Jongleur



2017

PUBLICATION |

The *Jongleur* is an annual publication of student work that is formatted and edited by a student staff. It is created for both the benefit of Louisiana State University at Alexandria and the distinctive voice of its students.

Individual authors and visual artists retain copyright. © Spring 2017

Jongleur Louisiana State University at Alexandria 8100 Highway 71 South Alexandria, La 71302

EDITOR'S NOTE

Martha Graham once said, "Remember that you are unique. If that is not fulfilled, then something wonderful has been lost" I find this a fitting quote for a magazine dedicated to the individual voices which express themselves through all types of art. When I found out that last year the *Jongleur* was unable to publish and the previous editors had graduated, I picked up the torch. There was no one to teach me how to put a magazine together except for my basic knowledge learned through putting my high school literary magazine together, and that was a few years ago. I knew it wasn't going to be easy, and though it wasn't, it was undoubtedly worth it.

There are beautiful people here on campus. Thoughtful souls that will reach to you. You don't have to take a poetry or creative writing class to understand the emotions you feel (though our English Dept. is amazing!). Nor do you have to take Intro to Art to appreciate the craftmanship of the work submitted. It doesn't matter what your major is either. The way you see the world is your own, and though not everyone sees the same shade of green, there is a human understanding coursing through us all.

So, get your juices flowing. If you have something to say, show it. Be it through words, media, or formulas. If you enjoy yourself, you're doing it right. Others may call you crazy, or tell you you're not good enough. The hardest critic you'll ever meet is yourself, and if you are proud of something, show it off with confidence. Develop your own voice, and use it.

Always,

Kennedy Runyan Editor, 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the first time in several years we are able to bring the *Jongleur* to print! I can't tell you how grateful I am to the CFO of LSUA, Darren Olagues, for helping us in the start-up money. I also would like to thank our English Dept. for fronting the funds for the contest. They are an amazing group of people that truly love the students and care for their education, while also being intriguing in their own right.

I could not have done this magazine without the helpful insight of Dr. Gallagher and Mr. Alai. These two professors have left a deep imprint on me of the dedication one must have to be a literary magazine editor, which is what I'd like to make my lifelong career. Dr. Gallagher has been the adviser for this project for well over 10 years, and his experience is unparalleled. Mr. Alai was an editor at his previous college in Illinois and his fresh ideas forced me to find what I wanted to make of this magazine. I have learned much from these two, and any editor that follows would as well.

Lastly, Shelly Kieffer Gill, gave me her personal collection of the *Jongleur* so that I may study the formatting and read the works of previous editors. For that I cannot thank her enough.

Enjoy.

WINNERS

Prose:	
1 Place: "The Dad Stand" Kristin Curtis	pg 8
2nd Place: "pretty ugly" TiffanyJo Ayers	pg 63
3rd Place: "My Memoir" Aaron Murphy	pg 29
Honorable Mention: "Technically Technological" Bradly Cook	pg 74
Poetry	
1st Place in Poetry for "Poland, Louisiana" Kennedy Runyan	pg 80
2nd Place in Poetry for "Untitled" Dustin Williams	pg 89
3rd Place in Poetry for "A Letter FromMme to You" Chelsea Gravel	pg 85
Honorable Mention in Poetry for "The Abyss" James LaCroix	pg 92
Art:	
1st Place in Art for "blue painting" Alexa Chambley	pg 97
2nd Place in Art for "Untitled" Saije Cousin	pg 107
3rd Place in Art for "Untitled" Victoria Bellino	pg 102
Honorable Mention in Art for "Golden Ocean" Alivia Burke	pg 109
Honorable Mention in Art for "Tolkien" Trevor Ewing	ng 110

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prose Works:

"The Dad Stand" - Kristin Curtis	pg 8
"The Journey to the Top" – Michael Dupre	pg 14
"A Craving for Peanut Butter and Honey" – TiffanyJo Ayers	pg 16
"It Starts with Me, It Starts Now" – Autumn Mitchell	pg 20
"Fusion" – Ashton Dean	pg 24
"An Everlasting Love" – Terra Wilson	pg 26
"My Memoir: The World Has Changed" – Aaron Murphy	pg 29
"The 'Up There'" – Bradyn Shock	pg 32
"Floating" – Kristin Curtis	pg 41
"The Stirring of Emotion" – Devon Deville	pg 51
"Reading Between the Lines: Edgar Allan Poe's Depression and	
Complicated Bereavement" – Alivia Burke	pg 52
"Where is the Love?" – Ashton Dean	pg 61
"pretty ugly" – TiffanyJo Ayers	pg 63
"Cognitive Learning vs. Great Programming" – Devin Davenport	pg 66
"Broken Reformation" – Devon Deville	pg 68
"Wick" – Alivia Burke	pg 70
"Technically Technological" - Bradly Cook	pg 74
"Overcomer" – Ashton Dean	pg 76
"24 + 24" – TiffanyJo Ayers	pg 78
Poetry Works:	
"Poland, Louisiana" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 80
"Let me be me and you be you" – Tara Sanders	pg 80
"Strength in Numbers" – Alivia Burke	pg 81
"On The Porch" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 82
"A Lover's Lust" – Aaron Murphy	pg 82
"Silence Heard in Time" – Jessica Schroeder	pg 83
"Whether or Not" – Aaron Murphy	pg 84
"A Letter From Me to You" – Chelsea Gravel	pg 85
"Love, Interrupted" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 86
"The Sea"- Samantha Barton	pg 86
"Fever" – Anthony Felps	pg 87
"Sigh" – Aaron Murphy	pg 88

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Poetry Works Cont.:

"Gratitude" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 88
"Untitled" – Dustin Williams	pg 89
"Confidence" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 89
"Beautiful and Shrew" – Aaron Murphy	pg 90
"Wednesday" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 90
"Untitled #1" – Aaron Murphy	pg 91
"Playgrounds" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 91
"The Abyss" – James LaCroix	pg 92
"Ecstasy" – Aaron Murphy	pg 93
"Snowball Fights" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 94
"Untitled #2" – Aaron Murphy	pg 94
"Haiku #1-11" – Kennedy Runyan	pg 95 and 96

Art Works:

"Blue Painting" – Alexa Chambley Cover	pg 97
'Fleeting Grace" – Alivia Burke	pg 98
'Untitled'' – Erica Aney	pg 99
'Head in the Clouds" – Alexa Chambley	pg 100
'Ian Mckellen as Norman in 'The Dresser'" - Trevor Ewing	pg 101
'Untitled'' – Victoria Bellino	pg 102
'Cyantint" – Alexa Chambley	pg 103
'Untitled'' – Jade Cousin	pg 104
'Aloof' – Alivia Burke	pg 105
'Tolstoy" – Trevor Ewing	pg 106
'Untitled'' – Sajie Cousin	pg 107
'Yellowpaintingsmall" – Alexa Chambley	pg 108
'Golden Oceans" – Alivia Burke	pg 109
'Tolkien" – Trevor Ewing	pg 110
'Untitled #1" – Chandler Krammer	pg 111
'Untitled #2" – Chandler Krammer	pg 112
'Ghost Train" – Alexa Chambley	pg 113
'Orangegreenyellow" – Alexa Chambley	pg 114

THE DAD STAND 1ST PLACE

By: Kristen L. Curtis

Joe hated the holidays.

It wasn't the festive music or decorations; it wasn't the turkey or pumpkin pie; it wasn't even the caroling or office parties. All those things were fine. It was the giving.

And giving. And giving. Joseph Alan Guthrie had been born in the good ole state of Louisiana, to two loving God-fearing parents. Because of this, he had been raised right: church twice a week, baseball in the spring, Bible camp in the summer, football in the fall, Christmas and Easter pageants. On a diet of cornbread, gumbo, fried chicken, and okra he had developed his tall muscular frame; by sixteen, almost every girl in his high school was imagining herself as Mrs. J. A. Guthrie. With his broad shoulders, blue eyes, and curly hair he was quite the catch.

So, when Joe met the love of his life in college—Tiffany Rabalais—he thought God was rewarding him for all the things he had done right. Their life together had started out normally enough. Joe was given a sales job at a family-owned car lot, and by their first wedding anniversary his wife was pregnant. During that pregnancy, Joe had imagined all the things he would do with his son. Baseball, football, hunting, fishing, all the right things. He was surprised but happy when they had a girl—Lily. Joe figured the next one would be a boy.

He was wrong again.

And again.

And again.

Now, at forty-years-old, Joe was certain of only one thing in life: he would never retire. He had been blessed with four daughters.

Four.

Daughters.

And all five women had birthdays during the holiday season. Starting in early November, their birthdays stretched until New Year's Day. His blood pressure always mysteriously climbed during the months of November and December. He was anxious and jumpy, never calming down

until February was well under way. Also, the condition of his hair was somehow magically linked to his children. In his twenties, his hair had been thick and curly. Every girl he had dated had loved running their fingers through it. His wife had often joked that she married him for his hair. After his first two daughters reached toddling age, he noticed that his curls began to thin. Once he had four daughters all under the age of ten, his hair began to go prematurely grey. When his oldest daughter began driving, he'd developed a receding hair line. Now that all four daughters were teenagers, he was nearly bald. To offset his hair loss, Joe had grown a very nice goatee and mustache. He liked his look, even though his wife joked that he reminded her of Walter White from the TV show, Breaking Bad.

Because all five had birthdays during the holiday season, Joe had to contend with finding presents not only for those special days, but for Christmas as well. It was damned hard enough for a man to remember important dates and find the right gift for one woman, let alone five.

Five.

Women.

On the first night of November, Joe lay awake staring at the ceiling, wondering how he was going to afford this year's mountain of gifts. He now ran the family business but it had been a slow year for the dealership. There hadn't been much to put aside. The first one was coming up soon, his third daughter Emily's birthday. Joe rubbed his face in frustration and sighed heavily. It's always the same things. They all want the same things. Designer clothes, concert tickets, jewelry, perfume, makeup, anything Bieber...

As he lay there, Joe recalled everything he had ever given his daughters. It had all started with dance lessons. As soon as his girls could walk, his wife wanted to put them in dance class. Joe couldn't understand the logic behind that. At that age, his daughters couldn't speak any better than cavemen. How were they expected to learn dance steps? Joe felt that dance was more for the adults than for the children. It was a chance for overly proud parents to put their kids in shiny sequined costumes and parade them across a stage. But, wanting to make his wife happy, he'd paid for it.

Next it was on to the musical arts. Joe knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that all those years of screechy and clanging practice sessions were responsible for the hearing loss in his left ear. Stoically, he had attended every recital and concert, and wept tears of relief when his youngest daughter had grown tired of her flute lessons. The house had been silent for the first time in eight years.

Well, as silent as it could be with five women.

Five.

Women.

The next phase had been sports: softball, soccer, horseback riding, and basketball. He had been enthusiastic about this at first. This was as close as he would ever get to son-type activities, and he wore himself out giving his daughters extra practice sessions at home in the backyard. It was all to no avail. Lily was afraid of the ball, Grace never could kick in the direction of her goal, Emily fell off her horse once and was done, and Beth's shorts fell down in front of an entire gymnasium full of people. She made the basket but lost her confidence and quit.

The current phase was technology, technology, technology. I-everythings laid strewn around his house, plugged up to every available outlet. Joe wasn't sure how he felt about it. On one hand, when their noses were in their phones they weren't bothering him, asking him for money. On the other hand, it cost an arm and a leg for a six-phone cell phone plan, not to mention swapping out those phones every time the latest version hit the market.

And were they appreciative for everything he had given them? Hell no! At least it didn't seem like it. The only time they seemed appreciative was when they really wanted something. Then it was all hugs and kisses and "thank you Daddys". It wasn't that he gave them those things to receive thanks and praise. He had done it because he loved them and wanted the best for his family. But now, watching the slowly revolving ceiling fan, Joe was afraid he had spoiled them too much.

Joe threw back the covers and began pacing the floor, head in his hands. Not this year. I can't. I won't.

An errant thought darted through his mind and he stopped cold.

What if you didn't do it this year?

What would happen if he refused to buy presents for the women in his life? Besides all hell being unleashed on Earth? Well, for starters his wife would probably hold out on him until he gave in. His daughters would shout and cry and moan and throw all their charms at him. Could he deal with that? A mischievous grin spread across his face. What if he took all that money and spent it on something for himself? Oh, how they would hit the roof!

But...why not?

Didn't he deserve to have something he wanted after all these years of giving? Didn't he deserve to go off on his own vacation, go hunting, camping in the woods, spend some peaceful solitary

hours and recharge his batteries? That was always his wife's excuse whenever she went to the spa...to recharge her batteries with green goopy face masks and other peculiar stuff Joe didn't understand. Dammit, he deserved something for himself!

Now he just had to decide if he was brave enough to do it. Brave enough to take a stand. If it would be worth all the days of dirty looks, angry outbursts, and passive-aggressiveness. They are so spoiled, they all take me for granted. They really don't know how good they have it.

Joe glanced over at his sleeping wife. Yes...yes, it was worth it. With a plan formed in his mind, he fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning, he rose early and went downstairs to make coffee. Some of his resolve had melted away during the night, and as the coffee brewed Joe gave himself a pep talk. Stay strong. Don't give in. You are the head of this family, what you say goes. Period. Who's the man? You're the man. Be the man, Joe.

With a caveman-like grunt Joe poured a cup and sat down with the morning paper...and waited.

Soon he heard the sounds of his wife and daughters rising, the pitter-patter of footsteps darting here and there on the floor above him. He poured another cup and sat back down. He was determined. He had prepared what he was going to say. He was ready.

His youngest daughter Beth appeared in the kitchen first, rubbing her eyes. She grabbed a banana and some juice from the fridge. Setting those items on the table, she walked back over to the wall outlet and unplugged her phone. Without a word to him she sat down, phone in one hand, banana in the other.

"Sleep well?" Joe asked.

"Mm," was all the reply he got.

It wasn't long before they were all seated around the kitchen table, munching away on their various breakfasts, noses in their phones. Joe cleared his throat importantly. When that didn't work, he said,

"I need to talk to all of you."

When that still failed to grab their attention, Joe pushed back from the table and stood.

"Phones down!" he shouted.

Like gophers, all five heads popped up and stared at him with wide, surprised eyes.

It was a first, having all their undivided attention at once, and it threw Joe for a moment. He could feel his resolve start to drain away.

"I have decided something," he said quickly, trying to hold on to his courage. "This year there will be no birthday or Christmas presents."

All five women stared at him like he was speaking a foreign language.

"You have all been blessed beyond measure. Blessed to live in a country that is free, blessed to have a good home and a husband and father that loves you, and blessed because you have always had everything your hearts desired. Frankly, you've been spoiled. And I see every day how you take those things for granted. So, this year, there will be no gifts. And I will be taking a week's vacation to somewhere secluded by myself."

With that, Joe sat back down flushed but proud, and braced himself for their response. They were all quiet, and Joe figured his news had stunned them into silence. But then he noticed tears rolling down two of his daughter's cheeks, and immediately felt bad. Had he been too harsh? Exchanging glances with her mother and sisters, his eldest daughter Lily was the first to speak. He could tell she was having trouble meeting his eyes.

"I'm sorry, Dad. You're right."

Joe's mouth dropped open a little. This was not the reaction he had been expecting. He had gone through all the scenarios in his head, mentally preparing himself how to respond to each, but he had not once considered this. Was his teenage daughter actually telling him he was right?

"Yeah, Dad. I'm sorry, too," said Grace, wiping tears from her cheeks.

Emily stood and walked around the table and put her arms around him.

"Me too, Dad," she said.

Beth was really crying now and in a choked voice she asked,

"Do you really think so badly of us, Daddy?"

Joe's heart broke.

"No, no, sweetie. I love all of you very much. It's just that I want you to appreciate everything you have, to appreciate me."

"We do appreciate you," his daughters murmured in agreement.

His wife had been silent this whole time, and now she spoke.

"You have been so good to us, Joe. I know we've put you through a lot over the years. If you want to go on your own vacation for some alone time, then I support it."

It was Joe's turn to look like he was hearing a foreign language. He couldn't believe his family's reaction. Were his eyes and ears betraying him? Was this all a dream? Slowly he looked around at their faces, each earnest and sincere, and his heart swelled with love and pride. They really did respect and appreciate him! They really did know how good they had it! He had been too hasty, too harsh in his decision. His heart soaring, Joe stood and exclaimed,

"You know what? I'm taking you all out for breakfast! And afterwards we can go shopping. Who wants a present?"

With that, Joe headed out of the kitchen to go get dressed. Not quite yet out of earshot, he heard the unmistakable sound of snickering and laughter...and Joe hung his head.

-	
H1	VA

Women.

THE JOURNEY TO THE TOP

By: Michael Dupre

I have always loved the mountains – the tall, vast mountain tops with the snow that never melts and crunches under my feet with every step. The winding roads seem to be never-ending through the mountains. The journey to the top of the mountain is always the best part. I get to see the high drop offs that abruptly end at the bottom and peer down below at the place I first started. The journey along the way makes the trip worthwhile, because it is the journey that reveals beautiful scenes, hardships, good times, and different landscapes.

Recently, my family and I travelled to Colorado. We went to Pikes Peak, the highest spot in Colorado. When we saw the long winding roads up the mountain side and the never ending snowcapped peaks, we thought we would never make it to the peak of the mountain. The journey to the top of the mountain is much like life. At first progress is slow, and it is hard to continue on, then you look behind and see how far you have come. Each stop on the mountain was different from the other – from the snowy spots that ranged from a few inches deep to a few feet deep to the huge boulders that varied in size and height and the ones that were too massive to even try to climb.

One stop along the way involved drifts of snow along the roadside. We ventured off the road and ran to the snow drifts. Accustomed to only ankle deep snow at the deepest, we failed to consider the snow drifts might be much deeper. A few steps onto the snow found us stuck in snow past our knees. In life, we also become comfortable to what we "know" without considering how life in other places might be different. Travel expands our experiences and helps us to better understand the differences in the world.

Much like the stops we had in the mountains of Colorado, the stops that we have in life are stepping stones to the goals we want to achieve. Climbing over the large mountain boulders and trudging through the snow in the mountains is similar to climbing the large obstacles we have in life. At times, life may feel as though obstacles are too difficult to overcome and that afflictions cannot be controlled but with perseverance and mindset I know I cannot fail – all things can be overcome.

Looking down from part way up the mountain, I notice the winding roads below me that zig zag in a downward trail. Stopping to reflect upon where I have been, I notice details of the journey that I had overlooked. The other mountains visible against the skyline and the clear, blue lake that was not clearly seen from the roadside create the entire scene. Focused on reaching my

destination, I had missed those views. Working toward and achieving goals in life often blind me to great opportunities and experiences that happen along the way.

At the top of the mountain, the view was not only breath-taking because of the scenery but also there was little oxygen. In life, you can feel overwhelmed with responsibilities and feel like you cannot breathe. But I realized when I made it to the top and saw the breath-taking view of the snowcapped mountains and the valleys below that enduring the difficult journey was worthwhile. Even when life is difficult and the days are long, remember to take it one step and one day at a time until the destination is reached. When you have the mindset to persevere and see the goal that has been laid before you in your journey nothing on this earth can stop you.

The long journey, the struggles, the stops, and distractions we go through in life are all worth it in then end when we realize that we have reached greater heights. Life has more meaning when we are climbing to our goals than when we stand idle on safer ground. When I have reached my final goal or destination, I can look down from the top of my mountain and see where I started and feel grateful for that long journey that took me to the top.

A CRAVING FOR PEANUT BUTTER AND HONEY

By: TiffanyJo Ayers

I heard the trickling of creek water and it stirred me enough to wake me. "Mmm coffeeeee," I groaned. I batted my eyes a few times and saw beautiful, dim sunlight spreading through thick green leaves when I finally felt brave enough to open them wide. I took a deep breath in and smelled the salt, the pine and a pinch of that delicious wood ash from last night's fire, my nostrils opening with sensitivity to the smell. I rolled to the side and pushed myself up, leaves crunching under my elbow and then my palm. I was bewildered in the wild. "Oh, right." I wasn't in my giant comfy, fluffy bed as I thought; I was wrapped in a forest-green, plaid sleeping bag, still in my swimsuit and shorts from the day before.

"Too much beer," I thought, scoffing at myself.

I finally sat up, rubbing the back of my head, sore from sleeping on the ground and took in my surroundings. The good ol' Whiskey Chitto...a childhood favorite, and now, an adulthood pleasing pastime. I l-o-v-e being in the great outdoors, though as a child, you wouldn't have believed that. Sure, I was athletic. I could pick up anything with a bat, racket or ball and be decent at it. But I was no granola girl, not at the time.

I looked around for my parents - my mom and step-dad, that is. My mom was NEVER much for the outdoors until Vince came along. Now she's in to fishing and four-wheeler riding...a true sight to behold. (The woman starches her camo for crying out loud.) I finally spotted her, full-face of make-up on, bright red tank top, down by the bank with Vince, sipping on a mug that I was sure was full of coffee.

"I don't know how you drink it like this Tiff, black as night," she said to me as I walked up. I grinned at her and snatched the mug from her hands and took a huge chug of that black elixir. "It's heaven in a cup, mom."

"Well, I miss my creamer. Do you want some eggs? I think that family over there is making breakfast."

"What? I can't just go ask them for breakfast mom, people don't operate that way."

"Well I do! I started talking to Lynn while I was making coffee; we traded. That's them over there; Lynn, Jackson, her husband, and their son, Jake." I surveyed the area...there were several families packing up their camping gear, getting ready for the last leg of the canoe trip. The Whiskey Chitto is only an eight-mile trip, but is split nicely if you choose to stop at each fluffy, white sandbar which is every mile or so, and spend the night under the stars. Really romantic, unless you're with your mom. I thought about this for a moment and was glad I'd driven up separately.

I walked over and introduced myself to Mrs. Lynn and her family, taking note that Jake was exceptionally cute and wondered if I could sucker him in to abandoning his canoe to row with me. I'd spent the better part of yesterday canoeing from the middle of a three person canoe with all of my camping gear...and my mom's...and Vince's.

"You must be TiffanyJo! Your mom said you'd be over once you'd figured out someone was making pancakes and eggs." I blushed a little and Jake slide over on the sand to make room for me; welcoming, warm and inviting...I liked him already.

We talked for a few minutes over hot coffee and breakfast, making conversation about the interesting people we've seen out here. The man collecting every snake he saw and throwing it in a bucket was at the top of both of our lists; I mean seriously, who does that? Jake told me that he was positive he saw a few alligators on the banks that were roped off. I gave him a few of my classic eye-rolls, but made sure to bat them just enough that he found them cute. Hopefully.

My mom eventually called for me and I thanked Mrs. Lynn for the breakfast and headed across the creek to my canoe. "Jesus, I'm glad you two think I'm strong." My canoe was completely filled in the front and back of the canoe with sleeping bags and ice-chests and all sorts of other odds and ends that my mom insisted she bring. "I'll see y'all at the next sandbar." I plugged in my headphones after lathering on some sunscreen and headed off, leading the pack, though no one was behind me.

About an hour or so in to my trip, I came across a sandbar that looked like no one had touched it in weeks, which was odd since this place is flooded with people during the summer. I thought it would be the perfect time to catch a little day time yoga in celebration of the first International Day of Yoga...fitting since it's the longest day of the year and beginning of the Summer Solstice. I was happily flowing through up and downward dogs when I heard something rustling in the greenery nearby. I didn't think much of it and sat down to eat my peanut butter & honey sandwich...my favorite. I suppose the heat had zapped my appetite, because I couldn't finish it. I stuffed the plastic wrap in my backpack and left the sandwich on the sand, figuring a bird or something would snatch it up. As I stood, the rustling grew closer and louder. I took this as a sign to get back in the canoe and finish the trip.

Since I was rowing solo, without another person in sight, I decided I'd challenge myself a little and stand on the middle row of the canoe, paddling like I was just off of some tropical island on

a kick-ass paddle board. The water moved heavily under the paddle. I blamed my difficulty pushing on all of the shit my mom had thrown in the canoe. I eventually found a slow rhythm I was happy with and pushed on. The creek curved a little to the left, my canoe easing through the turn on the smooth water. I was smiling from ear to ear; the sun illuminated everything. "Instagram would kill for this filter," I thought to myself. The water was shimmering, like a thousand coins under the hot sun; it almost hurt my eyes to look at it. The greens were vibrant, almost dream like. Surreal in a way.

I looked down at my arms and noticed how browned and freckled they were getting, compared to my forever stark-white legs. My legs rarely tan in the summer, and this bums me out to no end. When I looked back up, I notice that the creek was moving faster than I knew how to handle, the weight of the camping gear pushing me faster than I wanted...or could paddle. I was traveling solo on a path I've taken many times, I'm not quite sure why, but I was little worried. I focused my vision on the surface of the water, still standing, paddling as best as I could this way. When I felt confident enough in my strides to lift my gaze upwards, it was too late. My head met a huge, low-hanging branch and that was it, lights out.

I came to mid-stream and realized my arms were around someone's neck. I forced my vision clear to get a good look at my rescuer. As his face was coming in to focus, I realized I hadn't studied Jake's face enough. Were his eyes this brown? I thought I'd made a mental not that they were blue like mine. His hair was definitely brown, but not this dark...and I didn't remember him being the hairy type. My vision finally returned and it was all I could do to silence my scream. My little brown arms were wrapped around the neck of a giant Louisiana black bear.

The bear shook my stunned body off its back on the next sandbar and went back in to the water and plopped down, watching me. "The rustling, the peanut butter and honey," I thought to myself. This bear had been following me the entire time in search of a bigger, tastier, blonde snack.

I started to speak but bit my tongue. "What the hell? Do you expect him to answer you? The heat has taken over your brain. You've gone mad." The bear hunched down even further in to the water as if hearing my thoughts. My eyes never dropped its' gaze; I was nervous to blink. There was something....understanding and familiar in his eyes. Something I've noticed before in strangers passing me on the street on my way to the mail.

Moments later I spot my canoe, floating languidly down the creek. "SHT!" I managed to yell at a whisper. As if sensing my fear and dismay at losing all my things - including my mind - the bear made its way to the center of the creek and steered the edge of the vessel with the side of his huge body, thankfully towards the beach, where I lay paralyzed with curiosity at what I was

seeing. I'd never encountered an animal of this size before, not this close anyway. I've only ever heard horror stories about bear encounters and how menacing they are. But here's this giant black bear, Jake, I'd named him in my head, rescuing me and my canoe.

The bear paused and watched my canoe slide on to the shore, then returned his gaze to me.

I drew in the heaviest of breaths and laid back on the sand, closing my eyes. I figured if Jake was going to maul me, he'd have done it already. I looked up once more at the sky, thankful for my life and this gorgeous day and the kindness of a bear.

My alarm rang so loudly that I sprang out of bed, looking everywhere for either Jake. I looked down...no tan, no swimsuit. I looked around....no sand, no canoe, and no bear. I fell back on my soft, fluffy, white pillows in sheer disappointment and laid there, paralyzed with curiosity about my dream.

I'd hit the snooze button, but I was too awake to lay in still silence any longer. I stood and realized I had a hunger, a specific taste for peanut butter and honey.

IT STARTS WITH ME, IT STARTS NOW

By: Autumn Mitchell

Due to my many roles, I have a unique perspective on the complexities of the environments I live in, and the people within these environments that I am compelled to protect. In an extensive survey conducted by the Department of Defense in 2014, one in every 20 active duty women and one in every 100 active duty men serving in the United States military are sexually assaulted each year. This statistic however, does not include Reserve or National Guard Soldiers. For civilians the numbers are more staggering. The Center for Disease Control estimates that one in every five women and one in every 71 men are sexually assaulted. Both statistics regarding civilian and military men could be extremely underrepresented as men are much less likely to report their assault. Sexual assault is a dangerous and multifaceted enemy seeking to destroy the very pillars of the military and higher education. This enemy can no longer be over looked or swept under the rug. This enemy can no longer be ignored, denied, or a laughing stock. It must be destroyed. There are similarities and differences between the epidemic of sexual assaults in the military and on college campuses, and with this information it is my duty as a leader, a mother, and a decent human being to make a change.

The nature of sexual assaults in the military and at universities share many similarities. Most sexual assault victims in the military are junior enlisted E1-E4 Soldiers and the sex offenders lower enlisted as well. On campuses, the victims are mostly new freshmen. It is the vulnerable, intoxicated, unfamiliar with a new place, isolated, easily overpowered, or a person who could be construed as unbelievable, who are chosen by the perpetrator. On campus, it is the drunk girl in the short skirt, and on base it is the promiscuous Private First Class that become the target of the sex offender. Why? Because the rapist knows that our culture blames victims. Victims on campuses and military installations often face more questioning and retaliation than the sex offender. If the victim can be made to look bad, then the assault must surely be false. An unwritten set of rules are applied to victims. What is the right amount of sex? Did the victim lead the offender on? Was she/he asking for it? She/he drank too much on purpose. What could the victim have done differently? Maybe if the victim was completely sober, clothed, and chaste then the assault would have never happened. This mentality applies to military and civilians alike. There is also a universal over concern for false reporting of sexual assaults. Two to eight percent of sexual assault reports are false, close to the same percent as all other crime reported. That means that 92-98 percent of the time, the reports are true. None-the-less, many times military and college institutions are more concerned for over the idea that the report is false than concerned for the victim. This victim blame society continues to make reporting difficult, paving the way

for more predators to repeatedly commit crimes with little to no consequence. That is why I was especially alarmed when during a recent annual Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) brief from my unit, a slide actually stated that to reduce risk of sexual assault do not wear provocative clothing. When, I brought up my concern with this statement, my own officers tended to disagree saying that revealing my body would entice desires. I suppose it is easier to find blame in the victim than to accept that someone we know is a rapist. It is hard to accept, whether military or civilian, that our ability to judge character is limited. As Russel Strand states, during his address to the Army War College, "we can only judge what we can see". If we are in the midst of a dangerous person every day, then surely we would know it. Unfortunately, that is not true. There are numerous examples of Soldiers and upstanding citizens who were trustworthy, reliable, and competent who were also rapists. When talking to the people in their lives, every time what do they say? "I would have never imaged he/she was capable of something like this". That is because predators hide that part of themselves. Their crime is not a social norm, it is not acceptable to portray, so they hide. They hide, so they will not get caught; they hide so they can commit the crime again. There are too many variables in human behavior and no specific category that defines a sex offender for us to be able to identify one. Rapists come in every race, background, religion, size, gender, and occupation. Any one of us can be fooled by the persona a sex offender displays, and we must accept this. Furthermore, sexual assaults create many similar effects for the military and colleges. Victims of sexual assault are at risk for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and suicide. Victims may also experience tonic immobility and other psychophysiological effects, giving them uncontrollable reactions. Victims are the target of retaliation aforementioned and often labeled as a liar and/or a slut. Therefore, causing many to drop out of school or leave the military. Universities and military installations are both small, tight knit communities where the assailant and victim have ties. A victim may encounter their rapist on a daily basis. Sexual assaults create a hostile learning environment on a campus and a hostile working environment within a unit. Sexual assaults violate the Title IX law guaranteeing equal education for all students, and they violate the Equal Opportunity policy for a soldier to reach their full potential within the military.

Although sexual assaults are similar among units and universities, there are significant differences as well. Colleges have the reputation of being a safe place, being credible, and honest. Colleges must uphold this reputation to recruit more students and funds from alumni and donors. They have more incentive to cover up crime and face more perverse economic and effects if the crime is public knowledge. The military, on the other hand, has a reputation for prevalent sexual assaults. It is more appalling for military to commit sex crimes because the military is considered to be made up of heroes. The military should set the moral standard and defend our country's moral code. The military is held to a higher standard because it inherently leads. Despite the differing reputations, the statics show that sexual assaults happen more

frequently on college campus that within the military (Strand). Mandatory annual training is conducted in every unit on prevention and reporting of sexual assaults, while there is no established standard for training for faculty, staff, or students on most campuses. 30% of military personnel report their assaults while only 18% of civilians report their assaults (Strand). Reporting assaults within the military rose eight percent from 2013-2014 (Department of Defense). Soldiers are becoming more comfortable coming forward while students face continued discouragements to report. There are a number of sex offenders on campuses who are athletes and/or members of a fraternity, which has a greater impact on reporting sexual assaults on campuses than in the military. Athletes create immense revenue and branding for a college. Athletes are celebrities on a local or larger scale, which feeds into the entitlement mentality of the athlete. If such an athlete is a criminal, that could be detrimental for the school. There are policies in place at some universities, which protect athlete and school reputation, such as the inability of a campus officer to question or arrest an athlete in athletic facilities. Such polices put more value on the athlete than the victim. Also, universities have entangled ties to fraternities. Some fraternities create a rape culture that rewards sexual aggression and predatory behavior towards women, yet universities do not distance themselves from these organizations. Fraternities offer free housing that the university does not have to maintain. 60% of overall college philanthropy comes from fraternities (Hunting Ground, documentary). Fraternities are highly represented and lobbied in Washington D.C., becoming too important for universities to rebuke. The reputations of these fraternities is evident, yet in many cases in which university Presidents, Deans, or faculty warn parents or students of these fraternities, there were severe consequences for the school leaders and the warning retracted. In several instances of faculty and staff members taking a stand for victims, they faced retribution. The military however is unaffected by athlete or fraternity status, and affords every unit with a Victims Advocate, SHARP representative, and Chaplain to readily assist a victim. An upsetting three percent of civilian sex offenders are convicted (Russell Strand) while the military is hardly better with 6.5 percent of sexual assault reports ending in court martial (Department of Defense). Sexual assaults manifest their own set of unique problems on both college campuses and within the military.

In light of this daunting information, I am duty-bound to do my part to reduce the rampant atrocity of sexual assault on campuses and within the ranks. I am proactive in my approach to creating a safe and efficient learning and work environment. I do not tolerate sexist, demeaning, or inappropriate sexual conversations. There are healthier ways to build comradery, than to feed into a rape culture. Every case, must be taken seriously. Sexual assault is just as dire as any other crime. It is not my place to question the legitimacy of the crime or the credibility of the victim. All I must assume is that a heinous crime has taken place and it is my responsibility to act and to protect the victim. I must do everything within my capabilities to enable victims to

report their assault immediately and properly. Also, I do not tolerate the culture of victim blame among my peers in class or within my Army. No person EVER wants to be assaulted, and it is purely the actions of the sex offender that are under question. If I over hear language or conversation that contributes to blaming the victim, I will put an end to it on the spot. If sexual assaults occur under my command, I will hold assailants responsible for their actions. I will exercise my command to the fullest extent to ensure that sex offenders will never attack again. I will empower leaders at every level to do as I do, and be relentless in terminating any behavior that is not conducive to the standard our soldiers deserve.

College is a place to learn who you want to become. It is a place to learn from one another and grow. Sexual assault tears down people and communities. The military is a force built upon a value system that fosters mutual trust and teams designed to win. Sexual assault dissolves the ethos in which soldiers survive, to never accept defeat or leave a fallen comrade. The epidemic of sexual assault and how we handle it within our universities and our military, possesses a commonality, but also differs in various ways. All the same, I will be vigilant to take a stand against sexual assault in every way possible, in every role I live. As a mother, I will raise men who respect and care for others. As a student, I will empower and protect my classmates. As a leader in the United States Army, I will lead by example, lead from the front, and never back down from protecting my troops or the safe environment we have created. It starts with me, it starts now.

FUSION

By: Ashton Dean

America is a mix of cultures. Imagine the whole world in one place: that is the United States of America. One can tell it is a diverse country by the plethora of different cuisines, languages, clothing, and sports. The cultural variety in America is never set, it is forever evolving and changing over time. This country is cumulative. All cultures that arrive or have been here before fuse together to be called America.

Cultures come to America and become intertwines with others. In the essay "Tortillas" by Jose Antonio Burciaga, he writes about his daily life with tortillas in El Paso and the many purposes it served. Tortillas not only served as a regular Mexican dish but it became a culture to them. People used them as art, various food dishes, and even became a shrine in one incident. Being that Burciaga is located in America, his children took this famous Mexican dish and put an American twist on it. He writes, "My own kids put peanut butter and jelly on tortillas," (line 29) which shows the natural mixture of cultures in America. America is not only a bicultural place but a multicultural place. People bring their cultures here and they mix each other together. This is not the only Mexican dish that reached America and changed, there are many more. Burciaga lists the different dishes that you can make with tortillas: tacos, gorditas, and quesadillas. Some of these dishes have made it to America. Taco bell and other Mexican restaurants serve dishes that are bicultural. "Mexican pizza" is an Italian spin on the quesadilla that is served at Taco Bell. It became Americanized and fused itself with the famous Italian pizza. These two influences of Italian and Mexican are great forces of culture in the United States. America is a place for mixture.

Cultures that lived on this land forever and even become Americanized. In The Way to Rainy Mountain by N. Scott Momaday, he makes a trip to his grandmother's grave in Oklahoma and has flashbacks of childhood memories of her and how the Native American culture changed. Momaday writes about his grandmother telling the reader the various legends she had of the stars and how she, "had a reverence for the sun," but as religion from the Eastern hemisphere spread greatly over the Western world by colonization his grandmother, "was a Christian in her later years." (p. 3) Cultures came to America and began to spread and some replaced the traditions of those who were there before them. The mixture causes some things to be left in the past.

Momaday grew up in the younger generation of the Kiowas and says, "I do not speak Kiowa." (p. 3) He spoke English all his life. The Kiowas tribe became Americanized and mixed itself into

the United States culture. Many Native American tribes' culture are no longer evident because they have fused their selves into the American culture. America is ever changing its standards.

Cultures bring their way of life to America not knowing the influence it has on them. Asian restaurants have started serving chicken wings with different Asian sauces such as sweet and sour. Chicken wing is an American finger food and used at party events because it is recognized as a dish everyone will consume. Sweet and sour sauce is even served in McDonalds now to have with chicken nuggets. The effects of immigration are vice-versa; America impacts their life and the diversity impacts the United Sates.

All cultures come to America and change. Cultures can never be boxed in to a certain way because they can evolve or intertwine with one another to form the melting pot. America is a unique place of diversity. People come to experience the freedom of rights that we have and end up sharing their cultures forming new ones.

AN EVERLASTING LOVE

By: Terra Wilson

On May 19, 2006, my brother and I took our first field trip to the Louisiana State Capital. It was a very exciting day for the both of us. We were exhausted by the end of the day and looked forward to relaxing when we finally got home. My brother's form of relaxation was playing video games on the computer. I preferred snuggling up and taking a nap. Soundly sleeping, I was startled by a loud commotion and the chattering of people in the living room. Still dazed from being suddenly awakened from my nap, I was clueless about what was going on and why so many people were in my house. My mom ran into my arms crying. She gave me a huge hug. She said, "I love you and we will be alright." Confused, I looked at my mom and wondered why she was acting so weird. She then handed me the telephone to talk to my aunt. My aunt said, "Your father is now in Heaven and he is no longer suffering." Quickly, I ran into my room where my father had been, but he was gone.

My father was an active man who loved and cared for his family. He rarely complained about being ill. However, one day after work, he came home complaining about a severe stomach pain. My mom's experience as a nurse told her that something was seriously wrong. She immediately rushed my father to the hospital. After numerous tests and examinations, doctors informed my father that he had a tumor on his pancreas. Surgery was immediately scheduled to remove the tumor. My dad's surgery was a long and exhausting twelve hours. One would think that after such a long surgery there would be something positive about it. Sadly, that was not the case. My father's tumor was "malignant." The doctors recommended several options to eradicate any cancerous cells left in his pancreas.

When I was nine years old, cancer was a foreign term that I did not understand, yet I soon would find out. After surgery, my dad spent thirty days in the hospital recuperating. I spent each one of those thirty days in the hospital enjoying his company because I knew he would not have long on earth. Every day, I would attend to his simple needs and be there for him. When my father was released from the hospital, he had to travel back and forth to the hospital to receive agonizing chemotherapy and radiation for seven weeks. Sadly, after the seven weeks were over, the cancer returned. There was nothing more that the doctors could do. My father began to get his affairs in order before his battle with pancreatic cancer ended.

Even though my father had cancer, he did not let it become part of his lifestyle. He hid most of his pain from my brother and me because he wanted "his babies" to be happy. The first thing on his agenda was to make sure we were all secure when he was gone. He bought a

generator and a gas heater so that we would be prepared for a natural disaster. He also built an outdoor kitchen all by himself so that we could enjoy family gatherings there. Still, my father was not done yet. He felt that he needed to grant each of us a special wish. He surprised all of us with wonderful gifts. He gave me a huge fish tank filled with colorful fish. My brother was gifted with a new basketball goal. The biggest gift of all was buying my mom a brand new car so she could safely drive to work each day. We were overjoyed with the gifts he gave us. Our happiness brought him great pleasure although he knew his time with us was limited.

As time passed by, my father was losing much of his energy, and we all knew there was no cure in sight. He was worn out from going in and out of the hospital. He just wanted to be home with his family. The hospice care givers said my father needed a separate room to stay in. I decided it was best to give up my room since it was convenient for hospice supplies. I watched my father slowly drift away. Each day, he became weaker because he no longer had an appetite. He was nauseous from the chemo, radiation, and medication. As my dad became weaker, my mother became very sad. I was confused as to why my mom cried so much, but it all makes sense now. She was afraid of letting go. My brother told my mom, "Crying is okay, but smile because we have had Daddy for ten long years." My mom was shocked that my brother made that statement at such a young age. Later, she realized that what he said was true.

On May 19th, 2006, my father took his last breath. He tried so hard to hold on because he did not want to leave his family. As he struggled with life, my mother somberly said, "You can go on now. We will be alright. We love you." Even though May 19th was a sorrowful day, there was a feeling of joy and relief because my father was no longer suffering. The night of his death, the house felt completely empty. A big part of my family was missing. I was very scared to go back into my room knowing that my father had died there. I thought that his spirit would come back to "haunt" me. My mother sat me down and told me that my father would never hurt me because he loved me so much. It took three months for me to realize that he was not going to "haunt" me. Instead, he would always be there to protect me and watch over me.

After my dad's death, my brother and I had to face going back to school. My mom was a little hesitant for us because she was worried how people would react or whether our grades might slip. However, the complete opposite happened. There was an outpouring of love and cards of sympathy for the both of us. It made us both feel so warm inside, knowing that so many of our fellow students cared for us. In the face of losing someone important in my family, life still had to proceed.

My father is my hero because he did not let cancer get the best of him. He did not feel sorry for himself, and he did not want anyone else to feel sorry for him. Even though he was afraid of leaving us behind, he knew my mom would do a great job of taking over his role in the

family. Cancer may have taken my father away physically, but he is still with me spiritually. I feel extremely blessed to have had my father in my life for ten years. My father's death shaped me into the young woman I am today. His compassion for others has taught me to be courteous and respectful of other people's feelings. My father left a profound impact on my family, and not a day goes by that I do not think of him. The bond and closeness that exists within my family is the result of his everlasting love that lives in us and through us. He is and always shall be our guiding light.

MY MEMOIR: THE WORLD HAS CHANGED A 3RD PLACE

By: Aaron Murphy

Where do I begin? How does someone share the one thing that has altered his or her very existence and way of thought? I guess we should start from the point right before hell broke out. It was a normal, boring day in Fort Polk, Louisiana. It was warm outside, considering we were well into December. What made this day special? I was finally going to get some time off of the continuous grind of field rotation after field rotation. After committing three long years to this grind, I jumped at any chance to sit around the house like a couch potato. If Discovery Channel ever did a documentary on the Couch Potato, I'd have been their spokesman. This dream did not come into fruition. My spouse at the time was having trouble getting around, which wasn't anything out of the ordinary; she was pregnant with two boys. Imagine a five foot five Mexican woman walking around with a beach ball under her dress. You got that image? That's what she looked like at only 21 weeks.

However, at this point she was having pain in her stomach; we weighed the options and decided to go into the ER. After being admitted into the hospital and after five days of bed rest; the night Hell broke loose finally descended upon us. After getting transferred 60 miles from Bayne Jones Army Community Hospital to CHRISTUS St. Francis Cabrini, we met the next OBGYN (Obstetrics and gynecology). This doctor was short, about five foot three, had jet-black hair, and had a stomach, which turned out to be a pregnancy hump. After the evaluations, the doctor gave us the bad news that the twins had to be cut out. The surgical room was a slaughter house. It smelled of burning flesh and blood. I watched as the twins were cut out, one by one. My first son, Elijah, didn't cry, which was expected given his gestational age of 21 weeks and six days. However, my second son, Aidan, let out a short cry as he was taken out of the womb, which was quickly subdued with the ventilation equipment. I stayed some time later, watching them sew up the womb and abdomen. After they were done with my spouse, I went to check on my sons. They were in what looked like clear incubators and were so small that you could easily cradle them in the palm of your hand. Their birth changed my life, but what transpired after their birth shook the very foundations of my being.

After 18 days of what could only be described as an emotional typhoon, where my sons would battle it out to see which one would be better off that day. It seemed as if one son would do well one day, but the next day my other son would be doing better, and it went that way for the first

two weeks. After these 2 weeks of going back and forth, one of my sons started to fall behind while the other kept improving. The true nature of Aidan's status took only a couple of days to come crashing down on my family. Aidan started to retain water, which caused him to start swelling. After 4 days of seeing him gain double his birth weight in water, the doctors informed me that I had to decide as to whether to pull my son off the ventilation machine or to pray that Aidan will take a turn for the better.

There were only a few options I could make. First, I could make the decision to wait a couple more days, hoping he pulls out of the downward spiral. I could have decided to pull him off completely, causing myself and my spouse the pain of losing a child. I could have not made a decision, but this option of not making an option seemed unavoidable. The doctors and nurses in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit loomed over both of my sons like track stars waiting for the race to start, except instead of a foot race; it'd be a race to save one of my son's life.

I could have made the decision to wait it out a couple more days. However, there were so many questions looming for this option alone. The questions were like vultures watching, waiting, and weighing on me like they would a succulent feast. These questions came rushing and berating me:

"What if he still dies?"

"What if he survives, but ends up a vegetable?"

"What if he survives and nothing is wrong with him?"

"What are you going to do?"

"You realize the decision and consequences are yours alone?"

This leaves my last option, which is to let my son enter the abyss. This option weighed on me, like the black smog over Beijing, China. If I took this option, I'd have to face the fact that my son won't get better. Furthermore, I'd have to face all the guilt of the unknown, like the guilt of knowing that I may have given up too early on him.

While weighing the options, I finally came to the decision to implement the most merciful one. This is why after 18 days on this planet, I decided to let my son go. While he was still on the ventilator, he was held by his mother for over an hour. His eyes were closed, and his breaths were labored. Seeing him like that manifested a sense of physical pain that I can still recall even after eight months. After the long hour of being held by his mother, it was finally my turn. They placed him into my arms, removed the tube from his mouth, and wrapped him into his fluffy blue baby blanket; I thought that if he was to go out he might as well depart wrapped in a cloud of

fluffiness. Then, my son and I sat there for what seemed like a lifetime. I sat there listening to him continue to fight and struggle until it came to that pivotal moment when we both knew he wasn't long for this world. At the moment of his passing, Aidan looked up at me and into my eyes. He pierced into my soul with those dark-colored eyes, and I could swear that his eyes lit up like the fourth of July. I felt only what I could describe as pure love and understanding, and then it was gone. His light was snuffed out as quickly as it was lit. He drew one last raspy breath and was quiet. At that point, I knew my son was gone. With his passing all the grief, the pain, and the doubt of the decision I made came rushing back into my mind like a tsunami. What did I do? Was it the right decision? Will I ever love Elijah, his brother, as much as I loved Aidan?

Letting Aidan go was the best option. All the medical data on my son said that he wouldn't make it. If I were to have hesitated in making my decision, it would have only led my son down the path of more pain and suffering. This is the only way I have been able to rationalize the whole event. Even after eight months, the only thing I have could do is to become aware of my growing problems (mostly depression) and search for ways to make myself better. In April I sought professional help. With the help of my new social worker, I concluded that I need to live as happily as I can while I am in this world, so that one day I too can have that brilliant shine in my eyes.

THE "UP THERE"

By: Bradyn Shock

—When do you think you'll make it?
—To be honest, I'm not sure.
—Do you know what you want to eat? I'll order for you.
Marcus stayed silent for a moment. He kept the phone pressed to his ear. His other hand steered the car.
—Get me some pork fried rice and a spring roll.
—Okay.
—I shouldn't be too much longer. I'm on my way back from campus now.
—It's fine. I'll be here.
—Okay. Bye.
—Bye.
Marcus hung up the phone and lowered the volume as his music resumed playing. It began to rain. He was on Highway 164, headed back into Batterson from BU. There weren't too many cars on the road, so he pressed down on the gas pedal and watched the needle on the speedometer climb. The rain drops grew in size from small pinpoints to large golf balls hitting his windshield. He remembered seeing the weather forecast earlier that morning—it was supposed to be clear.
On the other side of town, another conversation was taking place between George Rainey and his wife.
—Are you at the store yet?
—Almost. What do you need?
—Can you get me some of those red mints? Not the candy—the mints. They're those little red circles with the cute little wrapping.

- —I remember. Yeah. I'll get them.
- —Okay. I love you.
- —I love you too. He hung up the phone and put his phone in his truck's cupholder. He hated going to the store. Rain began to hit his truck in small drops, then heavy sheets. He knew it was going to rain that morning when he could hardly get out of bed. His old joints hated rain. George had to sit hunched over so that his chin was over the steering wheel and squint through his glasses, but he was able to see the double-yellow line on the road.
 - —I'm getting too old for this, he mumbled.

Marcus turned his windshield wipers to a higher speed and kept driving. He began to slow as he neared the town's limits. Up the overpass, back down again. Two cars were driving at matching speeds abreast of each other, blocking both lanes. He slowed and approached the first intersection. He saw that he had the green light. He didn't like the song and picked up his phone to change it. He looked up as he was crossing the intersection and became aware of something approaching fast on his left. He dropped his phone and planted the gas pedal to the carpet, while at the same time yanking the steering wheel to the right.

George didn't see the red light until it was too late. He planted both feet on the brake pedal and felt the back tires lock up.

-Oh Jesus!

The last thing George remembered seeing was the solid red light passed overhead as the truck careened into the intersection.

The truck careened into one of the cars that was passing through the intersection. It's front-left bumper broke through the driver's side window, hitting the driver in the temple. The inside of the sedan exploded and morphed into something unrecognizable, the driver—who wasn't wearing a seatbelt—rocketed to the right side of the car head-first and was ejected through the passenger's side window. The sedan bent and buckled under the truck's weight and wrapped around the front of the truck. Witnesses at the scene reported seeing a person fly out of

the car and through the air only to then crash through the windshield of a parked car on the other side of the intersection. The driver of the parked car received only minor cuts from the glass from the windshield. The person who came through the windshield, however, was not as lucky.

Ethan didn't like waiting. He had been waiting for about thirty minutes. The waitress had already brought over two glasses of water with a cut lemon resting on the lip of each one. Now, the ice had melted, and sweat drops slowly fell down both glasses. Marcus was always late. Why was he always late? —Your friend going to make it? The waitress had appeared by his side. —He's on his way, Ethan said. The waitress nodded and walked away. His phone rang. —Hello? —Ethan? It was Marcus's mother. She was crying. —Hey. What's going on? —Ethan, you need to get down to Regional right now. Marcus has been in a car accident. —Is he okay? The signal went in and out. He thought he heard Marc's mother crying, talking to someone in the distance. —Oh my god! —What? More crying, then Marc's father's voice came over the phone. —Ethan, we just passed the wreck. It's bad. You need to get down to Regional right now. —I'm on my way.

He hung up, grabbed his jacket, and walked out of the restaurant.

The hospital was only a few miles away. The traffic became congested suddenly, cars creeping along the road. At first, Ethan was confused. The rain wasn't pouring anymore—the amount of it had lessened to a light drizzle. Then Ethan saw the blue flashing lights become visible over the car in front of him, followed by the sight of the wreck.

He knew that it was Marcus's car. The red frame had been mangled and twisted, almost cut in half by the pickup truck that had slammed into it. There was a white sheet over the front section of the truck, where the driver had been partially ejected. The windows were blown out. It looked like the steering column had been transferred to the right side of the car. Glass was everywhere. The leather upholstery had been gutted and spread about the interior of the car. He saw why Marc's mother was crying. His friend had to be dead—there was no way anyone could survive that. The traffic began to speed up again, and Ethan turned on his emergency flashers and began zig zagging his way through traffic and to Batterson Regional Hospital.

It was one in the morning. The crowd in the ICU had dwindled down to Marcus's family, Ethan, and his brother Jonah. The fluorescent lights had been dimmed so they were able get some sleep. On the far wall, a door opened, and out walked a male nurse. Marcus's father stood. The nurse motioned for him to sit. He came over to where the two parents were sitting and began to talk in whispers.

Marcus had hung on. There was, he said, less than a five percent chance that Marcus would be able to talk again. Even less chance that he would walk, much less drive or lead a productive life. His brain had been rearranged. The impact from the windshield took away almost all cognitive function. He might be able to feed himself, if he was lucky.

—What would the recovery process look like?
—If he recovers? It depends.
—What if he doesn't?

—Doctor Shaw will be able to provide you with more information about that. He'll be out in a moment.
—Okay. Thank you.
The nurse disappeared. Five minutes later, the door opened again, and Dr. Shaw walked to them. He reiterated most of what the nurse had said, and then Marcus's father broke in.
—The nurse said that you could talk to us more about what would happen if he didn't recover.
—There really is no easy way to say it. I'm sorry, but if he doesn't recover, he will have to be on life support for the rest of his life. He is stable now, but he is hanging on by a thread. I any of his numbers tilt, his whole system could shut down.
—What would be your advice?
—My advice would be to brace yourselves to let him go.

At three in the morning, Ethan was shaken awake by Marcus's father. There were tears in his eyes. Ethan rubbed a hand through his hair and looked around the room. People were being shaken awake. Some of them were crying, others were just sitting and staring at the carpet. His numbers had tilted too much.

—Ethan, I'm sorry. Marc's gone.

He was able go into Marc's room before he and Jonah turned to go home. Ethan had never seen a dead body that wasn't in a casket before, let alone his best friend. Marcus lay on a bed in the middle of the room. The machines and tubes had already been wheeled out. Some tape residue remained on his cheek, probably meant to keep a tube in place. Blood matted his hair, both eyes were swollen shut. His neck was in a brace—broken when he flew through the windshield of his car, the doctors had said. But now he was still, barely recognizable under the bruises and the cuts and the bandages.

He didn't know how to say goodbye to his friend, so he didn't say anything. He walked and stood by Marcus's left side, and looked down at him.

How do you say goodbye?

He put his hand on Marcus's shoulder, felt tears making their way down his cheeks. He didn't want it to happen this way. He didn't want his friend to be gone.

- —I'm sorry, he said. He didn't know what else to say. He turned and walked out of the room. Jonah was at the door, waiting for his turn to go in.
 - —Don't go in there, Ethan said. Jonah looked at Ethan, then the door.
 - —Trust me.

Jonah nodded and fell in line behind Ethan. The pair walked back into the emergency room. They hugged everyone, said goodbye, and walked outside of the emergency room and into the night air.

It had gotten colder. Their breath came out in clouds, trailing behind them as they walked like smoke signals. They got into the car and drove out of the parking lot.

Their way home took them through the intersection where the accident took place. The glass had been swept to the side of the road, where it reflected the greens and reds from the traffic lights.

They drove through that intersection, then the next, then stopped at the third. While they waited for the light to change colors, a man stepped out from the dark and crossed the intersection.

—Isn't that the guy from the other night? Jonah asked.

Ethan squinted. The build was the same, the coat was the same.

- —That's him.
- —What was it that he said to you?
- —Nothing.
- —Wasn't he drunk or high or something?
- —I don't know. What does it matter, anyway?

	—He just seemed out of it.
conve	The light changed, and as they drove through the intersection, Ethan thought back to the ersation that he had with him that night.
	It's all the same, it's all the same.
	—You sure?
	We all have the same appointment to keep, Up There.
	—Let's just not talk about it, okay?
said.	—Okay. Jonah put his elbow on the passenger doorframe. —I'm sorry about Marc, he
	—I am too.
home	As they kept driving, Ethan though about the last time the three of them had been her. They were getting coffee. As they walked up to the front door of the shop, they saw a less man sitting on the corner with a cup by his feet. Something about the way the man d at him caused Ethan to stop.
	—What's your name, son?
	—Ethan.
	He felt Marcus nudge him.
	—Come on man, let's go inside.
	—Go on ahead.
	—He just wants your money.
	—Go ahead, it's fine.
	—What do you want to drink? Jonah asked.
	—Whatever you get. I don't care.

Marcus and Jonah walked in. Ethan crouched down on his haunches in front of the man and they began talking. They talked for a long time about nothing. The old man was incoherent for most of the conversation, but at the end, right before Ethan left, he became clear and direct.

—I don't like saying this anymore than you like hearing it, but you've got to understand: Things like this just happen, you see? People come, and people go. Mourning, death, loss, hope, joy, happiness—it's all the same, all the same. Yin and the Yang, the snake eating its own tail it's all the same. Ethan nodded. The man continued. —You and I, we have the same appointment to keep, one day. Up there, you know. He pointed upwards. —Yeah, Ethan said, we do. —You believe in an Up There? —I do. —So make sure that you know what you're doing! Don't waste your time like I— He broke down into a coughing fit. He buried his head in his shoulder, opened his coat, and coughed into his armpit. He did this for ten seconds, then fifteen, then thirty. Ethan took this as his que and began backing away, dropping some folded up bills into the paper cup by the man's foot. He straightened up and backed away, finally turning to face his friends just as they came out of the coffee shop carrying three white cups. They handed one to Ethan, and the trio continued down the street. —Told you not to feed the wildlife. —He's human, you know. —He's homeless, Marcus said, laughing. —He's homeless.

Now he's in the Up There, Ethan thought. Images of what was left of his mangled body played back in his mind. The blood matted hair, the battered face, the blackened eyes. Yesterday that body was Marcus—now it was just a corpse. If there's anyone that's homeless, it's you.

—You say something? Jonah asked.
—Huh? No. I was just thinking.
—You sure?
—Yeah.

It's all the same, all the same—we've all got the same appointment to keep Up There.

If there is anyone that's homeless, Marcus, Ethan thought, it's you.

FLOATING

By: Kristen Curtis

It was that time of year again.

Hurrying across the parking lot, Megan caught a door that someone was holding open and dashed inside the mall. Immediately, her senses were assaulted by the rush of warm air, the loud music from the overhead speakers, and the twinkling lights. Megan removed her hood and stared for a moment at the Christmas explosion all around. The decorations had been put up directly following Halloween—a marketing strategy that always annoyed her. What about Thanksgiving? One holiday at a time, please.

Thanksgiving had come and gone, and now it was December 3rd. The third of the month was very important to Megan and her husband. That was the day Chris received his disability check. Ever since the accident three years prior they had lived hand-to-mouth on his meager income. In that time, she had learned exactly what they could and couldn't live without. They both had made sacrifices...a lot of them. Memberships to the gym, charities, magazines, and clubs were all cancelled. Bills were consolidated. Clothes and shoes were now solely bought at Wal-Mart, and luxury items like perfume and cologne were a thing of the past. Hell, she'd even had to forgo her top-of-the-line salon hair products, making due with cheap over the counter brands. And manicures? Forget it. An old filing kit at home sufficed. Megan had also picked up some valuable skills along the way, teaching herself to crochet and sew. Thanks to YouTube, their home was now bursting with her creations: afghans covered their beds and the backs of living room sofas; slippers, gloves, hats, and scarves lined their drawers; mended coats hung in the hall closet.

They had economized in transportation, selling one of their vehicles to reduce their car insurance rate and save on gas. That had been Chris' hardest sacrifice, Megan knew. Selling his truck had forced him to face his physical limitations and admit that there was no chance for a future recovery. His spinal injuries had made it impossible for him to drive. Also, he had hoped to give the truck to their son when he came of age. But like their dignity, that dream was gone now.

They had also forgone nearly all entertainment. She and Chris stopped going out on dates. No more dinners at their favorite restaurants, no more movies at the local theater. Instead, they got Netflix and stayed in with a home-cooked meal. And even grocery shopping was a source of stress! In the beginning, it had been humiliating enough having to apply for food stamps. But, an additional blow came when they discovered how much they would be receiving

every month—about half of what they needed. Thus, some of Chris' check always went towards groceries. That meant no more weekend barbecues, grilling up steaks for friendly get-togethers. Steak was a rare and special treat, only obtained whenever they'd managed to save on the electric bill.

Through it all, Megan had struggled. Struggled to wrap her head around what had happened. Struggled to adjust to their sudden and new way of life. Struggled against the desire to remain indefinitely in the fetal position. The first year had been the hardest and the darkest. She had seriously considered ending it all. In the weeks immediately following, Megan had laid in bed with her mind spinning, desperately trying to find a foothold in her world that had been ripped asunder. For months, she could hardly breathe buried underneath the weight of everything. At times, there seemed to be a wild, enraged animal living inside her chest, threatening to claw its way out of her body. It was during those moments when Megan could no longer stand being in her own skin, that the desire to leave this world was overwhelming. But, for the sake of her loved ones, she had shoved those feelings down and pressed on, doing what she had to do to ensure her family's survival.

Now...well...now she had grown numb to it. Whether it was her way of coping or simply because she no longer cared about anything, Megan wasn't sure. The last three years had turned her into a different person. Like the country song, her give-a-damn was busted. She had grown hard and cold and indifferent. Ever so gradually, it had snuck up on her. Most of the time she felt as if she were floating through space, just going through the motions, and that's how she preferred it. Floating meant she didn't have to think or feel. Floating meant she could turn everything off and just...escape. And she needed her escape. The accident had changed their lives in every way imaginable. Everything—every responsibility, every chore, every facet of their life—had fallen on her shoulders. Sometimes, in the dead of night when her dark thoughts laid her soul bare, she wondered what would have been worse. Losing Chris would have broken her completely. But, living the next fifty years of their lives with him so physically damaged and in so much pain seemed a worse kind of hell. It had taken months of physical therapy to get Chris walking again. Even now, he required the use of a walker to get around. And Hayley—

A country ringtone startled her out of her thoughts, and Megan looked down at her purse, four years old now and fraying at the edges. She dug out her phone and answered.

"What," she said, joining the throng of people making their way down the long corridor.

"Hey babe, I just noticed we're almost out of toilet paper," said Chris.

A gaggle of teenage girls surrounded Megan, and she plugged her other ear with her free hand.

"I know, I'm planning on stopping by Wal-Mart on my way home."

"And Brenda just called, wanting to see if you could play the piano for the nursing home's Christmas party."

She came to an abrupt halt in front of the Old Navy window display. The teenagers bumped into and brushed past her, but Megan hardly noticed.

"You know I don't play anymore. I hope you told her no."

"Yeah..." he sighed heavily. "I said it wasn't likely, but that we wish her and her family the best."

"Good."

Silence. She could hear Chris breathing. Megan stared at the festively dressed mannequins without seeing them. She had a feeling her husband was working himself up to saying something...and if she was right, she didn't want to hear it.

After a long pause, she asked,

"Was there anything else?"

Another pause, this one shorter.

"Babe...you know we could really use that money for—"

"Don't. Just don't," she snapped.

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry...I love you, Meg," he said quietly.

"Ditto. Be home soon."

Megan slipped the phone back into her purse and looked around, trying to decide which way to go. It was crowded, but not overly so. Her shopping could wait for the time being. Settling on the direction of the food court, she made her way over, her mind on something Chris had said. Her hardest sacrifice had been selling the piano that had been in her family for three generations. Before the accident, Megan had filled their home with music every night. Music was a part of who she was, it flowed through her veins like blood, and she had loved sharing her gift. Afterward, her passion for music turned to ashes in her mouth, and their nights were spent in silence. Chris had tried on multiple occasions to convince her to play, saying it would do her good. But, she resisted. Although the piano held tremendous sentimental value, playing was an emotional release for her...and she couldn't afford to be emotional.

Megan joined the queue at Mom's Cinnamon Rolls and sniffed the air appreciatively. She had always been fascinated by the fact that so many aromas in one place smelled good. You'd think it would all clash and smell disgusting. She could pick out pork fried rice from China Express, fresh baked bread from Subway, chicken from Chick-fil-A, and fries from McDonald's. Not to mention the scrumptious aroma of cinnamon and sugar. Her mouth watered as she paid for two cinnamon rolls and carried her tray over to an empty table. Sitting down, Megan placed one plate in front of herself, and the other across the table. Unwrapping her plastic fork, she dug out the center of her cinnamon roll and took a bite. Eyes closed as she chewed, her thoughts wandered to the purpose for her trip.

Images of her son flooded her mind's eye. Three years ago, with the help of her parents, they had bought Ryan an Xbox 360. He had been one ecstatic ten-year-old. She'd hardly been able to get him off the system long enough to eat, bathe, and sleep. She grinned at the memories, then felt a pang of sadness shoot through her. It was one thing to have to sacrifice what made her and Chris happy. She could live with that. But, denying her son's happiness had been the second hardest thing she'd had to do in all her years as a mother. Megan had never wanted her son to be without, and years of denial had racked up all kinds of guilt. She wanted to give Ryan the world on a string, the moon, the stars...and she would have moved heaven and earth to do so. Ryan had taken it all so well, though. Wise and mature beyond his years, he always smiled and hugged her when she told him he couldn't have something. "Don't worry Momma, it won't be like this forever," he told her often.

A lump rose in Megan's throat, and she took a few deep breaths to steady herself. Blessed beyond measure with that one. Such a golden heart.

Finished with her cinnamon roll, Megan stared for a moment at the one untouched, then collected both plates and threw them into a large bin. Taking her time, she moseyed down different corridors, stopping to admire various window displays here and there. It was difficult seeing so many things she wanted to buy for her loved ones. But, Megan had learned to dream. Like Pinterest, she pinned these items in her mind, saving them for the day her ship came in. It won't be like this forever.

Megan entered the Kids' Zone arcade and fed a couple of dollars into the token machine. Gathering the gold coins, she made her way past a plethora of games all clamoring to be played. She ignored the bells, blips, whistles and techno music. Her sights were set on one game only—skeet ball. As she rolled ball after ball, her mind drifted to the future. Her "ship" was the college degree she was set to receive the following spring. Until the accident, Chris had been the sole breadwinner of the family. He'd had a great job as an electrician, a job that allowed her to be a stay-at-home mom. They weren't rich, but they were comfortable. College had always been an

idea that she toyed with, but never pursued. Maybe one day whenever the kids are old enough and don't need me so much, I'll do it, she'd thought. The accident had put that plan into motion, whether she was ready for it or not. With her family's future now resting in her hands, Megan realized she would have to provide indefinitely. Four years was a long time to live on such limited means, but if they could just make it, their situation would turn around.

She was going to be a nurse. For years, it had been what she was leaning towards doing with her life. Megan enjoyed working with the elderly, something she had discovered during her years of volunteer work at various nursing homes. And now that Chris needed daily care, having a nursing degree would help her take better care of him. Also, she had calculated that a nurse's income was almost equivalent to what Chris had earned as an electrician. Five short months from now, they would get their old life back.

Well, not completely. Things would never be as they were. Like a shattered mirror, their family had been severely fractured...and there was no way to mend broken glass.

Her two games finished, she gave her prize tickets to the little boy on her right. He threw her a dimpled smile and ran off to show his mother. With quiet determination, Megan left the arcade and ventured out into the mall once more.

Choosing the path of least resistance, Megan headed towards her first destination: GameStop. Every birthday and Christmas since Ryan got his 360, she had added to his video game collection. This year was no different—he wanted the latest game in one of his favorite series. Stepping inside, she wove around people and made her way to the back.

Megan paused in front of a locked glass case and scanned the vast array of games before her. She quickly found the right one and shook her head at the price. New games were always the same. Sixty dollars was a lot to her and Chris, but it was worth every penny to see her son's goofy grin. Megan signaled to the man behind the counter and he came over and unlocked the case for her. She grabbed a copy and followed him back to the register. As he rung her up, they made small talk about the holidays.

"Got all your Christmas shopping done yet?" he asked with a smile.

Mechanically, she returned it.

"Almost," she said, opening her wallet.

He spotted the photo of her children.

"Now I know who this game is for. Some nice-looking kids you got there. I've got a little niece about her age."

Megan snapped her wallet closed and swiped her card.

"Thanks," she replied curtly.

The sudden change in her tone and demeanor made the man fall silent. Quietly, he handed her the bag and gave a tentative smile. She accepted the bag and left the store without another word.

Megan walked heavily back out into the mall, suddenly feeling drained of energy. If he had just mentioned Ryan... It always felt like an electric shock whenever someone asked about her daughter. Preferring to keep her mind afloat, each mention of Hayley jerked her out of her self-induced fog into the glaring light of reality. That was dangerous. She couldn't afford to live in reality. Megan could function as long as she could float, she could do what needed to be done. In three years she had never properly dealt with her feelings. She hadn't had the luxury of time. Megan was afraid that if she gave in to the animal inside her chest, it would tear her to pieces. And she couldn't afford to let that happen...not yet.

Turning a corner, her eyes landed on a familiar scene. Santa's Workshop had been erected in a courtyard, and the stage was huge. They've gone all out this year.

It was reminiscent of the movie, "A Christmas Story". On one side of the stage, there was a set of tall stairs leading up to Santa; on the other, a metal slide that deposited the kids back to their parents. Colorful presents and toys lay clustered in groups here and there, elf houses had been constructed large enough for kids to play in, and fake snow dusted everything. To top it off, a large train track boasted a shiny red locomotive that zoomed around the entire base of the stage.

Megan took a seat on an empty bench and watched the line of parents with children in various stages of meltdowns. Some were crying, some were fighting, but most were waiting anxiously for their turn on the old man's lap. Sitting there observing the procession Megan felt nothing. There were moments of hilarity, such as when one boy screamed and tried to run away from Santa. And there were moments of sheer cuteness, such as when one mother placed her infant twins upon Santa's knees. But neither situation could illicit a reaction out of her. She felt numb and empty inside. Is this the price for floating?

Over the years, she had noticed a gradual hardening. At first, Megan had chalked it up to all the added responsibilities in her life. Almost overnight she'd had to become the strong one, everybody's rock and anchor. And she hadn't exactly been a tough cookie to begin with. Megan had struggled with depression and anxiety on and off throughout her life. She was a second-guesser, always over-analyzing people's behavior towards her, and forever struggling with her

own self-confidence. In Chris, she had found validation at last. Megan believed him when he told her how beautiful and amazing she was. Having always relied on her husband for strength and comfort, it was strange having the roles reversed now. Before she'd even had time to process what happened, she'd had to go to work advocating for her family. For years Megan felt as if she'd been running a hundred miles an hour. And somewhere along the way, she had become unrecognizable. Indifferent to what others thought of her...indifferent to people period. Being stuck in survival mode tended to create blinders. She only saw straight ahead to her goals and blazed through anything and over anyone to get there. Megan figured once she was working and her family was back on its feet, she could focus on other people again. What she hadn't considered, and what she hadn't counted on, was becoming so hardened that she felt robotic...like a zombie, walking around dead inside. This past year, she hadn't been able to hide it anymore. It was rubbing off on her family. And they were worried about her. Megan didn't want to be this way. She wanted to get back to the person she used to be, only she didn't know how. How do I soften up again?

"Dear, I hope you don't mind me asking, but are you alright?"

Startled, Megan turned and looked at the stranger beside her. When did she sit down?

"I'm fine...why?"

The old lady slowly shook her head, her crinkly brown eyes searching Megan's blue ones.

"No, you're not."

This irritated Megan. Who was this total stranger to accuse her of lying?

"And how would you know?" she retorted.

"The way you were staring at the children just now. I know that look. Would I be right in guessing that you lost someone close?"

"I...that's...none of your business," Megan stuttered, taken aback by this lady's intuition and boldness.

"It's okay," she replied, patting Megan's arm, "you don't have to talk about it. But, a thing like that? Sooner or later you're going to have to let it out. Keeping it inside will kill you, a little more every day, until there's no you left. Trust me, honey, I know."

Megan stood and glared at the old woman. She wanted to tell her to back off, to mind her own business. But a part of her wanted to sit back down and spill her guts to this perfect stranger. That desire came upon her so quickly and so forcefully that it rendered Megan speechless.

Trying to swallow it, she tottered on her heels making unintelligible noises. Finally, shaking her head in frustration, she simply turned and walked away.

Her mind troubled and her mood dampened, Megan decided it was time to wrap up her trip, and headed to her second destination: JC Penny. Winding her way through other shoppers and festive displays, she came at last upon the little girl section of the store. Her eyes scanned the racks of clothes and came to rest on the Princess dresses. Megan walked over and began looking through them, her daughter's face filling her vision. Last Christmas it had been Ariel, the year before it was Cinderella. What would she have wanted this year? Immediately, the answer came to her. The movie of the year was Frozen. Every parent she knew had been pressed to buy all kinds of Frozen memorabilia for their daughters. Megan had not seen the movie but felt sure Hayley would have loved it.

She found the Elsa dresses, and picked the long-flowing blue gown, envisioning how her daughter would have looked in it. Megan smiled sadly and went to the register to pay.

It didn't matter that her little girl was no longer present. For the last three years, this trip to the mall had been Megan's way of honoring her daughter, of keeping her alive. This is what Chris had not wanted her to spend their money on. From a practical point of view, she could see where he was coming from. It wasn't like their daughter could enjoy her Christmas present. Megan knew that she would take the dress home and place it under the tree; that Christmas morning would come and it would be the only unwrapped present left; and that eventually, she would donate the gift to Goodwill. But, Megan couldn't envision a Christmas without her daughter being represented in some way. The thought of not buying Hayley a gift, of not participating in their favorite holiday rituals, made Megan's heart squeeze in her chest. To act as if her daughter were no longer here was the worst form of betrayal she could imagine. So, Megan ate the cinnamon roll, played skeet ball, and saw Santa, all to spend time with her daughter. I haven't forgotten my baby girl. I will never leave you out. You are my heart and soul, and I will love you forever.

Stuck somewhere between floating and reality, Megan wandered aimlessly through the mall, not paying attention to where she was going. For some inexplicable reason, this year she was having a hard time. Something was rumbling underneath the surface, something that threatened to crack her hard shell and completely incapacitate her. This thing, this animal, she must keep down in its place. Megan couldn't afford to give in to it. There was no telling what might happen if she did, what it might do to her. Float, Megan, just float and breathe.

Turning into a small corridor, she came to an abrupt halt. All her breath escaped and she stood staring wide-eyed. Thirty feet in front of her was a piano. And not just any piano. This was a

cherry baby grand piano. My piano? Surely not. It had been difficult selling the thing that brought so much joy and laughter to her and her daughter. Surely it wasn't the same one. Life wasn't that coincidental. Rooted in a kind of horrific awe, she suddenly heard Hayley's voice in her head, so clear it was as if her daughter were standing right beside her.

Play, Momma, play our songs again.

As if in a trance, Megan slowly walked towards the instrument, like a moth being drawn to a flame. It was then she noticed the sign sitting next to the piano, beautifully decorated in the Christmas spirit. On it only two words were written: PLAY ME.

Megan's heart began to pound. Was this really her old piano? There was only one way to make sure. Her hand lightly brushing the smooth, glossy wood, she walked around the piano to the strings and peeked inside. Etched into the wood were the words: Hayley Rose & Momma.

The animal in her chest awoke. Megan's breathing became labored, coming faster and harder. What were the odds that she should be at the mall on that day and stumble upon it? It was as if some divine hand had orchestrated the entire thing. Should she play? Was this a sign from her daughter that she was with her?

Megan walked back around to the bench and slowly sat down. Holding her hands in position above the ivory keys, her mind ran through the repertoire of songs she knew, but only one jumped out. It was from their favorite musical, and it was calling to her. Still entranced, not knowing or caring if people were watching, Megan's fingers lightly pressed the keys and began to play.

Immediately she felt a lump in her throat, making it hard to swallow. By the time she got to the end of the first measure hot tears had filled her eyes. She could hardly see, but it didn't matter. Her fingers and heart knew the melody, and Megan gave in completely. Her shell cracked, her heart split open, and the thing was released. As violent as an enraged animal, Megan's grief overtook her. Years' worth of repressed emotion came bubbling to the surface and spilled out in groans and wails and sounds that were foreign to her ear. For the first time in nearly four years, she was allowing herself to feel her own pain. Tears splashed and bounced off the ivory keys, wetting her fingers, but she did not stop. Effortlessly, she played with all her strength for the daughter she missed more than her own life.

Only moments ago, Megan had been wondering how to soften her heart. The answer was simple: she only needed to open it again. The old lady was right. If I had kept this inside any longer it would have destroyed me. I can't continue to be strong without allowing myself to be weak. She had at last come to the realization that with love comes pain, and she couldn't close her heart to

one without closing it to the other. Megan didn't know how or when she would be okay, but she had finally accepted reality. With the memory of her daughter to encourage her, Megan decided she would live, she would love, and eventually, she would laugh again.

By the time the last note vibrated into silence, Megan was no longer floating.

THE STIRRING OF EMOTION

By: Devon Deville

What is the difference between a book and a story? A book contains the knowledge of the mind, and a story contains the spirit of the heart. Knowledge pours from a book, and movement blows from a story. A book can give wise instructions, so that a person may be sharpened, but the deep and internal stirring of a story can give soulful meaning, feeling, and turning in direction.

A book can tell us what we need to know, with knowledgeable words, but the personal content of a story, if we relate, will reveal to us in personal ways, situations that we may face and how to approach and handle them with strength and good grace, or they may take us to an exotic place, in which, we may never be. They may inspire us to carry on from where we are now, and perhaps, take us back to where we have already been, to reminisce and see how far we have come. A book reveals, but a story speaks.

The writer of a book is one who can put wood on a fire, in a neatly stacked order, while the writer of a story can take a poker and stir the coals beneath the fire, in circles, so the heart burns brighter, and all these various elements are needed for a fire to be completed. A story is personal, while a book may be impersonal, but both can show us how to be able to reflect and ponder, to grow in knowledge and understanding with power, and perhaps a good author can write both a book and a novel. As I sit alone and contemplate, I think, is there anyone out there who can read and relate? And what's the difference between a book and a story.

READING BETWEEN THE LINES: EDGAR ALLAN POE'S DEPRESSION AND COMPLICATED BEREAVEMENT

By: Alivia Burke

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about literature is how much the audience can learn from reading the author's works. Tone, vocabulary, and even sentence structures can be connected to how well educated the writer is, their views of certain topics, a display of their emotions, personality traits, their family origins, social class, religious beliefs, and even the status of their health. Some writers wrote about the devastations of wars, others encouraged people to breakaway from government, a small portion demanded freedom from oppression, and the others wrote to inform and educate their readers on subjects. Nevertheless, all writers were important in developing American literature that is seen today.

Perhaps one of the most well-known names in American Literature is the American poet himself, Edgar Allan Poe. By making a mark in history with his horror and somewhat disturbing stories, Poe's murder mysteries are still famous to this day. Through reading the works of Edgar Allan Poe, one may find some correlations of the author having symptoms of complicated bereavement disorder as well as chronic depression. With a thorough break down of Poe's works, readers can find that Poe often uses symbolism as well as clever metaphors to express his daily struggles with his mental illnesses and attempt to overcome his intense grief.

Readers may also discover that Poe uses similar situations in his poetry as the narrator corresponding with events in his life. If one looks deeper into the symbolism, the reader may find a direct connection to Poe's personal life. Due to little documentations about his early life or his life in general, the mysteries that surround Edgar Allan Poe make it even more interesting to breakdown his literature to find out what's going on behind the scenes. By touching on Poe's life, the differences between complicated grief and simple grief, depression, an analysis of Poe's works presenting evidence of these diseases, and possible cures for the mental illnesses, one may be surprised on how much evidence can be found through reading in between the lines.

Historical Context

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts on January 19,1809, as the son of two traveling actors (Biography.com). Poe's biological father walked out on his family when Poe was only two years old and not long after his mother died as well. He was eventually adopted by John Allan, a merchant from Richmond. John Allan's parenting techniques were never consistent alternating between being very lenient and harshly strict with his foster child. Allan eventually

baptizes Poe with the middle name Allan but never adopts him legally. Poe's childhood consisted of moving from place to place because of his father's work. By seventeen years old, he went to the University of Virginia where Poe racks up a gambling debt of \$2,000 that he never pays. He runs off and joins the U.S. militia but soon finds that he has little time to write because his training so he breaks every rule in attempt to be discharged. It works and Poe is dismissed in 1831. He then decides that he was going to dedicate the rest of his life to writing. During his time in the army, however, his foster mother had died, and Poe experienced more tensions with his foster father John. Poe attempts to hold down numerous jobs, but he ends up getting fired due to his temper and tendency to argue. Poe continued to struggle making a living and suffered numerous more tragedies such as the death of his wife Lenore in 1845. Even through his depression, Poe continued to write his stories and poetry. On October 2, 1849, Poe's life story came to a screeching halt when he was found unconscious in the Baltimore streets. It was said that he was on his way to his next editing job but never completed the trip. He died a few days later due to unknown circumstances. Some speculate that Poe died from alcohol poisoning because of his heavy drinking habits (McMichael, 880-882).

Complicated Grief vs Simple Grief

Through time, everyone experiences the loss of a love one. Whether it was a distant relative or a very close friend, people will go through different stages of grief such as anger, denial, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, keep in mind that everyone reacts to death differently. Depending on the intensity of the attachment to the deceased person, an individual my take months or even years to accept that loved one has passed. If this is the case, is there such a thing of grieving too hard? The answer is yes. To understand why, it is important to look at the wide spectrum of grief and its common practices.

Grief is divided into two categories: simple and complicated. Simple grief, or normal grief, can be defined as the natural or "normal" grieving process. In this process, people are known to go through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptation (Smith). It isn't uncommon for people to skip stages. Everyone's process is different and there is no real order to go through. Some might go straight to anger and then transition over to depression. Another may be in denial but quickly accept the situation and become depressed. Regardless, the negative feelings that the mourning experiences usually peaks at six months (O'Rourke). After the six months, people begin to move on with their lives by naturally filtering the sad thoughts. People still experience negative thoughts and emotions, but, they have an easier time focusing on the happier memories than prior. The intensity of the negative feelings also begins to decrease over time as people find themselves being able to experience positive emotions more frequently.

Complicated grief prolongs the effects of normal grief and can even worsen its symptoms. People with complicated grief will often feel more than one of these symptoms: intense yearning for the deceased, lack of desire to perform normal tasks, bitterness or anger, preoccupation with the circumstances caused by death, avoidance of memories of the deceased, and even difficulty remembering happy memories (Grief). Complicated grievers often have a hard time reaching the acceptance stage of grieving and may bounce from depression to anger, and to denial. It isn't impossible to recover from complicated grief, but at the same time it isn't easy either. Complicated grievers are at risk with developing depression if they are weaker emotionally. The sad and guilty thoughts may branch off into self-loathing and suicidal thinking. Some doctors recommend family therapy to help the patient slowly accept the death and move on.

Chronic Depression

Chronic depression is known to be a less severe case of major depression. Although it shares the same symptoms, it tends to be less intense. Dysthymia, or chronic depression, is known to linger for at least two years or more (Chronic Depression). There isn't a definite variable that causes chronic depression, but doctors suspect that the issue is genetic. Patients could have been living with a gene that causes chronic depression, but never experience any symptoms until years later. The common signs of dysthymia are a sad or depressed mood most of the time or every day, a loss of enjoyment to things that the patient once found enjoyable, a major change in weight [gaining or losing], insomnia or excessive sleeping, being "rundown", having a loss of energy, feelings of unworthiness or excessive guilt every day, problems with decision making, and reoccurring suicidal thoughts (Chronic Depression). Dysthymia can be treated with some forms of medications as well as some types of therapy if necessary. However, it is important to remember that people with chronic depression have a risk of experiencing major depression if the symptoms are not properly accounted for.

Evidence Within Poe's Works

The first poem, and perhaps the easiest, to look at for possible signs of depression and complicated grief is Poe's "The Raven." This poem was written in 1845, the same year that Poe's wife Lenore died from tuberculosis. In the story, the narrator speaks of how he is visited by a talking raven that only says the word, "Nevermore!" In this work, Poe uses imagery in "The Raven" to express his emotional turmoil that was caused by the death of his wife.

In the first and second stanzas, Poe sets up the darken atmosphere and briefly mentions his dead wife Lenore as an angel (McMichael, 887). The narrator hears knocking at his bedroom door two separate times. He doesn't pay much attention to it in either instance nor is he seen concern about it. However, things began to get interesting in stanza 3 when the narrator states, "And the silken,

sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before..." (McMichael, 887). The narrator is shown to be afraid of what's behind the door, and one may go as far to argue that he already knows what's waiting outside. Those who are complicated grievers are people who generally have unhealthy grieving habits. One of those habits may consist of shutting the negative emotions down or storing them away for temporary relief. The narrator, Poe, knows that his unsettled grief is right outside the door waiting to get in, and he is afraid to face those feelings.

In stanza 4, Poe's intense yearning for his wife is symbolized as a whispering voice calling out, "Lenore!" from the darkness. The narrator doesn't react strongly to the mentioning of his wife's name and seems a bit confused. This can be drawn to Poe's avoidance in remembering his wife to keep his emotions at bay. Complicated grievers often find themselves having trouble moving on because they tend to avoid memories of lost loved ones thereby denying themselves any type of closure. In the next stanza, the narrator quickly tries to dismiss the happenings in another fit of denial, but a large gust of wind swings open the door and raven flies in perching itself on Poe's bedroom door (McMichael, 888). The gust of wind seen in the story can represent Poe's emotions finally breaking through the mental barrier and the raven symbolizes Poe's negative feelings such as his chronic depression and anger. The narration continues as Poe has a conversation with bird that can only say the word, "Nevermore!"

At first Poe is seen rather amused by the whole ordeal as he is not taking the situation seriously just as he doesn't take his feelings about his wife's death seriously. He plays along holding a full conversation with the talking animal, but quickly becomes upset when he begins to feel the memories of Lenore coming back in stanzas 13-15. The narrator cries out, "Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!" (McMichael, 889). Poe's mocking chronic depression, the raven, replays the memories of his Lenore making him feel even worse about her death. He is unable to handle these intense feelings and wants them to go away. By the end of stanza 19, Poe tells the raven to "take thy heart beak from out my heart, and take thy form from thy door!" (McMichael, 889). He demands that his negative emotions leave him, but the raven sits there perched upon his door. His chronic depression and anger will always be there on the edge of his subconscious to mock him and remind him of what he's lost. Poe never officially faces these feelings in the poem but instead tries to find a temporary fix.

Complicated grievers are caught in bitter cycle of negativity and depression. Not everyone wants to face those feelings; especially if they've been facing them for years. In the final stanza, Poe feels as if his depression is slowly killing him by stating, "And my soul from out the shadow that lies floating on the floor shall be lifted—nevermore!" (McMichael, 889). Poe feels this excessive and intense sadness and grief making his soul [heart] feel heavy. He's stating that he'll never be happy again because his Lenore has been taken away from him forever. Through this story,

readers can see just how immersed Poe is in the death of Lenore and how poorly he handles grief. Complicated grievers will often become consumed by the deaths of their loved ones and allowing them to dictate their actions and decisions. Poe is no different.

Another work that shows evidence of mental illnesses is Poe's poem "Annabel Lee." This poem was written in 1849, just four years after the death of Lenore. "Annabel Lee" is poem about two lovers that were separated by death. In this work, Poe uses a theme of envy to justify the death of the young maiden that holds similarities to his wife Lenore.

Poe starts off by introducing a beautiful young maiden named Annabel Lee describing her as young and beautiful and to be loved by only the narrator himself. However, by stanza 3, the young maiden had already died from a chilled wind. This could be translated as a reference to Lenore's tuberculosis that had cut her life short. In the next stanza, the narrator states, "The angels, not half so happy in Heaven, went envying her and me—yes! That was the reason..." (McMichael, 890). Poe is seen attempting to explain the reason behind the death of his Lenore because he has yet to accept the loss. Poe is still in of denial by refusing to accept the death and the negative emotions that come with Lenore's death. Instead, he creates a new world with his writing where his love for his wife can conquer the demons that took her away from him. The narrator continues by saying their love was much stronger than death, and no one from heaven nor hell could keep them apart. Poe is treating Lenore's death as if it were a fairy tale. Poe's reality has become bent due to Lenore's absence, and one can speculate that Poe had a great [mental/emotional] dependency on Lenore. Complicated grievers will feel an intense anger and bitterness towards their conceded situation especially if they were very dependent on the deceased. Much like a child losing his parent, Poe is angry and feels cheated by the world. The narrator goes on in stanza 6 to bask in Annabel Lee's beauty saying that she visits him in his dreams (McMichael, 890).

Poe's life revolves around the death of his wife. He's constantly thinking about the situation in a jaded manner. He remembers the good in her, her beauty and elegance, but he is more caught up hating the world for taking someone he loved away from him than focusing on the good memories. These thoughts become an obsession that grows stronger than Poe can handle. He even begins to dream about her frequently as he states, "For the moon never beams with bringing me dreams of the beautiful Annabel Lee..." (McMichael, 890). Readers can see Poe's obsession reach its peak in stanza 7 as he proclaims that he lies beside his Annabel Lee in her tomb by the sea every night. The scene that is painted reveals multiple facets about Poe.

The first facet that can be taken here is that Poe feels that he is unable to function without Lenore. People with chronic depression often feel a lack of motivation. Poe doesn't want to do anything, but to be with his wife Lenore. There isn't a document that states Poe slept beside the

dead body of his wife, but the poem can be evidence that he's at least thought about it. The second facet is that Poe feels helpless. Poe tries his best to stay in denial about Lenore, but subconsciously he knows that she isn't coming back. Lenore was taken away from him so suddenly with little explanation that Poe feels helpless and lost without her. He's willing to do anything to stay close to her. Next, the third facet is that Poe is still extremely depressed. Those with chronic depression will feel excessive sadness or depression for more than two years. At the time of this poem, it was four years after the death of Lenore. It is obvious that Poe was still feeling intense sadness. Finally, the fourth facet to gander at is insomnia. The reason that the narrator had lain down beside his dead wife was perhaps he was unable to stop thinking about her causing sleep deprivation. Poe most likely had suffered from insomnia due to his constant obsession with Lenore's death and maybe felt that he couldn't physically go to sleep without her being there with him. In reading this poem, the audience sees Poe's current mental state rapidly deteriorating as his life becomes more consumed by the sad and angry thoughts of how his Lenore was whisked away from him by jealous enemies.

Possible Causes and Cures

The human genetics are usually the first variables to be examined when depression is brought up in a doctor's office. However, it is important to keep in mind the common question in medical science, "nature v. nurture." Duboysky and Amelia state that it is the concept of both human genetics and the environment working together to shape a person's personality as well as their behaviorism (77). Poe's father walked out on his family when he was around two years old just before his mother died. It is possible for one of Poe's biological parents to have had the gene that triggers depression. Keep in mind that Poe's mother or father didn't have to experience depression themselves, but could have carried the gene within their own DNA which has the potential to cause depression. Since not much is known about Poe's father, this theory is difficult prove. If Poe's father did have depression, then Poe would have had a 28% chance of developing depression himself and if both parent had it, his chances would have doubled (Duboysky and Amelia, 78). This is one of the many mysteries in Poe's early life that may never be solved due to a lack of information.

Readers do know a little bit more about Poe's adoptive life than Poe's biological father. Most readers are aware of John Allan, Poe's adoptive father. It is stated in his biography that Poe had problems with John Allan from the beginning. Although adoptive parents can't change a child's genetic heritage, adoptive parents do still play a role in how mental illness are handled and ultimately treated (Duboysky & Amelia, 81). There are well-known accusations of child abuse, but little evidence to prove or even disprove them. If Poe were raised in a toxic environment with inconsistent parenting, it is mostly likely why readers see aggressive or toxic behavior later in his life. Poe is seen jumping from job to job due to his temper and tendency to

argue with authority figures such as the editors of magazines (McMichael, 881). This habit could have well been picked up in the earlier years of his childhood if Poe and Allan had frequent fights. He may have seen other empowered figures as threatening or was subconsciously reminded of his father thereby causing Poe to be more standoffish and more prone to irritability.

There were also psychological factors, such as the countless deaths and poverty that Poe suffered deaths through his life, which affected him greatly. Duboysky and Amelia claim that there is a positive correlation between patients who suffered childhood loss and those who develop depression from a young age (115-117). This means that people who suffered a loss of a close family member [mother, father, sister, or brother, etc.] are more prone to develop depression. There was first the death of his biological mother when Poe was only two years old. One can argue that Poe was too young to truly understand the weight of the situation. However, when a child loses his mother, the child's body changes to help it survive. Even if Poe was unaware consciously that he had just lost his mother, his body was aware. The separation of Poe from his mother, his life support, could have well been a deciding factor.

The last factor that could have caused Poe's depression was Poe's abnormal reaction to a loss. Poe's abnormal grieving practices could have developed into depression later. Professor Sandra Gilliland says, "It's really all in your head. If you feel sad, your body will release hormones that linger longer in your body. That's why when you are upset, the ache in your chest tends to last longer." Complicated grief is caused directly by a loss of an endeared loved one and starts off as normal grief. The abnormal grieving practices may have not started until the death of his foster mother, but Poe shows definite symptoms of the disease in his works after the death of his wife. Unknown to most, Poe did attempt suicide at least once in his life, but it was not successful (Miller, 115). This suicide attempt may have been a result of Poe's grieving and cognitive thinking. Cognitive thinking is a psychodynamic theory where the negative thinking is caused by depression (Duboysky & Amelia, 117-121). For example, the patient may say, "If I am not perfect, I am useless." There are other theories that involve different mind sets of depression such interpersonal theory and learned helplessness. Interpersonal theory involves problems with family member or having trouble in finding approval (118). Learned helplessness is when a situation doesn't work out as the person has planned, so the person willingly gives up (120-121). When the person is, again, presented in a similar situation where things seem helpless, the person is more readily to give up instead of trying. It is possible that Poe could have symptoms from each of these theories causing him to want to end his own life because he gave up on the world.

Depending on which period of Poe's life the doctors chose to intervene, a modern-day doctor may give Poe a low to high dosage of antidepressants along with putting him through therapy. In his early childhood, doctors would have most likely recommended therapy to help a young child move pass a traumatic experience of losing his biological mother. Later in his childhood,

professionals may do other testing if Poe is still experiencing chronic sadness and low self-esteem. If the problem discovered is genetics, Poe would have most likely go through multiple medications to figure out what best works for his body. For Poe's complicated grief, doctors may recommend a stronger treatment in therapy as well such as psychotherapy. Psychotherapy directly targets the symptoms of complicated grief by helping the patient come to terms with his loss and helps him heal developing a new sense of self-worth and purpose in his lives (Robinaugh, 3). However, it is important to remember that psychotherapy is a slow process much like the normal grieving process. In due time, Poe would have been able to move on from his depressed state and even find a new purpose in life whether that be in writing, editing, or something entirely new.

Conclusion

Poe's life was a whirlwind of death, self-destruction, and emotional agony. Through it all, he kept writing. His poems "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" give us a small glimpse into the mind of a mentally ill man fighting his inner demons that lurk underneath his bed at night. He painted pictures of obsession, possessiveness, and above all an intense longing to be reunited with his loved ones. He suffered through his bad habits of alcoholism and gambling which led him into poverty. His grief and depression were never ending as he went through life viewing the world through darkness and pain which can be seen in his later writings. To most, he was crazed and delusional with his anti-social behaviors and toxic personality, but today he is held as one of the most famous eighteenth century American poets. With countless biographies, there is still so much mystery to his name, yet that same mystery is what makes Poe's stories so great.

Works Citied

Biography.com Editors. "Edgar Allan Poe." Biography.com. A&E Networks Television, 27 Oct. 2016. Web. 22 Feb. 2017. http://www.biography.com/people/edgar-allan-poe-9443160#related-video-gallery

"Chronic Depression (Dysthymia): Symptoms, Treatments, and More." WebMD. WebMD, 2005. Web. 25 Jan. 2017. http://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/chronic-depression-dysthymia#1

Dubovsky, Steven L., and Amelia N. Dubovsky. Concise Guide to Mood Disorders. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Pub., 2002. Print.

Gilliland, Sandra. "Chapter 2: Biology of Behavior—Neutral Communications." PSYC 2000. LSUA campus, Alexandria. 24 January 2017. Lecture.

"Grief, Loss, and Bereavement." Grief Counseling: The Grief Process, Models of Grief, and Grief Therapy. N.p., n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2017. http://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/grief

Mayo Clinc Staff. "Diseases and Conditions: Complicated Grief." Mayo Clinic. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER), 13 Sept. 2013. Web. 25 Jan. 2017. http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/basics/symptoms/con-20032765

McMichael, George L. Anthology of American Literature. 10th ed. Vol. 1. New York: Macmillan, 1980. Print

Miller, John C. "American Literature." American Literature, vol. 51, no. 1, 1979, pp. 115–116. www.jstor.org/stable/2924930.

O'Rourke, Meghan. ""Normal" vs. "Complicated" Grief." Slate Magazine. N.p., 05 Mar. 2009. Web. 01 Feb. 2017.

http://www.slate.com/articles/life/grieving/features/2011/the_long_goodbye/normal_vs_complic ated_grief.html

Smith, Melinda, and Jeanne Segal. "Coping with Grief and Loss." Coping with Grief and Loss: Understanding the Grieving Process and Learning to Heal. Helpguide.org, n.d. Web. 01 Feb. 2017. https://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss.htm

Robinaugh, Donald J., Luana Marques, Eric Bui, and Naomi M. Simon. "Recognizing and Treating Complicated Grief." Current Psychiatry. Frontline Medical Communications Inc., Aug. 2012. Web. 25 Jan. 2017.

http://www.mdedge.com/currentpsychiatry/article/64797/ptsd/recognizing-and-treating-complicated-grief

WHERE IS THE LOVE?

By: Ashton Dean

The poem "Hap" is a story of a man whose sorrow and detestation grows and grows but instead of exploding, it is transformed into love and hope for the better around: an optimistic view. "No Place at the Table" by Eric Alai is written from the standpoint of Trayvon Martin, an American boy who was shot and killed while walking the street at night by a neighborhood watchmen named George Zimmerman. What struck Alai to write the poem from this perspective was his neighbor who popped fireworks after Zimmerman was released. "A Very Old Man with Enormous" Wings by Gabriel Marquez contains a couple, Pelayo and Elisenda, who discovered an angel but as it became exposed to the townspeople, they rejected him because he didn't meet the goals they wanted for a Godly person. In all 3 pieces the presence of love is yearned for. The authors want to remind the readers what makes us all feel at peace and easy: love itself.

In "Hap" Hardy contains hatred but later turns it around and still has love and hope for the world. Hardy's hardships begin with this line, "Know that they sorrow is my ecstasy,/ That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!" Sadness tends to get him down and turns to hatred. The negatives fuel his hate; the love he once had has turned to the opposite. Hardy begins to turn his feelings around with, "How so arrives it joy lies slain,/ And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?" His joy is quick to be put down by outside forces but there is still hope left in his heart. The hope he has for things to get better is greater than before.

In "No Place at the Table", Alai writes this experimental free verse poem from the heart. He recognizes the setbacks that we have just recently entered into in our country with racial differences arising again. Alai writes, "Dr. Martin Luther King,/ speaks of all people/ sitting at a mutual table,/ people from all races,/ being together in pious peace,/ laughing, reveling,/hand-in-hand in harmony,/ but is that what you see in George Zimmerman?" We are not fully living up to what Dr. Martin Luther King spoke to us almost 70 years later. America has begun to divide again just when we were getting closer together. Alai writes this to remind us what the real goal is: living together in harmony and not seeing color. Also Alai feels distant from his fellow citizens and questions, "Why won't you love me like the brother I am?" In America, we let past differences influence how we feel about every person in a race and that is not right. Every person is not alike. Just because George Zimmerman shot Trayvon Martin does not mean that African Americans should hold hate in their heart for all whites; they should look to unite together to break the chains with peace. Love is what cast out all hatred, not more of it.

In "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" Marquez demotes the angel even in the title to make people look in the mirror and see what they would do when they receive the holy blessing they long for. The angel is taken very lightly and the people do not look to him as they should because he is not what they expect from a super natural being from heaven. They toy with the angel as if he is not a supreme being because he did not fit the description of an angel that they wanted him to be. For example Marquez writes, "The only time they succeeded in arousing him was when they burned his side with an iron for branding steers, for he had been motionless for so many hours that they thought he was dead." A divine being like him was played with by humans that he could easily destroy but he has mercy on them because of the love that he carries. Do we sometimes dally with the wrong things? The angel was an aid yet nobody recognized him as one. He was looked at as a circus act. Another example is when they give the angel a place to stay but it's not as great as they portray it to be, "Pelayo threw a blanket over him and extended him the charity of letting him sleep in the shed" Even after all the angel did with bringing blessings upon the home with his presence and healing the child, no one appreciates him for what he has done. As humans, our focus is in the wrong place at times and we are not thankful for what is right there in front of us. We should love what we have because blessings are for a reason.

There is less love in the world and the authors show the focus of humans in their pieces. People are running from what we need to make for a peaceful world so the people after us can have a better lifestyle. Passion and affection have sailed away and animosity and disgust have took its place but we can shift the tide to bring the boat of love back.

PRETTY UGLY 2ND PLACE

by: TiffanyJo Ayers

She stepped lightly out of bed and slipped through the door, in to the hall; tip-toed up the steps to the kitchen and unlocked the front door, cracking it just enough to wiggle out: secret cigarettes that weren't a secret anymore. Not only thankful for the curbed appetite, but an activity for her idle hands.

She sat on the steps and wished for hot coffee and company; anyone to talk to about the upcoming day or just take in the crisp morning with. Those days of bliss were long gone...a road that seems miles away from where she was sitting now.

She dressed alone for work again, an activity that had become comforting in her quiet life. Coffee first, then the radio, which was probably too loud for her neighbors, but they were nice folks and never mentioned it at the mailbox. Some days were full-fledged doll up days and others she felt lucky to smear on cover up and smile.

On this particular day, she stared at her reflection and sighed loudly, so much so that she felt it's release from the crown of her head and the tips of her toes. Dark circles under her eyes were now more noticeable than her once rose-colored cheeks; color positively drained from her face. "Nothing a little makeup won't fix," she thought, ever the eternal optimist. After an hour of primping, she still wasn't satisfied. "You're just a reflection of a reflection I don't even recognize."

It was in that moment, in her own recognition of how little she remembered of her former self that she knew what had to be done.

It's hard to find your voice sometimes. We get lost, trampled underfoot of those who claim to love us. It's interesting to watch yourself fade in and out of certain lights, different shades of the same color. More often than not, we rarely notice; but when we catch a glimpse of someone we used to know, it can be trans-formative.

She was alone in a marriage, a binding contract, though that's merely a piece of paper with signatures - that's what it amounts to anyway. Marriage, in her mind, was a complete expression of love, gratitude and trust. A selfless act of commitment to another soul; the greatest sacrifice

one can ever make for another. She gave her life to another; her world, her heart and soul - precious items that were taken for granted over a short span of a few quiet years.

She marveled at how long she'd been blind to this as she wiped the days makeup off, silently in the guest bathroom, trying not to disturb the house. It was just the way she left it; dishes in the sink from two days ago, laundry - clean and dirty - littered about. It was late but she was hungry. She took out her contacts and slipped on her new frames - an effort to feel new - and tiptoed in to the kitchen. "Mmm nothing," she whispered as she grabbed the jug of orange juice, "this ought to do it." Nutrition and decent rest weren't on the menu for this girl lately. She was lucky to scarf down an old, burnt piece of pizza between doubles. God forbid she ever ingest an actual meal - would her hunger ever go away?

she's living in a ghost town. everything is familiar and she knows it all well but it's a miserable, empty place. Tables are still set and there's left-over brunch molding from the humidity. Someone left their radio and the same sad song is looping, for effect. She wanders around the streets of this town looking for any trace or resemblance of things she once knew.

her homes have been so temporary, shifting shapes and faces; endless unfamiliar places. and there's no one she can trust.

watch her bones rust - and then turn to dust.

she took the lasagna out of the oven and took the foil off to let the top breathe. "now for the cookies," she said, sliding the tray in. chocolate chip cookies were just about the only sweets she knew he really enjoyed, so she made some from scratch this night.

thirteen minutes was all the time the cookies needed, which gave her plenty of time to slip in to some lingerie that she'd never worn and smooth out her hair; touch up her makeup from the short work day, it was seven o'clock.

"I'll be home as soon as i can," a text received at 7:45 read. "okay," she thought, "that gives me more time to spruce up."

she folded all of the blankets on the couch and lit every candle she could find. made the bed so it looked inviting and checked her face once more; still pale but happier, this was the first night in a long time that they were going to be alone and she was thrilled, supper, dessert and dessert; that was the plan.

another text came through at 8:15, "I'm sorry, I'm running late. you can eat without me. I'm not sure what time I'll be home."

of course she didn't eat alone; "I'll just wait," she said to herself.

and she waited.

and waited a bit longer.

finally, she could take no more. she made a small bowl of salad and ate it standing in the kitchen, alone. she wrapped up the lasagna and put the cookies in a zip-lock. she blew out all of the candles, locked the door and turned out all of the lights in the front of her apartment, except for one. she washed her face and exchanged the lingerie for pajamas that swallowed her thinning figure. she curled up on the couch with a book and waited for his return.

"I'm going to stay with the guys since it's so late, sorry babe for making you wait."

she let out a big sigh and turned out the last light and went to bed. alone.

there's something about her sadness now; it seems a bit more pure, like she's really letting it all go and actually feeling the loss. reeling from it, perhaps. watching her deal, taking apart her coping mechanisms and putting them back together again has been a semi-joyful sight. I think there's a truth to her light now, something she never noticed about herself before, perhaps the pretty ugly phase has passed, and now she's happy focusing on the pretty parts, still dealing with the ugly, they seem separate now, and this is a relieving sight to see.

even if this girl is me.

COGNITIVE LEARNING VS. GREAT PROGRAMMING

By: Devin Davenport

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of cognitive learning is "of or involving conscious intellectual activity." Obviously, robots are not conscious, which is why one should not use terms that deal with the "alive " and "aware" side of things in life. Digital Technology has come very far in terms of for lack of a better word: "intelligence", but humans have to and should remember that we built robots to help us not become us in any shape or form. We as a species should remain along with animals, the only living things discussed in the realm of intelligence and cognitive ability.

Robots have no ability to think for themselves and proof of that is the simple fact that they do not have a brain so one can not measure their so called, "cognitive ability", but what one can measure is the amount of time it takes for the robot to pull up information from its program or the Internet. Physically, robots and artificial intelligence can be intimidating, especially to someone or people who have not witnessed the capabilities of a robot's artificial intelligence. Usually, robots are small in stature compared to humans, but based off of humans and our child-like interactions with technology; we tinker with cool stuff that could hurt us.

Robots across the world have been reported to actually blow up and kill people, or severely injure people and animals. Mentally, programming robots can be exhausting to humans and very costly, which in turn could affect the economy in a significant way. Robots are in no way "emotional", and we shouldn't view them as such. Movies like Big Hero 6, Star Wars and Power Rangers depict robots behaving emotionally like humans, which in my opinion, is utterly ridiculous and should be stopped immediately before we as a race are stuck in war with and against super computers that we created. Also, how would it look if you saw someone legitimately arguing with a robot or taking one on a date? Companies have begun to develop robots to do human jobs.

In my opinion, a big disadvantage with robots is the loss of jobs for people. Robots have eradicated many jobs for the middle class in several industries, such as car making, toy making and beverage filling. Robots also aren't equipped with everything needed for a job, and robots typically do not handle the unexpected as well as people do. Robots lack intelligence; therefore robots can never improve the expected results or outcomes of their jobs and or specified task. One thing robots lack but people have is the sense empathy or emotional understanding, as a result of this there are limitations on how robots can help interact smoothly with people. Human interaction with robots has a positive side sometimes take for instance: Watson. According to

IBM.com, Watson is a robotic computer system developed by IBM that is capable of answering questions posed in natural human language (IBM).

Watson has been featured on game shows with humans, and "he" even has been included in tough medical research projects (IBM). Watson is constantly labeled as a cognitive object with emotional recognition, but once again we as humans assembled the robot and programmed databases of information into it and forgot people actually built it! Watson allegedly can edit movie trailers based off of reactionary programming through monitoring the faces of humans while they are watching a movie (IBM). That's a smart way of saying IBM has programmed facial features along facial emotion recognition which, according to robotic enthusiast is not hard to do based of the current tools available in modern society. Robotic computer systems today come equipped with advanced technology. And to those who have don't have any experience with "smart" technology would be under the impression that Watson is self-aware. I don't have a weird quarrel with machines, but I feel as though in this day and age that I am the only person that doesn't see robots as "smart" regardless of the title given to robotic devices invented by man for man. Robots definitely have a place in society as servants, and they should be treated as such with titles appropriated to their specific purposes.

For instance, the Roomba is a vacuuming robot that uses sensory technology to identify liquids and food particles. One funny thing about this robot that its owners aren't aware of, is the fact that if you take the Roomba outdoors it can overstuff itself and robotically malfunction. That doesn't sound too smart to me, which is why we also need to come up with better adjectives when describing very well programmed technology. Robots are very exquisite pieces of technology, but they can only repeat and do what we program them to do.

There should be no longer a time that robotics are mentioned within the talks of intelligence because they aren't smart or cognitive, they are just so well programmed that they seem that way. If you think about it a logical manner, if we raise a child and a robot together through their entire "lives", which one will actually progress and survive throughout all phases of life? Obviously, the robot isn't alive so it can't cognitively function to be able to do anything. In conclusion, my obvious stance on dissociating intelligence with programming stands on the side of logic, and I also think it's important for us a human race to really give thought to what we call "smart" or "intelligent" so the next time you see a popular robot being advertised on a major scale, remember the programmer not the robot programmed.

BROKEN REFORMATION

By: Devon Deville

I am dead and lying in bed with tears forming and falling from my sunken and dilated eyes, simultaneously more tears ran down the cheeks of my pale and ghastly face, and from there, onto a dark and moistened pillow case. I was all alone, broken, forgotten, dehydrated and starved, with the inability to get up and move. I asked myself, "How did I manage to find myself here?"

I had lost my job three weeks earlier, and on the same day, my family also abandoned me, so for the previous three weeks, I had been withering away using the method of crystal methamphetamine to die by slow suicide. I cannot find a reason to live, and I cannot see a way ahead. This was not what I had planned for my life. All the foundations that I had built my life upon fell apart in one swift moment, and the collapse came down with such fierceness, that it all just seemed surreal. I once had a wonderful job working at a zoo, and that was a miracle for a felon like me. I also had a fiancée and a son too. I had a house and a vehicle and a yard. I had everything I ever wanted in life, but it was not enough to suffice that appetite within me, which was to feel the euphoria of a pill.

I had taken a few "dones" as some called them, or otherwise known as methadone, and then I was bitten by a one year old tiger cub at work. When the drug test came back unclean, that was the moment that I fell straight down in life right under its seams. When I called my fiancé to inform her of my actions and the consequences, I first hoped she would forgive me, but I also felt a deep and intense sense of fear that she would take my son and abandon me. My fear was realized when her response came: "Me and your son will not be here when you get home". I immediately knew that I would now be sleeping alone at night without the warmth and comfort of another.

Next came the drive to an empty home, and the knowledge that I would have to explain to my parents what had happened. I felt so much shame mixed with a deep and inward agonizing pain and I could not shake it off. I believed that everyone would be better off bringing flowers to my grave. For three weeks, I stayed all alone, longing for a hand to lift me up or hoping for a kind word, but all I got was the sound of a lighter striking to heat up a pipe, and the silence of a dark and cold home. My house was void from the noise of the running feet of my son and the warmth of a lover. "I didn't want this. I didn't want this. I burned it all down," I cried. I had destroyed everything I loved for the temporary feel of a handful of pills.

From out of nowhere, my ego came crashing down, all around me. I had no more defenses, and my mask disappeared, with all its selfish insincerity and dishonesty built upon an insecure fear of rejection. I was as helpless as a child. My helplessness was like a brick being thrown into a mirror, and the glass falling upon the ground with a thousand reflective pieces. I sat there for a while completely humbled and broken. I realized that all my understanding was nothing, and then words started entering my mind: "What are you doing here? You say that you care about the hurt and broken, but instead of helping, you turn around and use their sufferings as an excuse to hate the world, and you want to be able to help people, but look at yourself right now. How will you help anyone by doing what you're doing?"

My eyes began to open wide, and with that, so did my heart. I began to understand just how I arrived to where I was: my choices. I was not a victim of circumstances. I alone was the guilty and responsible party for my situation. I chose how I reacted to every situation in my life leading up to the present moment. I was the only person to blame for my life of smoldering ashes and dolefully deep and self-destructive ways, but it was time to do something different. It was time for me to exit my dark and depraved cave and go out into the world and eradicate the shame that I had hinged upon my name.

After becoming aware of what I must do, I arose a different man from the one who had been lying down. A fire burned within me with the ability to inspire. I began to move forward each day with a renewed mind and outlook on life, while staying focused on being helpful, productive, and caring towards others. I set out to extend a helping hand and lift others up with a smile, all the while understanding how it feels to be hopeless, rejected, forgotten, and broken. I set out to walk in humility with empathy.

I was dead and lying in bed, but I became alive again, and my death taught me that sometimes a person must be broken down to be reassembled, and in the same way, sometimes life is molded from death, and strength from ashes. I once believed that people are insignificant like the grains of sand on a beach, but I learned that they are not insignificant unless they choose not to receive a great part to play in this often-uncaring world. Sometimes a broken and shattered mirror can be reformed and given a new heart to reflect light in the dark.

WICK

By: Alivia Burke

"Wake up."

He shifted on the floor feeling his head spin. The ground was cold, jagged, and dug into his small back. His fragile body felt heavy. His legs numb at the thought of even attempting to move, his mind strained to create coherent thoughts. How did he get here? What was he doing before this?

"You must wake up."

The odd distorted voice could not be identified. It was neither male nor female. It hardly even sounded human. He laid there having the energy drain from his body pooling at his feet. He tried to drift back to sleep hoping he could wake up tomorrow and remember. He had to remember.

"Wake. Up."

A bright warmth spread across his right cheek sending a burning sensation down to his lower neck. He slowly inched opened his eyes to catch an array of white and blue lights flickering wildly in the stilled darkness. He squinted to help his eyes adjust to a dancing blue flame that stared down at him. The blue flame sat on a very thin wick of a long slender white candle. The slender wax was smugly placed in an old golden holder with a long loop handle for support. The boy laid there watching the flames' attack on the air. The bright blue light with a white tip slashed at its environment violently, taking its frustrations out on the world.

"Are you warm now?" the voice spoke again this time it was closer than expected.

The boy lazily rolled his head to the side away from the flame. Peering into the darkness searching for the creature that had awoken him from his slumber and that had placed this angry flame beside him. His peace shattered, he strained his eyes.

"If you're looking for me, I am right beside you."

The boy snapped his head back to the swishing flame only to meet blue eyes that were brighter than the flames. The pupils were charcoal black, small, and inhumanly shaped with rough edges. The blue flame blinked at the boy and it continued to thrash around. The wick that was sitting comfortably on the slender wax carefully inched down closer to his face to connect more fully in

his eyes. The heat hovered an inches above the boy's nose to prevent burns. The boy tried to speak but no words formed.

"You must not speak here." the blue flame with eyes spoke again not moving from the boy's face, "They can hear you."

He glanced around the room. He, laying down so defensibly, was completely venerable to whatever wished to harm him. He then looked back at the talking inanimate object that wasn't supposed to be alive (yet was) and went to speak but stayed quiet remembering the candle's warning. The flame slowly sat back on its wick looking down at him.

"Can you move?"

The boy paused for a moment and checked his mobility. He arched his back trying to force his upper body off the ground but freezing finger tips clenching his wrist kept his arms and ankles pinned. The boy jerked his body in every direction causing whiplash. He felt anxiety grip his throat and the concern weighed heavily on his chest making it harder to breathe. The boy shot the flame pleading eyes as he felt the fear begin to overtake him.

The blue flame closed it eyes as it took in a breath of air. Its flames began to grow bigger, brighter, and hotter. The size become so enlarged and the erratic movements became more widespread. The light from the magnificent fire scattered over the boy's body shinning a whitish blue ray repelling the darkness that bound the boy's limbs. He watched as the black hands begrudgingly recoiled from the seething brightness. The angry shrills of the shadows were heard so closely to the boy's ear but no retaliation could be done. The boy quick sat up with his newfound freedom gratefully eying the candle with the thin wick.

"Quickly now, take me in your arms."

The boy rolled onto his side and sat on his knees. He hurriedly took the candle with the blue flames into his arms surrounding himself in the comforting blue light. His legs still a bit sluggish, he took his time standing up. His body still felt heavy, but was no longer cold. The warmth gave him a surge of energy; a chance of feeling.

"We must go now."

The blue flame pointed behind him. He nodded and began to walk. He wasn't sure how long he had walked in silence with the soothing warmth in his arms. Time didn't seem to matter much anymore; at least not where he was. It was so dark in this empty, cold place. There was no telling what could be out there except maybe for them. Those things that had gripped him so tightly stealing the breath away from him, that had bound him, they were watching and waiting. He

could feel them. That's why out of all the possibilities, he never expected to find something as odd as, well, a dresser with a mirror just sitting in the middle of his path. When he approached the strange finding, he looked down at the blue flame. However, it didn't seem talkative like it was before. The boy placed the warm candle onto the dresser for better lighting. He inspected the drawers and found that they were useless. He then looked into the mirror that was severely cracked and covered in dust. He wiped the dirt particles off the smooth glass to find nothing.

"You don't remember, do you?" it had been a while since the voice spoke causing the boy to jump. He turned looking at the flame tilting his head to the side. The flame shook its head in disappointment and went to speak but was suddenly interrupted by demented shrieks echoing through the darkness. The boy rotated in a circle trying to pinpoint where they were coming from. They were everywhere.

"We have to leave now! Take those matches with you in case we get separated. Hurry!" the boy scanned the darkened dresser for the match and greedily swiped the light sources shoving them in his pocket. He grabbed the candle, cradling it in his arms and took off at full speed not sure where he was going.

Soft footsteps slapping close behind him, whispering becoming more intelligible, he was too frightened to look behind him so he focused on the tiny ball of white light that grew bigger and he ran closer to it. He could feel his senses becoming stronger as the white light gravitated his body towards it. He reached out to the large portal but found it to be too high up.

"You must climb! Hurry!" the flame instructed him. He felt around in the dark for the platforms to scale, nervous and terrified of the voices hunting him.

He was fast and agile, but so were they. They were agitated that he was leaving; leaving without them. They pulled on his ankles, yanking him down knocking him off balancing. He dropped the candle. He lost his guide. The warmth left him and the coldness returned. He hung onto the ledge. Reaching down into his pocket pulling out a match he struck it producing a flame. He thrust it the fire towards the creatures as he held onto the ledge with one hand. They released him, jumping onto the ledge below. He climbed up looking for his guide. His match's flame had begun to die, dimming his chances of survival. He tried to call out to the flame long forgetting that his voice did not carry here. Then, in deep darkness, he spotted the candle lying down on one of the lower ledges. Just as he was about to jump down, the blue flame intervened.

"No! Do not come any closer! Go to the light! It's the only way."

A creature clutched the candle on each of its side snapped the wax in two and covered its flame smothering it. The boy shook in horror as the bright warmth died and the light dimmed. He lit another match as he watched the creature begin to climb back onto his ledge paying no mind to the light. He was slowly backed up onto the edge of the ledge. With nowhere else to go, he turned towards the portal and leapt. They leapt after him screaming that he could not leave. He could never leave. They desperately reached out to him, clawing at the darkness, praying to tear him to shreds; to leave him as cold and broken as they were. He used every bit of energy he had left to propel himself to the portal. He could feel the warmth being restored as the rays pulled him from this dark world and brought him home.

TECHNICALLY TECHNOLOGICAL HONORABLE MENTION

By: Bradly Cook

With the possession of the microchip, are we much like our ancestors who struck the first flame or held the first wheel? For the first time in man's existence, our physical and biological parameters no longer determine the condition of our reality. No longer are we confined by distance, limited to calculate with the stored data of our existing knowledge, or slowed by the speed of our inherent powers of computation. The human race is now enhanced with the creation of technology. It can be said that the invention of computer technology has solved many of man's problems, but has created a set of new ones. Virtually, any question we ask can be answered by typing it into an online search engine. We can transmit great amounts of information across vast distances in seconds. Logistics is no longer a great concern when technology projects data into our homes. Anyone with a computer can calculate complex mathematical equations in just moments. However, I believe complacency with this power is leading to the demise of our control and security.

In an essay written by William Safire, "The Threat of a National ID," the author mentions the idea of an imposed technological form of identification. This identification would carry the owner's personal credentials in efforts to expose any non-compliant form of terrorism. Safire boldly states, "All of us are willing to give up some of our personal privacy in return for greater safety" (1). Although he was looking ahead from 2001, Safire was right to criticize the prediction of the public putting ourselves at personal risk by allowing access to our consolidated information.

However, we may be putting ourselves at risks more for the sake of convenience rather than terrorism. How many times do we download a new software application to our computers or mobile phones and hurriedly agree to all the conditions of its use? We are allowing software developers access to nearly all information in our personal devices under the pretense of entertainment. This single lapse in judgment puts our personal data at the mercy and good nature of the corporations who require access.

Does the fact that we carelessly expose our personal data lay the framework for a much greater threat? As we progress through the age of technology, the world becomes a much smaller place and every aspect of our lives becomes plugged into the Internet. Our social interactions are posted online and display our most intimate characteristics. Personal data on a public line leaves all of us vulnerable for cyber-crime and potential targets for cyber-criminals.

We are also potentially invaded by automated spy-bots that are designed to collect information for purposes of marketing or social demographics.

In his essay "Robots vs Humans," Steve Rosenbaum mentions spy-bots becoming highly automated to the point of impersonating humans (1). Rosenbaum also leads to the subject of the technological singularity becoming part of the equation (1). This philosophy is significant—as technology becomes more artificially intelligent, it will evolve exponentially to possibly overtake mankind; this viewpoint is partially demonstrated in the 2014 film Transcendence written by Jack Paglen.

The age of technology is bringing forth another vexing phenomenon. Humans are increasingly personifying software programs. In a 2016 web exposé, IBM CEO Ginni Rometty presents the company's new artificial intelligence platform called "Watson." According to Rometty, "Watson will not be programmed...it will understand, reason, and learn" (World of Watson, 00:10:33-00:10:40). This description is much like the plot to the 1991 film Terminator 2 by James Cameron; an artificial intelligence becomes self-aware, overtakes mankind, and humans must fight against the machines. Aligning with this theme, the essay "Rage Against the Machines", by Clive Thompson tells us how humans fight rebelliously against technology.

Perhaps the struggle with technology may not be directly for our lives, but rather our livelihood. In his essay, Thompson reminds us of a Napoleonic Era group called the Luddites, which were a group of textile workers replaced by a certain technology of their own time, resulting in an industrial rebellion (22). The conception of technological software acquiring the intelligence to replace the human capacity to perform work is now a subtle reality. We see information kiosks in hospitals, automated bank tellers, automated telephone receptionists, online training software, and a host of other computer-based programs replacing human jobs. When technology causes the total replacement of human labor, the original intention to enhance human skill is lost.

Technology has been created progressively to enhance and assist our daily lives to make living easier. However, we have come to a point that we cannot be without it, and I am inclined to think about creation in general. As a student simultaneously studying biology, art history, and psychology, I see a recurring theme: creation usually rebels. The biblical Book of Genesis tells us God created Adam and Eve, ultimately they rebelled against God which led to the downfall of men. Additionally, we see in Mary Shelley's work Frankenstein how a creation rebelled and led to the demise of its creator. I cannot help but wonder if man and technology will be the next tale.

OVERCOMER

By: Ashton Dean

Sweaty palms, dim lights, shiny shells and a foggy mirror was all I can remember from that night. This was a suicidal scene. The gun was talking to me screaming, "Pull it! Pull the trigger now!" My hands shook as I inched up on the trigger and my eyes squinting as if I couldn't look my own self in the face. What a coward I thought I was. Tears flowing down my face as my whole body became an earthquake. I gripped the trigger.

Boom! A year later and I'm enjoying my life. Feels too perfect. The author who was writing my book got fired and they hired a new one that wants to make a fairytale story for the kids and then make it into a movie that starts off with a black screen and gold letters that says, "Based on a true story," before the movie starts. I'm in a room that is my family, yet we are not blood related; people have brought my spirit from the gates of Hell to the homes of Heaven. "You want a plate Ashton? Never mind. I don't even need to ask you!" Eve says jokingly. Eve makes not only me but everyone laugh all the time as she teases us about our huge appetites. She is a petite woman that has a speech impediment, that her daughter Keion also has, but once you get to know them well, you'll "read between the lines." Keion is the smartest person in the room, but people focus on her disability too much. Eve's other daughter, Trice, fortunately didn't have to deal with those things but she developed problems on the way. Her boyfriend just up and left her with a baby out of nowhere. No one saw that coming or saw him leave. "Aw hush Eve! You always giving people a hard time." giggling speaks Grandma Helen from in the kitchen." She's a sixty something year old woman who is, by now, grown short but body frame is still in tack from her younger days. She claims it just runs in the family. And judging by her daughter and stories of other family it is true. Couldn't blame Pa for marrying her. He has a smile on his face that's from ear to ear. The last stroke devastated his body and he can't speak like he used to, but we know he'll make it through. "She's going to get what's coming to her." says their daughter, Faye. She is like a second mom to me. I can come so lost, and she will give me the best directions to the road of life. Her husband is Robert. A life of the party character. When he walks in, we know we are in for the most hilarious moments. He is an Army vet who's tall and lanky. "Hey Daddy!" screams Alexis as he walks in. She is Robert and Faye's daughter and carries both of their attributes. She'll laugh at anything you think is funny and has the build of her mother and grandmother. Here comes the Twins with a smirk on their face exclaiming, "Pick me up Ashton!" They are the cutest kids I will ever meet. I can't even fuss at them when they do something wrong because I don't want to damage their feelings just how I don't want to damage them physically. Gabrielle and Danielle always know how to make me feel warm and welcomed

while they're the youngest ones in the room. "Y'all girls are something else!" their grandmother says. Mrs. Bridgett is so short but she can't be qualified as a midget because she is above 5 feet. Her curly hair reaches her shoulders, and Eve teases her about her eating habits as well. Mrs. Bridgett has 3 daughters in the room. Emily is the oldest and inherited the family build the most next to Alexis, Faye, and her mother. The height definitely comes from her mother. Crazy thing is, she can eat almost as much as me. I still wonder where it goes. Then there is Jasmine who is the youngest and the tallest among her family even though it is still a height that is shorter than me.

Last in the room, but not least, is Jerilynn. My girlfriend but also my best friend. She found me in a bad place in my life. I did not know where to go or what to do. Depression had overcame me. I had lost sight of importance: my purpose. My parents were divorcing and I was confused on what my purpose was in life. School wasn't working for me. My grades were the worst they ever were. Depression took a hold of me and would not let go. But Jerilynn came and brought me to a spiritual hospital. She helped to cure my blindness. I'm glad she asked me, "Do you want to go to church with me?" because there is no telling what I would have done. Mind you, I have been to church plenty of times but none like this one. The service was not a performance, but a discussion. No program or traditional sequences. I can actual ask the person that preaches questions as church is going on. I can actually come and get my questions about my struggles answered happiness began to replace depression, and love replaced suicidal thoughts. All the negatives turned around to positives. All it took was one simple yes.

By: TiffanyJo Ayers

I watched these two people at my favorite diner last night; a new something of sorts, I could tell.

She was all smiles and starry-eyes and he only dropped his gaze from hers when he absolutely had to, or when she relieved him a little by glancing down at the tiny pool of black in her hands. I think she had three cups, but I wasn't counting; I was preoccupied making notes about strangers

They split everything, which was disgustingly sweet. I never noticed a lull in conversation, but my omelet was delivered at some point and I had to look away to make it seem like I was less of a psycho. My waitress came and refilled my coffee up and I stirred in my sugar and cream, watching the liquid swirl and change color. I let my thoughts drift to a specific time that I very rarely go a day without thinking about.

His eyes were the color of the darkest coffee, my favorite flavor, and all I did for 24 + 24 hours was drink, with an unquenchable thirst. I didn't expect to feel such hunger after a full meal and a few drinks but I did; I couldn't get enough, I was insatiable. This man, an unexpected yet welcomed stranger in my life, was consuming me, flooding my thoughts with a delicious elixir I never knew existed. I assumed that we would sip drinks and spend the evening talking and eventually part ways; I never dreamed that we'd spend the better part of forty-eight hours together, non-stop talking, listening to jazz and lying around, absolutely weightless on a some sort of cloud that was only drifting us higher and further out.

Time seemed suspended, like it had stopped though the world was still spinning, but perhaps it was just me. No other thoughts penetrated and no other feelings remained, only my lust for more of this leisure.

it's not very often that I shut my brain off completely, and I make it a point to do it consciously so I can turn it back on consciously, but this time-lapse was upon me and shut my brain down before I could react appropriately.

The minute details of these hours make up everything, each second a double count and weighing heavier in the air that was saturated with tension I wanted to cut. Instead, we let it hang, savoring it as we should have. I'd trace his bottom lip with my eyes closed, curious when I felt the sides of his mouth curl with slightness, though I refrained from opening my eyes.

He was like reading the best book, the lucky find in the back of the bookstore; the one that gets left on a random shelf because someone else was too lazy to put it back in its appropriate place. You love the cover, discovering that what's written inside is a treasure trove....and you are grateful.

All of this was mine for 24 + 24.

I looked up from my cup, now close to empty and noticed the couple was gone, probably lost in a song down an old dirt road. I wondered then what song it was and if anyone spends forty-eight hours with another person anymore, allowing themselves to be completely taken over by that "thing" that takes us over, for lack of a better word.

I took my last sip, reclaiming all of the sounds of the diner and smiling. I allowed a sensation of deja-vu sweep me away as I stepped in the parking lot, filling my nostrils with crisp, fall air. It was still summer outside, but autumn was rapidly approaching and existed so vividly in my mind when my thoughts turned to him; I am in an uninterrupted state of harvest.

24 + 24....and counting.

POLAND, LOUISIANA 1ST PLACE

By: Kennedy Runyan

Down by the river rocks where turbulent waters come to rest and nestle in the spaces of touching stone; there's a secret here.

A conversation between rough-smoothed edges of clay-stained granite and the feather painted of closing day, where starving spirits whip a line when joy and panic are the same.

And hidden in the crevasses the heather-skinned lizards and I find solace in the sun-soaked stone.

LET ME BE ME AND YOU BE YOU

By Tara Sanders

They say I look different I say I don't care!
They say it's the way I wear my hair.

They say it's nappy, matted an unclean I say my natural is beautiful I don't know what they mean.

They say I need straight hair, green eyes, and perfect teeth I say what's wrong with me just being me.

I like my nappy hair and even my big teeth I like the color of my eyes whatever color they may be.

So I'm different, You are too Let me be me and you be you.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

By: Alivia Burke

One is the loneliest number
To stand against the masses;
Two are bounded by destiny,
Three is a crowd;
And four are chosen carefully.
Five is a party
And six is a group that is a bit large.
Seven is team,
Eight can't fit in a car.
Nine seems rather foolish
And ten is just bizarre.
Eleven can be heaven
And twelve may be par.

There is strength in numbers,
Oh, how many times
Have I heard it?
Tell me to put trust and faith into people
That surely do not deserve it!
They snicker and tease behind your back;
Might as well be dead rats.

Go ahead;

Roll over and lie!

'Because of your arrogance and pride, You may find that one is loneliest number In stride!'

Well I can rest assure you that I am Willing to take that chance on a limb.

Before trusting him, Or her.

Thank you for your kind advice; Good sir!

ON THE PORCH

By: Kennedy Runyan

A coyote prays; (the doe-eyed girl rocks her chair) stars, emerge slowly.

crickets reap the fields; (high with flowers in her blood) the wheat, grows slowly.

fireflies hover; (her moment, in forever) the doe, creeps slowly.

A LOVER'S LUST

By: Aaron Murphy

Lines engraved into the pavement detailed artistry

A rugged work of art defined by curves

The simplicity, is scrupulous

To caress the arpeggio landscape that surrounds your incorporeal beauty as we try to entwine our souls

It is, inefficient

A passionate manipulation of aesthetic cruelty

Underneath the allochromatic cutaneous lies a fickle ghost

A chromophilous being

Tacently tenebrific is this inclinational infatuation

Basium

SILENCE HEARD IN TIME

By: Jessica Schroeder

Afraid that her silence would be seen as apathy or endorsement

To that which she did not agree, nor subscribe

One brave little girl decided to use her whispered, ragged, no-good voice

Insignificant, yet loud enough to be heard

And when that voice no longer gave the surrounding people what they desired

A most craved, undivided attention as well as resounding praise

Those very same people now looked at her with uttermost disdain

Tripping her as she walked by and spitting in her face

The looking glass, now cracked and broken, by their forked, lashing tongues

Now gave that same brave girl a false reflection

One that was not so bold and brave, but rejected

That tired, old soul once again became silent

For she knew that whatever sounds passed beyond her lips

Validated and acknowledged, only for their profit

Marred ideas stolen and corrupted by false prophets

Imperfection is perfection, when looked at with discretion

Now that brave little girl trapped in an old soul began to flourish

Once again spreading her invisible wings and holding her head high

Knowing that no matter how the world beat her down, she survived

She was still here, maybe not well, but alive

And although it would take some time to reveal her true nature

She was okay with taking her time, as long as she was the one taking it

WHETHER OR NOT

By: Aaron Murphy

Weather, weather, why are thee So raspy when you change without Why oh why must you tease me

So cordial in the spring you be Strange the way you bounce about Weather, weather, why are thee

Come from the mountains, come from the sea You always leave me with such doubt Why oh why must you tease me

Every day I long to break free You have such clout Weather, weather, why are thee

Step on everything you see Even though all throughout Why oh why must you tease me

When will we learn to agree You scream, I scream and thus we shout Weather, weather, why are thee

Why oh why must you tease me

A LETTER FROM ME TO YOU 3RD PLACE

By: Chelsea Gravel

Who am I? I think you know. Half your friend and half your foe Joy I often use to tease but pain's what I bestow

I come in like a swarm of bees and sting until you're on your knees I am known by many names, only I am your disease

A girl appears and boldly claims She'll hold your feet over the flames You'll fight to keep me just at bay and she will love you all the same

Though I digress and wander astray I wonder just how long you will stay Wrapped in love not disarray I guess we'll take this day by day.

LOVE, INTERRUPTED

By: Kennedy Runyan

Wilted petals of red laid across the earth like dried blood.

trailing past the yellow paneled house, once white, and filled with dreams.

Around the corner endured a decaying wood porch swing, covered in fading flowers.

A man dressed only in his bones, was modest in rotting black clothing.

In his hand he held another's whose eyes were dripping residual tears.

THE SEA

By: Samantha Barton

The coolness of the breeze on the sea,
Brought to me profound peace and harmony.
Here on the shore I felt a calmness flow over me,
Like a soldier coming home from an overdrawn war.
These waters are my sanctuary.
Their voices always beckoning,
To my home upon the sea.

FEVER

By: Anthony Felps

You may look strong and healthy, but you have been infected. With a disease quiet and stealthy, yet eventually detected.

It creeps into your thoughts, takes over your mindset.
And when it's finally caught, it has trapped you in its murderous net.

It starts out slow, with a few hate-filled thoughts. Yet before you know, you've already been bought.

By a ravenous beast, that inhabits your mind. And makes a feast, of whatever good it can find.

So now all you think, is how to get fixed.
A major human link, that never should've been mixed.

And the only complete solution, that comes to mind.
Is total annihilation, but now you're in a bind.

Because other people, don't think like you. So you get up by a steeple, and make them think they do.

Now you can relax, your job is finally done. You've broken their backs, and spread the fever to everyone.

SIGH

By: Aaron Murphy

Sitting lonely letting death hold me trying not to let her show me what it is like to be alive

In a world with no surprises colorblind your eyes fare those nightmares

Broken hands build glass stairs memories of shattered mysteries encapsulate the sea you see stare off into nowhere

I repose a message wishful thinking antiquated thoughts of dreaming I am lost in my mind again

I was just daydreaming

GRATITUDE

By: Kennedy Runyan

Watching daylight end Counting the constellations Midnight wanderings.

Our shoes side by side Fire gazing, on cold nights The sun is calling.

Shape shifting the clouds Burying our hearts in soil Watching spring rain fall.

UNTITLED 2ND PLACE

By: Dustin Williams

By bite of frost And scorch of sun, What's said is said; What's done is done

From Luna's Light
Doth Darkness flee;
The truth lay bare
For all to see

A snow-white rose A scarlet pool The deed is done A life too cruel

By scorch of sun And bite of frost, What once was taken, No longer lost

The die is cast; The race is run A final chance A life undone

The kiss of Death And Kharon's coin In Reaper's arms Lovers rejoined

CONFIDENCE

By: Kennedy Runyan

make me your canvas paint me with your fingertips color me pretty

BEAUTIFUL AND SHREW

By: Aaron Murphy

Beautiful, a pretty rose and thorn
Your eyes are lilac, scented with the grace of dawn
Skin as smooth as polished chrome
A vixen, in the early stages
I am drawn to you, like a child to a balloon
But when you speak
The voice and choice of words you use are poison
One word, two words, six words, seven
Eight words, nine words, ten words, eleven
Senses become erratic
Stop

WEDNESDAY

By: Kennedy Runyan

Dawn breaks, and breaks again. it breaks, breaks, breaks, until its cracked remains fall like first snow into the palms of our hands.

Slivers of midnight mornings sprinkled into tea cups and mugs of coffee by tireless thoughts that meander into daylight.

Frost licks the lips of sleepy leaves Dangling off waking branches in the Sun's whisper

and "a minute more" grumbles between the shower and the strength of a dreamer's grasp into a new world.

UNTITLED #1

By: Aaron Murphy

I am not mortal or immortal
I am not divine
Perfect nor willful
I am somewhere in between
Tempted by this poetic form
I no longer wish call poetry
Biggest critic you are no more
I found it within me
Every poet has a poison
I a disease

PLAYGROUNDS

By: Kennedy Runyan

Kingdoms made of soil, towers made of rock. Secret passages, deadly trials, we'll decide the King.

How we rocket to the sky, our toes above our heads. The space station is waiting our arrival, you can't be afraid to jump.

We can hide in the underground, skip on stones over lava. If they catch us we'll turn to monsters, or become frozen in ice.

But when the day is done, and the sun begins to set, we are called home by trumpets, to a feast fit for a King.

THE ABYSS HONORABLE MENTION

By: James LaCroix

Dark the abyss.
A light that shines.
Stumbling, I fall.
A hand from the dark.
I'm lifted.
Forward into the light.
Treacherous floor.

Happiness in the light.
Still, the abyss consumes
Every thought.
The light grows.
The dark abyss recedes.
For a time, it's forgotten.
Treacherous mind.

Only a small rock.
My footing is precarious.
The abyss.
Back into the dark.
The light remains.
Hand firmly grasped.
Treacherous life.

Love's light stirs.
Growing in my sight.
I am but a shadow,
In the dark.
No turning away.
The light embraced.
No treachery here.

Failure among the rocks.
The tiniest of pebbles.
Inattentive.
Falling.
Caught, not by the
Treacherous dark.
Loving arms.

ECSTACY

By Aaron Murphy

Fifty-two weeks are in a year

It is 1 am over here

The only light that shows your face

I play this music loudly so I cannot hear my heart attack me

Fifty-two plus eight makes sixty

My mind races over hilltops

Eight turned sideways means infinity

Random haunts that shadow me

Don't flatter yourself sweetheart, just jot my name down in your book of secrets called a diary

I look to the sun and it blinds me

It is beautiful, the way the world works in reverse

Me the sun blinds as I look to it

Your diary containing secrets of my name, how flattering, in a way

Shadows disappear below my feet and my fears are obsolete

The hills have gotten bigger

Eight turned sideways still means infinity

Fifty-two plus eight still makes sixty

The music has only gotten louder

I unplugged the lamp

Fifty-two week are in a year It is still 1 am over here

SNOWBALL FIGHTS

By: Kennedy Runyan

children's cold noses sniffles, laughter, and crying, with burning cold hands

UNTITLED #2

By Aaron Murphy

The days doleful

Oh, how I long to be swept up into her arms once more again, before I am dragged back

Nay!

Left me not rest atop the mirrored gate of Hell where deviled fiends lie just beneath

Nay!

Let me not look out upon the mirrored gate of Hell where deviled fiends ruse up from underneath

They will take you under they will drag you down to the bottomless pits of Hell where so cold it burns an icy fire the touch of death does no longer linger

Nay!

The fear of no hope to come

Born a sinner a sinner I am a sinner I shalt die

Lord hear thy prayers please take thy heart once more

HAIKU #1-11 BY: KENNEDY RUNAYN

Haiku #1

gazes avoided of underwater voices sentencing ourselves

Haiku #2

the piano groans impersonating lost men stealing woeful hearts

Haiku #3

We hid our secrets in empty perfume bottles and set them to sea

Haiku #4

waiting for color the world, empty before you save Her from her pain

Haiku #5

softly do they grow in somber and quiet fields though love won't bloom here

Haiku #6

You linger, you know in the hallows of my bones where marrow is supposed to be

Haiku #7

We sit atop of clouds catching wishes with a net still shy of the ground

Haiku #8

Her skin cracked morning bruises from slender secrets He staggered after

Haiku #9

only She could love a bouquet made of summer glass consumed by the wild.

Haiku #10

the dark house shutters, long lost dreams stained table cloths wishing star wounded

Haiku #11

flakes of white land soft upon tender lips once red eyes forever stilled.



"BLUE PAINTING" ALEXA CHAMBLEY 1ST PLACE



"FLEETING GRACE" ALIVIA BURKE



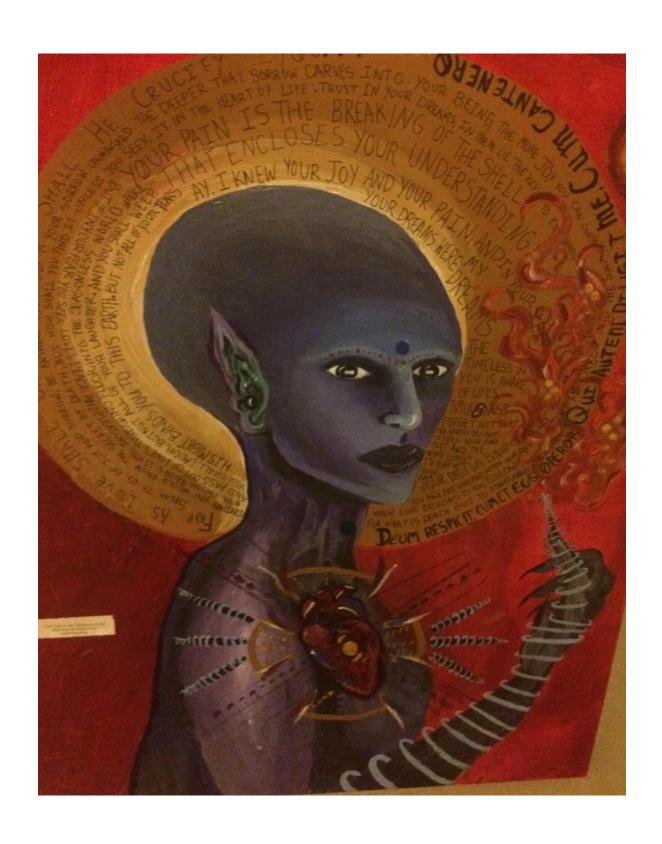
"UNTITLED" ERICA ANEY



"HEAD IN THE CLOUDS" ALEXA CHAMBLEY



"IAN MCKELLEN AS NORMAN IN 'THE DRESSER'"
TREVOR EWING



"UNTITLED" VICTORIA BELLINO 3RD PLACE



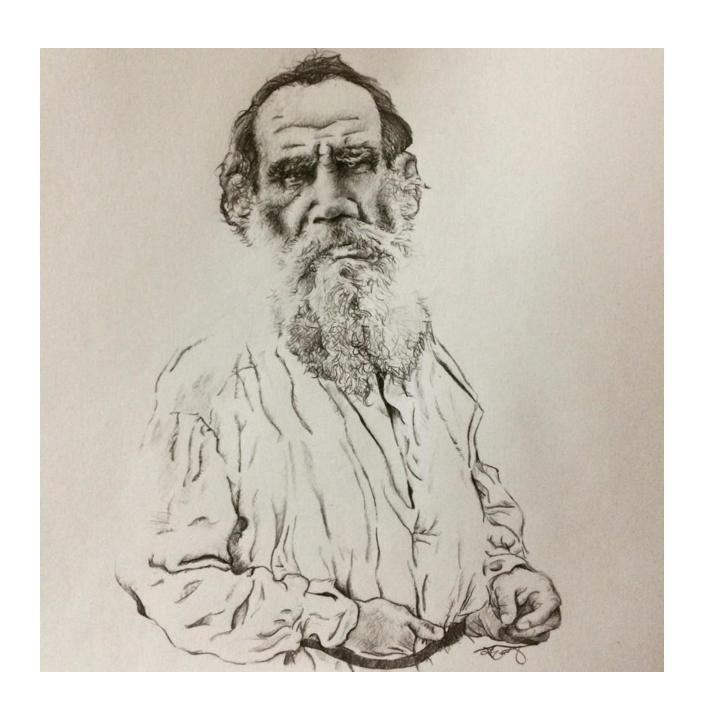
"CYANTINT" ALEXA CHAMBLEY



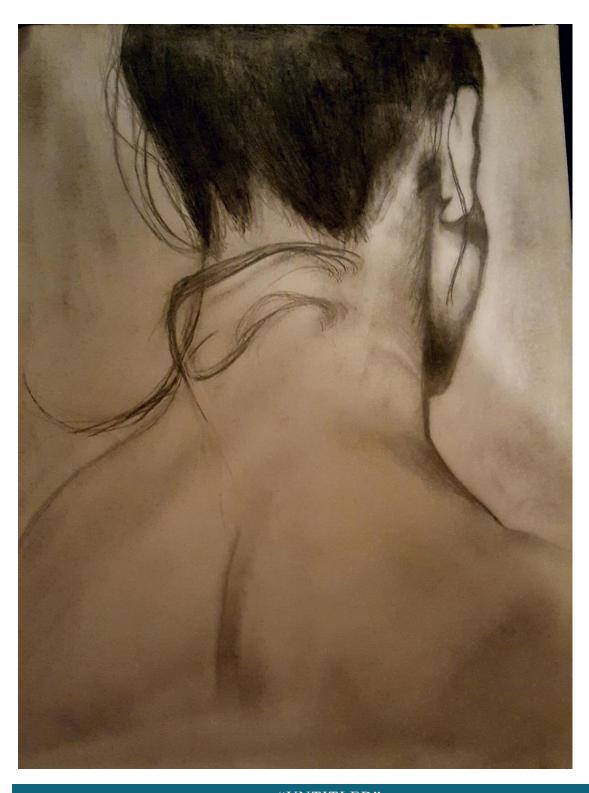
"UNTITLED" JADE COUSIN



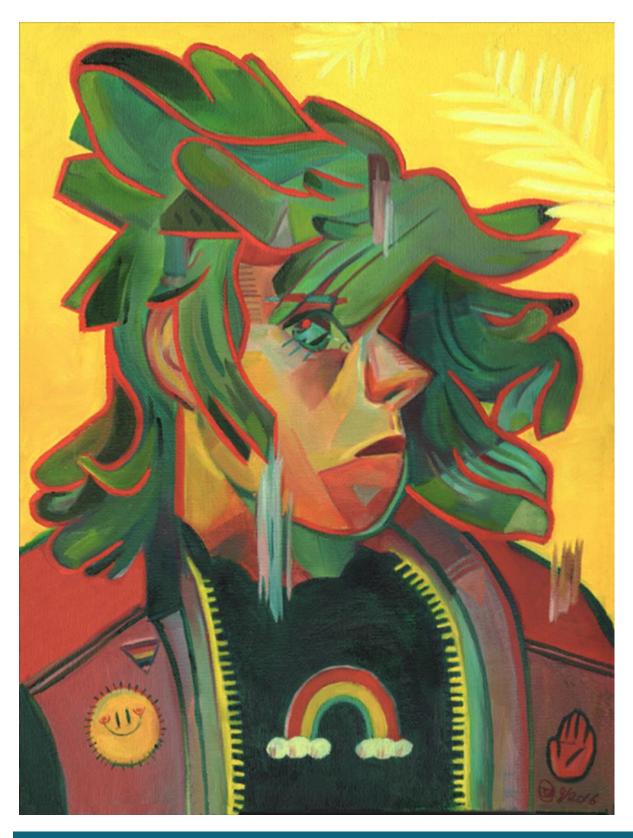
"ALOOF" ALIVIA BURKE



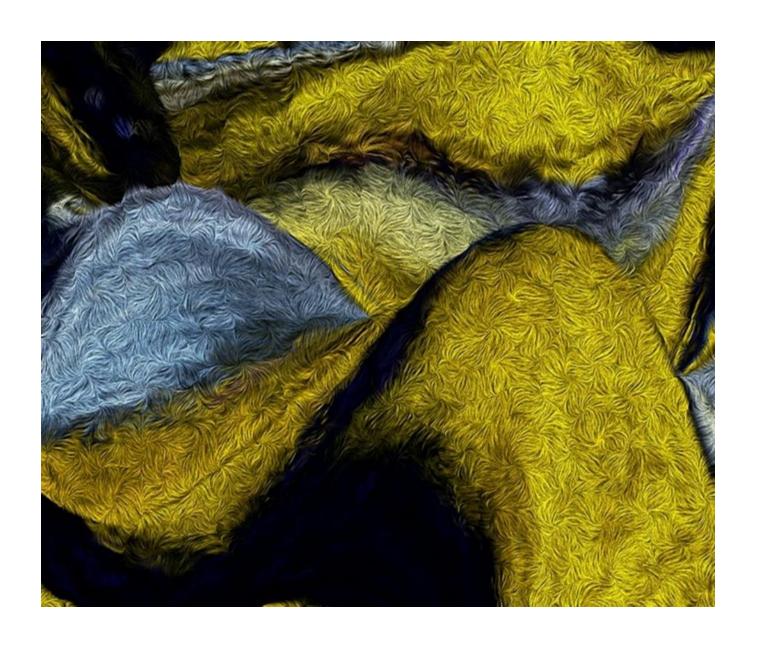
"TOLSTOY" TREVOR EWING



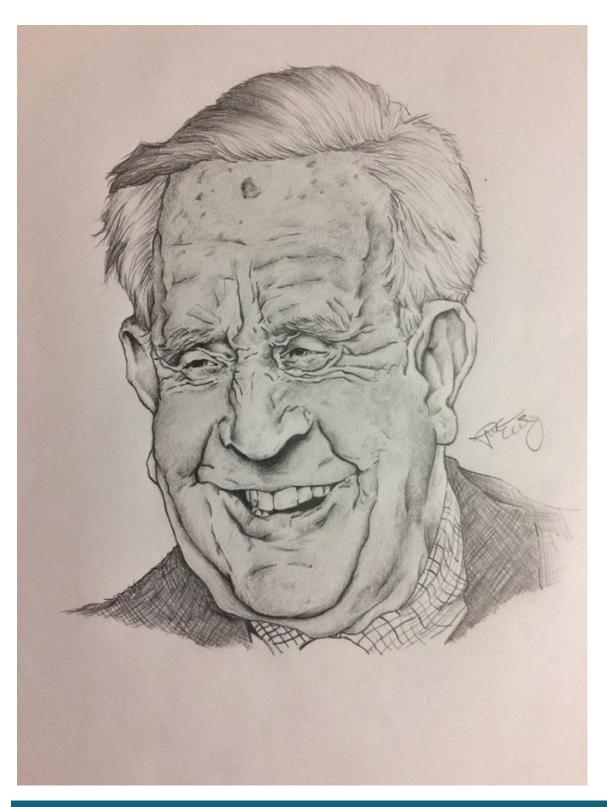
"UNTITLED"
SAJIE COUSIN
2ND PLACE



"YELLOWPAINTINGSMALL" ALEXA CHAMBLEY



"GOLDEN OCEANS" ALIVIA BURKE HONORABLE MENTION



"TOLKIEN" TREVOR EWING HONORABLE MENTION



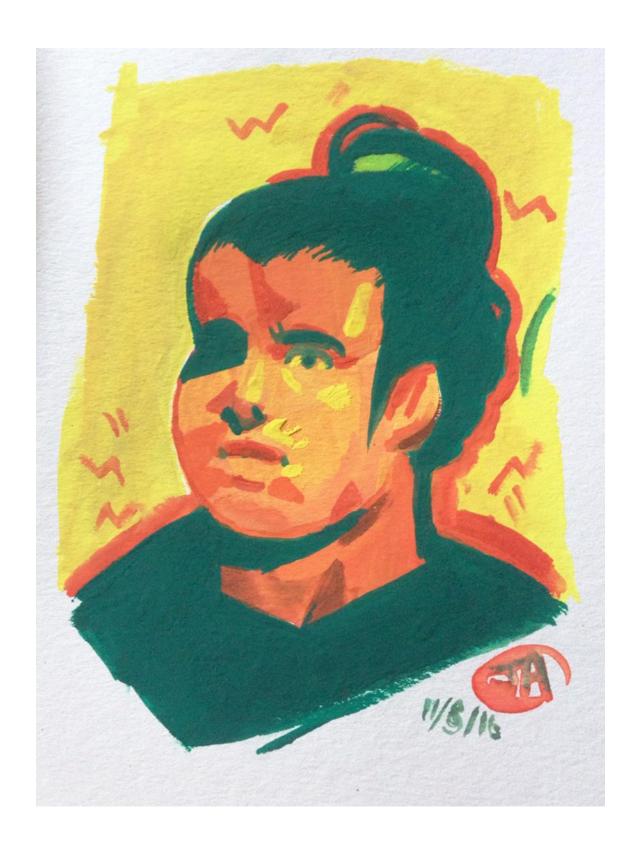
"UNTITLED #1" CHANDLER KAMMERER



"UNTITLED #2" CHANDLER KAMMERER



"GHOST TRAIN" ALEXA CHAMBLEY



"ORANGEGREENYELLOW" ALEXA CHAMBLEY

Jongleur

