



KALEIDOSCOPE

2022-2023

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Meet the Editors



Bethany Pankratz

I have always been a lover of photography and poetry. As soon as I heard about *Kaleidoscope*, I knew I had to be a part of it and was excited to join the editorial team in early spring of 2022. This has been such an amazing experience for me and has really made me consider what publication means to me and whether that is a future path I want to go down.



Elena DeWees

I am an avid lover of the outdoors, literature, art and adventure. I am always trying to find new ways to look at the world and am always curious to understand the things going on around me. I think that the *Kaleidoscope* is a wonderful outlet that allows many different people to share the way they think/see things and also to experience the world from a different perspective!



Dallas Davis

As a nontraditional student, I have come to enjoy learning. I am currently attending college to become a nurse. It is a joy to experience the many ways of expressing the arts.



Bloom

By: Paige Kruschinsky

Beetle

By: Alexis Stone



Dancing in the Moonlight

By: Loren Larson

The record player
Out of tune in the background
You and I, hand-in-hand
While we danced

The dog watched from a distance
As we smiled from ear-to-ear
While your long, dark hair
Sat on your shoulders
Your emerald green eyes
Caught a glimpse of the
Moonlight

Your laugh
Which made me laugh
Made me think—
I appreciate this moment
Two optimistic minds
Moving with every opportunity
Onto new adventures
That is where you are going
You stared out the window
The tan shades letting
The moon peek through
The light hit your face
Just right
Your eyes glistened
And a genuine smile

The look on your face
I could tell you were happy
With where you are now
And who you are now
I just wanted to tell you
You deserve the world

But instead
We moved in silence
Hand-in-hand
Dancing in the moonlight
With the dog still watching
Mom always wanted me to have this
To have someone like you
And finally, I do

Kylee

By: Paige Kruschinsky

**Content warning*

I beg on my knees for the colossus yelling,
throat grabbing tension, and
medication-souring to end.
He gathers my belongings and throws them
at me with fire in his eyes.

Brother-o-Brother of mine, wishing I was never born.
Strength of a hydraulic press up against a drywall.

I would give you away
For a sibling that calls me
Like a dove in a holy church.
She listens to me,
who sounds a desperate victim on a hotline—
homely like a warm hug.
A beating heart that wishes to live.
She keeps me in her heart.
She calls me her SISTER.

My New “Family” *By: James Campbell*

I sat on the bus, silent and scared. Thirty other kids and I didn't know what was about to happen once the bus stopped; the only thing I knew was that I wouldn't see my family any time soon. Five-foot-four with a total weight of 130 lbs soaking wet, I was not what people pictured when they thought of a “Marine.”

During the last week in boot camp, the instructors had spoken to us like normal people, which was nice for a change. They had us all sit in a circle on the cold, concrete floor and asked each of us what our MOS (job) was. One instructor looked at me with his baby blue eyes, pale skin and egg-shaped head and asked, “Hey, little Campbell! What's your MOS?” I muttered to him that I was going to the infantry, and his blue eyes went from harsh to sad. With a low tone, he said, “Good luck little man, you're going to need it,” and then turned to the next new Marine. At the time, I was confused why this man that was so harsh to all of us suddenly felt compassion; this made me uneasy and scared.

I was told on my last day of training at School of Infantry (SOI) that the fleet would be my home for the next three and a half years and I would meet my new family that would look after me before heading to combat. I can remember my first day in the fleet just like yesterday. It was a bright July day in Southern California with just enough of a breeze to keep you from sweating and not a cloud in sight. I stood in formation with one other new Marine that I had met in SOI- we stood there like two straight boards until the briefing was over.

I looked down the row, and there he was: my senior. He had black, slick hair (trimmed to meet regulations, of course), hazel eyes, and a mouth stuffed with chewing tobacco. He wasn't more than two years older than me, but in his position of power, I assumed he was the best man for the job.

My first order from my senior was to go to the second floor and tell Lance Corporal (LCpl) Retardo that the briefing was over and they were off for the day. I quickly ran up the concrete stairs and sprinted down the balcony, passing seven red doors before I stopped in front of room 207 and knocked. The man that opened the door was exactly what you thought of when you thought of a “Marine.” There he stood, six feet tall with a square jaw and muscles that looked like he had been training for the Olympics. I knew this man was not to be trifled with. This man did not care to be at the briefing nor did anyone seem to care if he was there. I quickly greeted him and was about to inform him about the briefing, but before I could do so, he stopped me.

“What did you just call me?” he asked in a deep-toned voice.

I repeated myself, and then it hit me: I leaned over the balcony to look at my so-called senior who stood with his hands on his hips and a big smile on his face after spitting his chewing tobacco out. I turned back around, but before I could explain what happened to who I thought was LCpl Retardo, he asked me to step inside his room. I knew full well he was not asking: he was demanding. As I went in, the room was dark with the smell of cigarettes and stale beer. The walls felt tight. Between the metal closets and bunk bed, there was just enough room for someone of my size to lay across.

CPL Retardous (which was his real name and rank) turned around with his jaw clenched, and then his cold, heartless eyes met mine. I knew what was about to happen. Before I could bring my hands up, my head hit the white metal frame of the bunk bed. As I lay on the ground, the smell of stale beer on the floor was overwhelming and made me want to vomit. The darkness made it hard to see where I was being hit from. I was familiar with this, though. I remembered the smell of cheap beer on my father's breath as he taught me to mind and the darkness of the places I tried to hide in. I knew it was best not to fight back but to wait until he got tired.

As I tried my best to fend off the punches and kicks, I could only think about my senior and the rest of the platoon that all knew what he was doing to me. The betrayal of my new, so-called “family” hit me deep and hard for what felt like hours but was only 20 minutes. As I left the room, the sunlight now burned my eyes and everyone was gone. I limped down the balcony and put my left hand on the rough concrete walls to help ease the pain in my right leg. Before entering my room, I looked out at the mountains and thought to myself, “This is my new ‘home.’”

I stood in the shower with its yellowish walls and mold in the bottom corners, and my thoughts repeated the words that my instructor said: “Good luck little man, you're going to need it.” I had never felt more alone in the world than I did that day. From that moment on, I have never trusted anyone in my life and never will again.

Three years had gone by, and I was a CPL with Junior Marines under me. My senior was now my equal; in fact, I now outranked him as he had been punished and lost rank. They say time heals all wounds, and for the most part it did. I didn't hate my platoon or senior for what they did to me throughout the first year of my training. To be honest, it helped me block out my emotions from the cruel world we had to see. I did, in fact, see them as family in the end, but who wouldn't after the firefights that lasted hours or the missions where friends did not come back. After all, they were the ones with me and had felt the same feelings I felt during those dark times.

It was July again, and my Junior Marines just made the step up to seniors. Now they had their own Junior Marines to train and prepare for combat. As I watched them, I remembered my first day at the fleet and how scared I truly was. I told my juniors that they should let the new Marines enjoy their first day before wrecking it; they respected me and listened. I was happy seeing them as they set up their rooms, fighting over who was getting the top and bottom bed in their room. But I also knew that their enjoyment wouldn't last long.

I walked into my senior's room with my juniors and their juniors for some quick training. My senior was sitting in his dark green shirt and desert camo pants crying on the red carpet floor. I started to read the room, looking for any evidence that may have caused him to be in tears. I walked slowly to him thinking that he might be suffering a PTSD breakdown and may confuse me as the enemy.

I was no more than two steps away from him before he looked up, his hazel eyes flooded with tears. I could tell that this was the most pain he had truly felt during his life. With snot dripping down his nose and face pure red from crying so hard, he slowly opened his mouth and said, “My mother just died.”

We trained for months and years to build muscle memory so when things went wrong, our brains would just act and there would be no delay. This helped us survive multiple encounters while on deployment and even saved my squad leader's life after losing both of his legs. You could hear a pin drop from the silence in the room, and my muscle memory kicked in. I looked around the room, and everyone looked at me, waiting for me to act. And so, I did.

At first, I thought it was from all the fighting we had done in the last three years and the mental harassment we put each other through day after day, that made us so cold-hearted. But I knew shortly after why I truly did it: this man made my life hell during the first year, and I hated him for it.

I looked at him with my brown, heartless eyes and said, “Life is rough, get over it.”

I could see in his eyes that I crushed him. He went from sitting to now lying on the floor sobbing, now knowing what it was like to be all alone in this world.

I turned around; everyone's eyes focused on me now. Suited in my desert camo uniform and a clean shaved face, they saw what I could only imagine as the devil himself.

I sat in the courtyard on a red metal table lighting up a cigarette with my USMC zippo I had bought from the Marine Corp Exchange (MPX). I knew what I did was wrong, fully knowing that the three marines that had killed themselves since I joined were for reasons just like this one. I did not care. I remembered my first day all over again and the way he broke me. I mumbled under my ashy breath, “Now it's his turn to either let go of his feelings for good or to end it all.” This was justice, I told myself. I had to make the same choice, and now it was his turn.

That night I dreamt about opening the door to his room, seeing him hang there from his bunk bed using the off-white bed sheet as a noose. Me, just standing, looking over his lifeless body swinging slowly as if I just missed it. I was relieved the next day to see him, mainly because I was afraid someone was going to blame me for his suicide. After that day we never spoke again; he finally knew how I felt and what he did to me all those years ago.





Untitled

By: Margaret Toothaker

Blink By: James Campbell

I see my wife. Her curly, dirty blonde hair bounces in the summer sun as she quickly walks towards me in the middle of our small-town street. Her blue eyes are soft; she is concerned about something, is it me? Her light pink lips dance, but her voice is muffled.

The ringing in my ear is overwhelming; I drive my index finger into my ear in an attempt to stop the sound. I realize what is happening. My blood begins to rush, I feel my ears burn as my body moves into its fight or flight response. My eyes fill with pools of water, I shut them and the flashbacks begin.

(Blink)

I am 18 again, wearing desert camo clothes, a tan bullet proof vest, and a helmet that makes me feel like a bobble head. There are 13 of us providing overwatch at the top of the ridgeline not far from our old operating base. We are doing one final sweep of the area before leaving for good. Carlson shouts that he needs assistance getting supplies and without hesitation I volunteer. Carlson is a twenty-one-year-old white male from Colorado and is currently second in command of our squad. Despite the fact he is younger than the rest of our leaders in the company, everyone knows he is born to lead. Carlson didn't just see us as bodies to attack an objective. Carlson made it a point to understand everyone in his squad, including their personal lives. To him, creating bonds with his team was just as important as the mission itself. I looked up to this man; he treated me as if I were his own brother.

We smile and laugh together as we pull foreign Gatorades from one of the supply trucks that cleared the area of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). It has been one of the hottest weeks since we arrived three months ago; temperatures reached 100 degrees or more without a cloud in sight to shade us from the intense sun.

We are happy. Not only did we get something besides water to quench our thirst for the first time in days, but our position has pre-dug trenches, saving us hours of digging in the heat.

(Blink)

I sit in a trench that is roughly 3 feet deep. I am drawing a diagram of my field of view for security purposes. My view overlooks the local village that's made up of twenty or so mud huts, a couple poppy fields, and a small creek covered in the only vegetation around for miles. I turn around and see Carlson standing twenty yards away in the center of our position. He is waving his finger in frustration while giving orders to a couple other marines.

As I turn back to finish my diagram...

(Blink)

Heavy dust fills the air. Larger clumps of dirt rain down upon me. My ears scream with a ringing sound...it's deafening. I squint my eyes, trying to avoid getting dirt in them, and turn around slowly to investigate what had just happened. A large cloud of dust rises in the air from the middle of our position. At the base of the cloud, Carlson lies on his back.

At first, I don't understand what is happening. Seconds feel like hours. I realize something is missing as I stare. My eyes widen and fill with tears as I realize his legs are gone from the knee down.

The ringing slowly fades, and I start to hear his screams. I begin to run to him. I am no more than 10 yards from him when I stop. My training has taught me that 50% of casualties are from the rescuers rushing in. I am frozen with fear. I can clearly see him now as the dust settles. He is frantically mauling at his blood-soaked camo pants in an attempt to end the pain without touching his exposed flesh and bones.

(Blink)

I am now facing Delireo, a 6-foot tall, wiry, Hispanic kid that wears glasses. He almost died last year in a car accident. He even has a nasty scar across his chest from the seat belt keeping him from being thrown through the windshield. Delireo is in a panic; he begins to rush towards me.

My voice cracks as I scream at him, "Please, STOP!" My eyes are like waterfalls, and I am more fearful than ever. I plead to him, "Get your EMT device and start sweeping the area."

(Blink)

My face is dripping in sweat as I look down at my tan boots; the outside heel is stamped with the United States Marine Corps logo. Delireo is sweeping the area now, and no one is holding security to our north. The enemy is likely to attack after an IED is set off, and I need to get back to my position. I decide the best way to get back to my trench is to leap and bound, like a frog jumping along lily pads.

I look back to my position and realize that I am walking through an actual minefield. This isn't fake, this isn't a movie, I might die right here and now. True fear sets in. I feel like I am stranded in the middle of the ocean.

I take the first leap. My ankle almost gives out as it slams into the dry, wasteland-like dirt. I piss down my left leg, filling my boot. I can't hold back my sound of relief as I yelp like a dog that's just been kicked.

I leap again. I can't breathe. There's a lump in my throat, and my heart is about to burst through my chest. The heat is intense. My eyes burn as I try to wipe away my tears only to get dust into them.

I'm in Hell.

Next leap.

(Blink)

I open my eyes; I can barely make out my wife's face through the tears. I hug her. Her curly hair tickles my nose as I begin to sob. I continuously repeat that I am fine. She whispers that it's ok. I think I am trying to convince myself more than her at this point.

Richard By: Gage Wallick

My great grandfather has worked his entire life. He has spent the majority of his life in Illinois, local to where he stays now, but he traveled the world according to his stories I've been told a thousand times. He is a kind man and shows a great deal of consideration and care for his family, who frankly haven't given him the same throughout the years. The honest truth to why I know him so well isn't even because I'm some amazing grandson, but because I was forced to mow his lawn each week since the age of 14. After I finished, I would go inside and chat with him for a bit. He would tell me stories, mostly the same ones over and over, about his 24-hour work shift ("I have the pay stubs in my dresser still to prove it," he says) or his "only real-life rocking horse" he had on his farm. I hated mowing that lawn, as it took hours and I had to use old tractors that broke down once a month, but as I look back, I wouldn't want it any other way—the hours I spent working on his property allowed me to understand what a hardworking and great man my great grandfather truly was and is.

My grandfather was raised on a farm with his brothers and sisters and was forced to work his entire life. His father would constantly beat him, as well as refusing him access to education, which he allowed his other children to have. My grandfather worked all day, from sunup to sundown, only to repeat the process the next day. I honestly know nothing about his mother, who he has never mentioned to me, but I know his father was an angry and abusive man who engraved a fear into my grandpa's brain that still remains to this day.

When my grandpa was older, he began to meet people off the farm. He met a girl who he really liked and offered to take her to a big church gathering. His father told him he wasn't allowed to go, but my grandpa didn't listen. He looks back fondly on the fun times he spent at the gathering, dancing, eating, and talking to that girl. His fun would end soon after he arrived back home. While his back was turned to his father, his father grabbed a wrench and wacked it over my grandfather's head, knocking him unconscious. The neighbor saw this and called an ambulance, which probably saved my grandfather's life. When he was released from the hospital, my grandpa did not go home. He hopped on a train with just the clothes on his back and hitchhiked, trying to escape the horrors of his home life.

My grandfather returned home a year later after receiving a letter about his father's passing. He was working on a farm in Nebraska, saving up as much money as he could. He spent time with his family, and from how he tells it, lived a fairly peaceful life after that. His greatest fear growing up wasn't anything a normal child should have. His greatest fear was his father.

My great grandfather had 4 children. His biggest regret is not knowing them as well as he could have. Having grown up poor, my grandfather strived to provide for his family. He worked two jobs as a welder for International Harvester and as a farmer. He would work as often as he could, even working 24-hour shifts where he would sleep during his breaks on the break room table. He describes his time at work as "living hell" and "back-breaking labor, like a work mule." The only time he was home was to shower, eat, and sleep. Just like his childhood, he worked sunup to sun down, putting in as much work as he could to provide for his children.

I think my grandfather's regret kicked in when his oldest son died. His son, Ramond, lived in California and was going to school to become a doctor. Unknown to my grandfather though, Ramond was gay and contracted HIV while in California. He died before he could even finish his schooling. I don't know what my grandfather thinks happened to Ramond. I know he knew he was sick and that he died, but I don't know what he thought the sickness was. For some reason, no one has told my grandfather about Ramond's true self, and I think it's for the best. It's best to keep his image of his son pure in his mind and let him just remember the good stuff.

After International Harvester was shut down, my grandpa was at a loss for work. He still needed money, so he fell back on the skills he had gained throughout the years and started a small engine repair business out of his barn. The same barn I still use to work on his tractors. He had that business for about 20 years before he retired, and from then on, nothing. With all the years of constant work, my grandpa retired directly into the brown, worn-down recliner in the corner of his living room where he watches old westerns from when he was younger. My grandma took up the job of the provider after that, cooking the meals, cleaning, and basically waiting on him hand and foot.

Whenever I imagine my grandpa, I see him in that brown recliner, the bottle of suspicious liquids he has in the window beside him, and the tv so loud I can't even hear myself think over it. He probably weighs upwards of 300 lbs now and struggles to move. My father and my aunts, along with their mother, were my grandparent's main resources, as they would clean my grandfather and help around the house on a weekly basis. He refused to move for so long though that he started to lose his ability. He went from constant movement to no movement and lost almost all his strength over the years. He got to the point where he needed daily help, help we were unavailable to provide, so he was forced to move into a nursing home.

Every time I see my grandfather at the nursing home, I want to cry. Not because the nursing home is bad—the staff seems nice, and the food doesn't look that bad either. He basically is living the same life he had before the home. The problem is his lack of freedom. It's not that he would've necessarily used that freedom if he still had it—he can't drive and struggles to walk in general—but it's the feeling of not having the option, the feeling of being trapped that upsets him. He hates it there, and it's upsetting to see him like that. He tries to make light of the situation by bragging about "giving the nurses hell," which my grandmother gets mad at him for. The man worked his entire life just to be locked in a room, rewatching old black and white tv shows until the day he dies. That was his cycle of life: you work, and then you die.

My grandpa knows he's going to die sooner than later, and he doesn't seem bothered by it. He likes to say "I've made it this far, so when it's my time, then it's my time," and I think he's truthful in that he's ready for his end. I think the one thing keeping my grandfather alive right now is that he wants to watch his grandchildren grow up. He wants to see someone else live a happy life. Every time he sees me or my dad or aunts, he gets a smile on his face. He smiles not just because he's happy for the company, but because he's happy to see his work paid off. He never worked for himself. He worked for us. He worked for his family. He worked so we could live a happier life than he did. That is what life is about to me. Trying to provide a better life for the next generation.



Riley

By: Melody Barnes





Luster

By: Amanda Koll

The Raw Beauty of Life

By: Loren Larson

It is all too good to be true
The feeling you get
When the early morning sun
Peeks through your window
Telling you to wake up

A full moon
Guiding the night
While the stars follow behind
Too many to count, but
There is only one
That can guide those
Who are lost

The pink, orange, and yellow hues
Slowly fading
While the sun peeks out
Over the horizon
For one last goodnight
The feeling of butterflies
You get in your stomach
Or the feeling of
Your heart pounding
The first time you met
Your soulmate
Maybe you thought
This is too good to be true

The truth is
All of the good
The happiness
The peace
It will come back
But it will be gone again
In an instant

The beauty of life
Is so bewitching
When it's there
But it does not last
Just know
That it always comes back
Don't take that time
For granted



Let's Explore Washington

By: Savannah Smith



Let's Explore Washington

By: Savannah Smith

Fatherhood *By: Dallas Davis*

"I realized that to get through this thing called fatherhood, I would have to be stronger emotionally and physically than I have ever been before."- Jeffrey Dumroese

A well-groomed young man in blue jeans and a polo walked down the corridor of an old school building. The building was still being used as an elementary school and nursery. It was obvious that it had not been changed since the sixties. It had old grainy wood doors with metal trim painted dark brown, creamy colored cinder block walls, and muted white waxed tile floors.

On his way to clean another room, he noticed a poster about the importance of a child's parents in their life and the need for love and affection. This caught his attention more than usual because he just found out that his wife was pregnant with their first child. The weight of responsibility and anticipation was heavy on his mind. They just moved to a small cabin in the woods on his in-law's property, and the only work he had was as a temporary janitor for the surrounding school systems.

Questions constantly invaded his thoughts as he tried to focus on his work. Each classroom he entered had a similar setup. Colorful images of cartoon characters and letters decorated the walls. Will I be a good father? He pushed small chairs that were scattered around the room under a nearby table. Will they be smart or struggle like me in school? He wiped down the tables cleaning off any pencil and crayon marks. Will I be able to give them all the things I never had? He grabbed a vacuum from a nearby closet to clean the gray matted carpet. Will they feel judged by me or accepted?

• • •

The tension in the air was palpable. A new father, wearing a polo and khakis, cradled his crying infant son in his arms. His short dark brown hair was starting to fall forward because of constantly looking down at his son. He paced around a cottage he and his wife were staying at for his in-laws' anniversary. The inside of the cottage looked like any typical hotel room, except for the hardwood furniture that gave it a rustic feel. The mother, a slender young woman with long red hair, was attempting to take their son from him. This was difficult for her since he was 4 inches taller and kept facing away.

With her arms outstretched, still trying to face him, she implored, "Please let me have him!"

"No! He is my son and he needs to get comfortable with me!" he snapped as he jerked away.

"But he is teething, and I know what to do."

Looking down at his child's reddened face, the man's brow furrowed in frustration. Why can't you let me comfort you?! He hated the idea of just passing him off for someone else to soothe. My own son doesn't want me.

A familiar pain of rejection welled up inside. "Fine! Go ahead."

Resigned, he handed the baby off to her. He briskly walked to the bedroom, dejected and angry, slamming the door behind him. He fell face first onto a full-size bed with a floral comforter. With one hand he grabbed a pillow and bunched it up against his face. I'm not a good father. My own son doesn't like me. Exhausted from the tense situation, he fell into a fitful sleep.

• • •

The small room with parquet wood flooring was filled with boxes haphazardly jammed full of unused jackets, electronics, and toys that were no longer played with. The room was littered with papers, empty soda cans, and unwashed dishes. The windows were covered over with dark curtains and aluminum foil to prevent any light from the surrounding woods getting in.

A couch with a hide-a-bed was set up near the middle of the room. The bed was pulled out and covered in a mess of sheets and blankets. The woman and child were drawn to a central lump clustered near the head of the couch. The lights were turned off.

The door creaked open allowing light to flood in from the living room. A hand reached around the corner and switched the light on.

"Honey, are you ok?" the slender young woman said in a low sympathetic tone. This was met with silence. She grabbed the

corner of the blanket and tried to remove it. This was met with resistance. A deep sigh came from underneath the blanket. She tried again, but this time she managed to uncover his face.

He looked exhausted, with unshaven stubble and brown hair in a style more fitting to Einstein.

"What's wrong, did you take your meds? I think you forgot again." She sat down beside him, letting her long straight red hair fall forward. She wrapped her arms around him and kissed his forehead. She recoiled with a disgusted look. "Woah! You are ripe! When's the last time you took a shower?"

He said in a low gravelly voice, "I don't know," and deeply sighed.

"Why don't you get up and take your meds, then take a shower? You'll feel better if you do."

This didn't elicit a response. She got up and left the room, only to return a few minutes later with a small glass of water and a handful of pills.

"Here. Sit up."

He slowly set up with his back pressed hard against the back of the couch. Taking his arms from under the covers, he grabbed the water glass and pills. After swallowing down the pills with a mouthful of water, he handed the glass back to his wife. "Thank you," he muttered.

The door came open and a slender 10-year-old boy with straight blond hair spoke out. "Is daddy ok?"

"He's got the sads. We are going to have to get the unicorn horn of happiness," she said, with a mockingly serious tone.

The father rolled his eyes and huffed.

"Can you go get it?" she asked.

"Sure!" the boy cheerfully screeched as he ran off.

A few moments later, he entered the room with a plush unicorn horn. It was rainbow-colored and had an elastic string to hold it in place. The boy stretched the elastic band with one hand, and with the other, held the horn upright. With a look of glee, he snapped it on his father's head.

The father was used to this kind of treatment. They would constantly joke and play around when he was in a good mood. This was just another way they liked to show affection. Even though he would jokingly say that he wished they had a little less affection for him. Playfully, they sat on opposite sides of the father and rubbed his face with the palm of their hands. Between each slow stroke, they would chant "Haaappppyy Daddy," over and over. This was combined with a few wet willies, and other slightly annoying gestures that he was too tired to dodge or block. They did manage to elicit a slight smile out of him, but eventually, it got overwhelming, so he got up in a hurry and took a shower.

• • •

The father, now middle-aged with streaks of graying hair, was in a closet that was converted into a recording studio. He sat on a bar stool wearing cushy headphones while looking at a large computer screen. The room had black soundproofing panels tacked to the walls. Instead of a door, he had put up two thick black curtains that ran the entire length of the door frame. The curtains pulled back as a tall skinny teenage boy came into the cramped space and stood behind him. The father took off his headphones and turned to face him. "Are you ok?"

Long blond hair partially covered the boy's face. With his shoulders slumped forward and head down the son said dejectedly, "No".

"What's up buddy?"

With only a brief moment of silence, the son continued, "I feel alone. I miss the woods."

The father looked down thoughtfully, and sighed, "Yeah, it's not easy coming from the backwoods to a suburb. I'm sorry. I wish we didn't have to."



The son looked up towards the ceiling while shoving his hands into his blue jean pockets. "I hate them."

The father looked understandingly with a touch of concern on his face, making the newly formed wrinkles stand out. "I can't blame you. I had a hard time forgiving them."

Several months earlier they moved away from his in-laws' property, where they had lived for the past seventeen years. His wife's sister lived with their parents the whole time. The sister had a lot of emotional problems, and the parents always let her have her way to avoid conflict. This was a source of contention in the family. Recently the sister got into a relationship with someone who was violent and manipulative. The pair would constantly cause trouble by lying, screaming, stealing and destroying personal property. His in-laws always ignored it just to avoid the violent and abusive backlash. It was so bad that he and his wife decided it wasn't worth the constant anxiety and stress.

The son had a look of anger and frustration. "Why does my aunt have to be such a bitch?"

Putting his left hand gently on his son's shoulder, the father said, "They can't understand anything outside their own pain." He paused for a moment then continued, "The woods were the only thing you knew. That is where you grew up. I can only imagine the pain you are going through."

Moving to lean against the door frame, the son crossed his arms into a tight squeeze, wrinkling the AC/DC shirt that he wore.

"I was able to go into the woods any time I felt bad. I don't have that anymore. Why did her and her boyfriend have to make us move?"

Pensively, the father tucked in his lower lip, deep in thought. "Nothing can make them happy. Even if they got their way all the time they wouldn't be happy. We tried everything to make it work, but they couldn't stop spewing hate. Your aunt still loves you, and I don't want to make you take sides. I wish we could have stayed for your sake, but honestly, the isolation was killing me. We had great memories there, and you and your mom made it worth it. You and your mom are the only reason I'm still alive," the father said with tears welling up in his eyes.

He felt conflicted. It was a major relief being away from that stressful situation, but he had the nagging feeling of responsibility for taking his son away from the only home he ever knew. The son unfolded his arms, approached his father and hugged him. They both started to cry, and the father said through sobs, "I'm sorry... I did this to you."

The son pulled back and looked at his father, "It's not your fault. I'm just homesick."

"You're very mature for your age. I wish me and your mom didn't have so many issues that you have to deal with."

• • •

A father and his teenage son were driving down a busy 4-lane road. The son had an uneasy distressed look on his face, with his arms crossed covering a classic Ghostbusters t-shirt. The father glances over at his son in the passenger seat.

"You look like you want to say something."

He uncrosses his arms and puts both palms on his knees, rubbing his blue jeans nervously. "Um, I," he sighs. "I can't say it."

The father nods his head consolingly and slowly blinks his eyes. "I know what you want to say, but I'm not going to pressure you. Just know that I won't judge you either way."

The son continues to rub his knees, trying to get the courage to speak. He looks up at his dad and says dejectedly, "I told my nana, but she freaked out."

The father furrowed his brow and grimaced. Slightly shaking his head, he said, "She believes anything that doesn't fall in line with her beliefs is a sin, and she is just worried for you. I wish you would have been comfortable telling me first. I was hoping by now you would know I wouldn't judge you or freak out."

The son's head slumped into the headrest making his shoulder length blond hair fall back. "I know, I just don't want to disappoint you and mom."

With a side glance, the father said, "You're not going to disappoint me. You are growing up to be a greatly caring and loving young man."

As if to rip off a bandaid, the son blurted out, "I have a boyfriend."

With a sly smile on the dad's face, he said, "I know. I guessed it a while ago."

They sat in silence as the dad pulled into a store parking lot. The dad parked, turned off the car, and palmed his keys. "From everything I've experienced, studying psychology, talking to other people who are gay, I think it's natural. Hell, in the animal kingdom they have far more same-sex partnerships than humans. Why should we think it is against God and nature when He made animals that way?"

They both opened their doors and stepped out. The son came around with his head down and buried it into his father and hugged him tightly. "Thank you," he said in a low tone.

The father put his arms around his son. "I know you inherited my anxiety, but I want you to always know we love you and accept you."

• • •

Dinner was spread out over a small four-person wooden table. There was a big ceramic bowl filled with mashed potatoes, a large plate overflowing with cheddar cheese biscuits that glistened with butter, and a small pot of brown gravy. The father, mother, and their teenage son sat in a triangular pattern around the table with the mother sitting in the middle. The father had noticeable gray streaks in his hair and had put on fifty pounds over the years. He was slightly annoyed that his wife didn't seem to age, giving him all the weight and wrinkles. She would never get gray hair because of dying it red. The son was almost as tall as his father, with only an inch from being six feet tall, and had long blond hair that came to his shoulders. He wore a t-shirt his father found amusing that depicted a cat the size of Godzilla hugging a rocket.

The son had been playing Xbox with his friend group right before dinner. His friend group was very close. He had been friends with his best friend, referred to by his gamer tag, Butter, for at least five years. The mother used a big ladle to scoop out mashed potatoes. The father grabbed some biscuits and looked over at his son.

"So, how's your friends doin'?"

The son looked up and said, "Well, Butter's dad was yelling at him for taking something from his younger brother, and it was his to begin with. The brother gets away with anything. He says they yell at him all the time."

The father widened his eyes in concern. "Ouch."

"Yeah, Delilah can't play unless she gets all A's. They get mad when she doesn't. Most of the time they just ignore her."

The mother, after taking a bite of mashed potatoes, looked at the son and said, "Well, every family has their own rules. You're only getting one side of the story."

Grabbing several biscuits the son continued, "Yeah, I'm spoiled. I got the best parents ever. I don't deserve you guys."

The mother looked up and said, "Bullshit! You're our bitch, and you are very mature for your age."

The father looked up with a wicked grin on his face. "She's right, you lil shit! You better get used to it!"

The son smiled and said, "Most people would be horrified by how we talk to each other."

The father then said, "Well, we aren't normal, and that's the way I like it. We know we love each other, and we can actually communicate."





Self Portrait

By: Melody Barnes

Oh, to be a frog in the Midnight Band

By: Elena DeWees

Oh, to be a frog
In the Midnight band
Resting on a water filled log
Or on the cool damp sand
Underneath the twinkling light
Of both stars and fireflies
The fresh evening air of night
Crisply floats across the skies
The crickets Chirp a Melody
While the coyotes Howl a Tune
The owl Hoots a Rhapsody
To the Whistling of the Loon
The bristling of the bushes
Adds to the trickling creek
Mixed with the hiss of reeds and rushes
All the creatures seek
But still you are the foundation
For you alone carry the beat
You direct the sighs of all creation
Without even moving your webbed feet
As the sun begins to rise
The other creatures say Goodbye
Their melodic night time cries
Hush, as the moon leaves the sky
But you are still,
Resting on a water filled log
Or on the cool damp sand
Oh, to be a frog
In the Midnight band!



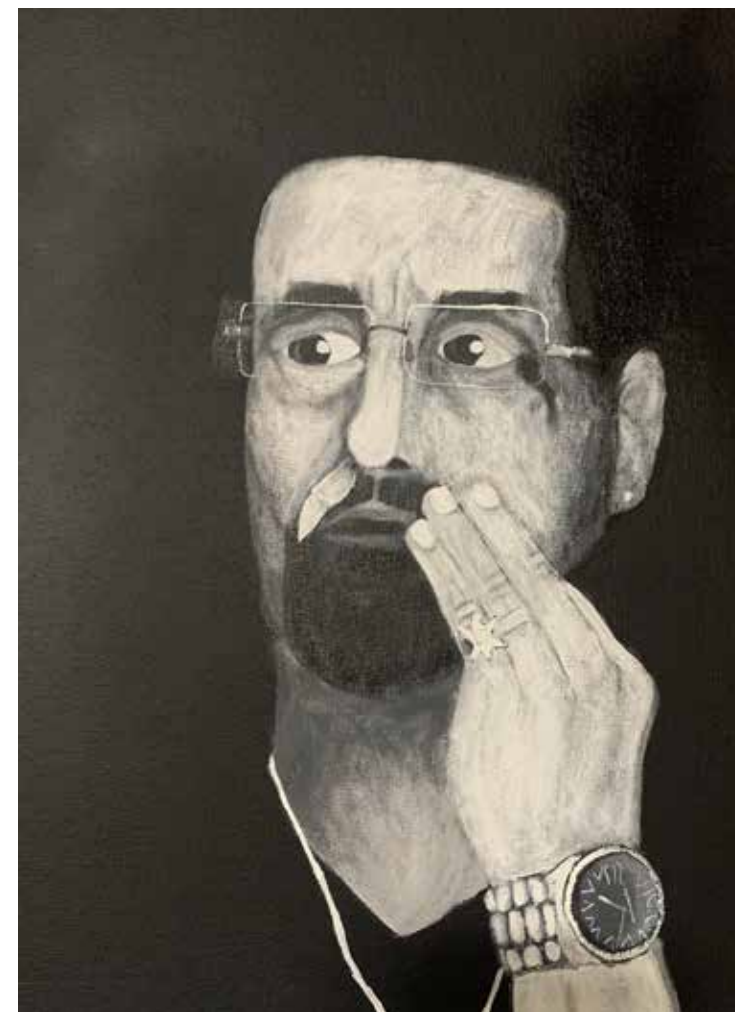
Ringing the Doorbell

By: Sydney Sager

I stand outside a building looking through the glass door. A woman is sitting with a magazine and a sandwich in one hand. I watch as she looks into the pages scanning with such intensity, but then stops all at once. A daunting sense of darkness approaches, and her eyes seem to glaze over. While looking down at her hands, she wraps the sandwich up as a rumble seems to echo through the glass. She looks at her stomach as if to tell it to be silent. She tosses her sandwich in her waste bin and smiles proudly. The smile falters as another rumble erupts; the woman looks at her stomach as a mother would look at her disobedient son. She's resilient and has willpower, she tells herself. She doesn't know that she is not alone; I'm with her. I am the only person she hears at a dinner party. The face of emptiness and discontent she sees in the mirror is me.

One day when she looks back, she won't reminisce about me; instead, she will mourn the lost time. She let me cancel plans and tell her how she must achieve perfection. She'll regret how she let me come right in. I promised to stay for a short time, but I may have overstayed my welcome. I would ring the doorbell, and she would answer by barely cracking the door. Then I would push the door open anyway. Until she finally stopped answering even through my constant ringing.

She'll forget me and will battle with the shame of me. She'll win because she will have used her resilience against me. I'll still ring her doorbell at specific parts of the day, but she will no longer open it. She won't look at me through the gap in the door, and she will get new locks. So I'll let her go after a long battle and cut my losses. I'll still be here through advertisements and sandwiches in the trash. Limiting the distinction between me and another and convincing them we are the same. I will continue to thrive through the media and the comparisons made daily. Some will leave, but others will find comfort in me and feel safe. I guess the question is, whose doorbell will I ring next? Or perhaps a better question is, who will invite me to come inside?



Untitled

By: Gage Wallick

The Beginning

By: Sydney Sager

I remember us too well.

I remember your smirk from across the room. My raised eyebrow back. The knowing glances at each other. Our witty banter. I remember the comfort and safety of hearing you say, "I saved you a seat." The little things; inside jokes, appreciation, mutual trust, the comfortable silences, and hope. I remember that hope. Knowing you're here to stay, even if there is no real evidence for thinking so, and believing you will anyway. Oh, I wish I could believe it again.

Meeting you was a nice accident.

The second chance. Giving back into a deep laugh. Those, "I was just about to call you, too." The remembering. The silence. Wishing to feel the anger but only feeling joy. Would it be easier if it ended with tears rather than soft, sad smiles? The waiting for the bitter feeling of regret. Waiting. It's not coming; I don't believe it ever will. I remember your voice cracking as we said our final goodbyes. I wonder if you heard my heart shatter 1400 miles away. I wonder if you wonder what I'm doing, or if I reflect on us. I wonder if you think about if I'm thinking about you. I wish you knew I wonder about you, and I worry you don't wonder about me.

I wouldn't change anything.

I remember the hum of the guitar guiding me to sleep. Those "I've never told anyone that before." The first hug. The side of legs accidentally touching at the table. The comfort of laying a head on a shoulder when sick. I remember us. The remembering but growing and not being consumed by us. Still having the sense of knowing who I am. Knowing you're returning home. Seeing the letter. Remembering that deep laugh. Feeling it fill my ears. Looking up to find that smirk from across the room. Eyebrows raising out of habit.

The remembering.
The hope.
The wonder.
The beginning.



Proud Pup

By: Bethany Pankratz

In Your Heart

By: Paige Kruschinsky

*Content warning

I was never there but in your heart.
A ghost of future desires bending in the wind.
Beating and bounding through your body.
Through the eyes, to your legs, and to your chest.

You lay on the floor with the world forced down on you.
Its sharpened knife carving, puncturing its way in.
Bleeding out your fears and devotion.

Jealousy, the world's deadliest desire, pierces your skin.
Ripping the tendon, Slashing the muscle,
and scoring your life.

Your love for that woman was open like
an unlocked door...
Filled with lies.

I watched as that jealousy slithered through it.
That jealousy pierced your insides from the legs that
carried your love... to your chest that protected it.

From that day, your body was crippled.
But that blade of jealousy never pierced the heart.
Merely so close, but so close enough for me to stop it.
My fate pushed that blade away.

A fate that could have ended your life, but instead led
to 19 years of jail time for that jealous man.
Spawning from that jealousy, your view of life changes,
giving life to a perspective only I could see.

You lay in the hospital bed sprawled in pain,
but your heart saved me.
That barbed blade saved me, too small to stop you...

And too small to stop my existence from beating
in your heart.



Dysmas

By: Amanda Koll

One-Eighty *By: Alliana Seely*

I'm sitting on a long, brown, leather sectional row of chairs. There is a plushness to each cushion, and a warmth to them from the light of the sun. I stare at my phone, trying to keep my mind sorted and preoccupied as I anxiously wait. I hear a clock ticking on the wall, and what feels like over an hour passes. Yet, it's only been fifteen minutes, and my attention toward the phone is dwindling. I lean to the side and rest my head on my wife's shoulder.

"A bit nervous?" she asks me, giving me a gentle pat on my head.

"A little bit. I can't believe I am going through with this."

"I understand. It's a big day, isn't it?"

"Indeed, I-"

Before I can finish my sentence a nurse opens a door across the room, and waves to me.

"Alliana? We're ready to see you."

With that, I cross the threshold, leaving the warmth of the couch, and down a cold and sterile feeling hallway.

I

An atomic purple GameBoy Color. Even though it's long since been sold, it still sits within the back of some of my earliest formative memories, as early as the age of three or four. The translucent purple bewilders my young mind, being able to see the various components littering the circuit board they are soldered to. It represents the simplest part of my childhood, a time when all accepted one another. It becomes a thread that links me to various friends within this time.

"Look at this! It's this new game called Pokemon. Do you know about it?" one kid on the playground named Brock shouts out. He doesn't look too different from me. He has brown hair, hazel eyes, and stands about as tall as I do. He waves me and two others over, eager to show us this new game. Among all the blips and boops of the music, the simple pixelated sprites, he showed us a world beyond our imaginations, all coming from this bright red cartridge slotted into the back of his gray GameBoy.

"I have not. This looks cool though!" I shout eagerly, this brief demonstration drilling into the back of my mind the need to get involved. The details of the game, the various monsters, the world it crafted with the simple sprites and sounds pulls my attention.

It doesn't take long. Having started with Pokemon Red, like my friend Brock, I sink my teeth into it, further spurred by the new anime that seems to weave all kids together at my school in what seems like a cohesive group. Nobody feels wronged. Everyone belongs. We tell of our exploits, and whisper about rumors of things that could be hiding within the game.

"There is a Pokemon in this game that shouldn't exist. Supposedly it's called Missingno. I heard about it from some other kid at the park one day." Brock always seems on top of the details of this game and divulges many secrets onto us. Some true. Some ending up false.

"How do you get it?" another kid asks, almost incredulously.

Brock waxes about the steps you have to take, but it being like a game of telephone, they don't quite work. Little details get left out in the process, and over time the Missingno becomes yet another myth that only a few kids ever obtained before the fervor over this new franchise wears down, and over the intervening years, the innocent cohesion everyone has also wears off. I am part of that.

II

Eventually, as I grow into newer Pokemon games like Pokemon Yellow, Silver, and Crystal, and as the solidarity over these games wears away, a particular target emerges among everyone. His name is John. Even for a barely managed ADHD child as myself, he elicits very odd behaviors, to the point of off-putting. He is demanding, self-absorbed, and given special treatment well beyond even what I ever got. He becomes the target of verbal abuse from his peers, something I am part of.

"Come on John Swandork, are you going to throw a fit again? Because you're too lame to catch me?" I stick my tongue out, a dumb expression on my eight year old face.

John stops, stomping his feet down, and yelling, "Stop calling me that!" John also doesn't look too different from me. He has brown hair, hazel eyes, and stands about as tall as I do. In this case, it shows that no matter how similar one can look, kids will find some reason to pick on one another.

"Why stop when it's the truth? You're just a massive dork."

Ah, yes, the talk of an eight year old. As an adult it does sound rather silly, the simple and relatively weak insults, but in those days it is enough to cut someone. Cut someone deep. But after school on this day, something changes for me, for my parents cut me deeper and in a way that would change my outlook on life. But in usual eight year old fashion, it is the most simple explanation of them all that works the best.

"He is such an idiot. He acts so weird. I'm pretty sure he's gay." I say to my parents in the car on the ride home. Their response is something my eight year old mind wasn't entirely expecting.

"You can have frustration with his special treatment, but calling him gay, derisively, is not something I want to hear you repeating, young man! That isn't right, and you see..."

My young brain has trouble collecting the words coming from my mother. My mind goes blank, and if the words could be seen as they're spoken, you would see them moving in one ear and out the other like in a cartoon.

Yet somehow, my dad sees that, and seems to have an epiphany. He wasn't always the most understanding of my mental health when younger, yet in this one instance he understands me, as if there is an alignment of the stars. He simply says, "If their behavior isn't hurting you, what does it matter if they're gay?"

Somehow something turns in my head. Like a gear engaged, like a firework went off to initiate the marble's trek down a Rube Goldberg machine in my head. It sets about a new perspective, and one I stick to this day. But unfortunately, not everyone else sees it that way.

"I understand. I'm sorry mom, dad." I mumble, having realized the errors of my ways.

III

"My backpack is still inside!" I scream at the barely parted window.

"We don't care. Get lost, you annoying faggot." This voice is joined in by another.

"Yeah, seriously, stop trying to join us when we're over here. Don't even come down to the creek with us, either."

This voice is of Brock. This one particularly hurt. The first one, Andrew, has always rubbed me the wrong way. As an asshole. But the fact that Brock would do this, after all these years of knowing him, stings the worst. It feels like daggers right into my heart.

"Come on Brandon, you can't let these guys do this! It's your house!" I scream out.

"I'm sorry." Brandon can only stammer out. This further incenses me, as I can recognize that Andrew's influence on Brock and another guy, Daniel, more or less has Brandon at their mercy while Brandon's dad is away. Brandon is a quiet, reserved, and very non-confrontational person, and while this makes him a very understanding person, it also has the unfortunate consequence of making him very passive.

"Seriously though, can I at least have my backpack before I leave?!" I yell again.

"No, now fuck off and go home." Andrew yells again, closing the window. With that, I walk off and start dialing my dad.

A few minutes later I get home, having been picked up by my dad at Fairmeadows Park. I'm a bit shaken from the experience and sit down on a large, brown leather sectional couch. I grab a silver Dell laptop next to me, and push the power button. The fan whirrs, and the DVD drive spins up with a loud whine as I start up a game. I do what I do best at this time and isolate my thoughts from everything else.

IV

I learn to keep more to myself after incidents like that. This comes to the logical extreme as I hold a MIG weld gun in my leather gloved hands. I've known, deep within, for a while now that I want to transition. There is one major problem, however.

In the years after graduation, I start to work in a factory in a small Iowa town. Pella, Iowa to be specific, a town infested with very traditional Dutch Reformed Church types, and drawing workers from all over Southeast Central Iowa. In a strange sense, in spite of how respected I am for my ability to weld, I still sometimes feel like I am in bat country. After all, seeing one coworker in one of the tackiest pro-Trump shirts and another routinely wearing a hat blatantly emblazoned with the Three Percenter's logo doesn't exactly inspire confidence in being an "out and proud" transwoman.

That's my very situation, and I ruminate on it for a moment before I drop my black and very clearly worn weld helmet down and get back to work, the bright white-blue arc flash emanating from the end of the weld gun with a loud droning noise caused by the pulsed arc, sounding almost like a spaceship from an old sci-fi film. Time goes by as the part gets built, the many pieces being thrown together almost like a robot was putting it together, except this robot swears.

A lot.

As it nears completion, a bell rings. It's time for lunch. Setting the weld gun down, and removing the jacket and helmet, I dump some hot water into a container of cup noodles and let them steep. Routine enough. Eat the noodles, a thing of applesauce, and ruminate on my situation further.

I don't hate my job, but I want out. I feel wrong in this body, in this place. This house is not my home.

V

I grab a pill bottle. Nothing particularly special, just translucent orange, with a white cap, and with that I open it. Out falls a small, blue, oval tablet-Estradiol, 1mg. I look at it for a second, thinking about how only a few months ago I had the appointment I had waited years for. But I think back further, and my mind wanders for a moment as I think back to the way I used to mistreat John. Then to how much my dad changed my way of thinking. I wouldn't have probably had the headspace or courage to go to that appointment and start this treatment without him. The courage to change. To become better. I remember how it feels to be tormented myself. How it drives me to be a mentor to the mentor-less.

Because we all need a world without such senseless hate.

Freshly Human *By: Jacob Utsinger*

I long for the days when I could see adventure

How everything was different in my fresh eyes

The way the clouds parted made my lips curl

The way I was captivated by anything and each detail about it

I counted cracks in my driveway instead of my heart

I soared into the forests looking for fun rather than running away from my fears

How somehow, someway, the Midwest had made its home within me

Now there's places I can only remember in dreams, but I'm certain at one time they were real

Living now is like fog glossed over and into my vision

I yearn for recklessness and dirt

The abandoned areas, or simply open soil

I feel the little boy within me as I climb rocks into a creek that perhaps I shouldn't

I miss the feeling of stillness, only feeling the world slowly turn

There's nothing more human than a child's heart still inside a grown man's body



Untitled

By: Margaret Toothaker



Tattered *By: Jacob Utsinger*

I wish ink could drip from my palms so I'd be coated in something other than blood
So that paper would be scorched with words I dare not say aloud



Radiant

By: Elena Dewees

Hurricane Heartbreak

By: Lauren Avery

Meaningful moments with the moon are just myriads of melancholy melodies. Miraculously meeting their morbid misery. Mid-night memories move on and morning measures mere mess.

Lousy love makes lavish lies. Luxurious language is lost in the labyrinth of loyalty. Leached with libido. Lungs lift with lust. Limbs left for lewd looks. Little literary loaded lies. Logic leaves. Love's labour's lost.

Jolting jaunts justify bitter judgments. A joyful journey jeopardized the juxtaposed jewels. Two jumbled jigsaws jagged and jinxed. Jam out to the jazz. The jukebox jingles joyously then jostles to junk.

Courage converts to cowardice. A contemporary couple contours the collected cosmos. Cradled under constellations construct cracked companions. Calculated catastrophes collide calmly through cursed conclusions.

Sea Major

By: Lauren Avery

They say the key of C major is difficult,
Counterintuitive even.
I took the chance, despite the risks.
I sailed the seas, the two laced with green islands.

The seas that danced around the abyss,
The two I dared not enter.
My eyes dilate listening to your music box melody.
I hear your siren calls.

Your song in the major of C
Nothing sharp about it, but Cupid's arrow.
I fall flat.
The hum of my heart tunes out the storm.

Whirling winds are the warning signs.
But what's that? Over there. Can you see it?
Will o' the wisp.
Oh, my heart sings; a pipe dream.

A mere façade.
Chaos, confusion, tormented delusion.
The sweet songs you sing.
They Ring Ring Ring

I can't escape.
This sea, it tears at my ship.
Why, sea? I thought we were friends.
You have destroyed Neptune's wooden angel.

The light, I see once more.
Abrupt silence, it's different than before.
What caused our song to wreak havoc?
Our song of sea, now a soloed duet.

A note drifts by.
The key was changed. That's why.

Untitled

By: Margaret Toothaker



“Mother”

By: *Dominique Addison*

I always told you
Believe to achieve
Might fear
But don't share a
Tear
Never give up
On something you love
Taught you to
Stand tall
Never fall
The youngest
But the strongest
The one that never gives up
Keep chasing your dreams
Prove them wrong
And take us far
And if nobody's there for you
You got me
Don't look back
Keep going
And I'll be right there
Waiting for you at the finish line
Till then
I'll be holding in tears
With no fear
You always told me
You'll take me out the hood
And we'll be good
I have faith in you
Never do me wrong
I got you
Just how you got me

“Father”

By: *Dominique Addison*

Somedays you hurt me
Somedays you broke me
Just like your mother
Never wanna be close to me
I just want you to see the best in me
But I'm still proud to call you my baby girl
You never once call
But I get you're always playing ball
You got my height
Very tall
I'll take you to the mall
But you always picking up a ball
I miss when you was small
Always catching your fall
I wish I can come to your games
To scream your name
But I be busy working
Make me proud baby girl
Be first don't be last
Finish strong
You can
You will
You must
Prove me right
Not wrong
Might be my last born
But be my first born
That will finish
Strong.



Untitled

By: *Margaret Toothaker*



Let's Explore Washington

By: *Savannah Smith*



“I Built Myself”

By: Kai Schultz

I built myself

With leftover tin and gears.

I gently shaped the metals that made my ears, so I can hear all of my fears.

I melted and molded my arms and legs, so that I could abuse them throughout the years.

I ever so carefully welded the intricate pieces of my mind, so you could fill it with empty promises of next time.

And ever so slowly did I construct my heart with the best pieces I could find,

Just so you could see and tear it apart, never to be fine.

Seeing the Light

By: Melody Barnes

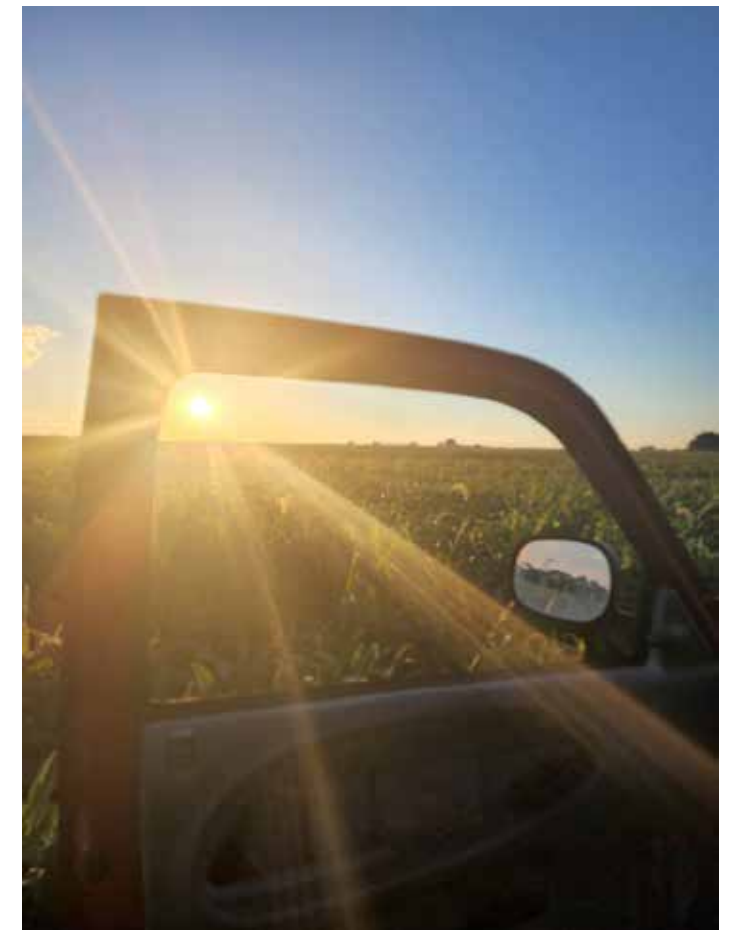


Untitled

By: Amanda Koll

Midwest Vibes Sunset Window

By: Avri Hindahl





Midwest Vibes Old Truck Grill

By: Avri Hindahl

Swingset Songs

By: Elena DeWees

Silly words sung softly on the swings
As the sunsets behind the swingset

Songs sung of swerving bikes
Up and down Shamrock street
Of swaying in the tallest trees

Songs of sword fights against
Strange neighbors named John
Of staying outside all day long

Songs of sweet treats
And racetime defeats
Of searching for toads

Songs of the adventures from the alley road
Of when all I knew, I could touch.
I dream of going back to before I knew too much

To when I was just singing silly songs on the swings
As the sunsets behind the swingset

“The Mirror of My Mind”

By: Kai Schultz

The mirror cracked and I lost myself-

Each shard carried a part of me.

It snapped and shattered when you struck, and I lost pieces of my being.

Some stuck in your hand, drawing blood as you moved away,

Some turned to dust; the breeze taking them never to be seen again.

The bigger pieces fall to the floor acting like roses and thorn,

Still useful but never to be whole.

The rest remains in the frame reflecting the fear in my eye,

As it shows the fractured features of my mind.

My psyche in pieces separated into the different sanctions of who I used to be-

Never to be me again.

The mirror of my mind cracked and shattered as the rest of my mind

Scatters.

Let's Explore Washington

By: Savannah Smith





Untitled

By: Elena DeWees

Let's Explore Washington

By: Savannah Smith



“Fearful life of depression”

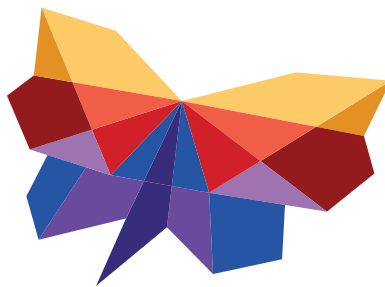
By: Dominique Addison

Not happy but not sad
Life as you knew before is gone
Feeling empty in the inside
Feeling the pain twist and turn
Eating your insides up
Friends and family can't notice the pain
Cause you take that hard pill for depression
By mouth once a day
To hide the pain for a couple hours
Heart starts beating fast once reality hits again
One minute you out smiling
Taking pictures enjoying every second then
The next day you looking at yourself in the mirror
Deleting every moment you thought you was enjoying
Thinking you're not good enough thinking you're not beautiful
Because that one person you wanted to see you didn't notice you
Or because you're not confident in the way you look
Thinking you'll never be something in life
You'll never find love
Fearing for what your future holds
Holding back the talent
Because you don't believe in yourself
All you can hear is the negative thoughts over powering the positive thoughts
Fearing to hear the positive thoughts
Fearing to accept the love people have for you



Madagascar Giant Day Gecko

By: Bethany Pankratz



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