

HAUTE DISH

The Arts and Literary Magazine of Metro State University

Fall 2024 | Volume 20, Issue 2



Editor's Letter

*Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing,
taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.*

— Mary Lou Cook

This is the Fall 2024 issue of *Haute Dish - The Arts and Literature Magazine of Metro State University*. The talent displayed within by Metro State students and alumni amazes and inspires me. We reviewed so many wonderful stories, poems, and art and while it was tough to choose, it was a labor of love and we are proud to present the works of these writers, poets, and artists in this issue.

As Managing Editor, I really need to thank all of the editors who reviewed each submission in their specialty. This magazine would not be possible without them. However, we are always looking for more people to join are team. If you are interested in participating in a student organization and you are a creative soul, please consider joining *Haute Dish* by emailing hautedish@metrostate.edu.

If you have pieces you would like to be considered for the Spring 2025 issue, please go to hautedish.metrostate.edu when the submission window opens on November 18, 2024.

I look forward to seeing more amazing works by writers, poets, and artists in the Metro community. It is truly a joy to be part of *Haute Dish* at Metro State.

With Thanks,
Dina Inderlee
Managing Editor



Table of Contents

Editors Letter	2
Staff List	4
A Mental Health Legacy by Owen Saarinen	5
Portrait of My Grandfather by Éowyn Prusak	6
Echoes of Departure by Jonathan Hiatt	7
Mind-full-ness: A Bridge Over Troubled Thought by Meta Titus	8
Holding Myself by Kathleen Isabell	9
Autumn Mushrooms by Éowyn Prusak	12
Epistemology of the Pantry by Ulysses Swanson	13
The Telegram by Tara Flaherty Guy	16
If Love and Hate Are the Same Words, I Love You by Jewels Leepalao	18
Museum of Love by Moxie Coe	20
Self Portrait Through the Eye of a Goose by Jill Bemis	22
Hershel's Seaside Cottage by Owen Saarinen	23
It's Not My Fault by Jewels Leepalao	26
Mood for Thought by Meta Titus	27
Queen Anne's Lace at Dusk by Éowyn Prusak	29
The Wound Clinic by Tara Flaherty Guy	30
The Memory of You by Jonathan Hiatt	31
Zenith by Jewels Leepalao	32
Silent Night by Tara Flaherty Guy	35
The Shieldmaiden by Éowyn Prusak	37
Everyone Loves Balls by Leah Moe	38
Contributors Bios	39

Staff List

Dina Inderlee ♦ Managing Editor/Prose Editor
Lizzy Adams ♦ Prose/Poetry Editor
Katrina Barnett ♦ Art Editor
Lisa Castillo ♦ Web/Social Media Editor
Diane DeRosier ♦ Layout Design/Art Editor
Jonathan Hiatt ♦ Alumni Poetry Editor
Laura Montano ♦ Poetry Editor
Sarah Murphy ♦ Art/Prose Editor
Owen Saarinen ♦ Art/Prose/Poetry Editor
Isaac Sonquist ♦ Prose Editor
Matthew Yang ♦ Art Editor
Suzanne Nielsen ♦ Faculty Advisor

Cover Art

Clouded Moonlight | Éowyn Prusak

About Us

Haute Dish is a publication of Metro State University
and is supported by the funds from Student Activity fees.

For More Information

hautedish.metrostate.edu
hautedish@metrostate.edu

Copyright Notice: All copyrights are retained by individual artists and authors.
Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is strictly prohibited.

A Mental Health Legacy — Challenge Piece Winner

by Owen Saarinen

The death of a brain means the birth of a new mind. Or is this brain of mine, the bipolar one, not dead, but just overly active?? I don't know what happened but in 2016 one summer I felt my entire inner world explode with activity. I wasn't experiencing symptoms of schizophrenia, but I most certainly had it in my head that everything was to be looked at through the lens of the dangerous *what if?* What *if* there was a caterpillar race up the kitchen wall right now, with little fleas riding on their backs? What *if* the busload of people all spoke only with their tongues alone—pointing and shooting this way and that—to be heard? What *if* there were other worlds beyond? Or beneath this one? And these questions and visions plagued me and pushed me into writing more and more until I became these stories. I became these ideas. And this was just one summer alone. Until I got on meds. Until I survived hospitalization after hospitalization to finally realize that, while the bipolar isn't going away... and what I mean by *bipolar* is far different than how people imagine it... I have to put some limits on my creative faculties. I have to take more meds, I have to stay away from scary movies, or even *writing* too many scary or disturbed character scenarios. I have to shield myself from the violence of the world by not watching much news. I have to remember that things are good when you decide to turn yourself in to be coddled by God, your friends, and your family. Whatever *God is...*

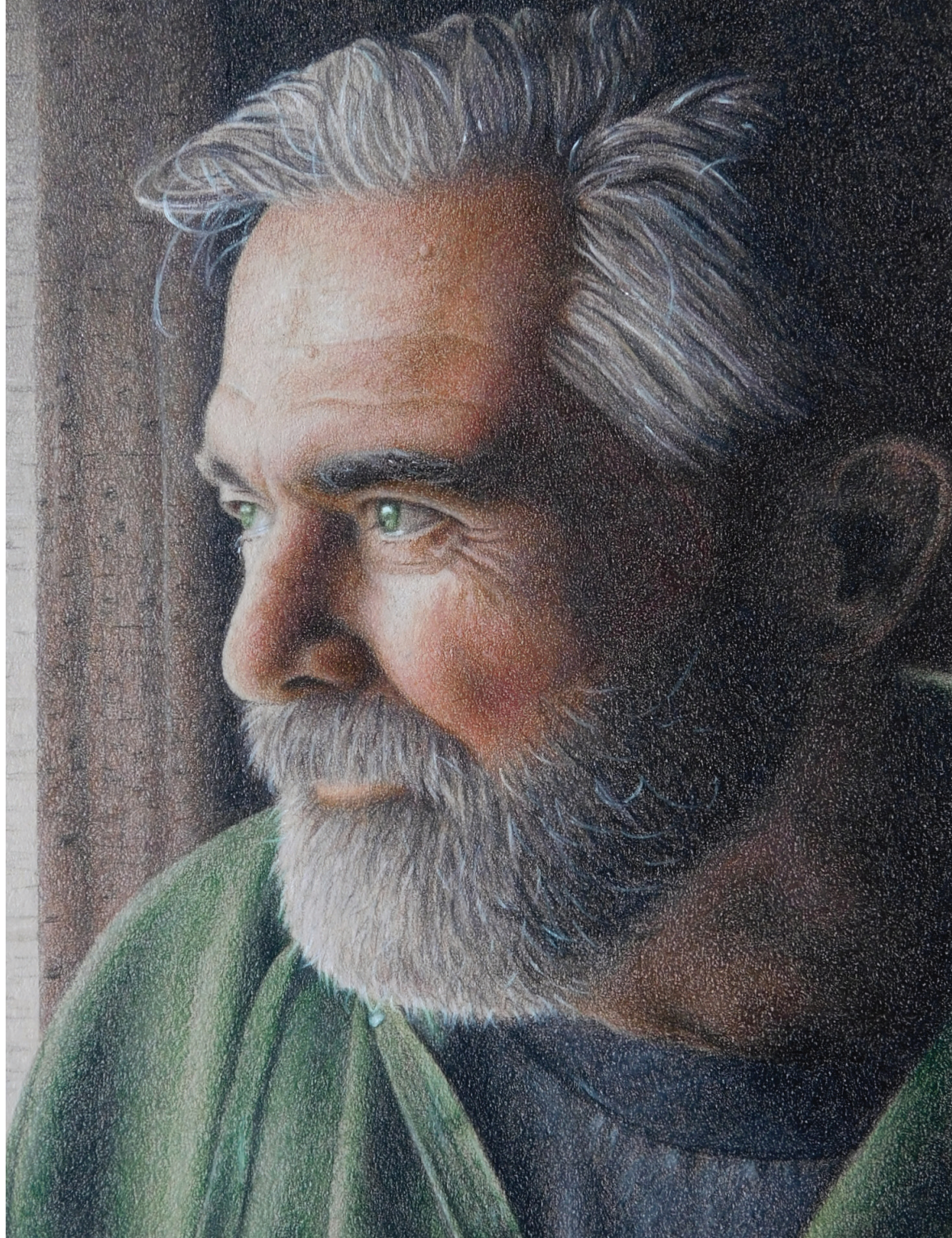
The prompt of this challenge asks this: How will my writing build my legacy? I like to think, how will my writing build the legacy of the bipolar warriors—the people like me? For in the end no one exists within a vacuum of their own mind alone; so I write for the downtrodden, for the afflicted, for the dreamers, and for those who end up killing themselves... I write in the name of mental health. In the name of a peaceful and a more-just world. We are all so terribly and beautifully interconnected and like that summer of 2016, all of this worldly information, these various humanly experiences, take me, the bull, by the horns and send me straight to my writing desk. I write for solutions—and probably to my own detriment—far more than for pleasure's sake. I watch myself succumb to the evil of a tyrant in a story. I watch myself soar along the one with a vision, with a glimmer, like an amulet, of hope. I don't always like this, but I do it anyway. Because it feels to me my calling...

Only recently have I decided that I'm okay as I am. Years of feeling ostracized because of my medical condition have left me with the scars of social strength. I care less about what other people think of me more than I ever could have thought possible. I make art because I want to move and not impress. And this is what now gives air to my sails. So my legacy, if we'll narrow it to me, with writing, that is, is *this guy has a big heart from all of the suffering bipolar has slung his way, and he's going to go out there and help heal this crazy world.* At least, this is what's in my head whenever I write.

But I want to reflect the question back unto you, dear reader: how are *you* going to make your mark in a way that is personal, yet humble, yet bold? I wonder if we can take our collective strengths, our hard-earned wisdom and construct something quite different from the darkness we often see looming about today? I wonder if our dancing, our painting, our writing, our movies, sculptures, singing, and thinking... our openness to *life* can turn us all a new leaf. The forces of "good" and "evil" are always battling (at this time at least), so where is that inner *what if?* What if we were okay? What if we were all whole? Together? Undivided. For as long as we so chose?

Portrait of My Grandfather

Éowyn Prusak
colored pencils



Echoes of Departure

by Jonathan Hiatt

Echoes of departure
and subtle reminders of you
fill my lonely and empty hours.
Such plaintive melodies
fade out with a diminuendo,
and like the incessant ringing in my ears,
I know the echoes will return again
without notice.

Mind-full-ness: A Bridge Over Troubled Thought

by Meta Titus

If meditation was supposed to be solely about emptying the mind, it would be called *Mind-empty-ness* not *Mind-full-ness*. *Mind-empty-ness* would mean the mind is either broken, or no longer of the localized mind. *Mind-full-ness* means that, despite being a potential nuisance, the mind is alive and well, making its electric dance across consciousness.

Just like how your organs cannot shut down, the mind cannot either. Even during sleep, the mind does not shut down. Shutting down means death. If enlightenment through mindfulness occurs, it is not through entropy (like death), it would be because of a dedication of the journey through *mind-full-ness*, with the end result being wholeness with all things, *outside* of the localized mind instead of *in* it.

When I was twenty, I took my mindfulness practice into the forest for 40 nights, with the intention to pray and fast and meditate in nature. There, I connected me with the whole of everything, yet still, there have been times in my own practice that I have felt like my mind was *jammed-ness*, not just *full-ness*, like stop-and-go traffic on a freeway. While being positive about it, I consider it humanizing, but paradoxically also an agitation. At certain times of the year this is worse than others, similar to construction season, but more like from certain lifestyle occurrences. It so happens periodically. When I am all “jammed up” during meditation, it is usually from life factors that contribute to it: stressful relationships, a lack of physical activity, processing too much information at once, or not having practiced mindfulness enough surrounding the attempt.

While certain thoughts may snag my attention, like a gravitational pull, but actually more like a neuro-feedback loop, the purpose of mindfulness is to still the mind, maybe even by driving it in the direction of an open road. Regardless of what the destination is, the whole point is to observe my thoughts, instead of judge them.

When the mind is in a mindful place, when the eyes are closed, and when you are all tuned in to the best of your ability, the mind becomes like a camera. The slower the shutter speed, the prettier the picture the mind creates, like cars all lit up at night on slow motion. This is the purpose of meditation: to observe the thoughts and slow them down. That way, you can appreciate *mind-full-ness* for what it is—a chance to observe the lights of the mind, as the electric signals in the brain that shape your consciousness—the way headlights shape a road.

As a fan of photography, I have found some of the best photos of traffic are in slow motion, some of which I know have been taken from bridges. I am reminded of one in particular, which is off 35W facing North to Minneapolis. Most people probably can think of a place that photographers go in their city to capture traffic; for me, the one I am thinking of is overlooking a highway that leads to the skyline. It's not just a pretty picture to imagine while zooming in on the steady flow of electric signals on the road and the mind, it is the metaphorical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow that meditation strives for.

These bridges offer an outlook, just like meditation does. *Mind-full-ness* is a bridge over troubled thought that offers us a better look at the thoughts patters that we deal with. Whether the processing speed is fast or slow, the effort is the most important part of the attempt to capture the mind in motion. Roads are meant to be driven on, so don't be discouraged by the passing of cars. Riding with them is a journey, either leading to novelty, or just as a ride back to where you started, which might even feel like home!

Holding Myself

by Kathleen Isabell

Terror can change a self-confident girl into an insecure girl in one single moment. I know this to be true. It happened to me the summer of my seventh year.

Abuse was not something I had known or even remember hearing about before moving to the farm. My siblings and I received an accelerated education within the first few days of our new life there when the helpless screams of our mother drew us into the kitchen of the home we had recently been introduced to. We stood near the foot of the farmhouse staircase as Don, the man who would now be known as our stepfather, stood at the top of the landing with our mother in his grasp, threatening to throw her down the steep opening. I remember the paralysis taking over my body as I watched Mom scramble out of Don's grip. Her body convulsed desperately as she descended the wooden steps. My sympathetic nervous system took over and I went still. What a crummy response. My body's reaction was to stand there like a dumb, weak rabbit. I wish I could've at least run out of the house—that way I wouldn't have seen my mom get pulled back into my stepdad's manipulative game. He scrambled down the stairs after her and his desperate words put her in a trance, "You're so beautiful, Christine. You know I would never hurt you." I had watched Don wrestle cows to the ground with his bare hands—his sculpted frame was intimidating and kept those of us who feared pain at a distance. I didn't know whether my mother was brave or foolish. One moment, Don was holding his palm to her throat and in the next he was gently pressing his palm to her collarbone, turning her body to face him. She seemed to melt into his arms as he kissed her forehead, her cheeks and then her mouth. She went from fearing him to worshipping him as he slowly led her into their bedroom.

I don't remember where I went after they shut their bedroom door that night, but I do remember the storm that came after. From the window of my room, I saw the grey expanse hurling itself toward our farm. Crusted paint curled upward as I peeled the window open. I wanted to feel the storm, but the storm mirrored my stepdad's temper, and as soon as I heard a thunderous boom crash down upon our roof, I threw the blankets over my head. Lightning cracked the sky in half and split the massive oak tree in the front yard in two, along with the metal sign that bore my stepfamily's name.

There was no one there to protect me from what I had experienced that day—no one bent down to my level to tell me that everything would be okay, nor did anyone hold me, or dry my tears. Insecurities were beginning to form in me, I just didn't know it yet.

I woke from a fitful night's sleep the following morning. The sun made sure the storm was indeed gone before carefully rising up and over the horizon. After I rolled out of bed and got dressed, I sauntered down the stairs and headed out the front door to see if my horse, Cocoa, had gotten through the night okay. Tree debris was scattered all over the yard. I grabbed a branch that had blown down in the wind and used it to vault over each puddle that had formed during the night as I made my way toward the barn.

I threw my branch down when I reached the electric fence and unlatched the gate to the field that led me to Cocoa. The tall, rain-soaked grass seeped into my shoes making my socks squishy like sponges as I walked around the barn toward Cocoa's shed-roofed shelter, but when I got there, Cocoa was gone. He was most likely scared by

the storm and was hiding in the woods beyond the hay field, so I tromped off to find him.

Along the pathway to the forest, just beyond the barn, was a graveyard of old rusted-out trucks, tractors, cars and discarded engines. It was a poor child's playground—a wonderland for those with wild imaginations.

My twin sister, Leah, and I often sat in the rusted out, old 1952 Buick Special pretending to be on the hot pursuit of our older brothers who were typically the bad guys. They would sit directly in front of us in a wheelless, engineless black 1955 Plymouth Savoy. I remember during one of our junkyard escapades, the boys had just robbed the local bank and were about to make their narrow escape when we had to call off the chase. I had noticed blood dripping down my sister's leg which soaked through the side of her shorts. The Buick had been used for target practice days before, and the window had been shot out by my stepbrother, Ron, with his dad's pistol. My oldest brother pulled Leah out of the Buick and carried her to the house. I was completely frozen, once again, helpless to know what to do. I'm not even sure what happened after that, but I know my sister wears the scar of that event on her right hip.

As I continued past the junkyard toward the woods looking for Cocoa, I came to my favorite maple tree. It had low, thick branches that were easy to swing up into. I thought that if I could get up high enough, I'd be able to see Cocoa.

I was halfway up my great maple tower when I heard a loud "CRACK!" and then a "BOOM!" and then all was quiet.

I was disoriented and foggy when I felt someone shake me awake. I was on the ground and couldn't remember how I had gotten there.

"Are you okay?" a woman I had never seen before was crouched down beside me. I slowly sat up and tried to focus. She had dark, brown hair, silver-blue eyes and a concerned look on her face.

"Are you hurt?"

I felt both my arms and both my legs and slowly shook my head.

"No?" she asked.

Even if I was hurt, I wouldn't have told her. I was so shy. I shook my head again.

She stood up and began to look about the farm. Her eyes began to well up. "I haven't been here in so long," she said. Wiping a few tears away, she crouched back down to look me in the eyes, "I know this may be weird and difficult hear...or actually more difficult to believe...but... it's me...I mean...it's you...I'm you...from the future."

I scrunched up my forehead and studied the woman's face, her eyes, her hair, her body.

"Look at you! You're so little. This is so weird!"

I looked at her blankly.

"Listen. You're not going to understand, but this is for your good and I'm asking you to trust me. We need to travel back to a few places."

I backed away from her as I knew better than to trust a complete stranger. But I couldn't look away from her... there was something familiar in her eyes.

"I know you probably think I'm a crazy person." She thought for a moment. "Okay...okay...I got it. Remember the summer you almost drowned at the cabin. The innertube you were in...it flipped over, and your head was under the water and your legs were in the air and no matter how hard you tried you couldn't get out of the innertube, and

you couldn't flip right side up. You were getting to the point where you couldn't hold your breath any longer and just at that moment Tom Halverson jumped in the water and saved your life!"

"That's weird," I thought to myself. *"How could she have known that."*

"How about this one. Remember when you and Leah were playing on the front porch and you thought it would be a fun to climb through the front window and pretend it led to Daddy Warbuck's mansion and when you stepped through it, your foot didn't land in Punjab's room, it landed on Mom and Don's bed, and they were in it, and Don screamed obscenities at you and then told you to get the hell out?"

I gasped.

"Yeah. That was a bad day, wasn't it?"

I nodded. We looked into each other's eyes. I believed her. She was me, only 30 years older.

"Will you take my hand?"

I felt an overwhelming trust—trust for this grown-up version of myself—and I slowly reached my hand out towards hers. I felt her fingers wrap around mine, and in that moment the world around us seemed to close in on itself like it was being sucked up through a straw. I shut my eyes tight and when I opened them again, we were in the farmhouse kitchen back to the moment when Don threatened to throw Mom down the stairs. Everything around us was chaos and my heart began to race. My grown-up self bent down to my level, looked into my eyes and asked me, "Who is taking care of you?"

I stood there for a moment looking at my mom frantically heading for the hallway with Don chasing after her. I don't know where my siblings were, so I replied, "Nobody."

"Okay. Do you want to be in here?"

I shook my head no.

Grown up me grabbed little me up into her arms and took me outside and she walked me out to the fence to where Cocoa was grazing. My legs and arms wrapped around her body as she held me tightly. It felt good to be held. I felt safe and secure as she let me down. We stood there and pet Cocoa for a while and then she said, "Are you ready to travel to the next stop?"

I nodded.

"Okay. Grab my hand."

The world sucked up inside itself again and we were transported to the first house we had ever lived in. We called it the Green House simply because it was green. We were standing outside a dark room as Neil Diamond and Barbra Streisand sang "You Don't Bring Me Flowers" from somewhere inside that dark space. I could hear Mom's sobs echoing in the room and I began to breathe faster, and my heart began to race.

"It's okay. We don't have to go in there. Do you want to be here?"

I shook my head no.

Grown up me took me into her arms and we descended the stairs and went out the front door where, once again, she held me close and then, as if I had been given the keys to unlock all the feelings I had been holding in, my emotions came flowing out in a torrent of tears onto her shoulder.

She held me and rocked me out on the front porch until my sobs subsided. "Everything's going to be okay," she soothed. "Are you ready to go back to the farm?"

I used my shirtsleeves to soak up the tears from my eyes and nodded yes. She took my hand, and we were sucked back into the straw that led us back to the tree beyond the junkyard. “Anytime you need me, I will be here. Never forget that. I will carry you out of any situation that feels scary. You never have to stay in those situations by yourself. Do you understand?” I nodded and hugged her tightly. It was my way of thanking her. Then she disappeared. Whenever I look back at the most traumatic moments of my life, I am no longer there. I’m outside in a field with my horse, Cocoa. I’m outside on the sidewalk feeling the silky petals of the pansies and blowing dandelion seeds into the sky. I took myself out of those situations and brought myself to safety—to peace—to healing.



Autumn Mushrooms

Éowyn Prusak
photography

Epistemology of the Pantry

by Ulysses Swanson

“‘Closetedness’ itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts...”

– Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*

“I’ve always presumed the people I worked with—if they thought about it at all—*knew* that I was gay.”

– Craig Claiborne, *New York Times* food editor, interview with Jenna Orkin, 1982

People see me as a chef first and heterosexual male second. To be clear: yes, I am fat, and have tattoos of a fork and raspberries prominently on my forearm; yes, I love to cook meals and draft recipes, and *eat*, and yes, I talk about food and cookery not only frequently, but with some depth of knowledge gained from my focus at college on culinary history; no, I have never gone to culinary school, and I’m in no position to advise others how to cook like a professional. I traded in my apron a month into working at a restaurant as a teen and have no intention of returning to the line. People, as in librarians and historians I have worked with over the last three years, elderly folk at the supermarket where I do my weekday morning shopping, bookstore clerks who help me reach the higher shelves of cookbook sections, tattooists adding inked fruits and flowers to my sleeve, waitresses on the floor, cooks on break, relatives and family friends across Minnesota I potluck with maybe less than multiple times a year, and children from seemingly everywhere underfoot, ask if I am a chef, assuming the answer is *yes*. And once I let them down, all, except for the kids, then they eye the ring wedged onto that finger of my left hand and ask about my wife.

What does your wife think of your cooking? My life partner of twelve years, husband for these last three—my wife, at the moment of asking—enjoys what I prepare, make, and pair. I could barely boil water before a wasting disease completely altered his diet, and my habit of hands in the kitchen has developed around his health and comfort. Finding and buying gluten-free soy sauce means *I know you*, using it to make the fried rice he craves and can safely eat means *I love you*. “She enjoys it,” I say. *Does your wife like to cook, too?* I have cleaned sugar, flour, and baking powder off of every surface, including the ceiling and cabinets, of every kitchen we’ve shared in the years we’ve lived together. Our home is never without cookies, muffins, brownies, and cakes. The transfer of batter to pans and bowls and whisks into my hands so I can sample what he has made is our blissful routine. Cooking, like me, is something he likes and loves. And I answer, “She does.”

I am trying to get better at bringing up that I am gay and addressing these assumptions about me. There are even moments when I get the jump on the conversation and mention my life partner of twelve years, husband for these last three, before food is even mentioned. But to some degree, it feels that queerness and food-ness exist on a binary spectrum, and the more I talk about food, the less gay I seem. It is a binary I struggle with now but used to rely on religiously, privately, coming home from school and regularly chugging a half-gallon of 2% milk to drown the unairable feelings I had around my boy friends getting lovesick girlfriends. I didn’t understand why I felt horrible or the many ways a person can feel horrible, and barely understood it any more as I grew up, and sicker.

Lactose intolerance and gay yearning may not seem the same, but food and queerness have always worked as twin forces in my own life, forces I pretend even now have had the same effect but are still separable. Each are glaringly obvious in my character and presence, but silence-able, when asked about my life and my wife.

* * * *

The pantry is a special kind of closet. As one anonymous Wikimedian first added to the “Pantry” entry during the summer of 2007, the pantry “serves in an ancillary capacity” to the kitchen. Where the kitchen is the place cooking happens and knowledge is put into practice, the pantry is the space we dedicate to inventorying foodstuffs and nurturing our domestic imaginations. Gluten-free fried rice can only begin with a pantry stocked with glutinous rice, chicken thighs, bulb vegetables, red and orange vegetables, peas, oil, powdered ginger, cumin, and garlic, glass grinders of sea salt, and of course gluten-free soy sauce, and the intention to make it at home rather than try to find it elsewhere... and to share it with someone, and to make eating that much more possible. The pantry is also where foodstuffs may disappear, intentionally or unintentionally, such as freezer-burned fowl and powdered pumpkin spice mix bought in a pinch because it listed ginger in its ingredients. The pantry is where choices are made and reflected in the happenings of the kitchen.

As I have learned more about culinary history, I have become aware of many gay twentieth century food writers, such as James Beard, Craig Claiborne, and Lucius Beebe, and thought about how their ambiguities, their low-profile queerness-es and high-profile public images as foodies, were less attempts to hide who they were and more dis-acknowledgements of the full capacities of their loves. Despite having multiple partners during their lives, Beard and Claiborne both committed to the image of the lifelong bachelor in their works and personae. Of the two, only Claiborne wrote and spoke publicly about the forces food and queerness had in his own life. In an interview from 1982 regarding his memoir *A Feast Made for Laughter*, the Mississippian gentleman gourmand’s detailed love of high- and low-brow foods started and capped the discussion, where his vagueness around his sexuality and his willingness “to discuss this [his ‘sensitivity’] in any depth, with anyone [he] knew”—if they *knew*—made up the middle. Food-ness came easy to him, as he drawled dreamily about peanut butter, hotdogs, hamburgers, truffles, foie gras, spaghetti, and more. Queerness did not. “I came out of the womb gay,” he added exasperatedly as the interview began to turn away from interrogating his queerness and back to food towards the end. Food and queerness did not meet in these sections, the binary organization of his life on full display. He did not like peanut butter but welcomed its transformation in “Indonesian” dishes, and he admired the “gourmet” quality of all foods, food exploration and experimentation being generative, transformative, and full of delightful possibilities he was capable of writing about and discussing at length. He was always gay, his queerness always there, and in its being there, never needed to be stated but was felt, always. His self-described “sensitivity” served in an ancillary capacity to his love of food. He organized the living of his life and ability to love around food, the humanity of his love understated, thus, in a way, silent.

* * * *

Our current kitchen has two pantries, not including the fridge, which have become a sort of *his* and *his* arrangement. My cupboard is where spices, rices and noodles, sauces, breads, rice chips, vinegars, and oils are stored, ready for use in making lunch and supper. His cupboard is where the sugars, flours, baking soda and powder, chocolate chips, extracts and syrups, and various cake mixes live in our home. His cupboard is so

full that whenever he opens the cabinet door, white powder falls snow-like onto the containers of nutritional supplements (my lactose pills, his vitamins and medications) on the counter beneath it. I am not much better; I currently must stop the six boxes of the gluten-free macaroni we buy in bulk from toppling onto the stove whenever I open my cupboard. Our pantries are filled beyond our capacities. Yet we cannot help ourselves but fill our lives with disorganized and unspoken loves, where ingredients for fried rice like gluten-free soy sauce and the cumin he adores on everything chicken mean *I know you* and *I love you*, where the funnel cake mixes and bags of powdered sugar that make what he can't eat but I devour like a dehydrated and sunburned kid at Valleyfair mean *I know you* and *I love you*, where an aging tattoo of a fork pointing towards the ring finger of my left hand and inked raspberries representing the sweet and sour jam of his favorite breakfast mean *I know you* and *I love you*.

The Telegram

by Tara Flaherty Guy

I drag the last mildewed cardboard box out from under the stairs and brush away thick cobwebs, hoping to not meet any of their spinners. I am in mid-purge, conducting an archaeological dig of my tribe's native land – that is, the basement of my childhood home. As I fold back the flaps of the water-stained box and begin to paw through the contents, little clouds of mold spores puff up, making me sneeze. I remember Mom and Dad having to mop the basement with every heavy rain, hoisting everything up onto sawhorses to avoid all of it being swamped in each deluge. I wish I could have put drain tile in for them long ago and spared them the years of back-breaking mopping.

I sift through the box's contents, considering what to keep, what to discard, and I discover that the box is a time capsule, a disorderly jumble of my family's quotidian days. It holds a tumble of old black and white pictures, my mom's confirmation certificate, a faded pink baby bonnet, my grandmother's old farm account ledger, a half dozen Sinatra LPs, and an old-fashioned bankbook, the kind they used to call a "passbook." It is mine, I realize with a start of recognition, from my college days. Suddenly I remember that the slim little books had to be inserted into a machine and print-stamped with the deposit or withdrawal amount, and the new balance. Recalling that big ka-thunking machine toting up my savings from my Fotomat job, it occurs to me that I am old, and I fleetingly wonder when that happened.

At the bottom of the box, I glimpse a tattered old envelope with the words "WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM" on the front. I pluck it out, open the envelope and draw out the flimsy yellow paper, along with the black and white photo that is tucked in with it.

1956 MAY 17 3:05 A.M.

**MR AND MRS CHARLES E KELLY
#5230 AYRES
CORPUS CHRISTI TEX**

**GIRL! 7½ POUNDS! MOM AND BABY BOTH GREAT. VERY PROUD & HAPPY. LOOKS LIKE RED
HAIR COMING. MA COMING UP FOR A WEEK. SURE HOPE TO SEE YOU SOON. WILL WRITE
MORE LATER.**

BROTHER JOE FLAHERTY

It slowly dawns on me that this is a telegram about me. Heralding my entrance into the world. It was sent by my dad to my aunt and uncle in Corpus Christi, right after I was born in the middle of the night. I imagine my dad composing the message, proud and happy when he saw glints of red in my fine baby hair. I smile, remembering that Dad - a redheaded, freckled Irishman - had been nicknamed “Pinky” in his youth. I imagine my young father sending this telegram about his new baby with the maybe-red-hair, perhaps thinking he’d have his own little “Pinky” now.

I look at the black and white photograph that was in the envelope with the telegram. It is a picture of my mother and father and me, taken in the hospital, probably the day after I was born. Mom, still in her hospital bed, is wearing a frilly bed jacket, looking like Doris Day. She is holding me, beaming down into my scrunched-up face which is contorted in either a yawn or a wowl, it’s impossible to tell. Dad is next to the bed, leaning over her to touch a forefinger to my cheek, a look of absolute wonder on his face. There are banks of flowers in the room, even costly roses, sitting on the table next to her bed and ranged along the wide windowsill behind them. Seeing that profuse floral celebration, I remember that they had tried unsuccessfully for five years to start a family and had almost lost hope by the time I came along. Mom was an obstetric nurse in that very hospital, and I suddenly think how hard it must have been for her, delivering and holding all those new babies, while longing for her own. I imagine her friends and coworkers sharing in her long-delayed happiness and delivering to her those big bouquets of flowers.

Looking at their faces in the picture, I feel a powerful rush of tenderness for my mom and dad. So beautiful that glowing young couple, suddenly parents. So lovely, that mixture of joy and wonder on their faces. Never again just the two, they are a family now, with all of the joys and sorrows, gifts and burdens that making a family brings. Childless myself, I try to imagine the enormity of bringing new life into the world, knowing you will forever be responsible for another person, someone that you created. I shiver at the very idea and think how brave they were.

My eyes moisten then, as I marvel at their courage, their hope, their faith in the future, in each other. Suddenly, though they’ve been gone for years, I miss my mom and dad fiercely. Like a chimera emerging from the mist of years in front of me, I can see my mother in her starched nurse’s whites, my father, the family chef, stirring something on the stove. I conjure the scent of my mom’s Emeraude perfume and my dad’s Borkum Riff pipe tobacco and imagine I can hear distant strains of Mom strumming her old ukulele, and echoes of their harmony on “Galway Bay.” I miss them.

With the eternal melancholy of aging people who wonder where the years have gone, I tenderly tuck the telegram and photograph back into the yellowed envelope. Feeling grateful for the life they gave me and their unconditional love, I press the slender packet to my heart for a long moment and bless the fragile little relic that reminded me so unexpectedly of those gifts.

if love and hate are the same words, i love you

by Jewels Leepalao

October

1953

There is a quiet humming in my chest, and all it does is whisper your name. Over and over again, and sometimes, I cannot bear it. I cannot bear this aching torment, where I am forced to lie on the edge of bed, gripping the nylon sheets, seeping into bitter darkness, desperately trying to fade into who God intended I be, loving the wrong people, loathing all the right ones.

There is a quiet humming in my chest, and it is muffled by the hands of morality. It yells pleads begs whines fights—and sometimes I am convinced there is a demon inside of me, because I never seem to listen to these hands that tug and pull and heave and FIGHT. I am convinced I shall be condemned to hell and that I shall deserve it and that it would be bearable so long as you are with me.

The voice in my head tells me to stop. But how am I supposed to stop when your name is raging in my chest? How am I supposed to stop when you have poured life into me? When every touch and every smile has mended back the soul that I hadn't bloody known was tainted in the first place?

I am ruined.

Because of this humming in my chest.

Because of you.

I should hate you for it.

I do hate you for it.

I hate you.

I want to see you. I need to see you.

When are you coming home? To London. To me.

Did you know that you have ruined the act of dancing? Did you know that? Did you know that after dinner, when the kids were put down, and the fire was dying in the hearth, and the meals were eaten, and the lights were dimmed, and the air was quiet, that my wife had turned on the stereo to some classical song that I didn't know and had coaxed me off the couch to slow dance in the middle of the living room?

You have no idea how badly I wanted her to sod off. My heart was so heavy. I didn't want to be dancing with her in the living room. I want to dance with someone, but not her. I want to dance with you. I asked her if she knew the name of the song. She said no. But I know that you would have known. You always know everything. You're a pretentious arse.

I miss you.

I shouldn't.

When are you coming back?

This stupid humming won't go away. I am almost tempted to rip my own heart out of my chest so long as it serves in making my head quiet. I hate you.

I HATE ME.

I am broken. I think we both are. What do we do? WHAT DO WE DO? I'd rather die than live without you. But I would die if I lived *with* you. What do we do?

I would never admit this to anyone else. Okay? You have to know that these words teeter on the edge of a vulnerability that I have not even surfaced with *her*. Okay?

But I am scared. I am *terrified*. Sometimes I don't know if my skin prickles when I am with you because I am afraid or because I am infatuated or if it is just God warning me away from you. It has made me better, loving you. But it has also made me incredibly sick, for which I am afraid there will never be a cure.

This fear is spreading. One day it will consume me whole. One day it will make me insane. This love makes me INSANE. Because it is not right. Because it is *unlawful*. Because I am afraid, and so are you, and so is God. This fear spreads and spreads and spreads the longer we love the wrong people and loathe all the right ones.

I know what you would say. You would tell me that while fear spreads, we are fortunate enough to realize that love spreads too. And perhaps you are right. What am I saying? You're always right.

When are you coming back? I know that our souls are not meant to be together, but they are singing anyway. Your name is humming a devastating tune in my chest. Don't leave me. My heart will find you.

Join me and the bird for tea. When you get back. You can bring your wife. I just want to see you. Come back to me. Yell at me. Love me. Curse at me. Forbid me from touching you ever again. Break my HEART if you must!

Just come *back*. H.W.

November

1953

Your fear is so palpable, my friend. And while I understand your fear, I also cannot find it in myself to feel the same. Love is not to be feared, it is to be embraced. God did not intend for us to be this way: afraid to love and afraid to live. Society has.

There will come a moment where you feel, quite like I have, that society has failed us. Be afraid of hecklers, of narrow minds, of darkened hearts, of destroying yourself from the inside out, but do not be afraid of that humming in your chest.

My heart is incapable of abandoning you. I will be home before you know it.

T.D.

P.S. I hate you, too.

museum of love

by Moxie Coe

a fumble in the dark
a stumble down the stairs
staring at the empty street as the deadbolt clicks behind me
another notch in someone else's bedpost
another name scratched out in mine

i am a museum of everything i have ever loved
a gallery with no curator
an endless open house with all the lights on and the curtains drawn
i've thrown out the key
hoping someone will see every painting
every sculpture
every artifact
and will hold each one
run their fingers along every mistake
and keep looking

my love is overflowing from my cup
i have a big heart, or so i hear,
too big for my body
too big to keep behind glass
and so i wear it on my sleeve, or my cheek,
on display reading "FREE SAMPLES"
no one can take what i've already given away

if love is sweet,
i'll skip dinner to save room for dessert
make myself smaller for consumption
let it melt on my tongue
and linger for too long
my tastebuds are still begging for relief

if love is healing,
i'll stay in the waiting room
until my name is called
read a dozen outdated magazines
and make friends with the fish
destined to swim in circles watching strangers come and go
a temporary spectacle before freedom
i'll stay in the waiting room
until i can empathize,
until i'm swimming too



Self-Portrait Through the Eye of a Goose

Jill Bemis

photography

Hershel's Seaside Cottage

by Owen Saarinen

As you get closer to the water things get very wet. A great steamy mist hangs over the shoreline and a large outcropping of seals can be seen. It can be very dangerous out here. Not only is it hard to see and getting lost is quite commonplace, but the tide will sneak up quickly and drag you out to sea. Nevertheless, people keep their dinghies out here but I think they're idiots for doing so. Today I am shirtless with my goggles on. I want to swim in the warm water. I am a very sensuous person. I need to have my body touched by something fluid.

I felt like visiting Hershel in his little stilted cottage, always a damp and calming place, but the water calls me harder. And, as I approach, still quite a far ways out, I can already begin to see the whitecaps rise and crash over themselves, again and again and again. This is home. I love to imagine great water dragons snaking about in the water and sphinx angels of light perched on rocky floating pedestals above, watching calmly over everything. My mother says my imagination can get the best of me, and it does sometimes, but when it comes to exploring the depths of this watery land as well as my own mind, I am content. Today there is nothing in my mind but the moment I am but a half-step ahead. Sometimes I am six steps ahead. Often I am a hundred yards ahead. A seagull beats its wings above. Yes, today I am right there.

I always have to step in a clear tide pool first to get to the main body of water and I watch out for the little creatures—the sucking sea anemone, the starfish, the crayfish, and the tropical colored blue fish. Then I climb the lip and the main body shines up from below at me. At first I am sad. I do not like my mainland job nor much of my life otherwise... I handle packages and mail at a local post office. I do not feel my mind is properly challenged. And my partner and I are comfortable, but there is a seed of lacking between us that has been there for years.

Never-mind. I crest a dive into the water with a fluid spurt, pedal myself forward with flashing arms and break the surface. The mists are about me like spectral furry feline. I've got the secret ancient mammalian compass in me; I'm not getting lost. Plus, there are certain landmarks I love to visit.

I am pulling my body like a rope attached to the top of my head, thinking deeply with my face down about Hershel. He is getting sicker and sicker but refuses to leave his home. I do not blame him for this. It is awfully beautiful out here by the sea. I am imagining tea with him after this and let this pleasant anticipation mix with the reef I see below me. It, too, is dying and growing bone white. Fewer and fewer fish visit its theme-park-like allure. The local marine biologists don't know why this decline is occurring. Nobody knows what's up with Hershel either. Again, they say he is sick and must be cured with some new modern remedy. He says he's just getting old. Like a car. Eventually enough parts will fail and that will be it. He often says this like he doesn't even care. But he is always smiling. Again, I don't blame him. Life can be very hard even if it's so incredibly beautiful once in a while.

There goes a shark—a small one the size of a larger salmon. I hold my breath and dive deep down for a closer look. Its gray eye peers at me, but I doubt it can see me very well. Apparently they use their keen noses more often than their sight to hunt out prey and detect predators. Or maybe I just heard that. I kick down to the shallow sea floor and grab a handful of shells from the silty bottom. Then I kick my way up and break the surface. In my wet bare hand is not just shells but a necklace! My heart skips a beat because I once had been told The Legend of the Huntsman's Daughter and her lost necklace, but it settles back down to a normal speed—it is only just a story—

and I kick to the surface, seashells and sand trailing behind me back to the sea floor. Immediately I brush away all silt from the necklace and peer at a large golden medallion the size of a silver dollar. It is the curling tree of life—I have seen this insignia before on the covers of books at the small-end bookstores I wander to now and then. I want to give this necklace to Hershel so he can give it to his granddaughter and pretty quickly, now, I’m making it back in in loud laps of my arms, back toward the shore, to the tide pools again. The necklace is clenched hard in my fist and my flutter kicks become stronger, more fluid as I go.

A wave hits my mouth and I spit out water. I stop and peer up at Hershel’s stilted little cottage ahead, all alone on a field of moist brown sand. Then I lower my head again and swim the entire one-hundred yards until I am pushing my hands on the rocky sand to stand. I shake my head, steal another long look at the beautiful medallion and stride up the beach. I pass burned out campfire pits constructed of large stone rings. One of them still has the flakey white snowy look of one of the coals still going. I grab a stick and poke at them, exposing a red hot nugget. Yes. He must have been down here with the help of his more-mobile, more-youthful friends in their fifties and sixties. Perhaps they are still yet with him.

I find myself going up the switchback ramp someone made for him when he became wheelchair bound. From what I know they have to put him in a pull-able red wagon with big meaty tires or a sled to get him back to the mainland, but that hasn’t happened in a while since his health had begun to fade. So up and back and up and back and once more and then I’m at his doorstep. Three pairs of shoes and his cat peered up at me. Nadja. Nadja rubs my leg but becomes more interested in staring out at the sea and becomes calm and resolute. I touch my bare chest in lack of a shirt. This isn’t a convenience store. I should be okay.

I don’t even knock. Nobody knocks for Hershel. He can’t even hear hardly anyway. And he prefers pleasant surprises above all else. But then I do knock since he has guests who surely can hear and I push the heavy wooden door back, feeling my palm press against its sea-worn surface.

Hershel’s place consists of two rooms, not including the small bathroom with a cistern which has to be emptied every few weeks by a paid sanitary service. The room I enter serves as his bedroom and living room and the other room as a pantry and kitchen. Hershel has always been one to economize.

I get the door fully open and smile. Then I see Doug and Christina, the married potters, sitting in chairs on either side of Hershel’s bed. Hershel has a serene look on his face and so do Doug and Christina. I know what has happened. Hershel has passed away.

I don’t feel much as I pull up the last remaining chair in the room, next to Doug on the left side of Hershel’s bed. And then the three of us don’t say anything for a very long time. We just keep looking at his face. Then his two feet underneath the covers pointing straight up. Then his face again. I feel like Nadja should be here but she’s still staring out at the sea, flicking her tail, in the doorway I left open.

Sea air, salty and sweet, blows inward. I’m not sure if I can cry but I try and let it happen. Which really just looks like me growing angry. Even when I’m not angry.

Christina looks at me.

“Shall we get him a proper pyre tonight?”

Doug and I nod.

“The great sea spirit has passed.” Doug says.

“Ay.” I say. Then I laugh because he’s only a human being.

But yet we all know that Hershel is more than that. He is something of a portal into the mindset of the ancients.

I give Christina the medallion, dripping from my wet hands.

“She’s your apprentice. Please give it to her.”

Christina knows who I’m talking about.

Hershel—the spirit or whoever—is still in this room. And he remains in my heart. That was the day I decided I would go and quit my job and travel the country taking pictures. That was the day I thought, “Damnit! If Hershel can claim the sea until death, then surely I can capture the Rockies, or the various rivers and estuaries across this great country!” And that’s what I did.

it's not my fault

by Jewels Leepalao

1. I told my mom I was afraid of _____.
 - a) speaking.
 - b) blood.
 - c) the dark.
 - d) my uncle.
2. My mom _____ .
 - laughed.
 - cried.
 - screamed.
 - didn't believe me.
3. Her voice sounded _____.
 - indifferent.
 - concerned.
 - sweet.
 - accusing.
4. She told me I deserved it because I was _____.
 - wearing shorts.
 - wearing my soccer jersey.
 - wearing pink socks.
 - all of the above.
5. I have worn _____.
 - a winter coat.
 - a long dress.
 - a pajama onesie.
 - a diaper.
6. The winter coat tells me _____.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - all of the above.
7. The long dress tells me _____.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - all of the above.
8. The pajama onesie tells me _____.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - it's not your fault.
 - all of the above.
9. The diaper _____.
 - cannot even speak.

Mood for Thought

by Meta Titus

Thoughts for Things

Society, particularly capitalism and consumerism, has provided people with so many options for things to do. Speaking empirically, there are commercial spaces like coffee shops, and bars, gyms, or stores, all with endless options. There is also lots of shopping – with things going obsolete before you know it, therefore requiring people to make more trips to stores or online orders.

Many of the things that we need are a click away. We also have apps to click in and out of, social media sites to scroll, key words to Google, and games to play. Truly, there is no end to the options. All these actions are driven by a noisy, restless mind, which in turn contributes to an even more fast-paced mind that is fueled by instant gratification, making it difficult to slow down.

Highlights of the Day

Addictions to phones can drive people through their endless quest for food for thought, as an insatiable quest to learn about the world. This is the information age: There is a need for constant stimuli, observable all around us by the obsession with technology, as the literal highlight manifesting before our eyes. Smart phones literally brighten many people's day. This is evident in the fact that in public, people are mostly always on them. The debated topic is: Can that need for stimulation be good for the mind?

It seems like a smart phone could be subliminally internalized into creating a busier mind. After all, distractibility is on the rise. People are more inattentive than ever. According to the Minneapolis Star Tribune, intelligence test results in the United States have been decreasing.

Paradoxically, it's more like a lack of mindfulness that is a contributing factor that drives cell phone use, and vice versa; people are distracted, so they pick up the smart phone to pacify a restless mind.

This is not so subjective, by now this is common knowledge. Smart phones are a huge distraction. People are more preoccupied with how many likes they get, instead of how many breaths they can follow. They might as well be holding their breaths for likes, after all, that type of thinking is certainly disquieting for the mind.

As technology replaces organic thinking by driving an obsession to the bright objects before us, the mind becomes like a moth attracted to a bright light. It fuels a preoccupied obsession that contributes to restlessness that created destructive neural pathways. Unless the mind is cleared of all unhealthy neural pathways, it will be like a pilot landing on a runway that does not have guiding lights, like no lights from air-traffic controllers on a mental runway. That is where meditation programs come into play. There are resources for developing a stronger mind, and they are best to be used.

Mood for Thought

By putting technology aside, it is noticeable that observing the mind is much like surfing the web. It too can be mindless, in an unintentional sense. Too many people associate meditation with needing a certain kind of skill to be able to do. Really, all it takes is a mood for thought, like food for thought, in the form of manifesting introspection, memory recollection, and solutions realized to personal problems that people could be chewing on. Instead of being in the mood for constant stimuli, we choose to be in the mood for observable, awareness of thought.

Consciousness is a fountain of wisdom that fulfills a spiritual thirst. In the pursuit of satisfying a spiritual thirst one must not just make the time, but spend that time reflecting upon relationships, recapping the day, finding gratitude for the moment, as well as the blessings that each and every one of us has, and also discovering the patterns of thought and action that drive us. All this is a recipe for a more fulfilling life.

In order for such a mental shift to take place, it is important to make room for a mood for thought to be a part of the shade of moods that make up the day. Every day is painted with so many colors, as thoughts and moods. Even if witnessing this means putting down the shiny object before us, there is a lot to discover in our minds, not just the shades of the cyber world.

Many shades are necessary to getting a certain dimension out of life though, equipped with even some shadows. That is why it should be said to face it. Go inward to go onward! The mind is a beautiful thing to face... not just paste!



Queen Anne's Lace at Dusk

Éowyn Prusak
photography

The Wound Clinic

by Tara Flaherty Guy

The door into the wound clinic swings open and I glance up to see a burly, bearded man rolling an old woman in a wheelchair into the waiting room. They trundle to the counter, where a moment ago I checked my brother in for his appointment. Joey contracted a bone-deep chronic infection years ago, following a botched knee surgery and requires regular, intermittent wound care. The occasional mild breaches in the human epidermal shield — inconsequential in a healthy person's daily life — can be harrowing for an individual with osteomyelitis, especially for diabetics like my brother.

Non-healing wounds are chronic, enervating, and life-sapping for the afflicted. We spend a lot of time here and see many of the same patients; most are wheelchair-bound. I wonder if they are non-ambulatory because of their suppurating wounds, or if they don't heal because they can't ambulate. It occurs to me that it really doesn't matter; this medical specialty has a lot of repeat business, and I've come to understand that the wound clinic is an unhappy place.

I resume reading the *Mpls-St. Paul* magazine I have found on the bland, blond side table as the old lady is checked in. As the moments tick by, I gradually become aware of what sounds like soft crying. I glance up and see that they've situated themselves near me. No real choice, it's a small waiting room, I think.

"I can't do this anymore, Mikey," says the old lady in a breathless, whispery voice. She is in profile to me, so I can barely hear her, but I see her shoulders convulsing minutely in what seem to be soundless little sobs. The man answers in a low rumble, most of which is lost in the quiet whoosh of the clinic's air-handling system and the buzz of the overhead fluorescents, but I hear the start of his response before it's lost in the ambient noise.

"Of course you can, sweetheart," he says. He takes her limp hand and strokes it gently. He is a big man to offer such a small and tender comfort so easily. His hands look meant for woodchopping, or cattle-branding. He rumbles on in a frequency below my hearing, then I hear a few of his words more clearly.

"This is hard for me too, you know," he says, dipping his head, trying to look into her face which is averted toward her lap. She doesn't resist his taking her hand, but I see her lowered head shake from side to side. Then I hear her ask for her Kleenex. The man reaches behind her and draws out a small box of tissues from the pouch on the back of the wheelchair.

She raises her head and half turns to take the tissues, and I see her face, a mask of suffering and despair. Tears glisten on her wrinkled cheeks, and I understand then that I am an intruder in this moment of grief the two are sharing. I look away; they need privacy—I wish I could teleport myself or slip out under the door, like a draft. But I am trapped here, an unwilling witness to this small human tragedy.

The two are ageless; I can't tell if they are mother and son, aunt and nephew, or man and wife. It doesn't really matter, their quiet tableau of sorrow is universal—the deep humanity of the suffering and the comforter. In my chair, my own eyes grow wet and I stare at the blurry magazine page through a sparkling prism of tears. I hear little else then, in the wound clinic waiting room, with the whoosh of the air and hum of overhead lights, but I weep a little with them, the hopeless old lady and her helpless companion.

The Memory of You

by Jonathan Hiatt

The memory of you
makes my heart sing,
while pangs of longing
for your touch
torment me as I await
your eventual welcome
and embrace
in eternity.

ZENITH

by *Jewels Leepalao*

I had just taken an edible for the second night in a row.

My cousin's wife was passing them around at the campfire that chilly, September night, red and orange gummies stuffed into a small, circular tin can. She held the can out to me and asked, "You want one, Jewels?" and I'd had so much fun being high the night before, where I did almost nothing but sit on the grass and stare off for an hour, that I said yes, grabbed a gummy, and plopped it into my mouth.

My family, who were undoubtedly the loudest group of people within the campsite, were passing around shots of alcohol around the campfire. I didn't want a shot. I'd just taken an edible.

My cousin, Branden, was already drunk, and he turned to me and asked me, "Hey, can you take me to the bathroom?" The closest bathroom to our campsite was a three minute walk at best. It probably wasn't the greatest idea to walk alone in the dark, drunk and high and in the middle of the woods, but we did it anyway.

He threw his arm over my shoulder and I held him around the waist. Not even ten seconds into our trek, he paused in his step and gagged. Then he began to walk again. Then he paused and gagged again—as if he couldn't have possibly multitasked to walk and gag at the same time. And I just laughed. I laughed and laughed, and perhaps I should have helped him, but everything was just so funny to me.

Inside the bathroom with one toilet, Branden made me wait inside with him while he did his business. Our quiet voices echoed off the stone walls as we talked about what Branden liked to call "deep stuff." We talked about boys, and girls, and school, and the complex emotions that sometimes consumed us so greatly that we didn't know what to do with them.

A knock came at the door, interrupting us. "Do you guys want to play frisbee?" Angel's muffled voice asked from the other side.

"With who?" I shouted to ask my older cousin.

"It's just us and Mickie," Derien, Angel's husband, answered for her.

"Leave us alone! We're having deep talks!" Branden slurred at his older sister and his brother in law.

"Come play frisbee!" Angel shouted once more. "Come on, Branden! We can play drunk!" Derien said. "Okay, we'll come!" Branden conceded.

Angel and Derien left, satisfied, and Branden finished up and cleaned his hands. We exited the bathroom and stepped out into the night, where thousands of stars were scattered in the sky, and the faint sound of laughter echoed from our family's campsite. In the distance, over a wide field of grass, Angel, Derien, and Mickie tossed a neon green frisbee to one another. It lit up against the darkness, allowing for our eyes to see it glide through the nighttime air.

Branden suddenly tackled me to the ground, and I hit the grass with a hard thud. It didn't hurt one bit. But maybe that was because I was high, and all I could do was burst out laughing.

"Come play, guys!" Angel called us over.

We stood up and spread out on the field. Derien tossed the frisbee to Branden, and he caught it and tossed it to our older cousin, Mickie.

“I’m gonna go get Grace,” Mickie called out, tossing the frisbee to me. I caught it and watched him trudge back to our campsite to recruit our other cousin to come play with us.

I tossed the frisbee to Angel, who threw it to her husband. Derien threw it to Branden, and it soared high above his head. Branden ran for it and dove to the ground like he was catching a football, and as his body hit the grass, Angel and I burst into fits of laughter.

Mickie returned with Grace and a bottle of alcohol. He made everyone stand in a circle and take a sip. And surprisingly, everyone did.

Once the last person drank from the bottle, we decided to play frisbee again. We broke from the circle to go spread out.

“Oh my god!” Angel suddenly shouted. I paused in my footsteps. “Is that the northern lights?!”

We all turned to look at the horizon at once. “Holyshit!” Branden said, pulling out his phone. “Oh my god, it is!” Derien exclaimed.

“Is it?” Mickie asked, a little skeptical.

“Dude, it is! Look!” Branden angled his phone to Mickie, and sure enough, the aurora borealis was significantly more prominent from his phone camera.

I took one glance at the sight before me, and then I turned and sprinted for our tent that I shared with Branden, Mickie, and my older brother, Calvin, who was passed out on one of the air mattresses after taking an edible earlier.

Seeing the northern lights was insane, and I wanted to see more of it. But I wanted my older brother to see it just as much.

“Calvin, Calvin! It’s the northern lights!” From within the tent, I could hear Calvin rustling around, abruptly getting out of bed and unzipping the tent. He stumbled out into the night, and glanced at the horizon almost dazedly.

He joined our cousins, who were snapping photo after photo of the wild phenomenon before us. He stood in a spot, stuffed his hands into the pockets of his jacket, and just watched.

“Bro, Calvin, how you just gonna stand in my shot, man?!” Branden said into a laugh.

We all began to laugh as Calvin dazedly stood there in front of Branden’s camera, clearly still high. Although we were brother and sister, only two years apart, we experienced very different things with those gummies. When he was calm and tired, I was energetic and laughed at everything.

We stood there on the grass. Me, my cousins, and my brother—who were probably the closest things to best friends I could’ve had. I thought, *they are the people who are still going to care when I’m old, or lost, or sad. And I am so glad that I am seeing this with them.*

The night sky was brushed in faint streaks of green and just the tiniest hint of purple. Each streak was brighter the closer it was to the earth, and as it brushed up towards the sky, it faded into a soft stroke of light.

Seeing the aurora borealis had been on my bucket list for as long as I could remember.

My cousins gushed about how amazing that moment was, about how it was a memory they were going to remember for what seemed like eons.

All I could think about, as a warmth filled my chest, was that I felt so alive in that moment, and yet I simultaneously felt like I could die right there. Right then. And I would whole heartedly be content with the life I had lived, loving the people I have loved and seeing the things I have seen.

As a mere human, I could never truly manage to predict what my future would look like.

And yet, as I shared with my cousins full-bellied laughs and warming memories to be forever engraved into my soul, I knew that this moment—of seeing the aurora borealis live and dance against a blanket of night with people who would love me till death—would perhaps become my highest point in this rotation of life.

The people I have loved, the things I have seen, the life I have *lived*—it had reached its zenith.

Silent Night

by Tara Flaherty Guy

Crabby and overheated, I stared dazedly at the array of sparkly Christmas wrap in the aisle at Target, envisioning the glitter-blizzard that would engulf the house if I bought those pretty rolls. My mind absently ticked off the remaining items I needed for the following evening's Christmas Eve gathering at our house. Ours was a crazy, modern family, blended together as the result of a happy second marriage for my husband and me. Our house was the perpetual party emporium, and we were the habitual founders of all feasts. My grocery lists were endless and schizophrenic; we ranged from gluten-free, lactose-intolerant, vegan, vegetarian, to voraciously carnivorous, teetotalers, winebibbers, and scotch-swillers. I seldom resented my eternal hostess role, but on this evening I was experiencing a rare moment of exhausted rebellion. I wished that someone—anyone—would step up and offer to bring something—anything, like a Greyhound bus ticket for me—to anywhere.

As I studied the marked-down wrapping paper, fragments of a one-sided conversation began to penetrate through the white noise of my mind-chatter and the saccharine crooning of Bing Crosby on the overhead PA. The speaker sounded like an older lady and was apparently on her cell, just on the other side of my aisle.

“At Target, just picking up a couple last minute things for the meal...what's that? But how can that be? But you've never had to work both Christmas Eve and Day before....no, I understand, but...” She went on timidly. “I got your room all ready...and I made room for the dogs...I found a dog bed for them, on sale...I guess I can return it...so when will I see... no, I know, you've got to keep the job...certainly in this day and age...but...” Whatever story was being proffered on the other end of the call sounded false and glib to me, despite my hearing only the old woman's sad responses to it.

The pathos of this night-before-Christmas conversation pierced my tired fog. Moving away from the wrapping paper, torn between wanting to see her, and not wanting to intrude on her private sorrow, I found that I had to look. I glanced down the aisle.

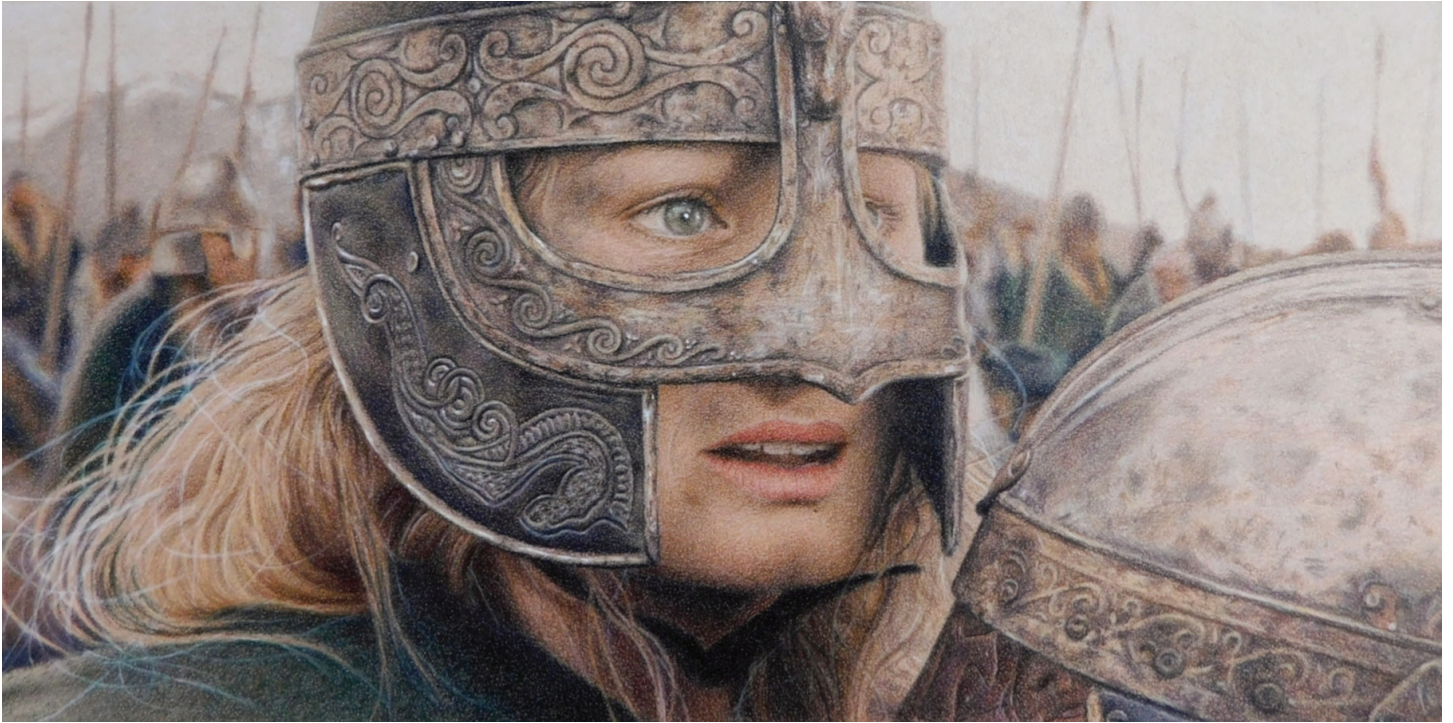
There she was, standing, cell phone to her ear, leaning into her half-full shopping cart. Her careworn face sagged in sadness, this old lady who was going to have too much holiday food, a refurbished empty guest room, and a pristine, unsullied dog bed.

My heart squeezed painfully at the sight of her, with her face like the tragedy mask of the theater; I wanted to rush to her, enfold her into a hug, and insist that she join our goofy gathering, to tell her we always have room for one more. Exercising masterful self-control, I managed to refrain from this imagined assault on a complete stranger and turned to make my way toward the checkout lanes at the front.

I saw her leave as I was swiping my credit card. She pushed her now-empty cart back into the cart corral near the entrance and shuffled, emptyhanded, through the glass doors and out into the night, where it was beginning to snow. She disappeared into the curtain of white, like a Christmas ghost.

Though not much given to prayer anymore as I advance into cynical middle age, I offered up an official ecclesiastical request that evening, to whatever benevolent spirit might be listening. I prayed that the old lady would find some small measure of peace, joy and companionship on the one December night when no one should be alone.

Large, lacy snowflakes were falling by the time I pushed my cart out to the parking lot. As I stowed my groceries in the trunk of my car, I offered up one more little prayer—this one of bittersweet gratitude—for my endless to-do list, for the backache I would have from long hours in the kitchen, for the manic, giggling havoc the grandkids would wreak, but especially for my nutty blended family who still wanted to come home for Christmas.



The Schieldmaiden

Éowyn Prusak
colored pencils

Everyone Loves Balls

by Leah Moe

In sixth grade, I was asked to give a noun. To any other student, this was an easy question. Our mustached teacher pointed her laser pointer at the Madlib blank that said “noun.” While Mrs. Oaks scanned the room of thirty puberty-stricken eleven-year-olds, my gaze stayed cemented to the frog I drew on my desk.

My eyes have been hot-glued to the same spot on my desk. I’m not a very good student. Mrs. Oaks has been pulling out popsicle sticks with our names because no one wants to raise their hand. Maddy was the only one raising her hand so her name got pulled out of the jar so the rest of us could get a turn. I hate Maddy. I suck at school. In fifth grade, I got a 2/20 on a spelling test and last week I got a 0.5/30 on a math assignment.

Everyone in my class was so much smarter than me. Even Jonny! He makes fart jokes in the middle of class but somehow still knows his timetables. Mrs. Oaks groans seeing no hands in the air, so she shuffles over to the podium grabbing the pickle jar of colorful popsicle sticks.

“Leah—give me a noun.” Mrs. Oaks says already shuffling back to the spot on the dry-erase board.

My spine snaps straight. My eyes grow like saucers and my mind goes blank. My eyes dart across all my classmates’ faces. Maddy crosses her arms and yawns. All eyes are on me and the prepubescent onion scent starts to ooze out of me.

After a pause, Mrs. Oaks says, “Leah, just give a person, place, or thing.” The tip of her red expo-marker on the blank space waiting for my noun.

My hands start to slip on my desk from the sweat. Think, Leah, think!

“Balls” I whisper.

“One more time.” Mrs. Oaks’s legs are spread and bent, the tip still on the board.

I let out a little cough, “um, balls.”

The class clowns, Jonny and Noah look at each other from across the room and start belly-laughing at their desks. I sink into my desk chair feeling my cheeks turn red, hoping everyone around me couldn’t smell my stress sweat. Now we had to listen to Mrs. Oaks say each sentence filling in the noun I picked.

She picked up the big ____ balls ____ .

____ Balls ____ were thrown all around the room.

He tripped over the ____ balls ____ .

My favorite thing is ____ balls ____ .

Don’t lick the ____ Balls ____ .

____ Balls ____ are my favorite thing to play with.

Jonny and Noah were now rolling on the floor clutching their stomachs in hysterics. Tears prickled in my eyes because not only am I stupid, but also way too sensitive. Mrs. Oaks saw my distress and tried to help. She said she saw us playing with a ball at recess and that it shouldn’t be that funny!

“Everyone likes balls!” Mrs. Oaks shrieked, throwing her hands in the air.

Jonny and Noah were then sent to the principal’s office for laughing for so long that the class started laughing.

Contributor Bios

Jill E. T. Bemis received her MPNA in 2006. She's a forty plus year State of Minnesota employee, amateur photographer, and co-author of "A Different Path." Her photography work has appeared in Catholic Library World, MDE Book of Delights, and Maplewood Parks & Natural Resources videos. She lives in Minnesota with her husband Michael, son Nate, daughter-in-law Julia, and Tiger the cat.

Éowyn Prusak is majoring in English and minoring in Studio Art at Metro State University. In addition to being a student, she is an artist and church pianist. She is also an avid reader, and especially loves the work of Jane Austen, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Brontë sisters.

Owen Saarinen has been writing since he was just a little kid. He hopes to become the author of as many books as he can write one day. In the meantime, he is working at The Home Depot, enjoys playing his guitar, and constantly works on improving his own world and the world around him through conversation, games, and fun.

Moxie Coe uses They/She pronouns and is a Gender Studies student at Metro. This is their first submission and she was referred by a professor to submit. The poem is about feeling lonely and yearning for love in a world that seems to have an abundance of opportunities for everyone else.

Ulysses Swanson studies history. His anticipated graduation date is Spring 2025.

Tara Flaherty Guy is a recovering county zoning enforcement officer. Guy is pleased to be working as a free-lance writer, where (so far) the worst response to her work product has been rotten tomatoes and bad reviews. Her work has been published in the *St. Paul Almanac*, *Talking Stick*, *Miracle Monocle*, *Emerge Literary Magazine*, *Grande Dame*, *Exposed Brick*, and *Longridge Review* among others. Guy has a BA in Creative Writing from Metropolitan State University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she lives with her husband and four aging, incontinent cats.

Jonathan Hiatt has been published in multiple issues of *Haute Dish* since 2017. He graduated cum laude from Metro State with a Bachelor of Arts in English in December 2020, and he enjoys writing poetry, memoir, and essays. Jonathan currently works as a full-time bookseller at Barnes & Noble.

Meta Titus is a graduate from Metro State and holds a degree in Individualized Studies with an emphasis in sociology, psychology, and religion. He is published with *The Edge Magazine* and *Elephant Journal*. He lives in Excelsior with this samoyed puppy and Himalayan cat.

Kathleen Isabell is a Metro State student working toward a clinical social work degree and plays at creative writing when time permits. She is the author of an illustrated book called *Restoring Victoria* in which all proceeds are directed toward recovery homes for men and women in need of a second chance. She lives with her husband and her golden lab, Chrissy, in Victoria, Minnesota.

Jewels Leepalao is a third year psychology major and creative writing minor who is passionate about the things she loves. In her free time, she enjoys reading, writing, and listening to music. She loves writing pieces that make others feel something, whether that is pain or love or yearning. She often dreams of a day where she can walk into a bookstore and see her books on the shelves. For Jewels, the world will always be too big for her, but she's determined to learn, experience, and feel as much as she can before this cycle of life is over.

Leah Moe is an English major trucking through her final year at Metropolitan State University. Leah is an aspiring writer spending most of her time writing horror novels and bailing her cat, Melon, out of jail.

Haute Dish publishes two issues per year (Spring and Fall), and is dedicated to showcasing the literary and artistic talents of students, faculty, and alumni of Metro State University.

Categories for publication include: poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, memoir, personal essay, and visual arts (photography, drawing/painting, mixed media, and so on).

Who may submit? Current students, staff, faculty, and alumni are all welcome to submit their work for both Spring and Fall issues.

Haute Dish is funded exclusively with funds from the Metro State University Student Activity Fees. The *Haute Dish* staff would like to give a big thanks to Philip Fuehrer and the entire staff of Student Life and Leadership!