

# PHOENIX

*essays • photos • poetry • stories • art*



**2013-14 Annual Edition**

**Milwaukee Area Technical College  
Literary and Arts Magazine**



## *Exterior Art Contributors*

– *Front Cover Photo* –  
**True Colors**  
Jan Aubrey

– *Back Cover Photo* –  
**Black and White Flowers**  
Rebecca Myers

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The Phoenix is a literary and art annual magazine published by the Phoenix Literary and Arts Society student organization with the full support of the English Department of Milwaukee Area Technical College. Its purpose is to provide a creative outlet for students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The Phoenix also encourages those who hope to launch artistic or literary careers. In addition, the magazine increases the campus-wide awareness of artistic and literary endeavors.

The Phoenix welcomes submissions of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, art, photography, and essays. Submissions are accepted year-round electronically through <[matcphoenix.com](mailto:matcphoenix.com)>. Non-electronic submissions are accepted from August through May and they may be brought to the Mailroom in the Main Building or mailed to: Adviser, the Phoenix, 700 West State Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233-1443.

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*Phoenix* | Greg Johnson





## *A Life Stamp* | by Michael Hammer

Living only a block away from Mr. Howard's candy store as a child was a treat. I went every time I had some change in my pocket. Most times though, I found myself going when I didn't have a penny to my name. It would be Mr. Howard who would teach me a lesson in trust that I would never forget.

I liked Mr. Howard. He was always quick with a smile and an offbeat joke that only he would get. I would laugh, or at least smile, to humor him. I liked playing the "guess which cup held the piece of candy game." He would place a piece underneath one of the cups, mix them up, and I would try to guess which cup it was under. I, of course, would always win. Mr. Howard would be amazed at how smart I was. For some reason this didn't bother him, and I loved to win that tasty treat.

One day, I found myself alone in the store. Mr. Howard stepped outside to speak to a neighbor. He had asked me to keep an eye on the place. I felt so important, someone at the age of seven taking on such responsibility. For the first time I truly saw the store which I spent so much time in. I was mesmerized by all the diverse colors all around me. The many shapes and sizes of the thousands of pieces of candy carefully placed in the glass cases, and counter top jars. The faded wooden floor would creak with each step I took as I explored all that I've seen before, but never truly noticed. All of this exploring was making me hungry.

I thought he would never notice if I were to help myself to my favorite candy bar. Besides, he gave me candy all the time. I started to work my way back to the front of the store. Although I could hear Mr. Howard talking outside, he wouldn't be able to see me from where he was. I had the candy bar in sight; my heart began to beat faster.

I placed the item in my pocket just as Mr. Howard walked in. Our eyes met. Mine must have shown terror, while his showed anger, a look I never saw before from him. Before I could muster up something to say, he told me to get out, and to never come back again. My heart that was racing slowly began to sink. What have I done? Everything at once came crashing down. I lost Mr. Howard as a friend, and I let him down. More importantly I lost his trust, which hurt the most.

Over the following weeks I tried to talk to Mr. Howard, to apologize, but he would have none of it. I missed my friend, and would do anything to gain his trust again. I vowed to myself that I would never steal again. Nothing like this could ever be worth it.

Several weeks later I walked past the candy store, Mr. Howard smiled at me again. I smiled back. Then I was elated one day when he invited me into his store. We were talking once again. I told him how badly I've felt and said I would never do anything like that again. He must have felt my sincerity and said he was sorry for yelling at me, but I knew that I deserved it. I wondered if



he would ever be able to trust me again. He then reached behind the counter and brought out those familiar cups. My eyes lit up, and he smiled. He then began to tell one of his jokes. When he finished, I laughed. I got it this time.

I did eventually earn Mr. Howard's trust once again. It didn't come easily, but was well worth it. That was a long time ago; it was a lesson that has stayed with me to this day. Now as an adult I find myself from time to time walking past the building that holds so many childhood memories for me. I stop sometimes to recall them, with that one particular lesson in trust always coming to mind. As I think about that day way back then, all I can do is smile.



## *Dare I Become?* | by Donald H. Schambow

“DARE I BECOME?”

Creative fires smolder,  
rekindle,  
blaze uncontrolled,  
subside into glowing coals.  
Then once more roar  
with threatening ferocity.

Dare I walk into the fire?  
Dare I allow myself  
to be consumed,  
and emerge, reborn,  
the one I will become



## *Questioning* | by Juan Del Aguila

Questioning  
Is what I was told  
Unless it was about “the man above”  
I was judged  
By those who said  
Only he can judge  
So I ask and no answer has come

Questions are all I had  
Is he real? Or not?  
Should I follow my gut?  
Or those that follow blindly  
no answer came

They told me what I need was faith  
And all the answers would come pouring  
But instead I got logic  
That’s when the answers started pouring.

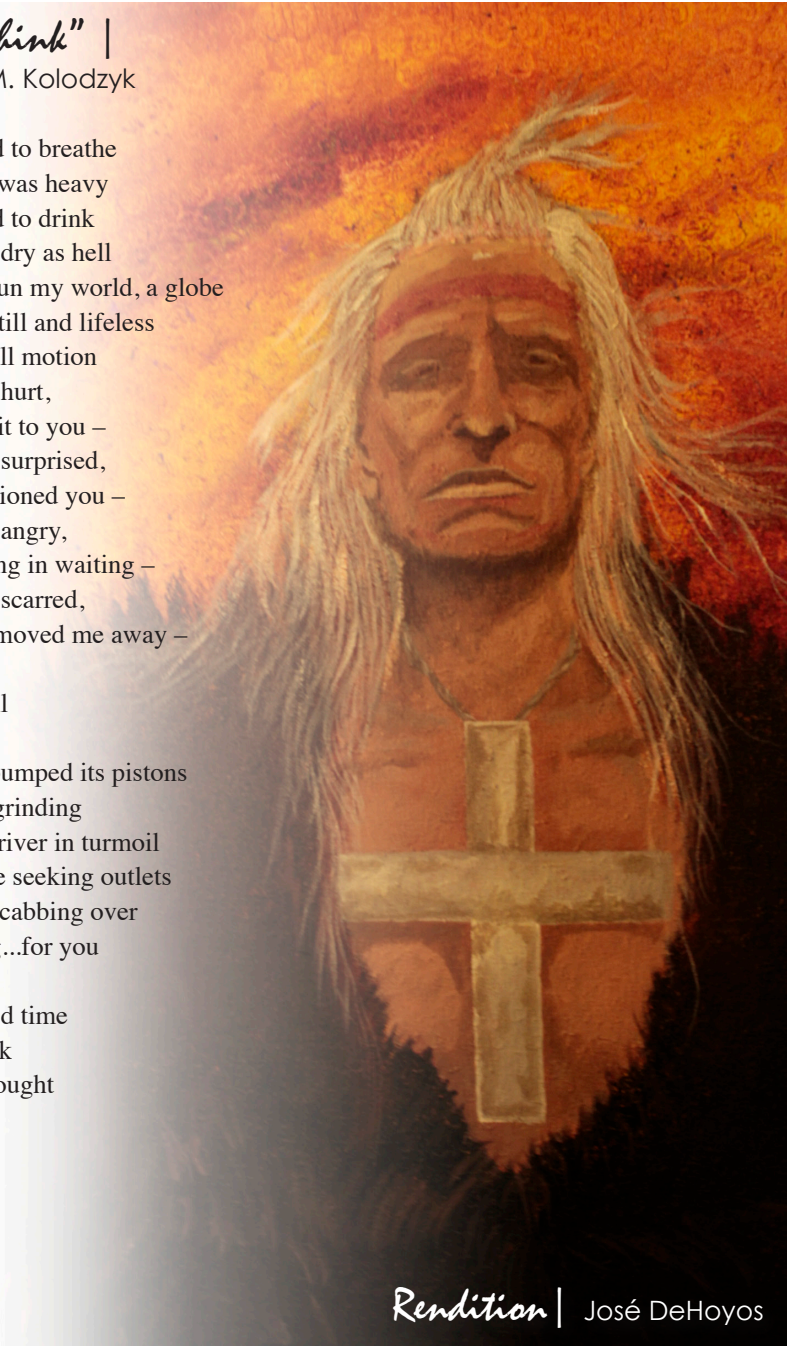
## "To Think" |

by J.M. Kolodzyk

Needed to breathe  
the air was heavy  
Needed to drink  
Throat dry as hell  
You spun my world, a globe  
From still and lifeless  
to in full motion  
– I felt hurt,  
took it to you –  
– I felt surprised,  
questioned you –  
– I felt angry,  
so long in waiting –  
– I felt scarred,  
legs moved me away –

But still  
Still  
Mind pumped its pistons  
Gears grinding  
Soul a river in turmoil  
spillage seeking outlets  
Heart scabbing over  
healing...for you

I needed time  
To think  
I've thought  
I now  
Know



*Rendition* | José DeHoyos



## *Escape* | by Mary Jones

*“If one says ‘Red’ – the name of color – and there are fifty people listening, it can be expected that there will be fifty reds in their minds. And one can be sure that all these reds will be very different.”*

– Josef Albers



“The Red Door” by Billy Knight used by Mary Jones, with Permission

Red is my favorite color; also one of Scorpio's, which I proudly boast as my astrological sign. It immediately draws me in, like a moth to a flame. It's energizing, powerful, ornamental, and obtrusive, represents sexuality, and is the color of the highest arc of the rainbow. It evokes action; stop, pay attention, incite, heed, usher. It lures and jabs my inner most precious feelings and private thoughts, and makes my heart race, as if I'm riding a horse running at full stride or watching the final seconds of a close basketball game.

The hue of the door entices me, and my degree of desire for the unknown rouses me to take action. Some would be intimidated by the deterioration, but somehow that beckons me. The passion to investigate leads to burning motivation and in turn, the driving question, what is held within? What mysteries and treasures are waiting to be discovered inside this seemingly abandoned shed, with a door of the most striking red hue? The blistering sun and torrid rains have battered it, paint peeling, revealing a plethora of shades underneath. Jet-black stains streak down the front, but I'm lured, nonetheless. It halts me in my tracks, as if I'd been snatched out of a blissful daydream by screeching brakes.

As I gaze upon it, my hesitation about opening the door swiftly moves to the forefront. Will bats fly out? Are raccoons or squirrels residing inside? Is it infested with spiders or wasp nests? Then again, shelves lined with fascinating trinkets and treasures, perhaps antiques, anxiously awaiting rediscovery, may exist. The eagerness to explore tugs my most basic curious nature, and I grasp the charcoal black weathered handle. It is smooth and worn, like my favorite jeans, and dirty and greasy, from years of use. As it slowly swings open, the hinges squeak, like the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard, and the grating noise causes me to cringe.

I have no idea how much time has elapsed since someone was last inside. At first glance, with filtered light shining in, the space appears empty. It's dingy and smells a bit musty, and I sneeze, the sound startling me. I pause, and quickly peer over my shoulder to see if anyone has heard. It's just me. I am relieved, and because I know I'm alone, I cautiously continue my investigation.

I turn back and my eyes adjust to the dimness. I observe cobwebs dangling between beams overhead, the fine filaments, wispy, like clouds on a warm summer day. The floor is made of wooden planks, four inches wide and six feet long, running parallel to the door. They're covered with dry leaves and small twigs, and they crunch and rustle under the soles of my favorite brown boots as I enter. I'm surprised to see the inside of the door isn't red. It's hoary, and a beautiful shade of raw umber, similar to a watered down cup of coffee.

I recognize a variety of items hanging on the walls. To the left, hand tools including hammers in various sizes with different colored handles, some wrapped in black electrical tape, hatchets, levels, planers, screwdrivers, ratchets, wrenches, some antiquated, and vises. On the right, spring-released animal traps, with nothing in them, and I laugh inwardly, relieved. I glimpse a metal lawn rake with a broken handle, as well as a spade, shovel and hoe. A

rusty sickle, dangles precariously on a nail, rocking gently back and forth, like a pendulum on a grandfather clock.

An old rickety ladder, with some of the risers snapped in half, is gingerly hanging on two bent hooks. A few tin cans, labels still affixed in muted colors, and glass baby food jars with screws, nuts, washers and nails, are placed on top of horizontal boards; make shift shelves, so they won't topple over, spilling their contents. I recall my father, and how he organized his own workshop. There's familiarity, which elicits a sense of pride in this simplistic approach to organization.

Ripped and tattered newspapers lie haphazardly in the left corner, smaller pieces scattered throughout, gnawed by mice to build their nests. Some rusty beer and soda cans in the opposite corner, and miscellaneous odds and ends. A wooden three-legged stool, standing two feet high, proudly occupies the middle of the space. It reminds me of a soldier, solid, stout and strong.

There are a few things on the wall I don't recognize, and I yearn to know what they are. Past and present collide when I utilize my phone to take a few photos. I press the button, and the click of the shutter booms, like a firecracker, inside the small space.

I'm extremely cautious. My instincts tell me to leave everything undisturbed. It's possible these things have been forgotten, but they don't belong to me, and proper judgment says better to leave all as is. I finish taking my photos, glance around briefly, step outside, and slowly shut the door. The latch falls into place, as it has countless times previously; it knows exactly where it's supposed to be.

I retreat a few feet and focus on the front of the shed again. I stare, with appreciation and longing, and soak in the serenity of the structure. It is profuse with history well beyond what I've found inside. There are stories I don't know, a lifetime of secrets, laughter, joy, pain, sorrow, tears. It inspires me, and makes me long to know who, what, why, when and where.

I quietly depart, my heart bursting with excitement, knowing full well I'm destined to return. Maybe I'll bring someone, but more than likely will come alone. Sometimes the best gifts are the ones I discover on my own and selfishly choose not to share. They become priceless, precious, even palatine, because of the memories they hold.

My life needs this amazing, purposeful, tiny structure with the red door that takes my breath away. It's a place I can call secretly call my own.

It is my escape.





## *Long Journey* | by Holly Wilde

Sinking. Faltering.  
Losing control of life.  
In too deep. No way out.  
The journey is unforgiving.  
Heart full of doubt.

It will get better, they say.  
Be strong, they say.  
I hope. I dream of that day.  
Hand over the burden.  
For a minute. For an hour.  
To not feel the weight  
A blessing.  
A power.

Taking it back little by little.

Strength. Perseverance.  
Help rolls off the tongue.  
The first step is taken forward.  
The next step has begun.  
Pulling out of the sink hole.

Fighting. Loving.  
No more falling.  
No longer alone  
In a lifetime of stalling.

Coming through to the other side.  
Seeing the light.  
Picking up the pieces  
that have shattered around me  
in the dark of night

It will be ok, they say.  
and in the light of day,  
on the moons hem  
I am starting to believe them.





*On Point – U.S. Marines* | Jose DeHoyos

The four of us had a lot to drink; Hutchenson tossed a few more than the rest. As we hadn't been able to persuade him to hail a cab, he was driving back to the barracks, and not a moment too soon. It was one in the morning according to his dashboard clock, so the last day of class had already started. Our graduation ceremony from the USMC Air Station, Cherry Point, NC would be that afternoon. We'd been broken down and remolded in thirty-two weeks of training with little play. All of us were grown men, but with the first freedom from our leash; as boys we bolted. Private First Class Lacy and PFC Knutson were in the back seat while I rode shotgun in Hutch's Chevy Silverado. Rather than storm the main gate, he had decided to cut through base housing to avoid the Military Police and a DUI.

For once it wasn't raining, but a fog had rolled in from the coast similar to the one swirling around in my head. The superhero ability to find the humorous side of life's little travails had deserted me. My thoughts were dwelling in the sea of mist, and I was about to drop anchor when the flashing red from the MP's car overtook my attention. We all pretended not to look in any one direction when our eyes met and Hutch leaked, "Oh, shit."

Try as we might, we couldn't dismiss the unsettling beacon. It was, both, at odds with our new life and its chain of command and, at the same time, a familiar sign of authority. Hutch pulled over. He rolled down his window as the flashing red spun off a smaller white light that then bobbed toward the truck. It speared in and stunned each of us in turn and then concentrated on Hutchenson alone. I watched helplessly as it sucked all wit from my friend and charged his nerves so he shook down to his fingertips reaching for the registration. I knew, then, that all his bravado, there so recently, was gone and he would crash. We all watched as Hutch fumbled to open his door and was led to the mark where both headlights spotted him. He read his lines and walked the trapeze with little success and even less applause, though we did sympathize with his sudden stage fright.

Just as I was finding security in the role as spectator, one MP broke away and headed in my direction. Before I could roll down the window the officer snatched open the door and motioned me out. I marched to the front and center where I turned a back on the remaining audience, as my routine was not well perfected. I surrendered the newly glossed identification as ordered. My tempered thoughts and yet unreasonable anger focused as Hutchenson stumbled and then fell from my peripheral view.

Lacy and Knuts, as if on cue, climbed out and, with the MP's direction, we all assembled within the vortex created by the headlights, fog and our own vexation. With a silent agreement to study the license plate and to abide by the house rules, we began throwing out questions and answers like dice in a craps game. Busted early, Hutch was cuffed and placed in the back of the squad car. I was



preoccupied, so failed to remind the officers that the reverse: what goes down always comes up, is also true. They rejoined the party cooling our heels for the results and the extent of our losses. The MPs passed my ID and Hutch's truck keys to me as I was the highest ranking of the four and deemed, falsely I might add, in control. Knuts and Lacy knocked the big six and eight, the easy break-even bet, and were freed. Both immediately hit the pavement in the direction for the barracks. Interrupted in my hopes for a lucky throw, I was told to join Hutchenson in the back seat where my cohort had begun to empty his gut between his feet. It seemed I had crapped out.

What awaited us through the fog was not a dungeon, but a modern Military Police station with large paned glass stretched across the front. Without commotion, Hutch was ushered to a holding cell in the back. The door shut, leaving me to conspire with only my reflection in the window as to who should hold the guilt and what we should do with it. One was convinced that because I was not the leader of this expedition in any official capacity I could hardly be held accountable. Though not unanimous in our findings, by the time the MP's returned and let me go (between two and three in the morning, I think) "me and my shadow" had agreed to table the discussion. It was a blurry juxtaposition from the station to my room where sleep finally claimed me as a pauper to his tomb.

From my anchorage in the heaving swells I was cut loose, first drifting to rocking and then almost upturned on the peaks of the high seas. Against better judgment, I opened an eye to find my roommate scowling at me. Over his shoulder, the clock glowed 5:29. I was trying to discern what I could've done in my sleep to upset him when he pointed to the door, tumbled to his bed and snored an ultimatum from under his breath.

Just as I got to the door, which I found already cracked, it whipped open and Hutchenson grabbed my arm to yank me out on the sidewalk. It wasn't cold so I didn't notice I was wearing only my skivvies. He demanded his keys. After an instant or two, I remembered and went to find my pants neatly puddled at the foot of my bed. I fished them out and, without thinking, returned outside to hand them over. As he was giving me the generals to his plan of escape, I was realizing it was getting colder and the snowball rolling down hill had become a full blown avalanche. I had to attempt to halt his crazy scheme to cut and run and join the merchant marines. At the precise moment when I decided to steal back the keys to his plan, our eyes met and his narrowed. For a span we were two gunslingers facing each other at high noon. He drew first, dropping them in his pocket. A DUI was one thing. Going AWOL was another; besides, they'd track him down. They always did. Before I clued him in, he cut me off again. Hitting below the belt, he whistled out with his thumbs up and pointed to my "nice tighty whities." I looked down and, then, back up to see him saunter off toward his truck. In a flash, I performed a triple jump over the threshold, across the room and back to my rack.

Forty-five more minutes of shut-eye did not help to organize my thoughts

and would have been better used to square away my uniform. I skipped breakfast and made a dash to catch Lacy and Knutson before they reached the flight-line; a perfect flanking maneuver. I wanted to make sure our stories were in sync, but there was no need. They shrugged it off with ease and pinned the weight squarely on my shoulders right next to the rocker I wore there and on my collar.

Twenty minutes later, in a hangar with the innards of several jets strewn about, I was standing in formation. With as little outward reaction as I could muster, I noticed the lack of interest in Hutchenson's absence from roll call. It seemed everyone caught their breath, though, when an order for Lance Corporal Mitchell's report to the Sergeant Major shot out into the bay. It echoed and continued to bounce around the high metal ceiling like it hadn't yet found its mark. There was an acute urge to duck and run from the stares as I would from so many tracking lasers and tracer bullets. I didn't even know which way to go and was, myself, propelled in several directions before striking an exit hole. Though I hadn't been there before, I gained the Sgt. Major's office by following the red carpet. Not at all similar to the yellow brick road with winding curves; it did not meander but led right and left with crisp corners and then ramrod straight to his door.

Standing at attention to the Sgt. Major was not like confronting the Wizard of Oz, either. There was no blustering with little to back it up. This man sat at ease, fully confident and capable. I felt a fervent need to take in every detail, but per protocol, maintained my thousand-yard stare. On the other hand, I wanted his eyes anywhere but on me. I think he suffered from oppositional defiant disorder, because he coolly continued to look me up and down. I should have been wary, but he posed the question that always catches me off guard. It, all at once, removes the possibility of gleaning some indication for how much is already known, belies total ignorance and requires one to accept, as if by default, responsibility or guilt. He asked, "Do you know why you are here?"

Of course I knew why I was there. The four of us had decided to get real haircuts, though each of us had hiked ourselves out of the barber's chair with the same high and tight as we had before. Hutchenson had suggested a barber neighboring both a tattoo parlor and a bar. I indicated to the Sgt. Major the convenience of the arrangement not only as the beginnings of a joke, considering Lacy and Knutson wanted a tat. With their cash already in hand, I should have smelled a set up. As we were all thirsty, this plan was ideal in killing three birds with one rock. Once a Marine, always a Marine. We don't say "one is as dumb as a stone." The Sgt. Major broke in to admit that he knew the spot; it had been there for as long as he could remember and at least one from every squadron got caught in that fly trap. I picked up the tale as we traded the barber for the tattoo parlor.

Seeing I was not interested in getting a tattoo, I went along as moral support. The others showed me the logos that would bedeck their bums: tribal

bands, eagle, globe and anchors and such. While they discussed which part of their anatomy to brand, I wandered around observing the sketches as if in an art gallery. Up near the ceiling in a far corner I found mine. I think it's those instant decisions that bite me on the ass; though, that's not where I was getting this one. A dragon with long claws and winding tail wrapped around a heart was going to stamp my biceps so it would beat when I flexed. After convincing me, the others had chickened out. The Sgt. Major sat forward with interest at this point in my account. Still at attention, like a half salute, I ripped off the bandage. He set me "at ease" and I turned to genuflect; whereupon, I bent my arm and took a knee in a classic Atlas stance. I, then, rocked back on my heels, feet shoulder-width apart, hands clasped behind my back, careful not to smile. He commented on the work and spurred me on. As the tattoo had taken over two and a half hours to install and the guys had been bringing me beers from next door all the while, the party indubitably moved to the bar.

I swaggered in and made myself comfortable in the perfect spot chosen by the trio to scope out the dance floor. Like the tat, I was staring at the one. To my surprise, without a prompt, she bounded up and bounced down in my lap. She whispered in my ear to kiss her quickly. I didn't know what she meant, so did what she wanted. I asked her, "Like that?"

"No," she said, "longer." This time, following her eyes, I caught her drift. Hutch, advancing in our direction, halted in momentary confusion, retreated and relinquished his prey. Later I would wonder whom I really saved. After a few dances, kisses and drinks mixed together, she led me from the bar. Naturally, as she hadn't lived far, we went all the way.

I'd like to say "much later," because I was still amorous; she was done. She stretched, grabbed my dog tags and literally kicked me out of bed, breaking the chain. I quickly dressed, picked up my shattered identity, and headed back to the club. Hutch, though over his anger, was already far-gone. Here the Sgt. Major asked her name. I told him I couldn't remember; to which he responded, "That part is always the same."

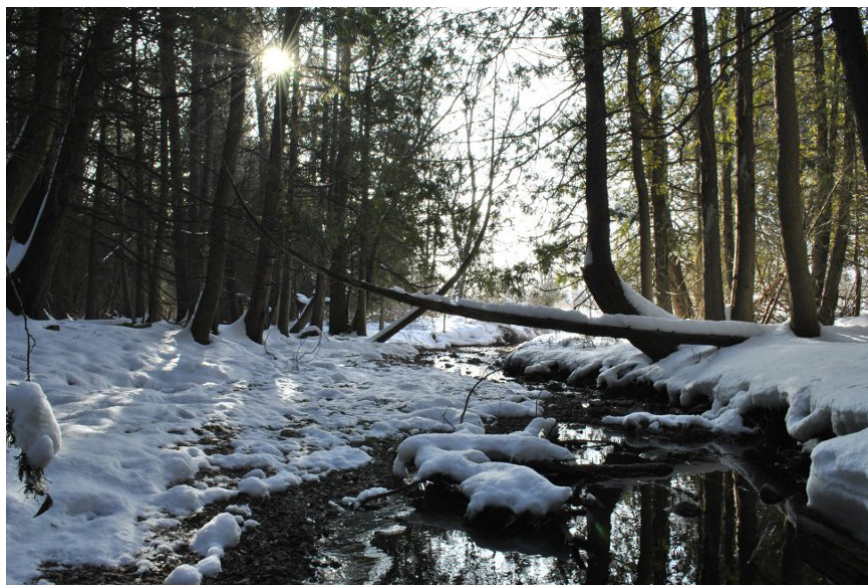
"I'm missing a dog tag." I confessed. He admonished but assured me S-1 would replace it. His anecdote (despite our best efforts, there is always one bear's claw caught in the honey jar) helped to alleviate some of the guilt. I stood straighter, still, when he stated with certainty that I should take pride in the fact I escaped with only a scrape to my dignity. He also convinced me a good sense of humor had always seen him through.

Before being dismissed, I was given one more lesson in the form of an order so to speak. "What happens in the field stays in the field; meaning: that story was only for me." He saw the thought clearly written on my face and added. "Hey, it's good to be the Sgt. Major."





*my life 151* | Gage Stewart



*Crossroads at Big Creek* | Steven Moore



## Public Health Interest | by Michelle Quirk

Kimberly opens up the mailbox to see another bill from the doctor. She got the explanation of benefits (EOB) from the insurance company last week. She will have to sit down with both and do a comparison to be sure they match up before she presents them to Jerry, her husband. This is just another in a long series of talks they've had regarding Tyler's medical bills. In the past three years, Tyler has racked up an impressive \$25,000 in medical bills. He is 16. He lives with his mother, Jerry's ex-wife. Tyler doesn't have a rare medical condition. He doesn't suffer from a chronic disease. He is inflicted with a mother who takes him to the doctor and demands medications for him as soon as he begins to sniffle with the early onset of a cold. She also demands x-rays and tests when he has an ache or a pain. She is setting him up for medical dependency.

Holly has a genetic degenerative condition in her spine. She is at the doctor's office at least once per week out of concern when anything irregular might signal a decline in her condition. She is on no less than six prescription medications at any given time, including the highly addictive Vicodin. This summer she developed severe stomach issues which the doctors are having trouble diagnosing and treating. She blames it on the Coca Cola slushy she enjoys each day. A quick perusal of my Food and Medication Interaction text would clearly suggest the stomach issues are related to a deterioration of her stomach lining from long term use of pain pills.

No one can deny Holly has a condition which requires attention and pain management. Nor can one deny the occasional doctor visit of a growing Tyler. Yet, these stories suggest an over-reliance on the medical community and the pharmaceutical companies.

Society gives credence to the media and the media deluges us with conditions and treatments. If you take this pill, your pain will go away. If you take this other one, your condition will be mitigated. See your doctor. Talk to your pharmacist. You don't need to suffer. We, and only we, the medical community, can help you feel better. And when medication doesn't do the trick, they will prescribe another. When the medication causes a long term complication, there is always a prescription treatment for that as well. It is a vicious circle and Tyler is at the beginning of a road Holly knows all too well.

There is no argument of an absolute medical necessity or medication necessity. The argument lies in where does necessity end and where does a manipulation of the public's reliance begin. Who, ultimately, has the back of the public's health? Do the insurance companies? Historically, they were set up to act as media-

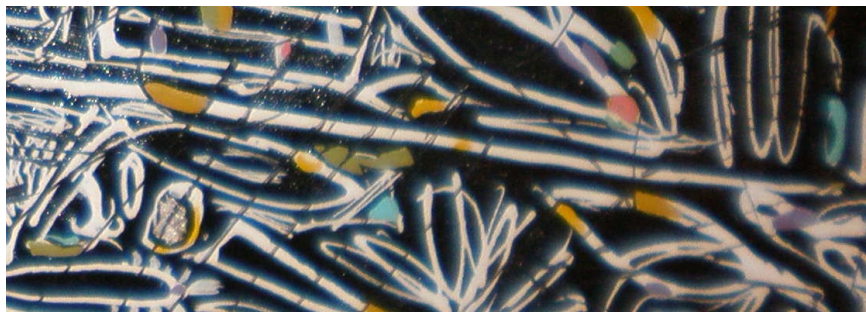
tors between the doctor and the patient and protect the patient's pocketbook in a world of rising health care costs. Somewhere along the line, though, this mission changed. Insurance companies stopped putting patients first and began looking at their bottom dollar. The challenge of sorting through EOB's and benefit payments became the job of the patients.

Is it the responsibility of the pharmaceutical companies? An evening watching television might present a picture of public health interest. However, a quick look at the annual income statement of Abbott or Pfizer will show profits in the billions.

Is it the doctor's responsibility? In an average day, a doctor will see an average of four patients per hour. A nurse will handle the intake, blood pressure and temperature. The doctor will review the nurse's information; listen to the patient's complaint and heart rate. He will then make a speedy diagnosis, write a quick prescription to fit the presented illness, and move along to the next patient to maintain the busy clinic schedule. Very possibly, in an urgent care situation, the patient will not see a doctor with whom he has a relationship.

It is up to the patient, or the patient's guardian, to take responsibility for his or her own health. They must take steps to understand the common viruses and aches and pains and understand when to use an over-the-counter medication, or when to let time heal the wound. They need to understand that not all ails deserve the attention of a medical professional or a prescription to cure.

This is the true public health interest.



*Collage* | Brenda Smith



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In Holly's case, it may be too late. But it's not too late for Tyler.

*Saw the Light* | by Juan Del Aguila

I don't understand  
What's so great about it?  
It's just there  
It didn't take me where I wanted to go  
Last thing I remember is a light,  
More like a spark  
Still not one I wanted to see.  
Truck lights,  
Right in my face, not stopping  
My mother crying, my father mad  
Cop lights in their driveway  
Not the lights they wanted to see  
And then I saw the light  
Not one I wanted to see  
A Red light  
Fire  
Hell!  
Not everyone goes to heaven

## *The Horse and the Bear* | by Dawn Utech

Deep in the night, the full moon laid a blanket of silver light over the vast and rugged Shield's River Ranch. Per usual, the river trout nestled in the rocks for a good night's sleep, and fluffed up ruby and brown feathered pheasants hid in the bush to protect their young from nocturnal bandits. But for the low eerie calls of the elusive grey wolf, the August night was still and all was peaceful in Big Sky country. It was always at this time that the lone grizzly bear conducted his nightly security check around the border of the ranch. All the residents of the land knew that Mr. Bear would protect them while they slept. With his massive head and powerful dark brown body weighing in at 800lbs he was an imposing figure. No one would dare try to loot in his domain.

Just as Mr. Bear came to a rest during his nighttime routine he heard the heavy clomping of hooves and scattering of stones on the worn gravel road that lead to the sturdy metal gate of Shield's River Ranch. His round ears perked up and he bolted like the wind to see who ventured to come upon his province in the middle of the night. There before him appeared a blue roan mare. He thought she was magnificent at 18 hands and so dark she was almost invisible but for the white underbelly the moon reflected upon. She came to a screeching halt. And, in due time, she held her head majestically high and allowed her black mane to cover her like a royal blanket. But, all the while she shivered deep in her bones with fear; wondering if she shall ever see the light of day again. With all the courage she could muster, she lied, "Good evening, sir. Dare I say what a lovely night it is for a run? I couldn't help but take to the night and enjoy the warm summer air." Worried with fear, Miss Blue was really out looking for her lost colt. Now she was hopeful Mr. Brown hadn't eaten him and wouldn't eat her, too.

"Good evening," replied Mr. Brown. "This is my land and I wish you to turn around and go back to where you came!" he said, as he bared his long sharp teeth and raised his gnarly clawed paw to hold her off.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Miss Blue. "Please, please do not attack! I am looking for my innocent young boy. He wandered off after dinner and I have been looking for him since. I fear he might have come upon some trouble. I meant no harm, Mr. Brown! Please allow me to continue. I promise I won't disturb you or your land!"

But before Mr. Brown could reply, a loud crashing sound came from the top of the knoll that they had been standing near. The crushing of tree limbs and birds screeching as they fluttered to safety broke the calm of the night. It seemed only an instant before a huge jagged boulder made its way right for them. Miss Blue



froze in her spot on the road, but Mr. Bear rose on his hind legs, and, with all his might and gentle soul, pushed Miss Blue out of the way of the inevitable collision of stone and bone.

“Miss Blue, are you alright? I hope I didn’t hurt you! My goodness, that happened so fast!” Mr. Brown shook his head. “That boulder is sure to be a problem for Mr. Shields when he leaves for town in the morning.”

Amazed, Miss Blue stares at Mr. Brown for an instant. Her mind racing as to the bravery and concern her new ally had just displayed. At first she could only stutter a “thank you,” but, she quickly recovered and in her steady voice she whinnied with gratitude, “Oh, Mr. Brown, you are my hero! I shall be forever in your debt! Thank you for saving my life!” - Just then, her naughty little boy rustled through the trees. Unharmred, but baffled and his jet black eyes as big as saucers, he gawked in awe as he witnessed this most unlikely friendship develop before him.

*“The moral of this fable is to never judge a book by its cover.”*

Three supporting morals:

1. You will find good in people when you give them a chance without prejudice.
2. **Friendship is more of how you *treat* someone versus how *similar* you are.**
3. He who shows care for others before his own is a selfless act - a virtue.



*Lion and His Thoughts* | Kimberly Niemiec



*Sunflowers* | Rebecca Myers

## *The Maritime* | by Brandon Haut

Whitecap heard hiss  
Salt-seaweed scent  
Tumultuous  
Wind-gust grazing  
A liquid land  
A universe  
Aquaterra

Unfurl cloth sail  
Yacht-boat down float  
Fresh air out there  
Exhilarate  
A glass of blue  
In blue encased  
Hydranemos

Softly gliding  
Blue-grey canvas  
Albatross croons  
Somber relents  
Reverberate  
Crystalline clouds  
Callicaelum

Breathe in breath out  
Open-eyed awe  
Porous blue veins  
Rip-tide heartbeat  
Adrenaline  
Sturdy Captain  
Horizonaut

What lies out there  
On maritime  
Time suspended  
Onward steadfast  
Resolution  
To risk it all  
Incognita

*Winter Beach* | Kimberly Niemiec



## *The Space Between the Raindrops* | by Tawanda Jones

Michelle Clark stared across the dinner table at the two women sitting across from her. Patricia Sims and her daughter, Dana Sims. Patricia had adopted Michelle eighteen years ago when she was just a baby. The dinner routine was going as it always had: Patricia and Dana conversing amongst themselves and barely paying any attention to her. If Cory, Patricia's husband, were at the table tonight, then she would put on a front and make pretentious gestures toward Michelle acting as though she cared: "Oh Cory, did you know Michelle is getting an A in her microbiology class. She is so smart!" Or "Cory, Michelle made the honor roll again!" But Cory was out of town on business. His position as a pharmaceuticals representative often kept him away. "Ma, do you think I need my hair done again? I just got my ends clipped last week, but I want a new style." Dana was saying. "No sweetie, your hair is fine. It has grown so long now! I'm glad I've been letting you go every two weeks to La'Avores beauty shop, it's working." Michelle rolled her eyes in disgust. La'Avores was an expensive hair shop, and Patricia never let her go there, not once. Even though her hair could use some special treatment. It was short, uneven, and often a pain to manage. She glared into her plate and started poking the meatloaf with swift, sharp jabs. "Don't play with your food! How old are you anyway?" Patricia snapped. "I'm eighteen, Patricia." Michelle said.

Patricia had long ago forbidden Michelle to ever call her 'mom'. She could remember being around 4 years old when Patricia had sat her down in a big chair near the living room window and had explained to her that she was adopted, and to never call her mom. "I'm Patricia to you, sweetie. Okay?" Michelle had nodded, looking past Patricia at the raging thunderstorm and large raindrops pelting the window. It was then when she had first developed her love of rainstorms. It was then that she first started to crave the space between the raindrops. She had wanted to be anywhere but in that room with Patricia. Her little heart had been broken. Patricia was a pretty woman with rich, flawless brown skin and beautiful dark eyes and long black hair. She had always been so proud of her, and she had especially loved it when others told Patricia that although adopted, Michelle still looked like her. Patricia was the only 'mommy' she had ever known, and now she was telling her to call her 'Patricia'? I can't let her see me cry... And so focusing hard on the rainstorm had helped her to keep her tears in place. Patricia had talked, but Michelle was outside in the rain, floating in the spaces between the raindrops. "Child, are you listening to me?" Patricia snapped. Startled, Michelle had turned her eyes from the window back to Patricia's face. She nodded. "Yes Patricia."

As she now sat at the table remembering that awful experience, her eyes watered and the sharp precision of the room dissolved into blurred waves. "You ought



to be thankful you can eat this good, some foster kids don't have anything." Dana said. Michelle blinked and the room became clear again. Michelle looked at Dana. She was a tawny complexioned girl, lighter than both she and Patricia, with long wavy hair and greenish gray eyes. She was only two years younger than Michelle. "Dana, I'm not a foster kid, I'm adopted. You know that." Dana shrugged. "Tomatoe, tomato." "Dana!" Patricia gave her a stern look, but the little smile belied it. Anger, hot and hard, rose in Michelle. She jumped up, and with one swipe of her arm, sent her plate crashing to the floor. "I never asked to be adopted by you! I would rather be anywhere than here! Why did you adopt me anyway? Was it for the check!" She glowered down at them. Dana was nervous, and caught off guard. Michelle had never snapped on her like that. She darted a glance at Patricia, who stared stonily at Michelle with watchful but veiled eyes. "Clean that mess up and go to your room. When Cory gets in tonight he will hear about this." Michelle could hear the rainstorm starting within her. She looked at Patricia challengingly "You clean it up yourself." And she ran up to her room. By now, the rainstorm was pelting inside her head. And as she lay in bed, she sought that space between the raindrops. It was the secret place she went to whenever she felt the haunting loneliness, and when she felt unwanted. It was her sacred childhood palace that Patricia had unknowingly helped her to build. Was there any space between raindrops? If so, how did they remain dry and unaffected from everything going on around them? For years, she had longed to occupy that space, where she too could feel protected and unalienable. Nothing was ever good enough for Patricia. She earned A's and was always on the honor roll. She had already received numerous scholarships from ten different prospective colleges. Yet Patricia lurked behind a curtain of indifference. But last week when Dana got a B in geometry, the whole family had to go to Red Lobster to celebrate. Cory was a lot nicer and Michelle knew he was proud of the fact that she had earned scholarships and wouldn't have to pay for college. "When you graduate, I'm getting you something special." He would often say. "You need to tutor Dana so both my girls can bring home A's!" And he'd always tell her that she was a genius. "Girl, you get A's Microbiology? I didn't know we had a rocket scientist living here!" Michelle was taking a pre-college Microbiology course at her high school. She wanted to major in Natural Sciences when she went off to college in the Fall. Cory was so funny and amiable, and didn't treat her unfairly. He was at least ten years older than Patricia. Michelle was three years old when he and Patricia married, and Patricia had gotten pregnant with Dana.

Up in her room, Michelle nodded off for like thirty minutes when she heard a knock at her door. She looked at the clock, it was 8:40pm. "Yes." "Michelle, Cory wants to see you downstairs." It was Dana. She sounded smug. Michelle waited until she left and then trudged downstairs into the dining room where Cory sat, sorting through papers. He looked up and smiled. "The other women

told me you had a bit of a meltdown.” Suddenly she was agonizingly aware of how they might’ve portrayed her to him. She felt like he must think she was nuts! “Uh, it’s a long story.” She said, as she sat down. “They kind of ganged up on me. And when you’re gone, they treat me bad. Patricia never pays any attention to me.” His eyes moistened. “I know. I mentioned this to Patricia, but she thinks you should go see someone. She wants you to be institutionalized. She thinks you are unstable and a threat to the family. But that’s outrageous. I told her she knows better than that.”

Michelle felt as if the air around her tightened. She felt weak, like her strength was beginning to ebb from her. Then anger. Her stomach churned and she could feel herself getting hot. But she gained composure. “Michelle, I’m not blind, I know that although Patricia loves you both, she has been more favorable with Dana. It’s not right. I told her over my dead body would I allow her to institutionalize you, because she and I both know you are not crazy. You’re a genius! I want you to continue to get good grades, graduate next semester, and go to a great college. Don’t be discouraged by anyone. I’ll keep working on Patricia, okay?” Michelle felt a twinge of sympathy for the balding man. He was such a good man, and yet she knew that he was putty in Patricia’s hand. She knew that he was madly in love with her and gave her whatever she wanted. They lived in this big beautiful home because Patricia had wanted it, and he got it. It must have taken a lot for him to stand up to her. Although her seeded resentment of Patricia now full bloomed, she masked it. “I won’t let you down, Cory.” She gave him a hug and started to walk away. “Since you’re going up, could you put this box in the attic for me?” She turned to get the box of files and odds and ends. Cory was a pack rat who never wanted to throw out anything. He kept lots of stuff in the attic. The attic was large and cavernous, but always neat and very well lit.

Michelle sat the box down and started venturing around. She had never really taken the opportunity to see what all was up there. She saw crates and crates of all of Dana’s old toys, school pictures from grade-school, etc. But nothing of hers. A sudden thought to go and burn them in the backyard fled through her head. She laughed at the absurdity of the thought. At least that would give Patricia a real reason to commit her to an institution. Her foot suddenly hit a metal case. She opened it up and found old musty pictures of an older man with a broad nose and dark skin. Who is this? She wondered. She also saw baby pictures of herself and Dana, and another picture with the older man and Patricia’s mother, Ann, kissing. Oh, this must be Patricia’s father. She had never mentioned him and Michelle had no recollections of him. Ann was now deceased. She was a beautiful woman who had actually cherished Michelle for a while. Then suddenly and unexpectedly she became distant. One day Michelle looked up and ‘gram gram’ had stopped coming around. Deep inside, Michelle knew

it had to be because of Patricia somehow. Maybe Patricia was jealous of how much gram gram had loved Michelle, and had barred her from coming? She put the photos away and went back to her room. She had to get some sleep. Tomorrow after her classes, she would be going over to Sunridge Nursing Home to do volunteer work. It would be her first time volunteering there.

The next day after classes, Michelle found herself walking the hallways of the nursing home with Elsie Cruz, one of the volunteer coordinators. They were visiting elderly patients, delivering mail, and transporting patients in wheelchairs to and from errands. Michelle found it inspiring and fun. The patients were so kind and loving. It reminded her of gram gram. When they came to room 336, Elsie paused. "Mr. Bradford is kind of disgruntled sometimes. He's always muttering confusing things. Don't let it faze you. He's still a sweetie." They entered the room and Michelle froze. A chill went down her back, raising her nape hair. The man on the bed looked up at her and his mouth dropped open. He looked like he had seen a ghost. He lifted his trembling hand and pointed at her. It was the man from the photo! He was older, much older now, but she recognized him instantly. "Mr. Bradford, we're just here to help you. Here's your mail. And here's a gift basket." Elsie said. His eyes stayed fastened to Michelle, and hers on him. Was this Patricia's dad? She said he had died in Vietnam. Elsie's pager went off as she was undoing the gift basket. "Oh my gosh, I've got to take this, can you finish unwrapping this? I'll be right back." She skipped into the hall. She had completely forgotten to tell Mr. Bradford Michelle's name. Michelle found her voice. "You know Patricia, don't you?" His eyes moistened. "Yes Michelle, I'm afraid so..."

Back at home, Michelle was glad to see that no one was home yet. She hurried to the attic and dug out the photos again. Then, just as Mr. Bradford had told her, she tapped on the seventh floorboard until it lifted, and saw a black folder. Her hands shaking and her breath shallow, she opened it and saw her birth certificate and several other records. She immediately read it and all of the other records and saw that everything Mr. Bradford had told her was true. A wave of numbness spread fanwise from her stomach over her entire body. An organic sense of dread seized her. She grabbed the folder, replaced the floorboard, and went to her room to get her coat. I've got to make copies of all of this. Her eyes were wide and unseeing as she rushed out. When she got home, Patricia was almost done with dinner. She was expecting Cory very soon, so she had prepared his favorite: fried buffalo fish with spaghetti and garlic-butter biscuits. "Get ready for dinner, you look ghastly." Patricia snapped. With a sardonic smile, Michelle went and washed up.

Around the dinner table, everyone was enjoying the meal. But Michelle started to poke at her plate with fierce jabs. Patricia was standing next to Cory, putting

more rice onto his plate. "Don't start that mess again. Cory, look at her. This is the type of behavior I've been warning you about." "Sorry mommy". Michelle said. There was a stunned silence. Patricia almost dropped the dish. "When you were about three or four, I explained that you were adopted and told you that I wasn't your real mother. I didn't want you to be confused. I didn't want to lie to you. I asked you never to call me mother again, and for eighteen years you obeyed my request. Until today. Don't do it again." "Sorry, I won't do it again mother." A tear slid down her cheek as she looked at Patricia. "What's your problem freak, you're making my mom uncomfortable. Stop it." Dana snapped. Michelle's eyes stayed fastened to Patricia. Cory looked confused. Patricia shifted from one foot to the other. "Child, what's wrong with you?"

"Daddy says hello, mommy."

Patricia dropped the dish. She was breathing hard and visibly shaken. She darted nervous glances at Cory. "She's delirious, you see! She doesn't know what she's talking about." "Mr. Bradford is my father, and you are my mother. He was dating your mother and you had an affair with him. I found my birth certificate and everything. When Mr. Bradford worked as your handyman, he stole these records and hid them in the attic because he knew you would deny it. Cory, there's information about Dana in here as well. You don't deserve this." She handed the folder to Cory. Patricia tried to grab it but he stood up and raised his hand to her. "I swear to God, woman, if you try to stop me from reading this, so help me God I will...." He sat down and read. Patricia clung to Dana and whimpered. Suddenly he lifted his head up with a distraught look in his eyes. He shook his head, his eyes narrowed, and his mouth widened. "Michelle is your real daughter, Mr. Bradford is her father. You slept with Mr. Bradford. And Dana is actually adopted... Her real name is Kisha Ingram! You faked your pregnancy so I would marry you. That one time when I saw Mr. Bradford kissing you, you told me he was drunk and you cried. I defended your honor, and I beat him up. But all along, you were having an affair with him! No wonder your mother stopped talking to you!" He was up and edging toward her with malice but stopped and just started to cry. "It's over." He said. Dana was just sitting there in silence, crying. "I'm adopted, I'm adopted." She looked over at Michelle with a pleading look. "I-you" she stuttered. "It all makes sense now. No wonder you look so much like her. Oh Michelle, I'm so sorry!" Michelle hugged her. "It's not your fault. Patricia had us all fooled. Here's information about your real parents." "I was such a bad person to you, and you're helping me?" Michelle nodded. "I've been there. Plenty of times." She said, referring to the space. By now Patricia was tearing the whole place up in anger. "You fool! You miserable thing! You're not my daughter! You have ruined my family!" She grabbed knife and started to lunge at Michelle but Cory wrestled it from her hand. "Michelle, call 911 right now. Your mother is going to a special place where she can get some



help.” Patricia became limp and fell to the floor. She put her head in her hands and started muttering desperately, and threatening to commit suicide. “No one is going to ask me why I did it? Michelle, I thought of you as a curse because of how I conceived you: with my own mother’s boyfriend. It was never your fault. I do love you, you know. I’m so sorry. It was me, I couldn’t face it...I couldn’t face it...and every time I looked at you, it was a reminder...my mother hated me until she died... I just want to die now!” she screamed, tears cascading down her face. Michelle felt an inkling of sympathy mingled with pity for Patricia. As she started for the phone, Dana rose and grabbed her hand. “Please, let me.” Michelle sat and watched as Dana called the police. “I’m so sorry Dana. I loved you so much. I still do.” Patricia was muttering. “Oh Cory, I love you too. I’m so sorry.”

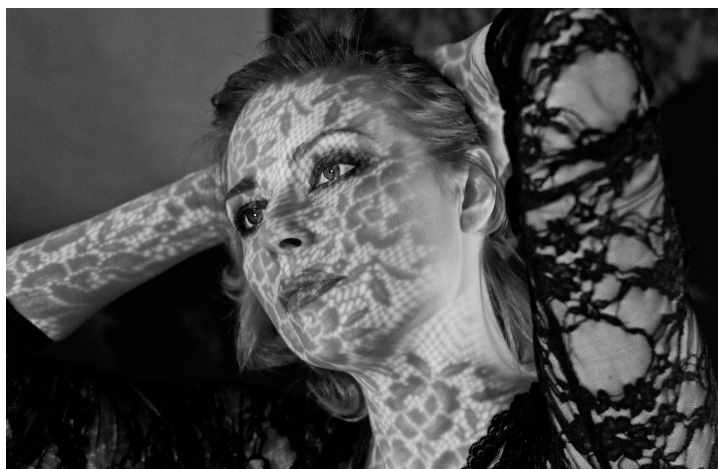
After they had taken Patricia away, the three of them watched as the van reading “Sunridge Mental Health” drove off with the squad cars trailing it. “I don’t know how she pulled it off. I don’t know how I was so blind.” Cory was saying. “She told me she had given birth at home while I was stationed overseas...” Dana hugged him. “It’s not our fault, Cory.” Michelle’s heart ached as she looked at the broken people before her. She knew their pain. Suddenly strength from an unknown place stirred in her. “We’ll be okay.” She said, hugging them. She was confident that they would overcome this. Suddenly the space between the rain-drops became more occupied. Suddenly, she was not alone anymore.



*These Wings* | Greg Johnson

## *The Steam Room* | by Darija Krecak

There is one room in the gym that is different from all other rooms – hot, plain and relaxing; it is a steam room where I can pamper myself for a few minutes, while enjoying my own existence. As you approach the entrance (the big glass door) it may appear a bit scary, almost mystical. Behind this door you can't see anyone or anything, but pale greenish almost white fog, and waterfalls of condensed water drops sliding down the glass door. Once you open the door, you may find yourself in doubt whether to go in or not, as the hot steamy air and a strong smell of eucalyptus or spearmint may surprise you. Like ghosts, the steam closer to the door will pass by you to the outside and disappear, giving space for your eyes to see a bit better into the depth of the room. As you walk in you will be able to see if you are alone or not, as comfortably hot steam will hug you all over. Relaxing music that is coming from somewhere above will start melting you as you will hear tranquilizing concert of the nightingales, the river stream, the rain and of the gentle notes of a piano. The whole room is tiled in white tiles, except for the green lines at the level of your knees which are the edges of the bench made of tiles, and are made that way so you could easier see where to sit or lay down. The whiteness of the room, the sounds of nature playing on some CD, the thickness of the hot steam which could almost be cut by the knife and eucalyptus' smell will force you to close your eyes and give yourself up to the moments of emptiness and relaxation.



*Soul Portrait* | Yevgeniya Troitskaya

## *The Winter Man* | by Steve Kuzma

Like a dusty key left unused to a door that ceased to exist anymore, the winter man waited for a winter that ceased to arrive. His snow removal equipment lay scattered in barns with no purpose but to rot. The fields which had brought joy and wonder all those years ago now lay overgrown and listless, waiting for the feel of a snowmobile track. No one appreciated the winter anymore and the winter man would have none of that. He always sat waiting, waiting for the snow to come back. The winter boots he wore curled and cracked in a sun that seemed to never set, his face red from the snow winds that had battered his face long before. The times had changed around a man, but the man had not.

The winter man held on to the snow, its wonder and mystery were never to be forgotten. The years flipped by and society forgot more. The winters of time seemed only like a history lesson that had battered the people instead of something that was to be enjoyed. The farm he resided on, too, was like the winter: dwindling into the past, it coated with rust and tarnish. The clock of time ticked on, but before all had failed and time expired, the winter man's waiting had stopped. So long had passed but the sky had grayed and a miracle fell from the sky. Blanketing the ground, his farm seemed as if it were new again. Society panicked and snarled at the sight of the winter, but the winter man was back into his grove.

The barns were lighted and glowing in the darkness of the night. The equipment roared to life and the snow continued to fall. Tracks from his snowmobile graced the fields that had lain listless for so long. The snow waged on, and now society waited. Like a kid afraid of the night, society was in fear of the snow. Locked in their homes, glaring at their T.V's, society's turn to wait had arrived. ... They were locked within the hands of winter and it was up to them to find their inner winter man.



*Sunny Days on Lake Michigan* | Alexandra Ritchie

*Water* | by Juan Del Aguila

Water

The purest thing on earth

It can determine life or death

No other thing has the same power

If there is a god

It'll be made out of water.



*Morning Reflections* | Steven Moore



## *These People I Love* | by Gage Stewart

People are my drug of choice. They fuck you up  
They fuck you.

Treat you loving you madly! Gladly!

Or beat you breaking you badly.

They intimidate with a confident glance.

They create paranoia

Then tense up the body,

Creating an empty space in the mind waiting to be filled with the worst possible outcome.

People are a bet with your mind.

People are a euphoric blossom of love

Embracing you

Tracing you, a stencil on the board.

That one person, what's'er name?

She got you so high once your vessel actually soared!

People are a droplet you place on your tongue

To make you want to smile, sing songs that need to be sung!

People make you cry

Laugh

Or die.

Even make you wait awhile

A speck of dust on a dirty tile.

Not to say you don't know this of course

For we are all addicts with brown and black smudges of remorse.

We've all gotten that bad batch

And no one is to blame, that shit is hard to catch.

But the good ones you want to frame.

12"x12" portrait on the wall

Say, "Yea, that was my drug. We got fucked up and experienced it all."

They take you on a journey of eternal thanks of being.

Open the doors to things in life you've never thought of seeing.

People are my drug of choice

Their story

Their voice.

But I've been sober now for hours.

## *Who Was My Grandma?* | by Darija Krecak

With age and experience we get to understand the story of the silence in our conversations with people. We specialize in reading thoughts that are said by body language, by the tone of the voice, by the gestures and the little facial mimics. The words that are said out loud are often not the measure of the real feelings. In my culture superstition plays a big role in the way how people, especially older generations, deal with everyday chores and in how and what they say to others. People say that I “read people” very well. Perhaps I do. However, there is one person whom I hope I never read correctly, and I wonder who was inside that cruel mask that she wore when she was with me. In fact, to me she was a scary grandma, grandma who didn’t like me, and I hated times when we had to go to the village to visit her.

I don’t remember much of her and the saddest part is that I don’t remember anything good about her.

I never knew what the exact color of her eyes was, but the “eye look” that she had, always brings me to the memory that sealed the feelings I have about her.

I was about five years old and wore my beautiful princess like white dress that was a gift from my aunt (my mother’s sister) who lived in Germany and a new pair of white flowery sandals. I felt beautiful.

I was petting our dog when grandma called me with a military tone of voice: “Darija, come over here!”

“Yes, Grandma,” I replied while running towards her.

“Take this lamb leg to your mom to roast it for the lunch,” she made an order to me.

“But, but Grandma. I, I don’t know how. I am scared. It is bloody,” I bleated in fear and disgust of looking at a bloody leg of lamb that was just killed half hour ago.

“What’s gonna happen to you? Oh, just take it!” she yelled at me and pushed it into my hand. At the same moment a drop of blood fell right in between my toes and I was grossed. I burst into tears and dropped it. That made her angry and she hit me with it. I just ran away crying, screaming. To this day I can feel the hit on my buttocks and hear her yelling after me. I had that poor lamb’s blood on me, I held it in my hand, its blood was on my new white dress, and she went to argue with my mom that I needed to be punished.

That wasn't the only time I wished not to be around her, but it was definitely the worst of a few that I spent with her.

On my fingers I could count my memories with her. The only time when she didn't yell or scold at me was in her last days of life. She showed me her wounded purple, blue and red arms and legs that looked like there was no skin left, and like her whole nervous and blood system was exposed. She cried praying to God to take her, like she did for many years in those seven years of blood transfusions and kidney dialyses. She became not even a half of the woman that she was before her illness. Pain was written all over her; it became her new name. She was so slim that her pajama, which she wore many years ago, looked like it was borrowed from someone three to four times bigger than her. I could only see a few strands of her gray and silver hair that framed her oval, very thin face under the head-scarf. The only resemblance of her that was left, and that people could recognize her by, were her chameleon eyes that were changing in color from blue to green.

She was sixty-seven when she died in 1990 and I was almost thirteen years old.

During her life and after her death I met many people who knew her, and interestingly everyone would make a comment such as: "O, Darinka is your grandma. She was a dangerous woman!" or "Darinka? It was always better not to be in her way;" or "Poor Djuro (my Grandpa), he didn't have an easy life with her. Neither did your mom."

There was only one elderly woman who told me that my grandmother was a woman with the biggest hearth that she ever knew in her life. My grandmother helped her family during the Second World War and provided them shelter and food. I was 17 then and wanted to hear more from this woman, hoping to catch some thread of good that I could put next to the memory of my scary grandma. But that was all that she had to say.

To this day I wonder why she was always rude to me, why she never acknowledged me as her grandchild – she surely did acknowledge my cousins who were children of her daughters (at least that's how it appeared to me). To diminish the bad memory of her, I like to imagine that she was a superstitious person and rudeness was her way to protect me. I wish I had a chance to get to know her better, to find out where her bitterness really came from – to find out behind whom or what, did she hide.



## World War III | by Lauren Tatum

Shortly after the birth of our son, my boyfriend and I began having huge arguments. We were always at odds about how to distribute the various duties that come with parenthood and running a household. Though we had talked about how we wanted our lives to be once our bundle of joy arrived, we never really talked about specifics. As a result, our relationship deteriorated rapidly, and I feared for my son's future perception of his parents as a cooperative unit.

"I told you I would need your help," I said to S., "lots of it."

"I am helping," he said, hands slowly curling into fists. "I pay the bills; I go to work every day. You really expect me to come home to cook and clean, too?"

"Yes!" I shouted at him, pouring all of my frustration, post-pregnancy aches and pains and resentment into the word.

"Do you realize that I've been holed up in a one-bedroom apartment with no one but a newborn to talk to for three months?" I screamed, "When do I get a break!"

"I go to work every day, how am I supposed to feel when I come home and you bombard me with your demands?" His words hit me like a slap in the face. I was so shocked I could hardly move.

"Demands?" I whispered. "Are you fucking kidding me!? You promised me that you would help! You said I could count on you. Now, all of a sudden, my sincere request for help is a fucking demand? How dare you! How dare you call my asking you to keep your promise 'demanding?'"

By this point in the conversation, S. has had it with me he began throwing various objects – the PS3 controller, the remote – just about anything he could get his hands on. Next thing I know, he's kicked a hole in our bedroom wall. I realized that this argument was heading toward the point of no return, so I took a deep, slow breath and tried to regain my composure.

"What the hell did you do that for?" I asked, as calmly as I could manage. S. grabbed his coat from the closet, spat on the floor between my shoes and stomped out of the apartment for a cigarette. Thirty seconds later I heard him banging his fist against the iron railing that surrounded our balcony. Slowly, I returned to the bedroom, where my previously sleeping baby boy had just woken up, blissfully ignorant to the fact that World War III just taken place 10 feet from his crib. Cradling my bleary-eyed baby, I whispered, "It's alright, baby boy."



Mama's gonna make it all better. I won't let this happen ever again. Fighting is bad, Jensen, and Mama won't make you witness it ever again."

The front door squeaked slightly as S. reentered the apartment.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I just don't know what came over me. It's just...when I come home...I dunno. I guess I just wanna relax and not have to think about anything for a while, you know?"

I just stood there, staring at him, too exhausted to fight or complain or to go into detail about how and why his behavior was 100% unacceptable.

"You said you would help me, S.," I said, my tone soft and even, "and you're not holding up your end of the bargain."

The struggles in my relationship with S. continued for some time, but I have kept my promise to Jensen. I never again let myself lose control or raise my voice to my son's father while Jensen is within earshot.



*Forgotten Pump House* | Steve Kuzma

# Going Down This a Road | by Ashley Miner

1

Going down this a road  
Its plenty twists and turns  
Many paths that can be taken  
Plenty mistakes to be made

And I keep ending up here.  
I swear this street is  
Not the last street  
I'm on a different block  
And I wasn't looking for a short cut

No matter which way I go  
I keep ending up here!

Clearly I'm missing something  
I haven't learned yet

I keep ending up here  
Now I'm thinking this is  
Where I'm supposed to be  
In a place that's full of possibilities

I guess I'm supposed to  
Make that first move and choose  
Whoever thought I'd be leading me?

2

What if I lead me to a place  
I ain't really supposed to be  
*I started off with  
Plenty friends which  
Dwindled down to a few*

*I found out that  
This was just my journey  
To take*

*After trying to drag so and so  
Along  
The path got so narrow I could only  
Walk alone  
I'm looking for street signs  
How many miles left?  
Wrong turns and one ways  
Even a yield or stop sign  
And it's just open land*

*After trying to lead  
And trying to follow*

*False conductors and*

*Crossing guards  
Unlit pathways  
Roads with  
No railways*  
I guess it would be better  
Than here  
Because I'm starting to know  
This place too well

I guess this was where  
I met the drawing board  
To map out my plan

I'm starting to see  
A new path in the distance  
But it's some construction  
Before me  
A few clouds in my way

I guess this road  
Won't be easy  
But it's one I'm willing to take

Ok I guess  
I'm on my way  
I'm starting right away

*Clear open space  
No shrubberies  
Or rose bushes*

*Like a blank canvas*

*Waiting to be  
Illustrated*

*What if I draw  
The lines wrong  
Can I really erase?*

*An imperfection  
Can I make a  
Masterpiece*



*Turns for Us* | Tuesday Morn



## *Cognitive Disparity* | by Terrance Ilion

I've heard people say that the hood is good but if that's all you know then I guess you would.

My anger and frustration should be apparent being  
raised in a house with a single parent

My mother isn't really the blame but still the one taking it  
She's doing everything she can working and school just barely making it

Today was not unlike any other  
being the man of the house and watching my brother

Role models are few; there is the drunk guy on the corner  
One of many sporting a wild irish rose bottle and a pair of bongos

Sitting on a blue milk crate he didn't say much  
With his red black and green medallion always in clutch

Everywhere I look some form of dysfunction  
Alcohol played a role in each and every function

The block was hot, drugs and booze it did not stop  
Every night hearing gun shots, lines of adults waiting for rocks

Man, it feels that we were destined to fail always something or someone to take  
the wind out of our sails most of men in prison or jail

So many displaced souls whole generation with no goals  
Ghetto games play out with unwritten rules  
kids getting shot just for their shoes

I've heard people say that the hood is good  
but if that's all you know then I guess you would.





*Malvina* | Yevgeniya Troitskaya

## *Hatred* | by Joshua David Wright

Some of us were born to hate,  
As others grew to learn hatred,  
And as for the rest of us our experiences  
We're the cause of our hatred towards another.

As for those who were born to hate,  
You may have found that your parents' hatred is in your blood,  
As they've hated against another race,  
Or bullying,  
Or abusive spouses.  
The fact is,  
You were born with the way your parents were as they teach you their ways.

Those of us who have learned to hate,  
You can control your consciousness,  
But with all of the factors in life that happen,  
Some things just trigger in our minds,  
That tell us to hate, whatever that may be.  
To leave it alone,  
To never go by it,  
To never do what it is that's being done.

As for those many individuals who've learned to hate from their own experiences,  
We cannot control what others do to us,  
We can only control who or what they see us as,  
If they still bully us around,  
Abuse us within their power,  
We will hate them for it.

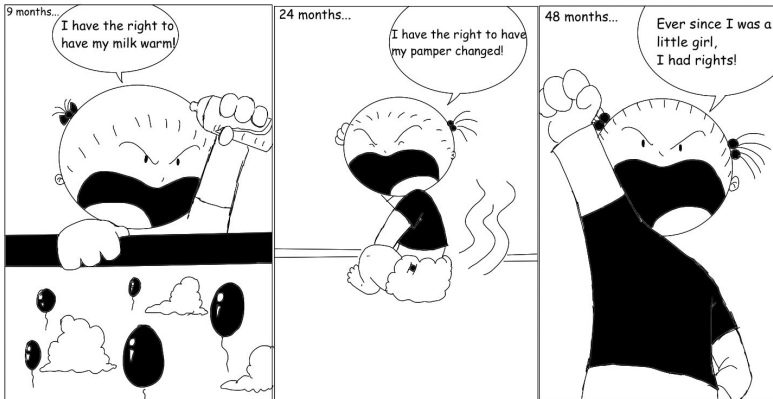
As all of this hatred comes together,  
It will overwhelm you,  
Can make you tend to do things in a state of mind you aren't even aware of.  
Whether it was to retaliate,  
To release your anger on that being for whatever they have done,  
Or in the complete other way of mind,  
As you were raised to hate a certain way of life, race, etc.  
To take action upon them because you hate what they do or what they are.

There are so many different types of hatred in the world,  
You don't even have to go far to find it,

You'll see hatred in someone's eyes as that fire builds up.  
Once you push them so far,  
And they do retaliate,  
As their mind, body, and soul snap into pieces losing all control of their consciousness,  
As they strike down hard to where it will truly hurt you.  
You will regret that day,  
Or all those days that you've done whatever it was to make them hate you.



## The Adventures of Suzzie Q: Page 13 | Malcolm Broadnax



Hazard | Jacqueline Allison | Scarlett

## *Thin Ice* | by Natasha Hollerup

*It's wonderful, everywhere. So white*

Kieran hated water, but the chill and the blades of his ice skates pushed him to the ice.

*The river has frozen over.*

He skated alone, rolling his hockey ball around the cold floor.

*Not a soul on the ice,*

*Only me, skating fast*

He wondered how fast he could go without the ice breaking, if he could get back through without being sucked into a current but still, he kept skating.

*I'm speeding past to release, leaving*

*Little lines in the ice, cutting out little lines in the ice,*

*Splitting, splitting sound. Silver hails.*

*Spitting; spitting snow.*

Kieran bent down to tie the laces of his boots and found someone watching him from the other side of the snow.

*There's something moving under,*

*Under the ice; moving. Under ice; through water.*

Kieran just thought that it was a mirror image of himself, so he stood and continued to skate along, ignoring cracks of ice breaking down.

*Trying to (it's me), get out of the cold water (it's me)*

He caught his balance and looked down once more, but the same face appeared from under the ice. He didn't want to stay around anymore, so he began to head back to his bench. That was, however, before the guy from the ice grabbed his ankle, causing Kieran to fall. Then, the ice man began to pull Kieran along with him.

*Something (it's ME!), someone, help them.*

\*\*\*

**Note:** The lyrics that are italicized are from a song called "Under Ice" by Kate Bush.





## NEVER GIVE UP | by Terrance Ilion

Trophies of failure and plaques of plunder, hang on walls of shame  
Illumination of the mind's eye steeped in darkness and despair,  
broken by a beacon of hope,  
light that shines like the North Star to runaway slaves searching for liberty,  
financial freedom to pursue happiness.  
cognitive incandescence  
illumination of the intellect  
a flare to the lost, wonderers of this world, walking without direction.  
casting shadows of men's future destiny  
testimonies of success and accomplishment,  
emancipating words acting as light to the blind  
parables, stories of mountain valleys, snowcapped peaks,  
rivers and waterfalls, ruins of past wars.  
words gently lift and propel me from my cerebral confinement  
yokes and fetters fall to the wayside  
while sitting on the clouds seeing the world as a whole  
I look up, as the stars start to align and spell  
Never- give- up



*The Lone Gull* | Alexandra Ritchie

## *A Burning Lie* | by Richard J. Plevak III

A Dragon is a creature of myth, too fantastical, too otherworldly for the real world. A real world in which nothing bad happens to the people whom do not deserve such things...right? If this were the case, then why was it that life had taken such an otherworldly, dark, sinister, demented, twisted, spiny turn that can only be comparable to the creature of myth itself? This creature now stands before me as I cling to the bit of wood that was to be my blazing grave. But I am getting ahead of myself. My mind has become twisted, foreboding and thick with cobwebs formed from what I thought to be truths and which I now know as only the lies which we tell to ourselves to get through the days.

\*\*\*

I was born in the time of religious oppression-- I believe history now calls it the Dark Ages. How right that sounds for this time period. And as I was born, as I first took my breath of air into my blood and fluid filled lungs, I could feel the rolling hatred from the room. I was not to be a male but instead a woman to my family, a useless creation not worth the blood that flowed through my veins; how I hate them even though I miss them so. We were iron workers. The family business kept us fed and clothed, and even made us a thing of envy amongst the villagers. Oh! And how envy grows, how it twists, twines, and worms its way into your heart and poisons the mind with thoughts of how what is mine should be thine instead. And what an age it was, was it not? This envy had such a wonderful outlet back then. You do not know?! You cannot think how a time period can possibly be such a tool of destruction? Come on, yes you do my darlings. I have already given you a hint: what is more flammable to the church then paper or wood? That which threatens them beyond any other? Free thinking women! That's what it is my darlings, and do you know what they called them? What term was used to persecute them and bring ruin upon them and secret evil glee to others? A WITCH! They accused me of being a WITCH-- me! A young girl, before her age of birthing even, and condemned to death at a fiery blaze! Ohhhh how I wish I could have cursed them, oh how I wish the curses the words which spewed forth from my lips actually had the power and the venom behind it that I felt inside my heart. But all was for nothing: I held so much rage for them and spat everything I could at them, but it was nothing to them as most of them just stared, some covering their eyes and crying to God to protect them from me.

And then the fire came.

A tall man in robes, both solemn of face and thick of coin purse, carried a torch and marched towards me, eyes never leaving the cross in his hands, and closer the fire came. Closer and closer the fire came towards me, dancing playfully, energetically in the wind. It seemed to be all present were in a jolly mood for the

solemn affair, all faces blank, all color seemed drained out of them and drained out of the surrounding area, but yet the fire burned bright, burned and shone with the ferocity of the setting sun. It seemed to meld with the brush beneath me, to bend and smooth it as the crackles and snaps rose to my ear. And I was lost to the smoke. It rushed into my eyes and blinded me, it pushed its way into my lungs and suffocated me...and I was lost. I was in blackness as dark as my thoughts and as bleak as my soul.

And then there was wind.

The fire was gone, the sun was gone, and all the people lay scattered and broken. I was glad and I was happy. And before me was a horror beyond belief. It hung there in the air, propelled by dazzling wings and was as dark black as the deepest bit of all creation. It offered me something. Something I was not suspecting and something I accepted. It said to me, for I remember it still, "I can give to you the power to stay alive and the power to get even, all that I ask for is you. I wish to have someone as brave as you to stand against an entire village and never show any fear, but only anger. I want you as a bride to me...and I will free you forever." I accepted and took that which was not mine to give, but yet I did it so. I felt my soul leave me, and something else come inside. The creature was no longer there before me, and I was no longer myself. I had become something more and something less, something that left none of the villagers alive, something that I hate, but also love...for it is me.



*My Art Lines* | Veronika Greco

## Rhema | by Malcolm Lane

The loss for a word is disturbed by a verb  
that only loses what it's worth when a curve ball is turned  
too much or not enough to get the message across  
while those who remain found tend to be the same ones being lost  
the word that means its spoken is a little bizarre  
when it comes down to memorizing why we stare at the stars  
space bars can't compete with this word it's a dilemma  
spoken word in greek means rhema  
it's the passion of the untolds that slip off your lips  
when in just one instance it's just that easy to forget  
that words have power had power and always will  
and yet no one in this room has ever tried to stand still  
go on ahead be silent while I go in for the kill  
so i can remind you that time is of the essence be real  
we never had it in the first place don't take over this earth  
just so people like me can disturb minds with spoken words  
i don't need to speak what's already been spoken  
cause behind those eyes your eyes have never really awoken  
to this social reality that lies beneath a breath  
of fresh air and calm humility put your mind to the test

take a second and realize that one word is all u need  
one rhema gave doctor king the motivation to have a dream  
one word gave god the power to put this world into existence  
and rhema man rhema to me is what tranquility isn't  
just a word one word deferred and intertwined  
etched out of existence yet stained in the mind  
one too many words have slipped your lips  
rhema gave back my existence i beg for indifference for kids  
that don't know how to uphold what my own goal is in life  
to speak just one word that could one day save a life  
rhema please design a way for words to express  
why this life is hard that people constantly fail this test  
it's a test of deceit they want what lies in your heart  
that one word that died long ago but gave your life a jump start  
that one little word is like a soft melody to a musician  
any word u speak that has already existed is not what rhema isn't

Spacediver | by Brandon Haut

One hundred thousand feet  
Resting at the edge of Space  
Feeling very much alone

Like an astronaut  
Gazing at the Firmament  
And the Nothingness below

There are Icy Stars around  
Creaking as they shine  
So explosive in the Snow

There's a hazy Planet Blue  
Looming under my balloon  
And I think of What I know

Twenty-four mile dive  
All my life I've lived for This  
With my Courage never shown

I'm so far from Heaven's gate  
Yet enormously infinitesimal  
The Uni-Verse says Hello

Patriotic far from land  
Gravity is calling me home  
I resolutely let go

Plunging through a shining sphere  
My fears are icy cold  
For it is useless to fear now

The planets watch me fall  
To where my Family awaits  
Watching me plummet down

My life spins in His Hands  
As I crash into a cloud  
Thanking Him I didn't drown

Diving into Gravity  
Tumbling through Adversity  
Swimming into History



*The Adventures of Suzzie Q* | Malcolm Broadnax





## *The Beauty of AIDS* | by Shenekia Sabrina Pinkston

She invites you in.  
No questions No answers.  
Her protection is the hairs between  
hers and your legs.  
Tasting the cruelty of youth.  
pledging to the unknown, but  
you've got it.  
She is lying next to him,  
but he is lying in a bed of AIDS.  
The fluid of love you thought  
she was giving to you.  
No a fluid of welcome to  
the wonderful world of AIDS.  
There is no turning back  
you gambled with death  
here lies her beauty of the  
part he once wanted  
not tamed by his name,  
but which had erased his  
past and predicted his present and future...  
AIDS  
Wrap it up!

## *The End and the Beginning* | by Jerry Viet

Where everything is a means to an end, but the meaning is scrambled and the beginning is concealed, yet somehow minutely visible.

Where love, hate and fear is the same feeling.

Where if one is prepared to fight someone's war; they have to be prepared to fight their own.

On a path I passed a black dog, a grey wolf, a snake and a hawk.

In a time where gift giving stops the asking of questions.

I saw a girl become a woman. This woman was the enemy. I hated her and then feared her when her temper was directed at me.

My battle lost, my life forfeited. I accepted my situation and laid my weapons in front of her. At that moment I looked at her with love.

In this world I am found because I am lost.

Euphoria and misery is always one step away.

Here I walk alone in the dark only to realize I am the darkness that surrounds me.

Am I the hero, the villain or the victim? Maybe I'm all three. Maybe I am just ordinary longing to be extraordinary.

My fear has brought me into this world. My lack of faith has kept me here.

I have the will, but not the strength, the courage, but not the knowledge, the destination but not the road. I am not whole.

My heart is empty. My mind is too busy. My soul is exiled.

My life seems like a dream. My dreams feel lifelike.

I am not here. I am where I want to be, but only part of me.

In this limbo no one has come for me.

I am the hunter and the hunted, however, I am somewhat empowered by my own fear.

The fear of never knowing.

The end from the beginning.



## *The Child Left Behind* | by Janella Jones-Steward

My soul is torn apart. My dreams are on hold wondering if you will ever come through the door. Choices separate us with thick walls of regret. Time goes by, seasons change as I hold on to hope. As I wait on a letter or phone call, my eyes fill with tears thinking about what we've lost and the cost through the years.

No kisses in the morning, no hugs at night. Not even a walk through the park, why oh why? As I grow up without you, life seems unfair. You ask about my grades or how I'm doing in school, but you never ask how I feel not having you there. You feel like a stranger to me in so many ways. How can you call me your child or say you love me, yet cause me so much pain?

You left me behind for selfish reason, never stopping to consider my feelings. Now you're doing time when you could have been free. But it's your time not mine so just let me be. Yes I forgive you but I have to live for me.

You have made me so much stronger because now I see. I can live my life without you and still succeed. I can fly to the moon or jump from a plane. I can be whatever I want to be as long as I stay free.

*Dedicated to my daughter: Adrianna Simpson*



*Thera* | Jan Aubrey

## *Time Quickens* | by Jeanie Dean

Time quickens  
compresses the space  
We feel the pace hasten us  
Squeezed deep more in less  
till we wander  
are we running  
hah hah hah hah  
out of time  
running to what  
where there is no  
tomorrow  
only from which we came  
ahead

Time quickens  
compresses the space  
How will I remember  
your shining face  
Oh my dear one  
it is the child  
who creates the parent  
We shoot through  
born amidst  
memory pressed  
in the divine spin  
coiled in your  
forgotten embrace

Time quickens  
compresses the space  
We struggle to face  
the limits of knowing  
it's the end of the road  
Will there be enough time  
to completely return  
Certainty  
catapults us through  
the narrow chasm  
between the last world  
the lost one now  
and the one unknown  
ahead

Time quickens  
compresses the space  
till there is none  
We can't fathom this place  
the feel of the air is lost  
the sound of the sky is foreign  
Movement carries  
a new name  
not a child  
many children  
renew a race  
pushing light  
to the still knowing  
ahead



*Blue Meadow* | Steven Moore

# Writing the Dream: an Interview with Chandra West

by Natasha Hollerup

*Chandra West, an Administration Assistant to the Dean at MATC and author of the novel titled Vanilla Dream, spoke with the president of MATC's Phoenix Literary and Arts Society student organization about her present and future writing projects in an interview during May of 2013.*



**Natasha Hollerup:** How did you come up with the plot for your book?

**Chandra West:** I had developed a good friendship with a white guy. We both ended up marrying other people. We are still friends to this day.

**NH:** How long did it take for you to write it?

**CW:** I started writing Vanilla Dream way back in 2006. At that time it was entitled Love Worth Waiting For.

**NH:** How long did it take for you to publish it? Did you decide to self-publish or did you submit your book to literary agents and publishers?

**CW:** Once this company agreed to publish it, it didn't take long at all, maybe six months. But, I did send the manuscript to a few agents and a few publishers. This time out, I did intend to acquire an agent first but it didn't work out that way.

**NH:** When did you get the idea for the book?

**CW:** I developed the idea shortly after my first book was published and people started asking me when the next book is coming out. By now, the guy I referred to in question #1 and I were just friends. But, I thought it would be interesting if our lives had taken different paths.

**NH:** Who did you contact prior to publishing the book? Did you have beta readers or friends who read the book to help you along?

**CW:** I didn't contact anyone. I only let one person read it before sending it off to various publishers, and that was my best friend.



**NH:** What are your plans now that *Vanilla Dream* is published? Are you planning on writing another book?

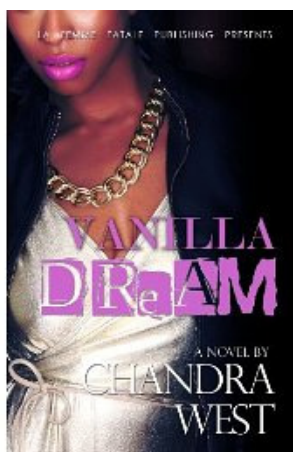
**CW:** Most definitely, I have already started novel #3. Within the next two years, I plan to start my own publishing company.

**NH:** Who and what were your influences for the book? Were they based on real life or was it something you had been thinking about?

**CW:** I would say that real life influenced my book; different situations that I went through or people I knew. Domestic violence is prevalent and I wanted this to be a message as well. “Get out. We don’t have to stay with men who don’t love or respect us or who want to hit us and cheat on us.” I tried to make the Ryan character a “good” man and he was the one to come into Sheila’s life and show her that she didn’t have to be with a man who wouldn’t treat her right.

**NH:** What would you say to anyone hoping to publish their own books? What advice do you have for them?

**CW:** I haven’t done the self-publishing thing yet so I don’t have much advice in that area. I know a lot more people are doing that now, so it might be the way to go. I am going to try it next time out. I can tell you this it is all about getting your name out there. People think the book will sell itself but there are so many books out there that you’ve got to market. SOCIAL MEDIA (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) is the way. Promote. Promote. Promote. If you want to get your book published, don’t settle and have someone thoroughly read that contract before you sign it.



## *Excerpt from Vanilla Dream* | by Chandra West

### Chapter 1:

“Sheila”

“Give it to me baby, nice and slow. Climb on top, ride it like you in the rodeo.” Believe me; he didn’t say nothing but a word. I mounted his pole and began working my magic. Up and down, round and round. My back was to him so he could watch my ass jiggle every time it landed on his upper thighs. I reached down below me to squeeze his balls and that’s when he said “ohhhh Sheila!” Like that old song from Ready for the World.

“Sheila! Didn’t I tell your ass to get up so you could fix my goddamn breakfast?!”

Oh no...it couldn’t have been. A damn dream. Here I thought I was rocking Ryan’s world just to wake up to the reality of my lazy bum of a husband Craig. And if it wasn’t Ryan instructing me what to do it must’ve been 50 Cent rapping his song “Candy Shop”. I touched myself and found that I was dripping wet, I couldn’t believe it. So I laid there a few more minutes with my eyes closed thinking of Ryan and when we first met.

It was winter with the holidays quickly approaching. Everyone was anxious for the time off from work but not for the last minute gift shopping. I had just finished stuffing the last envelope when I turned and saw him. It was as if I was seeing him for the very first time. His eyes were hazel and he had jet black hair with very dark skin for a white guy. He stood about 5’11 with broad shoulders that looked as though he could hold and protect you forever. I had seen him around a few times but never paid much attention. For some reason today was different. I think it was the black turtle neck sweater he wore. It gave him that sexy Tom Cruise, Colin Farrell, Eric Bana or pre-gray George Clooney look. And when I spoke to him and he flashed those bright whites at me, it was done, he had my heart forever.

“So are you a doctor yet?” I asked giving him my hot black chic pose. His eyes went from my double Ds to my eyes to my lip-glossed lips.

“Yeah I am. I finished about six months ago, why?”

“Just wondering if you’re looking for a wife?”

He smiled, “Why, do you know someone who’s interested?”

I raised my arm and said “Me.”

Now that is how it all began, but the problem was I already had a husband. And although I did think this white guy was absolutely gorgeous, I was just joking with him. But from that first encounter he made sure he always spoke to me when he came in the office, he even gave me a Christmas card with his phone number telling me to give him a call over the holiday break. Hold on I’m getting a little bit a head of myself; let me give you my background.

I’ve been married to Craig for four years. Everyone says I could’ve done better and that I married beneath me, and I think they’ve pretty much nailed it on the head. But for once in my life I was trying to accept a brother for what he was. Prior to Craig, it was always about looks and fast cars and shit like that. Craig was living in his mama’s house when we met...he was twenty-eight and I was twenty- five. He didn’t even have a car. But he was working. Besides that he sure knew how to lick the punanny! At twenty-five years old I had never had an orgasm from oral sex and my homies had just told me prior to meeting him that when it did happen to me that I would fall in love. Unfortunately they were right. Okay I’m talking real down on Craig. But as I said between him being a good candy licker, handing over them paychecks once we got a place together, a good housekeeper (he loved a clean house), even doing laundry most times he was alright. I fell in love fast and hard. At the time we met I was going to school and he stood up like a man and said I could quit my temporary gig and just go to school full-time—that lasted about one year.

He proposed six months after we met and we were joined in holy matrimony six months later. The honeymoon ended the first time he slapped me across my face, so hard that my lips were swollen for a day or so. Of course he said he was so sorry, he would never do it again and even cried. I had never experienced anything like that in my life. I was a virgin until age 19 and had only had 2 boyfriends prior to Craig. And neither of them had ever been violent toward me nor ever called me a Bitch. Craig had done both in a short period of time. Not only had I grown up sheltered but I also had never seen my father ever lay a hand on my mother. I attended private school throughout grade school and high school and for whatever reason had just never dealt with such people. But some people said that it was my mom’s fault for keeping me away from certain types of people so when I grew up I became attracted to ghetto guys or less fortunate black males. For some strange reason I thought if I showed him love and how life doesn’t have to be all about the streets, disrespecting, selling drugs, robbing, and that type of stuff it would be alright. I grew up in a home with both parents—who worked, family nights, family vacations, slumber parties, and my parents owned their own home. It was quite contradictory to Craig’s upbringing. His mother was a single parent raising six of them, didn’t work, the siblings had

different fathers who were abusive to his mother. I'm not putting anyone down. I'm just saying they were straight hood compared to us.

Anyway, having this information and the fact that my family had paid for this beautiful church wedding, I didn't leave. Now here I am four years later and I'm just sick and tired of being sick and tired. The fighting never stopped as promised. About every four or five months I'm getting hit in my jaw with his fist, or thrown to the ground or hit with whatever object he can find. Don't get me wrong I hit him back, but of course I can't hold my own against a man. He is a big guy, short but husky.

Fighting and all that stress he put on me resulted in me having a miscarriage. Craig already had two kids, both boys, so we had hoped to have a daughter. I wasn't very far along in the pregnancy but I was still devastated nonetheless. It was after this that I gave him an ultimatum in order for us to go on; he must seek anger management or counseling. He went to two counseling sessions then stopped going. I guess he felt I had forgiven him. From that point forward I resumed my birth control pills and he never knew. After three years of not getting pregnant again he thought he was being punished for whooping my ass...I certainly let him believe that.

Those days of working are now non-existent. He hasn't worked in a year! So now I'm paying the rent, car note, electric, gas so unfortunately there's no room for extras. Can't get my nails or my hair done much less buy any new gear. I forgot to mention how things come up missing around the house, even my money. I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired!

And now I've met Ryan, this good looking man who is the same age as Craig but has his own house, as a matter of fact he owns a couple houses, no babymamas, he's smart, he's a college professor with his PhD and has just joined the practice where I work with his uncle as a psychologist. Making plenty money!

I gotta get this white boy! I definitely want to be down on his team.





*I Do!* | Tai Hardie

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