

TALON



TALON MAGAZINE

Vol. 1 Issue 1

Fall 2022



Santiago Canyon College

8045 East Chapman Ave.

Orange, CA 92869

A collection of poetry, artwork, photographs, and short stories.

An online version of our journal is available at:

<https://scctalonmagazine.weebly.com/>

and contains performances, research papers, sheet music, and more.

Editors:

Mayah Hebeish, Danielle Chou, Ashlee Okamura, Ciara Stapp

Advisors:

English Professors, Corinna Evett, Nidzara Pecenkovic, and
Maureen Roe

Writers:

SCC Students, Alumni, Faculty, & Staff

Cover Designer:

Danielle Chou

Online Journal Designer:

Ashlee Okamura



Santiago Canyon College

What happens here matters.

Our Collection

Poesie	5
Rebounding	6
Room 432	7
Loneliness	8
The Noisy Closet Monster	9-11
The Debt	13
MY Vowel Shake	14
Skeletons	15
To You My Love	16-17
Doing Nothing, a Performance Monologue	19-21
If Trees Could Talk	22-23
Ow	26
The Way of Zen	27-28
Orange	29
In The Darkness of Winter	30
Birds	31
Lightning	32
Death	33
A Burning Memory	34
Buzz, Buzz, Buzz	36-38
Spring Memoir	39
The Old Man and The Bench	40-41
Clipped Wings	42
A Siren's Call	44
The Bridge	45-46
Life	47
Saloon	48

Extra Ordinary	49
For Professor Do's Birthday	50
Memento	51-53
Wars Chime of the Bell	54-55
Genesis	57-58
Natural Born Killer	59
Suite Temptation	60-61
Western Chauvinist	63
Empath	64-69
Dan's Story	70
Dreams	71-81
Pitch Black	83-87
Mountain and Stars	88
Pear of the Orient	89-91
A Tale of Two Cookies	92-94
-ew my father.	96-104
Caught Inside	106-112
Reflection on My Grieving Process	114-115
Comedic Biography of an Opposition...	116-117
Meet the Creators	119-123

Poesie

By Samuel Rosa

Spoken word is but a vapor
emitted from a maw.
That diffuses, then condenses
in the clouded minds of crowds.

The words create a sublime storm,
and after it has passed,
the sea of consciousness is filled
with new knowledge to grasp.

But liquid turns to gas again,
as time wears down the aging sea.
Ephemeral, the stimulation,
unlike good poetry.

For written words are no mere wisps,
But bountiful springs.
Feeding oceans eternally,
always more to bring.

Rebounding

By Dorothy Palin

All it takes is a little bit of rain
Upon the barren hillside by my home,
And those tenacious seeds spring back again

Bursting forth with no great intents or aims
Beyond surviving on such desolate stone.
All it takes is a little bit of rain,

Even the likes that most would hardly deign
More than a gentle mist that's been windblown,
And those tenacious seeds spring back again

With equal fervor as the prior trains
That adorned prior cloud's crests as they roamed.
All it takes is a little bit of rain

And suddenly draped far across the plain
Is the ink that enlivens the old tome,
And those tenacious seeds spring back again.

In just a week or so they'll start to wane,
But their cyclic nature leaves no unknowns:
All it takes is a little bit of rain
And those tenacious seeds spring back again.

Room 432

By Professor Marcelo Pimentel

Shadow-lungs fill angel-white room 432,
With fading hopes and growing dolors,
Microbe-beasts feast in full bloom,
In fragile father, in front of brothers.

Pale skeleton heaps up coffee colors,
A suction tube makes clear decay,
The micro-life—the dark brown Other,
Drained out, plucked...and sucked away.

Skeleton father coughs up more of them,
Umber regiments land on his lips,
Bemoaning brothers attacking brownish phlegm,
They "fight death" off with slurping sticks.

"Moist cotton swabs sooth pale tongues,"
Should an old man beg for water?
"If he drinks, he moves back a rung,"
The dying gasps, the living totter...

"Yet we can't 'kill him', deliberately!"
(It's a "Dirty Hands" affair, you see),
"Let God or Nature do him in!"
(Our "clean hands" do tend to win).

But can't we choose another path?
Hands neither dirty nor fully clean?
While avoiding guilt's dreadful wrath?
Is the very thought so cruel, so mean?

Can't we choose another way?
A human/e path from flesh to clay?
"All men are mortal," father would say...
Can't we choose to say goodbye?
Can we choose to let him die?

Loneliness

By Amelia Schuster

1st place for Fall 2021 SCC Poetry Contest

Loneliness is a barless prison

An expanse of hindrance and reclusivity

A bulwark for vexing ties

And yet,

Provider of freedom and independence

Perpetuator of expression

Sometimes, a choice

Its presence has

no fault

It just is

The Noisy Closet Monster

By Shy Perera

There's a noisy closet monster in my closet
I'm scared, and I'm trembling
I covered my face with my bedsheets
In the night, in the night.

"Mommy, can you please close the closet door?" I said
"Daddy, can you please sit by me?" I said
But there was no answer
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster began to growl
Grrrrrrrrrr, Grrrrrrrrrr,
I wanted to cry, but I couldn't
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster began to snore
Zzzzzzzzz, hsssssss, Zzzzzzzzz, hsssssss,
I wanted to scream, but I couldn't
In the night, in the night.

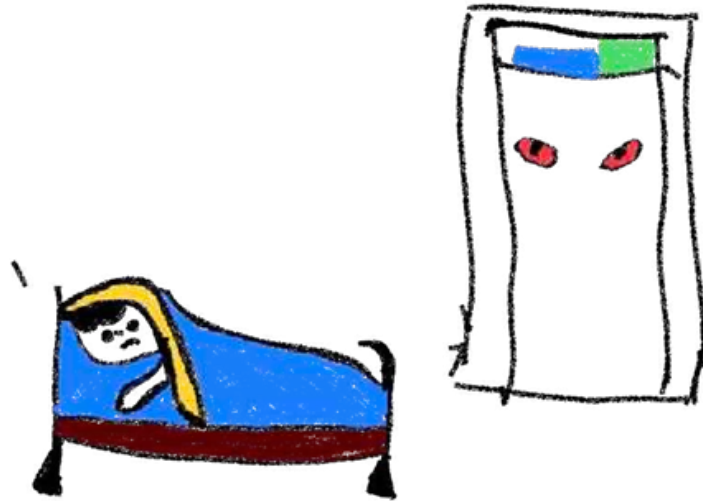
There's a noisy closet monster in my closet
I'm scared, and I'm trembling
I covered my face with my bedsheets
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster began to groan
Aaaaaaaaaha, Wuhuuuuuuu, Aaaaaaaaaha
I wanted to run out of the room, but I couldn't
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster began to move
Thuuuummp, Rruuummp, Thuuummp
I closed my eyes and stayed still
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster jumped out
Baaaaaaang, Claaaaaaang, Baaaaaaang
I wanted to roll out of bed and hide, but I couldn't
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster started licking my face
Slobbbber, Slobbbber, Slobbbber
I wanted to stop him, but I couldn't
In the night, in the night.



“Mommy, can you please open my room door?” I said
“Daddy, can you please put the light on?” I said
But there was no answer
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster on my bed started grunting
Oaaaaaaaah, Oaaaaaaaah, Oaaaaaaaah
I think I know that sound, I think I know that grunt
In the night, in the night.

Mommy opened the door and said, “What’s going on?”
Daddy put the light on and said, “What’s going on?”
I was surprised to see the noisy closet monster on my bed
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster was my pet piggy Rowdy
The noisy closet monster was my pet piggy Rowdy
I’m so happy that I don’t have a noisy closet monster anymore
In the night, in the night.

The noisy closet monster on my bed is my pet piggy Rowdy
The noisy closet monster on my bed is my pet piggy Rowdy
I’m so happy Mommy is here, I’m so happy Daddy is here
In the night, in the night.

Mommy laughed, Daddy laughed, and I laughed
Rowdy grunted and said Oink, Oink, Oink,
I’m so happy that I don’t have a noisy closet monster anymore
In the night, in the night.

To Mikey on this 26th, day of July 2020



Images
by
Ashlee Okamura



The Debt

By Leopoldo Marquez

You're there everyday
Not once do you look away
And as you prey
We slowly decay

The thing we take for granted, is what we love most

One is a beautiful lie and the other a terrible roast

But in the midst of all this pain

And as we fly through our day

I raise my glass and propose a toast

To the one we hate most

You're there everyday

Not once do you look away

And as you prey

We slowly decay...

The debt that all men pay.

M

Y

VOWEL SHAKE

By Shy Perera

a is for apple that grows on a tree

a a a a a a

alligator, ant, and astronaut Andre!



e is for elephant ears that flap to the breeze

e e e e e e

egg, Eskimo, elf, and eels with red heels!

i is for ice cubes that melt in the sun

i i i i i i

igloo, iguana, India, and eating ice cream for fun!

o is for orange juice in a tall glass

o o o o o o

orange, ostrich, oval, and octopus Olly taking a bath!

U is for the red umbrella on the rug

u u u u u u

umbrella, upstairs, underwear, and uncle Dan's puppy in the tub!

To Ari on this 18th day of March 2022

Skeletons

By Leopoldo Marquez

You give me Support.

You make me stand tall.

Without you, I'd have no life at all.

You are white, strong and capable.

You allow me to stand erect.

There are 206 of you

And I will never forget.

You make what runs through my veins.

You've done it for years,

Don't make me take the reins.

You're there in the beginning

As well as in the end

You're responsible for my existence

My skeleton friend.

À Toi, Mon Amour

By Isabelle Tuong Anh Bui-Nguyen

Chéri, tu m'as quitté

Pour la chanson du vent, en plein hiver

Pour prendre le deuil de la terre

À l'heure sacrée de ta vie

Tu es une ombre du passé qui essaie d'être effacée

Quand se détachent au loin les contours de ta musique

Si chers à mon cœur

Chéri, je ne pense qu'à toi

À nos moments de joie, et de bonheur

Tu es le cri doux de mon cœur

À l'heure où tombe la nuit

Tu es une âme apaisée dans ton repos éternel

Dans la brume au ciel gris, l'écho doux de ta musique

Fait chanter ma vie

Poème d'amour dédiée à Vương, 3/15/2022

TRANSLATED VERSION OF À Toi Mon Amour, To You My Love

Darling, you left me

To the sound of the Wind, in the midst of Winter

I mourn your return to Mother Earth

In the final hour of your Life

You are the shadow of the past which tries to be erased

When the contours of your music seem to fade away
from a distance

Music that is so dear to my heart

Darling, I can only think of you

Of our moments of Joy and Happiness

You are the soft cry of my heart

At the hour when night falls

You are the peaceful soul in your Eternal Rest

In the foggy gray sky, your echoing soft music

Enchants my life

Love Poem dedicated to Vương, 3/15/2022

Photos by David Arcos



Doing Nothing, a performance monologue

By Professor Will Lennertz, English Department

Characters

Phone User of any reasonable age but likely an adult, who can hold a cell phone to the ear

Friend on the other end of phone (who doesn't appear in the play and who can be played by anyone or no one in particular; This character has no lines or actions, but must have stage presence and animal magnetism. Could be introduced as a real performer or given first billing given the nature of the monologue)

Setting

An empty stage (what else?) denoting anyplace or no place, away from busy human activity and noise. A single spot— if possible— will be used on Phone User throughout the monologue.

PHONE USER Wanders stage in no hurry and directionless. Stops. Looks around the stage without focusing on any particular spot. Closes eyes. Opens eyes. stretches neck, rotates head. Stares up. Stares down. Closes eyes. Smiles. Phone vibrates. Takes phone from pocket and picks up call.

Hey (pause) What am I doing? Nothing. (pause) Absolutely nothing. No. I mean nothing. Seriously (pause, listening) No. Just nothing. It's what it's all about. All of it. You know there is more nothing in this universe than something, more empty space than matter. It goes for you and me. Did you ever think about that? (pause) I mean those little particle planets-- moving in orbits inside other little particle planets moving in orbits in others and others and others. They temporarily make us up. And we're really a lot of nothing. A lot of emptiness. (Listens. Pause).

Pulls phone away from ear and paces slowly back and forth while speaking

*No, I'm not depressed at all. Listen, Listen... (pause)
Yeah, I'm sure. (long pause) Since you asked I was--
in fact-- doing nothing, trying to feel that nothing, trying to
be that nothing, trying to experience the universe in its great
vast void, that big vacuum of space which was created by a
big bang and which placed distance between the parts of the
one big ball of matter and which each moment continues to
grow larger as the universe expands. (listens) Why?
Because REALLY I'm more THAT than anything else.
So are you. (pause) Yes, you are. So's your dog, So's your
car. So's your grandma Even your brand new phone.*

Listens for a few moments. Taps foot, exhales, and shakes head.

*No. You're missing the point. That nothing is as important
as the somethings everyone collects, All that matter used
for materialism...it's just trying to prove you are better off
than someone else living down the street. (pause, listens)
Am I attacking you? Why would you say that? (listens and
rolls eyes) No, no, no, no... next you'll be ask me why I hate
America! (pauses) Am I a what? You are really really
missing the point. Really. There are no somethings without
nothing. Get me? (listens and tenses as moments pass).
Look, I'm not trying to be a jerk. But maybe you need more
nothing. Like a lot more.*

Listens, nods, disagrees using negative sounds, makes
agreement sounds, nods. shakes head, listens, rolls eyes.
Pulls phone from ear, stares at it. Mimics the speaker on the
other end. Nods, shrugs, and looks disgusted.

*Yeah, I was just answering a question. No, I'm not fucking
with you. Seriously. But think about what I said. Just
consider what it means.(pause) So I was thinking about*

*things or rather really trying not to think about things. And
you called. So yeah, I was just hanging out doing nothing.*

Listens, scratches behind ear. Does a quick nose check
for possible Rogue boogers by lightly pinching nostrils.

*Let's just drop it then. Ok? Ok, then. Yeah, pizza sounds
good. Really, like I said, it was just nothing, nada, zip,
the big void. And me. Tomorrow? Your place? Sounds
good. Yeah, yeah. Really, I was literally, I mean literally,
doing nothing. What's up with you?*

FADE TO BLACK

If Trees Could Talk By Dr. Regina Lamourelle

If trees could talk
What would they say?
Would they wish for only the sun,
And never want a rainy day?

Would they talk about
The merits of a strong breeze
That carries the pollen
To make the fruit trees?

What would they say about the seeds
That is food for some ants
Would they extend their roots and canopy
So other trees could not plant?

Would powerful trees change
The rules of the game
So that only some seeds could plant,
Only welcoming those with rich names?

Would the color green
Be the law of the land
And those with leaves of red, gold, or brown
Unwelcome by the green elite leaf clan?

What would they say about the grandest
Wisest and the tallest of them all?
Would the other trees be happy?
Or jealous and plot its downfall?

Would they talk about a lightning strike,
Or flood to even the score,
By removing the tallest trees
So they would not exist anymore?

Would some trees not allow
Other trees to sway,
And exclude and shame them
Because they did not bloom anyway?

Would some trees figure out,
How to take the best soil
Get all the good nutrients
And not think about the turmoil?

I mean the chaos that is bound
To happen in an affluent tree city,
Pitting the haves against the have nots
Since they would not have empathy or pity.

What about trees that are the roundest
And some are not so attractive at all.
Would they be given drugs
So their seeds and leaves could fall?

Would trees have a problem,
With the color of another tree's bark?
Would they not allow
Some off-color trees in their tree park?

And what would they do,
When it came to planting season,
Would the "in" trees talk about the "out"
Or would that be tree treason?

If trees could talk
I wonder what trees would say
About how people treat people,
In cruel, mean, unfair, and unkind ways!

If Trees Could Talk was written to teach children about empathy, sympathy, diversity, and acceptance.

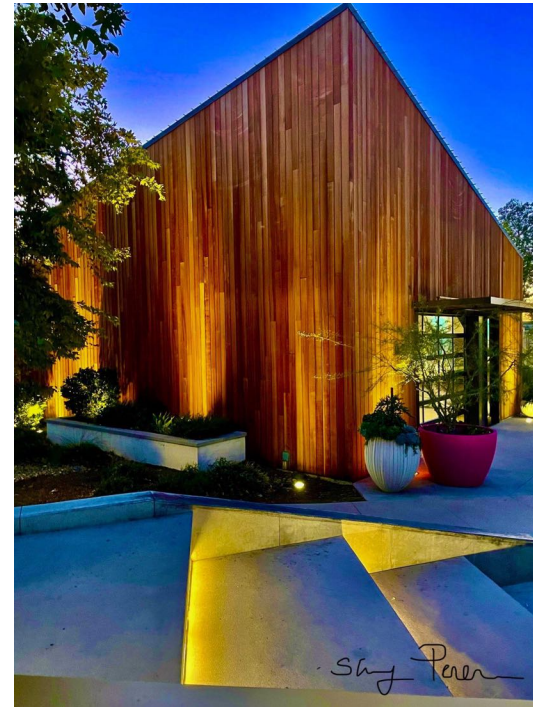
Photo by Professor Regina Lamourelle



Photo of
lamp-Dusk at
Great Park,
Irvine



Photo by David Arcos



**Photography by
Shyamali Perera**

Photo of building-Christmas
Lights at Rise Park, Irvine

Ow

By MacKenzie Mayfield

I was often told as a child
That Angels are the clumsy sort,
While not often,
They drop the souls ascending,
So at night when I drift,
When there is no light
No melody, not a beat
Not a thought going through my empty head,
And darkness starts to spin,
My bed sinks below me
And I fall again
Yet I am still where I was when I closed my eyes
I was often told as a child,
That angels are the clumsy sort,
Although with me,
I think they do it for laughs

The Way of Zen

By Professor Will Lennertz

is decaying
slowly
before my eyes.

Its cover yellowing
softly going fawn
since 1957.

It smells
of library shelves
where I found it
and myself in library stacks
and decaying pages:

reading words
hidden like deer in a copse—
their tawny background
dotted with consonants
edges as soft as
Japanese brush strokes
forming poems in curves

reading one winter
when rains fell
when I gave up mathematics
for something more stable

or not. Something to get rid of
this jaundice formed by
numerical assurance.

Only the photo plates remain white—

Bodhidharma's face in brushstrokes
rock and sand gardens
in landscapes with cherry blossoms.

Alan Watts returns to nothing.
His words soon paper dust
fine as sand. Rectangular bits
now jagged, uneven, natural,
or as he put it, wiggly and unnetted,
part of this whole, singular world.

Orange

By Professor Will Lennertz

Let's get this straight:
If Red and Yellow had a love child,
it wouldn't be Orange;
Yellow's stupid smile
and Red's 'roid rage
can't be found
in that juicy electric ecstasy
so rebellious it squirts
in your eye every chance it gets.

Caution?
My ass!
Fast forward
is more like it—
Its fuck-it, balls-out velocity
screams to the wind.

Road Hazard? Damn straight!
so punch it and here we go—
an optic streak in a muted gray world
blotched with soft blues, greens, and dull whites.

Want to know a secret?
If you were Orange, I swear I'd peel you
lick your sticky juices from strong fingers and pop
your sections one by one in my watery mouth,
your intensity making me glow like a lantern
illuminating the pleasure gardens of a summer night

In the Darkness of Winter

By Jessica Gilbert



Note from the artist:

I painted this at a paint party so I don't know if that justifies my artistic point of view but I really like the way my painting turned out. It was a most memorable night out because it was my mother, both sisters, and four of my nieces. We all had a fantastic time and I still have very fond feelings of how happy we were that night. Life changes quickly. Now two of my nieces live in Texas and the other two work and go to school. Getting together like that is seldom an option these days so I keep this memory with me.

Birds

By Michael Green II

Tomorrow, the caged birds will fly.
Yesterday, the caged birds struggled.
Today, the caged birds sing.

Tomorrow, the free bird will fly.
Yesterday, the free bird flew.
Today, the free bird flies.

One day, the caged birds' chicks will know nothing of struggle.
One day, there will be no caged birds.
One day, all the birds will fly,
As birds were meant to do.

But today, the caged birds sing.

And they will keep singing.

Until their voices shatter every cage.
Until their songs are etched into the tapestry of time,
impossible to erase.
Until their chicks doubt cages even existed.

“The land on which I was born.”
Birthplace,
America.
Safety? Unfamiliar
Every state: white or poor. Always
Stolen.

Lightning

By Sophia Rose Legarski



Medium: Acrylic on canvas Description: “For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”
Matthew 24:27

Death By Caitlyn Hodgkin
2nd place winner of Writing Contest, Spring 2022

What is Death?

Perhaps Death is a friend
Uniter of separated and lost souls
Rekindler

Perhaps Death is a challenge
The ultimate risk
Enticing

Perhaps Death is a cure
Welcoming arms dispelling anguish and despair
Recourse

Perhaps Death is a foe
A somatic assailant
Plaguebringer

Perhaps Death is a catalyst
Breaker of chains that aren't one's own
Liberator

Perhaps Death is an unjust payment
The price paid by pawns for an uncontrollable cause
Reaper

Perhaps Death is a monster
Claimer of the innocent and pure
Evil

Perhaps Death is simply the end
The final act of Life
Silence

A Burning Memory

By William Briar

1st Place Writing Contest, Spring 2022

It's strange to know

That, one day, I'll

Think fondly of

The stench

Of cigar

Smoke;

A smell which,

Presently,

I recoil from

Each night

It wafts

Up to my

Window

From

My Father's den below.



Submitted by Dr. Regina Lamourelle

Founding Fathers - This is a rendering of a drawing on a mug I received from someone visiting Mount Rushmore. It shows the presidents on Mount Rushmore in the background with Native American Chiefs in the foreground.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz

By Kevin Patrick Floback

Nature is a place of many wonders for both the big and small.

The forest is alive with sound, but one melody is clearly heard throughout.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

This is the rhythm of life for a bee; and the instrument it plays in the forest's grand orchestra.

So long as a bee can play this tune it is still alive.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

Flying through the vast and boundless sky, up and down, round and round

Into the mighty clouds above, that cast cool shade upon the world below.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

Between the overgrown blades, from the jungle of grass below
Around the skyscraper trees that fill this land.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

Over the small creek, now a raging and rampant river grown fat from recent rain

One simple thought is on the Bee's mind: "Find Flower."

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

A courageous carnation, an outrageous orchid, a timid tulip
Perhaps a lonesome lily, or a dramatic daisy, who will it be today?

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

The breeze blowing, growing stronger and stronger

A small gust for a falling leaf, a typhoon of wind for the Bee.

Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.

Fighting the torrent of wind, the Bee loses control

Falling, spiraling out of control; down, down, down.

SPLASH

The Bee crashes into the stream below, its cold hostile waters attack

The water invades the Bee's precious wings, now heavy and unable to move.

Splish, Splash, Splish.

Nothing to grab hold to the Bee struggles to stay afloat

The yellow and black stripes that paint this flying tiger, begin to fade under the surface.

Splish, Splash, Splish.

Colder, darker, deeper the Bee sinks lower...

Light is soon smothered by the water, the cold void encroaching in.

Splish, Splash, Splish.

Does the Bee think of its hive? A place now far and distant.

The weak Bee loses strength, reaches out one last time into the darkness, grasping for the light.

Groping into the water the Bee feels something

A leaf, but from where, why, how?

With the last of its might the Bee grabs on with hope

Up, up, up, out of the water; slowly but surely light reaches the Bee again.

A giant pair of hands cradles the leaf, the Bee tightly clinging on

The hands move the leaf to a dry sunny spot between the leaves.

The sweet amber sunlight, its life-giving warmth

Akin to honey, the sun's sweet embrace melts the pain away.

The Giant looks at the Bee, what does it want?

Waiting, watching, what is the Giant thinking?

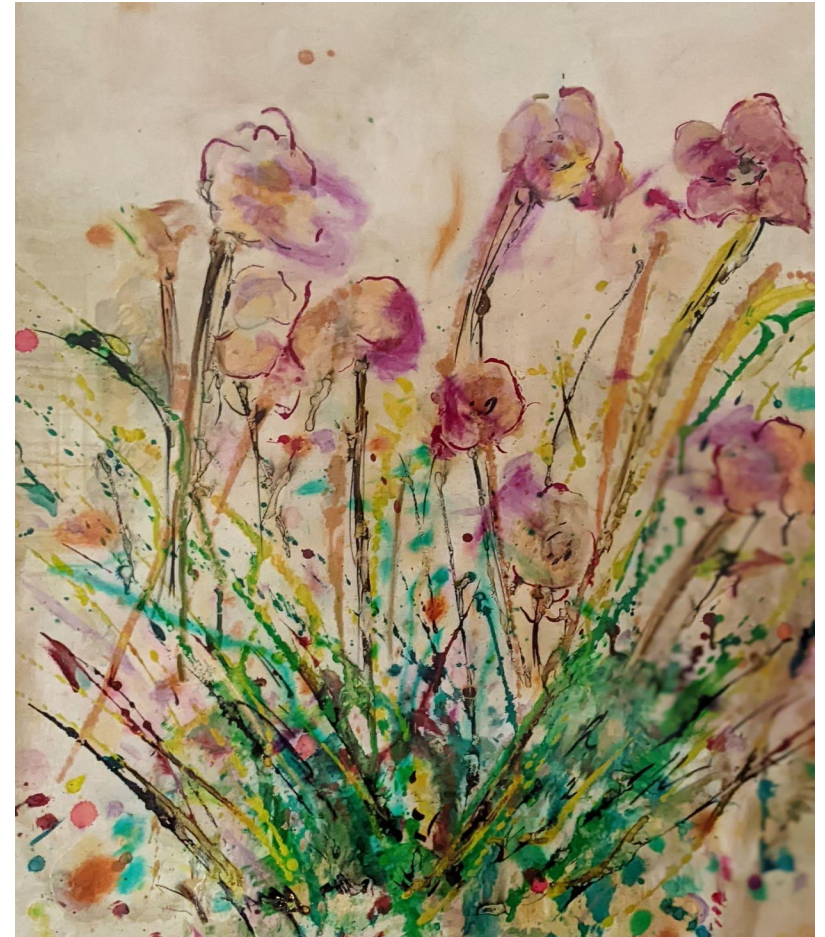
The Giant, still ever silent, speaks words simply with the tender loving look in its eyes

The Giant's body towering over the Bee, protecting it from the dangers of the world.

The water begins to leave the Bee's saturated wings
The Giant still waiting, guarding the Bee from the wind.
Pitter, ----- , ----- , ----- .
The smallest of movements from the Bee's wings
Beat by beat the wings awoken again.
Pitter, Patter, ----- , ----- .
The Giant sees the Bee begin to move again, if only but the
slightest
The Giant gives a smile and sets the leaf bound Bee upon
the ground.
Pitter, Patter, Pitter, ----- .
The Giant seemingly pleased turns to leave
Never once looking back, between the trees the Giant
disappeared.
Pitter, Patter, Pitter, Patter.
The Bee regains its strength, and the wind begins to subside
Was its life saved by the Giant on a mere whim? Or, perhaps
as a sign of gratitude for the Bee?
Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.
What is on the Bee's mind?
One simple thought "Find Flower."
Buzz, Buzz, Buzz.
Into the forest the Bee flies away, it too vanishing into the
mystical forest
Once again performing its part in the symphony that the
forest around is conducting.

Spring Memoir

By Professor Will Lennertz



The Old Man and the Bench

By Kevin Patrick Floback

Every day for the last ten years, the same old man always sits
on that bench.

Over the years, his back has sloped more and more.

Each day, he comes alone and sits for hours on end.

Sometimes he sits in silence, other times he mumbles to
himself under his breath.

The words he speaks, if only to himself, tells his life story.

He speaks of a time when his back was still straight, and he
still stood tall.

A time when he was willing to give everything up for people
he never knew.

A time when his eyes burned brightly with an inferno
of determination.

A time when he breathed the thick and poisonous airs of war.

A time when he heard the thunderous roars of explosions, and
the storm of unyielding gunfire.

A time when his hands were unmoving, even in the face
of death.

A time when medals sparkled like gems on his vest.

A time when he was a hero.

A time when his friends stood side by side with him.

Now, he has given everything for those people.

Now, his eyes only have the dim glow of the embers that once
captivated his stare.

Now, all he breathes is the stale air of the city.

Now, all he hears is the tranquil breeze softly carrying the
chirps of birds, and the gentle rustling of leaves in the trees.

Now, his hands tremble, no matter what they do.

Now, those shining gems have dulled and faded.

Now, his name has been forgotten.

Now, his friends have passed on, and now only he still stands.

Now, the only thing he still has is the memories of those
long passed days.

Now, he sits and recites his life to himself on his bench.

Now, he waits for his time to come.

Clipped Wings

By Sunmeet Singh

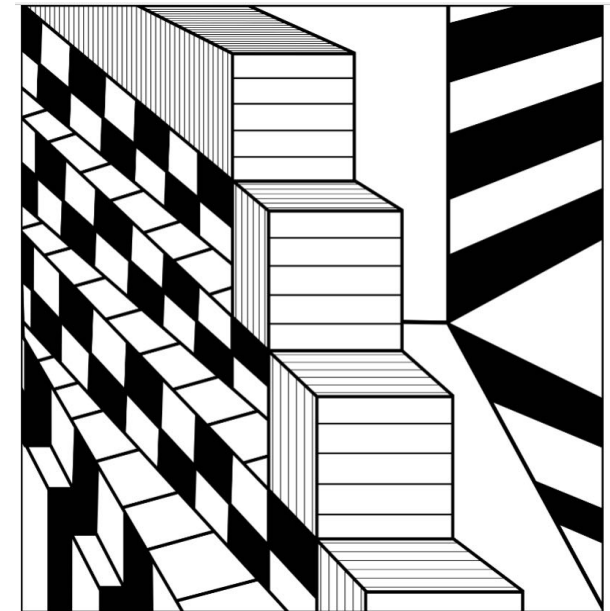
They say a fool can do no right
but I can say that he tried -
Like looking for home in
A heron's shade;
I took a cage for a hand
And a hand for a reason.

I'm told, I'm told, I'm told
That I'm selfish for wanting,
Naive for hoping
And
Dumb for trying
But then tell me -
What does that make them?

I was born
Bearing a debt to be paid twofold,
The Old Reeve's name Guilt.
To be built
To serve
To build
To fall
That and more to suffer.
Left praying that in the end
The heart is lighter than the feather
And
Deemed worthy by the writer



**Digital Art by
Taylor Stringer**



A Siren's Call

By Sunmeet Singh

*The soft gilded light was draped about her,
A small coy smile that I may have imagined -
The second that encaptured my eternity
Left me a heretic for a woman
Who'll never know my name.
Two seasons have passed now and
Days pour in as well-heeled suitors,
Kicking me to the gutter as a beggar of the past*

My Aphrodite was a Parthian lover
Who flew as she stole the hearts
Of unsuspecting men, and
The fleeting memory of her intricacies
Leaves me with naught
but the wound of her absence,
Pulsating and gaining with every grain of sand
The slow dull din balled into a deafening roar
As that brief accursed infinity occupies my every thought

Such regretful beauty
Questions your previous alignment with Ignorance;
As all of the world's jewels become etiolated and weightless
in comparison.
Debauchery in the senseless impossibilities cause
The puritanistic responsibilities of your day to day
To now weigh tons, as the air wanes and thins
As you toil and tussle about with Faith,s
For how can one remain pure in the face of Infatuation?
Oh, sanity is undertaken by Passion
For Hope is tomorrow's forbringer and without:
Death a remedy for all realities too underwhelming

The Bridge

By Chevy Stewart

Constructed between two realms lays a bridge
Made of memories tied with passion and twine
The planks across may sound hollow and rigid
But they can hold any weight till the end of time

Dangling between the luring light and the vacuous void
Stepped two souls weaved through the fingertips of splendor
But every step they baird time became paranoid
As her soul lifted from the planks, his turned to cinder

Holding on to each part of themselves their eyes started to stain
Bursting like a dam her eyes filled with a crystal blue cure
While the river flowed across her cheek his hand he evaporated
the pain
With the steam blinding are crystals, his ruby eyes cut though
so pure

Walking weightlessly she turned to see the past planks
Sighting only the steps falling from her grasp
Heavier his weight grew, he struggled more to hold his place
Once the last touch of her left, his soul could only collapse

Spiraling down the grooming abyss his passion dimmed
Barreling towards nothing his heart lit the anger in the frost
Losing touch of her aura she felt her love was pinned
Descending far from grace she dropped to an internal lost

Flames of his anger pierced the glimpse of a falling angel
Gliding closer the fire from his heart could only flicker

Touching her once more only set his eyes to boil
For no life was left for him to feel her tinder

With the lost now found his angered passion began to rise
Flying closer to the light her crystal eyes shined
Gasping for air she turned to a pure surprise
Their love lifting her up till his strength declined

Before his final push to deliver this angel from the cold
He whispered only the words of God could hinge
"If you are to fall I am to catch, if I am to rise you are to hold
For we are the weight to hold our bridge".

Life

By Abigail Roe

Isn't life a wonderful thing?
With its abundant intricacies, challenges, and joys
The way it strains and flourishes throughout the
depths of the world
How it's harnessed by beautiful machines

Could such a wonderful thing have arisen by chance?
From a mere single event?
Such a possibility is profoundly unlikely
For creation without Intelligence is like
 A mind without thoughts
 A bird without wings
 A compass without direction
 A body without a soul

All impossible
For life is a wonderful thing
And its Creator, remarkable.

Saloon

By Professor William Lennertz



Extra Ordinary

By Nathaniel Roe

Every soul a star,
They say,
Alloneinthesame.
Though differences divide us,
They add *variété*

A Bachelor's Button,
Among cornflowers.

A Pop!
Amidst sodas.

If every soul a star,
Then I'd like to be the sun.

Tặng Sinh Nhật Cô Bằng Lăng

By Djubilee Do

Tháng Tư, Hai Mốt, Cô chào đời Như
đóa Bằng Lăng sáng bầu trời Màu tím
thủy chung tươi rực rỡ Ai nhìn cũng thích
thú ngẩn ngơ
Chúc Cô như giai điệu mộng mơ Gieo
vào lòng người nốt đọt chờ Tài năng
thêm nhiều như hoa nở Sức khỏe, bình
an, hát từng giờ

Translation: For Professor Do's Birthday

That year, on Twenty-first April
Bang-Lang was born as a flower
Brighten the sky with purple Lighten
people with smiles

Bang Lang as a romantic melody

Sowing people's hearts with joyful seeds
A professor of great talents and a skilled pianist Playing
songs of peace and wealthiness.

Memento

By Steve Chan

I am a person with no plan, so I decided
I follow the steps of our ancestors:
across the Pacific, far away from home,
came to a land where our ancestors used to mine gold.
Only difference is
they were trafficked by European
I bought my ticket from American Airline.

It's February, unusual one
Lunar New Year is not as lively as I have experienced in my life
people in the world notice that
there is a place in the Far East
called Wuhan.

“You are Chinese” “Are you from Wuhan?”
my Airbnb host asks me that, she looks nervous, she
checks my temperature
“No, I’m Cantonese” I don't know how to respond
I feel like my yellow skin, makes me look like danger in
this period
I don't know how to prove that I have no connection to
the virus
this is also the first time I started to think about racism.

I'm a beach hater
but I go to the beach a lot since I moved here.
I will take pictures by the sea, take the sea horizon
draw a dot on the horizon, send it to my family
I tell them, I can see them across the Pacific
I pointed out our home.

The legend of the traffic jam in Los Angeles
I've heard it many times before I came
but after I came, this myth seems to be busted

2020 might be the most traffic-free year since the I-5
was built. Do any Californians imagine
40 mins, Orange to Downtown
I catch this opportunity, I drive to LA every week
I love driving in that empty Sunset Boulevard
I love walking in that empty downtown, the concrete jungle
but a city without people
is it still a city?

I grew up under the red flag
when I hear Americans talk about how Republicans or
Democrats make fake news
to influence the pandemic, influence the society,
influence the election
I totally agree with them.
But I don't know if I should cry or laugh
as living in George Orwell's world for past 20 years.
I still watch the media which covers my nation
I try not to watch
because the news always makes me cry
but I cannot.
The chairman thinks a great country will not have any
person test positive
then, one person is positive, they lock all people at home
The chairman thinks cats and dogs will be infected
then, they enter people's home, cats and dogs are killed
I saw the dictator using the pandemic
as a tool, a weapon, an invisible army
to educate the people, how to obey, how to destroy human nature.
The red color of that land
is gradually deepening, turning to darkness.

English is my third language
I never like to memorize words
But I learned a lot of new words
after the pandemic started:

OUTBREAK, PANDEMIC, LOCKDOWN, REMOTE,
MASK, N95, ZOOM, TO GO, TAKE OUT, TOILET
PAPER, WFH, POSITIVE, NEGATIVE, QUARANTINE,
NEW NORMAL...

I read, I saw, I post these words on my screen every day
I even wrote a paper on how the pandemic is affecting
people's mental health
that is probably the most professional vocabulary I have
ever learned
which is not my major.
I am a person with no plan, I'm lost
I don't know what the future holds
I don't know if I can still see my family
I don't know if these will stay in history
or we just are all in someone's dream?
I don't know
maybe ten years later
when I reread this poem
these memory fragments will help me reminisce
like Memento.

Wars Chime of the Bell

By Olivia Barkhordar

Dedicated to those in Ukraine

Hence brass bells thunder through the town;

The battle has commenced

Pale faces line the roads, distraught,

At bravery's bequest.

All have come, yet none desire

Rekindling of forgotten fire

As the lives they gave for hire

Would soon lie motionless

The evil was so vastly great

That faith was left awry

For faithfulness in fortune's fate,

For light, devoid the sky,

And chance was given little thought

Though life was all the hopeless sought

The evil that the darkness wrought

Opposed the chiming bell

Twice the bell had now rung out,

And hope it did beseech,

But hopelessness, without a doubt

Did pry upon the weak.

Though many bullets blattered fast

The leeches of the bell had passed

Good men killed until the last,

And then the bell yet not ever make a sound

And mourning knew no boundary

None remained to toll the bell

To put aside all relevance

A chess game, with no checkmate

What more, before belligerence

Can come from common kin?

The families of the men deceased

Shattered on the stone

Didache was the man's feast,

Now all would feel alone

And through the nights, incessant crying

Could the bell not have done the dying?

Saved the men,

Forever lying

Motionless to rot.



Photos by Michael Green

Genesis

By Theo Stilson

The stars had all gone out and the world had died, yet there was life, cold and shriveled, hidden in the secret places. The darkness had swallowed it, digesting and breaking down what little hope remained.

And yet the heart persisted.

Beat beat

Beat beat

A spark, a light. Soft, yet blinding. The heart drew back into what it knew. Light was dangerous, a lesson to be learned, but the emptiness was familiar. Back in hiding. The light grew, slowly, and yet the grasp of the void held strong.

Beat beat

Beat beat

The light grew large enough to show color, a glowing yellow, yet still only a grain of sand. And the curious heart studied it. How fine and warm that light is, it thought, how wonderful it must be.

Beat beat

Beat beat

The soft honey hue seeped into the cracks in the darkness, little by little.

The heart grew spindly limbs, weak and unorganized at first,
then as the light grew, they formed a body, legs, and arms.

The heart warmed from the heat of the spark.

Beat beat

Beat beat

The heart brushed dust off of its shoulders, the glow having
broken small pieces of the abyss and, for the first time in a long
while, the heart gave a faint smile.

The pace of its beat quickened.

Beat beat

Beat beat

All at once, a large patch of the darkness fell in, and landed
beside the heart and its new body. Light flowed and flooded the
place. The heart closed its eyes, blinded. Another spindly hand
reached through the window, and rested on the heart's cheek,
thumb at the temple. Eyes fluttered open, and the hearts met in a
hopeful gaze. The stranger helped the heart into the light, their
pulses now synchronized, and the darkness fading.

And the world began anew.

Natural Born Killer

By Maximilian Pollok

A cold dark alley

at the end of the street,

Where light ends full stop

and endless horrors meet.

The derelict building

in the middle of the block,

Stranger denizens of the night

enter your dreams to stalk.

A windowless van

patrols the roads,

A roaming marauder hides in plain sight

as a wraith forebodes.

The broken down camper

skulking on the curb,

Coats of rust and thick layers of crud

dares not be disturbed.

Isolated in the dead of night

and lost in a seedy park,

But there is nothing to fear

because I am what lurks in the dark.

Suite Temptation

By Danielle Chou

3rd Place Winner in the Fall 2021 Writing Contest

I swipe the card into the reader.
With a click and green light,
the door unlocks.

We walk into the cool room.

Against the wall:
a California King-sized bed,
a nightstand with built-in charging ports,
a small replica painting
of Barnette Newman's *Midnight Blue*.

Against the opposite:
a small desk with branded stationery,
a large drawer with a TV on top,
a small tray
filled with snacks.

We just got off a 23-hour flight.
No matter what I did, I could not sleep,
Judgment clouds over.
My eyes scan over the tray.
Fiji Water
Trail Mix
Peanuts
M&Ms

My mouth waters.
A glint and next thing I know
I reach over.

Shaking hands waver over the tray.
I snatch the M&Ms
and savor the taste.

My traveling partner glares at me.
But at that moment
I could not find
a care.

Photos by Joshua Guardado



Note from the Photographer:
The first image of the Cinema was taken a few months after quarantine began.

The second image was taken March of 2020, before quarantine started.

Western Chauvinist

By Maximilian Pollok

2nd Place Winner in the SCC Fall 2021 Writing Contest

Sitting in silence

Anticipating the violence

No sudden movements

It's too late for penance

Nothing will save you, not even your tenets

The chaos before the storm

The coiled viper strikes discord

Venomous lies spiked with scorn

Caught down stream without an oar

This has cut us to the core

This place is about to explode

Everyone knows the nuclear codes

Standing down and by in battle mode

A loner with a rifle ready to lock and load

He intends to make his killing quote

Misplaced morals

Public quarrels

Shooting fish in a barrel

Sit back and watch the horror

Like a hawk watching a squirrel

Empath

By Scotty Escobar

3rd Place Winner in SCC Fall 2021 Writing Contest

We're driving 40 miles per hour on the Pacific Coast Highway. I'm sitting in the passenger seat with my window rolled down. The ocean air slips into our car and overcomes the scent of 90s leather. My hair gets tossed behind me like ribbons. I stick my hand out and feel the cool wind curve and dance between my fingers.

"You know, when I was at the airport yesterday," Elijah finally says over the ocean breeze. "I saw a mother dropping off her daughter at the TSA area."

"How did you know it was a mother and daughter?" I ask as I begin rolling up my window.

"I don't, I just tell myself it was. It's recognizable to me."

I can't help but think of his mother who died six years ago. She died of lung cancer. Smoker. Lost all her teeth right before her lungs finally gave up. "And what about them?"

"Well, the mother hugged the daughter, and it lasted a good while. I was about twenty feet away, watching. Eventually, the mother lets go, and the daughter disappeared into the TSA line."

"Oh."

"Yeah. It looked like the mother was crying, too. It made me sad."

"It happens."

"You know, when I was still in college, my parents were the ones to drop me off at the airport. They'd pay for the parking and walk me over. It wasn't till I graduated that I

found out they would cry after I left. That's what they said, at least."

I pick up the aux cord and plug it into my phone. Scroll through my playlist, looking for something—"Sweater Weather" by The Neighborhood. "Was it Deborah or Cole who said this?" I say as I hit play.

"Mom."

"You trust her?"

"Not really, but what else can I do?"

"Ask Cole, I guess?"

"Doubt it. His Alzheimer's is pretty bad now."

After Deborah died, Cole started showing symptoms, so he sold his house and moved into a retirement home. His whole life working towards a house just to give it up in the end. "Exit in point five miles," our GPS announces.

"Was that it to the story?" I say.

"I guess. It just made me sad."

"Well, you're an empath. That's probably why."

"I wish I knew more."

"That's what life is I suppose. Just lots of questions. Don't think about it too much." "Okay."

We exit the highway, and by the time the song is over, we're pulling up to my apartment. "I'll text you once I get home," I say.

"Sure thing," he says back.

I finally step out, and he disappears between all the buildings. Everything has a pink tint now that the sun is setting. I make my way up to the third floor of my building. As I stand in front of my door, I look through my bag for my keys when suddenly, the door opens. It's Terry, my

housemate.

“Back from the beach already?” Terry says.

“Yeah, the bonfire was kind of boring. I don’t even know why Elijah and I still hang out with my high school friends. I swear, every year, we have less and less in common.” “Oh, come on now, it couldn’t have been that bad.”

“They are so sheltered. Half of them don’t drive.”

“Oh, Alexis. You’re such a negative Nancy.” Terry’s hand is now resting on her hip. “What can I say, I’m hard to please.”

Terry pulls the door open all the way so that I can get in. I walk through and slip off my sandals. Terry shuts the door and strolls over to the kitchen. The smell of popcorn fills the room. “Did you do anything fun while I was gone?” I ask Terry.

“Just watching *Gremlins*. 80s media is so weird.”

“Yeah, it’s 40 years old. Half the actors are probably dead.”

“Jesus, Alexis.”

“Sorry. I should go shower.”

I take the rest of my belongings to my room before heading to the shower. As I take off the jacket I borrowed from Elijah, I notice that the back of my neck is sensitive. “Sunburn, damnit.” I pick up my phone and text Elijah: “Guess who’s home with a sunburn.” Elijah doesn’t respond though. He’s probably still driving.

After I finish showering, I go back to my phone and dial my sister. The phone rings a few times, but she doesn’t pick up. I finish dressing and open my window. I lean out and

inhale California’s air. The sky is dark now, and the sounds of sirens echo between buildings. A cop’s siren. Maybe an ambulance. The signal of crime occurring or someone in an emergency. *If it isn’t you, it’s someone else needing attention*, I say to no one but myself.

I think back to the bonfire. We meet once or twice during the summer, and somehow, it feels like I’m meeting with strangers every time. They change so much. I change so much. It’s been eight years since we graduated high school, and we can barely keep up with each other. Someone starts a new job or gets a new boyfriend, and we only find out once we meet in person. Is this what happens to high school friendships? “Oh, I don’t work there anymore.” “Oh, I don’t live there anymore.” “Oh, I’m not dating him anymore.”

“I didn’t know,” someone eventually says. And of course, why would any of us know? We hardly stay in touch.

My phone buzzes. It’s my sister calling me back. I answer. “Hello?”

“Hi,” she says back. “Sorry, I was working on my statement of purpose.”

“The philosophy masters?”

“Yeah. I attended an info session today. Apparently, I have to name faculty members that I’d like to work with in my statement of purpose.”

“How’s that going?”

“The application or the faculty part?”

“Either one.”

“Well. It’s kind of slow. I have to research the program and the faculty members. There’s this one professor whose studying gender and performance though. She seems really

interesting.” “Did they tell you the acceptance rate for that program?”

“They accept five percent of applicants.”

“Yikes.”

“I know.”

“How much is the application fee?”

“\$140.”

“What the heck. That sounds like a scam?”

“It’s only a scam once they reject you. But anyway, I don’t want to keep talking about the application. Are you home yet? How’s Elijah?”

“Yeah, I got home an hour ago. Elijah is alright. He was telling me some story about how he saw a mom crying at the airport.”

“Oh, how come?”

“Not sure. I guess it was just on his mind. He said the mom was dropping off her daughter, and the mom started crying once the daughter left.”

“Sounds tough.”

I think back to when I first met Elijah in college. He had just secured residency in California and was able to qualify for in-state tuition. I remember first seeing him in a lecture hall of two hundred people by himself and asking him if I could sit next to him. Most students in the class had friends from a previous semester. Not him though. I might have been one of his first friends. It’s been a few years since then. I still wonder if we only grew close because we met so early into our college years or if it’s because he’s just that kind-hearted. The type to care about strangers at an airport or lend you their jacket when it gets cold.

“Yeah. Speaking of, I’m actually thinking of ending things with Elijah.”

“Wait, like breaking up?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“He’s a good person. That’s why.”

“That makes no sense.”

“He’s a good person. He deserves someone who’s good.”

“And you’re not?”

“No—”

“Come on, don’t say that.”

“I don’t care half as much as he does. He deserves someone who isn’t like me.”

“You’ll hurt him if you leave.”

“And I’ll hurt him if I stay.”

Dan's Story

By Anna Nguyen

Dan was born in a poor, farming family in central Vietnam . When he was two years old, he had been attacked by a rare virus and he couldn't walk normally like other children. For most of his life, he crawled on the ground.

At the age of five, his mother carried him on her shoulders to school. He loved learning and he paid careful attention on every subject . He never skipped school and of course I could tell that he was such a smart student. Unfortunately, his classmates were not nice to him. Sometimes, they called him mean names. He struggled a lot to cope with his disability. Luckily, his mother was his strength and motivation. She encouraged him to continue to live and to make a better life for himself.

One beautiful day, a missionary was sent to his village to promote education and brought him to America. Living in a new country without knowing any English at all was very difficult for him. He started studying day and night.

On the weekends, he went to the strawberry farms, crawling on the dirt to pick strawberries to get some money for the living costs. He didn't want to become a burden to the society. He wanted to be an independent person.

After many years of working and studying hard , he earned a high school diploma, Bachelors Degree, Masters Degree and then a Doctorate Degree. He is so proud to make his dreams come true because he has a wonderful family living in a cozy home with lovely children and grandchildren. He thought that only education could raise him up, could help him have a better life, could help him to become a useful citizen for the country where he lives. Seeing Dan's life, I admired him a lot. He inspired me by his strong effort and by his strong confidence. He is not only a good example for me, but I think for everyone.

Dreams

By Danny Abdulrazak

2nd Place Winner in Spring 2022 SCC Writing Contest

“Hello, my name is Thomas Keller, my friends call me Tom. I am 18 years old and for the past 5 years I have been the Stupendous Salamander.”

Thomas Keller takes off his mask revealing his secret identity to the world. In just mere seconds he has become the most famous man in the universe. Questions come pouring in from the reporters.

“How did you get your powers?”

“Is it true you're in league with Doctor Death?”

“Is there a Salamander Woman?”

The flashes from the camera blind him as he walks backstage and quickly into the limousine. Part of him is relieved to have lifted the burden off his shoulders. Another part of him worries about what his enemies will do now knowing his identity. All that he knows is that Thomas Keller, his wants, his desires, his needs no longer matter, as he has fully embraced the Stupendous Salamander.

“Abraham Lincoln gave his famous Gettysburg Address...”

Tom snaps out of his daydream. He should probably remember the date of the Gettysburg Address; it will most likely be on the test. Drifting in and out of paying attention, Tom thinks about his fake persona as the Stupendous Salamander. He loves comic books and superheroes. He thinks how amazing it would be. To be above the sky, to have the power to make a difference, to be someone. Someone who is not afraid to make themselves and their feelings known.

“Make sure to come prepared with your Civil War essays by Friday!” the teacher exclaims.

As Tom walks to his next class he notices a boy crying.

“Hey are you ok?” asks Tom.

“Oh? Yeah, I’m all good.” the boy snuffles his way through the statement.

Tom knows he is lying. He finds himself determined to come to the boy’s aid.

“Are you sure? It’s just I saw you crying and I just wanted to make sure you’re alright.”

“Well. It’s just that this is a new school for me. I’m kinda scared...worried. I don’t know. It’s stupid.”

“Hey, it’s alright man. We all have our first days at some point in our lives. It makes sense to be nervous. What’s your name?”

“Jack”

“Nice to meet you, Jack! I’m Tom!” Tom puts on the biggest smile he has for Jack’s sake.

“Nice to meet you too, Tom!” Jack’s tears finally dry away and a smile begins to form.

“Here I got to get to class, but why don’t you come and sit with my friend Matt and me for lunch?”

“Alright! For sure. Thanks, Tom.”

“Don’t mention it, Jack. See you later.”

“See ya, Tom!” Jack walks to his class. Tom can feel it. He can feel Jack has a sense of relief now. Jack will never know the feeling of being alone now. He has a friend and it’s all thanks to Tom. Tom was able to change someone’s life and he feels great.

It’s a good fantasy.

There is no kid crying. There is no Jack. Well, there are a bunch of Jacks, but this one was not real. This was all just some story cooked up in Tom’s head. Tom liked to fantasize about saving someone. Sometimes it would be princesses from dragon dungeons, other times it was something simple like helping a crying kid. Tom desperately wanted to be someone important, wanted to make a change. Tom was just a boy though, he was nothing special. Average height, average weight, average face, average grades, average personality, average. Tom knew he could not truly make a change, so he retreated to the

innards of his mind to change himself into the one that made the change. It was nice until reality kicked back in and he was just another kid walking to class. Another kid in a school of one thousand in a county of three million in a country of three hundred million in a world of seven billion in an ever-expanding and changing universe with trillions of different possibilities. Thomas Keller was not going to be the one to make a difference in this world.

Tom walked into his next class, Chemistry. Tom did mostly daydreaming here. Science had never been his best subject and it was so late in the day he would find himself drifting in and out of sleep. A lot of the time he would lean his head back and close his eyes and fall under the spell of slumber, only to suddenly snap his head back up to make sure he stayed awake. Tom’s friend, Matt, would watch this and snicker to himself, making a snide comment.

“Awwwww, you looked so cute all asleep Tom.”

“Shut up, Matt. Focus on elements and stuff.”

Matt had been Tom’s friend for a couple of years now. They were probably best friends, but it did not feel like that sometimes. They never had deep conversations or came to each other for problems. They had fun. That was all the two needed. They could hang out, watch a movie, and make each other die from laughter. They did not need to talk about their problems. Tom and Matt did not believe they had problems that needed to be talked about.

Not only did Tom have Matt in his class he had Jessica. Jessica in all reality was nothing special for Tom. She was beautiful, that was for sure. She seemed like a nice person; Tom had never actually talked to her to confirm this though. Jessica was just a girl that Tom wanted to talk to. He wanted to go up to her and say hi. Ask her about the class, how her day was, and anything he could do that would get her to notice him. Tom often daydreamed about situations like this. Sometimes it would go well, other times Jessica would laugh at him and reject him in front of the

whole school. Tom found himself imagining several possibilities.

Tom goes through several more daydreams in the hour and a half of class. Dating Jessica, saving the planet from a meteor, being a world-renowned actor, breaking up with Jessica, going to the front of the class and solving the answer like some kind of super-genius from a movie, and so much more.

The class ends. Matt and Tom say goodbye. Tom sees Jessica walking away.

“Hey, Jessica.”

“Hey. Tom, right?”

“Yeah,” Tom would laugh. “Class was pretty boring, huh?”

“Yeah, it really was.” Jessica would smile. Tom imagined she had the most beautiful smile in the world.

“Sometimes it’s really hard for me to stay awake in class.”

“No way, I am totally the same way. My buddy, Matt, is always giving me a hard time for closing my eyes and laying my head back.”

“I mean how could you not listening to Mr. Smith go on and on and on and on about Tungsten.”

The two clicked. Making each other laugh about their hatred of chemistry.

“Hey, would you maybe wanna hang out sometime?” Tom finally asked.

Jessica smiled and blushed a little, “Yeah, definitely.”

The two traded snaps. Tom knew he would text her before the day was over and they would hang out and it would be amazing.

It’s a good fantasy.

Tom is already on the bus ride home by the time he is done daydreaming about talking to Jessica. Sitting on the shaky bus, listening to the inane chatter of his fellow students, he can not help but wonder about how pointless his daydreams were if he was not going to do anything

about it. He just wanted to speak to her, it could not be that hard. So that day on the bus, Tom made a promise to himself that he would talk to Jessica tomorrow.

As Tom exits the bus he thinks about ninjas attacking him. A group sent by a super-secret overseas organization. Little do the ninjas know that Tom is well-versed in karate, boxing, jiu-jitsu, and wrestling. Tom easily defeats the ninjas. The fantasy is abruptly cut off when Tom approaches the door of his house.

As the door creaks open, Tom enters his house. His dad is gone and his mom is in bed. Tom walks past his mother’s room and sighs. She lays in her bed, unmoving, still. Tom goes to his room and lays on his bed. Thinking about Jessica. Wishing he had talked to her today. Wishes that half the stuff that he dreamt up would come true. He lays on his bed. Thinking about the potential relationship that could come. He tells himself to not get his hopes up. Even if he gained the courage to talk to her, it might not go well.

“Ew, you really think I would go out with you?”

“Sorry I have a boyfriend.”

“Who are you?”

“YOU TALKING TO MY GIRL BRO????!!!”

Just some of the many responses that Tom thinks could come from talking to her. Also having her 255-pound, pure muscle boyfriend beat him within an inch of his life for talking to his girlfriend. Even through all of that though, Tom thinks about how amazing it would be. The kisses they could share, the intimate conversations they would have, the nicknames they would have for each other. He knows he should not dream about this stuff. It may not be all that great. He should not put all his hopes and dreams on a girl, especially one he has never talked to before, he just can’t help it. He should at least be happy in his mind he justified to himself. If he can’t be happy there, where could he be?

The day goes by as it does. Tom watches YouTube, eats some leftover chicken, does his homework, texts Matt for a bit, and dreams.

“You can’t stop me, Salamander!” Doctor Death screeches at the top of his ironclad lungs. “I have all these hostages and if you take one step closer, they’ll all die.”

“What am I gonna do?” he thought to himself “Not only does he have all those hostages, he has Jessica. I have to ensure nothing happens to her and those people.”

“Ok, Doc. You win, I’ll let you have those missile launch codes.”

“Very smart, Salamander.”

The Salamander hands the missile launch codes to Doctor Death. All of a sudden, though, the Stupendous One shoots his patented laser beam from his wrist.

“You thought I would just hand over the codes, Doc? That metal you absorbed must have messed with your brain.” The Salamander lambasts the Doctor while pummeling him. The fight goes on for a few minutes and it looks like Doctor Death will be defeated.

“You think you have defeated me, don’t you, you cretin? But what will you do if I destroy this SUPPORT BEAM!” The maniacal Doctor launches a missile from his foot and destroys the beams that are holding the building up. Jessica falls off the building.

“NOOOOOO!” Salamander screams.

The Salamander launches himself down to catch Jessica as Doctor Death gets away once again. The two fall for just mere seconds, but for both of them, it might as well be a lifetime. Salamander is praying that she won’t die, that he will get to her.....and he does.

“Thank you so much, Salamander.” Jessica says, nuzzling her head into Salamander’s shoulder.

“All in a day’s work, citizen,” Salamander says trying not to blow his identity.

The two longingly stare into each other’s eyes and share a kiss.

Jessica looks into Salamander’s eyes. “I love you, Tom.”

Tom is taken aback by the revelation. How long has she known? Has she told anyone else? The questions race through Tom’s mind, but all he can muster to say is “I love you too.”

It’s a good fantasy.

Tom, still lying in his bed, makes a vow to himself. Tomorrow will be the day that he talks to Jessica. That tomorrow will be the day everything he has thought about will come true.

The next day comes. Tom sees Jessica as they both leave chemistry class and he says nothing. Tomorrow. He promises himself that it will be tomorrow.

Tomorrow comes and tomorrow goes as Tom says nothing to her once again. Tom would do this a lot. He would say he was finally going to conquer his fear of talking to Jessica, but he was just too scared to do it. He was too scared to do a lot of things.

Tom walked to his next class. The hallways were empty with the exception of a group of boys. Four boys were there surrounding one boy. It was not until he got closer that Tom saw what was happening. The boy in the middle has his bag on the floor, everything spilled out. The boy looked petrified as the boys kept on surrounding him. Tom was not stupid, he knew what was going on. They were bullying him. Tom stood there in silence for just a few seconds and he knew what he had to do.

“Hey is everything ok?” Tom asked.

One of the boys answered, “Yeah everything is cool, we’re just hanging out with our pal Joey.”

All the boys laugh at the idea of hanging out and being “pals”.

“Are you sure? Because it looks like Joey doesn’t want to be hanging out with you guys right now.”

Another boy chimed in, “That’s not true. Tell him how much you love being friends with us, Joey.”

Joey did not say anything which only angered all the boys.

“Hey come on Joey let’s go somewhere.” Tom reached out for his hand but it was smacked away by one of the boys.

“Why don’t you just leave us with our friend. Tom could tell that this was not a question but a statement.

“No. He obviously doesn’t wanna be here with you guys.”

“Yeah and what if he doesn’t. Are you gonna best us all up? Are you gonna save him?”

It was at this point that Tom wished he actually knew one of the martial arts he always fantasized about knowing.

“I’m not leaving without him.” Tom stood his ground not backing down.

Before anything could happen a teacher walked by.

“What is going on here? You know you kids cannot be in the halls without a supervisor.”

The teacher reprimanded all of them. No detentions were handed out, the boys were free to go.

The four boys looked at Tom and Joey with eyes that could kill.

“Hey Joey, you can walk with me from now on and I have a friend, Matt, you would probably like to.”

“Thanks,” Joey said rather meekly. He was obviously exhausted from the experience, but Tom knew he appreciated him sticking his neck out.

Sticking his neck out. That is what Tom should do, but he does not. Unlike the crying Jack though, this situation is real. Tom had to make a choice and he chose to not get involved. He walked away from the scene only hoping that nothing too bad happened to the kid. He was not sure what his name actually was. Tom wanted to get involved so bad. He wanted to be the hero. He wanted to be the good person fighting the good fight, but he just couldn’t.

Tom went home that day rather sad. He opened the door to find his dad home early from work.

“Hey there Tom. How was your day?” His dad asked. Tom placed his bag on the floor, “It was...ok”

“Well Tom, there was a substantial pause between your ‘was’ and ‘ok’. So why don’t you tell me what’s up?”

His dad could always read him. He could always understand him.

“I saw something bad happen today, dad. I walked right by a kid getting bullied and probably worse stuff was about to happen. I did nothing about it. I could have, but I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you do something, Tom?”

“I don’t know. I was too scared. I’m just not brave enough. I have all these thoughts in my head about being a good person and being a hero, but I don’t do anything about it. AND IT SUCKS!”

“Tom, Tom, it’s ok.” His dad consoles him, “You are a good person. You just made a mistake. I understand why you’re scared, but you just have to overcome it.”

“I don’t know how to,” Tom whined.

“Well, you like to imagine you’re a hero, right?”

What’s something heroes do a lot? They make sacrifices for other people. So if you won’t do it for yourself, do it for other people. Sacrifice your fear for someone else’s good.”

“Oh, I see,” Tom said unsurely.

“I know it sounds hard, Tom, but sometimes you have to put others before yourself.”

“No, I understand. It’s like all those heroes you used to read about in the comic books.”

“Exactly, Tom. So next time you see something like that happen, I want you to step in.”

“I will, dad. Thank you.”

“No problem, Tom. I love you.”

“I love you too, dad.”

It’s a good fantasy.

The conversation never happened. Tom's dad left a week or two ago. It all happened so suddenly. Tom never saw it coming. Everything was good one day and the next his dad left. It broke his mom's heart. She barely gets up now and just stays in her room for the most part. Seeing his mom like that made Tom angry at his dad, almost hate him. How could he do this? How could he just leave? Tom constantly thought to himself. Tom needed him the most now. His dad was always able to understand him and now he was just alone.

Tom sat in his room and made the promise to himself that he always did. He was going to talk to Jessica tomorrow. He thought that if he was able to get through that hurdle, the others would fall down. He could step in and help people in trouble, he could have the courage to talk to his mom and try to cheer her up, and he would be able to do it all. He did not need his dad's advice, he was on his own now. He was going to talk to Jessica tomorrow. As Tom sat in class he was greeted by Matt. He was ready for another hour and a half of daydreaming. But today is going to be different. He was going to talk to Jessica and it was going to go great. Today was the day. As the class ends, everyone hurriedly puts everything in their bag. Tom was ready. It was going to be his day. He walks out with Matt accompanying him. Jessica in his eyesight. His dreams were going to become reality.

"Hey"

"Hi"

"It was so simple. All I had to do was talk to her!"

"Yeah, it's really just that easy."

"Easy for you to say, I was a nervous wreck. I can't believe it though. She likes me! All this time while I was thinking about her, being too scared to do anything, she felt the same way. Isn't that crazy?"

"It really is." The boy sighs "I am really happy for you man."

"Thanks, I appreciate it." The two friends give each other a fist bump and start to walk away. "You're a great friend, Tom."

Tom has left once again with just his thoughts. The girl he liked did not like him back, she liked his friend. Not only did she like his friend, but she also daydreamed about him. Tom could not help but think about the irony. Tom was not heartbroken. She was just a girl in his class; one of many he had put all his dreams onto. Tom would move on, he knew he would. Tom was not heartbroken. He was embarrassed? He was sad? He was tired. Tired of seeing opportunities pass by him. Tired of wasting the little time he had on this planet stuck in his mind. Tired of saying today is the day, but pushing it until the next day. Tom was tired.

"Wait! Jessica!" Tom screamed.

"Tom? What's up?" Jessica asked puzzled.

"I like you t—"

Stop.

Tom stopped his daydream about some heartfelt confession to Jessica. What was the point? It's not going to happen. He missed out as he did with so many opportunities. Tom couldn't help but laugh at his futile situation. He hopes it will change at some point. But, for now, Tom is stuck in daydreams. Tom is stuck with no one to talk to. Tom is...

"The Stupendous Salamander! Look at him fly and soar through the air."

It's a good fantasy.

Photo by Danielle Magan



Photo by David Arcos

Pitch Black

By Chevy Stewart

As the time dwindled closer to midnight, I knew that the EXODUS of life was upon me. Seven pounds and 6 ounces... attached was a name that only a white trash mother and father could love. As the time passed in my life, my memories became the only thing to haunt me and become my perfect salus, when the darkness rolled in. Pitch Black.

My age progressed to two years old on this memory. As I felt the warm water surround me in a small rustic tub that no other than a week ago a boy of the age of sixteen overdosed in, the same place that I felt the warm waters embrace. My mother was a woman lost in a time of drugs and violence but to me she only smelled like sweet plastic. As my mother washed my hair, I felt and remembered every single last fingertip that glazed upon my head. Like a perfect symphony that only a heavenly Muse can compose. As she played her last note along my sun-bleached hair, the bathroom door crashed to the wall, revealing a stoic figure surrounded by his warmth. His anger was as choking to life as the smoke he inhaled to forget his. As I felt the stillness of the water like a lake right before the first drop of the storm splashes, I watched my father as he ripped her hand from my head to the ground with her body. As he laughed, he ran his fingers through her hair making sure to grab every last strand like a California wildfire engulfing anything that confronted its path.

As I watched this disgraced man I called my father, the only thing I felt was a fire to boil the water of which brought a

warmth through my spine. Once he was tired of her lying on the damp ground where he placed her, he gave me a look that I would fester inside of me for the rest of my life till fate plays my last key. Quicker than a diamond back, he lifted her above the vermin-ridden sink and used his forced breath to produce a laugh that echoed through the walls. Like a comet barreling to the earth, my mother's face also faced the same fate of a violent crash to reality. This dejected crustation gave her the same look that haunted me and shattered the mirror with the blood and flesh of a forsaken woman in a godless pit.

She collapsed to the sink engraving her blood-soaked fingerprints on the rim only to fall back and see the glass shine in the air like the Florida night stars that were ripped from her so long ago. Her cries may have been silent, but her tears slowly warmed with the blood and glass that expelled from her lips. As I watched my mother bleed from the floor, the only thing I heard was my "father" exclaiming that she will never leave him neither my brother or I. His words were only muffled by the sound of his footsteps collapsing on the glass as he left us in our pain and shame.

As every second time ticked by, my mother's cries became less apparent. After everything, the only thing that changed was the warmth of the bath. It became colder than the last moments of a unremorseful death row inmate. And more stained with my mother's blood than my birth. Nevertheless my bath was the only thing that got colder on that bathroom floor. Pitch. Black!

As the darkness of the memories begun to fade like a distress signal in the fog of night, my basic instinct to

survive was the only thing that resonated with me as a lesson I kept for the rest of my life. As a child, I remember the importance of sleeping with a glass eye open and colder than the blade I gripped at night.

Distant crackling and a laugh that was never familiar always arrived at midnight past five. As my eyes drifted to a numbing state of ignorance and restlessness, I never knew it would be the last time I ever felt that caused by the crackling sound of a door to my only tin house in a hurricane of violence and drugs. As my eyes darted to the empty space between the hall and the portal to my realm, it was only filled with a dark figure and the silent steps of a gazelle in a lion's den. As the creature glided on the shadows it cast, the moonlight that crept into the bullet holes faded from my sight like the warmth of a candle in a blizzard.

As the room filled with a darkness and confusion, I could feel the absence of god confined in an evil ditch surrounding itself by eight layers of sharp and blistering frost like the blade pressed against my neck. As the knife slowly pressed against my throat, I knew that this entity of a man was like no other I had ever encountered. He smelled of sweat and sadness that was only massed with an aroma of a blissful poison that flooded the world of the tears he and I had lost. As my blood began to drip on his blade, he whispered in my ear with a tone that encased my soul in ice and fear. "Never sleep in a jungle of snakes and rats without a knife against one."

As every last syllable left his breath, I began to see the imperfections of this being as he tried to display a smile of

confusion and eyes deeper than the acts this mortal man would commit just for one more last drop of this putrid nectar. As the last tear fell upon my cheek, I felt the sweet pain of my sadness enter the river of red that flowed through my body with an anger only Poseidon could imagine.

His eyes began to roll, and his smile faded quicker than the promise of a politician, causing his blade to slide through his fingers. Like a lightning strike on a dry summer day, the knife crashed onto my chest with a weight of an unmovable force. As his body began collapsing on the side of my bed to the floor, I could hear every crack of his bones twisting and contorting like a demon crawling to the surface. As my hand ran down the blade, I felt the rhythm of my heartbeat as I gripped tighter and tighter to my sword of Apollo that controlled my fear. I knew I had to survive.

As I raised the blade toward the ground, my eyes only captured an empty space. Grasping in fear, a chill ran through my veins like a heroin addict's last hit; I too feared the uncertainty of fate that Clotho has spun for us. With the seconds becoming minutes in a broken hourglass, I waited till his presence was shown with a step. To my shock, his voice echoed in the living room like a grand illusion. Stiff and still, my first lesson burrowed in my cortex, "A life that is controlled by fear is a life willing to die without a cause."

Very thoroughly, I examined every detail of this blade, and it became more apparent that this knife was a work of madness etched from the purest form of cherry wood. Engraved in the rear was a raven casting a numbing stare splitting the mind and body but nevermore leaving the spirit adrift in the fire indicated with the char around the handle.

With the blood and tears staining my hands to the grip, the connection between fear and sadness only incubated the flame that would set my tree of life a blaze.

As the weight of my eyelids began to grow, it also welcomed fear to cast its shadow over the light of my soul. Cold air swept through the room casting the luminosity away through the cracked window of my sight. Leaving the first memory to this madness to crystallize with frost sealing my eyes. Every night at 9, my mother would come in and check on us so she knew we were safe. This night in particular wasn't like the rest as my brother and I continued to wait for my mother's graces only to be condemned with restlessness.

After 2 hours, my glazed eyes rose and began to gaze at a silhouette of a woman. My nose was pierced with the fragrance of a sharp current of roses bottled and bought at a dollar store. Accompanied with the aroma was only 4 words to be the first cut embroidered on my heart between love and hate. "I'll be back, baby." Restlessness finally captured my will and slammed the shutters of my sight. All that remained were my ears catching her car take off in the dead of night for the last time. Fuzz, blur, confusion, and a time-lapse of silence are some of the only bridges of my memories destined to fall in a lake of vibrating black magma.

As the numbing heat began melting all my memories, all that remained were the glimpses that scorched my heart with a flame only to be described as Eternal, Pitch...Black.

Mountain & Stars

By Sophia Legarski

Description

Wood burning on pine tree wood slice



Pear of the Orient

By Clerre Rafanan

I awoke to the sound of the hummingbirds singing with the wind and the blinding ray of the sun. I was busy admiring the scenery in the city of Manila that was flashing before my eyes when a sudden puff of smoke abruptly met my nose. I stood up, quickly picked up my mat, and walked on the pavements. I went to the nearest public restroom and sprinkled myself with water. I also went inside one of the stalls to use the toilet. Dirt covered the whole bowl, and it made me wince. However, I had nowhere else to go but there.

I was startled when I heard the shriek of a young girl just outside the comfort room. I ran outside and saw a frightening scene that shook me to the core. An aged woman was lying down on the floor with a bullet buried deep inside her skin. Beside her was the young girl, still screaming and hugging the woman, who I assume is her mother. I looked around the city and saw two men, wearing blue uniforms, running away from the scene. I stared at the little girl and watched as tears ran down her cheeks.

After quite some time, a couple of cops arrived. Before covering the scene, they escorted the young girl to the police station. "Everyone, please move out! Nothing to see here," the police said. I glimpsed and saw one of them holding a bag filled with white powder. If my eyes did not lie to me, I saw them planting it inside the woman's pocket. "Ma'am, please get out of here," one cop said while his hands were inside his pocket, holding something that may endanger a person's life. A few days later, I still find myself waking up

to the sound of the little girl's scream. I slowly walked on the streets and passed by the television store.

"A 40-year-old woman, shot by the police, after discovering a drug packet inside her pocket," said the news reporter. I immediately stopped walking and turned my head to watch the broadcast. "Please listen to the statement of the police regarding the scene." After which, they showed the policeman, who looked familiar to me. "When we saw her, she was running along with a little girl. We called her out because we saw her pocket filled with something. She did not stop running, so we shot her as instructed by the president. We have the right to shoot criminals." I stopped listening, sluggishly continued walking, and thought, "What a messed-up place we live in."

After that day, the number of crimes made by policemen grew increasingly in number. Every day, I wake up with the fear of not feeling secure in the place I once called home. I always find myself getting startled by the faintest sound I hear. Preoccupied with my thoughts, I did not realize that the sun had already set until a man approached me. "Hey, Señorita. It's getting late. Wanna come with me?" The man asked. He looked pale, and he reeks of alcohol. Señorita? A foreigner, I suppose. I walked briskly to escape the alley and ran away from the man when I suddenly bumped into another man. He was taller than the other man and he had blonde hair. "Hey hey, where are you going? Come, join us, Darling. We are going to have a good time," he said and winked at me. "Stop," I faintly said. They both ignored me, smiled devilishly, and said, "Don't worry, babe. No one will hear you scream."

The night was still young when they finished their business with me. I sat down and shed every tear I could drop. People passed by me and saw me with ruined clothes but chose to ignore me. Some even looked at me disgustingly. After I pulled myself together, I stood up and went to the nearest police station. I knocked on the door, and the only cop who was there let me in. "What can I do for you, Ma'am?" He asked. "I would like to file a report, please," I faintly said while sobbing. He looked at me, stood up, and spoke. "A report for what?" After his question, he sat beside me. I replied while stuttering, "Rape." I stated. "Rape, you say." I looked at him when I suddenly felt his hand grazing my thigh.

I hurriedly got up to exit the station, but he pulled me with all his strength, and I had nothing left to do as weakness hugged every part of my body. ... As I was lying down in the middle of the street, it all sunk into me in the end. I have been ruined by all kinds of people, including my own. I will never be seen relevant. Every day, my name gets stepped on. Everyone will always see me as someone who was touched by monsters. My name? I am the one they call Pilipinas.

A Tale of Two Cookies

By Dr. Regina Rei. Lamourelle

This story was created for the children of Children's

Discovery Center.

It was the best of times, and it was the worst of times.

Charlotte, a Sugar Cookie, could not remember when things had been so good and bad. More sugar cookies were selling than she could ever remember. In fact, at the Cookie Exchange, there were so many sugar cookies that they had to stop cookie trading until the market settled down.

Charlotte, president of SCI (Sugar Cookie International), had appeared on a television show to tell about her success. Grandma Sugar's recommendation to add lemon to the dough was a real hit. Sales boomed when she suggested that people eat sugar cookies and milk before bedtime to relax and go to sleep. Apparently, people are influenced by what they see on television. The problem for Charlotte now was that the sugar needed for the cookie was in short supply. Charlotte was "one tough cookie," and she knew that she needed to find a fast sugar supply to keep her cookie market edge.

A sharp business cookie, Chancellor did not understand why Charlotte was complaining. She had fame, success, and lots of potential clients. Science was also on her side. Serotonin, a calming brain chemical released from sugar cookies and milk, really did help people sleep. She would have many clients. However, Chancellor's problem was somewhat different. He had plenty of supplies, sugar, flour, and chocolate. Plain, oatmeal cookies weren't selling so well, so he converted his factory to make chocolate chip oatmeal

cookies on the advice of a cookie counselor. How sweet the new cookie sounded. Chancellor would combine two main ingredients that people love, chocolate and oatmeal cookies. Chancellor was sure that his cookies could be just as big as Charlotte's if he only had some publicity.

Figaro, a Fig Newton, was one smart cookie. He knew that Chancellor would gladly share his sugar with Charlotte if she could help him with some publicity. It sounds like a "win/win," so Figaro knew he had to get these two cookies together to negotiate a trade. He knew just the cookie to help him, Ginger Snap. Ginger was the socialite of the bunch and knew how to plan meetings, parties, and ways cookies could meet each other. Figaro took Ginger, his old friend, to lunch and discussed his plan. She agreed to help if Figaro could get his cookie friends to donate some goods for her cookie charity event to help the less fortunate cookies. Figaro agreed, and the rest of the plan was a snap.

Ginger invited Charlotte and Chancellor to her Fancy Cookie Ball, and the rest was history. The two cookies sat next to each other, with Figaro and Ginger nearby. With some encouragement, Charlotte and Chancellor agreed on the terms of a sugar trade. Chancellor's chocolate chip oatmeal cookies did become popular, and Charlotte was happy to share part of the cookie market with him. She knew that without his help, she could have lost all her cookies. Chancellor learned from Figaro that his cookies and Charlotte's had a lot in common. Chocolate, the main ingredient in his cookies, also has a brain chemical similar to oxytocin that is good for thinking and caring.

According to the American Heart Cookie Association, oatmeal is also a very good fiber for the heart. Ginger Snap was a socialite, but she also had a cookie conscience and some final advice. Ginger reminded all the cookies that they were only snack items and should be eaten in moderation. Just because they have some good chemicals in them does not mean that people should eat too many or too often. Ginger told her friends that they had a duty to add this information to the cookie packaging. At first, the cookie friends were reluctant but remembered how cooperating helped them solve their problems and be successful. After all, if people only ate cookies and became sick, no one would ever want any cookies. That would not be good for all cookies.

So the cookie friends agreed and banded together to form the Responsible Cookie Coalition and passed the “Cookie Information Act.”

Photo by Emma Whitehead



-ew my father.

By Michael Green

My dad loves going out of town. Something about being around people he's never met or seen. I never really understood it, but one look into his eyes when we step foot outside our little community and I can tell he's having a blast. My mom... Not as much of a fan. It's the stereotypical fun dad and buzzkill mom trope from the movies.

"A road trip?"

"Yes, love! A glorious road trip. We'll escape this boring town and explore the world!" "And by the world, I mean Wisconsin," he whispered to me with his signature double wink.

"I thought we weren't traveling until next year? It's expensive, and Dennis has school."

Like I said, buzzkill. I'm Dennis Morte, Jr., by the way. I'm fourteen, going into my freshman year of high school. Not much else to say about me. I like video games, have no friends, you get the gist. Ironic because apparently my dad, Dennis Morte, Sr., was the most popular kid in school: quarterback, homecoming king, valedictorian... valedictorian? Whatever, he was top of his class. A golden boy according to my mom, Layla Morte.

Which of course continued into adulthood. You were thinking that he got a regular great job like a doctor, or maybe an engineer, right? Nope. He owns gas stations. Half of Wisconsin's gas stations to be exact. How did this happen? No idea, he probably just charmed his way into it. Guess what this lets him do...Travel...All the time. I don't

mind though, I usually get a new video game at some point on the road.

"Actually Mom, I'm done with all my homework for the week." A lie of course.

"Oh—well—well that's wonderful." She did a double-take. Seemed like she had to readjust like something didn't go to plan."

"Nice work, Killa! See, Lay? It'll be amazing. I promise. I have the whole thing planned out." Killa was my dad's nickname for me. He saw me playing Call of Duty once and got carried away.

Mom gave a tight smile.

"Okay, Baby, whatever you want."

"Yes! Pack your bags, Killa! We're heading out, over." I played along.

"Sir, yes sir! I'll be ready in zero-five minutes, Sir!"

"That's my boy!"

Before I went upstairs, I caught a glimpse of my mom. She was empty. Like all the life had been sucked out of her. It was nothing to worry about though. That was the expression she made every time we were going to "Escape this boring town."

I saw a TikTok the other day about how some people can't control their emotions on the outside, but have full control on the inside and some people are the opposite. Made me wonder if mom is screaming on the inside, but I mean damn. How much would you have to hate leaving town to cry about it every time?

Anyways I had to get some sleep, so I stopped thinking about it. Had to be up at 4:30 am so “We can make the absolute most out of our time out of town!” Says the 6’7 energizer bunny I, somewhat skeptically, call my father.

We finished loading up the car and finally got on the road. “Hey, Jr. You hungry?”

“Not too bad right now, but maybe we should pick something up for later?” “I think that’s a good idea,” Mom said. She looked like she cheered up a bit from before.

Dad just smiled. We pulled into the closest gas station. Of course, that meant he owned it.

“Alright! Your orders, Captain?” Apparently, I’m the captain now.

“Two Fantas, one Dr. Pepper, nine chips. On the double, Lieutenant.”

Not sure when I got good at this military banter. I guess it runs in the blood, wish the girl charm could’ve been hereditary too.

Dad pulled up and started filling up our SUV’s tank. He gave me and mom a quick salute. Then headed for the convenience store part of the gas station. I think I mentioned before that it’s literally 4:30 in the morning. The store opens at 6:00 am so there shouldn’t have been anyone there, but dad owns the station so he has a key of course, but I saw a car in the parking lot. “Hey, kinda weird there’s somebody here this early, right?” I said to mom.

She tensed up, it must have been 20 seconds before she said anything. “Mom?”

“Yeah, it’s definitely pretty weird!” She let out a nervous laugh. My mom always did weird stuff from time to time.

I just chalk it up to her being a little awkward, probably where I get it from.

ring ring

Mom’s phone was buzzing, she just looked at it though. Lifelessly. Must’ve been my dad. Hard to imagine one of her teacher friends calling her at 4:30 on a Friday. Anyways, the ringing eventually died out.

“Who wa-“ Before I could finish,

ring ring

This time she picked up. The conversation lasted for about 45 seconds, didn’t hear a word until the end when she hung up the phone with a heavy “okay.”

“Hey! Why don’t you play some music? I’m going to go to the bathroom really fast,” she said in an oddly upbeat tone.

“Uh, sure. Play whatever you want. Music’s never been my thing.”

Not completely accurate, but my dad would never let me off the hook if he knew I listened to anime theme songs for fun.

“Alright don’t blame me when you don’t like it. Hey Siri, play my liked songs, ‘ok playing your liked songs.”

We always imitated Siri in unison. It was one of the few connections we had.

“Hey, kinda weird there’s someone here this early, right?”
Dennis said. *Shit. Shit. Shit. Why is there someone here?
What the hell are they doing? “Mom?”*

*Okay Layla, calm down. He might not find them. You need
to act natural. Breathe.*

“Yeah, it’s definitely pretty weird.”

*Good, that was calm. As long as Dennis doesn’t ask too
many questions I can keep him uninvolved. Okay, it’s been
a couple minutes so he probably didn’t find anyone in
there. All goes well, it will be a normal trip. Is that too
optimistic? Am I being naïve? I don’t know. I just don’t
want to k-*

ring ring

No... no... no! He wasn’t supposed to call! Fuck!

“Who wa-“

ring ring

I need to pick it up. Pick up the phone, Layla!

“Hey, babe, what’s up?”

“Oh not much, just found a rat in here. I want you to help
me clean it up.” “Oh.”

“Aw, I’m glad you’re excited. I know I am. So get your ass
in here and make sure you turn on some music. Wouldn’t
want our son to get in on the family business would you?”

“Okay.”

“Good girl.”

*If...If this is what I have to do to keep Dennis safe, I’ll do
it.*

“Hey, why don’t you turn on some music? I’m going to
the bathroom really fast.”

I hope the rat isn’t young.

“Uh, sure. Play whatever you want. Music’s never been
my thing.”

*That’s a lie he listens to that anime stuff all the time. Oh
god, what if the rat is a high schooler?*

“Alright don’t blame me when you don’t like it. Hey Siri,
play my liked songs, ‘ok playing your liked songs.””

*He still mocks Siri with me after all these years. Yes, he’s
worth this. I’m doing this for him.*

The speakers blasted “Numb” by Tom Odell.

I should’ve told Dad I had to pee. Why am I awkward
with my own damn family? There should be limits to how
much the universe screws me over. It’s been like 15
minutes since mom went in so they should be out soon.
I’ve heard “I hold my hand over the flame —To see if I
can feel some pain” about twenty times too many. Gonna
throw on “Skyreach.”

“Hey, Killa sorry we took so long. You know how your
mother is, believe it or not, she’s still cleaning the
bathroom! She should be out in a minute. What’s this
music by the way?”

“Oh, um I don’t know. A friend recommended it. It’s from some anime about a country of killers or something, I think.” Okay, I know what you’re thinking, but this wasn’t completely a lie! My friend did recommend it...five years ago and it’s now one of my favorite animes of all time, so it was kinda true.

“Sounds nice. You should give it a shot and let me know if it’s good.” That sounds...nice?

“Yeah, sure thing.”

Once mom came back from what I assumed was the bathroom break from hell, they finally got settled and I finally got my snacks.

“Hey, Dennis, I grabbed some snickers in there, but I don’t want them anymore. Want them?” Mom never gave up her chocolate so there was no way I was gonna pass this up.

“Yes, please!”

She threw it into the last row where I was sprawled out. Of course, I didn’t catch it. I can confirm the athleticism was not hereditary either. The chocolate and caramel combination from heaven escaped under the seat in front. When I finally grabbed it there was a note.

“Under your seat, whatever you choose. I love you.”

Under the seat? What? Are they candy options or something? Oh...

A snickers bar in one hand and a gun in the other, I didn’t know how to react. I instinctively looked up ready to unleash some sarcasm. Then I saw my mom’s dark brown hair. It was messy and unorganized. Neither of us have

ever been morning people. I remember Dad used to wake us both up so we could get to school on time.

I looked over at the driver’s seat to try to find my Dad. I couldn’t find him. There was just a human or something like it. Looked exactly like my dad with the same short black hair and lame dad sunglasses, but it wasn’t him. This...thing had a gun to Mom’s head.

It started talking. Something about this wasn’t supposed to happen, this is just as hard on it as it is on us, how is he going to explain this...I don’t know. All I could pay attention to was my Mom giving me a soft smile through the rearview. She mouthed “I’m sorry. I love you. I love yo-“

bang

“Hey, Killa? It looks like I’ll need a new partner! Who knew your mom was a rat! Weird, right? Well, you’re gonna be a good boy for me, alright? It’ll be just like your games! We’ll go on tons of road trips. It’ll be wonderful I promise!”

I think it kept talking. I was still trying to figure out what the red stuff on the windshield was. *Oh. It’s blood.*

“Hey, forget about her. She was dead weight anyway, but I’d hoped to have her around for a couple more years until you were ready. She couldn’t even do that right, believe it or not! Anyways, you ready to hit the roa-”

bang

I shot its shoulder.

bang

Photo by Kirsten Clerre Rafanan

The other shoulder.

“Ouch son! Those actually hurt, you know? How’d you get a gun anyways? I think my heart might be more hurt though. To think, you’d shoot your own father, disgusting!... I love it. The family business is in good hands,” he ended with a double wink through the rearview.

This thing was right. It was my father.

bang

This time at its head. I was alone. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t cry. All I could think about was how I never kn-

bang



Excerpt from the novel, *Caught Inside*

By Professor Lynnette Beers

This is an excerpt from a chapter in my novel. The novel is titled CAUGHT INSIDE, and I've titled this excerpt the same title. The novel will be released in July 2022 by Flashpoint Publications.

As Maddie Fong watched the breakers far in the distance, her heart thudded hard. Kai hauled the surfboards from the truck while she sipped hot chocolate from a paper cup. Her mom had been dating Kai for a few months, but this was the first time he took her to this beach to surf.

Near the shoreline, small tumblers rolled onto the beach. Maddie stared at the soft morning light on the ocean. Bundled up in sweats and a hoodie, she read a couple pages from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, a book her English teacher recommended as summer reading. Maddie drank the rest of her hot cocoa and skimmed the next passage:

For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she often felt the need of... To be silent; to be alone...something invisible to others.

Maddie understood what Woolf meant by “something invisible to others.” At school, she often felt alienated, especially when kids teased her for being Chinese-American. Not purely Asian and not fully white, Maddie often felt invisible to others.

As Kai approached with two surfboards hoisted over his shoulders, Maddie scanned the next paragraph before they got ready to go in the water:

...and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind.

The floor of her mind seemed a peculiar way to describe a person's feelings, but the unique metaphor was surprisingly apt. And she'd never heard anyone describe waves as pure lemon.

Kai set both surfboards in the sand and rubbed wax on top of Maddie's board. “You ready to hit the waves? The surf report says the water's sixty-five.”

Maddie slid her book into her bag. “The water temperature seems warmer than the air right now.” She hunched forward and slipped her hands between her thighs to get warm.

“You'll stay warm in that wetsuit. The waves are perfect this morning. Just remember what you learned last week about not popping up on your board too soon.”

Maddie studied the waves breaking on shore. That familiar wave of fear washed over her as she recalled that awful night last summer in the lake when she almost drowned. “What if I go under and can't find my way to the surface?”

Kai crouched down next to her and looked at her intently. “I won't let that happen. I'll be close by the entire time.”

Maddie's body tensed. "I don't know if I'm ready for this."

"*Keiki*, over the past few weeks, I've seen the way you watch the breaking waves. The ocean is calling to you. Be silent, and you'll hear the call of the sea."

Maddie observed the steady swell as it headed to shore. "Hopefully I won't wipe out on the first wave."

"If things feel too scary, we'll go right back to shore. You did fine in the shallow area when I showed you how to dive under a wave. It's not much different farther out in the water. In fact, it's actually safer because you can gently glide under the breaking wave and not get pounded in the shallow area."

Maddie knew Kai was right. She nodded and took a deep breath as she pulled out the wetsuit from her bag. Kai looped the Velcro around his ankle and then hoisted the board under his arm. Maddie wiggled into her wetsuit, then fastened the leash around her ankle and lifted the board. As they headed to the water's edge, Kai began to sing a Hawaiian song.

A small wave washed over Maddie's feet. "What's that song called?" "Aia i He'eia,' an old surfing chant."

The scary memories from last summer arose, but the steady baritone of Kai's voice countered the fear. "Hopefully the song will bring me good luck as I try to surf. What do the words mean?"

Kai furrowed his brow and set his surfboard on the water. "The song describes a Hawaiian king who tried to impress

a woman with his skill at surfing. One part of the song translates to how the waves 'slip and slide, smoothly over the sandbar. It was I who glided all the way to shore, but I was mistaken about finding love there.'"

Maddie grinned. "That's really nice. Hopefully I'll be able to glide all the way to shore."

Kai waded out farther, and Maddie followed him. Once knee-deep in the ocean, she set the surfboard in the water and glanced back to the dry sand. She was already so far from shore.

"Are we going out to where those surfers are?" Maddie pointed to the area way past the shore breakers.

"In time, *keiki*, but not today. Remember, your mom told me to bring you back safe later today."

Kai laughed, his face quickly relaxing into a huge grin.

The surfers soared effortlessly on top of what looked like pretty big waves. None of them looked scared. Maybe Maddie could do it, too. "What if I get up on one of these small waves right away? Then will you take me out to the bigger waves?"

"Maybe in a couple weeks after you master the small ones. This morning, we practice riding waves in the shallow area. Just remember, you never wanna get caught inside."
"Caught inside a wave?"

"No, caught between the shoreline and the crashing waves. Nothing but whitewash in that area. You get caught inside,

and you'll have trouble paddling out to the surf line. You end up using up a lot of energy battling the surging water.”

When another breaker sloshed over her, Maddie studied the huge waves out in the distance.

“The waves are getting bigger. Do you ride waves that big?”

“I’ve mastered much bigger waves on the North Shore of Oahu.”

“You think I could ever be good enough to surf huge waves like the ones in Hawaii?”

“Sure, I started out only being able to handle small waves like these. When I was your age, I was nothing but a scrawny kid. Eventually I got good...and got bigger. Next thing I knew, I was surfing Pipeline. Guys who’d been surfing most of their life respected me.”

Only fifteen, Maddie couldn’t imagine surfing huge waves like Kai did at this age. But the floor of Maddie’s mind became flooded with excitement. “Those waves seem pretty big.”

“Maddie, you’ve got what it takes to be a great surfer. I’ll teach you a few things you can do as you ride the waves to impress your friends. Assuming that’s what you wanna do...impress your friends, right?” Kai grinned.

Maddie couldn’t hold Kai’s gaze and quickly glanced into the water. Below the ripples, the pattern of the sand stood out vividly on the floor of the ocean. She never imagined

that the ocean was this clear and beautiful past the whitewater.

Kai looked out toward the approaching breakers. “As long as *maka ‘u* doesn’t get in the way, you can be good at surfing.”

“Who’s *maka ‘u*?” Used to Kai inserting Hawaiian phrases and names into his conversation, Maddie tried to learn as many of these words as possible.

“*Maka ‘u* means fear. In life, you can’t ever let fear stop you. You master *maka ‘u*, and you can conquer anything. These waves are nothing compared to what you might face in life someday.” Kai stretched out on his board, motioning for Maddie to follow him.

Once Maddie got settled on her board, she stroked her hands through the water and headed straight for a tumbler. Fear rushed through her body, temporarily immobilizing her. Maddie braced herself for the force of the water. She held her breath and dipped the front of her board under the whitewater. The water gently sloshed over her body. She emerged on the other side of the wave— unscathed and exhilarated.

Another wave magnified in the distance. Even though Maddie’s hands trembled and her heart thudded hard, she got ready for the wave. As the wall of water barreled toward her, she pushed away the fear and paddled hard until she tapped into the energy of the wave. For a moment she rode the breaker while lying on her tummy, but then she

popped up and got her feet in the right position. Soon, she dipped down the face of the wave. How thrilling it was to glide over the ocean—to feel one with the wave.

Maddie rode the tumbler all the way to shore. Eager for another wave, she paddled through the whitewater and headed toward the cresting waves. As she dove under a breaker, she finally understood Woolf’s description of the waves and how “the blue went out of the sea and...rolled in waves of pure lemon.” The breakers, tinged with the golden light of morning, surged toward shore while Maddie paddled back to the surf zone.

Copyright Notes for "Caught Inside":

Excerpts from TO THE LIGHTHOUSE by Virginia Woolf. Copyright © 1927 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, renewed 1954 by Leonard Woolf. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

The passages from Woolf’s TO THE LIGHTHOUSE used in the electronic version of "Caught Inside" published in Talon Magazine are included with permission from The Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Virginia Woolf at: 84 Drayton Gardens, London SW0 2SB, UK.



Photo by Emma Whitehead

Reflection on my Grieving Process

By Ciara Stapp

Grief. It feels like a shadow that constantly follows me around. I've lost family before, when I was too young to truly understand or feel it. This time I. FELT. EVERYTHING.

My grandfather was my best friend. He was the first person I called when something happened to me, or if I just needed to hear the voice of someone who believed in me wholeheartedly. We saw it coming for years as his health slowly deteriorated. I knew it was coming. I had even spoken about it numerous times with him. He was adamant about the fact that he didn't want any tears after he was gone. He just asked for me to remember him with happiness and to tell my future children about him.

Even with the forewarning signs, I only ever thought of that moment; what came after never even crossed my mind. No one told me that after was the hardest part. I spent my waking moments wondering how people ever just kept on living, how the sun kept on shining, and how in the world I was going to be able to go through the rest of my hopefully long life without him.

Even in my sleep I dreamed of him. I don't have the comfort of a religion that tells you there will come a time when you will see them again. I don't believe that. Neither did he. I think that was all the time I had with him. And it will never be enough. It didn't just feel like losing him; it felt like losing me too. In one instant I lost my rock. The man who helped raise me, taught me to fish, drive, took me to tutoring, drove me to practice, and just about every other possible thing I needed to know to turn me into the woman

I am now. And I was expected to just keep living. How can I do that? When my life was forever changed?

I had to relearn who I was without him. It was a hard lesson in independence and identity. Did I want to be the person who just wallows in self-pity, or did I want to become the person he always thought I was? I want to love me like he did. I want to be someone who can think of him and remember the amazing things and not feel crushed under the weight of grief.

I am getting there, slowly. I have made many decisions in my life that led me down the wrong paths. But choosing to finally live my life the way he always knew I could will forever be the best one. I know so much more about me after these last two years. I have been through every emotion. Felt every single second of missing him. Had to give myself grace and the room to keep making mistakes. But I would change nothing.

He helped make me who I am, and continues to do so long after he is gone. That is his legacy to me. That's what I fight for everyday when I wake up. I will never get over losing him. But I no longer think it is something to get over. It is something to embrace. I can't wait to see how much more I will change and grow. That is what he did for me. I thought losing him meant that he took all my strength with him. In truth, it forced me to be my own strength. I will forever be grateful to have had so much time with him. Yes, I felt every moment of this grief, but I also felt every moment of every memory I have ever had with him. That is a gift I won't ever be able to repay.

Now, I can't wait to feel every moment of the rest of my life because of him.

Comedic Biography of an Opposition Politician Who Fled His Country

By Mojtaba Ali Hemati

He was born as a child to a pregnant mother with a remorseful father.

He had an older brother who was born two years before him and committed suicide at the age of six months.

He went to school very early, but wasn't interested in science, so with great effort, completed the six-year elementary course in nine years.

He lost his uncle as a child and was raised by his father.

He was very interested in weightlifting but said: It was too heavy.

He played basketball for a while to get taller, but got a few inches shorter.

He is currently only interested in mountaineering and water skiing, of course watching them on YouTube.

As a young man, he was prosecuted and banned from leaving the country for wearing a short-sleeved shirt on charges of spying for foreigners and acting against national security, so he decided to go to Bangladesh secretly. He left the country secretly by a drug trafficker in a disguise (long-sleeved shirt) in a charcoal sack embedded in a truck, but found himself disembarking in Turkey.

He went first from Turkey to England and then to Britain and from there to UK, but when he realized that all three were the names of one country, he left there forever and went to London.

He has been arrested several times in London for drunk driving but still believes that he, like his compatriots, drives better after drinking alcohol.

He believes in all the divine books and he is careful not to fall on his head.

He respects all religions and considers the prophets as the main criminals.

His favorite book is *The Art of Cooking*; he has memorized it completely and among politicians, he likes Nelson Mandela, but now loves Melania Trump.

As a child, he wanted a magnifying glass, a magnet, a ping pong ball and a flashlight, which he now has bought for himself.

His favorite regime is communist-leaning capitalism, that is, the equitable distribution of wealth among the rich, the equitable distribution of poverty among the poor, the distribution of tanks among the occupiers, and the distribution of Viagra among the invaders.

He hopes to one day seek refuge in his own country.

Meet the Creators

Danny Abdulrazak is an English major with aspirations to become a writer. When writing “Dreams,” he wrote based off of personal experiences, particularly the day dreaming aspect of it. He was also heavily inspired by his favorite movie, *(500) Days of Summer*.

David Arcos is currently pursuing a degree in film and hopes to become a film director and writer someday. He bought his first camera in middle school and has not stopped shooting short film and photos since.

Lynnette Beers has been an English professor at SCC for over twenty years. She's the author of four novels, including *Saving Sam* and *Caught Inside*. She's an avid mountain biker and ocean swimmer. She's currently working on a historical novel set in Hawaii in the 1940s. A few years ago, she was an author in residence on the Island of Molokai in Hawaii where she began working on this novel.

William Briar is a biology major who likes to collect antique tea cups. He is inspired to write by watching the stars in the night sky. One day he would like to attend medical school and become a pediatrician.

Danielle Chou is currently an English major. Her career plan is to go into English education and become a teacher. She likes to do sketches and make illustrations during her free time.

Deanna Dang holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Services & is a retiree from Social Services Agency of Orange County. Music and singing are among her hobbies. She has taken many music courses at both SCC and SAC. She also attended the online class, Music Play, of SAC Continuing Education Program. The first song she wrote was a final homework of the Theory class. “Sunset over the hills”, is the second song she wrote, with input from Dr. Do, the instructor of the Music Play Class. She was inspired by the knowledge and practice she learned from many different professors from SCC and SAC. She also is really excited to discover her capability to compose her songs, simply a transcription from doodling to music. She really enjoys many beautiful aspects of life and wishes to express the love of life in her music.

Chevy Dean Stewart's academic field is, in his own words, "complicated." His original field was anthropology, but he lost interest in understanding an understandable creature made from the dust of stars. Now, he is just searching for himself lurking deeply between the blood and lines that run through his soul.

Djubilee Do is earning an A.A in Arts and Humanities and hopes to write stories for a career.

Scotty Escobar (they/them) is a recent modern languages graduate. Scotty hopes to continue working within visual and literary spaces. Scotty's work has been featured in The Queer 26, The Thought Collective (Issue 1: The Everyday), Influx Collectiv, and QueerLand Zine: Rebirth.

Kevin Floback is SoCal born & raised. He is a history major who hopes to one day be a history teacher. He was inspired to write poetry after learning that his great grandfather did the same and reading some of his poems.

Jessica Gilbert is an administrative clerk at SCC. In 2017, she received the Distinguished Classified Part-Time Employee Award. After 23 years out of college, she returned to study at SCC, earn her Associate in Liberal Arts, and pursue her Bachelor's at California State University, Fullerton.

Michael Green II studies Psychology and Gender Studies at SCC. He hopes to be a psychiatrist and then enter politics. He learned to read from playing Star Wars: The Last Republic so perhaps that's why his writing tends to be very dramatic and bold.

Joshua Guardado is currently majoring in Biology at SCC in the hopes of working in the field with animals. He is a first generation college student with four siblings. Joshua grew up with imagination being the primary form of entertainment.

Caitlyn Hodgkin is a former SCC student who now attends Cal State Long Beach where she is earning a teaching credential for secondary education. She hopes to teach high school English and journalism.

Dr. Regina Lamourelle is currently the department chair for the Human Development department at SCC. She serves on the Board of Orange County Association for the Education of Young Children and is a former Orange County representative to the California Association for the Education of Young Children. She speaks three languages and holds a doctorate in Child and Youth Studies. Since 1996, her passion has been to teach educators how the young-to-adolescent brain learns so that they can care for children with kind hearts and with the knowledge of the child or adolescent brains' unique developmental needs.

Sophia Legarski is an Art Major. She loves to make art that is completely hands on by using paint, pens, charcoal, wood burners. A lot of nature aspects and designs play into what she makes, along with scripture. Her biggest inspiration is The Most High Elohiym. Everything that He has created and set before us, never ceases to amaze her. She is always in awe of everything that He has formed; the mountains, skies, trees, lands, plants, animals. She knows that is why she always resorts to making art that has to do with nature.
•Amos 4:12-13•

Will Lennertz has been an English professor at SCC for 31 years. He has been dedicated to creative endeavors his entire life and continues to expand his interests, which include poetry, fiction, painting, and music. His latest creative endeavor is building and playing cigar box guitars, an American folk tradition.

Leopoldo Marquez is a 31 yr old father to a 6 month old boy and married to wife Susanne. He is also a USMC Field Artillery Veteran. He started SCC last August and is currently finishing his GEs. His field of study is Nursing, and he hopes to transfer to West Coast University for their accelerated Nursing program next summer. One of his greatest interests is how death affects the human psyche.

Ashlee Okamura is a business major who also wants to minor in film and media studies after transfer. She has been doing photography for about four years now but started getting more into the editing and Photoshop aspect just over a year ago. One of her favorite things is to take inspiration from her favorite TV shows or films and transform them into a photo that feels surreal. Also, she would love to work in the film industry in the future, but her ultimate career goal is to work at Pixar Studios.

Dorothy Palin is undecided on her major but thinking about pursuing a degree in sociology and then eventually entering into social work. She loves teaching children at her church and believes the best way to connect to readers is to find something they hold dear and then treat that topic with respect, dignity, and clarity.

Shyamali (Shy) Perera is a returning adult student. She is transferring to CSUF in Spring 2023 to continue her BA degree in English. She has been a Montessori teacher and early childhood educator for almost four decades, and after graduating, she hopes to be a high school English teacher. Reading has always been magical because her parents made reading a fun activity growing up. She made picture stories as a child and knew that someday she wanted to be a children's story writer. She has acquired her creativity and storytelling from her mother and from three generations of women before her. Her hobbies are writing (children's stories/poetry, cookbooks), reading, nature photography, and knitting.

Marcelo Pimentel is a philosophy professor and department chair at SCC. He speaks Portuguese (his first language), English, and learned Spanish as a teenager. After transferring to Cal State Fullerton as an art major, he describes "falling in love" with philosophy. He completed his bachelor's degree at Fullerton and received his master's degree from the University of Nevada, Reno.

Kirsten Clerre Rafanan is a Biology major aspiring to be a scientist. As a Filipino citizen, she has long-term goals driven by her love for helping. She wishes to accomplish things deemed impossible- like treating incurable sicknesses. Her ultimate goal is to focus on cancer research and find inhibitors that will successfully obstruct the bad cells. She has had a couple of research experiences in the medical field. To this day, she is studying and collecting information on Gene therapy. She will use this gathered knowledge in the future for the betterment of the world. During her free time, she loves using the piano to play her favorite piece, Katawaredoki by RADWIMPS. She also enjoys watching Japanese shows. Her favorite anime is Naruto: Shippuden. Aside from that, she also enjoys embroidery, which she shares online publicly. Clerre has an uplifting spirit that influences the people around her to be more optimistic and enthusiastic.

Abigail Roe attended SCC from 2016-2018 as a high school student before receiving an Air Force scholarship. She earned her biochemistry degree from Cal State Fullerton in 2022, and received her commission as a 2nd Lieutenant this June. She will serve as an Intelligence Officer at Goodfellow AFB in Texas. Her true passion is baseball which she has played since she was four.

Nathaniel Roe graduated from SCC in 2018 with an English degree. He went on to get his secondary education teaching credential from Cal State Fullerton and now teaches at Chino Valley High School in Arizona. He is inspired by Emily Dickinson and the sonnets, and his hobbies include gardening, knitting, origami, and baking.

Samuel Rosa is an English major considering a career in teaching elementary school. He would like to bring the joy of reading to the younger generation. His hobbies include playing pickle ball and bowling.

Amelia Schuster is a former SCC student who is now finishing a degree at CSUF; she hopes to enter law school next year. Her dream job would be working as a prosecutor or a detective.

Theodore Stillson is a transgender Orange High School Dual Enrollment Student who graduated in June and plans to major in and teach Nordic Studies. Theo is also a talented artist and known as The Elder Scrolls Enthusiast.

Taylor Stringer is an art student majoring in graphic design who has already acquired an associates degree at SCC and is now pursuing a bachelors in studio art at Cal State Fullerton. Disney movies and cartoons have inspired Taylor to pursue a career in art.

Steve Chan Wai To is majoring in Computer Science. He is a STEM student who likes liberal arts; in addition to majoring in computer-related courses, he is also studying history, politics, literature, and cinematic arts. Steve enjoys watching movies at theaters and is a concrete jungle guy from the Far East now trying to acclimate to California's lifestyle.

Emma Whitehead is a first year plant science major with dual enrollment at SCC and at Cal Poly! She is from San Jose and has always really enjoyed learning and trying new things, which brought her to SCC and to this contest.



What
Happens
Here
Matters!

