

JOURNAL TWENTYTWENTY

PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC • UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER

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JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY publishes a print issue each year, and provides an online community for all genres of creative nonfiction at the University of Colorado Boulder. We acquire First North American Serial Rights. CU Boulder Undergraduate artists and writers of creative nonfiction interested in publishing in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY may refer to our back page for submission guidelines.

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ON JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY


This journal that you hold in your hands—is the result of months of labor. If you'd seen much of this labor taking place, it wouldn't have looked like much: you'd have seen a kid sitting in front of his laptop typing—or maybe this kid wouldn't have even been typing, maybe you'd have just seen the thrumming of fingers on the tabletop, a clenching and unclenching jaw, a blank stare. This is what the labor of writing looks like most of the time. Like nothing—from the outside. Only when the thoughts manifest and translate to paper can we truly understand the experiences of others. Putting honest words down on paper, with the knowledge that at least one person will read them, is a valuable act. And nonfiction is a special case. The writer of nonfiction has to get things right in every way. The experiences described in these pages are as varied as human experience, but they have one thing in common: they happened.

And yet we know, because we have this issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** in our hands, that the product of all this apparent nothingness is something—and not just something but something big, special, important. Something that resides in the most internal of landscapes.

In this issue of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY**, a sense of place is often palpable, though not all tangible. For Juan Mateo Menendez, meaning comes from a work of art; for David Gordon, it derives from the words of other writers who came before him. Michael Kusin documents a friendship with lovingness and care, while Thomas Van de Pas does the same with a particular point in time—the fourth grade. Madsen McComsey finds a hospital trip laughable. Others bravely and thoughtfully render difficult—and, in some cases, tragic—experiences. Sara Seidel evokes the uncertainty of being a college student; Rachel Hultquist exposes a secret trauma to overcome it; Andrew Hecock describes what it feels like to be inside his complex mind; Bailey Ferrari recalls her father's death; and Veronica Sachtjen's remembrance of her grandfather becomes a meditation on mourning itself.


Still other pieces in this issue focus on how external settings have helped to shape the internal landscape. We visit some faraway locales. Stephanie Quon takes us to an island in Ireland; Robbie Gershon travels to Northern Ghana; Sarah Ellsworth tells us about the Sachsenhausen concentration camp; and Dakota Brummel revisits Afghanistan, where he served in the Marines. Kelton Collins catalogues the places he's lived in Oklahoma, none for more than four years at a stretch. Others focus on places with which we Coloradans are more intimate—but their pieces are no less evocative. Ben Crawford takes us to a canyon in Southern Colorado; Heather Clark brings us to Devil's Causeway. Jack Herrick fondly recalls a river in rural Delta, Colorado, while for McKenna Russen, a river is remembered with horror as the scene of a terrible accident. We feel the uncertainty surrounding Molly Henze's arrival in Colorado from California, and the disappointment of Kelly Walker's arrival from the Seychelles. Others find

richness and depth in experiences that might be dismissed as mundane: Donna Das takes us to a coffee shop in Boulder, while Rebecca Hall recalls visiting a Rite-Aid.


In writing my short stories for *Tin House*, *Glimmer Train*, *Zyzzyva*, and elsewhere and my journalistic nonfiction, which regularly appears in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Businessweek*, and the website of *The New Yorker*, among other places, I have felt my work turn from nothing into something. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to read the pieces in this issue of JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY, and I believe you will be, too. 

VAUHINI VARA



We would like to extend our thanks to the contributors and extended staff for making JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY possible. Everyone's hard work and dedication truly made a positive difference. This year, the Journal is larger than ever, with more pieces and art than any of the previous issues. There were just too many good submissions, so we chose more. As part of such a large and diverse campus, we don't often know the people whom we walk with every morning. JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY's goal is to bridge the divide, to be the catalyst for a CU Boulder connected through stories of the true. This is reflected not only in the diversity of the pieces, but in our staff as well. We all came from different majors. We've gained insight by collaborating with each other, and the journal serves the same purpose for readers. From everyone on Editorial, we hope you enjoy the stories of our community. So we'll leave you with a question, what's orange, only has one hair, and jumps? 

EDITORIAL

Sitting in an ATLAS editing bay one evening, putting the finishing touches on this issue, we realize we need one more broken crossover—where the art reaches across two pages—earlier in the issue. One of us finds the photo, the other the piece closer to the front, we place it, and only then realize the match. (You'll find this in the answer to the riddle above.) Serendipity is like the muse: she's down the street at a bar unless you're putting in the regular hours of hard work. We could not have found that good luck in art for that piece without the incredible contributions of our artists, and the equally strong writing we had to illustrate and complement. 

ART DIRECTION

The response to our submissions drives this fall was so tremendous that not only is this issue more expansive than previous ones, but our online presence is growing as well—you will

find this and earlier issues on the site, and also find pieces which are only available there—be sure to check it out! The site is located at Journal2020.wordpress.com. And check out our Facebook page as well. Even better—submit something! We would love to get video and other multimedia content, which is best presented online. ☞

DIGITAL PRODUCTION



This year's **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** in print reveals an established student publication moving forward. The Fall 2015 **WRTG 2090 JOURNAL PRODUCTION COURSE** (yup, *twenty-ninety*) tabled, posterred, and talked up plenty of writing and more art than previous issues. Our diverse staff includes a non-traditional student whose blog you can find linked on journal2020.wordpress.com. Mistaken for a professor by a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, his conversation with Dakota Brummel led to publishing “Birds.” Of course the piece had to make it through blind submission, as does all our writing, but read it, and you’ll see why that happened. As long as this country sends young men and women to war, we will publish the truth of that.

We also continue publishing true stories of undergraduates enduring the seemingly unendurable: rape and abuse appear again in these pages, because these crimes continue to be a fact of life for too many students. I’m amazed by the toughness of writers and editors following Chekhov’s advice to “be somewhat colder,” letting the reader do some of the work of feeling, especially when feeling runs strong. This issue again disproves the suspicion that undergraduates (of traditional age) haven’t experienced enough to have anything to write about. We also see them asking questions about their education, their majors and how they’re being taught, and financial pressures making college harder for many. But you’ll again see pieces exploring reading and art, as well as honest confrontations with their relationships across divides of generation, culture, class, and country.

Spring Independent Study Staff not only took the final editing and digital production of this issue to the printers; they also grew our online presence, publishing our first online-only stories. Undergraduates at CU Boulder can check our guidelines for submitting to next year’s print issue at the end of this one. **THE PROGRAM FOR WRITING AND RHETORIC** continues to develop coursework in creative nonfiction video production. Our website also seeks graphic true stories, animation, and other work most suitable for computer screens. But enjoy this print issue as one can only enjoy printed words and images, and spread the word: creative nonfiction’s home in **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** issues, online, and the PWR-sponsored student Club keeps growing. ☞

JAY ELLIS, FACULTY ADVISOR

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BUCHANAN'S STATE OF MIND

by Donna Das

You can have your Starbucks or your Caribou, your Folgers or Nescafe, but the best coffee in the world is served in Boulder, Colorado, on the corner of Pennsylvania and Broadway. But it's not just the taste that makes it so great, it's the feeling. Cultivated after nearly four years of habit, each sense is signaled upon by just walking through the door and that's not the caffeine addiction talking. In fact, jittery is the opposite reaction. Instead, it's like catching a familiar scent that summons a memory forgotten in the wake of life; the sensation of comfort embodied in a physical space; a home away from home. Sitting across the University of Colorado in a neighborhood called The Hill, surrounded by sticky-floored bars infamous for cringe-worthy birthday shots and small rundown homes with overpriced rent is Buchanan's Coffee Pub.

To some, Buchanan's is a hub for free Wi-Fi or a pit stop before class, but to me those green awnings incite so much more than study space and drip coffee. I have a special spot tucked in the corner to the right of the door. Part of me will anticipate it before I'm even in, looking through the glass while I cross the

street. It is a small rectangular table and one of the few window seats devoid of direct sunlight in late afternoon. It allows for people watching both outside and in. One can look out towards the east and see the Broadway intersection, and towards the west, a slab of a Flatiron pokes out from behind the Fox Theater. Local originality radiates simultaneously in the atmosphere with toasty aromas of coffee beans.

The first incentive is always to claim a spot—the spot if it’s available—I learned that around my second semester of freshman year. You walk in, you set down your things, then you buy coffee—otherwise the flush of people that come in at the top of the hour will steal any available space. The beverage of choice varies day to day, and their options are as wide as my mood. I’ll catch up with the baristas. They are pleasant, enjoyable people, each as diverse as the beverage selection. We’ve become friends through circumstance; we know a lot about each other’s lives for not knowing one another’s names. I’ll put in my order whether by their recommendation or my craving and go sit down with a full cup. That moment—after the hustle of spot-claiming and coffee-ordering, when I have my drink, I have out my work to do, and I finally sit down—is the most calm I feel in an otherwise hectic life.

I was introduced to this café half a month into college by my Farsi class. My professor held his office hours on Buchanan’s ront porch. He was an elderly Persian man who read Rumi while drinking black coffee and smoking cigarettes. You could normally find him under the green awnings happily doing all these things. He assigned recited presentations that second week of classes and our group collaborated the meeting space to be in close proximity to his pseudo-office. “You know Buchanan’s on The Hill? Let’s do the project there.” I barely understand what “The Hill” is, let alone where Buchanan’s could be. The upper-classmen that surrounded me seemed to have no qualms about any of this; they didn’t have to verify where Buchanan’s was, they seemed competent in this language I barely grasped the alphabet of, they probably already had the assignment done. I, on the other hand, had all sorts of anxieties: the pace of school demanded more than I was prepared for, the pressure of not having held myself to that higher standard created unnecessary stress, and now, I have to get to this coffee shop on time without getting terribly disoriented on the way?

*They are pleasant,
enjoyable people,
each as diverse as the
beverage selection.*

*I was on my own,
and that evoked
a combination of
exhilaration and
confusion.*

There was this wonderfully terrifying feeling felt in full force that first month of school. I was on my own, and that evoked a combination of exhilaration and confusion: trying to get into a new groove of life all the while making sense of what my new norm was. Not to mention, I got lost fairly often. But this first month was also the beginning of my comfort zone's expansion. I learned the world keeps turning and I could keep stride. So I gave myself 30 extra minutes that day to equate for getting lost, and in my spare 25 minutes, I had my first moment of calm in my corner with a cup of black coffee.

Buchanan's in 2012 was different than the Buchanan's that I sit at today. It was reminiscent of a thrift shop but in a most humble way. The tables and chairs had no uniformity: some were circles, some were square, some were big or small. Certain tables had five chairs around them others had one, and all the seating seemed to be put wherever there was space, leaving not much room to move around. It was the type of clutter that promotes coziness, like a well-worn home. Sharing in that sentiment, the mugs you were served with seemed to be pulled from a coffee cup collector's cabinet. I grew to be partial to a red mug with a black and white cat on it. Mind you, you have no say in your coffee vessel but when I got Cat Cup it was a self-prophesized good luck.

Inconvenient off-hours were spent tucked in the side of Buchanan's, trying to organize my fake-adult life. I used coffee to fuel last-minute paper writing and nurse weekend hangovers, some days both at the same time. It became a space all my own: it was my study zone, my meet-me-here place, my favorite setting for me-time. I began noticing the "regulars;" I became a regular myself.

In the past three and a half years I've made hundreds of flashcards for dozens of classes. Typed millions of words for at least fifty papers. Watched thousands of people cross Broadway to get to school. I've seen three cars turn into traffic on a one-way road. Multiple bike collisions and sometimes human ones, with that awkward side step. I saw even more awkward first dates. There were stunning sorority girls with bows in their hair and frat guys dressed in pastels like walking Easter eggs. I devoured the words in my text books with a side of coffee cake only to become more passionate about International Affairs. Enough to take on a certificate for Middle Eastern and

Islamic Studies after completing the advance level of Farsi. I briefly took a look at graduate programs in different states and started applying for jobs across the globe. I began daydreaming about my future and started turning with the world. Something about those funky mugs and non-navigable floor space made me appreciate organized chaos.

College was the first time I was truly accountable for the person I was becoming. Being eighteen somehow legally qualifies one as an adult but what experience of the world did I have that gave that number any legitimacy? But of course I didn't think that at eighteen. No one thinks they're naive at eighteen. I remember thinking how awful it would be if I were to become one of those adults I watched rush away with a coffee in hand, living day after day on some monotonous schedule. That kind of routine mortified me. That was because I equated routine with being broken. The system got 'em, they're just a cog in it now. This is why the world doesn't change; they gave up on it. They stopped being dreamers and started molding to society, living their mundane lives. Where was the passion?

I realized how wrong I was in that on an early Saturday morning right before finals week my junior year. "Realized" may be the wrong word; there was no shock and awe. It was just one of those revelations you are contented with when you spend enough time with yourself.

Everything that morning was tinted a yellowish-gray while the sun and frost competed against each other for the landscape; the slab of Flatiron being a particularly gorgeous piece of contention. It had been one of those days where getting to a destination is done purely through groggy, human autopilot. I walked into Buchanan's around 7 a.m. exhaustion embedded in my bones. Sluggishly threw my backpack onto my empty seat and even more pathetically ordered coffee. The quiet harshness of winter assisted by caffeine trickling warmly in my body brought me back to life. I spent the first few sips looking outside before misty rings would fog up my view. Huffs of air from underneath the coats of passers-by made me appreciate the steam I felt coming off my cup.

The cup was white; they all were now. It was a chic bowl with a small handle on it. I remember watching the renovations in Buchanan's happen gradually, but all of a sudden it was something new. The tables were all the same shape and color,

Something about those funky mugs and non-navigable floor space made me appreciate organized chaos.

rectangular and gray. Seating arrangement had also been transformed; there were booths now along a wall and the chairs were all standardized. The bar and coffee counter were accented light blue. The floor was redone and the walls had new pictures on it. This all happened right before my eyes but until I took the time to look around, I'd forgotten all about the mismatched furniture and my lucky Cat Cup.

My fatigue was not just toward finals approaching; it wasn't a tired apathy towards school though, more of a frustrated longing to do more. The giddy inspiration that came with textbooks started to dwindle after I finally decided I would become a U.S. diplomat. Tired of taking tests and writing essays, I craved a routine that would contribute to the world. I wanted to see the world. Was I a cog now? Did I give up? No, my dreams aren't dead. But do they matter? Does it matter? Accepting my insignificance was so wonderfully terrifying. All the while, it induced such a strange feeling of relief and comfort that in another day and time would have crippled me. Maybe the system got me, like those adult-cogs. Maybe I was broken. But perhaps you're supposed to break in order to fit better into this grander organized chaos. Your pieces are the same, they're still who you are, just different. And in that moment I felt calm.

I didn't really change—I grew up. Buchanan's grew up too. I don't hate the difference though. I don't necessarily miss how it used to be either. My memories are fond but there is no desire to go back. I do feel an ache thinking about how we won't be able to watch each other grow in the next four years but it comforts me to think there will always be a coffee shop to cater to my Buchanan's-state-of-mind. Donna at twenty-five will be different than Donna at twenty-one, let alone Freshman Donna. But I'd like to think we'd all buy each other a cup of coffee. This time next year my days will be spent in another corner of another coffee shop in a place I don't know yet. It's a wonderfully, terrifying feeling. ☞



ON THREE, JUMP

by Stephanie Quon

On the island of Inis Mor, I can feel the cold rock under my bare feet as I stand on the edge of island cliffs. Forty-two feet below, the dark ocean froths and sprays to create a spiraling portal in an unnaturally natural rectangle cut from the hard earth, The Wormhole. The coastal winds push and pull at me, but I stand fast. As I stare down into the dark waters, I'm filled with fear. I can only see forty-two feet down and everything else is lost in the unknown depths.

My grip tightens on the rocks to keep me from jumping. The more I look, the more fear settles into me; regret hasn't. I have never jumped off a cliff before, and frankly I didn't think I would have the courage to do this. But the appeal of trying new things is too sweet to turn down. The possibility of a new adventure is something my body naturally craves, and this hunger is my own demise.

Count to three and take a step out.

One.

I teeter on my heels. Look down. Look out at the horizon.
And wait.

I have come too far to back out now. But my limbs remain
frozen.

Two.

The reality that I'm actually going to jump off a cliff sets in.

I'm not ready to commit.

Breathe.

I'm not ready to go only one direction. I'm not ready.

Breathe.

I lower my eyes toward the water and release my iron grip on
the rocks. I begin to bend and unbend my knees in a slow
rhythm, gently rocking onto the balls of my feet.

Three.

The rocks shackle my fears and uncertainties as my scream
pierces the air and the water engulfs my body.

Thank God. I did it.

The end is only a concept. The true jump between the cliff and
the water takes place internally. On the outside, I am composed.
But the internal struggle is what shortens the distance between
me and the water.

One. The prep stage. The fact that I am about to make the jump. It's
too soon to tell what I'm capable of, but I'll find out soon enough. I
don't know how I will feel on the count of three, but it's worth the
risk to find out. The chance to prove to myself that the feeling of ac-
complishment will outweigh the overwhelming fear in the moment.

*The end is only a
concept.*

*So, what do you
want to do with
your Psychology and
Communication
degrees after you
graduate?*

Two. Am I out of my mind? I can't believe I'm doing this. Why the hell did I want to do this? No, stop. Don't think about it, just go. The more I think about it, the longer I'll hesitate. I will be fine. I can do this.

Three. Okay, this is it. No turning back now. Oh my God. I'm out of my mind.

The scariest plunge can be the most exhilarating adventure.

Two months later, I am sitting at a booth with my friend Allison for brunch. The diner is congested with people, yet the space still feels pleasantly comfortable and cozy. Servers are running back and forth bringing food from the kitchen to the table and making sure your coffee cup never ran dry. Meanwhile the conversations around us grow louder with the flux and flow of pauses and times to speak. I can't contain my excitement as I recount my adventures abroad in London to Allison, making sure not to leave out any important details. The excitement of exploring new countries, the people I met during my internship, and all the adventures I had throughout my experience. All seems to be fine as I sip my cup of chai, but as we begin to talk about the academic year and how I feel about my senior year so far, the conversation takes a turn.

So, what do you want to do with your Psychology and Communication degrees after you graduate? She doesn't mean to say it in any way other than pure curiosity, but I feel my body tense and the plastic cushion in the booth seat squeak and tense underneath me. She is another voice and another face among the millions of other people who have asked this relentless question I dread. I feel my stomach drop and my adrenaline rush. I am back on the cliff looking down into The Wormhole, unsure about my answer about the end of this experience. Unsure about taking this leap.

One.

I am reluctant to tell her that I am in the process of trying to figure out my career path, again. This is the third time I have changed my major since my freshman year as I have had a difficult time trying to decide what I wanted to pursue. And although I am finally content with my current majors, being a

senior doesn't mean I have everything figured out, including a career. My body is too familiar with the tightening pressure in my chest as I jump through hoops trying to meet the criteria of my ever-changing interest. I also do not want to explain that I am hesitant to commit and jump full force in one particular direction because I still haven't figured out my future. Which, given the timing of my senior year, is not an ideal place to be mentally. My closest friends have decided their plans in advance as far as a year out from the day after they throw their graduation caps in the air. I avoid the conversation as often as I can. But I realize I have come a long way since my freshman year and am confident that I'm where I'm supposed to be. I might as well be honest.

Two.

It is frustrating to come to terms with the lingering ambiguity of my future. A majority of my college career was spent struggling through many semesters of course material I could not retain nor fully understand. During the summers I would use my free time to subject myself to more classes or for internships to try and gain experience. But in the end all the stress and heartache was for a major I didn't even enjoy in the first place. I had a stubborn mentality that thought the only way to be successful was to pursue a major that would lead me to an impressive career, such as being a doctor. It was only until I was at my wit's end that I realized that instead of trying to pursue what I think others would find impressive, I would pursue what genuinely excites me and I'm actually passionate to learn more about. I was worried about the possibility of disapproving looks and potential references to the stereotypes that are associated with being Communication major and then later on adding a Psychology major as well. Now, I could not care less about anyone's negative opinion on the matter. But with all the changes I have made, sometimes I wonder if I am out of my mind. I still don't feel comfortable to take the jump and make the commitment to pursue what I am passionate about, whatever I narrow the choice down to be. I still don't have an answer to what I want to do as a career, but I'm okay with taking some big leaps to test out the waters. I can do this. I will find my own way. I finish sipping my chai and place the cup down on the table.

*Now, I could
not care less
about anyone's
negative opinion on
the matter.*

Three.

I can't hesitate any longer, I'm not doing myself any good by trying to avoid the question with a well rehearsed response. I look up from my cup, across the booth past our breakfast plates to Allison and exhale.

Jump.

*Honestly, I'm still trying to figure that out.
She smiles. That's okay, that's how my journey was too.*

My whole body relaxes, laughing in disbelief and relief as my mind emerges from my clouded thoughts and insecurities. I do not know what will happen when I finally reach the end of my journey. I guess I'll find out in my next jump. ☪





A SMILE SEEN BETWEEN FLAGS

by Ben Crawford

I watched her approach, dazed and tired, eyes swollen. I didn't know what to do so I gave her my presence, to show her that I was there with her. We embraced, our breaths contracting and slowly melding together into one. The sharp red stone and vibrancy of the blue sky supported us. We breathed together. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. I held her tightly as if the pressure would dissolve the reality that we had experienced a few days previously.



Penitente Canyon is a place that I hold dear to myself. It is a place that when reflected upon, many specific moments shine bright as memories and burn through the folds of my mind as perfect images. Penitente Canyon is a small outcropping of volcanic rock tucked away in a small valley near the San Juan Mountains in southern Colorado. It is secluded and homey by nature. This canyon seems to lie outside the rules and notions

defined by the world and humanity itself. If even briefly, time seems to slow to a halt while in the bounds of the canyon, softly suggesting a natural existence encompassed only by what you find around you and those you find it with.

Tyler Gordon grew up climbing in Penitente Canyon. It is where his mother's boyfriend would take him on weekend trips to get out of Durango and explore the high elevation deserts of Colorado. Tyler always spoke very fondly of Penitente, often reflecting pleasantly on the 'bullet hard stone' and dreamlike environment. He would tell me that it is the best rock in Colorado.

For several of the years I had known Tyler, he had been someone that was difficult to get to know. He had always been the quiet, shy type, offering his opinions when asked but never pressing them upon people. He was an incredibly gifted mathematician and had plans to attend a graduate program in Vancouver for applied mathematics. Once he graduated from CU, we all saw a change in Tyler. He was beginning to blossom. Brightness emerged, his face constantly embedded with that smile that lit up the environment. He spent the better part of the year after graduating traveling Europe, exploring some of the best climbing areas on the planet with some of his closest friends. When they returned I could see a fire burning within Tyler. He had learned to share himself with the world and the world loved him.

Incomprehensible.



After everything, it felt right that we would all be here together in Penitente. There was a sort of comfort that came with being surrounded by everyone close to Tyler. Seeing the amount of love and compassion that everyone held for each other was immense. It is what he would have wanted. He would have wanted us all to be together, doing what we all loved the most, climbing. His spirit embodies simplicity in that way. Everything was always so simple to him: if you want to do something, just do it.

Tyler's death struck us all hard. When I heard what had happened I was bouldering up in the Flatirons with my friend Pandora. I received a call from my roommate, Curtis. At first, his words seemed empty to me. Incomprehensible. I could not understand what he was saying even though I heard his words

*We each took a
cloth square and
painted a memory,
imprinting it into
reality.*

clearly. Tyler had died rappelling off of the infamous “Nose” of El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. After climbing most of the route in what was described as a flawless manner, Tyler fell trying to retrieve some lost gear that was dropped onto the ledge below. Once I understood, I fell back into my crashpad in a fit of tears and gasping breath, reaching for something in the air to ground my lungs and muscles into a stabilized state. The presence of everything around me melted away as I could hear Curtis sobbing with me on the other end of the telephone.

None of us knew what to do. The incessant presence of inaction was the most difficult part. Knowing that no matter what, there was absolutely nothing that could be done. We were stuck in this mental state of insanity, flashes and images of the beautiful life that Tyler lived screening through our minds, only to eventually be masked by the ultimate truth—Tyler is dead.

That night we all gathered at my house to bake together and share in the intense flavors of all of Tyler’s favorite goods. Tyler had an immaculate gift in the art of creating baked goods. His craft was flawless. It felt good to be together. On this night, we all painted prayer flags for Tyler. We each took a cloth square and painted a memory, imprinting it into reality. When we had each finished painting our personal square, we strung them all together in a line, creating a long strand of prayer flags, each one resonating with a memory. The flags express the simple beauty found within Tyler’s life and represent, however brief, a life well lived.

We all drove into Penitente late Friday night. We gathered in the perfect silence of night. We sat with each other around a small camp fire, telling great stories of the laughter and happiness that Tyler had brought everyone over the years. About the huge grin he would have at the end of every climb shared.

We chose to drive to Penitente this weekend because more than anything else, Tyler loved to rock climb. We knew that if he were aware of us just sitting around in sadness, he would say in a simple tone “well, that’s dumb, go climb!!” Penitente was an obvious choice for us all to meet because it was also a place that held special value to Tyler, where he learned to climb. And thus, in a way, what brought him to us was we met in this place through climbing.

On Saturday, we went to the crags, exploring some of the best climbing in Colorado. People persevered and sent projects, completed goals, and everyone did it together. It was a

great day of rock climbing. That afternoon the rest of our close friends joined us. Once they heard what our plans were for the weekend, they found it a necessity to venture to Penitente to be with us. Among them, Cat stood out in my eyes. A piece of her had been broken. I saw her and did nothing but hold her in embrace, letting her know that my presence was with her. Cat was one of Tyler's closest friends. Someone that had been able to really get to know Tyler from the inside out. She was able to give herself and take from Tyler in perfect equilibrium, creating the perfect recipe for a beautiful friendship.

Sunday morning I awoke with the soft touch of the sun. I looked around me and found myself amidst a line of perhaps thirty sleeping bags, all cuddled in as close to each other as possible. What I had realized over the past few days was that the only thing that could really bring any warmth was being close to people that all share the same love for Tyler.

At the heart of Penitente canyon there is a striking wall that hosts some of the best and most aesthetic climbing in the canyon. The wall forms a large L shape and has an adjacent flat rock in which you can perfect view all of the climbs on the wall as if spectating an arena. There is a climb on the wall called "Bullet the Blue Sky" that climbs a sharp arête jutting straight the edge of the L. In his youth this had been a climb Tyler had always aspired to do, a climb that stood out, providing inspiration and a future goal in climbing. Once Tyler had arrived at CU he returned to Penitente with a group of his new friends and completed the climb.

Once everyone had gathered in the heart of the canyon, it was here that we hung Tyler's prayer flags. We strung them from the anchors of "Bullet the Blue Sky" and stretched them across to the other edge of the L, framing the wall with Tyler's memories. Once we had the flags hung, every one of us sat on the arena rock and watched. We watched the breeze touch and flicker each memory, gracefully, as if life were being breathed into them. The sun would move in and out of clouds rapidly, casting a movement of light over the wall, blue sky penetrating through the spaces between clouds. We sat together in silence. We let Tyler fill our minds and remind us of what it means to live a beautiful life. A simple life. A life in which his smile is one that will be carried with us, always. ❧





CRACK THE SKY YELLOW

by Molly Henze

I was 15 when my parents decided we would move out of the state. We moved four times before this decision, but always throughout California, so I only half-heartedly believed them when they stated it would be in Colorado. They had played this kind of game about five times every year. Their weekend past times involved driving to a town they'd never been to and look at open houses. My parents would talk to the real-estate agents, ask about the foundational structure of the property and its listed value. Then they would pack us into the car, give an opinion on the house, and never bring it up again. I think these ventures let them escape their lives for a moment; they could become someone new. However, the move to Colorado was different. My dad spent about a week alone in Colorado before the move, looking at different towns where he could buy property. He said this was the kind of thing he needed to "feel out."

When they stood by their decision, I looked forward to the move. For months prior to moving day I would spend time searching for properties online in Colorado, mostly ranches and farms. I'd print out the property details and present them to my

dad. I pretended we would live on the mountainside in a small town where everybody knew everyone's name. I would make a new name for myself. I could be anybody. I had created an entire fantasy future of what my new life would be like. It's not that I was afraid of leaving everything behind. I wasn't fleeing the crutches of an old life I held in California. I relished the idea of the future, of the unknown. Curiosity is woven into the fibers of my being. This was simply an opportunity to feed the urge to escape every day monotony. Perhaps this was even a genetic trait, as I had grown accustomed to the wayward lifestyle my parents had raised me in. If anything, I was fearful that this move was just another one of their attempts to temporarily flee their reality. My imagination of a life in Colorado could be trampled down to a mere dream in the wake of their decision.

I think even my parents were surprised by their own actions when we embarked on the move. They had made their decision final, signed in black ink at the Colorado State Bank and Trust, guaranteeing the title of the house. My father had decided on a dilapidated farm house with four acres in Parker. When we arrived to the house, sight unseen, my mother began wailing and screeching, "I can't do this anymore!" After two full days of driving, with three cats in a makeshift carrier in the backseat, with no air conditioning, she had had it. She got in the car and drove off in a panic, leaving me, my brother, and my dad behind momentarily.

My brother Christopher called it a shit hole. It was. All the windows in the house were inside out. There was an old, unattached pot belly stove sitting in the middle of the living room. The basement was nothing but concrete pavement holding up two pillars. The kitchen floor modeled peeling yellow linoleum, only to reveal splintered wood underneath. I picked up a rusted broom stationed next to a window and started to sweep the inch of dust that had accumulated in the living room. It was as if the previous owner had left the broom there as a condolence for the sorry house he had left behind. My dad stared off at the road my mother had sped off down. I told him that it would be okay. We would stay.

We tried to sell our house in California before we left, but the market was so bad we were left to rent it to a group of rowdy college boys for a year. The house tied us back to the state. After experiencing the harsh winter season, part of me hoped we would never be able to sell it. I hoped the market would keep our stake

*We were
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*I twisted and
ripped each lemon
off its branch,
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bucket with a
satisfying thud.*

there, so we would have a home to run back to if Colorado proved to be too much for our family. But the following year after the move, my dad decided he would go back and fix the house up one last time and sell it. Christopher, and I tagged along in the hopes of seeing old friends and everything we had left behind. To travel cheap, we towed our trailer that we used for dirt-biking trips as a mobile motel, sleeping at rest stops and camp sites while my dad fixed on the house. The longer we stayed in the trailer, the more California felt like the past. We were vagrants stationing ourselves in the depths of our memories.

My father had finally finished all the repairs on the house. A final “sold” sign was staked into the ground we once gardened in. The day that it came to pack up and leave I stole a white dump bucket splattered with dried paint from the back of my father’s truck and began filling it up with lemons from a tree in our old front yard. I did so stealthily and rapidly so nobody would know I was plundering a tree that was no longer mine. I twisted and ripped each lemon off its branch, tossing it in the bucket with a satisfying thud. When the bucket was overflowing, I still kept picking these lemons, piling them into a makeshift bag I had made by lifting up part of my dress. When my father came to the front yard, he saw me fumbling around, attempting to carry all these lemons. He smiled and went into the garage, only to come out with another bucket. We stuffed each crevice of the buckets with as many as we could, threw them into the bed of the truck and slowly drove away.

About eight hours into the trip returning back to Colorado, we had reached the town of Barstow, California. It was 117 degrees. The only buildings in town were a gas station and a restaurant claiming they offered the “world’s best gyros.” As we pulled up to the gas station, we soon discovered the sheer heat had shut down the power. There would be no gasoline. The blue and white restaurant seemed to draw travelers inside. We followed suit, and entered the building in the hopes of seeking refuge in an unforgiving desert. Everyone just sat there, waiting for the circumstances to change as they fanned themselves with paper plates. Nobody could purchase anything, but nobody wanted to remain outside either. I kept looking at the menu, wishing the machine would work to make an ice-cold strawberry milkshake. Dad claimed they were the best he’s had in his entire life. The next stop was just outside of Las Vegas, but we

knew the truck would run out of gas before we ever reached it.

There was nothing left to do but move forward. As the truck kept moving, I kept waiting for the tires on the truck to melt into the pavement and peg us to the desert forever. We were carrying with us the remnants of furniture packed in our trailer, which dragged along behind us. We had left our house in California for the last time, it was no longer ours. Along with the lemons, I insisted we bring back an old rusting metal cabinet that used to hold my dad's construction tools. The white paint was peeling off to reveal a burnt, corrosive rust. "I'll fix it, I swear," I whined, which was enough to convince my dad to throw the metal junk into the bed of the truck. I stared at it now, with a placid smile spread across my face knowing that I succeeded in keeping it, keeping the memories. Next to it sat the two buckets of lemons, so yellow they seemed unnatural against the desert landscape. As waves of heat swirled around my face, I thought of all the things I would make with these lemons: Ice cold lemonade, lemon custard, lemon bars, lemon sorbet, lemon poppy seed muffins, lemon marmalade. My hands would carefully roll the lemon out before slicing it and grate the soft, fine zest into tiny little piles of yellow. I would squeeze the juice out to add a zing to almost anything. I would use every last bit of these lemons.

I was sitting in the back of the truck with my head crouching out of the tiny window in the middle. I had my back to the road, instead of looking forward. I saw everything in a kind of vacuum. The road behind us was swallowed by the wrath of the heat and the surroundings blurred into a strange mesh of colors, streaking my peripherals with shades of brown. The wind was in a bind, disrupted by the gap between the truck and the trailer. It was stuck, but kept hitting me in the face from time to time, whipping my hair into my eyes. I felt an undeniable sense of peace as if the heat had filled every cell in my body, warming me into a state of comfort despite the fact that my white dress was permanently plastered to my skin. My mind was fixed on the lemons when the truck began to crawl along the asphalt.

With one last cough, it rolled to a stop. The truck crooned and lurched as it was put in park and then, suddenly, everything stood still. Nobody said a word. The truck filled with silence. Heat continued to blister the inside of the truck. Even though we were no longer moving, my eyes were fixed on the trailer and

*... so yellow they
seemed
unnatural against
the desert
landscape.*

the road behind us. I refused to turn my body around and face forward. A minute crept by as we sat there in silence. The heat was suffocating us. My eyes remained glued to the buckets of lemons until the sound of the door opening ripped my train of thought back into reality as the truck beeped, warning us that the keys were still in the ignition, ding, ding, ding, ding, slam. My dad circled around the truck before reaching into his front left pocket to pull a Sherman cigarette up to his lips and strike a match. The flame engulfed the tip of the cigarette and, as it caught on fire, it slowly smoldered into a red, hot ember. With one long inhale, he sucked the tobacco into his lungs and exhaled with a sigh as smoke lingered around his face, trapped by the heat.

My brother then hopped out of the truck and began to kick the dirt beneath him. He picked up rocks on the side of the road and chucked them as hard as he could, mumbling curse words under his breath. He complained about the heat and the stupidity of being stuck in the middle of the desert and the fact that my dad could only go a few hours without lighting up another cigarette. But I knew with every rock he threw that the anger within him was not about the heat, but instead about the fact that California was no longer our home, no longer our life. I looked back down at the bucket of lemons. Maybe there were 40 lemons. Think of all the things I could do with 40 lemons. I didn't want to leave the truck but the heat continued to slap me in the face. I peeled myself from the seat and slid out of the truck. The dirt was like a fine powder beneath my feet. It puffed up and swirled around my toes, sticking to the sweat that had accumulated between them and my sandal. I knew the truck would stop eventually—it was inevitable. We were without gas, the fuel that would keep our truck moving along mile by mile. And I also knew that waiting in Barstow would do nothing for us. It was 117 degrees. There would be no strawberry milkshakes and I would not eat the best gyro in the world. There was nothing left for us there. In this moment, I didn't want anything. I didn't feel anything. I would sit there with my bucket of lemons for the next four hours, waiting for whatever was to come next. ❧

*There was
nothing left for
us there. In this
moment, I didn't
want anything.*



COLD SHOWERS

by Kelly Walker

It was ironic at times, being on a tropical island. I was completely surrounded by water. It was easy enough to believe I was in paradise when I was sitting on the beach, feet buried in the sand. The sort of soft, white sand you always see in the calendars and blame Photoshop for making it look so unrealistic compared to the ice cold, murky coasts bordering most of the United States. But when you left the beach, exhausted by the waves and sticky with sand, turning the taps of cheap porcelain, nothing would come out. Even in paradise it seems that you can have a drought.

The water would eventually turn on at three or four in the morning. We left buckets under the taps, cheap bulky things that you could curl up inside if you really wanted to. It was a tiny studio apartment, and three people took up a lot of room. Sometimes when the water would finally turn on at an ungodly time of the night, it would stay on, when too often enough, someone in their sleep-drunken state mistakenly would turn on the faucet, forgetting about the wretched water restrictions. Jolting ice water flooding over plastic sheeting patterned in the shape of fancy bathroom

tiles. This would usually result in a great surprise in the morning. It was a surprisingly hard habit to uphold—to remember to turn off the tap when expecting a nice generous flow of water to come from the sink, and not receiving a single drop. After the first ten times, a soaked mattress, and a water-ridden laptop, we finally managed to learn heavily from our mistakes, coached by the shrieks from our loving mother. It was the worst kind of day when the showers consisted of the water remnants left in the plumbing. Mid-shower, soap still in your eyes, only for the spray to trickle out. I would think fondly of my days with clean, running water in the United States, and my adaption to my new life was slow.

I was originally born in the United States but while I was in the first grade my mum decided to pack her things and move my sister and me halfway across the world. Before then, I had vacationed in the Seychelles before, visiting family. A crowd of cousins gravitated around my forceful grandmother. But these had been the best times of my childhood: the steady sun beating down on waves, and the clean white sheets of the hotels that we stayed in. But living someplace, even paradise, is completely different from a vacation.

I eventually made the decision to move back to the United States about four years ago. I realized that I was finishing up with secondary school and I decided I wanted to go to college to pursue my dream of becoming a pediatrician. Since I had the privilege to possibly move to America, I figured I should take that offer, and make good use of it. So, leaving everything that I knew, I set off on a two-day plane ride at what seemed to be the scariest time of my life.

I had such high expectations due to the propaganda of the ‘American Dream’. In my head I imagined America to be a place of no wrong. From my happy childhood memories and books that I had read, I conjured this false an illusion of the United States as a place of friendly people, unparalleled shopping, and delicious food. To my disbelief, this ideology quickly began to dissipate before I even set foot in the country. I unhappily sat on the plane, very far from ready for the two-day plane journey that was ahead of me.

“Umm, excuse me, little girl, you are in our seat.”

I thought nothing of it, escaped in my own thoughts. Like the shot of a gun I heard it again—this time I was able to make out what was being said:

“Hello? Are you deaf? Get out of our seat.”

*“Hello?
Are you deaf?
Get out of our
seat.”*

I looked up alarmed, eyes red and swollen from crying. An older American couple stood towering over me, ushering me to move. Still crying, I stumbled over words of apology, grabbed my stuffed animal giraffe, and clumsily shifted out of the seat. Not a good start to my long journey to the 'Land of the Free.' Trying to meet new people and make new friends, all the while experiencing such a foreign culture was definitely far from what I expected; I guess you could say I watch too many movies. I quickly found myself missing my once simplistic lifestyle of being able to walk down the street barefoot to go buy some fresh red snapper for dinner, or to pick a ripe mango off a tree for a snack. I missed the hot, humid weather, and the warm rain that would fall almost every afternoon. I was so used to having my mother around; I continue to imagine her disapproval when I know I am doing something that I shouldn't, unintentionally still keeping me in check. Her constant nagging and worrying I had always taken for granted, and always misunderstood that they were just her show of love and caring. My newfound freedom in the United States was somehow lacking . . .

So homesick, I found myself taking cold showers, even if they would just last for a few seconds, just to give me that feeling of being back home in that tiny studio apartment. ☪



MEMORIES OF A HOME

by Kelton Collins

I have never lived in the same house for more than a four-year stretch. It came with the territory of my father being an architect and the ever present need to create something bigger and better. Looking back through all the homes I have inhabited, there are distinct memories, like separate chapters, all having their roots in a different place. Like the changing of seasons, the homes of my past were stepping stones, each serving a purpose and holding a place in my memory.

(11704 E 80th St North, Owasso, OK) 1993-1995

My first recollections are around the age of three, memories of a small house in the then modest town of Owasso, Oklahoma. It was a home not unlike all the homes that surrounded it, but this one was special. It was a place we called our own. Days of summer and little league baseball are all that fill my mind from this time. Days of laughter and fun without a single care in the world, times of spontaneous adventures and limitless imagination. These were days of blissful ignorance without any knowledge of all the hardships life has to offer.

(14506 East 102nd St North, Owasso, OK) 1995-1998

This was the first home my dad built for us as a family, with a long straight driveway and endless front yard this home was where my sister and I had room to run free and let our imagination be the narrator of our days. A hectic, stormy day stands clear in my mind from this home. A tornado passed close by on a humid, spring afternoon. My mother gathered my sister and me, sheltering us like ducklings under her arms as we darted across our yard to the neighbor's house, who had a storm shelter. The storm settled as quickly as it had come and all was fine that day, although the neighbor's trampoline did not fare as well and was found residing on the roof of our home. The wailing noise of tornado sirens still bringing back memories and reminded me of home.

*A tornado
passed close by
on a humid,
spring afternoon.*

(10122 North Dover Place, Owasso, OK) 1999-2003

A home surrounded by woods. An imposing stone turret stretching from the ground to the second story and beyond, coming to a conical point covered with copper. This turret that enclosed the spiral stairs inside was reminiscent of what I thought a real castle would have been like. The rest of the home continued in this fashion, large and covered in a beautiful grey stone. There was a small brook at the back of this home. It was not overly impressive, nor majestic, simply fulfilling the definition of what a brook should be. Babbling with water day and night and never running dry. Memories of holidays and family, adventures with my dog, exploring the woods, and endless seasons are all that fill my head from this home.

(1336 E 26th Place, Tulsa, OK) 2003-2005

As time progressed, our life in the neighboring city of Tulsa began to develop, and my parents felt the need to move us into Tulsa in order to save us from the daily forty minute commute that our lives began to require. With this newfound desire to uproot ourselves and find another home to call our own, the process began. My parents spent a lot of time considering all of our options, and for the first time since I was three my family had decided to move into a home that was already standing, designed many years ago for a family that had long since abandoned it as their permanent residence, leaving it to shuffle between hands until landing in our own. The intention was to again make this

a permanent residence, to have a place that we as a family could lay claim to and actually stay in for the foreseeable future. The home was a historic Tulsa home, originally commissioned and owned by Cecil B. DeMille, the famous filmmaker of the Ten Commandments movie. We found out he never actually lived in the home, and it seemed as if he only procured it to say he had a home on the bible belt. This home had a feeling of pride, a home that had stood the test of time and was still desirable. I miss this house. It was a beautiful home with stunning landscaping and every detail carefully scrutinized.

(2521 South Columbia Ave, Tulsa, OK) 2005-2006

A new home, one we had already labeled as temporary before even sleeping in it the first night. We secured a rental house for a time while our next permanent home was being dreamed up. This home was at the end of a cul-de-sac, the first time I had ever lived in one of these circular creations, with each home looking into the face of one another. It was perched on a mound of dirt higher than all the rest. This house had a steep driveway and a small, welcoming presence with a single tree in its yard. It was here where I first learned to drive. Turning sixteen, I qualified for a small plastic card allowing me to roam in a far larger radius than my bike had ever previously permitted. Memories of driving to and from school with my sister in the passenger seat, as we debated about who would have rights to the radio and the songs played on our commute to and from school.

*... we debated
about who would
have rights to the
radio ...*

(4532 South Atlanta Ave, Tulsa, OK) 2006-2010

The last home I lived in under my parent's roof was one that could be seen on the front of a magazine. Its giant stone face with hundred-year old trees shading the ground it stood on, acting as a frame to highlight every thoughtful detail put in the design of this home. It was the culmination of my mother and father's aspirations. This new home stated that we had made it in life, that we were somebody. This assumption, as I came to discover, was only a disguise. This house holds many memories, all being far more vivid than any previous home. I tend to think that the events that transpired in this home contribute to the reason that the memories from this house are so engrained in my mind. We moved into this house when I was transitioning

from a sophomore to a junior in high school. It was a labor of love; my entire family had worked in some way to help complete this home. It was perfect; every room, every hallway, every single detail was the picture of perfection in my mind. It housed, in so many ways at least, what I thought at the time to be the materialization of a successful life and family. This home, with its rich hardwood floors sprawling in and out of every space, a warm gold glow of the Venetian plaster coaxing you along, had a feeling of comfort and belonging. Every painting and rug perfectly placed to complement the structure as the inhabitant moved through. I loved this house, it incited visions of the future, and it was the home I truly believed would finally be the home that stood the test of time for my family. A place we could call our own, that would finally expanded past just a temporary residence.



This was not to be though. Life has a way of pulling things apart while allowing others to come together. This home that I cherished soon turned into a battlefield of human emotion and family conflict. The change was sudden, it all seemed a blur, and I was blissfully unaware of the problems building beneath the surface. It seemed like I just woke up one day and my parents had decided to no longer get along. The next thing I knew they were spending more time away from one another. This home that once held the picture of peace in my mind now seemed to be a prison. My mother and father simply resided next to one another, trying to just hang on, but this would not last. The bond between my parents continued to spiral with no restoration in sight, I was lost. I had always held my parents and family as the perfect picture of what a family should be. With that now falling to pieces I was baffled; what was to become of my family? Ultimately it proceeded on this destructive path until the only thing left was what every child fears most. Divorce. The day a child has to come to a realization that mom and dad no longer want to be around one another. The day mom and dad no longer say “I Love You” to one another. That day hurts, and the days that follow are no better.

My life has happened in so many places, all of my past homes are different now. All inhabited by new owners, by new families, making new memories. I still think of these homes as

my own, these structures that hold that familiar presence, a feeling of peace, a sense of belonging and shared history. I continue to search for that feeling in the places I reside in now, Living in apartments one year at a time does not recreate the same feeling of belonging. My apartment feels miles away from what my past homes once embodied. 🏡





CHESS CLUB DIARIES

by Thomas Van de Pas

The Highlands Ranch chess club always met at the library. Fourth grade Thomas liked it because he could play a game, then hide out in the kid's section with books about making money. Double whammy, heck yeah.

A ranking system ruled the chess club: it dictated your skill level, owned the room, who you could play, and when. This was a problem for dear Thomas and his lack of focus. He'd let out his nervous energy by messing with his beige zip offs, then get so wrapped up in capturing a stray bishop that his king would be left exposed. Thomas lived near the bottom of the rankings.

There was only one chess player younger than Thomas, a kid named Nathan who was honestly a doo-doo head and resided in the top third of the rankings. During a match he'd get all serious, enforce the time limits, scratch his head and squint his eyes as if that made him smarter and less of a butthole. If he made a dumb mistake he'd get really mad and throw a tantrum, even against thirty-year-old men.

After losing to a man with a math joke on his t-shirt, Thomas took a break. Out in the hallway was a pay phone with cold metal buttons and a big coin slot:

5 • 10 • 25
 U.S.
 COINS
 ONLY

This phone needed money, none of which was in Thomas' many cargo pants pockets. It didn't work then, but it still felt funny, and he could pretend to use the cumbersome metal box like an old person. Thomas began pushing the buttons and feeling their inscribed numbers against his fingers. There was a little thrill in pretending to call his Dad's work, (303) 559-0600—his friends Megan and Jeremy, (303) 471-2671—the police, 911. None of it worked, as he hadn't put in any money, so Thomas went back to playing chess.

Ten minutes had passed when the room was taken over. "Evening."

The police officer was nothing special, just a balding man with serious eyebrows. However, the way the officer projected authority used every square inch of his body and dominated the room, making his middle-aged pudgy suddenly intimidating. He could probably eat Thomas.

"Who here called 911?"

If Thomas didn't speak, no one would know, right?
 BUT WHAT IF THEY LOOKED FOR PRINTS ON THE

*BUT WHAT IF
 THEY LOOKED
 FOR PRINTS
 ON THE
 PHONE?!*



PHONE?! He would be screwed. Thomas disappeared into his chair, nervously fiddling with his zip offs so they constantly oscillated between pants and shorts.

The police officer, with his shiny badge, stood firm and looked around the room. Over in the corner, Thomas noticed Nathan, ready to toss a chair over such a distraction. There might still have been some guilt somewhere in Thomas' small frame, but at least he wasn't an assface like Nathan. This made Thomas secure in his secret.

Ten years later, Thomas still hasn't told anyone. He had to leak the story in writing.

Thomas' frail heart—the kid was somehow more skeletal than he is now—fluttered in recognition like a Pavlovian dog. Why would the phone actually call 911? He hadn't put any money into it? It didn't make any sense.

"Using the pay phone, perhaps? Anyone?"

Yeah. It was definitely Thomas.

"We need to know why we're here. Our job is busy, I had to jump a B&E for this."

The officer paused.

"No time for jokes. Please let us know so we can talk to you. We are not angry," said the voice, obviously ready to yell at a small child. ☞





THE RIVER

by Jack Herrick

Think about a stonefly for just a second. A stonefly, for anyone that doesn't know, is a bug about an inch long with big, luminous orange wings stretching down its body. Stoneflies are clumsy, they cannot fly straight, and live only two weeks, three if they're lucky. Stoneflies exist solely to fuel the circle of life as they provide food for fish who in turn feed life around the river so that humans continue to come back. Stoneflies only goal in the short existence they are given is to mate, and then lay eggs for the next years hatch. Stoneflies are strange, and normally you wouldn't give them a second thought. But with a second thought, you'd see how something so small, so stupid, and maybe a little disgusting looking can have a bigger impact on the world if they screw up their future than if you do. The river is an ecosystem, and without the stoneflies, there would be less fish, and once the fish were gone, the birds would start to leave too. The river would become less healthy, life around the river would slowly start to look more dead, and anything that knew how to leave, would. It would then become a lot less popular, and even-

tually forgotten. And that would really stress me out. But thankfully, the stress isn't here yet. It's just me, my dad, and the stoneflies.

I grew up in a small Colorado ski town, and for two years my education was a mixture of home school and travel. I returned to traditional public school for a year and then finished my secondary education at Holderness, a boarding school in New Hampshire. I've jumped around a lot. But throughout all of my travels and experiences, there is one place I always return: The Gunnison River on my family's farm in rural Delta, Colorado.

Rural is good, and so is seclusion. It's a time when you are away from your phone, cars, planes, and—most importantly—strangers. It's times like these, and places like the river, where you stop focusing on everyone else, stop worrying about everything else, and just look around. All too often, I wish someone could tell me that everything was going to be okay, that I don't need to worry about the future, about what I'll do, or about who I'll become because, some way or another, I will figure it out. I know people have to have their own experiences and learn from the bad ones, but the times I feel most stressed is on the weekends, when I'm not busy with homework, and when I have time to think about why I'm doing homework in the first place. It's not that I don't like school, because I do; it's just when I think further into the future than just tomorrow, and think about what I want in terms of a family, and how I'm going to make all of that work, it's stressful. However, at the river, all of that dissipates. It's a place where I'm not terrified of the future, or about what I'm going to do with it. The river, that wanders as it does, takes me with it and the continuous; zen motion teaches me how to be calm.

I was seven years old. Early one July morning, my dad and I hiked down into the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and found our raft that had been packed in the night before. Soon after, we set out to carelessly let the river take us as the canyon swallowed us. I sat in the raft and my dad passed me a fly rod. I held it and looked blankly at him, but he had already turned his back to prepare his own. I clumsily put my line in the water and whipped it back and forth; it didn't work. The art of casting the line showed that patience through calmness, not force, was the essence of succeeding.

*The art of casting
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*... plain
and simple,
a rainbow trout.*

We floated and fished for a while, then my dad stopped rowing. He handed me the oars and told me to row. I had never rowed our rafts, but as soon as I sat up and grabbed the oars, I knew I was in control. The oars, although much bigger than myself, felt like extensions of my arms. While I was grasping them, I began to notice things I hadn't noticed before. I now saw the sun reflecting off the river's newly hatched stoneflies, casting an orange glow throughout the canyon.

There were thousands in the air and hundreds in the water. Instinctively, I replaced my oars with my fly rod and casted with ease, letting the slack in the line calmly follow the rings of the rod up and out, only to glide through the air and land lightly onto the water. Almost immediately, a fish took my fly from the surface, but not just any fish, one the most gorgeous fish in the world: a rainbow trout. If you don't like fish, I understand; they are slimy, they are wet, and have different agendas than we do. But in their own way, they are beautiful creatures. I didn't understand death as an ugly thing until I saw the difference between a dead rainbow trout, and a living one. When holding one, you can feel every part of it. You can feel it move, you can feel its purpose, and when it swims out of your loose grip, you can see why people from all over the world keep coming back for that five second experience. Seeing a living rainbow trout from the side is like seeing a landscape. It is a landscape. There are small green sections, hills on the belly. Then, some black dots, black birds take flight in the middle between the dorsal fin and the stomach. The birds are flying over the hills, and under the rainbow which goes straight across from the head to the tail fin. It's eye catching, it's like nothing else in the world. It's just plain and simple, a rainbow trout.

It's sad though, to look at a dead one. You can't even tell it's a rainbow trout. When it feels cold, colder than the river itself, it doesn't look much better. It's still a rainbow trout, except now. It looks like the time right before the rain comes, the gray, dull, dark time. Once dead though, I like to believe any stress it held is gone. The future is clear to only it, and life goes on.

Trout, unlike humans though, never get to see what they become. To my knowledge, there is no money involved

in the fish world. There are no richer fish, no prettier female fish, and no bigger fish mansions. There are just fish. Although, the females are generally attracted to the better fed male, that's about the only form of currency, the only form of being better, and one of the only stressful aspects of a trout's life. However, trout stress only about the bare necessities of the condition that distinguishes bugs and fish from inorganic matter. In order for the cycle of life on the river to keep flowing, trout stress about giving life, and staying alive at the same time. So simple, yet so important. Humans, on the other hand, are stressing about what shorts go with what shirt, or about what may or may not happen in the future. While on the river, the thing that keeps me from stressing myself out is the realization that while the river may seem to wander, it always has a destination. I wonder if fish think about that too.

Life is strangely similar to a river. They both have the capacity for growth, exist with some form of reproduction, obtain functional activity, and change continuously preceding death. Now, death isn't usually the term used to describe the terrible time that a river dries up, but that's what happens: it dies, however, not until it has given everything it can to the organisms around it. The bugs, the fish, the animals, and the humans—everything invests some form of itself into the river, and through different means, the river gives back. It gives life. At this moment, the world has a truly unique and prosperous river. So when it comes time for that river to die, and at some point that time will come, it should be apparent that each living thing that relied on that river gave what it could, so that it could then distribute life elsewhere.

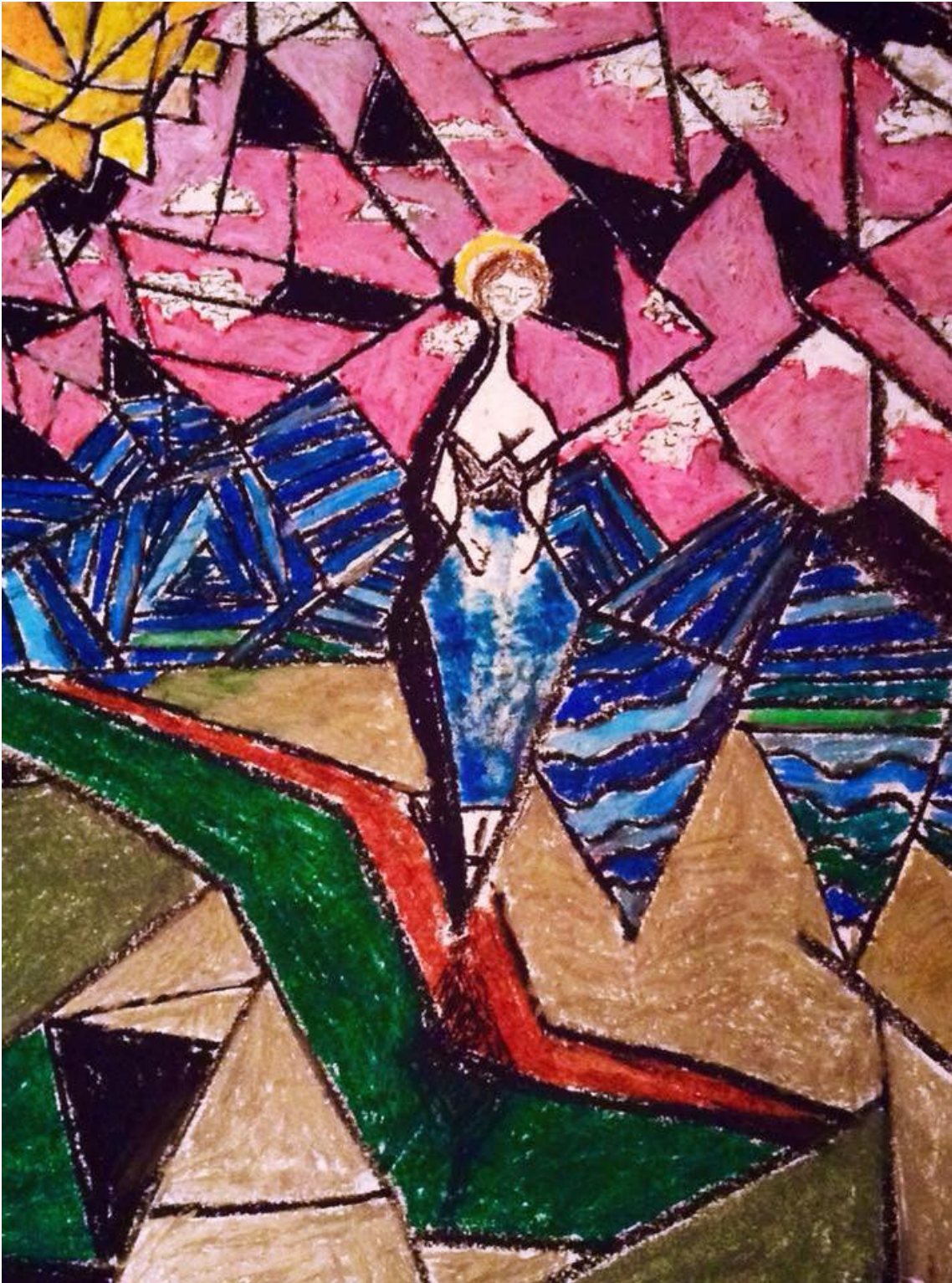
Similarly, what quality of life do you have if you don't give everything that you can to living? Life is a cycle, and no matter the stress felt by each individual, life is going to go on, and things everywhere are going to change with time. So when one life ends, it should be clear that you adapted to change, flowed over the obstacles put in front of you, and, directed those oars with courage and confidence. Furthermore, you should know that you gave everything you could to living, so that maybe, like a river, your life could influence others.

I like to say that I have mastered rowing the river, seen all the stoneflies, or caught all the fish although I never truly will do any of those things. But that cycle of new life and the

changes every year, cause the stonefly eggs to stay happy, the fish to stay around, the river to keep flowing, and the people to keep coming back. However, I am no longer that young child contained inside the raft, awed by its size, the power of the oars and the calm art of casting a fly rod. Instead, I sit above the raft on its frame, casting with ease, and directing the two oars that without me are dull, plastic poles.

As fall approaches, the stoneflies and I leave the river once more, but along with the lessons that the river has to offer, the rainbow trout stay and wander with ease. I sit back and revel, knowing that when I return, the stoneflies will too, the fish will be there to greet me, the river will be different, and so will I. ❧

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JUST SWIM RIGHT

by McKenna Russen

Even on this cloudy day, the boy's face was pale with sunscreen and appeared almost ghostly. I thought to myself that he must have one caring and loving mother to mask her son's face with sunscreen. She must have been trying to protect him from something. His life jacket went up to his chin as he sat down and it pushed his pudgy cheeks up to his eyes. He had a waterproof disposable camera clipped to one of the straps on his life jacket. His helmet was tight around his forehead and rubbed off some of the layers of sunscreen. His wetsuit was fitted snugly across his round abdomen. He sat in the aisle seat next to his older brother. They kept to themselves and stared ahead during the drive. The raft guides stood up at the front of the bus and told us about the conditions we were going to face.

"We've received record-breaking rain and snow melt this year."

"Raft guides live for days like today!"

"I've been doing this for 20 years and I've never seen the river this high."

"It's going to make for an exciting yet challenging

day! We really need everyone to be focused and listen to your guides.”

My boyfriend had invited me to go on a rafting trip along with five of our other friends. Our guide was all about us having fun, but said that rafting is not something to mess around about. We had the heaviest raft on the river that day which meant we had the most people on our raft. There were three other rafts on our trip, and one in particular was extremely light, the lightest raft in our group. That raft had a guide, and three generations of boys: two sons, a father, and a grandfather. Our guide explicitly told us that we were going to stick close to that raft because he thought they were going to be an issue. I will never forget him saying that.

The smoky clouds above teased us with spotty showers of rain. It was a little foggy, but the clouds brought out the rich greens of the pine trees and the rusty colors of the rocks that lined the canyon. The end of my paddle disappeared into the murky water. The river was so high that it covered the rocky beaches of the banks.

The first rapid was a practice rapid for everyone, and all the rafts made it through flawlessly. As soon as that rapid passed, our guide explained how we were going to get through the next one.

“We need to stay to the right of the drop. The drop is a giant hydraulic and we don’t want to pass over it. If you go into the water here, don’t think. Just swim right. Just swim right.”

Jagged rocks guarded the left side of the riverbank. My stomach dropped and my arms shook at the sight of the rapids curling and rushing back towards our raft. If a raft were even slightly sideways it would surely flip. I played intense music in my head as I extended my paddle into the ready position. It was a rush getting through it. Our guide kept yelling “ONE MORE, ONE MORE” to keep us stroking. I was drenched from head to toe with the frigid river water, but it felt energizing. We pulled off to the right bank to wait and watched the other rafts come down the rapid.

The lightest raft was almost completely sideways heading into the drop. Every muscle in my body tensed up as I watched it happen in slow motion. The raft dipped down into the drop so much that the floor of the raft was vertical to the river. All the rafters had dropped their paddles except for the

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was.*

guide who was still trying to steer them out, but the raft was flung again where the rapid reversed. I sat and watched as two people were heaved from the inside of the boat. I was close enough to see that one of them was smaller than the other. Guides were blowing their whistles and shouting, "WE'VE GOT SWIMMERS!" Everyone kept their eyes on the older man floating down the river backwards and watched as his guide yanked him out of the water. The boats were all pulled over onto the bank of the river now, but I heard random shouts as people looked around still with worry in their eyes. There was still one person missing.

I saw the little boy get flung into the water. I assumed he swam right. I assumed he was picked up by another raft. I assumed he was fine and that this wasn't a big deal, but I lost sight of him. I wish my assumptions were right. I told my guide that I saw him.

"I thought he swam over to that bank. He's just right behind those rocks," I stated to my guide.

All of the guides went over to the rocks where I had said I thought the boy was. Five minutes passed, then ten, and then twenty, and they still hadn't come back. I felt sicker as each second went by. I hoped the boy would come up for air. I tried holding my breath for a couple seconds so maybe he wouldn't feel alone if he were under the water. It was uncomfortable how quiet we all were just waiting for someone to come out from behind those rocks. After about 30 minutes, the guides came back with no one else by their side. I watched, frozen where I stood, as my guide walked down the bank of the river. With a rope tied around his waist, my guide attempted to swim into the rapid to see if the boy was stuck underneath it, but the current was ridiculously strong. There was no way anyone could swim into that rapid; it was just too powerful. My guide came back to shore, and then abruptly shot back into the water. He pulled out a bright red object that had been floating downstream. In his hands was the little boy's life jacket, the straps still clipped tight, hollowed out around a body its only job was to protect.

My heart sank into my chest and my legs became weak at the sight of the jacket without the little boy wearing it. My knees gave in and I sunk down into the raft. I wearily looked over to the raft next to us where the boy's older brother was

hugging his father. None of us wanted to believe what we all feared was happening.

All of the rafts decided to go down the river about a mile to tie up to a safer spot along the bank. I did not want to get back into the boat. It felt like my chest was being twisted and I couldn't stop myself from crying.

"It's alright, McKenna. Just take a couple deep breaths and I promise I will get you down this river safe. I would never let anything bad happen to you kids," said my guide attempting to calm us all down. My friend Hunter came over and rubbed my back saying, "We're going to be okay." I trusted my friends and our guide and knew we were going to be safe.

We all sat on the bank while the guides scanned the river for a sign. I repeated to myself, "That little boy is fine, he's just downstream, he's just downstream, and he is fine." About an hour later, his father, older brother, and their guide came to where we were all sitting. His older brother sat down with us and crumbled into a surge of tears. None of us had any idea what to say to him. There is nothing we could have said to make it better. The sun came out from behind the clouds and it warmed everyone up. Everyone except for his older brother stopped shivering. I overheard his father talking to his guide.

"You shouldn't have pulled me back into the raft. You should have gone for my son. Why didn't you go for my son?" the father yelled fiercely while holding back his tears.

"I know, I'm sorry, I should have let you go. The whole situation keeps playing over and over in my mind. I can't even imagine what you are feeling," said his raft guide.

After four hours of waiting on the bank for any sign of hope, everyone got back into the rafts except for his father and brother. They had decided to walk along the bank back to the bus. We rowed down the river in complete silence and in respect for their brother and son. My friends came together to get us all to the end of the trip. I had no strength to paddle any longer.

The rest of the day was a blur of emergency crews, police officers, and investigators swarming us for what information we could provide. I tried to picture what we looked like as we brought our raft up to the bus. We had puffy faces from our tears, dry eyes from being awake for so long, and broken hearts that went out to the family of the little boy.

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...

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I barely took one step off the bus when a woman walked straight up to me. She looked me directly in the eye and said, “Are you the girl who pulled my husband out of the river?”

“No, that wasn’t me.”

“Did you see my little boy go into the water?” I paused. Her eyes were sky blue, but all around them was light red. Tears formed under her eyelids. The skin around her eyes was red from rubbing all her makeup away. I could tell she had been pacing, as she couldn’t stand still for a moment. Her hair was matted and thrown back messily behind her ears.

“Yes, I saw him fall into the water. I am so sorry.”

I saw her shoulders slouch forward as her hand went to her chest, as if she were trying to protect her heart from falling out. She became smaller right before me. I knew what I had said, but I didn’t want to believe the words. I wish I could have said that I didn’t see anyone fall out of the raft. But I wish most that I could have said that her son was on the bus and he was okay.

The rescue teams found the boy four days after he fell out of the raft. Drake was only 11 years old when he was found in the exact spot that my guide had tried to swim to.

The part of that day that continues to haunt me is the fact that he was just gone in a matter of seconds, he completely disappeared. I ask myself how could someone so young, so weak, so fragile, just vanish faster than a blink of an eye? Every person involved on that terrible day was so vulnerable to nature and how powerful it can be. It happened so fast that it’s hard to believe, to this day, how abruptly a person can just disappear. I always think of his mother and how she had been trying to protect her son from something that she had no control over. I like to think that, in a way, I’m keeping him alive by telling the story of his last few moments of life. My whole heart and compassion will forever go out to Drake and his loving family. A couple weeks after the accident, I thought I saw Drake at the airport. I wanted to run to him, to grab his hand. This is the only way my mind feels it can save him. ❧



FOLDED FLAG

by Veronica Sachtjen

Sunlight shot into the interior of the truck and doused everything with a bright white glow. The tinted windows had kept the blinding sun at bay for the entirety of the eight-hour journey. Here we were, in the end of July, walking to the door of the starch white farmhouse my great uncle Cecil had lived in for as long as I can remember. Normally, he would greet us at the door, and I would try not to feel uncomfortable as I hugged Cecil's wife, followed by my grandfather's sister, my great-grandmother, and finally, my great-grandfather. It's nothing against them. I don't really like to hug anyone. I've never understood the etiquette of a hug. How long do you hold on for? How tight? The hugs during this trip may have been the same, but the trip itself was so unlike the rest. This time, there would be one less uncomfortable hug to suffer through. Five days prior, my great-grandfather had died, and today we gathered for his funeral.

END

OR

I had only ever been to one funeral before. When I was six or seven, my mother's father died. Or maybe it was her mother, I don't remember. Anyway, there was a funeral and Mom thought that it would be best if we went. The only memory I have from that day is of my brother, my cousin Caela, and I doing cart-wheels in the damp grass at the cemetery. I'm not sure if this is real, or a make-believe truth.



Ralph Wesley Sachtjen was born on August 16, 1922 just south of Winner, South Dakota. With the exception of a year in the war, he would live his entire life within 40 miles of this farm. Ralph served in the United States Armed Forces from March 1945 until December 1946. During his time in the military, he was a mail clerk for General Douglas MacArthur and spent time in Tokyo, Japan as well as the Philippines. He married Lois in 1945. They had four children: Jane, Gail, Cecil, and Donna. All of these children went on to have families of their own, and when Ralph died he was survived by thirteen grandchildren, twenty-seven great-grandchildren, and one great-great granddaughter, a one-year old girl named Elliana. Ralph Wesley Sachtjen wasn't only a family man; he was also a farmer, a hunter, a veteran, a one-time school board member, a mechanic, and a neighbor.



He was probably in Tokyo the day the war ended. He never went to college, in fact he never even graduated from high school, yet he went on to be a member of the local school board for nine years. He was married to my great-grandmother for sixty-nine years, almost seven decades. And I didn't know any of this. Nothing. I learned about Ralph Sachtjen's life by reading the flimsy paper program they handed out at the funeral. I can tell you where Steve Jobs went to college, what type of diet he was on when he died, and every detail of his professional career, but I could not tell you where my great-grandfather was during World War II. I know more about the war than I do about the family member who fought in it.

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*I avoid the elderly
because I am arrogant.*

I saw him every year; it would have been so easy to ask him just one question, any, instead of hiding in a corner, avoiding everyone. But I never did. Were you drafted? What was Tokyo like? How well did you know General MacArthur? How did you marry Great-Grandma if you were still serving in the army? Did you come home for the week to do it? Why did you stay in South Dakota? Who taught you to hunt? Did you teach Grandpa? Is this why Grandpa taught Dad and Dad taught me? How did you and Great-Grandma stay married for seventy years? What was it like when you were nineteen, in 1941? The war was just starting then. Did you always know you would join the army? Why did you join the army?



I avoid the elderly. When they can no longer take care of themselves and they go to live in a nursing home, I don't feel bad because I think that the nurses are enough company. After all, they're in a home with all of their peers so they can't possibly want me to visit them. I avoid the elderly because I am selfish. Seeing them so ancient, so fragile, so dependent on another makes me think of myself. How one day, I will be this ancient, this fragile, this dependent – it paralyzes me with fear. I avoid the elderly because I am arrogant. This man, who is mostly deaf and blind and can't remember his son's birthday or yesterday's lunch, is nowhere near as intelligent as I am. I don't care if he has been on this Earth for so much longer than I have, he needs me to speak slowly so he must not have anything substantial to share with me. He doesn't understand technology, so there is no way he can give me relationship advice, never mind that he has been married for seventy years. I avoid the elderly for no good reason at all. One day they will die, and all I will have left is their photograph staring up at me from the memorial card handed out at their funeral.



The evening before the funeral, the church hosted a memorial service and viewing exclusively for us. My family was some of the first people there, except for my grandpa and grandma who had been there to open the church. I stared down the narrow aisle, ignoring the oak wood benches and instead focusing on the mahogany casket that was halfway open. I knew my great-grandpa was lying in there. It's okay, my grandma said, he still looks like Grandpa. But you don't have to look if you don't want to. I told her that I would go. I have no clue why I said this. I think I just wanted them to think I was mature enough to look at the lifeless corpse of a man I hadn't seen in a year.

I walked up to the casket along with my mom and dad. My brother stayed in the back of the church. My grandma was right. He did look the same, he was even wearing one of those blue and white checkerboard shirts he loved. It was almost like he was sleeping. Almost. His lips were stretched grotesquely tight across his mouth, completely devoid of color. They stuck together the way lips do when they are dehydrated and beg to stay close to each other. It was enough to make him look dead. I wish I had just stayed in the back of church with my brother.



When the family was sharing memories about Ralph during the memorial service, my dad stood up to talk about his grandfather's legacy. He mentioned the rural safaris my great-grandfather had led and asked anyone who had been on them to raise their hand. I didn't raise mine. Nor did my brother; in fact, a few of the younger cousins were the only ones who did. I was beginning to cry and trying to avoid drawing attention to the fact. That is why I didn't raise my hand. My dad didn't know that. He got upset and sat down before really finishing his story. I blame myself for his anger. He thinks I just don't care.



*It was almost like
he was sleeping.
Almost.*

My great-grandpa used to round up four of his grandkids, usher us into his tiny blue pickup truck, and drive around for hours looking for the wildlife that he loved in that special way only a hunter can. We would sit in the decades old truck, shoulder to shoulder and listen to him weave elaborate tales about the animals he had encountered. He loved to tell us about all of the mountain lions he had seen last week. The way he told it, you would almost believe that all of the mountain lions in the west lived exclusively on his property.

It was on one of these journeys that he came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the dirt road to point out a flock of wild turkeys that had taken up residence in an abandoned one-room school. I didn't see anything special about them; they just looked like big brown ugly birds to me. However, great-grandpa said that they could be mean old bastards. They didn't look it, but if you got to close to one and pissed it off, the turkey would come after you and you wouldn't even expect it to happen.



Everything I knew about funerals came from what I had seen on television, where the prevalent image involves weepy-eyed family members gathered around the raised casket made of a dark wood. A priest (always a priest, never a Protestant) reads from a bite-sized Bible and tells the family that the deceased is with the Lord now. They are almost always standing beneath a tree as a soft breeze brushes against the hair of the women, women who are all wearing flattering black dresses. The men stand stoically, clenching their hands in front of their abdomens, looking like GQ models in their immaculately fitting black suits. Even the children, in their tiny black suits and tiny black shoes and tiny black dresses, understand that something terrible has happened. They refrain from begging for attention. Sometimes it is raining, because even the sky cries at funerals, and a ceiling of black nylon umbrellas protect the black-coated attendees. Right before the casket is lowered into the ground, someone walks up to the beautiful wooden box and sets an object of sentimental value on top, to be buried with the dead. Everyone then silently turns to leave. Maybe a muffled sob breaks through the near impenetrable barrier of quiet. A parade of black cars slowly exits the cemetery.

Television lied to me about funerals. It made me believe that the beauty of the funeral was the only thing that made it matter, that the more beautiful the funeral, the more beautiful the person. This is a terrible thing to show people. Ralph Sachtjen did not get a vogue funeral. Instead, he had a church bursting at the seams with neighbors, clients, family members, friends, and acquaintances ready to celebrate his life.



It turns out that despite what television implies, people do not actually have to wear black to a funeral. In fact, funerals aren't very black at all. Of course, I didn't know this, so I wore a simple black dress. Everyone else looked like they were merely going to church, as if it were any other Sunday. The variety of pastel blouses was astronomical; I was the black sheep in a sea of Easter Eggs. There was no homely priest to read from Corinthians. We got a Methodist pastor who read the obituary and talked about himself and his nuggets of forgiveness, whatever that means. There was an overenthusiastic sign-language interpreter in the front. The funeral procession wasn't graceful, it was just like any other stressful drive. And since cemeteries don't have parking lots, cars stacked bumper to bumper along the edges of the dirt path that was trying hard to be a real road. A bright blue canopy covered the burial site, whipping around in the wind, barely anchored to the ground by four fragile aluminum rods. The same wind slapped at faces and devoured the funeral director's voice before it could leave the confines of the—

The first shot of the three volley salute went off without any warning, and I jolted. I should have been more prepared. My great-grandpa was military, of course he would get the salute. I tried, in vain, to keep myself grounded for the next two sets of shots, but even the last one made me jerk. Two young Marines removed the American flag elegantly draped over the casket that held Ralph Wesley Sachtjen. With a precision I had never seen in my life, they folded the stars and stripes into a perfect triangle, holding eye contact with each other the entire time. The handsome one presented the flag to my great-grandmother, whispering something that even I, standing right behind her, could not decipher.



R.W.S.
August 16, 1922 – July 20, 2014

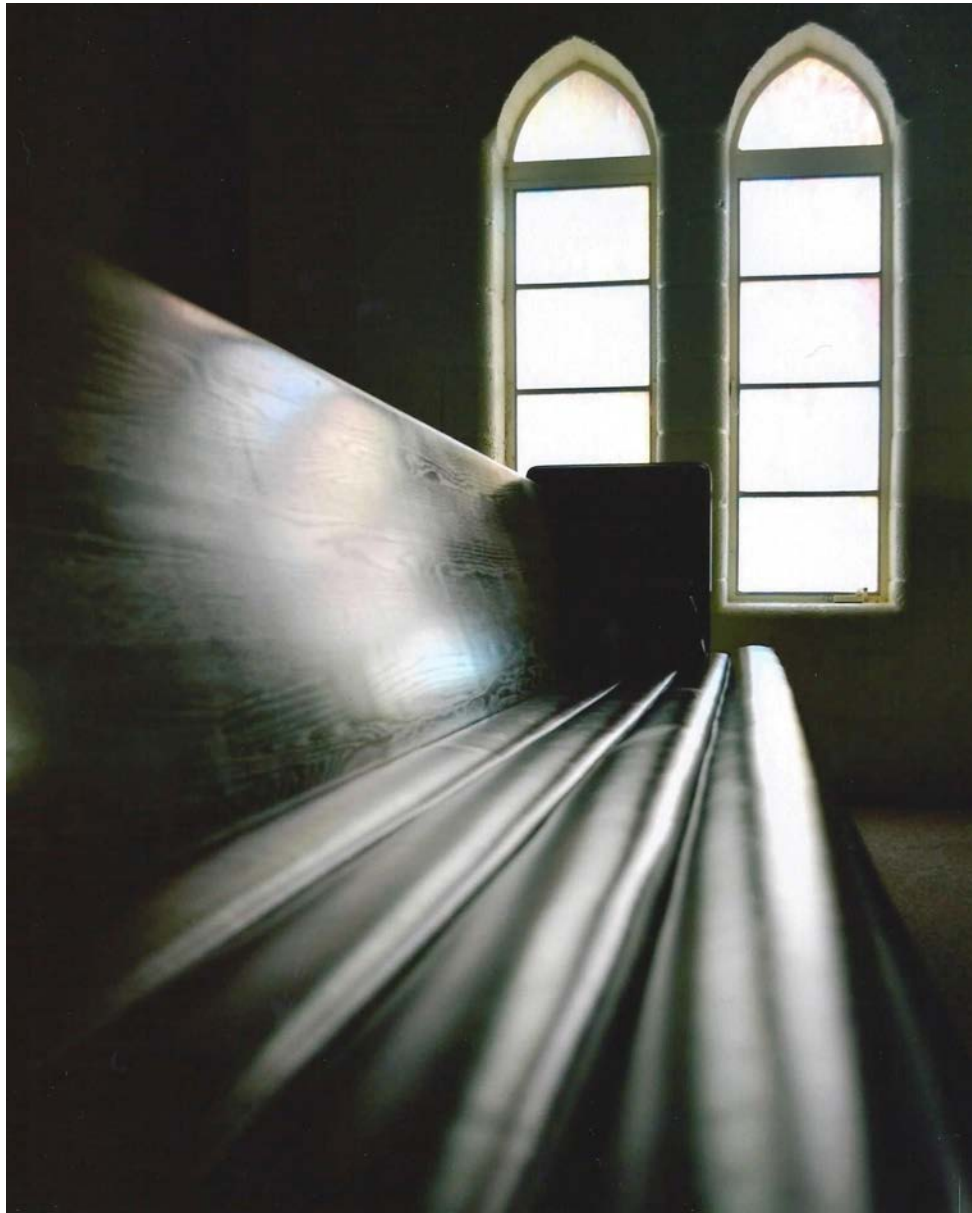




Photo by Logan Guerry

YIN

by Heather Clark

I begin with my legs crossed and my palms touching at my chest. I take a few breaths to get comfortable. I pause here to think of an intention for my practice: I am breathing in. I am breathing out.

Child's Pose.

From where I was lying I could see up through the back window of the Forester. It was so dark outside. I could see the stars through the dirt from the drive, thousands of them. A safe stillness came with camping in a car. All the creaking and rustling of the woods at night were held back by the thin piece of metal suspending me above the ground. In less than five hours I had to wake up to hike Devil's Causeway. Ten miles didn't seem so far. Up on the flat tops there were three feet of snow heavy and sagging into the earth. I lay there feeling the weight of sadness on my chest. Spring had become early summer. He had left for two months off into remote Alaska.

He hadn't called in a week.

My chest sinks to the floor. The muscles rooted alongside my ribcage and through my upper back are being pulled by the weight of my heart.

I had made it my intention to focus on work and succeed. Now my newly opened store was slipping into bankruptcy and none of my efforts were bringing people in. I could feel it on the edge of this cliff ready to tumble to a place where it couldn't be controlled and couldn't be saved. They had taken a chance on me. What if I wasted their investment? What if I was never worth it in the first place? What if I failed? Truly failed? Would they have the nerve to fire me? Did it matter?

The weight of my hips and thighs cuts off circulation to my calves and feet. My toes begin to tingle and lose feeling.

Two and a half miles in, there was a stretch that gives the hike its name, the Devil's Causeway. The trodden path disappeared, becoming a fifty-foot strip of odd rocks three feet wide that can only be crawled across. I feared the vertigo, nausea, and fainting that the 800 foot cliffs were known to cause. Past that, it was seven miles down Bear Creek Trail over the snowy and barren flattops back to the car. The loneliness from before shifted to excitement and anxiety over the thrill of the adventure I had been planning for weeks. My mind was racing. Four hours until I had to wake up. I exhaled. I felt energy building up inside and rising to where the two sides of my ribcage meet, right above my stomach. At last I felt alive.

Pidgeon.

About a year after we broke up, we talked again. He told me about his new girlfriend. He said she was kind and loving. He told me I had taught him a lot, but he hadn't changed. He had done the same to her that he had done to me. I thanked him for making our relationship something I could learn from.

My stomach lowers down, reaching the heel of my folded leg. I do my best to relax into the pose, resting the side of my face on the earth and

*I had always
hoped I was
secretly strong.*

opening up my outer hip. The stretch is so deep my core tenses and shivers in resistance.

I told my mom after I left him for the final time. It was how I could be sure never to turn back. She looked at me, both proud and ashamed.

The stretch is too deep, I switch legs. As I lower down again, I can feel my jaw tighten and my cheek sticks to the mat as a force just stronger than gravity pushes my hips toward the ground.

He always made the best breakfast burritos. He would take those frozen potatoes, dump them into a big pan and cook the scrambled eggs alongside them. There really wasn't anything special about them, but everything mixed with the salt and pepper won me over. I was sitting on the couch watching TV when he came from the kitchen to ask me a question. I answered wrong and he left the room. On the screen, Tom chased Jerry around trying to beat him with a broom and I sunk into the tattered hand-me-down couch, my cheek hot and swollen.

Staff Pose.

It snowed two feet that day. Boulder had shut down due to the unexpected weather. I sent a text to my brother to brag about how I didn't have to work but he did. He didn't text me back for a long time. When he did, he asked me if I had heard from Mom and Dad. I hadn't.

I lower down. I can feel my legs become long from my ankles to my lower back. I lower my head toward my knees and am met with resistance from my overworked muscles. My only desire is to push away from it and end all of the struggle and waiting.

My dad ran marathons his whole life. He had been an incredible athlete when he was younger and now was a skinny man with a greying beard holding on to whatever athleticism he had left. When we were younger he would take us all around for his marathons. My dad quit running when I was young because my mom always had a hard time caring for three chil-

dren while traveling to watch the races. Now that we were older, he had been doing marathons all over the state and qualified for the Boston Marathon. For old time's sake, my mom went with him.

The room felt lonely, so I switched on the TV. There were bombings at the end of the Boston Marathon. Every channel had the same clip on replay. Runners, exhausted and determined, trudged their way to the finish line only to be swept up, feet away from the end, in smoke, fire, and fear. The ground came up to meet me as I sat there on the floor of my apartment, stunned. I watched the reporters, as people were carried off in stretchers, saying all the same things in different words, "We don't know what's going on."

I couldn't stand to hear it all said again, so I got in my car and drove to my childhood home a few miles outside of Boulder. I had heard on the TV that all cell phone service in Boston and the surrounding area was cut off to catch the bomber. A bustling city, full of energy and urgency, cut off and silenced. As I pulled into the snow-covered driveway of my childhood home I could feel that silence echoing over the house. It was lonely and still as I stepped through the back door into the dark and cold. I took off my snow boots and let the light and sound of the TV fill the space where my family wasn't. All public transportation had been stopped, phones cut off, and a second round of bombs had gone off. The city had slowed to a halt.

Sharp intense sensations shoot from my sciatica to my Achilles. I flow between relaxing into the pose and recoiling from the pain. Only a few more moments.

I felt my phone buzz. As my body shivered sitting on the floor hot tears steamed down my face. They were alive.

I spread my legs out shaking them a little, relaxing into my final posture, Chivasana. I spread my feet and arms out off the mat. I allow myself just to sink into the floor. I breathe normally and return to my intention.

I can feel tingling in my toes as they lose feeling and completely let go into relaxation. I release any resistance I had to the ground. Calming sensations crawl up my tired legs through my calves and shins, knees and thighs. I feel my legs stretch out long and

Runners, exhausted and determined, trudged their way to the finish line only to be swept up, feet away from the end, in smoke, fire, and fear.

then be still. For a second, the muscles in my hips tense from the shock of no longer being tugged in odd directions and then relax. Calm takes over my belly and ribs, soothing my core until it is still. Peace soaks through my shoulders, arms, and down to my fingertips. I can feel it traveling up into my neck and up over the front of my face just kissing my jaw. My tongue, cheeks, and forehead seem to let out a sigh of relief. The ground caresses my body as they slowly become one. I can feel my breath traveling from the depths of my gut up to my heart, bringing it energy. As I let air out, it moves up to the nape of my neck, bringing me peace.

I am breathing in. I am breathing out. ☯



THE ATIVAN DECEMBER (LORAZEPAM)

by Andrew Hecocks

My doctor tells me the pills will make my brain work the way it's supposed to. And maybe after a long enough time, they'll bring some of that light back into my eyes. Some people call them happy pills, he says with a pen cap clenched in his teeth and his bespectacled eyes fixed on a paper-clipped stack of documents, but that would be misleading. They don't make you happy, they make you function. Of course, you know that by now, he continues, tearing off a slip of paper informing me that I've been greenlit to have all of my prescriptions refilled.

I came into this world with defective parts, and I learned how to deal with them: a bilious stomach, a violently weak digestive system—it didn't matter as long as I found a workaround. But when a panel of experts declared that one of these defective parts was my brain, and they gave me explanations I didn't understand about how some neurons didn't light up when they should, I thought holy shit, my entire brain is broken. Don't I need that to, you know, survive? This was something slightly harder to learn how to deal with, because the solutions weren't so clear-cut.

The vaguely threatening names resonate in some cavern in my head: clinical depression, personality disorder, anxiety, and I know them better than a lot of things that occupy the same space. Standing in the parking lot with my coat pulled tight against the December sleet, I clasp all three of my prescribed bottles in my hands and try my hardest to think this over in rational terms. Two are translucent orange, and the other is an opaque ivory white. Shaking them makes a cacophony of plastic rattles. I arrange them in alternating colors and roll them back and forth in the cupped halfpipe of my palms and fingers, wondering how something so infinitesimally small can fix a problem that is much larger. They are the David, my brain is the Goliath, and my body is the vivisectioned warzone of a shower of capsules and pills.

My doctors and physicians and nurse practitioners tell me, take this blue pill with a meal in the morning, and then wait five hours before you down a couple of these white ones with a full glass of water. Oh, and by the way, make sure to set an alarm at 7:00 in the evening so you can take this purple one and don't have a meal afterwards so you don't exacerbate the heartburn. Besides, you can't even take your 11:30 capsule on a full stomach anyway, so no matter what you're doing, just don't eat anything and you should be all right. Did we mention that alcohol is off the table? Because it is.

The 11:30 pill is my favorite because it's red on one half and blue on the other. It projects the illusion of something enjoyable. In school, I learned that when brightly colored things are found in nature they are usually incredibly venomous, and when found in food they are usually delicious to the same degree. The 11:30 pill is neither of these things, despite its cheerful colors. It does, however, control my mind so it turns into less of a whirlpool, and this way I'm not stuck with a spinning funnel of sea-green foam roaring in my head in the place where thoughts should be.

I learn to start carrying the pill bottles with me, because if I bring the pills alone and naked in my pocket, I forget about them and they get run through the wash and are stripped of their colors and shapes and potency. With the price of my prescriptions, this equates roughly to a dollar and some-odd cents per pill and I'll be damned if that money goes to waste in a washing machine instead of dissolving in my organs. Initially I wanted to resist the bottles because when I carry them, everyone can hear the clack and the rattle and the sound of the things that do their best to fix me. At

*The 11:30 pill is
my favorite
because it's red on
one half and blue
on the other.*

that point everyone knows I'm made of broken parts and their gazes are composed of either pity or of curiosity, neither of which I want to indulge for them. Despite some faulty pieces, for the most part everything still works together to do what it's supposed to. In the back of my consciousness, though, it's hard to forget the bottles in my pocket when they remind me and everyone else of their presence with every step I take, monotone requiem bells that click click click click and shout HEY, LOOK AT THIS GUY. LOOK AT HIM AND ALL OF HIS PILLS!

I shove the bottle of painkillers in the side pouch of my backpack, or I put the smaller bottle of Ativan in my back pocket so I can keep sitting on it by mistake, or I keep esomeprazole and antacid in my work apron so I don't have to spend another twenty minutes leaning on the side of a bathroom stall clutching my chest and wondering if I'm going to die here on the wet tile floor of a chain restaurant bathroom. It's a tradeoff between being silent as I walk and feeling like I can actually live, a tradeoff between appearing well and actually being well. Sometimes I'm stuck in parabolas between the two and my mind and body can't decide together on where to land. I just lie in bed without sleeping or showering or doing very much of anything, counting shadows on the ceiling and tracing their movements like constellations painted between the spiderwebs on the crown molding. I don't have to turn my head away from the pillow to watch the colon between the hours and the minutes on my digital clock blink with a comforting rhythm that doesn't sync up to my breathing or my heartbeat. The bottles are always there on the nightstand, standing in a staggered line that retreats into blurriness that farther they are from my face.

Ativan came first, when my mind was a stormy sea that swallowed the ship of my sanity and self. It hit out of nowhere in December, much like the snowstorms that year, sending me reeling to find something to pin down as the source. Reason turned into the handfuls of snow that melted and dripped away and I struggled to think of what could've caused it, considering that my job and a stunningly ruthless semester of classes were pounding away at me with their balled-up fists. This had happened before, but never to this degree: I felt like a dark well had broken open inside my head, deep and profound and endless with some kind of horrific Lovecraftian beast lurking at the bottom. Eventually, I caved to the advice of friends and went to the doctor's office

*Reason turned into
the handfuls of snow
that
melted and dripped
away*

...

before this monster punched a hole right through my forehead. I was bounced around to three or four different professionals, cycling through offices that all looked the same—tan paint on the walls, a wilting plant in the corner, and wildly uncomfortable chairs in which I read issues of TIME that were a few months out of date. Eventually I sat tightly curled in a chair, in one of these offices that felt more like an interrogation chamber with a single light dangling over each of our heads. Dr. Burton explained to me, in a lot of medical jargon, all about mood disorders and clinical depression, and that this thing called Ativan might be able to help me. He only prescribed me enough doses for a month, warning me of drug dependence, and that I should come in for a recap in thirty days' time and that we could go from there. I started throwing these little white pills at the monster at the bottom of the well, two per day, both in the morning when the beast was rising and ready to hunt, unfurling its limbs and long fingers to touch my mind in the places that were weakest. I hoped to placate it before it found the soft, bright spots in my brain.

About a year later, when I am doing my usual tour of the different hospitals, I find myself seated in another office with complaints of stomach pain. "How are the stress levels in your life?" the nurse practitioner asks, glaring at her clipboard through winged glasses. "They're definitely there," I reply simply, trying to free a wry laugh from my throat. I don't tell her that I'm manic with sleeplessness as I wake up at any hour of the night to take a pill. I don't tell her that my job might literally be killing me faster than the malfunctions in my body but that I am, astoundingly, still employed. She explains that I have inherited severe acid reflux from my father's side of the family and that stress is likely the catalyst that brought it to life within me. She faxes a prescription for Nexium to my Walgreens pharmacy, so I can add another bottle to the growing collection on my nightstand.

Sometimes it's hard to consider the fact that I'm supposed to be in the prime age of my life and I need medication to get me through the day. Where other people thrive, I find myself leaning on the front desk of a pharmacy. The success sought and discovered by my peers is outside of my grasp: when I reach for it, I'm limited by a body that resists most of the things I do. My fingers will move through the intangible wave of the future, my palm will come up clean and free of meaning and life, and instead I'll be clutching a fistful of capsules that dribble through the cracks in

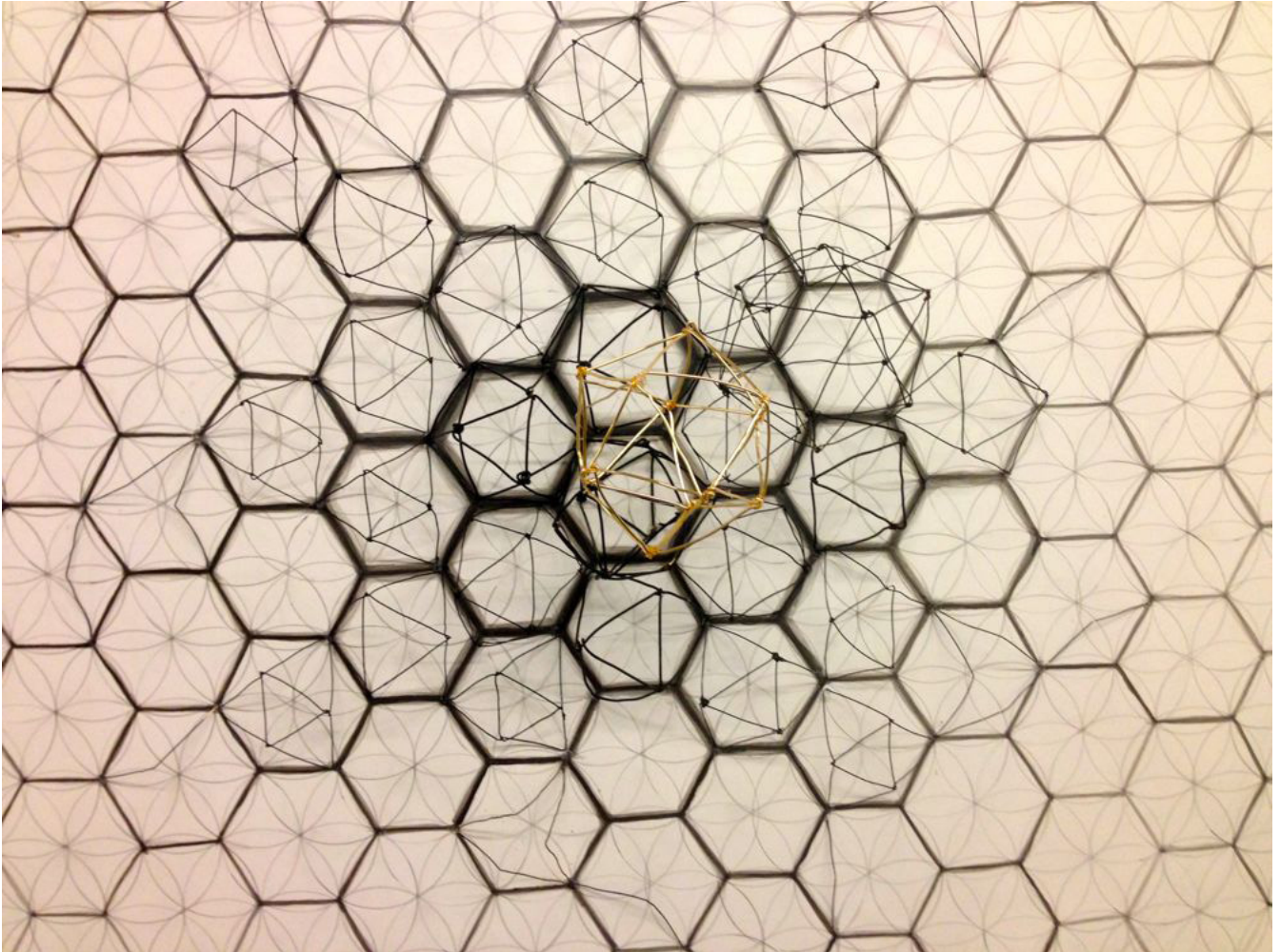
*"How are the
stress levels in
your life?"*

my fingers and fall to the floor. Despite how fascinating it is that we've reduced the complexity of the human body and mind down these colored tablets, it doesn't change the reality that the hours of my day are demarcated by the pills required between, and the months of my life are measured by the number of pills left in a bottle, rattling around the silica gel packet at the bottom. It's not simply a crutch that makes everything better for the day, it's a sudden flurry of chemicals that make my synapses pop and fire the way they're supposed to. It's a burst of sensation and cognition deep in the neurons of my brain. It's a cold drop of ice that stops the burning sensation from creeping from my stomach to my chest, mushrooming slowly upwards like the leftovers of an atomic bomb to rest behind my throat. It reminds me to feel happy at the appropriate times, it reminds me that jumping off of this stairwell would actually be a terrible idea and that doing so would leave a bigger impression than just the literal impact on the tiles below. Much like jumping into a pool, my body hitting a horizontal surface would cause ripples to burst outwards: not through water, but through people and news headlines and an outdated file photo of me that the newspapers had permission to use. Festoon my body with yellow police tape and throw me bouquets of camera flashes.

*Festoon my body
with yellow police
tape and throw me
bouquets of camera
flashes.*

As simple as we want life to be, most of the solutions we find don't come through positivity alone, but through the physical manipulation of biology. Weakness is not defined by the number of pills that somebody has to swallow each day. It isn't until another early winter morning, one in which the world is crusted over with a completely out-of-nowhere blizzard that reminds me of The Ativan December, when I try to pin this thought to my brain. I desperately want to focus on this, as much as I want my brain to feel bright, like all of the neurons have started working again. I am not weak. I try to make the schedule of the day, color-coded by pills and annotated with the timed schedule of when to take what, fall away from my mind. I want this to be the first morning I feel like I won't need to take my medication and that I won't, like each day before this moment, have to pray for evening.

But it doesn't quite work like that. So I swallow my pills, pull my coat on around my shoulders, and lock the door behind me. ❧



BEAUTIFUL SCIENCE

Why a PhD in biochemistry is necessary to shop at Rite Aid

“Science grows and Beauty dwindles.”
—Lord Alfred Tennyson

by Rebecca Hall

The hot sun glares down on my face as I scurry from my dull gray Honda Civic to the automatic doors of the corner Rite Aid. I can feel my ancestry burning clear back to my great, great Irish grandmother. As I lunge inside I narrowly miss nailing the hesitating sliding glass with my face. A pudgy blonde clerk looks over at me with disinterested annoyance and just a smidge of judgment. Clearly, the door and clerk have made the decision that just because they are at work doesn't mean that they have to work. Undeterred by my near-death experience, I continue walking as if nothing has happened. I am on a mission. I even made a list. And it is . . . somewhere . . . I search the pockets of my jeans. Nothing. I'm about to turn around and face another attempt on my life to retrieve the list from my car when I remember. . . I reach into my bra and pull out a carefully written list of various odds and ends that would no doubt secure me a spot on the NSA's watchlist. I started using my bra as a part-time storage compartment back in high school when I came to the realization that the structural integrity of my bras were never going to be tested.

I unfold the list and orient myself to the first item: face lotion. I turn and make my way through a brightly lit maze of glamorous shelves stocked with every unnecessary product a person could ever want. In sheer awe, I approach a wall—nay—a shrine of moisture . . . a basilica of beauty . . . a tabernacle of cosmetic wonder. I look back down at my list—“face lotion.” I look back up at the glowing bethel of products: skin clearing, pore refining, anti-acne, anti-aging, lightly moisturizing, extra moisturizing . . . I don’t even know where to look first when suddenly hovering above me as if a magic godmother from the sky I see Jennifer Garner. Her perfect porcelain skin radiates outward, lightly kissing the words “rapid wrinkle repair” gently suggested beneath her heavenly face. It has never occurred to me, but “oh shit—I am getting older!” I guess it’s never too early to be a time-fighter and I did see some laugh lines when I was checking my smile in the mirror the other day. Note to self: must brood more, laugh less. Okay . . . so I need an anti-aging face lotion. How hard can that be to choose?

My eyes wonder over to the Neutrogena section. Do I go with their Naturals line that is “fortified with Wintergreen leaf” and has “NO harsh chemical sulfates, parabens, petrolatum, dyes or phthalates?” I have no idea what any of those things are or what “Wintergreen leaf” is, but I feel like it would make a refreshing flavor of gum. What about their Pore Refining line with “Alpha and Beta Hydroxy formula?” Or their Hydro Boost line with “water gel?” It has “Hyaluronic acid” and is dermatologist recommended. Oh, but then there is their Rapid Tone Repair with “accelerated Retinol, vitamin C and SPF 30.” Or should I just go with their Triple Age Repair line that has “Hexinol and SPF 25?” But wait—quick question...why don’t all of their products say they have “NO harsh chemical sulfates, parabens, petrolatum, dyes or phthalates?” Does that mean they do have those harsh chemicals? Why would Neutrogena include any harsh chemicals in any of their products? And what the heck are hyaluronic acid, retinol, hexinol and alpha and beta hydroxy? You know what? It doesn’t matter—there are plenty of other options here—moving on.

A flash of classic red captures my eye. Olay. Now we’re talking. I pick up a box of their “Micro-sculpting cream.” It feels cool and dense in my hands. The box says “visible wrinkle

*What about their
Pore Refining line
with
“Alpha and
Beta Hydroxy
formula?”*

*In sheer awe,
I approach
a wall—nay—
a shrine of
moisture . . . a
basilica of beauty
. . . a tabernacle of
cosmetic wonder.*

results start in one day” with their “amino-peptide complex and hydra-firming complex.” That’s a lot of complexes. I turn the box over and in a bold, white, ballsy font I see the words “a cream that defies gravity.” Now that’s just crazy. NASA can barely do that. Moving on.

L’oreal. Oui. A slight sigh of relief escapes my lips. No one does beauty like the French. Immediately, I see all the right words: “expertise . . . age perfect . . . ultra-nourishing . . . anti-sagging . . .” Actually, “sagging” is a bit harsh but they mean business. And aging is a serious business. Just because we all do it doesn’t mean that we want people to know that. So to keep my face from “sagging” they have lovingly provided me with a cream that “nourishes skin with calcium” and a “nutrient complex.” Hmm. To be honest, that doesn’t sound that impressive, does it? What about Roc? They’re French and their Deep Wrinkle Repair line is “patented with Copper-Zinc technology.” Impressionnant. Or Garnier? That sounds French. Their BB Cream has “pro-xylane, mineral pigments and SPF 15.” But why BB? Why not AA? Well, okay, that one is taken . . . but why not CC or DD? Suddenly my mind hits overload. I start to feel nauseous as buzz words swirl around me like a vanity vortex. Aveeno advocates “calming feverfew, nourishing oat and soy complex.” Burt and his Bees buzz with “daisy extract, cotton extract and clary sage.” Clean and Clear claims “sea minerals, sea kelp extracts” that will “wind me down.” Some brand called SebaMed sports “pentavin, vitamins and allantoin.” Cetaphil . . . doesn’t really have much going on except that it’s recommended by Good Housekeeping. Not sure why that should convince me to use it on my face rather than my stove. Round and round the store spins as I grapple to gain my bearings. I close my eyes and take some deep breaths. In through the nose . . . out through the mouth . . . in through the nose . . . out through the mouth. My heart rate slows back to a moderate thump-de-thump in my chest. I open my eyes. The floor is down and the ceiling up. I look down at my list. I will think on the face lotion and move on to the next item: shampoo.

I start making my way back through the maze of glamorous shelves until I see a picture of a woman with longer, shinier hair than a Disney princess. I’ve arrived. I step into the aisle to start browsing. As my eyes scan the shelves I start to feel

an uncomfortable, yet oddly familiar sense of overwhelming pressure. Suddenly I am surrounded: “silicone free . . . peppermint complex and tea tree essence . . . oxyfusion technology . . . triple nutrition . . . moisture-silk complex . . . sulfate free . . . infused with keratin . . .” Son-of-a-bitch. 🐉

“I believe natural beauty has a necessary place in the spiritual development of any individual or any society. I believe that whenever we substitute something man-made and artificial for a natural feature of the earth, we have retarded some part of man’s spiritual growth.” —Rachel Carson





DONE GOOFED

by Madsen Lozuaway-McComsey

My right foot swings alongside my board, propelling me further, faster. My head hurts—everything is too bright. Music plays in my earbuds as the world spins by me. Thoughts are escaping my grasp like a freshly caught fish, but essentially I know where I am heading.

My destination is empty. Damn, I think, they don't open until 3. I was sure there would be brunch; everyone has brunch on Sunday. I begin my journey back towards home, my items still lost. I contemplate sustenance. Nothing quite calls to me, other than my stomach, which is loud and persistent. My eyes peruse several locations but they all leave a bad taste in my mouth.

It's been several months that I have been longboarding, and I finally feel comfortable on the sandpaper like surface. Hills are still out of the question though.

The thought of breakfast is still heavy on my mind, but my stomach keeps recalling the Mexican silver of the previous night, making it difficult to want to eat. I decide upon some Colorado medicine to settle my churning belly and set my course for home.



“Sunshine” by Atmosphere comes on. This is my jam. It’s so happy, positive, and motivational. All is well. Though one lyric in particular sticks out to me.

“My bad sight makes me trip on my ass, right into that patch of grass like, ‘That’s life!’”

My bad sight focusing on a pretty girl near makes me fall on the pavement.

Fuck.

She rushes over and asks if I’m okay. I’m not. “Pretty sure I just broke my elbow . . .” I can see the cap about an inch up my tricep. I look around, bewildered, trying to figure out what happened. My blurry vision picks out a hole about a foot deep. My wheel had caught it and my board stopped, but I didn’t.

*My blurry vision
picks out a hole
about a foot deep.*



Fuck.

She asks if I live near. Only four blocks away and I think I can make it. I start limping in that direction, hoping she will offer assistance. My board is in my hand and my headphones are mocking me as they dangle from one ear, still playing happy tunes. She starts off in the same direction, but picks up her pace with an awkward pep in her step as she tries to avoid feeling like she needs to help me.

Bitch.

The sun is beating down in the way the Colorado sunshine does. My head is swimming, my vision fading, my whole body is so warm. Pants were not a good choice, even in March. A block down the road and I can't take it. The thought of an ambulance enters my head, but leaves even faster as I recall my

lack of insurance. Before I pass out and damage myself even further, I take a seat on my board, lift my head, and scream. It helps a lot.

I arrive home after a few more sit-downs, a couple more screams, and an abundance of profanity. My bed rushes up to meet me, but the pain is hot on its heels.

I silently thank the Fates that I have my friend's car temporarily. With excruciating effort, I pull the VW out onto the road and head for the hospital. Normally, I love driving, especially stick-shifts—though this is not one of those times.

Siri, being as helpful as always, directs me to the nearest veterinary hospital. I'm pretty sure I know where Boulder Community Hospital is.

Broadway, that's where I need to go.

As I'm waiting to turn into the parking lot an ambulance flies by as if mocking my financial state. I stall.

Shit.

In time, I'm standing in front of a big sign that says, "No Emergency Services."

Fuck.

"Arapahoe," the sign informs me. My stomach reminds me I have yet to eat. My water bottle keeps me as sane as I am hydrated, barely.

The drive east is filled with laughing, crying, self-scolding, and an odd combination of all three that must have looked very strange to other drivers. "Why so serious," I ask myself with a chuckle. My arm throbs with each pothole, crack, and bump I hit, reminding me to avoid them for the rest of my life. Pay more attention, idiot, my inner monologue screams.

As I sit in the left-hand turn lane, waiting for the longest light of my life, I contemplate the consequences of my obliviousness. I need to call my manager; definitely can't work tonight. I need to call my parents. I can already hear my mom fussing over me, telling me I "done goofed," but also reassuring me, comforting me, being motherly.

After all of time has passed, I turn left and pull into a patient parking spot. That's me, I think, a patient. I casually saunter through the parking lot towards the large EMERGENCY sign, my arm silently reminding me of how stupid I can be. Before entering I triple-check to make sure I have my Medicaid card. Thank you, Colorado taxpayers.

Siri, being as helpful as always, directs me to the nearest veterinary hospital.

The face behind the counter is friendly and welcoming. I state very matter-of-factly what happened, my hip still bleeding slightly, my pants and shirt still very dirty and streaked. He takes down my information, gives me a custom printed wristband, and ushers me through a door to the emergency room.

Once I settle into a room, change into a robe, and get poked a prodded a few times by several different individuals, I can feel my spirits lifting. I realize the humor of the situation. I just had to let my eyes rest upon that not-even-that-beautiful woman for those extra few seconds, didn't I? I just had to not notice that perfect cylinder of air a foot deep in the pavement. Such is life.

My mom reacts well. I think the fact that I lead with a lie of being arrested helps to soften the blow. She is very worried that I'm alone but I reassure her it's fine. My dad, of course, is also very sympathetic. We all have a chuckle to try and lighten the situation. My dad offers to fly out, to fly me out to him, or to help with the bills however he can. I inform him that this should all fall under the Medicaid coverage. How wrong I was.

Twelve hours, one surgery, five doctors, seven nurses, and no food later, I am walking out with my aunt, and a bottle of Percocet in my hand. I can't help but smirk as I reflect upon the day. I think of how it started, sickly but optimistic; how it progressed, painful and sad; how it ended, humorous and comforted. Fuck, I think, what an experience. ☪



“BUILDING” IN BOLGATANGA

by Robbie Gershon

Lugging the 25-pound gritty cinder block across the uneven, muddy earth of the Bolgatanga schoolyard in Northern Ghana, my knees began to buckle, my shoulders quivered with fatigue, and my fingers felt raw beneath the heavy weight of the cement brick. Side-stepping carefully to avoid the foul-smelling urine puddle, I audibly chuckled thinking about the carefree summer days when my friends and I would chant, “Step on a crack and you break your mother’s back!” But here, my own back was breaking, and I felt slightly nauseous as the fetid, musty fumes permeated my nostrils. Beads of hot sweat rolled lazily from my underarms down the sides of my trunk, and I desperately longed for an ice-cold bottle of refreshing water. I licked my lips attempting to alleviate my cottonmouth, and frustration flooded through my veins. “Damn it, Robbie! Of course you forgot your Chapstick!” I felt irritated, and I damned the day when I proudly announced to my parents that I decided to spend the summer between junior and senior year of high school traveling in Africa. Cursing the cinder block, I wondered why I ever imagined myself cut out as a builder.

Shaking my head, I thought, "This is nothing like Kenya!" My family had taken a fantastic safari to photograph the Big Five and deliver gifts to the children in a Maasai village. Feeling the pus-filled, oozing blisters burn my feet, I wished I were back in Kenya riding comfortably in the open-top jeep excitedly pointing to the elephant herd as it trampled the long grass in the game park. The weight of the cinder block was unbearable, and sighing loudly I thought, "Just quit. You can leave. Why do you need this?" But when I glimpsed Ebo, a thin and wiry six-year-old boy pull down his pants and unsuccessfully attempt to urinate on the wooden planks posing as a urinal on the dusty playground floor while actually peeing on the foot of his friend next to him, I thought, "Come on Robbie, you can do this!" But could I really endure the pure exhaustion, the offensive odor, and the aches and pains attacking my entire body?

Careful not to drop the cinderblock, I briefly paused to catch my breath. My chest heaved up and down, and, with each exhale, whew, whew, whew escaped my parched lips. My fatigue was impossible to mask, and my friend Patrick mouthed, "Are you okay?" Warily I shook my head up and down, pushed my right leg forward, and trudged onward careful not to trip on the large rubber tires posing as fancy playground equipment. Finally, after the longest forty-five seconds of my life, I carefully lowered the cinderblock squarely on top of the already heightening pile. The muscles in my low back were throbbing, and, with my hands firmly planted in the small of my back, I warily performed an arch hoping to alleviate the achiness. "Just stop...no one will get mad," but the truth was, I would get so mad at myself if I ever quit. Angrily, I kicked the large thirty-pound bag of cement lying silently at my feet, and then I ripped it open and haphazardly poured the sandy dusty contents on to the ground. Instantly I felt the grit clog my nostrils. Struggling to breathe, I heard a hoarse, raspy voice in my head urge, "Quit!" I really did want to take a hot shower, plop on my pillow-top mattress and sleep for two days straight. But just then a firm, forceful, ferocious voice roared, "You will not give up!"

Hastily I grabbed the first of the ten large water-filled tin saucers that I had previously carried above my head and placed around my work area. Pouring the water on the pile of dust, I began the methodical task of turning the dust into workable

*"You will not
give up!"*



cement. Once again I felt the trembling in my thighs as I attempted to maintain a squat in order to complete this necessary but grueling task. The skin on my fingers split as I squeezed the wooden stirring stick, and red hot blisters erupted through the skin of my sweaty palms. Like a slithering snake, my tongue slid across my upper lip drinking up the sweat along the curved path. A sense of overwhelming thirst and exhaustion plagued my thoughts, and again the desire to quit exceeded the desire to help others, but glancing sideways at Dia and Georgine, the two six-year-old giggly Ghanaian girls kicking a soccer ball, I knew I would continue to mix and mix. Suddenly, I caught a glimpse of Ema, the adorable five-year-old innocent Ghanaian boy, out of the corner of my eye. Watching him pull his blue tattered shorts down to his ankles, I let out a heavy sigh. Ema peed on the playground dirt, and, without hesitation, his buddy, Junior, joined in on the action. Of course, none of the other laughing, carefree school children even skipped a beat as they continued to chase the rolling soccer ball. Urinating in the middle of the playground was no biggie!

Urinating wherever and whenever was common and acceptable behavior for these young Ghanaian children, and, without a designated bathroom area, these children exposed themselves and each other to potential health risks. Additionally, many of the older girls stopped attending school when they reached puberty because they were embarrassed to urinate in front of the boys. I heard Georgine and Dia screeching with excitement as they chased each other on the playground, and the forceful voice in my head repeated, "Robbie, you will not quit!" Completing my stirring and mixing, I plopped a huge mound of cement on top of the large cinder block pile. I spread out the cement with a metal trowel, lifted my sore body out of the squat, and returned to the pile of cinder blocks, only to restart the process all over again. I repeated the routine of carrying block, placing block, mixing cement, and spreading cement for a total of six to eight hours for two full days. Finally, by the end of day two, my job was done. I, Robbie Gershon of Suffern, New York with my own two hands built a "bathroom foundation" for the young Bolgatanga students.

The sun was beginning to set, and dusk was setting in, but never in my life have I felt more brightness than at that very moment. My sense of accomplishment was overwhelming,

*Urinating in the
middle of the
playground was
no biggie!*

and, as Dia playfully jumped into my arms, my eyes filled with tears. Just maybe, my hard work, fatigue, and soreness would keep Dia in school until the age of 15 since now she had a location to urinate in private. Smiling from ear to ear, I thought, “Wow, Robbie, you did it! You are a builder!” I squeezed Dia tightly and realized that Dia, Georgine, Ebo, Ema, and all the Bolgatanga kids were builders too. They helped me build my courage to tackle a physically challenging job. They helped me build my own strength and fortitude despite my exhaustion, and their claps and excitement at my success of layering one brick upon another built my knowledge that quitting was not an option. I am grateful for the opportunity to spend time with these loving, adorable, and innocent children, and I am grateful that these children built me a foundation for understanding that hard work is not just about the financial reward but more importantly about the emotional reward. 🐞





LUNCHING ATOP A MASS GRAVE

“Property damage is so much easier to live with than murder.”

—Peter Watts

by Sarah Ellsworth

I smelled nothing. There was no scent at all on the perfectly still air. And it was quiet. The sounds of Berlin had faded a few kilometers ago. There was the muffled overturning of gravel under the footfalls of my fellow tourists, but they granted the place some measure of respect by remaining otherwise silent. It was as if all sensory feeling had disappeared a long time ago. Or maybe I was just refusing the senses that the place offered, unwilling to allow my nose to pick up the aroma of the dead. The sun was bright, but the temperature of the March air was almost unnoticeable, so close was it to room temperature.

We had entered Sachsenhausen in a line of tourists, whose purses stuffed down pants and whose cameras held ready declared they were foreigners, like my band mates and I who had come to Berlin my senior year of high school to play a few jazz shows in the smoky old music clubs. I was curious when we came in what it would look like, and at the same time, it felt wrong, even in the beginning, to even find myself there.

“The German government has preserved the concentration camps as historical sites,” our guide informed us, walking backwards through the entrance so as to face us. “It’s one of the ways Germany is trying to atone for its mistakes, by reminding everyone of their own crimes.”

We were paraded through empty barracks, with cots strewn about the room messily, and then through the infamous ‘oven room,’ the gas showers, the medical experimentation centers. Everything was white and bright, but simultaneously dirty and out of order, as if someone had cleaned it meticulously, then went back through to make it look like the prisoners and Nazi guards had just been there and left quickly, leaving chairs overturned and plates on tables. It was groomed to look as real as possible, and it frightened some of the passerby, especially the younger ones.

The small, autistic Jewish boy, who played the trumpet and who the xylophonist sometimes picked on, trembled as we walked. He was the youngest among us, and the most shy, and the one with the fewest friends.

We were made to look at the mandatory pile of old shoes, which almost every place dedicated to the memory and mourning of the Holocaust has. We lunched under the quiet shade on the soft grass atop a mass grave, where small toddlers laughed and played. We all lay on our backs with our hands over our eyes, alone in our heads. Why had we come here? The voice in my head was playing on repeat. We should not be here. No one should be here. No one should ever have been here.

I felt uncomfortable, as if my mere presence in the concentration camp was a disrespect to those who had suffered there. We were touring a mass killing site like it was something people did on vacation for entertainment.

The guides treated it as a sort of museum, full of history and facts to be learned. To me it felt as much like a museum as a prison or a cemetery, of which it had been one, and was now the other. On our way out, we were marched through what appeared to be the Sachsenhausen gift shop, full of solemn history books and memorabilia for sale.

We waited for the bus, sitting on the curb outside. It was a beautiful little street, lined with white cottage style houses where the Nazi officers once lived. Some of the other

*“It’s one of the ways
Germany is trying
to atone for its mis-
takes, by reminding
everyone of their
own crimes.”*

tourists snapped some pictures. It was a beautiful spring day. A few of my band mates were slumped with their heads in their hands. I sat next to Nina, our dark haired clarinetist, who showed all the symptoms of solemnity.

“I think it’s good they let people see it,” she declared. “So no one forgets.”

“I think it should have been burned to the ground,” I answered her, almost tasting the bitterness in my voice as it came out of my mouth. “No one would forget the Holocaust if this place were destroyed. If I had been stuck here, I would have wanted to burn it down myself.”

She tilted her head to the side, considering.

“We should try to change and destroy the horrible things in history, not preserve them,” I said.

“I disagree,” Nina said. “The German government has this on their conscious and they should be reminded of that.”

“Nina, this is a tourist destination,” I said. “How often do you think neo-Nazi’s come here to repent? The only people that come here are tourists. Look around.”

Indeed, not a single voice in the crowd was speaking German.

“But this holds them accountable,” she replied, “with the world as their audience.

“These people didn’t come here to put the Germans on trial,” I told her. “They came to take pictures and feel like they gained some perspective on life. I think it’s disrespectful to walk around here and pretend we know anything about how it was.”

“That’s the point though, right? To learn how it was?”

“Did you? Do you know how it felt now to be stuck here?”

She hesitated a moment, then answered, “No.”

“We shouldn’t have come,” I decided out loud. “We shouldn’t have been made to come, certainly,” I said, thinking of our conductor, who had decided we were coming as a group, like it or not.

I looked at the little trumpet player sitting a few paces away on the curb, who looked distraught. He was the smallest thirteen-year-old I’d ever seen.

“Hey,” I called down to him. “Come sit over here if you want.”

*“How often do
you think
neo-Nazi’s come
here to repent?”*

He picked up his body slowly and slumped towards us and sat down. Nina put an arm around his shoulders. I felt the need to protect him, to shield him from what he had seen, but I couldn't. It was too real for him, real enough that he was feeling afraid.

Down the road a little, a saxophonist wrapped her arms around her young boyfriend's thin shoulders. He too was Jewish. His head was buried in her shoulder, and try as she might, she could not stop him from feeling sorrow like a barrage against him personally.

There are some things you cannot protect people from. You cannot protect people from feeling loss or grief or despair or anger. You cannot protect people from feeling personally threatened or afraid. You can stop people from feeling happy or hopeful—that's what the camps were all about on one level, but you cannot stop them from feeling afraid when they are paraded around a place that bred fear for their families. The best way to try though, is to destroy the threat, and to let those most threatened by it do the destroying.

We cannot protect innocent people from reality. But we can allow them to regain dignity after reality has torn them down.

We must ask ourselves what is important to us as a society when it comes to the camps. Certainly the camps are evidence of an evil that really happened, and without that evidence, denial of the crime would grow. But must we keep them looking the way they were—historically accurate? Or can we not stomp on them and tear them down a bit before we parade the children of those who survived them through? Can we not remove the gift shops? Can we not stop trying to pretend to understand what it is at all to be treated like an animal, just because we ate lunch on the dirt above the dead? ❧

He too was Jewish.





Photo by Dakota Brummel

BIRDS

by Dakota Brummel

The month of August in 2010 our unit received word that we were going to Afghanistan.

Good, this is what I signed up to do.

I was nineteen years old and a year into the Marine Corps. I thought that I knew everything about anything; I thought I was invincible; I thought that nothing would ever happen to me because, hey, I wasn't in the infantry, I was just a helicopter mechanic.

In April of 2011 our whole unit was sent home for mandatory pre-deployment leave. This time is usually spent with family and friends, getting really drunk, and trying to find one of your old high school flings to bang, because who knows if that's the last time you'll be able to do any of that again. Handing Mom and Dad a copy of your will is not something a normal teenager expects to do, so you just let loose and try to relax during those couple weeks. A few days into the month of May, our unit was back together, packed up, and on our way to the battlefield.

Once we arrived in the hot and sandy country we were not jumping from helicopters into incoming rifle fire every day like the movies made it seem; in fact, it was fairly uneventful.

Every day we would take a bus to the hangar where we turned wrenches on our helicopters, or “birds,” as we called them. There were a few mortar attacks directed at us, close enough to see the explosion, but not close enough to injure anybody. The few times that mortars went off with nothing happening just reinforced the idea that I’m invincible.

The following days were long, hot, and repetitive. I started having these demoralizing thoughts that although I was a Marine in Afghanistan, the only thing I’m good for is fixing helicopters. I wanted to do something more than that; it seemed like my job was not important. Our Officer in Charge talked to us one evening and kept our drive going with a simple, solemn remark that I will never forget: “Five Marines died this past week in the area that we operate. It really fucking sucks to hear about, but it’s because of you guys that keep the birds functioning and flying in the air that it’s not twenty-five deaths.”

One morning, after a few months of dealing with 130 degree heat, I was called in the back to talk to the captain. “Brummel, you’re going to help on FOB Eddy. It’s a small base with few people, you’ll probably see some shit, but you’ll be fine,” he told me one on one in a brief exchange. Of course I’ll be fine.

Honestly, I was excited. I wasn’t sure what he meant, but I was excited to “see some shit,” whatever that entailed. I mean, that’s what happens when people go to war, right? Not fixing leaky hydraulic lines, or fiberglass panels with bullet holes in them; no, that didn’t seem very war-like, especially to a Marine.

The next week I climbed aboard the helicopter with my large pack stuffed with clothes and books for my three-week camping trip in the desert. Once we landed and met the crew, I found out what we were actually doing. Our attack helicopters were there to provide security for the Army Medevac Blackhawk helicopters, because they kept getting shot at by the Taliban. A big red cross on the side of vehicles or buildings apparently doesn’t mean anything in Afghanistan.

That first day was busy, with about four calls back to back. Each time there was a call we had to sprint towards the birds and prepare them to make sure they were up and running in a timely manner. Each time they came back with wounded Afghani civilians: men, women, oftentimes children.

This is what the captain meant when he said I would see some shit.

This is what the captain meant when he said I would see some shit.



We did this for the next three weeks and every single day was different, yet, the same: constantly seeing wounded people being flown in by helicopter, who were quickly pulled into the operation tent; watching the Navy nurse washing the blood off from the inside of the Blackhawk with a big yellow bucket full of water and bleach mix; constantly rushing to get the helicopter ready to go for the next time they would bring back a bloody human.

The clearest memory I have was a call over the radio that I heard faintly about a bomb that had exploded: “IED, IED, four wounded, four wounded.”

We dashed out to the birds and prepped them for takeoff then went back to playing cards, reading books, or discussing

women. When the crew came back from that call I had the worst case of tunnel vision that I have ever experienced in my life.

This was the first time that the Blackhawk brought back fellow Americans, Marines like me, rather than one of the local nationals. There were four Marines loaded onto that helicopter: one screaming so loud I could hear him over the thumping of the blades still spinning; one breathing rapidly with his chest filling up and emptying with air like a brown paper bag used for panic attacks; one not moving at all; one with bloody strings of meat hanging off of his knees in place of his shins. I ran over there to offer help with two other Marines, but our training compared to the corpsman working at the hospital wouldn't have been beneficial, so instead I stared. I stared and took it all in wishing I could do something.

Our small crew continued to work through the rest of the day and through the next week before we went back to the main base. Everything seemed fine. I am fine; I am invincible.

The images of those wounded and bloodied Marines would flash through my head a couple times a week throughout the rest of deployment, but it was nothing. It was nothing, and I pushed them deep into the depths of my mind, locked behind a steel door.

We returned from our deployment a few days after Thanksgiving of that same year, seven months after we arrived. Everybody in our unit came home safe and in one piece.

Throughout the following years I would randomly experience flashbacks of that three week period where I was at FOB Eddy. Some of these flashbacks were different this time though. It wasn't just the Marines I reflected on, but also the Afghan men, women, and children wearing their single-colored, pure tunics juxtaposed against a splattering of bright blood that seeped through from the holes or gashes in their skin, from gunshots or hidden bombs. When they did resurface, I still didn't let those thoughts get to me. I took those memories, took those images and shoved them back in the shadows where they came from. I can't let them get to me; I'm a Marine. I'm strong; I'm invincible.

Fast-forward to September, 2015. Twenty countries later, I'm out of the military, and just starting at CU as a twenty-four-year-old freshman, feeling like Billy Madison. Those images of the wounded, bloodied people still pass through my mind often. Usually just a flash in the middle of the day, and, for only a couple

*I'm a Marine.
I'm strong;
I'm invincible.*

seconds, it brings me back to those weeks in the sun and sand where I stared and took in the images of people dying right in front of me.

My time in the desert made me realize two things: I know very little about anything; I am most definitely not invincible. The difference between the past few years and today is that this is the first time I have ever shared these thoughts with anybody, by writing this article; the first time I have actually sat down and reflected on them for a longer period than five seconds without pushing them away. I can genuinely say that right now I feel like this heavy, obscure weight, that I didn't know was there, has been lifted from my shoulders. ☪

*I am most definitely
not invincible.*





PIET AND ME

by Juan Mateo Menendez

All across the surface of the canvas, golden yellow lines intersect each other like the streets of Times Square. Squares, each a different primary color, zip along the lines like cars speeding down Seventh Avenue. In the Museum of Modern Art, my mom commented on how she could do that herself, showing her lack of appreciation for the geometric simplicity displayed. Years after being introduced to Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* though, I was still curious about the painting's minimalism. Much like how Hunter S. Thompson allegedly typed out all of *The Great Gatsby* to experience the writing of a great novel, I wanted to paint this masterpiece to see what it felt like to paint a great painting.

When I attempted to reproduce the painting, I deduced that he must have used a lot of tape to get the lines as straight as he did and started by painting the yellow lines that carve out the canvas. I used blue artist's tape, which did the job, but sometimes a little paint slipped outside the lines, frustrating the perfectionist in me while I apologized to Piet for desecrating his masterpiece. Once I set out the lines, I started to define the in-

dividual squares. In a previous project, I had filled in 200 shapes, the shades gradually lightening from shape to shape, by adding the smallest dabs of white. Now, with roughly 300 small squares to paint in one by one, I knew that that project had been practice for the real thing.

*... I saw the sliver
as a beautiful person who goes
tragically unnoticed.*


I got as close as I could to Piet painting his small squares and recreating what he felt in his studio in 1943. Dancing madly to Jazz tracks, he must have reveled in the small details of his paintings. The details I noticed while making Broadway Boogie-Woogie fascinated me, like the sliver of white so close to the edge it was easy to confuse with the background of the canvas. When I first discovered it, I saw the sliver as a beautiful person who goes tragically unnoticed. To Piet it might have been the small joke that no one hears, but that is the funniest once understood. Although his paintings appear simplistic to some, there is unbelievable complexity in all of them. Like a poem, you can completely unpack these paintings to find mass quantities of meaning. Most significantly, however, each one will mean something different to each person who views it. The possibilities are endless.

When Piet moved away from his native Holland to settle in Paris in 1911, he dropped an “a” from his birth name of Mondriaan in order to make the transition more tangible, more real. The painting I made was one of the few things that I took with me when I decided to transfer from Savannah to the University of Colorado in Boulder, a change that, like Piet’s, was not only physical but spiritual. It forced me to reassess the person who I truly am, just as he reassessed the world around him. After he moved, he came to realize that he wanted to “come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things.

As I look at the painting I made, with so much care and dedication four years ago, there is a certain sadness in me about the fact that it has undergone so much damage from the mov-

ing and years gone by. I had the painting with me when I lived in a house in which, after two years, the amount of things that had accrued, from pants, shoes, lighters, sunglasses, books, and movies to even a complete toddler's outfit, was simply staggering. Before moving out, we had to deal with all of that stuff plus everything that we had in our individual rooms. Before that moment, I had never realized just how much stuff could accrue over a period as short as two years. Between all of us, we took eight bags of stuff to Goodwill.

Once I saw how much stuff people keep, I had a deep desire to do away with all of it and live a simpler and more minimal life. This is what Piet was trying to get to by abstracting everything to its simplest possible form. He wanted to do away with all the clutter of regular experiential life so that he could get to the simplest possible point and find the beauty in that. Through his paintings he distills only the most basic of forms and in doing so has arrived at the very essence of life.

While I was doing research for this project, I came across a painting by Piet that I had never seen before, *Lozenge Composition with Two Lines*, and was stricken by its simplicity. The painting consists of a diamond-shaped white canvas with two black lines crossing each other near the bottom left edge, nothing more. What I find so striking is how much presence the white has on account that it is outlined by the stark black lines. Since the lines end abruptly at the edge of the canvas, it feels as if they extend out into infinity. What brings Piet and me together is that we realize emptiness does not necessarily mean the absence of something significant, but instead represents a field of infinite possibility. Whether it be painting, moving to a new place, or filmmaking, life will always present us with new white canvasses filled with possibility. 



HEADLIGHTS

by Rachel Hultquist

I'm crazy. Sometimes I think I'm actually broken inside. Like that one day dictated the rest of my life. Or maybe I've always been like this; maybe I was born in this state: liminal, estranged, always skimming over the surface of what's going on. I am constantly struggling to live instead of existing just in my head. I am constantly wondering if these things I feel are real or if I just made them up. I desperately try to hold on to some sort of solidarity, some sort of routine. So I throw myself into my work, my education, but at the end of the day, the only person here is me. And my thoughts, as their own entity. Reflecting in upon themselves and onto ghosts around me, like headlights in the rain.

I'm haunted. By feelings, by people, by these pictures in my head. Most people think in words, I think in images. And that makes not remembering a lot of work. Flashes appear on a daily basis, always reminding me. And I can sense other people too, as if they're somehow talking to me, silently screaming out their pain as they smile and take notes in class.

Sometimes being alone is unbearable, but then sometimes I remember good things. Like I'll be remembering the

whisper: “Shhhh, it’s okay. Nobody has to know. Don’t tell anyone. It’ll be our secret.” And I’ll feel my skin crawl, it’ll seem like I’m drowning, calling out in the darkness and confusion of my own memories. And then I’ll hear His voice.

“I’m sorry.”

That’s all He said. That’s all He had to say. And everything was ok; the panic receded.

Like that time we were wrestling and He pinned me too long and I blacked out and threw Him off of me.

“I’m sorry.”

Like that time He grabbed my right wrist while we were playing and pulled down at a slightly too-specific angle.

“I’m sorry.”

Like that time I had a panic attack in His bed, the first time anyone had ever seen me like that, the only person to know that I could be that helpless.

“I’m sorry.”

Like that time I had a dream about so long ago, so young, words jumbled around in my head, crying, screaming, begging for him not to do it. I didn’t want it, I didn’t want any of it. I had a dream about so long ago, so young, sitting in the lawyer’s office watching him cry. I had a dream about standing in the courtroom watching the face of the judge as she looked at me.

“I’m sorry.”

“You’re safe.”

“I’m here.”

I have built up so many layers of walls around myself, making sure that no one can get in, no one can see how weak I was. I have made myself strong, created a fortress of honesty and transparency, ensuring that no one could get past that defense. I have promised myself that no one can make me do anything ever again.

“I’m sorry.”

I have embraced the power of words, understanding that they can destroy and they can illuminate and that there is nothing and everything that we can do about that. I have made them my weapon, luxuriating in the feel of them on my skin, bending them to my will, compelling them to be my aid and not my torturer.

“You’re safe.”

I have carved my body out of a block of flesh, pushing past

... the power of words, ... they can destroy and they can illuminate ...



pain and exhaustion and convincing myself that I am strong. I have crushed my will so that it can be manifested in movement, my blood and sweat cohesively creating that which is ethereal, effervescent, evanescent. If you blink, I'll be gone.

“I'm here.”

That night in the dark, awaking in a pool of sweat and tears, shaking convulsively as I remembered all over again, unable to shake off the dream, weak, helpless as I was back then, He grabbed me and wrapped Himself around me.

“I'm sorry.”

“You're safe.”

“I'm here.”

And for the first time, being contained was not a cage, being consoled was not a challenge, being seen was not a terror.

And for the first time, sleep was not a descent into darkness. Because He was sorry, I was safe, He was there. ❧



Photo by Mark Haselmaier

FINDING STRENGTH FROM SORROW

by Bailey Ferrari

Christmas of 2008 was the first time I had ever spent the holidays away from home. My father had been very sick for many months, so I can't say I was surprised when we got the call telling us to come to the hospital. On an average night a few days before Christmas Eve my mother told me to pack my things. She hurried around the house and explained nervously that my dad needed us. I loaded my clothes into a small suitcase quietly; I knew it would add to her stress if she had to take time to explain things to a nine-year-old. We packed small bags, loaded the car, and drove to St. Luke's Medical Center.

We spent December twenty-third by my father's bedside. Busy nurses hurried in and out of the room and spoke in hushed tones to my mother. You could tell that my mother was exhausted. The entire hospital was hustling and bustling; the array of beeping machines and the constant flurry of blue scrubs left me feeling uneasy and nervous. We were ushered in and out of my father's hospital room sporadically. Nobody really spoke to me, but when they did, they would talk about my hair or my clothes or my smile. I didn't understand what

exactly was going on, but my mom seemed okay and everyone seemed chipper so I wasn't sad.

We spent Christmas Eve in a hotel. The only meal we ate was in the small restaurant inside the hotel lobby; I ordered Mac and Cheese and my mom just drank vodka. The waiters asked why we weren't home for the holidays. My mother stated that her husband was "terminally ill" and they didn't ask any other questions. By the time I finished eating, my mom had downed three or four cocktails. The manager told us that the meal was free and I thought it was a kind gesture but my mom insisted on paying. I'll never forget the way she looked at me, her eyes red and tired. "Even if you can't empathize, don't pity," she told me as we abruptly went back to our room.

When Christmas Day arrived, the mood in the hospital shifted. Everyone seemed conspicuously sad as they said "Merry Christmas!" which seemed ironic to me. Nothing about this day seemed merry. I stared out the windows for hours watching snow swirl down and white twinkling lights shimmer in the distance. For a moment I felt like I was out in the snow, dancing and laughing, then the faint beeping of machines in the background reminded me of where I was. My mother just held my hand, not saying a word.

Eventually a Chaplain came to visit my dad's room. My mother and I waited in the lobby as he went in and read my father his last rites. The plastic-covered couch felt foreign beneath me and the air reeked of rubbing alcohol and lemon disinfecting wipes. The meager holiday decorations in the hospital looked phony and insincere. It didn't feel like Christmas.

When we entered the room again, I felt particularly dismal. Although it had been months since I had last seen my father speak or move around, this was the first time I realized that my dad would never again be able to push me on the tire swing or play house. The only gift I received that day was a blue Slushie from my mother; she thought it would cheer me up. It didn't, the sugary syrup felt thick in my throat.

My father passed away on January ninth. My mother and aunt took me out into the hospital lobby and kneeled around me. "You get to go back home now," my aunt whispered, mocking excitement. My mother said "Daddy won't be coming back home with us" and that "he is in a better place." I nodded and didn't cry. Friends and relatives hugged me, took me back to the

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hotel, asked if I wanted to swim and kept me away from my mom for a while. I don't think I fully understood what had happened, partly because I was young and partly because nobody was really telling me.

The two weeks that followed remain a blur in my mind to this day. I remember the funeral, the faint smell of daises and old wooden church pews. Everyone was wearing dark colors. Many people from our small town attended the service; they made their way into the church without saying a word. Everyone around me was crying. The funeral itself was very brief, members of our church sent a quick prayer and the choir sang a few mournful songs. A few days later, I cried for the first time.

The days following the funeral, many of my mother's friends brought meals to our home. We would eat the food and they would watch in silence, their eyes wide with sadness and sympathy. When I finally returned to school, children my age simply avoided me as if I had a terrible, contagious disease. They didn't include me in their snowball fights, didn't invite me to play tag, and didn't want to sit by me in class. Maybe they didn't know what to say, or understand what I was going through, and I can't blame them for that, but I was left feeling confused, ostracized, and different.

I didn't feel like a regular nine-year-old girl anymore. It was as if the loss I suffered directly affected my entire essence, changing me into "that nine-year-old girl whose dad died." For a long time, my mother was the only one I talked to because she was the only one who truly understood my loss. I would come home from school and sit in her lap and her sweet perfume would linger in the air around me. She would hold me close and I would cry.

After a while, my mother stopped tiptoeing around the truth and starting sharing the somber details about my father's battle with leukemia. My mom spent hours telling me about his unrelenting positivity, strength, and courage throughout the entire process. As we talked, it got progressively easier to no longer picture my father as the immobile, malnourished man in the hospital bed and instead see him as strong, loving, supportive dad that would push me on the tire-swing and make me laugh so hard that my stomach ached. That's how the recovery process began. ❧



Photo by Logan Guerry

WRITING A REALITY

by Sara Seidel

“So I finally switched my major.”

I anxiously played with the handmade bracelet tied around my wrist. The pieces were starting to fray.

“A degree in the journalism school would get you a lot further than a creative writing one, plus you have to pay off those student loans somehow,” my dad said. He looked up from the grocery list he was currently making.

“I know, but I can’t get into the journalism school,” I said sternly. This is my major and I’m sticking to it. “And besides, if I do get in next semester I’d graduate a year late. Can you imagine me sucking at college for five years instead of four?”

“Ricky’s graduating a year late you know.”

He turned to my mom who was walking towards us with their grandchild in her arms. The baby was goo-gooing and gaa-gaaing as he was passed to my dad. He dropped his rattle and I handed him my phone to suck on before he started crying.

“He’s graduating a year late because he had this guy.”

I wiggled my fingers on the baby’s round, squishy stomach. I got really close to his rosy cheeks and said, “College is for

weenies, you pay so much money so you can someday get a piece of paper that says you're qualified enough to earn all your money back." I kissed his soft nose and tried to pry my phone out of his tight grasp. With no luck, I exhaled and leaned back into my chair. "I'm not changing my major, Dad."



"How was the test?" I yelled from under the mess of blanket on my bed. I listened to my roommate Julia walk into the hallway, her heavy Doc Martens striking the wood floor.

"That bad?"

"The multiple choice was fine, I knew that part, but I only knew one of the four essay questions." Her voice was anxious. "Fuck the business school."

"Don't they curve the tests a lot though? You'll be fine." I remember my neighbor had told me a week earlier that the class average before the curve on the tests in the business school is somewhere around a 65.

"Yeah, but I don't like that I don't know the information. Fuck being a business major." She retreated into her room. I heard her talk to her cat in a baby voice and then the springs on her bed retracted. I assumed she face planted onto her mattress, a common sign of defeat among college students. She let out a loud sigh.

"Yeah, fuck being in any major," I muttered.



"Fuck the business school."

"Of course you don't know when pay day is, you're a privileged white girl," my coworker yelled over the water beating against the metal sink. I'm a privileged white girl?

"I'm not a privileged white girl!" I yelled back. I could feel my cheeks growing hot.

"You went to Australia for winter break and you go to college. You're telling me you aren't privileged? You college kids have no bills to pay, you don't even need a paycheck." He turned the sink off and threw dishes into the water. I worked three jobs over the summer with the intention of draining half of my sav-

*Does it make me
privileged that
I'll be somewhere
around \$50,000 in
debt when I
graduate?*

ings buying a plane ticket. My parents had made college funds for my brothers and me, each containing enough money to send us to school for two years. The other two years have to be paid with loans. Does it make me privileged that I'll be somewhere around \$50,000 in debt when I graduate? I work after class, sometimes between classes, and on the weekends to take a small fraction of the financial burden off my parents, even if it is only a couple hundred dollars.

"Okay, point taken, I'm a privileged white girl. When's payday?" My voice fell flat. I could feel my jaw tighten. My knuckles were white from gripping the edge of the sink. I wouldn't have a job if I didn't need one.



I woke up to the sound of my dad yelling my name from the kitchen. The tone in his voice suggested I was in trouble. What could I be in trouble for? I haven't even been home for twenty-four hours.

"What is this?" my dad said, as he motioned towards spreadsheets laid out neatly on the kitchen table. His face was stern, as per usual. He jabbed his index finger at a number resting at the bottom of the spreadsheet titled "Grades." The one next to it was titled, "Loans." Somewhere in the pile was another that consisted of my monthly bills. Ever since I can remember my dad has always been obsessively organized, making lists to organize his other lists.

"I don't know?" I answered, rubbing sleep from my eyes as the sunlight from the afternoon attacked them. I shuffled onto the stool next to him and rested my head in my hands, peeking at him from the corner of my eyes.

"Do you know what your current grade point average is?" My dad stared at me, and then pointed to the Excel spreadsheets.

"Yep. It's okay, I'm taking care of it." I answered hastily. I was far too tired to be having this conversation. I knew my GPA was a 2.4, much lower than my high school one that, unbeknownst to me, had set a high bar for my parent's future expectations. I should've done what my older brother did in high school: be a C student so it wasn't as big a deal when I got my first F.

“Do you even care? Do you have any idea what kind of money it costs to send you and your brothers to college?” My dad looked at me accusingly.

“Did you seriously make spreadsheets, Dad?” I muttered, trying to play off the seriousness in his voice. I picked up the one nearest me. It had all my classes I’d ever taken in college listed in order by semester with the grade in that course in a separate column next to it. As I read down the list my throat tightened. I’m not naïve; of course I know how expensive college is.

“Maybe you shouldn’t go to CU anymore.” He stood up and walked to the kitchen, leaving me with the spreadsheets. I crumpled them up and tossed them across the table. Teen angst can last well into your twenties if you don’t nip it in the bud.

“Do you have any idea how hard college is, Dad? Really fucking hard.” I whispered under my breath. My mom looked up at me from the other end of the table. I hadn’t even noticed her perched there behind her laptop.

“Sweetie, you’re better than that number,” she said, looking at me over her reading glasses.

“You guys don’t get it. College is so hard.” My voice cracked, accidentally putting emphasis on the word “hard.”

“I do, honey, I went to college too.”

“No, Mom, you don’t. It’s more about grades now than it is education; it’s not the same as it was when you went.”

“That’s not necessarily true, your brother—”

“I’m not Ricky. And don’t even have that argument with me. He dropped out and had a baby.”

“Sara, that’s not fair.” I knew she was right. He took some time off school to sort his life out but he was back trying to pursue an accounting degree at Metro Denver. I was struggling with college too but from a different angle. I surely didn’t have to drop out because I was going to have a baby, but I couldn’t figure out how to balance typical college distractions with a passion for integrative physiology—that isn’t actually my passion. The good and the bad that college has to offer had consumed me.

“Yeah? I’m going from being an above-average high school student to a subpar adult but at least I don’t have a baby.” I got off the stool and turned to go back to my bedroom where I knew my childhood toys wouldn’t mock my grade point average.

*“He dropped out
and had a baby.”*

“I think I’m gonna do really well on this one,” I said into the phone wedged between my shoulder and face. “Yeah, it’s the anatomy one. Tomorrow night. I’ve been studying for a few days now.” I repeated the same answers I had a day or two before when I had the exact same conversation with my mom. “My flight is Friday afternoon. I’ll be home Wednesday night. Okay, Mom, I gotta go study. Love you too.” The phone dropped from my shoulder and onto the couch, bouncing off onto the floor. I glanced at it momentarily, and then moved my attention back to my closed laptop, specifically the white pill I was crushing with my driver’s license.

My roommate told me that if I snorted Adderall it would work faster than taking the pill orally, as it’s intended to be taken, for someone with a prescription that is. I’d already had half a pill a few hours earlier, along with a massive cup of coffee. I don’t drink coffee. I hadn’t eaten a substantial meal in days.

With Adderall and caffeine coursing through my veins I sat in the brightly lit corner of my living room. The front window next to me is lined with blue Sky Vodka bottles, my roommate Leah’s drink of choice, and I consistently tell my parents I didn’t help drink any of the bottles. I turn on 8tracks and listen to a playlist titled “study vibes” that plays Beethoven into my headphones. The music notes reverberate, bouncing off the walls of my hollow skull, dancing with anatomical definitions. I still don’t understand anatomy.



“I don’t want to be a science major anymore,” I looked over my academic advisor’s desk, meeting her eyes.

“What are you looking at switching your major to?” She looked at me confused.

“Can I switch my major to undecided?” I knew I couldn’t because of my class standing but it was worth a try.

“You said you like writing, correct? How about looking at the journalism school.” She clicked keys quickly and precisely on her keyboard, pulling up a tab with the journalism school’s requirements and another with my transcript. “It looks like . . . oh . . . your GPA is way too low to get in currently. You can try

getting your GPA up next semester then apply your junior year?” She looked at me with eyebrows raised, as if she were waiting for approval.

“Yeah, I’ll try that.” I cast my eyes downward, knowing I wasn’t going to.

“It looks like you’re stuck in science for now. Have you thought about the business minor?”

I left her office with a handful of brochures for majors and minors I wasn’t interested in. My face grew warm and my jaw clenched. I thought back to my first academic advising appointment ever. It was at freshman orientation and my first-year advisor was asking me questions about what I wanted my college career to look like. I mentioned I liked writing but I wouldn’t want to do it as a major—I only saw it as a hobby. She asked what classes I enjoyed in high school and I said anatomy. Five seconds later I was declared an Integrative Physiology major.



The first time I ever took Adderall it was blue and I was drunk. Really drunk. My roommate smuggled a bottle of alcohol into our dorm room under her shirt. The first thing I noticed about it was the caution and warning labels. It was 190 proof. Everclear. I had one shot right off the bat. It burned like a regular shot but the taste ignited a fire in my mouth that spread down my throat, and settled into my chest. Liquid heartburn. Four shots later I was seeing in cursive. I was by no means a straight edge in high school; I just wasn’t someone who drank something that took the nail polish off my fingers.

In a box disguised as a book, I hid the little blue pill. I had mentioned a few days earlier to a girl on my floor that I had an important essay due in a week. She disappeared for a moment and returned with a pill. I didn’t even ask for it.

I leaned against the edge of my desk for support and accidentally knocked the box over, the contents didn’t spill but I remembered the pill resting inside. Out of curiosity I took it out and eyed it. It was blurry in my vision and seemed harmless. I put it on my tongue and closed my mouth. What am I doing? I took a swig of water and swallowed the pill. My mind narrowed and my tongue dried. I didn’t sleep at all that night. This isn’t me.

*We were parked
in the Safeway
... waiting for the
rest of our brigade
of girlfriends to
arrive.*



“I can’t believe we’re going to college,” Jessica said from the passenger seat in my car. We were parked in the Safeway parking lot, a meeting place in the middle of most of the neighborhoods, waiting for the rest of our brigade of girlfriends to arrive. The windows were rolled down and the sun was just slipping behind the foothills. I had one knee bent and pulled to my chest while my other leg rested on the edge of my rolled down window.

“I know, I can’t believe you’re going to college either,” I said. She always made herself so easy to pick on.

“Shut up!” She squealed. Her high pitch laughed interrupted the calm sunset rays kissing our skin.

“Okay, okay, all jokes aside. I can’t believe we’re going to college either. Are you scared?” I asked, as I turned my head to face her. I’m scared.

“Nah, college will be so much fun. It’s not even a new chapter of our lives, it’s like a whole new book!” Her eyes lit up. What if I like this book though?

I pulled my leg into my car and placed both of my feet on the floor as the rest of our friends pulled up. Their smiling faces, tanned by the summer sun, spilled from cars. We exited my car and joined the growing group in the parking lot. “Yeah, it’ll be so much fun.”



“I can’t believe you’re all graduating high school this year! Have you thought about what you want to do in college?” Lisa Sherman, my sixth-grade teacher asked. I looked around at the people walking past us, glancing at their scribbled lists and turning down random aisles.

“I’m thinking about majoring in biology, or something useful like that,” my voice came out higher pitched than intended, a bad habit when I talk to adults formally. I gripped the metal lattice on the edge of the cart.

“I remember you always had your nose in a book. You would write stories and have me proofread them. I’ve always pictured you as a writer, but who knows, biology could be your

thing!” a high-pitched cell phone ringtone interrupted us and Lisa dismissed herself to talk to her husband.

“I’ve always pictured you as a writer too,” my mom said as she pushed the cart through aisles. I nodded in agreement, but my mind was still set on biology.



Thinking back to elementary school, I remember my mom was always complaining that I read new books too quickly, as if the ten dollars spent on them was wasted. She would buy me notebook after notebook that I would fill with stories and drawings. I remember scribbling in them during church, the only thing that would keep me from complaining about the itchiness of my dress or the length of the service. I don’t remember how I made the decision growing up that I had to major in something useful.

Ray Bradbury said, “You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.”¹ As hard as I pushed my appetite for writing away, the reality of everything that college has to offer has graciously brought it back. The more writing classes I took the higher my GPA climbed. The more I threw myself into assignments I actually cared about, the less I took Adderall. The more I just wrote in general, the happier I was. Of course writing has always been useful, but to me as an individual it’s essential to my happiness. I’ve decided that it’s inevitable. I was never meant to be a doctor; I’m going to be a writer. ✎

1. Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*



Photo by Logan Guerry



THOSE BOOKS

By David Gordon

“F or what you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: It also depends a great deal on what sort of person you are.”¹ “Sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”² My father’s books are scattered around the house. “When I was your age, television was called books.”³ “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view [. . .]. Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.”⁴ “I promise to love you forever - every single day of forever.”⁵ The books in the basket in his closet have shifted since last time I saw them.

1. C.S. Lewis, *Magician’s Nephew*

2. Lewis Carroll, *Through the looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*

3. William Goldman, *The Princess Bride*

4. Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

5. Stephanie Meyer, *Eclipse*



“Tick, tock.”⁶ “People say that eyes are windows to the soul.”⁷ “To explore the inner country of his own soul.”⁸ “The good writers touch life often.”⁹ The books change location from day to day, year to year; the covers stay the same. I am nine. “For, observe that open loves are held to be more honorable than secret ones, and that the love of the noblest and highest.”¹⁰ Mom and Dad read them together on the couch. A dim lamp, yellow shadows. Their affection for each other fills the silent room. A page turns. “Often we don’t realize that our attitude toward something has been influenced by the number of times we have been exposed to it in the past.”¹¹

“Daddy is sick,” Mom said. “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”¹² Leukemia. “I now walk into the wild.”¹³ “He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.”¹⁴ “Sometimes human places create inhuman monsters.”¹⁵ I hated the hospital. “You can look at a picture for a week and never think of it again. You can also look at a picture for a second and think of it all your life.”¹⁶ “They looked at each other, baffled, in love and hate.”¹⁷

6. Suzanne Collins, *Catching Fire*

7. Khaled Hosseini, *Kite Runner*

8. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

9. Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

10. Plato, *The Symposium*

11. Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

12. Ibid

13. Jon Krakauer, *Into the Wild*

14. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

15. Stephen King, *The Shining*

16. Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

17. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*



“Daddy died.” “We will use the actions of others to decide on proper behavior for ourselves.”¹⁸ “It’s dangerous not to listen! You miss important information and you don’t see problems coming.”¹⁹ “His descent was like nightfall.”²⁰

“Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to a mind when it has once seized on it like a lichen on a rock.”²¹ “To understand the world at all, sometimes you could only focus on a tiny bit of it, look very hard at what was close to hand and make it stand in for the whole.”²² Ten years have passed. I am twenty. The books in the basket in his closet have not shifted. I pick up the familiar cover and open to the first page. “To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.”²³ “Not a word passes between us, not because we have nothing to say, but because we don’t have to say anything.”²⁴ ☞

18. Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

19. Martha Davis, Patric Fanning, Kim Paleg, *The Message Workbook: Powerful Strategies for Effective Communication at Work and Home*

20. Homer, *The Illiad*

21. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

22. Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

23. Elie Wiesel, *Night*

24. Khaled Hosseini, *Kite Runner*



BYE BYE BYE

by Michael Kussin

I look out and see shadowed audience members out of their seats, applauding, screaming for us. I look over to see Sean and Jackson, our faces are lit with huge smiles, we just pulled that shit off. Three months of “prep” we never once taken seriously. We just capped off our senior year in the best way any of us could think of.

We had taken music theory for a few years but eventually we took the AP test and needed an excuse to keep Brindawg as our teacher, so for our senior year we took her vocals class. She was getting married earlier that year and we were determined to crash it. We would bug her about the details every day until finally she cracked,

“It’s at the Queen Mary. I guess I won’t kick you out if you show up.”

Unanimously, the three of us wore that maniacal look on our faces and let her know “You won’t regret this!”

Her wedding was in March, we suited up and head down in the Cougar, a car with too much personality. She’s a Mercury Cougar who loves to not work, we couldn’t help but love her. We rolled up to the Queen Mary, a famous ship now docked in the Long Beach

Harbor. We searched every sign and room we can find, and finally found the ballroom her reception was in. We made it. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the three of us sneak in through the service entrance of the kitchen and she knew it was a mistake to tell us we could show up. We spent the rest of the night dancing and singing, we read Rick Astley lyrics as a wedding toast.



Brindawg loved the idea of a semi-dysfunctional boyband, and Sean, Jackson and I were the triple threat of uncoordinated performances. We divided the parts, Sean got Justin Timberlake, Jackson was JC Chasez, and myself as Chris Kirkpatrick.

Over the next few months, Jackson learned the first verse, I got the second down, and Sean mastered the bridge. We all went with a collaboration approach to the chorus and other parts so that we could figure out the best harmonies between our voices. This was the funniest part to me since we sang like pizza. We were really bad, but reveled in our cheesiness

“Guys, we can’t be a boyband without dance moves.” Jackson would throw out.

“Yeah, cuz three off rhythm white guys can pull that off well. I’m in!”

“We can pull them from the music video and no one will even notice!”

May arrived, the month of the show, we were as ready as we’d ever be. We were also singing a few songs with our class, so we had a full night ahead of us come the 9th. We convinced as many of our friends as we could to come watch the show. We knew this would either be epic good or epic bad. Whatever the outcome, the three of us formed a special bond that many cannot say they have. We will have been boyband in front of 450 people. We were given the opportunity to water the seeds of our friendship and watch them bloom to the tune of our own ridiculousness.


The day of, we went to school as usual and hung out after to “prepare” for the show. We decided it would be a great idea to devour some food and raid Goodwill to find clothes. We needed to be at the theater by 4:30.

Come 5:03 we are leaving Goodwill, our phones blowing up asking where we were, but we didn’t care. We aren’t very cru-

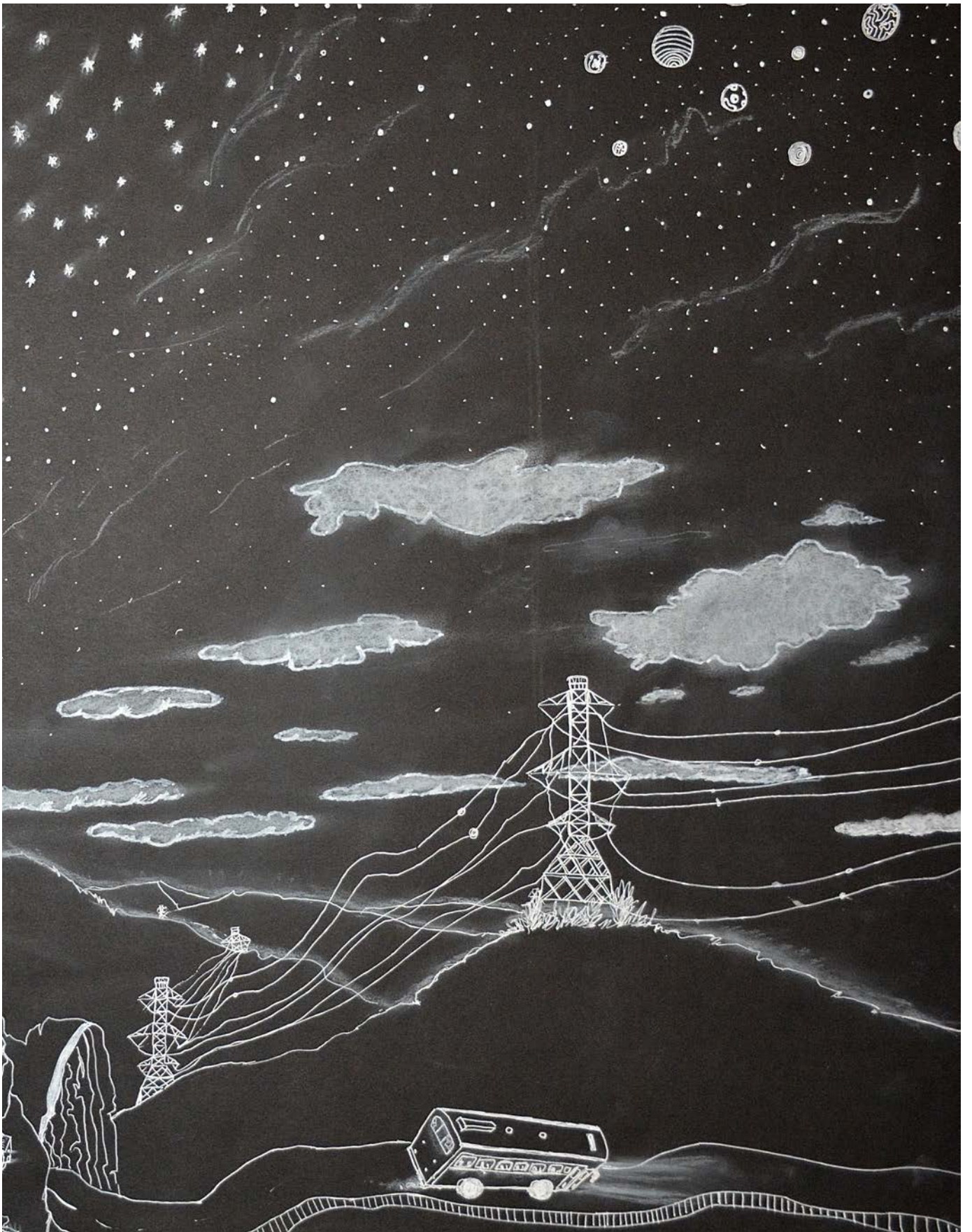
*This was the
funniest part to
me since we sang
like pizza.*

cial in any of the group pieces and everyone has come to expect this out of us. We just wanted to have fun. 5:15 we roll into the auditorium with hairspray frosted tips, white shirts, and white pants. We rehearse the logistics so that everyone knows where to go.

The show starts and we get through our other songs so the three of us disappear to prepare ourselves. We walk onto the dark stage, backs to the crowd, mics in hand. The light shines on us, everything else falls quiet, no one knows what to expect out of the loose cannons of Sierra Canyon. The music drops and people already begin screaming. We hype the crowd as the intro plays, “Best thing to do on a Thursday night!” Jackson famously yells out, we drop into the lyrics. Jackson’s on. Nails it. A little chorus, they were actually liking us. I go for my verse and have to remember all the dance moves. In the music video my verse has a nice hand drag from your face to your crotch punctuated with a little thrust. I hit the move and people begin screaming so loud I can’t hear the music in the monitors. Now, to my ear, I am finishing my verse acapella. Sean is up and he slays the lines he is assigned to. The song finishes as we are dancing around the stage and spitting out the last lines. That was when we look up and know we just finished high school in the best way anyone could; everyone screaming for you after you willingly made a fool out of yourself and pulled it off better than expected.

To this day we all still hang out together whenever we are in the same city. We pull out this piece every time we trek down to Korea Town for karaoke. Sean is in China, Jackson is in Italy, and I am sitting in Colorado. No matter how many times we are forced to say, “Bye Bye Bye” to each other, we will always reunite somewhere, somehow. 

*We pull out this
piece every time
we trek down to
Korea Town for
karaoke.*



CONTRIBUTORS

LARISSA BREWSTER is a college senior who loves dogs, dogs, and also puppies. She is currently studying Linguistics and intends to study abroad again in South Korea in the future. After graduation she plans to attend medical school and will probably spend the rest of her life as a perpetual student due to her inability to accept she is now an actual adult. Born and raised in Colorado, she loves the outdoors, rock climbing, and gardening.

DAKOTA BRUMMEL is a freshman who grew up in Northwest Indiana and then joined the Marine Corps straight out of high school. He was stationed with his unit in Southern California as a Huey and Cobra helicopter mechanic and deployed with them to Afghanistan. After returning from deployment, he passed embassy security guard training and was posted in Cambodia and then in Venezuela where he finished out his sixth year military enlistment. Dakota is currently studying Psychology and chose to move to Boulder for his love of nature and because Indiana is boring. After graduation he hopes to return to the government sector by working in federal law enforcement.

HEATHER CLARK studies Human Resources Management and Leadership. She was born and raised in Boulder, Colorado. She has been passionate about visual arts for years, however is now fulfilling her creative impulses through writing. She is an avid yogi, tandem biker, baker, and adventurer. She has traveled all over the western United States and throughout Europe. Her moment of bliss is hiking with a dog in the chilly air under the pine trees covered in snow. She hopes to one day live in a cabin in the woods.

KELTON COLLINS is a former professional wake boarder and recent transfer student to the University of Colorado. He is currently pursuing a degree in the College of Engineering and Applied Science. He enjoys writing creative nonfiction and draws much of his inspiration from where he grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In his writing, he shares experiences from his many travels across the United States and Europe. He is a free thinker and enjoys getting from point A to point B in a more unique way than others. His passion to experience life's journey to the fullest continues to this day.

BEN CRAWFORD is a fourth year Evolutionary Biology student at CU Boulder. Outside of school, he expresses his passions through rock climbing and music. He is a co-president of the Alpine Club at CU and spends many of his weekends traveling and climbing around the western United States.

MICHAEL KUSSIN is not like most people. On the surface it may seem he is just run of the mill, but everyone seems to tell him different. Whenever you see him, no matter what he's doing, he is enjoying himself. He has been able to have fun in almost every situation life has put him in simply by enjoying where he's at. He has been lucky enough to surround himself with people he loves and takes him to a state that is absolutely incredible. Even as he writes this on a plane to California with the passenger behind him kicking his chair, he can block it out and love the fact that he has the opportunity to travel so often and just zone out into some Earth, Wind, and Fire. His story was written about experiences with two of his closest friends. They had more fun through the few encounters he introduces you to than most have in a year. He hopes you enjoy reading and create some memories of your own!

Born in Calcutta, India, **DONNA DAS** is a first generation college student studying International Affairs. A lover of travel and speaker of four languages, her dream is to become a local all across the globe, though she would like to end up in the Netherlands one day—the Dutch share her propensity for bicycles and flowers. Part of her has always wanted to become a trapeze artist, even though she can't touch her toes. If the acidity weren't so bad for her teeth, lemons would be her favorite fruit. She will always find time for breakfast foods and prefers waffles to pancakes. She has a dog names Bacon and both of them love French fries. J.R.R. Tolkien said, "Not all who wander are lost," but with her sense of direction, she is lost constantly. She doesn't mind it though; she embraces it even, as it leads her to indescribably beautiful places that she would never have gotten to otherwise.

SARAH ELLSWORTH was born and raised in Boulder, Colorado. She is an Integrative Physiology major and Pre-Medical student who enjoys snuggling puppies, walking everywhere, cutting up dead things, and that incredible sensation of finally sneezing after you've been struggling to do so for a while. Her writing can also be found in CU Boulder Today on the weekly list of Ten Things to Do In and Around Boulder.

BAILEY FERRARI is double majoring in Business and Psychology at CU. She is a Colorado native who loves to read, spend time with her family, and explore the beautiful Rocky Mountains. Although she can be a little shy, she loves to connect with people through her writing. In her spare time you can find her hanging out with her friends, cuddling with her cats, or trying to be funny on Twitter.

ROBBIE GERSHON is a freshman Environmental Design major and loves to travel the world. Through her travels to Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, the Middle East, Europe, and many of the National Parks in the United States, Robbie has met so many cool people. Interacting with people in their homes and watching people endure difficult circumstances inspires Robbie to share her experiences. Robbie hopes to work in an underdeveloped country and help the people learn to use their natural resources to live healthy, safe, and happy.

DAVID GORDON is a true gentleman and scholar. Literary archeologists have been searching the world for years in hopes of uncovering his ten hidden manuscripts. David studies Economics, International Affairs, and Portuguese with the hopes of one day becoming an international investment tycoon. He enjoys mountain biking, having his papers published, and meeting potential mates. This year (2015) he has been disappointed with the absence of creative depth being added to his personal music library. He is hungry to graduate in May of 2017, advising that the world take precautionary measures in anticipation of his release from the Norlin Stacks.

REBECCA HALL is a senior at CU and is currently putting the finishing touches on a degree in Integrative Physiology. Though Rebecca finds the human body and its many complexities an epic topic of study, it is the written word (and Daniel Day Lewis) that has her heart. Her habitat is coated with words; quotes of inspiration and sonnets about love (though it has been mentioned that if she added a few candles she could be mistaken for a serial killer). In her spare time Rebecca enjoys searching for the perfect word, though sometimes she shakes it up by looking for the best word instead. She is honored to have her writing included in **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** and hopes to do a great deal of writing in the future.

ANDREW JOEL HECOCKS likes to think he's funny sometimes. He is majoring in English here at CU, and is glad to have met so many talented individuals through the program. When he's not working on a term paper or waiting tables, he can probably be found engrossed in novels by Chuck Palahniuk or Kazuo Ishiguro. His interests fall into four singular categories: the written word, craft beer, cats, and the human condition. Andrew would like to formally extend his thanks to the staff and editors of **JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY** for providing a platform for his writing, and for working with him to make The Ativan December the best it can be.

JACK HERRICK is a freshman from Telluride, Colorado. He enjoys skiing, hiking, adventuring, photography and river rafting. He is currently undeclared as far as majors go, but is enjoying all of his new classes. Jack loves to write about all things, especially things that have to do with his past. His love for the outdoors inspired him to write this piece and then submit it to the Journal. He is excited for what the future holds.

MOLLY HENZE was a Political Science student at CU. However, her real passion was for literary journalism. She loves to write pieces about her experiences, most of which are memoirs. She is a mixed blend of California and Colorado, two states she tends to find herself in most of the time when she isn't trying to set foot across the globe. In her free time she is spending time outdoors, drawing, writing, or whipping up some baked goods. She maintains a strong passion for helping others and one day wishes to incorporate her passions about writing and the world together.

RACHEL HULTQUIST is a senior double majoring in English Literature and Russian. She uses writing as a form of exploration and expression in order to communicate things that are otherwise inexplicable. In her spare time she reads way too many books, daydreams about returning to Russia, and - quite strangely - finds ballet a fun way to torture herself. All of the above can be further explored at rachelhultquist.com, where her love of tea, cats, and sweaters also becomes apparent.

MADSEN LOZUAWAY-MCCOMSEY grew up in historical Portsmouth, New Hampshire. After high school, a cross-country road trip introduced him to scenic Boulder, Colorado. He has now lived here for two years, and is a first year Physics major at UCB. In his free time he loves to hike and run, play piano and guitar, work in fine dining, and study personal interests. Madsen hopes to take his acquired knowledge and apply it in the field of Astrophysics to help advance humanity.

JUAN MATEO MENENDEZ is a senior who transferred from Savannah College of Art and Design in Georgia and fell in love with the mountains as soon as he got here. Originally from Mexico City, he is getting a BFA in Film Studies even though his secret dream has always been to be a writer. He had always aspired to be published on the Fiction section of *The New Yorker* until they stopped taking submissions, so now he'll have to write a book. As a filmmaker, he loves seeing people's dreams on the screen and hopes one day to be able to plaster his own on it.

STEPHANIE QUON is a senior who studies Psychology and Communication here at CU. She is originally from Southern California, and considers Boulder to be her home as well. She has always loved to write and connect with others through her experiences and stories. More often than not, you will find her on campus with her yellow backpack covered in quotes, wearing yellow headphones, and holding a sunflower mug filled to the brim with some type of tea. If you see her on campus, say hello.

MCKENNA RUSSEN is a freshman at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She is currently majoring in molecular, cellular, and developmental biology. McKenna was born and raised in the beautiful state of Colorado where she had the opportunity

to enjoy a diverse outdoor lifestyle. Whether it's skiing, competitive sailing, horseback riding, camping, or whitewater rafting, she always finds a way to utilize all this state has to offer. Her experiences have provided her with a deep appreciation and keen respect for the risks and rewards associated with outdoor adventures. She is looking forward to continuing her education at CU and possibly focusing more of her studies on writing.

VERONICA SACHTJEN is a sophomore studying English with minors in Computer Science and Leadership Studies. She is from a small town called Akron, Colorado, which is in the northeastern part of Colorado that is practically Nebraska. She is deathly afraid of geese and her greatest accomplishment is that she once watched all of the Harry Potter movies in one sitting. In addition to creative nonfiction, she also writes angsty poetry even though she is too old to have teen angst. She writes because it allows her to speak clearly in a way that talking does not.

SARA SEIDEL is a junior studying creative writing and business at CU. She's from Littleton, CO and can basically see her parent's house from the top of Flagstaff. She's a Leo and likes long walks on the beach, but there aren't any beaches in Colorado so she settles for long walks in the mountains. Her oldest pet is a cat named Snuggles who recently celebrated her 16th birthday. Sara hopes to someday start a blog that isn't terrible, and travel the world much like many other twenty-something-year olds. She hopes to make a career out of writing . . . and business . . . maybe advertising . . . something like that.

THOMAS VAN DE PAS hasn't slept for thirty hours, so he's listening to Limp Bizkit and using the self-hatred it creates to stay awake. Thomas was born in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, raised in the Denver exurbs, and spent two years at Wesleyan University in Connecticut before coming to Boulder to major in ????. This cocktail of Midwestern repressed-but-relentless self-criticism and suburban angst inspired Thomas to write Chess Club Diaries. Fred Durst references aside, Thomas is honored for his work to be selected in JOURNAL TWENTY TWENTY with so many talented students. You can reach him on Twitter @sensitivepapi.

KELLY WALKER is a sophomore studying Integrative Physiology with a minor in leadership studies. She has been living in the United States for about three years after moving from the Seychelles Islands. She is trilingual in three languages: English, Creole, and French. She loves meeting and hanging out with new people, cooking whenever she has the chance, and surfing every time she is near an ocean. Once she graduates from CU, she plans to go to medical school to eventually become a surgical pediatrician. She wrote her piece “COLD SHOWERS” to give insight to others that countries in Africa are not just the stereotypes that Africa has been labeled to be and that every place has its flaws. ✎



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