

THREADS



2017

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Be bold. Be a Viking.

Threads Committee

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Cover: "Globes" by Chandra Burkhart

Message from the Editors

We would like to thank all the students who submitted their work to *Threads* this year. We received many quality submissions, and we continue to read with pleasure the enthusiasm and creativity each submission presents. Of course, all pieces have merit, and we would like to publish everything submitted, but the limitations of space will simply not allow it.

It is important to note that *Threads* reflects works that are not necessarily perfect in their format and composition, but exhibit insight, creativity, social awareness, and a unique perspective. These works—of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and visual art — reflect the range of experience, culture, and imagination of the Hudson Valley Community College student. The editors relish the opportunity to travel and explore the territory each new issue stakes out.

Every year we are extremely pleased to highlight the exceptional work of the students at Hudson Valley Community College. Please plan your submission for next year.

Please submit your work to *Threads* electronically. Visit us at <http://clubs.hvcc.edu/threads> for more information.

Happy reading!

– *Threads* editors

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Embracing an Invisible Home: Five Years as a Refugee

Ruth Murcia

I was born in a place that disappeared the day I moved out. Named “Mesa Grande”, the camp was operating since 1981 in Honduras. Families, including mine, had arrived after fleeing from the Salvadorian Civil War. But, we were unwanted by the new country which forced us to live without freedom. However, the company of many others assuaged the fear and empowered us to build a determined well-organized community. The camp became our whole world where we felt worthy and happy. Unfortunately, the help decreased; and as a result, the lack of productivity and shortage of food forced us to leave. But, despite the lack of freedom, I had a home; places to cry, laugh, and play.

As unwanted people, we were forced to live without freedom. Like a jail, surrounded by Honduran military, people were killed just for mistakenly crossing the boundary. Once I saw four men holding a stretcher with parts of a human body hanging from the stretcher. Next to them was the mother who was crying inconsolably. He was a man that went to get mangoes in the forest outside of the camp.

Consequently, the terrifying scene of pain traumatized us. We felt forgotten by the whole world once more. However, people said it was safer than the military persecution, bombs, and massacres in El Salvador.

Resilient, we had to move on and create our home.

We were a massive group of 11,000 refugees, mostly children. Thus, supporting each other to overcome the adversities was our first priority. Therefore, families worked cooperatively for food and shelter. We created a committee who represented us. The committee convinced the UN and other organizations to help us with the basic necessities.

First, we got the legal permit to stay in a small area; 1.2 square miles only with the condition of not leaving. We also received food and materials; such as wood, fabrics, and seeds. In addition, volunteers from

around the world came to train people with new skills to be able to make our own things. Carpenters made our chairs, tables, beds, and the wooden shelters that were our homes. Flat pieces of wood placed one inch apart, formed the flimsy walls and thin films of metal was the roof. Clothes were made by our dressmakers. Others grew vegetables, corn, and beans for all. Therefore, the good organization made things work for so many people living in a small territory. Thus, the camp became our whole world where we felt worthy and happy.

We did find some happiness; sometimes, simply by running after the trucks full of bananas that came once a week to the camp. Getting new clothes was also an enjoyable event even though it was the same pattern for all. My favorite piece of clothing was a colorful warm sweater with horizontal stripes in red, orange, yellow, and blue. The blue stripes were thinner than the other ones. This and many other garments such as hats, socks, and bags were made by the dedicated women in the crotchet workshop. My sister also did crotchet where she enjoyed the sense of community and found happiness there.

While adults worked in the workshops, we, the children, played in a dusty spot of land, and made our own toys. I remember how proud I felt with my first kite my brother helped me to make with recycled paper and wood. Holidays especially Christmas, New Year, and Holy Week were another reason of joy for us in the camp. Tamales were the traditional food at every home. I can't forget the smell of banana leaves wrapping the tasty corn meal with a bite of chicken and potato inside.

At the center of the camp live music, plays, and folklore dances gather together all the families either to watch or participate. Every Christmas we had a new baby refugee to play baby Jesus, and for The Passion on Holy Friday a youth refugee played the crucified Jesus every year. It was very entertaining that no one wanted to miss it. New Year's Eve was *El Baile*, a time for dancing all night to welcome another year with jubilation as if we were free. We also had a chapel where every Sunday, the vivid choir brought hope with popular songs that we all sang with one voice. I still feel chills when I remember the lyrics, the guitars, and the voices:

Pedimos paz para el mundo (We ask for peace for the world
Con todito nuestro amor with all our heart
Que un dia los refugiados that one day the refugees
Volvamos a El Salvador... would return to El Salvador...)

My camp was beautiful with music, food, friends, and family celebrating together. It seemed as we could live there forever. Unfortunately, the help stopped; as a result, the lack of productivity and shortage of food forced us to leave.

My home and the home of many other children were fading. Hunger invaded the camp. With no more materials, people demanded freedom. The committee had several meetings with the U.N. officials to try to reach an agreement of letting us be part of a country.

Finally, El Salvador accepted our repatriation with many conditions. In August 1989, two months after I turned six, I watched as my hovel was ripped to pieces. It was the loudest day with so many hammers hitting the metal and the wood from all the other houses at the same time.

Piece by piece, all the homes and all the shops came down.

The camp "Mesa Grande" disappeared and doesn't exist anymore. Yet, it remains in my memory because despite the difficulties, it gave me the essentials I needed to live, a family and a community who cared for me. I love to go back to take the strength and joy of the people who valued so much the little things and built a solid town from nothing more than hope.

Swimming Pool

Derek Schmitt

A father's gentle toss
Is all it took for my life to turn
Upside down and in the dark
Oh the dark, I remember the water
Was everywhere, surrounding
Pounding in my head, my head
Has gone under with the rest of me
No rest as I scramble trying to
Try and swim up but where is up
Up where the light is I can see
Light, lightheaded as I'm losing
Breath, breathe without breathing
My lungs are heaving I can't
Stop panicking and focus on
Focusing now I begin to push
Off of the pool floor and by some
Miracle I walk on water if only for a minute
Four years old and I'm coherent
The blue is crystal clear as my head clears
And I am calm as if through osmosis
But my eyelids flutter, they can't stay
Open, open hand reaching to me
The force required to haul me out
Out to the world is nothing for this
Man who has seen my struggles and his
Divine intervention pulls me from the
Perdition my all too human and loving
Father threw me in, the water was so
Cool and welcoming, even to this day
It beckons for me to climb into its
Gaping maw of innocent potential
To cease my life, but I have grown
Wise enough to avoid such coaxing
I never did get to attempt to swim
Swim and know how a fish might
Appear to fly in its own sea of air.

Paper Thin Walls

Michael Anderson

We tacked them up, the old sheets, and they lifelessly sagged like a corpse. Our room was created; a masterpiece to my mother, for now she could sink deeper into her addiction. Meanwhile, I was sinking deeper into my anxiety.

I lay there for a second, upon two old twin-sized mattresses pushed together in an effort to create a larger sleeping area for me, my sister, and my mother. The springs inside of each mattress were blown out, leading pieces to stick out and poke me in my sleep. I look up at those sheets, their stains and rips are mocking me. They're a daily reminder of the situation my mother has put me in.

I got off of the beds and went to change my clothes; the old metal heater in the room didn't do a good job of keeping me warm. Almost every shirt I own is saturated with the smell of marijuana and mold; the ones that were not smelled like I haven't taken the off in a year. I open the top drawer and grab a pair of white tube socks. If they weren't white tube socks, I wouldn't wear them or else my anxiety would go through the roof. They're dirty, but the only thing separating me from the cold concrete floor, so I throw them on for the day.

Becoming bored because I've spent almost the whole day in the basement, I decide to play some videogames. Finding a game to play was always a challenge because most of the ones I owned looked like a cat used them as a scratching post. Luckily, Christmas had previously passed; therefore, I had a new game that I knew would work. As I am playing, I can hear people on the opposite side of the sheets. They're selling drugs or having sex; such events were usual. I try not to listen, but my curiosity leads me to tune out my video games and focus on what is being discussed beyond the sheets. I can never catch a lot of words because they whisper; I'm sure they know I'm listening. Because of this, I was always left wondering, what were they doing beyond those sheets?

My mother walks in, she looks rough. Her eyes look as old as the sheets on the wall, and her face is sunken in.

“Hey bud”, she says in a rushed tone; I could tell she was looking for something.

I didn’t say anything. I looked at her and gave her a quick smile; the video game in front of me had my attention. She grabbed a small zip up pouch and left the room swiftly before I had the chance to say much. The pouch she grabbed contained her drugs, specifically, cocaine and marijuana. The only reason I know this is because she left it out on the dresser one day, so I decided to snoop. She left; probably upstairs, maybe still in the basement. I never knew.

The day grew older, and I was beginning to get tired. My sister came in; I’m not sure where she was all day, but I figured it was better than where I was. She told me to get out so she could change her clothes. I reluctantly agreed and stood outside of the sheets until she said she was finished. I feel vulnerable, as if without those sheets, I have no way to protect myself against the evil within this house. I begin to panic, and my hands become drenched in sweat, and my heart races faster and faster.

Finally, my sister is finished, and I head back into our makeshift room. We argue for a while about which movie to put on, which oddly enough brings me joy because I haven’t talked much, and then we finally agree.

I crawl into bed and look at my sister, “Where’s mom?”

“I’m not sure, but don’t worry about her, she’ll be back later.”

As I wonder about where my mother is and what she is doing, I begin to drift off until I am finally asleep. The tattered sheets that surrounded me knew more than I will ever know. They know where my mother returns from and where she goes when she is in such a hurry. Their quiet whispers taunt me with hidden knowledge I will never be able to discover.

My life revolved around those paper thin walls that exposed the gritty truth, but soaked the evil before it could reach me. With those walls, we created a life down in that basement, and we fought everyday with ourselves to remain sane in an environment that contained so much evil.

THREADS WRITING AWARD: HONORABLE MENTION

Contrast.

Prezibai Oki

I am the first snow of the year:
O cool, calming ice.
Slowly,
I have come to the salvation
Of those previously damned by the long heat.
Overheated. Exhausted.
By the burden of emotions
Coupled with summer.

The joy of being outside.
The sorrow of a rainy day.
The heat of the night.
The bitter taste of gossip among friends.
The regret of unrequited love.

All those effervesce into ecstasy.
O sweet blessed snow.
Flowing unto me like
Perpetual bliss.
Freeze this hot aching heart
So that I may retire and reflect.
If only for a while.
Wash away yesterday’s woe
And unveil to me a new horizon.

I am the long awaited pale gale of arid heat.
I’ve come to rouse you from your icy slumber.
Let the frost of your frozen desires melt away
And be seen to fruition.
For I am here.

Flora and fauna flourish in my presence.
The sky weeps warm tears in my absence.

I am the wonders of the world.
The stars that smile upon you at night.
The distant moon
Whose image shudders in the heat of an open flame
Surrounded with love.

I am the angst in your breath
When you complain about the heat.
And I am the joy in your heart
When you complain about the heat.

I am the contrast
Of green vivacious leaves and the vivid blue sky.
I am the blade of grass
That stains your clothes
In an instant of playfulness.
I am the gelid agent of the air
Pouring from your air conditioner.
I am the sand beneath your feet
Acquiescing to your movements
And remaining there
To remind you.

Innocent Bystander

JJ Sawicki

When I was younger, I used to date a beautiful young lady from Trinidad. She was a short girl, only five feet tall, with straight velvety hair and large beautiful dimples. Her skin was dark, close to milk chocolate. She was easily confused for African American, even though the nation of Trinidad is off the coast of Venezuela, which made her West Indies. She was the sweetest person one would ever meet, who didn't only care about those around her and never herself. It would be surprising to find anyone not to like her once they started talking to her. One day we went to a friend's house to pick him up to go to the beach. On our way to the front door, my buddy's dad came out and stopped us on the walking path. He said "We don't allow niggers or nigger-lovers in this house, so you can leave."

I had heard a lot of this before when I was growing up. It was always like this. But never before had such a comment with so much hatred in it been directed at me. I was unable to speak, for I was shocked to the core. After a few seconds, I looked over at my girlfriend, and told her that our friend would not be going with us. I never said a word to my friend's father about what he said or what it meant about his intelligence.

How many of us hear, see, or experience such an event, and yet do nothing to correct the response? Why would I not inform someone of their wrong doing? How many people have you walked by doing something, and since it did not affect what you were doing, you just walked right on by? Are we so scared of what someone will think of us because we took a stand for what is right vs what is popular?

I spent a long time fighting my upbringing to remove the standing back and watching from my body and soul. But looking back over the years I can see how neither I, nor the people I was around ever stopped what was going on around us unless it was so deeply offensive to one of us that we reacted without thinking first. We never took into consideration the thoughts or feelings of anyone around us. We told jokes that were offensive and could have easily made someone uncomfortable. Why is it that when we are offensive, the people we are around do not correct us on the spot? Is it because we do think that it is

not our problem or it doesn't affect us? Some of us are not confrontational, some of us do not want to lose our friends, and some of us don't know what is wrong or right when it comes to racism.

We are all naturally racist and biased to some degree. We must admit it get better. Without this simple realization, then the problems we think do not exist will become engrained into our children. This was proven to me when I went home after being gone for over a decade, when I took a girlfriend who was Asian to the town I was raised in. When we saw that childhood friend, the first thing he said was "Fucking niggers, gooks, and spics are ruining our country." I did not have to look over this time, for I knew the results of those words. I knew she was crying. This time I did not walk away. This is when I decided to do the right thing, instead of the popular one. That was the last time I saw or heard from that person. It was also the last time I went to that town, too.

Simple Changes, Profound Effect

JJ Sawicki

Like all of my siblings, we were named after religious figures from the bible. These names were chosen by a devout catholic mother. Our heritage is of Polish and Irish decent. However, this is not about my family's heritage, but about a young boy who left home with the clothes on his back, shoes on his feet, and no money.

I came from an extremely poor family who moved every two to three months. Not because we were a military family, but because we were evicted from every house that we lived in. There were times where we were homeless, living on a beach in a tent that we borrowed, or a half-way house. Now this is not extraordinary, since millions do this throughout the world every day. What was extraordinary was there were six children and our mother doing this together in the United States. This continued until I was in high school, when I got a job and paid the bills.

Despite this, I had graduated high school, failed out of college and joined the military for a lack of anything better to do. When I was stationed in Orlando, Florida, at Nuclear School for the Navy, I decided to change the way people called me, from John to JJ. My thought was to erase my past, where I came from, who I was, and change how I would be viewed. This simple change in my life gave me a renewed vigor for what I could do and be. I progressed through the Navy for 20 years reaching one of the most senior enlisted ranks, and becoming a master of my craft, Nuclear Engineering. I was sought after for the hardest, most challenging jobs in the Navy, not just Nuclear related. You could ask people if they knew me, and most would respond that they knew or knew of me, even though I was not the only JJ in the Navy.

Adopting a nickname should not have this much effect and most nicknames are given not chosen. Choosing mine allowed me to shed my old hat for a new one. It allowed me to no longer have to explain my past to people, since JJ had no past and was created a new. After decades, I still ponder whether this simple expression of my freedom changed me, or whether I was always like this and just needed a nudge from myself to let me know that things can and do get better.

Dancing on the Trails

Kylee Christiansen

The cold and crisp air wrapped around my lungs as I was making my way up the trail, Overlook Mountain in the Catskills. It carries not only a beautiful view, but remains of an old hotel going back centuries. The air latched on as if the cool breeze didn't want to be released like a newborn enclosed in their mother's arms. Mother nature and the nurturing mother gleam with a bright shimmer.

The air became more thin as I went higher, and the trail became steeper as the shadows of the pines grew dimmer. The muscles in my calves tightened like the way my chest does when my mother is ever upset. The tight grip around my lungs is like the way stress and anxiousness feel. I could feel the wind picking up as the fallen leaves danced around in circles by my feet, dancing and twirling aimlessly creating its own special sound, the soothing sound when my mother and I used to dance together.

However, once the wind stops, I must let you go.

So, the trees tower over me and I am ant size, glaring up at those singing pines. I am protected and comforted like I was when I was a toddler. Now alone in my own solitude, skipping along the big heavy sized boulders following with the trail. I am dancing on the leaves absorbing the Red Oak's oxygen into my lungs, giving me colorful energy.

Rich with the air flowing through my body, and the light shining through the trees, life never looked so beautiful like the way my mother does in a ray of sunshine.

The higher I go the more difficult my legs weaken, but my heart beat is strong. Fortunately, the helpful oak's offer to be a place of respite as I sit down and press my spine against its soft bark. The sun leaking through the branches, the sparkling light glimmering between the leaves, the fresh air swallowed me whole. I knew I couldn't stop even when she isn't for me anymore.

Finally, I decided I had to keep going, and I had to make it to the top. The fall season is in its peak. Enjoying the main path throughout the one-way path to the top, and I wonder what the leaves feel when they

fall from the branches that used to hold them close. I find myself hopping over top of huge, slimy, and mossy rocks. Rock by rock is a straight forward pattern. Maybe those leaves feel independent being released, and even when they fall they know they'll have a chance to be alright. Crunching beneath my feet were these lonely leaves. Therefore, I select and collect the few with the most vibrant color to take home with me. Of course, bright happy greens, and passionate fiery reds surrounding me. Gliding the tips of my fingers across the bark, allowing comfort to my fingers.

The higher I get on the mountain, I noticed the air was hugging me. Just like the way my mother's arms do when I need comfort. Swaying my sensitive body back and forth, back and forth in her warm nurturing arms.

At last I notice an old lonely building behind the trees eagerly waiting for someone or something to pass through.

Behind the full healthy trees, I see sad, sappy romance of walls. The support is no longer around, but I can hear the wind slipping through the cracks in the broken-down halls that used to be whole. Climbing up the weak and brittle stairs, I tried to repair any of the concrete that would soon become weak and fall beneath my feet. Repairing damages is what I do best, it's what creates a comfort in my life. Truly, this ambience of the worn building is tangible.

Eventually I find my way to the repaired, cold steel fire tower on the highest point of the peak. My body is flooded with over whelming feelings of security and isolation as I stand there alone letting the wind drag my petite body with her as she sang. So, soft with cool sounds of love and warmth like mothers do when it's time for the lights to go out.

So, there I stand with nothing but the sounds of my own thoughts and the natural sounds of nature. The nurturing rocks supported my body when I would rely on them to keep me in place. In the same way, my mother does when I am needing her motherly advice and affection. She keeps me balanced like the rocks I find myself leaning on traveling on my mountain.

As safe as my mother once kept me; eventually, I knew I had to

let go. Walking to the edge of the peak to overlook the state of New York, studying each lake as I could sense of the pressure of fresh lake water pushing and streaming with each other to stay in constant flow. Radiating off my skin was a new glow. The houses of my childhood looked ant size, as I am now the one towering over everything and everyone. At the same time, I am no longer alone anymore in the moments.

As I closed my eyes and sat at the edge of the slated, mud colored rock. Holding me in place was the cutting wind. Eventually, I let go and allow the wind guide me, even though I know she'll always be around when she lets me go.

The wind started to hush and soon after that, there wasn't sound. Of course, when I ever need her, my mother will always be around.

The Scary Moment

Batul Amirali Bhimji

I still remember, how scary that moment was full of sorrow,
Where I had to hear the sad news of my father's demise;
All we have now is good memories to regrow.

I didn't realize that you would ever go,
Unexpectedly my world went anti-clockwise
I still remember, how scary that moment was full of sorrow.

Sad memories travel as fast as the bow releases an arrow
The pain is more than one can realize,
All we have now is good memories to regrow.

Too many memories to deal with, and agony to out throw,
I got traumatized as I prayed for you to go to paradise,
I still remember, how scary that moment was full of sorrow.

Messages of condolences came in flying like a sparrow
With the death news we were notified, as our emotions crystallize,
All we have now is good memories to regrow.

Your memories will remain in my heart today and tomorrow,
Forever I shall miss your advices, full of wisdom they comprise.
I still remember, how scary that moment was full of sorrow.
All we have now is good memories to regrow.

Why Do You Make Me Do This?

Alissa Kahler

It happened when I was 14 years old. It was a Friday night in October; the sun was beginning to set. We had already eaten dinner, and my family was settling into the couch for a regular viewing of my youngest sister's favorite movie. As I placed a bag of popcorn into the microwave, the phone rang. It was for me. A friend had forgotten her house key in the locker room, now encapsulated in the depths of the school until Monday morning, and needed a place to stay while her parents were out of town.

I knew it was cruel of me to refuse her a bed at my house, but I knew my father wasn't having it. So, I started the popcorn, walked into my bedroom, and closed the door so that we could talk about places she could stay. For about 20 minutes we debated who to ask: who would immediately offer, who could give her a ride, who wouldn't mind spending two days with her. We had come up with a short list, and she began adding them to the call so that they could discuss it, and I remained silent on the line, for moral support.

Shortly after our first call, I hear a loud slam from the other room.

I realize it is now 7:35, passed my 7:30 phone curfew for the weekend. I immediately tell my friend I must go but was not given enough time to hang up before my father broke down the door to my bedroom. He instantly grabbed the phone out of my hand and threw it on the floor, converting the device into glass and plastic shards, scattered down the hallway.

His icy glare turned to me, and with a shock, his scorching hand seared my face. My glasses flew off, my vision went black, and all I could hear was a high-pitched screech. White dots were slowly filling my vision as the ringing began to mute.

"Why can't you just fucking listen, Alissa?"

I feel another blister upon my face; I am blind again. I cannot breathe, I cannot hear, I cannot see, and yet I feel no pain. I turn towards a whisper I can hardly sense.

"Why are you such a shitty kid?"

Again, I am scalded. I feel wetness on my face; metallic, thick, not from tears. The pain finally seizes me; the stinging, the pulsing, the aching. I haven't breathed in a lifetime; I'm going to be blind forever.

I hear a familiar voice. "Brad... Brad... Don't do this."

The white dots evaporate, and I see my terrified mother. Fuzzy, speckled, but it's her. I tear my eyes from my savior and look at my steel blue father. I can finally taste the blood.

"Why do you make me do this, Alissa?"

I hear him, but I do not comprehend. I stare blankly back. He begins to chuckle as I remember to breathe, then adds his spittle to the bloody mixture on my face before turning away. I stare at my mother. We both hear a door slam, a truck engine fire up, and spinning tires on pavement. My mother whispers "I'm sorry." and rushes to tend to my terrified sisters.

Alone, I wonder if my friend found a place to stay. I find my glasses, they are broken. I fix the door against the wall, it is broken. I clean up the phone, also broken. I begin to wash my face. My nose, my eyes, my cheek, my ears all feels broken. I have been broken. Alone, I cry.

People look back on their childhoods in different ways. When people are asked to recall their childhood, some may feel a sense of wistfulness overcome them, and begin evoking fond memories of the past. Some may feel a sense of nostalgia that is bittersweet, but ultimately pleasant. Others may not be able to recall much of anything at all. When I am forced to recollect my childhood, I do not have the blissful nostalgia of joy and laughter, of love and learning. I suffer a heavy pit in the depths of my stomach, a tightening throat, a rush of blood to the back of the neck, and the immediate feeling that I am being watched. My experiences of abuse continuously linger in the back of my mind, like a noxious cloud of bitterness and sorrow, a toxic sludge you'd like to remove but cannot without repercussion. No matter your childhood experiences, if you remember them, they guide, follow, or haunt you for the rest of your life.

Racism

Rozeena Munir

What's racism? Racism is the belief that some races are inherently superior to others and, therefore, have a right to dominate them. Whether it's about religion or ethnicity, it's when people simply hate another for being different from them. Racism divides people into "us" and "them."

Growing up as a kid I was very blind to racism. I never saw it and never really even believed it was real. Partially this was because I'm so well known in the area I live, and I was so naïve that I felt comfortable. I believed racism didn't exist until I grew up and recognized it.

The first time I experienced racism was when I was cashing a customer out at my father's store as she bought a newspaper. This is also the first time I really stood up for myself as it was the first time someone was trying to push me down. The newspaper's cover story was about Muslims being terrorists.

The woman looked at the paper and said, "Yeah, these damn Muslims. They need to leave our country."

She continued on to talk about how Donald Trump should become president because he promises to send Muslim's to concentration camps, Muslims shouldn't be allowed their rights in this country and don't deserve the same respect as other people do. She then talked about how Muslim's preach that their religion is the best, but it actually teaches terrorism and war. I listened to this woman rant on and on ignorantly about my people.

When she was done and realized I hadn't said a word back to her she asked, "Hey, don't you agree?"

I laughed and said, "I'm Muslim, you know."

She then was shocked and said, "Oh, I thought you were Indian!"

After that I had to laugh some more at the level of her ignorance. I pointed to the shelf behind me and said, "See that? That's the Bible on the shelf over there. My father taught me to learn about not only my religion but others as well. And that's why I respect your religion, but

you don't respect mine. I can't have a debate about different religions and claim that mine is the best without having an educational background on them. You thought I wasn't Muslim because I didn't have a headscarf on? That's simply ignorance and shows that you don't really know anything about my religion. You also said you thought I was Indian. I could be Indian and still be a Muslim, but I'm Pakistani. India and Pakistan are countries, not religions."

The woman was so ashamed that she didn't say anything and quietly left. By this time other customers who were regulars had come into the store and were all listening to this conversation, and clapping for me in the end. This was the first time I was faced with a situation like this. This was also the first time I really stood up for myself, my faith, and my people.

Fate in the Hands of Buoyancy

Gabriel Father

Fi amaan Allah,
In the protection of God,
 We set out
 Across the sea.
Four families,
Twelve people,
 Packed not unlike sardines
 In a black inflatable raft.
This thin rubber membrane
Is the only barrier
 Between breath and submersion;
 Life and death.
The vessel gently
Bobs up and down,
 Propelled by unseen forces
 Moving deep in the black brine.
How unexpected
That so many dreams
 Would hinge on the integrity
 Of this frugally manufactured hull.
Looking back,
Turkish coastal sands
 Are shrunk by distance
 And swallowed by nightfall.
As the blue sky darkens,
Luminous pinpricks above
 Reflect off the peaks
 Of small waves below.
Parents hold their defenseless
Children close,
 Afraid that they will drift away,
 Lost forever in the vast darkness.
Equipped with naught but faith,
We drift for Lesbos;
 Inshallah,
 If so God wills.

Birds in the Attic

Gabriel Father

How silly of me
To think that they should not perch
In the trees' corpses.

Elisabeth, with an 's' not a 'z'

Monica Walsh

My mother's name was Elisabeth. I always heard people call her Lisa as that is what she preferred to be called. Lisa was loving and people loved her in return. She was a free spirit who did as she pleased and always had fun doing it.

Growing up, I thought she was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She looked just like Pocahontas. She had this beautiful olive skin that I always dreamed I would somehow inherit when I grew up. Her hair was as dark as a night time sky, not the skies in the city that is constantly lit up with streetlights and people but the skies you view from the country. Pure dark black.

I'll always be able to picture my favorite tattoo of hers, the red dragon on her lower back. It was the size of her whole lower back, colored with the most brilliant shade of crimson. It was protecting four fairies which represented my siblings and me. Now that I'm older I see that the gorgeous creature represented my mother and her dedication to us. However, her dedication to us did not always surpass her inclination to party and neglect herself and responsibilities.

On January 12, 2013, we found out she had an advanced cancerous tumor, the size of her lung. She soon began doing chemotherapy treatments combined with treatments of the highest amount of radiation someone can have in a whole life time. That is when she slowly started to become Elisabeth. At the beginning she kept her spirits high and tried her hardest to fight. Lisa was never the kind of woman to get up at six in the morning to do her makeup, not like her natural beauty needed it anyway.

When my mother began losing her hair, she became vain. She wouldn't leave the house. Her head began looking like a dog with mange or a doll that had been played with one time too many times. She couldn't wear wigs because her scalp was constantly burning and irritated from the treatment, so for days and days she stayed inside crying, trying to hold onto the last couple of patches of hair on her head. If you've ever watched *The Rugrats* and know what Cynthia doll looked

like, then you know how my mom looked. Her remarkably dark hair was almost all gone and what was left had turned gray.

Eventually, I got her comfortable enough to go outside by buying her every color scarf and girly hat you could find. She may have been ashamed, but I was not and was never hesitant to bring her out into public. I could still see her beauty though others couldn't. My prom day she wore a beautiful gold scarf on her head that sparkled bright like the sun reflecting off of the ocean. That wasn't enough when they took out her lung though.

Her skin began to sag as the little fat she did have on her body dissipated. You could make out every joint, every bone, and every space between her rib cage. She eventually couldn't speak as there was not enough air in her lung to breathe and speak.

The morning of the day she died I saw firsthand what happens when your

body stops going. I pulled up the bottom of her blanket and saw that her feet had turned black and purple. It looked as if someone beat her feet with a baseball bat. I asked the nurse what it meant and she told me it was normal, the blood wasn't flowing as fast and couldn't reach her extremities.

When she was sick at hospitals I had to refer to her as Elisabeth. I like to separate Lisa and Elisabeth now that I'm in my adulthood. It makes it a little easier. Although both parts of her were important, thinking of Lisa instead of Elisabeth all the time takes some of the pain away. Anytime I see a beautiful woman with tan skin and dark hair I smile and take a good look. It reminds me of the version of my mom who was filled with happiness, love, and beauty.

Desert Fox

Jacob Tate

A father fox was awakened as the
Radiant sunrise surfaced across the Sahara,
Lighting up the sky with brilliant shades of orange.
He heard a family of Cairo Spiny mice nearby.
His babies slept still through the sunrise,
Unable to see, hear or walk.
He needed to feed his family.
So he chased a group of mice through the tumbleweed
And then ran past the patch of wild cactus flowers.
The fox had no luck, all but one mouse had run away.
The mouse was caught. Bow-wow-wow,
Called the fox for his successful catch.
He then toyed with the Cairo Spiny mouse
Before it escaped its retractable claws.
His almost shaped eyes looked starved.
He scavenged a baby antelope, a lizard,
And anything he got his claws on.
He buried what he didn't finish for his sleepy family
And waited for his next catch.



"Little Victory" by Sarah Lamp



"She is One #1" by Jenna Savoca



"She is One #2" by Jenna Savoca



"Create Something New" by Lily Robinson

Battle for the Booth

Kristian Gutenmann

"Help, I'm under attack!" I scream as the giant, black wasp flies into the toll booth.

As my heart races, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?!" The wasp finds itself fiercely flying against the window peering outside.

I use my homemade "Spray & Club" method. The battle violently ends with another dangerous victim added to the "Bug Mortuary." Periodically, wasps find their way into the tiny, sweltering toll booth without my wanting them to.

I wondered, "How do I handle a wasp that flies in and does not know how to get out?"

There is no protocol for killing a wasp; every toll booth worker has to either choose to devise a plan for taking out the intruder or to try to pretend like there is nothing there, which is obviously hard to do. My method is spraying the wasp, at lightning speed, with a standard-sized bottle of "Expo-Marker Spray."

Expo-Marker Spray is supposed to be used for editing notifications on the dry erase board for customers to view as they pull up. My short-haired manager always wonders how the bottle runs out so quickly, and why the interior walls and windows of the booth always reek of Expo-Marker Cleaning product, like the wicked breath of an Italian man who ate seven cloves of garlic!

I spray the wasp until it gets high, as if on pot. The Expo-Marker Cleaning product has a subtle smell, not as nauseating as the Expo-Markers themselves, but definitely potent if inhaled. With my heart leaving my chest, I squirt the enemy rapidly with the spray as if I am playing a game of Crossfire, "The Rapid-Fire Shoot-out Game." Building up the muscle in my trigger finger, my adrenaline rush prevents me from becoming too exhausted.

When its wings start to get wet, the wasp has to flap its thin, little wings even harder just to stay in flight. The harder it flies, the louder its wings buzz in ear piercing loudness. Once exhausted to the point of terrifying fatigue, the wasp drops to the surface of the upper window sill, and crawls around like a two-year old.

Next, I prepare to make the final blow! With my other sweaty hand, I pick up my orange Renegade juggling club. The wasp, flightless now, straddles the window desperately in a last attempt to beg for help from the outside world. At the right moment, the flat knob of the club must be driven between the wasp and the window, like a hammer driving a nail into wood. The dense, flat, rubber knob of the club must be carefully aligned with the enemy; held in mid-hover about three inches away, and at a ninety-degree angle with the window. When most of the

wasps' body is covering the window, I drive the flat, rubber knob into the wasp. Crushing the wasps' crunchy exoskeleton against the glass window, I am careful not to apply too much pressure as the window could shatter like an icicle dropped on the ground.

Once it was scraped off the window, I lay the wasp to rest in the "bug mortuary." The "Spray & Club" method gives me confidence because the objects used act as superior extensions to my body. My method is definitely unique as others have chosen other options.

On the other side of the park, a relaxed, hip-hop loving co-worker of mine was sitting back, listening to music at the toll booth. Suddenly, he noticed a huge, black wasp, with its legs dangling, flying against the window just two feet away from his white, vulnerable face. The wasp was like a rabbit stuck in a "deadfall" trap: in the wrong place, at the wrong time. A quarter of a second later, the co-workers' brain pulled his mental fire alarm to activate his battle mode. Instantly, the world around him disappeared—the humid air, the cash drawer of money, and the radio calls to be heard.

Gone. Everything gone.

For a war was raging: the wasp, the co-worker, and a "Battle for the Booth." Without thinking, he boldly reached for a whole stack of pink park maps weighing ten dense pounds. He smacked the window like a tennis player serves a ball. Accidentally losing his grip of the maps, the momentum they possessed, carried them straight through the warm, single-paned window. The sound of glass breaking rattled the whole park.

After shattering the entire window, the stack of maps came into contact with the outer-screen. The surface of the screen broke like an Olympic diver breaking the surface of the water. A sea of glass poured out all over the road. Among that sea was the wasp, a fast, invincible Japanese Zero, ironically shot down by the Allied forces in World War II. Painful venom oozing out of its long, crippled stinger like the thick, red blood from a deer that was shot.

"Why me?" The wasp cries in agony. Its armor dented from the impact of the hot, rough asphalt, and sharp glass raining down from the heavens. The lean, powerful soldier it once was knows that the end is near. Flustered by the scene, the co-worker, with his soon to be cut up bare hands, sifts through the slivers of glass to find his lost victim. Picking up the wasp by its one remaining wing, like a lioness carrying her cub, he placed the carcass on the main window sill, known as the "bug mortuary," for its final farewell.

As a person who is deeply frightened of wasps, working at the Saratoga Spa State Park taught me how to deal with them in ways that I could not have imagined. Whether human or not, the wasp victims of the toll booth deserve to be honored in their afterlife by being placed in the "bug mortuary." The final step of death is having the wasp's protein-rich carcasses feasted on by swarms of black sugar ants!

Tamed

Kyle Pergolino

That noise never changed.
The creaking of the wooden floor.
It always made me feel strange.
And the walls always looked gored.
The darkness was the same.
The monster who was never tame.
With its jagged teeth and long claws.
It had but one flaw.
When walking down the hall.
The monster grew tall.
I could hear the unbearable noise.
That extremely loud voice.
I could never make it all the way.
I would always get lost in the fray.
But one time I won,
And the monster was gone.
And my voice became my own.

How to Be a Successful Quitter

Julio Rodriguez

During the end of my sophomore year, my peers often presented me with a question: “Are you going to try out for drum major?” The question was always met with an assured, “Yes.” I believed I was the right person for the job. I was the middle school drum major, and I had been a dedicated member of the marching band.

I lost the position, leaving me crushed and boiling lava angry. I was so full of contempt for the organization that I decided I wanted out. The loss was a hard one to deal with, but it forced me to acknowledge traits about myself that I hadn’t faced before. After receiving the news of the defeat, I was forced to return to my first period class. While walking back to the science wing, I had to force my tears away.

In retrospect, the tears seem ridiculous. Years later, I have finally realized that I would have despised being drum major. I was a member of the drumline, and I did not enjoy it whatsoever.

All the members of the drumline were friends, but I never developed a connection with anyone in the section. However, the bulk of the time I spent in band was with the drumline, so I was fresh out of luck. I wanted drum major to escape the social constraints of the section. I was sick of feeling alone, so I thought that if I had the position I would gain access to the entire band.

That was only one of the many reasons I auditioned, but when I did not get the position I thought that I would now have to be trapped in the drumline for another two years. Even thinking about returning to the section made me want to quit band altogether. So, after I was denied, I quit.

Throughout all my years in school I was constantly listening to teachers say, “Don’t be a quitter,” but why should anyone feel obligated to continue doing something makes them feel miserable?

It was not until after I lost the position that I realized I hated being in band. The other students in band were regarded as, “the band kids,” which had both positive and negative connotations attached to it. I took pride in being called a “band kid,” and my family members had also been in the organization. My mother, my sister, and my cousin had been in the band, so it was natural for me to take on the status. Band kids were regarded as the smartest, most well-spoken, and driven members of the school. They were known as overachievers by everyone in my hometown.

However, the band kids were also the most malicious, callous, and narcissistic members of the school. Being constantly exposed to

teenagers who had an inflated sense of self-worth made interactions with them unbearable. The members were knowledgeable, and they were not afraid to display just how proud of themselves they were.

I was subconsciously on the road to quitting before I even lost drum major. I never fit in with anyone in band because I was naturally an introvert. I kept to myself and I was taught to be humble.

So, if I were to give any advice on my experience, I would encourage students to quit if the situation necessitates it.

Losing drum major was the best thing to happen to me back then. At the time, I was crushed, but the loss opened doors that I didn’t have access to before. I suddenly had more time to devote to other activities.

The one thing I did miss about band was the music, but as a member of the choir at my school, I had more time to devote to singing. I developed a talent and love for singing that shaped my last two years of high school. During the end of my junior year, I participated in NYSSMA, a solo competition for musicians from middle and high school. I performed an Italian aria and had a small excerpt to sight-read. I received a 97, which meant I was going to be considered for All State.

All State is the goal of any student musician in New York State. The concert is given by some of the most gifted musicians in all of New York. I was elated, and I couldn’t help but think that I probably wouldn’t have been able to achieve this accomplishment if I had become drum major. I ended up performing with the Area All State choir, and as it turns out, a student must receive a score of 100 to be accepted into All State.

Just being granted the opportunity to sing at Area All State was an unforgettable experience. I auditioned and then performed in the Melodies of Christmas on CBS 6, which donates proceeds of the concert profits to the Melodies Center for Childhood Cancer at Albany Medical Center.

I was also encouraged by my choir director to apply to perform with Albany Pro Musica as a student apprentice. I ended up singing in Mahler’s 2nd Symphony with APM and the Albany Symphony.

During the summer, I was also invited to join them in Beethoven’s 9th symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra at SPAC.

Quitting band meant that I could devote my time to singing. The improvement in my singing voice wouldn’t have been possible if I had stayed in the band. My failure in one area turned into successes in another.

There is a belief that quitters get nowhere in life, but I think I prove that theory wrong. I quit once and I would do it again. We’re always told to stick things out to the end, but we’re rarely told to leave behind something that causes us grief. Students should feel comfortable walking away, and perhaps quitting will lead you to other talents waiting to be discovered.

Ellen

Eden Becker

I always thought it was strange the way she sat in her chair talking to herself and staring into space. She mumbled words that I could never understand. I was always confused whether or not I should respond to her. I was confused about if she was actually talking to me at all or was she talking to someone else.

She'd always make me a snack once she got me off the bus after school. Then I'd watch my television programs while waiting for my mom to come and pick me up after work. To pass time, we would play a couple rounds of dominoes and checkers. They became my favorite games to play with her. Little did I know how important they were for her and never did I consider that one day she would forget how to play.

It was the little things that I never noticed until it was too late. She would misplace items and collect small random objects that she would find around her house and hide important things that no one could ever find again. I thought it was just a part of life that everyone does. But her life was a little bit different from everybody else's.

In 2005, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Her brain cells were dying and destroying her memory along with other important mental functions that involved skills such as cooking.

It's hard to believe that she used to be the Home and Careers teacher at the local school from 1944 to June of 1977. After thirty-three years of teaching students how to cook and sew, now she was the one who'd lost her ability to do these activities.

Making food was just one of the many tasks she had forgotten how to perform. Soon after, she forgot how to drive. I remember the arguments she would have with her daughter and grandson; she was confused about why they wouldn't hand over the keys to her. They considered it was way too dangerous. It wasn't long for things to escalate from there.

Next thing you know she didn't remember who we were. A few years down the road, in 2008, she didn't know how to communicate anymore. Sure, she would repeat what you said to her, but she was not able to start or hold a conversation on her own. The disease took over her body and she was not able to take care of herself anymore.

At that point she needed to live with her daughter and nurses needed to come in and aid her. Everyday became a new day. She didn't know who she was anymore. What was once a person with so much life and wisdom became a breathing corpse, useless in her own behalf. Until the end, she sat there in her chair staring off into space. This time it was quiet. There were no mumbling words coming out of her mouth. Her memory was lost. So, who was the confused one?

The Beautiful Art Form I Call Ballet

Michela Semenza

The season that brings joy to people's hearts
Nutcracker season is that season, full of beautiful dancing delight
Dance is our form of communication
It's like watching an old painting coming to life
The magical costumes, that light up the stage
The season that brings joy to people's hearts
The growing tree, and enormous backdrops cover Proctor's Theatre
Dancers on pointe shoes, flutter across the stage
Dance is our form of communication
While the snow is falling, we get lost in the moment
The beautiful variations appear and step foot on the stage one after the next
The season that brings joy to people's hearts
The smiles in the audience captivate
Make us realize why we love what we do
Dance is our form of communication
And it's at that moment, when the curtain lowers, your heart skips a beat,
Knowing you just made that little girl say, "I want to be just like her
someday."
The season that brings joy to people's hearts
Dance is our form of communication

The Last Cowboy

Samantha Rousseau

My father still thinks he's the last of the cowboys. A dying breed of humanity, a mindset in extinction due to the new age.

When I was little, I characterized it in the way of old time westerns: outlaws and Indians. Summertime in childhood was characterized by those movies; the long drawl of them, the background noise, punctuated by indentations his tough love made.

End of summer is when my father tried to show us what cowboys were really made of. You see, end of summer saw an annual camping trip where my father could really put to use those 'survivalist' qualities he felt cowboys were known for. It started with a three-hour drive. Three girls crammed into Daddy's truck. It was a Chevy, I remember, with bucket seats that pulled down in a cramped extended cab. Blood was often drawn in battle for the front seat.

The destination was always the same: a lean-to up in the Adirondacks, in a place so remote I couldn't find my way back as an adult. Upon our arrival, there was the flurry of divvying up packs and the bickering of who hauled what the half mile hike in to camp. There were two trips made, stumbling over roots and swatting back branches, whining all the way with packs and coolers in tow. That first day was always so exhausting. My sisters and I moaning in protest of the labor involved in a trip we didn't want to make.

Daddy was always demanding. Firewood had to be gathered and stacked to a certain height. Food bags packed tight, we girls struggled to get the rope over the branch in the tall tree Daddy wanted the them to be tied over (to keep critters away). There were no facilities, which was (and still is) a bit horrifying. There was always enough energy to dip into the lake though, to ease the sting of fresh mosquito bites and remove a layer of sweat. It was a done deal after that, we would fall into an exhausted sleep without supper.

I think Daddy liked the first night to himself, though. I remember waking up on occasion to his peaceful contemplation of the fire before him.

The itinerary remained the same every year, as follows: First day we haul in, second day we hike Mount St. Regis, third day we fish, and fourth day we (finally) haul out. The Mount St. Regis hike always started much earlier than we were prepared for. It always ended with tearstained faces, muddy clothes and four scrapes, bumps and/or

bruises apiece. Legs rubbery from the arduous climb up and unbalanced from the weight of the water in my backpack (my duty as the eldest sibling, apparently) I usually gave up any pretense of grace, falling down the mountain pathways on my bum and pretending it didn't hurt.

Fishing was never peaceful, with shouts of, "Damnit, Samantha!" as I tangled lines and tipped the perilously balanced canoe. There was a squeamish unwillingness to spear worms and tears when fish were reeled in wriggling on the hook. Catch and release practices had to be implemented after much exasperation.

By the end of the trip, though he wouldn't admit it, Daddy was ready to pack it in. He never really bowed to the temperament of three moody girls. If anything, he fueled it.

He is the memory I attach to the word *stubborn*. We were along for the ride whether we wanted to be or not, year after year. Tradition. I don't know that he got the full extent of his "cowboy sprit" to stick, but I was given a memory steeped in sepia-tinted nostalgia. I remember him rolling his own cigarettes by the fire he made sure burned all night for us; there would be fearful cries otherwise. I remember running shrieking into cold lake water with my sisters and holding hands to get down the mountain.

My father, in his felt cowboy hat, suspenders and Levi's, was his own man in an old-world sense. God, how that used to embarrass me. Living with a cowboy definitely left some bumps and bruises. I don't know that I'd trade it for visions of normalcy, though.

A Freedom that Flows

Libby DeRubertis

My body sways from left to right as I sit in the car with my feet perched up against the dashboard. On this narrow winding road my excitement grows as rapidly as a wild fire. This winding road leads me to my favorite place in the world, a place I simply call... "The Waterfall." A place where all my thoughts can roam freely.

The edge of this majestic Adirondack forest is where the trek to insouciance begins. I hop over the guard rail that separates the concrete road from the woods. The pine trees stand tall and mighty. The sunlight is filtered through their crooked branches, scattering rays of light on to nature's floor. Squirrels prance around, embracing the livelihood of their picture-book habitat. The scent of fresh pine reminds me of Christmas. With the dirt patted down from its many visitors, it almost feels like home: a safe place. Making my way down to nature's greatest stadium, I am accompanied by the sound of rushing water, crashing and then flowing effortlessly to its new destination.

I slow down my pace as I approach the steepest part of this Godly created place. Knees bent, I make my way down the dirt hill and try my best not to skid down the soil like an anxious child down a slide. After successfully conquering the nearly vertical hill, it's then that the sheet is lifted from God's painting and the most breath taking view is revealed. As I stand with my feet curled on top of a hard, smoothly eroded rock, I inhale the crisp mountain air that cleanses my insides with every breath. The waterfall is the center of this beautiful sanctuary and the bushy pine trees surround every inch of it like body guards, keeping it safe. I fixate my eyes on the clear green water that reveals every pebble and stone laid at the bottom, as if I'm

looking through a window. Birds soar across the blue sky while others sing a song unrehearsed, and the water continues to dance along the rocks, everything is perfect.

While taking in the views around me, the chilling water splashes my toes and shakes me out of my trance. I cautiously tip toe over the slippery moss covered rocks to a place I can jump off of. I finally make my leap into the icy water. While falling through the air, every stress and worry is lifted off my shoulders like a weight, and when I break the

surface my excitement explodes like the feeling of walking through the doors of a surprise party. For a split second my breath is taken away by the numbing water but to become a part and be in this place is worth every goose bump. The brisk water runs through my hair and touches my scalp with the feeling of being rejuvenated. Looking around I see children carelessly splashing each other in the shallow end where the babbling brook begins. Dogs gallop around playing fetch while their owners laugh.

This place has the power to wash away every worry a person could ever carry. The sound of rushing water creates the symphony for this majestic stadium. The mountain air flows through my lungs, the kind of air you can't find in a suburban area. Every exhale allows me to feel more free than the last breath.

Every summer at "The Waterfall" I'm reminded of how powerful nature can be in provoking a sense of freedom and energy. Being able to witness the endless flow of water through the Adirondacks clears my mind. Then, I'm centered in my element and I have escaped from reality.

Love or Evil

Jason Gohra

It kills
Fuel to all actions
It drives, but also halts
The heaviest matter
But, yet It has no mass
It takes up space
But, yet the water never rises
Does it exist in life, or just in man?

Letting Go

Shiloh Staley

Letting go is one of the hardest things to do in life. Letting go of someone or something you care about or hold dear to your heart is even harder. Even if you know that letting go would fix something or make things easier. There have been a few times in my life where even though it was incredibly hard, ultimately letting go of something or someone made my life easier and improved everything generally.

Returning my first car, Susan, was the first time in my life where I let go and realized that it was for the best even though it was hard. Susan was a graduation present from my father, whom I had previously been estranged from for months. So although the gift was unexpected I accepted: because hey, whose gonna turn down a free car? He and I had been estranged for many reasons, but the main one being that even though I haven't lived with him for years or been a child for years he still treats me like I'm seven and tries to control every aspect of my life. Susan was a bright red 1993 Hyundai accept with a giant flower duct tapped to the antenna. She barely ran, couldn't make it up a hill of any kind without slipping backwards, and exhaust backfired often. A huge issue she had were her breaks, often when I had to break when going down a hill or any type of slope what so ever she would make this awful high pitched sound and once or twice her breaks just didn't work, they just let go. Snap! You could almost feel it, I thought it was her brake lines snapping but after I get off the decline her brakes return and work fine. Except when you finally get to the end of the decline I was generally flying down the hill at around 60. Luckily both times I was alone on the hill and didn't have anyone else or anything to run into, but had there been I would've crashed. Aside from her blatantly dangerous issues and (more than the cost of the car) expensive repairs I loved her. Everyone has a special attachment to their first car.

For me, my first car brought my father back into my life as well as gave me more freedom to get around town, or so I thought. The "gift" of the car he gave me was far from a gift. Although he never told me this when giving me Susan she came with a long long list of attached strings. Breakfast every Sunday after church with my father (regardless of if I had work or not), driving him to doctor's appointments no matter the

time or location, mandated dinners whenever he felt like it, a judgement of whatever apartment or school I was looking into, and a permanent invite to show up at my house whenever he damn well pleased. I work a job I absolutely love, and I'm a manager and work long eight hour shifts, and I run the shop and am in charge of the employees. I'm one of five managers and can't just "call out" especially not an hour or two before. My father didn't care at all, I'd get a text from him during church saying, "Hey meet me at our place for brunch after church" or a random text at a random time, "I have an appointment in Saratoga at 3:00, bring me." No wasn't an option. This went on for about four months before I couldn't take it anymore. I decided that the "gift" wasn't worth holding onto, because frankly, this was no gift, this was merely a hold back onto my life he so desperately wanted to get back into to obsess over. He had come back into my life and I had worked so hard to get him out of my life. He had so intensely disapproved of basically everything I've done with my life.

Around the time I got Susan, I was college searching and fell in love with Utica College (which is a whole essay worth of story as to why I didn't end up there). Also around this time, I started dating this amazing girl who I fell head over heels in love with, and had had a crush on for years. I was raised in a Catholic family (although my mom didn't really care too much about religion, that was mainly Father) so, obviously, Father disapproved. I told Father about her during one of our breakfasts and he basically told me I was forbidden from seeing her. I'm nearly 18 and I was moving out in a couple weeks, going to college in less than a couple weeks, and this guy who I just allowed back into my life, and he's telling me I'm forbidden from seeing her? No.

When we were at Utica college, talking with the woman who oversaw my department about classes and preparing for the MCAT's (the major test you must take before entering medical school), Father's sitting there, around the table with my mom and me and the department head. After the department head goes "We recommend you only take half the credits you technically need because you've graduated early and have taken credits over the summer, you don't need them and the classes you'll be taking are incredibly difficult." Both my mom and I agreed, looking at each other and nodding and as I was about to say, "Yeah, that sounds like a great plan, a good adjustment idea", Father stands up and goes "that's ridiculous, no way am I allowing her to do such a stupid thing" except with substantially more colorful language. He doesn't speak English well and spoke in his native language so I had to translate

for the department head, blushing hard and incredibly embarrassed that I had to. I hated when he did that; he spoke English well enough to communicate to her what he wanted to but he felt like being difficult and embarrassing me, so he chose to speak German instead. She didn't know how to respond. Sadly, he understood English near perfectly so I couldn't tell her not to listen to him, as he'd know what I'd said. "I like the plan, I'm sorry about him" I said to her trying to have her ignore him. Although that wasn't alright with him, and he tried to start a fight with my mom and me because we didn't agree, a common occurrence. This was a breaking point for me; I had been correct in kicking him out of my life, and wrong with letting him back in and feeling guilty for being my father's only daughter who hated him.

I reached out to my amazing mother for support and asked if she would help me return the car. At this point I had told my father that the Sunday breakfast wasn't happening, only to be faced with, "But, dear, I got you a car". Which only further proved to me that returning my beloved Susan was the right thing to do. My mom and I both drove out to my father's house, she in her car and I in Susan, all the while the only thing on my mind was the letter I had written to my father, sitting in the passenger seat, waiting for him to open. As we arrived at the house, I pulled way into the nearly mile long driveway as my mother stopped near the entrance. I pulled Susan up to the front of the garage, placed the keys and the letter on the dash and ran down the driveway to my mom's car. We drove away, narrowly avoiding my father on his way home. The letter was never talked about although I assume he read it. We became estranged again and I haven't heard about Susan or from him since, although I'm not complaining. That's exactly what the letter said. Letting go of Susan and thus the control my father had over me was worth it; the difficulty I faced after giving up my father again and the car I had come to so heavily rely on were all worth it in the end. Sometimes holding on is a lot more painful than letting go.

Letting go is hard and it can take a long time to actually do it. From my prior experiences I have learned and learned again that if you can just get the courage to release and let go everything will be easier, like a big sigh of relief. Why would you hold tightly onto a 100 pound weight over a cliff if all it's doing is dragging you closer? Wouldn't you want to let go and be free? So why hold onto these difficult situations and people who cause you more pain and stress than they're worth?

Letting Go

Jenny Caulfield

I'm out on a dock
My boyfriend and I
Push out our boat.
We head to the lake-
But I feel more Resistant.
"I love him",
I tell myself as we land.
I put my line in the water-
Try to relax my Breathing.
In the middle of the lake,
I feel us start to bob.
The bob becomes more Violent,
And I feel us start to rock.
I glance at him,
As we rock our boat.
That all too Familiar feeling.
"I love him",
I try to tell myself again.
I feel a stiff tug.
"I've caught one!",
I think to myself with Childish wonder.
That Special wonder.
That Naive, careless wonder.
I look at my Capture,
But he still seems Free.
I catch him, yet he is still.
Stagnant.
Full of knowledge, but so Foolish.
He looks me in my eye,
Not at all my Expectation.
He is beautiful,
A perfect brown color of scales,
That will endlessly compliment
Those sulky, damaged blue eyes.
He then goes from still to shakes.

I think to myself-
Perhaps he Thought,
He was ready to be caught.
But maybe, he still wishes to be free.
I look at my boyfriend.
The boat rocks.
I look at my fish.
The fish flops.
For it is then I understand,
I must let him go.

For Thomas Brown: Nov. 15, 1997 - Nov. 20, 2016

Dear Granny

Bridget Somerville

Dear Granny,

Tonawanda may not even exist on a map, but it has been a part of my vocabulary for my entire life.

You lived there in a small, old-fashioned home surrounded by houses that look the same. With sidewalks that led you anywhere you liked to go and large enough backyards for you and your friends to play tag in, Tonawanda truly felt like it was a world of its own. Thanks to you.

But it took four and a half hours to get there, three hundred miles to drive. Piling all eight of us kids into one van was not only illegal, but it was frustrating. I was always stuck sharing a seatbelt with Joseph because we were the smallest ones at the time. Look at him now though, practically six feet tall. The long drive itself was exhausting and almost always never felt worthwhile. It wasn't until we were sitting in your driveway and more than eager for our legs to feel our own weight again that we remembered why the agonizing drive was always well worth it.

We were all forced to abandon our favorite TV specials in addition to all of our neighborhood friends whenever we left for your house. Throughout the nights that we were there, I spent them either sandwiched

in between Joseph and Irene on your old pull-out couch or pushed up against the air conditioning vent on the floor. It was never exactly my cup of tea as a child when we visited you in Tonawanda. It was a difficult life for any one of us to adjust to even if it was only for a week at a time. We were enclosed in such tight quarters that by the end of the day, all we really had was each other. We suddenly became creative and made up our own games to play, or we entertained ourselves on rainy days with just a bucket of crayons. On the days when the weather was nice, we walked to the end of your street to where my father used to go to school and where his old playground still stood. As I reminisce now on all of my silly, little "troubles," I can't help but wonder what could have been if only I appreciated what I currently miss terribly.

There was an art in how you woke up with the sun yet rarely with your alarm. It was how you peeled your orange first thing every morning while constantly keeping up with Matt Lauer on Today. It was how you always drank a fresh cup of coffee on your front porch while breezing through another crossword puzzle. You had these quirky habits that never made me question if I was Jane Somerville's granddaughter. I have been working since I was sixteen years old, and I forgot what it felt like to walk through your front door. I forgot what it felt like to lean back in your recliner and smell the encyclopedias on your shelf that were brought over from Scotland a century ago. I even forgot the taste of the Canadian mints you gave us that we all swore tasted better than the ordinary ones. I suddenly found myself at eighteen years old, the busiest I had ever been. Still so young at the time, I was already using work as an excuse to not see my family.

It was a day just like any other when I picked up a pen and I wrote to you a letter. I missed you an awful lot and because of work, I was not able to drive the four and a half hours to Tonawanda. I took what I loved the most in this world, writing, and I wrote letters to whom I loved the most in this world, you.

At first, we kept up with each other really well. As I grew older though, so did you. Your strong hands eventually fell weak, and this prevented you from returning any of my letters. I knew that you wanted to because I could hear the strain in your voice on the telephone. I refused to stop writing to you though, because I knew that you truly appreciated my letters. During the last years of your life, I always imagined you feeling very alone. Although Uncle Peter and Uncle Tom were always nearby to help you, I was always so distant. Despite that you were never physically alone, it frequently crossed my mind that you might have felt like you were. My grandfather—your husband—died while your sons were all teenagers. You watched our family blossom from your very own roots, but you were painfully forced to do it all alone.

As I knelt down before you while holding Irene's hand, I remembered how lively your blue eyes once were. With my lips pressed up against your cold cheeks that no longer bled red, I felt the terrifying difference between the alive and the dead. I wrote my last letter to you during the final hours of your life. I tucked it securely beneath your pillow, only hoping that God's angels could somehow read in Heaven. My last words to you while we existed in the same world were written in

that very letter. I just wished that there was a way for me to watch your eyes light up once more in a world that seldom lights up at all on its own.

You used to tell me that you'd live to be a hundred years old, and I was the naïve one who believed that you would. I wrote that as a reminder to you in every single letter while you were alive, too. Perhaps, I was comforting myself more than I was comforting you at the time, who knows.

I couldn't bear to imagine a world without you in it. As I entered your home for the first time without you there, I couldn't help but think that you'd shuffle out of your bedroom door in any minute. You'd ask us,

"How was the drive, you guys," and we'd say, "oh, just fine." You never came out of your room though. In fact, it wasn't until I was sitting on your empty bed, staring at my own reflection in your mirror, that I realized I would never feel your touch again or hear the wise years in your soft voice. Walking away from your home of over fifty years for good was easily the most difficult walk of my life.

While the Scottish man played his bagpipe, we lowered you into the ground, and despite the swelling of my eyes and my heart, I felt at peace for you. After forty-five years on your own, the image of you finally reuniting with my grandfather helped me to realize that as long as my father had his father's eyes, you were never so alone after all.

During the time that you were right in front of me, I took you for granted. Now that you are gone, you are all that I want back. It is much too late though. I just wish that I made more time for you while you were still alive, and I especially wish that I had a chance to say goodbye.

I wrote to you your last letter, and then you died. I still had so many questions for you, but that I'll have to spend the rest of my life wondering what your answers might have been. We can't bring the dead back from their graves, Granny, but I suppose that's what we have memory for.

Love,
Bridget

Life at a Playground

Eric Roulier

I take a deep breath in as the comforting chill of the cool, early evening breeze washes over me. I sit alone on a bench at the edge of the playground as my daughter, Aurora, runs and swings with the other children. She exudes a fervent energy, like a hamster going nowhere in a wheel, as she jumps from one activity to the next. A bolt of lightning pent up in a tiny little body, she buzzes from see-saws, to monkey bars, laughing and chittering with all the other children. Her enthusiasm is pure and unfiltered magic, casting a spell over this neon hued childhood jungle.

A dull ache slowly appears beneath me, reminding me of how long I've been occupying this bench. I readjust myself to try to get more comfortable on the stiff wooden planks, painted the color green you only ever seem to see on uncomfortable park benches, but I fail completely. I determine that I must have somehow offended this particular bench. This bench despises me and is causing me discomfort out of angry spite. To distract from the literal pain in my ass, I let my mind start to wander. Quickly I find myself lost in thought about the terrible responsibilities that come with adulthood. I think of which bills I have coming up in the next week and if I'll have the money to pay them. I think about all the homework that I am apparently required to do if passing my classes is what I hope to accomplish. I think of work, gas money, finding time to study, making a dentist appointment, not getting enough sleep! Shit...did I feed the fish this morning?!

The sound of familiar laughter draws me out of my reverie and I scan the playground equipment to find its source. I see Aurora sitting in the sand box, chatting it up with one of the other little female humans. The orange glow of the setting sun plays tricks with the color of her hair. One moment it's a golden blonde, the next it's the bright, shiny red of a freshly picked apple, but glorious either way. The bright spark that reflects in her steely blue eyes gives life to the bounding intelligence and the mischievousness that I know lay within this four year old girl. I can't help but imagine how much trouble she is going to cause later in life. The thought makes me smile. Another gust of wind blows through us and it brings me the familiar sweet chemical scent of the strawberry-watermelon shampoo that Aurora prefers. It plucks memories from inside my head, giving me visions of soap bubbles and the echoing

sound of a father and daughter laughing as one. I wonder if this will become a fondly remembered childhood memory for her. Something for her to reminisce about when she's sitting on a hateful, vomit colored bench at a park watching her children.

I watch her interaction with the other girl for a moment and I can't help but marvel at how complicated life gets as you get older. I am amazed at how knowledge of the way the world really works can make a person jaded. Long gone are the days of care free abandon, replaced with twitchy anxiety and sleepless nights. None of that mattered to Aurora. She is free for the moment and enjoying life as best she can. I am jealous. I wish I was four, digging holes in the sand and having a conversation about cartoons with my best friend, whom I've known for a total of forty-two minutes.

I sigh at the thought, resigning myself back into my adult life, and check my watch. Aurora's mom will be home soon, so it is now time for us to head out. I call to her and tell her it's time to go. She gives me a look of incredulity, as if I were speaking a dead language and she is struggling to understand me. I tell her again that it is time to go and she huffs and pouts a little, but waves goodbye to her new bestie and scurries over to where I stand waiting for her. As we walk next to each other back to the car, she reaches up and slides her tiny, soft, sand covered hand into mine. She clenches it tight and without looking at me speaks softly in a voice that sounds more adult than it has any right to.

"I love you Daddy," she says. I feel the warmth of a smile crawl across my face.

"I love you too, little one," I reply. And in this moment, ever so briefly, the rest of the world went away.

Break Away

Shawna Fitzsimmons

Break away
Take me to a paradise far away
Far away from all of this hearsay
And heresy
Hypocrisy
Hippocrates and Socrates would disagree
They'd tell us to find our own way
So let's escape

And break away
Hide inside a landscape in a Monet
On Sundays
Sun rays
Floating through the curtains
We are the sunrise
Watch it grow
We can grow
Let our minds explode
Taking us to places we might never go
Deeper than the ocean blue
I'm with you

Break away
Far beneath the surface
This is purpose
To yearn
To learn
To explore the unknown
The ungrown
Discover the mysteries of simplicity
Of beauty
Who are we?

Break away
Break away from yesterday
Today's a new day
A new horizon for the rising hope within us
We have promise
I promise
We'll break away

Get a Grip

Shawna Fitzsimmons

Find camera!

Find camera bag. Zipper is opened. So messy. Irresponsible. Not good.

Find camera. Not D3000. Old camera. Bad. Bad photography. The past.
The old me. Move on.

Find D7000. Better. No lens cap. No lens caps on anything. So bad.
Irresponsible. Not good.

Lens is dirty. Pretend I didn't notice. Lazy. This is just for fun. This is
why I love it. Freedom.

Toss camera on couch. Find a surface.

I need a black shiny surface. Smear wet-wipe on black coffee table. Good
reflection. That will work. I'm
actually quite pleased with that.

Move it. Move the table. Create distance. Need a plain background. Wish
I had black. No black. Push
table long way against wall. Greater distance.

Wish I had a guy for this.

Lighting. Lighting source. Where's the window? Warm light? Cool light?
Offset the blue. Hands in hair.

Move hair out of eyes. Stretch tall. Twist your ribs. Breathe. Good
morning.

Grab camera by the strap off the couch. Feel its weight. Let it swing
carelessly. Now hold it. Grip it.

Feel the pinpoint pressure as I flip it on with the very center of my right
index finger.

Menu, shooting menu, white balance. Set white balance in camera to
allow warm colors.

Test it. Grab something. Anything. Bowl? No, it's white. Annoying. Grab
something. Anything. By my
feet - my 50mm lens? Perfect.

Test it. Put it on the shiny black coffee table I just wet-wiped. Where's the
light? Not enough. Need it directly on the subject.

Move two steps. Go back. Put camera down. It's heavy.

Windows. Light. Need more. Need to feel it. Raise left arm and reach
high and wide. Yank the curtain to
the left. Light! So bright!

I should change out of my pajamas. Why? This is why I love it. Freedom.

Turn around. Anticipate. Good conditions. Promising. Sit on the tan
carpet. Grab camera by strap. Now

hold it. Grip it. Flip it on with...oh, it's still on.

Look through viewfinder. Ugh. No good. Everything is flat. Change
lenses. Press button, apply pressure,
grab lens with right hand, push and twist and pull.

Gone. Toss into bag. Don't want you. Where's the one I want? 50mm.
Designated test lens. Darn it. Grab
it. Line up, push, twist, click. All set. Put camera down.

New test subject. 85 mm, come back! I'll use you. Just for this though.

Position just right. Lighting just right. Light at an angle. Gorgeous.
Highlights. Low lights.
Lovely. Reflection so perfect.

Raise the camera to my eyes. Close my left eye. Squish it shut. It hurts. I
know this. It's worth it.

Check it. Is it on? Flip it on with the very center of my right index finger .
It's already on. I know
this. Habit.

Position. Left hand under lens. Support. Cup it gently. Right hand grips

the body.
Flip it on with the very center of my right index finger. Stop! It's on! I know this! Such a habit.
Position. Aperture. Change the aperture. Make it right. 5.6 f stop ew no way. Open up. Bigger.
Stay in position. Raise your right middle finger to front right dial. Push to the left. Keep pushing. 1.8f stop.
Excellent.
Exposure looks good. Shocker. Leave it.
Exposure compensation. Check it. Right index presses button on top, close to my right eye. Hold it.
Dial. Slide the dial with my right thumb. Start at 0. Move on.
What now? What's next? What'd I forget? ISO.
Menu. Still in shooting menu. Press down to ISO. Choose 200 to start. Dark room though. Yes, but direct sunlight.
I don't know. Bump it up. I want some contrast. But I don't want it blown out.
Leave it at 200. Move on.
ISO, shutter speed, aperture, white balance, reflection, background. Yah I'm ready.
Wait, I haven't had any coffee.
Just take the picture. Test it.
Drop to my knees. Carpet is itchy. Lift camera to my eyes.
Close my left eye. Squish it shut. It hurts. I know this. It's worth it.
All looks good. Position. I need to compose. Where are the lines of the table leading me. Drop lower.
Bring bottom edge of camera forward. Balance. Straight lines.

Reach out. Bring 85mm closer. Create more distance between the lens and the white wall. Need subject to stand out. 1.8f stop.
Drop low again. Squish eye. Look. Steady. Breathe. Reach out with my left hand and twist the manual focusing dial on the tip of my lens.
In focus. Sharp. Tack sharp. Great light. Hold it.
Breathe in. Hold my breath. Press lightly on shutter release button with index finger - only half way.
Steady. Don't breath. Support is in your core. Stabilize through your hips.
Look once more. Lost focus. Exhale. Blink a few times. Release index finger from button.
Compose again. Find the lines. Drop lower. Good.
Steady. Breathe in. Hold it. Stabilize through core. Refocus. Tight. Sharp. Got it. Right there. Hold it.
Press lightly on shutter release button with index finger - only half way.
Take one last look. I'm good. I'm all set. Do it. Take the shot.
Click.

The Performers

Drew Garbarini

The theatre is dark and dim,
save for the spotlight, shining on stage.
Carefully placed furniture and props,
Help tell a story.
Stage lights hang down from behind the valance.
About the stage, words and body
meld with emotions,
creating a story.
The actors wonder how the audience will react.
Ideas and performance, actors and audience,
join in a small theatre.
It's not
the script and stage directions and the shining
lights they think of,
but the way
the audience ooohs and ahhs,
smiles and cries.
The actors want to entertain, adding
jokes or smiles
into each performance.
They want
to make you cry at one show;
in another, make you laugh and forget;
your troubles for a while;
they want to make a play that is more than a play