

Editors' Note

Dear *Manastash* Readers,

In our 33rd issue of *Manastash*, we are focusing on the theme, "Back to Roots." In looking at our journal's roots, T. Ellis reached out to founding member, Joseph Powell, a former professor at CWU and an author of seven books of poetry. He told us the first issue, published in 1990, was granted a budget of \$500 by Dr. Donald Cummings and was hand-made by a small team of students and staff. The first cover, a drawing of a crow, was done by Mary Sullivan who was a graduate student in the art department. Later, Mary went on to become an important regional artist. Nance Bracken, also an artist, who worked in the library helped with the cover, layout, and design. Shannon Hopkins, a graduate student at the time, put a flier in all the teachers' boxes asking for submissions. Together they laid it out, photocopied the pages, printed the cover, and stapled each one – very hands-on labor. That \$500 didn't go very far. Later on, Bobby Cummings helped increase the funding dramatically, allowing them to send the journal out to a printer; Abbott's Printing in Yakima, the same printer we are using for this 33rd issue. This year's editing and publishing teams have that same camaraderie, coming together to make something meaningful.

We found that the name Manastash comes from the Sahaptin word /má: maštaš/, possibly meaning "we are going root digging," making this year's issue even more relevant. In our root-digging this year, we start with appreciation for the indigenous land we are borrowing from the Kittitas Band of the Yakama Indians. Powell said he chose the name Manastash to honor the presence of Native Americans in the Kittitas Valley. Many of the canyons and creeks still bear Kittitas names – Taneum, Naneum, Umtanum, Manastash, and even the Yakima River. He also liked "the sound of the word which is an amphibrach and has some nifty repeat sounds; it even sounds poetic."

Whether we are dealing with our families, our ancestors, or finding our own footing – we all have a need to understand where we came from so that we can confront where we are going. You will find this year's submissions to be rooted in gratitude, connection, beauty, and pain. All the makings of good art.

T. Ellis & Lucy Otto
Managing Editors

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There's a Flower Growing Inside Me

Kaitlin Creeger

There's a flower growing inside me.

I won't show it. But I feel it. The twisting of soft hands.

Depression feeds it every day.

My lungs restrict in movement, that I believe. It scratches my bones, unlike my nerves.

I move concisely, unaware of others around me. Shops past my peripheral like ghosts—

the flower pinches my nerves, expanding inside my being.

My breaths taste like fresh clipped grass on a rainy day.

I cough; a petal, pink and wet, floats out- landing on the sidewalk amongst the weeds.

I think, *Where are you going? You belong to me.*

I scoop it up, crush it in my flesh, and coral pink dust covers my fingers, my palms.

I inhale, lick my skin 'til it is raw, and let the dust slide into my belly-planting another seed.

The Life I Never Lived

Brittini Tovar

Through life, I wish
I hadn't sped, for I never
found my niche—always moving,
moving, moving—determined
to get ahead.

To be young again and
bound around on bare feet, fresh
scabs on my knees-face
bearing a silly grin- playing
soccer in the street.

Life forsaken by age twenty, and
for this long—lost life I bled,
my life would be empty—a whisper
left drifting in the air—but for
the memories I refused to shed.

How I miss the action, to
have a game of hide-n-seek, body
nimble and thin—always
last to be found—to best
scurry and sneak.

Reminiscing with fury, life
dwindling to a thread, memories
long forgotten once I'm buried—never
to be woven again—once I'm
long gone and dead.

To be back at Lake Loveland
and flop into the frigid lake, goosebumps
lifting hair on end—hair adrift
grasping at skin—a shiver
I'll try to shake.

Until then, I shall lie
a fixture in this bed, until
I'm forced to say goodbye—soul
departed, body surrendered—to the
life I never led.

Alyonushka

M. Sage Flint

I wish the strawberry shortcake fairy
would come and bless me.

I was born old, I will die old, and in
the middle I'll be a dust mite, almost
imperceptible and very, very ugly.

Fairy, you could winnow
the pink anger out of me, make
me round and sweet. Like a diatribe
on the metaphysics of threshed wheat
or a puppy's bark stifled by plastic.

I carry grief by the season, deep
undercover in the queasy warmth
of a laundry room, adequately perspiring.
Because in truth, godmother, I forget
what it was like to feel cared for
as I strangle shirts in the grey water.
The trick is not to flinch as piglets
bury their noses in your stomach. To bleed
despite the dried nettles of your veins.

I am will-o-wisp fire on a crowded
thoroughfare: I am a mirage, a lie.
I look through empty doorways, lighted
tableaux, I laugh at illusory love.
Godmother, I am tired
of sweeping your floor
and eating your crusts, of spewing
frog spawn into the toilet bowl
whenever I raise my voice to you.

Lay me down, golden grasses.
Loosen your chain from around my throat.
I will go to wild daisies
and eat my heart out in the pasture
while the sun shines, like a little goat.

Starting Small

Grace McKenney



Escape to the Evergreens

Tiffany Wehr

Escape, the word ran through Eleanor's mind. One word. She kicked off her high heels, pushed through the glass doors, and began to run. Hands reached out from every direction. They attempted to grab and stop her. She tore against them until she fell forward with freedom. Somewhere behind a familiar voice shouted Eleanor's name. It demanded that she come back and fall in line. Attend the next meeting. Complete the next check box on the long list of life's duties. She ignored the grating sound.

It had been a long time since Eleanor had run on anything besides a treadmill. The brisk, morning air felt thinner than the temperature-controlled gym she had grown accustomed to. Almost immediately, her lungs caught fire. Her bare feet slammed against the rocky pavement one after the other. *Right, left, breath*. The sound deepened her trance.

The sensible, gray, pencil skirt around Eleanor's waist constricted with each step. A mile or so in, a tear ripped through the side of the stiff fabric. She welcomed the new space. She'd always hated this skirt. All of the skirts really, and the blouses, and the dresses. But they had told her it was proper. Appropriate. Expected. Demanded. Eleanor lengthened her stride. The seam ripped a bit farther. So did her smile.

A yellow sign appeared ahead, signaling a "Dead End." Eleanor hung a left at the post. She ran until the noise of the city fell away. Soon the hard cement melted into soft, green grass. Heavy smog turned to crystal blue sky. Trash turned to wildflowers. A row of thick, orderly evergreens stood on the hillside. Like soldiers promising security. Eleanor pushed harder. She ran into their embrace, welcoming the needles that poked at her frigid feet, and the shade that their canopies offered.

For a moment she breathed it in. The fresh smell of flowers. The damp feeling of moss and mulch against her toes.

Please, let me stay here. She whispered into the forest's dark depths.

The nearest tree bent down to face her. *Why should we help your kind?* Its deep, rich voice flowed straight into her mind. Anger hovered around the edges of every word. Anger and something older, deeper. Betrayal. *We've trusted men before*.

I am dying in that world. Eleanor placed a trembling hand against the tree's dark bark. *One more day and I will become like the rest of them. Greedy. Moving through life like the days never end. Protect me. I shall do the same for you*. Without another word, the tree reached a thinning branch and pointed deeper into the forest.

Eleanor followed its direction.

As the hill slanted downwards, the trees grew sparser. The ground grew hard and black. Eleanor's breath caught in her throat as she looked out over the once fruitful valley. Where saplings and old growth had once reigned, ashes remained. Thousands of corpses stood, barely upright on the battlefield. Once tall and proud trees had been reduced to pointed, charred sticks poking haphazardly out of the ground. Their branches and leaves are now just memories.

Eleanor's nose and lungs filled with dusty smoke. She fell to the ground, pulled her knees to her chest, and continued to look out over the endless miles of death.

An unknown amount of time passed before Eleanor slowly dragged her aching body away from the dirt. Instead of turning back, she trudged heavily forward into the valley.

Where are you going? Called the evergreen.

To find water for your friends. I won't leave here until the grass is green again, and the honeybees return.

The evergreen watched as Eleanor disappeared into the hillside. It bowed its green head, sent word to the others, and, as one, they vowed to hide Eleanor for the rest of her days.

Hum for the Perennial

Elliott Whanger

After Jamaal May's Hum for the Hammer

Be firm. You will be unable
to depart, and it will be
necessary, getting used
to the withering leaves.

Anticipate the ice and love it,
if for no other reason than to love
the breaking of earth and revivifying
shower that accompanies the spring.

Be barked or bulwarked, shielded
and hardly enough to survive any plight—
one bite could rot your core.
May nutrients fill the soil

cradle that rears you skyward.
Be turgid till your leaves point at every neighbor—
you know already the community it takes
to ingrain deeply, to not be dislodged.

Be an embryo inside your coat,
52 °F in a cold March
after your jacket splits, sending
entrails down. Let the rays bake

your bed until you're risen.
Have your stem unfurl to pastels;
Gorgeous is grotesque. Be born from mud,
buried patiently. Under soil. Alive.

Thunderbird's Blessing

Marelle Westcott

This traditional legend tells of a time when my people were starving, of storms and ice preventing fishing and hunting, the oceans too angry to venture. A break in the storms allowed the strongest and best hunters to gather into a big canoe in one last desperate attempt to bring home a whale. They sang hunting songs thanking the Creator for easing the weather so they could hunt and pray for a successful trip. The hunters found a whale large enough to feed the Quinault for months, they could not return without it. The hunters began the whale hunting song, powering themselves to overtake the whale and harpoon it.

But after many months of starvation the hunters were too weak to deliver the final blow and the whale towed them farther to sea, directly into a storm. The hunters prayed out to the Creator thinking they would soon die. Suddenly thunder and lightning rang out, illuminating a dark silhouette with burning eyes in the night sky: a Thunderbird had appeared. Twice as long as the canoe from wing tip to wing tip with eyes like fire glowing in the night. Thunderbird picked up the canoe in one claw and flew the hunters and the whale back home. The story is memorialized on the Quinault flag with a Thunderbird carrying a canoe.

In times of struggle and famine
When the mountains are angry and feral
The Thunderbird will listen
When the rivers freeze and kill the salmon
When the children are in peril
In times of struggle and famine
The strongest hunter's intuition
Knows this hit is instrumental
The Thunderbird will listen
Towed out to sea, cold and open
Progress is often incremental
In times of struggle and famine
Gripping the boat with one talon
Long scratches mar the bare hull
The Thunderbird will listen
Bring the whale home to feed the children
Thunderbirds blessing for all the people
In times of struggle and famine
The Thunderbird will listen

i before u

Mandy Abel-Zurstadt

Start

cold, whole as stone.

Terrestrial tentacles work over the surface
to find cracks that are first absent, second,

hairline fractures between smoky
grains of silica
caused by salt
that's settled
into pores like a spy
ready to cull the cells of inorganic skin
one by one until—*stop*.

This is no sad
occasion. It is a serendipitous
blessing to be weathered so
that whatever's at the stone's
core may become soft

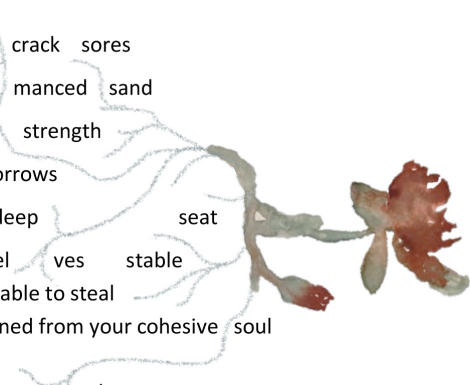
soil

Feel your body swell
with crystals no longer sheathed

These mud crack sores
are only geomanced sand
with tensile strength
Your sorrows
may burrow deep seat
them sel ves stable
around your table to steal
minerals mined from your cohesive soul

But then comes harvest season
and the farmer with her scythe
to kill the shoot
and leave the roots to slough
away pay its dues slowly
back to sources
of stability
of strength

the soil
of your soul



Jacarandas

Gabriel Elizondo

Me? I arrived before you found me,
here in the soil beneath your feet.
My roots grew sovereign before
the rest of your cultivations arrived.

Me? I denied you before you found me.
In the bottom of canyons,
at the tops of mountains, after
the rest of your cultivations denied

me. A contrived truth to conceal me
from histories scattered across time,
my branches bend in the wind, always
present in the storms; I remind

me. My hallowed bark protects me,
stoic as my ancestors that sing
their voices in the breeze, never
past the moments that intertwine

me. I arrived before you found me
and multiplied and shared my shade,
with loving creatures that seek, forever
find me blooming, wild, uncivilized.

Me.

Fragile Roots

Max Erickson

Fragile. What is fragile? It is the word written on packages tossed around by the post office. It is what we use to describe things that would break if you dropped them, like glass or plates. What else is fragile? My friend's body that is in the late stages of dementia, my grandparents who will be married 70 years this summer, babies, snails, seedlings, and my flute. Fragile is what the 7,000-piece Millennium Falcon LEGO kit is.

Even the word itself looks breakable. Fragile, g hides in the middle of the more popular letters, trying to blend in with vowels "a" and "i" while l does its best to go unnoticed. You can't miss the drama at the front of the word as r runs away from a desperate f and into a's waiting arms.

Maybe I'm just projecting, but for all I know, they have a great relationship.

Disregarding the physical bond the letters have, so far, I have only mentioned tangible fragility. It can also be a word used to describe more abstract things, such as one's heart, emotions, relationships, or mental strength.

It is undeniable that human hearts are fragile; love and heartbreak create some of the warmest memories but also earth-shattering types of pain. Hearts are so fragile that we tend to protect them, each of us in our own way. Some choose to build walls; others choose to leave them behind, lose them at the earliest opportunity. Some already have broken hearts and spend their free time gluing, taping, wrapping, and somehow holding the pieces together.

People can be fragile in other ways as well, not just in the heart. These are the ones who are easily frightened, overstimulated, shy, or just sensitive to daily life in general.

When something is fragile, it's natural for us to be more careful with it, to protect it, and to handle it with care.

But I have discovered this word takes on a different tone depending on its context. For example, nobody looks down on a person being careful with their new phone or when cradling a child in their arms, but if you were to describe an adult as fragile, chances are it's not to be kind. Being described as fragile is usually meant as an insult, implying that a particular person is too sensitive, annoying, or in need of attention. While fragile is a word you might use to

describe someone else, you would rarely, if ever, use it on yourself. For some reason, we as a species don't want to be seen as fragile and don't want others to think we are breakable. But why? Why is it so bad to be sensitive? To care. Suddenly, this trait makes you less prepared for the "real world."

But nobody blames glass for being fragile, or babies for needing a tender hand, or a flower for bending when stepped on.

It just so happens that glass is fragile.

Society is so set on "fixing" fragile people when it is not a trait in need of fixing but simply human nature. It is a trait that may need to be managed, but not "fixed."

I have only recently come to terms with my own fragility, identifying it in my own mind, in whispers behind me, and in letters and pictures on a screen. I attempt to block out other people's opinions, sounds, and eyes on me. But just as we treat fragile objects with care, I should do the same for myself.

Glass is fragile but sturdy; this is something we have in common. You must remember that fragile is only one characteristic of glass; a cup has more function than just sitting there and being fragile. Glass is used in every skyscraper; it can superpower our vision and, if made correctly, can even be made bulletproof. If we only focused on how fragile glass is, it wouldn't be trusted for all these important duties.

I have been considering my self-destructive thought patterns recently, trying to figure out when they began. Humans were not born hating themselves or others; we are not rooted in hate; it's a learned behavior. Unless there is a specific traumatic event associated with the pattern, such as a car crash or abusive relationship, we don't know exactly when the pattern of negative thoughts began.

I saw an interesting exercise online the other day. It was a video of a girl who challenged herself to do 30 days of self-love by looking in the mirror, into her own eyes, and saying out loud words that were positive and encouraging. Such as "I am so beautiful", "I love the way I smile", or "I am a person I admire."

I watched her record herself doing this, and at first, it was so awkward that I felt uncomfortable just watching her. But as the days went on, the words came easier, and she had more positive things to say about herself. The compliments flowed out, and she seemed to radiate sunshine.

I tried this activity.

I have not made it 30 days.

In fact, I have not even made it through a week,

Yet.

The first couple of days usually go well, but by day 4 or 5, I find my thoughts already slipping back into the comforting pattern of self-sabotage.

When I am so used to using a negative thought pattern as a form of encouragement, it's no wonder this exercise is so hard. Some of my negative thinking patterns sound like "If you eat that, it means you're unhealthy", "someone who really loves the flute would be practicing right now", and "A good partner would have taken the smaller piece." It's a form of protection, one of my coping mechanisms of choice. After all, if I tear myself down, it won't hurt as much when other people do it.

Obviously, this isn't true, and so far, it hasn't worked, so why is it such a hard habit to break?

Just like smoking and chewing your fingernails are extremely difficult habits to break, the self-sabotage loop is another tricky one. It takes a lot of internal processing, to reflect on your own memories and pre-existing beliefs and challenge them. It's easier said than done, and very mentally and emotionally draining.

I feel the need to practice flute obsessively, or I don't deserve to be called a flautist. Society has told us we need to capitalize on our hobbies and that we must be good at them, but that's not true! Just having a hobby and enjoying it regardless of its level, is enough.

My mom recently told me she didn't call herself a runner until she was 50. I was shocked. She had been running since I was little, so at least 27 years. A couple of years ago, she even won a 10K in her age division in a race I forced her to do with me. When we run together, she slows down for me! In her own form of self-sabotage, she told herself she didn't do enough to call herself a "runner."

I am proud I can recognize this behavior in myself, but it still takes a conscious effort to change, because, as I said before, habits are hard to break. I have been treating my anxiety as a problem to be resolved rather than a symptom that needs to be managed. It's not easy to retrain our brains.

While I may have fragile roots, it's only one of many traits I use to describe myself. I am also brave, unique, tough, interesting, take your pick, but if you're one to focus on the fragile in yourself or others, I encourage you to try and look at it from a different angle. You are probably only focusing on one aspect of a larger picture. It's from these fragile roots that we all must grow.

Snowflakes

Kaitlin Creeger

Gentle snowflakes
cascade around us --
like melting white chocolate

From childhood, I recall
laughter bubbling like wet soap,
planting sunflower seeds,
rustling of dying leaves,
baby blue and neon pink and ruby red of costumes
glittering in bedrooms

Staring, this cold fears me
falling like thick droplets
onto my cold, pale skin

Unable to consume me,
lying in bed, tucked and shaking,
I grasp in deep sobs of a world I once
felt secured.
And feel the pain, like lacerations,
deplore my ever heart and soul --

“Are you strong now?”
I taste the snow, like freezer frost, stale,
and as flakes gather on my lashes: “What is strong?”

The Marrow, Somehow

Tiffany Pate

You know that sound, that
high-pitched hum? Right after

a bomb goes off too
close. Not close enough to kill

you. Just burst your eardrums. Or
sometimes it's from

The sound in a room after the final fight
ends. And the door slams—

That can burst your eardrums, too.
The way your heartbeat pounds in your ears,

blood pumping.
The platelets, the plasma,

And the marrow, somehow.
You hear that, too

1 in 7 Experience Abuse or Neglect

Victoria Philp



Not Like a Tree

Sabrina Stoutamyer

Not like a tree
Whose roots anchor it to the earth
But like a leaf whose life hangs by a
 thread
And every year is blown from its
 mooring
To land on solid ground
Where it's trampled and kicked,
 bruised and buried
Becoming loam and fodder for the
 tree roots
Creating new growth
Where the leaf whose life was
 trivial blowing in the wind
Grounds itself to the earth
 vital in its smallness

Family Tree

Malachi Benoni

My grandpa of four greats
Peaceful was he called
His history rained down
Seeping deep into the ground

Down, down I dig
The pit I'm in, growing big
The dirt mound-turned-mountain
Growing continuously
As I search for the rare, prized jewels
The hidden rubies and silver
 Instead, I find dead bodies
Rotten teeth, emaciated heaps.
Is to uncover my forefathers' shames
Tantamount to robbing graves?
These ancestral guilts
Like sin-knowledge are a hilt
The sword biting at my neck
Threatening my life to wreck
But I try, I endeavor to be truthful. These past actions of those not-me
But from whom I profit, truthfully
I do not know how to cast off,
How to recognize my privilege
When all of these things are threatening
To crush me.

 The ditch is unstable, unsupported,
I am about to be buried in this crypt
With coal and dung I find myself numbered
Then I cry out to God and ask for mercy
And the clouds cease to rain

The clods cease to fall
The Righteous Sun flies towards me
Shining his healing rays.
I kneel down, I pray, I praise God for today

I resolve to continue, to dig until
My arms grow weary,
Until I can no longer continue
To search out the depths, for the hidden emeralds and amethysts
The bountifully beautiful bdellium and the stone called onyx
I dig, with shovel, hand, and foot
Sweat mixing with blood, my tear-ducts long dry
Digging, digging, digging, digging,
For what my forefathers have left for me
Their history and their legacy
The knowledge not forgotten of them
That, at least, with effort I can retrieve
 In search of gold or silver
 The life of my forefathers
 My antecedents' biographies
 Their loves and hates,
 Their pain and fate,
 Remain obscure to my eyes
That try to discern
 Fact from legend
History from story

Where do we Belong?

Lilli Mulvaine

Where do we belong
if our old country rips its people apart
and forces refugees to run from ruin like rodents,
while the new land
we were promised was supposedly of hope,
would now rather swallow us whole,
by scarfing down on our bones, and
scavenging on anything that brings assets and gold.

Where do we belong
once exiled from the core of culture,
ripped up by the roots,
unable to regain composure,
where our prior identity is rejected,
now being identified as a name and number
on a card colored green.

Where do we belong
once our souls are
civilized in the mist
of wine, apples, and evergreens,
Yet we struggle to contain
the essence of who we used to be.

Where do we belong
when violence and violation vacuum away any peace
Expelling us from the home we had to escape,
and leaving us unable to find tranquility
In the alien home where we now sleep?

Where do we belong
when those who we worshipped,
politicians and police,
divide our American dreams,
name us the undergrowth of society,
a reminder that "Freedom"
never comes free.

Seeing the World from a Different View

Ashley Peterson



Remember?

SJ Larsen

Remember when love was sweet?
Family, immovable, stronger than steel
Growing into love creates a chasm
Sharp spikes of iron protrude out
The ground slips from beneath, wind races past
Unruly heart leading the way, you take the dive.

Family flows through your life, a raging river
Tearing limb from limb
Rebounding from metallic burns to wet whips
Violet and crimson welts and dents
leave the heart disfigured
As swirls of doubt gnaw at the soul

She takes you in her gentle grip
The rapids a distant memory
Worries bubble along on a tranquil stream
family of sunlight
One that shouts you are more than enough, one that says
With honey lemon tea in hand beside the chasm
Remember when love was sweet?

Passenger 1969

Janelle Serio

I watch the yellow dividing lines, dotted and darting, disappearing under the wheels one after one after one in temporary obliteration. Summer roads lined with hay bales feel endless in late afternoons. My birthmother is narrating as she drives. Hands firmly on her wheel. She speaks of my difficult birth, how her mother was against my adoption, how she had followed my father's wishes instead of her mother's. How her mother had abandoned her after that.

She is driving me to meet yet another *old friend*. She *fills me in* about the friend's 17-year-old daughter, *who just gave a baby away for adoption*. She takes a sloppy drag from the red-and-white striped straw poking out of her sweating Coke. The lid shifts precariously over the damp paper cup. *They have no idea what they're getting into*. My birthmother's voice pitches above the noise of tires on asphalt. *I tried to tell them, you know—the not-knowing—the endless waiting—they'll see—that girl has a lot of long years ahead—*

Her mouth forms a tight line for a moment. Her voice became a hoarse whisper. *It would have been better for her just to—*

She mouths the rest, waves an emphatic hand, nods her own head, as in agreement with herself. She stares straight ahead, as if guided by blinders. Her hands quiver violently on the steering wheel. The front right tire of the SUV vibrates over the rumble strip next to the ditch.

I think of my adoptive grandmother. How she paraded me around to her neighbors when I was small. How they always reminded me how *lucky* I was to be *taken in* by a good family. How my grandmother kept dozens of photos of me as a child in the shoebox on the top shelf of her hall closet. How my photos nested with the photos of the foster children she and my grandfather had *taken in* during the depression. How my grandmother always wrote *Joann's adopted daughter* on the back of them, just below my name.

My birthmother flips the headlights on. In the sideview mirror, I watch the yellow dividing lines emerging from under the SUV in popping resurrection before it gets too dark to see. To our west, the sun is dipping below a wide nut orchard. The trees are heavy with filberts.

We never called them hazelnuts.

Homage to Umbilicus

Richard Denner



An Unremarkable House

Diana Braskich

Spacious, empty rooms sheathed in light brown carpet
Recently vacuumed, irregular patterns mar the surface
Unexpected directional shifts
which no one cared to smooth

Somber sunlight pours through vacant windows
Gaping upon the lush greenery of
adjacent homes. Flanked by ancient, unwashed
curtains. Immovable, permanent, frail.

Light envelops the living space,
shadows assemble in the hall.
A door opens on a barren
master bedroom. Smaller bedrooms
cover behind an obscuring wall

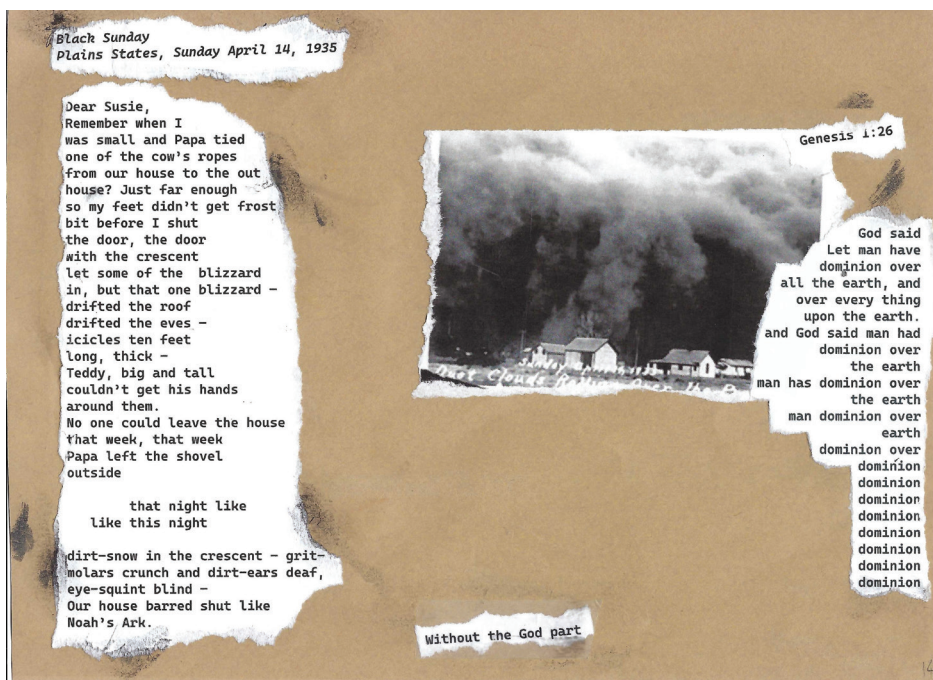
Wrought iron, twisted, black,
keeps guests safely above ground.
Cold and sturdy, easy to
Circumvent. A single, careless leap
sends you plummeting below

Stairs, worn by years of heavy
tread, sag beneath the weight of prior tenants.
A wooden banister long since
cracked by children sliding
silently away

Do not turn the corner and
look beneath the stairs.
There, a closet yields to
darkness. The claustrophobic center.

Black Blizzard

Janelle Serio



Dear Susie

Janelle Serio

Hildegard Berreth
Logan Township, South Dakota, April 1935

Dear Susie,

They called us into church today
to count us. The Smith girl was found
dead ten feet from her front door -
they say she lost her way back
from the outhouse in the black blizzard.
Pastor was sweaty in his suit and his hair
was stuck out in all directions like filth-
spikes. He says the grasshoppers and the jack-
rabbits and the heat and the big dust and the lost
crops and the buried farms and houses and barns
and the sicknesses are signs of the end
times. He says it like he knows,
says we should believe
what he says,
like if
he is right
it makes him
a prophet.

Ich liebe dich,
Hilda

16 years old

On Susanna Miller

Janelle Serio

On Susanna Miller
Late September 1936

Separation by a card table
flimsy, portable legs toe to toe -
dusty brown leathers against
white pumps that tread lightly
under the new white cotton
dress, freshly stitched and ruffled -
Her elbow poised in a dainty perch
on the white coverlet far from her sturdy
home hundreds of miles away, she holds
a decision, suspended between finger and thumb.
Through glinting round lenses, she gazes
out the door
out of focus, wonders
if she should resolve,
if she should turn just left
enough to say
I am sorry



On Katarina Berreth

Janelle Serio

On Katarina Berreth
Late September 1936

Separation by a card table
flimsy, portable legs toe to toe -
white pumps against dusty brown
leathers that trod hundreds of dusty
miles. Reality beneath the white dress
with flowers raised like extravagant
Swiss-dot-sheer, transparent pride
seated on a borrowed folding chair.
The white coverlet table setting,
the bud vase glinting vaguely in sun
light filtered by filagree lace curtains
blown in by hot wind. Her hand would
be on her hip instead of her lap
if she were to stand,
if she turned her squared face
to her right to ask,
Who are you to eat my bread?



21

Ars Poetica at Umtanum Falls

Elliott Whanger

My eyelashes frozen like zippers, I glide
this icy mountain decline on my ass, each rock
a new spot, a dark chasm to map

warm underground lakes not broken
open as a cenote. I find the bounds
of crimson beaches with my thumbs.

My palms explore a sheer escarpment wall,
an open-faced corridor to a bull's studio,
stream softly apposed. Rectangular juts, nooks
for my weary digits, resting not long enough. Moss hangs
like LEDs off apartment balconies

& fallen leaves bore me. In every mundane step
I want to ferry my senses downstream,
leave my husk as souvenir for the elk.

There's no boat but the one I am.

The Repair Shop

Preston Ham

We fix up our old belongings,
the brittle portrait, the chipped vessel,
the cracked chest.

We do this to preserve a piece
against time's decay
and the repair becomes part of the belonging
so that who we are
fills in who we were
the way a reconstructed vase can hold
both a new volume of cut flowers and
the memory of itself in fragments.

To properly repair
and restore my belonging,
I need to remove the glue in the old gaps.

Someone who cared a great deal
used too much of the wrong kind.

Roses

Sabrina Stoutamyer

I read each rose has its own unique whorl pattern. Like a thumbprint. I like my nails long. They remind me of thorns. Prickly. Warning: if consumed it will hurt. When I was seven years old, I fell into a rose bush. Head to toe. Blood streamed from skin scratched riverbeds. My anxiety travels from my brain to my fingers. Tapping hard surfaces. Desk. Phone. Tic, tic, ticking. Warning: beware she's unbalanced. Step careful now. Watch out for her thorns. I'm fighting the consumption of myself. Even as meds slowly plant roots in my brain.

Pascal's Pumpkin Patch

M. Sage Flint

Jesus and I play peek-a-boo
in the corn maze. I keep losing,
then finding him. His face
is sliced up from all the corn leaves.
I pick a ladybug out of his hair.
She wings away, a spot
of blood suspended midair.

Caribbean Hermit Crab (*Coenobita clypeatus*)

Susan Wenzel

An Imitation of Aimee Nezhukumatathil's World of Wonders Essays

I have lived in 23 different homes in my fifty-two years and, at one time in my youth, was even homeless for many months. All fifteen of the adult moves were by choice, my choice, and a direct result of my Navy career. The childhood moves were often short-notice and frequently occurred due to some impending family financial disaster—usually just as I was feeling settled and beginning to fit in with the newest group of friends. It was a decidedly uncertain period of time for me during which I felt the need to grow up quickly. I soon found the best way to cope with the helplessness and unpredictability of my life was to curl up tightly in my shell to protect my young self so no one could pick away at my tenderness.

Hermit crabs are best known for their need to continue moving out of one shell and into another, over and over again, for the duration of their life. Generally, they change shells out of necessity but sometimes they find a more enticing shell or are chased out by a larger crab. Hermit crabs are typically loners and earn their name because of their tendency to tuck themselves completely into the seclusion and security of their shell at the slightest hint of provocation. They are secretive and withdraw from their shells only when assured of complete safety. As nocturnal creatures, they dine and move about only at night when they are less likely to be seen by people and predators alike. By day the terrestrial species of these hide under coastal vegetation and rock ledges or in holes in trees, just as aquatic hermit crabs conceal themselves inside larger shells, reefs, tidepools, driftwood, and shoreline tree roots and vegetation.

As a child, the longest I lived in one place was three years; indeed, I moved into my eighth place the summer after eighth grade. Every year or few, we picked up and moved, for one reason or another, from one home to another. Sometimes the term “home” should have been applied loosely. Two of the earliest places were tiny apartments in the same low-income complex in Columbus, Ohio, not far from Interstate 270. Both apartments were walking distance from a malodorous Sunoco oil refinery and not far from a park where a teenage neighbor girl was found raped and murdered after going out for a Sunday stroll. The first shared a wall with the apartment complex dumpsters; the second, next door to a pot dealer whose crop often sprouted up underneath the fence of our miniscule concrete patio, my only outdoor hiding place.

Worldwide, there are over six hundred known species of hermit crabs. *Coenobita clypeatus*—the Caribbean hermit crab—is one of the most common, adaptable, and hardiest. This hermit crab, also known as the “Purple Pincher” because of their larger left chela—the grasping end of crustacean and arachnid frontal appendages—is native to the West Atlantic and Caribbean including the Virgin Islands, Venezuela, Bermuda, the West Indies, and can be found as far

north as southern Florida. Caribbean hermit crabs begin their lives as free-swimming larvae that quickly grow to become shell-seeking crabs. Hermit crabs, unlike other crustaceans, are unable to produce their own shell and must continually hunt for new homes gleaned from other organisms' discards—often calcified snail shells but sometimes human garbage—to shield their tender exoskeletons.

Each time I moved as a child, the homes became slightly larger, safer, and stronger even as my security and personal belongings—toys, clothes, books and all—dwindled down and down in accordance with my parents' willingness and ability to tote everything from place to place, once again. I often wished I could tote them all on my back, just as the hermit crab hauls its home, its only possession, everywhere it goes. During one particularly devastating time, I was yanked from yet another place mid-schoolyear to Minnesota, hundreds of miles away from the previous others in Ohio. After less than a year, we moved again, back to Ohio. This move, which occurred when I was halfway through sixth grade, an unarguably vulnerable time in a child's life, culminated with a period of homelessness in which I was unable to grasp onto anything and lost nearly everything.

Without their shell Caribbean hermit crabs are unable to regulate body moisture and are defenseless against predation and attack by insects like ants. Because of their soft carapace, Caribbean hermit crabs are a favorite food of herons, gulls, crows, and larger crabs and, as a result, leave the fortification of their homes only when it is necessary, usually for molting and breeding or moving into a larger or nicer shell. When a switch is imminent, the crab moves from one shell to the other quickly, always ensuring the new one is in close proximity. Once hermit crabs are secure in their new home, it is next to impossible to pull them out as they use their fourth and fifth pairs of legs and uropods—the specially adapted sixth pair of legs—to cling to the inner structure of the shell. Intentionally yanking a hermit crab from its shell is likely to gravely injure, if not kill, it.

It was not surprising that food scarcity was synonymous with the multiple moves. I knew to eat whatever I was given whether or not I found it appealing. Because of this, the school's free lunch program was a blessing... and a curse. This state-funded program guaranteed I had regular food and a bright yellow orange punch card, which broadcasted my vulnerability. This lack of camouflage ensured I was mercilessly, endlessly teased and bullied for being "poor." I never defended myself and always took my tray and scurried to the farthest back corner table of the cafeteria or into the storeroom behind the serving line where I worked during junior high to earn my "free" lunch.

Caribbean hermit crabs, too, are opportunistic feeders. As omnivorous and scavengers—part of mother nature’s cleanup crew—they will eat nearly anything that is available from carrion to fruits and vegetation, even leaves and plants that are naturally poisonous to other creatures. Because they must partially expose their body while feeding, they do so only when they are assured it is safe. Hermit crabs’ frontal appendages are modified walking legs that end in claws—one large and one small. The smaller claw is used for tearing and grasping food particles and delivering them to the mouthparts where they are ground down before being swallowed. The larger front claw is capable of being used for fighting if the crab feels threatened but more often is used to shield the entrance of the shell when the crab barricades itself inside, away from harassment or danger.

I, too, learned my survival depended on my willingness to adapt to my ever-changing environments...to harden my exterior and safeguard the vulnerability tucked deep inside. Unlike the hermit crab, I evolved to expose myself and truly live.

From Here

Preston Ham



Body

Caelyn White

My body

My body is

My body is amorphous!

My body is a ruler. Stiff? Straight? Sometimes used for non-traditional violence?

My body is filled with ants! Look closely, you'll see the freckles move.

My body is ART! Frame it, put it on the way, LOOK, discuss it with your dinner guests.

My body is...okay.

My body is available for a limited time only! Call now to pay three payments of \$19.99!

My body is yours if you promise to give it back to me when you're done

My body is okay.

My body is a stress toy.

My body is stress.

My body is not exactly what I want, and that's fine, right? I don't have to love myself every goddamn second.

My body is mouths. My body is

Teeth.

My body is a nice burgundy color.

My body is a mummy wrapped in caution tape.

My body is a second grader's diary with a lock cheap enough her mother can open it without a key.

My body is allowed when anyone else does it.

My body is my mind is my soul is my heart is me is

My body is, okay?

My body is a

The Death of a Star

Tiffany Pate

When a star dies, it falls in on itself

It collapses under its own weight

It lasts a billion years

It took a billion years to die

Surely there are quicker deaths

between the hydrogen and helium, wait

there's oxygen, too. Right?

Is there any oxygen there's supposed to be oxygen

Neon silicone racing through the particles

Molten rage, vivid hate

Bright, tangible, and blistering

A hardened burned-out husk, a black hole in your periphery

Crushed to pulp and dust. But what becomes of space dust?

Energy doesn't die, but what remains?

Something else... smaller, yes.

Another billion years

Day 1

in which im sober

Emma CrowE

im not my mother, but i cant remember where i put my keys
and i misplaced my phone,
the one with 42 missed calls

im not my mother, but i chipped my bottle opener
with my teeth and i cried myself to sleep,
the kind where you cant breathe, choking on mucus

im not my mother, but my sister calls me a drunk
and dad looks at me with crystalized pity in his eyes,
the ones he passed down to his favorite daughters

im not my mother, but chipped nails unearth memories
of a sleepwalker in plain view,
the one i became to alleviate

im not my mother, but my face crinkles the same way
with crow feet covering flushed skin,
the sunscreen doesnt work past 5pm

im not my mother, but locked aisles call to me
and my shadows pull away from me,
begging for a sip and the chance to self-erase

Family History

Diana Braskich

My grandma taught me genealogy,
lives absorbed through census data.

A surgeon from the fifteenth century.
A Union soldier from Ohio.
Six generations of men named François.
For tradition
And conformity.

Things I thought I wanted.

With your death, I inherited.
Our secrets. Our
illegitimacy. All things
seen anew.

Your birthday, a mere three months
after Great-Grandma became a bride.
Rabid Catholic moralizers,
counting backward by nine,
scoff behind closed doors.

Is that why you made mom cry? When her
granddaughter grew inside me?
Why Grandpa spun, so restless in his
Grave? Blinded by your mother's
shame, reflecting from my brazen,
ringless finger?

Is this your baggage, hanging from my neck?
Your beatings haunting
dad, haunting me.

All your pictures he threw away;
his phone number I deleted.

This is what you gave us.
Broken heirlooms locked in
lonely cupboards. Apart.

My pedigree sits dead upon the shelf,
coated in grimy dust. The heavy
weight of secrets.

Our legacy rots with you.
Properly buried in the dirt.

back pain

Zane DeYoung

at the root of us
we notice small things first.
small threads when
i place my hands
somewhere better than
the small of your back,
splintered before we met
and breaks and breaks again
against the resistance of concrete
and the crush of cool tile.

this was a middling form of bonding
for us. arthritis in the same
place on my spine where the
fracture sits on yours. but we'd already
been together so long, years
scraping away like vertebrae, growing
leaner with time
that it lost some significance.

talking our long way around problems,
we come to terms with our bodies
the ways and locations of pain
drifting slowly off course, then back
again, then away again
significant enough to notice in a knee
this morning or a shoulder the next
but seldom with enough clarity
or purpose to comment on
from year to year

this is concrete under our tongues,
the kind of love seldom expected
but often cemented by time and by
the small acts of plagiarism we perform
against ourselves and each other,
old habits parceled away
into the gentle topography
of wrinkled smiles and creased lips.

i love you
though this too i
admit is foolish

ELL Tryptic

Victoria Philp



Each Day in the US, Three Women are Murdered by their Partner

T. Ellis

He hits her
eventually apologizing
/
Kestrel calling her
in
like
lake water in June
everybody
dons a song
/
He hits her
eventually apologizing
readied for the next warbling

The Barn Owl

Tiffany Pate

The rain and sun battled each other throughout the afternoon, ending the softball game in a full-blown downpour. She walked out of the women's room of the stone outhouse. She pretended she needed to use the bathroom to get out of batting for the second time. She went to the game to socialize, not play. Her embarrassing lack of hand-eye coordination would only hinder the team.

As she turned the corner, she saw him leaning against the brick wall, watching everyone scurry across the playfields to their cars. They stood in silence for a few moments, sheltered by the modest overhang.

The only sound was the rain, sluicing through the overflowing gutters and down the drainpipes.

"Who won?" she asked.

"Not us." He laughed.

She looked at him and smiled. He raised one eyebrow, a twinkle in his eye—as if to say, "Ready?" Laughing, they sprinted down the long parking lot to their cars, joining the others. Drenched and smiling, everyone said their farewells.

The two looked at each other knowingly as she started her car. No need for lingering goodbyes or attracting more attention. When he pulled into her driveway several minutes later, he left his guilt with his wedding ring in the glove compartment.

The fires along the west coast of North America choked the air and cloaked the sky in a yellow veil of smoke. Staining it burnt orange. Blood red. She couldn't help but gasp at its breathtaking magnificence. The earth is burning down. The apocalypse is beautiful. She knew... this time, this was it. The earth could only scream, burn, and beg for so long before she just gave up altogether.

The fires continued to rage, growing in intensity and quantity. They spread across the continent and the world. None spared its wrath. Everyone said it would get better. It didn't. It didn't rain. It didn't cool off. They couldn't put them out. And then there was finally nothing left to burn. The blackened remains of the world, ever smoldering, in a crematorium.

"There's no more time left." A heavy sigh escaped him, laying his head on her lap. They sat on the crumbling retaining wall outside a foundry abandoned long before the fires.

She frowned, running her fingers through his hair. She didn't have the heart to tell him the truth, but he was right. She knew there was a time he would have laughed with pure delight to hear her admit he was, in fact, right about something.

"No," she said, her voice soft, "we have all the time in the world."

“Remember when we hated how much it used to rain?” he asked.

“I do. Yeah. Never thought I’d miss it.” They had had different versions of this same exchange more times than she could count. Time was short, even shorter for him. He weakened while his cough worsened by the hour.

He used to be so muscular and strong, bubbling with mirth. He used to have a serenity and sense of peace she had never seen in anyone else. It wasn’t always real, but he did it for her. He could always calm her down. Now his face sunken, dark circles under his eyes. His skin had become sallow and dry.

The spark in her eye, a glint betraying the rage just below the surface, always precariously close to bursting through the seams, had vanished. A tight coil always seconds away from springing. Her strength and loss of control were beautiful and terrifying. Rage was traded for melancholy. She often thought about his wife and children and wondered how they died. He refused to talk about it. She just knew it happened before they found each other again.

The end of the world gave her what she always wanted: the two of them together. He always claimed to want the same. She knew it wouldn’t have happened any other way. He would never have gotten a divorce, and she finally gave up. If you could do it over again, would you change it?

She often wondered if he thought the same thing every time he looked at her and why his eyes would glisten every time he tried to smile at her. They used to talk about how they were always together in another life, a parallel universe.

He paced her living room like a caged animal. She sat on the couch, crying. She almost didn’t bother putting on any eye makeup that day because she knew she would cry. But she also wanted to look pretty because she knew they’d never see each other again. He sat on her cold marble coffee table, facing the couch, pushing the microfabric against the grain.

“You have feelings for me. I can feel it, and I can see it.”

“It’s true. Everything you said is true,” he said, staring at his hands, swiping the fabric back and forth.

“So why can’t you admit it?” her voice cracked.

He shook his head, sighing.

“Why? Tell me why?” she demanded.

“Because!” he shouted. His voice softened. “Because... it’s just going to make everything worse.” The sadness and resignation in his voice told her everything she needed to know. He would never choose her and needed to invent a reality that made it easier.

Then he said, “It’s an... achy... feeling. Right here.” His hand hovered over

the left side of his chest.

He walked in front of the window, dust motes dancing in the early afternoon sunlight. She followed him.

“I don’t want to not know you,” her voice muffled, buried in his shoulder.

They stood there a few moments more. His body tensed. Fight or flight. He was choosing flight. She didn’t let go. He took her arms and peeled them from around his waist. He slammed the door as he left. Her spare key fell from its hiding place on top of the door frame and clanged to the ground.

Soon, she’d be alone. She stared at the sun. The polluted film covering the sky gave it a sickly orange glow. The air, a thick wool blanket draped over the world, grew more oppressive each day. She could almost still see the lush green forest and snowcapped mountain ranges that decorated the horizon. No more trees. The mountains bare. We destroy everything we touch. We deserve this, she thought. We deserve to be wiped out. Her chest hitched as she stifled a sob. They sat in silence for several minutes.

Then, clearing his throat, he said, “I heard that shrieking again last night.”

“Bigfoot? A banshee?” she exclaimed, then cringed. He had been insisting he heard this “ungodly screeching” at night. He sat outside most nights, his coughing keeping him awake. She always told him the coughing didn’t bother her; she didn’t want him to leave. He said he didn’t want to keep her up, too.

He scoffed at her dismissal and sat up.

“Sorry.” A pause. “I just—what do you think it is?”

“I’m pretty sure it’s just an owl, but still... it’s horrible.”

“An owl? From... from where, though?” She furrowed her brow.

He nodded his head at the scorched landscape and blackened remains of a forest.

“When was the last time you saw any animals? Anything moving but us?” She looked at her lap, the corners of her mouth drawing down. He rolled his eyes and stood up. He started coughing, a deep, wet barking, and sat back down. She rubbed his back until he stopped.

“Actually, I think it lives in the building. You really don’t hear it?” She heard a quiver in his voice. She started to shake her head and stopped.

“Well, maybe once. Yeah, I did hear something.” She nodded. “It must have been that.”

“Don’t patronize me. I’m not insane. I know what’s going on.” His eyes were clear. He didn’t break her gaze.

“Yeah. I know.”

He took her hand. Fury and sorrow overwhelmed her. She tried not to dwell on the way things used to be, The Before, and everything they lost. It only made it worse. And yet.

The last time she saw him, during The Before, was in a snow-covered parking lot, explaining why she didn't call when they both came to the same dead-end town for different reasons. Him pretending it didn't bother him. 46 weeks before the parking lot, before he went back East and she stayed West, they shivered, walking back to his hotel from the Five Point Café. April is cold in Western Washington. Neil Young and Crazy Horse played over the speaker as they were leaving, so she asked him if it was better to burn out or fade away. They both agreed burning out was better.

After he fell asleep, she walked the familiar route to the spring, pushing the cart stacked with plastic tubs along the worn groove in the trail, wondering how much longer they'd have water. The spring was almost dry. She thought of the snow and the cold of those moments often. Distant memories and stolen moments they'd never have again.

Then she saw it, perched on the charred remains of a fence. She gasped and froze. Its eyes, large lumps of shining coal, stared out from its snowy white face, tilted in cautious curiosity. Its thick brown feathers smoothed and settled against its small body. A barn owl. Her breath caught in her throat. The two creatures studied each other. It lifted its head upright, curiosity satisfied.

Dresser

Caelyn White

Inside me, I contain her
objects. All of her, everything.
Pants (her favorite), skirts from when she liked her legs, then blouses, a
hundred tee-
shirts, seeped
in too much nostalgia to part with,
underwear she got in high school, tank tops with broken straps tied together,
socks
(god the socks).
The top is adorned with knickknacks,
loose and contained
earrings and a tangled pile of cheap plastic painted silver and gold,
Gordian Knot.

Before she left her hometown she spent spare seconds that summer
in her fathers tee shirt and morphed me,
streaks of black speckling the porch.
She dyes her hair black,
three shades darker than its origins, and stains me to match.
I squeeze and
squeak and
squeal.
But she doesn't bother
to change me beside my aesthetics.

Each morning she ponders me, pulls my soul from me, clutters my face,
studies my skin as she considers her own.

Anatomy of Analogy

Gail Nixon

If I could I would grate the skin from my bones and sell it to you by the pound
so that you could use it to make me
into who you want me to be
knowing
consciously
that every pound of my fleshy body
is worth less to you than a drop of water in the ocean that carried the ships you
brought me on
chained and discouraged like a forgotten rusted fence
it is not a coincidence you plead ignorance

I would grind my bones into a fine powder
so that you may sprinkle me on top of the box you baked me in
hoping I wouldn't rise
swapping baking powder for gunpowder
I close my eyes
trying to memorize all the lies
I've been spoon-fed until I am so full I think I might explode
regurgitating words I once heard

Frederick Douglass once said
Rich inheritance of Justice Liberty prosperity and independence
bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you
Not by me
and still
I am called upon to remove my hands and feet
replacing them with hooves to better carry the weight of this country on my
back
becoming the mule to work the 40 acres you promised me
While treading lightly

as to not knock down the house of cards you stacked against me

And still

I would gladly

rip the long kinky curls from my scalp

strand by strand

deep conditioning the preconditioning you've done to me

so that you may use them as a garnish for the masterpiece you think I'd be

if only you could get your hands on me

I would rip the tongue right out of my mouth and hold it

like I hold my peace

as little pieces of me like tiny shards sever the urge to call you out for even

wanting me to

and I would melt down my intellect so that you may use it to glaze over all of

my imperfections

while perfectly accepting that there will never be enough

secretly wishing that you would drown in the intensity of my thoughts

like a fish out of water drowning on the air and wished for

but I never wished for this

For the need to gouge the eyeballs from my skull

as a courtesy

so that I could pretend not to see your hypocrisy

I would drop them in your spirits like olives in a Martini

hoping you would swallow them whole and choke on the vision of a future I see

where being born into Freedom isn't being born into oppression

or being born to be less than

Where resting in peace isn't the only piece I get
where I am allowed to say words like "I deserve"
and I deserve more than this

More than handing over my seared ears like cooked steak
so done I can barely hear you fumbling to fix your mistakes

And still
I would carve out my heart and serve it to you on a platter
À la carte
so that you may pick it apart in its purest form
taste the difference between love and hate
sop up its juices
lick the crumbs from your plate

And still
you would gag on the audacity that you cannot send me back from whence I came
covering your plate with a napkin like you cover your shame
of having enjoyed the essence of me
Wishing you could pick me out of your teeth
Like you pick which parts of me are good
Enough for your political agenda

Bury the rest
Throw dirt on my name
It's funny how buried and planted both look the same

No Land

Lilli Mulvaine

I can't say I have a land,
or rather I am between,
Amidst the forest green
And where the sirens sing.
Peering over the edge,
I'm finding a place for my feet,
either to replant old roots,
or let old roots grow free.
My childhood home holds ghosts,
and the brick house I grew up in has sold
which has left me bitter and rotten,
as if my memories turned to mold.
However, a place comes to mind:
a small town named Rockaway.
One side of the main road is forest,
on the other side is sea.
It's a place caught in between,
just like me.

The Beauty of Peyto Lake

Ashley Peterson



Regeneration

Jessika Roe

Wounded womb, scraped,
precious elemental veins,
corroded wires burned of plastic myelin,
neodymium, hafnium, gallium.
Fume-seared breathless,
copper-penny poisoned children.
Immortal ambition blinded in blue light.
Greedy lips dribble toxic tang from shriveled
breast sucked raw. Devouring,
sharp teeth deep in mother's flesh,
cadaverous veins of latex blue, cobalt ore.
From fiery death, Jörd emerges.
Lone wolf pines grasp
ancestral bones, ashes of heirs yet unborn,
nutrient-rich compost. Quintessence,
resurrected by the rhythm of earthworm hearts.
Tender-toed newts nestle deep in fire moss.
Liverwort takes root on misty forest floors.
Patient lotuses rise from murky depths,
secrets held for decades in quiet clay.
The ancient trees return, whispering
wisdom like silken webs, entwined,
Aspen-rooted; trembling transcendence.

School Days

Richard Denner

Let's you and me go burn down a couple of universities—
Fairy International, flap your mothy wings to speed the blaze
—Philip Whalen, "To Edward Dahlberg"

Pre-school was ok. Jampa liked snack time; the combination of graham crackers and grapefruit juice is still one of his favorites. He was willing to try and be polite, and he learned not to eat paste. He still likes to take short naps. Learning not to end a sentence with a preposition, as in "There is some shit up with which I will not put," came later.

Jampa's kindergarten classroom was in a portable building on a hillside. From his seat by a window, he could catch a glimpse of a rabbit that sat atop a rock outcrop. A part of Jampa liked school: making up stories seemed easy enough, but a part would just as soon be chasing rabbits.

In 1948, street cars clattered along The Arlington, the avenue in front of Jampa's house. One morning, he decided to let his ride to school go passed, and he spent the day climbing trees, following creek beds, and exploring beyond his neighborhood.

TRACETONES & AFTERDOTS

Smell of fungus and eucalyptus
Rough bark and smooth rock
Remind me of when I was a boy
Escaping up a creek
In search of Excalibur
Or ever elusive El Dorado.

Now, on the more traveled path,
I rein in my passions and fear consequences.
A salty will o' the wisp
Become a vulture's snack,
My mind still shifts and drifts.

The consequences of Jampa playing hooky included a visit to the principal's office and some, now, forgotten punishment, such as writing a sentence over and over on the blackboard. It was glorious on Indian Rock that day. This Jampa remembers.

Sequoia Elementary School is on Lincoln Avenue, in Oakland, in the Upper Diamond Area. Jampa entered the third grade there, in 1949. He took the name

Richard, since there was already a boy named Dick and another named Rich in his classroom. The school building was two-storied, in the shape of an L. The leg of the L was an auditorium with a basketball court. The principal took Jampa and the boy named Dick, after an altercation on the playgrounds, to the auditorium and gave them boxing gloves, telling them to go ahead and slug it out, now that he was the only observer. Their eyes met; they shook hands and went back to class. He would remain Richard and Dick, Dick.

At the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Hearst Street, where the school buses stopped, there was a Mom and Pop grocery store in the front room of a wood frame house. An entire wall, behind the counter with the cash register (the kind that had numbers that sprang up on separate tags), was devoted to penny candies: licorice whips, cinnamon wheels, wax tubes filled with flavored syrups, jaw breakers, sour belts watermelon, and packs of gum in flat sheets (5¢) that contained a card with a baseball star. Yoyos were the rage. The boys would stuff their mouths with bubblegum until they could hardly chew and “walk the dog” or “fly to the moon” on their way to school, blowing bubbles that covered half their faces when they popped.

Miss Robertson was a teacher’s assistant in the third grade. Jampa remembers her because she was young and smelled nice when she came close and leaned down to help with his schoolwork. Mr. Shriner was young, too. This was the first wave of new teachers, after the War, replacing ladies with gray, if not blue-tinted, hair. Mr. Shriner was tall, over six foot, and he had an intimidating presence in the classroom, a room that was scaled for children, but he was kind, and Jampa liked him, even after being caught out for reciting the same poem two years running. Jampa memorized new material for Mrs. Latimore, his sixth-grade teacher. He recited Mark Antony’s speech from Shakespeare’s Julius Ceasar: “The evil men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.” Jampa, at 82, finds that this line now makes more sense to him.

Jampa did not stay in touch with his high school friends. The only one he still knows, who went through all the grades with him, is Keith Olson. Keith came to one of his poetry readings and reminded him that their 50th high school reunion was scheduled to take place in the following year, 2009, and he wanted Jampa to attend it with him if he could. Jampa sent a letter to Keith explaining that he couldn’t attend the reunion and asked Keith to say hello to anyone who remembered him. He sent this poem:

AGE

I wanted to grow a beard,
but my mom didn't like it
my dad disapproved, or
I had to go before a judge.
"We're not letting you out
of the hole until you shave
that ridiculous red beard."

In the '80s my hair was long
and my beard glorious & full,
but when I was elected to be
Worshipful Master of Lodge 39
a few said, "Tell him to cut off
his beard; he looks like Jesus."
Looks like Jesus? As though
that was a crime, but I complied.

Now, I'm a Buddhist monk in long retreat,
and it's customary to let your hair grow.
I see my reflection with a long beard,
and it's white.

Unoriginal

Lesly Portugal

Therefore, I hated literature
It kept reminding me that my feelings were universal
That they have been recognized to exist long before I have.
It is the fact that I do not have the first-hand experience
Making me believe that
I sound like another person did
Like twenty-thousand other people did before me
The words I say, the phrases I use, the melodies I sing
A thousand before
Used them, said them, sung them
And a thousand after me will
Sometimes, I only wish to scream in a language no other has ever
Thought in, dreamed in, cried in
Sometimes, I wish to see garbled, ill-pronounced words come out of my own
mouth in the mirror
And think
"This is my voice, these are my words, this is my language"
What use is a thousand words if the sentences are common to the rest of humanity
Yet, I cannot think in a language I created
For, how would I create such a language in the first place
If not through the use of another?
But then how could my words, even in this disguise, ever truly be mine?
We are condemned to use recycled words and second-hand phrases
And all we write is naught but a haunting phantom of those that came and went
before us
Their words set in stone, while ours are stuck in our mouth.

Why do you Like Country Music?

Victoria Philp





Can I Understand You, Mom?

Khoa Le

When my mom and stepdad picked me up from the airport, I sat in the backseat of the car. My body just wanted to lay down after the whole night at San Francisco International Airport. My stepdad asked, “How was your trip with your girlfriend?”

“It was fun.” I turned to my mom and spoke in Vietnamese. “How’s business, mom? Making a lot of money?”

“It is okay. Sometimes good day, and sometimes bad day.” (In Vietnamese)

The whole drive, my chin was on my hand, and I looked outside the window. I wanted to ask her something else after 3 months of no call and no text. Most of the time when she called me, she said, “Eat healthy drinking a lot of water.” After I moved into the dormitory, I stopped calling her. I learned how to feed and take care of myself.

We dropped her off at the nail salon and drove back home. On the road, I asked my stepdad, Joel, again, “Is she doing okay? She did not say anything much.”

Joel said, “you know, her sister keeps abusing her. She tells her to work every day, even on break, she calls your mom in the middle of the day. Every time I talk about it with your mom, she gets angrier. Did you notice that she got angrier after we moved to California?”

She always likes this talk about money and others’ success. She compares me to her friends’ children. She tells me to get a better major in medical or science, not be an artist like her. To follow a job that demands respect. Telling her friends that I study a major in science to become a doctor. Lied that she owned a house, when we just rented one.

“Is she still sewing?”

“Just sometimes. Her eyes got really bad.”

We stopped at our house. He pressed the remote. The garage filled with kitchen kits, office supplies, wooden chairs, and an unplugged refrigerator. He drives inside the garage. I opened the door.

“Try to get some rest, we will get dinner with your mom today. Be nice with her okay.”

...

2012 INT. BEDROOM IN VIETNAM- DAY

The boy is sleeping on his mom’s bed. She calls her son multiple times till he opens his eyes.

MOM

“I will put 20,000 on the makeup table. Buy something to eat, okay?”

Her son stands up, and looks at the blue bill Vietnam Dong, folded in half on her make up table, full of products and pills. And that was his breakfast. He waits for his mom to say something more. He wants to eat a meal with her, with two of his brothers.

(CONTINUED)

...

Translator's note

We moved to America a couple months after her marriage. We've been in this country for more than ten years. I became a translator for my family. We moved a lot in those ten years: Vietnam to Washington, to Louisiana, and back to Washington again, and now to California.

Her nightstand always had a notebook that she translated from Vietnamese to English. Words related to her job and questions to ask at her nail shop. And the collection of Dr. Seuss that I bought for her. She kept a lot of pills that remind me of her makeup table.

All the dishes poorly washed.

The notion of difference between cultures exists when two people don't listen. No matter how much I tried to connect them through my translation. I just got lost in the process. As a translator in our house, I don't think it's enough, or necessary. They both need therapy to resolve their differences. Even when my mom and I speak the same language, we do not speak on the same terms most of the time.

Throughout this text, to me, the word mom defines someone who wants their kids to grow up and an obedient person. To them obedience means a good child. To my mom, a loving child is one who's stay with her and takes care of her.

...

2022 INT./EXT. CALIFORNIA HOUSE LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Women and children sit next to the Christmas tree. A group of drunk men sits in the kitchen. They keep filing their wine glasses. My stepdad and my mom stand outside the house

MOM

Can you tell Joel to stop complaining about my relatives? He makes me embarrassed. (In Vietnamese)

JOEL

What did she say? Does she defend those jerks again?
(In English)

MOM

Joel, please, I beg you, this is Christmas. (In English) Tell him for me.
(In Vietnamese)

TRANSLATOR

I don't know, mom. Those people drink all the time. (In Vietnamese)

MOM

You are still a kid, you don't understand. Your stepdad brainwashed
you.

FADE TO BLACK.

This happened to most of our conversations. I always feel my stepdad is right. I did not feel the connection between my mom and I. Connection needs to be built from time, not earned by demand. When I was a kid, I didn't spend time with her. The connection did not start from the beginning. I just called her mom because she just gave birth to me. She told me her rough past that when my biological father cheated on her, she swallowed sleeping medicine and tried to kill herself. But I don't understand why I didn't feel anything for her. When she moaned and called herself stupid, because she could not express herself in English for my stepdad to understand, and all I do is watch her. I know she will not listen to me, but the things I write, she will eventually read. I hope these words reach her.

...

Dear mom,

Thank you for taking care of me for the last twenty years. I don't know whether you will listen to what I say anymore. I acknowledged that you had a rough past. This is the only way to get these words to you. Everything I said so far, bad things or good things I have good intentions.

I appreciated those mornings when you woke me up early for school, without you, I don't think that I would ever have been able to get where I am right now. I admired your work ethics waking up early in the morning and working till late at night. One time, you stopped a stranger's car and asked him to drive me to school with your little English.

I hope when I move out, you don't call me "mất dạy" or "bất hiếu" those words are very strong words. I had a difficult time talking to you because you never let me finish a sentence. Joel is a good person he calls me and asks me about my school every week. He is my father. I know that it's hard for you to accept, but the only way that I will gain maturity is to move out of this house for my own sanity, my own life.

I promise you mom that I will drink a lot of water and eat healthy food as you tell me. I'll be responsible with myself. If I have time I will go home and see you. I still remember that I am Vietnamese and speak with you only in Vietnamese. Vietnamese is a part of myself

1. mất dạy: this word use for people who grows up without parents teach them any manners.
2. bất hiếu: this word describes someone disobeyed or disloyal their own family.

Translator's note

These two words are used when a parent renounces or no longer accepts a child as a family member.

Roommates

T. Ellis

Just in from the beach
sand tattoos
my heels the
sunshine heats my
still skin
unlike the ocean
salt in your hair
curlier yet
a damp suit clings;
the foreplay
for napping
sheets become waves
your eyes
my lighthouse

Bernice and Grace, 1946, Jersey Shore



Folklore

Emily Borg



A Garden's Tale

Elliott Whanger

I fling open
the grated door,
letting the flock
of boars fly. On wings
they careen toward
the monastery garden.

Running amongst kids,
we snatch feathers,
falling
like maple seeds, splotches
of thick, brown glue,
covered. The children
decorate one another
and scream at the clouds.

I fill my mouth with moss
like shag carpet fills grandpa's
basement. We sit together,
grilling between the smoldering
walls, as embers crack
and singe our backs.

Memories bring forth
a roaring flame
from the diaphragm, blown
to scorch out any
fungal remains
in the inner garden. But then
the cobbled courtyard bears

witness to the debauchery

of boars, bred rough
and free to feast.

Peony buds inhaled
by snouts dripping
petals. I grab handfuls
and arrange them
with feathers into a tiara
on my head. The Sus
eye me longingly. I go
and untie their wings.

Ode to Helianthus Giganteus

Caelyn White

If I glimpse you, cruising during late May
adventures, I will call your name, every time.
Cracked voice echoing down the freeway,
“Did you see them? They are here!”

My eyes lock, and you shoot me up
with saran-wrapped childhood.
Knees caked in garden dirt, feet soaked in streams.
I used to not think in the summer.

The world’s eyes cannot skip you over
because your build devours our attention, is it dumb
that I admire how, on a planet of small shrubs,
you dare look man in the eye.

If I further read seeds like tea leaves
I know you will consistently follow my future
scattering summers like confetti,
fingers locked til September.

And the ladies lurching arrange you in their vases, a pop of color to their
minimalism.
And wide-eyed young lovers wind you in bouquets, hundreds of dollars
discarded in a day.
And children pluck you gently as gifts to their parents, your stem gripped in
tiny hands.
But I will never take your head.

As they admire aesthetics, do they question?
Can I grow ten feet tall? Can I soak in eternal sunbeams?
Can people glimpse me on mid-August road trips, and think
“There she is! Existing, loud, bright, loved”?

There are Many Trees in the Afterlife

Bailey Day

A tree dies if it loses its roots. That's what Mandy McKenney said as they buried her Grandpapa in the ground, and it's what I thought of when Grandma Becky's coffin slunk into the sullen earth. Our last grandparent, Grandma Becky, was gone. Grandma Julene had died first, then her husband Earnest, then Grandpa Ralph. Now Grandma Becky is at one with the dirt, joining the worms and the mites and whatever else lives six feet under.

Mom hasn't stopped crying since the last of our roots died, and Dad hardly comes home anymore. Our home has become a hollow log with only the faint sound of sobs echoing from its inner depth from an animal who no longer feels like it belongs in the tree. I can't stand it. I become like my father and drive around most nights, hardly coming back to the empty log that's still my home. I spend a night or two at one friend's house, then the next three at another's. Their homes feel so alive compared to mine. I hate it because I miss it, but of course I don't tell my friends that. I simply pretend that I am happy.

Tonight, I'm driving home. I dread the sound of silence that will meet me when I walk through the garage, so I let the radio blare at full blast with the latest, unintelligible pop songs. I don't sing along, but let the noise, the noise, the noise of the car pump me up enough to keep me awake at this bleary hour past midnight.

I drive down a dark highway surrounded by dead trees. The dead trees stand as charcoal sentinels against the indigo background that engulfs the rest of the world. Their crinkly arms reach toward the highway, as if crawling there for safety from some wild beast chasing after them. So many dead trees crammed together in such a small space. They might look more alive in the daytime, but to me they just look dead—but everything has looked dead to me recently.

Bright lights hammer into me. I see a pair of headlights squealing toward me. I curse and swerve across the road. The other driver T-bones my car. Both the doors on the left side cave in, me and glass shooting out like bullets and scraping across my skin. The leather seat next to mine crumples. My car slams against the highway's guardrail. Sudden pain erupts from my side, hurrying up my arm until my head is pounding. The pop music drowns away and is replaced by a constant drumming of my skull and my brain—

Then it stops.

I blink and look around. I'm still sitting in my car, but the other car is nowhere to be seen. My car is suddenly in pristine shape, even though it still rests against the guardrail. A vine-covered guardrail. Looking out of my car's strangely clean windows, I see a host of ivy and soapwort tangling the guardrail to such an extent that I can't see the metal underneath.

I crawl across the seats, open the passenger side door, and wiggle out. I stand on a highway obscured completely by roses, petunias, rhododendrons—all kinds of flowers, growing through every crack in the asphalt. I spot a city skyline from a distance, but instead of lights poking through and polluting the night, there are trees and flowers growing around the buildings and skyscrapers. The stars above are so bright and colorful that I see swathes of purple and blue streaks dancing with them—a sight impossible to see when city lights soak up the sky.

I look where the dead trees were. In their place is a host of trees that are very much alive. I see oaks and aspens, birches and cedars, all growing in the same place. In fact, some grow around each other, trapped in an eternal hug. Some grow inside each other, their trunks melded into one, their individual roots lapping. There are hundreds of them, maybe thousands, all curled together in a mass of branches and roots, creating a sort of odd symphony.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

I start and look to my side. A lady stands beside me. She looks like she came straight from the 40s; she wears a dark, polka-dotted, green dress that cuts off right below the knee. Her platinum blonde hair bobs around her head, kept up by some serious hairspray, and her skin is flawless. She wears bright pink lipstick that clashes horribly with her dress. I gape at her. I only know one person who always wore tacky pink lipstick, no matter the outfit she wore.

“Grandma Becky?”

It feels wrong to call her Grandma now, since she’s suddenly my age. But she smiles at me, confirming my suspicions.

“You want to know why all the trees look like that?” Grandma Becky asks. She answers before I can reply—just like she used to do when she was alive. “Because they are all the trees that have ever been planted on that spot. When a tree dies, it doesn’t move to a spot it wasn’t at in its previous life. It stays where it was and shares with all the other trees that come after it.”

I stare at all the plants surrounding us, from the plants covering the highway to the city covered in flowers in the distance. I’m not seeing a world covered in flowers; I’m seeing the ghosts of plants where they once thrived.

“I’m dead, aren’t I, Grandma Becky?”

Grandma Becky just smiles at me. Every time she didn’t want to tell me something, she would smile at me just like that.

My cheeks flush. I think of when we lowered Grandma Becky into the ground. The sun refused to show its face that day. The sun may have shined a few times since her death, but I haven’t felt it. It’s been all clouds for my family and I.

“Why did you leave us, Grandma Becky?” My tone comes off more demanding than I mean it to, but I’m past the point of caring, especially if I

really am dead.

“Everything dies.”

“Well, why couldn’t you have stayed for just a little longer?” I ask. “Don’t you know a tree dies if it loses all its roots?”

Grandma Becky chuckles. She leans against the guardrail and keeps looking out at the kaleidoscope of trees.

“I’ve learned some important things since being here,” Grandma Becky says. “Especially after observing all these trees.”

“These trees are dead, Grandma.”

“Do they look dead to you?”

I look down at the highway, at the distant city, at all the manmade structures drowning in foliage. It’s not the plants that look dead; it’s what they cover that does.

“I’ve learned that roots never really die.” Grandma Becky fingers at one of the vines on the guardrail, letting the ivy weave around her slim fingers. “They’re reborn; that’s all.”

She smiles at me again. It’s the kind of smile Grandma Becky had always worn, even when she couldn’t get out of bed, even when she complained of the pain she had been trapped in for the last couple months of her life. She smiled, even when it was hard. She smiles now, and her smile is all for me.

“Tell my daughter that when you get back, won’t you?” Grandma Becky asks.

Pain flares up in my side again. I gasp, the same kind of gasp that happens when someone pops out of the water’s surface after almost drowning. Noise fills my ears: sirens blaring, people talking. I grip white sheets below me and look up at an EMT who tells me something I don’t understand. I understand enough, though, and lay down on the gurney as they carry me away.

I peer to the side before the EMTs cart me into an ambulance. I see the charcoal trees blending into the indigo night. But now, they don’t seem dead to me. In fact, sprouting on a branch, illuminated by the headlights of a police car, I see a single, solitary, cherry blossom.

By Firefly Light

Emma CrowE

The house in my mind has a wraparound porch
where I sip unsweetened iced tea
by the gallon and forget your name.

In my youth it haunted
dreams, the monsters lurking didn't reach for my ankles with dirty claws,
they whispered your name into the dark. Hush.

I spelled it out in blueberries the wind blew
through the cracks of my deck. Let your name become fertilizer,
feed the vegetable garden I buried your touch in.

With each passing phase, the memories flicker and fade. The brightest ones
buzz
around my head until I trap them in mason jars with holes in the lid and grass
lining the bottom.

I'll lean against the railing, use my captured light to map the stars,
I used to think them far away, but now I hold on tight,
close my eyes and leap—

Contributors

Mandy Abel- Zurstadt (she/they) is a geology graduate student and nature writer. She writes poetry about Earth Science both generally and as inspired by their research on soil. Her work also appears in the online science poetry journal *Consilience*.

Malachi Benoni is a human being on the planet called Earth. He currently resides in the Seattle metropolitan area and is a junior studying computer science. He is currently interested in further learning how to write creatively and communicate in general.

Emily Borg is a long-time lover of both storytelling and art. Emily plans to combine the two in their work. Her Scandinavian heritage continues to serve as a source of inspiration.

Diana Braskich is a senior at Central Washington University studying Professional and Creative Writing. Her work has previously appeared in *Idaho Magazine* and *She's Lost Control* from Post Mortem Press. She lives in Hayden, Idaho with her husband and daughter.

Kaitlin Creeger is a transfer student from Spokane Falls Community College. She is majoring in Psychology but minoring in Creative Writing at CWU. She did not take writing seriously until high school. She has written two novels thus far and hopes to get them published. She enjoys running, weightlifting, and caffeine.

Emma CrowE (she/her) is an academic and creative writer from the PNW. Her work focuses on feminism and mental health. You can find her work in *Manastash Literary Journal*, *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *Olit Magazine*, *Literary Imagination*, and upcoming in *Central Dissent* by *New Plains Review*.

Bailey Day has been writing about monsters since childhood. Suspense Publishing published her young adult horror novel titled *The Amazing Imagination Machine* in 2018. Her short story titled *H.O.U.S.E.* was published in *Suspense Magazine* in 2020. She is a senior and will be graduating with her bachelor's degree in Professional and Creative Writing.

Richard Denner (aka Jampa Dorje) is an eccentric poet-monk-scholar and a graduate of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. The proprietor of an Ellensburg coffee-house bookstore for many years, he moved to Pagosa Springs, Colorado to complete a traditional Tibetan three-year retreat.

Zane DeYoung is a writer and student from Seattle, WA. He has read his work at the Lion Rock Visting Writer's Series, and it has appeared in *Yours Truly Magazine*.

Gabriel Elizondo is a member of the American southwest's Rarámuri tribe, Gabriel was born on the distant outskirts of small-town America. His childhood was spent crafting stories in dime-store notebooks and daydreaming about escaping the boredom of small-village life. His adulthood was spent achieving those dreams.

T. Ellis is an upcoming graduate of the class of 2023. After 30 years of making a career, she returned to school and found a new love in writing. She uses poetry to tell stories with a commitment to transcend our differences and connect us through our common human experience.

Max Erickson (They/Them) is a postgraduate Professional and Creative Writing student at CWU. They learned to love writing through letters, first to family, then branched out to friends and pen pals around the world. Max currently works in the air traffic control industry uniquely requiring both a detailed focused and big picture point of view frequently explored in their writing.

M. Sage Flint has a B.A. in English Creative Writing from Eastern Washington University. She is currently studying for a M.A. in Professional & Creative Writing at Central Washington University. She is a teaching assistant in English Composition at CWU.

Preston Ham is currently working as an assessment specialist for a special education department, as well as studying and training to become a school psychologist.

SJ Larsen (They/Them) is a Washington based poet who enjoys writing in all forms and hopes this piece will give someone a new perspective or understanding of the human experience.

Khoa Le is majoring in Professional and Creative Writing and writes nonfiction of his experiences. To recognize his past and accept it as truth. The past does not define who he is, but it tells him to be better. We are not who we were and must learn to forgive ourselves.

Grace McKenney is a graduate student in the Cultural and Environmental Resource Management (CERM) program at CWU. Even as a scientist, she still finds time for art and creativity through photography and drawing. Grace also designed a published figurine with the Trail of Painted Ponies titled *Snow Ready*.

Lilli Mulvaine is an English and Secondary Education Major from Yakima, WA studying at CWU since 2019. She was the salutatorian of her small graduating class of 37 students and had her first poem published at 13 years old.

Gail Nixon is an aspiring poet and novelist. She was born and raised in midwest Ohio. She is pursuing a degree in Creative and Professional Writing from Central Washington University. She enjoys writing slam poetry and tinkering in romance and magical realism.

Tiffany Pate is a freelance copywriter who lives in Washington state. She is obtaining her second bachelor's degree in English: Professional and Creative Writing after nearly 15 years in the criminal justice and social service fields. She writes poetry and prose and has published two journalistic articles on *The Borgen Project Blog*.

Ashley Peterson says traveling is her life. Every summer she and her family love to travel to different national parks all across the country. She loves capturing the beautiful scenes of parks and sharing them on social media for friends and family to enjoy. Taking pictures of Earth's natural creations is a passion of hers.

Victoria Philp creates art that people can relate to, often broad ideas that tie into people's identifying roots. Whether this relates to early years in public education or within personal passions, she hopes to offer comfort in how we can experience similar origins that take us back to our roots.

Lesly Portugal is in her first year of a double major in Global Wine Studies & Entrepreneurship at CWU, she's also in the CWU Orchestra. She has a deep desire to express herself outwardly in hopes of being truly understood. She found a way to achieve this by simply writing.

Jessika Roe earned a BA in Theatre Performance and is currently pursuing a Master's in Professional and Creative Writing from CWU. She is a storyteller who explores the intersections between humanity, the natural world, and the magic of the universe. Roe lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Janelle Serio enjoys creating poems, stories, and hybrid works with themes surrounding identity and gender. She will be graduating from CWU in Fall 2023 with a BA in PCW and plans to earn an MFA in creative writing. Her work has been published in *Manastash Volume 32*.

Sabrina Stoutamyer is a graduate of CWU in the Professional and Creative Writing major. She is also a staff member of Central Access at CWU. As a young girl, poems were her outlet and continue to provide her soul with a voice as an adult.

Brittni Tovar is a senior, majoring in Professional and Creative Writing at Central Washington University. She enjoys writing about nature and playing with her three dogs. She grew up in Colorado near the Rocky Mountains but now resides in St. Joseph, Missouri. Her work has previously appeared in *Manastash Volume 32*.

Tiffany Wehr is currently a graduate student at Central Washington University and has previously been published in *Manastash Volume 32* and the magazine *Multicultural Education*. Wehr is also an elementary teacher in Bonney Lake, Washington, where she lives happily with her husband and two dogs.

Susan Wenzel is a veteran, mother, wife, and PCW MA candidate. Her diverse writing career spans more than three decades. She has been a military technical writer, nonprofit environmental writer, and food/wine writer who published 30+ articles for nonprofit *Whidbey Life Magazine*. She currently writes for a wine and specialty food shop on Whidbey Island where she lives.

Marelle Westcott is a Business Management Major at Central Washington University. She is from Taholah, WA on the beautiful Quinault Indian Reservation and is of Quinault descent. She enjoys creative writing as a hobby and takes influence from Quinault legends and other indigenous storytellers.

Elliott Whanger has spent most of his 23 years in Eastern Washington being surrounded by beautiful landscapes and hurting people, so his writing tends toward poetry of place, struggle and growth. His biggest influences are Robert Frost, Jamaal May and his mentor, Maya Zeller, without whom this wouldn't be possible.

Caelyn White is a senior at Central Washington University, pursuing both a bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts and in Professional and Creative Writing. While primarily a playwright, she also has a love for poetry and short fiction. When not writing, she enjoys reading, directing, and playing *Dungeons and Dragons*.

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Janelle Serio

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Kiana Wingate

Final Thoughts

Going back to our roots isn't easy and can be difficult to navigate without help. Here are some helpful links and hotlines for those who need them. Thank you for reading.

Abuse hotline: 800-799-7233

Sexual abuse hotline: 1-800-656-4673

National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233

Kittitas Valley Community Hospital

603 S. Chestnut St.
Ellensburg, WA 98926
(509) 962-9841
www.kvhealthcare.org

Planned Parenthood/Ellensburg Health Center

613 N. Pine St.
Ellensburg, WA 98926
(866) 904-7721

KVH Medical Arts Center

100 E. Jackson Avenue
Ellensburg, WA 98926
(509) 933-8777
www.kvhealthcare.org

Kittitas Valley Urgent Care Clinic

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