

The background is a textured, reddish-brown surface with a light beam shining from the top right corner. The text is centered in a red, outlined font.

ALL
THE
LIVES
WE EVER LIVED

A LIGHTHOUSE WRITERS WORKSHOP COMMUNITY ANTHOLOGY
VOLUME 2

All the Lives We Ever Lived

*A Lighthouse Writers Workshop
Community Anthology,
Volume 2*

Edited by Manuel Aragon & Roxanne Banks Malia

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Table of Contents

Hailey A.	
<i>No More Excuses</i>	5
Val U. Able	
<i>Listen</i>	6
Maureen Ackerman	
<i>What Matters</i>	7
Niyankor Ajuaj	
<i>Choice</i>	10
Kristen E. Andersen	
<i>Lobsters & Love</i>	11
Rick Anderson	
<i>The Timekeeper's Eye</i>	13
Brenda B.	
<i>My Girl</i>	15
Osha Bear	
<i>Road Kill At Midnight</i>	16
Bennie J. Bellino	
<i>Recipe to Sing</i>	17
John Donovan Bent	
<i>H371XER</i>	18

Jennifer Black Elk	
<i>Untitled</i>	20
Paul Blomquist	
<i>Accident</i>	21
Arenthian Bohannan	
<i>When the Pumice Lands</i>	23
Brad Boundary	
<i>Affliction</i>	24
Louise Brown	
<i>Surrender</i>	25
Giuliana Brunner	
<i>The War</i>	27
Ashley C.	
<i>Addict</i>	30
Crystal C.	
<i>Her Life in Reality</i>	31
Tammy C.	
<i>Destiny</i>	33
Joanna Cabrera-Rosas	
<i>Artist</i>	34
Liliana Cervantes	
<i>A New World</i>	35
Herman Chavez	
<i>love grows in an impossible garden</i>	38

Jonathan Coleman <i>The Cycles of Freedom</i>	41
R.R. Crespín <i>Untitled</i>	42
Laurie Duncan <i>Family</i>	43
Autumn Flynn <i>Untitled</i>	44
Bobby Z. Ford <i>The Thinking Death</i>	45
Fran Ford <i>Your Poem</i>	46
John Garcia <i>Momma's Love</i>	49
Kayla Gilbert <i>Walk of Silence</i>	50
Dean Glorso <i>Paint the Breeze</i>	52
Fernando Gómez <i>End.Less.Time</i>	54
Karen D. Gonzales <i>Memories Growing Up in the West Colfax Neighborhood</i>	55

Susan Guillory	
<i>Sometimes . . .</i>	56
Tasura Marie Hughes	
<i>The Tower</i>	58
Roshaun Hogan	
<i>My Cancer Story</i>	59
Amy Irish	
<i>Terratoma</i>	60
Hagan James W.	
<i>Once in a Love-time Opportunity</i>	61
Rachel K.	
<i>Untitled</i>	63
Mark Kern	
<i>Interview With a Gerund</i>	64
Malaina L.	
<i>Like A True Soldier</i>	68
John Lattany	
<i>The Unknown Soldier</i>	69
Charisma Lee	
<i>First Friday (welcome back)</i>	70
Jane Lewis	
<i>modern day madonna</i>	71
Dannel M.	
<i>A Woman I Always Wanted to Be</i>	73

Linda L. Magnuson	
<i>Mom's Battle</i>	74
Soni Marie A.	
<i>Goodbye</i>	76
Daniel Angel Martinez	
<i>A Royal Man</i>	77
Brandon McAllister	
<i>Untitled</i>	80
Ronald McCoy	
<i>Where I'm From</i>	81
Anne McWhite	
<i>Head Coverings</i>	82
Douglas L. Micco	
<i>The First Day of the Rest of My Life</i>	84
Rochelle Mills	
<i>Room # 3</i>	89
Adrienne Montoya	
<i>Funeral Attire</i>	91
Dani Jo Moore	
<i>Setting the Stage</i>	95
Dr. Jim Moses	
<i>Charlie and the Wax</i>	96
Myra Nagy	
<i>Homeless Faceless</i>	100

Derek Nast	
<i>Catching Up</i>	101
Grant O'Brien	
<i>Finality of Death</i>	104
Benjamin Eric Nelson	
<i>Eater of Dead Flesh</i>	105
Janis Olsen	
<i>May Tanka</i>	106
Twila Paul	
<i>Nursing the Sisterhood</i>	107
Susan Perrigo	
<i>Yes, I am 'The Runner'</i>	108
Bob Petrich	
<i>Confluence</i>	110
Trich R.	
<i>We Are Not Broken</i>	111
Marianne Reid	
<i>Creel</i>	112
Lydia Renfrio	
<i>In the Garden on Lowell Street</i>	113
Greg Rivas	
<i>Let Me Bake You a Potato</i>	115
Charlotte Rose	
<i>The Best and Worst of My Life</i>	116

Woody Roseland <i>Hide and Seek</i>	117
Deb Rosenbaum <i>Shpilkis</i>	122
Joanna Scoggins <i>Fury</i>	124
Rob Scharton <i>Today is for Fun</i>	125
Jim Seljos <i>Finding the Line</i>	126
C. Shetskie-McAllister <i>Castaway, Year 5</i>	127
Lilly Shoemaker <i>Vulnerable</i>	129
Pete Simon <i>Happy Valley Restored</i>	130
Michael Sindler <i>Color My World</i>	132
Sparks <i>Sisterhood</i>	134
Stephen Sparks <i>Poetry Homework</i>	135
Betsy Turnbull <i>Mom</i>	136
Richard VanDerVoort <i>Reclamation</i>	137

Patricialyn Veal <i>In Loving Memory</i>	138
Virginia Winnen <i>Roomies</i>	140
Jennifer Wagner <i>Riddelz</i>	141
Claire Wang <i>Untitled</i>	142
Twyla Weathers <i>Junk</i>	144
Matthew Weatherspoon <i>Hello</i>	145
Leaan Williams <i>There</i>	146
Sheree L. (Wingo) Downs <i>A Silver Bracelet</i>	147
B.E.L. <i>Colorless Prisms</i>	149
Dulcinia V. <i>When I Look Into the Mirror</i>	150
Iman <i>Folk in Uniform</i>	151
Maxx <i>Alisa</i>	154

Oscar	
<i>Drink of Death</i>	155
SK	
<i>The Loudest Rain, From the Quietest Clouds</i>	157
Nathan Ybanez	
<i>Thirteen Ghosts</i>	159
The “Writing to Be Free” Women	
<i>A Cornucopia of Thanks</i>	165

Introduction

A community has a voice, a shared language only spoken between one another; shorthand and phrases that communicate a history that, perhaps, you were not aware of, words that lets you know that the ties run deep. If you are lucky enough to build a relationship with any community, to be invited in, they will share their stories. This is a sacred act.

At Lighthouse we are honored that so many communities have invited us in and shared their stories with us over the past five years. For this collection, we spotlight a number of voices from the community: our Hard Times writers in Denver Public Library and Jefferson County Public Library; community writers through I Am Denver, the storytelling project run by Rowena Alegria and the City of Denver; Writing in Color, Lighthouse's group for BIPOC writers in Colorado; the storytellers at Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community; Growing Together, a collaborative gardening and writing project, lead by Suzi Q. Smith and Franklin Cruz; the voices of Unlocked Poetry, a program at Sterling Correctional Facility; the writers of The Gathering Place and Jefferson County ICCS's Writing to Be Free program; and lastly, UC Health's Writing with Cancer.

We are grateful for the Lighthouse faculty and staff, the folks on the ground who built the relationships in our communities, for their hard work and dedication to the many voices that make this anthology possible: Rowena Alegria, Herman Chavez, Kathy Conde, Franklin Cruz, Sydney Fowler, Michael J. Henry, Dan Manzanaras, Suzi Q. Smith, Joy Sawyer, Courtney Morgan, Theresa Rozul Knowles, Jesaka Long,

Twanna Latrice Hill, Sarah Elizabeth Schantz, Levi Noe, Assétou Xango, and Cody Yantis.

And to the volunteers — Alyssa Devlin, Sandy Tran, and Lindsey Vargas — who helped read and compile all of the selected works, this book would not have been possible without your hours of hard work.

The community has spoken with us, shared their stories, and here they are for you, a rare opportunity to see and hear and feel their words; we invite you to read their fictions, their poetry, nonfiction, and for a moment, enter their worlds.

—Manuel Aragon & Roxanne Banks Malia

Lighthouse Writers Workshop Community Engagement

HAILEY A.

No More Excuses

No more excuses to fall back into that life
Not going to happen since I've seen the light
Too many times I've walked down that path
Once for this
Once for that
But once turns into too many
And of course is never enough
I go in once and find myself stuck
Begging and pleading for my life
Unaware it's been mine this whole time
I'm done playing these games
That I lose every time
I'm going to stop making excuses
And stand up for what's mine
Freedom, loyalty, and a happy life
I'm going to start going for
what I have deserved this whole time

VAL U. ABLE

Listen

Ever wonder why we're born with twice the number of ears than mouths?! Ever ponder why attorneys in legal proceedings instruct each witness to listen to the complete question before responding—explaining that often the inquiry ends up being different than the first assumed?

Sitting amidst a room full of writers tasked with the assignment to list their 2019 goals, I sat still, eyes closed, as others scribbled hurriedly. When asked by the author next to me why I had written nothing, I whispered back, "I'm listening." As the leader issued our one minute warning, I penned the only word that came to me as my primary writing goal: Listen.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "If I were given nine hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend the first seven sharpening my axe!"

What Matters

The game had been Micah's idea. He'd played it during the wilderness trip in August with teenagers from all over the country, and everybody had cried at the end, and they had hugged, too, and had been sure that they'd never forget feeling understood, finally, loved even, and now Micah was suggesting we do it in my writing class when it was his turn for a topic.

Micah could have said, "We can try flying," and we'd have touched each other's wings. That's who Micah was. An icon, or a saint, and everybody worshipped him and his music and the way he bent toward you so you could almost touch and really listen when he spoke. The way you wound up, somehow, believing you could be like him. I had told my friend Annie once that Micah was a character I might have created for the class to analyze. "Why do we care about him?" I'd have asked. "Does it matter that he glides? That his hair shines onto his shoulders, that he finds your eyes when he looks at you? That he knows about hurt?" Annie told me you can never tell what happens to kids like that later.

Micah played piano and sang after school in the big auditorium whenever it was empty, and people started to talk about it, and now they came on their own—teachers, underclassmen, off-season jocks, computer geeks. And girls. Sometimes the girls would write poems about him, but Micah never blushed or looked away. "I love this line, Becca," he'd say, "because it's how it is at night since my brother died," and then read out loud from Becca's poem, *I can't look at a single star without him*. He always said the person's name, and others started to do that, too. Everybody mattered.

Micah had turned off the overhead lights and closed the drapes along the glass doors. "We'll just sit here like this for a few minutes," he said, "and you should think about things you're afraid of. Close your eyes, maybe, put your head down so you're not looking at anybody else, and just think. When Mrs. Ackerman opens the drapes, we'll all write something we really fear." We'd had other circle games before, so they

knew what would happen next. I would collect the cards and then, one at a time, I would read what was written down. Then each person in the class would guess who had written it and why. When all the statements had been read and guessed at, those of us who felt strong enough would claim our words. We would think about each other, and ourselves.

But before we began, a stranger, a woman with a notepad, walked in and sat at one of the desks scattered beyond our circle. “Don’t mind me,” she said to all the eyes trying to figure out who she was. “I’m just taking notes for this article I’m writing about the school. I won’t interrupt.”

I’d heard that a reporter from the local paper was coming sometime soon to get a feel for what made the school different from others in the county, what made it known as the *private public school*, and now here she was, intruding on this private moment in our very private space, but she stayed quiet and didn’t say anything when she heard Carrie’s, *I hate my body and I’ll never have a boyfriend and I don’t know what I’ll do when the prom comes*; or Bobby’s, *My father says I’m a screwup and won’t get into an Ivy because I got a C in physics*; or Micah’s, *My parents say my music leads to drugs. I want it to be my life. What if I’m weak and give in to what they want?* The newspaper lady found Rachel later and half-quoted her in the article without using her name: *I’m afraid I won’t have friends here because I’m new and not blonde and don’t play lacrosse.*

There was mine, too: *I’m afraid I’ll die before I can say I’m sorry to people I’ve hurt. I don’t know what people hear when I think I’m saying something. I don’t know how forgiveness works.*

But I wrote a poem once about light, how light forgives, how we are light, forgiven, and on the morning my father died from the Parkinson’s that had frozen him, I climbed onto his bed while light slanted into the room, and I kept thanking him for being my father, and it wasn’t until years later that I felt forgiven for my crooked little heart that hadn’t made enough room for his pain, because even though I went to him at the nursing home four or five times a week; even though I brought the lace tablecloth and Lenox for the dinners he couldn’t eat; even though everybody said, “Oh, what a good daughter,” I didn’t feel good when my insides knotted on the drive over or when I watched him try so hard

at physical therapy that I cried while I helped him stagger. The nuns had made us pray out loud, *Oh, Lord, I am not worthy*, and still that was what twisted me, not being worthy, not being perfectly kind every second, especially because people thought I *was* being kind. I don't know what my father thought. He hardly ever spoke.

After the surgeon found the tumor in my brain, everyone said, "Oh, I'm so sorry, you must be terrified, I'll pray that you'll be okay," but I wasn't terrified about cancer because that fear I'd written in my classroom had been smoothed over, soothed like shriveled skin from a tender touch that morning on my father's bed. He couldn't speak, and I couldn't stop speaking, and one day as I ran along the beach, I threw all those stones of sadness I'd been carrying into the sea. It felt like my father and I were the sea and the shore intertwined, beautiful and necessary parts of each other. What I've actually prayed for since the cancer is *May I be kind*.

The kids were usually kind to each other, maybe because we did those circles, and even when they might have felt antsy or upset about who knows what, someplace inside them would remember that they'd heard each other's fears and longings and had said nice things about each other in some of the other games we played, like when each of us would start a paper with our name on the top, then pass it around, and everybody would say something good about the person on the page. We had read the poem by e e cummings--*I thank you . . . for everything . . . which is yes*—and when Micah's compliment page came to me, I wrote, *You are my yes*. I've been told that on the night I was diagnosed with brain cancer, the only word I could say was *yes*. Maybe *yes* could be a metaphor for my life. And maybe Micah can remember out loud at my memorial service that *yes* is like light, it matters, as he sings me at that moment back to life.

NIYANKOR AJUJ

Choice

Choice ain't ever been for this body. Life ain't ever been for this body.

So how can choices about life possibly be made for this body?

This Black body,

This Black woman body,

whose womb was a lab long before a home?

KRISTEN E. ANDERSEN

Lobsters & Love

For Rudolph Egert

My grandfather was calluses and grease, engines and wood, laughter and gin. He was hugs so tight I thought love could crush me. Each time, I prayed I'd survive.

He was summers at the beach and picking out lobsters on the way home. He was steam rising from the oven, fogging up his glasses, the lobsters now bright red and still smelling of the sea. He was dipping their sweet flesh into hot melted butter, then savoring it all on your tongue. He was giggling, and sword fighting with the now-hollow claws, and tickling and pulling me in close so I couldn't escape.

Grampa was sweaters and snow, holiday lights and a reindeer's name. He was endless manicure sets for my grandmother. Every Christmas, after receiving the latest (which was sometimes exactly the same as the year before), she'd catch my mom's eye over his head and roll her eyes.

A few months before that last Christmas, however, he called her over and put a small, velvety box in her hand.

"What? How?..." she asked. He hadn't been anywhere alone for months, had barely been able to stand on his own.

"Just open it," he said.

She did, and saw diamond earrings sparkling up at her. Her jaw dropped, and for maybe the only time in my life, I saw tears fill my grandmother's eye.

Staring at the diamonds, she reached out to grip his hand. Over her head, my grandfather caught my mom's eye and winked.

This grandfather was my mom's dad, thanks to a battlefield in Belgium nine months after she was born. He was me wondering sometimes if it was okay that my favorite grandparent was the only one I wasn't "really" related to. He was looking through the patio doors at my mom that last day, telling me that what mattered to him most in his entire life was that she'd accepted him as her "real" Dad.

He was our last meal together—portobello mushrooms for my now-vegetarian sister, even though (I found out later) he'd offered to cook us lobster one last time. Grampa was so frail then, almost a different man. And yet he still hugged me so tight I felt for a moment as if—if he squeezed just a tiny bit harder—he could crush me.

My grandfather was steadiness and warmth, strength and ingenuity, trading watercolors for engine repair. He was loyalty and dedication and not needing to tell you he loved you, because you already knew.

I realize now he was everything I've been searching for in a man ever since. My grandfather was Home.

RICK ANDERSON

The Timekeeper's Eye

The mirror serves
an unforgiving
timekeeper
Each passing second
he deviously allows
another detail
another aspect
A new mosaic
grows minutely

The mirror throbs
with the pulses
of the timepiece
Refractions framed
the montage coalesces
into a whole
the image completes
a complexity
now uncomplicated

The mirror cracks
The image transposes
into an intricate
puzzle of moments
Labyrinthine
webworks
woven abruptly

An existence
in disruption

The mirror crashes
Slivers scatter
dispersed into
fractal reflections
of what was
The Timekeeper
amused and patient
boasts an infinity
of mirrors

BRENDA B.

My Girl

No one told her she was pretty, or that she was smart. She had dark auburn hair and freckles across her face.

Only words she ever heard were stupid and dumb, and you'll never amount to anything, then beat until she was dumb.

A little girl who never got to be, molested and beaten until she had no friends to call her own. The one that she talked to was the Girl inside her soul.

To grow up a Young Lady she thought sex was love. She was used like a whore, the, into a mother she had become.

From abuse from her father, then her husband, she met the door.

Nowhere to go—even my mother said no.

Meth took away her pain and even her love and replaced it with an emotion of disgust. Not for her children or those she adored, but for that lady, the one inside of me.

Today as I see my reflection staring back at me, she says, "Are you really me at last."

From ugly to beauty is what she could see, that girl, my girl, is she me.

OSHA BEAR

Road Kill At Midnight

The phone rings disrupting the evening.

"I hit a deer. Do you want her?"

"Sure.:

Awaiting the impending arrival of Roadkill. Dark settles in triumphantly. The truck rumbles in the driveway at midnight. Tying the deer up, the butchering process begins. A sharp box cutter performing the task. Exposing the foul stench of exploded guts. Skillfully slit blood flows from the upside-down neck. Ravenously joyful flies ascend in the daylight A feast unfit for humans. The dog fill their guts to swollen on this unwasted sacrifice devouring bones, relishing the guts, sticky and stinky, they ask to enter the house.

A friend's van now a recognizable force for the Rez fleet. These vehicles have characters of their own. Trucks you can hear from miles away and know just who's behind the wheel. Some trucks will make the bumpy dirt roads sweep by like the best-groomed racetrack, and others will slowly coast into the driveway.

Then on a fine Fourth of July, we turn to forgetting that it is the white man's day of glory, slow pattering Chevy arrives from Kyle bringing the medicine of a friend to the doorstep. We sip thick Wahkalapi and step into the sweet stranger days on the front lines of battle.

BENNIE J. BELLINO

Recipe to Sing

Ingredients:

- A spark of boldness
- A bunch of practice
- Song lyrics
- Instrument optional

Directions: Begin with a spark of boldness, allow the rest of the ingredients to blend into an epic mix. Now, sing with your awesome tone.

Caution: Don't shy away as it will gap the flow of your epic mix.

Tips: Have others sing along, enjoy the moment.

May be used on outings, in front of fans, or where you find it.

JOHN DONOVAN BENT

H371XER

So alone,
picking and licking wounds.
My mad mind consumes the ever unraveling runes.
Ev'ry fresh bleeding revelation profound,
resounds, swims down and compounds with
sweet, silently seething tunes.

JENNIFER BLACK ELK

Untitled

“Mitakuye Oyasin” a phrase Lakota native people expresses

“ALL MY RELATIONS”

All four races of mankind are assigned to be stewards of an element of Mother Earth.

Red nation: cares for the Green

Black nation: cares for the Water

Yellow nation: cares for the Air

White nation: cares for the Fire

It is imperative for mankind to know how to give reverence & ask permission to partake whatever element needed for comforts.

The plant & animal kingdoms also sacrifice their lives.

As mankind

Dominance above any of those relatives is delusional, as each element/kingdom dwindles, mankind will cease.

PAUL BLOMQUIST

Accident

I mean I don't remember being hit by the car, but the medic in the ambulance said I had some kind of the memory loss. "Yeah, you probably had some slight concussion."

I'd just left Hard Times, and I remember in the car talking to my daughter in D.C.

I'd said, "Ok, Rach, love you."

I called her Rach, that was my sometimes nickname for my second daughter.

And Rachel said, "Love you dad," and she hung up. I remember that.

Anyway, I'd parked the car for YMCA members at the free parking lot at Knights of Columbus and was walking across Lincoln on 16th Avenue.

And then I just remember a jumble of light and sound and confusion, and there was a car bumper and then I remember standing up . . . And water was coming down from above me . . . then it was coming out of me, and I realized it was red and it was not water but blood, my blood, and, y'know, that seemed so strange.

So Helen, who worked at the Y and was walking in front of me on the crosswalk, she called me the next day to check up on me and see how I was doing, and she said, "Yeah, I heard this thumping noise . . . I guess that was what it was, and I turned, and you were there on the ground, and your head was almost under the bumper."

"Really . . . really? I was on the ground? I don't remember that at all I mean, I remember, I dunno . . . and about five people standing around me, and they were helping me get up, but gosh, don't remember being on the ground at all. Then there was all that blood, too, but I thought it was water at first."

Y'know, I do remember asking, "Was the light red, was it red, was I walking on the red light?" I remember that, and all these strangers, all of them were so helpful, but they didn't answer me whether the light was red.

They were all strangers, about five of them, and they were so kind

to me and their kindness almost made me cry . . . They walked me to the steps in front of the Y where I sat down . . . and all the time I was so concerned about whether the light was red or not.

Then the nurse in the emergency room, she said that the CAT scans show no bones were broken, that I probably got a concussion because I kept repeating myself at the site.”

“At the site? What’s that . . . The site?” Then I figured she must’ve been talking about the accident site . . . And I dunno, I think I was just concerned whether the light was red when I got hit by that car, I mean, he just came around the corner and hit me, and all I remember was being worried that I was in the crosswalk when the light was red.

ARENTHIAN BOHANNAN

When the Pumice Lands

These eyes feel pain gazing at those fragments. They are irritated to the core. I can close, but I cannot forever lock truth's door. The tales of broken men so haunting the paths of choices to come are daunting. How did I drop myself to the concrete oblivion—a thousand pieces of me? Onward to perdition, be it near or far. Pause for intermission. Are those bits, these failed remnants, worthy of rescue and readmittance to experience's tool belt? A box of weaponry that I tote from this rebound to and beyond his majesty's moat. Thoughts, emotions, faded mental imagery that is igneous to my earthly sensory. To touch them, I dare not. To restore these jigsawed fragments to the chief engineer's design. A good word—a high call defined. It seems my ego must bleed and no longer breathe if I am to be refined.

BRAD BOUNDARY

Affliction

So tired of this incessant prison
Addiction with its patience and unending precision
Inhibiting any logic or a practical decision
Creating animosity, shame, guilt, and arbitrary division

This persistent and tenacious Beast
with its sharpened teeth, addiction will have its feast

Relentlessly taunting and provoking me to slip
Tightening its inevitable grip
Waiting patiently in the parking lot doing a flip
Preparing me for me to say, "fuck it," let's take this daunting trip

I mention the nature and disease of addiction
Because it never brings release, only affliction.

LOUISE BROWN

Surrender

This poem is not mine
though I have chosen these words,
some, quite carefully—
looked up the meaning
to make sure it was right;
other times, checking synonyms
to get the exact nuance.

Yet, at times
I've turned words over
one at a time
like fortune's cards,
left them
to say what they will.

Sometimes I wonder
if I write "lavender"
do you see purple?
If I pen "crisp"
do you hear a snap?
Is it possible to be more precise,
to fine-tune my work
so your experience mirrors mine?

Sure of this impossibility,
I dip into my mind,
release my thoughts on the page
where they shimmer
like blown bubbles, wavering,
changing shape, reflecting rainbows

I may not have intended.
Your own sun colors
what you find there.

The War

They moved my mother to the locked ward a few months ago after the second time she tried to catch the next train home to New Orleans. She made it out to the parking lot that time, though they caught her before she tried to cross Sheridan Boulevard in her wheelchair.

“What’s your mom’s deal with New Orleans?” one of the nursing assistants asked me. “Did she have a really good time there once or something?”

I told him curtly that we were from there and never felt quite so friendly toward him after that, as I think poorly of people who don’t know that New Orleans is a real city with actual residents.

I peek through the small square window in the locked door before tapping in the code. Sometimes there is a group of dementia patients directly on the other side of the door like detritus washed up against a grate, and I have to ask a staff member to distract them while I slip past, but today there is only one woman pawing at the door like an extra in a zombie film, and I am able to get by. The walls of the hallway are an unsettling pinkish beige decorated with word art urging the residents to DREAM, BELIEVE, and IMAGINE, advice which for dementia patients seems, at best, unnecessary.

My mother’s room is furnished to remind her of childhood, with a dark wood dresser that my grandfather made and two armchairs from my grandmother’s house. The ancestral photographs in ornate gilt frames covering the wall opposite my mother’s bed were also my grandmother’s. Sometimes I ask my mother about them, and she is still able to rattle off their names, as well as their relationship to her and salient anecdotes. There’s also a bulletin board by her bed with criss-crossed ribbons securing smaller photographs: my father’s high school pictures, some pictures of her and her sisters as children, and some of me and my siblings. Comfortable chairs are scarce here, and residents often nod off in the armchairs, but today my mother is alone, asleep in bed with her glasses on and her mouth open, up to her chin in blankets.

I've brought coffee, which gives me the right to nudge her awake, and I adjust the bed to the proper angle. Ignoring the armchairs, I pull the wheelchair next to the bed and feel the seat briefly, something I learned to do months ago when I sat in a pool of urine, then sit down, resting my feet on the bedframe and my elbows on my bent knees.

After pleasantries and a few sips of coffee, she notices the bulletin board and asks what the pictures are, although we've talked about them a few times a week for over a year now. I disentangle one from the ribbons and show it to her, my father's high school class.

"I think that's junior year," I say. "Look, only four boys in a class of twenty-five."

"That was during the war," she says.

"Yes, I suppose the boys were all working."

"I don't remember much about the war," she says, and I blink. She has always been able to tell her stories of World War II, even now that she can't form new memories.

"Well, let's see," I say, setting the picture aside. "You remember the margarine. Having to color it."

Their cook Anna used to grab whichever of the three sisters was unlucky enough to go near the kitchen at the wrong time and make her mash the gelatin capsule of artificial color evenly into the white oleomargarine so it would look like butter. It was hard work, and they all tried to duck it.

She doesn't say anything, holding her coffee cup in both gnarled hands to warm them.

"And were there air raids?" I prompt. "In New Orleans?" Another story she's told many times.

"Drills," she corrects me. "You used to tell yourself they were only drills. Which they were."

"So what did you do? Just turn out the lights?"

"And get someplace safe."

"Where did you go?" I ask, interested. This has never come up. "The pantry?"

"I don't remember," she says slowly. "We didn't have cellars in that part of the country, of course."

My grandmother was deaf and had aural hallucinations during her own dementia. She often banged on my bedroom door and screamed at me to turn out the light, couldn't I hear the air raid sirens? But she never tried to get us to go downstairs and huddle in the pantry, so maybe it was only lights.

"I got a soldier's name to write to," my mother is saying. "I think I wrote him one letter."

"Did you knit?" I ask, having read of such things.

"Oh, I knitted. I don't remember ever finishing anything."

"Well, you were awfully young."

Then I say, remembering, "And Grandma and Grandpa took you to see the soldiers boarding."

I immediately regret saying it. Most of her war stories are tales of childhood adventure with just enough danger or privation to be interesting, but this story always makes her sad. Soldiers from all over were sent to Camp Plauché up the river before they went overseas. One day my grandfather came home with the news that thousands of soldiers were going to board a ship at the foot of Canal Street that evening. My mother's family ate dinner early and lined up with the rest of the city to see them off. Neon was prohibited for the duration of the war, so it was eerily dark as all the people silently watched the endless lines of boys in battle dress trying to be brave.

"It was just marching feet, that's all you could hear," she says. "And people telling their beads."—a New Orleans expression meaning saying a rosary—"And crying. Even some of the boys were crying."

Her voice catches at this last sentence, and I quickly look for a picture to cheer her up, settling on one of her childhood dog, Soot.

"Soot was a good dog," she says.

I prompt her to tell how she and her sisters used to dress Soot up in doll clothes, how Soot ran out to play fetch still dressed, how the pink skirt fluttered as he jumped to catch a ball my grandfather threw. And then her coffee is finished, so I take the cup, and she nods off again. As I'm easing off her glasses, she wakes up long enough for me to ask if she wants the blinds closed. She says no, she likes the light. It's cheerful.

ASHLEY C.

Addict

I feel like a flower dying in a storm
I'm left alone, frozen, will never get warm
Everything around me is falling apart
I can feel the pain radiate from my broken heart

I keep looking for a reason to live
So tired of fighting, not much left to give
I'm crawling on my knees and the demons lurk
But what do I do now that the drugs don't work?

I get a feeling that the end is near
When I was a kid this was my biggest fear
I'm feeling like suicide is the only way out
I fall to my knees, look up and shout

Help me, help me I'm at my worst
I never should of started, but it was good at first
It took away the pain, I didn't have to feel
But what do I do now that all my demons are real?

There's no more hiding I have no choice but to give in
This battle I'm fighting I see now I cannot win
Lord, I'm asking you to please step in
I'm tired of DYING
I just want to LIVE

CRYSTAL C.

Her Life in Reality

Through the face of all her laughter
A hidden secret of all her pain;
Through her eyes so radiantly blue
Masks the deep fear held within.
The ultimate bitterness and sorrow
Lead her into self-medication.
So much incredible inner strength,
But now relaxed due to exhaustion.
She has a whole lot of great potential
But never had any real direction.
Comfortably hiding behind denial
Keeps her mind lost in confusion.

The loss of her mom she grieved at 17,
Vulnerable and desperate she made a decision,
Taking vows for some security kept her sanity.
Then three conceptions made her life complete.
Sacrificing herself to provide for her three
Became natural to her love unconditionally.
Then stuck with heartache to a bad degree
Her significant other so dramatically. The abuse
and anger came on so suddenly.

After ten years she was emotionally drained.
The person she was he destroyed in vain.
Trapped and alone with nowhere to turn
The family knew but showed no concern
Was bold living life on her own she couldn't do
Since life for herself she never knew.

The violence got brutal;
Their lives he threatened.
Murder he sought kept them terribly frightened.
As prisoners, they felt their time was soon
Since ending the family was a plan he consumed.
Long nights staying awake she continues to guard;
Frightening extreme exhaustion made it very hard.
So she hides in the room to prepare her young,
That if tonight he snaps,
For them to escape and run.

TAMMY C.

Destiny

Or, choice to be? Taking the hand I have been dealt and winning the pot

with it.

To sit in anger or hurt, or smile and change the world around you.

Frustration . . . leads me to wanting something else.

Ease leads me off my path of destiny.

Stand proud, speak my story, share and grow each time.

A helping hand for me, a helping hand for you,

No handouts

Just a hand up.

Up, up that's the way to look.

No more looking down.

No more frowns.

Yes, there will be tears and fears.

We are survivors and will overcome.

Thank you to you.

Thank you to me.

Where I end up will be a blessing for all of us to see.

Minutes, seconds, and hours, our words bloom like flowers.

JOANNA CABRERA-ROSAS

Artist

I wake up from a nap I didn't know I was having and I feel Him
cutting a piece of me
with a long, flat knife

"Where am I? What are you doing to me?"

But He can't hear me and continues molding.

I recognize I'm in a kitchen,
and notice the dirty countertops filled with
bowls of water, yeast, and oil.

As I begin to panic I look around
and see lumps of burnt bodies in the trash.

I plead,

"Please don't cook me, I'm afraid of fire!"

but He doesn't hear me
and He continues pulling at my arms and tugging at my face,
Occasionally, he throws flour on me.

His hands are like sandpaper
Molding me into His desired shape.

He puts me in the oven,
I try to hold still but I can't,

"Please stop! It hurts to be in here!"

But He just stares at me for a moment
and then walks away.

I see Him sit at a table,

A New World

Ilaria is a young, 22-year-old Mexican-American woman living in the spring of 1939. She is embarking on a new journey to Paris, France as a result of her family. Ilaria has given birth to a son out of wedlock and her family is trying to conceal Ilaria giving birth from friends and family. Her family's plan is to pass the baby as her brother while she's gone. The opportunity for Ilaria to travel to France came from her French neighbor Manon. Manon told Maria's mother that her daughter, Camille Abrams, was looking to hire an English translator to teach her and her husband the English language, as they plan on moving to America in a few years to be closer to her, and to begin a new life in America. Manon quickly thought of Ilaria, as she was aware that she was fluent in English and had studied French in school, so she decided to tell Ilaria and her mother about this opportunity. At first Ilaria just disregarded the idea, but then her mother and father talked to her about it and put pressure on her to take the job and to leave at whatever cost. Ilaria had no choice but to abide by what her family was telling her. She now finds herself arriving in Paris after a rough travel to start a new life that she did not want. Camille and her husband Blaise have been waiting for her at the docking station for a while Camille is holding a picture of Ilaria and is looking for anyone who resembles a young, petite, 22-year old woman, with dark, long hair, olive skin, and big brown eyes. After looking around for finally finds her and asks in French "Are you Ilaria from America? Texas?" she responds with "Yes I am Ilaria", "oh good we've been waiting for you for quite some time, glad you've arrived, it must have been quite the travel", Ilaria "yes it sure was, I'm exhausted". Camille and Blaise take Ilaria's suitcases and put them in the car and head over to their apartment. It's located in the 18th district it's a bit of a rundown apartment and neighborhood, but it's the best they can do for the time being. Camille and Blaise unload Ilaria's suitcases and take them up to the second floor, show her to a small room just a little bigger than a closet and set her suitcases down, Ilaria

tells Camille that she is going to rest up a bit, so they leave her to it. Her body is exhausted but her mind isn't. She keeps thinking about her son and how she was not going to be there to raise him and that he would grow up not knowing who she really is. Thinking that hurt Ilaria so much, she had expressed that hurt to her parents but they ignored her feelings, Ilaria now finds herself in Camille's house not able to control her emotions and cries as quietly as she can. She finally gets tired of crying and falls asleep. Once Ilaria wakes up Camille and Blaise take her around the city to get to know it a little better. They show her the local grocery stores, department stores and places to eat. They spend a few hours walking around and begin to get hungry so they decide to grab dinner at a nearby bistro. As they wait their food, Camille begins a conversation and tells Ilaria that she's excited to move to America to be closer to her mother and start a new life. Ilaria lies and omits the truth and tells Camille and Blaise about how she always wanted to travel but never though she could, when Manon told her about this prospect, she knew she had to go for it because she would never get the chance to do so again. As they are conversating Camille is captivated by the emerald beaded necklace Ilaria is wearing around her neck and says to her, "Wow that's a beautiful necklace you have there, where did you get it", Ilaria "it's been in my family for almost four hundred years, not sure about the story behind it as it seems to change from generation to generation, I hope to someday to be able to pass it down to my child when I have one.

f The three of them finish their dinner and head on over to the apartment and call it a night. In the next coming months Ilaria settles down with her new duties, not only does she school Camille and Blaise in English but she also does some house work and occasionally picks up groceries and makes dinner for them all. Camille and Blaise both work full time. Camille works as a writer for a local paper and Blaise teaches literacy at the University of Diderot in Paris. But one day things begin to feel a little too familiar to Ilaria. It's a sunny afternoon and she's taking a walk to the local grocery store to buy a couple of things she needs to make dinner. As she's walking down the street she receives an odd

stare from a man she's never seen before or never paid attention to, the man yells at her from across the street in French "Tu n'appartiens pas retourne"(You don't belong here). She's taking back when she hears this man say this out of nowhere to her for no reason. She had received some odd stares here and there while in Paris but nothing was ever verbal. She decides to ignore it and continues on her way. Ilaria had experienced name calling and stares back at home, but she thought it'd be different in France, she thought it would never happen there. Camille had also begun to see a change in her country as well, mostly towards the Jewish community. She no longer felt wel-comed in Paris and thought it was time for a change. She did not want to inform her mother of what was happening as she did not want to worry her. She had been experiencing isolation at her place of work and was given the writing assignments that no one else wanted to take, she felt as though she was being picked on for being Jewish. A couple of months ago an incident took place between her and a couple of coworkers that would change things for her at the paper. She had no choice but to take the assignments her coworkers passed up. She didn't want to make things worse for herself and would just have to deal with it a little longer. As time passed, things just got worse for the Abrams and Ilaria. They began to hear about the Germans invading all surrounding countries in Europe, Austria, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium. They didn't think France would ever be invaded and stuck it out as long as they could, but they were wrong, very wrong. On May 20th, 1940 things would change in France and their lives forever. Things would never be the same for anyone.

HERMAN CHAVEZ

love grows in an impossible garden

1. viento. wind
words grow overgrown and wild weeds
between concrete
dentro y sobre las calles arrastrados within and over the streets
dragged

2. smiles rise in the summertime because an abundance of shining is always
shared

3. no importan los alimentos que les doy the nutrients i give them do
not matter—
importa quien se los da— it is who gives them that matters—
yo no les puedo regar ni rogar— i cannot irrigate nor beg them—
solamente mis amores— only my loves—
del sur— of the south—

4. en el valle on en el cerro crecemos we grow in the valley or in the
mountain
cuando se nos cae una cascada when a cascade falls on us
—en el fuerte de samaipata —in the waterfall of samaipata
—en las uvas del vino chattaro —in the grapes of the junk wine
crecemos moscas we grow flies
que molestan hastal desaparecer that bother until the disappearance
yo les sigo i follow them

5. biennial, perennial...
what do you call the flower that blooms a matter of five times, completely
spontaneously, over the course of seven years?

6. en las noches—	in the nights—
la misma noche que me pregunto—	the same night that they asked me—
si queria abandonar el misterio del	if i wanted to abandon the mystery
verano—	of the summer—
y la felicidad del descanso—	and the happiness of rest—
para ser suyo—	to be theirs
en esas noches crecen avispas de flores	—in those nights wasps from bitter
amargas	and yellow flowers
y amarillas—	grow—
sin alimentos o sol—	without nutrients or sun—
pero augados en sangre y sudor—	but drowned in blood and sweat—
lejos de los tomates o frutillas	far from the tomatoes or strawberries

7. big bushy hair.

imagine overgrown lavender between buildings.

but the bricks are soft and the fact that they are behind lavender makes them kissable.

8. the harder you squeeze the deeper the roots go

9. whisper to the leaves as you water them

because you want them to scream when they bloom

& moan when you bouquet them.

10. an act of sowing seeds & thorns while

drinking fertilizer is more productive in

a party of eighteen

There lies death beyond the roses,
red & pink & brazen,
thorns infinitely placed behind the ears.

Beyond the roses the mothers have fallen,
gerund to the continuity of reproduction.
They have fathered themselves into recklessness.
Biome

of reparations to the
asphalt.

Privy to the privilege of moths
who die only of hedonism.

This house!

is a hive of rabbit-moths,

those who shit & fucked themselves
into greedy roadkill
despite being born from the petals,
their petals.

thermal peace
(ball-cap cursive)

strip hairs from, to
a lipped mirror

the paint is drying

tardy calf-weight =
deceitful thigh-flex

love handles / ask for more than is burnt

leg hairs chafed in
pessimistic tenderness

JONATHAN COLEMAN

The Cycles of Freedom

I am free, I am whole! To rise to face!!! To let go,
to carry on...

In the sunlight on the moon alike I won't stop! I must carry on.
Freedom to do it all. I can conquer it all!!!

In the summer heat, I stay strong! In Fall and Autumn I slow down.
For in Winter I sleep. Not dead at all as some may think!!! I just need
to rest so I can Spring forth to say I have the freedom to endure it all!!!

R.R. CRESPIN

Untitled

My skull is a bird cage, my head is a sieve, my head has holes in all the wrong sizes and places, all the important things in it slip right on through

Mania mania mania

Baby i was *disappointed* when i said they were healing up

Baby I value the scars more than the skin they bed

My skull is a crypt with a lovely headstone on the front, and locked behind my brain decays privately and out of view

People talk to my casket like I'm still alive

I can hear them but what good does that to me?

The particulars of orgasm and the particulars of an organism rotting the particulars of rot and decay and death in many ways its exactly the same and no one cares to discuss it but it's happening all around us, beneath us and above us

The earth is a sphere the earth is a high rise we're all sitting in the subway station beneath someone else's loft.

LAURIE DUNCAN

Family

Grandma Helen smiles from the comfort of her worn recliner
My mother Jan laughs out loud. She's taken over her dad's oversized
green rocker.

My daughter Jennifer stretches out her long legs on the love seat.
She's sticking her painted toes in my hair.

I'm sitting on the floor leaning against the front of the short couch,
playing with my granddaughter Mackenzie Rose.

We're calm, we're peaceful, we're family

Five generations of women

Strong women

Strong future

AUTUMN FLYNN

Untitled

Just recently i remember thinking
I could never be sober, never have stability
Without someone else attached to it, but most
Of all i'd never be whole.

I thought i'd always have this hole in my chest that was empty,
longing
 for fulfillment
Always have this chip on my shoulder
From the lack of care the person had when
Handing me a pipe at 13
Always have a longing to be truly free
Without the knowledge of how to get there.

I guess you could call it a coming of age,
Growing up, or just maturing but today, with only 3 short weeks free
 from hell
I feel i have acquired that and more.

BOBBY Z. FORD

The Thinking Death

My mind infected by foreign chemicals, to live in the dark is worse than dying there. Hell never burnt or felt so well, when the sting under the vein captured and then re-injected the pain. As the world suddenly changed, so did the difference between sane and insane, the critical juncture between sun and rain blurring, the world spinning and then turning, old problems reoccurring and perverting false images of the past and present.

I ride the clay waves sailing the brainwaves, where each neuron could be felt but never be properly spelt, phrased nor explained but just simply understood. I am touching the clouds, but never quite reaching the heavens. I am the sinking feeling down to the lake of fire, but not quite there. I am not on earth or of it, I exist both below and above it.

What started as one bad choice is now a path lit by fire and self-centered desires. No higher low I could ever expect to reach or aspire. So now that I am being rewired, I look for another way than what this disease requires. If I could do more than just survive my own humanity, maybe I could be something more than anxiety and become a productive member of society.

Though I see visions of a better future ahead, the pull to return to old ways is still there. A ghost of the past looking for a new way to infringe its presence upon my essence, to invade the vein for a second chance at killing me so that it can live. Death is not the soul leaving the body, it is the soul leaving behind a zombie. Half alive, half dead, no purpose to live but just to exist. No purpose, no meaning, just a brain that never stops obsessing or thinking.

Clear crystals hide the complexity of a restless mind, bound to a reality that it cannot accept or ignore. No past or future, just the present frozen in perfect homeostasis, covering up agitation and impatience. I am nailed to the cross by a truth I can't ignore.

FRAN FORD

Your Poem

A cadre of beggars halted importunities
at mid-stride
and ceremoniously turned their backs
on your poem.

No raving converts rallied
to the sacred cause
of which your poem was
to be the holy scripture.

A cripple overheard your poem
but refused to rise and walk;
he claimed to have been
struck deaf all of a sudden.

When you appeared on national T.V.
and said god would kill you
if no one read your poem,
no one read your poem.

Your poem landed on the ballot
as a write-in,
but then no one
voted for it.

A disco version of your poem emptied dance floors.
A rap recording of your poem incited
nothing. No one wants to know about the script for a T.V. movie
based on your poem.

Your poem will never sell itself or anything else:
beer, cars, soap, insurance...
Eskimos, offered kindling in the form of your poem,
declined.

Allen Funt substituted copies of your poem
for corncobs and catalogs in an outhouse; however,
he returned to find your poem unused
a week later.

Someone pulled your poem
out of the recycling bin,
stapled to it a deadly, anonymous critique,
and slipped it back on your desk when you weren't looking.

On your way home from work,
you balled up your poem tight in your fist
and tossed it up, up, up
to someone's apartment window (closed),

and your poem bounced down,
dunked by alley breezes,
right through the open window below
where the parrot objected

when its owner tried to line the bird cage
with your poem, and the owner,
feeling the onset of a sneeze,
dropped your poem, grabbed a dirty diaper.

A powerful swamp cooler system
sucked your fouled and fallen poem

from the home of the parrot of rejection
out the door and into a hall

swept daily by
a furtively vigilant landlady
inured to poems
of all these natures:

poems littering halls, poems scrawled
on eviction notices and shoved down kitchen
disposals or caught at awkward angles in toilets, poems
squashed and soggy on the laundry room floor, poems
during and about summer penned in lemon juice along heat vents,
poems soaked in vinegar to shine windows, poems
crammed into gaping holes in window frames so to defy winter,
poems
discovered under the dusty pillow of a vanished tenant who
left them for the poem fairy,
poems triple-folded in their stamped, self-addressed envelopes
and abandoned at the epicenter of a life
restlessly breaking the earthbound lease at two a.m.,
poems crumpled and flung, furiously, one after another,
into a corner where a slag heap of the mind swells, slides rumbling,
closer and closer, to a cave-in,
poems an embarrassment to family and friends
at social occasions, poems on Prozac,
poems locked in attics, poems on lithium,
poems handcuffed and led away,
poems that strike their own parents,
poems that used to torture small animals,
poems of madness and moral turpitude,
poems of perdition,
bad poems,
poems that come to a bad end.

JOHN GARCIA #147848

Momma's Love

Momma's love is the only real love
It's the first love and the last
It's the brightest and deepest
In the present and the past.

You might find another
But it takes longer to grow
That's the type to be tested
For someone to really know.

But Momma's is given freely
Raised in her womb
So, it's yours forever
Birth to the tomb.

Others come and go
Some deep most expensive
For a time. they fill your heart
But not as extensive

When the fire burns hot
Or the ember dies low
When you're in a tight spot
Momma's love is what will show.

Past the hurt and frustration
The anger and shade
Past the disappointment and rage
It's still a love that don't fade.

KAYLA GILBERT

Walk of Silence

I led the walk of silence -
45 people walking a mile of Denver streets
To honor 88 victims of traffic crashes since January of 2018.
88 people.
Eighty-eight.
88 people who were parents, children, siblings, lovers, friends.
88 people lost.
88 people dead.
Passersby walking by us
Nod quietly in thanks or appreciation
Upon reading the signs in our hands
Of one of those 88 people
Who was killed
In a preventable traffic crash on Denver's streets.
Maybe they recognized a name,
Or knew someone else who was hurt or killed
Just trying to get around.
Leading a walk is more than getting folks from A to B.
It's also making sure everyone gets there safely.
For us walking leaders,
That means bravely walking first into traffic,
Standing between the heavy idling vehicles
And the vulnerable people behind me,
Walking in the crosswalk
(Their legal right of way),
Often waving a greeting of thanks.
Sometimes a hand outstretched --
Begging, hoping, crying out, "STOP!"
It's a sad, ironic, but totally necessary role
For this walk of silence.
Keeping these 45 people safe

While I can.
Thinking about the 88 people
That I couldn't help.
If I could have held a sign to stop traffic for them,
I would have.
If you could have stopped it,
Would you?
Would you have slowed down?
Would you have not driven while drunk?
Would you have waited to respond to that text?
Would you have told your friend to put their seatbelt on?
Would you have stopped at the yellow light?
If you could have,
Would you have?
You still can.
Before it's too late.

DEAN GLORSO

Paint the Breeze

The breeze of the day
Brings to mind happier times
But they're too distant now

The leaves of the trees
Crackle a rhythm of solitude
The angry voice departs us now

Too quiet – suddenly
No voices for days
Not even electronic gadgetry

Can break this silence
The mind replays words
In the brain

Alas nothing positive to remember
A depression deep can kill
So we rattle the pans in the kitchen

Whistle a short tune
Stare long at the abandoned paintings
Drying too many days

Unfinished with tens of others
Combined they represent failure
Pick up a pen and write a song

Never to be connected to music
As the pen bleeds words of forlorn
A sense of happiness revenues

Then thumbing through a magazine by chance
We see a surprised published written work
Now these quiet days are yours

Rebuild the urge
To pick up a brush
Or pen

And paint
And write
And paint



Painting Incomplete

FERNANDO GÓMEZ

End.Less.Time

The clock in the living room ran out of batteries at 6.18. I notice the discrepancy during dinner when a sentence appears in the middle of my soup. It reads: *Time.Stands.Still*. I refuse to update the clock until tomorrow morning and choose to live in this temporal time period of 6.18 where one thought lasts years. I grow at 6.18. It's Sunday or was Sunday and my brother and parents eat our dinner in front of the tele-vision. The only movie on is *Basic Instinct*, on the American channels. It's 6.17 and Sharon Stone is being interrogated. Out of nowhere she asks, "Have you ever fucked on cocaine, Nick?" She then proceeds to slowly uncross and cross her legs. It's 6.18. I don't look at her, but at my family's faces. They all have that hungry look, that primal desire to see that naked thing. More naked than what is on the screen. The light from the television is bright against their faces and flickers against their beady eyes. My mother asks me to translate the scene to Span-ish as she unconsciously digs her nails into my arm. I quickly dip my hands into my soup. It's 6.19.

KAREN D. GONZALES

Memories Growing Up in the West Colfax Neighborhood

The story of my life in the West Colfax Neighborhood began when I was born at the old St. Anthony Hospital in 1959. My family lived in the Five Points area and moved to the West Colfax Neighborhood when I was two. I attended Colfax Elementary School and have vivid memories of landmarks that were either relocated or renovated.

There was the original McDonald's with the golden arches where the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema is. Then the first Taco Bell opened on the corner of West Colfax and Tennyson Street both were across from Colfax Elementary School. They both filled the air with great aroma.

In 1966, behind the Tobin's Pharmacy (now Tobins Liquor) was a Coney Island Boardwalk Hot Dog Stand. It was a giant hot dog and bun shaped diner. It wasn't there long and was later relocated to Bailey, Colorado. After school, my friends and I would stop there to eat or at Tobin's to buy toy pea shooters, sling shots, and long flat taffy candy.

The historic homes on Stuart Street looked haunted, cause they were so old and big. We also heard La Llorona (the weeping woman) haunted the gully by 12th Avenue where the light rail W-Line now runs. We found her disguised during the day as a bush, then a rock in that gully. Recently, I went to the gully near Perry Street and took a picture of the water and rocks. In the water, a face came out in the picture that looks like La Llorona. So beware, she's still there!

Amazingly, my folks ages 102 and 99 are still in this hood.

SUSAN GUILLORY

Sometimes...

Sometimes, I think about a girl I knew when I was a child. She was my friend. We laughed and played and dreamed together. Sometimes we cried. Not often, but sometimes. I knew her really well, but she didn't know me. Not then.

Sometimes, I think about that girl – my companion, friend – becoming my confidante. My holder of dreams, keeper of secrets. I knew her really well, and as we grew, she began to know me. Not well, not at first. But a little. Sometimes we knew pain. And humiliation. And fear. And sorrow. Not often, but sometimes.

Sometimes, I think about that girl as she became a young woman – as our lives changed, as the colors became brighter and darker at the same time. Sometimes, then, she was my friend. I knew her less well, then. And she knew me better.

Sometimes, I think about that girl/young woman/friend as she moved along the periphery of my adulthood. Rarely speaking, making little eye contact. I think of her – not often, but sometimes.

Sometimes, I would catch a glimpse of that girl, now woman. Or thought I did. In a bar, on the street, in another's smile. Not often, but sometimes. I hardly know her at all, now. But she knows me. Really well. Really too well.

Sometimes, the girl's shadow falls across me, now woman. A cool caress, calming me. Not often, but sometimes. Pastel dreams. Watercolor secrets.

Sometimes, I long for the bright and the dark and the hard edges, and I think about that girl. Now woman. And I wonder. Not often, but sometimes. I don't really know her. Not anymore. But I do.

Wonder.

TASURA MARIE HUGHES

The Tower

The wonder and horror of it all. Pain and pleasure all wrapped into one. My laughter through my tears a twisted reality. A conscious dream. Completely weak and the definition of strength. Fiercely insane or absolutely intelligent. Possibly the line where heaven meets hell. A walking, talking angel and demon love,brutal fairy tale.

ROSHAUN HOGAN

My Cancer Story

There is nothing kind about cancer
Nor the remedy that is prescribed
This disease consumes you
Before you are aware
And its totality cannot be described.
It begins by taking over your physical being
All while lacking your consent
It rapidly spreads through your veins
With nothing that can be done to prevent.
It then moves to your mind
Saturating every thought
And those yet formed,
Stealing the peace within you
And the mental stamina you once loaned.
It then penetrates your soul
Along with every hope
And desire you hold dear
It robs you of your solitude
Replacing the grace in your heart with utter fear.
I do not fight this battle
For me, this earthly life,
Or a promise for tomorrow
I fight this battle for the sake of my children
In hopes of sparing their sorrow.
This disease may have conquered
My current moments
Along with the present season,
But with the mercy of my Lord and Savior
Fulfillment will glorify His reason.

AMY IRISH

Teratoma

Listen for the hesitation, the unspoken, The
words that really mean unknown.

Tumor is one. *Teratoma* another,
A subtype used to scare a little less—
Obscure a little more.

Buy a little time
For tests and trials, because those pesky
Human bodies seed a little wild,
Attempt to grow beyond their allotment.
Ovaries collecting lost and wandering cells.
Newborns with extra bone at base of spine.
Some, painless lumps. Others expanding
With extra hair or skin or even teeth.

At fifty, her headaches rooted and spread,
Bursting into full migraine-bloom.
Scans and biopsies and surgeries
Finally found extra cells and bone
Not her own. Prompting her aging mother
To finally admit a brother who died
Late pregnancy, partially absorbed.
Her swirling fragments
Finally settled and fit. Unraveled
The mystery of why she married him—
A holocaust survivor. Why it felt safe
To lay abed with him like twins
Connected by the absence
Of those other bodies. Connected
By their severed lives.

HAGAN JAMES W.

Once in a Love-time Opportunity

Admiring her brown eyes staring back at me
As she smiles at me, it almost feels unreal but it has to be.
I feel like I truly found the better half of me.
She doesn't believe she's so beautiful
But she is unbelievably gorgeous, actually.
She takes my breath right out of my lungs.
Somehow, I feel convinced that I don't have to breathe.
She says she is in love with such an amazing man
And I am still so greatly amazed that that man is me.
All I can think about is,
How saying "you and I"
Wouldn't sound nearly as right as "we."
Correct me if I'm wrong, but are you an angel?
If she wanted to leave, by now, I think she would say so.
I ask her if this is too good to be true and she'll just smile and say no.
I love the image of her smile
Glistening in my head
Feeling divine inside of her mind
When recline, inside my bed.
Such perfect timing,
I think I'm inclined to believe immediately
From the first night that we met.
I love rewinding from now to then.
Just to smile at all the enticing things that we had said.
Love like this is so compelling it spells out bliss,
Expelling every bad part of myself every time we kiss.
It feels like magic, cause I have actually never, as magical as this.
She is the best thing that's ever happened to me.
Oh what a beautiful world we live.
Every time I sit, I wonder how she is.
She is the woman I fall in love with more with each and every chance

I get.

I work on self-improvement.

She blesses me with motivation to help myself to practice it.

RACHEL K.

Untitled

I know more and more we are defined by our experiences, our own
Golden Compasses.

I've seen a lot of dark, but also a lot of light.

Not for one second did I ever give up my fight no matter what time
day or night.

I've had everything, as well as nothing at all.

But each time I'd fall,

I'd get up and stand tall.

Life is a journey not a destination.

And you just can't tell

Just what tomorrow brings

I know one thing.

I'm no longer Addiction's puppet

As it pulls on my strings.

MARK KERN

Interview With a Gerund

ANNOUNCER: “It’s the Dick Adverb show, live from New York. Tonight’s guests are: A gerund, past and present participle and an infinitive. I’m your announcer Clause Thompson. And now, welcome please, DICK ADVERB (applause)

DICK: “ This is our Thanksgiving show, and in honor of that word and the associative celebration, we have a most interesting guest: A gerund.” (Pause for applause). “But that’s not all, gerund brought with him his relatives, Past and Present part-Iciples. if that weren’t enough, we will hear from the rock band The Infinitives, with their new hit single: ‘I Have Nothing to Do.’ I am really excited about tonight’s show, so let’s go right to the commercials and we will come back and talk to the gerund. Don’t go anywhere we’ll be right back.”

COMM: “Do you suffer from irregular verbs or have embarrass-ing vowel movements? Do you wish you could be a regular verb, like the other kids in grammar school?Are you ostracized, don’t know if you are coming or going? After eating, are you perplexed describing your meal? Maybe you can’t believe you ate the whole thing? Well, don’t suffer anymore! Now there’s Chewable Partici-ples that were made for irregular verb sufferers. Fast relief from vowel movement and painful writer’s gas, it’s Chewable Participles.” (Disclaimer) Chewable par-ticiples available in most bookstores, must be at least fourteen to purchase. Do not take if you are a regular verb user, void where prohibited, batteries not included. May cause consternation, plot failure, and syntax error.

DICK: “ Welcome back to the Dick Adverb show, let’s bring out our first guest: The gerund!” (Wild applause as gerund and ING come out). “Please have a seat and ING, you guys sit at the end.” (Audience laughs). “So you guys are words that are formed with verbs, however, they act as nouns. Of course, we can spot you guys by finding a verb with an ING trailing it. Wow, that is confusing, but do I have that about right?”

GERUND: “Yes, but it is confusing, frustrating and disarming-all of those things and more.”

DICK: But you always end in ING, wouldn’t you just once like to end in “en” or “ed” instead? Do you follow me?”

GERUND: “F irst of all, ING follows me. And secondly, that would make me more like a past participle, which would be galling, disgusting, and demeaning. It also would be unappealing, meandering, and weird. Wait a minute! Strike that last one.”

DICK: “Okay, I think we get the idea. Now, let’s bring out ger-und’s close relatives. The past and present participle, come on out. (They come out to polite applause). “Welcome guys! Hope we didn’t leave you dangling backstage too long.”

PAST: “No, dangling participle was floating in the pool, so he didn’t make the show.”

DICK: “Are you going to beat me over the head, so as to show how participles work?”

PAST: “I was thinking of doing just that.”

- DICK: “Your job is to help preserve the progressive and perfect verb tenses. (Past and present waited for him to finish). But, the present participle and gerund both end in ING, so what’s the difference?”
- PRESENT: “We both consist of the base form of the verb and both end in ING, exclusively.”
- DICK: “I feel a BUT qualifier coming next.”
- PRESENT: “If you would let me finish, you might learn something. As I was saying, it is still valuable to have two different names when talking about the role the ING form of the verb can play. Secondly, you can blame the Latin language, where gerunds and participles had different forms to justify different names. Unfortunately, the usage was carried forward to English back in the eighteenth century and continues today.”
- DICK: “But, my point is that there is no real reason for calling them gerunds one time and present participles the next. Save for it’s always been done that way (at least since earlier usage) and the practice is still to the present.”
- PRESENT: “Pretty much.”
- DICK: “But I am so confused, due to your conflicting answers.”
- PAST: “If the Infinitives were here, they would have said ‘EXACTLY.’
- DICK: “Let’s bring out the hot rock band: ‘The Infinitives,’ playing their new hit single ‘I have nothing to do.’ (Wild applause, but the band doesn’t appear). “I am very sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but it appears that The

Infinitives have split, due to the fact that it was cold. Sorry, but that's all the time we have. Remember, gerunds and participles are your friends, but never trust a split infinitive. SO LONG!"

MALAINA L.

Like A True Soldier

Everything I've ever known is with me now.
My life is a revolving door.
Like a welcome mat
I've been stepped upon with open arms.
Every emotion I've ever felt is filed like embers in a dying fire.
Every piece of my heart chipped is frozen over.
To forget means to remember.
To live is to let live.
With every bad memory
I thrive twice as hard to stitch back a better me.
With every laugh, every tear, every moment
—My heart ached to beat on—
Is what inspires me.
Like hot rain on a sunny day
There's more light than dark beaming
Through the window upon my heart.
And I will carry everything I have ever known and felt with
me Like a true soldier.

JOHN LATTANY

The Unknown Soldier

I never knew his name, but he lived across the street from me. I was about six or seven years old when I first encountered him. He was about nineteen or twenty, tall, very dark and probably considered handsome by the girls his age, I don't know. He looked handsome to me. He always had a word for me and he called me "June-bug". Every time I saw him he had a glass in his hand. I was always nosey, so I would ask "what's in your glass?" He would always say "Bug Juice".

Now being a child, I didn't know what that meant, but later on I found out that was another name for wine. So one summer I didn't see him so I thought about him from time to time but, you know I was a kid and I had things to do. Anyway, my mom had a party one night and there he was, tall, handsome, and looking strong. He had on a Marine uniform. My mom let me come down and say hi. Boy, that uniform sure was sharp. He looked even taller. I said hey and he said "Hey June-bug." I felt special that he had remembered me in front of all the grown-ups. I went to bed feeling almost grown-up myself and I dreamt about that uniform. The following morning I said to my mother that I wanted to be a Marine, but she said that she didn't want me to join the military. I said "OK". Sometime later, I was going to the market with her and I noticed a lot of the houses had black curtains. So I asked her about that and she told me that it meant they had lost someone in Vietnam. I said "oh" not knowing what or where Vietnam was. Not too much later that summer, I was playing and I noticed that my friend's window had black curtains. I never saw him again.

CHARISMA LEE

First Friday (welcome back)

I struggle to remember the days of the tortilla shop before the theater
across the street booked any shows we were interested in.

A friend had to drag me through a green door of used stuff, because
she liked making
up stories and imagining the lives of things.

We got our reeds and strings and picks
Trying to nail down some beats, but we mostly struck out.

During those dancing days,
long after the trolley, but certainly way before they renamed the park
after
the last Chicano left on the block.

We were little women, carefree
and clueless about

desirability / availability
displacement
/ replacement

or the true value of belonging.

JANE LEWIS

modern day madonna

joy

modern day madonna
in trademark jeans and black boots
dark hair hanging loosely in waves
framing her calm, serene face

eyes reflect the kindness that lies within
projecting light into the world
a smile that says hello
without uttering a single word

nestled in her favorite chair
long legs crossed
notebook and pen in hand
she surveys the writers
filtering into the room
each with a unique voice
a different story to tell

no matter age, race, origin
circumstances in life
the word favoritism
noticeably absent
from her vocabulary
modern day madonna
embraces us one by one
through patient instruction
and gentle coaching

creating a safe place to land
in the midst of hard times

that can leave one weeping
until there are no more tears to shed

words of encouragement
slide smooth as butter across her lips
building confidence
as souls are bared through self-expression

happy memories emerge
stories out of our imagination take flight
old demons are exorcised
paving the way to healing
new beginnings and hope

the passage of weeks
turns into months
and still we gather
friendships forged
through the lens of commonality
what seemed a disjointed group
cemented together
as a caring, diverse family

joy
modern day madonna
engraved these empowering words upon our hearts

resist comparing yourself to others
stay true to your writing style
but above all . . .

believe in yourself
with every stroke of the pen you are a writer

DANNEL M.

A Woman I Always Wanted to Be

Angel, you are a woman whom I look up to because you have grown to be so responsible. Also, you have helped me want to be a better woman, a woman who knows what she wants, knows who she is, a woman who can pick herself up and move forward, a woman who can budget her own money and a woman who is not a woman like me. You're that woman I always wanted to be—young, free, and beautiful, but most of all, responsible and not like me—a woman who used to be a junkie—again, a woman not like me. To the woman I always wanted to be, you, the sober me, someone I once used to be.

LINDA L. MAGNUSON

Mom's Battle

Mom's Battle is coming to an end.
Cancer rages through her body.
Realization dawns on us.
Time is growing short.
Everything needed to be said,
Has been said.
Everything we needed to know,
We've been told.
She slips into a final coma.
She is beginning to leave us.
Each family member in turn
Approaches her hospital bed
Our eyes red, voices thick,
Each tell her it's okay to go.
My sister and I talk quietly.
There nothing more to be done.
Her girls are exhausted.
We agree they need to leave.
Home to rest,
For what is to be.
Mother and daughter united
In this time, in this place.
As she watched over her mother,
Her daughter now watches over her.
As she was strong for us,
I'm now strong for her.
Now we wait in the eternal now.
Death sets its own schedule.
The room is still and cold
As she begins her final journey.
She takes her last breath.

The world recedes.
Her heart beats for a moment.
Then no more.
I speak my final words to her.
Quietly leave the room.

SONI MARIE A.

Goodbye

Goodbye Meth, goodbye men, goodbye all my friends.
Goodbye fog, goodbye haze, goodbye poison in my veins.
Goodbye guilt, goodbye shame, kuz I'm no longer that junkie lame.
Goodbye needle, goodbye spoon, goodbye nights locked in a room.
Goodbye glass, goodbye smoke, goodbye life that was a joke.

A Royal Man

Mr. Rosetti, my Junior High School typing class teacher, was a mean s.o.b. He wielded weapons in the form of a stern forehead, thick eyebrows and a huge hooked nose, not to mention a book tossed across the room aimed at any slacker's head. One of his favorite ways of dishing out discipline was to make one stand in a corner with a load of books to carry for the entire period. One should have known better than to get on Rosetti's bad side. I knew better. I sat quietly in the back row pretending to be on task, tap, tap, tapping away but actually tapping into a daydream.

Despite Rosetti, I managed to squeak by most difficult classes, people or situations of my awkward Junior High School years. But some circumstances were just too difficult and unmanageable, especially for a twelve year old who had lost his father in a car accident three years prior. Even at home it was all about squeaking by for a mother on welfare with six children. At times, basic needs were hard to come by. Such was the case when a situation affected me personally, not because a particular class or person was unbearable, but because my worn and tattered little-boy loafers became unwearable. I had no spares, no hand-me-downs, no other resources available. So, I became a seventh-grade dropout.

One mid-March Monday morning, one could say I stood my ground, although I was lying down at the moment. My mother and my two older siblings, one brother and two sisters, could not convince me to get up from bed, and I certainly wasn't making a great impression on my two younger brothers. Being the mid-1960s, there was resistance in the air and I followed suit with my personal protest. There was no school that day for me, no remedy, and I felt justified in my sleep-in.

Tuesday: Day two of the resistance. My Great Uncle Joe just happened to visit our home and he just happened to bring an extra pair of well-worn, old-man wingtips with him. He meant well, but far as I was concerned, those throwbacks could be thrown back to the era from

which they came. Besides, they were at least two sizes too big. At that point, there was no fitting solution. I deepened my resolve.

Wednesday: Day three of the resistance. My mother, in a panic, thought there was no other recourse but to resort to a good old-fashioned-motivator. First thing that morning, she came up to my little cot in the boys' bedroom, hovered over my bedside with belt in hand and she announced, "You will get dressed, you will wear Uncle Joe's shoes and you will get to school today or else." She brandished the belt directly in front of my face. Her soft voice and her gentle demeanor did not carry much weight to me. I turned away from her. She somehow drew up a bit of strength and let go at my backside with the belt. Her "whipping" was far from anything Dad had ever dished out. I easily weathered her quiet storm and remained steadfast in my resistance.

Thursday: Day four of the resistance. I burrowed further into my blanket, rejecting any light or hope for my situation. I felt my being, my very soul just as worn and tattered as the shoes I had to discard, especially after recalling the tears that welled up in my mother's eyes in her failed attempt the previous morning. Soon after my siblings scurried off to school, I managed to make it down to the kitchen where amid my mother's silence, I swallowed an uneasy bowl of cereal and sauntered back up to my room. I reached into the dresser drawer for any old comic and propped up on my bed. I tried to lose myself in a comic that I must have read at least a dozen times before. I was not having much luck. It was a Green Lantern issue, my favorite superhero. I wondered why he or the Justice League of America couldn't come to my rescue?

Suddenly, before I could get too comfortable in my solitude, my mother called out from the stairway bottom, "Danny, come down here. You have a visitor." I really didn't care who it was. My world was coming apart and interacting with any other being was the last thing on my mind. But not wanting to show any further disrespect toward my mother, I reluctantly retrieved Uncle Joe's shoes and in a desperate attempt to make them fit, stuffed the tips with cardboard.

As I made my way down the stairs, I heard my mother having an exchange with a familiar gruff voice that I couldn't quite place. I got to the living room and froze in my clodhopper tracks. There, sitting

on the sofa opposite mom, was none other than Mr. Rosetti, my typing class teacher. My brain swirled around as I was trying to make sense of this scenario. Nothing like this ever happened in the comic book world. What would Green Lantern do? Before I could figure it out, Mr. Rosetti declared, "I'm taking you back to school. Put on a jacket." I was torn between making a run for it or slowly disintegrating from shame, but all I could do was look down at my old man shoes. This didn't get past Mr. Rosetti. Not much did. Without any delay he said, "You'll need some new shoes. We'll stop at the shoe store on the way." Uncharacteristically, he gave my mother a reassuring smile. Holding back tears, she managed to squeak out a smile in return.

And so Mr. Rosetti bought me some high-top sneakers and my drop-out days ended with wingtips dropped in a waste basket. I made it to school by third period Social Studies. Next was fourth period Typing class; Mr. Rosetti stood proudly among his recently delivered Royal typewriters. I had new respect and appreciation for this man and his profession. I assumed the posture, feet firmly planted on the floor in a brand-new comfortable pair of shoes.

BRANDON McALLISTER

Untitled

As I look in the window

I see the life I never lived.

I see the love I couldn't feel

Ask the past to just die

And

Let the wicked death let me go.

From the grave I rise to the sun of the sky

As a rebirth from Earth

To walk in the light

As dark falls to the wasteland

I see that the window

Was not a gleam

But a mirror

RONALD MCCOY

Where I'm From

I am from tears
From the cement wall
I am from red hair and freckles with red eyes.
I am from nowhere
but I am from everywhere
I am from black and white
I am from who right.
I am from that abandoned car
and from those far away stars
I am from loneliness
I am from who is this.
I am from it's so dry
I am from little trees
and the Piggly Wiggly
I am from humidity
I am from atench hutson.
I am from humility
I am from get off your knees
and I am from loss
Again.

ANNE MCWHITE

Head Coverings

The Benedictine nuns at St. Gregory's Church were expected to fulfill many roles; besides teaching, they were also charged with cleaning the sacristy. I guess you could say they wore many hats which leads me to my story. Back in the 50's and 60's, it was mandatory for all women to wear hats in church. The nuns demonstrated their compliance with the long black veil framed over a white cowl covering most of their head and neck leaving an opening large enough to fit around the face. The nuns were nothing if not strict followers of their religious sect.

Our old church was an historic landmark featuring several twelve-foot stained glass windows depicting Jesus interacting with biblical characters in his time. High up toward the front of the sacristy were several statues recessed into the wall; a visual reminder of the various saints we could pray to for guidance. Latticed woodwork behind the altar contained the crucifix of Jesus hung dead center. Off to the right, mounted on a pedestal, was the pulpit where the priest delivered his sermons. Lastly the communion rail where the faithful received Holy Communion at every mass. The entire church was a cleaning and heating nightmare; but it inspired reverence—a sense of holiness that must be honored.

Besides organizing the cleaning, the nuns were the inspiration for demonstrating modesty and conformity to the church rules. Being a devout Catholic and living across the street from the church, I would volunteer to help clean. As fate would have it, the one thing I forgot was a head covering. Lately, the chapel veil, a lacey substitute usually in white or black could be used as a hat. A bobby pin helped secure your veil; it became quite the fashion. If all else failed, you could place a Kleenex on your head and still demonstrate compliance. My mother usually wore a hat, but most young people wore a chapel veil. "Where is your head covering," the nun inquired. A noticeable discomfort enveloped me. Sins are labeled either mortal or venial depending on your offense. In retrospect, probably I fell into the venial side of sinning,

but, at the time, it felt to be more of a mortal transgression.

The nuns, however, were an enterprising lot. They needed help, ill-equipped as I was. No one had a spare chapel veil, hanky, or even a Kleenex let alone a bobby pin. Necessity is the mother of invention. Reviewing the list of patron saints to call upon, maybe sister chose St. Zita, the patron Saint of maids and domestic servants, for a solution to my carelessness coming to church uncovered. One of the nuns retrieved a well-used oily dusty rag from the cleaning supplies and ceremoniously crowned this helper with the peasant style cloth tied in back. Relieved to find a satisfactory solution which would meet Catholic standards of holiness, I was sent out to do God's work. Blessing myself with holy water and the accompanying genuflection cemented the deal. I could now clean the sacristy with a clear conscience and reverence.

DOUGLAS L. MICCO

The First Day of the Rest of My Life

I'm Douglas L. Micco, former human being now reduced to Inmate Registration Number 124585. Today I'm just a mere digit in the system information banks. Stripped of my privacy, with further humiliation compounded by everyday stress of taking orders to file into lines, security clearances, custody levels, and psychological testing. Institutionalization challenging my mind. Friends, family, and loved ones so close yet a dimension away.

Dignity quashed by never ending strip searches and cavity checks. Totally desensitizing my preconceived notions of modesty. Pride devastated by stripping you of your self-sufficiency. Free movement of body and mind are surrendered to the daily routine of monotony. It's the same nakedness, same clothing, same menu, same agenda and the glow of the 120 foot yard lights rob you of your view of the stars. This leaves me to wonder if they still shine?

The ritual degradation of hand cuffs, waist chains, leg irons, bars, metal grates covering windows, unannounced transports, lock ups, lock downs, lights on and off, and at the bottom of the form the question asks, "Where would you like your body shipped to upon death?"

My first thoughts as I entered this prison were of mixed emotions. I had just spent the last 20 months in the county jail. I had given almost two years of my life to my legal case. I had over 20 court appearances which adds up to two trials where on, was legal and the other illegal, six separate attorneys and 12 different trial dates with one set of jury members who were to be of my peers to vote on my innocence or guilt.

After 20 months of hustling and bustling back and forth from jail to courthouse, I was found guilty in a rushed attempt to get the Memorial Day holiday started. This portion of my legal life was complete. I was originally sentenced to 72 years in prison. I made my claims for appeals, and I made my demands for a new trial. I stated my innocence.

After 20 months of not being able to breathe fresh air, eating county jail food, and the constant traffic of jailbirds coming in and out around

the clock. It seemed like cell doors were clanging and banging one right after the other. What gets tedious is there's no rhythm or order to this chaos. Somebody was always screaming, the toilets were always flushing, and the lights were always on!

Now that I had finally arrived at prison I could at least get my new life underway and hopefully get some peace and quiet! I did not have any clue about prison life, but I had been given a few pointers from a couple of "old timers" on how to get around and what to expect. I was elated that I would have much more freedom at the county jail, yet still afraid of the unknown.

I am entering gangland, with each race, nationality, religion, creed, and sexual orientation represented in this caged jungle. All willing to ruin your day if you took one wrong step. Convicts affiliated in the name of need, fear, and greed. In a game of power and control, to run the ward, the yards, the prison facility.

As I walk through the back gate I can feel the cold steel eyes upon me, tracking, checking, weighing and sizing me up. A bulls-eye on my back and crosshairs centered on my beating heart. I carry my duffel bag up the fenced "Dog Run." Razor wire drape over the tops like ivy cascading down. These metallic vines spiral their way up "Loser's Walk," the "Hall of Shame." The lonely trek through the corridor meant there would be no turning back. The loneliest 100 yard march you'll ever take. One mile to town yet light years away from the warm embrace and kiss from a loving mother. In the shadow of the gun tower, enhanced vision watching my every movement, the laser trained on my back by the scope of an automatic rifle.

After crossing through five gates I realize I'm in the belly of the beast. A place where nightmares come to life. Where you come face to face with death, where shadows lurk in the dark waiting to pull you in, drag-ging you to your demise. The worst part is coming face to face with myself. Arriving at the first day of the rest of my life.

I took a deep breath and told myself I was going to make the best of this situation. So this was to be my new life, "Home Sweet Home."

This is a freak show, outta control violence, how long will you go? In this world of hostility, you must watch your back by watching out for

yourself. Beware of the hyenas, the “wolves-in-sheep-clothing” the “do-gooders” and your so-called brothers. Things change in context where in one instance you are not allowed to sit and eat with someone from a different race yet in the cellhouse you sneak in a game of chess, barter-ing and/or even sex. Where your running mates had your back, but situations change in a heartbeat due to influence. Because everybody’s getting down while the getting’s good, but when it’s time to pay the piper everyone splits and leaves you holding the check. Same old situation.

I was sent to Cellhouse 5 for Intake and Processing and to have my very first Fremont Correctional Facility evening meal. I ate a Turkey Dinner complete with mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans and a giant slice of Apple Pie! The dinner rolls came with melted butter. This was better than Christmas!

This celebration was to be short-lived. The next day I was assigned to spend the next 70 years of my life in Cellhouse 7. Good old number “7”, who’s feeling lucky now? It ain’t me, I tell you that!

Prison is made up of a bunch of “know-it-alls,” “Super Heroes,” “Cut-Throats,” and a few divas. I had to listen to this onslaught of commentary about violence that awaits. This “expert” convict threatening a litany of convict code and regulation. I was warned and mocked about my impending doom. This prison expert’s buddy described with glee the amount of pain and misery that is dished out in Cellhouse 7.

Just as I dismissed all of those acrimonious statements as convict drivel, this little old guy came up to me and said very clearly “Cellhouse 7 is the Gladiator School.” I said “Thanks,” and off I went.

When I entered Cellhouse 7, I said to myself, “Wow, this looks just like on T.V.” It was very loud, very busy, and it seemed to hold every type of inmate imaginable in there.

The smell of blood permeates the air. The smell of fear hovers in the atmosphere. Sweat and grime drip from the ceiling and hopes and dreams stain the walls. Isolation from mainstream society, cut off from reality, enter a world of incarceration, and I have now become state property.

It seemed like every creep in the universe was here. Extortion seemed to be the order of the day. Roving packs of gang members charging

rent to outcasts to be paid every Friday when the prison commissary delivered the stamps, pop machine tokens, and the loot.

Bullies preying on the weak. Gambling debts unpaid bringing acts of violence and paying their victims a visit to the cell door. Living with rapists, child molesters, and people who violate the elderly. Drug addicts hooked on junk, lying, cheating, stealing to get their fix. If nothing is sacred then nothing must be sacred because we seem to be striving for eternal peace through nothingness.

Little creeps bouncing around, bouncing from cell door to cell door seeking out excitement, information, sex, food, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, pornography or just a “shot” of coffee. Everybody’s wishes and demands are of the utmost importance here. It’s of the highest accord to show your respect to the convict code. We are taking ourselves way too seriously and any slight disagreements can and will bring a mass of violence against you.

Each race of people fuming at the other races yet the infighting consumes all of each other’s time, so in retrospect the “revolution” will not be televised as promised due to “dumbness.” We have no time for a race war because we can’t seem to get out from under our own sets of disagreements. Who needs enemies when we have ourselves? I really believe that we are the only species of life that sets out in the morning with the mission to destroy itself.

Soldiers who have taken the pledge and sworn an oath to the prison convict code of upholding prejudice and bigotry as supreme rule fall short of the glory when they must cross racial barriers in order to obtain their wants and needs. So with a bible in one hand and a shank in the other, with illusions of grandeur hoping for justification to their cause.

Am I serving time or is it serving me? That is the question. As mundane as that seems, that will serve as the fulcrum, the axis of thought, or which direction do you want the revolving door of recidivism to turn?

There must be some grand appeal about living in prison because we are stuffed to the gills with repeat offenders, parole violators, and a bunch of new inmates every day, and I see no end in sight. Criminals running hog-wild having the times of their lives.

This is a reckoning. I had to come to prison to find freedom. I had to be incarcerated to understand liberty. I had to be jailed to know privilege. I had to become an inmate to become a human being. This is the “bottoming out” in the bowels of the system. I’m struggling to keep from being cast out to the abyss of dire straits. I fight to keep my head afloat. I had to lose my life in order to gain a life, and I can truly see how precious freedom really is. For the first time in my life, I realize that I have finally gone to hell.

Room # 3

“There’s a monster in my room,” the blind person replied, “he’s right there staring at me, don’t you see him? He’s looking right through my soul!”

“Sir, calm down,” I said, “There’s no one there, you’re imagining things.”

“No, I not, you’re crazy!” he snapped.

I walked away to go finish my rounds at the local nut house. Jerry was in Room #1. The talker, they call him, always talking to someone, somewhere, or to something. Betty was in Room #2, the screamer is what I called her, always hollering about something or someone.

And then there was the blind man in room #3.

The new guy on the block is what the other orderlies would call him. I just called him #3. Shit, I didn’t care about his name. Hell, everyone was too drugged up half the time to remember their names. So #’s was easier. Well, this was my first day with #3, so as my day pressed into the evening shift, it started to get interesting.

As I was making my rounds, I hear him yell out, “Get out you heavens. I’m not going to anywhere.”

So I walk up to his door. He’s standing at the end of his bed. Points to the corner of the room. I can see his white glistening pupils focused on the corner, staring intentionally on something I couldn’t see.

“Don’t you see it girl?” he yelled at me, “ Don’t you see it’s hungry eyes? He’s watching you too, he wants us both now girl.”

I told him to calm down. Since he was actually starting to scare me, he finally settled down, his eyes still staring intently on the corner. As I started to leave, he grabbed me close.

“He’s coming to get us tonight. “ He let me go and went back to starting.

I left and continued my rounds. Evening went to night. Once again, I can hear screaming again down the corridor.

Fuck, I thought, here we go again. As I go walking down the hall. I was

expecting to hear more screaming, instead, dead silence. As I approached the room, I was expecting to see the blind man. Instead, I'm met with this creature of darkness. The blind man was in his bed, frozen, blue, stiff as nails. Like his soul was ripped from him in one breath.

I stood there speechless, at this thing. I started to scream and run out of the room. I ran past the rooms, down the hall, past the orderly shack.

As they saw me take off running for my life, the senior orderly said, "Stop sending them to room #3. Nobody ever stays here once they learn what's in room #3. That's the fifth orderly this month we lost."

Funeral Attire

Catrina fingered the pink cashmere, probing it for impropriety. The sweater was classy, but a little sexy, in fit and color. It was Damon's favorite on her.

Had been Damon's favorite, past tense.

It was a blinding, celebratory fuchsia, so a huge *no* for a funeral.

Catrina sighed, closed the drawer, and turned to reevaluate the options she'd tossed onto the bed.

Her pencil skirt was black. Tight, but black. Too tight? She chewed her lip, made herself stop, and crossed the room to her sister's closet, eyes on a nothing-colored gray top. If Catrina looked washed out, maybe the other funeral mourners would believe she'd been crying. Skipping lipstick couldn't hurt, either.

This raised the question of mascara. Waterproof meant looking put together, but the regular kind meant looking like a mess, possibly an attention whore, if she did end up crying. *I've gotta cry at some point, she told herself. It'll hit me today, at the funeral, and after people see me cry, they'll leave me alone.* It occurred to her that she was pep-talking herself through the appearance of grief. *Does that make me a psycho? Gross.*

Recalling something about how psychopaths don't disgust themselves, she turned her attention to the possibility of false lashes as an answer to the mascara quandary.

After days of digging through her insides for self-loathing, she still only came up with awkward terror, awkward shock, and several flavors of frustration. Rationally, it wasn't her fault. Yes, Damon was trying harder to impress her, but she'd told him his idea was dangerous, and stupid. *She* hadn't run in the street, *she* hadn't driven the truck. Damon's death was an accident, but if everybody kept telling her nobody blamed her, that meant somebody did. It was awful that she'd strung him along, but did that make her a party to his death?

She exhaled, put the lashes back in their case. *Not my fault*, she repeated. Catrina knew she was a honey, but it didn't go to her head.

Lots of guys came on strong, whether she was into them or not, and she'd refined the art of the gentle letdown. She wasn't a bitch. So why hadn't she let down Damon Rodriguez?

She knew the answer, and it was cringeworthy. To be fair, Damon was definitely her usual type: charming, athletic, popular, just a little cocky. All the girls wanted Damon, but Catrina's eye was on someone else. If that someone else hadn't been so close to Damon, Catrina might not have said yes when he asked her out. She had, though, and let it go on for weeks. She'd justified her ulterior motives. She was savvy, not reckless, thinking that things would eventually go her way. She'd cleaned up a complicated mess or two before and always got what she'd wanted in the end.

Not with Damon. This complicated mess now required her presence at a funeral, demonstrating appropriate grief, in less than an hour. Worse, the object of her unrequited mad crush would be at the funeral; he was Damon's brother.

For months, all she'd wanted was for Tony Rodriguez to notice her. Well, to notice something good or special about her. Catrina was pretty, popular, and a track star; everyone noticed her. Sometimes she felt like she worked twice as hard for people to notice that she was also intelligent and thoughtful. Tony seemed like the kind of guy who noticed those things. To make things worse, Catrina wasn't used to feeling desperate or needy about anything, especially guys. It was disorienting to be desperate for Tony's smile, for him to sit near her in class, for him to really talk to her, maybe even to notice something intelligent she had said. Tony wasn't even her type, not exactly—he was athletic enough, gorgeous, and an achiever—but he wasn't popular. He wasn't *unpopular*; he was well-liked, and had popular friends, including his superstar brother. He simply—wasn't, and seemingly by choice. Catrina went from intrigued to full-blown smitten.

It was Damon, not Tony, who noticed her. Damon had asked her out, showed her off to his friends, and maybe even appreciated her as more than a reflection of himself. Weeks passed, and her feelings didn't change. Then last Friday, Damon had drunkenly bragged that, at twice her size, he could run just as fast as his track-scholarship girlfriend.

Three beers later, he'd attempted to prove it by racing traffic down a major boulevard, on foot, just after midnight. The driver of the truck, nodding off, hadn't seen Damon barrel into his lane.

Catrina wouldn't have been impressed by such a stupid stunt, even if he'd lived.

At the funeral chapel, Katrina couldn't figure where she fit. The Rodriguez family clustered around Damon's closed casket, while awkward classmates hovered by the flowers and photo tributes. Katrina paused at the guestbook. One of Damon's teammates had scrawled, "HAGS, bruh!" next to his name, then scribbled it out. She was relieved she hadn't worn the sexy pink sweater.

"Catrina." The familiar voice startled her.

"Tony. Uh. Um. Hi." She suddenly wished she'd died instead, to avoid this. "You, um, your family." She took a deep breath. "I'm so sorry, Tony."

"Thanks." He paused, expressionless. "My mom—"

"Please don't say she doesn't blame me," Katrina gushed. "Sorry, it's just everyone says that, like they're saying it because they do blame me. I told him not to—" The hitched sob in her voice silenced her. Thoughts and emotions blasted around her head like speeding traffic. Her eyes stung, and she lowered her gaze to an ugly paisley blob below the knot of his tie.

"That's not what I was going to say."

"Oh." She stared at his knees. Tired black pleats, less distracting than his tie.

"You should come sit with the family, up front."

"I, uh, no. Maybe I shouldn't." Their eyes met, but his face was blank. Was he being nice, or setting her up for some horrible scene? She thought either was possible; both could be justified.

"Please, for my mom. She asked me to come get you."

Catrina's open mouth produced silence.

Tony put on a tired smile. "If you sit with the family, everyone else has to quit telling you it isn't your fault, right?" He sighed. "Damon knew you were too sharp for him, and he was trying to hang on. I'll give you that. But he had other lapses in judgement, independent of you. This

one just caught up with him. Not your fault. I promise.”

Silently, Catrina took his arm.

He led her to a row marked RESERVED. Mrs. Rodriguez nodded weakly before returning her numb gaze to the flowers on the casket. Tears welled in Catrina’s eyes. They weren’t the right ones, perhaps, but they were sincere.

A balding minister droned about the loss of tender youth, and some bit about mysteries and faith. Eyes on Damon’s casket, Tony reached across the negligible gap between them and took Catrina’s hand. When her spare tears came, he held it tighter.

Her face was somber, but inside, Catrina’s joy danced in a hot pink sweater.

DANI JO MOORE

Setting the Stage

A place seen by me tasted like laundry soap.

A place seen by me tasted like Clorox.

A place seen by me tasted like smoke.

A place seen by me tasted like cigarette.

A place seen by me sounded like footsteps.

A place seen by me sounded like music.

A place seen by me looked like trees.

A place seen by me looked like sky.

A place seen by me smelled like shampoo.

A place seen by me smelled like oil.

A place seen by me felt like flesh.

A place seen by me felt like ground.

DR. JIM MOSES

Charlie and the Wax

My earliest recollection would be around 1942 when I was about four years old. I was a real cute kid with ringlets of golden blond hair. My Mother thought it was adorable to have her baby boy with long hair. I was inundated with severe back pains. I used to touch the back of my head with my heels and that would relieve my pain. My Mother took me to the doctor but the medicine of the time could not be of any help. My parents decided that I should be taken to my Great Grand-father, Charles Prezant, who was the Shaman who delivered medical advice to the poor Jewish population who lived under the viaduct on the West Side of Denver.

My brother had been taken there a few years previously for treatment, as he would wake up crying in the middle of the night. After seeing Charlie it was decided that he cried because he heard the of the crickets outside his window and was frightened.

Some things I remember, most was told to me by my parents. Aunt Billie picked us up in her coupe which had a very small back seat, barely large enough to have me comfortably seated alone. It had a funny win-dow that hinged outward so that I could stick my head out a tiny bit and feel the wind blowing in my face. It took a long time to travel to the West Side in those days. There was always a fair amount of traffic going over the viaduct, as there were only two single lanes, one com-ing and one going. The streets were barely paved and the small shops were few and far in between. There were two synagogues.

We arrived at Chalie's house after a short time coming off the viaduct. Grove Street sat on a hill, and because trees were not plentiful, one could see for a long distance in every direction. Eleven children and two parents lived in this small home with no frills. There were some remembrances from the old country. This was a poor home with rough furnishings. Charlie was a rag picker. He would take his horse and wagon to the Eastside to collect discarded rags and cloth, then return home where his wife, "Mima Itka" (Clara) would wash and dry them

so that they could be sold. She was also the midwife.

Charlie had long gray hair and a gray beard, neither were trimmed. He wore a different kind of Yarmuka. It was like a round hat, with sides that raised it up of his head with a two-inch round brim. His shirt was frayed and striped, with a black vest that fit over it. Dark, rather dirty pants and worn old leather shoes. His cuffs were rolled back a turn or two, revealing more soiled areas. He was thin and many of his veins showed up and down his arms and his face and neck. He was probably in his late seventies or early eighties.

He had a desk, like piece of furniture with shelves above it filled with many bottles and jars. There were a few chairs and one round bench resembling a modern-day piano stool. Old pictures adorned the walls, as well as some framed quotations in Hebrew. It was a small room of the back porch of the kitchen.

Mother and her Zaedie, spoke only in Yiddish. The younger members of Jewish families did not understand Yiddish. The elders spoke the ancient dialect, so that the younger members could not understand. That is why the modern-day Jewish generation doesn't converse in Yiddish.

"What is my great grandson's problem?" he asked in broken English. Sissy continued in Yiddish with details. "He has horrible back aches. They are so painful they make him arch his back, so that his heels touch his head. Once he reaches that position, the pains seem to subside. This position lasts for as long as he needs to become comfortable. Sometimes he stays that way, sometimes he returns back to normal. There is no predicting what will happen.

"Zadie, can you please help us?" Mother was crying.

He picked me up, put me on his lap so very lovingly that I wasn't scared. He cradled me in his arms and kissed me gently on the top of my head, and murmured softly in his very broken English. "It is OK baby, it is OK baby, it will be all right, it, will be all right, my baby boy." I felt a warm feeling begin to envelope me. I leaned into him to feel the comforting warmth of his body. He kept saying things over and over until I almost feel asleep.

He had a waterbath partially hidden in the corner of his desk. It was heated by coals glowing red under it. As he rocked me in his arms he

reached behind and placed large chunks of Bee's Wax into the warming bowl. Slowly the wax began to melt into a slurry of moldable soft tepid wax. When the wax was malleable, not runny or too hot, he felt it was perfect, he leaned into my ear and whispered, "Don't be afraid my baby boy. This is warm but it won't hurt. It will. Only be there for a few moments. Stay still, my kinder." Then he gently poured the wax on top of my head. I squirmed a little but didn't move. All the while he cradled me in his arms and rocked back and forth.

After a few minutes he let go of me, gently pulled the hardening wax off of my head, placed it into a bowl of cold water and let it settle there until it was hard. He took the wax out, brought his hands to his face, and began to chant softly, moving slowly back and forth in his chair. His hands moved in small circles as though he was bringing in air around his face, over and over.

He lifted the hardened wax off the table and began to study it as though reading a book. "Sissy, there is something wrong with his backbone. It doesn't seem to be formed right in some areas. As he grows the back bone will become completed and the pain will fade away. This will take several years to go away, but now that we know the troubles, you can hold him and comfort him as I did, and the pains will go away. In the same area, his body organs are also not complete. I am not sure what that means but some things are not normal, and might cause some problems when he is much older. It is not to be worried about. It will not cause him to lose his life. When he has pain, give him a teaspoon of this medicine."

"Take this wax to the Platte River on your way home Throw it in, and it will take all of his troubles away as it runs down the river."

Sissy said, "Zady how can I ever thank you? Please take some money for all that you have done for us."

"No," he said. "You are my family, you are my blood. I can take no money from you. You and your family are God's gift to me. That is payment enough. I will pray for health for you, your family, and for this wonderful great-grandchild you have given to me.

He got up and walked us through the house out to the car where my aunt waited for us. He waved as we drove away toward the river. Sissy got out,

walked over close to the river bank, and threw the wax into the water that would take it away.

Twenty years later, certain health problems arose that fit his diagnosis. Fifty years after that, my spine developed problems that also fit his medical diagnosis, and had to be corrected.

MYRA NAGY

Homeless Faceless

How do we live
With tattered clothes
No food to eat and
No face to see

See what is important
To me, who I am That
I am alone
I am scared

Scared of the word
Moving past me
No one cares if
I am left behind

Behind the dumpster
I see my boyfriend
Sleeping drunk
Will he come out

Out in the world
Chaos and hate
No place for tired
Old bone to rest
Rest is for people
With places to live
There face matters
They have a face to see

DEREK NAST

Catching Up

Some years ago I watched the movie, *A Walk to Remember*. Closer to the end of the flick, a particular scene stuck out as Jamie and Landon were outside on the balcony, dancing in the moonlight; to add which it was also the name of the song performed by Switchfoot. Thinking to myself I want to dance in the moonlight. To those that have known me for some time will say I wear my heart on my sleeve. This rough shell of mine, in most ways, is used as a defense mechanism. I do seek to be loved although an icy exterior is contradicting. Issues with abandonment have come to be extremely debilitating in this department, that and I can be pretty shy when it comes down to the select women I desire; even so the times when it works out, sabotage takes over. One aspect of sabotage has ruled in favor of the situation on countless occasions, mainly sabotage of self, cutting opportunities short. Cheating myself out of what I may actually deserve. It is either one of two things in this case; I don't view it like so or don't care to put in the leg work of having to uphold the responsibility of something new and deserving.

Perhaps it's fair to say that a good chunk of my life has been spent playing catch up. An ability to live on the outside refused to thrive. If I wasn't locked up, I was withdrawn, isolated while increasing paranoia took up frequent residence. Whereas the body is to be treated like a temple; My own was abused like that of trap-house. Rolling it back I can most accurately portray the role of catching up through a few sentences from an older piece, titled: "Leveling out the effects..."

(So, when the time came to rejoin the family my assumptions of who they were in the present, were the same as back then. I was sorely mistaken to think the ones I had thought to have known so well would remain as I had left them. With all these changes occurring it was now time to catch up.) "Fucking A, the story of my life."

The times when not incarcerated as a youth were spent rocking life till the wheels fell off! How I saw it, was that it was always a matter of time before I was sent back. So why not get in, what I can, while I can.

Back then; (what I'm about to say next I assumed would never be said.)

Now, twenty years later through the thick of it all the practice of catching up still very much exists, however in a more domestic form. At 36, which is only by the divine itself I have never married, fathered children or held any responsibility other than accommodating the moment. Building a family of my own hasn't exactly been on the top of my list. It's funny I seem to get more pressure these days from my father about a grandson than my mother. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that I am the last Nast. I'm ok with that though because I have been witness to three very special girls in my life who have grown up with distinct characters of their own. My three little cousins. Over the years I have also had to play catch up on this front. At my Aunt and Grams salon I would stop in for a haircut, followed by Paella (a Spanish dish) and playtime. As time turns, these youthful family encounters evolve to one-word responses, face down in the I-pod. "Hey kiddo, how's school going?"

"Okay"

"You doing good in all your classes?" "I guess." "Well let me know if I can help?"

"Sure." Marks the end of the conversation. Jessie rarely needed my help a pretty self-sufficient kid what the three of them, the entire family actually truly needed was not advice or insight. They required a gift of presence.

I like how Rick Warren once put it. The best way to spell love is T.I.M.E. For myself in the present life is not so much a race against the clock as it previously was. These past couple of years have brought about a fair amount of change; the state of affairs, mind & spirituality. In order to catch up with life I had to first take a time out. In my mind where things have to make sense, the above contradicts itself; once believing that it has to be more complicated than that! Again, some part of me needing to thrive off the chaos, even if I have to create it. Of course irrational thoughts resurface, although as a friend has emphasized time and time again, acknowledge the thought, then let it pass.

Last week I was camping out at Lathrop lake. Early on one evening the plan was to finish a card game. Instead, I fell asleep only to wake

several hours later sometime around two in the morning. Somewhat restless, I began wandering around with headphones on and eyes fixed on the stars. A ways out I found a patch of moonlight hitting the concrete, my shadow out in front. Call it the right beat at the right at the right time, call it a morsel of catching up. Putting all insight aside, here was my moment in the moonlight.

GRANT O'BRIEN

Finality of Death

She said death is gentle and you're surrounded by people's love as long as you need it.

Not for me. There's an account of all who puff themselves up and patronize me. They feel I deserves some miserable conclusion. I am always in a box.

I've got friends who don't like me because I am good. They want to villainize me because I drink. They drink too though. They want me to believe I'm bad, and they enjoy shunning me because they know I feel jealous that I am not included amongst them.

There's the humiliation of comparison. I fail to be as well to do. My younger brother is living the American Dream. He has an awesome job, great reputation. He is married and has three kids. They just moved to Italy.

No, death for me I fear would become the summary of my shame. A passage to a land of nightmares formed by the hard pressed memories of how uncomfortable my ex-friends made me feel.

Replays of poor decisions I've made. The harassment of an echoing tune that never stops playing over and over. Permanent psychosis and the inability to grow or appreciate what used to be.

Death means hell or Hades. Unless I can outdo myself and get over a haunting past.

Why do I feel like this?

Because I'm reaching into the past for good times I can't relive and company that no longer cares.

BENJAMIN ERIC NELSON

Eater of Dead Flesh

Vulture of brilliance
Tied down by green coils
Constricting...confining...dread
The time for bread
Vinegar swallowed on the cross
Gas ran out
The grape vine
The hatred escaped...cloaked as a fake
Bringing joy to become fate
Drastic measures taken to be safe
You will like the way
Never ever has the evil one won
Fear encompassed drenched in sweat
Prepare a place for the sun
The stars fall in the night sky Clouds
give me relief
Contemplative but brief
Bring your oversights to me
A broken item
Fixed up by the sight of him
Him that believes
People need to breathe
Some choke on the polluted air
WAKE UP!!!
We are slowly drowning in radium
Atomic information seized
A long march
A reason to enlarge the mundane
Refrain

JANIS OLSEN

May Tanka

white, pink, burgundy
feel the gentle springtime breeze
luring honey bees
fooling the pollinators
snowing crabapple blossoms

TWILA PAUL

Nursing the Sisterhood

Sisterhood nursing
white caps and black bands
little girls reading Sue Boston nursing books
Candy Striper in pink uniform
Acceptance letter
Women demanded

Want to help people
Overwhelmed
Abused and underpaid
Love the patients
Love the work
Reality
Tired, how do we go on
Sisterhood striking
Holding signs
Stethoscopes around our necks
We need help
Marching in writing
One step at a time
42 years –
Retirement
Thank God.

SUSAN PERRIGO

Yes, I am 'The Runner'

Several years ago, a woman at a gas station near my home asked me, "Are you 'the runner'?" I was taken aback by the question and was less than gracious with my response. I wrote the following for publication in our local paper hoping she or someone she knew would see it.

Yes, I am the runner. I began as a walker around 1996. A friend and I walked the trails of Littleton regularly, therapy and exercise sessions for two women raising small children. We progressed into run-walking and soon I was running regularly. Since then, running has been an integral part of my life, and not just for the exercise.

I am the runner you saw training for her first marathon that was to have occurred the weekend after September 11, 2001. So you saw me training another six weeks at which point I completed that marathon, a testament to not giving up, in so many ways, on so many things. But that wouldn't be the only time I didn't give up.

I am the runner you saw on Elati Street the day before my mastectomy in August of 2002, and at the Race for the Cure two months later, and for several years following running as a survivor. Showing myself and the world that you can be strong and fit in the face of can-cer. Being strong and fit will do one of three things; help you prevent disease, survive disease, or live as high quality of life as possible with disease. Let's face it, we all know someone who, despite doing every-thing 'right' still got sick.

I am the runner you saw training for my second marathon two years after cancer, because I was alive and I could.

I am the runner you saw training for my third marathon in the winter/spring of 2005 because my father had just passed away from prostate cancer and a friend asked me to run Grandma's Marathon with him in Duluth. What better way to process grief than several days of long runs, just you and the trail and your thoughts?

I am the runner who you saw on the canal pushing my toddler and his younger cousin in a Graco double stroller because at the time I

couldn't afford the fancy jogging stroller. That toddler is now a college graduate along with his two older siblings.

I am the runner who, in 2016, processed the grief and loss of the end of a 26-year marriage and an empty nest on the local trails, and I am still running.

I am the runner who saw several cities and some countries as no others often do: the Embarcadero in San Francisco at six a.m. deserted of the usual hustle and bustle of the day, the sun rising over the Seine in Paris, Juneau in the rain, the entire perimeter of Stanley Park in Vancouver to name a few. All have stories; vacation, college visits with the kids, etc. How blessed I have been.

I hope to be the 75 year old runner you see 20 years from now hitting the trails, running through life.

Thank you for recognizing me. I am proud to be a part of the Littleton community, the Colorado community, the American community, and most importantly, the Global community.

You probably recognized me because you too are often out and about. I apologize for my rudeness that day, and please, if you see me again on the streets or the trails, stop me and introduce yourself. I'd like to shake your hand and hear about your life's trail.

BOB PETRICH

Confluence

I recall the softness of her skin,
my amazement alongside its texture,
before our mingling embrace.
It felt as if I could pass right through her,
as if she had no barriers
to bar my muddy arms, my silty skin.
As the tension dissolved between us,
she the Mississippi and I the Missouri merged,
from whirlpools of conflicting currents,
into a solution of selves and souls.
Our convergence led to cascades,
a churning descent through chains of rocks, spray,
then foam that floats on our surface
as we flow past St. Louis.

TRICH R.

We Are Not Broken

The switch that controlled us within has taken up permanent residency in a vessel destined for greatness. That substance controls you no more. We are not broken; a spirit within has risen. Take back what belongs to you. That alcohol leaves a bitter taste in your mouth within so you can no longer consume it.

We are not broken. Take back the will to have self-love. Without it, we falter off the pillar of hope where despair exists.

We are not broken. Healed, rising from the things that broke us.

We are mothers, daughters, sisters, women in need of comfort and healing through our love and compassion, building each other up to never be broken again.

Never to be labeled a mistake, making the naysayers take back their doubt, for we are not broken. Standing tall, head held high, crown on to never be broken again. Healed by pain and strive to become.

MARIANNE REID

Creel

Edit and I stood at the chicken coop. It was newly built and functioning well. We turned our gaze to the flock inside. Edit stated that the hens won't lay eggs. A quick count revealed 18 roosters and four tormented, almost featherless hens. It was suggested the laying problem could be solved by the butchering of all but one rooster. So her roosters would not be wasted, we went down into Creel to buy half-gallon canning jars and a water bath canner. No refrigeration, no problem. I had experience with chicken butchering, so I pitched in with gutting and plucking. A pile of heads and feet formed, parts that I usually threw away - very American of me. I brought in roosters ready for the jars as Edit went out and gathered the heads and feet, bringing them in to clean them and prepare them for dinner. She carefully trimmed the nails and beaks then boiled them. "My husband likes them," she said. My children looked at the large bowl of boiled heads and feet being passed around the dinner table, and then at me. I indicated without words that they take some and pass it. Watching her husband for form, I chewed and sucked on this unusual entree. It tasted like chicken. My kids seemed uneasy, but our host's little daughter, Carolina, fell asleep at the table with rooster toes hooked on her lower lip.

LYDIA RENFRIO

In the Garden on Lowell Street

I come from her body.
I don't only mean mother,
I'm not talking only of direct contact between our membranes:
It's older than that, more compounded.
It's the sourdough passed down the years and families,
The piece that's put aside and included in the
Next batch and the next and another:
Skin folded in quietly, without trace.

Her honeysuckle, snapdragon, the vines of her strawberry beds,
Her quilted bed collecting sweat and anguish,-
and also every sweet thing.

I feel her blooming up inside of me every time
I make that joke about myself, touch the
Wrinkles forming fresh on my neck,
Smile to myself because no one but me has seen
This hummingbird take her morning sustenance.

Little girl, you come from earth people.
Your bones know it, though the rest of you is finding out.
Trust the heaving of your spirit,
The muscle memory in your fingers,
The skylark and the lobelia and goldenrod,
And your own true sounds.
There is singing here, and it is me.

I think, and am perhaps sure, that it's not enough to belong.
It's maybe more important to sow than to reap.
She sowed, spent a lifetime planting,
Bending her waist toward the earth and leaving behind

Only hope, the faith in her labor.

Really, reaping is nothing: it's over as soon as it's done.
But planting keeps on, requires waiting and breathing
And holding on.

On the prairie, they hang flowers upside down to
Collect the moment, dried color for the winter through-
Undead flowers for the supper table, reminding of
Good things during hard nights.

If they put me in the ground, I will send out what I know,
I will shoot it to you in faith:

That you must say your name clearly, and smile if
Another roots into you, and let creatures feed.

And joy-sing, yes!

Joy-sing for sourdough and ladybugs and grandmothers.

But if I get my wish, I will hang upside down,
Undead and color-cloaked,
Waiting for someone to reap.

GREG RIVAS

Let Me Bake You a Potato

Could I bake you a potato
that's been washed and cleaned?
Rubbed in virgin oil and wrapped
in fine foil – into the oven
I will bake it – 375 degrees –
until it's perfect.

And when you pull it apart
to open it wide and see
all the wonderful fluffy stuff inside.
I have all the fixings to put on top,
everything you can imagine –
except for gravy.

I'm jealous of baked potatoes.
If someone would open me up
they'd see I, too, have
wonderful stuff inside.
And all the gravy.

CHARLOTTE ROSE

The Best and Worst of My Life

Worst. Oh, I don't know. Let's start when my mom was in the hospital giving birth to my "celestial" sister and my dad walked into the living room and asked if I'd ever seen a grown man naked before. Of course, I laughed during the movie *Airplane* when Peter Graves said the line. It made my dad seem like the pathetic clown that he was and not the Barnabas Collins that I saw in my dreams. Six years of sexual abuse, though, isn't that funny. Followed by four more years of verbal, emotional and mental abuse, escalating to physical abuse before he left.

Best. Johnny Cash, staying in the hotel that I was working at, calling down for a wake-up call. We weren't allowed to gush, so put all the love and awe that I had for him when I said, "You have a very good night, Sir." He paused. And I knew that he knew what I was really say-ing. And he said, "You too, now. You have a good night, too." Suddenly I felt as if I was being tucked in by one of the greatest men in the world.

Hide and Seek

Mac likes her sleep on Saturday mornings, and for that matter, all mornings. Hands always tucked under her chin, curled up like a cat, still as a tomb. When I sleep, I toss and turn: when she sleeps, granite. Like most Saturdays, mine started before hers, with coffee, buttered toast, and a morning scroll on the back patio before the sun burnt off the crisp morning air.

Our plan for the day was to blow a gift card that we'd gotten as a wedding gift. Some of our house plants needed to stretch their legs a bit. Who knows, maybe we'd pick up a Cat Palm for the sunny spot by the window. I imagined spending our afternoon a little stoned, tarp spread out across the kitchen floor, potting soil under our fingernails as we re-homed plants and listened to Leon Bridges.

That didn't happen.

Mac woke up to a frantic text from Anna. Her husband Cody was missing, and she needed help looking for him. Mac and I agreed that if it was one of us, we would hope our friends would drop frivolous greenhouse plans to help. Anna and her husband Cody were members of Mackenzie's seemingly always expanding Ohio friend group. Denver transplants that had moved here at some point over the last decade. They were a tight knit community that spent a lot of time together. Buckeye games, Friendsgivings, ski trips. Every guy in the group, including Cody, was a Golden Retriever, All-American type of guy. The kind of fellas that if your daughter was dating one of them, you'd feel pretty alright about the situation. Cody worked with his hands, he was a builder, a craftsman, and now he was missing.

Honestly, I was excited about the idea of adventure and unknown. I put together an impromptu Indiana Jones day bag. I packed a camera, first aid supplies, knife, headlamp, lighter, rain jacket, flask-o-whiskey, compass, a couple Nalgene's full of water and threw a bunch of random food items in a cardboard box, thinking maybe everyone would want a snack later. I wasn't sure what situation we would find ourselves in, and

these all seemed like good things to have. We took my Jeep because a Honda Civic is no vehicle for a mountain search party.

Anna's directions led us to National Forest land off highway 285. We passed families on weekend camping trips. Kids running through campsites playing tag as their parents watched from the shade and sipped Coors Lite. After the turnoff the road got rough as we ventured deep into the Rocky Mountain wilderness. Distant gun shots echoed through the hills. A slight breeze moved between the aspens well into their fall cycle. Pops of yellow contrasted with the ruddy green pines that outnumbered them ten to one.

Anna had sent the call to arms far and wide. As we arrived, so did mutual friends, family members, first responders, and the Park County Search and Rescue squad. The search and rescue team received the call just like we did, except they knew *exactly* how to gear up. Tracking dogs, chest packs with radios, whistles, compasses, and every kind of medi-cal and athletic tape you could imagine. Looking at their well-worn hiking shoes, tanned skin, and lanyarded sunglasses, I felt dumb in my pair of old beat up Nikes.

We were an unavoidable nuisance to their working environment, the little brother they had to let tag along. Friends and family members wore stern expressions and tried to be as useful as we all could. Each of us taking turns cosplaying as some kind of detective about to crack the case of the missing Cody.

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Yesterday. He said he wanted to lay in a hammock. He's been dealing with stress and voices in his head telling him he's done awful things."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Only a couple months."

"Is he armed?"

"No, he doesn't have a gun."

"How did you find him?"

"He made a purchase at a gas station about 15 miles from here, and Kyle had a hunch that he might be coming this way."

"Yea, we camped out here last summer for a few days. Last night I drove out here and that's when I found his truck."

“He was really disoriented when he left and he’s probably lying down somewhere right now.”

Anna gave the Search and Rescue team a bag of Cody’s laundry and his favorite hat for the dogs to find his scent with.

“If it’s windy does that make it hard for the dogs to track?”

“No, the wind is good for the dogs. If the air is still, then they won’t be able to find his scent.”

They arranged us into two search groups, just like you see in the movies, a long line of people roughly ten yards apart from one another methodically walking through forest or field. I was on the furthest right edge of our surging line of volunteers. We were told to march east, perpendicular from the main road towards a grassy valley, with wooded hills on either side. It felt good to be contributing, doing something useful. The day was so thoroughly pleasant, a smattering of cotton candy clouds, mild temperatures, and a bunch of old friends on a scavenger hunt. It would’ve been lovely if it wasn’t for the context. Occasionally someone would shout Cody’s name out, and the reality of the situation would re-emerge. We walked no more than 200 yards before word came down the line to turn back.

We hadn’t been on the search for more than ten minutes. I was frustrated. It seemed silly to turn back; we’d barely covered any ground. Ahead of us was miles of open wilderness and Cody could have been anywhere. The guy next to me, who’s name I never caught, remarked that it was either good news or bad news that was bringing us back. We ended up making small talk on our way back, asked a few questions about my prosthetic leg, and we ended up talking about his son and how surreal fatherhood was.

I stopped to snap a picture of the landscape we had just investigated. The tree line of the valley trailed down to a small meadow before it ran into the next hill carpeted in pine trees. Closer to me was a shady gathering of young aspens growing next to a fallen log. If the sun set over the hill in the distance, this log would have been the perfect place to sit and watch the show.

Someone once planted the phrase *Moments of Aesthetic Rest* in my brain. I never knew quite what they meant by it, but I took it to mean

moments like this. I took a few deep breaths, fiddled with a few settings, took a couple photos, and we continued walking. We were the final stragglers to make it back. After cresting a short hill leading to the road, I saw Mac walking alone towards us with the unmistakable look of grief.

Up until that point I tried not to speculate about Cody's current state. I had been cautiously optimistic without putting too much thought into it. Turns out he hadn't survived; for whatever reason, he couldn't. He had hung himself in the forest west of where Kyle found his truck. Truthfully, I hadn't known Cody all that well; he was always kind and goofy. He had that classic Ohio friendliness, not a bad bone in his body. Cody was the type of guy you could sit down next to at a bar, strike up a conversation and in five minutes be cheering to the good ol' days and laughing about the dumbest shit. Mac and I hugged, she wept, I held her tight.

At the staging area everyone was in a similar state of disbelief and grief. The Search and Rescue crew back at their trucks packing up, their duties fulfilled. Girls cried and hugged anyone willing. Guys sat on their tailgates and smoked cigarettes and stared into the woods. Occasionally someone would start wailing and those around them would get pulled into the gravitational field of their anguish, surrounding and consoling them. I offered the group snacks, but no one accepted. Anna was off with someone giving her statement. Now that the truth was revealed the bureaucratic ball had begun rolling, and forms needed to be signed and boxes needed to be checked.

We waited around for a while. I never saw a body. In a weird way it felt like an elaborate prank had just been pulled on us. I signed Mac and my information onto a legal pad the coroner was passing around in case they had further questions.

It was the first time, officially signing Mackenzie Roseland since we had been married.

One by one, people ended up splitting off from the group and heading home. What else was there to do? We got in our car, drove home, and Cody was gone. That was it, all over, permanently irreplaceable. Across the street from our house, families were buying ice cream on

a perfect September day. The trees were still green. But autumn on its way nonetheless.

DEB ROSENBAUM

Shpilkis

Sitting on the sidewalk at 9 a.m.
in methodical attack on an evil creeper
attempting to take over the lawn.
The retired neighbors are out too,
presenting a unified front
as they battle similar foes.
My best friend and love,
yanking long tap roots together
in common combat and gratification.
Combining efforts in marital bliss.

And then there are ants,
the big red ones,
angry at condo complex violations.
One racing over my shin
followed by a comrade
across my ankle and foot.
Distracted, I observe their speed
and ponder their mindset.
Is the advance a warning or a threat?
Recalling nasty itchy bites,
I brush them away.

Then a slight itch or a tingle
near the bottom of my right butt.
Infiltration of my shorts!
My mission is abruptly aborted
with a quick stand, jump and stamp.
Recalling a word I used to teach my kids,

mom's favorite Yiddish phrase
when I couldn't sit still
now a literal translation:
"ants in my pants."

JOANNA SCOGGINS

Fury

There are times of peace,
then the times of war.

That fury on the edge of temptation
is a walk i want to walk no more

Keeping that calm
that gives me my release.

Is the only thing i'm allowing
to bring me to my knees.

Isolation stays so sweet
as the chaos swarms around.

I'm just here trying
not to lose
the new me
that i've found.

ROB SCHARTON

Today is for Fun

Today is for fun, having a laugh, having a smoke.
Always packing a bowl and telling some jokes. Not
today, my friends, I will see you no more. Today
my adolescence will be checked at the door.
Picking up nightmares and reasons for drinking.
Suicidal thoughts keep me from thinking.
Or caring for that matter what will it take.
Not dying that day...yeah, one would think.
Hearing the shots and even the screaming.
Thought it was a prank just keep on believing.
It can't happen here not on this day.
Happy and stoned is the way it should play.
Not dead on the sidewalk, or in the library.
Just eating lunch should not be this scary.
Walking at first and then forced to run.
When teachers start yelling you know it's begun.
The start of your day and already in sadness.
The rest of your life will continue the madness.
Thankful you seem to all those around you.
I guess for not dying I still see no value.
My life people pity, and that I can't take.
Keep on drinking, you know that's your fate.
Could you have done more? Hey it's in the past.
Your days seem numbered...is today your last
Wishing that day you were among the slain. Now
stuck here on Earth and feeling the pain.
One big excuse, you piece of shit.
Suck it up already, at least you exist.

—Columbine Survivor

JIM SELJOS

Finding the Line

What is it now
What is the time
How can I find my own way to the line?
Is it in spirit?
Is it on Earth?
Can it be found and is it of worth?

By leaving my body
By touching the soil
Smoke from the sage or anointing with oil

Focus on darkness
Bathe in the light
Running by day or stillness in night

Find peace on the pathway
or treacherous stone
In company travel or set off alone

Our cosmic sum of being is wrapped in a song
I've always felt its rhythm, so clear and so strong
It's raging and driven, like slammed with a fist
It's playful and soothing, ethereal mist
The line, I will find it around a lost bend
To discover, in crossing, I start over again.

C. SHETSKIE-MCALLISTER

Castaway, Year 5

Dreams?

Dreams...

Yeess...

Yes. I remember:

Aspirations...

Metaphysical declarations;
nourishment for the soul.

Revelations of

what we'd truly like-
to be?

Some say some
can even become
true

spiritual expressions,
alive in their own right.

Dreams are hymns
to the future.

My future...?

Life:

a taxpayer-funded
back-alley prison;
my young man's ignorance
& tragedy

twisted:

surgical coat-hanger
 administratively scraping me;
every scar,
 a dream.

What could have been...

As they arise
 they die inside;
still
born in my head.

 In-sanitized,
I stop dreaming.
conscious entity,
 Mimicking human life.

 living day for day

until I die.

Undreamed dreams...

Please,

Take me with you.

LILLY SHOEMAKER

Vulnerable

An old man shuffles by the front of my car. The wind buffets his puffy down vest. White haired, weathered faced, tall and lean, he is still a handsome man. He stops, stiffly turns to the left then to the right, scanning the rows of parked cars. He doesn't find what he is looking for. As the wind picks up swirling around him, a tinge of panic rising in his face. Closing his eyes, he pauses a moment to collect himself, then bobs out of sight as if towed by the current in the choppy sea of vehicles.

(King Soopers, Erie, Colorado 2019)

PETE SIMON

Happy Valley Restored

—For Gary Savage

Out on the street,
you make your bed, with
guys and gals, with
acid reflux-induced
gurgling sounds, from
fermented and vinegary provisions, the
kind you score, from
shady outposts, overlooking
once prosperous turf, they called
Happy Valley.

WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?
A peaceful night's sleep with
the lover of your dreams?
Jesus to arrive in combat boots, to
save the day?
Go check with Father O'Malley, down
along Delaware Avenue, when
he's back from making his rounds;
through the decay.
Perhaps he'll have an
encouraging word, to
pave your way.
Until then, breathe deep;
hold your head high and
remember, this is better
than what happened to those
who passed before you,
not as lucky,

not as strong
as you, you
the survivor
and witness to
what comes next,
what you help create,
for a better tomorrow.

Happy Valley
can be more than
a distant dream, again,
a place with
people like you.
Let's get started by

working on
that gurgling sound, like
creaking wind chimes
in the night.

MICHAEL SINDLER

Color My World

First... color my world with the invisible—the essential—the incorruptible. Grab the widest of brushes and dip it deep into compassion—swirling it until every bristle is saturated. Make wild sure strokes across the background of being. Cover it thickly—a viscous gesso—grounding all that will float and flow upon its surface. Let it dry slowly with the warm breath of love freeing vapors of longing—rising and disappearing into waning clouds of thought. Sand it gently with empathy until its soft smooth surface contains no crevasse, crack, or outcropping in which the dusty particles of doubt may find purchase. And then...

Color my world with all shades of human—every hue born from every clime. Color my world with the cross-pollination of lovers who leave convention behind. Color it with the shape and shade of every tribe. Color it with strands and curls and ringlets, with fuzz and stubble and wild cowlicks. Color it with eumelanin and pheomelanin. Color it with freckles and tans and birthmarks, with rashes and sunspots and scars, with albinism and vitiligo. Color my world chocolate, saffron, annatto, and peach. Color it oat, wheat, cumin, pecan, and chickpea. Color it delicious. Color my world raw umber, burnt sienna, burnished copper, and dimpled bronze. Color it smooth amber and saturated coral. Color it pale chalk, glimmering sand, and fragile rust. Color it hard and strong, soft and malleable, cold and warm, and always beautiful. And then...

Color my world with every chroma—every pigment of plant and plumage. Color it deep forest and shocking chartreuse green. Color it swaying poppy, slithering salamander, and fluttering cardinal red. Color it bold sunflower and tart citrus yellow. Color it ripe cut melon, darting goldfish and roaring tiger orange. Color it resting robin's egg, scampering scarab, fluttering Morpho wing, and clear waving water blue. Color it drooping wisteria, plump grape, and slow sea snail purple. Color it striped and spotted and spiked and rounded. Color it kaleidoscopic; color it subtle and brilliant, pastel and iridescent. Color it contrasting and complementary. Color it microscopic. Color it vast. Color it

a rainbow encircling the horizon. Color it wisdom. Color it passion. Color it intellect. Color it faith. Color it action. Color it thought. Color it everything. Color it now. But most of all, with every stroke, every movement, every touch—color it love.

SPARKS

Sisterhood

Sisterhood

Sisters sharing.

Insures intense.

Traumas & turmoil.

Either raw or hidden happenings.

Obviously overcomes our demons.

STEPHEN SPARKS

Poetry Homework

How do the curvy lines make me feel?

What does the painting sound like?

Merging of Cultures:

The curvy lines represent blending space and time. Life is smooth and relaxing. Despite the many different gatherings, everyone is relaxed and comfortable.

The colors blend to fade into one another as to belong, perfecting a form of togetherness by different cultures. Different cultures of the same race. The human race.

The red flowing into the street and under the roof reflect that conflict may arise from outsiders, whereas the golden streets that the church goers are traveling show peace.

What does this paint sound like?

San Domingo Corn Dance:

The sound is chaos. The participants are dancing to a beat of their own drum. Pairs are off on their own neglecting the group as a whole.

BETSY TURNBULL

Mom

She wouldn't let you ever take a good picture of her. None of us were photographers, or we may have occasionally gotten a good one of her rare smile, or of her contentedly crossword puzzling, or reading. Instead we have pictures of her making a face, smirking, frowning, holding her hand over her face, or standing there with the rest of us, or in another group, looking aggrieved, or exasperated, or sullen.

She never understood that the picture was for someone else, and not about her. She could never accept the love.

RICHARD VANDERVOORT

Reclamation

Of all I've seen, it seems,
 I've seen enough
And all I've felt, it feels
 I've felt too much
And when I dream,
 I dream to touch—
Your heart before it's interned in rust
Your heart before I'm returned to dust.

PATRICIALYN VEAL

In Loving Memory

Ravaged
By a newly named blight
A pestilence
A precious one from us has gone
A place is vacant in our world
A voice stilled
No more laughter within this home
For just a fraction
of one moment
I thought they had the wrong boy
And I
A brother's sister
A son's mother
Another's lover
A slumbering one to be later called
His wage
In death
Now paid
There was no AZT, there were no pills
Now there is nothing to cure this woe
They gathered the scraps of memory
A baby blanket
A first leisure suit
Two tassels from different years
A handkerchief
A similar piece of satin from the box they laid him in
A set of pockets from the rear of Levis
he himself had cut
They all sat and stitched and cried
Saying ALL
that could be said

in 18 square feet
Then his mother pulled the baggie out
We sat in awe as she threaded the needle
with his young blonde curls

VIRGINIA WINNEN

Roomies

I left my 94-year-old grandfather in a huff, angry about some silly chauvinistic remark. I drove around fuming, turn after furious turn, spending my anger clutching and shifting. Tears finally came. Fury dissipated. I remember I adored him. I forgave him his old-man ways.

Racing home, ruminating on his rapidly shrinking existence, I startled at the emergency vehicle parked curbside. My mind exploded with images of Gramps lying dead on a gurney.

Rushing into our living room, I saw him sitting comfortably alone. He smiled his cherubic toothless smile.

“The broad next door had a gas leak,” he said. “Wanna beer?”

JENNIFER WAGNER

Riddlz

Hey whats your name?

How much time they hit you with?

If we were to go to the zoo & i lost you where would i find you?

Whats your favorite color?

Whats your favorite type of music?

My name is jennifer but most people just call me riddz

4 years iccs. Thats what they hit me with

So you want to know me...i want to know you to

So picture us...a fun filled day at the zoo

somehow i've lost you where could you be

by the elephants is where you'd find me

the only mammals besides us who too know the heartache of grief

CLAIRE WANG

Untitled

I am Denver. I am history and memory and joy and fight and fire; I am my story and every strength that comes with it. And most importantly, I am who I am because of my parents, and so my story also starts with my parents.

My mom and dad both have their own really cool histories, but I'm going to fast-forward to when they met in Beijing. They both played in the same orchestra, and my dad asked my mom to marry him because he ultimately wanted to immigrate to the US. Back in the 1980's, the best way to do that was a) you had to be married, and b) you had to be coming here for higher education. He told her that she was the prettiest girl in the world – which only serves to prove that cheesy pickup lines are a global phenomenon. My mother said yes, and still to this day speaks of this memory fondly with nostalgia in her voice. Eventually my parents made it over to America, and brought over my grandma as well (who, at that time, wasn't even a grandma at all yet).

Fast forward a little bit. A little green house on Ivy Street was me and my brother's first *home*. It's also the first address he ever memorized. It wasn't huge, but it was nice, and it had everything that we needed to have a childhood just as valid as anybody else's. It had an upstairs floor, it had a basement, it had a small kitchen that held one round table and three chairs comfortably, and I remember being at that table with me and my mom and my brother and drinking orange juice that came from frozen cans and American pasteurized cheese that came from plastic. I think it's a universal experience to be a small child and naturally wonder if other children are like you – why they do or don't look the way that you do, think the way that you do, talk the way that you do. My personal version of this universal experience was wondering whether my cousins in China learned their first words in Mandarin as “cheese” or “basement” or “daycare” or “raisins” like I did.

My grandma married an American man (native to Nebraska, so you can only imagine the wonders this did to my already delicate accent) and

moved into his apartment near the intersection of Colorado and I-25. When I was the tender age of two and a half, I moved in with them as well. This was a shared decision that made a lot of sense to my family because my mom was recently widowed, she was still in college, she was working in different jobs on-and-off, and my brother's lived experience with autism was constantly getting him "fired" from underserved and underprepared elementary schools.

So I actually only spent my weekends and a handful of weekdays at that little house on Ivy Street, but a lot of my spatial and visual memories come from there. It had two bedrooms on the top floor... but the second one wasn't used necessarily as a bedroom; it was more of a playroom that the cat slept in more than my brother did. In my mom's bedroom, there were two twin beds. My brother slept on one of them, and me and my mother slept on the other one, and she would rock me in her arms when I couldn't go to sleep. I think we all stayed in that one bedroom because she was lonely after my dad died.

Eventually, my mom finished college—she earned her well-deserved Bachelor's degree in Computer Science. She stopped traveling all over for temporary work, and she started a new job in the tech department at Dish Network. She moved her life to Littleton, along with a very young me, and my brother, and my grandma, and her husband, all into a five bedroom, four bath house. We use all the bedrooms now.

Junk

- 1 Shut up with your junk mail mouth
- 2 There's no sale on babbling
- 3 You collect ½ price coupons for Spam
- 4 Do you know it's not a delicacy in Hawaii,
- 5 If you're a professional, baby, it's hate
- 6 It sinks down to the earth's deepest core
- 7 Send negative energy all the way to Uranus
- 8 Your butt be sagging, looking like diseased ass
- 9 When are you going to realize it comes back
- 10 Stop the jargon, you're not a motivational speaker
- 11 In your soul, I bet you really know
- 12 What you're doing is infinite blasphemy
- 13 The law of inertia measures an object in motion
- 14 Will stay in motion with the same speed
- 15 in the same direction unless acted upon
- 16 Unbalanced force—that's you in dangerous motion
- 17 It's there for you—swing in the ocean
- 18 like a puffer fish that expands on alert
- 19 If you don't slice it right you die
- 20 There's no known antidote—do you even care?
- 21 Sometimes I chime in on that shit called gossip
- 22 I can't resist the excitement of made-up lies
- 23 Don't you know? Do you even care,
- 24 I feel sorry for you and me, us and them

MATTHEW WEATHERSPOON

Hello

I lost you at 19. I'm 27 now. I ain't got a thing and you took my smile. Locked in jail a while, could be the rest of my life.
By the way, I dreamt about you the other night.
My ex and I made you all through the night,
told you I finally saw the light. I need you back in my life.
In my entire life, losing you was my biggest mistake.
You said, "I think you learned your lesson and I'll give you a break."
You said we were back together, then I had to wake.
Breakfast served by the Sheriff was two pieces of bread on my tray.
Wish I never woulda woke. I shoulda died in that dream.
You might come back, we'll see what the future brings.
You're the one and only thing that gives me reason to live.
By now anyone reading should know who you is.
I'm talking about love, I could live without lust.
I need her in my life, yes love is a must.
I'll never adjust without you, life ain't worth it.
Love please come back and come quick, love please come quick.

LEAAN WILLIAMS

There

Centuries of wars have dulled the living
Daily routines
Thought without thought
Life ongoing

People on TV
People walking by on the streets
Smiles expected, Smiles returned
Another day
Another errand completed

I stand in line at the grocery store
The cashier does his thing for all those ahead of me
Items bagged
Ding of the payment at the register

A comment is heard
He's an unfeeling robot
Not what I saw at all
A sparkling glint of light in deep turquoise eyes
An unseen person seen by me

SHEREE L. (WINGO) DOWNS

A Silver Bracelet

I don't remember how I even got the bracelet, living in a small north-west Kansas town, maybe the VFW gave them out?

The Vietnam war wasn't popular, but, for some reason, the bracelets were.

His name:

Lt. Col. Donald F. Casey

6-23-68

Not long after I got the bracelet, a letter came in the mail. A small white circle with a blue star in the middle. Lt. Col. Donald F. Casey had been officially declared MIA, missing in action. I attached the circle as the letter said, in front of his name.

The bracelet was on my right wrist constantly. Then, fall of 1974 came. I was on the college swim team and a cheerleader for the basketball teams. The bracelet was off my wrist more than it was on. I was afraid it would get lost so I took it off and put it in my jewelry box. Every time I opened the box, I was reminded of him.

The years pass. On November 13th 1982, the Wall was dedicated in Washington D.C. There are 58,276 names on the Wall with 1968, Lt. Col. Donald F. Casey's year, being the year with most casualties.

It is now June 2019. I've never made it to Washington D.C. to that wall but a replica of the wall has come to Arvada. I go. I am shown how to look his name up in the book of names. Panel # 55W Line # 20. His middle name is Francis, he was born January 25th, 1926 and was from Tennessee. I am given a soft pencil and paper to make a rubbing of his name. In front of his name, etched on the wall is a plus symbol. He is still MIA, one of only approximately 1,200 still unaccounted for. The other names have diamonds in front of them, recovered. If his remains are found, a diamond will be placed around the plus sign. Also, if any POW/MIA are ever returned alive, a circle will be put around their name, there are no circles on the wall.

I touch his name one last time, place the bracelet on top of the wall,
and turn away.

Rest in peace, Lt. Col. Donald F. Casey, may not know where you
are but GOD does.

B.E.L.

Colorless Prisms

Rugged

Misunderstood

Breeds

Lies

Markets

Reversible

Individualism

Stoicism

Cynicism

Exceptionalism

Isms

Truisms?

DULCINIA V.

When I Look Into the Mirror

When I look into the mirror I see a broken past
The battle scars of journeys I've surpassed.
When I look into my reflection
Wars and tears are what I see
Reminding me of all the arrows
My addictions constantly shot at me
A few made it past my shields
Others fell to the ground
When I look into the mirror, a warrior's what I truly see
A fighter for good for love and respect
Loyalty still shines in the mirror looking back
The Lord's not finished with one and that I can clearly see
But my armor is ready and no one can foresee the strength I carry
within
No mirror can reveal
The only way to show the real me is living life for real with integrity
and
honesty
When I look into the sterling silver I see the beauty purified forged
through fire
Now I know God will pull me through
When I look into the mirror I see me striving for the future and
Where I
want to be.

Folk in Uniform

Why do we have police?

I understand in theory: their tired slogan is to “serve and protect.”

Serve and protect who? Because it sure as hell ain’t me.

My junior year of college, I was walking home from campus to my off-campus apartment. I don’t exactly remember if I was coming home from class or one of my various extra-curriculars, but I know I was exhausted and it wasn’t even 3 pm yet. I had headphones in — the universal sign to not talk to me.

Someone tapped me on my back. It was a short-ish white guy about the same height as me and poop-brown hair. I immediately looked at the ground. For some stranger to interrupt me, I must have dropped something. But nothing was there and I felt my lanyard of keys on my wrist.

Noticing my confusion, dude tried to explain.

“Hey, I’ve been following you for like two blocks. I just wanted to talk to you,” he said.

Wait.

Did this man really just admit that he was watching and chasing me down for *two blocks*? *Like that’s normal conversation?*

“I think you’re cute,” he said, as if that’s an acceptable reason to stalk someone who clearly was unaware that they were being watched, let alone followed.

At this point, I was only a block till I got to my house. There was no way I was going to keep walking and run the risk of him following me all the way home and him discovering where I live. So what did I do? I did what most women do. I entertained this scary man, pretended I liked him, even gave him my number, just so I can appease him long enough that I can skate away without being harmed.

I blocked his number as soon as we left paths and I thought that was the end. It wasn’t.

Days later, he found me on Facebook asking why I never contacted

him after we had such a nice chat. I blocked him. I also thought was the end. It wasn't.

He online stalked me and started calling my job. He emailed my work email. He asked other people about me. He started hanging out, campus hoping we'd run into each other. At one point in his forms of contact (which I never responded to), he called me rude for not giving him the time of day. He's a 'good guy' and therefore was entitled to my time.

After this went on for about two-three weeks, I went to the police...and they were useless.

They told me that unless he physically assaults me, they couldn't do anything. They even suggested using me as bait which I was not on-board with. They didn't even offer to escort me home.

My only saving grace was that I was getting ready to study away to a different city for six months. If I had to stay in Philadelphia, who knows what would've happened?

A year later, I got into a car accident where a girl I knew from high school T-boned me. My witness was a police officer who saw the whole thing. She was my saving grace, I remember thinking. This wasn't going to be a he-said-she-said, situation. I have a key witness.

The girl who hit me was in the car with her mother and neither of them even tried to talk to me or even try to say a meek 'sorry.' I was more angry than hurt at this point. The female police officer with the soft voice comforted me, telling me not to worry about it, she'll write the police report of everything she saw, and it'll all be okay.

Two months later, I'm paying for her damages, and I'm paying for all of mine out of pocket. How did this happen? The police officer saw everything, told me not to worry. I even reached out to the girl at one point to ask for insurance information explaining that I'm a college student with a single mom, and I pay most of my bills. My money is tight and I wanted this resolved as soon as possible. Let our insurance companies talk it out. The girl with her nuclear family, who never paid a bill in her life, was affluent, only said "Sorry, my dad isn't comfortable giving that information out."

It wouldn't be till months later that I discovered that the girl's father is a cop.

That's when I finally understood — he “serve and protect” meant their own.

And now, as I just experienced a car-break where my wallet was stolen out of my glove compartment, my first reaction was simply to cancel my card and dispute charges. I went to work and continued on my day.

I'm rattled. Whoever did this probably has been watching me. I know the signs now. They didn't damage my car but went through all of my belongings — my glove compartment, my middle console, and pockets in the back seat. They had time.

As I retell this story to family and friends, I'm met with a chorus of “Did you go to the police?”

But never once did I even consider it. Why would I do that?

How do I explain that I'm more terrified of the folk in uniform than I am of criminals?

If anything, any time the police have been involved in my life, they were either useless or actually made my situation worse.

I don't feel safe when an officer is in the room. I'm more terrified that I know for a fact that they have a gun on them and can use it whenever, at their own discretion.

Why would I call them just to get victim-blamed?

I remember when I went to the office when my stalker was getting increasingly creepy, “Did you go on a date with him?” “Did you give him the wrong idea?”

I can already hear my lecture from an officer, “Why would you leave your wallet?” They can shift the blame to me although I'm not the one who did something illegal.

I remember watching a domestic violence dispute outside of my apartment in Philadelphia. My first instinct was to go to a neighbor and tell them to handle it and get the two parties separated. Calling the police never crossed my mind. The couple was Black, and even then, at 19, I knew calling 9-1-1 would only escalate the situation. I knew either one or both of them would likely end up shot.

I wasn't going to have blood on my hands.

MAXX

Alisa

Since we were kids she was
always there for me.
Her face and smile I adored
her laugh and voice I will miss
She taught me how to dress
do my make up and style my hair
So I wouldn't look a mess.
When she moved away I was sad
but she brought back Mercedes Joya
and Alanna Rose.
Those are my nieces I get to
celebrate her life with today.

Alisa my Big Sister. I pray
I will see you again one day.

—Maxx

OSCAR

Drink of Death

Cop a seat, and rest your feet
and let me tell you a very sad tale,
It's not about money and it sho' ain't funny,
but at the age of 12 my life was hell.

Now I put down my toys and hung with the boys
and ran around with the crowd that don't play fair.
Just as daring as speed, I pushed down the throttle,
I picked up the bottle, right then I didn't care.

You couldn't give me an Orange Crush, because I was a teenager lush,
and for my breakfast I was always sipping on a Steel Reserve beer,
I began to curse and stole out my mama's purse
and my family lived in total fear.

As other teens, I didn't wear Pumas, Nikes, Air Jordans,
or even Calvin Klein's,
My whole delight was to spend my whole night
sipping on a fifth of cheap Thunderbird wine.

Now at 20, my age you couldn't tell, was living downtown in a
fleabag motel,
and I always ended up in detox,
I wouldn't drink with Silly Willie, Annie Frannie, Sally from the Alley
and at night, I'd get clipped for my wallet, shoes, and socks.

So as I drank that wine, I withered and wallowed in puke and slime,
slept in a cardboard box, got the shakes and began to shiver.
Little did I know, when I saw the doctor, he said,
"Damn, Big O, it's a shocker, you have cirrhosis of the liver."

So I lay on my sick bed, almost dead,
listen my brothers and sisters while I breathe my last breath,
Take your time and search your mind,
'cuz alcohol ain't nothing but the drink of death.

SK

The Loudest Rain, From the Quietest Clouds

Alas, thus the Earth cried forth
For lo! It's sphere had grown so dry
There was no fair wind from the North
And those clouds above had seemed to die
The heat had grown
She shook and shivered
All things then moaned
And none were delivered
Oh woe
Weep not dear Earth
For those clouds above are quite slow
But they come soon, and bring along rain's birth
Hark!
Above I see them!
Yon skies grow so dark!
Tis now the moment where water shall fill you to the brim!
Oh torrent!
Oh stream!
Let those with woes lament
For this rain shall hide their scream
Oh rain!
Deafening!
My ears shall fain
Forget this fair sound, which did upon me come falling
Yes
I know
I remember now, I do confess
Your shape's familiar, oh cloud who doth rain throw
Returned again
You lumbering thing

My eyes stare at ye, where have you been
It matters not, for I know what you bring

The noise
The noise

It is all I know now
This sound breaks me
Water upon my brow
And aye, it breaks all things free
A lesson to yield
For all to learn
I sit alone within a field
And feel all my flesh burn

You free me
Oh rain!
Your noise makes the silence hide
Your form makes the sun flee
Your hand makes the world grow
You are the grandest beast of which I know
How I love you
My dear, dear friend

NATHAN YBANEZ

Thirteen Ghosts

I.

When I was thirteen – God! What did I know? I wore a tie,
a blue blazer, tried to survive a Lutheran school. I
didn't belong where rich kids snorted lines in clean bathrooms,
sucked dick in the janitor's closet, and, on Wednesdays,
streamed into the chapel to recite the liturgy
and kneel the prescribed number of times to be cleansed.
I knew I wasn't clean, but I wasn't *filthy*, and
when the priest put ash on my head where my tempest raged
I wanted to scream it out and split the old chapel
asunder, to breach the boarded up bricked over doors
of the Mains where they say thirteen kids were murdered
after being raped, after not doing their homework.
Those ghosts, at least, would befriend me – understand my life.

II.

But I just held things inside til the bell's clang set me
free to walk alone to a smaller prison filled with
lunatics instead of privileged kids with common vices –
cutting through Veteran's Park to prolong my freedom,
the park always empty and sad in some comforting way,
filled with oxidizing statues and rows of name-plates
the same size and shape, same level of lost forgotten.
I needed to be forgotten too, so I stayed frozen
til the sun melted its golden butter all over.
Then I stood, my arms wide, eyes closed feeling almost right,
almost safe, nearly loved, absorbed the warmth like copper. If
I cried the soldiers didn't care, just understood
in their own silent way how every tempest needs space.

III.

A small prison with lunatics is a two-bedroom house with three generations all bad at everything, except tormenting each other and keeping secrets. Grandpa Bernie sleeping in the basement with a knife stolen from the kitchen during one of his midnight raids, eating pie on the floor crouched like a monkey ready to attack ghostly enemies. In full view of my room that somehow lacked a door, he'd stand moonlit and moaning knife gleaming, floor creaking, me pulling the covers up to my face imploring God to keep me safe, recalling my mother say how he'd murdered my aunt, buried her on the side of the highway when she'd tried to run away, and nobody said a thing – so I always stayed still.

IV.

My stillness bled to biology class where Lindsey, my lab partner, made my heart race hands shake lungs ache because of her golden hair and perfect lips, cute ears and short skirt, amid an ocean of female things magnified to the point of breaking by chemicals whose names I was learning for the first time from the drone of a lecture on pheromones and testosterone – I knew I'd die if she saw the cupid army marching beneath my skin, she'd smirk, laugh, toss her beautiful hair in my face, viciously proclaim "For real? As if!" so I tried not to move or even breathe, just be cool. Then, she faced me full of soft vulnerability, asked "Do you like me?" My tongue slashed "No!", and I saw her bleed.

V.

Two weeks of cotillion – a foreign word everyone seemed to understand but me. Regular classes stopped and we assembled in the gym to be instructed in the artistry of polite society – how

to eat, how to speak, how to be little debutantes
at the upcoming ball where we'd be scrutinized by
a panel of judges for our ability to
choose a mate and look beautiful doing the box-step
fox-trot, waltz – I'd never danced before, generally
despised my body, but somehow I managed in my
cheap loafers and ill-fitting clothes not to make a fool
of myself, loving how the girls looked walking with books
on their heads, the way my hands felt on my partner's small waist.

VI.

There were eggshells all over the floor except in my room,
and my father was a snoring giant on the couch –
crumbs on his chest trembling like stones on a shake-table,
“Go ask your father” was a euphemism for “No.”
So I hid in my room writing the life I wanted
into existence on clean pages of a notebook:
I was the youngest musician to get a Grammy,
I was Indiana Jones and James Bond rolled in one,
the prettiest girls in school all fought over who
would get to drag me into a closet for my first kiss –
but the one I really wanted (shy, quiet, soft voice)
the girl with the easy laugh and warm eyes, always won.
And her love was medicine for everything broken.

VII.

Things were broken, scattered, tossed – mattress half off
my bed, a casualty in my war for privacy.
Raging storms I'd poured into that little red notebook
surged off its pages in a whirl of screaming parents.
I stood in their eye, Dad to one side holding my words
aloft like a gavel, an executioner's axe,
Mom on the other lashing her glass-coated tongue
over me in the torture that precedes confession
and punishment: “*This* is what you think? *This* is what you feel?”

I don't know what to say. I wish you'd never been born."
They made me burn it with my own hand to prove I still
loved them, belonged to the family. I couldn't feel
the flames lick away those pages. My body shivered, numb.

VIII.

My world was everything within biking distance of
the hub of my home. My compass-rose wasn't North, South,
East or West – it was the overpass we hawked loogies off,
the family drugstore from the 50s where we shoplifted
gum and cigarettes, the used-car dealership that held
concerts in the dingy parking-lot I snuck off to
every weekend to guiltily watch and listen from
a sidewalk across the street because one day my father
broke his usual silence to say, "Those bands that play there
aren't worth a fuck. People who listen are idiots." Last, but
not least, on my map – the seedy record store that sold me
CDs with parental warning labels
no matter how long I took counting nickels and dimes.

IX.

At night I waited for my favorite songs to come on
finger poised unwaveringly before my radio's
record button, feeling cold jolts of adrenaline
following each commercial break as the first few chords
sounded and I sprang forward like a chameleon's tongue
to snatch every precious note on my stolen cassette tape –
my sacred book, a two-sided compilation of
obscure psalms escaping censorship solely because
they aired long after the witching hour had begun.
Saturated overdriven guitar melodies
oceanic bass-lines crashing elegiac drum-beats,
disaffected voices from a blank generation
whose hopeless chants saved me from the daylight hours.

X.

Fourth of July was for lovers, a chance to scoot close
hold each other tight, dazzled by the lights while making
one poignant silhouette, bright dreams inside blossoming
with each extravagant burning of the summer sky.
Young lovers sneaking kisses, old lovers knowing winks
watching their rambunctious children playing in the streets
with bellies full of hot dogs, corn on the cob, ice cream.
I sat alone on our stoop watching it all unfold –
a movie I desperately wanted a role in,
whispering lines I imagined someone someday might
say to me, warming myself with the mimeography
of it all – smiling while grieving each passing scene.
Strangers passing by thought I was enjoying myself.

XI.

I wasn't scared – not at first. I was smug when she asked
if my dad had a gun. "Yeah," I said. "He's got a bunch."
Reagan, the prettiest meanest most popular girl
in school who the other kids followed everywhere
like bumbling ducklings, smiled coyly – the first time
she'd actually paid attention to me. It felt
so good to be seen I couldn't see the cunning glint
sharpening itself beneath her batting eye-lashes.
I proudly laid the weight of handguns, shotgun, rifle
on my parents' bed. They stood in a giggling ring
all reaching tentatively to finger, stroke, and hold.
Reagan aimed the magnum at one of her ducklings, pulled
the trigger. I'd forgotten to check if it was loaded.

XII.

Evenly spread neglect, dirty boxes disused tools
putrefying grass clippings in soggy plastic bags,
sleepy plumes of dust, roused in cyclone coruscations
by furtive steps, caressed streams of soft lemony light

glowing through a door in the corner of the garage.
My salvation, my escape – I longingly gazed at
its ancient frame, four-paned windows, paint flaking away
from loosely rusted handle, deeply splintered door-jamb
wondering whether they'd hear its tattle-tale creaky screech
over muffled shouts and violent paradiddle thumps
on brittle floor-boards above. I reached, stopped, breathed deep
concrete redolence of gasoline, asked the falling motes
how much car exhaust I'd need to go to sleep with them.

XIII.

Just one comment from him – I can't remember the words
now. Just how embarrassing it felt watching it spread
in murmurous rings through hallways like a pathogen.
The shame and rage, the delicious way I reveled when
I lashed back for once with a planned campaign to call him
a fag in every class, enlisting my friends to help
reinforce a meme I knew wasn't true – until it
was and the entire school cruelly ridiculed him,
even new kids who didn't know his name, and the beast
I'd awakened crushed him, when he cried in class no one
comforted him, and everyone but me was relieved
when he dropped out, disappeared. Because I knew that I'd
only done to him what my father did to me.

A Cornucopia of Thanks

We should be thankful every day,
thankful for the breeze of saltwater
on the sunlit beach—

for that is the fruit of who we are,
lying together under hazy gray skies.

Hot-diggity!
I have a llama and it’s loquacious!

Sometimes I’m thankful this thinker is out of think:
there are times you gotta admire shellac painted toes

So put on your waders and wade into the mist
offer an apple and ask for forgiveness

I don’t celebrate Thanksgiving because
every day we should give thanks for our breath

This time of year, food is a blessing,
a cornucopia of smells,
the day I wake early with my grandma to start cooking:

that delicious bird stuffed,
the smell of turkey and broccoli casserole

until the responsibilities lose a little value
when the parade begins.

Sometimes I feel the absence of friends,
but there are always weird cousins at Thanksgiving
roaming about.

So we give thanks at this time, at this place.
Give thanks for the word salad of our writing.

Give thanks for the loquacious lovely dazzle
that is us.