



THREADS

2022

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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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* Threads Art Award Winner ** Dr. Maria Palmara Award for Fiction

*** Threads Writing Award Winner

Memories of a Meal

Emily Beretvas

In a British-countryside kitchen that is as warm as a cup of tea and a good book on a rainy day, the father shows his daughter and two sons how to make a meal that his mother used to prepare. The counters are covered in different foods, some smell as sweet as candy, and others have no smell. The black tile floor chills the children's toes as they stand around the stove to watch and listen expectantly to their father. The lights are on above the stove, illuminating the spitting hot oil in the silver wok. The fan rattles and disperses the array of smells throughout the house. There are four people in the picture, but in memory, there is one more.

The father places the noodles into the boiling hot oil. The father is wearing a pinstriped apron to protect his paisley-patterned shirt and his khaki shorts from the oil and food. He is bent over the wok like a drooping rose. His hair is curly and storm-fog thick, his hands are weathered from chemotherapy and years of healing other people. He is gripping the woks smooth wooden handle in one hand and in the other he holds a silver spatula. In his eyes, an outsider can see sadness but to his children, he seems happy to show them how to prepare this meal.

The eldest and the middle children, both boys, have their too-big pajamas on, their hair cut short by their mother in what they call the "buzz-cut." The oldest stands with hands on the counter, his head is stretched like the wings of a bird in flight to see the noodles cooking in the oil. The middle child stands in between his big brother and little sister, his scrawny stick arms dangling by his side. His eyes in his bowling-ball head also watch as the noodles swell and puff in the oil like a wounded body part.

The youngest of the family, dressed in her favorite nightgown, stands with her hands by her sides as she also watches. Her caramel-streaked cocoa hair is tied back to avoid it getting in the food. Her stare is as determined and as focused as a parent watching their first-born baby. Her cheeks are chubby and rosy red from the warmth of the blazing blue gas stove that heats the wok. One can see the determination in her eyes to not miss a single word her father says.

Everyone in the picture is content and happy to be there. My brothers and I listen so intently because this recipe is one of the first and only times our father has told us of our grandmother. I am constantly told by my aunt how similar I am to the woman I have never met, and so I yearn to learn as much as I can about my lost twin flame.

My father wishes he could tell us more about her, but the memories are too hard for him, too painful. This picture evokes different memories for all my family that are in the picture, nostalgic ones for the times we had in that warm but damp British countryside home. But also tear-producing ones of missing someone we have never met and for my father, the pain of losing his mother too soon.

Indulgence of Thought

Ailie Malone

If you could let me sink
 Endlessly fall into blue
 And slow time,
 Slow my own body
 Get pulled down to my fate
 Let my hair float around me like kelp
 Help suppress that ringing in my ears
 With water pressure so strong I can't hear at all
 Slow, so slow
 I drift through that fantasy
 Look up and see the rays of light
 Captured in the slowness
 A rich ichor sharply cutting through
 It should be pleasant
 But I find it abrasive
 The way the light's clean lines interrupt my own softness
 That cushion of blue
 The fish look at me
 Sympathetic
 They know I'm running out of air
 I can feel it too
 But I pay it no mind
 As I look at them dance around me
 Glass scales, glass fins
 But I don't think I saw them properly
 Through the glass of my own eye

Struggle in the Silence

Briana Langlais

The bloody mass I was glaring at left me powerless, my shaky hand distracting me as I tried to steady my breathing.

Could that be my baby in there?

How can I walk away? My baby whose life I had begun to imagine could be lying in there.

Flush the damn toilet. You can do it, just stand up, and don't look in there again.

This brought me to my knees, pleading with God to turn back time. The thought of flushing my baby down the toilet as a permanent place of rest was the most disturbing of all.

It is perhaps the least talked about part of a miscarriage, the part that undeniably tears you apart at the seams you did not know existed. This is a story for the women like me, who stood up from that bathroom floor, and for those who are trying to understand the unsettling, demoralizing truth.

Being sent home from the doctor with a dead baby in my belly was nauseating, am I supposed to just go on with my day? The vivid pain I felt the day prior as my baby slipped into eternal sleep kept hitting me in the stomach to remind me that this was real. My heart had shattered inside my body when I saw my baby's heart no longer beating. I could still feel the warm gel on my belly, feel the tension in those two minutes as the technician searched hopelessly.

I could hear my voice as I worked up the courage to speak the words, "I don't see a heartbeat".

The cloud looming over my head followed me everywhere I went. I was unsettled, weak, glass, if someone threw a rock at me, I would have cracked into a million pieces. I wanted to crawl in bed, hide under the covers, and pretend this wasn't happening, just for a minute, to not feel the crushing pain that was coursing through my body.

Snap out of it, stay in the moment.

I was home slouching against the bathroom wall, staring at the toilet across from me. Light flooded through the window, reminding me that there was an outside world. Suddenly, my eyes became a projector. I saw my husband's face as he walked towards me at the doctor's, squeezing me with every ounce of affection he had inside of him, sobbing for the baby we would never have.

You are not there anymore, pull yourself together, you're going to be ok.

I sat on the floor, looking around the room like I was in a spaceship, waiting to take off.

Before I knew what I was in for, I began to bleed, heavily.

Ok I can handle this; this is going to be ok.

Then the clots got bigger. The bathroom floor felt cold, and my abdomen discomfort was becoming severe.

I don't remember the bathroom being this cold, or was it my hormones?

I realized I had never spent so much time in there. I was struggling to make peace with my husband not being allowed in the room as the tragic fate of our child had been discovered.

Come on, stop replaying the damn doctor's office and get yourself off this floor.

The toilet bowl in front of me was screaming at me, filled with a massacre of my insides that should have been helping my baby grow. I tried to stand up, but my vision slowly disappeared.

I'm going to pass out.

So, I sat back down. The projector began playing in my eyes once again. I could see the worry in my husband's eyes as he glanced at me while the doctor spoke to us. I could see his mouth moving, but I heard no words. Then I opened my eyes and there I was, still in hell.

That serene blue-green color of the bathroom walls brought me to the ocean. I was five years old, my hair blowing in the wind as I belly

laughed, running from the waves as they crashed into the sand. Suddenly, my body hunched forward in extreme discomfort. Something immense fell out of me.

What the hell was that?

I froze, staring blankly, half numb and half beat up.

*Is that my baby in the middle of that bloody mess? I'm imagining this, right?
What is that? I'm going to be sick.*

My arm weakly reached for the handle to try to end this horrific moment, yet it felt wrong just flushing the toilet. I had given birth, but not in the way I had planned. Something else came out of me, it was tube like, about the length of a straw, except much thicker, it looked to be withered away.

Is that the defective umbilical cord that was trying so desperately to grow to support my baby?

The tears would not stop, and down I looked to see the trail of blood that felt as if it would never end. I knew where it was coming from, but at that moment, it felt as if it was coming from the depths of my soul.

I flushed the damn toilet and went completely pale. I could feel the cold sweat hit me; the heart-wrenching pain sunk in deeper as I felt it run like a chill throughout my entire body. All my emotions, the heaviest of my tears, the processing of my loss, and ultimately, saying "goodbye" to my baby, all happened in one room, the bathroom.

This is what is not talked about, what no one can possibly be prepared for, and what takes all the strength inside of you to make peace with. To the women who suffered this loss, it is ok to crumble at the haunting memory of your baby's still heart. It is ok to be disturbed by the terrible things that appeared before you, that left you no choice but to confront.

There is a little piece of me that may always be on the bathroom floor, pleading with God, but the piece that walked away is a force to be reckoned with.

Ronnie the Robot

Benjamin Scott

Ronnie the Robot was great at his job. He worked in the button factory, counting and sorting buttons. Big red buttons, tiny blue buttons, start buttons, off buttons, shirt buttons, pants buttons, even belly buttons, Ronnie knew all kinds of buttons. Ronnie loved his job, he loved buttons. Since Ronnie kept track of his work through taking pictures of the buttons and storing them into his hard drives, Ronnie remembered every button he had ever seen. From 9:00 am every day, Ronnie sat there, by his conveyor belt, staring, counting, and sorting, until 5:00 pm when the factory closed, and the conveyor belt stopped.

When not working, Ronnie would sit in the darkness of the factory, silently looking through his hard drives for his favorite buttons. His favorite by far was his millionth button, a zebra striped button that went on to be part of a zebra costume. Ronnie had seen hundreds of millions of buttons. His hard drives were nearly full, and Ronnie enjoyed looking back on all his memories.

One day while working, Ronnie got a message on his computer. "Ronnie, we are retiring you today! We will be sending you up to storage and replacing you with a newer button sorting robot. Thank you for everything you have done for the factory. Please unplug your hard drives and move into storage." Ronnie didn't want to follow the directions, but he had to do as he was told. Without his hard drives, Ronnie would not be able to store any new memories, and only had enough on-board memory to save a few of his favorites.

Ronnie reluctantly unplugged his hard drives and moved into storage. He found himself in a room full of other robots that had been retired over the years. Outdated printers, coffee makers, and everything else the factory had replaced over the many years. Ronnie sat himself in the first open spot, facing a window that led to the field behind the factory.

The robot next to Ronnie, a cobweb covered box maker, greeted him. "Hello, I'm Parker, it's nice to meet you. I just got retired and replaced this afternoon." Ronnie responded with a simple "hello Parker, I am Ronnie, and I count buttons." As the day crept forward and eventually turned to night, Ronnie talked to Parker about his time counting buttons,

at least all the times he was able to save before he unplugged his hard drives. After that, they sat until morning in the silent storage room full of retired robots.

For most of his first day in storage, Ronnie spent his time looking out of the window. The warm grassy field just outside stretched as far as Ronnie could see. There were no buttons for Ronnie to enjoy, but it was good enough. At least Ronnie had his new friend Parker to talk to and pass the time with.

“Hello, I’m Parker, it’s nice to meet you. I just got retired and replaced this afternoon.” Ronnie felt a sense that he had heard those words before, but he couldn’t remember. “Hello Parker, I am Ronnie, I used to count buttons” Ronnie said. Parker and Ronnie talked for the rest of the day about their time working at the factory.

In the morning, Ronnie spent his time looking out the window. The corn field stretched as far as Ronnie could make out. His eyes were covered in dust and cobwebs. It must have been very dirty in storage.

This time, there was no word from Parker. Parker had blown a fuse. Ronnie spent his night in storage as it was his first. This time, there was nobody to talk to. It didn’t matter to Ronnie though, for he didn’t remember that there was anyone there to talk to in the first place.

Ronnie spent his day looking out the cold window at the snowy field. Alone. Thinking only about that zebra striped button. Ronnie didn’t remember anything else.

Nowadays Ronnie still sits, staring out at the field. His whole life is a lonely and meaningless routine that he wakes up unfamiliar with every morning. The nurses only come and go with meds and a meal a few times a day, and never stay to talk for long. Mail comes in a few times a month. Today Ronnie got a letter.

“Hey Dad,
Happy birthday!
I hope they feed you lots of cake and give you a big party in the cafe!
How is everything going so far?
Things are good at home.
The kids are getting bigger every day.
I hope you are enjoying yourself.
I found the old zebra costume you told me about last time, It was in the

attic tucked away.
I will probably visit soon enough...

Love – Davey”

Taped to the inside of the card, opposite to the note was a picture. A man standing with two children. Ronnie only recognized the man. The man in the picture was Ronnie’s only son. The children were unfamiliar, but both seemed to be around the age of ten.

The picture was taped to the wall, along with all the other notes and letters Ronnie had accumulated over the years. There weren’t many, but enough to call a collection.

“I will probably visit soon enough...” A promise forgotten, but on every note on the wall. Forgotten by all but Ronnie. Ronnie the Robot, who lost his memory.

The Hands of a Goodbye

Anna Caccia

They were lovely hands, petting an old sunny disposition of a black rabbit in the house.

Her hands sadly stroking black fur wondering if she would soon be crying or skipping for joy.

Her hands weren't just lovely hands, they were loving to the black rabbit who surely soon would be passing.

Because sometimes the backyard of a home could be a graveyard of one's past hugging and laughing.

The black rabbit stared up at her with shaky breathing yet somehow still a twinkle in her eye.

Her hands somehow didn't tremble until she started crying and letting go of the sunny lifeless soul of the black rabbit.

They were lovely hands, but were now full of sadness and exhaustion, filling in on her with a case of careless madness.

Sadly, her hands had to let go of a friend her lovely hands had often known.

Too exhausted to carry her away, her mother came and sent Springtime on her way.

The Wallet

Melissa Fritsch

It started with a bottle of gabapentin. Utterly boring pills really - they started out as an anti-seizure medication, but now doctors love to throw them at us junkies for everything: we get them for pain, anxiety, and as a mood stabilizer *since we can't have any of the good drugs*. Like many others, I was prescribed the gabapentin during my first tour of inpatient rehab. Now I was tearing our little storage spot just outside the apartment apart, frantically searching for the most boring pills on earth because when they're the only thing you have available to release your body from the crushing vice grip of anxiety your mind has locked it in, it'll do. Boxes were flying left and right. My hand stopped on a suitcase, quickly giving the pockets a pat-down with the speed and expertise of the most experienced police officer. Beneath that hand, I felt an almost imperceptible lump. Despite the fact that it was way too small, I was intrigued, so with both hands now invested in the outcome, I started furiously yanking zippers open on pockets. *Could this be something even better?* Strangely, I found a wallet I had never seen before.

My heart pounded heavily, my chest heaving up and down as my body struggled with my brain. I could hear that *whir whir whir* in my ears that comes when I just *know* something is NOT a good sign. As my anxiety rose higher and higher, I quickly opened up the wallet, defying the voice inside my head saying *no! Don't do this! Haven't you learned by now to not ask questions you don't want the answers to?* While that was my usual policy, something compelled me to push forward. I now stood alone, in the middle of a tornado of boxes, pulling items out of this wallet that still smelled of new leather one by one: a crisp new packet of alcohol wipes (*weird, okay*), a couple of q-tips (*uh-oh*), a couple ripped pieces of foil (*shit*), a couple of glassine stamp baggies with the tops ripped off (*they're empty - oh god what is this*) and the needles (*fuck fuck FUCK*). I took a step backwards, dizzy in the summer heat. My upstairs apartment suddenly felt downright oppressive.

How had it come to this? Steff swore up and down she had quit using when I had. Was it a mistake? I clung to that thought like a surfer to a wave, I'd have ridden it right out of that apartment if I could, but as quickly as the thought came, it was replaced by another, and another, and another, until I realized I was shaking my head back and forth in

some strange attempt to dislodge them all, physically release them from my brain's tight grasp. Suddenly, I realized I could end all of this with the very same shiny metal and plastic inducers of death I was holding. I looked down at them. I had never really actually *seen* a needle before, despite my extensive experience with the drug scene. The plastic felt smooth; I could feel the slightly raised numbers, like those braille letters I would sometimes run my fingers over at the ATM. The bright orange hub felt dangerous somehow, like a red flag that screamed "put me down! Don't even *think* about it!"

As I ran my fingers along the cool metal tip, I felt shudders down my spine. It was smaller than I expected somehow, and yet so sharp, sharper than the very best knives I had used in the professional kitchens I'd worked. I slowly crouched to a sitting position, lowering myself onto the dirty floor, leaning on one of the boxes I'd tossed aside earlier in my rampant search. The thoughts followed me, raining down on my consciousness like a storm. They crashed against each other loudly, bouncing off my hard skull until I shot up, screaming "STOP!" The thoughts did not obey my order. *I got clean for her. Every day, I go to the clinic and drink my ninety milligrams of bitter liquid for her.* My eyes suddenly burned with self-righteous tears, as if even they rejected this thought, but my brain stuck with it nonetheless because it gave me something to be angry about, and I much preferred anger to sadness. Being sad was for schmucks.

But anger, on the other hand, gave me the energy to raise myself up, put everything back where I found it, neatly of course because that is how Steff liked it, and wait. I shoved the alcohol wipes, the q-tips, and the foil back where they belonged, along with the sadness, the emptiness, and the regret. The needles and the baggies I kept out, and with those, I stored my anger and resentment. Together, we waited for her to get home. Then, I would calmly tell her what I found, and I would convince her to never touch the needles or the baggies again. We would throw them away, with my anger and resentment, and everything would be ok again. I had to believe this, that I could make things right again somehow, that I could pick up the broken hourglass of time and glue the pieces back together, put the sand back inside again, and we could start over like when I used to play board games as a kid, just start the time over, start our lives over.

The Human's Soul

Imran Khan

Your soul is so light, that flies here and there,
Thinner than air, more pleasant than the breeze, and sweeter than love,

For it carries nothing but hope and good news, humility, and prosperity,
It encompasses all that is worthy to please the heavens and all on earth,

When the soul fared well to the heavens, when it was welcomed by the earth,
The heavens burst with sadness, but the earth hugged it well,

It is raised in the womb of the earth, it suffered great trials at every stage,
It became harder than iron, stronger than mountains, yet still soft in manner,

And as the soul flows, it flows with dignity and honor,
For it is noble and loves those with grace, with nobility,

It is a soul of a country man, that knows nothing, it grew nothing,
But to sow seed, setting it into the land, and wait with a hope that never ends,

Even when in a city of sin, it still possesses the greatness, the holiness,
The quality of generosity, the selflessness, and the forgiveness,

As none have seen evil in it nor the tendency of foolishness as it walks,
Its movement is full of grace, instilling reverence, yet everyone dares to talk with it,

Strong in belief, that nothing is impossible, and staying tall,
Tall against lust and desires, and full of humility, and full of light,

Like it has seen nothing, nor endured suffering, but the spirit of spreading
The seed of goodness, the spirit of service, and of course good words.

Grateful for My Foundation: Why My Upbringing in New York City was Essential

Octavia Douglas

New York City is one the best places to grow up in. Being a native has been advantageous to my character, my independence, rapid response coordination and development in general as a human being. There is always this stigma with New York City being noisy, crowded, unfriendly and gritty. That may be true to an extent, but those are the elements that assist with establishing an edge in your personality that makes you more resilient than most. And life is complicated, messy, and difficult. Resiliency is key to survival!

I grew up in Brooklyn, in the Bushwick neighborhood. During my childhood, it was an extremely economically depressed area, rife with drugs, violence, and death. However, taking the negative aspects out of the equation, I grew up in a plethora diversity. My neighbors were Black, Puerto Rican, West Indian and inserted sparingly was Italians, Indians, Polish and Eastern Europeans (Yugoslavians, Romanians). I went to school with children from all these backgrounds and was exposed to their cultures, something that made me able to see beyond race or stereotypes early in my life. I have never experienced culture shock, and I feel comfortable in spaces with people that don't look, live, or act like me due to this.

As I mentioned before, I was raised in humble means, which meant my parents did not have money to take us on vacation. Who needed to board a plane in the most exciting city in the world? Believe it or not, in this concrete jungle, there were a variety of parks of my parents had to choose from for us to explore, our favorite being Central Park, in Manhattan. We also visited local libraries, Botanical Gardens, the Bronx Zoo, Coney Island, and museums – The Museum of Modern Art (or MOMA) - being my favorite, Broadway Shows - Cats was my favorite, but I saw over twenty, regularly. My parents made sure we left the neighborhood, even if it was to walk in other ones, just to see how they lived. I grew up in a run-down railroad-style apartment in a tenement building. But I knew there was better out there. Brownstones,

Penthouses, Tudors, were all in my peripheral as we navigated through different neighborhoods by foot.

Dining in New York City is an experience in of itself. Being a latchkey kid, my parents worked long hours and often left money on the counter for my siblings and I to secure food. I ate Chinese food, Italian food, Spanish food, Caribbean food, as often as home-cooked meals. Caribbean food was my favorite though, and the most cost-effective meal for me as a child that cost under a dollar at the time was a Jamaican beef patty stuffed with mozzarella cheese and cloaked in cocoa bread. There also was a Jewish Delicatessen on the corner. I was well-versed in the magic of toasted knishes with mustard as well as bagels smothered in cream cheese and lox.

Street food was something effortless. I could walk to the corner and grab a “Bloody Frank”, a Sabrett’s hotdog smothered in ketchup. There were also Greek vendors that offered chicken, beef, and lamb gyros drizzled in succulent white sauce. Older Spanish men walked the neighborhood with blocks of ice and fruit flavored syrups to make piraguas, Spanish-style slushies, for fifty cents a cup.

My palate was well-developed, and I had no fear of trying things out because in my environment there was so much to choose from. In another setting outside of New York City, I could not fathom the availability of the aforementioned had the community not been as diverse.

Independence was not a rite of passage in New York City; growing up, it was a necessity. At five years old you, were sent to the nearest bodega or deli to run errands for your parent or elder neighborhood. You had to know how to count change that you received from the merchant too at a young age; that was mandatory. By ten years old, you were so conditioned by public transportation, it was nothing for you to take a bus locally or take a train into the city by yourself. I recall being twelve years old traveling to my own doctors’ appointments in Manhattan alone. It was not considered a big deal; my parents work too hard to escort us places. You had to have a toughness about you that kept you protected but also openness in your personality that did not get shocked at whatever you encountered enroute to wherever you had to go. As a child I would navigate my neighborhood; stepping over hypodermic needles, crack vials to walk to my local library for story time, and this was perfectly normal as well as acceptable. It wasn't so much that we

were jaded as we were just comfortable even in chaos. Children that were confined, not allowed to leave their “stoop” (porch) or allowed to leave the block were few and they were shunned for being treated as a baby. For the most part, it was understood that the adults surrounding us were there for guidance, direction, and discipline but not there to escort us through the trivial parts of life we could accomplish ourselves.

Growing up in New York City was a gift, and it shaped every single facet of me into the woman I am today. I was blessed to be in an environment that readied me for the world, so that as an adult I was experienced enough to practice discernment in situations that may have confused people from less vibrant or shady environments. That knowing; the ability to “spot a con”, the inner liberation to embrace a good time even if it looks shady initially, was instilled in me through New York City. I am to move confidently through life comfortable in every setting because of where I grew up.

“If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere”-Frank Sinatra.

She Mustn't Know

Amanda O'Neil

You mustn't talk about that
In front of the little one
She is too young to hear it
She mustn't know

If she is too young to hear it
What, then, to live it?
Their comfortable words
Were a feeble shield to her

abuse
assault
rape

She needn't know those terms
They only create fear
Gleeful laughter on the playground is her only focus
Scorching metal slides, her only concern
She mustn't know

If the terms would create fear
What, then, to be in the dark?
She has lived in anxiety's clutch
Ignorance was not her friend

As she grew older
She shared such grim words
Please don't talk about that
It is unpleasant for us to discuss it

If it was unpleasant to discuss it
What, then, to remember it?
Her plight was to be faced alone
They mustn't know

Upstate Farmland

Ethan Keller



Kiss Me

Hannah Boehlke



Along the Rails

Sierra Burniche



Carousel

Sierra Burniche



Rainy Night

Sierra Burniche



Last Night's Vision

Davis Snyder



Through the Leaves

Kiera McHerron



What is Even Real?

Alex Nagy



Turned Down

Riley Wilensky



Skeleton #3

Stefan Urban



Wide Lens

Stefan Urban



The Peace of Loss

Kayleigh Krug

There was a mournful feeling in the air. Nothing felt right. Nine weeks prior, Nana was a healthy, vibrant woman. Little did we know, cancer was already eating away at her body. Her body, so fragile and weak, simply could not keep up with the aggressive cancer that was taking over.

Though only a few hundred feet, the walk from the parking lot into the funeral home felt like a mile. My life was broken, and all I wanted to do was sew the pieces back together. The time had come that I had to say “goodbye” to my nana.

Truthfully, seeing Nana’s lifeless body laying still in the casket was the most difficult part. The gorgeous, wooden, mahogany casket with ivory lining was the most perfect choice to lay Nana to rest in. As I knelt by the casket, tears flowed down my face. The flow of tears was as steady as the rain during a thunderstorm. To be honest, my life felt like a thunderstorm. It seemed like everywhere I turned, another strike of lightening hit with the rain starting to fall even harder than before. With my parents and siblings by my side, also letting their tears run free, my heart was broken and calm all at the same time.

Shattered like a dropped piece of glass, I wondered how my heart was ever going to be repaired. Kneeling by the casket, I could not help but think why my life had come to this point. Why did I have to experience this pain? Why was my family the one who had to watch their loved one slowly slip away?

A hand gently placed itself on my shoulder offering some comfort as the tears continued to leak from my eyes. It was my dad. The slow, horizontal movements on my back seemed to calm my aching heart, allowing some slow breaths to appear amongst the fast, hyperventilating breaths.

As I stood up to allow other family members to say “goodbye”, I was met with a loving embrace from my uncle. His arms wrapped around me like a warm blanket on a cold winter night. Any control I had over my

body vanished in a split second. I had completely let go and just sobbed; it was all I could do. With my head still on my uncle's shoulder, the wet spot on his blue dress shirt seemed to become wider. Black marks from the mascara applied to my eyelashes joined the wet spot on my uncle's shirt. For the brief few moments my uncle held me in his arms, my heart seemed to be glued back together by the strength of his arms around me.

My tears, though still present, became less frequent as I started to compose myself. "Deep breaths" is what I kept telling myself. My head, now starting to pound from the tears I had just shed, could not comprehend everything. Filled with confusion, everything in my brain appeared to be jumbled up. I just needed a break.

A few steps outside the door lay a water station. As I wandered over, with my tears mostly subsided, I grabbed a cup and slowly started to watch the water rise. The water, appearing as fast as my tears did, now filled the cup. The cold river of water flowed down my throat as I started to move towards my family.

Entering back into the room where everyone was, I could not help but look at the casket. The casket was the most gorgeous eyesore I've ever seen; it just kept jumping out at me. With more hugs and loving words circulating the room, my heart oddly started to ease itself. Looking back at the casket I saw a lifeless woman, but I also saw a painless woman. The pain that ran rapid through her frail body for three months had finally subsided. For the first time in nine weeks, Nana was out of pain. The most glorious thought kept bouncing throughout my mind.

"Nana is at peace" is all I could keep telling myself. Those four words put me at peace. Looking around the funeral home, peace started to overwhelm me. My body, once shaky, had become still. I said "I love you" to all my family and accepted it was time to go home. I was still as heartbroken as I was when I walked through the funeral home doors, yet I had accepted that I had to say "goodbye".

In time, I knew my heart would heal. A piece of my heart will forever be gone like a ring flushed down the toilet, but the rest of my heart would slowly be pieced back together. Even amongst the brokenness, peace still finds a way.

thank you for locking the door

Charlie Crocker

i wanted to be proven wrong.
to push through the stage curtains into something better than this,
although i didn't know yet what that might be.
to be told that something was broken, these mechanics aren't right,
that this isn't how it should have all turned out.
it was just a bad dream, and it was time to go back to bed.
this house inspires a soft and bitter hopelessness
kept in between the notches of my spine,
and a litany of anxieties
hidden underneath crudely bitten fingernails.
all of these crushed expectations that rot the frame from the inside out

how we measure time is in
the growth of things, decomposition, acceleration.
i rusted into the metal bed frame
and fell through my mattress every night for a year straight.
i watched my hands go right through my own body.
there are no instruction manuals for deconstructing your own hardware.
the sorting out of our machinery:
the metal shell around the heart,
the muscle of the heart around the songs,
the songs kept safe by gunpowder and oxygen.
i packed two bags and left the kitchen faucet running.
i hammered the gas pedal indefinitely and filled space with white noise,
vomiting exhaust fumes and working against the car's engine.

how much did it cost you?
we wrote down a list of all the things that i owe you
and you sewed it into the skin on my knee
so that i couldn't forget.
i'm calling to thank you for staying with me that night,
for watching the dogs, and for keeping things stable.
i said it from the beginning,
that the only way out was brute force
and i was right.
but these are things that nobody wants to hear

escape brings no catharsis
 only a certain tiredness that aches and won't stop aching
 even if you sleep all day, even if you ask it nicely
 cold december sunlight creeps through the cracks in the roof
 it's only through looking back that we notice
 it does look really and truly beautiful.
 thank you.

Australia's War Against Emus

Adam Scott

Did you know that Australia waged a war against several large flightless birds? This conflict is really interesting of course because I'm fairly certain this is the only war waged on emus in the history of mankind. Some of the many causes of this purging of poultry were the return of soldiers to Australia from WWI and receiving farmland from the government in Western Australia, the migration of around 20,000 emus from the coast of Australia after the conclusion of the breeding season, and the Australian government's refusal to subsidize the ex-soldiers for their land and crops. Basically, 20,000 emus waltzed into a real powder keg situation at the absolute worst time.

After World War I, a large number of soldiers began returning to Australia and many of them were rewarded farmland in the western part of the country. The government then encouraged the farmers to increase their production of wheat crops with promises of subsidies to stave off the effects of the great depression on wheat production. Despite the government's effort, wheat prices continued to fall, and the farmers were not given the financial support they were promised. In October 1932, things began to boil out of control with the farmers refusing to deliver their latest crop of wheat if the subsidies were not provided.

Right about when you thought things couldn't get any worse between the government and the Australian farmers, as many as 20,000 emus began migrating inland from the coast after the end of their breeding season. The emus found the new farmland to be the perfect place to set up shop due to the increased availability of freshwater and the newly cleared fields. The emus began eating and ruining many of the farmer's crops and destroying fences which allowed other animals to enter into the once-enclosed area to further destroy crops as well. With the farmers already upset at their government, this unexpected migration did not help. They began to plead with the government asking for assistance with the invasion of the giant flightless birds. Being that many of the farmers were veterans of World War 1, they specifically requested the deployment of soldiers armed with machine guns to take care of their bird infestation. Having just returned from the war, the ex-soldiers were quite sure the effectiveness of machine guns on enemy soldiers would translate to similar effectiveness in destroying their newfound flightless foes.

With the government trying to avoid a full-scale revolt from the farmers, they saw a military intervention against the emus as a pretty good deal. A worthy and cost-effective alternative to handing out the subsidies they had promised. The government agreed to send assistance as long as the farmers fed the soldiers and paid for the ammunition. What happened next surprised everyone involved: the emus turned out to be harder to kill than initially expected.

The soldiers were having trouble even getting in range of the birds, and on top of that, the birds began splitting into smaller groups than before, understanding that perhaps they were being threatened. The soldiers continued to try different tactics and ended up killing only a few thousand birds, which was widely regarded as a failure. With the deployment of the troops being highly criticized, the government ultimately opted for posting a general bounty on dead emus that any person could cash in on. Since then, the farmers have requested further aid but have been denied a formal intervention each time since. Not only is Australia the only government in human history to go to war against birds, they are also the only country to lose a war against birds.

Explosion of Culture: A Triqui Party

Yazmin Hernandez-Merino

The spark of light from the Castillo de polvora explosion can get as hot as a bonfire, but we all gather close to it when the sun goes down. You might not think so, but you probably have seen a Castillo de polvora in movies where Mexican fireworks are screeching in all directions. Like our fireworks, our community is loud and filled with bright colors and traditions. My background is a unique and strange combination. My culture is an incredibly special part of me. I have developed and experienced many things as I grew up. Triqui traditions are not well-known, even among most Mexicans, but the parties of my country put it on full display. My people celebrate with each other and cooperate to ensure the needs and wants of everybody. We help each other like brothers and sisters. While sharing in the community, for the Triqui people, there is always a little spice at the parties that might shock some outsiders.

When I was a child, I used to accompany my grandmother to community gatherings. They could be wedding parties, baptisms, Quinceanera's, or funerals, which are kind of weird, but all the parties were the same. We lived in a small village within a town. Those in charge of organizing are usually leaders in the village. They will invite everyone to come to the party. It is not private, and people can come whenever they want. The party is open to all, but everyone must contribute money for food and music. The celebration is organized in front of a church which normally is big enough for all people to fit in but not always if other villages come to celebrate too.

While I walked with my grandma to the party for the preparation, I noticed that there were quite a few people helping with the party. Several men on one side were helping with the decorations. They stood on the ladders holding the "Papel Picado," which is a very colorful, vibrant festoon that makes that party more attractive. It is a kind of Mexican banner. Others put chairs and tables out for people who are coming. In front of the church, there were musicians ready to play music. Their music is so loud that you can't even hear yourself talk, which is annoying. Our town treats the musicians like The Beatles. They are

famous in our village, and they play all around the area.

On the other side, away from the church, there is a shack made for cooking only. The house is very poor looking and empty. It has only two doors and no windows, but there are some tiny slits between the wooden planks of the walls that let out the smoke and steam and provide a beautiful view of the people in the streets. When I stepped inside the shack, I saw a bunch of women. A few of them were sitting in chairs, chatting and gossiping as they worked on the food. Others were helping with the lighting of the fire using firewood. Once the fire starts, you have to get out of the shack because it makes a lot of smoke. In one area of the house, there is a place saved for the butcher to prepare the meat for the caldo de rez (spicy beef soup). He was a very old man who had two assistants to help him out. When I was younger, I was very frightened of him with his serious face and sharp knives, but he was well-known and had many, many years of experience.

You know the party has started if you hear the music beginning to play. With my eyes on my little view, I could see many people sitting at the tables. Many others were still standing. Women dressed beautifully with their “Huipui,” a beautifully handmade, red dress that makes everyone stunning. The men were setting up the Castillo de polvora, a magical display of fireworks which are dazzling to the eye even before they are lit on fire. But that is for later. First, we must eat.

Without announcement, the women file out of the shack holding platters overflowing with food. The people with seats quiet down, and I could see that they were ready to eat. Around them, many people stood waiting for an empty chair, so they could eat too. As the people ate, my grandma stayed in the shack, preparing platter after platter of delicious food. The children ate last, so I was starting to feel hungry watching all the plates go out. Luckily, my grandma was generous in slipping me a slice of beef or a piece of fruit as they worked.

After all the people had finished eating, half of them leave to go home and rest before the night’s festivities. Men begin moving chairs and tables aside to make more space before people come again to dance and go crazy. In one area there is always a group of men smoking and drinking Cerveza. In other places, women are helping to clean out the area of dirty dishes and leftover food, while my grandmother takes her break. I was so bored that I decided to go home by myself because my grandma couldn’t leave until the party was over.

The sun goes down as it gets darker. I could hear fireworks already exploding in the sky. I ran as fast as I could to not miss the Castillo de polvora. When I got to the party, there was a crowd of people, even more than before. I went to find a good place to have a better view of the Castillo de polvora. It was dangerous to be at the front, so I went to the other side where my grandma was sitting. People started to gather more and more. Music was already playing, people gathered to dance. It is normal to dance next to the Castillo de polvora since it is a tradition. I saw other people gathered around watching it in awe. The sound was deafening. People laughed at each other with big smiles on their faces. In one area, people were dancing. Music was playing, but you could not hear it over the explosion of fireworks. I kept my eyes open and stared at the Castillo de polvora. It was very brilliant and magical.

People aren’t different. Culture and traditions are different because my village keeps its culture the way the older generations used to. Mainstream Mexican culture is a rich, colorful, vibrant, and more modern way to celebrate parties. They have bigger cities and more modern houses. They have festivals down the streets, dancing wearing traditional clothes. They’re normally celebrated separately when celebrating weddings, funerals, Quinceanera, or baptism. Around the world, everyone knows Spanish is the language used in Mexico. Not everyone knows there are even more indigenous languages spoken in some Mexican villages. My village speaks Triqui, an indigenous language. Since Spanish became more known, we have to learn it too. The older people in my village have afternoon classes where they learn how to write and speak Spanish. It was lovely to watch my grandmother as she writes letters in her notebook. We normally tried our best to use Spanish to communicate with other people in Mexico. One time, when I was in Mexico City for a visit with my grandmother, I was amazed since it was my first time ever being in a city that is much more advanced than my village in Oaxaca. Although it is the same country, I felt like I was in a foreign land.

Our party finished almost in the middle of the night, after the fireworks from the Castillo de Polvora finished exploding. There are small black rocks raining from the sky caused by the fireworks. Your hearing starts to come back after all the whistling and noisy sounds of the Castillo del Polvora. People started whistling, music stopped, and everyone just looked so consumed by the party. Men talked nonsense with each other while being drunk. Older women finally getting drunker than ever, still dancing without music in the background. Other women just getting

out of their seats, lifting their children to take them home. When I was comfortable on the chair with my tired eyes already wanting to close, I heard my name. I did not make any movement and pretended to be sleeping. Firmly, my grandmother grabbed my shoulder and shakes me awake. The night started to get cold, and my mother gave me her huipil. I covered myself in it like a blanket to warm me up. I took a final look back while holding my grandmother's hand and walked home.

Small village celebrations are intense, but they represent my culture. You could have big technologies and wealth, but we have our unique colors and wild celebrations. As days pass by, I can let go of the memories, but my village is part of me, and I can never let that go. Although some people find us strange, our strangeness makes us special.

Little Book

Anna Caccia

I will finish you, your pages turning.

Please don't cut the tip of my finger.

Please don't cut my edges as I flip the paper over and over.

Every line of your eyes, I try to read them.

I can't help but wait for you to be finished with

your story.

Slow

Slowly

Slowing

End

Ending

Ended.

Last Train Home

Connor Danz

I must let you go out of my hand, as your story comes to a pitiful end,

ending slowly and then

boom.

Little book, I have finished reading you.

ZOOM

Trains blow past each part of the terminal in the Washington DC Amtrak station, the trains are as rushed as the men and women who board them, all anxious to return to their nightly rituals as their nine-to-fives all end. All of them frantically scurrying through the terminal, pushing and shoving to get to their designated train before it was full and departed. One of those people on this winter's eve was an older gentleman by the name of Edward A. Finley, age 72. Finley worked a small day job as the janitor at the Smithsonian Museum of American History. Like the other people around him, he was also looking forward to returning home after a long day of work.

Finley left work at his usual time of 6:00 PM, after doing his usual last-minute checks of all of the displays and making sure all of the guests were gone. He was also tasked with locking up the building at night as he was the last person to leave. Once the building was all locked up, Finley would complete his nightly routine by grabbing the evening edition from the local newsstand as he heads to the station to catch his 6:30 PM train out of the city. After a short walk to the station, Finley found himself reading the newspaper to kill time for his train. He waited, waited, and waited, until looking up to find that his train was running behind on its stops and wouldn't arrive until 7:15 PM.

After reading, and then re-reading his newspaper several times to the point where he could quote the story about the downed plane so many times he could recite it, his train, at last, crawled into the station. Finley had an odd feeling as the train approached, not another soul was left in the train terminal, and when he stepped aboard the train, there was no one in the cars either. Before he could question his peculiar circumstances further, there was a creaking of the doors behind him as they locked shut. Despite being startled by the uncomfortably loud door lock and the emptiness of the car, Finley decided to keep his head down and ignore it all. After quite a long pause, despite no one else boarding, the train finally began moving towards its destination. Curious what time the train had departed to calculate his arrival time, much to Finley's surprise, the clock read 19:42.

“That’s odd, when did they switch to military time?” Finley thought out loud to himself. Even though it had been years since he had to use military time, he could never forget how to use it.

Finley also began to notice something strange, the route the train was going on, it wasn’t the same surroundings as his usual train route. Instead of the usually wooded area with a few abandoned buildings, the train strolled past a peculiar-looking hospital. It was quite an old-looking building, but not due to wear and tear of time, to the contrary, it looked fully functioning but it was old in design like it stepped out of the early ‘40s. But before Finley was able to remember where he had seen the hospital before, it had vanished as he had gone through the tunnel with the clock reading 19:43.

Despite now going down a corridor of miles of unknown dark, cement tunnels, Finley was unable to shake the hospital he had seen. It seemed so familiar yet he couldn’t put his finger on it. It seemed like an eternity had passed of dark concrete tunnels until the next new view, an old schoolhouse. As with the hospital, this too felt familiar, but there were more vivid emotions attached to seeing the old schoolhouse. Suddenly, the train car had faded into a schoolyard field after a rainstorm. There was mud everywhere, the kind adults curse at for getting on their slacks, and that little kids dive into to have fun. Ever so slightly off in the distance, on the other end of the field, Finley was able to see a group of boys playing a game of kickball. But just as vividly as that by-gone era had come to him, it left in favor of cement walls. Finley checked the time again.

“Good heavens! It’s 19:52, Maria is going to kill me when I get home,” Finley jumped in a panic. His middle-aged housekeeper likes to keep his supper warm and make sure he doesn’t eat alone, he could only imagine how worried she was. Finley thought to himself I should really carry that phone she got for me.

Finley decided to sit back for a little while in the peace and quiet of his train car, closing his eyes for a couple of minutes. When he had opened them back up, he was shocked by the time that was on the train clock. 19:62.

What could this mean? Military time is held to the same sixty-minute system as standard civilian time, why would it be going beyond that?

Before Finley could ponder his question, he once again emerged from a tunnel onto a new scenery set.

Once again, he saw himself looking upon a field, but this was not the same field as the one where he reminisced about the youthful games of a bygone time. No, what lied before him was the hell he had escaped many years ago. Gazing at the field, he saw explosions everywhere, greying the green ground around him. Not only was there the fire scorching everything from the fields to the trees, but bodies littered the scene. Bodies in the trees, bodies limp on the ground, bodies engulfed by flame, they were everywhere. This time, Finley saw soldiers in the distance, who, despite being well aware of the death around them, continued to endlessly fire at each other. Falling to the ground on the battlefield, Finley curled up into a human ball, rocking back and forth, wishing for this ordeal to be over.

“We have arrived at the final destination,” a young woman’s voice rang over the intercom.

Finley had opened his eyes to realize that he was curled up on the floor of the train car which had since coming to a stop. Collecting himself, Finley breathed a sigh of relief, believing that everything that he had seen was just a bad dream. He confidently left the train, but what he stepped off to was not a platform, but a road. A driveway to be more specific, confused, Finley turned behind him, and with a great chill down his spine, found that there was no train behind him. Terrified, the older gentleman started speed walking down the roadway until he came across a sign.

“Arlington National Cemetery,” Finley read aloud to himself.

“That’s impossible, no train at this time of night would be going to Arlington,” Finley said, expressing aloud for no one to hear. Due to the thick fog behind him, Finley elected to march on through the cemetery to see if he could find any guard to help him. As he walked through the graveyard, he was overcome with an aura of peace as he gazed upon a sea of crosses. Down the winding roads, he followed the roadway until he hit the end that led to a headstone. Jumping off the roadway, Finley went to further investigate the headstone, which he read aloud to himself...

“201 to dispatch?”

“Dispatch on for 201”

“I have an unconscious gentleman in the waiting terminal at the Amtrak at 50 Massachusetts Ave NE, according to his identification, his name is Edward A. Finley, he is currently unresponsive. Please send EMS and the supervisor to my location.”

“Received, 201, we are sending the supervisor to your location now.”

Mark 10: 13-16

Connor Danz

The soft spring breeze gently pushed through the Shean household, its soothing touch was that of life itself, comforting with a twinge of cool to awake those it blew upon. This fresh air slithered like a serpent all throughout the household that was anything but asleep. Quite the contrary, Sunday mornings always had the household resemble the speed of the Daytona Speedway, each member of the household running like a lion after its food to assemble themselves for the morning Mass.

The Shean household always embodied the term “Sunday Best” whenever they went to their church. Jacob Shean, the patriarch of the household, was fully assembled in his grey three-piece suit that’s shade reassembled that of the wolves that could be found in Alaska, which made his sky-blue tie pop more. His attire completed at both ends of his person, an old paperboy flattop that matched his suit and night black shoes hugged his feet with their polished shine making them shimmer like stars. Not to be outdone, Jacob’s beloved wife, Joyce, was wearing a long and elegant dress that curled down to her ankles, with the blue being that same sky color as her husband’s tie which made her white veil like a cloud creating a shape in the sky. Once they had gotten themselves together, they then moved to prepare their sons. The older of the two, Thomas, was in his teenage years and thus, had begun to dress more like his father when going to church. He was wearing a two-piece suit that was tan like the sand of the nearby beach with a newsboy hat that matched his suit and blended well with his oak brown hair, with a nice pair of polished brown dress shoes to finish the outfit.

Now, this Sunday was very special for the last member of the family, five-year-old Paul who was going to church with his family for the first time as they believed he was now old enough to discipline himself during the Mass and to show the proper respect and reverence to his environment. He was wearing almost an identical attire to that of his brother Thomas, with a few notable exceptions. Firstly, his two-piece suit was a bit brighter of a tan than his brother’s, something akin to a ripe banana. Secondly, he was wearing short pants instead of the slacks his father and brother were wearing, and he had a sky-blue bowtie that matched the sea his family created. With the entire family together, at last, they all gathered themselves into their black with faux oak detailed

1988 Mercury Grand Marquis Colony Park and embarked on the journey to their church.

The Church of St. Joseph was approximately a fifteen-minute drive for the Shean household. Their family home was farther outside of town than most as they live in the farming district of the county where fields of golden wheat stretched from the ground in front of you to the sleeping mountains far off in the horizon. However, this would gradually change, with the long sea of gold slowly fading house by house into a homey village that was as if it had stepped right out of a Norman Rockwell painting. Most houses in the village had a shop on the first floor, so simply taking a drive down the boulevard to the church was a showcase of all of the businesses from the cleaners, the grocery store, the barber's and the brewery all neatly lined up together creating a path to the center of the village. The center of the village was where everything important happened as the church sat on one side of the street, with the lumbering main doors lined up directly with the entrance to the City Hall.

Finally, the family car took a turn around the large stone building and into a lot at the side of the building. When the family got out of the car, Paul was struck in awe at the castle he was gazing upon. The church building alone was about two stories tall and appeared to be an old fortress from the outside with its solid stone walls and its towers at four corners that created the shape of a cross from a sky view. This awe continued as the family had marched around the corner up to the doors of the church where there must have been a hundred stairs to be climbed before they could enter. The doors too were massive, filling up the several-foot tall archway making the doors appear the same size as the mighty oaks they were cut from. However, when the family entered the church, Paul was nearly struck unconscious by the beauty he was processing.

The inside of the building was supported by several mighty columns like that of ancient Rome that stretched above him into the entire ceiling. A ceiling that was had every inch of it covered in immaculate detailing. The larger areas of the ceilings were artistic masterpieces that depicted key moments in the life of Christ, with the empty space around those paintings being sculpted detail that ran across the rest of the ceiling. Looking down on his own eye level, Paul saw what seemed to be endless rows of old oak pews that were incredibly similar to the doors of the church but with more detail on the sides. As Paul's eyes followed

the building's pattern, it all lead his eye directly forward in front of him to the altar. Shining a bright golden light, the altar was the most magnificent part of the church. Glowing like sunlight, sculpted details dripped off of every service from the candles, to the altar rails, and to the grand tabernacle behind the altar. The tabernacle itself resembles almost a miniature version of the church in gold, four towers that stood guard of the massive middle tower that had a tiny door with a cross on it for where the Body of Christ was stored. All of this being looked down upon by a dome with four great Saints depicted in stained glass: St. Peter, St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, and St. James the Greater, with a massive crucifix in the center of them that reached from floor to ceiling. This magnificent scene had stopped young Paul in his track for several minutes, his mother stayed behind with him and walked him through the church while his father and brother found their way to the pews. After his tour of the building was cut to an end by the thundering church bells, the family reunited once again, just in time for the start of mass.

Earbuds: A Haiku

Ethan Keller

What a joy it was
to untangle my earbuds.
Pity, now wireless.

The Place I Call Home

Kerry Lopez

Welcome to 123 Main St.

Amid the hustle and bustle of downtown sits an unassuming building; one in a row of many dotting the sidewalk like a jagged smile. Walking up to the front walk, the façade emits a warm feeling painted in sage green with a second-floor room that hovers out over the sidewalk. Walking through a hefty front door carved with intricate floral and vine-like patterns on honey and brown sugar-stained wood, I immediately have a sense of security as it closes behind me.

This is 123 Main Street; this is home.

As I ascend the creaking stairs to the second floor, I can hear the “click-clack” of Quest’s toes dancing on the hardwood floors. Reaching the second floor, landing I am confronted with a scattering of boots and shoes that let me know Bill is home. I smile as I look at the foot-worn doormat that reads: “Welcome to our home, hope you brought beer and dog treats”.

Opening my front door, I am confronted by a 120-pound Akita who will not let me cross the threshold without pets and a “hello”. She is wagging her tail so ferociously that her body dances back and forth on the floor as she sits there. I am surprised that she doesn’t propel herself along like an inchworm. Quest patiently waits as I ask her to show mama how she was a good girl and quickly leaps up to lead me to the front bedroom.

The room is bathed in a symphony of warm colors streaming through the stained-glass windows, that surround the nook that hangs off the building over the sidewalk. This is where Quest spends her days, behind the wall of blackout curtains in her own little world. This little cube of a room serves as her personal portal to the parade of people who stream by the house throughout the day.

Leaving the bedroom together, we walk into the living room where I am greeted with a warm hello from Bill. As I gaze around the room, I am swarmed with memories and a sense of belonging. From the giant topaz sectional, I can see the wall of photos that I created over the spring. There

are moments from our life together as well as sights from around our home.

In the center of the wall is an exposed brick fireplace that has a plethora of autumnal colors all living cohesively above the mantle. Below is a closed-off fireplace with a grate that looks like an owl is sleeping peacefully among the branches of a great oak tree. To the left of the fireplace is a large bookshelf that houses an array of titles, on one shelf we have medical textbooks and a speaker. Another section altogether has a humidior with a few photo albums nestled alongside. On the top left shelf is a painting with the lyrics of Otis Redding's "These Arms of Mine", and I hear the melody as I gaze upon it.

Amongst the rainbow of book spines lies a small grey rock, shaped like a pregnant arrowhead. This rock evokes the memory of my friend Krystle, whose photo stands proudly behind it. I must remember to return that rock to nature in her memory.

I follow Quest through the antique white French doors into the dining room. I skirt my way around my second favorite piece of furniture - my round table made of soft oak. Six chairs huddle around it waiting to be filled during our next family dinner. Inlaid in the wall to the right is a small glass-enclosed cupboard filled with barware, a pre-Waterford crystal decanter, and an assortment of bottles that were too cool to be recycled away. I can hear the laughter and rambunctious conversation that embodies a joyful gathering.

Our last stop in the coming home tour is the kitchen; poorly designed with enough counter space for a few spices and knives, not a drawer in sight, floors that slope towards the back door, and a hodgepodge of wire shelving. This is where Quest gets her "chicky" treat for being so well-behaved and an overall "good girl."

This is 123 Main Street; a place I am proud to call home. It is the first place I had a hand in creating, and the first place that feels like "me."



The State University
of New York