



# FINE PRINT

Literary Magazine



The Literature and  
Arts Magazine of  
Elizabethtown College, 2023

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

This year's edition of Fine Print marks an important turning point for the magazine... the continuation.

At the beginning of the school year, I truly didn't know if I was going to be able to keep the magazine going. After three years of working on the magazine, I feared that Fine Print was finished. Only three of us were left on staff and the interest in the magazine had been decreasing for years; what were we supposed to do?

Then, a wonderful group of individuals joined our staff and my worried ceased. Many are writers or artists themselves, others are simply enthusiasts, but everyone came together to help make this year's publication possible. I am incredibly grateful for all your hard work this year. Thank you for your passion, your patience, and your flexibility throughout this process. To our advisors, Dr. Moore and Dr. Skillen, thank you for your continued support of our publication.

Our magazine this year features a variety of work from students across all years and majors. Without them, our efforts at continuing Fine Print would be futile. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your contributions to the magazine and thank you for continuing to craft and create beautiful works.

As Friedrich Nietzsche said, "The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude," so I thank you, our readers, and hope you enjoy our magazine.

Ingrid Peura  
Editor-In-Chief

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## Vying Silence

by Kira Koutsouftikis

Something is stuck in my throat  
If it isn't words unspoken  
It is just the silent stifling of my thoughts

How many letters must I weave together  
Before the words I am forced to spew breach my walls?  
A bliss less façade of tranquility, a tragic sorrow to be quiet

Explicitly complacent within your conversations  
Actions speak louder than words, but words control your actions  
Are we our actions or the thoughts behind them?

There is a limit on my words, a cap on my breath  
An understood disadvantage between us all  
Do you feel that silence will consume you too?

## Mirror

by Charlie Carberry

I'm with him so often that I'm alone.  
To stare at him is to stare at a mirror.  
I breathe in, he breathes out. Our lungs sum four,  
I hear my stomach growl, he asks to eat.

He'll dread his bad dreams I'll shake in my sleep.  
To weep from four eyes and wipe them askew,  
He'll hold me tightly and pull me nearer.  
He misses me as soon as I go home.

## Smell of Memories

by Christine Castellano

It was a Monday in mid-March, when I walked out of her house for the last time. The crisp salty air of the days leading up to spring stung my cheeks and began to dry the tears welled in my eyes. Carrying a cardboard box of my favorite trinkets that I knew I needed to remember her, I kept my head forward fearing if I looked back the tears would escape from their hiding place. The tan ceramic cookie jar covered in robin-egg blue flowers was my favorite. It was always overflowing with cookies for my sister and I each time we came to visit. Cigarettes smoked with friends from a different time, overpriced liquor sitting in its ornamental decanters, and the chilling mustiness of shells we collected on the beach together over the years, those were the smells of my grandmother's house. That smell lingered, even on the old piece of kitchenware, subtly blowing into my senses and bringing with it the sweet memories of childhood.

I stared down into my box as we drove the Garden State Parkway towards her care center, dreading the numbers on the small green mile markers nearing 36 where I would have to say my final goodbye. The glass milk bottle repurposed to display the shells we had collected together at Sunset Beach during the summer of '07, she kept it. The manila folder, stuffed with pictures of the relatives from weddings of days past and the ration cards that were her lifeline as a kid, she held onto them dearly. But she hadn't recognized any of these items in the box and she hadn't recognized me. Alziemer's had been robbing her brain of memories for three years.

Shore Gardens Hospice Care had been her new home, except this home was cold and reeked of stiff alcohol cleaners and the cadaver lab at school. When the car stopped, I brought in the box, my hands glued to it as if I could not process ever letting that part of my childhood go. My mother led the way, I followed like a lost duckling trying to keep sight of her mother's tail, until we reached the room. Grandma's frail chin lifted painfully slowly, first up then to the right, to allow her eyes to lock on the box. Her dusty blue eyes rolled towards me and I saw her take as deep of a breath as someone on the verge of death could muster. The dust blew off, and her eyes widened to resemble that of a child seeing the vastness of the ocean for the first time. Inhaling the sweetness of her life one final time, I knew my grandmother remembered.

# Tea Spiders

by Lauren Closs



Flick the wheel to make it spin

Left foot red, then

Right foot green, then

Left hand green, then

One person down, they take another with 'em now

Right hand red, then

You fall down, leaving them standing in victory,

Not because of talent but because of proximity,

When the spinner lands on a certain color they win the game, not

Because of talent or references that prove their skill, no they win

the game due to proximity to power and privilege, never

Generosity because they push others down and call it "life",

They stand there a victor: male, cisgender, and white.

# Twister

by Christine Castellano

# I Could Never

by Lucy Krug

You know those moments you never imagined would ever happen? Like working at a Christian summer camp for two years in a row. Or meeting a tall bespectacled man from your tiny college on the first day of your second year of pre-camp training. Or walking with him almost every night and weekend.

Or working with a questionably mature high schooler all summer who actually had some insight. Or sitting on the floor with your back against the wall in a dimly lit, musty room in the middle of the night as that younger coworker lists whom he considers to be eligible bachelors.

I'll give you a hint: most of the suggested potential pursuits were utterly laughable.

"Owen."

"Mmm. I could never." Too much like a brother.

"Chris." I looked over incredulously at Aidan as he messed with the elementary kids' toys and lounged about the rough, carpeted floor.

"Mmm. I could never."

"Job." No way. Our campers from last year already tried joining us in holy matrimony--trust me, fourth graders do not typ-

ically have a sense for personality dynamics, especially when they think someone is attractive.

"Mmm. I could never."

Aidan paused for a moment before conveniently playing with the building blocks more intensely as if he thought he was being inconspicuous. He was putting them together in ways no kindergartener would ever think to try. "Nate."

I was tired, and honestly, honesty seemed like the only answer. I mean, Nate and I had been spending a lot of time together. Almost every weekend included a long night hike and deep conversation. Of course Aidan would think something was going on. So, I cut the crap and handed him the silver platter.

"Uh. Not right now."

Aidan's head whipped around, and he sat up so fast I was afraid he might faint. The kid looked like I had just told him the moon had fallen from the sky. His eyes became five times larger than his eye sockets and literally almost popped out of his face. My own face was having a hard time deciding between being bemused or blushing. Apparently, I am more indecisive than I originally thought.

Almost as quickly as he had contorted his body to stare at me in shock, he composed himself and not-so-nonchalantly returned to his diamond-shaped, multi-

colored building blocks. He thought he was so slick. Poor kid. I could see right through his tricks. Unfortunately, I lacked the energy to avoid them, but hey, I needed someone to talk to about life, right?

He took the ball and ran with it, teasing me as younger siblings do, his voice dancing with suggestive romantic implications. "...that wasn't an 'Mmm. I could never.'"

No. It was not. I just told him something he thought he would have to continue to probe for until the end of the world. Aidan never believed I would admit to him that I would give anyone the time of day. I never believed this cocky, athletic, talented 16-year-old that I had nicknamed my little brother would be my matchmaker.

Don't worry. Aidan approved of my description. His pride can definitely survive being called out like that. Anyway, back to the story.

"I don't know him well enough."

Aidan continued prying, "Well, yeah, but it wasn't a no."

I shrugged. "There's nothing I can do about it at camp, and nothing I want to do about it right now. Dating at camp? No thanks. Not a good idea."

"But...Nate." He looked at me, eyebrows raised, a smirk lurking beneath his sparkling eyes.

I sighed. "Yes, Nate. I wouldn't be opposed to getting to know him better. Happy?"

"Yes." Aidan looked excessively gleeful. This was literally the epitome of Christmas in July for the kid. Frankly, he was a little too smug for my taste, so I changed the subject, and we kept talking.

And with that, we had unknowingly welcomed in the next day. Slowly, we peeled ourselves off the floor and ventured outside under the bright stars. The teenager did not even have his license, and he was already driving me crazy. Mmm, I could never have seen this coming.

Aidan went to bed that morning practically exuberant that his two best friends might have a chance at learning about the type of love he had already found. Anna was the love of his life, and sometimes it felt like they were already married by the way he talked about her. Seriously, I do not understand how he moved forward in the romance department so much earlier than me. I had a five-year head start, and yet he was the one telling me that one day I would find love just like him. Talk about a humbling experience.

Well, of course, this meant that Aidan felt entitled to play wingman... All joking aside, the kid won in the end. Nate and I are dating now. Spoiler alert.

## Acidulous Musings

by Blake Stolarik

It's been a long time since I've felt this way.  
My legs swing freely o'er the dun waves,  
floating in the breeze.  
The canvas of the bag itches my skin while I stroll  
through the rows of stands at the farmer's market.  
Lettuce, radishes, blackberries -  
I admire the bright pops of color adorning the tables.

I'll soon drop the tote at the end of the pier  
and bite into the tender fruit that spills out.  
The syrup will drip down my arm in sticky sweet streams  
Tangerine tears will pool on the book while I read;  
saccharine fingerprints will grace the aged paper.  
I'll leave them as a mark that I existed  
and a sign the book had been well-loved.

Maybe then I'll go for a swim.  
The weather has been quite agreeable-  
that ephemeral spot of warm before the jellies arrive.  
Or maybe I'll sit here a little longer  
And watch the sun dip low beyond the horizon,  
Illuminating the entire sky  
A pale, bruised purple.

Oh, but I know these feeling will soon drift away  
Like the orange peels in the tide.  
Maybe they'll lodge between the rocks somewhere  
Or settle on the bottom of the seabed.  
They'll exist for a while, I suppose,  
Until the salt tears them apart  
And they return to the iridescent fabric of the air.

# A Last Resort

by Sarah Colletti

The scratch of a pen against a prescription pad  
The look of shock when you reveal you've caved  
The small green pill taken every day at 9pm  
You slip into a peaceful sleep  
Eyes crack open against the harsh sun  
You stare into the mirror, looking for the change  
Your chest feels lighter  
It is easier to laugh at your friends jokes now  
You feel grounded, whole  
The roaring pit in your stomach has closed  
You listen to others who ridicule your reliance  
Who demean your decision  
But they are not the ones who felt empty  
They have not been huddled in their bed, scared to leave  
Your steps are lighter now  
And for the first time, you step into the sun and smile

## Thoughts From 2 AM

by Dani Hathaway

When people say there's kindness in my eyes,  
I want to bare my teeth to prove them wrong.  
I am a mask of hollow thoughts and prayers,  
Like Fundamentalists with guns at home.  
When people wish that others were like me,  
I bite back hard the urge to tell them "no:"  
If I were every human on this Earth,  
Then all the land would be a battlefield.  
Why do we mistake a quiet voice  
For quietness of mind? No, I won't comply,  
I'll cut my hair, I'll scream my silence loud  
To shatter all those mirrored selves they see.  
And yet, like grass in trenches of the past,  
My gentleness, my nature, will return,  
For I have never been a warrior,  
And thus my spirit drifts along the breeze...



# Change

by Meghan Williams



# The Reading of 'Violent Ends'

by Lauren Heidelbaugh

When I was in eighth grade, I was required to read a certain number of books for my honors English class. I was a slow reader, and I was concerned that I would not be able to meet this requirement. However, I gave it my best attempt by choosing to read books that interested me, as I tended to read these novels faster than ones that didn't initially spark curiosity. One of the books that I chose to read was "Violent Ends," which was a novel written by multiple authors pertaining to one story: a high school student brought a gun to school with every intention of inflicting harm on others. At the time of reading this story, violence in schools was not nearly as common as it is now, but it was growing increasingly more frequent. Still, I had not yet experienced the wave of terroristic threats, true violence, and fear that would soon come during my high school education, so I was oblivious to how the characters in the book truly felt as they endured this horrific event. Nonetheless, reading this story was still a memorable and moving experience that I would like to reflect on.

The majority of the time that I spent reading "Violent Ends" was in my English

classroom during our scheduled reading time. The classroom was always silent during this time, which allowed for better focus and for me to create clearer images in my mind as I pictured the scenes occurring before me. Although I already knew how the book would end, I was still on the edge of my seat while reading nearly each section, anticipating what would happen next. As the story unfolded and I got to know more about the main character, I constantly questioned why he ended up inflicting the violence he did and what could have driven him to be so cruel. I specifically remember reading a few sections of the story in which the main character interacted with some of his classmates and presented them with valid excuses for why they should not come to school the next day. He was careful not to allow his true intentions slip out into the conversation or into the minds of his classmates, and none of them had any suspicions. As I read these portions, I felt myself internally screaming at the characters, warning them what was about to come and to seek help for the man speaking to them. Nevertheless, the ending



of the story never changed.

As I read about the moments leading up to the terrible event that was about to occur, I remember my palms sweating and my stomach churning. I knew it was only a fictional story, but the concept was all too real. I imagined the faces of victims of school shootings that I had seen in the news and online as people shared their sorrow and empathy for those who knew and loved the late children. I also remembered all the conversations that my teachers were required to have with us, as middle school students, about our protocol in the instance that an event such as this one were to occur in our home town. We pretended as if we were prepared if this event was to ever happen, but in reality, no one can ever be prepared for something so horrific.

I was overwhelmed with emotion as I read the story and imagined it occurring in my school. As violence in schools was on the upward trend, I was forced to consider what actions I would take if I were ever in this situation. I remember pondering which teacher I would run to if there ever was an active shooter in the building and being thankful to have an ex-military member as one of my teachers, since I saw him as best fit to be able to protect students from a gun.

Reading this story and simply attending school in America only confirmed for me what I already knew to be a reality: there are horrible people in this world who do horrible things. Although I, thankfully, had never experienced what the children in the book were about to experience, I knew they and I were one of the same. I knew this because if they were real students, attending school in America, they would have been living with the same wariness and anxiety that each and every one of us carried every time we walked into school. Even if we were unaware of our fear, it was constantly there, lurking in the backs of our minds and making itself apparent every time there was an unexplained, quick, loud noise that echoed through the hallways.

Not only was I reminded of this reality while reading “Violent Ends,” but I also grew more empathetic for the families of children who had died in similar tragic events as well as the traumatized students and school staff who survived. This is still something that I carry with me every day, and I am reminded of how I felt while reading this story every time a new child’s face pops up on the news with the words “killed in school shooting” flashing below it.

||

by Lucy Krug

they said she was a problem  
pushed her away  
asked her to be more than she could be  
but didn't recognize the strength or beauty of who she was

they said she was a problem  
pretended like she meant nothing to the mission  
they had asked her to join

they claimed it all was for her  
but it was a cover  
she was worthless

he was angry

...

he says she is gorgeous  
doesn't push her away  
or ask her to be a goddess

she is better by being with him

he sees the strength and beauty she lost sight of  
he says she is priceless

don't let them steal your purpose  
he says have patience, my love  
time will achingly reveal  
life has meaning

The excitement of first love  
The warm feeling when it's there  
The empty hole when it's gone

A foreign world opened up  
Addicting while it lasts  
Horrorifying when it's gone

Deceitful in design  
Confused identities create young liars  
Morals and personalities yet to be molded in stone

Sitting in the arms of a stranger  
The moment of realization  
The weeks that follow

Beautiful in design  
Carefree and innocent  
Every possibility on the table

Time isn't a question  
Time is an opportunity  
Optimistic with endless outcomes

## Young Love

by Joey Wagner

Plan for the future  
For the best  
For the worst

Plans are built to be followed  
Plans are built to be changed  
Two pages forced into one

When the words don't mix  
The story ends  
And the grieving begins

Every possibility  
A new gravestone  
A new nightmare

Nights become sleepless  
People become shells  
Love becomes a lie

Foreign like before  
The question arises  
Will it return?

## Better Days

by Joey Wagner

I've heard  
Every contradiction there is  
I've heard  
God is alive and well  
Planning a bright future for me  
I've heard  
The gunshots on the news  
As people kill each other  
Over things that don't matter  
I've heard  
Happiness comes with age  
Age brings freedom  
And freedom brings life  
I've seen  
Depression  
Fear  
Anxiety  
I've heard  
That better days are coming

I've heard  
You love me  
I've heard  
You're mad at me  
I've heard  
Things aren't the same anymore  
I've hoped  
That better days are coming

I've heard  
The pain goes away  
Things just take time  
I've felt  
The hole in my chest  
Continue to grow  
With each passing day  
I've heard  
I'll become stronger from this  
It'll be better next time  
I've heard  
I'll get over it  
Things just take time  
I've waited  
For the better days coming

I've heard  
The world is in a bad place  
I've heard  
Love is complicated  
I've heard  
The pain goes away  
All these things I've heard  
Just words  
More true on mute  
I've heard  
That better days are coming

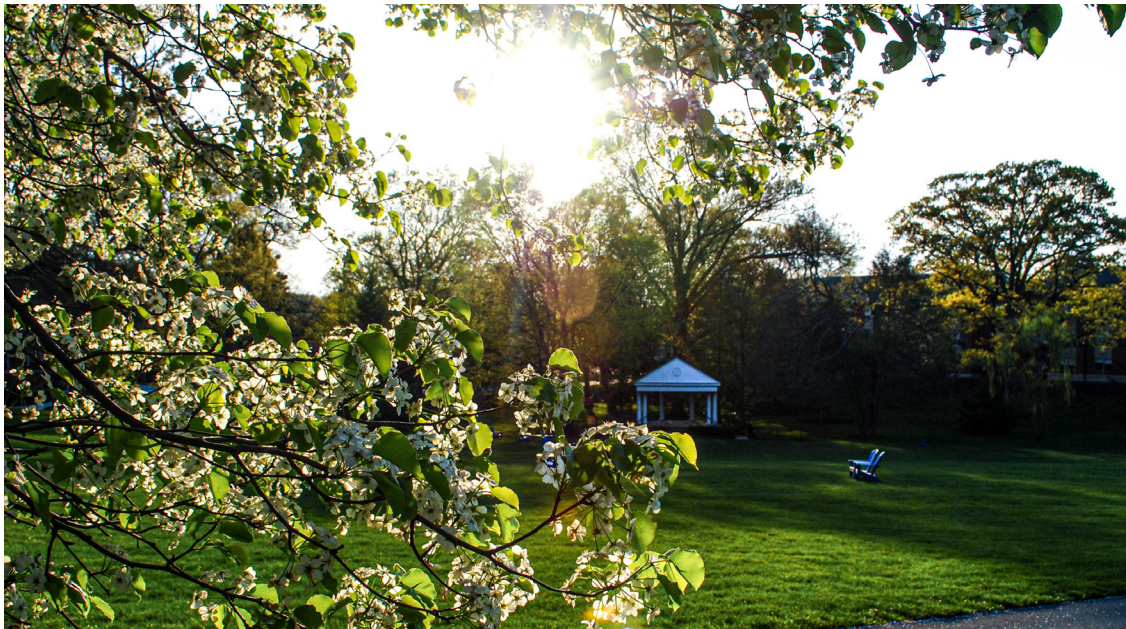
## Love Like Cicadas

by Natalie Meyer

you buzz in my brain like cicadas,  
sunk under mud for a decade  
or a day — minutes breed hours  
in the time you are away.  
your words, though quiet, swell  
& twist together, ringing  
an invisible cacophony  
in the void of my chest, my lungs,  
my barely beating heart.  
lilacs bloom around my ribcage,  
tended by the butterflies  
that appear when i can feel your touch,  
or bees that sting when you look away.

## The Dell in Spring

by Mason Podgers



i think of nothing else  
as i wait for sleep to heal the wounds  
of my day to day existence.  
i sit in shadow & dream of you  
shining in the starlight.  
i met you as the seasons changed.  
i met you as i molted,  
tearing older flesh to shreds  
& unraveling my aspirations,  
spilling them atop your lap  
& leaving just a husk at home  
so i could fly on my translucent wings  
into trees & happy places.  
you helped me find that freedom  
from a world that felt too small.  
  
we are new, but still alive.

## On Babies

by Madaline Shaffer

The U.N. estimates that there are nearly 385,000 babies born every day around the world. That adds up to almost 140 million babies born each year. Whether they're born in a hospital, at home, in the bathtub, on an airplane, in the back of an ambulance, in a Starbucks café, at the mall, in the passenger seat, in a field, or even on top of the Eiffel Tower, one fact remains true: all healthy babies come out screaming and crying. In utero, babies breathe through the placenta and the air sacs in their lungs are filled with amniotic fluid. During birth, the vaginal canal acts like a mop wringer, squeezing the fluid from the lungs until the air sacs are empty and ready to be filled with the magical combination of O<sub>2</sub> and other chemicals that make up the air we breathe. When their little faces finally enter the cold of the world, they scrunch up their noses, open their mouths, collect their first independent gulp of air, and let out a screaming cry.

It is a triumph. A scream of victory. They have spent nine months growing inside the womb, transforming from a minor blip the size of a poppy seed to an actual, full-blown, slightly alien-looking human. It is a cry of anger. A sad, confused wail as the warmth of their mother is ripped away. They have no practice, only

pure animalistic instinct that spurs them on to expand their lungs with air. The life-sustaining fluid turns into life-endangering fluid, and their body immediately begins expelling it in the only manner it knows, screaming until the lungs are clear. If a baby cannot cry on its own, quick intervention is needed. Doctors will often stimulate the baby to cry by suctioning fluid from the mouth or nose. The longer the baby goes without crying, the greater the mortality risk. A lack of crying is fatal to the newborn.

Years after birth, the act of crying is looked down upon by former babies. They have co-opted the word “baby,” deviating from the traditional definition of a young, recently born human. A baby is one who is timid, weak, or sensitive and often cries. This is shocking, as previously stated above, it is scientifically proven that crying is healthy and conducive with life! Crying is much more than a pastime for the meek and mild. It is a desperately vital human activity. Crying is the difference between life and death.

We all cry when we are born. There is a hidden joy in being sensitive. In being weak. In being a baby. This joy is love. Love. Love that fills you up so fully you have no idea what to do with it all. It coats every corner of your being, every crevice of your insides, bubbles in your heart,



flows through your blood, and gurgles desperately in your stomach. It must eventually find release, so it erupts from your eyes, nose, and throat, a geyser of intensity showing itself in tears, snot, and sounds. A wail of unabashed grief at your grandmother's funeral. A wet laugh and slow tears that come while walking to your car at graduation. A single hot teardrop and the heaving breaths that come during a fight with your dad. A guttural sob of confusion when life does not make sense and you have no idea where you are going next. A choked vow and the cascade of happiness from your eyes as you marry your childhood sweetheart.

Live a life full of tears. Be sweet and sensitive. Take up space with the softness of your heart. Continue being nostalgic and welcome the tears that come with feeling so deeply. When you read a long-forgotten fairy-tale, smell your mom's perfume in a strange city, find an old photograph of your childhood dog, or hear your grandpa's favorite hymn, welcome it. You are a keeper of love. The world will try to toughen you up. You will be called a baby. But I urge you to resist and recognize that to live so wholly is not for the faint of heart. Pediatrician Dr. Ana Machado says that crying is the key to life. Your softness is a gift. You are privileged to cry like a baby and feel so indiscriminately.

## (He)art

by Ellie Barley

People think art is a gift.  
An innate talent bestowed  
To a select few.  
But the artist knows  
Art is painful suffering.  
How to convey an image  
In one's mind into life  
Can't be done with only  
Talent. The artist knows  
It's not in the paints or  
The charcoal or the ink  
Or the pastels or even  
The canvas.  
Art is made in the  
Heart. It is the deep  
Raw emotion translated  
In every movement to  
Create their work.  
Something talent could  
Never do.

## Ocean Breeze

by Meghan Williams



## Tomorrow

by Lucy Krug

Tomorrow, you can start over.  
Tomorrow, it will be okay.  
Tomorrow, you can try again  
And find another way.

Tomorrow will be different—  
Just hold on and see.  
Tomorrow can be better.  
Tomorrow is a plea.

Tomorrow, you can start over.  
Tomorrow, it will be okay.  
The only thing about Tomorrow  
Is that you must survive today.

# That Vicious Cycle

by Charlie Carberry

A father to his daughter has gave  
The great darkness with which he used to reign,  
And then her child within her womb-cave,  
Bore the circular, inherited pain.

And so his birth of that immortal womb,  
Half his mother's flesh, half his father's bone,  
His own kinds both are doomed to be entombed,  
Subjected to the fury all his own.

To a woman of water he was wed,  
And brought the flames of hell to ocean's depths,  
With that vicious cycle he did then spread  
The great strife he placed on his mother's steps.

The Gods and men and the immortals  
Debate his fate that they themselves imposed,  
In wait for his actions of war to spill,  
To say if, indeed, hate is predisposed.

## The End

by Zoe Scheerer

You told me once that you wouldn't hurt me  
What a beautiful lie that I believed

I became afraid when you said those words  
I knew the hurt I was running towards

However, I just kept on running  
Ignoring the pain that was inevitably coming

My happiness as endless as the sea  
Only to end with me feeling shitty

I should've known better than to get attached  
But I guess I should've known we weren't a match

# The Roadside Memorial

by Natalie Meyer

It was the perfect night for an evening drive. The air was cool enough to leave the windows down, but the wind still lacked the bite of winter. The sun hung low, spilling blood over the horizon as the trees swallowed it up in the distance. There were a few streaky clouds, and as the sky slowly darkened, they glittered a soft gray-blue on the black night.

Dale sat in silence as his tires rumbled gently on the pavement. He crested a hill, rounded a bend on the highway. It had been some time since he had come down this road, and it was familiar, but that didn't stop him from checking a map every few minutes, just to be sure. The trees lining the road loomed threateningly in the corners of his vision. To comfort himself, he reached over to the passenger seat, and for a moment, he expected his wife to grasp his hand, to run her thumb along the backs of his knuckles as they stared out the windshield watching the stars slowly appear. But when nothing happened, he turned his head to gaze at the empty seat, and the seatbelt hanging loose by the window. A few salty tears burned behind his eyes, and he looked away.

He gripped the steering wheel harder. His fingertips turned white as he pressed on the gas, feeling the old car lurch as it

shifted gears. He hadn't had it for long, and was still getting used to its feel.

He let himself drive for a while, meeting few other cars. The clock on the dashboard read something like three o'clock, but he hadn't changed it after he bought it, with the battery long since dead, so there was no real telling how late it had gotten. His headlights cut into the buttery darkness.

The guardrails appeared and fell away as the ground beside the highway dipped and rose. If only a ditch had been left clear, he could turn the steering wheel and... He shook his head to clear his thoughts, but the loneliness had burrowed deep into his mind.

It was around this time he began to get awfully drowsy, the hypnotic nature of the road mixing with his recent lack of sleep. His foot eased off the gas, and as he did, he picked up the sound of a man shouting off to his right. He snapped awake and looked over, where a motorcyclist, his bike in a ditch and his helmet under his arm, was waving frantically. He straightened to press the gas again, but he didn't want the man to get run over trying to find a ride, so Dale hit the brake instead, sliding to a stop a few feet past where he stood.

He looked relieved, and jogged up to the window. "Hey. Any chance you could take me up to Oakford? My bike's



busted—” he gestured behind him, “and my girlfriend’s outta town.”

The man didn’t seem threatening, just tired and maybe tipsy, so Dale nodded.

“Oh, great. Thanks. Thanks so much. Lemme get my bike.” He tossed his helmet onto the seat, then hurried back and started wheeling his motorcycle toward the car.

For a second, Dale thought about diving off without him, but he set the car into park to wait.

He opened the hatch and grunted, trying to lift his bike into the trunk. It took him a few minutes, but Dale heard a thump and puffing as the man came back around to the passenger seat. “Thanks again,” he said, sliding in with a squeak of leather.

Dale nodded again, shifting into drive and easing his foot onto the accelerator.

“I’m Justin,” he said.

“Dale.” There was a pause.

“So, ah, where were you headed so late?” he asked.

“I’m doing something for my wife.”

Justin shifted. “Ah, okay. Well, if you were wondering, I was on my way back from the bar. Met up with some old college

friends, see, and...” He noticed the way Dale stiffened, and stopped himself. “Oh! I wasn’t doing any drinking myself. Or, well, maybe a little. I was being careful, I swear, but then this damned deer jumped out and ran me off the road! Can you believe it! Don’t those things ever go to sleep?”

Dale glanced at him from the corner of his eye. “Hm.”

“If my girlfriend was home, she’d be hysterical. She’s always worried about where I am. ‘Be home by twelve,’ or, worse, ‘Be home by ten.’ Ah, where’s the fun in that? If she knew I crashed my bike, I can’t even tell you.” He shook his head.

Dale turned toward him for the first time since he’d gotten into the car. He had dark hair and eyes, with the glimmer of youth still in them. “That means she loves you,” he said. “Cherish that.” He dug his bitten nails into the palms of his hands.

“She’s a nag,” he said bitterly.

“You’re unappreciative.”

“Hey, I didn’t ask for help just for you to criticize me. Take me home, or let me out and I’ll find somebody else.”

“Would you like me to?”

Justin huffed and looked out the window. The trees blended into a shadowy mass. They rode in silence for a while, neither willing to talk, until Justin looked

down at the floor.

“What’s this?” He rustled a plastic bag resting beside him, and started to open it.

“That doesn’t concern you,” snapped Dale, and Justin pulled his hand away.

“What’s your problem, dude?” He leaned back and folded his arms across his chest. “Doesn’t matter. I’ve had too good of a night to let you ruin it for me.” He closed his eyes and smiled, remembering something.

Dale said nothing, watching the road. A pair of headlights appeared on the horizon. He continued forward cautiously, and as the two vehicles made their way towards one another, Dale began to sweat. It was a sleek black pickup, with big tires and pinstriping around the sides. He couldn’t swear he’d ever seen that model before, but it instilled in him flashes of memories, images he’d tried so hard to forget. Shattered glass, blood. Shouting. Brakes squealing, police lights, smoke, a stretcher. The smashed front end of his rusty old car. Without thinking, he jerked the steering wheel to the right, as if to dodge the truck, then immediately straightened to stay on the road.

Justin was tossed to the side, and the plastic bag slid into his legs, leaving a bruise as something solid bumped his ankle. “What the hell, man!” He grabbed the dashboard to keep himself upright.

He pulled himself back up and gathered his bearings. “You could’ve given me whiplash.”

Dale grimaced and stayed silent.

“You’re gonna get us both killed,” Justin muttered.

“What was that?”

“Nothing.”

Dale decided it wasn’t worth pursuing. He relaxed all the muscles he had tensed after seeing the truck, and let out a breath.

Silence settled over the two men again. Only the steady hum of the engine filled the air, until Justin asked, “So, where are you from?”

“East Riverside.”

“Oh, wow, that’s kind of far.”

Dale shrugged.

“My girlfriend’s from around there. Do you know Highland Avenue?”

“No.”

“Oh, alright. Well, that’s where her parents live. Very nice people. Sometimes I wonder how they ended up with her as a daughter. I mean, I love her, but...I don’t know, sometimes I think I need a little extra, you know? She’s kind of, how do I put it, she’s kind of bland, and some days

I feel a little more adventurous, and she's never up for it."

"Break up with her."

"I'm sorry?"

"If you're not happy with the relationship, leave. You'll be doing both of you a favor."

He leaned forward. "Hey, that's not... well, I don't know. See, I had this friend in college, a real pretty girl, but she had a boyfriend. All four years, anytime we'd go anywhere, he'd be there too. He's a decent guy, but when I tell you I woulda done anything to get her away from him... Anyway, I saw her tonight. First time in a while, and we started talking, you know how it goes. Well, turns out they broke up. She asked if I was seein' anybody, and I said no, and we ended up hooking up." The smile was creeping back onto his face by the end of his story.

"And you're proud of that?" Dale said, slowly.

"Well, I guess not exactly, but after six years it's nice to finally pull the girl I wanted from the start. Might see her again soon, too."

Dale shook his head. Anger set his blood to a simmer, but he was able to keep from saying what he wanted to. "I don't understand."

"You wouldn't," said Justin, settling back into the seat.

"You talk to your father that way?"

"Ha." He touched the button to roll up his window an inch. "You have any kids?"

"No," said Dale quietly. "But not for lack of trying."

More silence.

After a few minutes, Dale began counting the mile markers under his breath. "Point one, point two, point three..."

"What are you doing?" asked Justin.

"Looking."

"What for?"

"Point six. Here." Dale eased his foot off the accelerator and pumped the brakes. He guided the car to the shoulder and set it into park. It reset just past the sign, the empty stretch of pavement to the left and a wall of tangled brush to the right.

He opened the door and slid out of the car. "Would you hand me that?" He gestured to the bag.

Justin complied, reaching out the window. It was heavier than he was expecting.

Dale took it and went over to the

grassy line between the trees and the road as Justin watched with narrowed eyes.

Dale knelt down and untied the knot keeping the bag shut. One at a time, he removed two short lengths of wood with streaky white paint, a hammer, a box of nails, a framed photo, a bouquet of synthetic lilies, and a Sharpie.

He laid out the wood in the shape of a cross, placed a nail in the center, and hammered it down with more force than was necessary. It bent sideways, but the pieces held. He stood it up, kicked some blotchy red leaves aside and made a small indent in the dirt with the heel of his boot. Using the hammer to drive the cross into the ground, he wrote "Sarah" on the horizontal piece and nestled the photo against the base of the cross.

The photo was a portrait of a woman, her black hair pinned back and her eyes eternally smiling. She was beautiful, even in her age, and she wore a red dress that folded over her shoulders like the crow's feet resting just above her cheekbones.

Justin watched as Dale continued, placing the lilies around the base of the cross, planting them like real flowers, pulling some from the stems and nailing them to the wood. It was imperfect, as life often is, and when he decided he was finished, he stood silently with his head bowed.

Justin opened the car door. The seal popped as he pulled the latch, echoing into the night, and he stepped out into the clear air and the quiet. He stood for a moment, regarding the man he had only known for an hour. His eyes were closed, and Justin saw no tears, but a deep sorrow was etched into the lines of his face. He stepped forward and cleared his throat. "I'm sorry for your loss." The breeze was heavy, and the darkness weighed on his voice.

Dale straightened, and slowly turned to face Justin. "I am lucky to have had her," he said, the tremble in his voice betraying his composure. "She was an incredible woman." He sighed. "My life is so empty now."

Justin took another step forward, and as he did, the shadow lifted from Dale's eyes. In them, he saw himself, and his girlfriend, and the young woman he had been with that night. He knew that when his girlfriend came home the next day, he wouldn't be able to look at her the same. He knew that even if it was her face plastered onto a white cross, all he would see was the other woman. The thought sickened him, and he realized that he was the one deserving of Dale's life, standing there utterly alone.

"Dale," he said, turning to stare up the stretch of highway, "I think I'm going to tell my girlfriend what I did."



# The Road Less Traveled

by Ezekiel Ciafre



# Changing Education Paradigms

by Ingrid Peura

Perceptions of the necessity of education have changed quite a bit in recent years. While a career requiring a college degree is what is most strongly encouraged in schools, there is an increase in a push towards vocational careers. More and more schools are partnering with trade schools, associate degree programs, small businesses, etc., to provide students with career opportunities that they can jump right into after completing high school. Education is described as having been “designed and conceived and structured for a different age,” and in a lot of ways, that is true. The expectations of students no longer match up with their abilities. Education used to be a luxury that only the wealthy could afford, and in a lot of ways, quality education is still a luxury not afforded to everyone.

Students are being overmedicated for ADHD and are being punished for their distractibility that results from the disorder. A lot of the blame is placed on technology, video games, etc., when the reality is that children are allowed to get distracted— they’re kids. This talk

discusses the importance of keeping the arts in education to help stimulate students and keep their attention. The arts provide an “aesthetic experience” for students. When they are medicated, it is believed by some that children are being shut off from those sorts of experiences.

By encouraging schools to maintain and expand their arts and performance groups and curriculums, students will be offered more opportunities to explore and pursue things that they are truly passionate about and interested in. Allowing students opportunities to engage in dynamic thinking through creation and performance can help combat the rising number of students struggling academically due to inattention and hyperactivity. This will allow students to have an outlet and a passion that will help balance out their academic interests with their extracurricular engagement.



# Sunflower Seeds

by Madaline Shaffer

Our pants were never dirty, except for the one time Cheyenne tripped over her own feet and fell face first into the gravel so hard her nose bled through the stack of McDonald's napkins her mom kept in the glove box. The other marks came out just fine in the wash, but there was a faint, kidney-shaped stain on her thigh for the rest of the season. We didn't want to be there, but we carried our bat bags dutifully to the chain-link fence and watched our parents find uncomfortable seats on the rickety wooden bleachers to watch us warm the bench. Coach would push us to the outskirts of the team huddle and talked about strategies we might have cared about if he ever cared about us. Five of us marched to the dugout in our bright white pants and sat for what felt like hours while the rest of the girls adjusted their visors and ponytail elastics, making clouds of dust rounding the bases, and grinding red dirt into their polyester-covered calves as they slid home and the ump screamed "Safe!" We watched with boredom, sometimes admiration, but mostly jealousy, and wondered what it felt like to be pretty as fistfuls of sunflower seeds found their way into our mouths.

"I just got my ears pierced. They'll grow shut." Coach made his star pitcher take out her diamond studs and stuck them in his pocket before giving the pot-bellied umpire a thumbs up. We never saw him return them. Our sport was eating sunflower seeds. We would trade flavors like spicy buffalo and tangy dill then try to spit the soft shells through the holes in the fence until the bookkeeper tattled and we got another lecture on "team spirit" and keeping our heads in the game we wanted no part of. The neon green balls would whiz in sloppy arcs from the outfield to the pitcher's mound and we sang encouraging cheers as Coach begrudgingly sent us up to bat because he had to let us participate. Our stomachs would bloat from the salt, and we approached the plate nervously, swinging wildly at low balls and clipping a foul into the gaggle of parents sat in camping chairs if we were lucky. If the pitcher had a tired arm, we might walk to first base then get out at second when our unathletic legs went up against the quick, strong arms of girls who wanted to play softball, not eat sunflower seeds. Their hair was always straight and blonde, the baby fat was already melted from their faces, and none of them put in \$25 fake turquoise studs from Claire's after the game was over. When the final out was called, we would

form a long line and give high fives to the other team, "good game, good game, good game" blending into one long, mangled word before we returned to our bags and put our unused gloves back into the front pocket beside our half-filled bags of sunflower seeds.

No matter the outcome of the game, winning was not in ice cream cones eaten under yellow lights with moths and flies trapped behind the glass panels. Not murmured praise about pep and being such an encouragement to the girls on the manicured field. Not a too-hard clap on the shoulder. Our parents would force smiles as they said goodbye, then would yell in the car about our failings of the evening. Or about the coach. (No one liked him, not even his daughter.) Or even about how they were paying ungodly amounts of money to watch us sit on the bench. We didn't meet their eyes in the rearview mirror, but we would spitefully wipe our cleats on the cloth floor mat and grind in the dirt and sunflower seed shells into the fabric. Our parents spent a lot of quarters on the car wash vacuum that summer. That was winning.

# Book Titles

by Lucy Krug

No Longer Living as Gentiles,  
I consider All Things Vain—  
everything that was There Before Us.  
Crossing Horizons of pain  
To Be at Home, Waiting for the Call,  
waiting for the Room to Fly.  
The Faith Once Given was one  
that let us lament and cry.  
The Unity We Have  
And the Unity We Seek:  
To be Together Bound  
with the God of the meek.  
I'm learning that you are  
The Same Kind of Different as Me,  
learning that I'm not  
the only one who can see  
that even Ordinary Time  
cannot be changed by chasing vanity.

# The Lovers of Valdaro

by Blake Stolarik



# Undiagnosed Disabilities: How Self-Advocation is Imperative

by Bri Hastings

There I was, zoning out, staring at a map of the world in my sophomore year world history class, listening to the drone of my teacher talk about Mesopotamia, when suddenly...

**POP!**

That noise, following me all day, once again managed to sneak its way into my life. What was it??? As I tried to find the source of the noise...

**POP!**

What *WAS* that????

**POP!**

I began to get annoyed; this noise drove me insane. “Ms. Hastings, if you don’t stop making noise, I’m going to have to send you to the office” my teacher rasped at me without turning from his computer.

ME? Making noise??? “Sir, that wasn’t-”

**POP!**

What the *heck*??? That was me??? Then I felt the urge. My lips, pushing

themselves together and pursing as I forced them out, created a popping noise. The urge went away, like a scratch. It was such a relief, like the feeling of finally sneezing. I couldn’t help it, I *had* to do it. *What was wrong with me?*

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2022) states that only 0.3% of children, ages 3 to 17, in the United States receive an official diagnosis of Tourette’s Syndrome (TS). They also state “that about half of children with TS may not be diagnosed” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). As one of the least diagnosed disabilities to date, Tourette’s isn’t talked about enough in our school systems, so it tends to be difficult to differentiate when a child is just hyper, seeking attention, or needing help. Additionally, school children, especially in our society, jump on and make fun of the smallest of differences their peers show. Cyber bullying, as of 2019, is at a high of 15.7% and was at 14.8% in just 2013 (U.S. high school cyber bullying rate, 2022). I’ve had tics for as long as I can remember, but I never knew that it was caused by something out of my control. I thought



of them as a sneeze, or a chill down my spine. I thought everyone experienced them. Looking back now, I can see why I'd get made fun of for being "weird". It doesn't excuse the actions of others, but it most definitely explains my condition.

After finding out that the source of noise and chaos in my usually peaceful classrooms belonged to me, I immediately went home and started my google search. "Random uncontrollable movements," I first searched. Then, "the difference between demon possession and being weird." And finally, "why do I do things I don't want to do?" Obviously, my searches came up fruitless, and I ended up even more confused than when I started.

One day, 3 months after I noticed the movements, I was sitting in the living room with my twin. She was watching a Twitch Stream from a streamer named "Sweet Anita" while I was reading a book. Sweet Anita has Tourette's and has struggled with it for many years. Even though I was immersed in my book, I did hear Anita mention something about not being able to control what she said or did due to things called tics, the main symptom of her disability.

Well, that piqued my attention. As I listened harder, the things she described

sounded all too familiar with the struggles that I had been battling for months. With a quick google search, and the knowledge that the term was spelled "tic" and not "tick," I found what seemed to be the answer to what I had been searching for.



A year later, my mother, with a constant sour expression on her face, laid out in her recliner as she mindlessly scrolled on her phone. Her hair, graying and chasing back her natural brown color, pulled back in a tight ponytail. Her stout, yet narrow face looked up from her phone making her brown eyes hold contact with mine. "Brianna, I need you to not be overdramatic right now. I'm exhausted and I just want to rest," my mother replied, dead panning towards me.

"I'm not being overdramatic; I know you need rest! But I need to get checked out! I need you to trust me, just once!" I begged. I could feel the burn of tears welling behind my eyes. This conversation would end just like the rest did.

My mother sighed once more. "No, Brianna, you're just seeking attention. You're always either seeking attention or--"

"NO!" I a tic sounded, cutting her off. I had a name for it now, an idea to why

I differed from my peers. I just needed medical professionals to agree with me. My mother's eyes dug daggers into my skin, surely screaming would soon follow.

However, before my mom could speak, "Mary, maybe we should get her checked out," my usually silent father replied.

My mother let out a sigh. "Fine. I'll take you, but once they prove you wrong, I want to hear no more of these 'tics' you talk about!" Finally! Thanks to my father's voice of reason, I was going to get fixed. That's what I wanted, of course, to be fixed. Right? Perfection is what I've always strived for, wasn't it?

Medical neglect is one of the many subcategories of neglect. In 2020, neglect was the highest type of child abuse, with 470,297 reported cases (Number of cases of child abuse in the United States, 2022). Child Abuse Review states that one of the reasons a child may experience medical neglect is due to a parental figure's lack of awareness and knowledge. This is defined as a caregiver not being "aware of the signs or symptoms in their children" (2021). This could explain why it took my family 16 years to notice that there was something wrong with me. As the youngest of seven, and in any large family,

there is always a fight for attention. Many assumed that my tics were just a portrayal of a need for attention. However, my self-advocacy began to be put into play when we finally noticed something was wrong. Even though it was obvious, no one wanted to listen to my cries for help.



On Wednesday, January 27th, 2021, six months after the initial call, my mother and I sat at her desk and waited for the neurologist to start the zoom call. I had just turned 17 the day before, and my mother and I were wearing masks, as our household was exposed to covid. During the exam, the neurologist asked me a ton of questions.

"How long have you had the tics?"

My mother, trying to speak for me, replied "she's had them for about a year and a half."

The doctor continued his questioning. "Okay, and what do they consist of when you do tic?"

Once again, my mother spoke up, cutting me off. "Well, they consist of--"

"Ma'am, I appreciate your input, but please let your daughter speak. I am examining her, not you," the neurologist

cut in, allowing me a gateway to speak.

My mother huffed and leaned out of view of the camera as I carefully explained my symptoms; the popping, the screaming, the hitting -- all of it.

After more questions about other disorders, we sat through a few silent moments of scribbling notes and a quick physical exam. The doctor then looked up from his notes and confidently started to speak. “Yes, so what we typically suggest for cases of Tourette’s Syndrome like yours...” the doctor’s voice started to drown out. I didn’t hear a thing he said: I had gotten it! The one thing I was searching for! My diagnosis, finally within my grasp, made everything feel alright for just a moment. It had to get easier from there!

We finished the appointment, left the call, and shut the laptop. “I can’t believe you; you are so selfish to do this. Couldn’t I have had one normal child?” My mom almost immediately started berating me. “I can’t believe you went through with this. I thought you were faking, and I still do think you’re faking. Go back to your room, I’m done with you.” I left for my room, and she didn’t speak to me for the rest of the day. I had already felt alone, isolated, and now like a horrible daughter.

Maybe I was selfish?

Self-advocacy travels much farther than the diagnosis. Even after the doctors agree with you, people you thought were close to you and loved you won’t. You’ll notice that some people in your life will make it their mission to drag you down. You’ll feel like you’re faking it, like you’re an imposter. But you’re not.

What you’re going through is completely valid, and you have every right to fight for yourself. Whether it’s a friend, a colleague, another doctor, or even your own mother, you need to advocate for yourself because no one else will do it for you. It’s difficult: I won’t say that it’s easy, because it’s not. You will spend nights crying sometimes. You’ll lose friends, family, and people you are close to. But nothing is more important than making sure you’re getting the treatments and accommodations you need.

People will describe you as selfish. They’ll take their own emotions and try to guilt you into not getting help. But it’s okay to be selfish sometimes. The Oxford English Dictionary defines selflessness as “the quality or condition of not having or expressing a sense of self” (Selflessness, n.d.). A sense of self is not considered when one is dealing with issues involving

well-being. You are not selfish for self-advocating. If anything, it takes a selfless person to self-advocate because then you can help others in their self-advocacy journey.

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I felt hot tears run down my skin. Curled into a blanket on the floor, I sobbed. I felt like such a fake. In these small quiet moments, tics rarely happened. Yet they still happened. These few moments of silence were usually filled with tears, like hot magma burning against my skin. How do you live knowing you have a disability if in your moments alone it rarely occurs? My thoughts were racing. Thoughts of my family and the people I used to call friends telling me “You’re faking it.” Thoughts of: “Who do you think you are? Talking to me like that? I know you’re faking it and there’s no way you can convince me.” They were so loud. “Of course you’re crying now, why wouldn’t you be. Tears mean lies.” Tears mean lies, but this time I was lying to myself.

Self-doubt is one of the hardest things to overcome when you try to advocate for yourself. The entire world is against you, so what do you do when the fight is in your own mind? You end up learning

to show yourself that, even when you doubt yourself, you need to lean into your conscious knowledge. You learn to live and think intentionally, as the automatic responses that your brain creates are what causes your doubt. Self-doubt is detrimental to self-advocacy because doubt is what creates giving up. Trust yourself, it’s worth it in the end.

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I’m still learning about the process of advocating for myself, but once I understood that it was never too late to learn, it’s only gotten easier from there. Yes, because I didn’t know about my disability until later in life, there are still things that I’m in the process of learning. But now, I have the freedom to live in ways I never had before. I no longer have to apologize for being myself because I fought hard to become who I am. Since I began to advocate for myself, life has become brighter. It’s not simple: life still has its ups and downs. However, the understanding that you can do anything if you just keep fighting? That’s what makes self-advocacy worthwhile!

Citations for this piece can be found in the appendix at the end of the magazine.



# Branch Pond, Vermont

by Ezekiel Ciafre



# Petals

by Joey Wagner

You walk through the rain in a quiet suburban neighborhood. It's late at night and hardly any cars are on the road. You try to focus your mind on walking, but your thoughts wander a little more with each step. You know your destination, but you question how you'll ever get there. Physically it's not far, but mentally it's a thousand miles away. The moon is outshined by the streetlights that line the road. It's visible through one of the few breaks in the clouds. You look down to see your reflection in a puddle that you pass by. You have a hoodie on, but you can't be bothered to pull the hood up. The water soaks your hair and rain mixes with your tears. Your hair is flat and unlike the way you brushed it this morning. It looks terrible, but you keep walking. Each step gets harder and harder until it feels like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. Your vision is blurry, but you can just barely make out her house lights. You stumble but keep moving forward. Your stomach churns and you think you might be sick. An awful smell burns your nose. It's familiar, but you can't quite pick out what it is. You make it to the end of her driveway and just stop for a moment.

You think back to the first time you set foot on that driveway. You were so excited—optimistic for the future. You look back at your first date and how everything felt so natural. The images float in your mind. They torture you. You recall the first dance you had together, and the sparkle in her eyes as she smiled at you. You remember the way she laughed with you when you both forgot the words to a song. A car passes behind you and splashes you with water. You're now soaked from head to toe and shaking because of it.

The moon is almost completely gone, and its light is just barely breaking through the clouds. The headlights from the car reflected off a metal sunflower decoration on her door. You glance behind her house into the garden that you made with her. The crops are withering, and in the middle of them all, you see the sunflower you planted together, hunched over and missing several petals. A strong gust blows, and another petal leaves the once-happy face of the flower. You look up at the sky. The moon is gone now, hiding from you like prey from a predator. You know what you have to do now, and you muster your remaining strength to walk forward. You step onto the porch. The metal sunflower lies to your face, and you knock on the door.



# Pieces of Flesh

by Lauren Closs



# Things I Know About Him

by Ingrid Peura

## *His Mother's Rings*

She always wears three rings: two on one hand, one on the other. Her wedding band is always worn alone, the thin diamond strip leaving a line on her finger after a day of being in the sun for too long. On her other hand rests her wedding ring, with the loosely secured diamond, and her mother's old ring. It's oval-like in shape, with a doily type of border surrounding an ocean green stone. It's not a beautiful stone, but it's pretty in its own sort of way, with faded edges and miniscule cracks running through the center. She takes them off to sleep, placing them in a little container on her dresser that holds her lucky pennies and a few hair clips.

## *The Crib*

His sister had cried when she was told that he wouldn't be able to sleep in the room with her until he was older. She had filled her old crib with piles of blankets and stuffed animals for him. Six months later he was moved into her- their room- and had drowned in the sea of fluff and cotton that had been waiting for him. That first night, she had climbed into the crib with him and held him close while he slept

through the night for the first time. By the time he could crawl, she taught him how to climb out of the crib and into her bed beside her. The first time he had climbed out successfully ended with his small body enclosed in his mother's arms, while his sister spent the night alone. A safety net was attached to the crib after that and every few weeks had to be replaced with one that he had not yet ripped.

## *The Emergency Room*

When he was in elementary school, he swallowed two quarters while playing upstairs in his room. One went down easily, but the other one became lodged in his throat. His father's van was filled with vomit and tears from both himself and his sister, as their father drove to the hospital. Upon arriving, they were taken into the emergency room, where he was attached to monitors and given sedatives. X-rays were taken and the coin that was stuck in his throat was removed with ease. The other one, they were told, would just have to pass. Upon asking him why he had swallowed the quarters, he had told them that he "wanted to be a piggy bank."

### *First Criticism*

A typical day in the fall, he is three years old. The family is out shopping at the mall. He runs up in front of them, jumping and clapping while watching the automatic doors open and close. A woman pushing a stroller nearby says to his mother, “Learn to control your kid, he’s a freak!”

### *Listening In*

Years ago, after the start of sixth grade. “I’ve been beaten up before, it’s not so bad.” During a conversation with his mother before bed.

### *Self-Criticism*

“He called me an autistic freak and pushed me on the ground. He started hitting my back. I have bruises. I didn’t tell a teacher. Because they can’t make me normal, they can’t fix people like me.”

### *Fantasies*

To be able to control his body so that people will leave him alone. Be allowed to go hang out with the guys like everyone else does. Independence. To own an ATV like his friend and be allowed to ride it without a helmet. A room that isn’t filled with his mother’s old dresser and bookcases, and a closet where her clothes are not hung. To be allowed to drive to

work alone. Season tickets to a Phillies Game.

### *Reprise*

He didn’t say his first word until he was four, and even then, he hardly spoke. With the diagnosis came a never-ending pain for **his** family. Everything hurt. Going out to dinner hurt. A play date with the neighborhood kids hurt. Movie theaters hurt. Vacations hurt. Being at home hurt. As he grew in age, the problems grew in severity. The once silent child became a screeching banshee with the power to summon the neighbors to the house to see if everything was okay. Medications piled up in a kitchen cabinet, to be tried and replaced with others. The third diagnosis came after six years, jerking the dream of normalcy further away from **his** family. He makes progress. Slowly, with two steps forward and one step back. His own house and car keys now hang next to the others by the front door.

## **For a Friend**

by Natalie Meyer

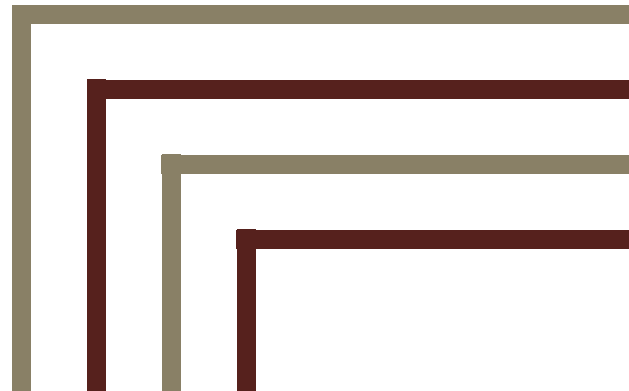
Crunching snow coats the sidewalks underfoot  
And briefly retains the shape of our sneakers,  
Wind driving against us and erasing  
The wandering trail of our prints as we walk. You spit salt  
From between your teeth, clean  
As the earth and poisonous.

I’m at your shoulder spilling truths  
From discarded cans of Coke, crushed  
And left by others while you offer me the care  
You knew you always needed,  
And yet you’re the one apologizing  
Though you were never one to hurt me.

The sky is far too dark for stars.  
You slip on the ice and I reach  
Out to catch you, but you’ve already righted yourself.  
You tell me it’s like roller skating, move  
with it and you’ll be fine, but  
You have to be prepared to fall.

Pausing just before we join our friends inside,  
You tell me I can always call; you’ll pick up  
If you’re free. Please know that  
You can do the same.

Thank you for staying with me.





I gave you all of me  
Because you said we were meant to be

You wanted me, so I stayed  
Then you changed your mind and I felt betrayed

I tried to help you any way I could  
Now I'm leaving you for good

I tried to push you to be your best  
And you didn't listen, which made me depressed

You can't find happiness in others  
Only you can make yourself happy, not another

Part of me is still very angry  
Part of me wants you to feel empty

To think you wanted me with you on your journey  
But that's on me, for thinking we could be

You showed signs of being naive  
I saw the signs but I wanted to believe

I really wanted us to work  
But in the end, you acted like a jerk

You need to mature and work on yourself  
Don't be so stubborn as to not ask for help

We can't be friends until then  
We'll run into the same problems time and again

You don't understand how much you hurt me  
But I should've expected that from someone who lacks empathy

I can't forgive you, not for a long time  
Good luck with the enormous mountain you have to climb

## I Loved You

by Zoe Scheerer

## Greenhead

by Christine Castellano

The sand dunes parallel to the shore were vast and tan. On the north end of Sandollar Point, the sand grass grew tall and obscured the view of the water. Close against the side of the street, where the grass grew, was a wavy bike rack, with u-shaped holes, for tourists to park the rusted bikes their renters left for them. The New Yorker and the girl with him sat at a table shaded by the bleached blue awning, outside of the cafe. On a Sunday in late August, the greenheads were carried by the west winds from the water to the legs of impatient guests waiting for their brunch on the way out of town.

“What should we get?” the girl asked. She had placed her woven beach-bag on the table and was slapping her bony shins to swat away the bugs.

“It's hot. I'm itching for something,” he said. His skin was pale, he hadn't spent much time on the sand during the trip. He adjusted his Rolex, a large gold-one, checking the time.

“Let's drink mimosas. Oh and crab

cake Benedict, I know they make a delightful one here.” She had picked out the two most expensive items on the menu without laying an eye on it.

“Sure they do,” he replied. “Two crab cake Bennies and three mimosas,” he said to the waitress rounding the corner with a full tray. The woman gave a questioning glance, but nodded.

“Tell me...” she said, twisting one of her dirty-blond ringlets around her thin finger, “Why last night, why out of the blue?”

“I thought it was the best thing to do. My last night in Sandollar, spent with a beautiful gir--” the waitress interrupted his train of thought. She brought two cups of coffee over, placing them on the edge of the glass table. They steamed in the August heat, both the man and the coffee. “I wanted something hot,” he smirked, continuing his response. He cradled the cup in his hairy hands. “In the city, my life is cold and I only see the

same few people.”

The girl didn’t say anything. The man slapped his thigh, squashing a greenhead and smearing its bloody remains on his skin. Without wiping the guts, he reached under the table and laid his hand on the girl’s smooth thigh.

“I mean I really enjoyed our time together,” he said. But she flinched, startled, as if she had narrowly avoided being hit by a biker while walking on the pedestrian boardwalk in the afternoon.

“Hey, when do you think that mimosa will be out?” she said abruptly, turning towards the waitress. The woman already had them on the brown plastic tray, setting them down with green felt coasters underneath.

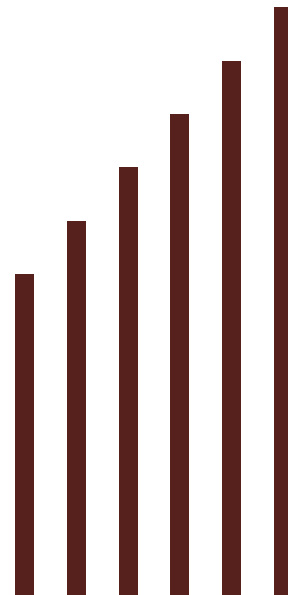
“Now doll, I thought you understood what the deal was. I thought you knew,” he said. He drank the first mimosa in one swift sip. She clearly hadn’t known, the cool touch of his sterling silver ring on her thigh drained all of the color from her face and with it took any ounce of self-respect.

“I never want to see you again,” she said. The girl stood and walked to the left,

passing the 5 and 10 shop and continuing on out of his eyesight. Past the dunes and the sand grass that had once protected her from a devastating storm. The man was sitting on the sidewalk alone, the buggy breeze bringing more greenheads that landed in her crab Benedict.

“Sugar, could you wrap this up? The girl is going to have hers to go,” he said to the waitress while sipping on his second glass and eating his own.

The girl didn’t stop walking until the crispy salt air of the days leading up to spring stung her swollen feet. The New Yorker sent her a check. He could always cover the most expensive item on the menu. Once that summer was over, it never was the same.



# Tranquility

by Meghan Williams



To think, to eat, to drink, to breathe, to dream;  
To be human is to seek earthly things.  
To want more, the voice desperately sings,  
But not all are as human as they seem.  
They can look the part, though their smiles gleam,  
Yellow eyes; like harsh fire, writhes, burns, and stings.  
As terror rises, the voice screams and rings,  
And blood boils in the body’s red streams.  
But what compels the voice, who is the beast?  
What burns like fire, but freezes like ice?  
None but fear, unhinged, uncaged, and released.  
With grave mistake, comes a terrible price,  
Where consequence is so greatly increased,  
One learns to hide, and not cross such fear twice.

# Human

by Charlie Carberry



## The Success of the Starship Icarus

by Dani Hathaway

Dance, my friends, dance, we will all soon be dead:

Waiting in gloom will not stop what's ahead.

Spaceships drift broken, just look at them all!

Emptiness beckoned; we answered its call.

Dance, my friends, dance, we are all that is left;

Empires fall and they leave us bereft.

Humans reduced to this one meager ship;

Planets are hostile— we're not well-equipped.

Dance, my friends, dance as we plot out our course

Straight to the sun, no way back, no remorse.

Ship, take us out, we will not go down slow:

Burn down our home, just like ages ago.

Dance, my friends, dance, we are burning alive!

Glorious fire is melting our eyes!

This is the end, so we're raising a toast:

"Hubris, our God, of your glories, we boast!"

## The Monster in the Making

by Ellie Barley

I lay on the table

As you examen me

Picking apart everything you dislike till all

That's left is hollow.

You pick and choose

Everything - my appearance,

My work, my day,

And when you don't like it

You throw me out again.

I fight your prodding,

And I refuse to let

You restrain me,

To let you have control.

I am the Frankenstein

You put together.

You can't burn me

In the morgue like

The pieces of me you hated.

I'm all you have left.



# Winnie Foster

by Julia Yudichak

Almost every performer knows that the most thrilling, and at the same time, nerve-wracking experience is stepping out on stage for the first time on opening night. No matter the significance of your role, ensemble or lead, the feeling is always the same. Being practically blinded by the stage lights and feeling their warmth on your skin. When your heart feels like it is beating out of your chest out of nervousness and excitement. The band playing so loud you can barely hear yourself think. The first notes being sung by the ensemble in perfect harmony. You step into your position at down center stage, you look out into the audience about to sing your first note and...

The school bell rings. My block 6 class had ended and block 7 was next. The first “Advanced Theatre” class of the year. Our class was held in the band room because our auditorium roof was being replaced over the summer and wasn’t quite ready yet. I walked into the room expecting to have a grand reunion with the drama club director/theatre teacher, Mrs. Higgins, for whom I adored and admired so much. Instead, I was greeted with the concept of “bad news”. The usual expectations for the year and

structure of the class were replaced with news that would change the course of the entire year for the Hackettstown High School Drama Club.

Our auditorium always had water problems. We often joked that “it was raining in our auditorium” whenever the roof would start dripping... but it wasn’t a joke anymore. Mrs. Higgins told us that there had been a problem with the roof in the storms we had in the last few days. It literally rained in our auditorium. The stage, the seats, the back office which housed every costume and prop we owned, everything had been ruined within the span of 48 hours. I sat there in the band room with tears rolling down my face as Mrs. Higgins went into the details of what had happened. I was devastated. Theatre was my entire life. Would we still have a spring musical? A fall play? A winter cabaret? Every question we had; we were met with an “I don’t know...”

The school’s solution to the theatre department not having a space was to find the most unused room in the building for us to use for classes and rehearsals: The wrestling room. We had our first official drama club meeting of the year in that space. Auditions for our anticipated show, Tuck Everlasting the Musical, had to be earlier than normal because the administration was threatening to

cancel the show. I had never gone out for a leading role before. I was always too nervous about being cut because all I ever really wanted was to perform. I don’t know what came over me, but all of a sudden I was writing the name of the female lead, Winnie Foster, on my audition form for “Roles You Are Auditioning For.”

I felt a cloud forming above my head as my fear of rejection was looming over me. I went into the audition room, nervous as ever, and sang my song for Mrs. Higgins and our choir director, Mrs. Pomeroy. Once I had finished that song, I was surprised when they asked me to sing other songs Winnie sang from the show. I sang the songs with ease because I had been singing them over and over again for weeks. I wasn’t expecting anything out of that audition; I was just a sophomore. Despite all my anxiety and doubt, I ended up getting a callback for Winnie.

The next day we had callbacks, and I couldn’t focus in any of my classes. I had never gotten a call back before, and so I didn’t know what to expect. I got there and everyone who got a call back for any role was in the room. I was up against a Senior, a Junior, and a Freshman. There was no chance of me getting this role. The callback consisted of singing the two big songs again, “Good Girl Winnie

Foster,” and “Everlasting.” We also had to perform a “chemistry read” and the audition dance with male lead, Teddy, to see if we worked well together. I left that call back feeling the worst I have ever felt. I had never put myself out there before and the cloud of my fear of rejection was growing by the minute.

The next day was one of the most dreaded days in an actor’s life... the day the cast list comes out. I couldn’t focus on anything the entire day because all I could think about was when 2:30pm would hit. On that day in our block schedule rotation, I had theatre class last. Mrs. Higgins had a rule that we had to keep our phones away in the phone holder until the school day ended at 2:33pm. 6 anxious teenagers waiting to see the results of something they had worked so hard for. 2:30pm hits... it’s posted. My anxiety was rising as I impatiently waited for the bell to ring so I could grab my phone and finally see what the results were. In the meantime, Mrs. Pomeroy had come down to the wrestling room to chat with Mrs. Higgins. My heart was pounding. Then, the bell rang.

I couldn’t seem to grab my phone and open Google Classroom fast enough. When looking at a cast list, the leads are always listed at the top and the roles go downwards from leading roles to

supporting roles to ensemble roles. I looked at the bottom of the list first and was devastated when I didn't see my name. I had never been completely cut from a show before. My life was over. I then continued up to see who had been cast because the other girls in the room also seemed disappointed in the results. Then I finally got to the line... "Winnie Foster.....Julia Yudichak." I looked up at Mrs. Higgins and Mrs. Pomeroy with my jaw practically on the floor. I could not believe what I had just read. I felt like I was dreaming until people started showing up in the room to pick up their scripts and congratulated me on the role. I couldn't stop smiling.

Our rehearsals consisted of going back and forth between the choir room, the cafeteria, the wrestling room, the hallways, the gym; everywhere was a rehearsal space. The biggest stumbling block was that the space we were using for the performances would not be ready for us to be in until two weeks before opening night. Country Gate Players was thirty minutes from the high school, and had another show happening there at the time. We did not have transportation besides our parents and were limited on time in the space because of their show. We had measured out tape marks on the floor of the wrestling room to map out

the different spacing and levels we would have at Country Gate. When we finally got into the space and our first rehearsal had ended, all I could think was that we weren't going to be ready in time.

Opening night finally arrived, and I felt the exact same way that I did sitting in the hallway waiting to be called in for my audition. I was sitting backstage when Mrs. Higgins called places and I was terrified of what would happen. What if I dropped a line? What if my voice cracked? What if I didn't make my quick changes on time? I stepped out on stage for the first time as Winnie Foster. I was practically blinded by the stage lights and was soaking up the feeling of their warmth on my skin. My heart felt like it was beating out of my chest. The band was playing so loud I could barely hear myself think. The first notes sung by the ensemble in perfect harmony behind me. I stepped into my position at down center stage, I looked out into the audience about to sing my first note and then...

All my emotions went away. I wasn't Julia Yudichak anymore. I was Winnie Foster. The show felt like a fever dream. I climbed down the trap door after the finale song, and you could hear my sigh of relief from a mile away. Hearing the audience cheer when I stepped on stage with Teddy for our first bow felt like a

Broadway debut. My life was complete at that moment. Our shows were amazing. Nearly all our shows sold out, which meant about two hundred audience members each performance. Closing night came and went so quickly and I sobbed as I took my final bow. I couldn't believe it was over... I wasn't ready for it to be over...

Even though the show was over, we still had the Freddy Awards Ceremony and nominations to look forward to. The Freddy Awards are awards that recognize excellence in high school theatre in the Lehigh Valley Area of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The State Theatre has welcomed esteemed musicians and countless Broadway national tour companies to its stage. The Freddy's were a big deal. 6 judges came to our performances, and then based on our scores from the shows, we were nominated for different awards. Nomination day came, and the words "Hackettstown High School, Tuck Everlasting" were announced 6 times. 6 different nominations, including the biggest award we could be nominated for, "Best Overall Production of a Musical by a Small School." All the emotions I felt on opening night were flowing back into my body in anticipation of May 23rd.

The night of the awards came and I

was shaking the entire night. We took a bus from our high school, dressed "red carpet ready," to The State Theatre. When we arrived, I could feel the anxiety in the air. Hundreds of teenagers from over 20 high schools in one room, all thinking the exact same way... will we win? Every category we were nominated for came and went and we hadn't been mentioned once. Would all the hard work and effort we put into making this show happen be for nothing if we didn't win anything? Then, the time came for the last award we were nominated for. "Best Overall Production of a Musical by a Small School." The room felt silent. The presenter couldn't open the envelope fast enough. "Hackettstown High School, Tuck Everlasting." I fell to the floor. Everyone was crying and my heart was going a million miles a minute. We had done it.



# Praha, Czechia

by Ezekiel Ciafre



# A Lack of Faith

by Sarah Colletti

I grew up in a small town. It's the kind of town that has a Target and a surplus of suburbs, but you could barely walk ten feet before running into someone that you knew from school or one of their parents or siblings. It felt confining, where differences were punished rather than celebrated. Being terribly uncoordinated, book loving, and an introvert was a little too different for my town. However, the real breaking point was my lack of faith. The looks I receive from my classmates when I inform them that I did not go to church seems that I announced I had met Satan himself. I felt an odd sense of shame as I got older, as though I was letting these people down by not claiming a faith. It became a gnawing pit at the bottom of my stomach, as a rippling sensation of discomfort would pass over me when we passed a church. The ornate crosses and red brick buildings only reminded me of another point of distance between me and my peers: another way I just seemed to stick out among them.

The odd thing though is that the primary dictionary definition for faith is as follows: complete trust or confidence in someone who something. I have faith that when my mother tells me that she loves me she means it. I have faith that the wind will kiss my face when I walk out the door, that the crisp smell of the air will bring me a small spark of joy. I have faith in the beauty, hope, and passion that is contained within the pages of every novel that I read, making me consume them desperately. I have faith that while I am an imperfect being, I can wake up every day and try to be a better person than I was the day before. I have faith that the earth will still turn and that the feeling of love, grief, hope, despair, and joy will cycle through every being on the planet as that is the nature of human existence. My friends and family allow me the grace to determine my own faith on my own terms. But for now, instead of finding my faith in a church or chapel, I find it within the smiles of my loved ones, the smell of fresh cut grass, and the knowledge that joy can never be too far away.



## The Magpies

by Sarah Colletti

We collect little trinkets to tie us to reality. Pretty rocks that stud the hiking trail, a shining pressed penny from the amusement park, an eraser shaped like a dolphin exchanged for tickets at the local arcade, a folded-up sticker pronouncing you as the birthday star. Our life seems to overflow: a small plastic box with birthday cards, seashells dot the dresser from years of trips to the beach, a little turtle figure gifted to us by a friend after their cruise to the Bahamas. The objects seem meaningless to others, but we treasure the scrunchie given to us right before the game, the marker our fourth-grade art teacher let us keep because we had never seen a shade of blue so beautiful, a fake flower stolen from the centerpiece at our grandparent's vow renewal.

We do this to remember that we are here. When the moonlight streams through the windowpanes, when the night is so dark that the crickets have stopped their chatter, when we shiver not due to lack of warmth but lack of hope. We slip out of bed, grabbing a smooth rock off the bookshelf. We examine its colors, the blue blending into streaks of white dappled with highlights of grey. We squeeze the rock until we can feel it wearing off the thin layer of skin that covers our palm. We have loved, we are loved, we have felt joy, and we will feel joy again. Tears run down our cheeks, half sorrow, and half relief. This is temporary. We know that this is temporary. We tighten our grip on the rock before crawling back into bed, falling asleep as we hold our hope close to our heart.

## Serve

by Christine Castellano

Men in suits,  
Shoes tapping like high heels,  
Empty briefcases rattling,  
Power walking to the door,  
Like waitresses with more coffee in hand,  
Ready to serve me more—

Marry and grow old,  
    Something to live for,  
        Something to die for,  
            Someone to abuse,  
                Someone to lie to,  
                    Someone to run to—

Men with regrets  
Buy flowers at the store,  
Spending 9.99 to  
Prevent more expensive nights with a whore,  
Marry to grow old we are  
Together yet apart,  
From years of not being sold  
On the mundane routine—

Men in suits,  
Shoes tapping louder  
Approaching to serve  
A Divorce within the hour.

## Love is Dead

by Joey Wagner

Love is dead  
Rotting like leaves in the fall  
Wilted like flowers in the winter  
The idea is beautiful  
The reality is morbid

Love is a cycle  
A cycle like the seasons  
A cycle that never ends  
The bad parts come  
And the good parts go

Love is a cycle  
Like the cycle of life  
Every beginning has an end  
And every end  
A lesson  
A lesson for the next season  
A lesson for the next cycle  
A lesson for the next time  
Next time  
Next time?  
Love is dead?  
Love is

## Watching from Above

by Natalie Meyer

I was sitting up on that cliff down the road from my house, letting my gaze sweep over the hazy blue town far below. The cliff was jagged and rocky, and sometimes I worried I'd tumble down it while distracted by the inventions of my mind. I liked looking at that town. It seemed so quiet, so kind, and I often thought of taking up residence there, but I didn't have the money to move and, in any case, I'd never actually been.

A house was nestled into the base of the cliff, and I could see a shadow pass over the windows from time to time as the lady who lived there tended to her assortment of potted plants. Her roof was battered, but it was a neat little cottage, and I decided her name must be Miss Amanda. She was plain but beautiful, with wavy auburn hair and rosy cheeks, and one of the town's men was in love with her. He visited nearly every day.

I watched as he came up her gravel driveway. He was holding a little white smudge, probably a chrysanthemum, even though daffodils were her favorite. He didn't know her like I did.

He paused at the end of her

driveway, just before the start of her porch, and smoothed his chestnut hair. He was taking her out on a date, had to be, but it wouldn't go well. They never seemed to, or he would've moved in by now. Amanda was too kind, and he was too brash.

He took a breath and went to knock on her door.

Hi Dean, she said. Oh, a flower? Thank you. She took it from him and smelled its sweet fragrance, but was secretly disappointed.

Are you ready to go?

Oh, I suppose I am. Just let me fix my hair.

He followed her inside. Amanda passed by the window again to pour him some lemonade while he waited.

Dean took it, sipped it slowly and wished for alcohol. He put his feet up on her coffee table, and she sighed, knowing she'd have to clean it off after he left. She turned to the mirror and tried to ignore him stealing glances at her backside.

They came out together. She wore a beautiful black dress and looked rather sullen. Dean tried to cheer her up, but nothing seemed to work.

How about a joke? Have you heard this one? She had, but she covered her mouth with her hand as she forced a laugh.

They headed down the driveway together. He didn't have a car, so he only ever walked. Amanda glanced back at her house, then up the cliff to where I was sitting, and he put an arm around her shoulders. She turned back to the town ahead of her.

They disappeared from sight, and stayed gone a while. I watched over her cottage, keeping it safe from a distance. There was a picket fence surrounding her perfectly square backyard that held a neatly tended garden, and she had a willow tree in her front yard, with poppies around the base. She loved nature, and sometimes she'd sit under the shade of that willow tree and look to the top of the cliff. I wondered if she saw me, and pictured us together like I did.

When the sky grew dusky and the blue horizon turned to a gentle reddish purple, she came back up the road. Dean stopped at the end of the drive, but she was stumbling a bit on the gravel, so he returned to her side and walked her to the door. I pulled up a flower from the ground and turned it between my fingers,

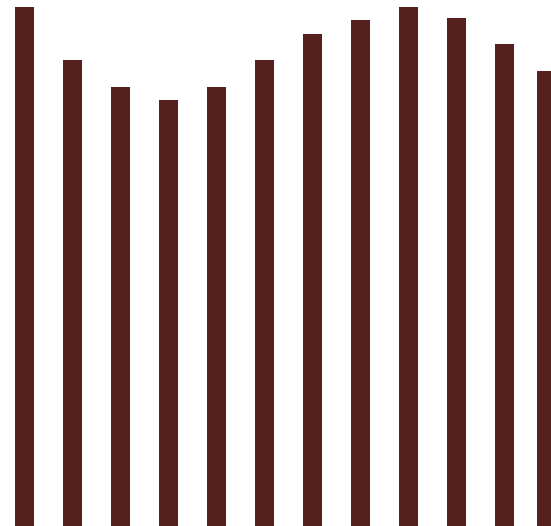
pretending I'd give it to her.

As she got closer, I swore I could hear her crying, and it made my heart leap. They stopped at her doorway. He hugged her tight, but she pulled away and looked deep into his eyes. I can't do this. I'm breaking up with you.

Dean tried to argue. You need me. I deserve better.

He nodded, slowly, and turned away, starting back down the road. He shoved his hands into his pockets, head down.

Amanda watched him for a minute, then went inside. I didn't see her for a few days after that, but when her perfect garden had begun to fill with weeds, she came outside with a little box and spread its contents under the willow tree, her black dress swishing in the breeze.



## The First 'I Love You'

by Nolan Pettit

From the first 'I love you' you felt at home  
You felt harmony in the arms of your lover  
And you have never known happiness to  
Feel like it does in that moment

From the first 'I love you' you knew she was  
The one that you wanted to spend the rest of  
Your life with, and from that moment you wanted  
The rest of your life to start immediately

From the first 'I love you' you knew that  
You would do anything to keep her safe  
And make her feel like the most important  
Person in the world

From the first 'I love you' you knew that she  
Looked perfect in your eyes, her stunning beauty  
Unmatched and even now you feel your heart race  
Whenever she wraps her arms around your waist

From the first 'I love you' you knew that you would  
Be there for her until her last breath  
And there will never be a day in which you go without  
Saying 'I love you'



## The Voice Inside

by Morgan Bellavia

I CLOSE MY EYES

And he is there

Waiting, watching

A constant stare

He speaks to me, saying

Just give up now

You are weak, you do not matter

Just another face in the crowd

I OPEN MY EYES

And you are there

To remind me that

Even though life isn't fair

I do matter

And you do care

So, get up my dear

There are so many doors

The world is vast

Now make it yours

# APPENDIX

References for Undiagnosed Disabilities: How Self-Advocacy is Imperative  
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