nota bene

29th Edition

FROM THE *NOTA BENE* EDITORIAL BOARD

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is proud to present the 29th edition of *Nota Bene*, the only national literary anthology featuring excellence in writing among community college students.

Once again, we are pleased to offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. This year's *Ewing Citation Scholarship* has been awarded to **Certitude Lembion Gakounet**, Montgomery College, Takoma Park Campus in Maryland member, for her short story "Do Not Forget Me."

The **2023 International Poet Laureate Award** goes to the author of the most outstanding poem, **Josslyn Ames** of Umpqua Community College, Roseburg Campus, in Oregon, for "Polka Dotted Roses."

The authors of four other standout entries have been recognized as **2023 Reynolds Scholars**. They are **Aidan Altman** of Pearl River Community College, Forrest County Campus in Mississippi, for "I sit on my floor, peach juice dripping down"; **Cherryenne Hibbing** of Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon Campus in Iowa, for "In Every Tense"; **Jessica Pounder** of Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Campus in Washington, for "Photography's Influence on Reality"; and **Raine Schmid** of Los Angeles Valley College, Van Nuys Campus in California, for "Transgenderism."

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the response from members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and from the audience who enthusiastically read the book. Today, we continue to see a fervent response to the call for submissions, and selection for publication remains a great source of pride. *Nota Bene* takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired by the good work of these exceptional authors. We are grateful for the continued opportunity to showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members and to affirm our commitment to the recognition and academic excellence of students seeking associate degrees and certificates.

Sincerely,

The *Nota Bene* Editorial Board
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Dr. Kelly Kennedy
Dr. Terri Smith Ruckel

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AWARDS

The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award of $1,000 is given to the author of the *Nota Bene* manuscript considered to be the most outstanding of all entries. It is named in honor of the late Nell Ewing, long-time Phi Theta Kappa staff member who was a driving force behind *Nota Bene*, beginning with its conceptual design and establishment. She retired in 2012 after serving 26 years with Phi Theta Kappa.

The International Poet Laureate Award of $1,000 is given to the author of the most outstanding poem. In addition to the scholarship award, the International Poet Laureate will be invited to present their poem during one of Phi Theta Kappa's international events.

The Reynolds Scholarship Awards of $500 each are given to up to four authors whose manuscripts were deemed outstanding. These awards are endowed by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and honor the memory of the late Donald W. Reynolds, founder of the Donrey Media Group (now Stephens Media Group).

Special thanks to the following Advisors and Advisors Emeriti for reviewing *Nota Bene* submissions:

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DO NOT FORGET ME



CERTITUDE LEMBION GAKOUNET
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"You live next door yet you somehow always take forever to get here." She was laying in bed in a pink oversized shirt when he snuck through her window.

"Sorry, I was looking for my crayons." His hands were empty, "Couldn't find them. Can I use yours?" He plastered a large smile on his face because who could say no to such a cute face?

"This was your idea, you know. How are you going to propose that we draw each other and have no supplies at all?" She said as she walked to the bookcase that stood in the back of her room. The third shelf was riddled with paintbrushes, sharpies, and crayons. She had meant to clean it last week but never found the time. Maybe she'll get to it next week.

"Because I knew my good friend Oasis would have my back." He jumped on her bed and took off his green sneakers before grabbing Bimbo.

Bimbo–with its missing eye, matted fur, and eternal brown stains– was as old as their friendship. Oasis had received the yellow teddy bear on her fifth birthday, the same day he knocked down her birthday cake because he was running recklessly. She clung on to Bimbo as she cried herself to sleep that night and swore to hate him for as long as she lived.

There was a cake on the table when she went downstairs the next morning, "Blue's mom made it as a way of saying sorry about what happened yesterday." Oasis's mother cut her a slice and gave it to her. It was better than she could have ever imagined. The chocolate cake covered in pink fondant danced in her mouth as the richness of the chocolate chips exploded. She hugged Bimbo tight while devouring the cake, deciding that maybe the little boy wasn't as bad as she thought.

Oasis dumped the supplies on her bed and sat across from Blue, her legs crossed, sketchbook in hand, "My drawing is going to be better than yours."

"Doubt it. I'm a genius." And he was. Straight A student since middle school, Blue was the smartest boy in their junior class. Honor Roll every semester, national math champion; name an accolade, Blue had one.

They both got to work, each with a different method: she lightly drew an outline; he began working on her left eye. The sounds of the TV downstairs leaked into her bedroom. The Property Brothers were debating over which color they should paint the kitchen of a Nashville home they were working on. "I think the kitchen should be white," Blue mumbled, eyes not leaving the paper. He had committed her face to memory.

"What?" asked Oasis as she looked up from her sketch.

"Nothing. Where are your speakers? I wanna play some music."

She pointed to the bookcase, second shelf. "Don't play anything stupid."

"Why? Are your parents home?"

"No, I just don't want to listen to anything stupid."

He chuckled. Bringing the speaker onto the bed and connecting it to his phone, "I Wanna be Yours" by Arctic Monkeys enveloped them. They both began bobbing their heads.

This song marked her first time sneaking out of the house. She listened to it as she got dressed. One earbud in, the volume low, ears peaked in case anyone had woken up. Once her jeans, shirt, and Converse were in, Oasis tumbled out her window. Blue was waiting for her down the street, amused that she was running so fast towards him. The party they went to was shut down after only twenty minutes. Refusing to let the night spoil, they bought 7-11 snacks and sat on the swings at the nearby park. Connected by a pair of wire earbuds, they talked and listened to the song together. The empty park, the music, and moonlight shining down on her face, that was the one and only time Blue ever saw her as more than a friend.

"You have a really sharp jawline" Oasis stated. She had finally finished with the outline of his face. He looked at her and grinned, taking it as a compliment rather than an observation.

"Thank you, sugarplum." Nothing got under her skin more than that nickname. They fell silent again, a silence she was comfortable with, but he wasn't. As he drew her nose, his mind dizzied with topics that would not sound forced.

Oasis spoke before he could. "Have you seen the new house yet?"

This was the one topic he did not know how to answer. There was no use in lying, but he knew the truth would upset her.

"Yeah, we did," he began, trying to keep his tone neutral. Her eyes met his. "My room is bigger and so is the backyard." Should he say more? He stared at her, hoping to find the answer in her brown eyes. Oasis offered him a small smile, a sign that he should tell her more. If he kept talking, maybe his voice would give way to how he really felt moving so far away from her. Blue said nothing.

"That sounds exciting. More space and all," Oasis said, her gaze reverting back to page.

Her emotions were always so plainly displayed on her face. But she prayed he did not notice.

Just this once.

"I'll miss you," Blue spoke softly. Barely above a whisper.

She added another hair stroke to his thick, straight eyebrows and refused to look up. She could almost feel his eyes piercing through her soul.

"I just think it's stupid to move the summer before your senior year," she said, shrugging.

"Oasis." The tip of her ears got red as her name escaped from his lips. Shame?

Embarrassment? Sadness? The feelings all muddled together, inseparable.

The last time he had called her by her first name was two weeks ago. She had snuck into his room after he incessantly texted her, insisting that it was urgent. Each time he had told her that it was urgent, it never was. She hopped through his window to find him at his desk, two Surfer Cooler Capri Sun in front of him. He handed her one. "Oasis, I'm moving in three weeks." She stopped mid-sip. She searched his face, scanning it for any sign that could give away this cruel joke. There was no sign. He was serious. Blue was leaving their town.

It was not fair to be mad at him for moving. He could not say no. But she had to be mad at someone. "I'm not upset," she said. "Liar."

His parents were getting a divorce. They sold the house and his mother got custody, so he had to move with her. His father was staying in town, but Oasis would never ask Blue to stay with his dad. Their relationship was marked with strife, always butting heads. This led to screaming matches that the whole neighborhood could hear. And whenever things would become too unbearable at home, he would slam their front door—duffle bag in hand—and knock on the house across the street to ask if Oasis was home. After a while, everytime he knocked, her parents just let him in. He patiently waited for her, sitting at the corner of her bed or talking to her little sister. And when she finally came home, he already had the rest of their evening planned. Video games, a movie, drawing, or whatever he could think of to get his mind off his father. She would ask him if he was okay and that he should not bottle things up. She was there for him. But Blue would always say he was fine and slither to another topic. After a while she stopped prodding, against her better judgment. Forcing him would only push him away.

"The move would be good for him. The city life will suit him," she thought. He was meant for big things, and a part of her—one she tried to suppress—knew that they were not going to be together forever. Unfortunately, the reality of the moment was much more sour than she could bear. But she had to put on a brave front. This was hard enough as is; why make things more difficult for him?

"I'm not abandoning you. You know that right? We can still facetime and text every day," he said, placing his hand on hers. The warmth of his fingers quelled her heart for a moment. But then she remembered this might be the last time she would ever feel this warmth again.

"You know it won't be the same." He did know that. His hope lied in the fact that if they never said it out loud, then it would not be true. She slipped her hand out from under him and went back to the drawing. The highlights were easier to color in than the shadows. They worked quietly until she asked, "Can I come visit during the summer?"

His face lit up, "Yes, of course! I'll have so much to show you!" She smiled because his was contagious.

He added the finishing touches to her face: the scar on her chin that she got after he pushed her a little too hard and she fell, the beauty mark right above her lip, the curl at the top of her hair which she complained never behaved like the rest.

"Finished," she said. Oasis ripped the page from her notebook and walked to the bookcase once more. She grabbed two sheet protectors that were tucked between stacks of books and slipped the drawing inside. He did the same. She stared at her image of Blue, afraid that if she did not memorize the details of his face, he would walk out of her room and she would forget him. Forget the memories they created together. That it would all vanish, having meant nothing.

He handed her his drawing and as she saw how he had captured her beauty with nothing but her colored pencils, she hugged him. Blue—caught by surprise—instinctively wrapped his arms around her as he had done a million times before.

"Don't forget me." The words were muttered in the fabric of his sweater.

"How could I? You have my heart."

POLKA DOTTED ROSES



JOSSLYN AMES
Umpqua Community College
Roseburg Campus
Oregon

There are such things as polka-dotted roses.

They're the rarest of things.

Finding one is like finding a butterfly in the dead of winter, but they exist.

If you are lucky enough to find one be sure to treasure it.

Don't pick it and encase it in a vase, but instead nourish it where it grows. Remove the weeds that suck at its roots.

If it shows up in your bush of roses, don't paint it to make it blend in.

Pour on it, water only from clouds that shine gold. And sing to it songs that taste like sugar.

Within its petals of colorful polka-dots there is a special kinda magic.

The kind that makes you giggle at every glance of its unique wonder.

It will flourish even brighter upon your laughter. Its magic will seep out in tendrils of golden fog.

But how can something of such bliss be so uncommon?

We will never understand the nature of nature.

But the one thing we can be sure of, is that there are such things as polka-dotted roses.

I SIT ON MY FLOOR, PEACH JUICE DRIPPING DOWN



AIDAN AULTMAN
Pearl River Community College
Forrest County Campus
Mississippi

I sit on my floor, peach juice dripping down.
The fruit was ripe,
Easily torn by desperate teeth.
No paper towels available,
I let the carcass rest bare in my hands.
Such a treat was rare,
With childlike eyes, I devour it.
Normal fruits are bone dry.
Leaving a hollow feeling where your own pit is.
Much like the rest of living.
The rich own strawberry fields that glisten in the sunlight.
What does a strawberry taste like?
I wish parks were open still.
They closed in 1984.
Swing sets were torn apart.
Their chains now lived in the desperates' fantasies.
Oh, the fruit is gone now,
Leaving a pit in my hand and a puddle of what life tasted like.
I know how to keep it going,
And shove the pit down my throat.
Feeling it clog.

TRANSGENDERISM



RAINE SCHMID
Los Angeles Valley College
Van Nuys Campus
California

The day you died, I did not shed the tears you thought I would
Forgive me?

For your wake, I cut off my hair
And wove each strand into the flower bouquet detailed in your will

In your casket, I lay my old clothes
The ones you always wished I would wear

And at your funeral, I listened to laments about you and your life
And when the turn was mine, I lowered my voice
And spoke with a chest now flat and burning
And shook as the sun rose

Over your body
I stumbled to the mourning sky's blue-pink-whites
And watched my eyes open for the first time in Eighteen Regrettable Years
And ached for your hands on my weightless shoulders

But you told me
That the day you would utter my name was the day your lips paled and stopped working
That the day you could no longer tell me you love me was the day you would start
And the day your heart beat was the day you would part-

I gave you what remained of my salt long ago
Hid the rest in a five-page handwritten letter
now months folded-up in the drawer only
alive in fear of being found when you told me:
'Over my dead body.'

So the day you died, I could not shed the tears you thought I would.
I do not forgive you.

IN EVERY TENSE



CHERRYENNE HIBBING
Northwest Iowa Community College
Sheldon Campus
Iowa

She was
Born into the heat of a small island
Island girl sun burn brown
Brown eyes, black hair, and brown button nose
Knows no wealth and little want
Wanting a new pair of shoes
Shoos a mosquito with her slipper
Slippery with sweat as she walked to the schoolyard
Yards downhill it's a trek
Trekking back uphill as the sun sets
Settling down her frantic soul
Soles wearing thin into holes
Whole closet puzzled as freckled birthmarks
Market fish booths run by bloodlines
Lines of blood on her forehead a birthday tradition
Traditionally acknowledged in the Philipines
Filipina islander
Landing in America

She is
A mother of eight, four boys and four girls
Giving up everything she's known for her family
Her homeland, her sisters, her mother, her language
Her weight finally sticking to her after the fourth child
A big difference compared to her 60 pounds at sixteen

She loves flowing skirts of rich colors
Fuschia, flamingo, amaranth, and amber hems sweep the floor

She is showing her children to measure rice and water
With the creases of their knuckles

Permanent calluses armor her knees
Her defense against harm, she prays as she dozes
A rosary with thinning thread
Rubbing her palms till they bled
She'd hold it up at the airport claiming carriage of a weapon
At least if we could take her on a trip to the Bahamas or aboard a ship

She is gravely underappreciated
For all the baggage she muscles
Roses for you too, Mama

She will
Go to rest
Like the star, the sun set in
the west
When at last, her duty is done

Outliving whom she loved best
Her youngest one
Is welcoming Mom as a guest

Her grandchildren run
Chasing her hearse in protest

She will go, but her legacy has just begun

PHOTOGRAPHY'S INFLUENCE ON REALITY



JESSICA POUNDER
Whatcom Community College
Bellingham Campus
Washington

Photography plays a considerable role in determining how we learn about the world and others. Photographers particularly hold a tremendous amount of responsibility because their intentions and perspectives significantly influence the information we extract from each photo. `Throughout this paper, I will explore how the relationship between the camera, photographer, and subject can positively or negatively shape the way we come to view the reality portrayed in an image.

Photography frames the reality we perceive from images in diverse ways. In "Photography in the Age of Facebook," Johnny Winston states how "the act of photographing shapes reality itself because the camera is not a passive capturing or communicative tool, but rather, a tool that actively affects the photographer's actions and behavior" (3). The presence of a camera encourages a photographer to behave differently than they would without one because it alters how they view and engage with the present world. Furthermore, it encourages the photographer to seek out more picture-worthy events, which lessens the authenticity of the resulting image. This is important to take into account because, in a sense, the reality shown in the image is manipulated before the picture is ever taken. On top of this, the presence of a camera affects the way the photographer interacts with the subjects within the event. It places distance between the two, which can largely or slightly impact how subjects behave when a picture is taken. For example, when a photographer shoots pictures of a wedding, they can capture genuine interactions from a distance, but once the attendees notice the camera, they're highly likely to pose or behave differently had the camera not been present. The photographer

may also have specific goals for the pictures they'd like to capture, which can slightly over-romanticize an already near-perfect seeming event. This scenario shows that the camera plays an active role in how the photographer engages with their environment, therefore affecting how the subject appears in the image compared to a completely natural circumstance. It is helpful to remember when considering how images may not literally be altered, but still, show a reality slightly different than how we may see it with our own eyes.

An opposing situation can also be true. When photographers approach an event with a less concrete goal for specific visual outcomes, the resulting pictures can show very accurate versions of reality. If the main objective is to present something as close to the way we naturally encounter it as they can, the chances of misinterpreting or misunderstanding the image become lower. Although the camera cannot exactly replicate the worldview we see with our own eyes, photography with these thoughts purposely in mind lessens the damage it may cause.

While photographers may approach their situations with the best intentions in mind, the practice itself puts the subject in an unguarded position. "In Plato's Cave," respected writer and philosopher Susan Sontag reveals that the act of photographing another human being is "to [see] them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have: it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed" (14). In other words, the camera gives the photographer a level of power over the subject. They control how the camera represents or erases the essence of their being, and often reduce them to unconscious ideals of perfection floating in the back of the cameraman's mind. I see how cameras create distance between the subject and viewer, and more specifically, how this separation creates a power imbalance between the two. I believe that Sontag was trying to draw attention to this phenomenon by examining the effects of a camera being used to see an event. Considering the nature of photography as a whole, I see how the subject is placed in a position of vulnerability. Since a photograph will only ever capture a glimpse of reality, the photographer has the responsibility to decide just exactly what that is. The characteristics of the result is reflected almost entirely in the cameraman's intentions. Yes, the pictured person(s) may often decide which images get released to the public sphere in informal settings, but the subjects of most circumstances do not have that luxury. I believe that it's essential to bring attention to this disparity because the relationship can quickly become harmful if the photographs we view arise from the wrong inventions.

If we overlook the degree of control the camera gives the photographer over their subject, we risk turning a blind eye to the damage it could cause. Manipulating the appearance of a subject can negatively change the way we view the circumstances depicted in the image. It can equally hurt our mental definitions and expectations of certain things, which may cause us to negatively react to the truthful, real-life realities of these distorted images when we naturally encounter them. For this reason, it's important that photographers do not intentionally and negatively weaponize cameras for selfish benefits.

Ignoring the need for responsible and respectful photography creates issues stemming from insufficient moral values. According to photographer and photo agency owner, Grazia Neri, in her article "Ethics and Photography," she describes how the absence of "ethics gives rise to distortions in the information and education of young people, prevents art and beauty from being enjoyed and turns us into victims of the worst types of manipulation" (2). This means that without a form of morally correct principles to follow, photo-taking can quickly become an untrustworthy and harmful practice. It could impair our ability to understand and learn from certain situations based on

false information, while simultaneously preventing us from enjoying the beauty and artistic value of photography. I think ethics are a significant factor to bring into this conversation because they dictate the relationship between the photographer and the subject. Neri makes an important point to show how large of an impact an unethical mindset can have on a significant number of people. It helps illustrate how big of a responsibility picture-taking actually is, and why we need photographers with the right intentions. Whether it's on the smaller scale of something like a personal social media account, or something bigger, like the front page picture for a news article, a lack of morals can have a profound effect on the quality of information we gather from the image. We can easily be intentionally led to perceive widely inaccurate falsehoods from an image if the photographer is cunning enough to do so. This should be taken into consideration when viewing photos in a context where the photographer may benefit from these lies and distortions.

It's also beneficial to remember that the manipulation of self-image is extremely common and nearly inescapable when the photographer and the subject are the same people. Our personal ideas about beauty and how we'd like the world to perceive us take over when we can dictate how we're going to be pictured. The camera usually puts a wall between a photographer and subject that makes it a little easier to detach from imposing ideals onto the person or thing being pictured. However, when the two are one and the same, the wall is non-existent. The identity we most want to be portrayed takes priority over the identity that may be most authentic.

As we increasingly rely on images to learn about the external world, the act of self-portrait style photography becomes more misleading. Winston discusses this idea in "Photography in the Age of Facebook," by expressing how "despite [our] reliance upon the photographic image as an accurate portrayal of identity, identity is shaped and manipulated from the moment of capture" (6). We desperately want the world to see a better version of ourselves and that desire is reflected in the pictures we take. Even though we tend to see these photographs as trustworthy, they show an identity we'd like to have, but aren't great representations of our most authentic selves. Recognizing the distortion in identity from personal picture-taking is a crucial and meaningful point that Winston makes. Everyone has an unconscious bias towards certain aesthetics and attributes that affect how we perceive others and the world around us. However, understanding and working to notice these tendencies makes it easier to see how and why we're consistently imposing these things on ourselves. Although hiding our assumed inferiorities might make us feel better in the moment, being untruthful always has the capacity to damage the picture's viewer. One instance of this is sharing images that hide common insecurities. A woman might be insecure about her stomach, and after seeing countless pictures of other ladies posing to hide the same insecurity, she begins to think that her body is inferior to what she sees online. In reality, most women don't have perfectly flat stomachs, but as a result of mass identity manipulation, it's easy to arrive at the conclusion that it's the norm.

We can observe social media constantly changing the way people come to view and feel about themselves. While contrasting preferences are constantly pushed to viewers through different algorithms, the ideas we consume of what's normal or most attractive constantly shift.

As more images appear to emulate these trends, our opinions of certain attributes often change accordingly. Although the progression of these changes is slow, society naturally adapts and tries to fulfill their demands. Now that people have increasingly easy access to resources that encourage these changes, we have unfortunately become more trapped in the pursuit of perfection over time.

Even though the urge to strive for improvement and development is natural, photographers must be mindful of how it affects their work. Sontag mentions in "In Plato's Cave" how "[e]ven when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience" (6). Although ethical and truthful photography might be a photographer's priority, it's still tempting to let their biases at least slightly dictate how reality is captured in the image. There's always the temptation for the photographer to seek perfection. Perfection is undefinable and impossible to achieve, so aiming to capture it in a photograph will never happen. It's important to note that while it's simple to say that eliminating bias and seeking out the purest forms of reality when using a camera is the definitive solution to distortion, it's easier said than done. We'll never be able to entirely avoid it merely because of the nature of what a photograph is, but we can avoid malicious manipulation and extortion with these principles clearly in mind. When photographers use cameras to capture a subject, they should aim to capture them with respectful intentions. Fixing things like the lighting and angle of the image is unavoidable and sure, it's a form of manipulation, but I think it's most important that we don't touch the intrinsic nature and identity of the subject at its core. To explain this, I think of how we used to photograph Indigenous people in the 19th century. Images were taken to objectify and dehumanize them instead of showing the beauty of their culture and identity. It created damaging stereotypes of what western photographers wanted them to be viewed as versus who they really were/are. Instances like these show an illustration of why it is so crucial for us to be mindful of what drives our use of photography.

While aiming to show the unbiased truth of an event definitely is key to minimizing the misrepresentation and mischaracterization of events commonly seen in images, it's not the entire solution. When it comes to handling sensitive subjects, we also need to include basic compassion in the process. Sometimes in an attempt to show harsh reality, images become unnecessarily cruel. There's a fine line to walk between meaningful documentation and borderline exploitation that has to be thoughtfully navigated by the photographer in these circumstances.

In addition to valuing truth, photography must also include social conscience. In her article "Ethics and Photography" Grazia Neri elaborates on the importance of ethics by explaining how photographers "should be motivated by the intention of offering a honest document, choosing the truest reporting language…in an attempt to reach beyond the horror to understand the photograph and the photographic message" (3-4). Particularly for images showing forms of hardship and/or suffering, their objectives must be moral and truthful. They should aim to deliver the reality of the situation in a humane way that doesn't harmfully exploit the subjects in the event taking place. I think Neri does a fantastic job of pointing out how crucial it is for ethics like these to be considered in photography to avoid unfair, dishonest, and inhuman picture-taking. When photographers forget to properly consider their subject in these situations, they risk destroying the positive impact their photos could have had. I see this situation reflected in images of the famine ongoing in Yemen. Online, you'll see a variety of photos that instantly show up, but there are clear instances where suffering children are pictured in ways that objectify and disgustingly take advantage of ongoing starvation in the country. It's necessary to know the realities of this crisis, but there are other ways to make an impact without horrifically exploiting young children unaware of their situations. Instances such as this one show harm caused by photographers who've neglected the importance of this aspect in ethical relationships with their subjects.

In conclusion, ethics have proven to dictate whether the relationship between the

camera, photographer, and subjects yields meaningful or harmful results in the way an image depicts a situation. Additionally, photography has shown its deep and complex influence on how we think about others and different environments. It is critical for all picture-takers to be mindful of this nuanced relationship and how it affects the truths we need photography to tell.

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CHEROKEE



CELESTE RAMIREZ GONZALEZ
Central Carolina Community College
Lee Main Campus
North Carolina

Tsa la qi means Cherokee
Sequoyah, the one who made the syllabary,
Cherokees went through a lot pain,
They went through the trail of tears,
have been here almost 1500 years,
all this still wasn't enough to be U.S. citizens.
But no matter how many times they tried to bring them down,
They're still here,
living today.
They are *tsa la qi*.
They are Cherokee.

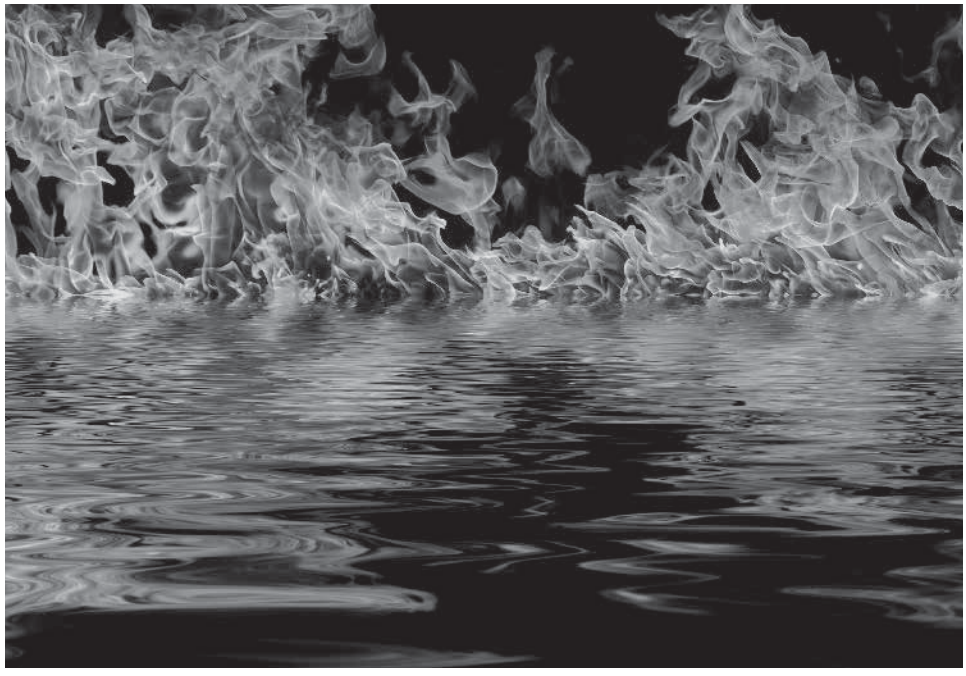
FLOWERS



MATT PASCALE
Middlesex College
Edison Campus
New Jersey

I spent over a decade growing my flowers
Several strenuous months, weeks, and hours.
My garden is kept safe with a lock on a sturdy gate
I anxiously clutch the key tight as I wait
For when the time comes to water their sprouting seed
The aqueous nectar for which delicate plants feed.
So imagine my surprise,
When right before my eyes
An intruder had forced my defenses open
And despite my protests, anxiously hoping
My pleas laced with desperation would be heard
They only fell upon deaf ears and stones killed the bird.
There I lay in a bloody puddle
With only the grass to caress and cuddle
As my weary eyes greet my once lovely garden
My soft expression began to harden.
The taste of iron built in my throat, and a knot in my chest
The once beautiful flowers are now an ugly, mangled mess.

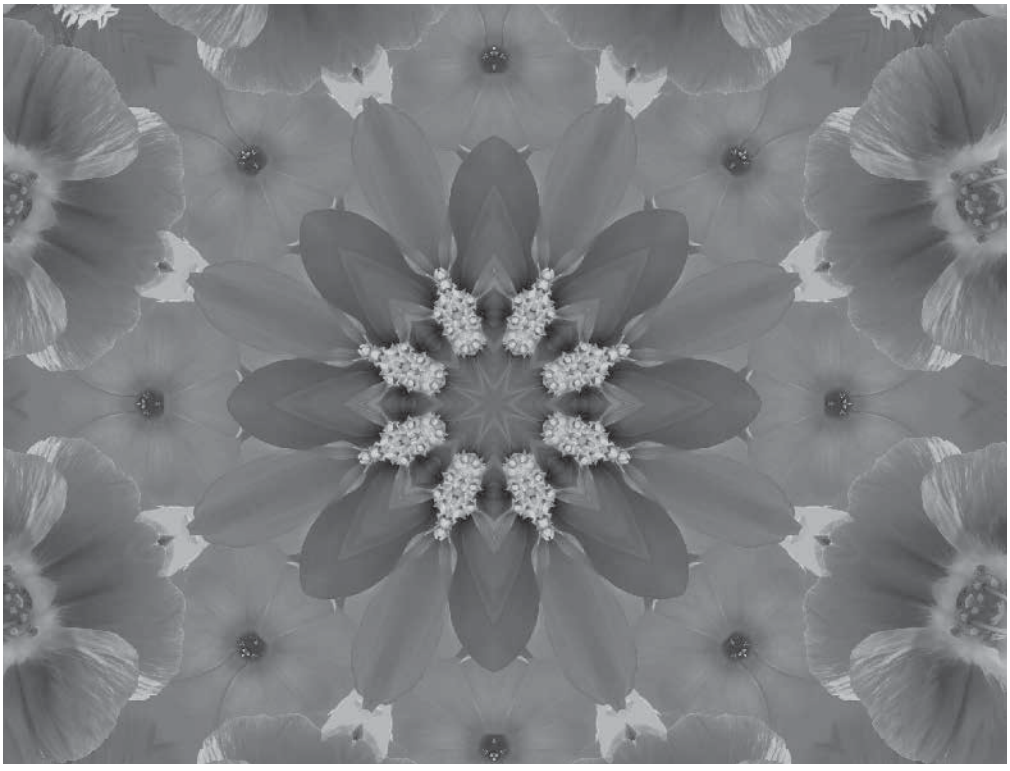
SEA PRINCE AND HIS FIRE CHILD



BEATRIX TEANEY
Los Angeles Valley College
Van Nuys Campus
California

sea prince and his fire child
    enamored love running wild
adventurous wanderers making way
    separate together day after day
tethered feelings
    shattered ceilings
glancing up at our own reserved star
    present journey with future afar
a true love story foretold
    glittering hearts of glowing gold
water wash and cleanse the mind
    exuberant elation of what we find
growing beyond what we can foresee
    navigating a turbulent sea
smooth oceans not for great sailors
    words sewn by crafty tailors
binary pairings of water and of fire
    tale as old as time, never does it tire
duality reflected in reality after reality
    two beings in divine synchronicity
Malta and Sirius
    Euridice and Orpheus
the fate of great lovers
    doomed and blessed like all the others
forever and ever
    never and never
ending endeavor
        You are my
            One
                forever
                    and ever

TINY THOUGHTS OF THINGS



BEATRIX TEANEY
Los Angeles Valley College
Van Nuys Campus
California

feeling helpless, feeling small
being reckless, standing tall
towering high above it all
toppling over, a harmful fall

back and forth, up and down
screaming my thoughts without a sound
looking ahead, what's to be found?
uphill battle, no more ground

mind in a flurry
my vision is blurry
trying to catch up, i'm in a hurry!
anxious thoughts, caught up in a worry

sitting down to convey this rhyme
spending away my precious time
internal dread, a personal crime
no external words, silent mime
straining to be present
living in the moment seems more pleasant
waning moon phase, slim little crescent
words for the lunar mother, message sent

how much further can i go on
before it becomes a played-out song
tiring down, let out a yawn
enjoy a nap on the moon-soaked lawn
wake into a new day at the break of dawn
… too many thoughts
all at once
swirling in my kaleidoscope mind …

WHO I SAW TODAY



MARIAH RICHARDSON
Northeast Mississippi Community College
Booneville Campus
Mississippi

It's been five years and some change
I saw you there, yesterday
I thought of all the things you used to say.
Even now I see you
And even now I say
To all my closest friends
"Guess who I saw today?"
Though time has taken its toll
And my heart starts to ache
I can't help that when I see you
I freeze, I shake

Thank you for being the hardest lesson I ever learned.
Thank you for being the hardest punishment I never earned.

Won't you say hello?
Tell me it's all a lie
Why do all the best people
Someday, in some way, have to die?
My life has been on pause since I was last with you.

OPAL'S ADVENTURES



JENNA SANDERS
Weatherford College
Texas

Thursday morning, the best time of the week. I'm headed to coffee with Nana at our favorite coffee shop, just as we do every week. I make a quick floral arrangement on my way out the door for The Coffee Bar and head out, locking up the store. I live in the second story apartment of my flower shop, and so I enjoy bringing a nice bouquet to The Coffee Bar everytime I go. This particular morning I have decided on a hydrangea base with red roses and sunflowers—simple yet elegant.

As I walk to The Coffee Bar, I am daydreaming about a nice iced mocha and the story Nana will tell me from her youth. Nana loved to tell stories and would do so anytime she was reminded of one. Sometimes it was some wild party night from her young adult years or a story from when her husband was in the Marine Corps, but the best stories are childhood memories from the ranch her grandparents owned. I really hope that's the direction she wants to go in today.

I walk in the coffee shop, place the flowers on the counter, order Nana's chai latte and my iced mocha, and I go to our booth while I wait for Nana to show up. When she walks in the door, every barista greets her with an enthusiastic, "Good morning, Opal!" She is so well loved in this small town, and it's not hard to see why. She always has a smile on her face and a Bible in her hand. She just shines with everything she does. Nana's an old soul with young eyes, a vintage heart, and a beautiful mind.

She sits down with me as our coffee arrives and thanks the waitress saying, "God bless you, sweetheart," as she does every Thursday. She takes her first sip of coffee, then looks at me and asks about Jake, my boyfriend who always keeps me on my toes. I told her that he has another cattle working day organized with his friends this weekend and that his welding shop is starting to kick off (he's gotten 3 orders this week alone), and he's started reading through Romans with his friends every Sunday night after he comes and eats dinner with my family.

"That reminds me," Nana starts as expected, "When we would go to Grandma's ranch, we used to ride the horses and round up the cows. And there was this mule. One time, my cousin was riding the mule and it took off. She was screaming so much, it was hysterical! Of course that shouldn't be funny, but we couldn't stop laughing!" She stops to laugh for a moment then goes on, "And another time, we were working cattle in the mountains, and Grandpa almost fell into the canyon. He gave us all quite a scare that day! Do you ever plan on joining Jake on his cattle drives, Aurora?"

"I'm going with him this weekend actually! He has been teaching me to ride all week and I think I'm finally ready!" I have been looking forward to this weekend, and I'm glad she asked. She has lunch with her friends every Saturday, so she can't join us, but she loves to reminisce. We finish our coffee and say our goodbyes, then part ways until next Thursday.

DANTE—CHAPTER 1



REESE THOMAS MAURIELLO
Bucks County Community College
Newtown Campus
Pennsylvania

My feet numbly dragged behind me as I approached the house. All I could think about in the moment was the taste of sweet hot chocolate and the warmth of a cotton blanket. Every breath dragged me down as I swung my bag over my shoulder and knocked on the door.

"It's me," I said.

I waited for a response while silence filled the air within seconds and the house lingered with lifelessness. My hands gently banged on the door a little harder.

"Mara, it's Vincente," I said.

Silence shortly followed as a thump echoed from the back. The door swung open quickly revealing Javier standing in the hallway.

"Where's Mara?" I asked.

Javier's face dimmed to my prompt. He looked away for a moment.

"She's in the basement," Javier responded. "She says she's not feeling so well."

"Why didn't you tell me anything? I could've searched the area for helpful stuff," I said.

"What were you able to scavenge?" Javier asked.

I grabbed my bag off the porch and paused as I tried to recall everything.

"I found some expired chicken, cocoa powder, some spare straps, and uh-" I continued before he interrupted me.

"Vincente, get inside. You look exhausted and drained," Javier said.

His words stopped my train of thought before I had to pull myself inside. Javier shut the door behind me where the brisk wind swiftly escaped. All the pain in my feet quickly spread up my lower calves as I began to undress. Once I removed my shoes, I handed over my backpack into Javier's hands.

"Please take care of that. You're the best," I said. Javier just looked at me with a slight grin on his face.

"I'll go check on Mara in the meantime," I continued.

I made my way towards the basement door lost in thought of starvation. It's already day three and we're running on a prayer; our food supply is shortening by the day.

"Watch yourself, Vincente," Javier called from the kitchen.

"You got it," I replied.

One step after the other I descended my way down the stairs where a small lamp lit the room with a soft orange glow. Mara gently rolled over to my presence. Her pale face casted a shadow of fatigue that overlapped the molding wall behind her.

"Hey Mara," I said. "How are you holding up?"

She slowly positioned her body upward to meet me while sweat drenched along her hairline.

It looked like she barely got any sleep.

"Were you able to sleep while I was away?" I asked.

Mara tilted her head towards me and took a deep breath. Her voice rattled and sounded raspy.

"I'm fine. Javier says it's just a low fever," she replied.

I placed my hand along the top of her forehead. She was burning up. She needed food and water quickly. My hand quickly grappled the water bottle strapped along my waist so I could gently place it between her hands.

"Please, Mara, try to get some water down. I'll go fetch you something to eat," I said.

Mara quietly chuckled at my generosity. She set aside the water bottle along her torso.

"You telling me to get some rest? You literally just walked miles trying to scavenge-" she paused.

I silently stared waiting for her response.

"You worked all day. Just sit down for at least a minute will you?" she continued.

Mara had a point. My legs were begging for a break, so I traveled to the end of the mattress and offered myself a seat. Her heavy breathing slowly diminished while I faced the wall, lost in thought.

"What are you thinking about?" Mara asked.

My head dropped to my chest as I took a deep breath; I rotated myself towards Mara.

"I don't know how much longer we can stay here. Scraps in the surrounding towns are running low and uhm," I said.

Mara began to transition into what I was saying.

"It's okay, Vincente. We'll find something else. I know we will," she said.

My stomach growled with a sharp pain making me place my one arm around my belly. I hunched over in reaction with my throat begging for water. Mara's eyes darted me with concern.

"How are you not starving?" I asked.

"When you're sick, I guess you really don't pay attention to that. All I'm really worried about is the next time I'm going to throw up or have to use the bathroom," she replied.

My eyebrows lowered in disbelief.

"That must be great for you," I said.

Mara coughed trying to push out a laugh.

"Shut up, Vincente," she grinned, "It sucks. What's the plan for tomorrow?" I sat in silence trying to formulate an answer.

My voice lowered in response, "To be honest, I don't know. I have to talk with Javier," I said.

Mara laid back against the wall without saying anything. Her eyes surveyed the room around her.

"That's fine. I'm beginning to hate this basement anyways," she smiled.

"I'm going to go get both of us something to eat. Hopefully Javier didn't eat everything when I was away," I said.

After a brief moment, my body shot up from the bed and waited as the fatigue flooded my system. I turned towards Mara while walking over to the stairs with some regained strength.

"Any requests?" I asked.

"Surprise me," she said.

I nodded before turning back around to find the basement door greeting me as I ascended the wooden stairs. Light trenched the hallway I was in, only showcasing a shadow leading towards the kitchen. Shortly I made my way over to the living and dining room opening, looking for Javier. My hand grasped the edge of the doorway as I turned to enter the kitchen where I saw him. His hands were arched above the cabinets, supporting his body leaning forward against the counter. I made my way over to join him near the sink. Seconds ticked by as Javier tried to digest the reality we were in.

"We only have a matter of days. Possibly two if we're lucky," he said. "We're not going to have enough food here to support the three of us."

My heart sank in realization of Javier's statement.

"I'm worried about Mara. She's not going to get any better unless we think of something fast," Javier continued.

"You don't think I know that?" I asserted myself. "Just let me think."

Javier adjusted his body towards mine waiting for an answer, while I stood carelessly staring at the floor dusted with dirt. He gazed around the kitchen doorway, hesitant of his next response.

"Maybe if we," Javier suggested, "go hunting for our food…"

I jolted back with shock at Javier's proposal.

"You can't Javier, please," I said.

"Hunting is a two man job, Vincente," he replied.

"What about Mara? Huh? Who's going to take care of her?" I asked.

"She knows how to take care of herself. Everything is here for her," he replied.

"It's- it's too dangerous out there for the both of us to go together," I explained.

"What makes you any different than me, Vincente? It's a risk either way. If we don't do anything now we are all going to die from starvation," Javier held himself.

I couldn't respond. I became sick to my stomach. Javier doesn't understand the situation he's putting himself in. It's just not that simple to just go hunting if we don't even know what's out there. The danger of losing Javier and Mara spread to every square inch of my thoughts while my stomach sunk deeply.

"Are you okay?" Javier asked.

I held myself upwards, "Yeah… I just need to eat something before I continue with this conversation."

Javier backed up to find the kitchen table. All the food and water rested in front of him in an organized fashion so his hands could easily search among the rest of the goods. He grabbed a granola bar, a packet of stale nuts, and a bottle of water to rush back over to me. My hands automatically held out in desperation.

"This is for you and Mara," he said, "Tell her it's from me will you?"

"Thanks," I replied.

I stood staring at Javier's darkening boots trying to say something.

"We'll discuss later. I just need to talk with Mara about this."

Javier paused and then nodded in agreement to the idea.

"In the meantime, I can start cooking dinner. The uhm- raw chicken you found," he said.

I silently moaned on my way out as I looked back at Javier.

"You're the man," I said.

He flailed his arm at me as he turned back to the kitchen table to start dinner. I twirled around to make my way over back to the basement door where the floorboards creaked with every step back down.

"I got food Mara," I said.

My eyes made contact with hers when I reached the bottom. Her eyes sang to the sight of food resting in my arms and she sat up eager to get her share.

"Here is your surprise," I said.

She happily took her share when I handed her over the granola bar.

"Eat slowly, Mara. I don't want you getting a sick stomach," I warned.

Mara ripped open the wrapper to take a small bite. Her face flooded with joy while her body relaxed. She took a deep breath and then rested against the wall behind her.

"I haven't eaten anything since yesterday afternoon," she said.

I twisted open my bottle's cap and took a quick sip before opening the packet of nuts. Mara looked at me waiting for my response.

"Uh- Javier is preparing dinner for the three of us," I said, "He's cooking chicken."

Mara's face lit up just like mine when I first heard that. She coughed a little and then smiled at the idea of chicken.

"Mara," I said, "we're uhm- getting very low on food." Her eyebrows and face dimmed waiting for something.

"The only option we see is to start hunting for food," I continued.

"What if we start a garden?" she proposed.

"Making a garden would take too long and we don't have the supplies," I said. "He says we only have a day left of supplies."

"What about me? I can help," she said.

"Mara you're sick…" I replied, "We need you to get better first. Everything will be here for you. If anybody knocks, just don't answer the door."

Mara began to digest the fact she'll be alone for a few hours.

"What if you guys never return?" she asked.

"I promise that I'll return for you. No matter what," I said.

Javier slowly descended the stairs to greet Mara and I, so he could stroll over to the bed and see Mara's reaction to our idea.

"Thank you for making dinner, buttercup," Mara said.

Javier smiled back without saying anything.

"She already knows about our plan," I said.

He looked over at Mara, "It's only for a few hours; we'll be back before you know it."

"We shouldn't need to worry about food anymore if we're able capture some hefty animals," Javier continued.

I remained hesitant towards Javier's idea, but I knew this was the right thing to do.

"When are we starting?" I asked.

"We'll head out early tomorrow, around dawn," he replied.

Mara was beginning to feel a little more confident and less worried now that we discussed how to go about it.

"I know the area best, so we stick together and follow my paths anytime we hunt, got it?" I said.

"Yes sir," Javier replied.

Everyone in the room seemed to be in a common agreement with one another at that point, so Mara decided to lay back down. Javier stood in front of the mattress for a moment like he was about to say something. I looked back up at him to notice his eyes jolting to look away.

"I should go check on the food uh- I'll let you two be," he said.

He patted me on the shoulder before making his way back up the stairs.

"See you at dawn," he said.

Mara and I looked at each other in confusion. I get it. Tensions are high in times like these.

Perhaps Javier was just feeling nervous to start hunting tomorrow.

"Anyways… I can start a garden for us when you find the seeds and tools for that kind of stuff," Mara explained.

"I'll put it on the checklist for the next run," I replied.

Mara laid thinking of her next question.

"So anything interesting happen on your run today?" she asked.

"Not really. Just the usual," I replied.

She tilted her head while looking at me with suspicion.

"Oh come on? Nothing? I don't believe you," she said.

"What? Do you want me to say I saw a raccoon eating an apple today?" I asked.

"Yes! That's exactly what I want to hear," she replied.

She began to question what I said, "Wait, did you really see that?"

"No, of course not," I said. "Believe me. It's straight out boring beyond these walls. I do what I do to survive."

"I'll take your word for it, Vincente. Would this be the first time Javier is leaving the house?" she asked.

I paused at her prompt and slowly transitioned into shaking my head up and down.

"Yeah. It's been a long time since we settled here. I would give or take eight months tops," I said.

"Wow. I've really lost track of time then," she replied.

The room grew silent to the point where you could hear the wind gently brushing up against the outer walls of the house. Mara continued to play with her fingers as she gazed around the room and my thoughts shortly consumed me by the second.

"Vincente," Mara said. "What really happened out there?" I looked over to Mara in dismay and carefully crafted my response.

"I really don't know. Why?" I asked.

"I just want to know. That's all," she said.

"It's hard to remember what happened for sure," I replied. "I'm just too tired right now to discuss this."

Mara chuckled, "Fair enough. You've had a long day."

I waited a second to think of what I was going to do next.

"Are you okay sitting here by yourself?" I asked.

"Yeah, why?" she replied.

"Javier will bring you your dinner when it's ready. I need to go lie down for now," I said.

I got up to go walk to the stairs and grabbed my water bottle along the way.

"Hey- since I won't be awake tomorrow morning, I wish you both the best of luck," Mara said.

"Thanks," I replied.

I gave Mara one last smile before turning to continue my way back up the crooked stairs.

Before I knew it, the night consumed me by the hour.

I FORGAVE HIM LONG BEFORE I HAD TO



ASHLEY RODRIGUEZ
CT State Community College
Three Rivers Campus
Connecticut

I forgave him long before I had to
For all the things he did
And all the things he didn't do

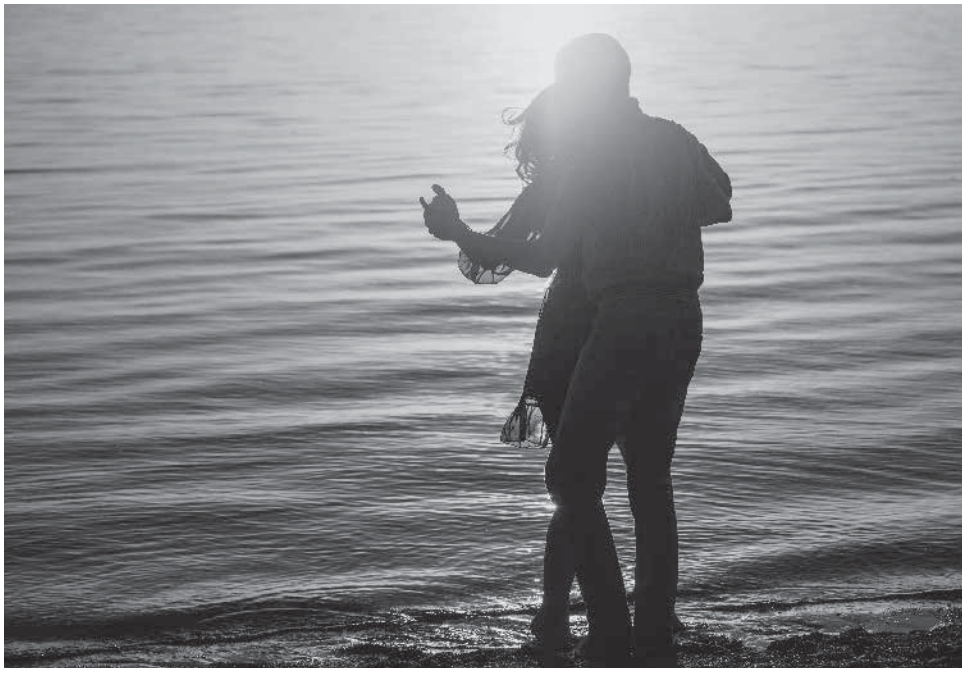
I forgave him
For all the future things he did
And didn't do

I forgave him
For all the things he did in the past
And didn't do

I forgave him
Because he didn't forgive himself
I forgave him
Because others didn't

I forgave him
Because I understood him
And in forgiving him
I forgave myself

RECONCILIATION



ALEXIS TRIMMER
Central Arizona College
Signal Peak Campus
Arizona

Whenever we're in a fight
I want you to dance with me
Because to dance is to love
Even when we're angry

Even when we're so mad
We do not wish to speak
Place your hand upon my hip
And we'll slow dance cheek to cheek

For when we dance inside our space
Is when the anger subsides
As we move our feet to the rhythm
Our souls happily collide

It doesn't have to be pretty
Like ballroom dancers do
Just dance with me a moment my dear
And know I still love you

WHAT IF MAGGIE HAD MISCARRIED?



ALLISON HASELHORST
Dodge City Community College
Main Campus
Kansas

The blank expression that Banner had donned for the last year changed as a new ship came into view. She recognized it as the Wailing Wyvern, her rival's ship. She was sure that William would be aboard. Suddenly she looked endlessly tired. When her eyes finally peeled away from the Wyvern and onto her own black floorboards, she motioned for her first mate, Kinkaid, to hoist the flag that bore the pirate insignia. He looked at his Captain with apprehension. She never really passed up the opportunity for a fight anymore. Sometimes it wasn't even necessary. The Captain who used to board a ship, fire a shot to get attention, and take prisoners, was hiding behind a bloodthirsty monster who would kill anyone, regardless of a moral code. After a few moments of Kinkaid's silence and apprehension, Banner turned to him and looked at him with a terrifying gaze that chilled his bones.

"Raise the fucking colors, Kinkaid," she said, leaning forward just slightly, as if she were a cat ready to pounce upon its prey. He hesitated for a moment, then turned to the rest of the crew and began barking orders on behalf of the deranged Captain.

The next days were spent chasing down the Wailing Wyvern. Upon its deck, William Dougal, the ship's captain, stood with his hands behind his back. He wasn't necessarily running from the Devil's Rose, but he wanted to see how far she was willing to go. How far she would push her crew just for a fight. He had been hearing rumors among ports during the few times he had actually paid attention to them. He was aware that Banner had disappeared for a year, though everyone had been unsure as to why. Rumors began circulating among the pirate community, as everyone seemed to be curious. Then the change had come on and the dread pirate captain Banner was a much more formidable force. Merchant ships that had paid for safe passage in her waters were suddenly set upon and raided, leaving few, if any, survivors. Other pirates had similar encounters when they had come across her. One story from a

former crew member had the pirate community buzzing with gossip. It nearly rivaled that of high society.

Confirmation of the rumors had come from murders Banner had committed while in a port. William put little faith in rumors, but he was relatively sure that Banner had experienced great loss that had deeply affected her. Whether it was the rumor pertaining to her mother or the much more taboo rumor that she had lost her baby was up in the air.

With the Devil's Rose off their stern, William decided to engage in battle. He gave orders and cannon shots rang out. The battle commenced quickly. The ships ended up side by side, but the Devil's Rose refused to fire cannons. The first mate, whom William had learned was Kinkaid, was obviously displeased with that. Banner stood at her helm as the ships sidled up to one another. Her eyes were glossy and her stance had no feeling. The husk of a woman turned her head and met William's gaze, and he felt something spark within him. In that moment, he saw a woman who was in immense pain, a woman who couldn't confront what had happened. He had never really liked Banner before her disappearance, but now he pitied her. The nothingness in Banner's eyes gave way to sudden rage, but it was directed at nobody. The fighting style that William had seen before she disappeared was gone and was now just brute force. There was no constraint. Banner no longer fought with the intention to antagonize or annoy; she fought with vengeance and hatred that could only be directed at herself. Anybody who could live through her madness could see that she was releasing her anger from within.

As Banner cut down the people in her path, she didn't even care to check if they were still alive. Most of the people who she had knocked over or stabbed managed to get back up, but they were bloodied and not looking to get back into it with her.

She wasn't necessarily making her way for William, but suddenly they found their blades crossed. She said nothing as she swung her blade at him. He blocked her easily. Their battle continued like this for a moment, but she changed her tune and started to make quicker movements, but they weren't exactly decided. She was blinded by her hatred. William wasn't even sure that she wanted to kill him.

"You're fighting sloppy today, aren't ye?" he asked, a grin forming on his face. Usually their fights were at least amusing and they shared banter, but she didn't even bless him with a response.

"Get a hold of yourself, woman!" he said, trying to get a clean fight out of her. But she just continued blindly. He realized then that she wouldn't respond to flowery words and needed direct, antagonistic responses. He blocked a blow that went for his face, side stepped her, and surprised her by grabbing her by the neck and locking her in a headlock.

"Let me go, ye bastard!" she growled, elbowing him in the gut and trying to force her release.

"This is about your failure, isn't it?" he said, his voice suddenly turning antagonistic and violent. Banner didn't seem to like that at all. She kicked his knee and did everything in her power to get out of his grip and succeeded. He released her and gauged her reaction. There was something in her eyes that seemed fractured, like a mirror that had yet to fully break. He was getting through to her.

Hatred could not properly describe the way her blows landed now. It could only be described as desperation. She wanted to avoid whatever she was hiding, and it was being brought to the surface by a man she didn't exactly care for. William found himself struggling to keep her at bay but noticed that she was animalistic and wasn't taking openings that he had made.

"Face it, Bernadette, you'll never change it!" he said, disarming her. She dodged a blow and dove for her sword, which was becoming more frail as she fought the much stronger man.

"Dinna call me Bernadette," she said, pulling a knife from her belt and throwing it at him.

It missed by a longshot.

"I'll call ye whatever I want, Bernadette," he said, pinning her down under his boot. "And maybe I'll call ye a whore, as it seems that ye always end up on your back." He only released her when she managed to grab her sword and moved to cut off his leg. She sprang up to her feet and they continued their fight. Members of both crews were beginning to lose interest in their own fights and began to look at the captains. Most members of their crews didn't exactly care for each other but didn't have qualms. Their fights were normally short and sweet and didn't usually end up with many deaths, so the Captain's fights were more entertaining.

William aimed a few more pointed words in her direction, and each time Banner's facade cracked.

"Will you shut up!" Banner shouted, managing to cut William's face. He threw her backwards with a good kick and she strained to get back on her feet. "You don't know what you're talking about, wretch!" she said, throwing everything she had left back into the fight.

"Ye can't run from it forever, Banner!" he said, now easily blocking her blows as she lost her strength. The two paced around each other as they tried to look for an easy opening. William smirked and lunged forward, clashed his sword with hers, and pinned her against the wheel of the ship.

"You will never be able to take it back," he said, his face close to hers.

"Shut up," Banner said, her voice quieting and beginning to shake.

"You will never get your baby back," he said, pressing his strength into his blade to force a reaction.

"Shut UP!" Banner pushed him off of her with the last bit of strength she had. She stood there afterwards, pointing her sword at him. At this point, the crews had stopped their fighting and all eyes were laid on the two captains. Her posture was poor. She leaned forward and her feet were unbalanced. She had broken. Her chest heaved as she tried to regain her breath and desperately tried to keep the mirror from shattering. William let her stand and he kept his sword at his side.

Banner began to tremble. Uncontrollable tears began to shed as she dropped her sword. She tried to balance herself, but instead she slumped forward and fell to her knees. William made a move to catch her instinctively but refrained and stepped backwards. Banner tried to stop it, but the sobs poured forth. Kinkaid, who was not on the Wailing Wyvern, was watching from the Rose and he began to rush towards her. He called her name, but she was unresponsive.

William knelt down beside Banner and rested a hand on her shoulder. He hadn't really believed the rumors that she had lost her baby until then. She seemingly no longer had the energy to shove his hand off, or she didn't care. Kinkaid reached the pair and he looked at William apprehensively, but seeing that his own Captain was largely unharmed, he backed off. Instead, he grabbed one of the Devil's Rose's crewmen and muttered some orders. With that, the Rose's crew went back to their own ship.

"We should get her somewhere private," Kinkaid muttered to William. William had managed to do what Kinkaid couldn't, and Kinkaid was grateful. But Banner had never liked her shows of emotion to be entirely public, and Kinkaid wished to respect that. William nodded and got

Banner to her feet, then took her into his quarters. Kinkaid followed and stayed at the door. It took a while for Banner to stop the tears. When the tears had stopped, she looked at the walls with a mournful gaze. She didn't entirely expect the words to come pouring out, but nonetheless, they did. William leaned against his desk, allowing her to spill out the secrets and not appearing in her view.

"... I had… gotten pish drunk. I dinna ken who I slept with, but when I had noticed my cycles had stopped, I began gettin the mornin sickness. It wasna hard to figure out what was goin on after that. Kinkaid and I… we came up with a plan. Go to shore, stay until the wee'n was old enough, and take it to sea when it was ready. So that's what we did. I even got tae kill my father's murderer in that time, and had tae kill many more after that. Mouths who couldna be trusted to shut." She paused for a moment and remembered the faces of her crewmen as she killed them. "We got tae shore… I was at five months at the time. Took me a month to get home to my mother. She wasna happy with me. Berated me because she had always taught me tae marry before carryin a bairn." Tears began to well up in her eyes. "I hadna been there three days. I had just settled in. Just gotten back from the town with dinner, just gotten used to the fucking dress." She chuckled and folded her hands, then continued. "I felt this… pain. I'd felt the pain of the wee'n kicking and shiftin around. It wasna pleasant, but wasn't somethin that would put ye out for a day." She went quiet as a few tears shed. "There was a moment when I knew somethin was wrong. It was before my waters broke, I think. I couldn't feel her shiftin so much."

"She was going quiet, which wasn't like her. And I had been carryin her for six months, I knew her." Banner choked on her tears for a moment, cleared her throat, and took a deep breath. "Bairns are supposed tae help their mothers durin birth. It's why they're so tired afterwards. But I- I could feel her dying. I tried-" she broke down and the sobs became uncontrollable.

"I tried to keep her alive, but I was dyin too- I…" she began speaking in stutters, quickly and incoherent. When she realized what she was doing, she paused and breathed for a few minutes. William placed a hand on her back. She flinched, but allowed it. "When she was out, I thought I heard her breathe. I was relieved, but I'd lost so much blood that it hardly mattered what I felt. I fought to stay awake, because if I had fallen asleep I'd've died. I wanted tae hold her. Mother said that it was sixteen hours of labor, that I should rest. She was just tryin to protect me, I see now, but I wanted to hold my bairn." She stared at her hands and the tears ceased. "I think I was fightin for my consciousness for around thirty minutes. When I finally got to hold her, she was clean… Her face was wet from my mother's tears. Her wee lashes had little flecks of water on them." She smiled fondly as she recalled this memory. "Her little head was no bigger than my palm. She had ten fingers, ten toes. Wispy hairs that were red as fire. They curled around her ears. Wee little lips that were parted, just slightly." The blank expression returned. "But she was cold. So cold. I tried to warm her, but I was afraid that if I touched her, I'd break her. She was so delicate and soft. Ye could… ye could see her veins runnin through her body."

"She was almost transparent, clear like water…"

"I dinna ken when I finally knew she wasna alive. All I know was that my mother had told me I was wailin like a banshee. I don't remember how long I screamed. I wailed until I couldnae wail anymore. And when the tears had stopped coming and I was so tired I could scarcely keep my eyes open, I lay her next to me and named her Margaret. Margaret Emily Fraser. It was a bonny name that fit a bonny lass."

"Then I slept. I dinna ken how or for how long. But when I woke up, she was still next to me, pale and colorless. The rosy cheeked lass I had expected to be smilin at me when I woke… I'd had a dream that's what she'd be doin. She was just… laying there. Mother took her from me and got her dressed up in nice linens, all of which were just so big on her. I held her for as long as I could before mother put her in the ground." Banner fell silent for a long while. The room was quiet as well. The only sounds to be heard were the crew above milling around.

"Then ye came back to the sea?" William asked, prodding her to keep her talking.

"It was the only thing I knew how to do," she answered, surprising William with her candidness, "I just packed my things and left…" she fell silent again, but she began weeping. "I could only ask myself how I could live in a world where she wasna. What kind of merciless and vengeful 'God' could take such a pure and beautiful thing from this world? What kind of mother was I for not dying alongside her?" Her words became angrier as she spoke. "How can the world go on as if nothing happened? Why is she gone? Do ye ken how badly it aches to live on without your bairn? What it feels to have nothing in your arms when you wanted so badly for there to be? I never wanted to be a mother until I was pregnant. I never wanted her but she was the best thing to happen to me-" she put her head in her hands and sobbed. William rubbed her shoulder with his hand and carefully began to stroke her head, like a father trying to comfort a child.

He didn't fully understand the depths of her pain, but he understood that she was in more pain than he previously imagined. "I killed so many people, ye ken! How can they live in this world where pure things are ripped from the breast of the mothers who will love them? I wasna blind to the fact that my reputation would have caught up with me, that she'd be in danger if I stayed too long. I wasna going to abandon her, I couldna. She was everything."

William comforted her over the span of a few hours. A silent truce had fallen between the pair. When Banner had finally recounted the whole story, she slept. William and Kinkaid shared a conversation, wherein Kinkaid admitted that he was at a loss as to how to help his captain. William felt a sense of duty, and a spark of something he couldn't explain inside his heart. They agreed that they'd help the broken woman fix herself. The Devil's Rose sailed alongside the Wailing Wyvern from then on, and Banner's smile began to appear more often. Her thirst for violence was quenched, and her bloodlust was quelled. She often leaned on William for support, but she did have to apologize to his crew and earn their trust after a few years of trying to kill them. But the light started shining for Banner again, and that's all she ever wanted.

THERE WAS A MAN WHO LIVED ACROSS THE STREET



CHERRYENNE HIBBING
Northwest Iowa Community College
Sheldon Campus
Iowa

He lived across the street
In the house nearest the creek
Its water rushes and upon it floats
Five little paper boats

One was a blue
Of the exact same hue lining
the corner of his eyes
From which the creases he cries

Another was as tightly wadded
As the tie 'round his neck was knotted
The corporate office had him choked
His dreams had long since croaked

The middle one was dry
Like the flowers he would buy
And ship to a lover in July
Though she never would reply

The fourth was hard and dented
Bent as his heart the world had ended
He heard no kindness, only words that tore him apart
And now it's far too late to begin again or restart

Upon the last, he wrote
His goodbye, his final note
He gorged his boats on what he was fed, straight hate
So when he set them free they sank, too heavy was their weight

Now drifts down one more paper raft
The man was upon it and he laughed
Waving so long with a white rag
An SOS but everyone ignored the flag

There once was a man who lived across the street
His house now vacant for he had drowned in the creek

WEATHER



AUDREY LONG
Front Range Community College
Boulder County Campus
Colorado

This morning, the clouds have bade goodbye, and my spirit is as bright as the sun rays Shining on the nape of my neck.

I think I'll grow wings and hover

With the cumulus clouds in the sky. Everything is going to be okay.

Cumulonimbus clouds loom over me,

Tumultuous, turbulent, a beautiful cacophony.

Their electric battle is cloaked by mist

For me to marvel at and turn into a story.

As the rain pitter-patters, my inflated ego shatters. The thunder shakes me into revival, ready to conquer my melancholy.

The ashen clouds shelter us in a blanket Stretching miles on every side.

Joy is not to be found from here to the horizon,

But my artist's heart can be found painting The shades of gray, blue, and white above me. Today, I am content with the serenity.

I thought the snow would bury my frozen body for someone to find come springtime. When you walked in with a smile on your face, you reminded me of the tenderness of snow. For the first time in years I let the snowflakes fall gently on my skin and weave into my hair. Light is reflected a billion times, turning the Earth and sky into a reservoir of snowflake stars.

Everything is going to be okay.

Standing on a mountaintop, the wind forges my spirit.

Chilled gusts blow away lingering heat of yesteryear.

I'm reminded that heat yields to entropy and escapes my body with the high velocity

Of the wind in my face. I belong to the universe.

I've never felt smaller than on the new moon, under a clear sky at Jackson Lake.

I see infinity in the celestial sphere.

I am equidistant from the stars

And everyone else on this planet.

Snow illuminated by streetlights is surreal.

Time stops; the second hands are frozen in place. Light is ricocheting through the troposphere,

Banishing midnight and replacing the moon.

I think I'll get lost in snowy forests

And let myself surrender to the forces of weather.

MY MOTHER'S DAUGHTER



NATHALIE REYNOLDS
Queensborough Community College
Bayside Campus
New York

Am I my mother's daughter?
The one who put me in
nude, flesh-colored stockings, sweaters, and skirts?
Am I my mother's daughter?
The one who put barrettes in my hair then sent
me off to church but never sat in the pews?
Am I my mother's daughter?
The woman with trials and tribulations, who
made it out alive, yet carries herself as if she's stuck there?
Am I my mother's daughter?
Who brought around men with dirty hands
that taint the pure, who brought men with
lint offerings and limbs
made for infidelity, bones coated with lies?
Am I my mother's daughter?

NOW YOU SEE ME (PLEASE DON'T)



SOPHIE AYERS
St. Louis Community College
Meramec Campus
Missouri

You say "Protect our women"
With hard amber flow, that floats and
Soaks my feet as I sweep the floor mat
And stalk inside a four-walled room
One bedroom, two bed

You say "Hold your head up high"
Buttressed by knit buttons and sweet psalm sayings
But mine seems to waver, connected to flat chest
Like infant in-utero
One nightstand, three bottles

You say "Speak your truth"
With algorithm echoes and clipboard scribblings
That note of my absent eyes and
"Yes pleases" and missing teeth that lilt of
Sunny getaways and never waking up alone
One bedroom, five men

You say "Listen, I see you"
But post the quote and turn off your phone
While I sneak into homeroom late and
Sniffling, "It's just a cold"
So where were you?

You say "Be true to yourself"
But I can't even see past my fast pupils
And into your eyes, where I know you're
Squeamish and turn your shower head to my
Matted hair, to my lipstick and tight slip
When I can't even distinguish where his limbs end
And mine begin, where pharmaceuticals are spoken
More often than my own name

You say "Be kind to yourself"
But how can I tell you this is the only way I know?
One street, one woman, one key;
I begin to walk home

MORNING BREATH



MARIAH RICHARDSON
Northeast Mississippi Community College
Booneville Campus
Mississippi

The other night, I was lying in bed
Listening to the sounds of you snoring
And I thought about how distraught I would be
If you weren't lying next to me
The thought, it made me start to cry
And I cried about it all that night
And I realized that I'm in too deep But, baby, that's okay with me.
Lay with me forever,
With your arms around my sides
I'll huff your morning breath
Because if I don't, I'll surely die
An inch away is much too far
A second of silence, far too long
I can't afford a moment away from you.
You saw the worst, cruelest parts of my soul
But you didn't let go
No, you didn't even look away.
So, I'll always stand next to you
Even if it becomes
The last stance I ever take.
I realize that I'm in too deep, but I guess that's okay with me.

IT WORE MY FATHER'S CLOTHES



LUCAS FULLER
Washtenaw Community College
Ann Arbor Campus
Michigan

The figure shifted in the half-light, amorphous and changing.

"Dad?" I called out, but there was no answer. It turned toward me– or maybe away from me. There was no face, no point of reference for its gaze, but I was dead certain it was staring at me. Wisps of some ephemeral something curled off the figure, flickering and fading away into nothingness like lost memories or broken promises. The thing drew closer without moving, as though it was bending the room around it. It spoke– if you could call it speaking– in a rasp of discordant whispers.

"My boy. My darling son. What is wrong? Don't you recognize your father?"

I shivered as the words crawled along my neck like centipedes and raked my ear like fresh broken glass. I stared in horror and took a step backward only to trip and fall over a tendril of that dark figure's creation.

"You are not my father!" I cried, flinging my hands over my face as the inky tentacles threatened to overtake me.

"Come now, there is no need to act out!" roared the thing that was not my father. "Give your father a hug!"

I struggled against the dark ropes as they pulled me ever closer to that black mass, fighting desperately for every inch of ground I could gain. My fingernails chipped and splintered as they ground against the cold, hard floor.

"Give my father back!" I cried, kicking vainly as the thing slowly enveloped me. It cackled like it was taking part in some dark sacrament.

"Oh, child," came the chilling words in what was sickeningly, undeniably, my father's voice,

"I never left. It's been me the whole time."

MY ANGEL



TERESA J. TERRY
Bishop State Community College
Main Campus
Alabama

I remember the last time I saw you. When I pulled into the ER, the radio played a song ("Right Thru Me" – Nicki Minaj). I walked into the room, and your body lay supine on a metal bed with no cushion. Spite the fact I knew you couldn't feel it, I was concerned about you having back pain. Your hair was always beautiful. It was wet and wavy from where you had sweated. I knew you put up a fight until the end. Your body told the story. You were swollen, and my sister, who once weighed about 150, looked like she was 350 pounds. I kissed your forehead, and you didn't move. Usually, when I kiss your forehead, I can feel your soul. I could feel anguish or anxiety, but this time I felt nothing. It was at this moment I knew you weren't there. I knew you were gone. Even thought this was a blessing for you, my flesh desired for you to move or say something to me. I sat next to you as our mother cried silent tears behind me. I kissed your cheeks and waited for your chest to rise. It never did. I held your hand and stared at your beautiful manicured acrylic nails with bright color designs, and I knew I would not be able to hold your hand anymore. No more sister handshakes, no more late-night food runs.

My sister is now with the Lord. Thoughts of our childhood flashed through my mind, and then the nurse walked in and said we only had five more minutes and that she was so sorry for our loss. She handed me a bag with a ring and your cell phone inside. It was your ring that you never took off. And now it's my ring, and I will never take it off. For 22 years of my life, I have watched you in pain. Month after month, we spent at the hospital on the 3rd floor while you lay in a hospital bed getting a blood transfusion. I watched needle after needle and procedure after procedure as my sister yelled out in pain, or body shock as a side effect to the withdrawal of pain medicine. I laid next to you on the uncomfortable pull-out couch and watched them wheel your bed out for surgeries and testing. Sometimes they would let me

push your wheelchair myself to get a test run on your body. Sickle Cell Anemia was a disease you fought for many years, and now there is no more pain and suffering.

Now you are with God, and your soul is at rest. As much as I love having my sister here on Earth to fight with, I love that she doesn't have to suffer anymore. My 5 minutes were up, and the hardest thing I ever had to do was walk away from you. As I walked out, my cellphone rang with the ringtone ("Right Thru Me" – Nicki Minaj), and the phone read "Sissy Pooh" with a picture of my sister. Surprised, I attempted to answer. The phone hung up. I continued to walk to the car. When I cranked up the car, the radio played that song again ("Right Thru Me" – Nicki Minaj). It was at this moment I felt you. I even smelled your scent, and I knew you were with me. And you will live on through me.

THE RELEASE ON THE BEACH



ALEXIS SMITH
Dyersburg State Community College
Tennessee

The rain begins its wicked dance upon her head, and the wind, cold and icy, slashes at her face as she tries to collect her bearings on the deserted beach.

"How did I get here?"

She looks behind her and sees nothing, yet she can feel the heaviness of the air and its monstrous claws reaching out at her. Barely as a whisper she hears,

"Why are you running from fate instead of simply accepting the comforting embrace of death?"

The sky rolls in thunder and lightning blinds her, forcing her to her knees as she falls onto the wet and gritty sand. Salty tears and cold rain stream down her face as the air is sucked out of her lungs. Suddenly, the rain seems to still and the wind whispers her name over and over, the rhythm ringing like a bell in her ears.

Shivers creep down her spine as she feels dark and promising talons trace her skin. She looks at her hands as the skin seems to melt away, only leaving the slimy, white bones, and she screams in terror. The voices hover in the air as they encourage her to let go, getting louder and louder by the second. She sobs and rocks back and forth as the rain crashes against her once more. Finally, she yells at the top of her lungs,

"I DON'T CARE ANYMORE!"

Once again, the rain and voices run silent. For a split second she is able to look at the beach around her and appreciate the wondrous Earth: the sand that has turned brown from the storm, the waves as they dance to a song known only to them, the stars as they twinkle in the night sky, the full and luscious moon as it peeks through the clouds, the sharp and shiny rock that she holds in her hand…

The storm started back up at full force. The previously peaceful dance of the waves now crashed at the shore threateningly, and the wind whistled and laughed at her menacingly. It was as if her hands acted of their own freewill, as if she was put to the backseat of her own mind. Her boney fingers gripped the stone and plunged it into her body.

BOOM!

The thunder roared to cover up her pain-filled screams as she continued to mutilate herself. Finally, she sat on the lonely beach and laughed at the irony of it all. After all, a life full of rejection and solitude would only make sense if it ended the same way. Taking one final breath, she becomes at peace with the raging madness that has consumed her and releases herself from the torment of her own mind.

MY BEAUTIFULLY MORBID LOVE STORY



JOHONDAPHOENIX PASHELK
South Puget Sound Community College
Olympia Campus
Washington

My heart is still & silent,
My lips are blue, My skin is ice...

Yet I have never looked so Beautiful.

A broken heart,
Trapped in the dark...
She held on with every bit of strength she had.

She tightens her grip, It
was not enough, she
begins to slip...
Into a deep sorrowful sleep.

With her rosaries in one hand,
Broken heart in the other,
She could not put the pieces back together.

She does not understand.
What is love if there is no man?

The flame that once was a blaze, began to fizzle
and soon fades...
What happened to the two-flamed dance?
What happened to the romance?
Where was the man, that took
her by the hand?

Sealed with a kiss...
A sweet love that would soon be missed.

Who knew it would be her last. She was
not murdered...

Death by a shattered dream, & a
broken heart...

My heart is still & Silent, My
lips are blue, My skin is ice...

Yet...

I've never looked so beautiful.

No more tears raining upon my cheek,
No more trembling of my nervous hands, No more
broken heart...
No longer accompanies my chest.

Just me...
Lay me in my wake, a deep
rest takes my place.

Dear God, Please
take me, For there is no more love.

My hair is soft, washed, and brushed...

I can hear my caretaker's gentle voice, He is near...
So warm and gentle, a soul indeed.

I know my body is in good hands... I soon to follow...

"We gather here today, to mourn the passing of..." My mind tuned
out the rest of the truth.

A small room filled with a few broken hearts, scattered mutter,
and forced tears from my mother.

I held my cold hand...
Please wake up...I whimpered.
I began to grow more sorrowful.

Please wake up.

I blew into my mouth, one last kiss.
A kiss of lost life.
I wept the rest of that evening.

Back in the morgue,

Watching my body burn... I wept uncontrollably.

"I hear you miss,"

Don't be afraid, for I am here with you.
I see you...
Your body was temporary, your soul is forever...

I have seen your eyes clouded with worry and doubt,
I weighed your heart, heavy with burden,
I am here with you now...

"Who was he? Tell me who is to blame?"

I am just a foolish woman, looking for love...
A man to fill the hole in my soul...

And all I found was, my untimely end.

"Please free me..." I pleaded down to my knees.
"Please free me!"

"Well miss, only you can free yourself.
I am not your guard; therefore you are no prisoner of mine."

Time marches on...
Days grew to months, to years...

Caretaker and I began to grow very fond of one another's company.

Despite being only a familiar face that sees me, I am not quite as alone as I could be.
One day, this day was not like any day I have known...

Caretaker took my ghostly hands into his own.

The truth was softly spoken.
He was one without a living body.
He was not the one who prepared my
lifeless vessel to be placed on a final display.

"I am no longer alone... but it is time for me to go.
Please take my hand and thus enter our new lives...
Together,
Forever."

How must I know when it is you?
"Only you will know..."

I closed my eyes for the final time in this life.
I opened my eyes for the first time...
My new life...waits for my arrival.

He waits for me.
Where are you?
Who are you now?

For this, fates have given us a gift...

A gift of another life.

A gift of the truest form of love...

To be continued...

How will I know?
God, please help me...I am afraid.

So many lost souls, wandering mindlessly,

In a field full of mist...

"Follow me miss," a familiar voice called out.

So close... I cannot see but I hear you.

I can hear your heartbeat sing.

I can feel your warm breath, I can feel you guiding me...
To our new destination called life.

"The moral of this story is, do not give up on love no matter what. Even if you depart from one world... There is still another. I will never give up."

~To my dearest future self... You got this. ~

Love,

Phoenix

~~PARALYZED~~



OLUWATOSIN SHOKUNBI
Prairie State College
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Illinois

The feeling of desperation
Reaching for the light
My greatest desires at the tip of my finger, unable to reach it
Being weighed down by guilt, fear and pain
Going deeper into the darkness
Fighting my way to the top
Calling out for help only to hear a muffled voice
Trying my hardest to keep my eyes open
Making every effort, but to no avail
Surrounded by nothing but the icy cold waters
Numb to everything I'd used to feel
And I find myself asking why I am I drowning
Am I being punished
Having to watch as my life flashes right before me
Not being able to do a thing about it
Until I finally realized, that I'm paralyzed

DEVOTION



EVIE ROTH
Moraine Valley Community College
Palos Hills Campus
Illinois

It was while scrubbing laundry, along the Derora river, that I wondered when I'd started forgetting William's subtler details. Each garment had gotten its due beating: my hands were practiced in this, after all, and didn't so much as hesitate as I ran my fingers along the collective stains and spots of an entire household. Miraculously, though, William's old waistcoat had wound its way into the assembly of familiar trousers and stockings, and all at once my mind was flooded with the memories of lazy afternoons alongside my oldest companion.

The arms of the coat were frayed and old, and upon gazing down at the garment, I wondered if it'd still fit him. Two years to a growing woman were one thing—though now, years gone, it was quite likely William had shot toward the stars in height, that the skinniness of young adulthood had fledged into the bulky frame of a man.

Maybe "forgetting" wasn't the right word, then—after all, how could I possibly forget the richness of a voice I'd grown up surrounded by, hearing its nuanced changes as it aged? There existed no universe, no natural state of the world, whereupon looking back in time, I was not met with the fondness of his voice—the very same that had once whispered soliloquies into my ears alongside the river I now scrubbed upon. Maybe that was it, then. Maybe now, two years later, William had finally finished becoming a man.

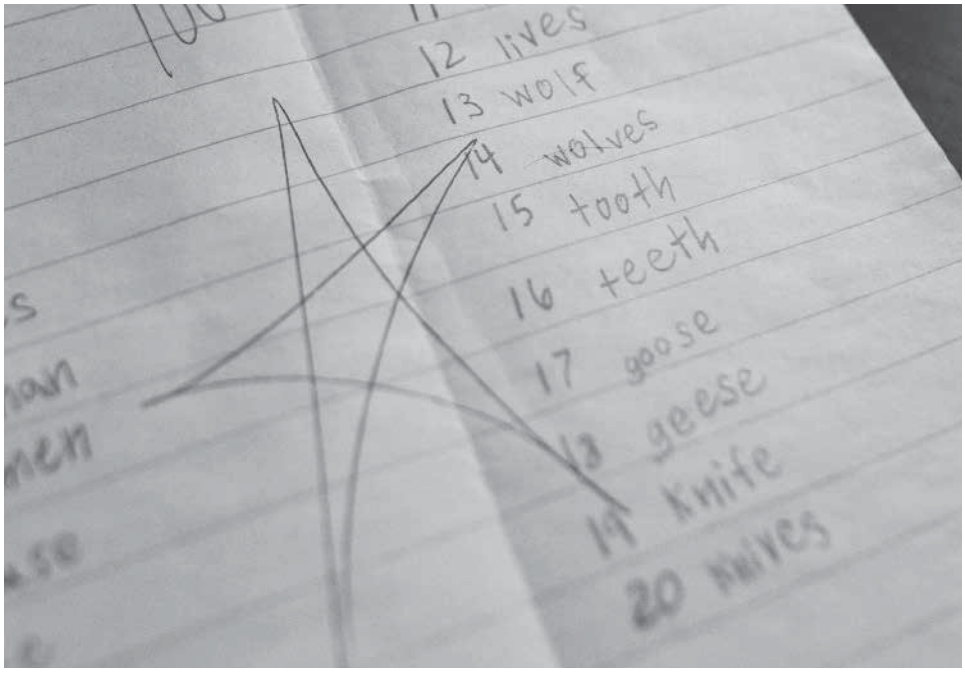
Shameful though it was to admit, the idea frightened me. Just imagine—one day, while tending to the garden, or tucking in the supple fabric of my uncle's bed, that William would return home unannounced, wearing the body and voice of a stranger. Older, maybe wiser. A man.

The same features I had grown up admiring in him: would those still remain painted across his face? I hoped they had. I hoped something there would remain recognizable.

Sighing, I worked through the laundry bit by bit, giving William's waistcoat a scrubbing in the hopes that he would one day wear it again. Upon finishing, I loaded each garment into a wicker basket, hefting the load onto my back with two straps taut with tension. An entire family's clothing sat perched along my shoulder blades, threatening to topple me should I lose balance. Though of course, I didn't. I walked my way homeward, the weight upon my back, though heavy, comfortable in its familiarity.

The walk home was peaceful. Often, I found myself enjoying these quiet moments in between tasks. Moments dedicated solely to the purpose of travel were, for a brief time, moments I was free to indulge the kaleidoscopic workings of my imagination. The briskness in the air felt invigorating, and seemed to motivate me onwards as I ambulated about the wilderness of Switzerland's countryside. In its subtle sharpness, the bitter mountain winds seemed to whisper promises as they whipped past. In them, the scents and frigid air of places many miles away whetted my senses, hinting at a world much larger. Pines in a woodland I'd never see greeted me and fled.

GOOD BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH



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This is the story of how one teacher can change a child's views on adults, and not for the better. I was never the smartest at school or anything. I was the pretty one, the funny one, the girl next door. However, I am also stubborn and determined. I know what I want, and I fight to get it. It took many tears and hours of frustration, but in the end, I am here now and thankful. In third grade, my parents actually got me professional help. The specialist would later diagnose me with dyslexia and dysgraphia.

My mother woke me up for school on a chilly Friday morning in southern California. At the time, I was in the second grade. I was ready to take on this day. For a week leading up to this Friday, I practiced my spelling words. I wanted so badly to get up in front of the class and get my first gold star ever. This gold star represented getting a 100% on the spelling test. Much more though, this was something I had never received before in my life. I was lucky to get one word right on my spelling test. This would be different though. My mother studied with me till I was confident I would get the golden star.

I took my seat and got out my pencil while the teacher handed out lined paper. I put my name and date on the top right corner and numbered the paper 1 through 10. I even put an extra 1, 2 and 3 at the bottom for the extra "bounce" words.

"It is time to start!" The teacher started the test with the first word, "Clean. I like to CLEAN my room."

In my head, I was happy. I knew this one! "Clean…K.L.E.N…no that's not right…It is with a C…C.L.E.N…Wait mom said "EA" makes the "EE" sound…So it must be C.L.E.A.N." I did all my spelling words that way. Taking a little extra time to focus on each sound, each letter, and the ways my mom taught me to remember each one.

Now came the extra bounce words. That week they were there, their, and they're. It was one of the most stressful events of my life to that point, but it was over now. It was time for recess. When I was outside with a group of my friends, I asked them how they thought they did on the spelling test. Of course, they all thought they got everything right. They always got a golden star. I told them how I had studied really hard this week and thought I did really well too. They were all so happy and excited for me. We went on playing tetherball and thought nothing else of it.

The bell rang. Time to line up and wait for our teacher to come walk us back to class. I knew that when we got back to class our spelling test would be sitting at our desks. I would find out if I got a golden star. I hung up my jacket really fast, hurried over to my chair, flipped over the paper, and saw I got all the spelling words correct. I missed the three bounce words though. I thought, "This is ok." At least I tried, and I would still get a golden star, since I got all the test spelling words right. The teacher sat down and took out the sheet of stickers. She started to read off the names of each student that got a golden star. I waited to hear my name. It never came. She put away the stickers and started on a new lesson. I was heartbroken. My anxiety got the best of me, and I shut down the rest of the day. I was not able to ask her why I did not get my golden star or if maybe she had forgotten I got 100%. On the bus ride home, I cried. I did not want to go home and show my mom the grade. I did not want to then have to tell her that all that work was for nothing, since I did not get my golden star.

My house was full of love and warmth. I lived with both my parents, an older brother and baby sister. We were always busy. With my brother's high school activities, me in cheerleading, and having a baby sister along with both my parents working full time, there was never a dull moment in the house. We always made time for each other though. My dad took me to my sports, and mom always had dinner on the table ready for us all to enjoy as a family. It was at dinners we would talk about our day and what we had planned for the next day. It was this time of the night I dreaded on this day. I did not want to tell my parents I had failed. I did not get a golden star even though on my paper it said I got all my spelling words right. I was scared of disappointment and sadness that I took time from my mom's life for nothing. She spent hours with me, helping me, and I failed her.

"Heather, how was your day? Let me see your test!" My mom spoke, and I just stared at her. I ran from the kitchen table to my room. I was sobbing. A couple minutes later, my mom walked in holding my test. She told me she was so proud of me that I got all my spelling words right. She then asked why I was upset and ran off crying. I told her the teacher did not call on me to get a golden star. That I failed, and I did not understand.

My mom was in shock. She also did not understand why I did not get a star. She told me she would take me to school that next Monday and ask the teacher for me. Maybe it was a simple mistake, and I would be able to put my star on. I handed my mom my test. She, very visibly, got upset. I heard her talking to my dad in a stern way, not at him, but with him about my test. I did not understand what was going on, but I did know my mom was now mad.

My mom held my hand as we walked down the hallway to my classroom. I was so nervous. My hands were sweating, and I felt my heart racing. I did not want my mom to make a scene, but I also wanted my golden star since I did get every word right. My teacher appeared surprised when she saw my mom and me walk into her classroom well before school started for the day.

My mom said, "Good morning. Heather came home Friday very upset saying she got all her spelling words right but did not get a golden star. I asked to see her test and also noticed every word on there was right. More importantly, I noticed what you wrote on her paper, and that is why I am here today."

I looked at my mom very confused. I knew my teacher had written something on my paper, but I was not able to read it.

"You wrote on my child's paper, a paper that she studied and worked very hard on, 'Good but not good enough.' This little girl can't even read what you wrote yet. You felt the need to put her down and degrade her efforts. Please tell me why you wrote this, and why she did not get a star."

My teacher shifted into complete defense mode with her hands crossed over her chest and took a step back. "Mrs. Horn, Heather did spell everything right, BUT the three challenge words are not in the right order. I suggest next time you study with her, you explain each word so she knows what one I am asking for." This really made my mom mad. She took my hand, and we walked out of the classroom. My mom gave me a kiss and told me to go play with my friends till the bell rang. I later found out my mom went to the office to talk to the principal about my teacher's behavior.

My three challenge words were there, their and they're. I did not know what each was, so when my teacher told us the word along with a sentence, I just wrote the words. They were all spelled right, but they were not in order. So, I got them all wrong, and I did not get my golden star.

After all was said and done with my mom and the principal, I still did not get my golden star. I knew in my heart though that my work was good enough, and this lesson never left me. This was one of the first times in my life I knew what I wanted to do when I got older. I wanted to be a teacher and make sure that when a little girl who tried her very best on a project, a project that was difficult for her, a project that may come easy to others, that she would get that golden star. She would never feel how I did that day. She would know she did good, and it was good enough.

PRELUDE



HAVALAH MAUZEY DEFIELD
South Puget Sound Community College
Olympia Campus
Washington

i am molten, thawed and raw
with these hands i write my thoughts
like frozen limbs warming
my sense of self breathes
i wish i could forgive
what i thought i had forgot

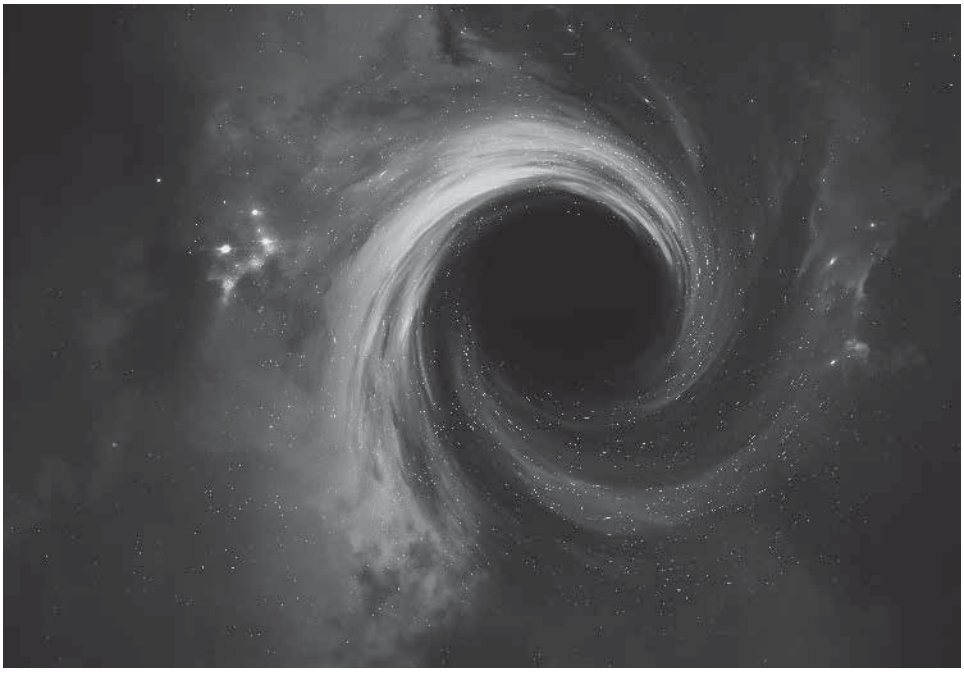
INSOMNIAC HYPOMANIAC



HAVALAH MAUZEY DEFIELD
South Puget Sound Community College
Olympia Campus
Washington

sleep alludes me
when i close my eyes
i feel like i'm falling and
lights flash and flicker
underneath my eyelids
this beast's teeth are
sinking into my jugular
all i can do is take it and
hope i don't bleed out
what am i doing besides
fucking up my life
what am i doing besides
slipping back down this
mountain i have just
started to climb
in times like these i
feel as if i have made
no progress at all
it tightens its hold and
my neck may snap
someday, i think
all i want to do
is sleep
please let me sleep

UNREALITY



HAVALAH MAUZEY DEFIELD
South Puget Sound Community College
Olympia Campus
Washington

heavy, spinning on an axis
separate from the earth's
i have my own gravitational
pull, even as i float
the mere thought of my
existence, a black hole
i struggle through the dictionary
definition of
reality, limbs detached but
i can control them,
at least
from what i can perceive
the flow of time is both
meaningless and profound
my vision simultaneously fuzzy
and sharp, like a photo filter
in my eyes

anxiety bubbles but
the lid of unreality seals it down
drowns it out
i want nothing more than to
stare out at the world around me
in the cold or the sun
grounded by the
wind and the rustle of trees
the buzz of artificial
lights
has me two steps back
from my head
i am as far away from you
as one could be while
so close
overwhelming yet
underwhelming
everything is too much yet
not enough
the world around me lacks the
substance i instinctively know
comes from being
present
aware
heavy, spinning on an axis
separate from the earth's
i have my own gravitational
pull, even as i float
the mere thought of my
existence, a black hole
i am here
and not in
the world around me
a confusing symphony
soft, intangible
brittle, sharp

VISITING MOTHER



LUCAS FULLER
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Ann Arbor Campus
Michigan

I wove between the headstones, carefully avoiding stepping on the graves themselves. The search took longer than expected, but I eventually made it to my mother's resting place. A chill wind howled as I placed the flowers in the vase, replacing the withered stems that sat there previously. I stood and turned, and there she was. She looked the same as she had when last I saw her: tangled hair, drooping skin, bloodshot eyes.

You killed me," my mother's ghost rasped, "I loved you, and you killed me."

I stood mute, turning away, shoving my hands in my pockets to protect them from the wind that bit like a pack of wolves. I knew better than to talk back. I tried to walk away, but she hovered in the corner of my vision. I stopped at the entrance of the graveyard, but I kept my back to her.

"I never did anything wrong, and you killed me!" she cried again.

I sighed, pausing for a moment before stepping out beyond the fence. Suddenly, her voice vanished.

"You did that yourself," I replied, though she could no longer hear me. "Besides, you killed me first."

RACIAL EQUALITY



NATALIE DODO MACHAVARIANI
Raritan Valley Community College
North Branch Campus
New Jersey

A gavel touches down upon the wood
Defining something that goes beyond law
The nations views and truth on where they stood
Two souls connected as one, now they saw
Hard to believe in a nation of peace
Words of man play the symphony of hate
Clashing to the earth, rings begin to cease
Fighting the prejudice within our state
The paper of our forefathers wrote upon
Once used as a symbol, justice for all
Renounces ideals the country stood on
Amidst this all, our love shines through the squall
Pity the world, for they may never see
Love goes beyond our melanin and plea

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC & SOCIAL INTERACTIONS



MELISSA TAKAHASHI
Leeward Community College
Pearl City Campus
Hawai'i

COVID occurred during a pivotal time in my life when I struggled with my identity and goals for life after high school. My classmates and I didn't understand the severity of the pandemic at first, while it hadn't reached America, let alone Oahu. I recall a few classmates in chemistry jokingly wearing face masks to class weeks before school was shut down, and looking back, it seemed like foreshadowing for the following years. Many businesses implemented explicit rules like requiring customers to wear masks inside stores. These signs were plastered in front of doors, some with thermometers. Toward the beginning of this requirement, people wore anything: scarves, costume masks, bags, and even underwear, to cover their mouths and noses for a sense of conformity. My family took great care in wearing masks because my grandmother, who lives with us, was considered high risk for COVID due to her age, diabetes, and COPD.

During this time, breaking mandates like the federal stay-at-home order from March 25 to April 30, 2020, was considered a crime (Hawaii State Department of Health, 2020). The order required people to shelter in place unless they needed to leave for healthcare, safety, obtaining goods like food, or essential, non-remote jobs. Along with these guidelines, the government issued social distancing requirements instructing people to keep a six-foot distance from each other and use sanitizing products. Businesses were to switch to online and remote access if possible, supply sanitizing products for customers and workers, and allow separate hours for high-risk populations like the immunocompromised. The government also maintained these requirements through social control and sanctions. People who committed the nonviolent crime of violating a stay-at-home order faced a negative formal sanction and were either fined, imprisoned, or both (2020). Besides breaking the law in this way, deviance occurred through anti-maskers who refused to wear a mask due to discomfort or the belief that it was unnecessary and had no effect on maintaining the spread of COVID (He et al., 2021). As restrictions lessen and masks are no longer

required, the sides of deviance and conformity have flipped, and it's now more common to go maskless in public. Throughout the pandemic, my family and I haven't broken the stay-at-home order except to leave the house for groceries. We still wear our masks in public, and when my parents occasionally forgot before the mandate was lifted, cashiers or other employees reminded them through informal negative sanctions.

When COVID extended into spring break, it rewrote the tasks and expectations of formal organizations, changing how people interact. As one, school during COVID changed the opportunities for my future and my sense of connection with friends. Technology during the fourth quarter was the most important and only way to stay in touch with classmates and friends. During this time, students did lessons asynchronously and submitted assignments online or attended school through online conferencing programs like Zoom. E-readiness grew during the height of COVID and the stay-at-home order, increasing society's reliance on technology and teaching kids and teachers how to implement technology in everyday lessons. Before the pandemic, people heavily relied on technology for grading and typing assignments, but COVID introduced new learning platforms and knowledge used to make education widely available. As society adopted these innovations, it created technological diffusion that challenged old ideas of normal. These new forms reached telehealth and healthcare, online school, remote work, interpersonal relationships, and even buying groceries online. Jobs allowed people to work from home, creating different opportunities for people in the working force. Online school allowed me to do better in my classes, which opened my future to better opportunities. Rather than struggling to focus through lectures, I could teach myself the material and finish assignments in half the time.

Throughout the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization controlled most public and official information about COVID. They released information on how to stay healthy and avoid the virus, symptoms, and number of deaths and infections, while local government and news covered information within the state. In a sense, the CDC and WHO had a concentration of media ownership that led to their media consolidation during the height of the pandemic years. Besides mass media, people spread information through social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, among others. Social media communicated news that wasn't covered nationally, like the difficulties and realities of healthcare. Technology made the exchange of knowledge instant, allowing people from across the country to learn about the current standing of the pandemic. While some people were in touch with the latest news, others that lacked technology skills experienced a knowledge gap since all their information came with a delay from TV and newspapers. As other events occurred during COVID and the news focused on the pandemic, my mom and grandmother often weren't aware of what was happening, like the Black Lives Matter protests.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment declined by 15% in March and April 2020 (Ansell & Mullins, 2021). Changes in business activity and government restrictions undoubtedly had a role in this, causing the downward social mobility of many people in America. BLS says the highest losses were in leisure and hospitality, followed by industries requiring close contact, like food service. It's also significant that downward mobility largely impacted women since they dominated the leisure and hospitality industry, along with others like education, health services, and retail (Ansell & Mullins, 2021). The pandemic caused people to be fearful of leaving their houses, which lessened the need for nonessential businesses during this time. Unable to continue paying employees, these businesses laid off workers and contributed to the downward movement into the working class.

Not only did people struggle to keep jobs, but they also faced pay cuts with lower unemployment payouts compared to 2010. Pew Research Center reports that the COVID recession caused lower and middle-income families to have the highest decrease in income due to COVID (Kochhar & Sechopoulos, 2022). Although some people continued to buy items directly from online retailers, many chose new routes to save money while entering the COVID recession. Thrifting and secondhand goods took social media by storm as people

learned to live within new budgets. It led to lower conspicuous consumption, encouraging people to buy vintage, inexpensive clothing and home decor or start hobbies of creating clothes and other items for cheaper than retail value. Many could afford well-made items for affordable prices, and brand names were sometimes obtainable for relatively low prices, even if hard to come by. Thrifting was not new to my family since I grew up frugal on my family's limited income, but I learned to enjoy sewing, making clothes, and jewelry during the height of the pandemic.

During quarantine or the stay-at-home order, material comfort available was often things people already had in their homes. Because of this, the way people experienced a lower standard of living was different between social classes. When there was only talk of a quarantine, people rushed the aisles of stores and supermarkets to stock up on toilet paper, eventually causing purchase limits and it to sell out. I distinctly remember my family in line, and this sense of scarcity of necessities contributed to the lower standard of living. Employment, as mentioned earlier, nosedived during the pandemic and had a hand in the wealth and material comfort people could afford as prices rose. Travel, in addition, is a form of wealth available to upper and middle-class people. However, the onset of COVID in the country momentarily shut down travel in and out of the country. Healthcare also suffered during this time, contributing to a lower standard of living as beds, materials, and machines in hospitals were used by the surge of COVID patients, lessening the amount available for other non-pandemic-related emergencies. While online school enhanced the standard of learning for some like me, it increased distractions from family, and lower-income students struggled with internet access. The population's general health decreased as COVID numbers and deaths rose, and crime levels increased as racially-motivated hate crimes against the Asian community grew rampant.

On March 16, 2020, Donald Trump, the then-president of the United States of America, called COVID the "Chinese virus" on Twitter. It sparked an anti-Asian movement online and in real life, causing prejudice toward Chinese people and sparking hate crimes to rise against the Asian community (Kurtzman, 2021). Trump's words reached many impressionable people who espoused negative beliefs about the connection of COVID originating in China. Some believed it was created in a lab as a form of biowarfare or population control, that only Chinese people could catch the virus, or that all Chinese people had it. The term "Chinese virus" exacerbated prejudice and xenophobia against the Asian community, causing fear-mongering and conspiracy theories, which affected the safety of the Asian community (2020). For me personally, being Chinese during the pandemic was especially scary, seeing how the media and president blamed China and the Chinese people.

Racism was inescapable during COVID, and through social media, I learned how prevalent interpersonal racism was online and in public. A classmate in high school once told me to stay away from my Chinese language teacher because I'd catch COVID. Upon asking him "Why? COVID hadn't reached Hawaii yet," he said, "Because she's Chinese." I spent the entire class wondering why he thought it would be okay to tell me that. Did he assume that I'd think it was funny? He must have forgotten I'm Chinese or thought I would laugh along since I wasn't the butt of his joke, even though I shared the same race and ethnicity as my Chinese teacher. While I wasn't too afraid of leaving my house since Hawaii surrounded me with the Asian community, I didn't know how to feel about my adoption. I was hesitant for people to know I was Chinese and lived in Wuhan before coming to Hawaii. Even my mom, who loved to talk about my adoption to anyone who'd listen, was dampened by the pandemic and encouraged me to keep my past in Wuhan private.

According to the Health Affairs organization, 57% of Asian Americans felt unsafe during the pandemic because of their race or ethnicity The FBI also documented a 77% increase in hate crimes against Asian people (Findling et al., 2022). The earliest reports of overt

discrimination through verbal and physical assault and hate crimes due to the virus came from restaurants and small business owners in Chinatowns nationwide. There were cases of vandalism, assault toward Chinese workers or customers, and even a racially-based mass shooting that killed six Asian women. People recount being attacked and nearly killed while waiting for the bus or being verbally abused and called derogatory names for speaking a different language in public (Hahm et al., 2021).

Through the intersection theory, race, class, gender, and other attributes affect how people experience the pandemic. As an adopted Chinese teenager in a working-class family, I've uniquely experienced the pandemic compared to how a Hispanic person might have or someone in the upper-middle class, my Japanese parents, or even a Chinese adoptee with a White family in the Midwest. Although I've experienced my share of racist remarks from classmates over the years, I would consider myself lucky to have lived through the height of COVID in Hawaii. My mom always called Hawaii the "melting pot of the world," a nod to the amalgamation within Hawaii's local community. Hawaii, as a whole, is more accepting of minorities due to the diversity in its population and history, resulting in fewer hate crimes than in other areas of America. Many factors in play affected individual experiences during the pandemic. I imagine a stay-at-home order or buying masks is difficult for someone of the working class. The upper or middle class would have an easier time affording necessities during quarantine, and a White person would not experience COVID-related hate crimes.

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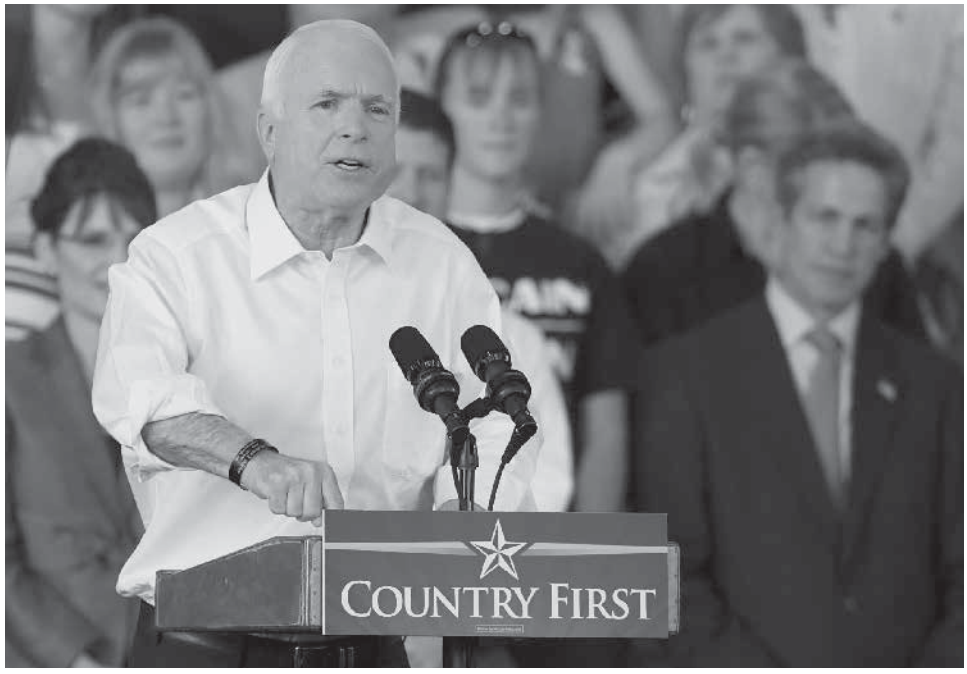
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HOW MY PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY IS SIMILAR TO AND DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE GRIMKÉ SISTERS AND SENATOR JOHN McCAIN



JULIANNE CROUCH
Northwest Mississippi Community College
Senatobia Campus
Mississippi

It is hard to go against the popular opinion in any situation. Both the Grimké sisters as well as Senator John McCain had to do just that which is how they rose to the top as leaders. It wasn't because they were popular, or wealthy. It was because they chose to do the right thing and were respected for it. Being a leader isn't about power or recognition even though society has made it out to be just so. It is the ability to step up and show honor in your actions and in your character.

Stepping out into the world and leading by example, refusing to back down out of principle, that is honorable. It takes a lot of courage to put aside fear of persecution or ridicule. Showing selflessness is the ultimate gift to society yet the most underappreciated act of bravery. It is often those seen by the majority as weak that are the ones that show us true strength.

Expectations of greatness from those so meek and mild in demeanor is often mistaken for an inability to lead. That couldn't be farther from the truth. It is in the quiet of our inner thoughts that we form our beliefs and hold onto that which is meaningful to us. It is only when we are faced with opposition to our core value system, that we charge like a lion to defend that which we held inward until it must be defended. Out of that quiet reflection came a Leader.

In looking back on the lives of such pioneers as the Grimké sisters and John McCain, one could only hope to strive for such sense of humanity. It is the work of the few that can have such an impact as they did on the world. To wake up and fill your day with such an outward desire of wanting to make a difference for others is so very hard to find. It is a rare thing...a

beautiful thing...to find someone willing to put their lives at risk for another. We turn on the daily news and see hate, crime, and so much greed. It is awe-inspiring to witness acts of kindness, loyalty, goodness, love, compassion, and a longing to help others beyond yourself. That is the true sign of a leader. Looks, money, being educated, etc. can only get you so far. Character is so important. It is the most important part of being a leader.

A true leader is one that doesn't run for office, that doesn't seek a title. To me a real leader is one that has earned the respect of the people because they are pure of heart and of good character—the type of person everyone thinks of as a leader without them ever having to campaign.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké were pioneers in rights not only for women but also in their contribution to the fight against slavery. Senator John McCain believed strongly in his country, the United States of America. He was a proud patriot. They all stood up for what they believed in and were willing to put themselves in harm's way to fight for a cause they would lay down their lives for if need be.

I share in their passion, commitment, and honor to lead by example. To do what is right even when it means to not be popular for doing so, that is my heart. Even if you do not set out to be a leader intentionally, by your own actions and behaviors, by the example you set, by gaining the trust and honor of those around you, you become one.

SONGS OF BRAZIL



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Growing up in the very diverse city of Union City, New Jersey, I felt lost in a sea full of ethnicities. "Where are you from?" my classmates would ponder after meeting me. Well, the answer is quite simple: My mother is half Cameroonian and half African American whereas my father is fully Brazilian. On my father's side, my *vovô* (grandpa) still lives in Brazil while my grandma has always lived in Miami with her true love, my Cuban grandpa. Gringa is what my classmates teased me with, but they are right; I don't resonate with either culture in my family as there are no cultural dishes that we make, nor annual traditions, and I cannot even speak the language of the countries I am from. This disconnection ruined my day every time I heard my grandma say phrases in Portuguese or watched her dance the Samba, so I deemed it my duty to strengthen my Brazilian roots through its songs.

Every summer, my task was to learn a new song in Portuguese with my grandma and seeing that I grasp lyrics quickly, learning songs is an easier alternative to learning an entire language. "Why did you never teach my dad, my aunt, and my uncle Portuguese?" I curiously asked my grandma. Explaining that there was no need for Portuguese, English was the only language spoken in her Americanized household. The idea of my heritage never being passed down to my future family consumes me with guilt, and therefore, my grandma was my only chance at continuing our culture.

The excitement that consumed her body when hearing that I wanted to learn the songs she always sang made the endless rehearsals and frustrations worth it. "I want to learn the song that you always hum," I'd eagerly say to my grandma. "Garota de Ipanema?" she asked, surprised that I even noticed her fascinating habit. "The Girl from Ipanema," is a classic that almost anyone can recognize just from its tune and it transports me miles away as I learn it. *Olha que coisa mais linda mais cheia de graça.* Reading the first line instantly places me

on the black and white tiles of the sidewalks along the busy city streets of Rio de Janeiro. I look up at the sizzling bright sun that provides Brazil with its tropical climate. As I gaze at the people playing in the clear turquoise waters, I am distracted by the smell of the fresh, warm cinnamon churros that workers would prepare and sell. Suddenly I'm rising in a cable car towards Corcovado, overwhelmed by the pink and purple gradient sunset in the sky. With his arms out, *Cristo Redentor* (Christ the Redeemer) embraces me with all of Brazil's magnificence and I too open my arms with my eyes closed.

When I open my eyes, my grandma is next to me in her living room and we have made our way to the last line: *E fica mais lindo por causa do amor.* I have fulfilled my duty. Pleasing myself, my grandma, but most importantly, my Brazilian ancestors for keeping my culture alive, I am now one song closer to feeling connected to my roots.

PACK A BAG. WE'RE GOING TO ORLANDO!



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It would always start off like any other Friday before a regular weekend, get out of school and dread going home no friends, no teachers, nothing to do, but sit at home bored. As I walked up the driveway, Uh, Oh! Why is dad's truck already parked? What could he possibly be home for? It's 4:00 P.M. on a Friday; he is three hours too soon. I walk in and my dad immediately says, "pack a bag, we're going to Orlando!" My sisiter and I scream with excitement, "yeah! Whoop whoa, Orlando." "Alright, alright, go upstairs pack your bag, let's head out." I ran upstairs to my room with a lightning quickness. Yelling, from upstairs now, "ok, dad, where in Orlando? How long?" Before I was even finished asking my questions he was already answering. "Universal, one night." I thought to myself, ok bathing suit for the wet rides, black tank top to cover up my top half, gym shorts, because it is going to be way too hot for pants, and tennis shoes, for all the walking we will do for hours.

The drive from Jacksonville, Florida to Orlando, Florida is only two and a half hours, but somehow dad gets down there in two. Jamming out, windows down, blonde hair blowing in the wind, playing the air guitar right alongside with dad's favorite 80s music. We pull up to McDonald's to grab a quick bite to eat before we check into the cheapest overnight stay with two beds: two people to a bed. Trying to go to sleep the night before I get to go to Universal Studios is quite difficult. I usually end up just laying there, making sure my sister doesn't touch me while we share this small bed even though it's bigger than my twin bed, I am having to share it so, I am not happy. Next thing I know it's morning. You can hear the night in dad's voice, "Come on girls, get up." I know he didn't sleep well, but he is up before us so that means we are still going. We always make a stop at Denny's to get a grand slam breakfast. Bang for our buck when feeding a family of four on vacation. I don't know why, but I always get cold in Denny's as soon as I take my first bite. I wait patiently to hear, "Let's roll."

The earlier we get to the theme park, the better the parking is. You want up front parking, even if you pay extra, it is worth it. Dad already decided that we are going to do the new Islands of Adventure Theme Park at Universal Studios. 1-Day-1-Park-pass. Oh, it's on now. I can't contain the excitement on my face. Just grinning from ear to ear is enough to make my dad say, "well we know Lee's excited; we haven't even made it inside the park and your already cheesing, kiddo." Of course, who wouldn't be. I get to experience my stomach dropping, my heart beating out of my chest, over and over all day. I get to experience Newton's Law. For every action there is a reaction. And it's a good one.

Ride after ride, line after line, all day and it doesn't get old. One learns patience in line at a theme park. Standing for that amount of time with thousands of people around you can't help but people watch. Watching loved ones attempt to entertain the younger children in their group, or the people that refuse to ride a ride because of who knows why. All that matters is, if we wait, we get to ride. I don't know what would happen if any of us at anytime refused to ride. It must be in our blood because all four of us always ride no matter what.

When night begins to fall the park comes to life in a completely different way. The lights shining in the dark sky with the speed is the most thrilling thing I have yet to experience in my lifetime. We all get to pick our favorite ride of the day to ride again before we call it a day/night. It isn't until our way out of the theme park that we realize our feet are aching from walking for almost twelve hours. At that moment you are grateful you paid for up front parking because you are no longer preoccupied with the excitement of the next ride. All you want to do now is stop walking, eat, and sleep in your own bed.

WRATH



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Bite me.
Your venom drips from sharpened fangs,
A slip of the tongue
And it poisons you too.

We tear at each other;
Aimless,
Frenzied,
Tooth clashes with bone,
Which gives way and splinters.

Hollowed out and breathless,
You hang your head,
And I remind you that you bit first.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN AIR NYMPH AND A WATER NYMPH



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Mesabi Range-Virginia Campus
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When it rains, you visit with your friend.

As the raindrops fall to the ground, he tells you he is in love with a human.

You do not know who he is talking about. There are many, many people, and none of them are special. You nod and pretend to understand. You tell him to go on.

He tells you again that he is in love. He sighs.

You tell him that he should live in the moment, that he should tell her how he feels. You do not know if this is even possible, but it feels like the right thing to say.

He tells you again that you don't understand. He tells you that when the water hits her, she turns into a goddess. He says you could never in a million years understand, that when you see her, her hair is dry and frizzy, and her skin is hidden away. You try not to take it personally.

You tell him you see plenty of human skin. You tell him about the people in sunhats and swimsuits on breezy days, and he shakes his head. He tells you it's not the same.

Dropping the subject, he tells you about a different boat in the harbor. Tells you how he hates the smell of the new engines. You tell him you can smell them too, and yes, they are foul.

As the rain fades into a mist, he tells you that he'd better be on his way. You nod and smile and tell him how nice it was to catch up, and how we should do this more often. It's a little joke you like to tell. You don't control the weather.

The joke is getting stale, but he still laughs. You love it when he laughs.
You love it when he laughs, and you miss him when he is gone.
You watch the sky and wait for rain. You wonder if this is how he feels about the human.
You wonder if, when she is gone, he waits for her like you wait for him.
And you wonder if he thinks about you sometimes.

AMERICA: A FOUR HUNDRED YEAR GENOCIDE



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Nowadays, I have to keep my moves like surgery
I can't even go out and get a card for an anniversary
Because if I'm in a store where they haven't heard of me
They'd claim I gotta gun, it's a burglary
The cops come, they'd say, "We got here urgently."
I feared for my life, "He was gonna murder me"
In reality, they shot first before even searching me

Now I know if I screamed "You're hurting me!"
They'd keep their arms folded and look at me like a criminal, and there's no one worse than me. I'm waiting for the act to be up like, "Curtains, please!"
If I'm not submissive I might end up with a bullet in my clavicle; the community is hurting, but to them it's just collateral.

I hate people who say, "This is a tragedy." You have to realize your voice matters E...
VIL is all that comes to mind when I see that man on tv because

Even when he said, "Make America Great Again," his intentions said don't believe me.
Visions of an equal future are beneath me.
I wasn't there but I can only imagine Floyd's mom saying, "George, don't leave me." Life is only grand for us on movies or in the songs on CDs

They say its hard living through this crisis.
I have to ask, "Which one?"
I feel cheated, when I signed my contract to society, they didn't give me a hint,
But I guess it's my fault, I didn't read the fine print.

ROOTS OF THE POOR



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Michigan

I stem from white wife beaters and little dreams, From PBS to MediCaid's healthcare means.

From a plastic pool bought at Walmart's store,

Little fishes painted on the inside, what more?

I am a result of the Marlboro Red 100's scent,

Whose smoke would fill the car with its event.

Mini skirts and sagging jeans, I recall,

From Amber and Ryan, they stand tall.

"Shake it off" and "I'll give you something to cry about," Words that we grew up hearing, no doubt. "You're so pretty, honey," and "We love you so much." Words of endearment that never lost their touch.

Clothes found at garage sales, under my bed they hid. Much too big to fit, so we left them where they did. We grew up too fast and too big, no time to play,

But still, we found moments to cherish, day by day.

Generations of love, we've inherited with pride. Our family tree, a treasure we hold deep inside. We know that happiness isn't about money, you see. It's about the love of family that makes us feel free.

THRIFTING... IS IT SUSTAINABLE?



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I love our planet. I've realized that so much needs to change if we want it to last. I also realized that the fashion industry is a huge contributor to environmental damage. I'm doing my part by thrifting. It was my, and more specifically my mother's passion, way before it got big on social media. To me thrifting is buying clothes that have been used/owned before me, or clothes that were donated to a secondhand shop. I also see it as not directly contributing to fast fashion companies since my money is not going towards those companies; it's going towards charities or those who are selling clothes. There are positives and negatives when anything goes mainstream. Awareness… a positive, reselling… a negative. People are now more aware of thrifting, which is great since there are more sustainable ways of getting clothes for a cheaper cost. Since they are more aware they've realized that there is a way of profiting off thrifting, by buying clothes and reselling them. I am disappointed that people are profiting and taking away from those in need, but so happy people are realizing they don't have to spend $50 on a shirt. Overconsumption is useless. Some YouTubers film thrift hauls and admit that they only got something to show in the video or that they don't even like the item and are going to resell it. This is not thrifting.

Thrifting gives clothes new purpose and it's more accessible than high fashion; it's available to those who cannot afford name brands. This past week I bought a pair of faux leather pants from Zara that retails for $45.90. Zara is considered a more high-end fast fashion brand and these pants were new with their original tags. Since my mom is good friends with the workers at this store and because the button was missing from the pants, we were able to get these pants for 99 cents. I had saved $44.91 just because I had shopped at a thrift store. My mom also had found a pair of real Gucci loafers for $10 that sell for over $300 when used. I think many people believe that thrift stores only have used clothes but that's not the case. Many thrift stores get donations from big brands that usually have extra stock or are getting rid

of clothes for the new season. So, there will be clothes that are brand new with their tags marked down like 80 percent of their original retail price.

This, in turn, makes thrifting a more environmentally friendly way of shopping for clothes… supposedly. The fashion industry is one of the main contributors to the climate crisis; from production to clothing ending up in landfills. It is disheartening to see such a big industry being one of the main reasons the planet is falling apart. Not only is the fashion industry not environmentally conscious, but it is also known for horrible treatment of its workers. They're usually from low-income countries in Asia, with dangerous working conditions and horrible wages. I wonder how the next generation can change the process and lifetime of clothes or if there is some way for the supply and demand to change. With the popularity of microtrends online, trends that usually last two weeks then move onto something else, it seems now more than ever there needs to be a change.

I discussed the unethical way of producing fast fashion, which is where clothes are unsustainably mass-produced for consumption. This is where overconsumption comes in. Overconsumption is elevated because of TikTok and other social media. The promotion of buying stuff such as technology, school supplies, clothing, home decor, and so on has significantly increased. People who consume this way usually do not need the product but want it due to a flashy video showing off this product. There are many popular brands that are considered fast fashion brands, but a popular one is Shein. On TikTok it was trending when people did extremely large Shein hauls with a monetary value of about $400, showcasing the mass amount of clothing they bought. With Shein being so cheap, people can buy more for less, but those who need to buy more affordable clothing are not those who do these giant hauls.

I'm not on TikTok as much as I used to be but seeing all these hauls made me realize how often people are buying new clothes. Whether it's fast fashion or more high-end brands, I just don't buy clothes new nearly as much as others. I feel like because I don't buy new clothes as often as some people do and I thrift when I do buy clothes, I am being more environmentally friendly. This is because I am not contributing to the ever-growing fast fashion industry, and I am also keeping used clothes out of the landfills and other place they might go if they aren't bought. I don't understand how people need or are able to buy need clothes constantly. New clothes can be very expensive especially if you're a college student or are just struggling financially. Sometimes I do buy clothes new if there is a big sale or if it's something specific like hornet gear from the bookstore.

I don't know if it's just because of my mom, since she likes wearing the same jeans for a while before washing them, or what, but I usually don't need new clothes unless I purge my closet which is like twice a year. I realized I try to not over-consume or buy things I would not need. I am trying to adapt to the minimalist lifestyle, at least with my clothes, by buying only what I know I will wear. I also noticed this when I shopped with my mom. She used to have this mentality that if she did not get anything when thrifting, she wasted her time and gas. She also has a knack for vintage jeans that are "Made in the US," or other places that represent vintage made. My mom feels like she should be the one to buy the vintage item, so some reseller doesn't get it and resell it. I understand where she is coming from, but she already has a bit of a space problem in her closet and there have been many times where she gets something and it just sits in the closet. I've recently encouraged her that she won't always find something, and that's okay.

My mom—the most important person in my life—was also the person who introduced me to thrifting. I grew up with it. Thrifting is my mom's lifestyle, and I have just adopted it. I believe that thrifting has helped me strengthen my relationship with my mom. It started as something she enjoyed doing, and I would just benefit and go along since I was a child. As I have grown older, more mature, and more independent, I've come to realize how closed off

I am with people, even those close with me. I enjoy that with thrifting I can be close with my mom and share something we both enjoy doing.

Whenever my mom and I go thrifting it usually starts off with me just going because I want to get out of the house. Other times I'm the one who brings up the idea and my mom goes along since she just loves doing it. She usually talks about what she is looking for, which is jeans, sweatshirts, and anything vintage in good condition. I usually don't have a specific thing that I am looking for, although I do know what I like so that helps when looking. I usually don't take a long time when looking for stuff since I am very specific when looking. I know what colors I like and my size which helps with estimating whether something will fit me or not. I am usually done looking for stuff then help my mom look for the things. Sometimes if we see something ridiculous looking, we jokingly say "I think this is perfect for you," and then we laugh because it's usually something we'd never be interested in. My mom is good friends with some of the workers at a specific thrift store and if there's something wrong with an item, like the item is ripped or stained, then she'll ask for money off since they are supposed to be putting out items that aren't damaged. After we have checked out, my mom likes to do a thrift haul with me when she shows off all the items that she gets, how much they are, and how much she saved. When we get home, she likes to look up the item she got to see how much people would be selling it for. This is specifically for vintage items but also with items she has never heard of. Although she likes to do it more often than I do, it's always fun to do it together. It helps us understand what we are interested in with clothing and just allows us to talk while doing something we both enjoy. It has also taught me how much money is worth if used correctly. I believe that if my mom wasn't huge with thrifting, we wouldn't be as well off as we are. She taught me that some things are worth spending money on and other things don't have to be.

Even though I am just one person, like my mom, I hope to share my love for thrifting and being more environmentally friendly with those around me. I know that I, the individual consumer, won't change the climate crisis greatly. At least I am aware that I am trying to do my part and am being more conscious with my actions. By spreading these ideas to my friends, I might start a domino effect within my friend group and impact my community.

DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF 5G TECHNOLOGY IN AVIATION



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The implementation of 5G technology is having a profound effect on aviation. This is primarily due to where the 5G towers are constructed. New technology like the concept of 5G is something most of us don't really understand. When we think of 5G, the new standard for global wireless technology, one thing comes to mind – our phones. If we can make a call, get on social media, access an app, or search the web, then we are fine. We don't give much thought to where our signal is coming from or what its consequences are. The effects of 5G in aviation all revolve around one piece of machinery - the altimeter, specifically the radar altimeter. This device measures how high the plane is in the air, or its altitude, by shooting down a radio wave and measuring the time it takes to receive that same signal and shows how high the plane is currently above the ground. This is one piece of equipment that must work. It could be life or death. The new 5G technology has not been tested thoroughly and its benefits are not worth the risks of mechanical failure, legal ramifications, and consumer satisfaction.

First, the performance and mechanical issues created by close or interfering frequencies can cause loss of signal, loss of communication, and create landing delays or redirects. When a plane is nearby, possibly attempting to land, these interfering signals can cause incorrect readings on the altimeter. If the weather is bad and a pilot can't see the runway to land or how high they are above the ground, this would demand a pilot use the plane's instruments. The pilot might have no choice but to delay the landing or find another location to land. If a pilot is running low on fuel, this delay or redirect could have catastrophic consequences. Cybercriminal access via 5G programming hacks is also a problem that could cause mechanical failures. These problems lead us to our next effect of 5G on aviation, legal and financial ramifications.

If a plane landing is rerouted or delayed and causes health problems, missed financial opportunities, or death, then travelers would want compensation. It is safe to say no

one—airlines, ATT, Verizon, FCC, FAA would want to take the blame. According to Tim Clark, Emirates Airlines president, "this is one of the most delinquent, utterly irresponsible" situations that he's seen in his aviation career (Wattles et al, 2022). If a pilot is given wrong information from a faulty reading on the altimeter, and comes in too fast and hard for the landing, the plane might crash. According to Maxim Solkin's review of critical issues in aviation security, written in the Transportation Research Procedia, "all interference from electromagnetic fields will cause deadly consequences and this issue needs to be addressed" (Solkin, 2021). Legal costs and consequences are a realistic possibility and could mount quickly if damage is done.

Finally, the most important driving force in any business decision is consumer satisfaction. If consumers do not feel safe, or are inconvenienced, they won't fly. If they don't fly then they aren't spending their money with the airlines; this would certainly be cause for some adjustments. As long as cell phones have been around, it's almost guaranteed that the airlines have been asking us to shut them off during takeoff, landing, and during flight. Nowadays, airlines are quite firm in their requests. There will always be travelers who will not turn their cell phones off. Their phones may actually have an effect on the flight. A research paper in US Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives that studied the impact of 5G on air travel (Sobieralski and Hubbard, 2022) confirms that 5G towers are usually placed in central locations to population, especially heavily populated areas, and airports. This close proximity would make it more likely that their phones and 5G would have an effect on air travel than phones or towers that are miles and miles away.

France and Japan have claimed to have done research and say there is no 5G effect on aircraft. In December 2022 several aviation companies, airlines, and our own FAA issued airworthiness directives stating that "altimeters cannot be relied upon to perform their intended function if they experience interference from wireless broadband operations" (2022). This may be one reason for all the airline delays lately. Boeing and Airbus both warned the US government of the interference issues, as reported in a BBC News article (2021). The FCC and the FAA have also indicated there is a correlation between the increased air traffic issues and our increased 5G capabilities.

This illustrates the detrimental effects of 5G on air travel. There are performance and mechanical concerns, financial and legal consequences, and consumer satisfaction issues. Until we have a better understanding of the real detrimental effects of 5G on aviation, it would be best to respect the process and the pilot. Give the industry respect, follow the rules for the safety of everyone on board, and give the pilot(s) every tool to do their job well. It could mean the difference between arriving safely or not at all. This means keep the 5G towers away from airports, continue research on the effects, and turn off the phone.

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