

# Haute Dish

The Arts and Literary Magazine of Metro State University



# Editor’s Letter

---

**“I can alter my life by altering my attitude. He who would have nothing to do with thorns must never attempt to gather flowers.” —Henry David Thoreau**

Welcome to the Spring 2022 issue of *Haute Dish – The Arts and Literature Magazine of Metro State University*. We acknowledge in our previous issue there were some errors regarding the content. Particularly the assignment of authors names and works. We are in a transitional phase and are working to ensure that we do not encounter these issues moving forward.

This is my first issue as managing editor, and I am looking forward to doing what I can to build and improve *Haute Dish* and ensure that it continues to be something Metro State can be proud of. These have been difficult times for all of us on multiple levels. In thinking about this issue, it seems to me that Spring in particular is a time of renewal. Even though difficulties and struggles may continue to present themselves, this renewal is a constant process. Spring is a time for new life and new beginnings, in this we can find hope.

I would like to thank all those who contribute to *Haute Dish*, all those who shared their work, the editors, the staff, and all those who continue to make *Haute Dish* possible.

Enjoy,  
Josh Rieger

# Table of Contents

---

I Had Tea with Hermes at 3a.m. by Isaiah Porter .....	5
How Elephants Remember by Issiah Porter .....	9
Killing Yourself by Issiah Porter .....	11
We Need to Talk About the Tall Man by Bri Krickhahn .....	12
She’s Leaving Home by Jason Emrick .....	14
Memories Fail by Jason Emrick .....	16
Depression by Jill Olson .....	18
Happy Birthday? by Jill Olson .....	20
Endless Early Mornings by Jill Olson .....	23
Thank God My knee Hurts by Andrew Kasmarek .....	25

# Table of Contents *continued*

---

You Can't do This Alone <i>by Leah L. Gabrielson</i> .....	28
In Little Eyes <i>by Lisa Castillo</i> .....	32
Milkweed <i>by Tessa Schmitz</i> .....	34
Alley Cat; Bus Ride; Crips <i>by Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis</i> .....	36
The Danger of a Full Stop <i>by Jonathan Hiatt</i> .....	40
Knox my rat terrier with chocolate eyes <i>by Bryant Rooney</i> .....	43
A Child that Sings the Language of We Trees <i>by Bryant Rooney</i> .....	44
Her Ancient River <i>by Bryant Rooney</i> .....	45
That Bus Ride <i>by Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis</i> .....	46
When I Met Jack <i>by Louise Reed</i> .....	48
Last Light <i>by Erick Suchy</i> .....	50
Cup O'Leaves <i>by Erick Suchy</i> .....	51
Drip Drop <i>by Erick Suchy</i> .....	52
Thirteen <i>by Jonathan Hiatt</i> .....	53
The Shire <i>by Samara Adam</i> .....	55
Daughter <i>by Avery Hunter</i> .....	56
Skull, Egg, Stick <i>by Maria Petric</i> .....	57
Desire to Sew <i>by Sam Kleinberger</i> .....	58
Selene <i>by Sam Kleinberger</i> .....	59
A Love Letter and Some Kind Words <i>by Tommy Shreve</i> .....	60
Droplets <i>by Sarah Schenck</i> .....	62
Plant in Red <i>by Kong Thao</i> .....	63
Afternoon Tea <i>by Kong Thao</i> .....	65
Biographies .....	65

# Staff List

---

Josh Rieger – Managing Editor, Art Editor

Jonathan Hiatt – Secretary, Prose Editor

Andrew Kasmarek – Prose Editor

Thomas Shreve – Prose Editor

Robin Brown – Art Editor

Peng Moua – Art Editor

Damien Mills – Poetry Editor

Miya Ochocki – Poetry Editor

Miranda Okonek – Poetry Editor

Spencer Vik – Poetry Editor

Lisa Castillo – Web Editor

Amerti Kitila – Business Manager

Suzanne Nielsen – Faculty Advisor

## ABOUT THE COVER

*Untitled Heart* (detail) by Avery Danger Hunter

## ABOUT

*Haute Dish* is a publication of Metropolitan State University  
and is supported by funds from student activity fees.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[hautedish.metrostate.edu](http://hautedish.metrostate.edu) | [hautedish@metrostate.edu](mailto:hautedish@metrostate.edu)

# I had Tea with Hermes at 3 a.m.

Isaiah Porter

---

Mother's heart monitor went flat that night. I sat in the dark of her living room staring into the swing of her grandfather clock's pendulum, a gift from the father I've never known.

Four glasses of scotch were downed when someone knocked at the door with loud, frantic pounds. The guy was huffing and hunched over. He was in his mid-thirties, supple hands peeking out of the sleeves of his Adidas tracksuit. His hair curled into a mahogany bush, like mine.

I gave him a moment to catch his breath before I said, "Can I help y-"

He put his finger up, the other hand gripping his knee, as sweat trickled down his chin.

"Isaac Odysseus Smith," he huffed. "I need to speak to you."

His breathing, his wheezing, was like Mother's on that pristine hospital bed.

I shut the door.

"W-wait," he insisted, grabbing the frame before it would crush his hand. "It is urgent, I assure you. Your mother is no longer with us, yes?"

She was dead. There's nothing else that could have mattered.

"We can talk right here." I said with the door between us, shards of night creeping in the dark house through its open inches.

"I would rather have somewhere to sit- to...to gather my words. D-do you mind if we take this inside?"

He had the traces of an accent to him. Eastern European? It was something kept at the back of his throat, an anxious, occasional stutter.

At fifty-five, maybe our age gap, or that franticness of his, compelled me to let go of the door. The hinges only ever creaked when someone opened the door from outside- a mailman, a delivery driver, an old friend visiting. It rang through the house as he took his first steps inside.

I returned to my chair.

"Mr. Smith- can I call you Isaac?" he stumbled through the shadows of Mother's living room. "S-should you not have lights on at this hour?"

"No one's home." I finished my scotch glass.

"B-but wouldn't your mother-"

"What on God's green Earth would you know about my mother?"

A part of me wanted to apologize for the outburst. I didn't.

He found his way to the lamps on either end of the living room sofa.

“Do you mind?”

“Sure.” I shrugged.

The lights blindsided me as both lamps were turned on simultaneously, shocking my vision like twin suns. He sat in the very middle of the couch, shining a thin smile at his accomplishment. I rubbed my eyes.

“You’re old...” he said with a distant mixture of surprise and joy.

“What about it?”

“Do you have Oolong,” he changed the subject. “Green Tea? It is chilly.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “Why are you here?”

“Will you bring tea?” he quipped.

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t move,” I got up and walked past him to the kitchen. “It’s about my mother?”

“Yes,” his voice drifted. “Ophelia...”

I stuffed the teapot with something from the cupboards, returning to him standing across the room, looking into the grandfather clock. He followed its pendulum. His body was still, caressing its wooden frame.

I cleared my throat.

“Oh.” he turned to me before blinking back to the couch. “Sorry, Isaac. Th-the clock fascinated me.”

Maybe the scotch got to me, but it still struck me as odd that I only caught where he was standing and then him back across the room sitting at the sofa, nothing in between, like he teleported. I rubbed my eyes as I returned to the lazy boy.

Her grandfather clock ticked.

“You were saying...”

“Right! It may not be clear in this form, but I am Hermes, messenger of the gods.”

How drunk was I, hearing that jogger make such a claim? I stayed quiet, expecting more.

I am the patron of travelers, you see. Your mother was a traveler-

“You’re God?” I jokingly smiled.

“One of them, yes- it is not important. I,” he paused. “I have come to help your mother...to tell you of your father.”

That smile disappeared. Eyes closed, my nails dug into the fabric of Mother’s chair.

“Out,” I whispered in my drunken stupor.

“Excuse me?” the jogger leaned his ear to me.

“Out.” My arm snapped a single, smiteful finger at the front door.

The teapot was fuming.

I went to take it off the burner as the jogger fidgeted with his fingers.

"Fine," I stomped through the kitchen. "You gonna tell me where my daddy's been?"

"Y-yes."

I slammed a teacup onto the coffee table near "Hermes" as I sagged back into my chair. He graced the china handle with his long fingers. He took a whiff as he said, "This is Chamomile," in a cracked voice.

"It's all she had." I poured another glass of scotch. "Drink it or leave."

The grandfather clock just kept on swinging.

"Did," he hesitated. "Did your mother tell you what she was doing in Delphi before you were born?"

"She was an archaeologist."

Part of the last great wave of academics assisting the Greek cultural resurrection team back in the '20s. Scientists and scholars ached to dig up the centuries worth of deprived monuments and scripture dedicated to a dead religion buried by Crusades and Christianized Romans.

"Did she tell you about anyone she met there?" he took tiny sips of his chamomile.

"No one important." Few worth remembering.

"No one at all?"

"Drink your tea." I shotgunned the rest of my glass.

"There was no mention," he chuckled. "of a tanned herculean man with sandals you could kiss?" he flashed a cheeky smile.

"I'm sure there were a few of those."

"But this one swept Ophelia off her tired feet," he was getting louder. "They went across all the Aegean sea-the whole archipelago." he trailed off.

Mom never told me about any of that. I shook my head.

He put his cup down and looked deep into my eyes. "What about your first baseball game—the one you played in little league—the one your mother said she couldn't make it to because of work. The one where you were surprised to see her cry your name from the stands."

I lost that game.

"The one you lost," he added.

I wanted to get out of my chair.

"Sir," I announced, something hot burning up my chest. "I think you should leave—"

"The one where she knelt to you after you tripped and fell so many times on the field, saying you're no runner," he continued. "When she told you, 'Your legs can chart the seas, little one.'" he began speaking softly. "They can slide on the sand like wheels. Your legs could chase the sun if you put one foot in front of the other."

“You don’t get to barge into our home at the ass crack of dawn,” I spat as I jolted out of Mother’s chair. “claim to be some magic mailman, and then tell me you know where my father’s been for the past half-century.”

His eyebrows gave in, softened around his drooping eyes. “You are right.”

He walked up to the door and opened it as my eyes still lingered on where he sat on the sofa.

Then the fucker walked behind me and said, “Here,” I don’t dare to look at him.

His hand came in view with something small, dull, and round- a rusted coin. “When you see her body, lay this on her mouth-”

When I slapped it away, the coin hummed through the air and crashed on the floor.

I could still hear her grandfather clock when Hermes clicked the front door shut behind me.

His coin had the teal tint of bronze as I picked it up. It had an ancient bearded man on one side and an olive branch carved on the other.

I wanted to run over to the clock- to smash and silence it in the front yard.

But it’s Mother’s.

# How Elephants Remember

Isaiah Porter

---

She buckled  
under the heat.

Her body was a crashing meteor  
dust-clouding the canyon's  
dried riverbed. Skin  
wrinkled into ash  
under an immortal sun. the herd,

a funeral of shadows,  
dancing around the eyes  
of a dying aunt-  
a dead sister;  
an elephant. The herd's matriarch-  
mother-sister-conductor-father

leads in prayer as the parade pleads to a holy father  
they'll never know. Raising their trunks,

they beg for rain. Look high in the deep blue  
to see their dead aunt, a dying sister,  
swimming in the endless

among their mystery  
man called God.

Only the littlest baby boy,  
too young to raise his trunk,  
so small as to not trumpet-mourn  
sees how

her wide-toed feet  
her eyelashes become blades of grass. How  
molded earth beneath her. While his  
  
mother, and aunts, and cousins, and grandmother,  
beg the sky for water,  
  
he sees his dead aunt,  
a godly sister, raining  
  
her last tear down the riverbed of her wrinkles  
to a procession of ants making pilgrimage across  
her ash-grey canyons, her Kilimanjaro continent of skin. The boy  
  
marveled at her single tusk,  
a bone-white sword,  
fingernail to her trunk's exalted finger  
when she smote prowling lions. While the adults  
sing their deific yearning,  
  
the boy notices his dead aunt's scars,  
how she roared at the human that shot  
bullets scrapping her scorched skin  
like God's hand. When he  
  
grows older,  
he'll forget his aunt  
  
as we all knew She was never eternal-  
she was God- brief immortality  
branded by bones the ants left behind.

# Killing Yourself

Isaiah Porter

---

Cops spread Covid  
marching down neighborhoods  
attacking hosts in their own homes

Can't

Breathe.

cops think-  
white blood cells  
kill foreign bodies  
it's called autoimmune disease

I couldn't  
living free-  
America's pistol-whip grip on  
their names. blood  
leaving the lie  
that they were home

Believe.

once it seeps into concrete  
cops

Think.

it's only natural  
bullets entering illegal  
America loves to

flesh.

enter

foreign flesh

but white men are foreign bodies  
stuck between lands they claimed hostage

birthed

to the US

that gave them a gun  
before they could light up a camel

kill foreign bodies before-

# We Need to Talk About the Tall Man

Bri L. Krickhahn

---

With each step, the rip in the side of the brown paper bag threatened to spill its contents across the laminated hardwood of our kitchen. It was the same balancing act every time I forgot those cloth bags that I kept in the trunk. I barely managed to get the paper bags to the granite island countertop before the bottoms of both bags split, and my groceries scattered in every direction.

“Shit,” I muttered to myself.

I chased after the cantaloupe that had fumbled to the floor. After an inspection of the hairline fractures on the melon’s webbed surface, I decided that a quick fruit salad would make for a great afterschool snack. As I reached for the fridge handle, the muscles in my stomach tightened, because there was a new addition to the smudged stainless-steel.

A chip clip with a magnetic backing held the charcoal drawn figure at a child’s eyelevel. More and more of this vague but specific image had crept into Gregory’s drawings. His mother, Jill, explained that it’s just his way of coping with being lost in the woods. After the search party had found him, Gregory had manifested his trauma into an imaginary friend that he called, “the Tall Man.” Maybe talk-therapy wasn’t enough? Jill was the child psychologist, though. I was just a second-grade teacher, so I followed her lead.

The charcoal smeared onto my fingertips as I took hold of his drawing. This one was different. No trees or clouds or grass. Just his faceless imaginary friend. As I examined further, flecks of mud flaked off the paper. Where the hell did the mud come from? I pondered to myself.

The eerie silence of the house snapped me out of thought. Usually at this time of day, ramblings of lessons taught at school, facts about the dinosaurs, and laughter filled the house, but things had been all too quiet in those last five months. I had even started to use my sweetest teacher voice at home to coax one-word answers from him.

I washed my hands and began preparing our food. The knife met the cutting board in uneven chops as I struggled to remember the way Jill had taught me to avoid slicing my fingers. As I assembled the fruit mixture, my attention kept being pulled back to the faceless figure watching me.

“Salade de fruits, monsieur?” I asked with my best French accent as I came into the dining room.

The black marker in Gregory’s hand came to an abrupt halt. He didn’t look up at me. His head stayed bowed over his drawing, dark hair obscuring his eyes. A tremble vibrated through his overly tensed shoulders.

“No,” he finally responded.

"Y'know, fruit salad isn't technically cooking, so I think we're safe, buddy," I teased. "Check it out, I even remembered to cut out the seeds of the melon this time."

"No!" Gregory repeated louder.

I blinked at Gregory as I was taken aback by his behavior. I had seen this kid devour an entire fruit tray in a sitting, so it wasn't that he didn't like what I had prepared. Kid is getting weirder, I thought to myself. Like, concerningly different now.

"I'm just gonna leave this here... If you change your mind," I said.

As I padded back to the kitchen, a crash boomed behind me as the bowl shattered against the wall. This wasn't the first smashed dish. At work, I send my students to the principal's office when I can't handle a situation, but this was my partner's son.

"Alright, that is not okay!" I warned.

As I rounded the corner, Gregory's expression was just as shocked as mine. Tears welled up in his eyes as chunks of the fruit and bits of ceramic slowly slid down the freshly cracked drywall. Jill and I made that bowl on our third date. So much had changed in those two years.

"I didn't want to do that!" Gregory choked out in a sob.

Comforting him should have been my first instinct, but these violent outbursts only happened when his mother was at work. I had never received so many bruises from a child in my six years of teaching. Backing out of the room, I decided to give him space to cry it out. I needed Jill here to deal with this. She always had a handful of these psychological terms that she throws into her explanations for his behavior: post-traumatic stress or oppositional defiance.

When his crying settled down, I brought him his tablet as a peace offering. Gregory's eyes, full of confliction, darted from the video back to his drawings. I sighed with relief when he opted for the tablet, put on his headphones, and zoned out to a video of someone else playing video games. That would keep him occupied until I finished cleaning up.

I went to empty the dustpan, and there was a piece of paper with what I thought was a crumpled crayon drawing of a family portrait. It was the typical drawing with five figures. He had drawn himself in a superhero stance holding hands with mom. His dad was always drawn with the mustache that he hasn't had in years. I was placed on the other side of Jill, also holding hands, but lacking any facial features. Drawn directly behind me was a familiar faceless stick figure... The Tall Man.

I ended up in a duel staring contest with both the clock and the faceless figures on the page as I willed Jill to come through the door. As I sipped on a dry red, my head filled with possible excuses I could give to start staying later at work. Maybe his dad could start picking Gregory up from school? I needed something to tell Jill besides that I was growing more and more afraid of her son.

"Wine on a school night, Miss Quinn?" a voice interrupted my thoughts. I flinched as arms wrapped themselves around me, then the scent of her sweet perfume lulled my anxiety. "What's wrong?" Jill asked.

"We need to talk about the Tall Man."

# She's Leaving Home

Jason Emrick

---

Today she tells me that it is her ambition to walk the Appalachian Trail, from Maine to Georgia.

"Will you take me to the trail head," she asks?

"Of course," I answer, "it's your summer, you should get away for a while." Her degree sits on the mantle, earned after a grueling final year. A year where she has held more than books in her arms. A year in which she held her mom, Diane, for the last time. A year in which we lost what has made our home, home.

"Better yet, how about I drive you to Georgia. Then you can walk home, I could even come with a ways, or meet you somewhere?" Suzy smiles the new smile she earned this spring, a smile that masks sadness with love and memory.

"No, Dad," she replies, "Jimmy lives in Atlanta; he said when I get there he will take me wherever I want to go."

I try to recreate the smile she is sharing, but it flips to one of acceptance, the lines will not hold. She is my little girl and all that holds me to this place.

"Are you sure I can't join you?"

"No, I think it would be easier..." Her words trail off, I do not want to hear the rest.

That night I struggle to find rest. I am stunned by her plan, walking south. We live in Maine, we've always been in Maine. It scares me that she is walking away. In all my days of walking a one way trip, it's always towards home. I am afraid she will not return, at least not return here. She will have built a new world in her time away and I fear Maine will not be big enough.

The next morning I awake early to brewing coffee and frying pancakes.

"Dad, can I use the car? I need a few things for my trek."

"Do you remember when you were little, that game we played?"

"Do you mean 'find home'? I remember. Wasn't that more about giving Mom a break."

"It was more than that, it was our time... and maybe a break for Mom too."

"Well, I do remember it was fun. You'd scoop me up and dance me down the street spinning and dipping. How old was I then?"

"You must've been about four, your hair was still blond. I remember, your little blond head, tipped back, snarled hair hanging, laughing so hard I was afraid you'd giggle right out of my arms."

"That was a clever way to get me turned around. You'd set me down, kneel in front of me and brush my hair back with a kiss. You'd stand and look at me like we were parting at the airport and say, 'find home, find Mommy.' Why'd you say it like that?"

Her question goes unanswered. The vision of her so long ago plays on in my mind. I see Suzy toddling along one hand held out for me to squeeze. She covers a couple sidewalk squares and circles, still dancing in my hand. A gentle breeze blows her tangled hairs back in front of her eyes, she turns into the breeze like a sea gull, letting the wind unfurl her hair.

“Is the ocean that way?” She asks. With a nod of my head her question is answered and her bearings gained. She continues on, marshalling all of her senses to find the way. She stops at a cedar tree two block from home, her head tilts left, her eyes close. I know this look, it is my Suzy drawing a picture, plotting the way home.

“Mommy’s that way,” signals the end of the game. As she aged the trials increased, her ability grew. That should reassure me now, but it doesn’t. I worry those lessons freed her from fear, freed her from me. I guess that was the goal but I had hoped to hold onto her a little longer.

As the summer wears on she sent me letters from along the trail. The same crisp penmanship that marked Diane’s letters greet me in Suzy’s. It is an old fashion thing, a letter, but it feels so much more intentional than a text or an email. Paper had to be acquired, a stamp and envelope, not to mention the time it takes to find a post office when you are on the Appalachian Trail.

*Hi Dad,*

*Happy birthday. I think I mailed this so it would arrive on time. I saw a fox yesterday, seemed almost tame, still, it kept a safe distance. The weather has been hotter than I expected. I almost feel like ditching my long sleeves and pants. I know you’re shaking your head. That is a bad idea, so I won’t. I hope you get some cake, say hi to Grandma and Grandpa.*

*Love Suzy*

There is an inkling of something under the surface, the words seem scripted, written out of duty or expectation but I ignore that notion, I often project meaning where there is none. Still, the almost tame fox worries me.

The letters slowly decrease from two a week to one, to none. After two weeks of silence, of anxiously waiting the mail man’s 11:55 parcels, a post card arrives. It is an Orangutan baby, hanging from its mother, the message, “Hangin’ around the Atlanta Zoo.”

*Dad,*

*I made it, I will tell you all about it the next time I visit. Jimmy and I are headed to Oregon. The pictures make Oregon look a lot like home. Say hi to Grandma and Grandpa.*

*Love Suzy*

I walk the card towards the fire place. Sitting on the mantle is a degree I did not earn and an urn I do not want. I stare at the picture of the three of us hanging over the Mantle, a memory of the life I have lost, and neatly tuck the card into the frame.

# Memories Fail

Jason Emrick

---

One morning, more than 30 years later, I was sitting at a bar trying to remember what he'd said? It was something like, "This day is getting long, this year, this life." It sounded cool at the time but I don't think I am remembering it quite right. His voice has faded to a whisper in my mind. Maybe the words are right but the tone is gone. I can't capture the feeling, the emotion that penetrated his voice. The sound of defeat. Anyways, it's the way I remember it and 30 years is a long time.

I finish the pint of Guinness in front of me and order another for the ditch. Damn, I do love Savannah and their to-go drinks. I hate to admit it but that's about the only thing I like about my home town now. Too many ghosts on too many street corners. And come to think of it, Dad would have been better off without the to-go drinks or at least we would've been.

I wander on to the street and find myself walking towards Monterey Square. That was the last place I saw him, my brother that is. I was home on leave and his was one of the few friendly faces I knew. We had just left the bar like today, same one in fact, Six Pence Pub, Wally's Six Pence back then. One of two familiar places on this pilgrimage.

We buried him six months after that night. I remember getting the call from Auntie Jo. Dad was nowhere to be found. We knew where to find Mom. Strung out on the couch, arms outstretched, hoping someone had a needle for her when the time came. She was unable to tell her last son, relying instead on the one good sister she still had. The auntie who watched us after school and on Saturdays, baked us cookies. I drove home from Fort Bragg for the funeral. I never came back, until now.

I remember after we left the bar that night we stumbled over to a bench and fell onto its wood slats near the centerpiece of this square, a towering stone memorial, spiked at the top and surrounded by a wrought iron fence, like everything in Savannah. We played a quick round of rock-paper-scissors, to decide who would drive home. Not sure if the winner had to drive or got to ride. When we both threw rock for the third time we laughed ourselves off the bench, rolling together towards the center of the square, the monument.

My brother sat up, both hands gripping the fence and said, "I sure do love this place. Remember when we would walk to school? You would always stop right here and look at that carving like it was your first time seeing it. Like the sculptor had just laid down his chisel on it... Just staring at the horse and rider."

Then he sat up straighter, chin raised, and said, "What were you looking for? 'Oh, Nothing,' you would say. Well, I am asking again, what were you looking for?"

My response, when it came, was slow and slurred, "I just liked looking at it, pretending I was that rider, horse hunched back, front legs up ready to gallop away, ride off to somewhere better, at least, I think that was it."

“Look at it again, man. He’s not riding away. His sword’s fallen, he’s holding his side, wounded. He died near here you know, that’s why they built it.”

“Maybe I didn’t see it like that, at least that’s not the way I remember it... Still, seems like he is going away and that always seemed better. Anyways, we’re all wounded.”

“You got away, is it any better? And you’re right, we all got wounds. Some of ‘em won’t heal.”

We settled into silence. He was four years older than me, had spent his youth preserving mine. When we were young and it was dinner time he served me first, made me eat it all even when there was not enough. He quit school to work, bought my Christmas presents, stood in front of me when Dad would visit. Took the hits through life that we should’ve have shared. Tightened his chains to loosen mine.

“Sorry man,... thanks,” was all I could say to break the silence, to end the conversation we should’ve had.

His hand grabbed my shoulder and rolled me forward off my seat as he staggered to his feet. When he turned, he extended the same hand to me, “Brothers?”

“Brothers,” I answered, grabbing his hand and gaining my feet.

I drain my to-go cup, crumple it and miss the garbage sitting next to that same old bench. Thirty years later, still trapped in that moment. The last words my brother said, as we turned to walk away from the memorial that day, I can still hear. The voice is clear now, the emotion bleeding through almost sounding like salvation, surrender. Where was the clarity then?

“Yeah, most anyplace is better than here and this is my favorite spot.”

# Depression

Jill Olson

---

Boulders wedged on your shoulder blades,  
you stretch, take ibuprofen, get massages; yet,  
pain, discomfort, lingers, ongoing,  
never-ending, relentless.

A long, gloomy tunnel filled with shadows,  
anxiousness, tightened chest, elevated heartbeat,  
cold clammy skin, self-doubt, decisiveness,  
down your face sweat beads drip.

A stormy, wind driven sea,  
loud cracks of thunder, brilliant, blinding, lightning strikes,  
tumultuous water, rain drops pelting your face,  
gasping for air, flailing to stay afloat,  
panic overtakes you; gravity pulls you under, sunlight fading.

A tornado of depressive thoughts, whirlwind of anxiety,  
racing mind, feelings of despair,  
fear, no sleep, achy body,  
no slumber, appetite nil, lethargy.

A pitch black, deep pit of earth,  
roots sticking out, tangling your thoughts,  
skewing perceptions, swallowing you up,  
struggling to free yourself, lying at the bottom,  
allowing it to overcome you.

Retreat from life, curtains closed twenty-four hours,  
comfort under the blankets, security within bedroom,  
isolation, endless sleeping, waiting,  
holding on, waiting, dormant.

Endurance, slow-moving,  
weight lessening, heart rate dropping,  
light illuminating, water calming,  
tornado subsiding, whirlwind dissipating.

Perseverance, encouragement, prayer,  
hope, exercise, nourishment,  
You emerge from the depths, opening the coffin,  
permitting the sun to caress your skin,  
leaving the abyss behind,  
not looking back,  
never forgetting,  
you sigh,  
and wait,  
for the next wave.

# Happy Birthday?

Jill Olson

---

“Happy Birthday dear Jilly, Happy Birthday to you.” I sat with my mother alone at her house in the kitchen, on this day of my fifty-second year on earth. Seven days before I quarantined with her as I prepared to admit her to a memory-care facility. It was a long emotional sleepless week for me as I packed her things in the middle of the night as she slept. Her admittance day just happened to land on my birthday. This would prove to be a birthday I will never forget. As for mother, she will forget, as her brain shrinks and dies inside of her skull. We sat together eating ice cream and chocolate chip cookies.

“Yummy, these cookies are good. I’ll think I will save this one for later.”

“Mom, eat the cookie.”

“I’ll save it. I have to watch my figure.”

My mother weighs one hundred pounds. There is no need for her to have to watch her weight, but after a lifetime of living with a plump figure and cup size D I do believe she is enjoying her new stick figure and cup size A breasts.

“Mom, please eat the cookie.” I gently insisted.

“No. I’ll save it.”

She stood up from the kitchen table, wrapped it in a napkin and laid it on the counter. Heading to the bathroom to brush her teeth she sang another verse to Happy Birthday.

“How old are you, how old are you, --- how old did you say you were again?”

“52.”

“Wow. If you’re that old, I must be really old.”

I chuckle as I clean up the table. I took the cookie and put it in my coat pocket as I ruminated on the fact that in the next hour, I will be driving my mother to a facility where she will be on lockdown. Reducing our visits to telephone conversations and window visits. I wish there was another answer to the dilemma of my mother’s care, but every avenue was considered, and her fate was decided with the help of our lawyers and the consensus of my older brother and sister. We kept her at home as long as possible, the time had arrived.

Emerging from the bathroom and walking down the hallway I asked her to bring me her toothbrush and paste so I could put it in her suitcase.

“Why? Are we going somewhere?”

I explained to her again for the umpteenth time what was happening to her and why she was moving. Her eyebrows furrowed as she quietly repeated to herself what I just said. I wheeled her suitcase out to the car and threw it in the trunk. I gathered mom’s purse, phone, and pillow and we stepped out of the house that my parents lived in and raised their kids in for sixty-years. Knowing this would be the last time my mother was ever to see her pretty house on the river again. No more times eating breakfast while looking out the enormous windows at the river and wildlife. I backed out of the driveway and watched the house through my rear-view mirror get smaller and smaller until my view was blocked.

It was a quiet ride to the facility on that warm, sunny August day. It crushed me that I could not accompany mom into the facility, meet the staff, see her room, help her ease into this transition. She seemed like a young, innocent puppy that didn’t understand that they were going to have surgery and must stay in an unfamiliar setting while recuperating and feeling sore. That’s how I felt. Like I was dropping a puppy off at the vet. Only I don’t get to come back, pick her up, and bring her home. I felt uneasy, heartbroken, and somber as I rang the doorbell to the facility. As we waited, I took a selfie of us together. My birthday memento.

“This is where I will be living now?”

“Yes, mom.”

“But I’m not sick. Why do I have to move here? I don’t understand. I’m not sick.”

“Mom, you have a severe memory loss,” I said gently.

“Who said that?” she inquired.

“Your doctor.”

“Well, I don’t remember that!”

I stood there silently, trying hard to maintain my composure, feeling emotion well up in me, sadness knocking on the door of my tear ducts. I cleared my throat and swallowed hard to remove the lump that had formed there. She heaved a big sigh, the door opened, and we were greeted warmly by a staff member. I gave mom a hug and a kiss, told her I loved her and that I would call her tonight on her cell phone. I slipped the chocolate chip cookie into her coat pocket and watched the door close behind her. I just stood there. Feeling numb. Frozen. Sorrow filled me. I felt heavy. My heart ached. I watched her through the small window in the lobby area briefly then moved outside to the big front windows to get a bigger view.

I watched her standing there, observing her surroundings. It was then that she spied the piano and instantly walked over to it, sat down, and started to play. One ability Alzheimer's had not claimed. Music filled the room as she played hymns by memory. Hymns she had played for sixty-years at the little white protestant church I grew up in. I finally allowed my emotions to be expressed as tears fell to the ground. A continuous waterfall I wept as mom played moving from one hymn to the next. A few people gathered around her. I smiled, knowing her music will bless these people. I prayed through the tears, rejoiced for the gift of music my mother possessed, thanking God.

Fuck you, Alzheimers.

Happy Birthday to me.

# Endless Early Mornings

Jill Olson

---

November 20th, 2019

2:43 a.m.

"Help, help." I heard my father's voice call out. "Help, help." I bounded out of the bed, flew up the stairs, passed my mother's bedroom door and entered my elderly father's bedroom.

"I'm right here, Dad, what do you need?"

"I need a Kleenex."

"Dad, they are right here above your head on the headboard."

I guided his hand to the box. I waited as he finished and released the Kleenex to the floor, just missing the garbage can. I assisted him with the replacement of his C-Pap mask. Adjusted it and readjusted until a seal was created and I heard no air leaking.

"My blanket."

"Yes, Dad."

I covered him up and adjusted his blanket the way he liked it. Smoothed out, with no wrinkles. I stood back and waited. He rolled over onto his left side, his favorite position to sleep. Once again, I readjusted the blanket until my father said thank you. I stood back and silently waited in the dark. One minute, two minutes, wait for it.....

"Help, help."

Instantly I responded with, "I'm right here, Dad. What do you need?"

"I have to go to the bathroom."

"Okay."

By the glow of the nightlights on every wall of his bedroom I assisted my father in standing up and guided him to the bedside toilet, as he pivoted and plopped down. The toilet tilted back and hit the floor with a thud as it returned. I hoped that mother would not be woken. She added a whole new layer of stress to these moments of caregiving for my father. My father sat there in his birthday suit as he relieved himself as I sat on the chair facing the window.

"I'm done."

"Okay."

I handed him some toilet paper.

"Ready, Dad? One, two, three."

With my support as I steadied him, he stood up, pivoted, and sat down on his bed. He leaned back as I simultaneously grabbed his ankles and swung them up on his bed. Dad scooted up, placed his head on his pillow and the entire tucking in process started all over again for the third time that night.

Dad seemed to have settled in, however past nightly experiences taught me that within the half hour my father would be calling out again. As soon as I am back downstairs, snuggled into bed with my own c-pap mask on and just falling asleep I will hear my father's voice through the baby monitor. To keep the frustration at a lower level I sat in the corner of the dimly lit room on a chair. I waited. I listened to the rhythmic sound of the c-pap machine. As I sat, I prayed and pondered.

I prayed for God to bless us with trustworthy and genuine caregivers to staff my parents twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. With twenty-five years of caregiving experience, I thought that I would be able to provide caregiving services to my parents. I found out I was wrong. I was unable to keep the level of professionalism I know I am capable of with my parents. Allowing frustration to takeover and control my words and tone of voice.

I pondered what was in store for my father. His mobility and balance failing. He was growing weaker and showed no interest in exercising to maintain the strength he had. The numerous conversations I have had with him concerning this have proven to be useless and a waste of time. He was having none of it. Once he no longer has the strength to walk on his own and needs a wheelchair will be the point at which homecare will not be a choice any longer. He will have to go into a memory-care facility.

I watched the red-digital numbers on his alarm clock as the minutes passed by. 3:15am. Thankfully Mom did not hear us up. Everyone was snug in their bed sleeping. Except me. These night shifts were hard on me as I usually ended up with a horrible migraine the next day from lack of sleep. Despite that, I was still willing to pick up the slack as my two siblings and myself searched for more caregivers. For now, my brother and I filled in the nights when there were no staff available.

I sat in the dimly lit room; stared out the window. My arms crossed over my chest. The heater kicked on. The moonlight illuminated the snow-covered ground. The light smell of urine in my nostrils.

I glanced at the clock. 3:32am.

'Help, Help.'

# Thank God My Knee Hurts

Andrew Kasmarek

---

You probably won't believe what you are about to be reading, and who could blame you? It will not sound real, but what you are about to read happened. And it happened exactly as I am about to write it to you.

Cross my heart & hope to die.

Stick a needle in my eye.

Listen:

It was four years ago now and I was working on the valet stand like I normally was. I was trying to save all the money I didn't smoke to become a road dog and live in a van with some friends. I wanted to go to the National Parks. I wanted to try to fall in love again. I wanted to stay as far away from home as I could.

I was reading Slapstick by Kurt Vonnegut when I was approached by two men.

"Hello Brother" They said.

"Hello Brothers" I said back.

(I will note here that we weren't actually brothers but that sometimes men on Earth will call strangers "brother" as a way to make peace and show the potentiality of a friendship. And while I admit that these two could have been actual brothers, when I said "Brothers", I meant it in the way I just described.)

"We are New Age Disciples of Jesus Christ" one of the Brothers said. "And we are performing miracles in his name much as Jesus did in his day..."

*Ooookkkaayyyy*, I thought to myself. I was taller than both of them, but if I wouldn't have been dressed as a valet man I might have fit right in.

"Do you feel pain?" The potential Peter of the two asked.

I couldn't help but smile. It was closer to a laugh than a smile. I tested.

"Of body or mind?"

"Either/or, Friend."

I thought for a moment how serious I wanted to take these two brothers, and then I decided to be an asshole.

"Well, my left knee has been hurting since high school."

Though my remark was callous, the first brother dropped to his left knee and wrapped his hands around my own. He started praying on it. The other disciple, the Thomas perhaps, raised his hands high over his head and started his own prayer and I started spinning but we were all just standing out in front of my valet stand and they had their eyes closed tight, and I had my eyes wide open and just as I was about to pull my leg away they stopped and they smiled softly like a still pond might smile.

From the ground Brother Peter looked up and said, “You are healed. And You have been healed by the power of Jesus”. He stood up and reached into his pocket. He handed me a card that just said “Jesus” on it. And then the two brothers walked away.

---

## **After Jesus’ Disciples Healed My Knee Things Went Horribly Wrong Elsewhere:**

My back began to hurt from that crash and that was before my hands began to hurt from holding onto her so tight even though she didn’t want to be held.

I became dead inside because I knew I shoulda been dead from that crash.

I became a killer in my mind because I realized that I coulda killed someone in that crash.

And what’s worse is, I can never unthink it no matter how hard I try. And what’s worse is, I don’t dream so I knew what was happening was really happening.

After that crash I became the quarterback who couldn’t throw anymore.

After that crash I let myself taste too much sugar and my teeth started falling out.

The truth is that after that crash everything hurt but my fucking knee.

And then somehow I let my suffering become my choice.

And I lost it.

And I was lost in it.

And I tried to burn the evidence but instead it became a scar.

And it all brought me back to square one.

But I finally wasn’t scared anymore.

---

## **Four and Half Years Later:**

I’m standing in my bedroom that has two windows and thinking about all the rooms I’ve had with no windows. There have been a few of them. I turned 31 last week, and I just had a wisdom tooth removed but I swear I feel smarter now.

Honestly, I have to say I feel pretty great.

I’ve been doing this ancient Chinese practice called the I Ching for a while now. In today’s session I was brought to a reading titled “Fu”, which loosely translates to “Return”. It tells me that “A time of darkness has come to a close”, but I am quickly reminded not to celebrate. Growth is only possible when

we relinquish our expressions of ego. I am reminded that to act forcefully now in my return would be to spoil the harvest.

It's a soft message, but it feels true. The last four years have been so crazy but I'm starting to feel like me again. It's taken a long time to learn how to turn me into me. I must be still learning too because my follow up message to "Fu" was "Chun" - or "Difficulty at the beginning". Chun's literal translation is "a blade of grass pushing against an obstacle as it sprouts from the Earth.". The passage tells me that I am at the beginning again and that patience and perseverance are words to keep present.

I'm standing up and playing guitar and looking out one of my two windows and I gotta say that that is exactly how I feel; like a blade of grass working and waiting. And while I'm standing there swaying, thinking about how cool it is I have started to choose to work on the things I love to do the most, I notice that out of nowhere my left knee started aching, just like it always used to do. And I don't know what to do, so I just say, "Thank You, God."

Thank God That My Knee Hurts Again.

# You Can't Do This Alone

Leah L. Gabrielson

---

Looking toward the fortress in the sky, chandeliers of gold and blue, incense of fresh fallen rain, music of birds chanting, Patrick felt that he could live on, if he could reach that fortress, he could accomplish anything. Patrick didn't have much, but he wanted to give his son a fortress, a remnant to consider him by.

Junior remembered when his Dad first made the treehouse. During weeks of the Covid pandemic, when humans weren't supposed to be around each other in fear of transmitting the sickness, Patrick Sr., would bring his son into the undeveloped woods behind their tenement. The two would enjoy spending sunny afternoons picnicking and joking. It was at the picnic spot, in the woods, that he would teach his son nature's lessons. A fallen, pale, blue Robins' egg, was a lesson on how birds were born and a lesson on how only the eggs that were properly developing would not be kicked out of the nest. That egg "found on the ground was no accident," explained his father. "There is something wrong with the bird inside. Either it is not growing, or it will not be able to be a normal bird. At any rate, the egg is left to the ground so that it will nurture the earth for the other animals to be born." "Can we crack it open to see?" Patrick Jr., his namesake asked. "Let's look at it a little later, fearing the inevitable talk he would have with his son about being a part of the sky and earth." "Let's bring it home so we can have a real biology lesson," his father answered. Junior carefully packed the egg in a half-eaten sandwich and placed it in the padded protection of his makeshift gym bag/lunch box.

Junior followed his father as a Jesuit follows his savior, studying his every move. His father was carrying a large piece of plywood strapped to his back while looking for a majestic oak; an oak that would stand the test of time. One that would symbolize the love he had for his son. Patrick was aware of his mortality since his diagnosis and knew he had to build the treehouse urgently, while he was fit enough for labor. Father and Son wandered through the woods until they saw two mature oak trees 3 meters apart. Junior exclaimed, "Wow, here are some beauuuuuties, just far enough apart to set up my hammock!" Patrick's breathing became labored like a slow locomotor train as he observed the bouquet of leaves and an ark to hide under on top of the first tree. The branches were spread apart like steps. The branches were thick like industrial shelves and the base and trunk were sturdy as if they already withstood 100 years and would be standing for 100 more. Leaves adorned each branch, like appendages on an arm, the arms of the tree were opened to cradle anyone who dare scale its elevated peaks. The boy's father attempted to hide the hurt in his body, his back and ribs clenched like a vice grip with each deep breath, as they sat quietly beneath the two oaks. He wanted to get a sense of the ambiance. He wanted to hear the sound of spirits. Buzzing bees and various insects were abound. The glisten of dragon fly wings in the sun, daisies waving beneath the breeze provided by the oak's arms. This would be a perfect place for his refuge; and his son's refuge, and sons after that.

Patrick blocked out the fact that one can't buy land when they are poor; and the other fact that he wasn't long for earth and the only thing he had to leave his son was memories. Junior was too young to understand the concept of death and money, demise and taxes. He wrestled with the news he must deliver to his son. He wanted his son to know his love and that he would be gone in body, but that every time he heard the leaves rustle in his tree house, or feeling the sun set or hearing the sound of silent reticence, that he, his father, would be there. That his Dad wasn't going to let him do this life alone. He wanted his son to be as happy as a child throughout his entire life. Patrick damned his own actions, wished he would have never went to the doctor, never heard the death sentence, and remained oblivious to his mortality.

In hindsight, Patrick could have used his knowledge of nature to find a less-than-lethal mushroom to block the pain; but he didn't want his son to see him high and weird. It was at this point that he decided to build an homage that would show Junior happiness and let him commune with nature and with his father's spirit. "You can't do it alone," rang in his head.

"Here, hold this." Junior helped remove the plywood from his father's back and he laid it on the ground. Junior watched his father take a run towards the 'Oak Tree Grandpa,' jumping on his mark like an Olympic Long Jumper and then springing 3 feet vertically into the air. Junior laughed as his father stuck to the tree like Spiderman, hugging barely a third of the trunk. Patrick then shimmied up the tree to the first branch that was 12 feet up. Winded and ready to hurl, Patrick sat on the branch and stared down at his son, who was frolicking in the spotted sunshine, chasing baby toads. Gazing another half a story up, three branches that were extending from the trunk at the same level made a frame like an Asian folding fan. He zig-zagged through each subsequent branch, stretching a body's length, feeling the pull of his ribs, but muscling through the pain to jump to each branch. Now standing on the 'Asian fan,' Patrick brought out a big butcher-block piece of paper and a pencil from his cargo pants. With pencil in hand, he traced the shape of each tree branch that formed the 'Asian folding fan,' a blueprint for his treehouse. Patrick was a Park Ranger and conservationist and he did not want to pierce the tree with any nails during the construction of his treehouse. Carefully folding the butcher block paper, he placed it back in his cargo pocket. Then removing a thick rope from his pants pocket, he tied the rope next to the branch where he was seated and strategically knotted the rope every 10 inches, signifying his son's age. As the knots were completed, he hung the rope down and ascended down the trunk.

Patrick caught up with his son "playing tag" with the butterflies. It was such a fine day, that he decided to have his son help him with the platform of the tree house. "Hey, Kiddo. I can't do this alone." Junior, captive by his father's every word, said, "I'm here. You ain't alone. I wanna help."

"Good," Patrick said, drawing the butcher block blueprint from his cargo pocket. "Where's your lunch box?" Junior handed his makeshift gym bag/lunchbox to his father. Patrick carefully unzipped a side pocket from the cloth lunch box to reveal a pair of kindergarten kiddy scissors. Patrick instructed Junior where to cut on the butcher-block paper to unveil an exact curved pattern of the tree branches. Patrick then set the

“pattern” on top of the plywood and under Patrick’s direction, Junior carefully drew out the pattern on top of the plywood.

“Wow, Dad, are we going to get it done today?”

“I can’t do it alone. Let’s just get as much done as we can. It will give us a reason to come out to the woods every day, huh?”

“That’ll be greaaaat.” Junior shouted like Tony the Tiger.

Patrick pulled out a battery powered jigsaw from the “lunch box” and carefully cut out the printed pattern.

“Dad, how are we going to get that biiiig, piece of wood in that biiiig tree?”

“Look and learn, my boy, look and learn.” Patrick punched a hole on the edge of the plywood with the jigsaw and brought out a rope from his “bag of tricks.” Patrick threaded the rope through the plywood and tied a sailor’s knot on the end. Junior looked on with admiration. “I can’t do it alone. Help me carry it to the tree.” The boy happily complied. When they got to the foot of the tree, Patrick’s breath heaved as he set down the plywood.

“What’s wrong, Dad?”

“Dad’s like the Robin’s egg. ...getting a little tired; it may fall out of the nest and become part of the earth.”

“You can’t do this alone. I got my Spiderman energy drink.” Junior pretends to hand his Dad the drink. Patrick catches his breath as he drinks Junior’s offering.

Patrick tugged on the rope and shimmied up the tree. Hanging from the cord dangling from the tree, he beckoned his son to throw him the opposite end of the rope that was knotted to the plywood. Junior, wound up like a baseball pitcher, attempted to throw up the rope, but it went only half the distance required. Patrick encouraged Junior to try again. Junior, took in some cleansing breaths, wound up his arm like a dreidel, and flung the rope upwards in the tree. This time closer, but not quite. “I can’t do this alone, son.” “Try like a cowboy roping a horse. Whirl it around your head and then throw the rope up.”

Junior, feeling discouraged, whines, “Jimmy says I throw like a girl.”

“How can you throw like a girl, when you’re a boy!” “Now throw the rope up, son.” “I can’t do this alone.” Junior grunted, swung the rope around like the Lone Ranger and hurled it into the air with all his might. Patrick, hanging onto the rope with one hand, swung to meet the cord pitched by his son. Junior ran around with his hands in the air like a heavy-weight champion. Patrick was able to use a tree branch like a pulley to bring the plywood platform into position. He wedged in the platform into the tree and walked on top to be sure it would stay in place.

In subsequent days, Patrick and Junior returned to their Grandpa Oak Tree. Picnicking and carrying piece-by-piece of their treehouse with every trip. “Are we going to put a roof on it?” Junior asked. “You don’t need no stinkin’ roof,” Patrick echoed in his best Al Pacino, Scarface voice. Junior laughed at his

Dad. Junior tickled his father, then pointing the tickling finger into the air, “Say hello to my little friend.” Patrick cut the air with the seriousness of nature. “The roof is the stars and the sky and the hands of this tree.”

That night with the satisfaction of finishing the treehouse, exhaustion overtook Patrick and he collapsed into his bed for a well-earned slumber. Unaware of the leaden look of his skin in the dark, Junior laid next to his father and held him, “You can’t do this alone Daddy, you can’t do this alone.” Patrick’s snoring soothed his son to sleep ... snoring loudly like a WaterPik and then not snoring. Patrick passed away into the fortress in the sky.

# In Little Eyes

Lisa Castillo

---

Once upon a time, the world was all messed up. There is a bug, or that's what mama says, that is making people sick. That's when everything changed. The day it changed I am wearing my green dress to school because its Irish day. That's a place where my grandma came from, so my mommy says we have to wear green. Teacher has the class all decorated and was explain countries. The principal came in with a cart and gave us all iPads. "I can't have that, mama won't let us have screen time." Teacher laughed; it wasn't a joke. "Its not nice to laugh at people." I have to tell her because she made me mad. "I spoke to your mother, and she said its ok." Teacher got down and rubbed my hair. She messed up my hair and laughed at me, grrr. I took the thing and put it in my desk, I'll ask mama later. Teacher is at the front of the class by her desk. She is ringing the attention bell; we all look at her. "My wonderful kindergarten explorers, starting tomorrow we are going to be in a new class." All of us look at each other, I don't understand. "We will have class on our ipads." She told us, that's silly. How do you have a class on that thing.

Me and all the other kids in class are waiting for our parents. The teachers all look sad, and they are talking in groups, adults are so weird. I hear, "shut down" "Masks" "Cobid" what is that? I will ask mama. I see her and run, "MAAAMAAA"! She scoops me up in her arms. "Mama, they gave me an ipad, I told teacher I couldn't, but she said you said its ok. They say we are having school on it, that's silly." She hugged me tighter. Mama only does that when she is sad. "Mama, you, ok? I told her I can't have it." She let me go, and smiled "No babe, its ok. I will help you with school for a bit. I want to say hi to your teacher, come on." She grabbed my hand and then they did that grown up whisper together. I see a butterfly and let go to catch it. All the parents are being weird. That is usually bad. Look at that butterfly go. She is playing tag with me which makes me giggle. I hear mama, got to go butterfly.

The car ride home mama listened to the radio. Parent radio news is so boring. That word shut down was said a lot. I practiced my abc song. "ABCD" I yelled out. Mama head snapped back, "quiet, in your head ok." Mama is mad at me? No, she is mad at the radio. "Mama, if it makes you mad turn it off, I will sing." I can see her smile in the tiny mirror on the glass. "I need to hear this love but thanks." The radio man keeps talking and talking. I start to sing in my head, then my head can't hold it, so I sing out loud. "ABCDEF" Mama turns the radio man up and shushes me. Do people grow up to be mad or sad. I won't grow up like that. Moms and Dads are always upset. Maybe they need naps, or they need food. Mama says I'm grumpy when I am hungry or tired. I look out the window and there is a lot of grown ups going into stores and coming out with lots of stuff. We pull into the apartment parking lot and stop the car. Mom looks a long time at dads' car, he is not usually home when I come home from school. Her face gets all squished up and

her mouth is a line. She unbuckles me from the seat, and I get out and pull her, “Come on daddy’s home.” Dad is at the door he has the same face mama does. Why is everyone wearing that face. Daddy hugs me and then mama, “pudge, go in and play, I need to talk to mama.” I walk to my room, now I’m wearing that face too.

Mama’s crying and daddy is hugging her, I can see them from the hall. I sneaked up on my tummy to watch. Daddy said, “they let me go.” Mama cried. Daddy said, “no work for anyone,” mama cried. I hate when she cries, my eyes start to cry but I don’t know why. My brothers are home. They see mama and daddy and now they have the face on. Daddy says, “go in and play with sissy.” They come in and drop their backpacks in my room. “Hey, take your junk to your room, this is princess room.” Chris pushes me, “quiet, something is wrong everywhere stupid, stop being a baby.” He is mad too; everyone needs a nap. Alex gets up and sits by me and helps build a bridge. He doesn’t say anything, but he has the face too.

The rest of the day from lunch til dinner, mama made calls to grandma and my aunties. Dad came in and out with stuff. Every time he opened the door his face was madder and madder. “NO can goods, there.” Slam the door “No toilet paper, really!” slam the door. By dinner mama was sitting at the table with her face in her hands. Mama is so sad, daddy is mad, no school. I don’t know what is happening, but it’s not good. All the food was on the table and counters. Daddy came back with a few more bags. “that’s all we have, but its ok it won’t be more than a week.” Daddy says as he hugs mama again. I see him as we pretend to watch cartoons. I’m not sure what will be a week, but Daddy is always right.

# Milkweed

Tessa Schmitz

---

The Monarchs flew without rest over the peaks and valleys of the East until Mother breathed in the desolate fields of the plains. She swooped down, her babies following suit. They stopped and perched upon a dried cornstalk and rested their wings. The vastness of the fields nauseated Mother. She saw no source of nectar. The kids were tired. They had to sleep. She knew this.

Mother counted the wings of her offspring. All sixteen here, fluttering in exhausted waves against the cornstalk. They looked to her for instruction. Though weariness and angst spasmed within her, she obliged to her directorial necessity and lifted her antennae to the sky. Freckles of stars prickled through the hazy clouds and dust of the farmland, and the moon punctured into the grey like a sorry sliver. It wasn't much but it could render them away from the fatigue and hunger and toxins within them. She told her eight, her beloved eight, the best story she could muster between the heaps of dizzying uncertainty. She said something about the stars, about how they go through their own metamorphosis. Something about how caterpillars are nebulae and we, the Monarchs, are the supernovae. Something about the light that remained after they're gone. She stretched the story further until all sixteen wings closed and the antennae rested. Then she herself closed her eyes, the reflection of stars imprinted within her.

Mother did not know how long she had been asleep when the murderous roar jolted her from the cornstalk. She drifted back to her babies, twitching but asleep. The sky still bled a filthy grey. She looked between the fickle cornstalks and saw nothing but mud and flies. Just as she had convinced herself the noise came from within a dream, the rumble howled again. Piercing lights flickered between stalks in the distance. And all at once, men like wild hogs plummeted through on four-wheelers in rows just beside them. They were bare chested with bows across their backs, ghosts in combat. One carried a bloodied pheasant in one of his hands. Another had a deer wrapped around his shoulders. Their knuckles all colored the same maroon of malignity.

Mother dove to her eight and summoned them to fly. But evoked from their deep sleep, they did not soar in one direction. They sprawled out like tigers freed from a cage. They did not remember their surroundings. Mother flapped her wings harder, begging them to focus. But there was no time for formation. The vehicles thrashed into the stalks and the sixteen wings cried and floundered to Mother. She swept as many wings together as she could toward the dried clumps of mud below, tires pounding past around them.

As the cornstalks stilled and the engines faded away, Mother counted her wings. Sixteen. She stomachached the exhaust and began to flutter again. The plight of future beasts crushing her babies curdled her empty gut. She knew they must keep moving. She fluttered as if to spark flame from beneath her. And her eight followed.

They swooped between the cornstalks, and Mother urged their gangly eyes and rattling antennae to trust. She said this to them and wondered if she could listen to her own words. But, she questioned if she should have ever listened to herself. Perhaps she should not have begun this journey with them at all. Perhaps it would have been easier to burn from the cold of the Northeast instead of the drought and immorality of this migration. Her cousins had told her of the glory in the South, the abundance of life and breath, the nectar, the milkweed. They salivated as they serenaded her with the fields of mariposas frolicking in the flowers and rich fruits of Mexico. But the dire center of it all crumbled the images they painted, and Mother wondered if there ever was such a place.

Mother and her eight heaved and spun until they landed on a long windowless building in the field. She counted the wings. One, two, three.

A cacophonous groan punctured the sky once again. Their wings lifted off of the building, and Mother swooped around the building's corner. A wooden door lay open, and within lines and lines of cows crowded the dimly lit barn. Mother saw the life leave a cow, then another, and another in seconds. She reversed her eight, praying that they had not seen the blood that now possessed her sight. What world had they entered? Where would she go from here?

Mother wondered if she was not meant to birth life, if perhaps she was meant to be a Father. A Monarch without a following. Her Mother always knew where to lead, where to direct, where to find the light. Her Mother had never sent her offspring to the pits of a land destroyed men with wicked eyes and monstrous hands. Rage and confusion and lament oozed out from within, and Mother flapped and flapped and flapped. She could not count the wings behind her. She just flew.

She flew until the stars vanished and the darkness was blown from the sky and dusts of pink rose in the horizon. The colorless plains dissipated into trickles of green until the dried dirt vanished altogether. The air thickened with moisture from the promise of a pond, a stream, a puddle, even. Trees wide and narrow accumulated in such a way that she questioned whether cornstalks ever existed. Her wings loosened and sailed between branches and mosses and brambles.

And in an instant the tail of one milkweed flooded her senses. She dove to it, flailing and surrendering to the nectar. White, swampy, milkweed. The strand lifted into her being and she rested into its petals. Then, one, two, three, sixteen wings followed.

# Alley Cat; My City; Crips

Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis

---

*“Never trust a white man, ‘Old Time’ said, “and don’t think Black folk are any better.” —Gang Leader for a Day*

“You’re not black, you can’t be black, and you’ll never be black. You can’t understand black! You wouldn’t last a day black!” he yelled.

I did not know what it was like to be a Black man living in America not having been one that white guilt lay heavy but I do study, and I did, my bibliography 38 pages. “You cain’t learn everything outta’ books. Git your nose outta that goddamn book!”

“I won’t sleep in your bed until you get that goddam futon off the floor!” Challenged me to change or else. I bought a mattress and a box spring, headboard, footboard, and sideboards in a wooden frame brought it home put it all together. I was so excited for him to come that night to see what I’d done. He didn’t. At 3 a.m. he said he was in jail with his black buddies without probable cause and no apparent reason other than riding in a car together in America. I’d told him I don’t do bail and I don’t do jail, but I do write letters to the editor, and I did declaiming the injustice for a Black man living in America.

Silly me. There was no Klaxon horn, no Klieg lights, no red lights and sirens no patrol car. No “Pull Over! Hands on your head! Stop or I’ll shoot!” no jail, no bail and no holding cell that night in America. “I didn’t think you could handle the truth,” he said later about spending that night with another woman in America.

He would say I don’t have to cheat you to beat you. He’s Black. He lied. It mattered. In the vernacular they would say, He played you. His black lie mattered.

## My City

First came notice that we could no longer free-range at our public library. Humans were now on the endangered species list, quarantine was enforced, and I read Albert Camus’ *The Plague* again.

Then came the mandatory wearing of masks. “It’s me behind the Mask!” I heard someone say. I pictured a bank teller hand her mask to the bank robber and say “Here, you can borrow mine.”

Citizens were driving their cars hard, loud and crazy, speeding in defiance of authority and restriction, their self-discipline challenged. The French waited for the Armistice, according to Arthur Koestler, and like us sixty years later for “everything to be normal again. They really believe life will be as it was before,”

Then came the siege. My city erupted in civil unrest and upheaval.

It was as if a leader told his followers, “We can make a statement here, now, by breaking windows, starting fires. Torch the strip mall, throw rocks. Looting is permitted. Steal goods. Learn to spell fascism when you graffiti buildings. BYOB (Bring Your Own Brick.) Protesters, carry matches. Flick your Bic. Bring lighter fluid to the protest. Bring your plastic pay for C-4 blasting caps and wires and cans of spray paint to graffiti.”

I saw a rent-a-car building exploded, reduced to rubble. Broken glass littered sidewalks and graffiti flourished. “Rest in power,” graffiti read. Curfew (8p.m.-6 a.m.) was imposed in order to regulate, restrict, and minimize risk to public safety. The Nat’l Guard Reserve unit of the State’s active duty roster (equal to On-call Fed) was called out to enforce martial law against the extreme threat. Quell the civil unrest when we can’t self-regulate. Light-rail service was suspended; the United States Post Office closed their lobby. “Imagine a fire here!” their postmistress said. After windows were smashed and fires started windows were boarded up, buildings fenced off deemed unsafe. The Police bldg. was cordoned off with a moat of concrete jersey barriers. The city braced [for] items that could be used as weapons such as bricks. Black-owned signs were meant to provide a free pass, but I heard a black owned building employee, ask “Why us?” when they were hit. Demonstrations as acts of civil disobedience: riot/looting/arson protests were reported in 75 U.S. other cities that day. “If that’s what it takes,” an acquaintance said. “You kill us, we fight back,” was spray painted on the Goodwill building. “They don’t care,” someone quipped of retailers’ damage.” White Supremacists are insured.”

I witnessed the red fire and smoke of University Avenue. I can hardly roast marshmallows or keep a weenie-roast going. Structures needed to collapse and smoke still needed a woman firefighter to spray the fire department’s hose. When I saw what they did to her restaurant of this indiscriminate targeting I thought, ‘What did Leeann Chin ever do to you?’ I coined the one mile stretch of devastation Misery Mile and I walked that mile every day for another 4 days afterward to assess the magnitude. Our twin city was “hit hard,” but someone said, “It’s not about cities, it’s what’s underlying.” A death at the hand of the police was the match that struck the fire. I believe that the recent viewing of that civilian death posted on social media was traumatic, that it incited and contributed to this recent aggression in our city. The public was indignant and insulted and reacted in violence. An equivalent are underground snuff movies where real people are filmed dying unlike Hollywood movies where the audience knows Tom Cruise goes home at night. These recent public deaths were not choreographed; they were real.

In the aftermath neighborhood volunteers did clean up, grabbing debris. I believe that the majority of residents of my city prefer a guileless clean conscience to a troubled one. They are insulted, aghast even, by crime. They are not simple, but they are giving. Panhandlers on the side of the road at stop lights know this and both the Police Department and the City Attorney’s Office warn that this benevolence contributes to aggressive solicitation. Witness, even, a hand-off of cardboard signs at their shift-change.

My city conjures, reinforces and strives to retain a small-town mentality that if I can see your eyes you won't hurt me. It's said people can tell you who used to live in your house. "We're very much a herd animal, a coupling animal," University of Washington Sociology Professor Pepper Schwartz wrote. "We need to have people in close intimate relationships. We get strange when we don't. If we stay isolated, we feel unimportant, irrelevant and start to get self-destructive."

Take for example in this same neighborhood a small July 4th parade. Little children rode down the street on tricycles and bicycles and in strollers and wagons pulled by their parents. With the other residents of their street they marched down this one city block and back; then the grownups read portions of the Declaration of Independence aloud and passed the written text of it to the next person to read and to celebrate American ideals. This sweetness is decried as nice, naïve, even. "There's this need," wrote Amin Maalouf, "felt by every individual, to feel part of a community which accepts and recognizes him [her] and within which he [she] can be understood easily. "

Our twin city is not an identical twin. Our twin can be rough. In that same week of that tiny parade their Police Department Public Information Office said, "Early morning hours when many downtown clubs are letting out are problem nights for incidents." Our twin is the mini-apple wanting to be as savvy sophisticated as the Big Apple, but has, at the same time out grown its britches. Our city may seem quaint, sensible, even old-fashioned unnerved by brutality, but not out of touch. With its steady moral compass my city prefers stability, rule of law, discipline, and common sense. We are capable -- like a trained police dog-- of controlling our aggression. A young woman once said she actually preferred downtown of my city to its twin downtown. Another young woman joked that you can practically see tumbleweeds roll down the streets of our city after dark, and a young man said that in that twin city girls go out to prom "more sinned against than sinning."

"It is impossible," Edward T. Hall wrote, "for man to divest himself of his own culture, for it has penetrated the roots of his nervous system and determines how he perceives the world. Most of culture lies hidden, outside volume control, making up warp and woof of human existence." And yet people do get shot and killed in my city. I was reminded of someone I knew who put down the blow horn and ponied up community activism on a day after day basis.

## **Crips Sticks and Stones**

Yesterday I became a witness, affected by and drawn into the noise of raised voices dripping with hostility, insult, and venom, repeatedly shouting "N\_gger!" and the f\_ck word. Mention of a Crips' vendetta was bandied about with the imminent (and voiced) risk and threat of guns. Passersby on the street were dazzled --like rubber-neckers to a fresh fatality. The bully-culprit who initiated this confrontation was a white middle age male physically thrashing about, thrusting out his chest. It felt like display, strut and swagger, a plea for attention; poke and provoke, posturing for effect, bravado, bludgeoning this young black male. This incident of street violence was instigated over a parking spot.

We phoned 9-1-1, but rather than ratchet down, the antagonist's voice escalated. When I saw a tear in the young man's eyes I put my hand on his back and said, "He doesn't know you." Though I begged him to leave the scene, to back down from his assailant he wouldn't. Neither could I, though I heard what my daughter would say. Get out of there! In the face of an antagonist when challenged by the enemy, don't buckle under. His Rule of Law was Don't back down. Today I read that in Spain indeed there are ancient rites and codes of behavior governing the dispute of an age-old grudge. Something chivalric conspired here today in 2021.

# The Danger of a Full Stop

Jonathan Hiatt

---

“Our Father, who art in Heaven. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven...”

January 25, 1998. Killing yourself is a risky endeavor at any age. You know that it is best to be inconspicuous in carrying out your plans regardless of your method. As you pour yourself another glass of Johnnie Walker Black Label and eye the bottle of sleeping pills you bought at the corner pharmacy, you ponder what seems like a fate worse than death: the fate of a bitter, jaded, and unrepentant soul. You know intuitively that what you are doing is a huge mistake. You know that everything happens for a reason, and you know it is such a tired, old cliché. You know that sometimes the reason is you make poor choices. You always seem to make poor choices.

You recall one of your favorite poems, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost. You meditate on its final stanza.

You were deep in the woods. A doctor told your parents that when you were five years old. You pretend you don’t remember even though you have a photographic memory, according to your mother.

You have tried to keep lots of promises over the years. Promises. Broken promises. Too little, too late, too many and all at once...

Thy will be done, indeed! You’re thinking maybe this is God’s way of calling you home, exactly one month after your twenty-first birthday. And in your alcohol-induced haze, you curse under your breath, “Fuck it!” and take another sip.

You own your struggles. You wear them on your shirt sleeve. You remember how your stepmother insisted you look at yourself in the mirror when you were thirteen and say you’re worthy and how ridiculous it all seemed then, like an adolescent version of Al Franken’s Stuart Smalley character on Saturday Night Live.

“You don’t love yourself,” your stepmother tells you. “You must love yourself first.”

Yeah. Whatever.

You pour yourself a final round and wash down a handful of pills after you have said to yourself, “It is finished.” You close your eyes to clear your troubled, poorly formed conscience.

You decide to close your eyes and rest. It will be over soon enough. Death be not proud. God will take you home. This is how it must be, maybe was meant to be.

Until...

3:00 a.m. You need to pee. Inebriated beyond measure, you try to stand but the room is spinning so you must crawl on your hands and knees to the bathroom. You manage to void into the toilet while

sitting down. You don't bother to wash your hands this time.

You crawl back to bed and wonder when you're finally going home.

Thirteen hours. That's how long your landlord's fiancée said you slept that night. She is a nurse and is amazed your liver didn't give out.

You've heard of this thing called mercy. Maybe it was a form of divine intervention that saved you.

And why did it save you and not somebody else? Someone else more worthy than you, maybe a promising Rhodes scholar.

Or maybe someone with a wife and two teenage boys.

On July 26, 2005, my friend Stephen jumped off the high bridge on Smith Avenue. He was forty-one years old. I learned the truth a few days later when a social rehabilitation worker at Guild told me. And I thought I was in trouble for having told an off-color joke earlier that day.

Now, Saint Stephen was stoned to death. But my friend was no martyr and certainly no saint and I shudder thinking about the last thing I remember that he told me when he said (citing the Catechism of the Catholic Church) that abortion was a grave sin because God gives us life and only God has the power to take it from us and O, what tragic irony! what a hypocrite my friend was but I felt his pain too.

It was the first time I attended a funeral with an open casket. I remember his closed eyes, a rosary placed in his folded hands, and his stiff, lifeless body reminding me too much of a Madame Tussaud wax figure. He left behind his wife, Janet, and two sons still in middle school. Stephen taught social studies and was working on a master's degree in pastoral ministry. And I thought, what a goddamn waste and it didn't have to end this way, but I knew just as well that I could have, would have, should have but could not stop for death.

But why? Why are there reasons some of us live while others don't?

There are no fucking reasons!

Everybody says life goes on. But does it, really?

Fast forward to June 11, 2019. My friend Scott died suddenly at the age of fifty-five. I learned a week later that it too was suicide when I Googled his name, followed by "Minnesota" and "obituary." But this obituary is different. It reads "...loving son, compassionate brother, kind uncle and friend to many took his own life June 11, 2019. Scott's passing leaves behind bereaved friends, family, and loved ones. We ask that you open your heart and offer compassion without judgment to help end the stigma and shame for anyone living with mental illness."

When was the last time you read the obituary of someone who died by suicide that didn't resort to euphemism or omit the cause of death?

Here's an interesting fact. Did you know that almost 99% of the mass of the human body is made up of just six chemical elements: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus?

Another .85% is composed of another five elements: potassium, sulfur, sodium, chlorine, and magnesium. All these elements are necessary for human life.

But something is missing. What accounts for the remaining .15% of a human being?

And then you remember the four last things from RCIA class, the final things of human existence: death, judgment, heaven, hell.

A quote frequently misattributed to C.S. Lewis says, “You don’t have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body.”

Ah, yes. The soul.

I keep thinking about that word “absolve” and what it means. And why it is a much stronger word than “forgive.”

Compassion, yes. But without judgment? That is so much harder.

O death, where is thy sting?

A year after Scott’s death, I opened an old copy of The Norton Anthology of Poetry and just so happened to open it to John Donne’s Sonnet #10 from Holy Sonnets, otherwise known as “Death Be Not Proud.”

And on November 2nd each year, All Souls Day, I remember to pray for the repose of the souls of my friends, Stephen, and Scott.

But that isn’t all.

I remind myself that I survived. Yes, if only they would have been so lucky. If only...

What the hell, all this talk about souls! Has it ever occurred to you that maybe you are a vessel?

My friends were vessels, too.

Now, as a writer and editor with a bachelor’s degree in English, maybe I should have given you the TL;DR version of all this. So, let me put it more succinctly.

I don’t know if you’ve ever seen people with a semicolon tattooed on their arm or wrist, but the only difference between Stephen’s or Scott’s experience and theirs—or mine—is like the difference between a semicolon and a period. One is a pause; the other, a full stop.

A full stop. Think about that.

Think about that when you feel you can’t go on. Or when you’re writing your next term paper.

My life, your life...it matters.

And so, I remind myself that my friends did the best they could. But it didn’t have to end that way.

A semicolon. What a useful analogy! For a writer, anyway.

# Knox my rat terrier with chocolate eyes

Bryant Rooney

---

Knox eyes glow milk chocolate  
thin clouds of wispy pine needles  
black holes pull fingers forward  
sleeping comfortably  
upon crispy brown leaves

Unleashed pack unhinged appetite pitbull

heavy pressure pierced through veins  
hungry intent drags  
lightning from its cage

small black nose  
scented to crumbs licking up frantic

rat packs memories away  
clotting white holes  
future spills

a barbed leash drags hope away rage  
hangs hope from the moon rage brick up space  
prevents loss drown rage in place

steam flies through whimper eyes  
loss pulls glass from toxic space  
tender cloth cradles empty arms  
Knox rests among warm dew  
subtle earth succor chocolate eyes

# A Child that Sings the Language of We Trees

Bryant Rooney

---

We Trees sing the voice of life  
silent-overflowing / bound with the ground

A Child wandered in / whistling gales that meld to Our sapling needs  
moss branches pulled from closed ears  
simple thoughts written down with chalk-mark lyrics  
onto sheets of alabaster wood  
space between Our staves allow small fingers to take  
the notes from Our duramen

caroling vibrato carried down rows and rows  
follow through wind swept aisles /  
the debris of shattered trees unfold a melody

a musing conversation illuminated by brown and growing seeds  
A Child takes barking words / trek through the evergreen  
watermark altered on leaves of music  
A Child spirit shielded within a fresh ballad

We Trees believed We were only  
wood carved windows  
A Child showed We Trees an outline  
imprinted into tailored soil / gardened by sprouting plots

# Her Ancient River

Bryant Rooney

---

Water Nymph witnessed  
a boy skip across  
night stones  
his glistened eyes with moon-kissed wonder  
her life flowed from her mouth

*glacier raindrops bore*  
blossom flora  
guided through coiled caverns

pampas garden  
envision my painter's truth  
soft handles  
erode mountains

flood black ink  
overflowed with  
smeared stars  
*my charcoal stories*

a boy drank from her euphoric microbes  
Soothed fingers through  
burned dreams  
weather bones  
on the floor of a voyageur's bed

# That Bus Ride

Elizabeth Wadsworth Ellis

---

It was 10 o'clock on a Friday night, drizzling rain in a not-too-good part of town behind our State Capitol. I flagged down the first bus I saw. I was not at a designated bus stop, but I hailed that bus knowing full well the driver was within his rights not to stop. He pulled over. I climbed on, grateful.

Grousing rose up immediately from the back of the bus. More than one voice chimed in agreement with the outspoken, incensed, disgruntled one, jeering and heckling the driver.

"Now, if she were Black, he'd have never picked her up! It'd be a different story."

Anger is emotion; violence is behavior.

Normally, I would've sat in the back of the bus. Not now. Heeding the words of B.B. King's grandma, "Don't go where you're not wanted," They didn't like me. I chose a seat near the driver.

Two sanctioned stops later, two handsome young Black men — eyes unfocused, feet stumbling — took the seat directly across the aisle facing me. The one wearing dreadlocks didn't notice me, his buddy did. He made eye contact. "A smile is the shortest distance between two people," Victor Borge said.

I smiled. He asked why I was holding my umbrella so tight as if I thought someone was going to steal it. I said I wasn't and I didn't.

He asked me, "What bus is this?" I told him.

When I got up to leave, he told his travel companion, "She smiled at me." Then he asked me, "Will you take me home with you?"

In that same week, down this same street, bus passengers made news when they dethroned a rowdy, cursing fellow picking fights, misbehaving, causing the bus driver anxiety. Columnist Joe Soucheray wrote, "People have been shot on the bus."

On that same route on a sunny Sunday, I put my bicycle on the bike rack and climbed aboard, heading to the co-op for bike repairs. I chose a seat next to a Black woman. She saw me and snorted.

"I don't hate all White people," she said to the couple behind us. "I smacked a woman in the face," she went on, "for getting blood on my outfit," when that woman was drawing this woman's blood. "I told her, 'You get that blood on me, I'll mess you up.' And I did. I told her if I ever see her out on the street, I'll f\*\*k her over." Cultural critic Gerald Early classifies cursing as an "intensifier." Angela Davis says people in her hometown fought "over being bumped, over having toes stepped on, over being called a name, over being the target of real or imagined gossip...punch[ing] Black faces because they could not reach White ones."

The woman on the bus that day shared another vignette. She was waiting to be waited on, and when the attendant waited on her man before her she got impatient. "I didn't snap. I just said, 'You forget about me?'"

Staring at my man more than me?’ I can have any man — all I got to do is holler.”

This day she was commuting. “[They] banned me from the Minneapolis [site]. Said I got me an attitude. Now I got to come all the way to St. Paul,” she said, to redeem some \$35. “I’ll buy me a blunt.”

This same day, I took a one hour bus ride to Sun Ray, the only traveler when I climbed aboard. I asked the driver how many outfits the bus company issues, since drivers don’t seem as uniformly neat as he did. His shirt was titanium white, his trousers ironed with a crease.

“That’s the way my momma raised me,” he said, “to be clean, to take care of my things.” The Jesuits preach, “Give me the first six years of a child’s life, and you can have the rest.”

The driver said he was originally from a Jamaican community in New York City. Stanley Crouch wrote, “We are the results of every human possibility that has touched us, no matter its point of origin.”

When we reached the downtown St. Paul transfer point, the driver bantered with passengers climbing aboard paying their fare. They talked golf and pro baseball. Passengers asked about the new North Star line. Train or airplane or bus employees are as anxious to get off work as we are to climb on. It’s a job. This driver would barely have time to eat at the end of this leg before it was time for him to double back. The last time I saw him he was standing at Culvers Restaurant counter on Old Hudson Road, waiting to be waited on.

My former Black husband told me that as a child he was thrown heave-ho into the water to force him to swim. Like with his toss, my thought one day on a bus ride was, “Swim.”

*Get this and get it straight: When you meet a black man on the street, you are not looking at a Negro of a particular generation; no, you are looking at an accumulation, an historical phenomenon, a dialectical synthesis of nearly four centuries enclosed in a single black skin, and — if he is not a middle-class, non-violent Negro, which he is likely not to be — you are looking at dynamite. — C.C. Hernton’s “Dynamite growing out of their skulls,” Black Fire*

*By permission of Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.*

# When I Met Jack

Louise Reed

---

When I was ten, I met my best friend, Jack.

He brought the big city to our small town. He was the loudest, but brightest in our grade. I learned early on that he did not have an off switch. Jack was the type of guy who wasn't afraid to pick a fight with anyone and craved the light to be shined on him, despite how the rest of the class felt about him, there was something about him gravitated to me. He was loud while I was quiet. He dreamed big, while I was more practical. He was creative while I was more analytical. It made is the best collaborative partners; it made us best friends. Jack and I clung to each other like saran-wrap on a glass bowl.

When I was thirteen, Jack and I told each other our deepest secrets.

Jack and I would hang out every day outside the 7-Eleven after school. I would use my allowance that I got each week to buy us both slushies and soft pretzels. We had our own hideaway, a little shed in the forest behind my house. We decorated it with posters, string lights, and bean bag chairs.

One day after school, we sat in our hideaway, sipping on our slushies while being swallowed by the bean bag chairs. The three years Jack and I had been friends, he had never brought me in his house. I hadn't even met his parents. But that afternoon I found out why. Jack told me that his dad didn't make home a safe place for him. He showed me his scars and bruises that his dad had gifted him.

I told him that I had a crush on a girl named Ava. My parents told me it was just a phase and that girls can't be with other girls. I was told that was against God. But Jack always supported me. We cried together in our hideaway that day, vowing to keep each other's deepest secrets.

When I was sixteen, Jack and I started to grow apart.

We became like distant cousins. Occasionally we check up on each other, but the frequency of our checkups was irregular. My parents pushed me into the higher-level courses, started prepping me for college and made sure I spent my free time focusing on my future. While I had to study to ensure my acceptance to the University of Washington, Jack had discovered high school parties, which led his newfound love for alcohol and girls. Of course, we would always see each other in the hallway. Jack never stopped smiling at me. Even when the people we hung out with changed, we always had that moment in the hideaway that bonded us together.

When I was eighteen, Jack's newfound love for alcohol escalated into a coping mechanism for the mess he had going on at home.

I would see the bruise marks on his arms, neck, face, and chest. I didn't have to ask, and he didn't have to tell me. I knew all too well what was going on inside the walls of Jack's home.

There was hardly a time that Jack wasn't drunk. Jack would show up to school with a water bottle full of vodka, thinking it would trick the teacher into assuming it was just water. It was the only coping mechanism he knew. Jack was going out almost every night and I was the one he would call to pick him up if things got out of hand. I spent most of my weekend nights studying and working on college applications, while also being the one to bail Jack out of trouble.

One night, while I was finalizing a paper to turn in, I got a call from Jack. He was distressed, mumbling so much that I could hardly figure out what he was saying. I drove around town, stopping at every bar in town, before finding Jack on the side of the street with vomit soaking his shirt. I dragged him to my car and back to my house, where I cleaned him up and sobered him up. After that night he told me he was going to do better.

That promise lasted a week.

When I was twenty-one, Jack discovered heroin.

It had been years since I had seen Jack. While at school, he would text me, call me and ask how I was doing. He wanted to know about the girls I was dating and how campus food was. He would often say he was going to pile up the truck to come visit me. "Let's show that what city, what we're made of," he would say. But nothing ever came of it.

Unlike me, Jack never left our small town. I knew little of what Jack was up to in Forks until I came home my junior year of college for Christmas. Jack had called me, telling me that he was playing at one of the local bars, and invited me to see him play. So, on one December night, I went to go see Jack play at the dingy bar. Jack had worn an old ratty t-shirt that night, his hair arms covered in track marks. I couldn't focus on the music he was playing. All I could think about were those needle marks.

That night after the show, I confronted him about it. He told me that he had it under control. Jack had said, he was going to be a dad soon and promised me and his girlfriend Tessa that when the baby came, he would get sober. He was going to stop using and stop drinking.

He never did.

When I was twenty-two years old, I lost my best friend Jack to a drug and alcohol addiction. At three in the morning on a Wednesday, I got a call from Jack's girlfriend telling me that he had overdosed.

She had found him in the bathroom, hunched over the brim of the tub, unconscious and not breathing. Then, on a February morning, days after his twenty-third birthday, I had to bury my best friend, Jack.

# Last Light

Erik Suchy



# Cup O'Leaves

Erik Suchy



# Drip Drop

Erik Suchy



# Thirteen

Jonathan Hiatt

---

When you're thirteen, the last thing in the world you want to hear from your middle school guidance counselor is, "Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better." You spend as much time, if not more, in Mr. Sexton's office as you do in class. This time, it was because you threw a chair in class. Your dad tells you simply to walk away and ignore the taunts from the kids who call you "queer" or "fag" or make fun of your surname by greeting you with "Hi, It!" The worst is when bullies steal your drumsticks, and your dad must fork over another \$12 at Schmitt Music for a new pair. It isn't worth it, he says. And besides, it is not like you can fight, anyway. You remember the time in fourth grade when you tried to do a crane kick and go full on Daniel LaRusso on someone after school at a local park and instead, were knocked out by your classmate's older foster brother. You may have spent three days in the intensive care unit with a concussion at Children's Hospital, but how could you forget getting your ass handed to you like that?

The bell rings and Mr. Sexton excuses you. You wipe away the tears and sniffle, leaving his office just in time to make it to band class. It's the only thing you're truly good at, anyway. Next period is gym, which totally sucks. At 110 pounds, you're too lanky and uncoordinated for any sport and you walk like a toy soldier which explains why you're always the last person picked. That is, when you go to gym class. But at least you don't have to worry about taking a communal shower while you wonder if the other boys look at you "down there." Fortunately, your band director is kind enough to allow you to take out your teenage angst on a drum kit while you try to play Neil Peart's solo from Rush's "Tom Sawyer." It's nice to have a kind of study hall for band geeks. Unfortunately, your dad never attends your band concerts, and you don't understand why, especially after he bought you your first drum set and tells you he loves you.

What is love, anyway? You don't have a girlfriend yet. Well, not technically. But you did have a crush on your friend, Shannon, back in third grade. Sadly, she moved away before you left your mother and siblings behind after the divorce to go live with your dad. It's hard to talk to a girl at any age, I suppose, but especially when you're thirteen. At least you never got detention for pulling the bra straps of the girl sitting in front of you in math class. That isn't like you, way. Though you did find a stack of 1970s era Hustler magazines by accident, tucked away in your next-door neighbor's drum cases underneath a pair of cymbals, but looking at a woman's bush made you feel squeamish and...well, weird. Your friend draws dirty pictures one day in wood shop and faced with the prospect of getting detention yourself, you do the unthinkable and let him take the fall. Some friend you are, he says. He hates you but only for a little while.

Lunchtime is a rite of passage when you're thirteen. You head to the cafeteria, a microcosm of society where you meet your friends, Mark, Chad, Nate, and Jon. You all sit at that table. You know, the one for the geeks and dweebs and general misfits. Mark takes out his paper lunch bag and eats the same sandwich every

day: Kraft singles on white bread and sometimes the cheese gets stuck between his braces, and you want to tell him to maybe go floss afterwards, but no, that would be rude. People sometimes call Mark a “cripple” because he walks with crutches due to his spina bifida. He tries to blow it off. Brave kid. One day, you hear a sixth grader call him a “cripple” and you grab the little shit by his armpits, threatening to drop him from the second-floor balcony of your school. “Call my friend a cripple ever again and you’ll end up worse than him!” Sure, you may get your ass kicked nearly every day, but you would do anything to defend someone who can’t defend himself. Blessed are the peacemakers.

The last period of the day is English. You’re in the gifted and talented program, so you’re reading about the futuristic, dystopian worlds of Martians and cyborgs. The stuff of Ray Bradbury. You are assigned to write a book report for Monday. You always procrastinate and your homework gets turned in several days late. Your dad wants to know why you’re only pulling a D in the class. It’s not that you’re stupid or anything, you just don’t care. Your teacher encourages you and tells you that you’re one of the best writers in the class but if you don’t start turning in your homework on time, she’ll have to fail you. There’s no one home after school, as usual. You’re a latch key kid, and though you’re supposed to start on your homework after you’re encouraged to make yourself a quick snack, you never do and you end up watching Cartoon Network, the news, and Family Ties until it’s time for bed. Your parents won’t be home until 2 am, anyway. You may be just thirteen, but you’re independent. You do your own laundry. It’s better that way. Especially when you’re embarrassed that you had your first wet dream the night before. You’re growing up.

Daybreak. You shower at 6:30 am every day. You’re developing slight acne, so you scrub your face so hard under nearly scalding water that it turns beet red, and some girl starts calling you Mr. Tomato Head. Nevertheless, you try to do what your stepmother insists you do every day. You’re supposed to look in the mirror and say aloud, “I’m Jonathan Hiatt and I am a good person and I love myself” but it seems so silly, and those positive affirmations remind you of Al Franken’s Stuart Smalley skit on Saturday Night Live. Though you must admit Al Franken was pretty funny back then.

As you head to your locker, you overhear your new moniker and the day’s gossip. “Here comes Mr. Tomato Head. Oh, and did you hear about Gavin? I saw him in the bathroom the other day and caught him whipping it!”

“You’re full of shit, Mike!” says Chris.

“No, really! I swear. He was whipping it! You know, like...well, you know,” Mike insists.

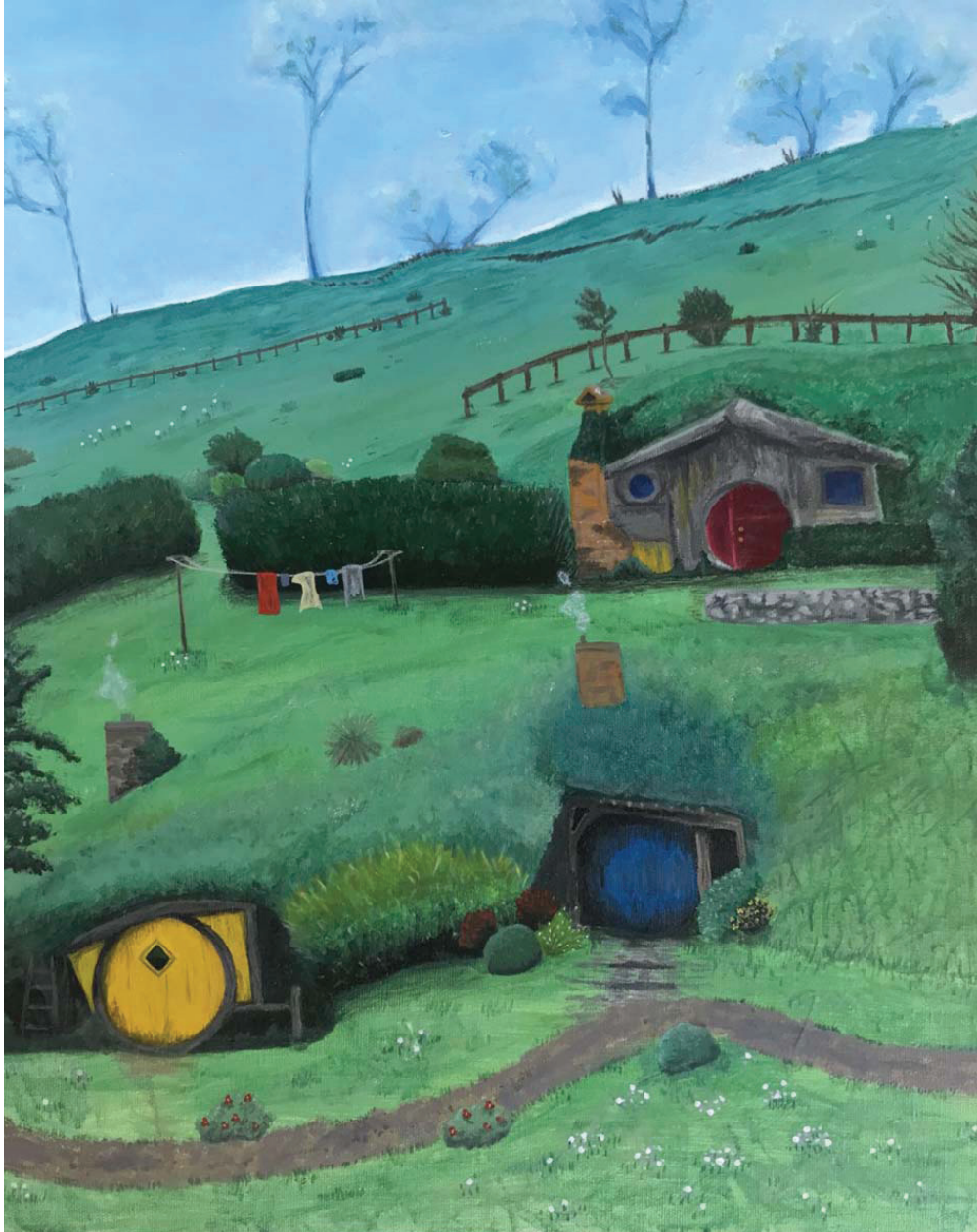
Of course, you know those dipshits are full of it ‘cause your dad reminds you that kids are just plain cruel. Boys will be boys.

Yeah.

There’s never a dull moment when you’re thirteen.

# The Shire

Samara Adam



# Daughter

Avery Danger Hunter



# Skull, Egg, Stick

Maria Petric



# Desire to Sew

Sam Klienberger



# Selene

Sam Klienberger



# A Love Letter and Some Kind Words

Tommy Shreve

---

My Dearest Drew,

Do you remember that fall when the leaves didn't change color and the air stayed humid, like my tiny town of Mayfeld had forgotten about the seasons? I knew right then and right there that something was different about this year.

Being a tailor's apprentice in a small town meant I didn't get many outsiders. Mrs. Juniper came in twice a week to keep her old-fashioned dresses in pristine condition and a couple of the farmers' wives came in every once in a while to have us patch up their husbands' tattered overalls, but that was about it.

That fall, as I watched the resilient green leaves cling to their trees from the window of the shop, I spotted the most magnificent sight, a strong, square jawed beast, laid back in a black throne on two wheels. The beast pulled up to the window and wiped the humidity from his rugged jaw with a black bandana.

"Excuse me miss," he said to me in a polite, yet firm voice. This beast had manners.

"Hello, sir," I greeted him casually, pretending he was Mrs. Juniper or one of the farmers' wives.

"If it's not too much trouble," he squeezed out of his tight leather coat and pointed to a tear on the shoulder, "would you be able to take a look at this?"

I examined the coat as I inhaled the sweet stench of leather, sweat, and man.

"Sure thing, honey, but it'll cost you," I said with a smile.

Over the next week, that fierce Viking gave me so many unbelievable rides around town, and only a couple of them were on his bike. I never wanted to finish his jacket, I wanted him to stay there forever, but he said he had a life to get back to. I wish he had swooped me up and taken me with him, together we'd ride across the country, just he and I. But, one day I came into the tailor and his jacket was gone. Mary-Beth said he had stopped in early to grab his jacket and get going. I imagined him riding around town looking for me, hoping to give me one last ride before he left, but he never did.

His departure signaled Mayfeld to continue on with time once again. The leaves turned red and died, the cool air washed over the town, and I was alone once again.

I have thought about you every day since, Drew. I know we were meant to be, I feel it, and I know you do too. I don't care what it takes, I will track you down and be with you finally. Please, be with me.

With all the love in the world,  
Marilyn

Marilyn Declyn,

Please leave me alone. You have stalked me and followed me and tracked me across this country because of something that happened over a decade ago. I do not know what is so wrong with you or what possessed you to act like this but it is not even remotely appropriate. I have a family now, a wife, kids and a house, they are my life now and I do not wish to abandon them for the sake of fulfilling some delusional woman's decade old fantasy. This constant harassment needs to stop. So, kindly leave me and family alone or I will be forced to take legal action.

- Andrew J. Boulliard

# Droplets

Sarah Schenck



# Plant in Red

Kong Thao



# Afternoon Tea

Kong Thao



# Biographies

---

**Erik Suchy** is an emerging writer and soon-to-be-graduate student at Metropolitan State University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where I am earning my B.A. in Creative Writing.

**Isaiah Porter** wishes to touch the hearts of his readers with words and the stories they form. Whether that be through a prose piece, poetry, comic books, screenwriting, or even a video game matters not to him. One of his past achievements was winning the 2020 Carother's Award for his screenplay, Proxy. In Spring 2022, he will go through his final semester at Metro State and graduate with a BA in creative writing and a Minor in screenwriting. After, he will focus on writing a collection of short stories inspired by his fascination with fantasy concepts clashing with real-world situations. He'd like to thank his friends and family, his professors and peers, for continuing to push him forward.

**Jill Olson** will graduate from Metro State University in the Spring of 2022 from the Individualized studies program. Upon graduation she will take the written and performance exams to become a certified American Sign Language Interpreter. She has taken writing classes from Belo Cipriani and Suzanne Nielson at Metro State. My student email is [jill.olson@my.metrostate.edu](mailto:jill.olson@my.metrostate.edu).

**Bri Krickhahn** is an English Education Major at Metro State University. She is currently working on the upcoming "Blondie the Bombshell" book

series. She is the proud parent of two cats that she is terribly allergic to.

**Jason Emrick** is a senior in creative writing with plans to graduate in the fall of 2022. He is an Alumni of Dunwoody College of Technology with an A.A.S. degree in Automotive Service Technology. He worked as an Automotive Technician for 17 years before becoming an instructor at Dunwoody where he has worked for the past five years. Prior to Dunwoody he had many unsuccessful college attempts and is grateful to have found Metro and its creative writing program to finish his four-year degree. He is married with two children, 14 and 12. He currently lives in the Highland Park neighborhood of Saint Paul.

**Leah Gabrielson**, a 31 year Veteran in the US Army and a Registered Nurse, has finally decided to pursue her last love and "write an interesting chapter in her life." Putting aside practical matters, Leah has enjoyed her beginning semester at Metro State University and hopes to play around with her imagination and continue to write.

**Tessa Schmitz** is a senior with a Liberal Arts major and minors in Creative Writing and Screenwriting. On this interdisciplinary path, Tessa has focused her studies on inclusive storytelling, and she hopes to create narratives that shed light on topics often overlooked in society. After graduation, Tessa plans to attain her MFA in Creative Writing and Film to publish and create transmedia stories.

# Biographies *continued*

---

**Bryant Rooney** is new to poetry. He was born in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He is often inspired by the landscape of Minnesota into, and the people he has met along the way. He hopes to continue his dream of writing, and is going for a degree in Creative Writing and English.

**Louise Reed** is a writer of rom-coms, eater of pizza, cat enthusiast, and self-proclaimed tattooed icon. Her current writing projects include working on another novel, and working as a sketch writer for a friend's upcoming sketch comedy show.

**Lisa Castillo** A senior majoring in English with a minor in creative writing. Mother of 3 and a grandmother too. She has spent many years writing, and originally went to college with a writing scholarship. Covid gave her the opportunity to return to her studies after being furloughed from her Marketing Career.

**Andrew Kasmarek** is a junior at Metro State University but a freshman in his heart. He lost his beans once upon a time but found them again as he re-committed to education. He is a creative writing major and plans on writing until the day he dies. He views money as the root of all evil and also enjoys singing songs and playing guitar. When he does die, he hopes his epitaph reads that he was a tremendous house guest.

**Elizabeth Ellis** I graduated Metro State 1983. My work has been accepted for publication in literary journals.

**Jonathan Hiatt** graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with honors from Metro State on December 13, 2020. He has been a member of Haute Dish's staff since 2017 and continues to represent Haute Dish as an alum, assisting as a proofreader, poetry and prose editor, and secretary.

Dr. Suzanne Nielsen describes Jonathan's approach to writing as "fearless" and states, "Jonathan's contributions to equity are ever present in his own creative writing, where he challenges the reader's moral compass, allowing each of us to be actively involved in the replenishing of humanity."

Jonathan is an Assistant Editor at Oleb Books in Minneapolis. He lives in West Saint Paul.

**Thomas Shreve** is a Creative Writing major from Lakeville, Minnesota. He spends most of his time playing video games, reading comics, watching movies, and just generally procrastinating doing anything productive with his time. When he finally is productive, he like to write about either silly, lighthearted humor and depressing, emotional drama, depending on the day. His dream is to one day be a published writer, whether it be screenwriter, comic book writer, novelist, or all three.

# Biographies *continued*

---

**Avery Hunter:** I am an artist living with schizoaffective disorder, ADHD, PTSD, ASD and severe anxiety. I moved to the U.S. from England in 2004 at the age of 18. I left behind a lack of creative resources in Northamptonshire, England, to find a surprising abundance of creative opportunities here in Minneapolis, Minnesota. It has been the ability to create art that has seen me through many personal and professional obstacles. Not only is it a key part of my therapeutic process, but it is also an effective communication tool, utilized to advocate for myself and others.

**Samara Adam** I am a current student at Metro State University who is double-majoring in Studio Arts and Psychology. I am set to graduate in the spring of 2022. I was a self taught artist for most of my life, but as I started my college education I began taking art classes, and quickly realized I wanted to pursue art more seriously.

**Sam Kleinberger** I'm currently a Studio Arts major with a minor in Digital Media at Metro with plans to graduate in the fall.

I am trying to find my place in the world through the art I make. My artwork is often concerned with states of flux and temporary states of being. I view my art as an extension of my own journey and it's changing nature reflects that.

I work primarily with heavily edited video, music, and sculpture. I also work in other mediums including digital drawings, acrylic and watercolor paintings, and charcoal drawings. I enjoy seeking out new artistic mediums to work with and learn.

I draw inspiration from my experiences and filter it through my work. What comes out is often bizarre and distorted but becomes a framework with which I hope to better understand myself and the world around me.

**Sarah Schenck** is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in accounting at Metro and expects to graduate Spring 2022. Her love of photography began in high school when her dad taught her how to develop film and enlarge prints in his darkroom. Sarah shares this love of photography with her brothers, her father, and her grandfather - both her dad and her grandfather had their own darkrooms and a passion for photography that they loved to share.

**Kong Thao** is a student at Metropolitan State University as a Studio Arts major. She mainly works with graphite, watercolor, and acrylic. Photography has always been a challenge to her, but she had decided to take the two photography classes available at Metro and enjoyed both. This artwork is a part of the intermediate photography project using one color as a reoccurring subject in the photograph. She had a great time figuring out her subjects and placing props to create interesting pieces. She enjoys the use of color that photography has to offer.

*Haute Dish is published two times a year, spring and fall semesters, and is dedicated to showcasing the literary and artistic talents of students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Metro State University.*

*Categories include: poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, memoir/personal essay, visual art (photography, illustration, Focus on Metro), and digital storytelling.*

*Who May Submit? Current students, staff, faculty, and alumni of Metro State University are all welcome to submit their work for both the fall and spring issues.*

*Haute Dish is supported exclusively by funds from Metro State University student activity fees.*

## DEADLINES

Fall Issue – April 15

Spring Issue – November 15

## VISIT US

[Hautedish.metrostate.edu](http://Hautedish.metrostate.edu)

## QUESTIONS?

[hautedish@metrostate.edu](mailto:hautedish@metrostate.edu)

## LIKE US ON FACEBOOK!

@HauteDishofMetroState