

**My Survival Story**  
**by Megha Sood (1st Place)**

The slow cleaving in my backbone  
the seamless transformation:  
branching into my thousand selves  
Like a sapling breaking  
from the blind seed  
I'm sprouting, I am thriving.

Growing like a Medusa  
this fecundity of myself,  
breaking out into  
thousand versions of me  
morphing into shapes  
perfecting the art of topiary.

Like a reflection of the summer sun  
shining into a million versions of me,  
on shards of broken mirror  
blessing them with its apricity.

I'm the war cry, the mortal fear  
residing behind the enemy lines  
The lava, the primordial gel  
creating life so sublime,  
I'm the knowledge in the verse  
in the smattering cacophony of your mind.

With inked breaths and walnut skin  
boisterous, unfettered and uncontrolled,  
Walking barefoot on this graveled path  
unspooling life's fears in its intimate corridors.

My pain impaled on the stars in the nightly sky  
I shine through my pulverized skin,  
The broken pieces I foraged together  
to make a whole of me

an untrammelled beauty within.

This fecundity is my survival extinct  
to handle the plethora of emotions  
life throws at me,  
Undulating between the proximity and prosody of pain:  
I'm learning.  
Yes, I'm growing.

## **Untitled**

**by Jennifer McGraw (2nd Place)**

she set foot into the Storm for the first time in a while  
the song of sunflowers filled her ears with melodic tones  
her nose with it's blissful, warm summer scent  
and her brain with ease

she no longer had to be afraid of the roaring thunder  
and flashing strikes of lightning  
instead of being hesitant, she walked with confidence  
for that the Storm was not going to terrorize her mind anymore

you see, she has grown and changed  
and pushed through doors and broken down walls  
she has undergone a character development; a journey  
she is not the same girl last week, last month, or last year

there was a time  
when the Storm was able to snatch her of her identity  
her sanity  
and her mental wellbeing  
but not anymore

she walked into this Storm and she felt free  
free from her old self  
free from that last chapter she was stuck on  
she was just free

the rain splashed onto the ground  
onto her hair, on her clothes, on her being  
and it was refreshing where it used to be troublesome  
her sunflower song  
and her stronger mind, body, and soul  
helped her see that Storms can only cause damage if you let it

## Silence

by Michelle Belfiore (3rd Place)

Down.  
Into the darkness.  
Hands reaching for me  
But no.  
I don't reach back.

Further.  
Into the darkness  
I go.  
It's all I know.

Alone.  
Into the darkness.  
Gasping for air.  
None  
To be found.

Afraid.  
In the darkness.  
Not sure  
When  
If  
Light will be seen  
Again.

Silence.

Up.  
Into the light.

Hands reaching for me  
But no, help isn't needed.

Slowly.  
Into  
The light.  
I am  
The light.  
I am  
The fire.

The fire is  
Within me.

Up.  
Slowly.  
Into the light.  
Things are  
Brighter.  
Things are  
Clearer.  
Things have  
Hope.

What goes  
Down  
Can  
Come Up.  
Higher  
Than ever before.

**Hello my name is: Resilience**  
**by Edward Ballo (4th Place)**

I am a child, or am I the parent, or am I their spouse  
I shop, caretake, and provide support  
It's 10am and she is sleeping

Don't upset her  
I must be her favorite  
Pray nothing goes wrong

Open the refrigerator  
Butter, ketchup, cold pizza  
Electricity shut off again  
It's 1pm and she is sleeping

Achieve to better yourself  
Achieve to escape  
Achieve perfection and all will be fine

My arm goes through a glass door  
Dishes fly, words too  
The child did wrong  
It's 4pm and she is back sleeping

You are too uptight I'm told  
I know no different  
Uptight is my protector

You achieve, you move forward  
Others parent, feed, teach  
The journey has value, you have value  
It's 7pm, I know she is safe; I think she is sleeping

I am growing, I am growing up  
Coping skills, education, relationships, independence  
I am not alone, I am not unique

It's 2020, I am not sleeping  
I am alive  
Thank-you my friend, I didn't catch your name  
Hello my name is: Resilience

**Metamorphosis**  
**by Karen Jung (5th Place)**

There are moments and days  
When my Spirit struggles to breathe  
And feels trapped inside this dark hole  
With no tunnel to escape  
And nowhere to scream  
My eyes become blind  
As despair seeps into my brain  
And loneliness captures my heart

...and just when I'm on the brink of crumbling...

I paint rainbow colors  
Across the canvas of my mind's eye  
To cover the hues of black, blue, and gray  
That seep from the depths of my soul  
And spread like ever-growing spiderwebs  
That threaten to imprison my sense of Hope

...and when my rainbow colors start to fade...

I raise my shield of Faith  
And shout words of protest  
To ward off the enemies of my mind  
For they speak partial truths and twisted lies  
That try to poison the sanctity  
Of who I was born to be

...and when my shield starts to shudder...

I enshroud my Spirit  
With a halo of God's Grace  
And dance to the rhythms  
Of the sun and the moon  
For I am like the butterfly  
Who has broken free  
From her coffin-like cocoon  
To bask in the beauty of the Universe  
And soar with the winds of Peace



## **Visibility**

**by Cooper Kidd (6th Place)**

Oftentimes it is the fact that I am trans that makes me visible,  
Thankfully not a mockery or a disgrace,  
But visible enough to be vocal.  
I used to say that being trans was my superpower,  
But that was before I knew my superpower exists in wholeness,  
Not in silos or compartments.  
My superpower now consists of all of me,  
Not just parts pieced together haphazardly like bits of trash speckling the Philly streets,  
Loose, torn, fragmented, never still.  
But sadness is like that sometimes,  
Like a caged lion trying to escape,  
Trying to roar with no sound,  
Attempting to mask its frustration and cries for help.  
Time capsules help though,  
Transform me, motivate me, move me,  
Allows me to remember better times exist,  
Glimpses into a future untold but omnipresent.  
Like a ghost I am neither here nor there,  
Cutting in and out of lives, situations, places,  
Striving to stay,  
But unable not unwilling.  
Sometimes though I transform,  
Caged animals sing sometimes too you know,  
Sing loud and proud,  
Unmasking and rejoicing in freedom that has at long last come.

**Cosmic Revelation**  
**by Sacha Batra (7th Place)**

As I surpassed the line that separates heaven and earth,  
The universe whispered that life on earth can be cruel,  
But I will guide you to find beauty within and evolve,  
Like a lotus in dark waters.

My soul grew restless.  
For many years, I screamed at the barriers,  
That pulled me, into, a starless dark sky.  
It pushed me to an inconceivable edge.  
I wished to jump into that darkness with the delusion of achieving eternal sleep and everlasting peace.

It was at that pivotal moment, when I felt most broken,  
The universe felt it was time to intervene.  
It lifted the dark veil to reveal the light that was always inside me.

Soon, each drop of cosmic ray granted by the stars,  
Surrounded me with a blazing glow.

Through the radiance, I saw my truth; a soul that was gifted a life of darkness to overcome in order to discover my own light.

**D.I.D.**

**by Jodie Intilli (8th Place)**

I'm a did  
made up of multiple parts.  
Sarah, 8, 12, and Tommy  
to name a few.  
We were born out of insanity;  
torture, neglect-  
created to survive an unbearable childhood.

DISSOCIATIVE.

Escape the rolodex of memories;  
his sadistic games,  
my mind would leave my body.  
My mind was all that fled.  
My body-  
it lay lifeless, captive prey.

IDENTITY.

Twelve,  
Jodala,  
boy,  
girl.  
All of us grieve.  
We surrender to become protectors.

DISORDER.

Confusion,  
fear and suffering-  
chaos.

D.I.D.-

ultimately a label  
to tell the world my mind  
is undone.  
Crazy I am not.  
I try to piece back the fragments;  
find integration,  
Become one.  
I am a did but I am not done.

## Signs

by Aparaaajit Sriram (9th Place)

Curling at the edges  
a blue post-it on a dirty window  
'No analysis will save you.'

The A train hurtles from 125th to 59th street  
Space finally to move, breathe

But I am still at 168th  
What had I missed? Why had I rushed?  
Am I safe? Am I sure?

Dancing again between steaming grates  
sidling by trash cans, ducking overhangs  
Gyros for \$3.99, spiced chicken charring the air

I can rack my brains  
and replay images past  
all while smiling at you

OCD is watching and doing at the same time  
Consciousness and self-consciousness  
An edifice in two places,  
with too many moving parts

A glitch, a catch,  
vigilance off-kilter  
And I feel for feelings felt

It is a delicious itch itched, compulsive checking

But what is it to push through obsessive doubt?  
I cast my eyes down to my half-copy of *Irrational Man*  
No spine, no cover, a slab of text

To press forward while  
the muscle of memory pulls me  
back

'No analysis will save you.'

## **The good the bad and the mental illness**

**by Shelley Pickles (10th Place)**

Being in this place is fun sometimes: the stories.. the quirks.. the inappropriate jokes that only I hear.

other times its nightmare.. a visual minefield, that I tried to forget exists, one no cliché aphorisms can soothe.

You can sleep but that only brings more darkness and passing of a man-made illusion that serves as a biological clock

Dancing on the end of a pin in an attempt to sew yourself back together again  
Other times you can hear the drop of a pin from self-isolation

Times like that you have to make your own escape from this collagen fiber enclosure  
That is meant to protect you.

Whilst doing something that's meant to better yourself, you might find a light-like Christmas lights or the light of a lighthouse guiding you away from the rocks.  
It's beautiful but only exists in those minutes of wonder. is that why my heart rate thuds faster?  
It's beautiful but so alien and unexpected

The light is part of something a person said they loved about you. They loved it so much they enclosed it in a box filled with pink love hearts that twinkle in the light.

Could that be my light