

THREADS

2023



THREADS

2023

Threads Committee

Jessica Brouker

Paul Charbel

Sara Kennedy

Joshua Kohan

Threads is a journal of student writing and art published by the English, Foreign Languages and English as a Second Language Department at Hudson Valley Community College, Troy, New York.

Special Thanks

Dr. Tyler Kessel, Dean of Business and Liberal Arts

Anthony Podlaski, Department Chair

The Graphics Department

The Print Shop

Macmillan Learning

Hayden-McNeil



Copyright © 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, except as may be expressly permitted by the applicable copyright statutes or in writing by the Publisher.

All rights to reproduction by any means revert to the writer upon publication.

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

In Memory of Noah Kucij

The Threads 2023 Committee would like to dedicate this year's publication to the memory of esteemed professor, colleague, and poet, Noah Kucij. Professor Kucij served on the Threads Committee from 2010 to 2018 and was instrumental in fostering student expression through written and visual art

In commemoration of Noah's service to student work, we are including the "Noah Kucij Award for Poetry" recognizing a Hudson Valley student who exhibits excellence in poetic language.

May his dedication continue to inspire students to share their unique voice.

Contents

* Image by Lydia Boruta, <i>Lady Like</i>	Front Cover
** Justin Hurley, <i>Paradise at the Brass Monkey</i>	1
** Lee L. Dandoy, <i>Something in the Past</i>	3
*** Yahzmine Gause, <i>Hair</i>	5
**** Clotilde Mussett, <i>The Locket</i>	8
Image by Riley Wilenski, <i>This Body</i>	10
Image by Gwen Elliott, <i>ADK</i>	11
Image by Kordehlia Koopman, <i>Monarch Butterfly on Purple Cone Flower</i>	12
Image by Kordehlia Koopman, <i>Female Ruby-Throated Hummingbird</i>	13
Image by Lydia Boruta, <i>Broken</i>	14
Savannah Tenace, <i>Mannequin</i>	15
Gwen Elliott, <i>The Creek</i>	16
Mollie Egan, <i>The Other Woman</i>	18
Julia Mooradian, <i>Typical Morning Journal</i>	19
Ryan Scotto, <i>Forged in Stars</i>	21
Ryan Scotto, <i>Citrovia</i>	22
Paris Lyons, <i>The Rose Finch</i>	23
Gabe Straw, <i>Infinity</i>	26
Image by Angela Silecchia, <i>Stop Watering Dead Plants</i>	28
Image by Elliot Stover, <i>Inseam</i>	29
Image by Ashlyn Lather, <i>Wanderlust</i>	30
Image by Ashlyn Lather, <i>Deadhead</i>	31
Image by Skylar Hyslop, <i>Converse</i>	32
Image by Tia Victoria Santicola Jones, <i>Five O'Clock</i>	33
Image by Leah Barcomb, <i>Beauty Perfected</i>	34
Andi-Grey Sheingold, <i>Written History</i>	35
Madelaine Wied, <i>The Joyless Joyride</i>	37
Jennah Taaffe, <i>the bird</i>	38
Chao D'Arcangelis, <i>The Death of My Grandma</i>	39
Sean Sampler, <i>Into the Spider-Verse</i>	41
Sean Sampler, <i>The Pizza Connoisseur</i>	43
Marie Williams, <i>Blizzard</i>	44
Havah Youngmann, <i>The Chairlift at Mount Snow</i>	45
Anthony O'Neill, <i>Uomo di Granito</i>	47
Brianna Valenti, <i>Distant Conversations</i>	49

* Threads Art Award Winner ** Threads Writing Award Winner

*** Noah Kucij Award for Poetry **** Dr. Maria Palmara Award for Fiction

Paradise at the Brass Monkey

Justin Hurley

A harsh wind blows up the street, kicking beads of dirt into the air. The biting cold penetrates my peacoat and I shiver. My shipmates and I quickly ducked into a bar that was highly praised by locals for its beer.

A warmly lit room greets us as we shake the cold out of our hands and feet. Ruckus laughter peels from the lungs of other sailors enjoying the feeling of hard earth under their feet for the first time in a month. Locals are deep in conversation, and from what I can make out from their conversation, it's about a recent cricket match. My shipmates are having trouble getting the attention of the bartender, as she is busy trying to hear orders over the general din of the bar.

A bright red face with lines of laughter turn to see us waiting, and head over. With loud, friendly greetings, she asks us what we want to drink. A blackboard adorned with brass monkey statues standing sentinel lists the different house craft beers offered. While studying the menu, a single beer stands out to me, Sail and Anchor. A stout beer made with chocolate, banana, and coffee sounded heavenly to me, and I ordered a pint.

As I wait for my beer to be poured, I roll a cold metal tube between my fingers. Earlier in the day, we stopped by a local cigar shop, and picked up Cuban cigars, since they were legal in Australia at the time. My beer arrives, and I grab it and start looking for a seat. T.V.s line the walls playing cricket highlights over booths. Wanting some peace, I decided to brave the cold, and sit on the central courtyard patio.

Stepping out, I see a couple of groups sitting around tables, smoking cigarettes and cigars. Black peacoats and tan officer jackets dot the groups. I found a small table with a single chair in a corner and took a seat. The anticipation of both the beer and cigar has made me forget about the cold, and after I settle in, I take my first sip.

A crash of flavors hit my tongue, and I almost reeled from the deliciousness of it. Chocolate notes dance across my tastebuds twirling and mingling with the bitterness of the coffee. I take a hefty gulp. When I pull my lips from the glass, the slowly fading taste of coffee gives

way to a smooth, sweet banana aftertaste fading like a note from a lone saxophone playing in a dark club.

My thirst slacked for the moment, and I pulled out the metal tube and uncapped it. The sweet smell of tobacco fills my nose as I inhale deeply. I retrieved the box of matches that I got along with the cigar. I strike a match and start to puff away, making the tip of the cigar glow brighter and brighter. Once the tip is lit well enough to hold a “cherry” (the lit part of a cigar or cigarette), I take my first real pull from it.

A heavy woody taste fills my mouth. The light buzz from the tobacco mixes with the haze of the beer, and I feel relaxed. As I pick the beer up to take another blissful sip, the clouds split, and sunlight shines onto the courtyard like a golden spotlight.

This story is from over sixteen years ago, and the memory of that moment still brings me peace. A small moment in my overall life; however not many people can say they’ve found paradise. Especially, paradise at the Brass Monkey.

Something in the Past

Lee L. Dandoy

“It’s beautiful outside!” my coworker exclaims as she stretches her tired arms out to ease the pain.

And it is. It’s afternoon, and the sky is beautifully brushed with layers of blue, orange, and peach hues with the glimmering and golden sun placed at the focal point. On the ground, the slithering arms of the fog cover the peaceful lake near our work. It’s a perfect painting for us to gawk at while we walk to our cars to finish the day. The fresh air and the sun’s rays gently brush our sweaty faces as we take in the glory of nature.

“It is,” I add. “I feel homesick”.

That statement is random, but that’s how our friendship works; no matter how random our thoughts are, we say it.

She asks, “Why is that?”

I hesitate. I’m unable to explain these feelings that I have in my chest, like a name that’s at the tip of your tongue. It feels painful to remember and process, but I can’t help but think of it. And this feeling always follows me wherever I go.

It was late afternoon, but, somehow, the yellow sun was still up in the background. Far off the horizon, the dark blue sea looked distant, as if it didn’t have an end. Near the foreground, the large, green leaves of the palm trees on the beach swayed to the smooth waves of the ocean breeze. In my mind, it was a beautiful picture to look at.

I was in awe.

On the other hand, the obnoxious yet calming buzz of the motorcycle filled both of my ears until I couldn’t hear anything else. The cold breeze violently brushed my small face as we passed by the long coast. But to me, it was okay because I liked it, too.

“Are you still alive?” my dad looked over and jokingly asked me. I always admired that comical side of my dad. Of course, I reciprocated the same

SOMETHING IN THE PAST

energy to him as I gave a big nod and a chubby smile that would always hurt my jaw.

*He added, "Make sure you hold on tight to me, so you don't fall off."
Being the obedient child I was before, I happily did.*

We rode around the familiar town with our humble motorcycle; at this point, it was a little tradition that my dad and I enjoyed from time to time. I enjoyed it, and I looked forward to it when we got the chance.

But it's not the same anymore. It's definitely something in the past now.

"I don't know; I just miss home." I look into the distance as I try not to get these feelings affect me. My eyes, however, betray me and sweat a small tear.

But somehow, she understands it and comforts me with a gentle rub on my back.

Hair

Yahzmine Gause

When I was ten my mama cut my hair.
I didn't care.
That's a lie, I cared.

I went to school the next day
with a yellow princess skirt on my head and I prayed
that no one would look my way.
Wondering if my friends noticed that I'm not like I was yesterday.
My hair turned to fabric overnight.
They noticed, no surprise.

I hovered under my desk until the bell screeched for me to go home.
And pointless puckering pretentious pupils to stop pointing.
I didn't want Halle Berry's hair.
And Beyonce's honey blonde wig made all the Black girls think twice
about loving their coils.

At twelve I was told I wasn't beautiful because my hair didn't flow down
my back.
I didn't look like that little blonde girl
In the front of the class
getting valentine after valentine after valentine.
But where's mine?
My name didn't chime chimes.
I didn't get red rosed rhymes.
My garden was cement blocks,
unattended,
invaded by weeds,
locked and vacant
waiting patient
for my time to awaken.

When I was thirteen I started wearing weave.
I guess it was a bad word.
I told people and they ran
Like I was the Boogey Man.
Horsehair they told me,

scolded me.

And even behold my bubble gum pink highlights any little girl would love to have,

It wasn't mine so it wasn't right.

Unbaweaveable.

Sacajaweavea.

Weavey Wonder.

I've heard it all. Those kids were creative.

By fourteen I refused to wear a hat.

Cause from the back

I looked like Zack,

or Jack,

or any guy for a matter of fact.

Wore jewelry, makeup, anything to make up for my lack of locs.

Cause at age fifteen afros weren't in.

Along with my skin

r my predicament

where I coulda shoulda woulda

had a boyfriend if I didn't have the same hair length as him.

When I was sixteen I didn't want to go in the pool.

I was scared my hair would puff up and get matted,
rat-nested.

And I'd get too invested

in the opinions of insignificant minions to society telling me how my hair should look.

By seventeen extensions were cool.

In my school girls would drool

over everyone's new length.

I would always think

Am I always gonna be a little outside of the box?

It's not okay when I do it,

but when Becky has good hair

hers or not.

I thought this isn't fair.

Doesn't matter what I wear,

how much I care,

or how I'm always there.

It just matters about my hair.

I was twenty when I finally learned to love my hair.
I love my hair.
I love my fro.
How it flows,
how it grows.
And it just goes to show
that those kids that made me feel less than
can kiss my Afrotastic ass.

Insecurities still find their way into my recovering sanity and self-esteem.
I get scared that my man will see someone else who isn't me.
Whose hair he can pull?
Whose hands he can run through their not-so-thick scalp
and flick off their shoulders,
style and straighten it,
without the smell of death and five- hundred beauty products on the
bathroom sink just to tame it.
Someone who gets out of the shower and doesn't have a lion's mane.

Do you hear what I'm saying?
I'm scared my man won't love me
because of my hair.
My past has scared me so bad
I don't think anyone can love me
because of my hair.
Until I can put my hair up in a bun.
Until it's as blonde as the sun
Or flows when I run,
Like I've been running from the thought that I and all of my curls are
beautiful.
Each one.

I'm twenty-three and I am just learning to love myself as I should have
when I was ten and my mama cut my hair.

The Locket

Clotilde Mussett

This was it.

The box was black velvet, coated in a thin layer of dust. I blew on it, and the dust swirled in the air, the years of not being able to find the box finally coming to an end.

This was what I had been searching for all this time.

The locket belonged to my lover. I remember the day we met exactly. It had been a warm, sunny day; a breeze tossing her hair around in the wind as she pulled into the parking lot in a black Mustang. She walked up to the counter to buy an ice cream cone--vanilla swirl. Her eyes were big and enrapturing, and from the moment I set eyes on her, I wanted her. And so, I wrote my number on a napkin and folded it in half, handing it to her. She went back to sit at a picnic bench, and when she saw it, she looked up and smiled.

We went out to see a movie that night. It was *Where the Lilies Bloom*. I wasn't much of a fan of it myself, but she seemed to like it. She was all done up, her lips painted red to match her dress. We sat and talked in the car afterwards, listening to the radio and watching the sunset.

We went out again the next night, and the night after that. It was then she told me that she was moving away. But I knew we would find each other. I knew she was the one.

I had spent the last ten years of my life looking for her until I found out she had died a couple years back. I knew nothing but devastation for a time, but I was determined to find one last thing—the golden locket I had given her before she left.

And here it was. I opened the box, waiting with bated breath. Apart from a bit of tarnish on the edge, it looked just as it did the day I bought it, all the way back in 1974. Inside it, would be the picture of us, I just knew it. I remember it almost perfectly—her sitting with her legs crossed next to me, leaned up against my side on a bench in the park by her house. In the photo, the sun was radiating off her face, and I sat next to her, beaming with pride.

I opened the locket.

In it was a different picture. She was as beautiful as ever, standing next to her lover in front of a blue house with a pretty lawn and a picket fence.

But I wasn't the man in the picture.

THREADS 2023

This Body

Riley Wilenski



ADK

Gwen Elliott



Monarch Butterfly on Purple Cone Flower

Kordehlia Koopman



Female Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

Kordehlia Koopman



Broken

Lydia Boruta



Mannequin

Savannah Tenace

Mannequin

In the daylight, fractured serenity-

Statuesque femininity, still - tipped at you and away to you

Parts of a whole and wholly apart, thighs and ribs detached to another-

Attached to another- another seeped of worldly color, residual color
seeping

Seeping- seeping into night, light shifting all around, she takes center
stage

Center stage stripes and fractures of dark, fractures of dark, darkness
fractured into the light-shifting and shifting-shifted seams of a bust

And busted seams of thighs

Flat and slim, rounded curves, rounding and rounding around you

Four feet of metal, cool and calm, a still ground, grounding of blue and
white-

White running there and to here, a game of long and across under her
feet-

Feet by feet, dancing under her seams and bows, their worldly color,
seeping to- to and through,

Through to, to daylight, to the fractured stage, center stage, serenity yet
fractured-

The Creek

Gwen Elliott

Our journey starts at the patchy driveway. The rocks have been thrown about for years from kids kicking and campers coming and going. I stand at the front to count the little group of family and friends we've collected. Six, seven, eight. Our ninth friend never comes to the creek with us, he prefers sitting curled up listening to our parents' chatter with a hat over his face. I turn to Luke, the only other person my age. We are like camp counselors, keeping the activities going for the young ones, but we don't mind. We find enjoyment in each other's company.

"Ready?" He smiles and leads the way.

At the top of the driveway, we walk ten steps to get to the bridge. Through the rust and chipping paint, we can see that it was mint green in its prime. A revamp in the summer of '21 was promised, but we have not yet seen progress. Under the bridge is something spray painted, a red line tracing almost the shape of the letter 'M' that Luke says is an unfinished heart.

When I turn away from the wall, I face our beloved creek. The water runs slower under the bridge, it makes for a good swimming spot when it's hot enough. We climb our way down the rocks in an organic line towards the part of the creek that's low enough to walk on. The water level changes each trip. Sometimes we can walk on only dry rocks, but this time it had rained, and the water reached my shins.

We spread out across the creek walking in all different pairs. There are a few of us who walk faster than the others. So, when we're up ahead waiting for them to catch up we look for the crayfish and tadpoles. We are invaders, as their homes are right under our feet. We splash, skip rocks, laugh, and disrupt their peace. But the tadpoles, when the water is still, aren't scared of us. Instead, they eat the appetizing skin off our feet.

There is always one person who falls, and someone usually carries my phone in expectation that it will be me. Even with my crocs on, the strap on my heels, I always find the stones trying to trip me. From the creek, I can see woods from either side. The woods to our right are owned by our friends who have the campsite. To the left, is the neighbors' property,

where our waterfall runs. The neighbor was kind enough to let us walk on his grounds once three years ago to get to it. Ever since, we've been afraid of him changing his mind. We sneak into his backyard and run until the trees hid us so as not to be a bother.

I smile remembering. The creek has many memories and hushed secrets. I feel honored to be a part of it.

I love the constant humming of the creek. When we are on our last day of camping, and we've slept less than we've played, trudging through the creek is a good place to heal our exhaustion. There is no need for speech when the creek's babbling fills up the void. We go until we hit the bend, since the younger ones are often too antsy to carry on. We head back the same way we came, walking faster now because we smell the meat and see the smoke lingering over our family's campsite. I turn to Luke to see if his face shows any sign of wishing we could trek further. It always does.

But there is "always next time", he tells me.

Yes, the creek is our place, where our friendship started, and feelings grew. We don't exactly know what the future holds but we do know that we will be back at the creek together soon.

The Other Woman

Mollie Egan

Her eyelids glide open to the sight of her Cherry Kiss lipstick from the night before smeared across his white linen pillowcase. She smirks, thinking the stain looked as if she was marking her territory. Her expression turns grim when she thinks that this bed, his bed, is not her territory at all. The sudden familiar feeling submerges her. She feels desolate, subdued even. But most of all, fear. Longing to return back to their passionate night filled with flirtatious banter and one too many refills of subpar sauvignon blanc. The taste of alcohol still lingering, but the confidence that was brought with it has dried up. She rolls over to face him. Sunlight piercing through the blinds leaves an abstract pattern upon his resting face. While studying him she thinks about how beautiful he is, in appearance as well as character. He is pure in her eyes, she admires how he is so genuine to those he cares for. How he carries himself, reserved yet can captivate anyone with his presence. He is the stranger you meet that you remember in glimpses throughout your life. She wonders if anyone has ever viewed her as highly as she views him. Rolling over onto her back as the feeling intensifies. The other woman. She knows that is what she has been the entirety of her life. Not a mistress, but in the sense that the ones she loved have always loved another. Why have I never been enough? A recurring idea that resides in her brain, never leaving nor being resolved. She knows she is desirable. But, not the sort of desirable that a man envisions committing himself to. The sort of desirable that years later when he thinks about her, he wonders what her life amounted to. When he is with another who he deems to meet his standards, she will remain the woman who was desirable, not loveable. She is his short-lived infatuation. The fear of never experiencing sincere, deep love eats her alive. She listens to him breathe, counting his breaths. She envisions the woman he loves doing the same. I know he wishes she was in my place, I know he yearns for her, not me. He would never admit it, but she knows. She hates him for it. The thoughts begin to boil over, she jolts upright. Holting her breathing, and swiftly making her way to the bathroom. Out of his line of view. Waking up to me in the middle of driving myself insane with my own thoughts, the utter epitome of undesirable. All she feels is pain. It leaves her silent and still, fixating even more harshly on her thoughts. Screaming on the inside. Silently screaming to be loved, silently screaming to be enough, silently screaming to be the woman.

Typical Morning Journal

Julia Mooradian

Journal entry number three hundred-ninety-two.

4:54 am

Thursday, June 4th, 1994.

Do you know what it's like? Rising every morning. The pessimistic persona surging through your frontal lobe and excreting through your ocular. The sweltering-freezing sweats, fueling your morning nausea. Greens and yellows, purples and blues. Serrated floaters all throughout your bedroom, imperfect black clouds. The floors are shaking like the A-train stammering after Joe Jorgan pulls a knife on the pregnant madam in the last car. Everything feels so hypnagogic. Thoughts race like a blurry transit, making stops at each and every botheration station.

After pulling yourself together, making way to the arctic, mold-riddled tile bathroom, retching in the toilet with nobody to rub your back. Nobody will hold your hair and tell you, "you'll make it." Gasping for air, reaching for a damp towel to calm your vagus nerve. You pray to a fictitious god for it to stop, and feel like a blubbering idiot when nobody answers the phone. Faith is a feeling of the past.

Starting the shower seems like a medieval torture method. The rainy water is far from pleasant. The sound of responsibility almost causes you to aspirate further. Knives falling from the stainless steel pipe you patched up with flex-seal and plumbers tape, yet another failed project. A therapist told you lavender body wash is a calming scent, yet it just reminds you of doing dishes in the kitchen that caused most of your pain. Memories flood the shower walls, and suddenly, I'm a young boy. Yellow gloves on, elbows deep in last night's ravioli, listening through the cracked window to another argument Sally Jade is having with her sadistic John. Razors peel back your mask, and reveal your true identity, body scrub peeling off the last of your dignity.

Once you're back to the cold floor, shivers rush throughout. Each hair standing up like an ovation, a round of applause. An applause you never received. Never being good enough, always making mistakes, and yes, having them made known. A lack of approval? Is this what causes your pain and suffering, or is it a sheer lack of fulfillment? Maybe she was

right, maybe your mother was right. Maybe everything you've done you deserve. You deserve to suffer, for that time you lied to her about eating chocolate before bed. You deserved to starve.

Start with a lackluster pair of boxers, green and red, like Christmas. A worn in, white cotton tee shirt, smelling like leftover cologne and cigarettes. A pin-stripe button up from the local thrift store, buttoning every button except the bottom two and the top two. The closer you get to your neck, the more your confidence drops. Pleated trousers, a couple sizes too big, a hand me down from your brother, who was always mom's favorite. It actually pairs quite nicely with the belt you once feared. Deodorant, geometric readers, and a drab trench coat will complete today's ensemble.

Breakfast is served with a migraine and mild lumbar pain. Black coffee, existential dread and two microwaved eggs, the breakfast of a champion. This breakfast is guaranteed to fuel your thought-cycling, and the flies swarming your half-decomposed brain. Neurotoxins have kept you alive far too long.

After breakfast, buzz consumes you, it's the best time of the day. Medication. Oh the feeling of serotonin running through your forty-something year old calcified veins. Wellbutrin, this one might be a scam, but it is supposed to help you think positively, numb your negative emotions, while numbing the rest of the joy you may have left, and swiftly stealing your sex drive, faster than the best bank robber in the city. Focalin, this one will actually improve your current situation. It prevents you from jumping into the tracks of the subway, throws your heart rate up for some mental cardio, and keeps your brain energized for all the clerical work you're about to drown in during your "bread-making" nine to five accounting job. Iron, for anemia. Lastly, an ACE inhibitor, for the heart weakened by the feeling of impending doom (and the mental-cardio from Focalin), is the last thing you need to finish off your disgustingly-perfect morning.

Thirty minutes later you're ready to take on the cruel world. Looking forward to more sleepless nights, lonely wine sessions, and weekly journals with your only friend, your therapist. Who cares if your co-workers think you're bland? At least they don't think you deserve to be lying down there in the train tracks, where you truly belong. Take the A-train, make some small talk, eat some water-flavored, microwavable broccoli (ready in three minutes, just add butter!), drink yourself to sleep, and do it all over again like the rest of us miserable flunkees.

Forged in Stars

Ryan Scotto

Hydrogen, Oxygen, Carbon, Nitrogen
Hydrogen, Oxygen, Carbon, Nitrogen
Homogeneous
Titans cook
Forge
Pressurize
Explode
The blueprints are shared with all
Condensing, collapsing
Colliding, and fused together
Primed with the formula for life
You feel small
As do I
But we are big
For we are forged in stars

Citrovia

Ryan Scotto

Tangy aromas rush my nostrils
As I slice into citrus delight
Smells of a family cooking
Juice drips slowly off
The knife to the countertop
Tastes of grandma's homemade meals
I rub my finger down
The brine of the orange
Feels of long time no see
And tight hugs
The liquid sizzles as
It drops to a hot pan
Sounds of love

The Rose Finch

Paris Lyons

I sat on concrete steps crying over the phone to my mom. I had just moved 5,000 miles away from home. She tried to calm me, told me to look at the view I had worked so hard to see again. As I looked up a small red bird perched itself next to me, as if it were telling me everything's okay.

I was living with my family friend before my semester began. For three weeks I sat in a congested house. It was as if the three-bedroom home was too small for baby and military supplies. Every window was covered with black out curtains, two of the three exit doors were blocked by shelves, and the AC blasted a cold 68 degrees, all at the command of my friend's husband. I was trapped here and felt like I had to help my friend. All the while, a warm, inviting world waited outside for me. It was a world that I had waited to come back to, a world that I had worked so hard to see and experience again. Oahu was waiting for me.

And I finally made it out.

I moved into my dorm. It wasn't anything special, built in the '70's, with carpets that left black marks on my socks after taking only three steps inside. It never mattered how much I cleaned; there was always mold in the seams along the trim. Despite these turn offs and plenty more, I adored that dorm, especially the window. That window brought me the view I had always wanted. From it I could see all of Honolulu and the most beautiful of all, Diamond Head. It even provided a small ledge for a rose finch to perch itself on.

I was pretty much alone on the island; the only support was the friend I had stayed with for the first three weeks. After moving out, I visited her every single weekend. It was always the same thing. I woke to a dark cold house and was greeted by clutter and dishes. I felt bad for her because she was busy with her first baby. I tried to wash and clean as quietly as possible. I would always run out of time because the baby would wake and my friend would come downstairs.

It was the same routine every weekend. Halfway through the semester, though, I stopped going.

"You're okay, you're okay, you're okay," he wouldn't stop whispering in my ear. Each whisper wreaked of beer and sent paralyzing chills down my spine, shooting throughout my entire body. The husband was holding my hair back as I threw up in a plastic bag on the floor of the living room. My friend and her baby were upstairs, asleep.

As soon as I finished throwing up, he took advantage of me and left me there to pass out next to the bag.

The next morning, despite all my hours and efforts helping her out before, my friend pointed at the bag, her way of telling me to take it out. I came back inside and she began laughing, "You were so emotional, I couldn't get you to calm down." She had no idea. She thought I was getting the typical college experience, trying to recover from only a hangover on a Saturday morning. My mind was actually trying to process the events of the night. He angrily insisted on opening every drink and I reacted strongly to them.

I couldn't tell anybody. They were family friends; my parents would easily guess who hurt me and would want to step in. I was afraid of breaking up my friend's family. I was terrified of what her response might be. For the time being, I limited my weekends with them. At the end of the semester, I returned home and told my family that I couldn't go back.

I felt like I was grieving the loss of a life I had planned for. A whole month that I had worked years for was wasted with caring for problems that weren't mine. My time and effort only led to a night that ruined everything I wanted. Any sense of trust that I previously held vanished. It made me want to never go back to my childhood home. Never to go back to my college.

Now I sit in my car looking out the window, sad about the icy world before me, sad about the current school I am about to walk into because it isn't what I worked so hard for. I sit here thinking about everything he took from me: my relationship with my friend and her baby, four years of college and a study abroad opportunity. I sit here thinking about how he pulled me back into the dark cold world he had created.

I begin to have flashbacks to moments when I was happy. The flashbacks bring me back to driving to Kaneohe to visit Bellows, my favorite childhood beach. I walk down to the shore, allowing warm sand to slowly engulf each step. I push against harsh waves, coming to a calm space where I can lie on my back. I am surrounded by water that dissolves my problems into an infinite ocean, as if they had never existed. The sun beats down, making me warm and whole again. I sit here looking out this window, waiting for the ice to melt away, taking my problems with it, and for a rose finch to perch itself on the hood of my car. But it never comes.

In spite of my rose finch never coming back, those flashbacks to memories keep me going. Those flashbacks are my new rose finch.

And I know that someday I will finally make it out again.

Infinity

Gabe Straw

I close my eyes, taking in a long, deep breath of crisp, fresh air emanating from all around and filling me with a primal, unfiltered happiness that I can feel deep in my bones. I focus on the melody of birds chirping in the distance. I hear the sounds of trees rustling in the cool summer breeze, the distant voice of someone talking faintly, carried hundreds of feet over the water. I smell the distinct signature of water mixing with the freshly recycled air from the trees, and finally decide to let out that breath of air. I feel my whole body relax and let go. It feels like a massive weight sliding off my shoulders as I slowly exhale.

I open my eyes, and at first I'm looking down. I notice the lively, green patches of grass and the loose, brown pine needles that litter the ground. As I slowly pan up I see the vibrant greens of the forest abruptly end and a wide, beautifully still body of water begins to partially fill my vision. It's not a big lake, more of a large pond really. Maybe a couple hundred meters to the other side, but then it stretches out of view, behind some trees, implying a larger continuation of the water in another direction. I look up even further, towards the sky above, where the tops of the tallest trees reach their end, and the blue of the sky is overwhelming, parted here and there by fluffy white puffs of clouds migrating slowly overhead.

The slow pressure that our lives seem to build up over time slowly releases the more I take in the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. I stare out across the water, slowly looking back and forth at the different things that peak my interest. I briefly see a fish disturb the top of the water and submerge itself back into the depths below. A bird lands on a tree just an arms length away from me and chirps out a short but alluring song. I hear a small rustling in the bushes nearby, most likely a squirrel scavenging for an afternoon snack. I feel the pleasant weight of entire worlds that are happening all around me. Millions, if not billions of animals and plants, big and small, living out their entire lives around the water. It reminds me that humans really aren't all that different from the wide array of life that makes up the natural world, and that we're all a part of the same whole. A living world that seems to stretch on forever.

It's a beautifully serene atmosphere surrounding the Dunham Reservoir. It's a place that few people know about, or at least, it seems that way because I never see more than a small handful of people there, even on the hottest days of the summer. It's a place to get away from the monotony and chaotic nature of everyday life, and just simply exist in nature as every single plant and animal has done for billions of years. It connects me with the natural world in an almost indescribable way, and reminds me of what it means to be human; what it means to be alive. It's a vital reminder that we are minuscule parts of a whole; that when compared to the essentially infinite history of life, both before and after us, our human problems that we create, whether it be intentionally, or unintentionally, are ultimately insignificant in the face of infinity.

THREADS 2023

Stop Watering Dead Plants

Angela Silecchia



Inseam

Elliot Stover



Wanderlust

Ashlyn Lather



Deadhead

Ashlyn Lather



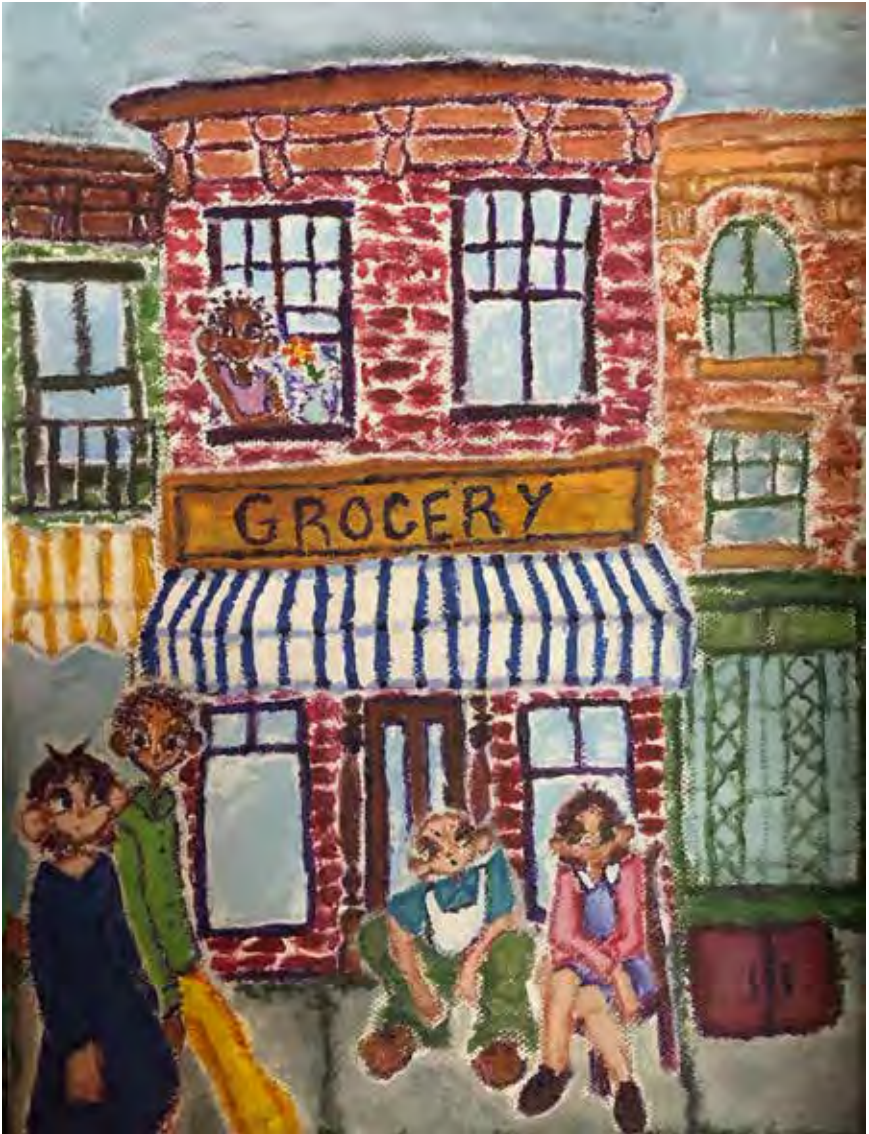
Converse

Skylar Hyslop



Five O'Clock

Tia Victoria Santicola Jones



Beauty Perfected

Leah Barcomb



Written History

Andi-Grey Sheingold

I trace my finger along the impressions of your old tattoos.
The art that was once dark, prominent, and distinguished
against your weathered olive-toned skin
had faded to a murky green-brown.
The sage lettering of your mother's name
is barely legible now
on the herbal-tea-stained parchment of your flesh.
You had closed your eyes as the needles pierced your skin,
all those years ago,
shielding your precious emeralds from the permanence
that your earth, your body embraces.
Your verdant soul still houses your thoughts on occasion,
as even through winter, the daunting cavern remains lush.
Your eyelids cover your precious jade gems again now,
just resting as you remember how you had left things with your sister.
An overcast trek in a silent forest,
camouflage boots flattening abundant clover.
You bent down to pluck one from the moss-covered ground.
Five leaves, but you break one off before making a show of your find.
She didn't care for your superstitions,
but she cared enough to shed her lowly crocodile tears.
The laurel in her hands seemed to loosen their posture as she wept,
though she grasped them tight with one hand.
In the other she had crushed a single stem
and rolled it around between two of her fingers,
as its iridescent blood stained her prints.
Your cologne is pungent and pine-scented,
bringing me back to that day
before I had met you.
When your tattoos were dark, prominent, and distinguished
against your youthful skin.
When you understood that untraveled pastures
were nothing but unexplored territory
awaiting the kind of practiced cartography only you possess.
Now I am witness to the sea-foam of your veins
and the basil blush of once imposing ink.
As my finger glides across the algae-rusted forms

on your tired arm,
I find my own name,
written in my outdated, tender signature,
as though it had been minted onto, etched into
your body long ago,
but never fully healed.

The Joyless Joyride

Madelaine Wied

What seems like an infinite number of pixels form the photo on the overpriced MacBook screen. In the photo, a young girl, with an untamable mop of long dirty-blond hair, stares directly into the tiny iPhone camera. Her eyes resemble the color of the ocean during a storm, and they are filled with a hurricane-like chaos. She sits behind the wheel of a Barbie-pink plastic Mustang convertible. The unlicensed driver possesses on her face a look of extreme concentration, the same amount of concentration a surgeon might use when operating on a patient.

Riding shotgun is a young boy, he too has the same dirty-blond hair and stormy blue eyes. He is leaning over the door with half his body hanging out of the toy car. The boy's brows are furrowed, his eyes and mouth wide open. The corners of his mouth are turned downwards, and he appears to be shrieking. Unlike the driver, his face possesses a look of sheer terror. However, if you look behind this fright so clearly plastered across the boy's face, you can see joy peeking through in his eyes, like sun rays trying to break through clouds in a dark sky.

The t-shirt wearing children drive on the bumpy gravel driveway, which makes crackling noises beneath the plastic tires of the car. The movement of the tires creates high-pitched whining sounds, like crying horses on battlefields. The aroma of freshly cut grass fills the summer-evening air. As the sun sets in the overcast sky, the children see the blinking lights of fireflies, and watch them in awe like they're a magician's magic trick as they disappear and reappear. They hear the chirping of the crickets echoing through their yard in their barely country, country land.

The comforting sound of their mother's voice calling them inside overpowers the quiet sounds of the insects outside. They hurry inside, holding on to the endless summer feeling, and the hope that they'll be able to play again tomorrow. However, what they didn't know was that nothing was endless. Soon after, summer ended, and so did limitless playtime. Along with playtime went their time in their almost perfect white country house and little country yard. Most noticeably went their time as a family of five, which became a family of four shortly after.

the bird

Jennah Taaffe

these dead
feathered intentions
shed in due season
caught by dreaming palms
reaching for the heights

The Death of My Grandma

Chao D’Arcangelis

Losing is something that is hard to deal with; losing a loved one at a very young age gives not only pain but also psychological trauma. My grandma died when I was five years old. Continuing up until the present day, I still don’t know how to accept her death.

My grandma was my hollow tree. People usually sympathize with children who don’t get to be taken care of by their parents. In my case, however, I was glad because my parents had very bad tempers and would often fight. My grandma provided the security, care, and love that I needed. In the early 90’s of mainland China there was a shortage of materials, but she knitted me colorful sweaters that I liked from the yarns she took from other sweaters and pants in the house; she made sure I could have an egg every morning for breakfast. Scrambled egg, hard boiled egg, egg pudding, and my favorite egg soup. She mixed the egg in a bowl, added a spoon of homemade salted chives, then poured hot boiled water into the bowl. Voila—a delicious hot bowl of soup is made. I was always impressed by her creativity, and loved her for the warmth that she brought to every cold winter morning. After she died, I never had that warm soup again; the warmth died along with her.

My grandma was the sky above me that was always sunny and colorful. It is probably hard for kids these days to imagine that there is no air conditioning in the house in hot summers, although that was how I grew up. My memories of every summer of the first five years of my life is full of sweet ice cream bars and bed time stories along with the whining sounds of mosquitoes. My grandma persisted in persuading me to take a nap after lunch in summer, but I was always obsessed with getting my favorite ice cream bar. I would pretend to fall asleep until I heard the ice cream seller’s calling in the alley, then I would try to use my nap as leverage to get my ice cream. She would say no at first, but in the end she would always end up getting me one. Maybe because I could see her laugh at my obvious trick. It made the summer afternoon sweet as the ice cream.

The mystery sickness kept my grandma away from me. I vividly remember how sick she was because she hid it away from me very well. As a result, I was in complete shock when my mom took me to see her in

the hospital for the last time. I remember the long dark hallway to get to her room and the “clean” smell of the hospital, and the peaceful nap that I took next to her. Sometimes I thought if I knew that was the last time I would get to sleep next to her, I would have wished to never wake up.

Then my hollow tree fell and sky went dark. I had a sense when she was gone. All the grannies of the neighborhood came to help, they covered everything in white sheets, I felt so strange when I walked in the house that I lived in for all the time I could remember. I didn’t cry, or couldn’t cry, because I didn’t know how to react when all the goodness of my five years of life shattered to pieces.

There was never a closer. I didn’t really talk to anyone for a few years after her death, and I forgot how to be happy. The terror, sadness, pain, confusion, anxiety...lived in me from the day she died. Sometimes I get confused, I don’t know if I miss her more or miss us more.

My grandma once promised me that she would always wait for me by the big rock next to the kindergarten school gate and bring me home. I never went to kindergarten, because there was no more grandma, and no home.

Into the Spider-Verse

Sean Sampler

Ladies and gentlemen, I have something to tell you—I'm an arachnophobe. The problem is, my mother is too, and out of fear of the unthinkable, we've developed techniques depending on the type, size, and location of the spider. When it's 3 mm or smaller, you can use the 'double tissue' to pick it up and throw it in the trash, but any larger, and this method fails since you begin to feel the texture and shape of the body. This is when you use the 'electric tennis racket' they sell at Walmart during certain seasons. It's got a short handle, but can really barbecue a spider. Now if it's on the carpet, I'd recommend the 'mummification' method where you use extra wide packing tape in an asterisk formation to prevent any movement, and wait for it to die.

When you get to your medium-sized or long-legged spiders, distance is key. The 'spider broom', exclusively used for spiders, has a 3-foot dustpan to match. We put our shoes on, you know, for protection, and my mother guides the spider onto the dustpan and walks it to the bathroom while banging it on the floor repeatedly which prevents it from crawling off. Now I know what you're thinking: if you put the spider in the toilet, it'll never go down when you flush it! Not many people know this, but if you add a few drops of soap to the bowl, it breaks the surface tension and takes the spider down with it. That's my job—unless of course, we decide it's too big and needs to go outside. Then, if it's daytime, my job is to wait by the front door and open it as she approaches, flings the spider out like a LaCrosse ball, and jumps back in as I close the door all in one fell swoop. We've got this down like clockwork. But if it's nighttime, while she's walking and tapping and walking and tapping, I'm sprinting around turning off all the lights in the house by the time she gets to the door. Otherwise the light would attract even more bugs! It's just common sense, really.

Now, if the spider is on the wall, you can't use the broom with any accuracy, so you use the 'Cup of Death' which is an expandable curtain rod pushed through and taped to a paper cup. You spray the Raid in the cup and then hold it under the spider until it falls conveniently in, at which point you can lower it and implement the 'soap in the toilet' method.

But this one night, I was up late studying, and out of the corner of my eye, I saw the biggest, hairiest, most monstrous spider I have ever seen in my life, and all previous options were thrown out the window! All I could think to do was scream loud enough to wake my mother on the opposite side of the house. In a panic, I grabbed a fresh bottle of Raid from the stock. We then willed it to crawl to the corner of our kitchen, and my arm stretched out in a locked position, as I forcefully pressed my finger on the trigger, “sshhhh,” my mother screamed, “Oh, no, no, no, no!” “Sshhhh.” A minute later, the bottle was empty, and the spider was buried under a mountain of poisonous foam. But then, as the toxic mound started to move, we watched in horror as it crawled out. Each hair on each leg was covered in white foam, and we had only seconds to think of our next strategy. The printer was behind us, so we grabbed stacks of paper and tossed them toward the spider; I landed a ream dead on it, but we could not take any chances. Bam! Another ream. The deed was done. Just the sight of it would remind us of the trauma, so we quarantined the area with a bright orange milk crate.

Should this fail, the spider has won. Our only option is to call in the experts, pack a bag, and move out for a few days. Without certainty that the spider is dead, we would be sleepless and the house, unlivable.

Wait! What is that? Is that a spider?

The Pizza Connoisseur

Sean Sampler

I belong to the community of pizza aficionados, firmly believing in the healing power of hot pizza fresh from the oven. At least based on my empirical findings, I always feel better after eating a slice! A true aficionado requires not only a great appreciation of pizza, but a constant quest for the perfect one.

Whenever I travel, one of our family traditions is to seek out the best pizza. To name a few personal favorites: Cane Rosso (Dallas), Tony's Pizza Napoletana (San Francisco), Piccolo Buco (Rome), Pizza My Heart (Chiang Mai), Pizza 4P's (Hanoi), 800 Degrees Pizzeria (Tokyo)—I could go on and on. When I discover something outstanding, we talk to the manager and listen to stories of how the cheese was made from cows only in Parma, how they source their locally-grown organic tomatoes, or even how the chef went to Italy to study the art from the masters. When visiting foreign countries, many tourists seek out cathedrals to be inspired by the art and beauty of their traditions, but for me, I pay homage to the awe-inspiring dome of a wood-burning pizza oven. I search for the high priests of pizza-making just as pilgrims travel to Mecca. Many find solace in pizza in an otherwise foreign land, smiling as they experience the heavenly mixture of ingredients.

Here, I find comfort in realizing that what started as humble peasant food has become a global phenomenon. As I eat, I notice that all sorts of people: myself, weary travelers, and even the locals, come together around the warmth of the wood-burning oven, basking in the scent of oregano and sharing deep thoughts over deep-dish pizza. We're all different, but all the same—everyone agrees that pineapple should NEVER be on pizza!

Blizzard

Marie Williams

I have never known the warmth of a mother's touch,
And in knowing you, imagining it seems an impossibility.
When I open my eyes to cold, desolate wastelands,
Where peace is a whipping silence, and hope is an icicle to the abdomen.

I have only known a mother's touch to be of this –
Frost forming cracked ribs and empty pitted stomachs,
Crippling fingers in snow blanketed nights of unfathomable silence,
Where the only warmth to be had was outside under stars.

You threw me into the blizzard and watched me grow buried,
Breathless under the weight of your burdens; a fifteen-year avalanche.
Yet even so with these blueblack nails I am clawing to the surface.
I am cold, yes, but against you, I will be hotter than any sun.

The Chairlift at Mount Snow

Havah Youngmann

Some people hate when the chairlift stops. Without fail, it begins to sway and bounce—and when you are fifteen feet in the air, it can make you feel uneasy. But I love it. The feeling I get in my abdomen—similar to the stomach-dropping sensation of a roller coaster ride—is something I anticipate, rather than dread. That is what the chairlift at Mount Snow does to me: it brings out my most fearless self, freeing me to experience and attempt things that I would not dare to do otherwise.

However, the chairlift does not wipe away every feeling of trepidation. Sometimes the slow ascent to the peak of the mountain works against me, by allowing me several minutes to watch my fellow skiers and snowboarders on the snowy slopes below. The first sign of trouble is always the sound of skis and boards on the snow; when weather conditions are precarious, the scrape of equipment against ice reverberates in my ears. And with ice comes slipping—which also serves to set me on edge. From the vantage point of the chairlift, I witness almost every tumble and “yard sale” (which is a particularly grizzly fall—it often entails a sprawled person, with skis that have flown off their feet and landed yards away) that takes place on the trails that I pass from above. When I observe these things from the safety of the lift—removed from the excitement of whizzing down the mountain—it is easy to nervously await my own descent. But despite my fears, I always make it down the mountain safely (give or take a few bumps and bruises).

While I experience nervousness, it is nothing compared to the way the chairlift garners my anticipation. One of my favorite sights is crisp lines in the snow that indicate quick and decisive turns made by some of the more talented snowboarders. They always evoke my desire to improve. From the lift, my eyes often search for the small forms of the most advanced boarders, in order to analyze their movements. The result is an ever-present itch to try out the new techniques that I witness from above. Snowboarders who seem to glide over bumpy snow are always more bent at the knees than those whose bodies are jostled by the obstructions. Snowboarders who land big jumps always lean into the jump rather than away from it. With every new observation I make from the lift, I become a bolder snowboarder.

My time on the chairlift is not isolated. I usually snowboard with a partner, and when the mountain is busy, sharing the lift with strangers is common practice. When I was little, my dad was always the one sitting beside me on the frigid seat. I grew accustomed to his gregarious inability to let us go unIntroduced to the unknown folk on the lift with us. My early years on the mountain were marked with happy chatter and pleasantries— “where are you from? Beautiful day out!” Later, I preferred to ride the chairlift with my best friend. Synthia and I spent our time discussing movies and boys, as if we were lounging in one of our bedrooms rather than suspending from a chord in the sky. Lately, I travel up the mountain next to my boyfriend.

It was on the chairlift at Mount Snow where I first really got to know Levi. On the rides to the summit, while overlooking the vast mountain and the miles of white and brown land stretching behind us, I mustered the courage to tell him how I felt about him. My voice trembled and my sweaty hands defied the temperature, but my uncharacteristic bravery paid off—Levi is still the person who most often sits beside me on the chairlift.

Yet even Levi can fade from my peripheral vision when the beauty of the mountain demands it. From my seat in the air, I have relished a variety of views. From trees that droop under the weight of icicles that glint in the sun, to far away buildings that look like multicolored dollhouses, to stagnant fog that makes the world feel quiet—my breath has been stolen over and over.

By trying things that scare me—like snowboarding on trails where I witnessed people fall and attempting new techniques—I have exceeded what I used to believe was my capacity for bravery. Beyond that, I expressed my feelings for someone despite the possibility that I could be rejected. The lift is where I have taken my biggest risks and felt the freedom to experience new things, whether or not they scare me. I never used to consider myself brave, but on the chairlift at Mount Snow, I have found my courage.

Uomo di Granito

Anthony O'Neill

We arrive just in time for Sunday dinner, the sweet aroma of sauce and garlic engulfs us, the air humid from the cooking pasta hangs heavy as we enter the kitchen. There he is, the man of the hour, waiting patiently, meeting us with a firm handshake and bear-like embrace that reflects the spirit of a younger man. Today is a big day, Joe is celebrating his 89th birthday. He is looking well, with a fresh shower, shave and a hint of Old Spice, casually dressed in a thick orange sweater endowed with the logo of his alma mater. A weathered cane is his constant companion, offering him a steady handhold and confidence in his step. As he moves through the room, it's impossible not to be impressed by his resilience and determination.

Joe is vestige of the past, a member of what most consider the greatest generation of our time. I have always considered them an inspiration, their example a gift. Grandparents, with values rooted in sacrifice and grit borne of depression and countless conflicts, grounded me as a young man. Their experience forged a life of conviction that accepts sacrifice in spite the inconveniences, tempered with an appreciation for each day. Somehow, they maintain a grateful focus on the present with a wary eye on an uncertain future, maximizing the experiences that time offers. My time with Joe reminds me of them, and all they provided throughout my early years.

We hastily seat ourselves, being the last of the tardy diners. The long table is set with the labors of love, each end a mirror image of simmering meatballs and sausage, spicy Utica greens, slices of crusty bread and of course, Locatelli Romano, the king of cheeses. Rigatoni is the pasta of choice, ensconced in red sauce.

Joe in his place, his hands folded, eager to give thanks. The family awaits with impatient respect before digging in. He bows his head and begins, speaking in a baritone voice, his cadence even and reassuring. I am not a religious man, but I appreciate this ritual that brings all of us together for a short time. Time passes quickly and this is a tradition that has been and will continue to be repeated many times over the years. I realize this as I search for the children from not so long ago in the faces of the young adults seated around the table.

The pleasantries of serving and sharing seamlessly transition into comfortable conversations, returning to topics, recent or ongoing, like sliding into a comfortable pair of favored slippers. Joe is quiet and attentive, always listening and considering. He asks each of his flock for an update on school, work, and life. Eager to hear, offering encouragement and advice, always with patience and respect. He telegraphs his excitement with raised eyebrows or a knowing grin, sometimes releasing a burst of laughter and wide smile in response. They are, without question, the pride of his lifetime of sacrifice and hard work.

The kitchen fills with the clattering of plates and cutlery, and the burbling of fresh coffee. With the feast on pause, many stand and, with fleeting discomfort, wander throughout the house like we've hit the seventh inning stretch on a hot summer day. Joseph, standing tall, is an imposing presence. His complexion is dark and weathered. His deep-set brown eyes lie below thick eyebrows with a prominent nose and jaw. His hair is gray, but streaks of black remain. His torso is thick with lanky legs and arms. While athletic in his early years, he has struggled with MS since his thirties.

Through faith and family, he manages to keep a positive outlook, uncomplaining and with a steely resilience, in spite of the lifetime with this chronic disease. His demeanor is one of peace and tranquility, having come to terms with his ailment years ago. He takes a great deal of pride in his family and the traditions that bring us together, hosting family events and religious holidays without fail. He is famous for his homemade wine, an inspired presentation of Scallops Scampi, served exclusively on Fridays, and his delicious *compate'*, an heirloom candy of toasted sesame seeds and a caramelized red wine reduction.

Joe cues the Sinatra, then returns to the head of the table. He pours himself a snifter of his favorite brandy and lies in wait. It is well known that he has a considerable sweet tooth.

The family becomes restless as the afternoon wears on, the table now cast in hues of gold. The younger members become restless, eager to return to their busy lives. Sensing this, Joe begins his goodbyes, moving carefully, almost hesitantly towards the stairs, his body bent, legs set, reaching for reinforcement. He shoots me a glance with a raised brow as he tucks a carefully wrapped cannoli into his sweater pocket, his solitary indulgence.

Distant Conversations

Brianna Valenti

The dimly lit room was hidden away inside of the brick house. It was only slightly illuminated by the rays that poured heat through the narrow, flapping blinds. The familiar aroma of ancient perfume and cigarettes danced around the enclosed space. It was just me, toying with my imagination and the dolls in my hand. I was feeling so at peace with the world, so naïve and unaware. I never knew problems outside of what snack I was in the mood for or not wanting to go to school.

Only, it's been years since then.

The zooming of the cars met my eardrums just seconds before they disappeared completely. Tan carpet scratched against my sensitive skin as I continued to jump my barbies up and down in conversation; the plastic smell that stayed throughout my childhood.

The door slightly opened, but my small self was too invested in Barbie's shoe choice that day to hear the familiar squeak. The cheap material of the dress played in my small hands as I thought, Should I choose the red boots or the yellow heels?

"Boo!"

The raspy sound echoed off the corners of the room. His bright smile lit up the room, highlighting the wrinkles covering his face.

They always said I had his smile.

The white t-shirt that covered his arms accentuated his tan skin, the same kind that my mother has. The loud laugh boomed through the tiny space, feeling like a warm hug wrapped around my eardrums.

She always said I made him laugh.

He said.

She said.

They said.

But it was never anything I remembered him saying.

“You scared me,” my tiny voice squeaked as my figure trembled like a falling leaf.

My body slowly started recovering as I laughed alongside him, ignoring my rapid heartbeat from moments prior. He glanced towards the elderly woman next to him, staring at her as if they were just beginning to fall in love. The taste of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich still lingered in my mouth as I gasped for air. A moment so insignificant at the time, but now engraved forever into my mind.

I did not know that this would be the last, and only, memory I had of him. The familiar laugh now inaudible in my mind, but still fully aware that it happened.

The dark room soon became a mysterious memory, reminding me of the time that I took for granted.



The State University
of New York