
Satori Literary Magazine

English

Spring 2020

Satori 2020

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Mike Desch

Annette Deyo

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SATORI

2020



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2020

A Student Literature and Art Journal

Winona State University

MISSION STATEMENT

In Zen Buddhism, “Satori” is the Japanese word for enlightenment, seeing into one’s own true nature. Since 1970, Satori has provided a forum for Winona State University students to express and share their true nature and their creations with the university community.

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THE STORY OF WHAT WE KNOW

Shannon Laurance

we know there was nothing in the beginning,
but what is nothing? is it everything? or is it just cold, bitter darkness, or
heat contained in a small ball of nothing that finally said
“okay, that’s enough, I want to be *something*.”
we know a large ball of rock has a few rainy days and
now we know Earth, and life. humanity governs
life and Earth, even if we did not come first, we take
responsibility for it all, even when we know nothing.
we know nothing of the darkest corners of the ocean,
what misty figure hides in the reflection of the mirror,
who lies and who doesn’t,
and how long we have left.

PURGATORY

Sara Severson

They say three things cannot be long hidden:
The sun, the moon, and the truth
I find it hard to believe the sun will rise when
Everything around me
is a nightmare merging into midnight

They say there's a correlation
Between suicide and certain stages of the moon
Perhaps the tides of my tears
are managed by my goodnight moon

Certain sections of my brain seize up
And send signals to the heart hidden
In my harlequin hands
One soft squeeze is all it takes
To plummet me into purgatory

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ON THE RIVER

Mike Desch

When my attention strays, it floats
Like a feather across the racing weather,
Chasing after the next season, always.
Across the river, across the bluffs.
Past the slender limbs lifted above,
Brushing bark smooth to the touch.
Carried down and around the twisted trunk.
Snagged-tight-on a gnarled branch.
Peering out at the whirring world, never
One to remain constant. Next moment
A gust of clean air clears where the feather
Sat still. Propped free of its perch, continues
An earthly trajectory to join others in a
Jolt of discovery to discern a blend of kin.

The shadows cast long across the angled earth,
The lively litters of carefree creatures,
The fretting of footsteps finding their path,
The passing of blue and white, green and gray,
And their found feather lost in the fray,
Say - "We're all here."

FOREST AND SKIES

Annette Deyo



16 x 20 Acrylic on Canvas

ENDYMION

Nicole Tompos

I wonder if Selene would
visit me while I sleep.
Or maybe I could
finally sleep if Selene
decided my insomnia
was worth her time.

Every breath I take
is restless and I am
paralyzed with such
exhaustion that it is past
the point that she, or
the sleep she brings,
could even help.

But, forcing this wakefulness
isn't doing me any good.
Caffeine has made me
its lover instead and
demands my vigilant
attention at all hours,
leaving me twitching.

The twitching has become
part of me now, like my hair.
I want to chop off
all my hair.

But, I'm not free enough
to cut my hair. And
Delilah has no way
to do it for me either while
my eyes remain open.

I just want to sleep-
If not by the power of mortals,
than by my goddess's.
Just, slip into her cave
and lie down
until she shakes me -
evicts me into
the world once more.

OUR GARDEN

/kay/

Our garden survived on my water
On my sunshine
On me

But I have other gardens to watch over
Other plants to feed

And I will soon realize that this garden
Needs more than me
And these flowers will soon die
And so will our garden

SOME WOMAN ON SOME BUS

Jena Archer

Unspoken rule:
don't make eye contact.

But, out of one peripheral,
this woman, half-seen, half-conceived,

had cavernous wrinkles beside her temples –
one smile line for each child

bouncing with glee around her.
Somehow on the same wavelength

as I chanced my head to an angle of two o'clock
copper-colored eyes promptly met mine;

had I not been so entranced by an ardent smile
I perhaps would have noticed another line being added.

UNLOVABLE

Megan Martin

“Honey, what’s wrong?” Mom said.

“I’m not hungry,” I said as I pushed my rice back and forth with my fork.

When I tried to swallow the rice, I could feel vomit coming up in the back of my throat. I sensed the worry in my mother’s face. She knew that I was losing weight but did not know how to help me.

“I saw that the school is having soccer try-outs. That could be a nice way to make new friends,” Mom said.

“Soccer? I haven’t played soccer since I was five. I won’t be any good.”

“Just give it a try. If you completely hate it, you can quit. All right?”

“Okay, fine.”

“Great. I’ll pick you up after try-outs. And don’t take it too seriously. This is meant to be fun.”

After dinner, I retrieved my diary that was hidden under my bed. I turned to a blank page and wrote down the items I had consumed that day. I had eaten a piece of toast with no butter for breakfast (60 calories). For lunch, I had eaten a serving of peanuts (161 calories) and an apple (95 calories). During dinner, my mom had served rice, chicken, carrots, and broccoli; I estimated this to be around 300 calories. I calculated the numbers and totaled 616 calories for the day. I flipped through the other pages in my diary and determined that this number was slightly above my normal consumption.

After my calculations, I went to the bathroom and stepped on the scale. To my horror, I had gained one pound since I weighed myself the day before. I studied myself in the mirror and jabbed my fingers in between my ribs. I began tracing the ridges of my bones and squeezing any fat I could find. Pinching the fat on my arm, I decided that this must be the culprit. I decided to decrease my intake to 600 calories per day.

....

The next morning, I tried to eat a serving size of Yoplait yogurt. A serving was 150 calories, but this was too much for my body to handle. I gagged as I put the spoon into my mouth. I swallowed a few spoonfuls before packing my backpack and riding

the bus to school.

As I stepped off the bus, my eyes drifted towards the cross that hung above the entrance to school. I attended Benilde-St. Margaret's, a Catholic school located in St. Louis Park. This was my second year at Benilde, and I had also attended a Catholic elementary school. However, after years of hearing the same message, I stopped paying attention during religion. What could the priest say that I didn't already know? Besides, each day I recited the same prayer and it still hadn't been answered.

My best friend, Greta, on the other hand, scribbled notes in a devout manner when Father Brian preached his homilies. She was one of those girls who wore Team Jesus T-shirts and quoted John 3:16 in her Instagram bio. Although Greta could go a little overboard on the Jesus stuff at times, we had been inseparable since pre-school. Greta's cheerfulness could always break my sour mood. Lately, her levels of energy had heightened as my fatigue became more noticeable. I think she hoped her energy would somehow transfer to me if she tried hard enough.

Once I arrived at school, I made my way towards my locker. Before the bell rang, I needed to grab my textbook and calculator for my first period pre-algebra class. As I was turning the dial of the locker combination, Greta ran towards me.

"Hey, Mallory! I missed you so much!" said Greta as she hugged and squeezed me.

"Woah, check your energy level! It's only been a day," I said.

"I know, but I have something I need to tell you."

"Okay, what is it?"

"I'm trying out for the soccer team!" Greta screamed as she pulled a soccer ball out of her backpack.

"No way! My mom convinced me to try out for the soccer team last night. But I'm not sure if I actually will," I said as I reached for my textbook.

"Aw, why not?"

"All of the other girls have been playing soccer practically since birth. I don't think I'd be good enough to make the team."

"You won't know unless you try. Plus, it could be fun to try something new together!"

"Well, I suppose if you're trying out, I could too," I said as I slammed my locker shut.

"Yay, I am so excited! I'll meet you on the field after school," Greta said as she bounced on her toes to class.

....

After school, I dragged my feet towards the soccer field. As I scanned the field, I noticed that the girls were already warming up. God, what was I doing here? I couldn't help but notice the differences between me and the girls on the field. All of the players had pulled their hair back into high ponytails; my mom had styled my hair into two braids with my hair parted down the middle. Their brand-new, white cleats still sparkled in the sunlight; I had borrowed cleats from my older cousin, so my cleats were coated in a layer of dirt. Plus, the girls on the field had such beautiful and skinny legs; my legs were as wide as full-grown tree trunks.

I reached for my phone to ask my mom to pick me up, until I saw Greta sitting on the bench waiting for me. She screamed in delight as soon as she saw me approaching the field.

"I was starting to worry that you weren't coming! Let's go," Greta said as she jumped up from the bench and pulled me towards the field.

"You go ahead. I'll be right there," I replied.

Greta looked like she was going to protest, but then one of her friends called for Greta to join the other players on the field. Greta gazed towards the field for a moment, but then her eyes flashed back to me.

"Are you sure you don't want me to wait with you?"

"No, it's okay. I'm not feeling well. I'll just sit on the bench until the coaches come."

Greta studied my face for a few seconds before deciding it was best to let me rest. As I waited on the sidelines, Trevor, a boy in my pre-algebra class, approached me.

"Hey, dawg. What's going on? Why aren't you warming up with the girls?" he said.

"It's none of your business," I replied.

"Dawg, why the sour mood? No hard feelings here, dawg. I bet you'd be the star player."

"As if," I said as I rolled my eyes. "What are you doing here anyway?"

"Oh, I didn't make the boys team, so I thought I'd try out for the girls. Doesn't hurt to try, eh?"

"I guess not."

Trevor had always been a little odd, so it didn't surprise me that he had decided to try out for the girls' team. Last year, Trevor took first place at the school talent show for his yodeling performance. Trevor had not hit puberty yet, so it was quite the scene. After the show, the other boys at Benilde teased him for his high-

pitched voice. However, it didn't seem to bother him; he exuded confidence.

Finally, the head coach arrived and blew his whistle. It was the signal for the players to huddle around him.

"All right, girls, here's the plan. Each of you are going to be on a team. Half of you will make the A-team and the other half will make the B-team. Now, the other coaches and I are going to determine which teams each of you belong on. Your ball-handling skills and your performance during the scrimmage will factor into this decision. Got it?"

"Got it," 23 girls plus Trevor responded.

"First, we will dribble the ball around the cones to test your ball-handling skills. Everyone, grab a ball from the ball bag. Then, line up in two single-file lines."

The other soccer players and I did as we were told. As I anxiously awaited my turn, I wished I had practiced more before try-outs. All of the other girls had been playing soccer since they could walk. Although I had played soccer as a little kid, I hadn't touched a soccer ball in eight years. Why did I think this was a good idea?

I watched the other players dribble the ball around the cones. All of the girls appeared to complete the drill so effortlessly. Greta kept the ball close to her toes and sprinted across the field in what seemed to be record time. Although Trevor was not as fast as Greta, he also dribbled the ball around the cones with no errors.

"Next," said the coach as he blew his whistle. This signaled my turn.

As I dribbled around the first two cones, I kept the ball close to my toes. I did not want to kick too far and send the ball flying. However, as I made my way to the third cone, I tripped over the soccer ball and tumbled to the ground.

"That's okay, Mallory, brush it off and keep going," the head coach said as he made a mark on his clipboard.

I got up and glanced towards the sidelines. Trevor gave me a thumbs up. Greta gave me an encouraging smile. Thankfully, none of the other girls seemed to notice or care. I continued dribbling the ball and completed the rest of the cones successfully.

"Looks like that's everyone. Okay girls, now let's do some shots on goal. Greta, I want you to be the goalie," the coach said.

Again, we formed two lines and waited for our turn to shoot. When it was Trevor's turn, he sprinted towards the ball and kicked it towards the left side of the goal. It soared through the air, too high for Greta to reach. Greta jumped to the right, attempting to block the ball. Trevor's ball sailed into the net. Trevor jumped into the air and karate kicked in celebration.

“I made it! After ten years of playing soccer, I finally scored a goal,” Trevor said as he began to break dance in the middle of the soccer field.

“All right, that’s enough Trevor,” said the coach.

“That’s how it’s done ladies. If anyone needs any pointers, I’ll be here all day,” Trevor said as he walked towards the lines of girls waiting their turn.

A few more minutes passed as I waited for the coach to give me the signal. When it was my turn, I set the ball in front of me. I backed up about ten feet in order to get a running start. I raced to the ball, ready to send it flying. But as I cranked my leg backwards, my aim was too far to the left and I whiffed the ball.

“Can I try again?” I asked.

“Yes, but only once more. We need to save enough time for the scrimmage” the coach replied.

Once again, I set the ball in front of me and ran towards it. Although I struck the ball this time, it soared too far to the right and missed the net.

“Nice try, Mallory,” the coach said and made another mark on his clipboard.

Why couldn’t I do anything right? As I thought about my performance during the drills, I began to feel dizzy. Little black dots began to appear in the corner of my eyes.

“Coach, I don’t feel very good.” I said.

“All right, you can sit on the bench during the scrimmage, but it will be harder for me to place you on a team if you do not participate. Would you like to take a break or keep playing?”

“Oh, actually, I’m fine. I can play,” I replied.

“Perfect. All right, now we will start our scrimmage. I’ll divide all of you into two teams.”

Trevor and I were placed on the blue team, but Greta was the goalie for the red team. As we waited for the scrimmage to start, more black dots began to appear. But instead of just a few dots, the specks danced throughout my whole vision.

The whistle blew and the red team dribbled the ball towards my team’s goal. One of the players attempted to score a goal, but our goalie blocked the shot. The goalie kicked the ball towards my end of the field, and I darted after it. As I was running, the dots seemed to mesh together until I could not see the ball nor the other players. I tried to call out to my coach for help, but no words came out when I tried to speak. Then, everything went black.

....

I woke up in a hospital bed. I looked around the room and noticed a card and

a teddy bear on my nightstand. I opened the envelope and saw that the note was from Trevor.

You were great at soccer try-outs today. I hope that you feel better soon, dawg.

As I was reading the note, I heard voices outside of my door.

“Your daughter appears to be underweight for her age. Has she always been thin?” a female voice asked.

“She seems to be skinnier than usual,” my mom answered.

“Has there been any recent changes in appetite?”

“Yes, she has not been eating as much lately.”

“When did you first notice this change?”

“Well, it first started about five months ago when she began to stop eating specific types of food. But her overall appetite decreased about three months ago. I didn’t know what to do. I thought it would just be a phase, but she is getting thinner and thinner, and I don’t know how to help her. I feel like I’ve failed as a mother.”

“It’s not your fault. The positive part of this situation is that we can help her now. I would like Mallory to speak with a counselor. Is that all right?”

“Yes. Is she going to be okay?”

“She’s in good hands here. We will help you and her through this.”

While the doctor reassured my mom that everything would be okay, I had my doubts. How was I going to be beautiful if I wasn’t starving? How would I be loveable if I wasn’t skinny enough? How could I be perfect if I wasn’t in control?

As I pondered these thoughts, the door opened, and the doctor walked in.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Anderson. How are you feeling?”

“Fine.”

“Okay. I talked with your mother and she noticed that you’ve lost a significant amount of weight recently. I would like you to talk with a mental health counselor to help us identify the source of this weight loss. Is that okay?”

“I suppose.”

“Great. Dr. Smith will be here shortly.”

I was terrified to speak with a counselor, but I didn’t think I had the option to refuse. After all, the conversation between my mother and Dr. Anderson revealed that my secret had been discovered. As I waited for the counselor to arrive, I noticed a card taped to the front of a gift bag. I opened the note and saw that it was from Greta.

Hey, Mallory. I'm sorry that you aren't feeling well. When I'm not feeling myself, my mother always tells me to read the Bible for comfort, so maybe it will help you too. Let me know if you need anything.
Love, Greta.

Inside the gift bag, the Bible was wrapped in tissue paper. It was a kind gesture, but I already owned a Bible and only read it during religion class. Plus, what could the Bible say that would make my pain go away? However, I was intrigued. If it helped Greta, maybe it could help me too. I unwrapped the tissue paper and flipped through the pages of the Bible. As I skimmed one of the pages, Titus 3:4-5 caught my attention.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

How could this be true? Of course, I knew Jesus had died to wash away our sins; the priests and nuns drilled that into our heads. However, I never knew that God's love was unconditional. I thought we needed to be devout Christians to be saved. Yet, if God loved us despite our flaws, maybe I was lovable without being perfect. And maybe, I did deserve to be loved.

BURNING SIDEWALKS

Carly Weber

you have been
going through the motions
so carefully
as to not walk forward
solely of the fear
of mistaking it
for walking backwards

what will it take
to make you realize
you must feel the burn
of the wrong sidewalk
to discover the right one

what will it take
to make you realize
that only by walking
on the burning path
will you realize
it will not kill you

LETTERS FROM THE LIVING

Sara Severson

The petals of my pretty flowers have never been so pink
Sun shines on my skin as my shoes sink in the soil
A pigeon passes on my walk to the mailbox
Cooing as the cool morning breeze ruffles his fringe

My neighbor sweeps past on a bright blue bicycle
I lift my left hand in salutation
She does not notice

My mailbox creaks as the latch clicks open
The paper inside crinkles softly between my skinny fingers
I brush at the dust on my letterbox
My fingers brush together in distaste for the dryness

The wind whips a few wispy hairs into my eyes
And my fingers flip them back into place
The untamed tabby treks across the alfalfa field

When I get to the backyard, the birds bid me good morning
I lob the letters into the bin beneath the balcony
A letter from my mother finds itself on our front porch
I dare not open it.

APRIL 25TH

Nicole Tompos

With this bastardization of
journaling I call poetry,
I'll record today. It's Monday.
It's raining and cloudy. The trees
are finally starting to bud.
I am 467 days sober.

I slept through breakfast.
My job hunt didn't pan out
and the bank rejected
my loan request. Rent takes
priority over lunch, so
I skipped that too.

Mom still won't answer
my phone calls but she
texted me—asked me to
lunch for my sister's
birthday next week.
I had to call the dentist's office
to cancel my appointment.
My filling will have to
wait another two months.

At my local Walmart, I bought
a pint of mint chocolate chip
ice cream. A six-year-old loudly
pointed out my shirt was stained
to his mother. I gave them
a little wave and watched

the mother's face turn red.
In line, I remembered that
I actually came to the store
for Advil and some floss.

I had the ice cream
for dinner. Instead of doing
laundry, I tried calling my
sister. It went directly to voicemail.
I thought about asking for
money but hung up instead.

I double checked my alarm
after crawling into bed.
Tomorrow I will get up
early and send my
resume somewhere. Then,
I will do laundry. 468.

FREEDOM

Mike Desch

The world says to us with hushed eyes:
All I am mustn't fool an eager mind,
I am a day of time standing in line.
Worn thorns we gladly try on for size.
Inside a hand-hewn box, our perfect guise
Reflects what we request others to find.
Rely on these shrines ever more defined,
See behind, it befits us to be wise.

Free of uneasy altercations, see past
The painful weight of best plans left unmet,
The warm grasp of insidious others.
Maintain a sense of wonder, is our behest:
Seek to be free; seek instead its silhouette.
Keep time as the harmony of colors.

MANDARIN DUCK

Kimberly Coffee



THIS BODY OF MINE

Sara Severson

This body of mine is not responsible for your crime
This body of mine was not made to be the punchline
And to the boy with the rape joke in the back of the second row
Your best friend's sister is seated by the window

Her name is Sam and she's 5 foot 4
And she's never really had a boyfriend before
But the man who beat and repeatedly raped her was 6 foot 2
But I guess that's just another rape joke to you.

And to the teacher who stifles a laugh because "boys will be boys"
You are teaching them that women are to be used as toys
This body of mine was not made for your personal use
And "boys will be boys" is not an excuse

So forgive me if I offend
But let's not fucking play pretend.

Content removed by author request

BECOMING A TREE

Annette Deyo

It was dragging my hands along its bark
feeling the soft moss lace
dampened by the misty rain.
the strength and firmness in its trunk
Supported my limbs,
and the many hands springing out
the tips of branches accepted the
Light's sugary gifts
with barely even a rustle.

EUROPA

Shannon Laurance

welcome to my domain, the icy moon,
where few cracks lead to my interior,
containing bizarre creatures that swim quietly,
you've never even heard of their roaming souls,
who hide under my thick and fragile skin,
they have never even seen the sun,
and they don't plan on it.

TRUST ME BUMBLE BEE

Carly Weber

since i was young
i was taught to stay away
from bumble bees
i was told if i leave them be
they will not hurt me
but i wanted so badly
to introduce myself and ask them
where they got their stripes
and why they get so mad
when they get to spend
their whole lives near flowers
but before i could ask
i felt the pain of its sting
and a black and yellow casualty
laid at my feet
i know he was trying
to protect himself by stinging me
because to hurt is
easier than to trust
but now his soul is dead
i wish he knew i just
wanted to say hi
i wish he gave me a chance
to show him
not all humans want to hurt him
but now he never will

TREVI FOUNTAIN IN THE AFTERNOON

Abbey Johnson



Rome, Italy

THE CRICKET DAUGHTER

Hailey Seipel

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)

Potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, and early death in adults; as the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for these outcomes.

There is an online quiz available to determine an individual's ACEs score. My father has a minimum score of two: one point for growing up in a household with substance abuse; one point for growing up in a household with instability due to parental separation. My ACEs score is zero.

BEER CAN COLLECTION

Dad started collecting beer cans in second grade. His grandpa let him have an empty one while he and his fraternal twin sister Carla were visiting for the day. On their way back home, Dad's aunt stopped a few times on the side of the road and let him pick up a few more.

Dad lived in the small town of Stockholm, Wisconsin, and he went dumpster-diving for cans with a couple older kids in his neighborhood. He wanted newer ones to add a little life to the collection, but he was too young to buy them himself. So, he stepped in his father Dell. From nearby towns, he scored Schell's and Schmidts covered in nature scenes, wildlife, and fish painted in vibrant hues. Dell made sure to pierce the aluminum cans from the bottom to drain out the beer beforehand. They were worth more that way.

The beer can collection was one of the many things he left behind years later.

CRICKET

Dad was nicknamed Cricket by a group of sixth graders who were teasing him on the playground. When I asked him where it came from, he could not quite remember if it was because he was quiet and kept to himself or because they overheard him singing the Bic Cricket Lighter jingle on the makeshift merry-go-round. Either way, the nickname stuck throughout most of elementary school, and he had many teachers

and coaches and friends calling him Cricket by fifth grade. What was first meant as a tease ended up working in Dad's favor—he was no longer confused with the two girls in his class, Kris and Christine, which mortified him growing up.

Because of Dell's numerous strokes and resulting speech impediment, he could not pronounce Dad's name. Instead of Chris, Dell said "Russ." He left when Dad was just ten years old, and from that point on, he was just a cricket in the background of Dad's life.

DINOSAUR ROCK

Dad was also known as "Psychedelic Sipe" for his on-campus radio gig at River Falls. He was a part of the show for a semester or two as a sophomore or junior, and he worked with another guy from the dorms who was coined "Cosmic Chico." They would talk in between songs and banter and even invite friends to be their guests for the night like they were big-shot radio hosts. Their show was the most popular on the school's public channel.

Dad took it upon himself to steer from playing the mainstream tunes of the '80s and instead educate his listeners with the classics of "Dino Rock": Rolling Stones, ACDC, Pink Floyd, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Led Zeppelin. A psychedelic musical palate—hence the radio name.

EXAMPLE

When Dell left and started a new family in the same town, Grandma set the tone that life was going to continue as it had before, only a little differently. The kids were still expected to do their chores and go to school and church, but they "just kind of moved on." Dad told me the main reason he kept it together all that time was because Grandma did. She did not fall apart or crumble like the sugary toppings she added to her homemade pies, nor did she start drinking or take it out on the kids herself. She set a good example, and for that they persevered together.

FIRST LOVE, CIRCA SEPTEMBER 14

The night I was born, my dad cradled me for hours in a pink blanket and rubbed the soft skin on my head. And even in that moment with my eyes closed and my tiny fists wrapped around his thumb, I knew I had found my first love.

GRAND CANYON, 1975 V. 2012

When Dad was seven or eight years old, the first camping trip he and Carla and his

parents went on together was the Grand Canyon. They took their pop-up camper along and hit a variety of campgrounds out west from Wisconsin. It began a short-lived tradition of exploration, notably marked by multiple games of Chinese checkers and orders of hamburgers, Cokes, and fries while on the road—Grandma otherwise cooked every chance she could get.

Dad went again in 2012 with a lifelong buddy of his, Eric. It was early November, so the air was chilly and the park was not very crowded. They both ate lunch on a glass ledge lining the perimeter of the canyon, its belly drained like the beer cans left to Dad's name.

HEREDITARY

1: 50% of the underlying reason for alcohol abuse is genetics and the development of alcoholism has been linked to some specific genes.

2: the likelihood of an individual struggling with alcohol use disorder increases if they have a parent or sibling or other close relative who also struggles with the same addiction.

3: despite children of alcoholics having a twofold to fourfold increased chance of struggling with alcoholism later in life, fewer than half of them do. My dad is one of them.

IRONY

Dad drinks a glass of whiskey in honor of Dell's birthday every year. Dad misplaces socks and to-do lists and forgets the punchlines to jokes and the ends of his own damn stories, but he always remembers to make a toast on April 5. To this day, Dad wishes he could have sat down and had a cold one with his old man.

JEFFREY DEAN

Dad's older brother of eight years and fill-in father figure once Dell was out of the picture. Jeff took Dad hunting, showed him a few things while playing basketball in their driveway, and even borrowed his cobalt blue Corvette to Dad for prom night to impress his date. While he was working in the Twin Cities after high school graduation, Jeff would come home on the weekends and help around the house the best he could and check on his little brother. He would get Dad into trouble, too, sometimes.

Grandma made Jeff in charge of taking himself and Dad to church every week when they were younger, which the two quickly finessed. They had a system: by the halfway point of these services, Jeff would send Dad in to collect the ballot

summarizing the program as proof that they went, which they would then hand over to Grandma. In reality, they crashed at Jeff's buddy's place nearby and watched All Star Wrestling instead.

Dad remembers meandering out to the friend's backyard farm during one of their church-skipping escapades and approaching a barbed-wire fence to get a better look at a cow. He somehow found himself inside the enclosure and before he knew it, Dad got spooked by the cow—it must have made a weird noise or turned to face him head-on. When he ran back to safety, the fence got caught on Dad's nice corduroy pants and ripped a hole on the knee. Grandma knew better when they told her later that they went to a farm after church, but she sewed the rip anyway and instead of getting mad she asked what they wanted for dinner.

KITCHEN

1: where Dell fried liver on the stove that caked the air with a wretched stench; where he threatened Dad and Carla of going to bed with only bread and water if they refused to eat liver; where Grandma made snacks for them and later snuck into their bedrooms so they would not go hungry.

2: where Grandma concocted hot cakes and apple crisps and beef stews and mashed potatoes and breads every day despite her long shifts at Red Wing Shoes; where she always whipped up another dish “as long as the oven was already hot”; where she made nearly everything from scratch even though buying processed food was an easier option for any single mother.

LITTLE LEAGUE

After Dell left, Dad biked six miles each way to his little league practices and games all by himself.

MAN OF THE HOUSE

At ten years old, Dad became the man of the house before he was even a man.

NINETEEN NINETY-FIVE

Garvel Dell Seipel died on October 30, 1995, after suffering his final stroke. He was rushed up to the Twin Cities and put on a ventilator. By the time Dad, Carla, Jeff, and Anita arrived at the hospital, though, Dell was nothing more than a vegetable. His face was contorted and “all fucked up.” Dad's great grandma ultimately made the decision to take Dell off life support a few days later. It had been many years—many

lifetimes—since all four kids had last seen him.

At the funeral that followed, Dad wore a navy suit between Mom and his great grandma. The three of them sat near both of Dad’s sisters, but neither Jeff nor Grandma showed. It was the first time Dad had to face the reality of Dell’s infidelity and new family, who grieved on the opposite side of the aisle: “I just wanted to get through it and get out of there.”

OPEN HEART SURGERY

Dell had open heart surgery in his late twenties to combat the damage done by the fit of rheumatic fever he had as a teenager. He was one of the first people in the 1960s to have steel valves put in at Abbott Northwestern Hospital.

Dad told me that after the surgery, he could hear a faint ticking noise from Dell’s chest if he got close enough. It was almost as if he was a quiet cuckoo clock made of flesh.

PLANT, ROBERT

Plant was best known for his vocal range emulated in the popular rock band Led Zeppelin that was formed in 1968, the year my father was born. Plant was inspired by Elvis Presley at an early age, who prompted Plant’s deep love for rock and roll.

Every day on the way to daycare, Dad rolled the windows down and played Led Zeppelin on the stereo, and I sat wide-eyed in the front seat of his Ford F-150 pickup truck. I was too young to understand the meanings of the lyrics Plant belted, but I could not have cared less—I was an instant fan of rock and roll.

Thanks to my father, Robert Plant was my Elvis Presley.

QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE

Because I never met my paternal grandfather, the inspiration of this essay was to learn more about him. And although I did just that, I now know a lot about my dad and grandma and their collective resilience to move on after Dell moved out of their lives.

RHEUMATIC FEVER

1: an inflammatory illness which arises as a complication of untreated or inadequately treated strep throat infection.

2: what sent Dell to the hospital for an entire summer when he was fifteen or sixteen

years old.

3: causes about 60% of people with the fever to go on and develop rheumatic heart disease, a group of short-term and long-term heart disorders; the most common form of which affects the heart valves.

STROKE, ISCHEMIC

A life-threatening condition that occurs when the blood supply to a part of the brain is compromised via arterial clots; accounts for about 80% of strokes annually in the United States.

Dell had six to seven strokes during his lifetime after his initial bout of rheumatic fever. He had one out in his parents' fishing boat in Spooner, Wisconsin; he had another in the basement of the family restaurant, Car-Dell's—a clever cocktail of his and my grandma Carmen's names—which they eventually sold a few years after its opening.

With strokes being the fifth-leading cause of death, the first should have killed Dell, let alone his recurrent ones. Dad was too little to remember any of the strokes except for the aftermath of the last in 1995.

“TEN YEARS GONE”

One of the most heartbreaking stories Dad told me was when he ran into Dell after he officially left and started a new family in the same town. Dad was in his early twenties and at a local bar in Maiden Rock named Oley's—or was it Dean's—one afternoon with a couple of his buddies. They were getting ready for a pool tournament later that night and were just about to grab more quarters to start another game when in walked Dell. He and Dad looked at each other without saying a word. Their stand-off continued as Dell bellied up to the other end of the long bar and began chatting with the bartender. During their match, Dad tried to tune Dell out but was in utter disbelief when he overheard Dell say from twenty feet away after pointing Dad out, “That's my boy down there.” It had been nearly a decade since they had seen one another.

There were two ways to exit the bar: the front and the back. The latter option was past the pool table Dad and his friends were stationed at, which was the door Dell ultimately chose after finishing his drink. The two of them stared at each other again, and just like the day he walked out on the family—his first family, that is—Dell was gone from the bar and from Dad's life. Crickets.

“You never know the last time you're gonna see someone,” he added on the other end of the line. It kills me knowing that to this day, he wishes he would have

said something to Dell before he walked out that door and turned into a vegetable.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Dell left his telemarketing job at a local airline company after his strokes completely impeded his speech and progressively disabled him. He could not talk very well and would often get frustrated with himself from not being able to articulate the things he wanted to say. This undoubtedly impacted his own image as a man. Dell took up drinking as an escape and became an alcoholic.

When I asked Dad if he ever sympathized with his father, he responded, “I think that would have made just about anyone start drinking.”

VINYL COLLECTION

Dad started collecting vinyl records throughout his years in junior high and college. He now has between sixty and eighty albums total, a musical cornucopia of the best ballads and blues and British Invasion riffs, all of which he will one day leave in my name.

The vinyl collection will be among the many things I will have to remember him by.

“WHEN THE LEVEE BREAKS”

- 1: song originally recorded by Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie in 1929, then re-worked by Led Zeppelin in 1971.
- 2: Dad’s favorite song and what he wants to be played at his funeral as he is lowered into the ground and out of my reach.
- 3: song that I will blare in his honor every year on February 25—his birthday.

XENOGENESIS

(zen-uh-jen-uh-sis), n. Biol. 1. heterogenesis 2. the supposed generation of offspring completely and permanently different from the parent.

Despite Dad likely not knowing the meaning nor the pronunciation of xenogenesis, I have to believe that he deliberately decided not to repeat his own upbringing when he found out he was going to be a father.

Y-CHROMOSOMES

Because a father’s Y-chromosome is unique, its genetic code remains relatively unchanged as it passes from father to son. The DNA in other chromosomes is more

likely to get mixed between generations in a process called recombination. Translation: boys have a higher likelihood of directly inheriting their ancestral behaviors.

Dad may have inherited the “Seipel humor,” by which my mother refers to our dry manner of telling jokes, but as far as I can tell, Dad did not inherit any of Dell’s negative traits.

ZEPPELIN, LED

English supergroup composed of four members: singer Robert Plant, Jimmy Page on lead guitar, bassist John Paul Jones, and John Bonham on drums.

First introduced to Dad by one of his buddies growing up, Rob Roach. Roach brought the Led Zeppelin II vinyl to school in sixth or seventh grade, and they played it at Dad’s house whenever they hung out since Roach did not have a record player. He did not have either running water or electricity back home because after his mom remarried, his stepdad moved them into an A-frame in the countryside that lacked the essentials beyond bare bones. When Dad told me that Roach used to do homework beside a kerosene lamp, I said, “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

Roach and his stepdad butted heads a lot, so he took refuge at Dad’s house as often as possible. Never having to deal with a stepfather was something Dad mentioned he was still grateful for to this day. Grandma chose not to remarry and instead persevered for the sake of her kids by cooking and cleaning and working without ever complaining. “My dad leaving didn’t change my life dramatically, but it could have. I looked at it as, I got a really good parent out of it.”

I am beyond grateful to have been blessed with him as a father and with the opportunity to tell this story. His constant love sings proudly, and he is anything but a cricket in my background.

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VALEDICTORIAN

Sara Severson

As it turns out, there isn't much difference
between being haunted and being the ghost

We fill the void with chemistry and economics
As we stuff our skulls with scientific notations
until we shatter under the fluorescent lights

We expect everything to end in an epiphany
Basketball boys with tender eyes and shaking knees
Every shot that hits the backboard screams staticity

We percolate our words until we're in too deep
Silly girl, valedictorians don't have time for sleep

THE BASEMENT OF THE BLUE HOUSE

Shannon Laurance

there is a dead moldy stench,
evil crawls within the walls,
dirty water drips through the pipes,
muck develops between the bricks.

you go to the musty washing machine,
grittiness scratches the shoe soles,
something flutters its black flesh wings,
the musty, empty, room watches.

in the basement, the itchiness
of you is so maddening,
new dark shapes appear at every glance,
under the Blue House where we all live.

CUT MY TEETH

Sara Severson

Uncomfortably numb we laid in sunset sand
Inches apart, afraid to reach out for her hand

Days turned into weeks and my body stayed numb
We sat in her bed blowing bubbles with chewing gum

I always fall in love at the drop of a hat
My mistake for thinking it was deeper than that

She tells me she's moving to Cali to follow her dreams
But I'll be stuck in Minnesota 'til the day I cut my teeth

ENTRANCE TO AUSCHWITZ

Kimberly Coffee



Poland

ANATHEMAS IN A CHILDHOOD HOME

Jena Archer

Figure in the corner, tips of my toes –
the grandfather clock comes into focus.
Nearby, seven unpacked boxes gossip;

There's much to talk about, collecting dust
since their taping in fall 2001.
The coat rack holds everything except coats:

A pair of scissors, a charcoal satchel,
and a dog leash are hanging in shackles.
The latter, the leash, belonged around the

Neck of a tireless German shepherd,
buried thirty-six steps from the plum tree
whose stump is now a labyrinth for ants.

Thirty-six steps forward, it feels like one
hundred back. We stop by the side fence, where
a question still echoes off its metal:

Should we run and jump?

NEVER HAVE I EVER

Carly Weber

never have i ever
met such persuasive eyes
holding my gaze
confidently for hours
as yellow street lights
reflect off them
never have i ever
been pulled in closer
at 8am
two mouths colliding
as if to say
i'm glad you stayed the night
never have i ever
made love with such emotion
trusting bodies
endlessly connecting
until exhaustion overcomes desire
never have i ever
stopped a kiss
in exchange for laughter
while hands
followed the curve of my spine
painting potential
for many more nights that
bleed into morning

THE SIREN

Nicole Tompos

Singing sincerely so serenades
slip over the mind like satin,
she revels with self-satisfaction in
the sounds of her song
surrounding her. She smiles,
slowly showing her sharp teeth
soon to sink into some poor
sailor's soft throat. A sad sea
surrounds her spot as she
sits smugly on slick stones,
shrouded by seafoam and the
shambles of sun-bleached wood
ships where sharks sluggishly
swim and claim sanctuary.

PAINTED CEILINGS

Abbey Johnson



Vatican City, Rome, Italy

CYANIDE

Nicole Tompos

WINONA PRIZE WINNER IN POETRY

Four and a half ounces of crushed
apple seeds away from death
if I don't gain any more weight.
On the list of things I should never
own, the orchard joins the garage.

How many seeds is that? How
many apples even would I have
to slice into—with juices running sticky
between my fingers—for those seeds?
Grave metal bends around my wrist—
his name there, in that October newspaper,
and on a stone—cuffing me to the
reality apple seeds would have me abandon.

Orchards can stay those
few picturesque seconds in the
window while driving somewhere that
isn't home. How many more poppy seeds
until I'm happy?

-for Sarazin -

BACHELOR BUTTONS

Dahlia Garofalo

WINONA PRIZE WINNER IN CREATIVE FICTION

I'm eating Poptarts for dinner when Dad gets home. He takes his time up the garage steps like he has one of those cartoon ball and chains shackled to his ankle. He rounds the bend and pauses in the entryway, watching me sprinkle frosting crumbs on the island counter.

He doesn't really watch me though, just stares down at the strawberry rainbow sprinkle Poptart in my hands. He hunches his shoulders. They look pronounced in his pressed suit I know he hasn't dry-cleaned in months.

Dad ambles into the kitchen and stares at the green tiles. He opens the fridge and stares into it without sorting through anything before pushing it shut and grabbing two Poptarts from the crushed cardboard box beside me.

I remember when his eyes used to brighten when he walked around the bend. I remember how he used to mess up my ponytail by scratching the top of my head affectionately. After I finished my online classes, he used to make dinner for the three of us while I entertained him with Bradbury's short stories.

I lick my thumb and pick up the crumbs from the counter before heading upstairs to my room. My parents' bedroom door looms, swallowing the hallway. I stare at it so long that I can make faces appear in the grain of the wood, long haunting faces. No one's slept there in months. Dad went right from sleeping in the hospital room every night to crashing on the couch. He must have gotten addicted to watching trash TV in the waiting room.

I keep the light to my room off and crawl into bed under the covers. I lay, opening and closing tabs on my phone until the light outside dims. I check my email. There's something from my school about preparing to apply to colleges but I delete it. I used to like to read before bed but the effort of paging endlessly through made up stories exhausts me.

When I get up to close the curtains, my eyes instinctively scan what used to be mom's garden. Melting snow pools along the indents of the still frozen dirt. Mom would say that it's full of infinite potential. It looks dead to me.

Mom said that her plants grew faster because she loved them. I liked to visualize the small stone seeds vibrating beneath the earth to the rhythm of her humming.

She'd lead me outside each day before sending me back inside for my online classes to show me the fragile urchins yawning from the earth and I marveled at how fast plants could burst from their seeds. I would go to bed, the garden nothing but dirt, but wake up to small spots of green washed over the garden like moss. How was it that such small shoots could burst through their stone shells, through layers of dirt and rock in a single night? But if I was a plant, I'd fight that hard to see mom again too.

I walk through the frozen aisle and pick out two cardboard boxes of fudge popsicles. I do most of the grocery shopping now. It wasn't a job specifically assigned to me but after mom went into hospice care, Dad was with her all the time, and I got tired of eating triangle cheese sandwiches and barbecue chips from the vending machine.

I curl my cart around toward the dairy section but pause, a wall of color drawing me in. It's one of those seed stands that every store seems to broadcast in early spring.

Mom wasn't one to buy seed packets from capitalist corporations. She usually saved her seeds or ordered them from an organic catalog she got in the mail twice a year. Still, as my eyes scanned the varieties, I saw some familiar names. The veggies were sprawled across the top five or so rows, then the vines like pumpkins and watermelons, then the herbs, and finally the flowers.

I crouch, my fingers grazing the smooth plastic-coated packets. Bachelor buttons. Mom had always grown vegetables, finding flowers to be a waste, but she always found the space and time for bachelor buttons. They had been the flowers at her small wedding, picked from a nearby field. There are pictures of her and two-year-old me picking through the woody stems in white, a field of indigo behind us.

Mid-July was a holiday all its own for our family. Everything was Bachelor buttons. There was a vase of blue in every room, dried flowers hanging above the sink, indigo petals pressed in old cooking books. Mom and I planted them as soon as the last frost shuddered through the garden. Each year she sifted wispy seeds into my hands and told me to spin.

I place the packet of seeds in my cart and speed for the check-out counter.

"I went shopping," I announce and dump wet plastic bags on the counter. Dad is sitting on the couch, the top of his head encapsulated by the frantic flashing of the TV. Either he doesn't hear me or doesn't acknowledge me.

I unpack and make myself some chips and salsa. The jar makes a satisfying pop. I break open a box of fudge popsicles, grab two. I toss one in Dad's lap and sink into the brown velvet couch. His sweat perfumes up from the perpetually damp cushions.

Dad used to help mom unpack groceries and ask about her day at the University. She would ask him about his woodworking or what machines he was tinkering with because she knew he hated his job. Dad used to spend hours tinkering with lawnmowers or farm equipment in the garage. After mom's recurrence, Dad got into wood carving. The kitchen is still littered with wooden spoons.

Dad stares at the coffee table, his expression one of mild surprise. I rarely sit next to him anymore. There's some sort of fake dating show playing on the TV with some girl complaining about how her boyfriend kisses.

We eat our popsicles in silence and I get up. I toss my bowl with the wooden popsicle stick in the sink. The seed packet is still on the counter and, not wanting Dad to see it, I tuck it in my pocket.

I wake up, disoriented. It takes me a few full seconds to focus on my blazing phone long enough to see that it's 3:15 in the morning. I only planned on taking a nap and a wave of irritation washes over me at sleeping until now. My blankets twist around my sweaty legs as I switch to my side.

Something rattles in my pocket. I turn on my light and another wave of irritation washes over me at seeing the crumpled seed packet. I find myself reading through the directions on the back, realizing that I have never really read directions on how to grow something before. They sound harsh and robotic. Plant 2 to 3 inches apart, 1/4 inch deep. Direct sun.

Mom had always taught me how to plant everything in her garden. There were no directions on the back of this packet about giving the seeds exactly three kisses or spinning in a circle to let the wind carry them. There were no directions about checking on the seeds in the early mornings or sitting in lawn chairs with lemonade and watching the sun come up.

I kick myself free of my twisted blankets and creep downstairs, past Dad sleeping on the couch, the remote still in his hand. I fumble in the dark of the laundry room until my hands brush the champagne painted drawer beside the dryer. The drawer sticks but I eventually wedge it open and grab the wooden box inside.

I sneak back upstairs and lay the box on my bed. Dad had made it for her. It was crude with nail gun marks and un-sanded edges. But mom had loved it. She

stained it with grass smudges and iced tea. She carried it around everywhere, even out in public.

The box makes a familiar creak as I flip it open. I feel every memory of my mother showing me the contents of this box. Every time she stuffed it in her large purse just to have it beside her when she ran errands. Every time we sprawled each packet on the living room floor. It's all tainted now.

I brush my fingers down the creases of the packets lined up like greeting cards. The last four packets in the back are made from envelopes folded in half. I pulled them out, cupping them in my hands. Mom's dainty cursive reads Bachelor buttons.

I lean back against my bed frame, rubbing my sweaty palms against the packets until the paper pills. I pick up the packet I bought myself and squeeze the seeds inside, then squeeze one of the envelopes. The seeds inside feel the same: dry and crunchy and dead.

I keep the box in my room for a few days, then move it out into the kitchen, then the living room on the coffee table. I don't want to return it to the drawer but can't seem to find a place where it looks like it belongs.

I finish my online school assignments early and grab the last fudge popsicle from the freezer. I sit next to Dad again and notice that he's staring at mom's seed box on the table instead of the TV. He sniffs as I settle in, turning up the volume. There's a cooking drama on and a man screaming about overcooked fish.

"Can I borrow your credit card?" I ask quickly.

Dad doesn't turn down the TV even when it switches to commercial. "It's not Sunday."

I let my popsicle fall to my lap. "I know, it's not for groceries."

Dad glances in my direction, his gaze settling somewhere past my right ear. His brow furrows as he processes my request. "Why do you need it?"

"For gardening."

I watch his shoulders hunch and it reminds me of our old dog Wiggles trying to make herself small after stealing zucchinis from the garden. I've seen Dad like this for a long time but there is something about this moment that makes me want to slap him. A hot flood of anger rises in my throat and washes up my cheeks.

"You know where it is," Dad finally mutters and turns the volume up more.

I sit at the edge of the bare muddy garden, my hands and neck smeared with

compost from loading the heavy bags into my front bike basket. It took four trips from and to the co-op to get the eight bags here. It is getting warm enough to bike without my winter jacket even though there is still beads of frozen dew on the mixed green brown grass in the mornings.

The air is cool and damp even though it is already noon. It's beginning to smell like what mom would call spring. I sit at the edge of this mud pit that mom somehow made beautiful every year and feel for those hibernating seeds on the coffee table. Some of those seeds are nine generations old. All they have known is my mother and she broke a promise to them. She broke that same promise to me.

I sit and allow anger to wash over me at that realization until I can't take it anymore. I attack the compost bags, tearing at the plastic with my slippery muddy hands. I dump the bags in the sinking divots of the garden and claw them level on my knees. Mom knew how to churn the compost until it was spread evenly, while I left dark splotches in the mud like a checkered quilt.

I sit cross legged in the middle of the mud pile that I have created and bury my sweaty face in my muddy hands. My face still burns hot, so I run my caked fingers through my hair and wipe my dirty hands down my sweatpants. I feel a small bit of release, the cool mud cracking on my skin. If someone looked out the window, they might just mistake me as being part of the earth too.

It rains for a week straight. It isn't soft summer rain either. It's hard Wisconsin April rain that leaves gaping holes in the recently thawed earth and gathers in thick puddles in the dead grass.

I try not to think about the garden but when at my computer listening to teacher instructions, I find my gaze drifting to the drizzly window. Sometimes all I see is a pit of mud and my heart aches. Sometimes I see my mom in her seashell straw hat. I see the way she bends, always one hand on her bad hip. I see the way she wipes her dirty hands down the front of her shirt instinctively and my heart aches more.

I'm halfway through algebra when I hear Dad get home. It is nearly noon and I still have four more subject assignments to go.

Dad used to go out to eat during his break. When mom got sick, He took Fridays off and spent his lunch hours with her. He still takes half days at the end of the week, but just comes home.

When mom started to get very sick, Dad had me visit her less. The last time that I saw her, we talked about the same things, but she was quieter. She asked me if I still wanted to be homeschooled and if I was excited to start driver's ED in less than a

year. We talked about college and our love of short stories. There was still excitement and hope in her pale blood shot eyes, but she whispered like half her soul was already gone.

That night Dad woke me up and we drove in silence back to the hospital. I sat outside in the waiting room on the couches and napped until Dad shook me awake. I knew.

He hugged me and wept into my neck. He held me so long and so tight that I lost feeling in my arms. That was the last time that he touched or looked at me.

The ground isn't wet anymore but rock hard. Even the compost I put there weeks ago is now pale and cracked. Dad used to rototill the garden before mom planted to help break up the clay soil, but I know he won't do that for me now.

I start some seeds indoors, just a few tomatoes and vines. Even though the living room doesn't get much light, I line the small windows with seedlings just so Dad is forced to look at them.

I sit next to him now, two cosmos brownies still in the wrappers crinkling around in my bowl. I don't know why I'm mad at him, only that I hate the red watery rims of his eyes. I hate the way he tilts his head down slightly so that his fat neck bulges. If someone asked him what his daughter looked like, I don't know how he would answer. My hair hasn't been cut since mom died and my bangs are long enough to tuck behind my ears.

I crinkle my empty wrappers to get his attention, but he only looks at my hands. I get up and throw my dish in the sink with a force I'm surprised doesn't break the bowl. He doesn't even look back.

His silhouette sits like a black hole in front of the TV screen and do something I've never done before. I stand in front of the TV.

Dad immediately looks down at his socks, intertwining his fingers in his lap as if waiting patiently for me to go away. Something snaps inside me, but it's not anger anymore.

I don't go up to my room but instead, I storm out into the garage. Everything is the way mom left it and I find the hoe and rake easily. Dad is not going to pull out the rototiller this year.

I leave the rake in the grass and hold the hoe firmly with both hands. It's only ever been used to clear weeds in between rows. I don't know how long I work for. After the first half hour, the pain of my blistered hands blends with the rhythm of my movement. By the time I finish, the sun is just beginning to kiss the tops of the bluffs.

Its strong fiery glow illumines the fresh blades of electric green grass.

I chop around the border of the garden one more time then use the rake to smooth the sifted mounds. It doesn't look as nice as when Dad used the rototiller, but it is loose enough to be planted in.

I sit cross legged in the middle of my masterpiece, watching the sun slip below the horizon. The curtains to mom and Dad's room shuffle.

The next day is the weekend. I keep waking up in an excited panic, not remembering where I am. There's an uncomfortable lurching in my stomach but also an anticipation for something different.

There's a single brush stroke of magenta on the horizon when I finally decide I'm up for the day. I don't get breakfast. I don't look at Dad still wheezing on the couch. I just grab mom's seed box and head outside.

The grass soaks through my socks but it's been well over a week since the last frost. There's a stillness in the air like the moment between taking in and letting out a breath. The only sounds come from two doves cooing from the telephone wire across the street and the clicking of gears as a man bikes up and down the sidewalk.

I haven't been up this early since mom went to the hospital. I feel a familiar ache as I remember how much she cherished her early mornings. Sometimes we sat in rickety metal lawn chairs outside with books and coffee. Sometimes we went on long walks around the neighborhood and she would point out the name of every tree in bloom in the neighbors' yards.

I use my sock to wipe as much of the dew from a section of grass and sit with mom's seed box. I carefully lay out the packets just like we used to do across the living room coffee table. I reorganize the seeds I want to plant, then enter the garden and gently place down the packets as place holders to space out my rows.

I had started the tomatoes, cucumbers, cantaloupe, and peppers too late inside, so I would either have to wait to plant them or buy seedlings from a green house. Mom never liked to buy anything from greenhouses, I think because she didn't trust other people to grow her plants for her. I had always been fascinated by the rows of small black pots stretched out in front of every window in the house. I liked picking the seed shells off the emerging plants, but mom always told me not to. The leaves had to become strong enough to break out of their dead husks all on their own.

I make space for three tomato plants and three pepper plants: one hot, one red, and one green. Mom's favorite had been the red, but Dad and I like green better.

I also make space for three mounds: cucumbers, zucchini, and cantaloupe.

Mom's garden is thin but long, making short rows. Dad built the frame for her when they first moved into town when I was still a baby. It's surrounded by severely bend chicken wire that does little more than confuse rabbits for half a second. Mom never seemed to mind when a few pea shoots or cabbage heads went missing though, so she never fixed it.

I lay down stakes to mark the rows, then use the hoe to trace a pattern for the seeds. For the carrots and other small seeds, all I have to do is trace the row, scatter the seeds, and cover them with a light dusting of soil. I make sure to crumble the large chunks of dirt with my fingers as to not smother the seeds.

I wrap twine around tall metal rods for the beans and use a stray stick from our willow to poke inch deep holes in the ground. I remember mom poking holes for me to drop peas into. I remember her tracing the earth with her hoe while I scattered basil seeds irregularly. I remember the dirt under her nails and the way she snacked on wild purslane as she worked.

I finish planting the seeds and hook up the hose from the garage to water everything in. I had planted every seed but one.

I clutch the bachelor button packets to my chest, smearing the white envelopes with my muddy fingers. The place that mom and I usually spread the seeds is in a small six-by-six area next to the thin line of woods that separates us from our neighbors.

I pull a few of the large budding weeds from the area then head to the back of the house. The compost pile hasn't been cared for in about a year. I still threw my scraps out back, mostly out of habit, but it had always been mom who turned it and mixed in branches and cardboard.

As soon as I lift the lid, I'm struck with a sour rancid odor. Many of the scraps on top are still recognizable so I do my best to scrape off the top layer with my shovel until I see dark hummus.

The smell worsens as I mix the earth and I breathe through my mouth though it doesn't help much. Sometimes it smelled slightly musty in years past but never this bad. The texture is also off. Mom's compost had been airy, almost fluffy. We would scoop it with our bare hands into the garden.

I don't want to touch this compost. I load what I can into the wheelbarrow we use only for dirt and head back for the small bachelor button field. I finish spreading the sticky clumps as best I can.

Next to the compost pile, mom collected grass clippings in a large box made

from pallets. The only grass inside the pallet box is limp and brown. It won't spread easily but I load it in the wheelbarrow regardless.

I use the shovel again to spread it as best I can. The grass is solidified in layered clumps and looks about as evenly spread as if I had pitched the clumps into the field like baseballs. My blistered sweaty hands slip on the shovel and I feel pin pricks in the corners of my eyes. I swallow my frustration and grab some wooden stakes from the garage to set up a little border.

This isn't what I wanted my first garden alone to be. The rancid moisture from the withered half decomposed grass and sour compost soaks through the tops of my tennis shoes. I want freshly trimmed grass that sifts through my bare hands. I want mom to fill my palms with crunchy indigo seeds, clapping her hands as I spin. Instead I'm standing in a field of rotten food and withered grass.

But I have a choice: to do this without mom or not at all. I see Dad's choice and I want something different. I fill my own cupped palm with seed from both my mother's white envelope and my store-bought packet. The seeds fan out around me. They blend until I can't tell what is mine and what is my mother's.

The bachelor buttons are knee high and I can see a few closed buds encapsulated in ashy green. The bees and mosquitoes buzz around them, almost as impatient to see their blooms as I am.

This morning, I walk out with my garden gloves to see half the buds open. I walk back up the hill and put the gloves back on their hook.

I'm surprised to see Dad awake without the TV on. He's sitting staring at the black screen. He turns his head slightly in my direction as I open the fridge.

I make lemonade from the container because we don't have real lemons. Mom always drank iced tea but used to make real lemonade for me. I mix the powder and water in the largest glass I can find, a jade plastic cup. I grab an apple from the counter.

I get a sprig of mint from the small unkempt area lining the woods and sit along the short wooden edge of my garden. From here, I have a perfect view of the bachelor buttons, a wave of indigo swaying like an ocean.

Mom and I used to sit at the edge of the garden like this when the bachelor buttons bloomed. I caress the dirt stained wood beside me, reaching for the place mom should be.

I don't know how long I sit but it's long enough to slowly sip half my glass of watered-down lemonade. The bumble bees drift lazily by among the bright blossoms

of my zucchini and cucumber plants. I watch their fat bodies dive into the large blooms.

The sound of the bachelor buttons' woody stems brushing past one another is so familiar. I can't count how many times mom and I sat on this very ledge, dirt lining the rims of our drinks like salt on margaritas. The last time we sat together, side by side like this, was last year.

Her voice had been as quiet as the brushing bachelor buttons. She kept glancing over to them instead of looking at me when she talked. She wasn't wearing her wig or bandana and the morning sun illuminated the purple veins along her scalp.

"I promise, I'll be right here with you."

"I don't want to do this alone."

She pressed my head to her chest and her shaky breathing rattled in unison with the shaking of the woody bachelor button stems. "You don't have to be perfect. I don't want you to be."

I hear the crunching of gravel and my head snaps back at the unfamiliar sound. Dad is walking towards me, his head low. He's still in the clothes he fell asleep in yesterday, his hands tucked into the pockets of his sweatpants.

My chest starts to spasm. My first reaction is anger. I don't want him to ruin this safe moment, this place for just mom and me.

He stands a few feet away, his body hunched as if the force of gravity is stronger for him. He kicks at the grass and eventually asks, "Can I sit?". His voice is as airy as mom's was in the hospital.

I want to tell him no, but my head starts to nod, and he sits awkwardly with space between us. We both stare at the bachelor buttons.

I wipe my calloused hands down my jeans, waiting for him to say something. I want to scream at him. I want him to feel the abandonment I have felt from him for months. I want to tell him that mom would hate him if she could see him now.

I pass him my lemonade. He looks cautiously down at its contents, then takes the jade cup. He sits hunched over it, takes a large gulp and hands it back to me. I can see him holding the liquid in his mouth, swallowing it bit by bit.

"I did the garden this year," I finally say.

He nods and glances briefly behind him. "You did peppers."

"One green and one red."

"I like—"

"The green more," I finish. "Me too."

Our eyes meet for the briefest moment before his bloodshot gaze focuses

once again on the field in front of us. His eyes mist enough for me to see the reflection of indigo in them.

“Do you remember why she loved bachelor buttons?”

The Rodent Lovers

Dahlia Garofalo

WINONA PRIZE IN CREATIVE NONFICTION

You may find us at the pet store, loading carts with paper bedding, alfalfa, and yogurt drops. You may find us living in the apartment above you, smearing peanut butter and birdseed in live traps. You may even look over our shoulders at bus stops to see our phone backgrounds littered with pictures of mice, rats, and gerbils dressed in sock sweaters. We are the rodent lovers.

My first pet that was all my own was a gerbil. I was ten with my heart set on owning a hermit crab ever since Haley brought hers to show-and-tell one day. My parents conceded to the seemingly simple errand after church and we stopped at a small reptile shop in Onalaska.

As I pressed my nose against the glass of the hermit crab tank, my spirits dimmed. Somehow, the hermit crabs here, tucked tightly in their SpongeBob SquarePants themed shells, were less than exciting than I had expected.

I found myself wandering around the small shop, tapping on the aquariums of snakes, lizards, tarantulas, and iguanas. The reptiles and amphibians seemed lethargic in their small cages, blinking slowly as I passed.

It was then that I noticed the backroom, a cacophony of furry action within. I wandered back and was amazed at the small hairy creatures spinning on wheels, chasing each other's tails, drinking from upside-down bottles.

"These are our feeder gerbils," the associate explained. "Do you want to hold one?"

I nodded. I don't remember ever looking at the man, completely immersed with the energetic balls of spotted fur. He scooped one up affectionately and placed it in my cupped hands. "This one is my favorite."

The gerbil sniffed around my palms for a few seconds before scampering up my arms. I started with surprise, but it didn't deter the energetic ball from scampering up my chest. It finally rested upon my shoulder. From there it sat, polishing its little face contentedly. I named her Sunday after the day I brought her home.

The community of rodent lovers connects primarily online. Because we are spread out over large distances and because most of us are socially impaired, the internet provides our connection to one another. That is, we are diagnosed as socially

impaired because who in their right mind would want a rodent for a pet?

We have communities all over Reddit, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. We use these online communities to learn tricks, share pictures, and find support. In a world where rodents and rodent lovers are ostracized and dismissed as weird, these online communities allow for rodent lovers to be themselves. It can be difficult finding that same support in the real world because the majority of people are confused at the concept of a pet rodent at best and repulsed at worst.

I note about almost any species of rodent: They love cardboard boxes. Therefore, so do rodent lovers. You can never understand the horror of watching someone throw out a perfectly good cardboard box, especially Kleenex boxes which are the perfect size for nesting.

My second rodent was another gerbil named Minli. I collected boxes from every place I could find: home, school, even neighbors' recycling bins. I created a fine network of family and friends saving me an assortment of Minli's favorite boxes. My younger brother and I would stack them up randomly around the room. We stuffed a towel under the crack of the door so that Minli could roam and explore. Sometimes, we used flour paste to stick the boxes together. We created entire cities complete with mazes, bridges, and castles of cardboard.

Just as important as boxes are, so is nesting material. Rodents use nesting material to keep warm, for enjoyment, and to combat boredom. Rodent lovers know how important nesting material is to their pocket pets and go to great lengths to collect them. We become like crows, collecting in large bins colorful bits of yarn, fabric, and pillow filling. Our first thoughts when in a yarn store are concerned with how much our creatures would love that skein. Old t-shirts and pillow stuffing never touch the garbage can.

Rodent lovers can be obsessive creatures. To a degree, we adapt to the habits of our rodents' mannerisms, communication methods, and body language. Our rodents become an aspect of our identity much like you to your dog or cat. We adore their feet, their paws, their twitching noses, their small pink tongues. Even their soft tails become admirable.

One body part that I was especially obsessed with was my fur ball's feet. When holding my gerbils' paws, my gaze was often drawn to their small knuckles, like little monkey hands. I loved to feed them sunflower seeds. Like giving cigarette after cigarette to a chain smoker, I watched their fragile hands clasp the seeds excitedly. I remember the wonderful sensation of lying on my stomach reading while my third gerbil, Field, scampered over my back. I would press my ear to the floor just to

hear the scampering plops of her paws against the hardwood floors.

Rodent lovers continue to find beauty in even the body parts people tend to hate. People often tell me, “I just can’t stand their tails”. I was always confused by this. I have never heard people complain about other creatures’ tails, but it almost always became a topic of discussion when it came to my gerbils, mice, and rats. I theorize the fear of rodents’ body parts is in some way connected with the plague. People often interpret rodents’ tails, paws, and fur to be dirty even though less than 10 percent of rodent species pose any threat to humans or crops (Makundi 2009). Whatever the reason, rodent lovers will continue to admire every part of their fur-balls.

Tank-tops do not exist so long as rodent lovers are concerned. Bare shoulders and sharp translucent claws attempting to find traction are not a good mix. The best outfit is a warm sweater, preferably with as many pockets as possible for optimal hiding and exploring spaces. Given these requirements, any rodent can become a certified “pirate parrot”.

My first three mice I adopted sophomore year of high school were notorious “pirate parrots”. I allowed the associate to take her pick of whatever mice I got, being that they all were albino feeders. I let them sniff my fingers through the holes in the cardboard box the entire drive home.

I named them Minty, Pip, and Squeak but could never tell them apart. However, when anyone asked, I pointed out each one with certainty, not wanting to admit that I could no longer tell the difference. I used to walk around the house, carefully completing my tasks as I balanced three squirrely bodies on my shoulders. I felt like a pair of monkey bars, the mice hanging precariously off me like juveniles.

I kept my gerbil Ebony and the mice separate for a long time, afraid that Ebony would become aggressive. When I finally introduced them, it was love at first sight. Ebony picked up each one by the nape of their necks and gathered them within his Kleenex box nest. They ate together, drank together, and played together. They napped together throughout the day in a large mass of black and white like a scrambled yin and yang symbol.

Ebony was ever the protective father, constantly gathering his energetic children from precarious ledges and dangerous falls. When my last mouse died of old age, Ebony crawled into his Kleenex den and slept. I gathered his stiff body the next day and buried him beside the mice he loved so dearly.

The definitions of “pest” and “pet” are loose and based more on personal opinion, culture, and ignorance than any specific definitions (Berkowitz 2019).

Essentially, we have all been taught what is acceptable to love and what is acceptable to fear and hate. I tell these stories of my rodents with the hope of blurring these lines.

My three mice and Ebony were considered pests by many throughout their lives. I was given strange looks when I talked about them freely. After they died, I told the story of Ebony's broken heart. People told me it was a coincidence. They still shuddered in disgust as I relayed what for me was a symbol of pure and unconditional love.

Ebony and the mice's love for each other could have had a biological explanation. So could there be a logical explanation for Ebony's death. But the internet is filled with similar stories of rodent's affection for one another, written by rodent lovers like me who witnessed the compassion of small animals. People can be so quick to assume that rodents are dumb, beady-eyed creatures. They do not challenge these assumptions. But we rodent lovers know differently. We know the compassion and love that rodents express to us and to each other.

Rodent lovers also know that when they live around their fluff balls long enough, they start to eat like them. By the time I adopted my two rats, Llara and Sienna in college, I was a pro at rodent nutrition. I never bought them any kibble or blocks throughout the entirety of their lives. I had adapted so intensely to a rodent diet, that essentially everything I ate, my rats could also. I have many fond memories of sitting in my bed, a rat perched on each knee as we shared carrot hummus sandwiches.

People are often horrified to learn that I broke bread with my rats I suspect because they correlated domesticated rodents with wild rodents. Just as there are differences between feral cats and house cats, there are differences between wild rodents and pet rodents. Field mice, sewer rats, and tree leaping squirrels can carry diseases just like any wild animal. But pet rodents are domesticated and the chances of them carrying any disease is microscopic (Rose-Wood).

Every meal that I ate, I made sure to pull out one of the small rat dishes as well. Their tower of small bowls sat leaned against my own. It became such a common practice to grab one of each, I find myself still to this day reaching for that second bowl now and again. The rats enjoyed butternut squash soup, kale salads, cucumbers and dip, and cinnamon oats with apples. When I sat in bed munching on carrots, I often left the ends for the rats to nibble around. Near the end of their lives, the only things that they would eat were shelled frozen peas and small shavings of dark chocolate.

The wish of any rodent lover is to always have more pocket pets. If you were to type the term “crazy rat lady” into google, a number of t-shirts and other humorous attire would appear. Because rodents are mostly social creatures, the more the better. More rodents means more playmates, snuggle buddies, and fragile paws to admire. On top of it all, rodents are some of the cheapest pets to care for, making loving just one more ever more tempting.

From the first day I bought my rats, I knew I wanted more. The only bad thing about loving rats is that they don't live long. Feeder rats usually only live for two to three years. I had mine for a year and a half. When tumors began to plague their bodies, my thought process switched. I never wanted another rat again. Lara's mammary tumor grew to be a third of her body mass, completely enveloping her right paw. Sienna's brain tumor grew so large, it pressed against her eye sockets. Still, I struggled to put them down.

I kept praying that I would wake up and they would have passed in their sleep. Yet, every morning their pink noses emerged from their Kleenex box nest. The stress of those last few weeks engrained the idea that I would never own a rat again. I had become too attached to them and just like that, they were gone.

They were my first pair of rodents that I ever took to the vet. She took one look inside the cardboard box and shook her head. Rodent lovers are like any pet owner in this way. The confliction between keeping them here or pulling the cord is personal and difficult. It goes against every instinct to kill our best friends, our snuggle buddies, and our babies. Yes, rodents can be cheap to feed and house, but ultimately, there is a heavy price to loving them.

The hope of any rodent lover is to be understood. So often we are met with shame. With over 2,200 species, rodents make up 42 percent of the mammal population (Makundi 2009). With almost half of all mammals on the planet being rodents, one would think there would be less stigma for loving them.

Perhaps it is the sheer number that causes people to see rodents as pests. It's safe to say that most rodents on the planet are wild. Most of people's only interactions with rodents take the form of field mice scampering across their floors, chewing off the corners of their cereal boxes, and scampering through their walls. If this was a person's only interaction with the rodent world, it would make sense that they couldn't visualize rodents as pets.

But despite this rodent stereotype, 16 million small animals in the US are bought as pets each year (Pierce 2012). There are millions of people in the US alone who call their rodents pets. Yet, rodents and the people who love them continue to

be stereotyped, stigmatized, and alienated.

Yes, we have heard again and again your fears. *Rodents carry diseases. You could get sick. I can't stand their tails. They are gross. They can't love you like dogs can. I would never let my daughter bring home a rat. I'd like to feed it to my snakes. Sounds like you to bring rodents into the house.* Most common is the silent look of horror or a disgusted grunt and shiver.

You do not seek to understand. Why do you tell us these things about our pets? Is your goal to convert us into hating the very creatures we have loved enough to bring into our homes? Do you speak from fear and concern for us? Or are you only reacting in the way you have been taught to, without thought?

We don't understand your repulsion. To us, our rodents are precious pets, best friends, soul mates, and babies. It is no different from your connection to your dog or your cat. It would offend you if we shuddered in disgust when you showed us pictures of your dog. It would hurt you to your core to hear someone saying they would like to feed your cat to an alligator.

We are not asking for you to love rodents. There are dog people, there are cat people, and there are rodent people. But we ask that you treat us and the creatures we have chosen to love with the same respect of any pet and owner. We ask that you do not stereotype us, judge us, or make assumptions about our lifestyle. Instead, ask questions. Expand your own understanding. It is a good philosophy to question your reactions and thoughts, not just to rodents, but to everything in life.

There is something to be said about loving the unlovable, the misunderstood, and the feared. For the most part, the repulsion of certain species by humans is considered a highly socialized idea (Berkowitz 2019). Rodent lovers are able to look past the stigma and ask why we hate rats, mice, and gerbils. Why do we fear them? Why is it believed that they contain diseases? Why are they seen as less than dogs, cats, or even bunnies?

Humans love to create hierarchy. It is how we find value in ourselves because we are able to look down and say, at least I'm better than them. This hierarchy of people has created racism, sexism, homophobia, and many more injustices. But just as it is wrong to stereotype and classify people, it is wrong to do so to all living things.

A hierarchy of animals creates something problematic in our society. It creates a hierarchy of value and love. Rodent lovers have chosen to abandon this destructive hierarchy. We do not listen when you tell us that our rodents are pests. We do not listen when you tell us that rodents are less valuable and lovable. We do not listen to

your fragile hierarchy which has justified human and animal suffering for centuries. We have reached the enlightenment that not only are rodents deserving of love, but everyone is.

When we form online groups, we are not just learning the tricks of owning a rodent. We are forming community. We are creating a place where not only are our pocket pets accepted, but we are. These online communities give us a place to offer and receive the safety to be ourselves.

I remember that moment that Sunday first perched on my shoulder, her weight heavy despite her light footing. I was a weird ten-year-old kid that didn't understand what it was to be accepted. I was the kid that parents told their children in private they didn't need to be friends with. I confused attention with acceptance and fed into my own humiliation in order to feel what I thought was love.

As this soft weight bore into my shoulder, I felt complete. I felt the acceptance and love I had craved from my peers my entire life. This rodent that had been bred to be nothing more than snake food had chosen to face the world with me.

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Abbey Johnson is a graduating senior with majors in Literature and Language, and Applied and Professional Writing. Abbey joined Satori to gain more experience in editing and publishing. After graduation, she would like to begin her career as a professional writer.

POETRY COMMITTEE

Jena Archer is a junior majoring in English Literature and Language with a minor in Philosophy. In the future, she plans to pursue a career in teaching or tutoring. She also enjoys writing and hopes to continue this passion after graduation.

Megan Rebnord is a Writing, and Applied and Professional Writing double major. She also hopes to get her Masters in English. Megan joined Satori to gain editing experience, as she wants to work for a publishing company after graduation.

PROSE COMMITTEE

Madeline Peterson is a senior with an English Writing and Film Studies Double Major. During her time at Winona State, Madeline has had the opportunity to be the Film Studies Social Media Intern.

David M. Som is a third-year English writing major at WSU. He writes regularly for Book Riot, and he has been published in a number of small collections and websites. He looks forward to a future writing plays in upstate New York with his bachelor's degree and a cactus plant or two.

ART & DESIGN COMMITTEE

Kimberly Coffee Kimberly Coffee is a fourth-year student majoring in Applied and Professional Writing with a minor in Psychology. She is a non-traditional student, as she already holds a baccalaureate in Nursing and has worked as a Registered Nurse for fourteen years. When not working or studying, Kimberly likes to read, travel, and spend time with family.

Anjuli Harris is junior majoring in Applied and Professional Writing and minoring in Psychology. She joined Satori this year to learn more about the journal and to gain experience with publishing. She hopes to one day pursue a career that involves professional writing.

Janae Mann is a senior pre-law student graduating with a degree in Marketing and a minor in Creative Writing. She was interested in becoming involved with Satori to participate in recognizing and celebrating the diverse artistic and creative work from within the community of Winona State.

