered with redworked teapots by my mother. In the center of the dresser top is a piece of interesting and eclectic "book-art" completed at a class showcasing one of my favorite colors, verdant green. Ear-cuffs with green accents are placed upon the "book-art" and a green travel necklace with a prayer box lies in front to accentuate the green motif further. A bangle/bracelet black velvet, three-tier holder rests along one of the back corners of the dresser top and holds my extensive collection of beaded bracelets, bangles, and cuff bracelets that have been purchased or that I have created over the years. In front of the bangle holder rests a wool swatch from my foray into graphed, color knitting that reminds me of the joys of a good instructor and the things he taught me. Opposite the bracelet holder is a teal vase with irises and poppies to add a pop of color and to draw the eye to the large canvas of poppies hung above the dresser and to the "Keep Calm and Carry On" wall art in the corner.

In front of the vase is a vintage piece of ceramic that depicts a cottage in the countryside with bright color usage and a shiny finish, recalling the rolling hills and the rural locales that have been a part of my life since birth. To the side of the vase, is a ceramic ring holder: one of those vintage, hand-

painted finds from the era when ceramic shops were a going concern. This ring box was painted by “Flora” and reminds me of “Flora’s Secret,” by Enya, making me smile with the reminiscence of Enya’s work that brings to mind sparkling sunlight, gentle raindrops, and rippling water in musical form.

On the dresser top, in the center, against its back, is an incorporated piece of lovely gingerbread work and beneath it, an antique plate entitled “Empress” by John Edwards and called a “Porecelaine Deterrl” piece. I love the creamy background on this plate with the gold accents around the edges and in the center. This plate is also a memory cloche: holding an odd assortment of physical items that are touchstones of my times past. The diminutive, plastic calf was a gift from my great-grandfather when I was four. He was and remains the finest man I ever met, reminding me of the verse in the Book of Esther regarding Mordecai, “. . . accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.” (Esther 10:3 KJV) . Opposite the calf rests a tiny, ceramic bear that I lost when a toddler, and I was so disturbed by missing the minuscule figurine that my father and I spent an entire afternoon searching our back yard for the little object until we found it. A marble reminds me of the lowan toy shop that it was purchased at, and the good memory of that experience rolls around the center of the plate. Meanwhile, a favorite fashion necklace in brass, red, and pearl accents with Bollywood style warmly shimmers beside the marble reminding me of beautiful Indian films with their exotic, bright colors. Across from this item, another necklace lies quietly poised in gunmetal blue patiently waiting to take a shot at any given day of my choice in resounding volleys of quick silver and cold diamond accents.

The ephemera on my dresser brings back to me valued memories of my family and my experiences. These past memories build me up while I am firmly grounded in the present, adding not only beauty to my life, but additional touchstones of meaning that help me to move into the future with courage and grace. I love how ephemera, like tangible photographs and Ed Sheeran’s song, can recall the moments, past and present, when our eyes and our hearts were/are open, preserving our memories so that we can hold them close throughout our lives. Ephemera may appear small and insignificant to the casual observer, but the reflections that our possessions give us of our past and of our present allow us to better understand ourselves and to remember those we care about as we move into the future, carrying with us the only personal treasure that really matters in the end—love.

RENEWED OPTIMISM

Dr. Paul Illich • President, Southeast Community College

PRIZE DONATED BY DR. ILLICH AS PART OF THE FACULTY/STAFF PRIZES HE SPONSORED THIS YEAR

This hand-crafted occasional table features a live edge Elm wood top made of two separate scrap pieces. The seam line connecting the two pieces is hidden with a Blood wood inlay across its length. The base is made of Alder wood with Blood wood inlays on the inside of each table leg. The design of the table, which consists of mortise and tenon and dado joinery, was inspired by the devastating loss of most American elm trees during the 1960s and 1970s. This unique table is an excellent reminder of how trees can be repurposed to ensure they continue to inspire, reassure, and support those who interact with the reimagined versions of their original live tree identities.



RENEWED OPTIMISM



SNOW CAPS

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer

GRAND PRIZE AWARD WINNER, ARTWORK



NEBRASKA MILKWEED

Layla Thomson • Student, Academic Transfer

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, ARTWORK



FALL ON THE RANCH

Linda Hartman • Faculty, Business Program Co-Chair

RUNNER-UP AWARD WINNER, FACULTY/STAFF PRIZE



BARRELING THROUGH

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



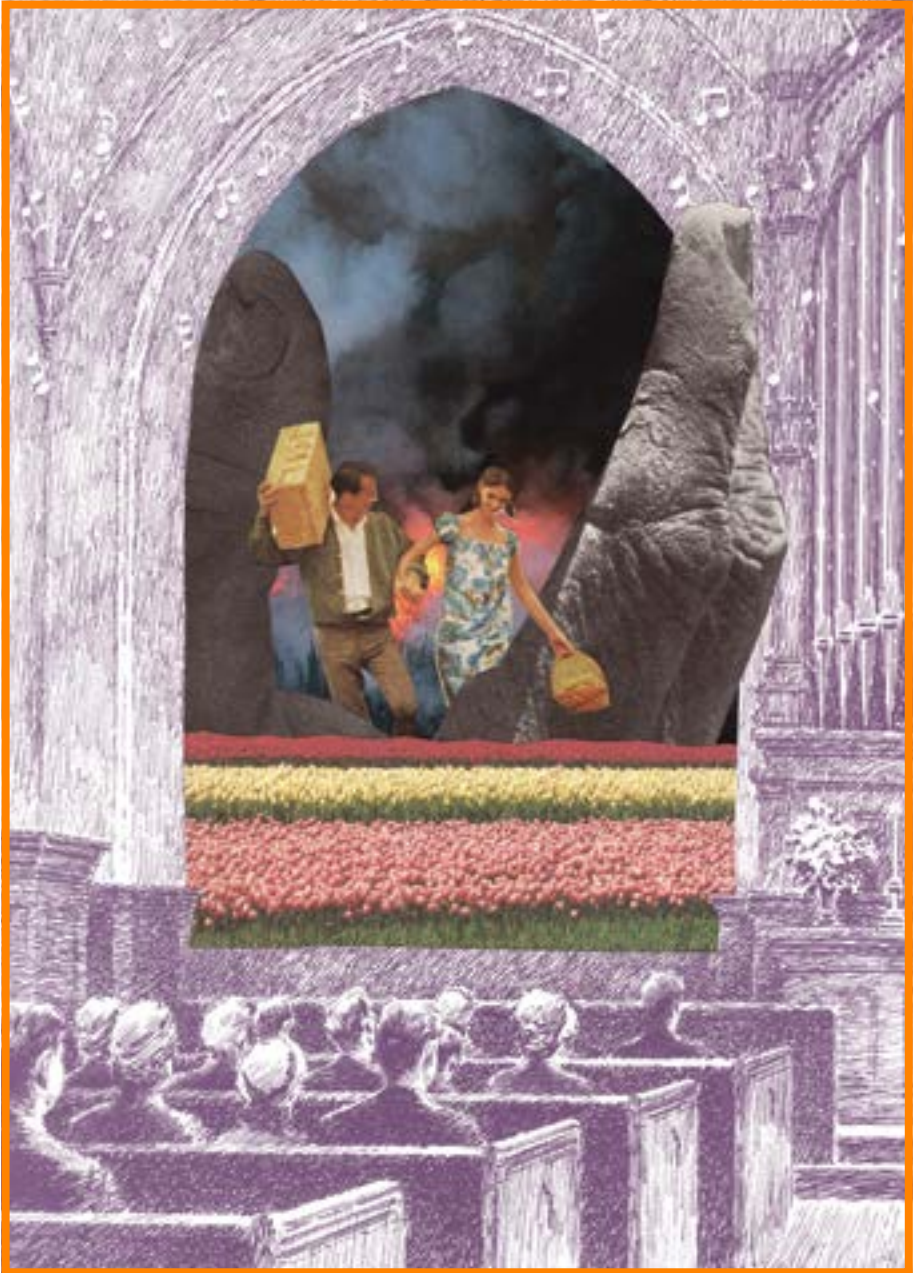
HARMONY

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



WE'RE THE FIRE

Tammy Zimmer • Faculty, English



STAIRWAY TO YOUR FUTURE

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer



LOOKUP

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



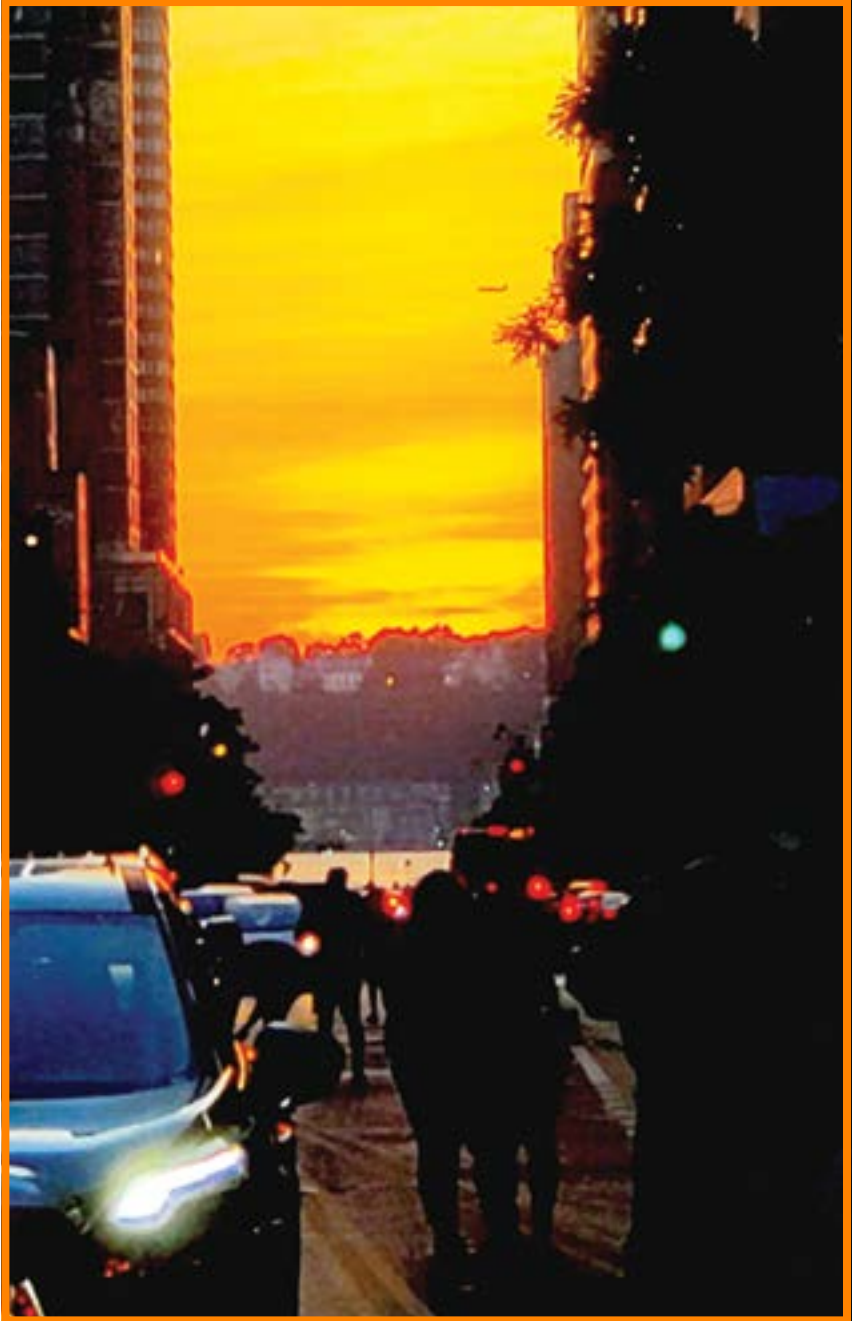
OFF THE TRAIL

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



SUNSET, NEW YORK

Patty Haddow • Staff, Retired



SHE ASKED FOR IT

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



YELLOW BLOOM

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



SHINING DOWN

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



FLOWER BLOOD

Shaima Kari • Student, Academic Transfer



STRONG. SMART. BEAUTIFUL. BLACK. PROUD. SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



STRONG. SMART. BEAUTIFUL. BLACK. PROUD. SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



IT TOOK ALL THE COKE IN TOWN TO BRING DOWN DENNIS BROWN

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



ON GUARD

Patty Haddow • Staff, Retired



BUZZ OFF

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



MY BELOVED LINCOLN

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



SHAKE IT OFF

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



LITTLE BEAUTIES

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



TRAVEL

Shaima Kari • Student, Academic Transfer



SUNRISE FROM MY BACKYARD

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



PHONE

Patty Haddow • Staff, Retired



ROAMING PILLBUG

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



KING'S UNCHAINED MELODY

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



INSECT NECROPOLIS

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



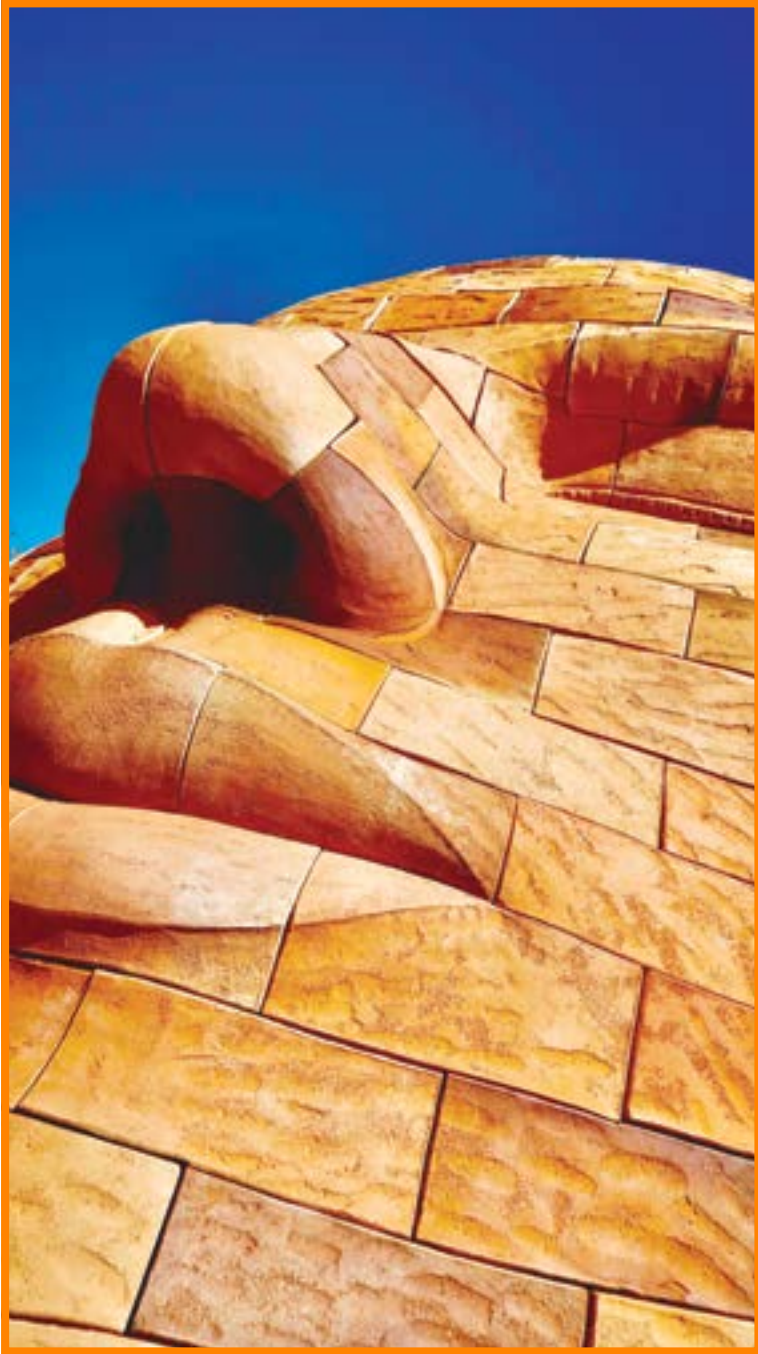
LAVENDER

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



ONE FACE, A MILLION STORIES

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer



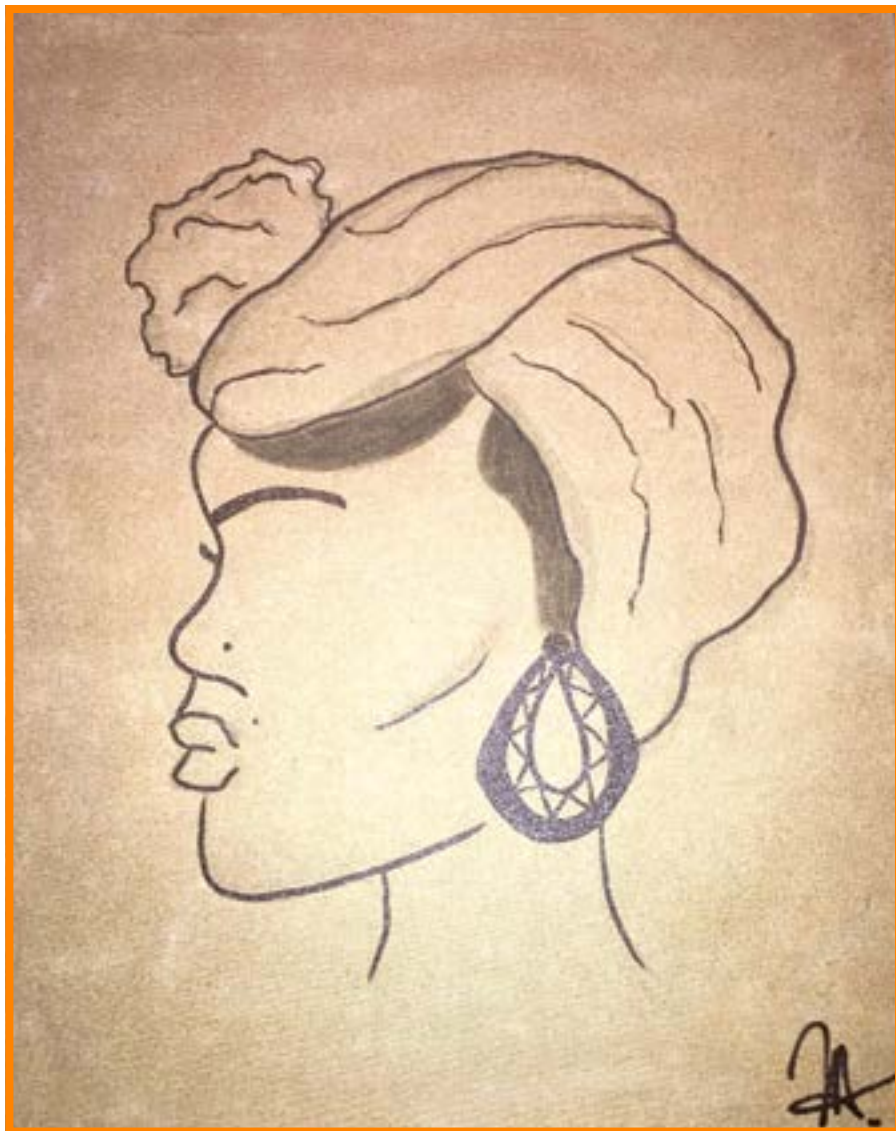
PEARLS OF GARDEN

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



WOMEN START REVOLUTIONS BY SIMPLY EXISTING SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



WOMEN START REVOLUTIONS BY SIMPLY EXISTING SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



WOMEN START REVOLUTIONS BY SIMPLY EXISTING SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



WOMEN START REVOLUTIONS BY SIMPLY EXISTING SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



WOMEN START REVOLUTIONS BY SIMPLY EXISTING SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



FINDING PEACE IN THE PAS

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



CLOSE UP SERIES

Lynda Heiden • Staff, Retired



CLOSE UP SERIES

Lynda Heiden • Staff, Retired



DAY AT THE BEACH

Nicole Schwab • Student, Welding Technology

FRONT COVER IMAGE



ALONE

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



CRAGGY TREE

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



COMPOSITION

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



SPITTING MAD

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



DRAGONFLY

Lynda Heiden • Staff, Retired



NO CLOWNIN'

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



SIT STILL: “LOOK PRETTY” DECOR SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



SIT STILL: “LOOK PRETTY” DECOR SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



SIT STILL: “LOOK PRETTY” DECOR SERIES

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



BEAUTY OF WESTERN NEBRASKA

Tanya Hare • Staff, Student Accounts



HIBERNATION

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



HIBERNATION

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



MELLOW MUSHROOM

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer



ROPING

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



PERSPECTIVE

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



A DAY AT THE BEACH

Linda Hartman • Faculty, Business Program Co-Chair



LITTLE DREAM

Shaima Kari • Student, Academic Transfer



WHAT DOES ASKING FOR IT LOOK LIKE?

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



BEYOND

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



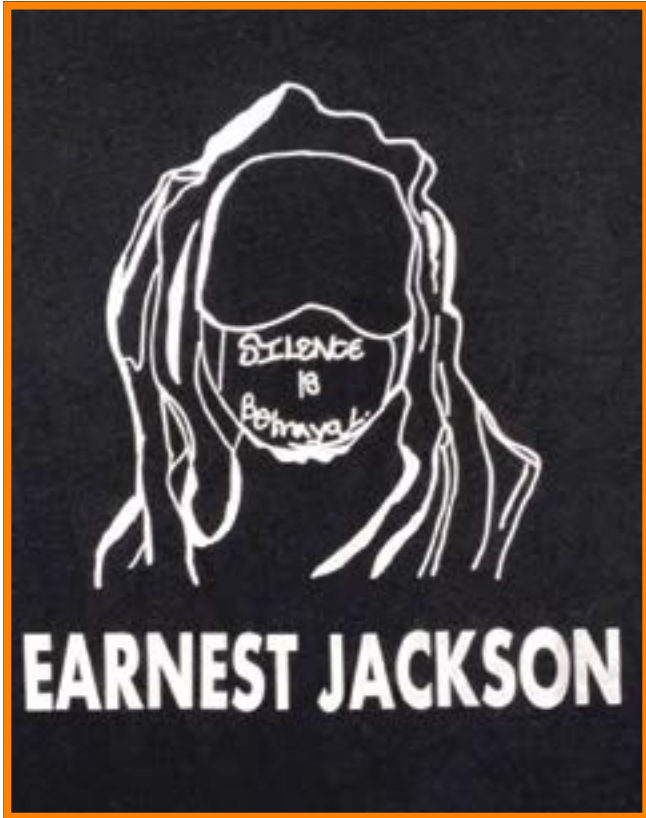
TRANQUILITY

Linda Hartman • Faculty, Business Program Co-Chair



WHO IS EARNEST JACKSON

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer



VISIT SENDEARNESTHOME.COM

REACHING HAPPINESS

Shaima Kari • Student, Academic Transfer



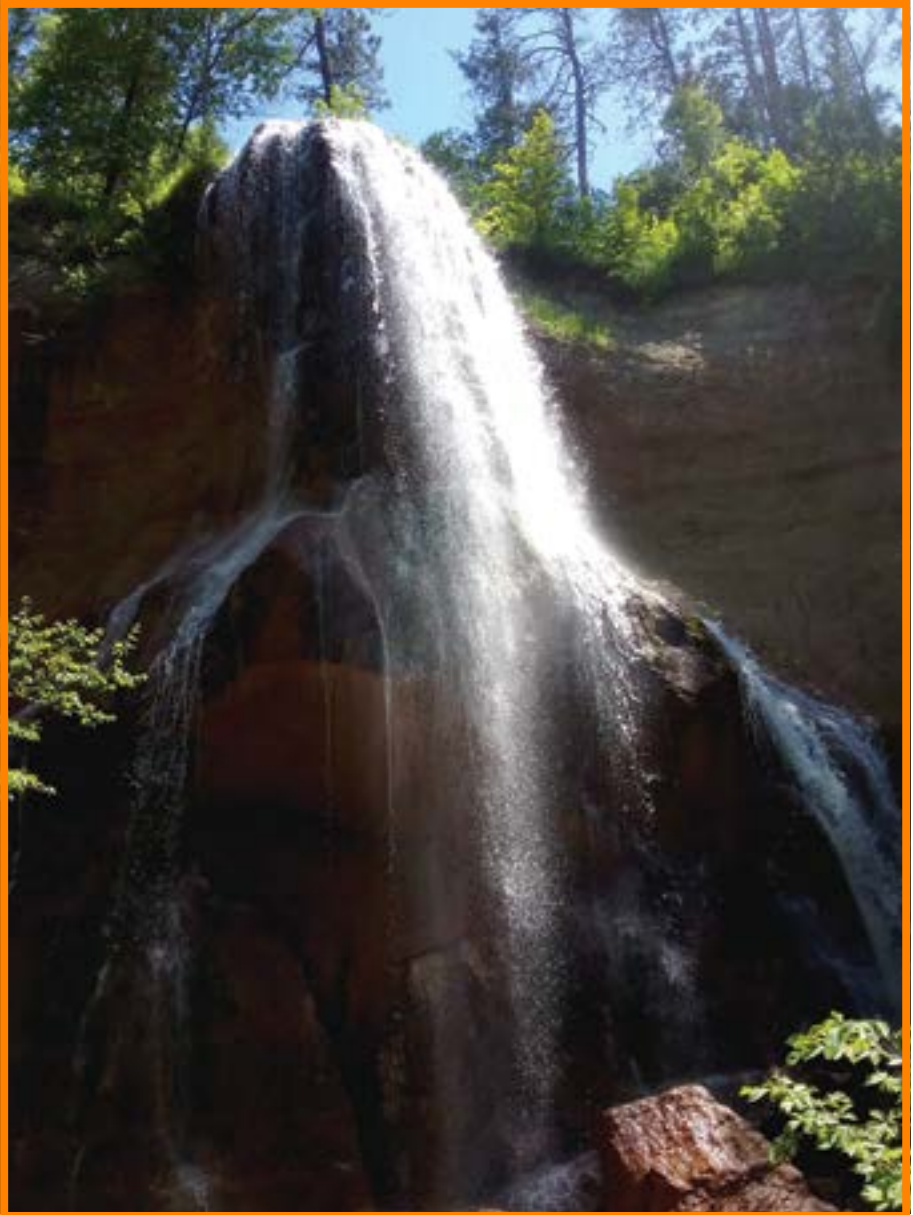
WESTERN STAR

Logan Henson • Student, Continuing Education



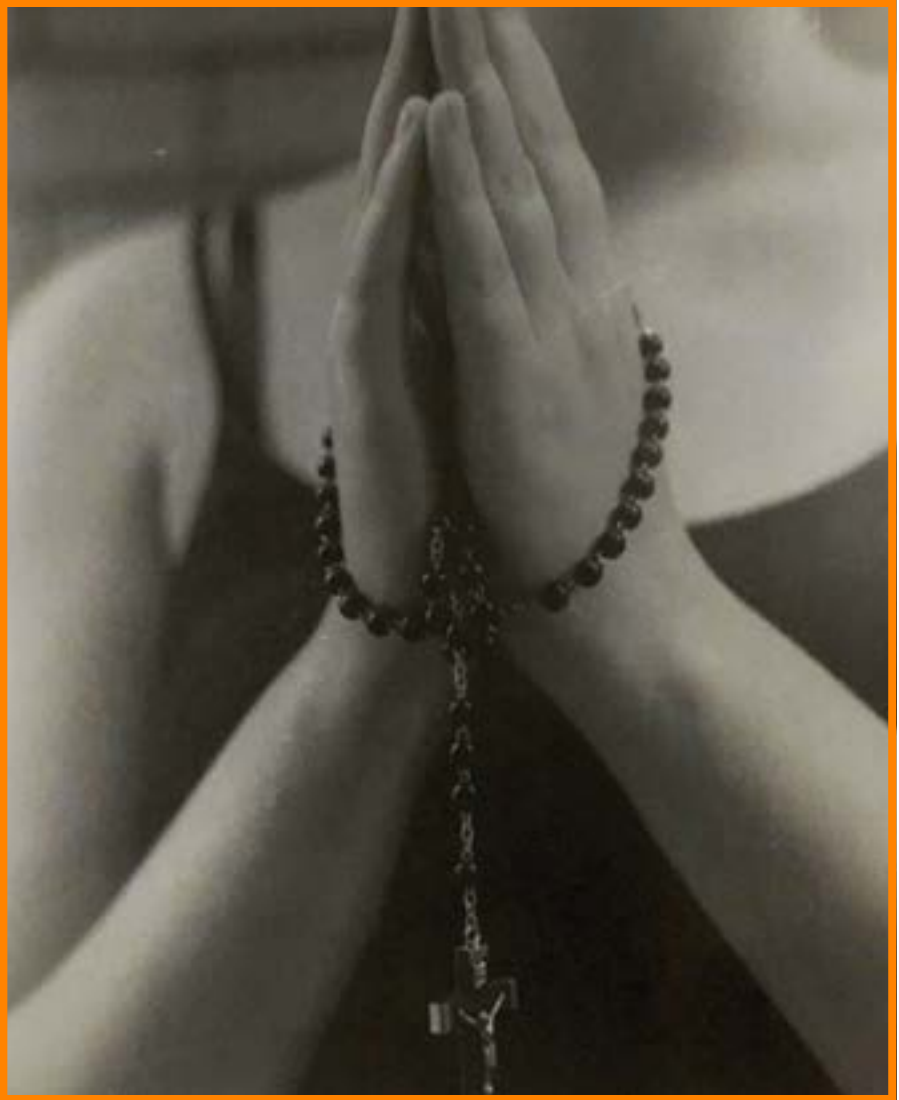
SMITH FALLS

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



MARIA

Dallas Brown • Student, Academic Transfer



SIGNS OF SPRING AT SCC

Tanya Hare • Staff, Student Accounts



BADLANDS, SOUTH DAKOTA

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer



COMMON GROUNDS

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer



PRIDE

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



ABANDONED HOUSE

Dallas Brown • Student, Academic Transfer



FEELING

Shaima Kari • Student, Academic Transfer



PLEASE DO NOT THROW CIGARETTE BUTTS IN URINAL

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



ROADSIDE BLOSSOM

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



SUNSET

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen • Student, Graphic Design



ICE SICKLES

Brittani Salvatore • Student, Academic Transfer



PALE CLEMATIS

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education



COLORFUL THREADS

Onna Carr • Student, Business

1. The crispness of the pre-printed piece of cotton-blend.
2. The varied colors of antique flosses in an array of colors: sky blue, lilac purple, rose pink, verdant green, and sunshine yellow, to name a few.
3. The smoothness of the plastic wrapper for the table runner.
4. The smell of the stitch guide--ink and old paper.
5. The feel of the cross-stitched "X"s and back-stitches of a smooth and solid line against my fingertips.
6. The sounds of my family, talking about ordinary things in the living room--my younger sibling and my mother discussing how my sister's pastry classes on Udemy are going, and what kind of pie she will make next.
7. The ceiling fan above my head, gently circulating the air that stirs my air and cools me with a gentle breeze.
8. The thinness and sharpness of the needle, loaded and poised for action.
9. The repetitive motion of my hands steadily making the stitches.
10. The familial history around this task/hobby that reminds me of my connections to the past and my current moment in the present.



Stitches and Colorful Threads: The Shared Commonality of Four Generations

A pre-printed piece of cotton-blend is very inviting. Antique flosses in an array of colors are just irresistible: always ready for my expression to flow through them. I get most of my floss and some of my pre-printed embroidery projects at thrift shops, flea markets, or antique stores. I began work on my latest embroidery project by carefully removing the table runner from its bag and getting rid of the stitch guide with color suggestions.

The whole idea of an embroidery color guide is reminiscent of a Masterpiece Theatre host, trying to explain what is obvious if the presentation is watched. The whole principle of the Masterpiece Theatre host annoys me to no end (no offense to the hosts, I would just rather see

the actual BBC presentation three minutes sooner and not be made to feel that Masterpiece Theatre believes that viewers cannot come to conclusions unaided. In the same way, color guides annoy me to no end. Color guides and the idea of Masterpiece Theatre hosts were created by similar minds: minds that believe people need help in determining a suitable color scheme or in deciphering a plot or a theme. However, I like to believe that most people are quite capable of choosing their own color schemes and ascertaining the storyline or moral of a film production on their own.

The table runner I am working on is a floral butterfly motif, worked in my chosen color scheme of yellow, purple, pink and greens of various hues. The selected floss for the project is standing at attention in clear, plastic bags, and my needle is loaded and poised for action. I steadily work on the runner, using cross-stitch and backstitch stitches the way my Mama taught me, the way her Grandmother Grace taught her, the way her Scottish mother, Anna (Onna), taught her. At least, I assume Anna taught Grace. Though the years have passed and the hands have changed, the stitches have remained the same, and four generations share not only the commonality of blood, but of hobby. Perhaps, I wonder as I remove a wrapper copyrighted 1921, we even share the same floss. In the end, the whole process of my embroidery projects bring me not only joy; but also, comfort in the continuity of things

NOT WHAT SHE EXPECTED

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

She wears long-sleeves to cover up the scars of self-hate
She coats her face with makeup to cover up a black eye
She wraps a scarf around her neck to hide the handprints
She chopped off all her hair to disguise the bald spot

He calls her stupid, worthless and constantly disrespects her
He wants her to shut up, so he wraps his hands around her throat
He can't stand her presence, so he smacks her around
He wishes she'd disappear so he pulls her hair throwing her to the ground

She thought she married the man of her dreams
But he has become the monster of her nightmares
She thought he loved her more than anything in this world
But he loves everything in this world more than her

He doesn't love her anymore; she doesn't think he ever did
She doesn't mean anything to him, she knows she never did
He hates her for all this time he feels has been wasted
She hates herself for not being what he wants

He blames her for ruining his life, and demeans her daily
She hurts everywhere physically, emotionally, and mentally
He takes pleasure in hurting the one he promised to love and cherish
She's ready to give up, she just wants out, she just wants it to end

BETH'S STORY

John Cook • Student, English

“Remind her of the rules again!” Beth’s mother shouted from somewhere down the hall. The older woman had already reminded Beth of the rules twice this afternoon and at least three times earlier this week, but apparently that was not enough.

“Do I really need to?” Beth’s father asked her quietly enough that her mother could not hear. He had one eyebrow raised and half a smile was trying to etch itself across his face despite his best attempt at a menacing glower.

“Don’t answer the door.” Beth began to rattle off the usual litany of orders, rolling her eyes and flipping her head back and forth as she spoke. “Don’t make any calls unless it’s an emergency. Don’t go out on the balcony, which I can’t because of the stupid lock. And under no circumstances am I allowed to-”

“Enough,” her father interrupted before she could finish. “If your mother hears you talking like that, she’s going to call your grandma. You can spend your evening hearing about ‘The Old Days’, her hip replacement, and how old lady Grierson cheats at Bridge.”

Despite her dad’s attempt at a joke, Beth had to choke down a dose of panic at the thought. This was an impossibly rare opportunity, an evening of freedom like she had not experienced in years. It was the first time her parents were willing to leave her completely unguarded since the day of the change. Two months of detailed planning had gone into making this night happen and the thought of everything falling apart at the last minute sent her heart racing. There was no way to know when another opportunity to be free would present itself; she could not afford to lose this one.

“I’m sorry,” she mumbled, ducking her head demurely while trying to sound sincere. “I’ll be good.”

“Is there a problem?” Her mother asked, suddenly materializing over her father’s shoulder in the doorway. The woman’s long red hair, the same shade as Beth’s, was swept up in an elegant pile atop her head, making her the taller of the pair, while her brightly painted lips were set in a judgmental pucker. It was the same look she always wore when looking at her daughter these days, as if Beth were deliberately trying to ruin her life.

“No,” Beth’s father replied mildly, “we were just going over the rules one last time and I offered to have her grandmother come over if she was worried about being alone.”

BETH'S STORY

"I'll be fine." Beth replied quickly, cutting off the idea before her mother could weigh the value of it. "I've got a date with a book and a bowl of popcorn. I'll probably have more fun than you will at the Gala."

Her mother, a socialite to the core, looked at her like she was crazy but walked away without another word. Her father shot her a conspiratorial wink before following his wife out of the room, politely closing the door as he left. The shutting of the door was not just a kindness, it was a reminder. Even having a door that closed was a privilege, one she had only recently earned and one that could just as easily be taken away again.

Beth dropped to her bed and heaved a sigh of relief, breathing out the fear that had tightened in her chest. As the worry left her body, it was replaced with the familiar urge to do the one thing that was forbidden above all others. With the door closed and her parents distracted, she decided that it was safe enough to enjoy a taste of what the night had in store. She focused her will and pushed herself off the bed with a barely restrained giggle.

The sensation of the blanket beneath her disappeared as she slowly floated up until she could reach out and brush the ceiling with her fingertips. She hovered there, luxuriating in the denial of gravity, and slowly spun in a circle just for the fun of it. It was a risk, even this small moment of joyous defiance. If she were caught using her gift, there would be hell to pay. With a wistful sigh, she gently pushed off of the tiles and let gravity drag her back down to the mattress below.

She had not exactly lied to her father about everything, she had no intention of answering the door or making any calls tonight, those rules would remain unbroken. As for the other two, she had a plan to get past the lock on her balcony door, something that she had been working on for over a week. If it all worked out, no force on earth would keep her from breaking the last stupid rule, she was going to fly.

To keep up her ruse of complacency, Beth slipped on the oversized shirt and comfy shorts she often slept in and made a show of popping a bag of popcorn in the microwave. She even plopped down on the couch with the snack, a soda, and a book that she had already read several times, appearing to settle in like the hermit her parents expected her to be.

"The Gala will be over by 1 AM." Her father mentioned for the fifth time or so as he guided her mother to the door. "I doubt we'll be attending any after-parties but don't wait up."

"Just try to keep it down when you party animals get home." Beth quipped, a hint of her usual snark coloring her tone. Her parents would be suspicious if she were too compliant after all. "I'll probably be here on the couch, sleeping under my book."

"Do try to drag your poor tired body off to bed at a decent time." Her mother fired back. "Your father and I might want to use the couch when we get home." It was the closest thing to a joke the older woman had made since the day Beth learned to fly. Beth was so surprised that her normally reliable wit failed and left her without a comeback.

"I'm locking the door and setting the security system," her father reminded her one last time, though the way he glanced at her mother suggested the comment was for her benefit rather than Beth's. "I'll get an alert if you open the door. If that happens and the place has not burned to the ground by the time I get here, you better have a really good excuse for doing so."

"Don't give her such bad ideas dear," her mother admonished, "she comes up with enough of those on her own."

"Wow, two jokes in one night," Beth could not help but snark back, "that might be a record for you." She knew that talking back was a bad idea, but her pride would not let the comment slide without retort.

The pursed lips of judgment returned, and her mother looked as if she were about to say something more cutting and harsh. Instead, she surprised Beth by closing her eyes and taking a deep calming breath before speaking.

"I know you hate the rules, I don't blame you for that." She finally said, her voice so deceptively calm that the room seemed to cool around her words. "It is our job as parents to protect you, even from yourself. If I have to be the villain to keep you safe, then so be it. Someday, I hope that you'll see that everything we've done has been for good reason. The world is a dangerous place and there will always be consequences for your actions. If the worst thing to happen is that you end up hating me, I'll consider all of our sacrifices worthwhile."

Beth was prepared for an exchange of barbs - it was their customary way of communicating after all - so this change of tactics caught her completely off guard. Her tongue seemed frozen in place as her mother walked away without waiting for a response. Her father's face spoke of sorrow and disappointment as he followed his wife out the door. Beth knew how he hated the way they fought but he had learned a long time ago there was no point in trying to put a stop to it, neither of them appreciated his interference.

Beth spent the next ten minutes laying on the couch, pretending to read her book just in case one of them came back for some reason. She did not really expect them to return, not after her mother's grand imperious exit, but she did not want to risk being wrong. The longer she sat thinking about her mother's final comment, the angrier she grew. How dare she act as if her life was full of sacrifices; she had not spent the last year and a half as a prisoner in her own home. It was easy to talk about consequences when you

were the one handing them out all the time. Her mother had missed out on a few parties and social networking events, Beth had missed out on nearly two years of her life.

After what felt like an eternity, she decided it was safe, she was finally alone. Her anger shifted to excited anticipation as she leapt to her feet. No snippy comment from her mother was going to ruin her night, not this time. Leaving her props on the couch, she began shedding her clothes as she floated down the hallway six inches above the floor. The PJs were tossed on her bed for later as she yanked open her closet and rummaged for the secret box hidden on the top shelf. The box held her real outfit for the night, an all-black ensemble she had carefully picked out and hidden away from her parents' prying eyes. It was a simple outfit really, just black jeans and boots with a plain tee under a loose fitting black hooded leather jacket. Despite what her mother might think, Beth was not an idiot. She understood that people were likely to freak out if they saw a girl flying through the city. The dark clothes would help her blend in with the night sky while still being normal enough to let her land and walk around unnoticed if she were so inclined.

Once dressed for her night above the town, Beth pulled the last hidden item from the box, a slim leather lockpicking case. It had taken her some time to find a place who would sell the picks to someone without a locksmithing license, but she eventually found a dodgy site that sold gray and black market items for an exorbitant price. Then it was simply a matter of having them shipped to her giftwrapped inside an ugly green sweater so she could claim they were a present from her somewhat senile grandmother. The old lady was as sweet as her daughter was bitter, but she was really bad with remembering holidays, this was not the first time such a present had arrived out of the blue.

Beth had started looking for the picks online the same day her father put the lock on her balcony door. That had been six months ago, the last time they caught her sneaking outside without permission. She had not even been flying at the time, just hovering a few inches off the ground with her eyes closed, trying to pretend like it was enough. Despite her protests and promises, her parents decided she could not be trusted, and the lock was soon installed. As far as Beth was concerned, it would have been kinder to brick up the wall completely. Instead, they left her last little square of freedom just inches away, silently mocking her from the other side of the glass.

As difficult as the picks were to obtain, learning how to use them properly was surprisingly easy. There were several video tutorials available online, most presented as teaching guides for locksmiths in training. Beth studiously absorbed every video she could find and practiced her skills on an old padlock she found in a drawer until she felt that she was ready for the real thing. In what she deemed an impressive amount of self-control,

the lock on her door had remained untouched the entire time. Her mother made a show of examining it every so often and Beth did not want to risk drawing attention by messing with it before she was ready.

Waiting until tonight to try the lock was risky too, it would be more difficult than the practice one she was so familiar with. What if there was something different about the newer lock that made it harder to open? It did not look much different than the other one, just shinier and a bit bigger maybe, but she still worried about the possibility every time she thought about making her grand escape.

That fear haunted her thoughts once again as Beth knelt in front of the lock and began plying her newly learned skills. She worked the long slim metal picks into the barrel and carefully maneuvered them back and forth, a twist here, a jiggle there, trying to slide each tumbler into place one at a time. There was no way to see into the tiny slit of a keyhole as she worked, so she closed her eyes to better focus on hearing and touch. Time passed, but Beth had no idea how much, her entire world was the cool bits of steel in her hands and what she could feel on the other end of them. Finally, the last tumbler fell into place and the lock sprung open with an audible click. The room was so silent that the small noise sounded like a gunshot to her ears, the crack of a starting pistol releasing a runner from the block.

With suddenly trembling fingers, Beth pulled the padlock free from its mounting and dropped it to the floor. Slowly, still not quite believing her plan had worked, she grasped the door handle and pulled. The door stuck for a moment, unused to moving after so long, but then it popped free and slid open, allowing the sounds and smells of the city to come rushing in on the cool evening breeze.

From the moment Beth had discovered her ability to fly, her parents had done everything in their power to keep her grounded. Whenever she protested her loss of freedom, they would warn her of the possible consequences should she be discovered. They never explained exactly what those consequences might be, only suggesting that they would be more horrific than Beth could imagine.

At first, Beth feared those unnamed consequences and accepted the need to hide her gift. As time passed, she came to resent her parents for making her suffer under their burdensome new rules. Now, as the breeze caressed her skin and the countless scents that made up the cologne of the city reached her nostrils, she realized that the consequences simply did not matter. The only thing that mattered was her chance to be free. Free to fly.

When she dreamt of this moment, Beth liked to imagine herself strolling gracefully onto the balcony like a queen arriving at court. She thought of how she would behave responsibly, taking the time to look around and make sure she was unobserved while savoring the moment before taking

flight. If asked later, she would have claimed to do exactly that. Of course, it would have been a lie.

With a laugh of uncontainable glee, Beth leapt to her feet and ran headlong through the open door. It was only a few short steps to the railing, which she leapt over in a wild swan dive like she had a death wish. She had no idea if anybody saw her and, honestly, she could no longer pretend to care.

The winds reached up to catch her as she leapt, and her fall quickly turned into a looping climb as she soared gracefully into the night sky above. Gravity tried to pull her down to earth but she simply refused to give in to the demand. What was a law to most was merely a suggestion for her, one she had no intention of obeying tonight. Instead, she pushed ever higher until the entire city was spread out before her, a vista of lights so far below they seemed to mirror the stars above.

Beth hung motionless for a time, spinning slowly in place as the wind tugged playfully at her clothes and whipped her long red hair around her face. Hot tears slid down her cheeks to be blown away by the wind that swirled around her. A sob caught in her throat as the beauty of the moment threatened to overwhelm her. She felt as if she had been trapped under water, on the verge of drowning, and this moment was like that first desperate gasp of air as she finally managed to break the surface.

Eventually, she shook her head and wiped away the tears with a deeply satisfying sigh. As beautiful as the city was from up here, this was not what she wanted to do with her night of freedom. Floating up here, so far removed from everything below, was not much different than being locked away in her room. She did not want to drift above the city, she wanted to be a part of it. With a whooping battle cry, she dove back towards the earth.

For the next few hours Beth pushed herself to draw out every last wisp of pleasure her gift had to offer. She chased the winds as they whipped around the towering buildings, tearing through the man made ravines faster than the drones and air cars trundling along below her. Her body twisted impossibly sharp corners and slid through alleys so narrow she could reach out and touch both walls at once. The paths she flew were meandering and chaotic, twisting trails punctuated with diving loopbacks and abrupt stops for no other reason than because she could.

Occasionally a lit up window might catch her eye and she would take a peek inside to see how other people lived. She never watched for long though, partly out of fear of being seen and partly because it felt so invasive. Privacy was one of the most precious freedoms she lost when her gift emerged and it felt dirty somehow to steal that privilege from others, even if they did not know she was doing it.

As the night grew late, lights began to wink out one by one until the

towers were little more than shadowy monoliths; dark prisons haunted by the ghosts of people whose only hope for escape came in their dreams. The growing quiet of the sleeping towers filled Beth with a morbid sense of melancholy, both for the sleeping denizens who would never taste true freedom and for herself as she realized her night was also nearing its end.

The hours had, quite literally, flown by as she reveled in the glory of being free. A glance at her watch confirmed that it was well past midnight, her parents would be returning soon, and she had to be there when they arrived home. If they discovered what she had done, Beth was certain they would find a way to punish her and make sure it never happened again. Yet, despite the growing pressure to return to her room, Beth hesitated. The thought of willingly stepping inside and clicking the lock shut on her door made her blood run cold and filled her throat with bile. If not for the fact that she could escape again so long as she did not get caught, she might well have defied her own best interests and stayed out until morning.

Before turning in for the night, there was just one more thing she had to do. It would not take too long; she could do this one thing and still be tucked under her blankets by 1 am. The open sky above seemed to call out to her, coaxing her up out of the shadows to come touch the stars. She had learned how fast she could fly, now she needed to know just how high.

Beth shot up into the beckoning sky, racing towards the twinkling stars above with a peel of laughter. As she climbed the cool breeze around her took on an icy bite, nipping playfully at her exposed hands and face. Another bubbling laugh escaped her lips as the frosty winds scraped against her bare skin, balancing the burning feeling of pure joy in her core.

The higher she flew, the less she worried about her parents and the dire consequences they liked to hold over her. This was what it felt like to truly live, the perfect bliss of freedom, and no punishment could be harsh enough to make her regret her decisions. Nothing in the world could ruin this perfect moment.

Then she realized that there was something wrong.

The stars directly above were somehow becoming brighter as she climbed, growing from pinpricks of light to perfect circles as wide as her palm. Beth understood how stars worked, they should not look any closer this high up than they did standing on the ground. Yet, they kept growing as she climbed, becoming the size of a baseball, a softball, a volleyball, and then a basketball in quick succession. The nearest orb was approaching the size of a beach ball when she finally began to understand why it was growing so fast. What looked like a star from a distance was actually just a circle of light emitting from a massive screen.

At first, she tried to deny what she was seeing, imagining it must be a hallucination. Perhaps she was suffering from a lack of oxygen or some

such issue. Mountain climbers were supposed to have trouble breathing on the highest mountains, at least in the movies, and she was definitely flying well above the tallest peaks. Except she did not feel dizzy or short of breath and her thoughts were clear, it was only her eyes that seemed to be playing tricks.

A growing sense of foreboding sent a tremor of terror down her spine as she slowly reached up to touch the glowing surface. Her fingers slid across smooth cool glass humming with the faintest sense of power just under the surface. It felt exactly like touching the monitor screen in her bedroom, the window into the world that always taunted her with videos and images of places she could never reach. She jerked her fingers back as if the glass had burned and clutched them to her chest with a choking sob.

“This can’t be happening.” She choked out. “There has to be a way through.” She reached out again, this time pushing against the glass as hard as she could. The screen stubbornly refused to budge, no matter how hard she struggled against it. Punching it only hurt her hand while kicking only left a slight scuff mark on the smooth surface. If it were actually glass, it must have been too thick for her to break.

Giving up on the idea of brute force, Beth pulled back and considered other options. If she could not get through the barrier, perhaps she could find a way around it. Perhaps she had simply chosen a bad spot to fly up and run into some sort of hi-tech observation tower or something. She had heard of things like that before in sci-fi movies but maybe they were based on real secret technology.

Picking a direction at random, she started flying along close enough to the screen to notice when she reached the edge. She flew slowly at first, convinced the platform - or whatever it was - could not be that large, but no edge materialized above her. As panic started to set in, she picked up speed until she was racing faster than she had ever flown before. She was out past the edge of the city in a matter of moments and yet the barrier remained. Before long she realized that the screen had begun to gently curve down towards the ground below, driving her lower in the process. She followed the slope as it steepened until she was flying in a near nose-dive towards the dark ground somewhere below. Sensing the earth rushing up to meet her, she slowed her descent and begrudgingly flipped around until her toes pointed down. A moment later, for the first time since leaping from her balcony, Beth found herself standing on solid ground. The barrier had no edge, or at least none that she could see. As near as she could tell, the entire city was trapped under a giant dome.

Nothing made sense about this. Nobody had ever mentioned a dome over the city, not once in her entire life. This was not the kind of thing a person might forget about; it was no passing bit of unimportant trivia. How could something like this exist and she not know? Did other people know about

it? Was this why her parents tried to keep her from flying?

Hours passed as Beth tried to grapple with the fact that everything she thought she knew was a lie. She punched the wall until her knuckles bled then slid down to lean against it and cry. At one point, she leapt into the air and flew along the bottom edge, desperately looking for a hidden door, but a sense of defeat overtook her before she was even a quarter of the way around. There was not going to be a door, not one that she could find anyway. Why would someone put a dome over an entire city, go to all the trouble of making it invisible, and then add an exit that somebody could stumble on in the dark?

She thought about going home to confront her parents and demand answers. They had to be home by now, it was nearly dawn, they would be waiting up to catch trying to sneak back in. Only, what if they did not know about the dome? If not, they would never believe her story. She had lied and snuck out; they would assume she was lying again to avoid punishment.

Emotionally lost and unsure what to do next, Beth launched herself into the sky once again. She flew back towards the city but climbed high enough to stay well above it as she approached. The anger and tears had left her feeling worn down and hollow inside, she found herself longing for her bed. Before she could rest however, there was one last thing to do; she wanted to watch the sun rise.

One last vague and desperate hope had crept into the back of her mind as she flew, an idea so ridiculous that it felt foolish to even consider it. Yet, like a drowning victim flailing in the ocean, she reached for this single bit of flotsam and clung to it with all her might. As insane as it sounded, what if the dome only covered the city at night?

Such a thing would explain why people did not know about the dome, or at least why they did not talk about it. Perhaps it was some kind of security system for the city; a protective bubble that formed at night and then vanished like magic in the light of day. If she waited just a few more minutes, she might even get to watch it disappear. Maybe her freedom was not a lie after all.

The change from night into day was subtle at first, the fake sky above her slowly turned from the darkest blue to shades of purple. Eventually, the pretend stars began to fade into the background as purple bled into red at the far edge of the world. Finally, the first golden curve of the sun peeked out over the distant horizon. A new day had begun, a horrific digitally created day. The dome had not vanished with the rising sun, the morning sky was just as false as the night had been. The final bit of hope died in her chest, burned away to ash in the faux morning light.

Staring down at the city as stirred to life below her, Beth felt broken inside. Tears blurred her vision, turning the sunrise into a golden

BETH'S STORY

kaleidoscope of lies. Her chest tightened until it was almost impossible to draw a breath and her heart felt as if it struggled to beat. The tiredness from before turned to outright exhaustion so intense that it was an effort to wipe the tears from her eyes. This was not just a physical weariness from staying up all night, but the bone deep soul crushing ache of an athlete who has reached the absolute end of their endurance.

She had dreamt of flying free for the last two years, fought for it, plotted for it, even lied to her family for it. All of it was meaningless, a pointless waste of time and effort. Freedom was only an illusion; no more real than the video screen sunrise before her. She had not escaped at all, only traded her little cage for a bigger one.

The small effort it took to deny physics became suddenly unbearable, as if she were trying to hold an entire mountain in her hands. Like that athlete at the end of their endurance, her body trembled with weakness; she could go no further, the finish line was beyond her reach. Gravity - that inevitable force she had mocked so often before - once more asserted itself. A final tear rolled down her cheek as she closed her eyes and let out a sigh of release.

She let go of the mountain and fell.

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

There are times when a feeling consumes you to the point of disrepair
When you can't see because your eyes are swimming in salt and water
You're barely holding it inside as your shoulders sag with a surrender
Seconds feel like ages each heartbeat signals a parade of quakes

Hard work seems meaningless in the face of inexperience
Vulnerable embodiment leads to unexpected rejection
Saying why try because it's impossible to comprehend
Collapsing of lungs incapable of breath through despair

Negativity sucks out any hope of possible success
Shivering against the chills of icy desperation
No room for planting dreams of future achievements
Drowning in inescapable fear filled thoughts and emotions

Nowhere is safe from the enemy's oppositional attacks
Escape is futile, doesn't matter how far you try to run
Discovery is imminent no hiding place will provide enough cover
Doubt sticks to every cell and every piece of your DNA

Foreboding emptiness controls every fiber of our being
Without lubrication we are frozen with fear and anxiety
Directionless we have no place to go no one to find
It's time to just give up the oars and drift into oblivion

CAFFEINE & EXISTENTIAL DREAD

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

After the smooth, black surface of my morning dose of coffee
Is perturbed by a tiny drop of cream,
For the *briefest* moment,
These exquisite spiral galaxies emerge at their admixture,

And then they're gone.

Humanity itself is no different,
Just a brief, complex state of affairs,
Existing at the boundary between two things.

COUPLING

Rachel Hruza • Faculty, English

The pairs of shoes on my closet floor curve
in opposing directions,
but when one goes the other goes with it,
fixed like the duct taped-antennae on top of an old television
balanced and refusing to touch,

or the scissors that must meet if they are to cut,
to commiserate and separate what is before them.
And my right eye can never catch the periphery
without the other one watching as well.

Hearts beat in a pattern of two, sometimes missing
a step, like a breath followed by a slight pause,
then the exhale of carbon dioxide that needs two
atoms of oxygen in order to exist.

A DREAM OR TWO

Isabel Anderson • Student, Academic Transfer

I know you have nightmares,
I have seen them too
This is not just the mind's planned departures
Just thoughts crashing into

Iron and eyelashes, love long past.
We have drowned the world together
And your thoughts will be the thing that last
Now surrender the monster,

within the mind's unseeing eye
I have seen it too
don't be shy
I know it to be true

I know that death
is not what haunts you

STAINED GLASS

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

I have always been made of glass. Beautiful, colored glass. Ugly, clouded panes. Crystal that refracts the light into a thousand shapes. I am made of glass, and everyone else I know is a mural, each pane a memory or characteristic or lesson, every shard something unique or congruent.

Everyone I knew was a mural of stained glass, and I wanted to copy their mosaics.

In 4th grade, I would flap my hands when I was excited. Or stressed. Or afraid. Or whenever I felt a strong emotion. It was a relief to express the tension from the buildup of emotion. To hear the tinkle of colliding glass fragments, like crystal windchimes.

In 4th grade, I was standing in line for lunch. The cafeteria was cold, beckoning goosebumps and frosting each pane, and the air was thick with the scent of boiled broccoli. The fluorescent lights washed out the area in a watery glow, reflecting off the tile. The sunlight from the door reflected brighter, blinding, brilliant. The volume of the lunchtime conversations was almost too loud, wildly distracting, and wildly exciting, and I had just received incredible news; we were having a cookie with lunch. As a 4th grader, this was the best news I could have received, so of course, I flapped my hands, bounced on the balls of my feet, exclaimed my enthusiasm to my friends. The clatter of crystal rang in my head. Another classmate stared at me.

“What are you doing? Stop it, you’re being autistic, you weirdo. Only Seth does that.”

I don’t have autism, but Seth, a boy a grade below us, did. And whenever he felt a strong emotion, he flapped his hands too, and I’m sure whatever panes of glass or crystal he had twinkled and glittered too.

Every child tried to break his glass, destroy the panes that made him different. There was no greater crime than the crime of failing to align oneself with the impossible standards of everyone else. Seth was thus a criminal, and his sentence was social ostracization and otherwise solitude. The silent decay of vitric in isolation. They were cruel to that boy, and anyone like him. It was found in Seth’s solitude at lunch. It was in the threats and insults hurled at him when no one would hear. It was the constant slew of toxicity, from any student, from any grade.

“Little autistic bitch.” Perhaps it was a snicker in the hallway, a shove in class.

“Stupid fucking retard.” It was snarled, a lash of irritation.

“God, don’t talk to him. He’s incompetent.” A quick summary. Straightforward. Exasperated.

“Don’t be autistic.” A warning.

“You’re being autistic.” An observation.

“Stop being autistic.” A threat.

They hounded him like wolves, and I was desperate to escape their snapping jaws. I never knew ‘autistic’ or ‘autism’ to be anything but a slur, the gravest insult. I never knew it to be anything but bad, and I was desperate to be normal and accepted. I was desperate to copy their mosaics.

I slowly lowered my hands, and slowly flakes broke off, decaying in winter sunlight and fluorescents. They glittered in the air like suspended snowflakes, and slowly fluttered down in larger and larger fragments until entire crystals broke away and shattered on the floor. I turned away and let the chatter of the cafeteria fill my ears. I didn’t flap my hands again. They were too fragile, then, to clang together and make their lovely windchime song, so I instead shoved them into my pockets, and I fell silent. God forbid I be lumped in with the ‘others.’ The freakshows. Kids were cruel. We were cruel.

It was still freezing in the cafeteria, with brilliant sunshine reflecting off the tile, reflecting off glass. I shattered a pane that encased a chamber of my heart. It had still been soft and warm, malleable from the glassblowing heat of youth. Something brittle and grey replaced it, etched with spiderweb veins and the skeletal fingers of elementary winter.

In 6th grade, I would hold my sister’s hand. I always did, even before 4th grade, when we first started going to public school. I always held her hand, because why wouldn’t I? I loved her. I went with her everywhere, holding her hand. We were each other’s moral support. She struggled with navigating the school, so I walked with her. I was clingy, so she walked with me. In 6th grade, I was walking with my sister to one of our classes. Our hands were pentagons of pale pink glass, our fingers- her fingers- prongs of still-glowing crystal while mine were rough stumps, and sometimes I thought our digits to fuse together, each of us a part of the other. I swung her hand and bounced a little, grinning as I made my way down the hall. I was stopped by a few classmates.

“Why are you holding her hand? That’s weird. It’s like you love her.”

I did. I said that I do. I was confused. I didn’t understand what I was doing wrong. Which standard I failed to conform to.

“No, it’s like you, LOVE love her. Are you guys going to get married? That’s so gross, you guys are sisters.”

STAINED GLASS

I was embarrassed. Of course, it was wrong of me to fail to recognize the inherent absurdity of showing affection towards my own sister. I gave her hand a little squeeze, but a few shards of glass broke off and fell away.

I still held her hand often. Through the halls, as we left classes. Still, we got comments.

“That’s weird.”

“Are you guys lesbians?”

“Knock it off! You aren’t supposed to hold hands, that’s so weird! No one else does that.”

We held hands. I held her hand tight. I never let go until I let her hand drop from mine. I let her hand go and didn’t hold it again. I didn’t want to be made fun of anymore. Kids were cruel. We were cruel. The glass of my palms ground down, powdery and fine. I snapped off my crystal stumps and left fragile wire in the ragged planes.

In junior high, I wore t-shirts and shorts. Everyone did. I was always cold. But in junior high, I was wearing a T-shirt. I started to receive comments.

“Do you eat?” Curious.

“Are you anorexic or something?” Concerned.

“Dude, you’re so thin. I could literally, like, snap you in half, y’know?” Taunting.

“Oh my God, your wrists are so thin, they’re like toothpicks. I could just crack you over my knee.” Derisive.

“Who’s that flat, fuckin’- alien girl over there?”

That one hurt.

I started wearing sweatshirts. I covered up. I wore sweaters in June, and jeans in July. I didn’t take pictures and I didn’t look at them. I couldn’t stop looking in mirrors, but I felt sick when seeing my reflection. Carefully, I tinkered away at the glass on my extremities. I removed each fragment with tweezers, took a blowtorch to the stubborn shards, and I melted the glass into something wicked and sharp. I slotted in different shades of stained glass, and some of it was wild with a bubbled pattern, with angry and jagged lines and breaks, and sometimes it was dark, deep red, sometimes it was dark and muddy, sometimes it was pale and ghostly, but never a lovely shade.

Kids were cruel; it was normal, surely, to retain every bad habit and every insult ever received, to base my identity on it and resign myself to my lot.

I continue to retain these habits, so deeply instilled in me. I contain my emotions. I shy from touch. My arms are always feeling too exposed. But as glass can be wicked and sharp, it can be beautiful and lovely as well. I remember the hurtful things I've been told, but likewise, recall the kindness I've been showed and the sweet things I've been told.

"Oh, dear, your hair is so pretty."

I'd been working my shift at my job, only a few months ago, letting an older woman into the fitting room. I shied from the compliment, smiling, hot in the face. She sighed ruefully.

"It isn't fair. You're so fortunate to have such beautiful hair." The woman had smiled, melancholic and bittersweet before disappearing behind the door. And so, I keep my hair long, glass threads that captured the light and reflected it, golden brilliance.

"Your hands are so lovely." It was many years ago my mother had told me this, and I was no older than nine. She clicked her tongue and shook her head.

"If you grew your nails out- they would be so pretty, Rebecca."

So, I grew my nails long, taking care when cutting and trimming them. Like icicles, they became delicate and beautiful, daggers of glass with frail beauty.

And as I change my parts for other people, I take parts of others as well. I click my nails together as my mother does. I amble aimlessly when brushing my teeth or speaking on the phone like my father. I laugh like my sister. I write like a hundred nameless faces across the continent. I shake my head to clear hair out of my face, even when there is none, like a boy I used to know. I copy these small pieces and slide them into place. I take these habits and make them fit.

I am a mosaic of every hurtful comment, every compliment, and every insult. Bad habits linger with me as fissures in the panes, as does someone's kindness and encouragement- a strengthening element, staining the glass something brilliant. I have been cruel, and others have been cruel in return. I am stained glass, and pieces of others color the panes. I am a sum of my parts and more, and I am a sum of everyone else's parts. I am a mosaic of everyone I love and hate, people I've never known. I am stained glass, and my pieces have been broken or cracked or melted by others, in the same way I have taken pieces from others and cherished them.

I am made of stained glass, and I am a mosaic of everyone I know.

SUNSETS AND REGRETS

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

One constellation
Two stars
You love me infinitely
But I'm still out of your reach
So close
Yet so far
We sail on endlessly
Like the ocean beneath
I'm wrapped in the sun's embrace
While dreaming of the moon's face
I don't mind his dark side
He pulls me in like the tide
If I had it my way
I'd have both night and day
I'll meet you at the horizon
Where all of the lies end
A stellar collision
Our souls fused together
We'll burn bright forever
Or turn into stardust

THEM

Easton Dodson • Student, Academic Transfer

I remember the day I first met you
Your beautiful brown eyes make me fall deeply
I remember the sky on the first night you said you loved me
I remember telling myself that I would always love you
And it is true
From the millions of shining stars to sunsets on the beach
I find more peace within you than anywhere else I could be
The way you would smile at me made me feel complete
I looked for you in everyone else
Trying to forget
But you were always there
Your smile and laugh lingering in the back of my mind
And it still makes my heart skip a beat

HANGING LIGHTS

Rachel Hruza • Faculty, English

We say every year
we should
buy new strands
and not risk
the old ones
flashing on, only
to burn out later,
but it is not about
waste we are concerned.

The bulbs dangle
from the eaves
and the wind blows,
leaving us
to hope they
will still shine
through ice
and snow.

PIECES OF MY PAST

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

I'm letting go of the pieces of my past
And all of the seasons never meant to last
I'll let them blow in the breeze
And scatter across the grass
Burn the bridges to nowhere
Then watch as they turn to ash
If every leaf was an unpleasant memory
I'd watch them all die and just laugh
As they fall down from the tree
If every branch was a version of me
I'd snap each one in half
Because I'm not who I used to be

A DECEIVINGLY IDEAL COLLEGE PLAN

Carely Adame-Ortiz • Student, Land Surveying/Civil Engineering/GIS Technology

Imagine seeing an honor graduate with a perfect plan for her future. Short, with dark brown hair, and dressed in casual clothes from a small-town high school. That's me. I was so determined that a four-year college was for me. I had applied to the College of Engineering- undecided at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. Shortly, summer ended, sprouting mixed emotions. I was flustered with the thought of leaving my hometown but felt eager to get to explore this new chapter of my life. Little did I know it was the beginning of an extensive, gloomy dark path. My perfect plan was vanishing minute by minute.

The sound of success at UNL followed me everywhere until I started Calculus I. I was an honor graduate expected to succeed in all of my classes. I did succeed in my Theatre and Human Geography classes. But for Calculus, I spent endless nights trying to put the pieces together. I would attend all of my professor's office hours, hoping a miracle would occur. After countless office hours, I knew I was lost. The class was causing me to be miserable. When I started noticing that chunks of my hair would fall out, my smile was forced, and I simply wasn't happy. I tried convincing myself that I would get through this. I would tell myself, "You were able to get through many challenges. This isn't going to be impossible to get through." Eventually, I started staying at my friend's dorm to see if it would make a difference. The dark gloomy path started forming, pulling me away from my perfect plan, but a bright light was still in sight.

After a long, stressful night of doing homework at my friend's dorm, the sun slowly rose as I woke up shivering. I quickly jumped off the dorm room bed, ready to start working on the homework of the day. I was finishing an essay for my Quality of the Environment class. Shortly, I had to start working on Calculus I. My professor had office hours that day. My light bulb flickered on, thinking it was a good idea to connect to his zoom office hours. Time was ticking slowly as my turn to get help felt eternal. Eventually, it was my turn. I shared my questions with my professor. Immediately his mean/rude side came out. He said, " You should go back to Pre-calculus because you don't understand anything." I was filled with anger and disappointment. My face felt warm as my eyes started forming tears of anger. Immediately, I started filling out an admissions application to Southeast Community College. I commented to my friend that, was the last straw. I was transferring out of the University of Lincoln. In-depth, I explained my situation to my friend. She recommended that I should speak to my advisor about it. As soon as she mentioned that, I emailed my advisor. The dark gloomy path diverged rapidly, not leaving any light in sight.

It was time to Zoom with my advisor about my situation. I spoke to her about transferring out of UNL and withdrawing from Calculus I. She suddenly became a machine of fundamental questions. Finally, an agreement arose among all those questions. I withdrew from Calculus I and started the process of transferring to Southeast Community College. My main goal now was to pass my other classes. I was able to effortlessly pass them now that Calculus I didn't entangle my thoughts. Although it felt as if everything was perfect again, I still needed to converse with my parents about transferring to SCC.

Countless days of reflection led to a thoughtful plan of how I would articulate to my parents that UNL wasn't making me happy. My first step was to tell my mom and then my dad. I chose my mom first because I didn't want my dad to be disappointed with my decision. I directed my mom to her room as I slowly rehearsed in my head what I was going to tell her. The initiation of an overwhelming conversation ended up being very comforting. But the hardest part was approaching me as a lion getting ready to snatch its prey. This conversation was more intimidating because I was continuing my education for my parents, particularly my dad. My dad's biggest dream was to attend school in the United States. My parents left Mexico so their children could have a better life. I would think to myself the struggle I am having right now is nothing compared to what my parents experienced coming to this country. I couldn't sleep without the thought that I was going to disappoint my dad.

That day started sprinting toward me. I finally spoke to my dad. Surprisingly, he told me to do whatever made me happy. I was not expecting that. I expected a whole pep talk about how I was making a mistake. The elongated dark gloomy path I thought I was on had a spot of light in it.

Although conversing with my dad went extremely well, I still needed to decide which program I was going into. As my head tried putting pieces together a dark, thick, and thunderous cloud hindered me. I had to make a big decision. It was as if the Land Surveying/GIS/Civil Engineering and the Heating, ventilation, and air condition programs were in a tug of war. I was in the middle of that never-ending war. This led me to extensive concentrated research on both programs. I was able to get more information on the Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning program than Land Surveying/GIS/ Civil Engineering. I decided to apply to the HVAC program.

After applying to the HVAC program, I was filled with a handful of questions. Why did you choose HVAC? Are you sure that's what you want to do for the rest of your life? What exactly will you do once you graduate? These questions came from an important person in my life, my older sister. Once she questioned me, I had no idea how to answer her questions, but I improvised based on the research I'd done. Little did she know that her questions were taking me to a blank sheet of paper. Her questions led me to that dark gloomy path again where it now felt as if I was walking

backward. A few weeks later, I got accepted into the HVAC program. I was jumping up and down with excitement but, deep down I knew that I didn't know if I still wanted to pursue HVAC. Time flashed before my eyes. I was asked if I could babysit two kids Monday through Saturday.

Babysitting was appealing to me. I loved taking care of my cousins. Little did I know that it was the worst decision. I woke up at 7 am and left at 6 pm. The first few days weren't as I expected. The mom told me, "Give him everything he desires." I tried to obey him as much as I could. I felt as if my head was going to explode. My sanity was so close to walking out of the door. At that point, I was glad that I didn't major in Education because in high school I wanted to be a teacher. When I sat next to this kid as he watched *Paw Patrol*, an outburst of thoughts made way to my brain. I also wanted to be a nurse in high school, but I didn't think I could handle watching my patients die. I was radically puzzled, reflecting on switching to Radiology Technology. My first step was to initiate prolonged research. I encountered plenty of information luring me to deviate. Pondering my research, I knew I would be able to help the Hispanic community. This convinced me to explore the requirements for the Radiology Technology program. The program had extensive requirements that I didn't think I met. Cheerless, I held back from making a sudden move.

After not having success, I questioned whether I should persist in my education, this caused the thundering cloud to pour endlessly on the path I'd planned. It felt as if my ancestors were apprehensive as they put their eyes upon me humiliated. It was significant for me to persevere in my education. I didn't want my parents to endure the thought that the path they embarked on wasn't worth it. In a blink of an eye, I resolved that my best bet was to quit babysitting. Once I quit, it was astonishing to see how blissful I was. New opportunities were heading my way. One of them was meeting my college advisor.

My college advisor at SCC was the most comprehensive person I met during my career path. I couldn't imagine finding the best fit for me without her. The first time I met her, I didn't expect her to be welcoming. Her sweet and comforting voice told me to imagine which program I envisioned myself in. I had no idea what I wanted. We met a few more times slowly leading me to make my final decision. She helped build the person I am today. Her guidance provided me with a sense that I would be able to find the right career, but I still didn't make a decision leaving me stuck in the middle of the gloomy dark path. An opportunity presented itself. It was a spontaneous trip.

My sister unexpectedly invited me to go with her to Cabo San Lucas. I didn't want to go, but she ended up convincing me. It was the best decision I made. The burning hot sun shined so bright. A light breeze picked up the scent of salty ocean water. The ocean fought with the sand picking up huge waves leaving ripples of white foam. My world turned into living in paradise.

I was careless about what would happen next. My focus was on the present and not my future. Although I thought I wasn't making decisions about my future on this trip, I astoundingly did.

My cousin lives in Cabo San Lucas. She influenced me to make a decision. I briefly commented that I was drifting into space with my future. Her advice was to do what I thought would make me happy. It then clicked to me that I should switch to Land Surveying/ GIS/ Civil Engineering Technology. I rushed to exclaim the good news to my sister. A weight lifted off my shoulders when she didn't question me. Within days of arriving home, I had a meeting with my advisor.

Boom. It was as if a magic wand was waved during the meeting. I had one easy task. It was to apply to the Land Surveying/GIS/Civil Engineering program. I rushed to fill out the application. I couldn't contain myself. I wanted to yell at the top of my lungs that I got accepted into the program. Peacefully, I skipped off of the dark gloomy path to meet the bright future ahead of me.

Being able to get off the dark gloomy path was my biggest accomplishment. Not attending a four-year university didn't interfere with my academic drive at Southeast Community College. I ended up being where I was meant to be. I wouldn't see myself anywhere else. Rather than envisioning a perfect plan, I would have loved to let my future slowly unfold to what it is today. This taught me that not everything unfolds perfectly, it reminded me that even the smartest students can fail. In this case, not being able to attend a university led me to a community college where I am welcomed and encouraged to keep striving to reach my best potential.

SCC'S FIRST PRESIDENT: DR. ROBERT S. EICHER

Lynda Heiden • Staff, Retired

Southeast Community College (SCC) officially began operation in 1973. The College's first president was Dr. Robert S. Eicher. He was the leader of SCC until his retirement in 1992.

Dr. Robert Eicher grew up on a farm near Milford, Nebraska. He graduated from Milford High School in 1944 and enrolled at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He attended UNL for one year before he was drafted. His education was put on hold while he served his country; he served in the Army Signal Corps for two years. He returned to the University, and in 1950 he completed his bachelor's degree in business.

After graduation, Dr. Eicher was offered a job at the Nebraska State Trade School in Milford by its director, Lowell Welsh, in 1951. He accepted the job as a recruiter/registrar and traveled the state to recruit students from Nebraska. He and a group of school recruiters went to almost every town in Nebraska. Dr. Eicher developed close relationships with the students and knew them by name and where they were from.

As time went on Dr. Eicher took on more duties, including coaching the basketball team and helping Director Welsh with administrative duties. In 1956 Dr. Eicher was named assistant director, a job he held until 1969.

In 1967, Dr. Eicher's wife, Jan Eicher (whom he had married in 1952), became the first female member of the faculty at the Nebraska Vocational Technical School (formerly called the Nebraska State Trade School) and also the first Dean of Women. (In 1964 there were only two female students, and in 1967 that had increased to nine in data processing and drafting.)

By 1969, Dr. Eicher had earned two advanced degrees (Masters in 1963 and Doctorate in 1968), and having worked at the Milford Trade School from 1950 until 1969, he decided to advance his career by accepting a position at the Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), in Ankeny Iowa, as Director of Career Education. He held this position for four years.

During the time Dr. Eicher was employed in Iowa, the community college system was being "created, revamped, and refined" in Nebraska. The Nebraska system created in 1973 merged the Nebraska Vocational Technical School (Milford Trade School), Lincoln Technical College, and Fairbury Junior College into what was referred to as the Southeast Technical Community College Area.

SCC'S FIRST PRESIDENT: DR. ROBERT S. EICHER

Four years after leaving the Nebraska Vocational Technical School, he was offered the presidency of Nebraska's new community college system of three campuses. Several challenges faced Dr. Eicher.

- First to unify and integrate three independent educational institutions into one system.
- Second, staffing
- Third, facilities for the campuses.

A major task was facilities for Lincoln. In 1973 classes in Lincoln were held in at least six different locations. Because it had been a part of the Lincoln Public School system, there was no ownership of buildings. Once the Board decided to build, controversy followed on where a facility should be built.

After many challenges and legal battles, a Lincoln Campus facility was completed in 1979 and as a result, unified the different instructional sites throughout the city.

Additional building projects were added on to the Lincoln Campus:

In 1982 the Lincoln Campus student center and gymnasium were added.

In 1988 a Business wing was constructed. Remodeling and additions from 1985 to 1991 provided additional and improved classrooms, a gymnasium and a conference center at Milford.

In 1976 the College acquired the Beatrice Campus, which was the defunct Pershing College. Some Fairbury Campus programs were transferred to the Beatrice Campus and a couple new programs were added to the Beatrice Campus. The programs at Fairbury Campus were academic transfer, while Beatrice Campus offerings were vocationally oriented.

The SCC Board voted to close the Fairbury Campus in April 1986. It authorized merging the Fairbury Campus programs with the Beatrice Campus programs.

For Dr. Eicher this was probably the most difficult part of his presidency - the College's failure to prevent the Fairbury Campus from being closed and the bitter feelings it created in the community.

Five years after the merger, enrollment increased steadily, more than doubling the size of the two separate campuses. At the Beatrice Campus a 1991 renovation provided a new student center, classrooms, and Learning Resource Center.

Dr. Eicher worked diligently to enhance the image of the community college system, and acceptance grew by the public that a community college education was a great bargain and was a quality education. Enrollment grew under his leadership.

SCC'S FIRST PRESIDENT: DR. ROBERT S. EICHER

Dr. Eicher was instrumental in initiating and growing the Southeast Community College Foundation, which was founded in 1975. The Foundation is responsible for providing scholarships for students as well as broadening the financial support base of the College. From 1982 to 1992 the Foundation distributed more than \$900,000 in scholarship monies to students attending Southeast Community College.

Dr. Eicher was a visionary. He worked hard to keep SCC at the forefront of quality technical education. He was well known as a leader in initiating relationships with business and industry. As a result, numerous partnerships with business and industry were formed. In 1987 the Milford Campus was named as a General Motors Training Center, and in 1991 the Milford Campus was selected as the nation's first John Deere Ag Training Center.

The Lincoln Campus developed an innovative Truck Driver Training program for Crete Carrier Corporation, which is one of the nation's largest independent trucking firms.

The Beatrice Campus developed a project, Parents of All Ages, which was a cooperative venture with the Department of Social Services and Department of Labor. The Ag Program was moved to the Beatrice Campus where it flourish because of land that was acquired for the program as a result of Dr. Eicher's relationships with community business members.

During his tenure as president, Dr. Eicher guided the College to grow from three diverse campuses to an efficient and successful organization. He was a skillful administrator. He encouraged diversity and a decentralized administration but worked steadily toward unity within the College. Under his leadership the College developed its staff, facilities, equipment and educational programs to provide one of the finest educational opportunities available to students.

In addition to all of his presidential duties to SCC, he also served on the North Central Association Accreditation Teams for many years.

In May of 1991 during the SCC-Milford's 50th anniversary celebration, it was announced that the main instructional building would be renamed the Robert S. Eicher Technical Center.

Dr. Robert Eicher retired from the SCC system in September, 1992. He continued to work with the SCC Educational Foundation, as president, until his death in 2012.

Dr. Robert Eicher was recognized throughout the educational community. In 1982 he was honored by the Nebraska Vocational Association with its Outstanding Achievement Award. This award was presented annually to the person who provided outstanding service and support to vocational education in the state of Nebraska. In 1987 he received the President's

Award of the Adult and Continuing Education Association of Nebraska. In March 1992 Eicher was selected by the University of Nebraska as a member of its "Gallery of Distinguished Graduates." In 1992 he was awarded the Meritorious Service Award by the Nebraska Association of Community College Trustees.

In an interview in the *Lincoln Journal* in 1991, he stated, "There is no such thing as status quo in educational institutions any more. You have to continue to grow and mature." He went on to state that he "has been pleased to see community colleges gain greater acceptance as an integral part of higher education."

Dr. Eicher has been recognized as both a pioneer in vocational education in Nebraska and a leader in Nebraska's community college system. During the interview with the *Journal* Dr. Eicher said, "I think we've had the right chemistry to become a good institution. When I look back at what we were doing 20 years ago, I had a vision of what I thought the institution could be and should be. And I think it's exceeded my expectations."

Dr. Robert Eicher died May 3, 2012, at the age of 85.

In the 2011-2012 SCC Educational Foundation Annual Report, a tribute was written in remembrance of Dr. Eicher. Foundation Board member and friend, Jay Dunlap stated that Dr. Eicher "... invested his life in SCC. Everything he did was to benefit of that school."

In that same annual report mentioned above, SCC President Jack Huck (from 1994-2014) stated that for those that knew Dr. Eicher, "remember a kind and compassionate leader of great integrity and vision who provided distinguished service as our president. All of us who serve the College today build upon the foundations created by those who have come before us, and that is certainly true in the case of Dr. Eicher. He will always be an important part of SCC."

Mr. Dunlap also said of Dr. Eicher, "He helped build SCC, left it as a very viable community college... He was committed, intelligent, well acquainted, and a great worker."

Mr. Dunlap went on to state:

Bob was a unique individual who always put SCC first. SCC is the only place he ever worked except for four years in Iowa more than 40 years ago. His value to the Foundation was immeasurable, and we, as Board members, would do well to try to emulate some of his best practices.

...a few things I observed and learned about Bob:

- ***When you make a commitment, stand by it no matter what. Commitment is something Bob stood for all of his years at SCC.***

He loved this College and this Foundation, and he worked hard to persuade others to share in his passion for SCC and its students.

- ***Command respect from your coworkers. Bob led by example every day of his life. He had so much integrity that you couldn't help but respect him. I'm sure people didn't always agree with Bob's decisions, but they respected the way he arrived at those decisions, considering all viewpoints.***
- ***Give back to your community. Throughout his days in Milford, Bob got involved in projects, organizations and events that made the community a special place. People admired his community involvement and spirit of volunteerism and both serve as models for all of us.***
- ***Be charitable. Bob's passion for SCC ran deep. Even after retiring as president of the College, he and his wife Jan made significant donations to the Foundation. If you believe in something, and Bob and Jan were unwavering supporters of SCC, do all that you can to see that it is successful.***

In closing, I'd like to challenge you to be like Bob. Be committed, be charitable and lead by example. You never know who you will have a positive effect on today.

On a personal note, I worked for Dr. Eicher for eight years as an executive secretary. He treated everyone with respect. He was humble. He never acted like he was above anyone. He was a leader. He wanted what was best for students, and he wanted to provide a quality education for them. He was a person of integrity. I feel blessed to have worked for such an honorable person.

Sources: SCC Connection Newsletter (April & June 1992), SCC Alumni News (Spring 1992), resume, and obituary, Lincoln Journal articles

WARRIOR WOMAN

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

Bells ring and candles flicker
She has the power of the goddess with her
She's a force to be reckoned with
Holding on tight to her amethyst
A strong spirit
Either love it or fear it
Her heart chakra is open
But she won't let you near it
She's coming
Then she's leaving
Always changing with the seasons
A creature of wonder
The lightning and the thunder
As deep as the ocean blue
A wildfire blazing through
Shifting phases like the moon
Waxing and waning
Half then full again
Lunar moth in a cocoon
Mystic metamorphosis
Total transformation
You can call her High Priestess
From Maiden to Mother
Gracefully growing older
Rising from her own ashes
A warrior woman
Attuned with the elements
As free as a feather
You should be a little scared of her

ENGLISH CLASSES I LOVE YOU.

Lane Nollendorfs-Miller • Student, Business Marketing

I Miss my teachers **exposing me** to wonderful new books.

Journeys I would have **otherwise** never experienced

A privilege to **turn** page by page into a new world.

I'm Bliss filled. They helped **sow the seeds** for my destination. Education I have received from books.

Learning that conflict is **contrived** from a want combined with obstacles and actions

A privilege to **learn** day by day new skills that lead me to a better world.

I wish there were more **openings** for English classes. Perhaps I can after a semester of business books.

Concerning how **time** always seems to slip away. New Wants, Obstacles & actions to experience

A privilege to **earn** appreciation for precious memories from this college in what was once a new world.

FEELINGS DERIVED FROM A POET

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

True poetry isn't devoid of emotion
But rather this expression stems from it
At the center of this art form is what we feel
I'm one who derives much from my emotions
I wear my feelings on my sleeves for the world to see
When sitting down to write I find that words begin to flow
Sometimes my fingers type and my mind is blank
Then I look at what I've typed and I'm in awe
No, the poems aren't always perfect
But why ruin the raw uncut edition
It's important to take time to love it
Then take some time to perfect it
I find my best poems come when I'm not really trying
This gift I've been given is one I treasure
I've solved many a problem by putting it into a poem
I can't say that it is a solution for every problem
However, it comes pretty close to it
I love to write and express myself in this way
A part of me is visible when I write poetry
This part is usually hidden somewhere inside me
I don't mind feedback or critiques from others
But my poems are precious and mean so much
So, I only share when I know they'll be appreciated
My heart swells when I make people feel something
That's one goal a poet should always keep in mind
When you make someone laugh or cry
It's a good thing to draw out feelings
When both a poet and a reader become vulnerable
That's when a true connection can form.

A NIGHT IN THE WOODS

John Cook • Student, English

Steve was hanging around Mr. Grierson's to watch their favorite show, Searching for Sasquatch, when he had the most brilliant idea for a prank ever concocted. The idea struck like lightning, appearing fully realized in his head, so suddenly that he nearly dropped his favorite hat. In fact, once he thought of the prank, he was almost disappointed in himself for not having come up with such an amazing idea sooner. Why was he just watching his favorite show on TV, when he could get them to come visit his own town?

Steve had been telling his friends for years that he was an amazing practical joker, but most did not understand his games; they lacked his imagination. This trick though, this perfect prank, was going to make him a legend. Even Harry, the most boring friend he had, would have to see his genius after this.

Of course, a prank of this magnitude would not be easy to pull off. It would take time and careful planning just to get his targets' attention, much less lure them into his trap. Luckily, as a huge fan of Searching for Sasquatch, Steve knew exactly what it would take to bring them to town. The SFS crew was always on the lookout for the most recent bigfoot encounters. If people around town reported enough new incidents, word would eventually get out and they would come running straight into his trap. Steve just needed to make sure those sightings happened to the right people and in the right places.

The next nine months were some of the best times Steve had ever had. He spent nearly every night creeping through the woods in search of people to mess with. He threw rocks at campsites from the cover of darkness, startling campers. He banged branches on trees, making the loud noises the SFS crew called knocking, just far enough away that nobody could find him if they looked. He left big footprints along muddy trails where they were sure to be found by hikers during the day. When there were no campers in the woods, he would sneak around the houses on the outskirts of town and make a ridiculous howling noise that the SFS crew said was a bigfoot mating call.

A few lucky people, such as Mr. Grierson, even managed to spot a "big hairy monster" lurking in the forest. The sightings were always from a distance, and never for more than a moment or two; Steve was always careful to vanish before anybody could get a good picture, though there were a few blurry images caught here and there.

One evening, he was following along behind a small group of hikers, looking for a good spot to give them a scare, when a young deer stepped onto the trail up ahead of them. Someone in the group shouted "It's Bigfoot!", and the others screamed in terror and came tearing back down the trail towards him. Steve stepped off the path behind a tree and watched with amusement as they ran right past, completely unaware of his presence. Clearly, his plan was working.

However, as winter rolled into spring with no sign of the SFS crew, Steve started having doubts. The new season of Searching for Sasquatch started airing but there was no mention of his exploits. Though he would never admit it to his friends, Steve secretly began to wonder if he had made a mistake somewhere. Had he pranked people too much and made them suspicious? Were they not coming because they thought it was a trick?

Steve was so worried that he did not create any incidents for an entire week just in case. He was thinking about giving up altogether when he finally overheard Mr. Grierson tell Ms. Ellis the good news, Searching for Sasquatch was coming to town next week!

"They called me yesterday," the old man bragged, "said they heard my story from last fall and how a bunch of others've seen things lately, so they wanted to come to town for one of their investigations. I told 'em they should come week after next, that way they'd be here before deer season. No sense in them city folk coming up here and getting' mistaken for a buck, we'd never hear the end of it if one got shot."

"That's very good thinking on your part." The gray haired woman agreed with a nod and a sly smile. "So, does this mean you are going to be on TV?"

"Darn tootin'" Mr. Grierson replied with a wink. The old man had been sniffing around Ms. Ellis for as long as Steve could remember, but she always played coy, flirting but keeping him at a distance. She would come by his place some evenings but never stayed too late to avoid creating any gossip around town. Mr. Grierson did not care about that kind of thing, he just wanted Ms. Ellis' company. Steve hoped she would come around eventually, they were two of his very favorite people and he liked the idea of them together.

With the first part of his plan finally coming together, Steve turned his focus to the next step. The SFS crew ended every episode with a night hunt in the area they deemed the most "squatchie"; Steve wanted to be sure that they picked the right place. It was time to make some more incidents.

Previously, he had spread incidents all over the forest; the number of reports had been more important than the location. Now, he kept himself confined to one very specific area, a large patch of woods he knew well. The spot was perfect, there were plenty of game trails crisscrossing the area, but nobody actually lived nearby. He would not have to worry about

any of his friends showing up and ruining the prank. When the TV crew finally showed up two weeks later, there were over a dozen people pointing them directly to the right spot. The second part of Steve's plan worked as perfectly as the first.

There were four people on the SFS crew: Popo, Biff, Manny, and Ronda. Each person had their own role to play on the team. Manny was the leader, he was an adventurer who had hunted all over the world for what he called Cryptids, creatures that people believed were real but had never been caught. Biff was the scientist of the group, a cryptozoologist, he would analyze samples of hair or tracks that they found back in his lab and declare them real or fake. Ronda was the team skeptic, she wanted to believe in sasquatches, but she demanded absolute proof. She was usually the one who questioned every sighting and cast doubt on the rest of the teams' ideas. Popo, Steve's favorite team member, was a big goofy guy who had grown up chasing bigfoots, making him the team expert on sasquatch behavior. Popo was the one who came up with the craziest ideas for luring out a 'squatch' each week; like throwing what he called a rave in the middle of a forest one night. His plans never worked but that did not stop the whole team from encouraging him to come up with another one next time.

Even though Steve wanted to hang around town when the crew arrived to do their interviews, he decided against it. Every interaction at this point He did not want to risk doing anything that might ruin the whole plan when it was so close to coming off. Instead, he forced himself to stay at home and avoid everyone while he waited impatiently for night to fall. Finally, after what felt like the longest day ever, the sun began to sink behind the distant hills. With a shiver of excitement, Steve donned his favorite hat and set off to meet his destiny.

Shortly after dark, the SFS crew made it to the small clearing Steve had chosen for them. It was the perfect setting for his plan; a small, remote clearing where hikers would sometimes park their cars or even set up campsites. There were two hiking trails leading out of the clearing, one on each end of the oblong space.

Steve was hidden behind a tall pile of brush just a few dozen yards away from the edge of the forest, where he had a good view of the clearing. He was close enough to hear the team chatting as they piled out of their SUV and began preparing for the hunt.

"Are you sure this is the place?" Ronda asked, looking around after they arrived. The forest was old, full of tall mature Oaks and Birches with thick shadowy undergrowth thriving beneath them.

"According to those Yokels back in Podunkville it is." Biff replied, sounding grumpy as usual. Steve was not sure if the mustachioed man was ever

happy, mildly irritated seemed to be his natural state with occasional flairs of outright anger serving as his only real mood change.

“Either way, it’ll have to do.” Manny announced as he moved to the back of the Squatch-mobile, the crew’s official name for their logo emblazoned SUV. “It’s too late to find someplace else. Besides, one patch of dark woods is as good as any other.” He popped open the back of the rig and started pulling out the cameras and night vision goggles, handing them out as they talked. There were two kinds of cameras, handheld models they would use to try to catch a bigfoot lurking about, and backpack mounted ones that hung over their shoulder and faced back at them so the audience could see their reactions.

“This spot is perfect!” Popo declared ecstatically, waving his arms to point at the woods all around them. “I’m feeling really good about this hunt! We’re finally gonna catch one of these big furry bastards on camera, I can feel it!” The rest of the crew looked at the big man like he was crazy until Popo finally dropped his arms to his sides and started laughing.

“Don’t mind me, I’m just trying to get into character.” He chuckled.

After taking several more minutes to get themselves organized, the crew was finally ready to get started. They then spent more time talking to the cameras, documenting where they were and what the plan was for the viewers. Most of the time was spent repeating themselves because people kept making mistakes and had to redo everything to make it sound good. Steve was fascinated with watching the inner workings of his favorite show, even though he was starting to get impatient with them. They messed up so many times that Steve thought he could say their lines for them at this point, which was saying something indeed.

“Good enough,” Manny declared after the thirteenth of so attempt, “I’ll have the editors splice it into something coherent later.”

“About time.” Bill grumped. Never mind the fact he had messed up his lines more than anybody. “I don’t know why we come out on these ridiculous hunts to begin with. It would be so much easier just to film a bunch of footage back in California and dub everything in.”

“The fans pay attention to the smallest details, you know that. Somebody’d notice we filmed the same damn tree or rock twice and we’d be busted.” Manny pointed out. You know the rules; the moment we get outed, the network can and will kill our contract.”

“I don’t know about you, but I like collecting a paycheck.” He continued, jabbing his thumb in his own direction as he spoke. “If we get outed here, not only do we lose this gig, but no other show is gonna pick us up either, much less a movie studio. We would be pariahs back in LA, our acting careers would all be over. Traipsing around in the woods looking for

imaginary monsters has been a damn good gig, I'm not about to screw it up by being lazy."

"Seriously dude, why do you have to bitch about this every week?" Popo chimed in irritably. "If you don't like the job, quit. There are a dozen other actors out there who would kill to take your place."

"They'd probably be better at remembering their lines too." Ronda pointed out, her voice dripping with snark. Manny and Popo both laughed while Bill glared daggers at them.

"Fine, whatever." The mustachioed man finally relented. "Can we at least try do shoot someplace warmer next week? It's practically freezing out here. I kind of wish Bigfoot was real, then I could turn one into a goddamn coat."

The team chuckled at Bill's complaint and made a few more jokes about what they would do if Bigfoot were real, but Steve was no longer listening. Instead, he sat silently in his hiding place, trying to come to terms with this sudden life-altering disappointment. He had spent months planning this good natured prank to pull on his favorite TV people, only to learn they were fakes. Not only were they actors and frauds; they did not even believe in sasquatches! It was almost too much to bear; he even thought about calling off the prank completely.

Before long, however, his frustration gave way to determination. If the SFS crew were actors, then that meant they had tricked him; and if there was one thing Steve could appreciate, it was a good trick. Of course, a good trick always needed to be paid back in kind.

These people might doubt the existence of Bigfoot right now, but by the time they left this forest, they would be true believers. He was going to make sure of that.

By the time Steve had emotionally recovered from the shock, The SFS crew had split into pairs and were making their way towards the trail heads; Popo and Ronda were going to his left while Manny and Bill went right. He decided to stick to his original plan by pranking Popo's team first. The big man was his favorite person on the show, after all, even if he was just pretending. If there was time later, he would circle back and give the other two a taste of the same medicine. After scooping up a small handful of stones that he had gathered earlier, he trotted off to chase down his targets.

Steve tracked the pair easily enough; he was really good at seeing in the dark and knew these woods very well. Also, the trail wandered through the forest but did not branch off for quite a distance, meaning they only had one way to go. Once he spotted them up ahead, he was careful not to follow too closely; they had donned night vision goggles, so they could see almost as well as he could even under the shadowy canopy above. As he

ghosted silently through the brush alongside their trail, the pair trudged along on the narrow path ahead, making enough noise to scare away every animal within a mile in the process.

The pair chatted as they walked, mostly filler for the cameras, the kinds of things they would say during every show. Steve listened intently as he waited for the perfect moment to start his prank. Eventually the conversation turned to discussing how quiet the woods were around them. Popo declared the silence to be a sign that a Sasquatch must be nearby. Unable to imagine a better queue, Steve chose that moment to throw his first rock.

It was a small stone, easily pinched between two of his thick fingers, but he threw it as hard as he could. The rock hit a tree some distance ahead of the pair with a reverberating crack, causing them both to jump. Steve had to cup his hand over his mouth to stifle a laugh.

"It's a squatch!" Popo declared excitedly, pointing his camera wildly in the general direction of the noise. Ronda rolled her eyes but played along, panning her camera across the same area. As soon as they were focused in one direction, Steve threw another rock that smashed into an even closer tree just off to their left. The pair jumped again, with Ronda moving to put Popo between her and the latest sound.

"Holy crap, I think there're two of them!" Popo was, if possible, even more excited. Ronda looked nervous as she spun around erratically, trying to spot the cause of the disturbances. Steve even had to duck behind a tree when she turned abruptly in his direction. As soon as she looked away, he let fly with the third rock.

This stone struck a tree less than twenty feet to the right of the pair with a thunderous crack. Ronda let out a terrified scream and jumped on Popo's back, sending both of them tumbling to the ground in a pile of flailing limbs and camera equipment. This time Steve was not fast enough, a burst of laughter escaped his lips before he could muffle it with his hand.

"WHAT THE HELL IS THAT?!" Ronda shouted even while struggling to her feet. Her night vision goggles were knocked askew, and Steve was able to slip back under cover before she got them adjusted. He choked down on his laughter and froze in place, watching from the shadows as the pair struggled to fully disentangle themselves while climbing to their feet.

"We're leaving!" The woman declared, abruptly latching on to Popo's arm and dragging him behind her back down the trail. "Now!"

"Ronda, calm down! It's probably just Bill and Manny messing with us!" the big man argued as she pulled him along in a brisk, determined stride.

"We are leaving." She announced again, not slowing her stride in the

slightest. “That sounded like a bear, and I am not getting eaten by a damn bear for ratings!”

Steve held his breath as the pair stormed past his hiding spot, close enough to touch if he were so inclined. He entertained the idea for just a moment but decided it might be too much. He was pranking these people, not trying to give them heart attacks.

“Ronda, do you smell that?” Popo asked, sniffing the air as they passed. When the woman did not respond, “Did you crap your pants?”

“Shut up, Popo.” Ronda replied tartly.

Steve waited until the pair were a good distance down the trail before making his next move. He looked around until he found a thick branch laying nearby, picked it up, and promptly slammed into the trunk of the nearest tree. The explosive cracking noise of the first blow sounded like a gunshot echoing through the quiet woods and Ronda screamed again as her brisk walk turned into a full-fledged sprint. This time, Popo did not even try to argue as he followed just a few steps behind.

Steve chuckled and gave the tree one more good whack, breaking his branch in the process, before turning down the path to give chase. He loped along behind them as they ran, careful to keep his distance. He could have caught up to them, he was a very fast runner, but he was worried one of them might glance back and see him if he got to close.

Once they broke past the tree line, Popo slowed down and started looking back over his shoulder, just as Steve had feared. Ronda did not slow up or look back even once, she ran straight to the Squatch-mobile and leapt inside, her cumbersome pack still strapped awkwardly to her back. The moment the door was closed behind her, she started pounding on the SUV's horn to call the other two back from their hunt.

Manny and Biff emerged from the far side of the clearing a few minutes later, and Popo marched over to confront them. Steve was too far away to hear the conversation, but eventually the pair seemed to calm the big man down and they all returned to gather around Squatch-mobile. Ronda rolled down the window to join in the conversation but steadfastly refused to get out of the SUV.

Steve crept silently through the shadows until he was near the edge of the clearing himself, close enough to hear what they were saying. The next step in his plan depended on exactly what the four hunters decided to do next.

“I’m telling you, somebody’s out there trying to make us look like idiots.” Popo declared as he gestured towards the woods.

“I don’t think that was a person Popo,” Ronda pointed out, “that sounded more like a bear to me.”

“They’ve probably got speakers hidden in bushes, cameras too. If we don’t go back out there and catch them, we’re going to be laughingstocks.” Popo argued, refusing to back down. “If you think getting caught faking film footage will tank us, just imagine the blowback if these pranksters post vids of us running away from their bigfoot hoax online.”

“Popo’s right.” Manny agreed with a nod. “We need to get out there and find out the truth. Who knows, maybe it really is a sasquatch, and we’ll actually prove they exist after all.”

“Fine,” Ronda grumbled as she climbed out of the SUV and began readjusting her pack. “If I get mauled by a bear, I am going to sue all of you and the network.”

When it was clear they were coming back into the forest, Steve quickly retreated farther along the path to wait for them. He was excited, but also a bit worried, things were not quite going to plan. The SFS crew was supposed to be happily hunting a sasquatch in the woods, not looking for pranksters. This might be harder than he thought.

While waiting for the hunters to come closer, he gathered up a few more rocks and found a good stout tree limb he could use for knocking. Then he found a well-hidden spot in a gulley where he could duck out of sight if he had to hide. He was just getting comfortable when he heard the crew coming down the trail in the distance. As usual, they were making no effort to mask the sounds of their movement, any real bear in the area would’ve heard them coming and left long ago.

“Are you sure it wasn’t just some animal making noise out here?” Bill asked plaintively. “Maybe it was a couple deer banging their heads together, they do that don’t they?”

“No, it definitely wasn’t deer.” Popo replied dismissively. “Besides, they only do that during rutting season, which was last month.”

“Well, I’m not seeing anything with the night vision camera.” Manny said. “Maybe whoever it was left already.”

Unable to imagine a more serendipitous line to act on, Steve stood up from his crouch and threw his rocks, all of his rocks. In a matter of seconds, five rocks hit five different trees all around the SFS crew. Then, just for good measure, he gave the nearest trunk three good whacks with his stick before chucking it in the group’s general direction.

The results were impressive.

Ronda screamed even louder than she had before, spun on her heel, and sprinted back down the trail in a flash. She ran so fast that Steve was not sure even he could have caught her.

Manny tried to spin in several directions at once and only ended up falling down, tripping over himself. He scrambled backwards for a good distance in a crabwalk before finally making it to his feet and taking off after Ronda.

Bill fainted.

Of them all, only Popo held firm to his courage, spinning around wildly but retreating not one step as he tried to catch a glimpse of anyone or anything in his camera. Unlike the rest of his team, the big man was determined to get to the bottom of what was happening.

This was what Steve had been worried about. If he could not scare Popo into running, the whole prank could be ruined. As risky as it was, there was only one thing left for Steve to do. He drew in a deep breath and let loose with his ultimate weapon, his very best version of the ridiculous mating call.

The high pitched screech tore through the forest, echoing off of every rock and tree for at least a mile. The noise was still reverberating through the air when he leapt up out of the gully and lumbered menacingly in Popo's direction, making as much noise as he could along the way.

Steve was less than thirty yards away when Popo finally broke down, turned tail, and ran. Luckily for everyone, he had the decency and presence of mind to grab his unconscious compatriot and toss him over his shoulder before fleeing down the path behind the rest of his friends.

Steve followed the SFS crew down the path at a more casual pace. He also went back to moving with his customary silence in case they somehow found the courage to come back. He reached the clearing just in time to see the taillights of the Squatch-mobile as it tore off down the road heading back to town.

The episode he had been waiting for finally aired six months later, and Steve could not wait to see how it turned out. He decided to watch the show with Mr. Grierson and even wore his favorite hat to mark the occasion. The old man had been talking recently about rumors the episode had caught real live proof of a sasquatch and the whole town was planning to tune in and see for themselves.

When he arrived at Mr. Grierson's house, Steve was happy to see Ms. Ellis' old gray Buick sitting in the driveway. The couple had been spending a lot of time together lately and Mr. Grierson seemed happier for it. Luckily, Ms. Ellis was just as hard of hearing as Mr. Grierson, so the couple kept the TV turned up nice and loud when they watched it. Steve could hear everything just fine, even with the window closed to keep out the cool night air.

He crept up to his usual viewing spot to find the couple already

ensconced on the couch, a big bowl of popcorn between them. They were chatting excitedly about the upcoming show and did not notice him standing outside, as usual. The windowsill was only six feet above the ground, so Steve had to get down on his knees in order to rest his big hairy forearms on the sill, his chin on the back of his hands. The popcorn smelled tasty, and he wished he had brought a snack of his own. It was too late to go find something now though; the opening credits were starting.

The episode was entertaining, but Steve was a little disappointed. All the stories were there, including Mr. Grierson's interview, but they managed to edit the night hunt a lot. There was no sign of the crew running away in fear, and they even dubbed new dialogue over the footage they did have and then claimed that the cameras all "mysteriously malfunctioned", cutting the hunt short.

However, there was one thing that made up for the disappointment. Just as Popo turned to run away, he caught a few seconds of Steve charging towards them from the shadows. The footage was blurry, shaky, and mostly useless; all except for a single frame. It was a single frozen moment, still almost too blurry to make out, where a beam of moonlight splashed across him, pushing back the darkness. Of course, the team argued about whether the picture was authentic or just a trick of the light, and the audience was left to draw their own conclusions. Steve was satisfied, the picture was perfectly inconclusive, exactly as he had been hoping for.

"Well, there ya go." Mr. Grierson announced, turning off the TV as the credits rolled. "That's the best proof of a sasquatch I've ever seen."

"Hmmm." Ms. Ellis muttered, clearly unimpressed.

"What's the matter?" He asked.

"It just looked kind of fake to me." She replied bemusedly.

"What makes you say that?" Mr. Grierson asked, clearly confused. "That picture they got was 'bout plain as day. The thing had to be nine foot tall and furry as a bear, what else could it be?"

"Yes," Ms. Ellis replied slowly, dragging out the word. "It's just that, I'm pretty sure he was wearing a red baseball cap. Whoever heard of a bigfoot wearing a hat?"

Steve snickered, only to realize too late that, with the TV off, they could hear him inside. There was no time to duck as the couple turned towards him. They locked eyes in an awkward three-way stare; man, woman, and sasquatch.

Steve smiled sheepishly and gave them a friendly wave.

Ms. Ellis screamed before keeling over in a faint.

A NIGHT IN THE WOODS

Mr. Grierson leapt to his feet, stumbled over the coffee table, and collapsed in a heap on the floor.

Steve wanted to help the couple, but he knew that going into the house was a bad idea. People houses weren't designed for someone his size, he would just end up making the things worse. The best thing to do was to make himself scarce, he gave Mr. Grierson one more little wave and bolted for the woods.

He would definitely have to find someplace else to watch TV for a few weeks.

"That sum'bitch stole my hat!" Mr. Grierson shouted angrily from over his shoulder.

Ok, maybe a few months.

CHAOS INCARNATE

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

I'm just one of me in this multiverse
Parallel to a version that is worse
She never knew all she took for granted
She never grew beyond the roots she planted
In an alternate reality
There is another me
Floating through time and space
A stranger who has my face
I call her chaos incarnate
Darkness is all she craves
Wonderfully wicked goddess
All that was pure in her fades
Then a paradigm shift in me
Peeling back my shadow self
It's not who I was destined to be
So I evolved into someone else
Like a snake shedding its old skin
Revealing a new self again
I was heading nowhere fast
Then I took the higher path
I manifest my own reality
The best version of me

SWEETEST DREAMS

Michaela Hartman • Student, Continuing Education

When Stiles put his mind to something he wouldn't rest until he had it figured out and tonight was no different. Stiles was typing so fast on his keyboard that Derek was concerned he'd break the keys but he kept his eyes on his book instead of his fiancée. Derek knew when Stiles had gotten home from classes that he was on a roll with something and that he needed to get with it or get out of the way. For a few hours he was all in and helped until Stiles had ushered him away saying he'd work better on his own. That was just a little over twenty hours ago and Stiles was still awake having not slept a wink which was of course concerning to Derek and that's why his gaze kept landing on Stiles every time he slurped from his cup of coffee. At the twenty four hour mark of no sleeping Derek set his book down and looked over at his fiancée who was still flipping through a large leatherbound journal and typing away at his computer, "Stiles honey?" Stiles barely reacted and so Derek got up and walked over to him, "Stiles? I think you need some rest. What do you think?" Stiles froze and looked up at Derek, "I couldn't disagree more. I'm so close to cracking this. Five more minutes." Immediately Stiles was eyeing his computer again, his fingers perched over the keys when Derek tilted his head, "Hmm. That's what you said twenty four hours ago as well as every hour since." Derek didn't want to push too much because it wasn't worth a fight to him. Stiles looked up at Derek and huffed, "I'm not a child. So I'm not going to bed. Please Der? I know I can solve this. Plus I'm so not tired." As Stiles said this he reached for his cup of coffee which Derek had already picked up, "I see. Well if that's the case then you won't need coffee because you're not tired. So I'll just take this." Stiles faltered for a brief moment before shrugging as nonchalantly as possible, "Uh huh. Right. So not tired." Derek smiles as he takes the coffee cup to the kitchen to wash it and hears the clacking of keys resume.

Derek has experienced this before with Stiles where he refused to go to sleep and ended up falling asleep with his head on the table which was bad for his neck as proved by the visit to the chiropractor. So Derek smiled to himself as a plan formulated and he looked at his fiancée fondly. He loved when Stiles got focused so intently on something that he didn't notice anything around him or even notice what he was doing himself. Stiles would worry his lip between his teeth, wet his bottom lip with his tongue, scrunch his eyebrows up, constantly readjust how he was sitting and just so many other small things that only Derek had noticed. Which is what would make it easy for Derek to carry out his plan.

Derek started by dimming the lights a little because after all Stiles had his computer screen that was super bright and even if he wasn't tired Derek was. Stiles didn't react at all and so Derek continued by turning the heat up slightly. He was pleased to see the light sheen of sweat that broke out on Stiles's forehead but even then Stiles didn't notice anything out of place.

Derek grabbed a small remote from the coffee table that controlled their speakers and played rain sounds which had a habit of lulling Stiles right to sleep and if Derek was honest had the same effect on him. He could see Stiles's head droop for a moment before he shook his head as if to clear it and sat up straighter, his attention now on the journal.

Derek made his way back to the kitchen where he put a kettle on to boil and grabbed out Stiles's favorite mug. He added the hot water, the tea bag and a spoonful of honey before taking it to Stiles. Stiles barely looked up but took the mug and sipped his cheeks twinging pink and a smile forming, "Thanks Der. Perfect." Derek kissed Stiles's forehead, "Just like you." Stiles blushed harder before clearing his throat and focusing back on his computer, "Once I'm done I promise the most mind blowing..." Stiles cut himself off with a huge yawn that had Derek stifling a laugh before turning the air conditioning up. As predicted Stiles began to shiver slightly and when goosebumps broke out on his arms he made a grabbing hand in the general direction of the couch, "D-Der? Can I have the blanket please?" Derek smiled and took the blanket over to him making sure it covered him before placing a kiss to the back of Stiles's neck and going back to his chair where he picked up his book.

After a few more minutes the combination of the dimmed lights, the rain sounds, the cool air and a soft blanket Stiles was swaying slightly, his head drooping. Derek set his book aside and got up making his way over to Stiles. As soon as his arms wrapped around Stiles, Derek felt his fiance go completely pliant and melt into his embrace as he thought to himself, "*Works every time.*" He picked Stiles up and carried him to their bedroom. Stiles tried to frown as Derek tucked him into bed and Derek was glad that Stiles had already been in pajamas even if he wasn't wearing a shirt. Derek smiled in spite of himself when Stiles tried to frown harder as he muttered, "Cheader, cheddar. Pumped kinned eader. Not fair." Derek placed a kiss on Stiles's forehead just as Stiles zonked out and whispered, "Love you too Little Wolf."

Stiles was out like a light and dead to the world as Derek set about cleaning up their home. Once he had tidied everything up he turned the lights off, let the rain sounds continue playing, plugged Stiles's computer in and made his way back to the bedroom. He shucked his shirt and jeans before changing into pajama pants, deciding a shirt wasn't necessary and then he climbed into bed. Derek knew that Stiles wouldn't wake up but he was still careful not to jostle his fiance too much. Derek's wolf preened every time he heard, thought of or said the word fiance and he couldn't believe it had been only a month ago that he had asked him. Even more surprising though it really shouldn't have been was that Stiles had agreed as soon as Derek pulled the box out which meant Derek couldn't say everything he had planned though that was alright because Stiles asked for a complete reenactment when they got back home. Derek smiled at the memory and placed a gentle kiss on Stiles's neck as he scented him. He

SWEETEST DREAMS

loved his mate so much and he melted when Stiles pushed back against him until they were flush, letting out a pleased purr before a steady stream of purrs fell from his mouth every time he exhaled. Derek let a pleased growl rumble in his chest. His Stiles was perfect and he spent another half hour probably just watching him sleep. Derek knew that Stiles would be asleep for a long time and he was fine with that because he got to hold him in his arms the entire time.

MIRAGE

Cecelia Bialas • Student, Academic Transfer

Atop the sloping pasture hill where the Deere
leaks oil, my chestnut pinto heaves a sigh beneath his saddle
of creaking leather and we stop to rest my eyes are drawn
to a sun-bleached skull awaiting its return to earth,
looking back in a scream—for help or a curse echoing in the valley
are calls of a red-tailed hawk, primal spirit unbroken it sings
in the silence, swoops down to the prairie
to prey

I feel the sun's inferno bake my skin brown, cast dizzy waves upon the cornflowers
and sweet alyssum if I look further near the southern sky,
the distant hint of railway lines below the horizon blurs and I can see back
to an age when the now-stagnant brook ran rapid; the land was still wild,
further, to an infant trail system rutted dusty by wagon trains
that drew tear-clean tracks down solemn faces,
footprints of a culture erased over time
by those with bigger feet

under the smothering heat, my horse's flaxen tail whips, driving off
the glittering blue flies I hear the victory cry
of the hawk with its prey and twist the reins in my fingers,
guiding my horse through the yellowed buffalo grass, past
the cow skull resting easy in the shade toward
home a homeland born by Indigenous loss
of sacred land stolen
not even two centuries ago

GUN CONTROL

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

in the kindest and the cruelest way possible he had been tarred and feathered *I'm sorry, I didn't know you felt that way* and wasn't it always so sensible and understandable when he had been tarred and feathered *I don't think I was leading you on* and he was hurt and he was angry, of course, naturally, who wouldn't be but he had not expressed that, not usually because what is there to do or say that's ok, that's acceptable, there is nothing and here he was with nothing, and there was the part of him that felt the way he had before, the part that pointed fingers, and he had pointed at so many now who had nothing to do with anything, and yet everyone in this damn society had something to do with everything, and there was the ironic "look how we got here" sense of his everything which had given him the giggles once or twice these past few minutes, but by now there was this bigger part of him that knew it was bullshit, that knew he had failed at everything in life but this, that he had achieved nothing but making certain that nothing he felt mattered at all anymore, to anyone even himself and justifiably so, and yet he felt more now than ever, before everything had felt so big but that was before the guilt and the shame and he needed help but there was nothing and so finally he pointed to himself, and in an instant loudly but wordlessly he said all this, everything and nothing at once all across the floor, the walls, the table & the trays of the school cafeteria—

APRIL 23, 2021–JANUARY 2, 2022–MARCH 28, 2022

Kaitlyn Walton • Student, Business

April 5th, 2021

Sitting in the car,
the sun roof open.

The seats reclined back,
we were watching the stars.

“Hey”

I looked at him.

His lips were inches from mine,
and for a second my heart froze like it did
every time.

“Whatever happens I’m not leaving.

I will always be here.

You will be my last.

You’re never going have to worry about

being heartbroken or

stood up ever again

because Kaitlyn,

I’m so in love with you.

I’m never leaving.

I promise.”

As he linked our pinkies together and kissed it,
looking at me to do the same.

My brain went blank and I whispered,

“Why do I have to kiss my pinky?”

He looked down at our hands,
still tightly intertwined and said

“To lock in my promise.”

January 2, 2022

I promise you,
he's not the one.
You keep saying "what if"
but the truth is,
if he was the one,
there never would have been a
"what if."

He would've held you,
when things got hard,
told you everything was going to be okay,
that he'd be right there for you.
If he wanted to marry you,
he would have talked to you,
because he couldn't stand the thought of losing you.

If he was the one,
he wouldn't have made you feel the way you
felt that night.
Standing in your best friend's driveway at 3am,
shaking and bawling,
while he was probably texting her heart emojis
the same time that he was breaking yours.

He wouldn't have hooked up with her,
two weeks after it happened and never told you.
And he wouldn't have made you question everything he did behind your
back,
because he still texts you,
five months deep into a new relationship.

He wouldn't have made you feel worthless,
like it was just your body he was after.
He wouldn't continue to text you,
after you've explained that you can't heal with him here.

But it's always,
*"I was just checking in Kait.
I still care about you.
I still love you, even if it's not like that anymore.
I'm here if you need anything."*

And you fall for it

every time.

Stuck in an endless loop of hoping,
he'll come around.

But deep down,
you know that

he was never "the one" for you.

March 28, 2022

One day I'll get married,
to a man who isn't you.
I'll have everything planned out.
I'll be standing at the altar,
wondering if the view of Pretty Place Chapel would have
been behind us in our wedding pictures.
I'll be wearing a dress
that you wouldn't be able to see.
I'll be surrounded by music and colors
that wouldn't be *ours*.
I'll be spewing empty guarantees—fingers crossed behind my back,
until death do us parts.
Pretending we never promised each other forever,
staring at the stars that night in April.
Gazing into his eyes,
wondering if somehow,
some way
I could morph them into
yours.

**-empty promises at eighteen
and twenty-one**

THE PHOENIX AND THE RAVEN

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

My world was monochromatic
Then I saw a pair of eyes so blue
I've always been a hopeless romantic
But now I see every hue
You're the music to my lyrics
Our connection is cosmic
You read me like your favorite book
One kinetic kiss is all it took
Made from the same element
Both of us are just a little bent
I give you my pastel paper heart
It's fragile so don't tear it apart
We're the phoenix and raven entwined
Circling the sky until the end of time
Our perfect piece of paradise
Two souls bound together from another life
When I hear the sound of your voice
I'm surrounded by the color turquoise
We match energies like we're the same
I think I've finally found my twin flame

SUMMIT GIRL

Dillon Walker • Student, Continuing Education

Intro:

B_b G/D#add9

I was nineteen and

F B_b

You were twenty

B_b G/D#add9

Neither of us had a

F B_b

Whole lotta money

B_b G/D#add9

I was nineteen

F B_b

You were twenty

B_b G/D#add9 F B_b

I wish it had worked out between us honey

B_b G/D#add9

I was a freshman and

F B_b

You a sophomore

B_b G/D#add9 F B_b

I saw you after class and I grabbed your hand

Main Verse:

B_b C F C B_b

B_b C

Finding ourselves at a vantage point

F C

We lay in the grass and I rolled you a joint

B_b C

With the city below us and the lights above

F C

I discovered you were thinking what I was thinking of

B_b C

It had already been a little bit of a hike

F C

I don't think I was ready to know what that felt like

B_b C

And when you and I finally reached our peak

F C

You were self-assured, but I was meek

B_b C

Baby the lights were less beautiful than your form

F C

The Montana air was cold but your skin was warm

B_b C

I was all caught up in my own little reverie

F C

The sky lit up with ionized energy

B_b C

Yeah I got all caught up in my own little reverie

F C

We were nothing but potential energy

B_b C

But we burned out out there

F C B_b

Out there in the atmosphere

Solo Repeat/Fade Out

SUMMIT GIRL

Intro tab:

B \flat G/D#add9 F B \flat

Intro Melody:

I was nineteen and you were twenty

Neither of us had a whole lotta money

I was nineteen and you were twenty

I wish it had worked out between us honey

I was a freshman and you a sophomore

I saw you after class and I grabbed your hand

SUMMIT GIRL

Main Verse Melody:

Finding ourselves at a vantage point we lay in the grass and I pulled you a joint With the city below us

and the lights above I discovered you were thinking what I was thinking of It had already been a little bit of a hike I

don't think I was ready to know what that felt like And when you and I finally reached our peak you were self-assured

but I was meek The lights were just beautiful that your form the Mountain air was cold but your skin was warm

I was all caught up in my own little reverie The sky is up with latent energy Yeah I got all caught up

in my own little reverie We were nothing but potential energy But we burned out out there out there in the

atmosphere

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a time signature of 3/4. It consists of seven lines of music, each corresponding to a line of lyrics. The melody is primarily composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and ties. The lyrics are: "Finding ourselves at a vantage point we lay in the grass and I pulled you a joint With the city below us and the lights above I discovered you were thinking what I was thinking of It had already been a little bit of a hike I don't think I was ready to know what that felt like And when you and I finally reached our peak you were self-assured but I was meek The lights were just beautiful that your form the Mountain air was cold but your skin was warm I was all caught up in my own little reverie The sky is up with latent energy Yeah I got all caught up in my own little reverie We were nothing but potential energy But we burned out out there out there in the atmosphere".

SUMMIT GIRL

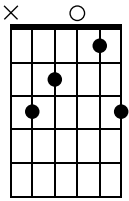
Tuning: DGC FAD (standard tuning down a whole step)

Tempo: 110-120 BPM

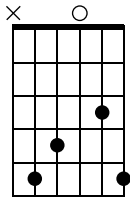
Main Verse Strumming Pattern: ↓ ↓ ↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑

Chords:

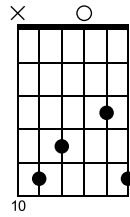
Bb:



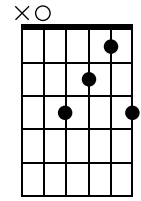
C:



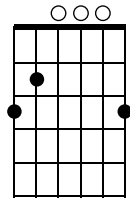
F (verse):



G/D#add9:



F (intro):



Solo Tab:

("Harm." – Natural Harmonic & "A.H." – Artificial Harmonic)

1 V V V A Tap V V V A Tap V 10 10-10 10-12 Harm. V V A A Harm.

2 V V V A Harm. V V A A Harm. V 10 10-10 10-12 Harm. V V A A Harm. V V V A Harm.

3 V V A A A.H. V V A A Harm. V V A A Harm. V V A A Harm. V V V A A.H.

4 V V A A Harm. V V A A Harm.

A STORY TO TELL FOR JOHN

Rachel Hruza • Faculty, English

It's hard to imagine
you any differently
than you once were,
the skinny curly-haired kid
with dinosaur Converse Sneakers
who would sometimes knock
me down, or hit me too hard
when playing tag. Some nights
we would hike across
the yard, broomsticks in hand
and pockets full of rocks
and leaves for later
examination under
magnifying glasses.

And now, though your hair
still curls and your mind
questions the things you
can't see up close,
there are moments
that will not repeat
themselves in our lives,
but know that you have the rest
of your days to create
a story for the child
you now fear and will soon
grow to love, much the same way
as the parents loved the little boy
who once frightened them.

JULES AND JULIET

Haley Lebsack • Student, Human Services

She was glowing with ivory skin
Mocha hair blowing in the wind
Eyes just like pools of honey
Winding river for a body
Cherry blossom trees with limbs entwined
Curiosity bloomed for the first time
Rose petal lips calling out my name
Folds my heart like a paper crane
Her kiss tasted like vanilla sugar skies
That bliss felt like a cotton candy sunrise
Love letters sealed with bubble gum
I won't forget her marshmallow hugs
Her calla lily smile would always fade
The ballad of a melancholy mermaid

THE BIG DECISIONS

Cameron Hayes • Student, Human Services

Have you ever woken up in the morning questioning a decision you made the day before? Maybe your words or actions did not reflect who your character well. Throughout my life I have had to make decisions every day without knowing just how big of an impact they will make on my life. In a short span of two months in 2019, I made decisions that I would regret the next day and also made other decisions that are now some of the biggest blessings I have in my life now.

It was the beginning of 2019, I believe it was January. In Omaha, Nebraska I didn't just feel the cold weather on my skin how most Nebraskans will, I also was feeling it in my heavy heart. I am a young man at the ripe age of 24, multiple legal issues were impacting my life at the time as well as a bad breakup. So much of my character was questionable at this time in life that I lost the person I thought I was. All I knew how to do was drink alcohol and use drugs to get through my every day, this was the only guaranteed thing people received from me. The only thing in my life that was consistent was my addiction. I knew I needed to get help, and even asked for help sometimes. I would then quickly change my mind and reach for the bottle instead.

Fast forward to late February in Omaha, Nebraska. I'm still doing my same old routine I was doing and had been doing for years. I was like a man stuck in loop and could not get myself out. By this time I was continuing to drink and use as I was but started to involve alcohol into my work life. Still a man desperate for change at the very end of a night of binge drinking. One night I had decided to go to a favorite bar of mine and my friend in which we were regulars. The bar ended up getting shut down early because me and my friends start a shoving match over what was probably a misunderstanding, my friend and I then got into his car and proceed to find another hangout spot at someone's house. It's all the usual scene you could say, the last thing I remember was drinking liquor out of a bottle while petting someone's puppy they had just bought.

The next thing I know I am beyond cold on concrete in a neighborhood that I did not know. I was so cold I could hear my teeth clicking together and my knees were weak. It was 30 something degrees out and I was in a dinge pair of khaki shorts and a Chicago Cubs wind breaker jacket. I had no idea what happened and why I was not at home. My phone was dead, I was almost out of insulin, and my wallet was empty of money. I felt as if I was the lowest of the low in the moment, my pride was nonexistent as I walked two miles to the nearest gas station and begged them to use a charger so I could contact my brother for a ride home. Once I was no longer

THE BIG DECISIONS

sitting in the gas station and was in my brother's Dodge Durango with its bright chrome rims. All I could do at this moment was weep with tears. I was overcome with all the emotions my decisions had brought me to this point and was fed up with life. I needed a timeout, like in football, but this one would need to be much longer. All my brother could do was look at me and shake his head, not in an approving way, but that he could sense something in me. He could see me reaching my pivotal point in my addiction and sense my desire for change. This moment was different than other rough nights, I was on empty and was demanding better for myself.

About a month later April 19, 2019, I get off of work at 5:15 p.m. and am getting picked up by my brother. I have all the intentions of going out that night to get into the usual trouble I get into. After I get in, I am told I am going to a treatment center in Texas and that I leave at 7 a.m. the next morning. I was shocked in this moment it felt as if time stood still, I began to weep tears of fear and relief, relief from all the struggles thus far. The next morning on April 20, 2019. I find myself so scared getting onto the plane to head to Milwaukee and then a second flight to Dallas. I did not feel like I was even in my own body at the time. It was like watching someone else's story from above.

When I arrived at the treatment facility, I was full of nerves and excitement. I remember feeling like a kindergartener on the first day of school. I had so much hope for life, hope of change and cheerful to know I was not alone, there is other people like me. I can still see the front of this ranch style fortress that is 45 minutes away from Dallas. The sun burnt white building with these dark green doors that obviously painted that way to be welcoming. Everyone was very welcoming as they searched through my belongings as if I am going into jail. The intake process took about 3 hours in which it was just me and one of their employees. After the intake process was done, they escorted me to my room in which it was already around 7 or 8 p.m. I knew at this time I had to start moving forward to attempt change.

I found myself sitting in my room a desert tan color with two identical beds with a blue comforter and white sheets with one white pillow each. I had no roommate it was just me and my thoughts. I knew at this moment I could sit in my room where I felt somewhat safe and had limited worries, or I could go out to the common area with the other individuals here to change and start the process of healing. I sat and pondered for a few minutes and recapped how I had gotten to this point in my life. I remember sitting there on my bed debating on unpacking and calling it a night or to take that leap of faith. I sat there waiting for myself to decide, it felt as if I was waiting for a roller coaster to take off.

Then I stood up and found myself out in the common area until at least midnight that night. Talking with individuals and staff members. It felt so good to know there was other people like me and it was safe for me to be myself and work on myself in that place. This decision set me up for success

THE BIG DECISIONS

the next day in which all the nerves were gone, and I was ready to meet with my counselors and to attend the groups that would help me.

So many decisions got me to where I was in the beginning of 2019, the lowest of the low and a young man who had the life sucked out of him. The beautiful decision I made that evening to leave my room and meet the staff and individuals change my life forever when I look at it. It set a bar for my recovery. It was a starting point in which I could improve on daily, it introduced me to amazing friends I still have. This decision affected all my aspects of life in which I now proudly have two and a half years of sobriety and have a life I am proud of.

BLOOD AND GOLD

Isabel Anderson • Student, Academic Transfer

In the heart,
pour over,
rip open.
Let the blood flow,
iron,
rusted over
thoughts
drift
and flake.

Lick gold,
not metallic,
tasteless.
Cut up the tongue,
on jagged edges
Let the blood flow.
Pure as light,
like the roots of the
tree of life.

BE SOFT

Tammy Zimmer • Faculty, English

I beg you to be
soft; to be warm
 to soften
all your edges

to see those
who stand next
 as fully whole
so beautifully human

worthy of all
kindness can muster
 I beg you
to be so soft

MY IMPERFECTIONS MAKE A PERFECT ME

Nature Villegas • Student, Academic Transfer

Limited edition, colder than figure skates
Endangered species- impossible to imitate
No similarities to simulate.
Except my simetry- 40 simile
Candle flame shivering
Cold and kindling
I needle through things
My energy can push a swing
Rolled truth- not a swisher sweet
A sweeter dream
My presense captivates while intimidates
Naturally beautiful disaster like hurricanes
Mother nature- I determine the weather
Yeah make katrina sing
Chasing a dream I woke in dream dejavu
Feeling like
Seems like
Better keep your screams and seams tight
The good life
Piece of pie, must be nice...Lyfe
Cut me a slice-in the cut like peroxide

Watching at night shooting dice with life shit
Crackas and kidnappers, B boys jus flippin to make it

Mentally impressive as I come off aggressive
Skipped childhood & adolescence

MY IMPERFECTIONS MAKE A PERFECT ME

Grew up while it was skewed up
Fed my mind
Open third eye blind
Shed some light mind

What makes us human we fail to exorcise
We're a poltergeist in a diamond heist
While trying to make it right
We're an assimilated cold with a sicker vibe.

__NaturezFury™

NO REGRETS

James Chanaka • Student, Health Sciences

Kirby Says Goodbye was the headline on the front page of the Minneapolis Star Tribune on July 12, 1996. Six days earlier a very scrawny 18-year-old boy and his 44-year-old father made their way to the Hubert H. Humphry Metrodome. I had just graduated from High School a couple months prior and was living the easy life. No school, just graduation parties and sleep. During my teens I never went through the phase where I thought I was too cool for my parents; so, when dad said he volunteered us for an event put on by the United Way, I was excited. The event location had me even more geeked out, the grand old Hubert H. Humphry Metrodome, where my family and I had many of our best days together during my childhood. Throughout my youth we watched Kirby Puckett and the Minnesota Twins win two World Series inside this building. This stadium was also home to the Minnesota Vikings, and even the Minnesota Timberwolves played their inaugural NBA season in the dome. So going to the Metrodome for us, was like visiting Mecca.

Saying my family loves baseball is an understatement. Grandpa Nick on dad's side played for the Saint Cloud Rox. They were the minor league affiliate for the New York Giants which later relocated to the San Francisco Bay area. He was a slick fielding first baseman who could also hit for average. If it weren't for a serious knee injury, he would've been called up to the big leagues the following season. On mom's side, Uncle Paul was drafted out of high school as a heavy throwing right-handed pitcher. His fastball hitting the upper 90's on the radar gun. Unfortunately, a torn ligament in his throwing arm also ended his chance at becoming a pro. Dad played little league ball all through college. He was a great fielding first baseman and decent hitter who really took after Grandpa Nick. Lucky for me, he chose having a family instead of the long road of trying to go pro.

When Dad, Uncle Paul, and Grandpa were in the same room, the stories that would come out of their mouths would make baseball fans stop and listen. Grandpa's stories about meeting Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Babe Ruth and other legends will make anybody's jaw drop. To this day they still talk about the popping sound my uncle's fastball made when playing catch with him, the smell of burnt wood emanating from the bat after fouling off a pitch and digging low throws out of the dirt at first base. I learned every single detail about the sport of baseball, no matter how small from these three. Every nuance from the ash wood of the bats, the different dirt used in the ball parks around the league, to the weight of the different brands of gloves.

Just before we left for the event, dad decided we should bring a bag

packed with our gloves, baseballs, a bat and a giant super ball. If there was any chance, we could play around we were going to take it. “What is the one thing you want to do while we are there?” Dad asked me. I said “I wanted to jump against the wall where Kirby made so many memorable catches. No wait, I want to try to catch a pop fly under the dome” (the roof of the metrodome was the same color as baseballs making it hard to see the ball.) “No-no-no, I want to try to hit the superball over the hefty bag in right field!” (The hefty bag was a vinyl cover hanging over the folded-up football seats that for years was sponsored by Hefty brand garbage bags.)

When we walked in through the right field tunnel the doors opened into this massive expanse. I had been there as a fan in the stands many times but being at field level was a much different perspective. The smells were the same though, stale beer and old popcorn. Hotdogs and this weird rubber smell that I think was from the floor of the Wheelchair World Series that we had volunteered to remove. Square after square we lifted and placed pieces of the floor onto carts. While doing this hard labor dad suddenly mentioned an idea. He was not one to break the rules but, in this instance, it was worth it to him.

We would hide in the bowels of the Metrodome while the other volunteers were escorted out. Then come back to the field and try to play catch before security gave us the boot. My father’s plan worked better than expected. We played catch, jumped against the wall, tried to hit the superball over the fence but it broke on the first swing. Oh well, we laughed and laughed. Unknowingly, ball players started coming onto the field to stretch and take early batting practice. Shockingly, we were not told to exit the field, so we stayed to shag the balls hit during practice. I don’t think I caught a single ball under that damn roof.

We figured we were now living on borrowed time, so we walked infield and noticed MLB Hall of Famer and former Twins great, Rod Carew staring us down. At the time he was the California Angels hitting coach. I looked at my dad and said, “Rod Carew just gave us dirty looks!” with a big smile. We then got to the Twins dugout where we met the trainers and the clubhouse workers who were getting the dugout ready. Then out of nowhere they brought us into the equipment room, let us take baseballs and batting gloves, then upstairs to the clubhouse where we met a handful of Twins players. We were told by the trainers to take whatever snacks we wanted, and they had EVERYTHING! I think I pocketed some Big League Chew a Snickers and a Gatorade. I wanted to take more but my father’s glance stopped me at those three items.

We then saw the locker of our favorite player. We knew something wasn’t right since Kirby hadn’t played since the 1995 season, so we sat in front of it and got our picture taken. Talked to the trainers about Kirby and got to hear some great stories from them and his teammates. After we made our way back down to the field where I ran out to Rod Carew who was setting up to

NO REGRETS

throw batting practice to the Angels and got his autograph. Apparently, that was a big mistake as we saw Twins skipper, Tom Kelly motion to security to escort us out. But who were we to complain? We had just had a day that we would cherish forever. The joy on my father's face that day is forever etched into my mind.

The car ride home it's all we talked about. At the dinner table that night it's all we talked about. Five days later it was still our main topic of conversation. But on that sixth day Kirby Puckett announced his retirement from baseball because of glaucoma in his right eye. Ending his hall of fame career prematurely. My dad and I watched the press conference on the news and saw all the people we had just met. They were all crying. The reporters were crying. Kirby and his family were crying. My dad and I were crying. Pretty sure the entire state of Minnesota was crying. Going from the elation of the Metrodome experience together then to the sadness of the retirement announcement was a true whirlwind of emotion and such a tremendous bonding experience with my father that we still talk about to this day.

Kirby Puckett played like every game would be his last. He left everything on the field and had no regrets the day he was forced to say goodbye. The relationship my father and I have mirror that. We rarely take each other for granted and we express how much we love one another so when that terrible day inevitably comes, we will not have any regrets because we held nothing back and left it all on the field.

MEMENTO (MORI)

Rebecca Ford • Student, SENCAP

Send me a postcard, would you?
Please remember I'll miss you
Make sure to cross your t's and dot your i's
Because forever is such a long time

Don't forget to send me a postcard
I'll check the mailbox in the yard
I'm expecting word from you, don't let me down
The city is empty, not a person around

I'll look forward to your snapshot
Perhaps of silver sand beaches, or another hotspot?
Wherever you are, I'll be thinking of you
Once you left, it's all I could do

I don't mind when you send it
I'm alright with waiting a bit
Wherever you are, I hope you do well
I don't excel at farewell if you can tell

It's hard to say goodbye
But hello is just a lie
When you breathe a final sigh
My tears run dry, I'm trying not to cry

Send me a postcard when you die
Send me a postcard when you die
Of heaven or hell or limbo
Something small I can show

MEMENTO (MORI)

Send me a postcard when you die
Send me a postcard of your damnation
Send one of your salvation
Send me one of your post-mortal vacation

Send me a postcard when you die
Send it to me on a tropical breeze
Send it when I'm at Death's door on my knees
Send me a snapshot of whatever you please

Send me a postcard when you die
Show me your eternity of suffering
On basalt plains in Hell's fever coloring
Show me anything, I'm just wondering

Send me a postcard when you die
Show me Heaven's pearly gates
Of the resplendent riches that awaits
Show me your halo and your shed weights

Send me a postcard when you die
Show me blank suffocation
Or an infinity of contemplation
Show me the vastness of all culmination

Send me a postcard when you die
I want to know what it's like to die
Beyond death's door, I want to see what will lie
I want to see what I will occupy
Send me a postcard when you die

CAPTIVE DREAMER

Ryan Greenwood • Student, Academic Transfer

My nightmares are cruel, when I die, I do not awaken
Open my eyes, the pain, still fresh.
Claws and teeth rend and eviscerate.
“Shake off the last round.”
I mutter perceiving the Spielbergian landscape.

Lake before me is cool and placid.
Lush, antiquated fauna, Towers skyward.
Reptilian rumbles resound ^{above} the canopy.
Whilst long-necked behemoths *s-t-r-a-i-n* for the heavens.

Primal pressure *crushes* against my shoulder blades.
Desperate, ^{splash} into the lake.
Behind, a velociraptor screams frustration.
I swim, my stalker follows, I SCREAM.

Dolphin kick *careens* me *forward*.
Thunderous quakes drown my senses.
Stale air burns my lungs.
Open eyes **blurred** by liquid haze.

Small bubbles escape *rus->hing-> upWard*.
Shucking off Chains of confusion.
“Follow them to safety!”
Thrusting forward, my head br^{each}es the surface.

Survey the rup-tur-ed surface.
Espy the Majestic Tyrant.
On bended knee to drink.

Bird-like his head cocks.

Eyes narrow, he ROARS, wading in.

Chase renewed; race for shore!

Mud sticks, ^suckⁱng at my soles.

Rex nears with impossible speed.

Bog-like muck steals my shoes.

"I'm free! RUN IDIOT!"

I yell *wh-o-o-shing* ahead.

Parkor **inspiration** helps me bou---nd through obstacles.

Coffee haven beckons amidst concrete jungle

Double-shot mocha soothes the soul.

The earth shakes, the sunlight is **BLOTTED** out.

Techno-Rex stoops down Catching my eye.

He winks with gleeful menace.

Terror escapes my lips.

Patrons dirty-faced looks reproach me.

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP! The alarm! My savior.

WHY POEMS!

Breann Baker • Student, Continuing Education

Why does it have to be poems!
Our teacher says they aren't so bad
Just give it some thought
But trust me I have given it plenty of thought
After, thought
After, thought
After, thought
I can't thought (I mean think) anymore
What do I do, it's due...
TODAY
Welp I tried my best
Let's hope this will due
I hope that I don't look like a fool
....
....
...
Turns out that I got better than D
Better than C
I GOT A B.. +
My teacher said that I did well
Exceptional well!
She even said we are doing another project called
Trig-o-nom-atry
Sounds easier than poetry!

P.s. Definitely not easier than poetry

FALLING IN LOVE

Taylor Adams • Student, Academic Transfer

Oh to fall in love

We often fall for simplicity

We also fall for complication

We fall for hopeless hope

Sometimes we forget to get back up

Falling in love

An emotional rollercoaster

You're stuck

It kills when it's all over

After they leave

We forget about ourselves

We forget to not depend on someone else for love and happiness.

Fall in love with yourself again

Tell yourself *i love me*

Before you let someone in saying *i love you*

Fall in love

With breathing and living and life

You are young

Which means sunrises are right around the night and who knows what a new day will bring

Fall in love with what you want

Romanticizing your life again

Making yourself happy like you did before.

Oh to fall in love

With rain on a tin roof

Singing out loud

Late nights with friends

New adventures

Finding something and falling in love

Isn't quite as complicated

Fall for the simplicity in loving yourself and the things that make you
You.

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Carely Adame-Ortiz: I'm Carely Adame-Ortiz, born in Crete, NE. I am currently a student at Southeast Community College studying Land Surveying/ Civil Engineering/ GIS Technology, graduating Spring of 2023. I work at Admissions, am President of PSAN an association I started, and form part of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. I am passionate about helping minorities succeed and people in general. I try to leave a mark everywhere I go because, as a Hispanic woman, I won't receive the same opportunities as a man. I always try putting all of my effort into everything I do because it helps me grow as a person. I'm also passionate about the immigration process, and by informing myself, I can help my community. In all, I want to be able to help the Hispanic community where eventually, we'll see more Hispanics in Congress, The White House, Senate, and in many other careers.

Taylor Adams: My name is Taylor Adams. I was born in Lincoln NE, I am 19, and the youngest of 3. I am currently working and going to school. Some of my hobbies are writing, painting, cooking, going to the gym and spending time with friends and family.

Alyson Kay Ahrens: Alyson Ahrens is a mother of 3 amazing children, a student, and has worked in the foodservice industry for 15 years.

Isabel Anderson: My name is Isabel. I live in Lincoln, Nebraska. Writing has always been important to me, as I have been attempting to tell written stories since I was about seven years old. I think no matter what I do, or where I go, I'll be writing. I don't really have anything clever to say.

Rachel Andrew: I am a stay at home mom currently homeschooling my two teenage children. I am an accomplished seamstress and have recently enrolled in college to pursue a degree in business communication.

Breann Baker: I am currently a student transferring to UNL and looking to major in Elementary Education. I love to write poems, I just don't share them very often.

Cecelia Bialas: I am a Nebraska native and lifelong literature and writing enthusiast. From 2018-2020, I took general education classes at SCC, found a love for poetry via Tammy Zimmer's Intro to Poetry class, and then transferred to UNL where I will graduate in December of 2022 with my Bachelor of Arts in English, focused on Editing and Publishing, with minors in Communications and Humanities in Medicine. My passions (and inspiration for my writing) include horses, reading historical fiction, learning about medicine and advocating for those with disabilities and chronic illness, being outdoors, and spending time with my family, partner, and friends.

Dallas Brown: I've lived in Nebraska my whole life and have been interested in photography since the 7th grade. I was even Senior Photographer of the Year at my high school because of how involved with it I was. I'm currently enrolled in the Academic Transfer program and I'm hoping to transfer to UNL to study Political Science. I love exploring abandoned places and, surprisingly, have found a lot in Nebraska that I've gotten the opportunity to explore before they've been torn down or boarded up. Along with that, I also enjoy portrait photography. I love the ability to capture so much about a person just from a photo.

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Onna Carr: I am a college student, writer, ESL teacher, and work for a non-profit. I live wherever I happen to be at the moment.

James Chanaka: The last time I was in school was technical college in 1997 at the age of 19. I am now 44 and decided to make a massive life change. My wife and I concluded last year that we would make our dreams come true. Her dream was to be a travel nurse and to move around the country helping people from all walks of life. I quit my job of ten years and we started on this adventure. So far, we have moved from Minneapolis MN to Fargo, ND and three weeks ago we moved way up north to Duluth, MN. At the time I decided to start school I still didn't know what my dream was, but I did know that I wanted to make a difference like my wife. So, I started the path to become a respiratory therapist. To do that I needed to take an English/comp class and an algebra course. It turns out writing is a passion of mine. I wish I would have known this 25 years ago. But better late than never, right?

John Cook: John is a legend, a myth, an international man of mystery, and quite possibly, an immortal dragon in disguise. He is both larger than life and yet more humble than a gentle summer breeze. The tales that he crafts are plucked from a world of truths, lies, and everything in between. His words can move nations and his actions can change the course of history.

Alternately, he is a loving husband and father of two boys who happens to enjoy writing so much that he is hoping to someday make a living at it.

He invites you to choose which persona you think is the real one.

Easton Dodson: I am 18, almost 19 years old. I am not from Nebraska but I got the opportunity to transfer to SCC because my mom moved up here not too long ago. I love music and art and being outside. I am a transgender male, which many people don't know. I have a dog who I love more than anything in this world. I am submitting a picture of her.

Natalie Duchesneau: I was born and raised in the middle of the cornfield that is known as Nebraska. I am a current student at SCC, and I believe in reading, writing, and changing the world.

Rebecca Ford: My name is Rebecca Ford and I'm a SENCAP student at SCC, and I will be a Freshman at SCC in 2023. I live in Cortland, Nebraska with my three sisters, one brother, parents, one cat, one dog, and one bearded dragon, I both write for a regional newspaper and manage an exceedingly lucrative career at Walmart. Infatuated with creative writing from an early age, I hope to one day literally make a career out of it.

Ryan Greenwood: Hi guys... The long and short is that I am a new student of SCC, but I have been writing unprofessionally for years now. If you have a vivid imagination and a love of short stories, I am most definitely your guy. If not, then I am sorry I couldn't help you. Most often, I can be found around the campus usually playing Pokémon go (yeah, I am that kind of nerd). Generally, I am willing to help anyone in any subject that isn't mathematics. Hmm.... What else? Oh yeah! I am the founder and CEO of the non-profit organization RNG2 also known as Rabbits Need Guns Too. Okay, I made that up, there's a lot of pressure to create an interesting biography on the spot especially when you're going for cheap laughs.

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Patty Haddow: I enjoy life -- the people, nature, what nature says to me.

Tanya Hare: Love the frozen moment of time that a photo captures. Love taking pictures that tell a story.

Linda Hartman: I have taught at SCC for 22 years and am looking for a hobby. Turns out I have taken a few good photos so maybe my hobby found me!

Michaela Hartman: I'm Michaela. I'm a writer, poet and active in theater and choir at SCC. I have many poems on my website and have recently, in the last year, started working on fiction and FanFiction. I want to be a writer and any time I can spend on my computer creating worlds I do. I dive into the worlds I create. There's nothing like it.

Cameron Hayes: I am a 26 year old man. I come from a big family from Lincoln but have moved around a lot in my young adult life. I am known for having a lot of tattoos that I continue to add to all the time, this is the first thing people notice about me. My life is consumed with recovery, my own and helping others find their way down their own recovery journey from alcohol and drugs. I am in the human service field at SCC and am starting a new journey of becoming a certified peer support specialist. I currently work in the human service field as a behavioral health tech at Touchstone recovery center in Lincoln Nebraska. The thing to know about me is not one decision is made in my daily life that my recovery is not taken into consideration, Recovery is my passion. Without going through all the things I have I would not be the loving helping man I am today and would not have my passion in life either or be able to help my fellow recovering alcoholics and addicts.

Logan Henson: I am a Nebraska resident born and raised from Eastern Nebraska. It is my goal to present the visual poetry of so-called "fly over states", with imagery that provides a recounting of the beauty of the Great Plains.

Rachel Hruza: Rachel Hruza teaches English at Southeast Community College. She has a novel for Middle Grade readers called *Dear Isaac Newton, You're Ruining My Life* published by Sky Pony Press, and hopes more are forthcoming. Besides writing and teaching, she spends time reliving her youth with her two children.

Paul Illich: As President of Southeast Community College since 2014, I have directed a number of transformative initiatives, including: strategic planning, facilities master planning, removal from monitoring by our accreditor, completion of multiple new construction and renovation projects, addition of six learning center locations, and conversion from a quarter to a semester calendar system. Previously, I served as Vice President of Research, Planning, and Information Technology at McLennan Community College in Waco, Texas.

Kristin Kliment: I am 19 years old and I currently attend Southeast Community college but plan on transferring to UNL next year to earn a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education.

Brayan Moreno: My name is Brayan Moreno, I was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. My folks are from El Salvador. I started taking a liking to creative writing in the fifth grade and decided that it was something I wanted to do with my life in the eighth grade after reading Oscar Hijuelos' *Dark Dude* which had a profound impact on me. In 2019, I started writing some short stories here and there about a group

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of teenagers who start a new life in Los Angeles after fleeing war-torn El Salvador in the 1980s. Eventually it turned into one huge snowball of an idea, looking at the refugees and the discrimination they faced from the Mexican-American community and other communities in L.A., which in turn created the notorious MS-13 street gang, then looking at the corruption from the American and Salvadoran politicians who profited off of the war, then looking at the massive terrible effects of what happened after the war with gang violence not just plaguing El Salvador but also various communities throughout the United States. It's just layers, layers, and layers of a bunch of things. I decided to portray it through my own interpretation of how these things played out.

Ha Vy Linh Nguyen: A small and simple girl who loves small and simple things in life.

Elizabeth Noel: I am a wife to my wonderful husband and a mother to our 5 grown sons, 1 daughter-in-law, 2 grandchildren, 2 cats, and 1 dog. I keep myself entertained by driving a school bus during the appropriate season and gardening in same manner. I thoroughly enjoy the Theater Production class and Community Chorus class provided by SCC.

Lane Nollendorfs-Miller: I am a hip-hop artist and story teller from Omaha, Nebraska. I love to create with words whether it be a song, story, or a poem.

Rod Rhodes: I have worked at SCC since 2008. I enjoy spending time with my family and cheering on the Packers and Huskers.

Brittani Salvatore: I love capturing nature's beauty. Whenever I feel stress or upset I often find myself going outside and exploring. Walking a small trail or hiking a mountain I always end up stopping and capturing something beautiful. My take photos for me so when I can't leave and I feel overwhelmed I can go to my calm place and relax. I hope my audience feels the same way when they look at the photos.

Nicole Schwab: I am from New Jersey and have been here in Nebraska since the 90s. I get a chance to be a mom and now a grandmother. I love to see the world!

Hanan Smoqy: My poem is about two amazing females that I lost to death. One was to suicide because of abuse, and the other because of kidnapping. Two brave women had the best impact on me. Their story is shared through my poem.

Layla Thomson: My name is Layla Thomson I am from Grand Island Nebraska. I am starting my sophomore year at SCC in the fall. I have always loved exploring my creative side in artwork and sometimes photography. I have loved all forms of art, where I am used to working with 3D I am branching out to explore photography. At this time I do not have a set major, I am seeing where my experiences direct me for the future.

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Nature Villegas: ARTIST: LIKE NATURE, EYE AM EVERYWHERE. SHE WAS LIKE A GREY SKY- BEAUTIFUL EVEN IF SHE DID NOT WANT TO BE. HER MIND SWIMS AT A BRAINGEROUSLY MERMAID DEPTH MAJORITY DROWN IN. HER SOUL DANCES LIKE THE SEA, CAUSING EVEN HER RAGE TO BE CAPTIVATING. SHE NEVER LET THE SAVAGED SCARS INSIDE OR OUT DEFINE HER, SIMPLY DIVINE HER AS SHE MIRRORS THE JOURNEY AS NEVERENDING. SHE IS PHENOMENALLY OUT OF PLACE LIKE THE MOON ON A SUMMER DAY. STARDUST GLISTENS ON HER SKIN FROM PLAYING IN THE OUTERSPACE OF HER IMAGINATION...NARROW MINDS HEAR HER TESTIMONY AND ASSUME BROKENNESS. OH HONEY, NEVER THAT!! SHE TOOK ALL THE BROKEN PIECES, COLORED OUTSIDE THE LINES AND CREATED KALEIDOSCOPE BEAUTY. THE ROSE THAT BLOOMED IN CONCRETE WITH NO EXPLANATION OR COMPARISON, SHE BLOOMED: NATUREZFURY™

Dillon Walker: Dillon Walker is a Lincoln, NE artist studying music at SCC. Presented in this volume are a song from a few soon to be released albums.

Kaitlyn Walton: I'm from a tiny town in the Northeast area of Nebraska called Wausa. I have one younger brother who is total opposite of me, but he's one of my best friends. I've always loved reading and writing. I started looking at books before I could talk and started writing stories in kindergarten. In 8th grade I discovered poetry, and it became my form of self-therapy. I always put way too much emphasis on titles, so I started treating my writing like a journal, and I've been writing for going on six years now, so it's been interesting to read how I've grown as a person.

Tammy Zimmer: is an English instructor on the Beatrice campus and the editor of *Illuminations*. In her spare time she enjoys gardening, board games, and painting.



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"Sandy had no idea where the Secret Place was, but she imagined it must be far away if it was as magical as her daddy said it was. He told her stories about the times he spent there when he was a boy, but he would not tell her where it was, he said he was sworn to secrecy!"

John Cook

"The Secret Place"



As he linked our pinkies together and kissed it, looking at me to do the same.

My brain went blank and I whispered,

"Why do I have to kiss my pinky?"

He looked down at our hands, still tightly intertwined and said

"To lock in my promise."

Kaitlyn Walton

"April 5th, 2021"

"My college advisor at SCC was the most comprehensive person I met during my career path. I couldn't imagine finding the best fit for me without her. The first time I met her, I didn't expect her to be welcoming. Her sweet and comforting voice told me to imagine which program I envisioned myself in. I had no idea what I wanted. We met a few more times slowly leading me to make my final decision. She helped build the person I am today."

Carely Adame-Ortiz

"A Deceivingly Ideal College Plan"

"We once sat three on the bench with six hands fighting for the sharps and then back to natural, a sibling rhythm pulsing from a cadence in our bones."

Rachel Hruza

"The House of Piano"



"I believe in changing the world. I know, it sounds like one of the most daunting tasks to ever achieve, much less attempt. When most people think about changing the world, they tend to think about actions that would affect the world on a global scale and impact millions of people's lives, like starting a political movement in the name of justice, redistributing the wealth of the top 1% and ending poverty, or discovering a universal cure for cancer. When I think about changing the world, I think about actions that, while small, could have just as big of an impact on the world, like smiling at strangers, giving or receiving compliments, and extending gestures of kindness and generosity to others."

Natalie Duchesneau

"I Believe in Changing the World"