

2017

## Expressions 2017

Khiana Jackson

Claire Kinder

J. Kay Timmins

Rebecca Barrett

Meghan Wilmes

*See next page for additional authors*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openspace.dmacc.edu/expressions>

---

### Recommended Citation

Jackson, Khiana; Kinder, Claire; Timmins, J. Kay; Barrett, Rebecca; Wilmes, Meghan; Christianson, Rylie; Clemons, James; and Hanson, Jordan, "Expressions 2017" (2017). *Expressions*. 32.  
<https://openspace.dmacc.edu/expressions/32>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Open SPACE @ DMACC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Expressions by an authorized administrator of Open SPACE @ DMACC. For more information, please contact [rsfunke@dmacc.edu](mailto:rsfunke@dmacc.edu).

---

**Authors**

Khiana Jackson, Claire Kinder, J. Kay Timmins, Rebecca Barrett, Meghan Wilmes, Rylie Christianson, James Clemons, and Jordan Hanson



*Expressions 2017*  
DMACC Literary Magazine



## **Acknowledgments, Expressions 2017**

### **Educational Services**

*Jim Stick, Academic Dean, Arts & Sciences; Kari Hensen, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences; Scott Ocken, Academic Dean, Industry & Technology; Kim Linduska, Executive Vice President, Academic Affairs; Rob Denson, President*

### **College Supporters**

*Ankeny Campus' Student Activities Council, Erin Smith, Coordinator, Breck Danner, Coordinator, Alumni Affairs; Drew Nelson, Provost of Boone Campus; Lisa Cappaert, Administrative Assistants, DMACC Foundation; Tara K. Connolly, Executive Director of DMACC Foundation, Veterans/Foundation Coordinator*

### **Corporate Donors**

*West Des Moines State Bank*

### **Individual Donors**

*Christine and Clark Bening; Neal and Kahn Hamilton; Keith and Diane Krell; Janet and Loran Parker; Dean and Diane Peyton; Curt Stahr; Anthony J. Stoik*

### **DMACC Creative Writing Judges**

*Marc Dickinson, Matt Alberhasky, Ann McBee, and Krystal Cox  
Creative Writing Contest Coordinator: Marc Dickinson*

### **Additional Academic Support**

*Monte Ballard, Chair, Visual Communications; David Purdy, Chair, Photography Program.*

### **Expressions Staff**

*Art Direction: Rachel Rong, Roxann Vo  
Copy Editor: Amber Alli  
Michael K. Bryant, Editor and Advisor*



**2017 Expressions**  
*Contents*

**Khiana Jackson “Conform//Daydreamer”**  
*1st place poetry*

**Claire Kinder “The May–December”**  
*2nd place prose*

**J. Kay Timmins “WLW (Women Loving Women)”**  
*1st place scholarship*

**Rebecca Barrett – “A Look Into the World of Drag”**  
*1st place prose*

**Meghan Wilmes “I No Longer Celebrate My Birthday”**  
*2nd place poetry*

**Rylie Christianson “Al-Anon”**  
*2nd place scholarship*

**James Clemons “Here Yet Gone”**  
*3rd place prose*

**Jordan Hanson “The Diver”**  
*3rd place poetry*





## “Conform//Daydreamer”

*Khiana Jackson*

Read a book, get good grades,  
 Ace a test, graduate, make my parents proud.  
 Learn a new language, meet new people  
 Get over stupid anxiety, try and be happy for once.  
 Find a new hobby, find a new place  
 Admire art, admire architecture, admire someone.  
 Go to a festival, end up backstage  
 Meet an artist, produce a song, get a platinum record.  
 Write something honest, be hopeful  
 Direct a movie, make a fortune,  
 win an Oscar, dedicate it to you.  
 Stop daydreaming, develop cynicism.

Road trip across the country, do it all.  
 Have deep conversations, lose faith, find where I fit.  
 Pick everything up, move far away  
 Fall in love with a new place, miss new things,  
 cry for the old ways.  
 Never forget, never regret.  
 Make mistakes, move again, stop fearing planes.  
 Try to fall in love with someone, but don't try too hard  
 Eventually realize, leave them behind,  
 get a dog because dogs.  
 Travel to places I'm afraid of, make a difference  
 Never look back, don't make contact,  
 toss my phone in the jungle.  
 Stop being such a baby, stop relying on everyone else  
 Run out of money, go home, let the soul die.

Go to Amsterdam, go to Japan  
 Move into an apartment in a city much  
 bigger than this one.  
 Have fun, be free, get it figured out  
 See my friends and family every Christmas,  
 make great memories.  
 Write a screenplay for an indie movie,  
 Let it become my new favorite movie,  
 watch it when I'm sad.  
 Be the same person I've always been.  
 Be sort of sad, be sort of anxious,  
 be comfortable in these feelings  
 Do it this way so I don't have to do anything different.



## **“The May – December”** *Claire Kinder*

“How’s the game going?” Since I sat down on the flimsy metal bleachers over an hour ago I’ve kept my chest locked in a forward position, afraid a slouch or relaxed muscles would be seen to her as an invitation. Although, the strict posture was all in vain because she approached me, publicly anyway. The Little League game was half way through but I never cared for baseball, let alone children playing baseball. I usually wore headphones, but I left them at the house, and without my safeguard, I couldn’t pretend to ignore her question.

“I think we’re in the lead,” I said, while staring straight ahead. I hoped not making eye contact would be enough to discourage her, but she sat down next to me anyway. Close enough for her thigh, exposed from under her jean cut-offs, to lay too comfortably against my own.

“You think we are?” she giggled. “Sounds like you’re not paying much attention.”

She bumps her shoulder into mine and I stay still, praying no one noticed her. There were about a dozen other parents, mostly couples, throughout the stands. We were only a few rows behind the active mothers who stood at the front for the entire game, shouting encouragements and gossiping amongst themselves.

I pulled out my phone and opened one app after the other, pretending to look. She turned her torso so she was facing forward again, but leaned on her right hand until the side of her face was inches away from my own.

“No one is paying attention,” I stare at my phone even after the screen went black. I had to ignore her gold hair that felt like straw from the cheap dye she stole from her mother. I ignore her chewed nails and sloppy posture but, When she leaned closer to me, it was enough to remind me why I chased her in the first place.

She smells like my wife, when my wife was young and happy and full of ambition. Particularly the particular combination of cedar-wood incense she burned when she was stressed, but not so stressed that pleasant scented wood smoke couldn’t relieve her. There was a tinge of burnt coffee that she used to

let seep in the pot for too long but was committed to drinking anyway. And a lick of vanilla, that I assumed for years was a product of a particular perfume, or lotion, or shampoo. But after she gave birth to our daughter, and too caught up in exhausted, baby-fueled cries, she had ceased any sort of frivolous self-care. Still the vanilla lingered on her skin. I held my brand-new child in my arms and on impulse, I sniffed the top of her head; it was clean, and it was vanilla. It was then I realized the vanilla was an organic part of her being, not the manufactured add-on I always assumed.

And this girl, too young to have a taste for black coffee, and too cheap for incense, somehow had the precise blend of individual aromas, even the organic vanilla, that tickled me, that reminded me of happier times.

My wife used to take me to concerts of bands I’ve never heard of before, and I’d forget why we were there because I was lost in the way she danced around me. My wife used to smile so wide all her teeth would show and I would beg her to hold the pose so I could take a picture.

Then she stopped smiling, and dancing, and planning. Around our daughter’s last birthday, she stopped going to work and stayed in bed and cried. Her manager called me after she abruptly broke down at the office and sobbed for several hours in the break

**“When she leaned closer to me, it was enough to remind me why I chased her in the first place.”**

room; he recommended I get her on medical leave. Our income took a hit and I could no longer afford to keep our daughter in a daycare after school while I was at work, so I signed her up for a cheap Little League filled with friendly moms who brought sliced oranges for the team. Twice a day I watched my wife take her Xanax and I combed her greasy hair. After wrangling with our insurance, I was able to coordinate a therapist to come to our house once a week because I didn’t trust her to make the appointments on her own. Her face is usually blotchy.

The therapist has asked me multiple times if

I remembered her ever speaking about past trauma, maybe in her childhood or perhaps a bad boyfriend. I would spend my nights gazing at the ceiling, knowing my wife was doing the same thing next to me, and I would try to parse through all the confessions we've shared through the years. Her relation with her mother was strained during her teenage years, but that tension quickly passed after she moved out. Her first breakup was, in her own words, devastating; he chose a career in England, and although the movies would have you believe a new life in Europe would make for ever-lasting love, she couldn't bring herself to leave Wisconsin. She used to laugh and say, "But that's what popcorn and Julia Robert's films are for, right?"

I realized, as I stared at the egg-shaped shadow that engulfed nearly all of the ceiling fan, how much I missed her laugh. I turned my head right, the noise from the pillow shifting under me amplified. She was facing the ceiling too, but her eyes looked blank, as if she fell asleep while they were open. She held no expression. I could feel the sadness exude from her, the empty grief hit me in waves.

After a while I had to sit up slightly on my elbows to keep myself from drowning in her sorrow. That's when she turned to me, maybe because I made enough noise to wake her out of her trance, or maybe she understood the physical effect her depression had on me in that moment. This was the first time since her illness took hold that I was married to a stranger. I decided to call her therapist yesterday while I was driving home, and she told me my wife mostly spoke about regret, and feeling like an empty soul in a human vessel.

All I could picture was her blank expression when she stared at me the night before. Her eyes were hollow. They were cold.

When I got off the phone I parked behind a gas station and stared at an overflowing dumpster until the tears I was suppressing made their way down my cheeks, fast and messy. I would have preferred to have spent the rest of the evening alone and crying, but my daughter had to be picked up from her playdate, dinner needed to be prepared, and my sad, vacant wife had to be watched over to make sure she swallows her pills.

Samantha, who resembled my wife only through her scent, scooted herself half an inch closer

to me. Close enough that if I let my legs relax at all they would fall next to hers.

"Do you think you could let me drive home?" I could hear the smile in her voice. "My driver's test is next week, and I think it would be good practice." I wiped my forearm across my forehead and it left a long damp streak on my sleeve.

At first, I started coming to practice twenty minutes before it ended, using the empty time to sit and be mindless. Then, maybe six weeks ago now, by chance I sat next to Sam's mother. She was a chatty, lively woman who laughed often. Ten minutes into our small talk, Sam came up to us, in her own softball gear, to ask her mother for snack money. She glanced over at me before she smiled and looked down, then briefly at me again, then stared intensely at her mother's purse.

"Her practice gets over half-an-hour before her brother's does," she said after Sam left. "And it just makes me so sad, you know. I love that they're into sports and all," she leaned over to me and spoke quickly, "But trying to find someone to cover my shifts so I can pick them up has been a nightmare."

She shook her head and rummaged through her purse before she pulled out a pack of cigarettes. "It's a goddamn tragedy they don't have a bus system or something because I just don't know."

"Where do you live?" I asked before thinking.

"Oh the west side," she said while lighting up. "On Wellmark Street."

"You're kidding," I said, looking at her through the stream of smoke she pushed through her lips. "That's on my way home." And five days a week for several weeks, I drove Sam and her brother to their house before returning my child to ours.

If it had just stayed that way, with all four of us, maybe I wouldn't be frozen at my child's game while the fifteen-year-old leaned against me. When it was the four of us, the children fought and giggled over nonsense in the back seats, and Sam laughed when I rolled my eyes at the bad pop songs I let her play. She spoke endlessly about her lame teachers and dumb projects while the kids would pretend they were passengers on a rocket ship, and it all melted into wonderful, ambient noise.

About half way through the season the wife of the coach, an enthusiastic woman with long acrylic

nails and too much time on her hands, insisted that several times a week after practice she'd take the team out to eat. I went back to my empty car, after giving the parental O.K. and was relieved to have one less mouth to feed that night, when there was Samantha, leaning her bum and shoulder blades against my car's passenger door. This position curved her spine forward and left a half-moon of light pass through the empty

**"I decided to call her therapist yesterday while I was driving home, and she told me my wife mostly spoke about regret, and feeling like an empty soul in a human vessel."**

space between her bowed back and the metal door.

"I have a lot of homework," she rolled her grey eyes. "I don't have another ride home." She was already wrapping her fingers around the car door handle. But it was after I agreed to take her home, and she turned down the air conditioner and turned her attention solely onto me that I knew I might be in trouble. With no sweaty children in the back, her scent was overwhelming, and for a moment I wasn't driving through suburbia, but on my honeymoon road trip, speeding down the California coast with my beautiful, lively wife. Perhaps my wife's scent had disappeared, or was buried from the infrequent showers or change of clothes.

"So you're married," she said while pointing at my left hand, evaluating my ring. Even when I glanced at her, and could confirm that she was in fact not my wife, "I couldn't shake the feeling that she was with me, that through their similar scents they were somehow connected, that Samantha was somehow a reincarnation of the woman I fell in love with. That she had, in fact, vacated her body and was inhabiting this younger one instead.

"Yes," and before thinking, I continued, "She's very sad right now." I've pulled into her carless driveway by now, and instead of making any moves

to leave my vehicle, she unbuckled her seat belt and turned towards me.

"Wow, that's really lame," she said, scrunching her mouth over to one side. "Do you still love her?" I focused my attention on keeping my breathing steady, but I felt like a small child looking desperately at its mother for help after being caught in a lie.

But the audacity of this child, though nearly grown and filled out but a child nonetheless, to ask me about my most intimate and sacred feelings towards my own wife. And yet she kept her gaze on my face, squinting her eyes slightly because she was scrutinizing every dip in my brows or if the side of my lip twitched; my wife used to do the same. Then, even if I didn't answer, my wife would turn away and say "I already know the answer." At first I would ask how, and she'd always reply, "Your face gave it away." And she was always right.

I knew this trick, so I focused on the muscles in my face, careful to keep them blank and unmoving. She and I stared at one another, and I wanted to scream at her to get out of my car and that she was banned from entering it ever again because, despite the careful and steady configuration I put into my expression, I was exposed.

Sam turned away from me, presenting her profile and her bold, Roman nose.

"It will be all right." My eyes were brimming with eager tears, so I turned away from her. We were both facing the windshield once again. We sat still, facing forward for a while before she finally said her thank-you and left me and the car.

I went back home, and when I laid awake, my eyes glued to the nearly black ceiling, I replayed Samantha's question to me again, and again, and again.

It was just the two of us, alone in my car, at least twice a week. I knew beforehand which days my carpool was unnecessary, but I showed up anyway. The helicopter mothers thought I was a very supportive father. Sam and I often spent an extra half hour in her driveway; I was drunk off her scent and her youth, and when she'd casually touch my shoulder or my hand as she laughed or with concern. It was dangerous but it was enough. Like the high that made you feel like you were floating, but you could still function, you could still quit.

I was kinder to my wife after being around a reminder of who it was I was supposed to miss so much. I thought I had found some sort of solution to my wife's emotional absence. Samantha wasn't the original, but she was intoxicating. Some nights I'd lie awake and imagine my wife's soul, wispy and light blue, (her favorite color), and watch in my mind's eye the delicate, playful light slither out of her throat, and leave her body behind. It would bounce around through the ether, twisting and bending like her body would when we use to go dancing.

But it would slither further and further away from our middle-class suburbia until it reached the white-trash mayhem that was Wellmark Street. I would imagine it, the robin-blue translucent light, enter Sam's sleeping throat, slowly pushing itself down her

**"I couldn't shake the feeling that she was with me, that through their similar scents they were somehow connected, that Samantha was somehow a reincarnation of the woman I fell in love with."**

esophagus until it had entered her completely.

Sometimes the fantasy would keep me awake because I couldn't decide what, in turn, would happen to Sam's own soul, which I imagined to be the same shade as her gold hair. I didn't like the imagery of the blue wisps forcing the gold out of its residency, or any sort of battle for dominance. I'd come to the conclusion the blue must have absorbed the gold, still ultimately in control, but also had become something new, a greener shade of blue.

Then last Thursday rolled around, and my heart sank as the team's final practice came to an end. There was a silver lining, however; the team would be out later than usual to celebrate at a Chuck-E-Cheese restaurant. I wasn't planning on vocalizing my good-byes to Sam, but as I drove her home I felt I had to bring us some kind of closure. I pulled into the

driveway, and before I could begin she asked, "Do you want to come inside and grab some water?" Her doe eyes stared at me and I realized how sweaty I was.

Maybe the astute woman could sense my discomfort, how dry and weak my voice was, the perspiration that was beginning to form at the top of my forehead. So I followed her inside and was stiff and obsessively conscious of my proximity to her as I waited for my drink in the living room. Her home was small, made even smaller by the piles of magazines, dishes, and beer cans that littered the space.

"When does your mother get home?" I asked, mostly to fill the air I felt uncomfortable inhabiting. "I would love to see her again."

"Oh," she said as she crossed arms and scrunched her brows together. "She usually gets off at seven but will definitely go out afterwards," she said. "So unless you're planning on staying until midnight," she smiled with her head tilted slightly downward making her face cat-like. I smiled back while I imagined the blue-green wisps dancing within her.

"Johnathan," she spoke, breaking my trance. She has never addressed me with my first name before. "Can I show you something?" Too slow to react or retreat she grabbed my hand and pulled me down the hall and into the farthest room on the left side. It was very plain, especially for a teen girl's space. The walls were bare and a mattress laid on the floor without a bed frame. She let go of my hand and went over to her dresser, and motioned me to come closer. When I stopped a few feet behind her. Her dresser was almost covered in gold painted trophies, the majority of them sporting a non-descript girl holding a bat in mid-swing. She pointed to a jarring empty slot of space amongst

**"Some nights I'd lie awake and imagine my wife's soul, wispy and light blue. . ."**

her crowded dresser.

"That's for when we win the finals this year," she turned to face me. "We only got second place last year," she pushed her lips to side, as she does when she's upset. "My mom has only seen me play when we

made it to the finals,” she looked up at me. “But she left when she realized we were going to lose.” I didn’t know what to say because “good-bye” was no longer the most merciful option.

My wife once pulled me aside into a stranger’s room, less than a year into our dating, at her friend’s party during Halloween. She wore a store-bought sexy butterfly costume in bright blue, while I wore an old Hawaiian shirt covered in flowers I found in the back of my closet. Everyone thought we were a riot.

Three cocktails in she pulled me into the spare room and locked the door quickly. We were a moderately adventurous couple sexually, but this sudden pull into a stranger’s room had me nervous, although her legs were so wonderfully exposed. But as soon as she locked the entrance and turned around, she was at the brink of tears.

**“. . . leave her body behind. It would bounce around through the ether, twisting and bending like her body would when we use to go dancing.”**

“There’s so many people now,” she told me as a single stream of dark eye-makeup ran down her cheek. “I’m sorry, it all just makes me feel *unat-ease*.” I brought her forward to my chest, her drunken descriptor left me chuckling. I kissed the top of her forehead and held the side of her face before I moved my lips down the bridge of her nose, until they finally nestled in-between her own. And as I moved her blue wings up against a stranger’s door, I knew she and I had become more than lovers, an entity that could be felt but not labeled. We had tapped into an energy that combined and bound us into a unit, parts that built a larger whole.

As my hands wrapped themselves around Sam’s back, I felt I was a part of that whole once again. The thought passed, as we momentarily stopped to break the seal of the condom, if I could stop, if I could still leave, if I could possibly still say good-bye. Maybe then she wouldn’t sit so close to me at this public

space. Maybe she wouldn’t be stealthily wrapping her pinky around my belt loop while we both pretend to watch the game.

But I didn’t stop. My withered grey wisps of a soul were desperate to dance with their partner once again, even if it had been tinged with another’s. I held her up as I pressed her against her door, her grey eyes watching me the entire time.

After we finished, she left the room to answer a phone call and I clumsily sat down on to her mattress and stared at her bright white walls. She rushed back into the room and threw on fresh clothes.

“I’m sorry. My mom got off work early and she’s too drunk to find her way home,” she was almost out the door when I offered her a ride. “No, I think it would embarrass her if you saw her like this. I think she has a crush on you.” She winked before she kissed my forehead. “Make sure to lock up when you leave!” she yelled before a door slammed, and then I was alone.

I dressed and slowly made my way to the front of the house. Finding my joints stiff and my head heavy, the stack of soiled dishes in the sink caught my eye, and as if my being was on autopilot, I was in front of the sink, sudsing the sponge and scrapping through hardened leftovers.

When the dishes were done I grabbed their trash bag and threw away the beer cans and cigarette butts left on the tables and floor. When the bag was full I found their broom and swept the kitchen and their hallways until my wrists were sore. When I took a step back to evaluate my progress, the house looked almost the same.

The phone vibrates in my hand and I remember where I am, and who I’m next too. I try to gently scoot over but her pinky tugs against my belt loop and she looks at me and smiles, her face resembling a cat once again. I looked down at my illuminated phone screen and there was a new message. In bold black letters within the white box read “Madeline.” Underneath was simply, “Hello. I’ve missed you.”

“Who’s that?” Sam leaned over, resting her chin on my left shoulder.

“No,” I shrugged my arm. “No.” I looked her in the eyes when I said it this time. Her eyes grew large and her mouth hung open and suddenly she

looked closer to my daughter's age. And all at once she both moved and shifted away from me, brows tilted downward, her eyes focused straight ahead of her.

My wife stopped making casual conversation with me last spring. Stopped saying "I love you," in the summer. Stopped talking almost completely by the fall. I assumed, I accepted, that the woman I loved was gone when winter hit. And yet here she is, the proof

**"My mom has only seen me play when we made it to the finals," she looked up at me. "But she left when she realized we were going to lose."**

was written across my screen in tiny letters. And she says she misses me.

I glanced over at Samantha who is quietly but visibly upset, her lips shifted slightly to the side. I look out at the field and find my daughter on the bench, giggling with Sam's little brother.

She's only seven-and-a-half and will easily integrate into a new school system. I get up from my seat, and try to estimate how soon we could sell the house, or how long we could sustain two mortgages. I turn to my right and quickly head towards the bleacher stairs. I'll insist on being transferred to another state, to another coast, and maybe my wife will resist the move at first, but I'll convince her that we need a fresh start and we'll move and we'll reconnect, and we'll be fine. We'll be happy again.

I made it to the stairs, almost around the corner, when a shrill voice filled the stands.

My knuckles are white from my clenched grip around the stair's support beam. On impulse, I look back over my shoulder.

All the mothers in the front row have surrounded Samantha, her eyes are still and steady on my own, and their heads followed the length of her arm that was extended in front of her. And she is pointing at me.







## **“WLW (Women Loving Women)”**

*J. Kay Timmins*

my love is not a burden  
my affections are not unheard of  
my romance is not a tragedy  
my sex life is not for you to see  
our kisses do not scream revolution  
for they've been done before  
our clasped hands are a familiar comfort  
not a curse we must endure  
you want to force us into hiding  
but we are not ashamed  
you shriek and spit and shoot at us  
but we are not afraid  
you tried to erase our history  
but we brought our stories to light  
you tried to subdue us with hatred and misery  
but you can't subdue what cannot die  
still you ask why we need labels  
why we choose to stand out so noticeably  
would taking conformity over independence  
really be such a terrible thing?  
you ask because you've never had to march  
en masse in the streets  
holding signs and screaming ***“Please!  
For the love of god, give us our god-given rights!  
We have a goddamn right to be free!”***



## “This Wasn’t Covered in my College Experience Class”

*J. Kay Timmins*

the community college experience  
 is an experiment in surrealism  
 in one hall I see a woman  
 still clad in her pyjamas at half-ten  
 I admire that  
 her large headphones are lost  
 in her even larger mop  
 of warm brown curls  
 she’s watching a sci-fi film on her mobile  
 I hope she has enough time to finish it  
 before her next class  
 walking down the next hallway  
 I see a man  
 either a faculty member  
 or a student who doesn’t realise  
 that 85 degrees  
 is just too damn hot  
 to be wearing a three-piece suit  
 he’s standing before a vending machine  
 in a state of euphoria  
 exquisite enough to drive this well-dressed fellow to  
 tears  
 the vending machines now carry his favourite brand of  
 snack cookies  
 his tears are more than understandable  
 the cookies are chocolate chip  
 as I set my textbooks and journals down on the table  
 having finally completed my trek to the classroom  
 I hear an earnest voice remark  
*“man, Freud was a punk-ass lil shit”*  
 I bite my tongue to keep from replying  
*“ugh, truuuuuuuuuu!”*  
 (god, I hate Freud)  
 these are my people  
 this is where I am understood



## “Coming Out to Men”

*J. Kay Timmins*

*“Have you ever kissed another girl?”*  
he asks me, eyes wide and pupils dilated.

“Yes,”

I tell him, remembering her.

“She used to braid my hair  
and laugh when I told her  
she looked like she just stepped out  
of a van Gogh painting.

She had thick blonde hair,  
like a field of sunflowers  
and deep-set eyes  
that couldn’t seem to decide  
if they wanted to be blue or green.

I remember feeling her fluttering lashes  
against my eyelids

when she placed her calloused fingers  
under my chin,  
tilting my face upwards to kiss me.

When we parted, she told me I had soft lips  
and had me sit in front of her  
so she could fix my smudged lipstick.”

*“Have you ever made out with another girl?”*  
he asks me, eyes wide and pupils dilated.

“Yes,”

I tell him, remembering her.

“She was over a foot taller than me,  
and liked to pick me up.

She’d carry me round  
for as long as she pleased,  
before setting me down  
somewhere ridiculous,  
like on a tree branch,  
or in a cabinet.

One day she put me down on her bed.  
That day was the first time  
that someone who wasn’t my doctor  
touched my bare chest.

An hour later,  
she was brushing my hair back  
and braiding it so my parents wouldn’t suspect of us  
our rendezvous.”

*“Have you ever dated another girl?”*  
he asks me, eyes wide and pupils dilated.

“Yes,”

I tell him, remembering her.

“She always wore purple eyeshadow

and I used to come home  
with the scent of her perfume  
woven into my clothes.  
The fragrance hung heavy on me,  
never oppressive,  
never overbearing,  
but like a winter coat.  
And every night  
when I had to leave her arms,  
I still had her warmth.”  
*“Have you ever had sex with another girl?”*  
he asks me, eyes wide and pupils dilated.  
*“Almost,”*  
I tell him, remembering her.  
*“She was big and brawny,*  
or maybe she just seemed so  
next to my tiny form.  
But whatever her size and strength,  
she was always so gentle with me.  
One evening,  
she took me to her bed,  
and we undressed each other,  
slowly, sweetly, reverently,  
but just as she was about to remove my panties,  
I got nervous.  
I told her I wasn’t ready,  
and she kissed my forehead.  
She understood.  
So we ordered pizza  
and yelled at the news instead.  
I can’t tell you what reporter we cursed out,  
or what breaking story they were covering,  
but I remember feeling safe.  
I remember how extraordinary it felt,  
to share such intimacy,  
even after having a panic attack  
in my underwear  
in another person’s bed.  
So no,  
I haven’t slept with another woman,  
but I’ve loved many.”  
*“Oh,”*  
he says to me, shoulders dropping and face falling.  
*“That’s too bad.”*







## **“A Look into the World of Drag”**

### **Creative Non-Fiction**

*By Rebecca Barrett*

**G**lamour, lights, pizzazz, and a whole lot of sass and laughs is the only way to explain a drag show. The Garden Nightclub is home to some of the BEST drag shows in Central Iowa. On Sunday nights, they hold “Sunday School” which is a drag show for ages 18+ and has beginner queens, queens who are regulars, and the “Old or Lifers,” the regulars who have been doing drag for many, many years. I am not sure where this term came from I just heard it being used in an episode years ago on RuPaul Drag U. (None of the queens introduced themselves to me by their real names). One Lifer that I met, Idaho, is a father of a 24-year-old, who, when dressed as a queen, looks like your typical hipster middle-aged mom.

Idaho was married but knew he was gay. After the divorce, when his daughter was very young, he turned to drag as his outlet. Idaho’s daughter, Alyssa, supports and loves her father, stating “I’ve always supported him, he has been gay almost my whole life and he started doing drag when I was 14 so this lifestyle has always just been normal to me.” (Alyssa). Alyssa also explained that she has never had a problem with her father’s lifestyle, and has always been proud of who he is. Her friends have never had an issue with her father’s lifestyle and they even come out with her to his shows to support her. Idaho is like the mother of the group, he is the oldest performer and queen at Sunday School and takes care of the younger queens by helping them perfect their acts and their wardrobe.

When I first went behind the stage to talk to the queens I wasn’t sure what to expect and was worried I would offend them with some of my questions. I believe they knew I was nervous and scared of offending them, so they made me feel completely accepted and welcome. They answered all of my questions with no issues. When I walked in there I thought I was going to be judged for my questions, but I believe these men have been judged all their lives for being gay and dressing as women. They were accepting of me because they know what it is like and

how it feels to go into a world that does not accept them for who they are. Instead of being bitter about not being accepted and being judged from outsiders, they have turned that around and help make others feel unjudged. They accept outsiders and do everything they can to make them feel normal.

While backstage talking to all the queens, and some men who were typically queens but not performing for the night, I could see the long process it takes for them to change from what they call their “butch” look into their performer look. One performer’s husband sat backstage in his sweatshirt and jeans. I did not think he was gay or a queen until he told me stories of him dressing up and going onstage. During the day, each queen dresses as the male that they really are. One thing they want everyone to understand is that people think drag queens are just guys that want to be female. In truth they are men, and they love being men: Their dressing as women on the weekends is just a hobby of theirs and a way to be a woman for a little while. But they truly like and want to be men.

One queen, named Natalia Rose, explained to me that she is transgender. She is currently in the process, half way through her medical procedure and hormone shots of becoming a woman. She explained that she is a woman during the day but still has male parts, and male genes. She does drag to express herself as a woman.

One challenge Natalia has faced in the drag community is that she is a girl while the other performers are guys. This issue has caused a divide between her and other performers because she does not feel like she is fully one of them or she feels they have not fully accepted her as a drag queen. Onstage she even dresses as a woman and has a very funky 90’s style with a Miley Cyrus look and attitude.

Natalia explained how she is a drag queen but also different from the others because she truly is a girl and in her own way she is just dressing up and acting more exotic by doing a drag performance, while the other queens are actually men dressing as women to display their sexuality. She is a woman dressing like a woman, but in more exotic terms, and performing for the fun and thrills.

Behind the stage these men become

almost unrecognizable, going from “butch to bitch,” said queen Anya Dicks. When these queens get onstage they take over the whole crowd with their performances. I noticed that drag queens don’t just dance or lip-sync: they do many different forms of art performances.

The first queen onstage who was also the hostess of the night, Demita Diva Sanchez, took the stage and not only lip-synced her sassy upbeat song, she also danced through the whole performance and interacted with the audience. I was in shock by how well she multi-tasked all while in 6-inch heels, and making it look so easy.

The other performers, Jay Knight, Natalia Rose, Anya Dicks, and Porsha D’Marco Douglas performed songs while singing along, but they did not display such a wild, multi-tasking performance as Demita. Throughout their performances they would stop lip-syncing to kiss audience members and collect money that many audience members would hand to them.

## **“She does drag to express herself as a woman.”**

Idaho went with a little different route in her performance, and did a comedy act that included of the audience. She went around asking audience members different personal questions and then she would bring it back to her life or relate it to something else and make a joke out of the questions and answers. One girl in the crowd was laughing so hard she began to cry because of Idaho’s performance.

Before the show, on the big T.V. on the wall, performances from other performers here playing. Some queens read poetry, some did interpretive dances, and some played instruments and sang to their own songs. There was also a video of the “Queen Pageant,” where queens were performing and showing off different skills they had in the pageant show.

My life has personally been touched by the gay community and drag queens because my cousin used to dress in drag a lot before he moved to Colorado. When my cousin first came out as gay, some of my family stopped talking to him. Many at our big family Christmas party would treat him differently. Our

immediate family was very confused about if it was just a stage or if he was actually gay. For him to come out as gay to a family of conservative Christians was somewhat of a big deal for our family.

When he first came out was around 2006 when he was 16 and my family was uncertain on how to handle this. The main thing that helped us all understand him better and still love and support him was the fact that no matter who he was, and who he loved, he was still family and the fact he was gay could not outweigh the fact that he was family. My family still may not agree with his lifestyle but, he is my cousin and my family has accepted him for who he is. It was hard for my cousin as well because some of his aunts and uncles did not accept him and would make comments about his sexuality; this was hard and my family saw how hard it was for him. Though it was only a few intermediate family members who said these things and acted cold towards him, the rest of us showed him the love and support he needed.

The reason I have supported my cousin and other LGBTQ people is because I have grown up in a generation where being gay or lesbian is completely normal and acceptable, unlike my parents and grandparent’s generations. My cousin’s story is so much like the performers I met and other LGBTQ people’s story. Some families accepted them and were like “yeah we’ve known for a long time you were gay,” while others did not accept them for being themselves.

My cousin began to go to the gay bars often in Des Moines and he found this hobby of drag. He decided, like many other queens, to try it out. He discovered he was good at it and kept doing drag. In the Drag Queen community, they have what is referred to as the “Royal Family” or the “Diamond Family”. This is a family of drag queens that have earned the name Diamond which is then used as their last name. To earn this name you have to be a drag queen who performs and is considered a regular and almost professional.

After performing for a while, the family may or may not accept you into their family depending on whether they feel like you are a good addition to the family and will represent the family well. This family supports you and accepts you for who you are. It is basically a family of men and women who are just like you.

Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Gender Queers, and Transgenders populate this family. They are basically a big support system to the performers and others in the LGBTQ community to be who they are.

This club is all about entertainment which is exemplified through the hostess Demita Diva Sanchez. Every time she introduced or reintroduced a queen, she had a vibrant and dramatic way of talking about them and what they were about to perform onstage. For many of the girls, she told personal stories she had with each of them and the introduction was not complete without her saying "Get on out her bich!" (Demita Sanchez). Yes, she said it as "Bich" instead of "bitch," which made the introductions even funnier. When she introduced Idaho, she would begin by asking the audience "Who dah Hoe?" and the crowd would answer with "I-dah-ho." She would ask this a few times before Idaho would come out onstage to do her comedy act.

Behind stage the queens called each other bitches rarely; onstage Demita would call them "Bich" instead. This is a common thing in the drag community. Behind stage they will call each other these types of insults but not mean them as an insult, but onstage in front of an audience they do not use these terms. The way I see it is these drag queens are already judged and called many names so onstage they come out onstage to a judgement free zone where they are not called things like queers, fags, freaks, or bitches. They come from a very unaccepting place, so they welcome

**"This family supports you and accepts you for who you are. It is basically a family of men and women who are just like you."**

being able to be a part of a community that accepts them and doesn't call them these kinds of names. They call each other these things backstage in a joking and friendly type of way, they do not use it in a derogatory way towards each other.

Bitch is kind of a term they all use about other drag queens. Anya Dicks did explain some drag

queens that think they are better than others as "Catty Bitches." Drag queens have gotten a bad reputation of the names they call each other. The issue of the names they call each other has become an even bigger issue as RuPaul, a famous drag queen, has been under fire for the name he calls his queens on his show *RuPaul's Drag Race*. RuPaul calls the drag queens he has on his show She-Males and some he calls Trannys. The media has not taken these terms lightly and has condemned him for using such words.

Reporter Parker Molloy, from the magazine *Advocate*, said in response to the terms RuPaul's uses on his show "When a minority group is repeatedly made the object of ridicule, the majority finds it much harder to see them as fellow human beings deserving of dignity and respect, which can have direct real-life consequences" (Molloy). RuPaul explains to *The Huffington Post*, that the drag queens and transgenders that are on his show didn't care about these terms because they have gone through so much more throughout their lives related to being gay that these terms are just terms and not meant to directly hurt them or shame them for who they are (RuPaul).

In this interview RuPaul does talk about how he is one of these "She-Males" and "Trannys." He does not use these terms when talking to people as an insult, but rather a term which they are called. He is a part of them and their community, so he can get away with saying that kind of thing more than an outsider could. I don't believe RuPaul says these types of things out of hate or to be rude. I think he says them so people can express who they really are. He wants everyone on his show to feel comfortable and know they are not being judged.

In many episodes of RuPaul's show *Drag Race*, drag queens compete to become "America's next Drag Superstar." In these episodes he uses these terms and he never says them in a rude or vulgar way; he says them almost as an encouragement to be who you are and express yourself. Reporters like Parker Molloy, who believes RuPaul is being rude and using inappropriate language towards these people, likely have ever seen any RuPaul episodes to really know what is going on, or haven't sat down and talked to him about his use of these words. Therefore, I believe they object to him using these types of words because they don't know

where they stem from or why they are actually used.

Unless they are a part of this community and have dealt with the type of ridicule people in the LGBTQ community have had to face, they should not be allowed to judge terms that are used.

I know many LGBTQ people may not agree with RuPaul and the way he talks but the majority of the community does not take offense from it.

Each performer has a different performance style, some very dramatic, while others were more subtle. During every performance audience members would give the queens money. Demita and Porsha had very similar styles. They expressed their sexuality through their dancing and gave great performances that were a mix of singing and dancing. They must have been crowd favorites, because during their sexual performances where they almost seemed like strippers, the crowd members would walk up with money to hand to them.

Natalia Rose was a little weird to watch in the way she performed, because it almost looked awkward with how she would try to be very dramatic at awkward parts in the song. It was also weird to me that she would do full costume changes on the stage (wigs, and all), but the audience seemed to like it. One performer who was very subtle was Jay Knight. Onstage she sang and performed to songs that expressed her feminine side. They were not songs you typically dance to, but strong songs with a great and powerful meaning.

Jay performed them in a strong and powerful way. She did not run all over the stage like others, but instead stood and sang her song with purpose. This made her performance powerful and she performed it in such a way it was meaningful and felt like she was really singing from the heart. One moment that was really cute was when Jay's husband came over to give her money and she held his hand and sang her love song to him. Jay and his husband both dress as drag queens and support each other fully.

One big part of being a drag queen is your costume and how you look, one of the main things people are looking at. Many weekends the bars will have costume parties and costume wars, where the performers are able to go onstage and perform in their costumes and show off every aspect of their costume,

then they and all the other competitors are judged on their costumes. My life has kind of been mixed in with this lifestyle mainly through costume designs. I have helped my cousin design costumes and perform in costume wars. One of my favorite costumes we made was Maleficent from Sleeping Beauty for a Halloween costume war. We had all the different blacks and purple colors in there. We also designed wings and horns. He wanted it to have different special things like ties on the main robe so it could be pulled off easily for a costume change and lights and glitter. This began my love for costume designing for this community. That costume did not win first place but it did win second place which was still a big deal to me (I was only 16 at the time). We were then able to turn around after the costume war and sell it for \$75.

The overall atmosphere of the bar was not only one of happiness and excitement mixed with fun and laughter, it was also an atmosphere of love and acceptance. Everyone there seemed so open-minded and accepting of these men dressed as women. Many of the queens' husbands were there. Jay's grandparents attend his shows, and Idaho's daughter said she goes to almost every Sunday show and most of her father's Saturday performances to support him and have fun.

**“Unless they are a part of this community and have dealt with the type of ridicule people in the LGBTQ community have had to face, they should not be allowed to judge terms that are used.”**

When I asked the guys how they overcame this fear of going onstage in front of many people dressed as a girl most of them said it was completely normal because growing up they would wear and perform in their mother's or sister's clothes and they were used to it. Jay Knight told me that for a long time he had to be drunk or on the verge of drunk before he would even think about going out and performing. Now when he goes out he is so proud because he

knows that for someone in the crowd, being a role model and letting someone who is scared of who they are, shows it is okay to dress as the opposite gender. It is okay to be gay, queer, lesbian, or transgender because you have a community behind you to support you.

I had many different answers when I asked why these guys decided to dress up like girls as a hobby; I mainly was told it was to express themselves, be able to experience life as a woman for a little while, and to be a role model for other people who are unsure of who they are and who are scared to come out as gay or lesbian. A reason I was not told, yet what I believe, is that one of the main reasons they dress as women is because when they are dressed up they are completely different people. This hobby is a different gender and different identity for them.

They are able to become not only a woman, but a new person. They have different stage names and are able to completely transform themselves into a whole new person.

Though the scene is fun and upbeat, there are some downsides to being a drag queen and going from dressing and looking like a guy to dressing and becoming a girl. One major issue in the drag community, as Anya put it is “Some drags are just catty bitches” (Anya). Everyone backstage immediately agreed with this statement. They then told me how many gay bars have issues because some queens can get catty and will talk behind others, backs, being fake to everyone. Even in Des Moines, where I thought all of the queens got along and helped each other as much as they could, they have issues with this type of drama where queens think they are better than others and act stuck up. Jay Knight explained it really well when he said “It’s stupid to act stuck up because every queen is different in performance styles, and talents. There is no queen who can do everything, and look like the hottest girl in the bar because no matter what someone else is better at something than you, and there is always someone prettier than you” (Knight).

I wanted to learn more about how they view themselves and how they think the world views them. Their consensus was “I’m human no matter if I am dressed as a boy or a girl at the moment I’m just a person.” When we began discussing how the world

sees LGBTQ people as a phase or disorder, Anya was the first to say she tells those people to “F\*\*\* off.” Porsha made the point of saying, “If me being gay is a stage then is you being straight a stage too?” (Porsha). This made me think that they are completely normal and don’t believe being straight or gay is the right way, but love is love whether it is same-sex or heterosexual love.

Porsha saying this really did help me to see their point of view and understand where they are coming from, and the type of crap they have to live with just because they are gay, whether they see being gay as a phase or a disorder. Natalia also informed me that homosexuality was taken off the DSM disorders list in 1973, and that – as a transgender woman – she

**“. . . when they are dressed up they are completely different people. This hobby is a different gender and different identity for them.”**

does not feel her transgenderism is a mental disorder. She also told me that dressing in drag is not considered a disorder or mentioned in the DSM-5. After reviewing the article by Jennifer DeFeo about understanding sexuality and the disorders listed in the DSM-5, she confirms this statement from Natalia.

Anya Dicks is one sassy queen when she performs and when she is just hanging out backstage. To get into her sassy performance, she starts by getting into character backstage. With the sass also came complete honesty with me about her life. The guys explained to me how there is a difference between their boy lives and their drag lives. They call their everyday, regular routine their “boy life,” and their dressing as women time their girl nights. Anya explained how sometimes it is hard during the day as her boy life, so she comes to the bar to perform and takes all her anger and struggles from her boy life and puts them into her performance. She also explained how sometimes it’s not easy being gay because some people just seem to hate you and when he is dressed in

his “boy clothes” and someone finds out he is gay they then treat him differently. “Perkins loves us; the rest of the world, not so much” (Anya). All of the day-to-day being gay routines and struggles he faces motivates his performance. One very important thing to Anya that is incorporated in her performances is her beard. She is proud of her beard and loves her beard no matter what anyone says.

Many drag queens have beards and don’t want to shave them because it may not go with their drag performance and look of a girl, but it goes with their everyday boy look. Anya said that many people tell her she would look beautiful with her beard shaved and in her sassy way she tells them “I’m beautiful no matter what” (Anya). Even dressed as women these guys have issues and set-backs or boy issues that they still have to deal with and find a solution to when they are getting into their girl mode. Ways that they get ready for their performances is by putting on many pairs of tights and stuffing bras to seem to have cleavage. Anya had to put glitter into her beard to get it ready for the show.

Some ending thoughts: After the show when they were taking off their makeup and clothes and getting ready to go home, you see these guys in person and out in public. You may walk past them and never know they are drag queens or kings. Many people you know may have this alternate lifestyle and hobby and not tell anyone. Porsha started doing drag when he lost a bet to a friend at a gay bar in Colorado and had to dress in drag and perform. After that one performance that started as a bet, he knew that he was good at performing as a woman. He felt comfortable enough to keep performing and as he began to have more and more fun, and the hobby stuck.

Anya told me “This is a hobby and it is kind of like your grandma knitting but harder and more expensive (everyone chuckled and nodded in agreement) but in the same way it is still a hobby” (Anya). With this hobby they are given the chance to travel and perform in different cities and states. One thing they want their audience and community to understand is that there is no correct way to drag. Drag comes in different forms, and “If you are not happy doing drag then you are doing it wrong” (Natalia). There is no wrong way to do drag, it’s all about having

fun and expressing yourself.

These guys truly are inspirational with all of the hardships and judgment they have had to overcome, not only from their community but also

**“Anya said that many people tell her she would look beautiful with her beard shaved and in her sassy way she tells them ‘I’m beautiful no matter what.’”**

from their families. They are definitely role models to other LGBTQ people who are not sure of who they are. Being a drag queen means so much more to these men and many other LGBTQ people of the community. It is their way of finding an alternative way to express themselves. Not all of them want to be women, they just like dressing like a woman and seeing life from the other side of the gender fence. No matter how they are dressed they are all still human.



## Works Cited

"Drag Queen Interviews." Personal interview of The Garden Nightclub Drag Queen Performers. 27 Nov. 2016.

"RuPaul Stokes Anger With Use of Transphobic Slur."

*Gay News, LGBT Rights, Politics, Entertainment*. N.p., 18 Mar. 2014. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.

DeFeo, Jeniffer. "Understanding Sexual, Paraphilic, and Gender Dysphoria Disorders in DSM-5."

*Taylor and Francis*. N.p., 6 Mar. 2015. Web.

Nichols, JamesMichael. "RuPaul Responds To Controversy Over The Word 'Tranny'" *The Huffington Post*.

TheHuffingtonPost.com, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2016.



## **“I No Longer Celebrate My Birthday”**

*Meghan Wilmes*

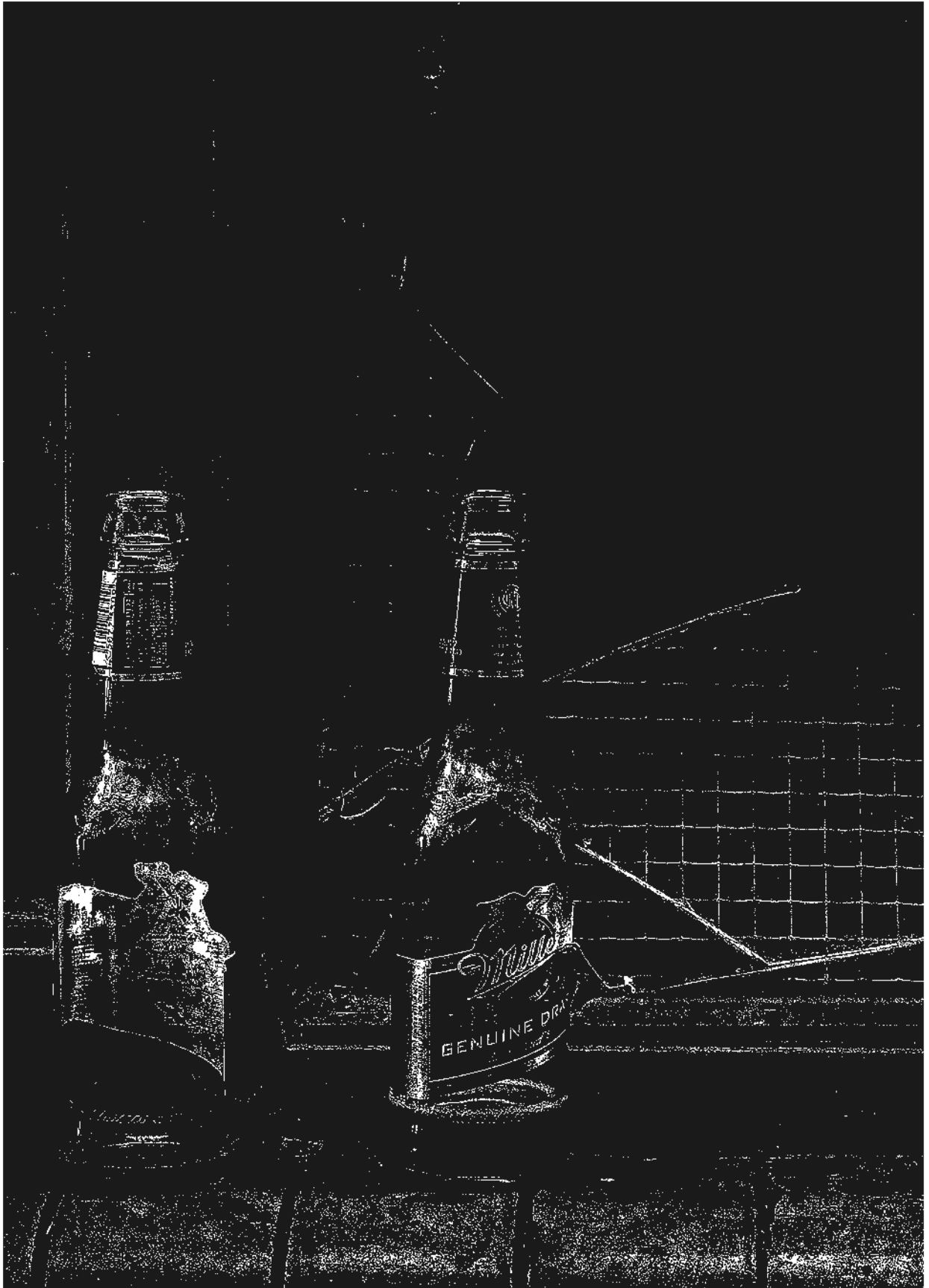
I no longer celebrate my birthday  
My 21<sup>st</sup> was not spent with friends and a bottle of  
liquor—  
But with a blanket and a wall and  
Glassy eyes from overdosing on you.

I no longer watch football  
All I see are passes and blocks of cold words and closed  
fists—  
Hitting the ground concussed with cartoon  
Visions of ginger horses swirling around.

I no longer read about Scientology  
It reminds me too vividly of ivory teeth and leather  
jackets—  
The star of that action movie causing a  
War reenactment in your living room.

I no longer see myself  
As a person deserving to be or be touched gently—  
I am what rocks and invisible wrestlers  
Use to warm up before pretend fights.

I no longer am.



## “Al-Anon”

### Creative Non-fiction

*Rylie Christianson*

The church smells like Febreeze. When my mom and I walk further forward, I notice a sign that says “Alateen Meeting in Room 11” and underneath it says “Al-Anon Meeting in room 12.” Ding ding ding. We make our way through the hallways until we see a small 8x11 inch sign leaning up against the wall outside of Room 12 that lets us know that we are in the right place. We walk into the room and are both greeted with smiles. It is a small square room with two windows located next to one another. When I look through them, I can see a neon sign glowing from the city campus down the street. Three of the walls are an off-white color and there is a navy-blue accent wall with a bible quote written on it in gold. It states, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. -John 14:6”

I take a seat in the metal chair and place my hands on the rectangular folding table. Spread out on the table in front of me are many different books: *Courage to be Me*, *Alcoholism is the Family Disease*, *Courage to Change* and many more. Soon after noticing the table covered in books, I am given one to keep called, *How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics*. Eventually the table fills up, so when more people come in everyone scooches closer together to make room as the person grabs a chair and joins the group.

At the age of ten, a typical night in my household consisted of going out to the garage if I wanted to speak to my mom. She would be out there every single night from right after she got off work and until she would go to bed. She would spend her evenings on the phone talking to people, drinking, and smoking. Her main alcoholic choice was Busch Light beer. During this time, I thought this behavior was normal, until I began noticing that none of my friends’ moms spent their free time doing the same.

Despite this addiction, my mom was always there for my sister and me, for school activities, birthday parties, or sports. You name it, she was there to make everything go smoothly. She has always been the number one fan and support system of her two “baby” girls. We are now and always have been her world, which is why we were a large part in her decision to become sober.

My mom had always drunk often, but it began to spiral out of control after her younger brother died unexpectedly from alcohol poisoning. At the age of twelve, I was notified that my mom was going to be going to a rehabilitation facility to help her detox all the alcohol in her body in a safer way where professionals would supervise her. Years later I was informed that she would try to detox on her own, but doing so would cause her to seize. Her body needed this poison to function.

It is said that addiction can be caused by using it as a method to cope with psychological disorders. Some of the most common disorders associated with alcoholism are anxiety, mood disorders, personality disorders, and ADHD (Alcoholism and Other Psychological Disorders). My mom has struggled with depression and anxiety, which got more severe after the death of her brother. It is also noted that people who begin to drink at a young age are more likely to become dependent at some point in their lives (Psychology Today). “A family history of alcohol problems doesn’t mean that children will automatically grow up to have the same problems. Nor does the absence of family drinking problems necessarily protect children from developing these problems” (Understanding Alcohol Use Disorders and Their Treatment).

My mother was one of those people who began to drink at a very young age. Her father was an abusive alcoholic and her rough childhood left her with mental illness trying to cope with it all. I, on the other hand, do not drink alcohol. I know that, from what I have seen with my childhood, I do not want to have to go through what my mom did. I was also raised in a supportive and loving household, not an abusive one. I was always openly spoken to by my mother about her past. I have learned what I do and do not want for myself through her past mistakes.

But wait – alcoholics are not mothers with children, devoted husbands, or stable jobs... are they? Before I was informed that my mother had this disease, I always pictured alcoholics as smelly men with beer bellies that were extremely lazy couch potatoes. Fast forward to today, I now know that this disease does not choose people of a certain race, income, or gender. Symptoms of this disease are feeling guilty after having a drink, repeated alcohol consumption, black outs, shakiness, cravings, destructive behavior, depression, anxiety, and loneliness (NIAAA Publications). Many people also believe that alcoholism is determined by

a person's genes, but research shows that it depends on influences and factors in a person's life. My mother is now six years sober, but the question has always boggled my mind: how do other families live (or have lived) with alcoholics?

For my family, this struggle has made us all closer than we ever have been. It taught us that we can make it through the problems that life throws at us. I am not going to sit here and say that this disease did not affect me. It has. I have struggled with extreme anxiety because of this disease. It caused me to constantly wonder as a child, "Where is my mom? When will she be coming home? Is she coming home?"

I also have anxiety because one moment I was hugging my uncle good-bye and the next we were lowering his casket into the ground. We had no idea that he would be taken away by this monstrous disease. It has caused me to have attachment disorders with people that I love. I have struggled with pushing people away and with irrational fears of losing them suddenly to an unexpected death or disaster, much like my uncle. For example, if loved ones do not let me know that they arrived to their destination safely then my mind will go into overload thinking of all things that could have gone wrong, such as, "Did they get into an accident?" or "Did someone hurt them?" I text and call non-stop until I get an answer as well as reassurance that everything is okay. I knew that this behavior was not normal, which caused extreme embarrassment and led to me choosing to completely avoid forming new relationships altogether.

After a while I became extremely unhappy and my anxiety just kept getting worse. I spoke to a counselor and began taking anxiety medication which has helped drastically, but I know that I was not just born with this mental illness. I believe that it is because of the uncertainty that I had during my childhood regarding my mother and uncle's problem with alcoholism. Despite this, I would not change one thing about how I was raised. Every experience made me to be the person that I am today, of which I am very proud and even more proud of my wonderful mom.

It is not typical that an alcoholic goes to an Al-Anon meeting because it is made for the families of alcoholics, not the alcoholics themselves. There are no regulations or rules regarding who comes to the meetings, so my mom comes with me so that I am not unprepared or alone. As we sit there waiting for the meeting to begin, my mom begins to cry. She resents all that she has done in her past; she has never heard

the story of an alcoholic from their family members. Another member comes over to my mom, places a hand on her shoulder, hands her a box of tissues and says, "It's very normal for people to cry at their first meeting. Don't feel bad." She thought my mom was crying because there was an alcoholic in our family, not because the alcoholic was her.

Throughout the whole meeting my mom was the only one who was emotional, and that was only before the meeting began. Her mind seemed to be on overcharge and cause her to overthink about every

**"I have struggled with extreme anxiety because of this disease. It caused me to constantly wonder as a child, Where is my mom? When will she be coming home? Is she coming home?"**

horrible thing that she had put my family through, such as spending roughly five hundred dollars per month for her alcohol fix. My family has all forgiven her, but she has not forgiven herself. It appeared as if this experience would be good for other alcoholics still struggling to overcome this disease. Nobody else in the group seemed to have resentment either, which could help these people struggling with alcoholism forgive themselves for their troubled pasts.

Once the meeting gets started I immediately notice that there are two males and ten females, ages ranging from early twenties to mid-fifties. None of the people in this group were the exact same, and not everyone had the same person in their family that was the alcoholic. Most of the people who came to the meeting arrived in casual clothing, while others appeared to have come right after they got off work. I look around and quickly notice that everyone is passing around a piece of paper and writing on it. Once everyone else had written on it someone hands me the paper with everyone in the group's phone numbers in case my mom or I ever need someone to talk to outside of a meeting. Along with the phone numbers I am given brochures entitled, *Information for the Newcomer, Understanding Ourselves and Alcoholism, So You Love an Alcoholic, Dear Mom and Dad, What do YOU do about the Alcoholic's drinking, Al-Anon*

*Spoken Here, and Getting Started.* One of the men runs this meeting, although it appears the leader is rotated every week to ensure that nobody is the one in control of the group. Before getting into this week's material, each person reads one of the Al-Anon *Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, Twelve Concepts of Service*, as well

**“Nobody else in the group seemed to have resentment either, which could help these people struggling with alcoholism forgive themselves for their troubled pasts.”**

as the *General Warranties of the Conference*.

At first I thought we were reading AA's twelve steps but no, families of alcoholics also have steps that they try to achieve. The steps are “1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol – and that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as *we understood Him*. 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understand Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.” (Al-Anon Family Groups page 397).

The steps for Al-Anon are identical to the steps for Alcoholics Anonymous. When my mom and I made that discovery, one thing she said to me really caused me to think: “I know that for me personally if I was on a step and your dad was working on his own

different step that it would make it harder for me. It would make me feel like I didn't have his support because he was doing the steps for himself, which he wouldn't need in my opinion because he was never the alcoholic. Him being such a big supporter of me meant the world.”

I completely agree with that statement; it makes it appear as if the people in the group were trying to make everything about them when it did not need to be. They did nothing wrong that caused the person to choose to drink.

This week the group was on Step 10: “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admit it” (Al-Anon Family Groups page 397). After the group leader notified everyone what chapter they were on, everyone proceeded by saying their name, reading a favorite part from their book about Step 10, and then saying they were ready to pass it on to the next person to have a turn. Once it was my turn I had nothing to say, so I nervously said “Pass.” After I did so, I was smiled at sincerely and everyone unanimously said, “Thank you for coming.” They then continued to go around the group to allow everyone else to speak. The meeting only lasted about an hour, but it felt like I was instantly welcomed in.

One thing that I did not like about this meeting was that these people seemed like they believed that they were the reason the alcoholic person in their life drank. I know that it was never my fault that my mom drank and she has always made sure that my family knew that. I think the twelve steps for the families is not needed. They were not the alcoholic that made the poor choices. The meeting made me feel as if these people were trying to find an outlet, to find reason why the alcoholic in their life drank. It appeared as if they would not accept that it was not their fault.

There was absolutely no cross-talking during the meeting. People only spoke when it was their turn and everyone said “thank you” when they were done, nothing more and nothing less. It gave these people the ability to say whatever they felt without the fear of being judged or ridiculed. While going around the circle and sharing their personal thoughts and favorite moments from Step 10, the other people around the person speaking would often close their eyes as if it made them see what the other person was saying from their perspective.

While going around the table, we got to a woman around 50 years old. She read one of her

favorite portions of the step and followed by saying, "Last night I had conferences for my kids so I had to dress nice. It was a late night and when I got home I saw that the trash cans were still on the curb and not put away. It set me off and when I went inside, I instantly said something. I'm lucky I have a nice husband because he put on his shoes and went to put them away. As he did this I sat by myself and wondered, "Why am I so bitchy?" Then I realized that it was the fucking dress clothes that I had been wearing for over twelve hours. I haven't apologized to him yet because I just thought of it, but I will right

**"One person during the meeting said, 'Here I stood pointing one finger at my alcoholic spouse and had three pointing back at me. I am not perfect myself.'"**

when I get home." Her example caused me to realize that the reason behind these meetings is to help these people learn how to respond in a healthier manner to situations. I found her cursing in a church to be quite ironic but I loved her honest and raw emotion that she shared, nothing was held back or left unsaid. She ended her turn by saying, "We're all dealing with this human condition and life has nasty shit it'll throw at us, but God will get me through it."

This group of people were not bitter, rude, or anything of the sort. In fact, the meeting was full of laughter and smiles. Much like me, these people have worked hard to overcome resenting the alcoholic in their lives. All of us shared the personality trait of being easily irritable: I am easily irritable when driving. People and their outrageous driving causes me to become unhinged. Whether they are going too fast or too slow, it all drives me insane.

We were also all "do it yourself" type of people. For example, when I am assigned to do a group project I like to do a lot of the work to ensure things are done to my liking. Is this because of the alcoholics in our lives that caused this anxiety within us? Have they made us this way or was it some ironic coincidence? Our group, I discovered, was made for families who know an alcoholic currently struggling with the disease. My mother has turned her whole

life around and has been sober for over six years, but I understand what these people are going through.

Our group did not spend the meeting talking about the alcoholic, but rather talking about themselves and how they attempt to keep themselves in check because not everything that goes wrong in their lives is due to an alcoholic. One person during the meeting said, "Here I stood pointing one finger at my alcoholic spouse and had three pointing back at me. I am not perfect myself."

Online, the website of Al-Anon says that their goal is to provide their members with a group where "They learn they are not alone in the problems they face, and they have choices that lead to greater peace of mind, whether the drinker continues to drink or not" (About Al-Anon Family Meetings). It also says that "They share their personal experiences and stories, and invite members to 'take what they like and leave the rest'—that is, to determine for themselves what lesson they could apply to their own lives" (About Al-Anon Family Meetings). This all sounds wonderful, but when I was there nobody once directly came out and spoke about the alcoholic in their family. It was like the big elephant in the room that nobody was supposed to address, it was all very hush hush.

Are these people reserved about the topic because of our geographic location? Midwesterners are known for their politeness to one another. It did not matter that these people were in a safe and open environment, they still told everyone else in the group what they wanted to hear. Nothing seemed to be getting accomplished. It could also be because it appeared as if the other people in the group were living with someone who was still drinking too much, too often. It seemed to be an escape from the reality that is their life.

When the last person in the circle had finished their turn, the person who was running it for the night said to my mother and me, "I recommend coming to at least six meetings. If you don't like them then you'll get your money back." Everyone else at the table laughed. Not once during this meeting did anyone vent or complain about the alcoholic in their life. They all seemed to gracefully accept this challenge and came to the meetings to help better themselves. They came to the realization that they can only control themselves and cannot do anything to fix or change the alcoholic in their life, unless that person takes the initiative on their own to do so. This group seemed more like a way to meet people that understand what you are going



through or what you have been through in the past.

The conclusion of the meeting involved everyone standing, holding hands, and reciting The Lord's Prayer. Afterwards I grabbed my new book, phone numbers, and brochures and headed for the door. Before I left, someone in the meeting stopped my mom and me and said that they recognized her. The woman seemed to be able to tell that we felt somewhat embarrassed, but she just shook her shoulders and said, "Ya know, we all have our stories to tell" and just smiled at us both. We spoke to her and another woman; instead of shaking our hands, they both welcomed us with a hug.

There were only twelve people at the meeting, including my mother and me. They do not represent all families of alcoholics and I know that there are plenty that resent their alcoholic family member for all that they have put their family through. For example, my uncle that passed away unexpectedly from alcohol poisoning, is resented by his son. He resents him because he missed his wedding and the birth of his first child. He resents what could have been and what was so quickly taken away because of the love his father had for this poison. So, the question remains, are other families of alcoholics understanding? Are the majority forgiving or resentful?

**"It's a safe place! You do not have to talk about your uncomfortable work clothes or the normal parts of your lives. The alcoholic is not your fault!"**

I know that this is an experience that I was glad to have but will not be something that I will be returning to in the future. It made me feel as if these people had a lot of guilt in their hearts and felt as if the alcoholism in their family was all their fault. During the meeting, I wanted to shake them and say, "It's a safe place! You do not have to talk about your uncomfortable work clothes or the normal parts of your lives. The alcoholic is not your fault!"

I wanted to hear the stories of these people and if they have been through anything like myself, but they had this kind of protection over the alcoholic and blamed themselves over all that had happened. They

subtly victim-blamed themselves and all found it to be healthy. The man who was leading the group caused this thought to stir in me when he said, "I notice my daughter has traits just like her mom. They worry me. She has seen a lot in her young age and I know that I should have protected her from it. I don't know how to make it so she doesn't grow up to be like her. That's why I bring her and her sister to these meetings, I should have protected her from it."

## Works Cited

"Understanding Alcohol Use Disorders and Their Treatment." *Pardon Our Interruption*. American Psychological Association, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

"Psychology Today." *Alcohol Use Disorder (Abuse/Dependence) | Psychology Today*. Psychology Today, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

"Alcoholism and Other Psychological Disorders." *Alcoholism and Other Psychological Disorders - Alcoholism*. AMHC, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

"NIAAA Publications." *U.S National Library of Medicine*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, n.d. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

"Alcoholism." *www.google.com/search?q=Alcoholism* (n.d.): n. pag. *Alcoholism*. Google, 17 Aug. 2016. Web.

Al-Anon Family Groups. *How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics*. Virginia Beach, VA: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, 2008. Print.

"About Al-Anon Family Group Meetings." *Al-Anon Family Groups*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 Dec. 2016.





## “Here Yet Gone”

*James Clemons*

The creak of the stairway steps disrupted the silence inside the house. His slow steps on the stairs created a low, lasting sound similar to an old rocking chair being rocked slowly back and forth. Once at the top, he reached out into the darkness for the light switch, found it with precise memory, and clicked it on. He loved the old house, and had called it home for almost twenty years, but he consistently criticized some of the trades involved in its construction back in the mid-1940s—primarily the electrician. Who would put the only light switch for a dark stairway at the top of the stairs? Doesn't help a person much from the bottom of the stairs, at least that's what he's always thought.

The faint smell of mothballs hung in the air while he looked around the walk-in attic. Suitcases are what he was looking for. As he made his way to the corner where the suitcases rested, halfway there, a small stack of boxes caught the corner of his eye. He planned on walking past the boxes, he knew what was inside them; however, he didn't. Instead, he stopped. A low-watt bulb glowed dimly from above him, as he knelt down beside the boxes. Brushing the dust from the top box, he revealed a name neatly written in bold-black marker. The name was Samantha Sue, his only child.

He placed his palm across the name, like a man might feel a chest for a pulse, but, of course, there was none. He told himself to get the suitcase and get on with it; there wasn't time to stroll down memory lane. Nonetheless, he opened the box. A picture of a bald baby flashing a nothing-but-gums smile up at him. He removed the picture from the box. “Can't see the shoes,” he whispered, before viewing the picture closer.

He knew the picture well; he remembered the day it was taken. He had based what the baby girl would wear for the picture around a pair of shiny, black shoes with a tiny, red ribbon on their tops, given to her by some distant relative. A distant relative, that was true, but cool little shoes, nonetheless. He'd been able to find a black dress with white lacing and a red bow on its middle, a perfect match to the shoes,

and the perfect outfit for a baby picture. He'd played hell getting that tiny baby into the dress. He blamed his lack of parenting experience on that one, but once everything was on and together, oh—did that baby look nice. The picture had been taken before technology allowed viewing before development. However, somehow the shoes were cut out of the picture, even after last-second adjustments to make sure everything was perfect, from a quick polish on the black shoes, to making sure the red bow was sitting straight and centered on its dress.

“Oh, well. We gave it our best shot, didn't we, Sammy Sue?” he asked the empty attic. Still kneeling by the boxes, he looked around and said, “Those shoes and dress are up here, somewhere, in one of these boxes, amongst all the dust and cobwebs.” He shrugged, looked down at the box, and then let go of the picture. It made a quick, slicing sound against another photograph as it slid back into the box, and he cringed without even realizing it.

“Focus, Dad,” her voice whispered from his memory, as he stared into the box. At a young age, after learning those two words, it was always her way of keeping her only, and sometimes scattered-minded, parent on track. When he scrambled to finish the peanut butter and jelly sandwich for her school lunch, or find that missing sock that matched her outfit, or locating the misplaced car keys, or any other situation that can be overwhelming for a single parent. Focus, Dad, focus.

“I am, I'm trying, I will,” he answered.

He stood and then walked to the four suitcases in the corner. He grabbed the smallest of the four and then made his way toward the stairway, walking past the boxes in the process. Already contemplating his strategy for the trek down the dark stairway with a suitcase in hand (damned electrician) he reached for the light switch, preparing himself for darkness. With his hand on the switch, a noise stopped his actions. He set the suitcase down and made his way back to discover the top box had fallen from the stack.

“How the hell?” he said, and then added, “I'll pick it up later.” He turned away, but then stopped.

“Pick it up now,” he told himself. He didn't want to leave her scattered throughout the floor.

As he tossed the years of her development

back into the box, he wondered how the box had fallen from the stack, not really caring one way or the other, only trying to keep his mind distracted from the task at hand. It still hurt to see her image. He supposed that it always would, but sometimes it was hard to look elsewhere. Regardless of the fact that he truly believed there was light now for this person's dark, young soul, and that everything happens for a reason, it was hard to empathize with certain actions, feelings, or beliefs of another, and literally impossible to permanently look away from the past.

"Focus, Dad," her voice came again.

"Yes, I will."

With the slightest glimpse of any of the photographs going back into the box, his memory tried playing him a movie of that particular time. He did his best to avoid this, but as everyone knows, sometimes a

## **"They were late, yet she sat in their pickup truck in the school parking lot, unwilling to open its door and get out. Picture-day jitters, he'd thought."**

person's best can fall short, and so the movie began.

It was the day of her sophomore pictures. They were running late, which they did a lot. In fact, "they were late, yet she sat in their pickup truck in the school parking lot, unwilling to open its door and get out. Picture-day jitters, he'd thought."

"Excited for pictures?" he'd asked.

"No," was her reply.

They sat in silence. He looked at her while trying to come up with something to say, other than he needed to try and hurry to get to work. It was shortly before her high-school days had begun that it had become increasingly hard to say, or even do, the right thing. They seemed to do very little together anymore, and conversation between them had literally stopped. He tried using extreme caution at all times when with her, but he still sometimes slipped.

Knowing that she felt his gaze, and feeling he needed to break the silence, he reached out "without

caution" and with a slight caress of her cheek, brushed the hair that now always hung in her eyes and asked, "You willing to push the hair out of your eyes long enough for the picture? You have beautiful eyes, Sammy Sue."

She responded to his touch as if it were toxic and pulled away from it so hard and fast she smacked the side of her head against the truck's side window. Stunned, he asked if she was okay.

Without a word, she got out of the truck. He watched as she slowly walked toward the school's front entrance. Before passing a group of girls, who were apparently procrastinating on getting their school day started as well, she picked up her stride and pulled the hood of her oversized hoodie up over her head.

They mocked her as she passed by. Without looking back, her hand reached up to brush something from her eyes as she entered the school. He knew what it was that she was brushing away; he had to brush away his own, as well.

The photographer on that day had convinced her to move the hair from her eyes. In the photograph her eyes appeared too tired for such a young person and looked empty next to her pale skin, as her forced smile screamed, "Please get this over with, and thank you!"

It was the following year when the cuts began to show. At first they appeared to be no more than scratches. Scratches were nothing new for Samantha, though. Her childhood play was spent with scratch after scratch and scar after scar. She never was a "Barbie" kind of girl. The only Barbie she had ever owned was given to her on her eighth birthday by another distant relative who didn't know Sammy Sue too well. The following day, he'd found it buried in their backyard from the neck down.

"How did your Barbie end up in its current predicament?" he remembered asking her.

"Don't want it."

"So you buried it? Why is the head sticking out of the ground?"

"I don't know. I thought maybe I could hit it with a golf club or something. See how far I can make it fly. Do we have any golf clubs?"

"What? No! We don't have golf . . . what . . . no."

Samantha, go out there and dig that Barbie up. Put it up in your room or something. You don't have to play with it."

She had done as she was told without protest, for the most part anyway. The following trash day he'd discovered that Barbie's final resting place was not in Samantha's room, but rather would end up being at the city dump. He figured the dump was just as good a place as any for the formed-plastic figure, so it was never mentioned again.

**"The only Barbie she had ever owned was given to her on her eighth birthday by another distant relative who didn't know Sammy Sue too well. The following day, he'd found it buried in their backyard from the neck down."**

Those were the days when scratches were just scratches, though, and he now understood that scratches on a child were different than scratches on an adolescent. Over time the scratches increased, and with more scratches came deepness. Until the deepness turned the scratches into cuts, and each cut became deep then deeper. Until those cuts, oh, those cuts, those—motherfucking cuts!

He cringed again, but this time felt it before shivering from head to toe. He slammed the picture down. Upon its impact into the box, his psyche flashed the image of her head slamming against the truck's side window on that day just a few short years ago. He stood and picked up the box with all intent of throwing it as hard and far as he could. He didn't, though, he couldn't. Instead, he hugged the box, and the weight of loss he suddenly felt for Samantha tried forcing him back down to his knees.

"Stand strong," he told himself, "Things are . . . different now . . . better . . ."

He released his hold on the box, and it crashed onto the attic floor with a dull thud. He shoved the box with his foot over to the stack from where it had come, but he didn't worry about placing it back on

the stack's top. Instead, he walked toward the suitcase and picked it up on his way to the staircase. Before turning off the light and descending into a different form of darkness than what was currently swallowing him, he stopped at the only window in the attic. He needed a minute to regroup.

He gazed out of the small window at the neighbor's backyard. The current neighbors were relatively new. The small, quiet family had only lived next door for roughly two years, and that was after the house had sat barren for quite some time. The previous owner's name was Eidie Wilkenstein. Longest resident in the area upon their meeting, she was known as Miss Wilkenstein to him (who, at that time, was the new, single dad on the block), and to most of the other people in the area she liked to call "her neighborhood." To three-year-old Sammy, however, she was Miss Frankenstein, or more often than not, Eating Frankenstein. Miss Wilkenstein never corrected Sammy about the name error and never seemed to mind. He figured that if Miss Wilkenstein didn't mind being called Eating Frankenstein by his kid, he wouldn't try correcting it either.

In fact, he'd had direct orders from the "cannibal of a mad scientist's macabre experiment gone murderously wrong" herself not to; she had always found the name "cute." Age eventually corrected the mispronunciation, but none of them bothered to change it; it had been funny from the beginning and had remained that way, even long after Samantha could properly pronounce her name, almost until the end.

Miss Wilkenstein was an outside gal, that was where she spent most her time—especially in the summer. Garden work—that was her thing. Even in the winter's cold, though, she would be out there finding something to do. A lot of winters, it was building snowmen with her buddy, Sammy. Or the occasional snowball fight, in which Sammy showed no mercy.

"Take it easy, Sammy Sue," he'd continuously say while standing in the cold, not always partaking in the activities, but freezing his body parts off instead, as the two pals, bundled in layers of clothing, built and battled with the snow around them.

"She's all right," Miss Wilkenstein always responded, the crispness of the air showing in her

breath, as she would throw a snowball that purposely soared a foot above where Sammy stood in their toe to toe battle.

Sammy always answered back with a snowball blast that penetrated some body part of her good pal, Eating Frankenstein.

“Take it easy, Sammy Sue.”

With time and age, the outside fun decreased between the two. It had ended completely a short time before Miss Wilkenstein passed peacefully, but without warning. She’d sat down under the only shade tree in her yard (a tree Samantha had spent many hours climbing through the years) on a spring day for a catnap (catnaps in the yard were a norm for Miss Wilkenstein) and just never woke up.

They were not around home on that weekend in which she’d taken her final nap, and he was glad—for Sammy’s sake. Samantha’s world had not begun

## **“He figured that if Miss Wilkenstein didn’t mind being called Eating Frankenstein by his kid, he wouldn’t try correcting it either.”**

to darken yet, but when he told her about Miss Wilkenstein’s death, she only replied, “She was old. She never even married and neither have you. We all die someday.” He’d found the comment rather odd and harsh coming from a child so young.

He thought briefly about the never-being-married part of Samantha’s comment, as he looked out the window at the backyard next door that was now nothing more than a crabgrass lawn with a once beautiful garden, which was now neglected and taken over by weeds and critters. The marriage thought faded as he mumbled, “You would shit if you saw your lawn now, Miss Wilkenstein,” and then added, “It all went downhill pretty fast after your years of hard work stopped.”

As he stared at the weeds, he remembered how Sammy would help with the de-weeding of the now-neglected garden. There were times when more

worms were thrown back and forth between Sammy and Miss Wilkenstein than weeds were pulled, but the job was done by the day’s end just the same, and that’s what mattered to Miss Wilkenstein. Several years have passed since then and a lot of changes have taken place.

During one of these weed-pulling parties, Sammy Sue caught a garter snake with one quick swipe of her hand and then snapped its neck with a second swipe that was just as quick. She had been working solo in the garden, as Eating Frankenstein took a beer break in the shade with Sammy’s dad, who was watching Sammy Sue from under the tree. They sat in the shade, each with an ice cold Coors in hand; Samantha approached them with something dangling from her hand. She tossed the dead snake on the grass in front of them and said, “Killed that son-a-bitch.” “Watch your mouth,” they responded in unison, as she turned and trotted away.

As Samantha made her way back into the garden, leaving the snake where it lay, Miss Wilkenstein, after a long swig of beer, belched, turned to him, shook her head, and asked in her matter-of-fact way, “You do realize the only thing keeping that girl of yours from being your boy is a penis and testicles, don’t you?”

At that time, he’d had no response; he only sipped his beer and stared down at the snake lying dead in the grass. Since then, he’d given the question a lot of thought, more than he ever thought imaginable, in fact. Admittedly, he wasn’t a religious man. Not an atheist by any means, but a man who tried keeping an open mind and followed no set religion.

After several sleepless nights spent contemplating that question, he’d come up with the best answer that he could, which was: It had to be possible, mistakes were made by all and made all the time.

He knew some, if not most, or even all, religions would find his views not only blasphemous but impossible, as well—he knew that! But, it all made sense now! It answered all the questions! It would ultimately stop the darkness in its tracks! God had made a mistake; the Higher Power had simply gotten it wrong.

The attic door opened, and a voice called out,



“Dad, are you up there?” The voice was much deeper now, almost as deep as his.

“Ah, yeah, I’m up here.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m looking for the suitcases.”

“Still? You’ve been up there for almost an hour.”

“Well . . . I was . . . ah, was . . . ah . . . I . . .”

“Focus, Dad,” the young man said and walked up the stairs. Supporting nothing but a pair of boxer shorts, life’s scars were fully exposed. The horizontal scar that ran across his mid-chest area, his biggest and longest scar, had healed nicely. Actually, it wasn’t even that noticeable, compared to the various, smaller scars among the left arm and leg areas, that is. Through time, the man had determined that those scars, too, were not that visible to many eyes, but he knew the darkness related to them, which made them more prominent and noticeable to him.

“You still need to pack?” the young man asked, reaching the top of the stairs.

“No, that can wait until we get done with the other stuff. I’m not packing much. I’ll only be gone the weekend. Remember, take care of the house and no kegs while I’m gone.”

They both laughed at the keg part; drinking had never been a problem for either one of them. The son grabbed the suitcase sitting at the edge of the stairs, and on the way back down the stairs, he said, “I’m assuming this is the one you want. You can get the light. Come on, we need to focus.”

“You assumed right, and thanks for leaving your dad to walk down the dark stairway,” he said, as he reached for the light switch while his son made it to the bottom of the stairs, and out the door, and into the main level of the house. Click, darkness, and then, with stealth, down the stairs he went.

They were running late (surprise surprise) but they managed to be dressed and almost ready to go fifteen minutes after leaving the attic. As they stood in front of a dresser mirror in the man’s bedroom, dressed to match, the young man asked, “What’s the plan again?”

“Pictures at 2:00, then we will—”

“—2:00, that’s less than forty minutes away.”

“Yeah, we’ll be alright, always are,” said the dad, as he turned and faced his son. After brushing a piece of lint off the black jacket the young man was wearing, the man gave the red bowtie one last adjustment—just making sure everything was straight and center.

“I can’t believe you are making me wear this monkey suit,” the son said, patiently standing there, as his dad did last minute adjustments.

**“After several sleepless nights spent contemplating that question, he’d come up with the best answer that he could, which was: It had to be possible, mistakes were made by all and made all the time.”**

“Easy, my day, remember? You’ll just have to tough it out for a few hours,” said the dad, as he brushed the shoulder of the jacket one more time.

“I suppose I can deal with the tux, but these shoes are killing my feet, and I’ve only had them on for about five minutes. I think I might be getting blisters and stuff.”

“Well, we don’t want the poor guy to get blisters and stuff on his little footsie, footsies, do we?” said the dad, as his hand moved from the son’s shoulder to his son’s cheek.

The son pulled back, smacked the hand away, and behind a laugh said, “Dude! No touchy touchy the cheeky cheeky.”

The dad turned his attention back to the mirror, looked at his son’s reflection now staring back at him, and made a fart sound.

As they stood facing their reflections, the man couldn’t help but think how they looked good—looked sharp, standing side by side. He’d become a parent when he was only a teenager, and after the baby’s mom had left (never to be heard from again) before “baby’s first tooth” had even appeared. He’d become a single dad shortly after becoming a parent, and that’s the way it had always been. He understood how some

individuals looked at them together and thought “big brother, little brother.” There were only seventeen years between them. Even after people knew their relationship, some still found it hard to believe that they were, in fact, father and son.

On this particular day, they were the groom and best man, and there was no one else the man would want to stand beside him on this day, other than who would be. Still facing the mirror, the young man grimaced at his dad’s reflection.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” the dad asked.

“My feet.”

“Wow! Change into your black tennis shoes. Make sure you wear the dress shoes for the wedding,

**“There was only seventeen years between them. Even after people knew their relationship, some still found it hard to believe that they were, in fact, father and son.”**

but that’s the only time you have to wear them is during the ceremony.”

With no questions asked, the young man went to change his shoes. The man now stood solo at the mirror. As he adjusted his own red bowtie for the last time before heading out the door, he couldn’t help but smirk; the black tuxes with the red bowties were a bit much, he had to admit. He had doubt that anyone else at the small wedding would even get it—including his son, but that was okay, it was his day, and it’s what they were going to wear. His day, that’s why he’d made such a quick decision on the shoes; it wasn’t necessary for a person to walk around getting blisters and stuff just for pictures or an after party, the ceremony was what was important.

So, what the heck, why not? Just wear tennis shoes, it’s all good. Besides, life experience had taught him that regardless of all the preparation a person can make, sometimes the shoes do not show in a photograph, anyway.





## **“The Diver”**

*Jordan Hanson*

The diver perches at the end of the board,  
still and watchful,  
a bird of prey on a high sea cliff.

We wait with bated breath,  
and focus on her  
as though through binoculars.

Her muscles tense  
and she soars,  
arms extended into wings.

For a moment she is suspended  
mid-flight, floating,  
a cormorant on the wind.

Then she reaches her arms above her head  
and streamlined, shoots  
towards the water.

She slices through the waves  
effortlessly,  
with barely a splash.

Her head breaks the surface,  
hair slick, dark,  
and shining like feathers.

Our cheers are echoing bird calls  
and our applause  
is the surf on the stone.

# DMACC

Non-profit student magazine



**AUDIO DESIGNS**  
**AMPLIFIED**  
Full Service  
Speaker Installation  
Sound Enhancement  
System Installation  
Accessories & More  
www.audio-designs.com  
800-850-8888

**GROCERY**

**SUBWAY**

**SPECIALIZING IN CASUALTY, EXOTIC  
& SPORTY LUXURY VEHICLES**  
Exotic Sales Services  
Exterior Enhancements  
Audio/Video Systems  
Mobile Theater Systems  
Convenience & Safety Systems  
High Tech Services