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**Teacher-Consultant
Writing Contest Winners
2020**

Poetry Winner

Persephone

by John Wetmore (SI 15)

Steps again from
that stale underplace,
blazing in shadows

that curl from her
skin like steam—
sublime, fuliginous.

No flowers spring
under her feet,
just sidewalk.

Her starved pupils
shrink in light—
pebbles down a well.

Were she shrouded
so in light,
they would worship,

but the places
they drag her
are always dark.

She hitchhikes shoeless
on the expressway.
Mother calls and calls.

Passing a field she raps
the Chevy's window,
says, "here's fine."

The driver stops,
asks no questions
as she disappears

between the wheat,
heavy with seed,
on another furlough
from damnation.

Fiction Winner

Landlocked

by Rebecca Snay (SI 16)

Crabgrass and dandelions inched higher and higher across the two-acre property. A strip of vinyl siding hung like dried seaweed from the second story of the yellow, sun-faded house. Artie had been meaning to fix that.

Deer had nibbled the hostas in the front garden down to splintered stalks. Artie trudged towards the push mower he had left in the middle of the yard yesterday like an anchor. Half mowed, half not. He always wore the same khakis to mow the lawn. The bottoms ragged and stained green.

He swiped the droplets of sweat already appearing on his temples and started the mower. The initial thunder of the mower was always unsettling and he hoped it didn't bother the neighbors. He gave it a quick shove as if undocking the piece of machinery. The old blades hacked at the lawn as he slowly walked behind them. He had a certain path in which he always mowed, but no matter how many seasons he'd mowed that lawn, it always felt like he was going against the current.

He could see his wife, Cindy, across the yard watering what was left of the hostas. She took on the job of tending to the gardens while he mowed. Vines and weeds had invaded most of the garden beds over the years despite her efforts but she still loved the routine of it. Most days were now yard-work days, as their bodies had slowed and there was always more to be done. She pulled up a tuft of crabgrass growing between the cracks in the sidewalk and dripped more water on the hostas.

Clouds sailed in above, shading the treeless yard for a moment. They both looked up and slowed to a stop. Cindy left the watering can out front and went inside. Artie unclenched his hands from the handle and plodded towards the house, stranding the mower in the yard.

They would be back.

Rain pelted down on the house and Artie relaxed into his armchair in the front room. He was glad the rain had forced him to come in and rest. He couldn't mow the whole yard in one day anyway. He picked up his Sudoku, but couldn't find his pencil. He didn't mind and drifted to sleep. For a moment, he felt light and buoyant in his slumber.

"Looks like rain tomorrow too."

Cindy's voice jolted him from the kitchen. His eyes opened and he watched the drips stream down the dirty window. They had been married for so long that this felt like a rehearsed scene. He knew what lines came next. He knew how it ended.

"Should I wash your mowing pants tonight?" Cindy asked right on cue.

"Yeah, won't be able to mow tomorrow," Artie replied and went upstairs to change.

He dropped his pants into the wicker basket in their bathroom and turned on the shower. He stared at the lighthouse painting that had been hanging by the shower door for as long as he could remember. He had never really noticed the details in it before. The water wasn't just blue. It had emerald green and bursts of white. He wiped a layer of dust off the canvas with his fingers and noticed that the crest of each wave sparkled in the warm light. The water from the shower cascaded down on his body. He closed his eyes and felt waves washing over him.

"Grass always grows faster after a rain," Artie recited at breakfast, following the two-day rain storm.

"Your pants are in the dryer," Cindy reminded him, sipping her coffee.

She liked to rearrange the framed pictures she had on display of their son, Robert. He was grown now and had settled down in the south. Remnants of his childhood still lingered in each room of the house. Rollerblades, baseball caps, Legos, a trumpet. She found comfort in the clutter. Artie didn't notice it anymore.

Artie put on his pants. The green never came out. He stepped into the heat of the day and found where he had left the lawn mower as if moored in place. The machine came back to life as he started the engine. The loud rumble forced his mind to float along with the bumps of the yard like being pitched on waves. Dripping in sweat, he finished the last section of the yard and released the handle. He could hear the gentle clinking of the wheels as he towed the lifeless machine back to the shed.

It wouldn't be long until he had to start mowing again.

"Have you heard from Robert lately?" Cindy asked. The July sunset beamed onto the dinner table.

"Not since last week," Artie replied. "He'll check in when he's ready."

They ate quietly. Before Cindy went to bed, she refolded the throw blanket at the end of Robert's old bed.

Artie went to his armchair and rested for a moment, but decided to go out in the yard tonight. The last of the season's fireflies blinked in the distance. Bats darted around above him. The smell of cut grass always lingered. When the sun disappeared behind the tree line, Artie felt a spark. He couldn't explain it, but went to wake up Cindy.

"What are you doing?" she questioned. This wasn't part of the script they had polished over years of performing.

"Let's go," Artie said, the sparks beginning to pour from him. Artie pulled her by the hand and seated her in the passenger seat of their car.

"You're still wearing your mowing pants," Cindy pointed out.

He drove the two of them down the dark, quiet roads of the night and eventually arrived at the shore. They hadn't been in years. The beach was empty, but full of life. The ocean never sleeps. Dark shadows dimpled the rocky beach. The waves of the ocean rose and fell in the dim light, smoothing over all it touched. They walked to the edge. Frigid water rushed over their clothing and Cindy shrieked.

They returned home, dripping in a blissful wetness. Grass clippings stuck to the bottoms of Artie's wet pants as he walked up the sidewalk to their yellow, sun-faded house.

Nonfiction Winner

Keep Going

by Moira Cassell (SI 20)

“Mom?”

I was knee-deep in the salty Sound, giving the horizon a thousand-yard stare. August’s balmy breeze belied the strength of the sun that warmed my shoulders.

“Yes, sweetheart?”

My youngest stood next to me holding a snail in his hand. “Did you know that if you hum to a snail it will come out of its shell?”

In 42 summers at the beach, why had I never heard this?

“No way. Really?”

“Really. Try it.” My son gently dropped the snail into my outstretched palms. We both looked it.

“Try it,” he said again.

I raised my open hands toward my chin and began to hum a quiet, happy little tune. The snail remained firmly in its shell. I stopped, my hands still raised, and cockeyed an eyebrow at my son.

“Jeez, Mom. Give it a minute,” he said. “Keep going.”

I began to hum again, unconcerned with how silly I might have seemed singing a lullaby into my palms. But after a few more bars of steady melody, the snail slowly emerged from its shell. Its striped, squishy body arched as high as it could. I stopped humming. “Look at it!” I exclaimed. “It’s like a little miracle!” And just as quickly it emerged, it retreated into its shell. I tried again, humming a few gentle bars of the song and, sure enough, the little snail once again wiggled from its shell and seemed to look all around.

If I had to choose a moment in time to freeze forever, it might be that afternoon at the beach with my boys. Our summer jobs and camps had ended, we had just returned from a family trip to Washington, D.C., and we had a couple of blissfully uneventful weeks ahead of us before we returned to the school routine.

And yet, despite how happy I was to enjoy this time off, I kind of missed my job—not the work, per se. Not the meetings, data, grading, or planning. But I missed my students, and I had spent the summer thinking about a few of them in particular. I looked forward to returning to school August 31 st and being reassured of their safety.

What they don't prepare you for in teacher school—what they don't tell you—is how close you will become to your students. Sure, they tell you that you'll care about them. Yes, they'll warn you that you will likely, at least once, grieve their untimely loss. But they don't tell you how much you will fear that loss for certain students in particular. They don't tell you how deeply you'll care. They don't tell you how hard it will become to listen to the superficial chatter of peers outside of education who, through no fault of their own, have No Clue what it's like to be a teacher—especially in a city.

Especially in New Haven.

No one prepares you for the day your lesson plans will need to be tossed aside to address the collective grief in class over the shooting death of their friend from another school. They don't tell you that you'll worry all summer long about your student who missed the last two weeks of school recovering from a gunshot wound. They don't tell you that you and a colleague will sob together in a small office because a very disruptive student revealed that both of his parents were dead, and that he's being raised by his grandmother—but they don't have any food to eat because she's too proud to ask for help. That's why he's always hungry first period. And, you note to yourself, he's often so dirty, too.

They don't tell you how much you're going to care about kids who often don't believe you even like them let alone want the best for them. They don't warn you that some days you'll stand alone in your classroom after the last bell, forehead pressed against the cool cinderblock wall, one hand holding the phone's receiver as you weigh whether it's worth calling home today to report a student's awful behavior, or if that might make things worse for him, for you, and ultimately for the whole class. You wonder, exhausted, if instead you should talk to him in the hallway next time you see him. You wonder if that class learned anything that day. You wonder if you're a good teacher. You wonder if you ever should have become a teacher in the first place. Then you hang up the phone.

They don't tell you about how you will sit and stare blankly at your gradebook in June, wondering how to convert a high F to a D for a kid who has twice failed freshman English, but who was always present and respectful, who always said hello to you in the hallways, and whose mother once said she had “given up on him” because she has “other kids to raise.” What is a third year of English 1 going to accomplish here? The gradebook will stare back at you in silence.

And surely you never would have become a teacher if you had known that some of your colleagues would say—out loud, for people to actually hear – that they aren't interested in getting to know their students. They're just at school to do their job, teach their material, and go home at 2:15. No one tells you how you'll surprise yourself by wanting to throw something—hard, hard enough to break—after hearing that.

They don't tell you that you'll get summer emails from students who just want to say hi, who want to share good news, or who need reassurance that their first year of college will be okay. No one lets you in on the secret that you'll be tearfully proud of your students when they graduate and

make their way to college and into the big, beautiful world that awaits them. No one could prepare you for the day an emotionally and academically struggling student would find his way senior year and receive a huge ovation from his supportive class upon receiving an award.

No one clues you in to the fact that your students will come to you when they are proud of an accomplishment—a good grade, a spot on the team, acceptance to their reach school, or simply that they kept their mouth shut and didn't sass someone who always angers them. No one tells you about the invitations you'll receive – to recitals, art shows, sporting events, and talent shows – from students seeking your support outside of the classroom. No one warns you how often your Sad Teacher Lunch (a baked sweet potato and apple sauce, anyone?) will be interrupted by visits from freshmen who would much rather sit and safely chat with you during lunch than wither in the wilds of the cafeteria.

No one could prepare you for the hugs you would receive the first week back to school. Hugs from kids who gave you hell all last year, but who come back to school a little taller, a little more mature, and who ask you if you had a nice summer vacation. No one told you how much you'd want to cry when that student who had been shot gives you the biggest hug of your life—in front of all of his friends. And you are so grateful—so impossibly grateful—that he is alive. That he is smiling. That he is now where you and your colleagues can see him, keep an eye on him, and remind him to do his best at this game of high school, this game of life.

No one told you that you would care this much, and that some people might even chide you for it. But the truth is that you don't care what they think. Instead you quietly, persistently hum a gentle melody to yourself and know that miracles are hiding everywhere for those who wish to find them.

**Teacher-Consultant
Writing Contest Honorable Mentions
2020**

Poetry Honorable Mentions

Beyond Recognition

by Bernie Schreiber (SI 11)

You wanted to exhume yesterday
as if it were in a shallow grave
and meat was still on bones,
but you could only piece together
what you thought it looked like;
your truth,
like a sketch artist recreating form
from your own mind's witness;
no meat, just some bones
to be realigned.
Snap some pictures
and submit as exhibit A.
Yesterday was forty-three years
of yesterdays,
forty-three years
of memory's carcass rotting,
blotting out the body of truth;
yet you lay it on the altar
of today
with absolute clarity and certainty
to cleanse yourself
and offer up my sins:
I see a burnt offering
(reconstruction impossible),
beyond recognition
of what is truth.

Truth Be

by Amy Nocton (SI 14)

Truth be bittersweet herb. Truth be [forever] tomorrow. Truth be trespasses suspended in others' [stories]. Truth be a beauty salon for broken bodies. Truth be [fleeting] phantom. Truth be elusive [in its] furtive glances stirring fires and soot. Truth be [concealed] in leaves and love. Truth be a drowsy moss [covered] stone. Truth be raucous [applause]. Truth be a library [unfolding] in the fog. Truth be broken [glances] drowsy [in the] fog.

Truth be [a walk] barefoot in the snow. Truth be [lullaby] hummed to the sun. Truth be a stand at the edge of a diving board. Truth be seamed [stockings]. Truth be uncertain, unanchored, unnerved. Truth be [the] shifting [earth], [the] sifted [sand]. Truth be [joyful] sorrow. Truth be goats grazing. Truth be [a] calloused [heel]. Truth be banjo music in [a field of] feathers. Truth be dragonflies and campfires. Truth be breath. Truth be to stand unanchored, [with] joyful music [in] breath.

Truth be an ache [arching] over awake. Truth be [skin shed by] a snake. Truth be [to slumber] heavy. Truth be a blade [on the tongue], a [lollygagging] cloud over still water, [a circle] upside down. Truth be agnostic, silent [allocution], absolution. Truth be graffiti-[art-streaked] coasts. Truth be slumber still [and] silent [on] graffiti-art-streaked coasts.

Fasciation

by John Wetmore (SI 15)

An error of internal geometry
guiding the shape of life.

In plants it spawns tissue
elaborately contorted:

the daisy becomes
a splayed prayer fan,

the cactus a mound
of crucified worms.

No one knows why
the cogwheels slip

in the furtive manifold
that governs growth,

only that it can result
from an injury sustained

in the flowering phase,
or from some illness.

Other cases of fasciation
are labelled genetic.

Similar phenomena
appear elsewhere—

always a body twisting
under invisible torment:

the vein becomes an abscess
wide as a beefsteak tomato,

the heart a fantail willow
cultivated to be broken.

Fiction Honorable Mentions

The Ticket

by John Wetmore (SI 15)

Mr. Lester tilted his head inquisitively at the fascinated child who had again returned to this moment from a long ways off in time. The child's mother, studying the inscrutable colored lines of the bus routes on her pamphlet hadn't noticed her son's curious interaction with the ballroom-tuxedoed Mr. Lester and his dark-eyed ventriloquist Frank. The dummy had a brown-stained ticket stapled to its hand.

"We won!" tweeted Mr. Lester, and Frank raised the dummy's hand on its thin iron spindle to wave the ticket enthusiastically. "Yaaaaay!"

"What did you win?" asked the child.

"The question is less about what, and more about when did we win, dear boy," said Mr. Lester.

"Huh?" asked the child, reasonably.

"You see," said Mr. Lester, inclining forward and looking in both directions conspiratorially. "This is a very old lottery ticket."

To the boy it looked just like the ticket in his pocket that his mother had given him to hold, except the one in the dummy's hand was old and worn and smelled like Pennies.

"So you won it a long time ago?"

"Oh no, dear, sweet boy. Only today."

The child was young, but not that young. "What do you want with an old lottery ticket? Didn't it get used already?"

"Yes, it did! How astute, my dear, sweet, intelligent boy."

The dear, sweet, intelligent boy studied the dummy, then looked at Frank's clothes: patchwork camouflage cargo pants and jacket that had faded to an indistinguishable brown-gray-green. It made Frank almost disappear on the gray-painted bus bench.

"You look homeless."

Mr. Lester put his hand over his heart. "Sir, I resent that! Clearly I carry myself like a sophisticate of high society—one might say: an aristocrat!"

The dummy's outraged squeak made the boy laugh. It was funny. Mr. Lester undeniably came to life in Frank's hands. The boy was about to answer Mr. Lester, but recognizing the deception, looked instead at Frank. The visor of flesh that could be seen between his wiry gray beard and profusion of matted gray hair was deeply tanned and lined beneath a fresh, ruddy sunburn. Frank's eyes contained unsettlingly large pupils ringed by coronas of an even deeper black—lit by the fluorescent white lights of the bus station, the boy saw himself clearly in them. He looked quickly back to Mr. Lester and his oily, painted smile.

"I meant him," said the boy, nodding timidly towards Frank.

"Who?" said the dummy. He put one hand to his brow and pretended to search about the bus station like a scout.

The boy chuckled in spite of himself.

Finally, Mr. Lester noticed Frank and his wooden body jumped as if startled.

"Frank, you frightened me!" said Mr. Lester, steadying himself with a hand on Frank's shoulder to prevent a full swoon. "You look like hell. Have you been there this whole time?"

"Yup," said Frank. "Still here."

"I can ask my mom for some money to give you," said the young boy, charitably. He was at the age when salvation is still a cheaply purchased commodity.

"No need!" peeped Mr. Lester with a hopeful enthusiasm that verged upon sounding undignified. "Frank here and I are doing just fine, or, I should say, we shall be quite soon. However, you are so good to look out for us my dear, sweet, intelligent...hmm, do you have any other aggrandizing adjectives at your disposal, Frank?"

"Beautiful."

"Ah, lovely. My dear, sweet, intelligent, beautiful boy!"

"Are you crazy?" asked the boy.

"Crazy?" Mr. Lester threw back his head and belly-laughed, bouncing up and down as though on horseback. "Frank, would you care to address this young man's Inquiry?"

"We're gonna go back in time again, to when I was young," mumbled Frank. His face looked like a slab of stone, the movement of his mouth almost imperceptible beneath his overgrown whiskers.

Many years later, as the boy recounts the story to his wife, she asks, having a big beard, isn't that cheating? And the boy, now a man who shaves religiously, touches his own smooth cheek and says no, no it wasn't.

Frank cleared a red-yellow smoker's clot from his throat. "All bus stations are effective time-traveling devices if you ride them long enough. Same difference for Trains."

The boy wondered how somebody could ride a bus station.

"Eventually we'll ride them straight to the day before the winning ticket gets cashed. We gambled for that ticket, fought for it, and we won fair and square—so it's ours!" Frank's ancient brow, crumpled like a brown paper bag in time's trembling hand, looked momentarily ferocious. "Not just the ticket, but the whole timeline! It was supposed to be ours anyway, before it got all fucked up. We're going to..."

"Whoa, whoa, Edgar, what are you doing over there?" the boy's mother had realized he had escaped her vicinity and quickly stood up to wrangle him. Edgar ignored Her.

"...to do it over. We'll both be rich, just like we used to be." Frank finished in a Whisper.

"Can you really go back in time?" Edgar asked, just before his mother caught him by the sleeve.

Mr. Lester deferred to Frank. Though his face could not change, he somehow looked unsure.

Frank looked back reassuringly into the eyes of his old dummy.

"Come on Edgar, let's leave the nice man alone now..."

Frank covered the winning ticket in his big hand to hide it from Edgar's mother. He looked back at the boy.

"Well, can you, mister? Go back in time?"

"Oh yes," Mr. Lester said with newfound self-assurance. "Just keep your ticket, and you can come back and see us any time you like!"

Note: The names of Mr. Lester and Frank are based on "The Great Lester" Harry Lester and his dummy, Frank Byron Jr.. Edgar Bergen, the famous ventriloquist, was Lester's pupil.

Nonfiction Honorable Mentions

Our Place in Line

by Mindi Englart (SI 05)

COVID-19 reminds us that we become adults as our elders pass on.

This is a hard piece to write, because it's about death and dying. It's about who gets to live for how long and who cares. And it's about the choices privileged humans make in this regard.

Both of my parents died a year and a half apart, after long illnesses. My mother didn't feel well one night and we called 911 and that was the last of her as we'd known her. Though she did live another six months in various states of fear, dementia, pain, and rest.

If you're forgetting how long six months is, it's the time from the fall of autumn leaves, through the blizzards of a New England winter and to the time of the crocuses abloom. It's the time between a baby safely in the womb of her mother and her first solid food. Six months is long enough for someone to lose their job, their home, and their lives. What I'm trying to say here is that six months is a long-ass time. In six months, my mother moved back and forth between the hospital and the rehabilitation center and finally to the wing from which people do not return. She had a stuffed animal that, in her dementia, became her closest friend and confidant, who understood her and accepted her better than any of us now could. And she died, in the night, without us.

As my mother was declining, my father's Parkinson's took root like an invasive plant and grew to make it harder and harder for him to breathe. It took up all the air in his body and thus, in our lives. This patriarch of the family, who'd employed us all in his thriving business over decades, this man who you could call day or night and get an answer by the second ring. This man, who'd weathered a life and helped us all weather life too. He was dying a torturous death of loss after loss. Visiting my mom in his wheelchair, in his diaper, with his oxygen, he helped us to make the decision to let her go.

When he began to fail to even live with a full-time aide at home, he took his turn moving between hospital and rehab and back and forth until he was moved to his last home, the wing from which people do not return. And then he, too, died in the night, without us.

All this is just a precursor to say what I mean to say. Which is that people die. And once you've lost both your parents, you know this in a new way. The death of your parents is a new birth. The birth of your adult self. You don't try to hold on like you used to. You understand that death comes and needs to come and prolonging it when it wants to come, will bring a vengeance. Will take a toll. Will have consequences.

In the end, the year of healthcare that was required to keep my parents alive was an exhaustive list. I get exhausted just thinking about it. The cost of each of them living with round-the-clock health care for six months each. The medicines, the aides, the doctors of all kinds, the physical therapies and occupational therapies, the laundry, the food, the procedures, the pain medications, the cost on all of us, the gas to drive there, the sleepless nights, the many gifts of love that were not even noticed by these loved ones who eventually went into their own worlds of delusion, which I can only assume was life's way of taking them from their suffering and from the pain of seeing us all around them suffering. The cost of delaying my

parents' deaths was a deal with the devil and in the end, of course, as it always does, death did what death does anyway.

Consider this, the privilege of a delayed death, versus the teenager that dies from a gunshot, the homeless person that goes to sleep in the natural world and does not wake up. The immigrant from our southern border who dies, unnamed and alone, in a detention camp. The instantaneousness and lack of resources a sudden death, the death of the disadvantaged, entails. It is the ultimate slap in the face of fairness, death.

I have seen a lot now. More than I can write here and frankly, more than I want to remember. This piece is about the cost of prolonging life and the seeming correction that COVID-19 is making on us. It's a special kind of privilege to make it to old age, especially with relative good health. The oldest among us have received an abundance of the most precious gift life allows — time. But as we watch the clocks of our loved ones hit their final hour, from COVID-19 or from any cause, we have no choice but to accept the natural order of things.

Because our old people are dying now. With their compromised immune systems, complications, pre-existing conditions, they are the first to go. These loved ones that would be gone if not for all the health care options we now employ to keep them alive. Not to heal them, mind you, to keep them alive.

And now, no. They are dying. And we are horrified. And shocked. And feel the loss of control. The grief.

But we are not in charge of life, try as science does to convince us otherwise. Fighting the good fight to have a few more days, weeks, months, or years of love or of habit or of whatever it is that we try to have when we hold on to our loved ones through medicine and love alone.

Never have we seen so clearly, that when a person passes, when a bed empties, it becomes available for the next in line. And never before have we been reminded so starkly, that we are all in a line from birth to death, and as our elders pass, we adults naturally take a step forward to assume our next place in line.

Saving or Saved

by Jane Cook (SI 07)

"Tell me what it is you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" - Mary Oliver

I think it started when I was about 5 years old living on the farm. There were so many animals around - cows, chickens, cats, and dogs, not to mention the wild ones - rabbits, foxes, deer, and woodchucks - that lived in our 90-acre woods and pastures. The first one I remember is a baby bird that fell out of its nest. I think it was a starling, which is not the kind of bird a farmer wants to encourage around his cornfields. But, nonetheless, my dad supported my rescuing of the baby bird, providing me with a box and some hay to make it a soft bed. The bird was so young that it had no feathers and looked more like a prehistoric creature, a mini Pterodactyl. I wanted to bring the box to bed with me, but Dad insisted that I leave it in the barn. I don't think he expected it to live more than a day and he didn't want me waking up to a dead bird. But it did live and as I cared for it, the bird began to grow feathers and resemble the sleek black bird that it would become when I released it back to the wild.

Following that, I rescued countless baby rabbits, mice, and more birds. Most lived only a short time, but I couldn't help myself. By saving them, at least I was giving them a chance at life.

This penchant for saving animals followed me into my teenage years. Susan, my beloved puppy came to college with me when I got my own apartment as a junior. Susan was an accident who was conceived when her mother, our fawn Pug Daisy, was attacked by the neighbor's Toy Fox Terrier. Though she wasn't exactly a rescue dog, if I hadn't taken her, my parents would definitely have given her away or taken her to a shelter since they couldn't take on one more animal at the time. Susan grew into a beautiful fawn colored 15-pound dog who looked like a Pug with an elongated pug nose. Susan and I went everywhere, even to my classes on campus. I hid her under my cape on days when the weather was so bad that I had to take the shuttle bus. Dr. Schorr even added Susan to the roster for my Voice and Diction class and checked to make sure she was in attendance. Our bond was so strong that when Susan died of breast cancer at age 13 ½, I vowed that I would never adopt another animal ever again because my heart ached so badly.

That vow didn't last long. What followed has been a string of rescues - abused, abandoned, neglected, unwanted canines, felines, and even an equine - more than 20 to date.

There was a shaggy, young dog of the Hartford streets who came into our building and curled up in the well of my desk. I brought her home that night and nicknamed her TD, short for That Dog, because she was such a sweet puppy that I was sure she must just be lost and I would be able to find her owner. TD quickly wormed her way into our hearts and home and her name stuck. After weeks of posting her picture around the streets in Hartford and checking with nearby animal shelters with no success, TD knew she had found her forever home. Unfortunately, life on the streets had been hard on her and she had contracted Distemper before I rescued her. She had survived the Distemper, but it left her with a condition known as Chorea, a neurological disorder that causes involuntary muscle spasms. By the time she was about a year old, her body was wracked with such serious convulsions multiple times a day that putting her to sleep was the only humane treatment.



Then there was Honda, the Seal point Siamese kitten that Chip's brother Harry adopted and then couldn't take care of. Jane to the rescue. Of course, I would take care of Honda until Harry got settled into a stable living situation after his divorce. Months later, when Harry came to pick up Honda, I refused to let him go. Honda had bonded with us - my dog Susan and with Chip, my high school sweetheart and soulmate - and he didn't even remember Harry. Though I love Harry, I didn't believe he could give Honda the loving home

that this beautiful cat already had with us. Harry agreed.

Shortly after Honda died, we bought our tiny two-room house. It was a "house with possibilities," the name my mother gave to houses that were run down and decrepit when she saw them on our family Sunday drives. Most importantly, it was on a 1+ acre wooded lot. This was a prerequisite for me that would allow me to finally get the horse of my dreams, the one I had been longing for since I was a young child growing up on a dairy farm. Then I heard a sad story about some kittens that were born in my friend Cindy's barn. Of course, we would rescue them. Before long, two tiny gray kittens with white chests and paws joined our family. Chip called them Gerry and Abbey, the yippie cats, nicknamed after Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, militant anti-war and social activists. The two sisters were not social activists, but they were extremely active, racing around our tiny house, jumping up on the plant shelves in the front window. Daily we'd find smashed plant pots with dirt and plant shreds all over the living room floor. But they were so lovable and grew into beautiful, sleek gray cats who became good friends with our dog Susan so, of course, they had to stay.



Shortly after adopting Gerry and Abbey, another phone call from Cindy changed our lives. Cindy needed my help rescuing four horses who were destined for the slaughterhouse the following Saturday. Before the week was over, Sadie, Matt, Parker, and



Trisha arrived at Cindy's barn, the same barn where Gerry and Abbie had been born. Cindy told me that if I paid for the hay for all four horses for the winter that I could have Trisha. Not only was our money stretched thinner than a French crepe, but Chip was deathly afraid of horses. On the other hand, how could I pass up such an offer? That's how Trisha, the Wonder Horse, came into our lives. She was a gorgeous 18-year old chestnut Morgan mare out of the University of Vermont Morgans - the state where the Morgan breed originated and the university that

preserves the legacy of Figure, the sire of the Morgan horse breed. Cindy told me that she had been warned that Trisha was a “hot horse,” an expression that means she could explode at any moment without warning, causing harm to herself or others. Once she moved into our loving home, this formerly abused “hot horse” turned into a 1,000-pound pussy cat who became the pet of the neighborhood.

Trisha was a character. She would stand on the front step and bang on the front door to let me know that it was suppertime. She came when you called her better than the dogs did. She followed Chip around the yard when he had a beer in his hand just waiting for him to set it down so she could knock it over and lap up the suds.

Since I couldn’t afford a saddle and bridle, I would ride her around the neighborhood bareback using her halter and lead rope as reins. As she aged, Trisha developed heaves, the equine form of emphysema, and needed special feed and medication. When she went blind, Dr. Mike, our equine vet, told me that she would be fine because she had the yard memorized. At age 34, sixteen years after I rescued her, she finally reached the point where she could no longer stand up and Dr. Mike helped her pass. The hole in my heart was as big as Trisha’s grave.

There was Mutt and Jeff, the Redbone and Bluetick Coonhounds that I rescued when my sister’s elderly neighbor Lester had to go into a nursing home. Lester, too frail to go hunting anymore, had trained them as puppies to hunt racoons by trapping racoons and bringing them into his house for the dog’s hunting lessons. You can imagine how wild this made them and since running was in their blood, it was not possible to keep them contained. But they were sweet and lovable, too. When Lester died, I saved them long enough to find a pair of hunters - a middle



aged son and his elderly father - who were looking for hunting dogs. When the pair arrived at my house to meet the dogs, Mutt stood up on his hind legs, wrapping his front paws around the old man’s shoulders and began licking his face, I knew I had found the right home for them and I willingly let them go. But I still missed those two goofballs. We live only five miles from UConn and are surrounded



by woods, so cats often wander into our home and hearts - Moe, Felix, Buff Cat, Lola, Joy as well as her babies Jack, Buddy, Faith, and Hope. They’ve likely been castoffs from UConn students who finished the semester or graduated and moved on. Woody, K.C., and Ami were rescues, too, but they didn’t come out of the woods. Some of the cats arrived in fairly good shape but most arrived malnourished, injured, and covered with ticks and fleas.

Then there were the dogs. Peggy, a 15-pound black Pug/Fox Terrier, joined our family about 9 months after Susan died. Peggy who bore an eerie resemblance to Susan, except for her coloring. My broken heart was so lonely for a dog companion that we fell in love instantly. Peggy had been badly abused as a puppy; her head bore scars from cigarette burns and her right front leg had been broken and never treated, so her leg was permanently curved like a Queen Anne’s chair, but she never complained. She was originally rescued by friends from Georgia who came to visit with two dogs and left for home with one. Peggy was afraid of Chip for about the first nine months of her life with us. I’m sure she had been abused by a man, probably a bearded man. But eventually she



became great friends with Chip and Woody, our Blue Point Siamese cat that we had rescued from a restaurant dumpster.

Slo, a 105-pound German Shepherd who had been a guard dog, was too old to do his job anymore so he moved in. Slo and Peggy became best friends, nicknamed the “odd couple” because of the huge discrepancy in their sizes. We all mourned when Slo died during a sweltering summer, especially Peggy. When Peggy died, I again vowed not to adopt any more animals. It was just too hard to lose them.

But a foster dog was another story, so we fostered Chloe, a Lhasa Apso, who belonged to a woman who had gone into a coma. When Chloe first arrived, she earned the nickname of “devil demon dog” because she would go berserk for no apparent reason, snarling and snapping and spinning like a whirling dervish. I’m sure she had been abused, but after spending 6 months with us, she became a sweet, gentle pooch with no signs of her original neurotic behavior. When her owner recovered enough to take her back, she didn’t recognize this calm, sweet dog. Had I known what an unfit owner she was, I would never have let her take Chloe back.

But if Chloe had stayed, we would never have rescued Mr. Sunshine, Sunny for short because of his sunny disposition, and Libby, Ms. Liberty for long because she was born on Patriot’s Day and she was THE most independent dog I’d ever met. They were a pair of Teacup Poodles who had been conceived by accident when their mother was impregnated by her youngest son and they were the happiest accident that we ever encountered. Libby weighed four pounds at her heaviest and her big brother Sunny weighed five and a half pounds, all heart. We called them our forever puppies.



Sunny and Libby taught us about living with special needs. I cried when Sunny went blind at age 8 from a genetic disorder that breaks down the retina, causing the world to go dark. We set up the house with bells on every door handle and a mat in front of each door so Sunny could hear and feel when we were going outside. We left the furniture in place so he would not have trouble maneuvering around the house. His little sister, Libby, became his seeing eye dog; they continued to run around the yard, with Sunny placing his muzzle on Libby’s shoulder to guide him safely, until she developed the same genetic disease at age 11. Animals are much more resilient than people. Both dogs shook off their blindness as if it was just a minor inconvenience. They lived to be 14 and 15 respectively and both died in my arms, a gift that I cherish to this day.

Dolly, a plucky little Pekingese, joined our family when her human mother, Doris, died of a heart attack. Doris was a dear friend and a former colleague who was as wild about animals as me. We made a pact after Doris’s husband died that if Doris died before me, I would take care of her animal family members and that if Chip and I died before her, she would do the same. Dolly went blind from a disorder that our veterinary ophthalmologist believed was brought on by the trauma of Doris’s death. Our house was already set up to accommodate the needs of a blind dog, so Dolly fit into our family as if she had always been there. She developed congestive heart failure and only lived a year and a half longer than Doris. I do believe that she died of a broken heart.

After Sunny and Libby died, we were dogless for a few years though we still had five cats. That was enough to take care of, to feed and provide veterinary care for. Most people would say that was more than enough. But then Zen and Willow, Toy Poodles who were being badly

neglected, bounded into our lives. This brother and sister were inseparable, so taking one meant taking both. Zen's left eye never developed in utero and there's a large hole in the retina in his right eye so the veterinary ophthalmologist thinks he can see very little. He's aptly named because



you'd never know he's virtually blind to watch him frolicking with his sister. Willow, on the other hand, is affectionately called "the wild child," but as our trainer said, "Willow, you are so stinking cute, I bet you get away with murder." He wasn't far off. Unlike her Zen master brother, Willow can see very well and is easily distracted by a calling bird, a passing squirrel, and even a blowing leaf. When there are pillows or a chewed-up napkin on the floor, we know Willow has been at work - that little scamp.

The puppies were 11 months old and totally out of control when they arrived - not house trained; no knowledge of basic commands like sit, stay, come; absolutely no clue of what the word NO meant. Almost two years later, after intensive obedience training and months of getting them on a schedule and teaching them that all good doggies do their business outside, they've learned manners and know that they found their forever home. Mary Poppins would say "they are practically perfect in every way." Chip and I would, too. Okay, so we are still working on Come, Leave It, and NO.

Some people might think I'm crazy. I admit that animals are a lot of work. They all need vet care at least once a year and more often when they get sick. They need to be fed twice a day, but they will remind you when it's time. The dogs need to be walked four times a day, but that forces us to get exercise and keeps us in touch with nature, even in the dead of winter. They limit our travel since it's hard to find someone willing to care for our menagerie and I have difficulty leaving them in anyone else's hands, but there is no place on earth I'd rather be than staying home with Chip and my animal family so that has prepared me for the global pandemic. I'm not wealthy and, yes, it does take a fair amount of money to properly care for animals, but each one is worth every penny that I have spent to rescue and care for them. The pure love and joy they share is immeasurable.

All of these unique animals are deserving of their own stories. All were timid and fearful, but after working up the courage to enter our home, all became dear, beloved pets. There is never any question about whether everyone will get along. I think they remember what it was like to be abused, abandoned, or neglected and they value the safety and security they have found. Usually within days of their arrival, or at most no more than two or three weeks, they bond with us and each other and our home becomes the peaceable kingdom that will nourish and protect them for the rest of their lives. Each of our animal family members holds a special place in my heart. All take a piece of it when they pass.





Now that Chip is battling cancer, Zen and Willow give him a reason to get some fresh air and sunshine on days that he is feeling good enough to take them for a walk and they cuddle with him on days that he's not. Each day our pets wake up with anticipation of what the new day will bring. Both our dogs and cats give us a reason to smile and laugh out loud, even on the really hard days. They help us find the courage, strength, patience, and faith to face whatever lies ahead. So, I cannot help but ask myself the question: Who is doing the saving and who is being saved?

"I have sometimes thought of the final cause of dogs having such short lives and I am quite satisfied it is in compassion to the human race; for if we suffer so much in loving a dog after an acquaintance of ten or twelve years, what would it be if they were to live double that time?"

Sir Walter Scott
1771-1832



Summer Institute Fellows Contributions

Heavy Letter

by Kaye Bishop (SI 20)

Kyisha,
little girl
arms wrapped around
her broken pieces
slipping, falling,
shifting, picking
them up.
She was slowing me down.
Weighing me down.
So I put her down.
Kaye,
is so much
lighter to hold.

Within and Without

by Kyle Kibby (SI 20)

High over the city our line of yellow windows must have contributed their share of human secrecy to the casual watcher in the darkening streets, and I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life.

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby

I

I had set the clock the previous night to make sure I woke up with plenty of time, but a hand shook me before my five AM alarm ever had a chance to jar me into consciousness. It was my father, who despite the early morning time looked like he had been awake for hours. I'm guessing he probably had.

"Hey", he whispered, "time to get moving".

Normally I might have muttered a soft complaint or even tried to escape back into sleep for a few more precious moments, but that morning it was easy to get up from the pull out bed and start the day. Both my parents were packing their own backpacks and nibbling on a small granola bar breakfast, moving noiselessly around the New York City hotel room as they prepared to bring a few items with them to the hospital. I followed suit, splashing my face with water and downing a small lukewarm cup of coffee to get rid of my groggy fatigue. There was very little said between my parents and I during that early morning routine, and although I had only been awake for fifteen minutes, the silence was already starting to ring in my ears. I could not shrug off the feeling that the tension would just go away if we could run out of the lifeless hotel room and spill out into the expecting New York streets.

A lifetime later the three of us were packed up and out of the hotel, marching like soldiers in a line down trash littered sidewalks. Dad was slightly ahead of Mom and I, and while it was still dark outside, the early October air was charged with what promised to be a hot day. Our silence continued as we walked on, only breaking when my dad would announce, "we need to turn left up at the end of this block", or "it's only another twenty minutes". You would never have guessed from his brisk pace and stoic demeanor that he was sick.

I started to wake with every step as we paced down long streets lit by street signs. Around me, New York was doing the same. Shop lights flickered on, distant voices could be heard discussing morning breakfast or the heat. Vendors sluggishly stepped out from shops while other early risers moved to their own cadence, almost like on a conveyor belt as they went to work in unison with airpods in and heads down. My family almost went by unnoticed, undetected, but I suspect most New Yorkers that took a moment to watch us realized we stepped to a different beat, like a marching band slightly out of rhythm.

We quietly walked by parks, shops, museums, and carts. The hospital was closer now, and the sun had just started to peek out in between towering buildings. I had never seen New York in this sleepy state, just starting to stir before it burst to life. I wanted to soak it in even more, to stay outside for a few more moments instead of trying to face the reality that was behind the hospital doors. I could have continued walking past the ambulances and shuttle bay, left the emergency ward and infirmary behind, and never stopped like Forrest Gump on a football field, but soon enough we stood directly in front of the looming Sloan Kettering building.

Dad looked better by the time we entered the lobby. He even turned back and smiled, as if to say, “why the hell are you so worried?”

II

The hospital was its own little world with its own agendas. Nurses galloped through the surgery ward in mint scrubs and clipboards. It didn’t take long before we were admitted and given our own curtained off space. We were assured that Dr. Barbiary would be with us shortly. It took Dad two tries to get his hospital gown on, which coupled with a conversation with the unintelligible anesthesiologist made us nervously giggle. By the time the surgeon strolled in, Dad had been propped up in a hospital bed for about an hour.

Dr. Barbiary was young, maybe pushing forty, with wiry dark brown hair that was beginning to thin in the front and a whiskery stubble. He had a calm demeanor about him, and to me he looked like a guy you could enjoy a beer with but who also wouldn’t stay for more than two. Congenial, calm, and perfunctory. He pulled the curtain back and shook hands with my dad.

“How are you doing?” he asked, slipping his hands down the pockets of his white coat.

A big grin spread across my dad’s face, “I’m doing well doc”, he announced. “More importantly, how are you?”

Barbiary chuckled, “I’m actually doing great. My Eagles won this weekend, so I can’t complain.” He paused, letting his smile ease off his face a bit before moving forward, “no, really, how are you?”

My Dad nodded and swallowed something back, “I’m nervous. But I know this is the right decision”.

Dr. Barbiary discussed the surgery for a few more minutes while the three of us listened with pursed lips. Later on my dad would tell me, “I always thought they would wheel you in when you were going into surgery, strapped to a gurney with nurses at the ready. I must have seen that a hundred times on TV.” He was surprised when the nurses invited him to walk down to the operating room on his own accord, and so my Mom and I embraced him for what felt like a long time and no time at all, and watched him walk down the hall and into surgery.

III

Mom and I found ourselves outside the hospital building again with a few hours to kill. The sun had risen further in the sky and there was a cool river breeze keeping the heat at bay. Cars and taxis managed to gridlock in front of the hospital like a tetris game, and more people were scattering the streets than during our morning walk.

“I’m starving”, Mom announced to me. “Want to find somewhere to sit down and grab a bite?”

I exhaled and nodded, “sounds good to me”.

We didn’t walk for long before we both agreed we wanted something light, and so after passing a few dozen shops we found a juice bar and coffee shop named JOE & THE JUICE. On the way in I glanced at the sign, which portrayed a shaded in picture of a well dressed man wearing a wool cap, probably the titular Joe, sitting in front of a cup of coffee. Joe leaned his head against the knuckles of a clenched fist in a relaxed and apathetic posture. I wanted to scream at him, “my dad has cancer!”, but he probably only would have said, “does it look like I care, man?”

We both ordered smoothies and sat sipping them out of paper straws by a large window. I loved New York, but again couldn't help but feel like a foreigner as I watched people walk by through the storefront, going about their day as they walked their dogs or simply strolled by. It was mesmerizing and a little frustrating as they went about their day assuming everything was just fine. I looked across the table at my mom, who was watching through the window as well.

With our smoothies finished, Mom turned to me, excused herself, and crossed the cafe to the bathroom. I continued to watch through the window, playing with my straw like the tube on a trombone when suddenly a man in a bright orange vest and construction hat walked by. As he did so, a phone loosely clipped to his belt fell to the ground, directly next to where I was sitting. I tapped the window to get his attention, but he never noticed, continuing his leisurely pace as he left the phone behind. I looked around the cafe to see if anyone had seen the momentous event, but the three other patrons who were there were busy scrolling through their cell phones, too busy to notice or care.

I admittedly sat there for a moment unsure of what to do, but then sprang to my feet and half ran, half jogged out of the store. The man wasn't too far ahead, and I knew I could catch him without yelling or causing a scene, so I scooped the phone off the ground and reached him before he could cross the street.

"Excuse me!" I muttered twice to get his attention. He slowly turned and saw my outstretched hand, holding the cell phone. "I think you dropped this," I stammered.

Nodding, the man took it and continued on his way, never looking back to say thanks but instead managed to blend in to the sidewalk crowd despite his hard hat and bright vest.

IV

By ten that morning my mother and I agreed that it felt like the day had lasted forever. We started to conspire that time had actually slowed down. We continued to walk through Manhattan as the day got warmer and brighter, and while the sun felt good on my face, it did nothing for the dull tightness in my chest. At this point I distracted myself by observing all the life around me, and was breaking every New York City rule by watching everyone and everything that passed me. I felt like a fish trying to wade upstream, bustling shoulder to shoulder as more and more people left their apartments to get outside.

My mom felt the same way too, and suggested we find somewhere else to duck into for a while and avoid the crowds. I glanced up ahead and saw our beacon in the form of a bookstore that stood at the end of the block. In all honesty I don't remember the name of the store, but it was my haven that day, more so than bookstores normally are.

And it was a beautiful store. Motes of dust lazily hung to light that splashed through the windows. The aroma of coffee gently wafted throughout the entire room, which was long, narrow, and lined with bookshelves from end to end. The dark wood floors gave a satisfying creak when you pressed your weight into them. It felt like home away from home.

Nothing truly exciting happened during our stay there, but when I look back at that day now, the bookstore was the only time during that infinite morning that I almost forgot why we were there. I flipped through book after book, read front and back covers, shared recommendations with my mom. There, time stood still in a good way, but when we had to leave the store, I also felt ok that life continued to move on. I watched New Yorkers go about their day and enjoyed it. Each

and every one of them had their own worries, doubts, joys, victories, and losses depending on the person and the day. It gave me a little hope.

And so, a few hours later, back at the hospital, I felt a little more content as we waited with a few other families to hear the results of the surgery. There was a television with information on patients that ran like a ticker tape, and occasionally my dad's number would pop up in a yellow banner that read, "in progress". I stopped looking at the TV and was leafing through a few worn magazines, so I was surprised when Dr. Barbiary entered the room and approached my mom and I.

"Do you guys want to come with me for a second?" he asked casually, as if he needed help moving a pesky piece of furniture. We both nodded as he led us to another smaller, private room adjacent to the waiting room.

I found myself sitting with bated breath while he stood over us again. His hands managed to find their way back into his coat pockets.

"While we will have to wait a few weeks for the biopsy, I am confident that the surgery was able to remove the tumor and the cancerous cells that I could see. In fact, it went a little quicker than normal because of how smooth the procedure was." He continued his clinical description of the surgery and its initial success for a few more minutes, but I was miles away. Apparently fighting back tears affected my hearing.

Barbiary left us after a while and for the next few moments my mom and I just hugged.

V

We sat on a bench in Midtown late that afternoon eating bagel sandwiches and breathing easy for the first time that day. Across the street stood an old church, positioned between taller apartment buildings. It seemed out of place and meant to be there at the same time, and was the kind of building you might miss if you were just walking by. It was within and without.

My mom turned to me and smiled, "I am glad you are here today. Your dad is too". We had left him to sleep after spending the majority of the afternoon in the hospital making sure he was alright and comfortable. His recovery would be painful, and I think the Navy commander mindset that he still showed at times was a little ashamed to be seen in this vulnerable state. I was a little uncomfortable to see it, but as strange as it might sound, knowing that my dad was not superman but in fact very much human made me love him even more. It made my parents' dedication to their family more special, in my eyes.

And so I said, "I am glad to be here too", and I think about that day a lot. Not because it was the most exciting day of my life, or that it was a necessarily enjoyable one, but I got to see a small part of the inexhaustible variety of life, and I'm thankful for that.

The Combination Plate

by Kim Perschmann (SI 20)

I've yet to find good Mexican food in Connecticut. I'm talking about *good* Mexican food, like the Mexican food I grew up with in Dallas. Oh sure, there are "Mexican" restaurants (and please picture a melodramatic use of air quotes) that "claim" (more giant air quotes) to serve authentic Mexican food, but I've never found one that adequately showcases the combination plate.

Mexican food is a lot like Garanimals, the kids clothing line that you mix and match using the animals on the tags. The same ingredients can be found in almost any dish, mixed and matched in an array of colorful combinations. You've got your meat (beef, pork, or chicken) cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, a sauce or salsa, jalapenos, rice and beans, and that's pretty much all you need. The tortilla, whether corn or flour, crunchy or soft, is just a vehicle for the merger of said ingredients.

The stand-out dish for me will always be the combination plate, which provides the opportunity to experience these core ingredients in several unique assemblages. The finer restaurants often provide a fancy name for their combination plates, while the more casual establishments will simply number them. And the ultimate combination plate consists of the following three items: a cheese enchilada, a soft cheese taco (more on this later) and a crispy beef taco. At *El Fenix*, this plate is called The Saitillo; at *Mi Cocina*, it is The Luann. At Blue Goose, the #11.

Some of the newer restaurants boast of a "build-your-own" feature, allowing you to create a two-item, three-item or even a four-item combination plate. Frankly, I find the quantifying nature unsettling. I'm not even sure why anyone would bother with a two-item combination plate, and I also don't need to be reminded that it's possible. And while four items would be awesome, I don't want to be *that* customer either. Not to mention the thrill of the quest, which all but disappears once you've entered build-your-own territory. It's a tricky business, the ordering of Mexican food.

And no one up here understands the enchilada. Oftentimes, what is billed as an enchilada will shamelessly arrive at the table wrapped in a flour tortilla. A flour tortilla is a troubling repository for anything called an enchilada, as the corn tortilla is responsible for infusing the dish with its authentic, masa flavor. Sometimes, a sad excuse for an enchilada will show up laden with nothing but a thin, watery red sauce. The enchilada is a very misunderstood dish.

As for the *cheese taco*, this is an item I have not found on any menu in New England. The cheese taco is basically a cheese enchilada, except instead of a thick, spicy red sauce, it is swimming in a golden pool of creamy-smooth cheese sauce. Don't ask me why they call it a taco, because it doesn't resemble anything we have come to understand about the taco. It just is. And when done right, it is a beautiful thing.

Finally, the crunchy beef taco, most often served on a side plate, provides the necessary lettuce and tomatoes to make it feel almost side-salad-like, and thus, healthy. Because the vegetables are often generously heaped onto the plate, less a part of the actual taco, I like to take a knife and fork and make a chopped salad of it.

Growing up in Dallas, my best friends and I spent a lot of time in Mexican restaurants together. We all have our favorites, our favorite combinations, our favorite chips, our favorite salsas. Patty

loves *Chuy's* because they serve warm corn tortillas before the meal. Mary loves *Blue Goose* because their tacos have shredded beef instead of ground. (I am squarely in the ground beef camp.) And I love *Uncle Julio's* for the hand-crafted flour tortillas and spicy queso they drop on your table practically before you sit down.

There is also something about the spicy weight of Mexican food that makes it a perfect antidote for a hangover. My friends and I would crawl out of bed on Sunday mornings, throw on sunglasses and ballcaps, and lumber into our favorite places to debrief about the previous night's shenanigans.

But those meals were also a time for us to debrief about the food. We paid careful attention to each other, deconstructing menu choices, options, and special requests. We would acknowledge a well-crafted order with a slow, knowing grin over the tops of our menus, a slight nod. A look that says, "I see you. I *understand* you. Nice work, my friend."

In 1991, shortly after I made the move up north, and for a variety of reasons too complicated to explain, I quit drinking. But I don't need a hangover to appreciate a good Mexican restaurant. I do, however, enjoy it a lot more with old friends. Which is probably why I enjoy them so much more in Dallas. Which is probably why Connecticut just can't seem to get it right.

Pirates

by Sadie Robinson (SI 20)

In the woods there are pirates. The forest is made up of tall sails that they can climb and conquer. The sap from these trees was relentless, but it's effort to slow them down always failed. In the woods there are homes and villages made up of twigs and sticks. In the New England snow, the hodgepodge homes turn to white. As the snow slowly melts towards the afternoon sun, the little huts become that slushy spotted brown; not as pretty, but still adventurous. The woods beg us to tell a story.

There were five of them. The three boys headed to the forest, each one with scraped up knees, wore their dirtiest outdoor clothes: tattered shirts and stained shorts. The woods bordered their colonial, pale-yellow home, though not stretching beyond 500 feet. These woods were an adventure park. The girls, ready for action, sprinted to the woods to claim their home for the day. Sometimes, they'd bring their dolls, dressed in the best activewear in their tiny, pretend closets. The summer sun broke through the ceiling of trees, hardly an August day. They still smelled of sunscreen.

Each day they wrote a new story. That day they created a community. The tallest, most climbable tree served as town hall. Each of the five kids claimed a small area of land as their own. Her land was small, she always believed her brothers had more, but she'd make the best of it. Her land had a large boulder right in the center, one side serving as a cave. Their many days of play molded several walking paths through the wooded area, and hers was farthest from the house. She began to create her hut. Twin trees behind her rock made for good structure: she placed sticks in between the two trees, and some resting on the rock to form a ceiling. She cleared her area of leaves, leaving only grainy dirt as her carpet. Her hands were soon caked with dirt and she could feel the griminess on her face. She had her little home for the day then set off to explore the four neighboring creations. For the most part they looked the same: a ceiling, cleared floors, no doors.

The children played and played. As the sun wavered between daytime and dinnertime, they sauntered inside, tired from the play and dirt and sun.

She is older now, her own real home in New England: a blue farmhouse with a lawn perfect for play. The woods are smaller here. A bigger blue house peeks through the wall of trees beyond. "I'm bored," her oldest son protests. The girl looks up from her coloring book and harmonizes a similar profession. "It's a beautiful day out, why don't you go outside." They questioned their mother. "What would we do outside? It's hot and we already played on the swings." Though she knew the forest had secrets.

She understood a tree's way of blocking the summer heat from the woods. Without even changing from her polka dotted sundress, she gathered her two kids and sprinted to the woods, eager to crack open their creative power. "Today, we could be pirates? Cavemen? Lions?" Her children's eyes widened, surprised to peer so far into mom's imagination. She showed them what trees made best for climbing, and warned of dangerous branches. They found the perfect rock for their ship

and collected all their necessary natural goodies. Their imaginations broke into their tiny little brains and soared until dinner.

“Tomorrow let’s be villagers,” the girl pleaded.

Where My Teaching Is From

by Natasha Schweitzer (SI 20)

I'm from sitting under planes with grandma and grandpa
in the grey chair that looked like it was about to
collapse
racing endlessly through the books on my shelves
enveloped by a warm cloud of Pall Malls and laughs

I'm from arms stretched out far and wide
to the imaginary students in my family's living room
I still saw each one
practicing reading aloud so that the words could reach them like I hoped they would

...

I'm from teachers who didn't see me
though
living and breathing in the flesh
they asked me
Are you sure?
This is what you want to do?

Yes.

Because I'm also from a teacher who believed in the value of the
word
who told me that Mark Twain said there is a big difference between the lightning bug and the
lightning
and who made me crave the passion for language
that she brought to her students each and every day

And because I'm also from spaces where I felt like I could never raise my voice
until I put my pen on the page
it was on lined paper that I tackled
my fear of fleshing out aloud what there is room to scribble out and revise somewhere else

And because I'm from turning to words
when a friend's struggles became too much
she didn't get to finish her narrative
a where I'm from with beautiful stanzas
but unfinished

And because I'm from the importance of empathy
and how that is sourced from the stories that we read

because this is the work that we do
and I yearn to do it more than just well

I'm from students who speak their truths:
"You know it's a good book when you have to put it down and take a second to digest"
leaving tears in my eyes

I'm from students who speak their truths:
"They told me I'm not allowed to speak Spanish here"
leaving tears in my eyes

I'm from students driven by curiosity
that isn't typically welcomed in our conventional spaces
whose voices I'd say deserve to be elevated more than those
others outside our rooms forcibly insert into the center of our work

That's trauma.
We need to change that.

...

As I continue to go
I'm from learning beside educators
who bring such an energy
even to the screen
that it will forever echo.

Birthmarks

by Clarissa Tan (SI 20)

Popo wasn't supposed to have blue eyes. But, my grandmother, a Malaysian Chinese mother of eight surviving children, did; and her eyes are always the first to come, when eastern winds carry her to mind. They had faded years ago from age, from a deep brown—the color I've inherited—into a faint and cloudy blue. As a child, this seemed a miracle. I peered more at my Popo's eyes than I ever did into them, desperate to know whether I'd ever shed the darkness that enveloped mine the way she had hers. "*Will I have blue eyes, too?*" I'd ask my mother, hardly concealing my envy, and entirely oblivious to the fact that lighter tones expressed *decay* more so than *beauty*.

Back in Singapore, Popo warned us that every grain of rice left on our plates would become moles on our spouse's faces. This disturbed me as a young girl. I'd peek underneath the dining room table, studying the birthmark on the back of my left hand. It was this small, dark green spot I'd repeatedly tried and failed to scratch off, once furiously enough to draw blood. It was an upsetting reminder to leave my plate spotless.

At seven, I migrated with my family to the states. Popo visited us for months at a time, during which I started collecting the pieces of this woman that was my grandmother. I mentally catalogued how she'd wag a bony finger toward strangers on the street, certain they were friends from her childhood in Malaysia. How she insisted there'd been unfriendly spirits ascending from the apartment's electrical outlets. The way she passionately indicted them—and not the arthritis—for any pain done unto her body, hitting the problem areas (lower back, right hip) to ward them off.

Despite her steadily cocooning back, Popo was adamant about sleeping on the hard floor. Beds were not natural. Our carpet was not natural. We didn't sleep with our feet toward the door, for there was no need to tempt our souls to float out and away from our sleeping bodies. And when she wasn't shuffling her deck to play *pái pái* alone, she'd rest—on the floor—one leg propped across the other, resting her blue eyes and picking her coffee-stained teeth with the nail of her pinky.

As puzzled as she often left me, Popo and I did share tender moments throughout my childhood. We spent many summer days together holed up in my bedroom; me, nursing an Internet addiction at my desk; her, assuming her usual position on the floor; and the air conditioner, sputtering to a stop every fifteen minutes.

Quiet rarely lasted long between us. With eyes still shut, Popo spent what felt like hours orating tales that occupied the space of the universe. I stewed in my office chair, sipping on a strong cocktail mix of tolerance and distress. Maybe Popo spoke of growing up under the thumb of a domineering adoptive mother. Maybe, she spoke of the 40's; how wailing village sirens sent her flying into thick Malaysian jungles to escape the Japanese. Maybe she simply spoke of her successful career haggling vendors on the streets of Singapore, or the best hawker centers to find her favorite *kway teow* soup, or *our* favorite Hainanese chicken rice. Her stories could have been nothing, or they could have been everything.

I could only guess.

Popo often switched between Mandarin and Cantonese, with sprinklings of Malay. Perhaps she hoped I was better versed in one over the others, that I hadn't demolished the one bridge that tethered my world to hers. In fact, I'd gone further. In the very bedroom she rested in, I spent

hours rinsing away the traces of my accent. If I were back in Singapore, they'd pity how I squandered my culture. They'd call me an *ang moh* child (Hokkien for "red-haired") or White like a *gu ĭ l ă o* (Cantonese for "ghost man").

I resented the knots tightening in my stomach with each foreign sound she sent warbling through the air that I'd never be able to catch again. I'd groan, "Popo..." and beg her to finish, but my Popo prattled on, her voice rising and sinking, rising and sinking.

Sometimes, though, my small body just erupted with laughter. My Popo: the great orator. I lost it, my cackles exploding and petering and exploding again. My soul was simply possessed by hysteria, body bent over and shaking, feet stomping on the carpet, and face agonized by euphoria. Every seam I had sewn tore open in those hilariously ridiculous moments.

"*Shénme?*" *What?* she'd ask, now looking at her violently giggling granddaughter, and gently laughing along with swollen cheeks. When I couldn't catch my breath to answer her, she'd say in a combination of Mandarin, Malay, and Cantonese, "*Mèimeī pandai si ŭ,*" *Mèimeī is good at laughing.* Or, she'd simply say, "*Mèimeī...happy!*"

When I finally caught my breath, I'd sigh, then remind us both: "*W ǒ ài n ĭ,* Popo." *I love you, Popo.*

Laughter was our strongest language, but not one that was always spoken.

When I was nine, I was happily in the middle of wolfing down the Tiê-Chiu porridge, salted duck egg, fried dace, and bok choy Popo had whipped up for my afternoon snack—when Kim Green called.

I met Kim on a bus ride home when her head popped up from behind a tattered seat to ask, "Why do you spend all your time talking to the bus driver?" Our bus driver, Earl, was a Black man in his 30's. Kim had fair hair and fair eyes, ivory skin dotted with the cute kind of freckles, and I wanted to say Earl was my friend. I might've mentioned he had been, ever since he drove all the way to the bus depot only to discover I'd fallen fast asleep and missed my stop, and that he needed to drive me all the way back home. I might've shared, *Earl cracks me up. Whenever it's my stop, he says, 'Wake up, Sleepy Head!'* I might've spoken of the honey in his voice or the picture he kept tucked in his wallet of his girlfriend. I might've told Kim Green a number of things instead of: *I don't know.* I started sitting at the back of the bus with Kim and the others, who looked nothing like Earl, and nothing like me.

Over the landline, Kim gushed over the treehouse her dad had finished building and insisted I walk over, reminding me I was one short mile away. I started to envision my mother's worry-stricken face, when from the dining table behind me, I heard Popo's slow sips of black coffee—deafening static in my head. My porridge was getting cold.

"So, will you *come?*" Kim asked in a voice starting to teeter with impatience.

At that moment, Popo began her routine ramblings in Chinese, sending an icy pang down my spine. I hastily cupped my free hand over the telephone and shot her a scowl. Popo quieted, as surprised at this as I was. I removed my palm. "Umm, yeah. See you soon, Kim!" I hung up.

After a pause, I turned my heels for the door. I avoided Popo's inquisitive gaze, her concern flickering behind baggy eyelids.

Her coffee cup clinked against the table. "Ay, *Mèimeī, ch ĭfàn,*" *Finish eating.* I slipped on my shoes instead.

"*Bùyào,* Popo," *I don't want to,* I told her, waving my hands. "*W ǒ hěn b ă ole,*" *I'm very full.*

As my palm kissed the cold brass doorknob, my Popo, now standing, called out to me, “Qù n ǎ l ǐ?”

Blood pounded against my skull walls. “Friend,” I growled, “Fri-end. W ǒ de péngy ǒu,” My friend. She launched a flurry of questions in Chinese.

What did she not understand? “Popo, stop!”

Silence fell thick between us. Then, I walked out, hearing her call again in a crackling voice flooding with panic, “Mèimei! Qù n ǎ l ǐ! Qù n ǎ l ǐ, Mèimei!” The door shut behind me and I stood, self-stranded, on the front steps.

My Popo asked me the still unanswered question: *Where are you going?*

What did I not understand?

After her first stroke, Popo was a landed bird. She no longer flew overseas, and over the years, I watched, in real-time, as her stories and laughs waned over FaceTime calls. She watched through the screen as I graduated middle school, then high school, then college, too.

Last year, while visiting her nursing home in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, I was reintroduced to my Popo. She occupied a simple space, home to nothing more than a bed, basic armoire, and a portrait of Mother Mary my godmother had placed beside her. Upon entering her room, she studied me as one would a stranger. Her wrinkled upper lip did not curl to a smile. Her pale eyes seemed barren of recognition. But looking into them flooded my soul with all the pieces of my Popo.

This is Mèimei, my mother told her in Cantonese.

“*H ǎ ole*,” Popo agreed, already tired and fading from the conversation.

I sat by my Popo, who now lay on a bed after all her years on hardwood floors. As though it were the most fragile and precious thing I would ever encounter, I gently picked up Popo’s skinny hand and placed it in my palm. As she lay resting, my thumb lightly caressed the back of her hand, and for the first time since I was a child, I noticed the birthmark on Popo’s left hand: a lone, dark green dot centered amidst constellations of age spots and blue veins. I turned my wrist to reveal the back of my own left hand. I once shared this birthmark with my Popo; the exact same shade, the exact same spot, but now, a pale, eye-shaped scar. “*There’s a chance it could be cancerous*,” the doctors had whispered to my mother. As it turned out, the mark was completely benign; only a birthmark.

“Popo...” I stammered out. “*Duìbùq ǐ*,” I’m sorry.

Popo opened an eye at this, one dim orb of blue. “Mèimei...” she said. “Happy.” I softly laughed, letting tears fall onto my dress. “*Sayang*,” she told me, Malay for love. “*Sayang*, Popo. *Sayang*.”

Fool

by Danielle Phillips (SI 20)

Only a fool would commit to a craft
That involves raising demons
Wrought more surreal
And threatening
With practice
The way writers do.

Isolated with dreams etched
On papers strewn across the floor
We hope to find gold
But often stumble on pyrite.
We persist with the faithfulness of the chosen few
Celebrate ephemeral joys,
Ponder inscrutable truths,
And lord in the rabble of confusion.
We are a community of thinkers
That serves an invisible multitude.
Who but a fool could bend to such a life and not break?

Thread

by Gwen Crosby (SI 20)

Life is meant to be succulent - full of pulsing turgor and vibrant flesh - able to withstand neglect and remain viable. How rarely though are we nurtured enough to be a delicate orchid or a fussy sensitive fern? Survival of the fittest. We develop roots as little people - they in turn determine our strength and temperament. Each of our roots trained to seek specific water. Water that fills the vacancies and pockets of our need.

I wonder where I got my 'stuff' - my temperament, my abilities, my emotionality. My family is fraught with a soulless detachment to an underlying thread of the unspoken grief that has ebbed through our psychic landscape. It served to isolate us from ourselves and each other and the world. I have no WORDS for that.

I developed a tenderness between my cheek and tongue - it reacts when words escape my mouth unedited and I see the reaction I've caused wash across the recipient's face. That space is flush and fat happy when it is laughter that meets my words or dry and desiccated when a grimace or soft pained eyes look back at meor worse yet look away.

I've spent decades studying the effect of my words on the faces of others, heard my own angry voice lash out when in an unconscious moment I've allowed syllables to leave my lips unchecked. Hold back. Rein in. Think and consider. Know your audience. Make friends.

For decades my words danced above the eggshells. I was careful to choose the lightest ones not to risk causing injury. All the while *my* face twisting and heart recoiling at other's ill chosen words, their secret conversations, their dismissive knowing sidebars. I would spend evenings plucking little daggers from my heart.

I asked my therapist once "Why don't I have a flock?"

She replied "Is there a flock at work?"

I said "Yes."

"What was the flock talking about today?" She queried

"Who won American Idol and the new Michael Korrs purse." I recalled

"Uh huh" she said "And how long would you tolerate that conversation?"

"Like 15 seconds" I said.

"THAT's why you don't have a flock" she landed bluntly.

I wept. I asked her if I would be alone forever. Was it just my destiny to live apart and as other to no one. She said no. She insisted that my flock WAS out there but they were very hard to find.

So why seek other? Why bother? Because roots need water.... especially fussy sensitive ferns. Seek one and all eggs are in a single basket - too risky. So seek many. Connectivity in a crowd. Potential rejection diffused. Online: Human soul energy shared without so much as a grazed arm or door held open. Quarantine isolation breached - no germs.

Cyberspace is the ether then that controls the seemingly disparate lives we share but not just words. Animated faces and voices shape the relationship space.

I choose to see it like a scientist and this, some cosmic experiment.

Hypothesis: 1) Put 18 strangers in negative space, add theory, practice, and work: communal and individual. 2) add strong personalities 3) remove the captain of the ship and watch to see if it capsizes.....

GO: Hmmmm it does not. Interesting. Two capable helms-women right the listing vessel and sail on.

At first there is stasis - but not for long. The playing field is soon in motion. Extra conscious listening notices potentially polarizing differences in philosophy; philosophy or just style?

Hmmmmm. Fiber optic spider web alliances forge through satellite space. Reconfirming identity plays out in the back of the back channel. I am who I say I am versus I am who you tell me I am.

More evidence gathering.

Who are we learning to be together? How does what and who we seek confirm our version of ourselves, our reality and our perception of the fight ahead?

What role do we each play in the form and function of this machine?

What purpose will the machine serve, if any, when it is disassembled? Will we choose to go forth apart or together?

It comes down to the individual I think- who am I? What is my story about who I am? And who do I allow to feed that narrative?

Each of us uses our roots judiciously and purposefully. Roots rarely seek tainted water but mine don't avoid it. I love the evolution of my thinking as I wade through toxic puddles. I collect what is useful and discard the poison for poison's sake. Ignore baseless judgement but stop to divine knowledge and nuance from other's experiences and vision. No interesting decision is binary. You will have no trouble finding ugly things if that's what you're looking for. Life can be a self fulfilling prophecy.... I heard that once.

I seek only the beauty in other plants. Admire and emulate the Swizz mechanics of a well oiled machine. That is the narrative that feeds my life and feathers my flock. And so at day's end I will turn my petals to the western sun and draw up my roots to digest all the life sustaining water you've offered.

Life's food that lives in:

Tracy's ungodly ability to articulate in real time what is frozen on my tongue

In Sadie's wonder and enthusiasm

In Denise's refined honesty and surgical word choice

In Jamiah's formidable courage

In Ginny's masterful cadance

In Clarissa's passion for truth

In Kim's thoughtful observation

In Kaye's supportive command of the backchannel

In Moira's tenderly timed hugs and kisses
In Becky's peaceful constancy
In Kyle's deliberate silence as he absorbs and intuits before uttering a single word
In Danielle's strength in holding her ground
In Amanda's exquisite ache as she seeks her destiny
In Natasha's HEART which I cannot fathom has ever thought an unkind thing
In Max's willingness to see through the fog and steer me away from the rocks
In Jane's humor and patience in showing the rest of us how to adapt and evolve
And in AB's unquestioning acceptance of mind numbing responsibility and a seemingly unending supply of expletives.
You have all made me more than I was and for that I am grateful.

Untitled

by Max Bakke (SI 20)

When the pandemic put our world into a permanent state of buffering, the first thing many of us did was reach for a pair of clean underwear. Then, we reached for familiar or long-abandoned comforts to find a way to pass the time while homebound and blunt the fear that settled deep inside each of us like a medical instrument left after surgery.

Some threw themselves into hobbies or fed sourdough starters. Many people watched a docuseries about tiger-owning conmen. A few picked fights with strangers on the Internet about face-coverings.

Me? I used it as a chance to play videogames.

I wanted to finally play *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*—a decades-old game that I never played, but has retained a legendary status in pop culture as “the greatest game of all time.” I’ve played other *Zelda* games, and I craved its simple adventure story and colorful world in which the game takes place. Not only does it stand in contrast to the grisliness found in most contemporary games, but it provided a sanctuary from the world outside my window.

I could’ve joined the millions of gamers who retreated into the comfort of creating their own island paradise in *Animal Crossing*. But I resisted, after my brother—my gaming Yoda—explained its loop of taking out loans to renovate a small island agricultural business, selling items and borrowing more money. It sounded less like a game than a capitalism simulator.

I thought it could be a hard sell, too, if my wife saw me stepping over weeds in our driveway on my way to sink hours into a virtual garden. And I was more interested in exploring a world that I could put right, not just beautify.

For those who don’t know, the basic story of any *Zelda* game goes like this: Link, a nonverbal elf, wakes up and goes to visit some old lady, or tree, or owl and receives a quest. He needs to collect “x” number of macguffins in various locations by using items and weapons that he obtains along the way only to find out that he needs to go get a few more things. It may sound like a pain in the ass, but it’s not. Because every time you solve a puzzle or clear a room of bad guys, triumphant music chimes, a reward appears that floods your brain with dopamine pushing you to explore further.

But it can be maddening because the game isn’t great at telling you what you do in the clearest ways. Sometimes you get stuck, which I did a lot, without the item you need. So you hop online only to find out that if you had been paying attention to an oblique clue given by a villager a few hours ago, or gone into that house in the corner, you would’ve had it already.

Most games follow the same formula: learn the game, grow proficient at the game, proceed further. But halfway through *Ocarina*, the formula changed. I was thrust through the looking glass (in this case, a time-travelling clay flute) into an uncanny world. It was a world in which the bad

guys had already won. My hero now had to weave back and forth through time to solve puzzles growing even more complex.

This is where game became allegory. Since March, we have all been living in a world that is darker, scarier, and a little bit more dangerous. The rules of this new game have changed and we're all still learning them.

Perhaps that's the genius of this game, and why it endures twenty years later: it never stops teaching you. It consistently layers complex puzzles that demand to be solved in new ways. And it pays to pay attention to those clues. Especially the ones that come from departments of public health.

I reached the end of my adventure eventually, banishing the bad guy to wherever bad guys go. Harmony in Hyrule was restored, which is more than I can say for where our country currently sits.

For me, one of the worst feelings associated with this shutdown is that feeling of helplessness. We're all disempowered right now until testing increases, vaccines are developed and restrictions lessened. Perhaps that's why games are a source of comfort—because they provide us with a sense of completion, especially when there aren't other opportunities to do so. Saving these video games worlds are the closest thing many of us not on the front lines are going to get to feeling useful.

Which is ok. There's not much to do at home anyway.

Cicada

by Moira Cassell (SI 20)

The shadow gave it away.

That's how I found it tucked under the ground cherry's

crooked arm. I watched it

slip from its exoskeleton

slowly,

slowly.

First the eyes,

then the body,

a green leg here,

and there

and there

until fairy wings unfurled.

Then,

nothing.

An acorn thudded to the lawn.

In a hanging flowerpot, baby

robins cheeped for worms.

I waited. I read. I ate a peach.

Still nothing. The insect's little

green legs clung to its familiar

home, unmoving. Perhaps, I

considered, it deserved some

privacy. I tossed the peach pit

and returned to lists and chores,

as the sun relaxed its shoulders

another minute earlier, again.

Half Savage and Hardy, and Free

by Amanda E. Abbott (SI 20)

"I wish I were out of doors. I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... I'm sure I should be myself, were I once more among the heather on those hills."

Catherine, Emily Brontë, Wuthering Heights

Flashback: *Heather on the Hills, An American in Haworth*

Adjusting my city black leather backpack, completely out of place in this gentle landscape -minus ninety degree angles, but rather quaint historic town of Haworth, England, I walk past ancient farm buildings, crumbling yet motionless, speckling the hills. They seem to watch me as I go by: they know why I am here, and in their silence they are nodding. With my ham and cheese sarnie, crisps, and waters packed, I embrace the trails of Emily and Charlotte Brontë for the first time in my life. Skylarks are overhead haunting sky spaces with mysterious echoing caws as they swoop in and out of view.

The first section of the trail is through moss-covered graveyards, farmland, and an incredibly well traveled footpath dotted with car parks along the way and a casual family hiking aesthetic.

"And it makes me wonder."

My worries whisper on the wind:

"I could not help it; the restlessness was in my nature; it agitated me to pain sometimes. Then my sole relief was to walk along the corridor of the third story, backwards and forwards, safe in the silence and solitude of the spot, and allow my mind's eye to dwell on whatever bright visions rose before it—and, certainly, they were many and glowing; to let my heart be heaved by the exultant movement . . . and, best of all, to open my inward ear to a tale that was never ended—a tale my imagination created, and narrated continuously; quickened with all of incident, life, fire, feeling, that I desired and had not in my actual existence" (Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, 1847).

About an hour into the trail voices disappear and I am aware of a sudden aloneness. I am aware that the space has undergone a transformation: nude dusty hues not unlike that of the American midwest have given way to a mystical lushness. Suddenly the trail changes, it becomes a charcoal, graveled space, intermingled with sheep who seem to wander in, off, and around at their own will--with not a farmer in sight. It would seem that even the sheep are independent here. The mothers look me up and down with their sparkling black-fleeced heads and eyes. They bray. But as a Mother myself I get it, 'Move on lady human, you may look, but do not touch, you are borrowing footpaths here.'

You are borrowing voices here.

A great canyon in the hills appears, vast and muddled with hues of green I swear I've never encountered in my paint box -all floating in and amongst others like the butterflies that dot the picture. My mind's eye turns them to a wash of watercolor, my breathing ushers the water from the tip of my brush, pushing the colors to mingle on the bumpy paper. Its softness escapes me in words that I am not aware of in the English language, and perhaps, this is why so many poets have made pilgrimages themselves to these lands- its beauty is a challenge to digest, and nearly impossible to describe without great pains and care.

The very wind commands respect.

"And it makes me wonder."

Surely, this can't be real.

Still, I'm in awe that there's no rain! How cliché of me. Although, perhaps Frances Hodgson Burnett, in *The Secret Garden*, was telling the truth after all: "Yorkshire's th' sunniest place on earth, when it's sunny." Everything is glittering with pixie dust it seems. Indeed. A secret garden; Pan's Neverland. I force myself to turn off my phone, to disconnect, to become one with the space as The Brontë's must have done. Women who published under male pseudonyms in their time. Full of grit, guts, and talent.

Their voices challenged the patriarchy and violence against women and children.

Their voices challenged gender as performative.

Their voices are set on the moor wind challenging my worthiness to be here.

Their voices came to me in a book when I was eleven on my Mother's bookshelf.

Silenced and un-silenced.

Unheard and heard.

"And it makes me wonder."

As I lose my breath on the trail, their breath breathes back into me with each uncertain step. I'm so grateful their voices are still here, helping me recover mine once more.

As I hike on, the trail narrows to spaces where one foot must be placed in front of the other as a vegetation so thick and intertwined encapsulates the ground and is impossible to walk through without getting tripped up. 'How did the sisters do this- in dresses nonetheless?!' My respect for them is growing with each new treacherous curve of trail, every slippery, muddy, rocky ledge, and every grass-covered footpath, that one hopes is the *actual* trail- and not just the making of the sheep residents who call this place home. Hiking alone without signage is not for the faint-hearted. It's thrilling. I welcome the solitude.

The air is so heather-sweet and it flows in and around your head, tickling your eyelids, entwining your hair, and curling within your nostrils- beckoning you forth and onward.

Jane's whispers curl within mine ear: *"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me. I am a free human being with an independent will"* (Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, 1847).

Imagine The Grand Canyon if you will, edges erased and smoothed into slopes, and covered in velvety elvish hues that Tolkien himself must have held on dearly to in the trenches. Ruins dot the open expanse and there is a sadness in the air as bittersweet as the essence of the many flowers birthing fragrance. A kelly green lava covers the mountainous way making love to the hooker green shadows of a valley of trees. Another hour and I am at the base of the canyon where a river runs through it. Water under the tiny stone bridge and I'm climbing up once more out of the canyon. No time for breaks now, I'm Top Withens bound. The ruin may or may not be the inspiration for *Wuthering Heights*, but that didn't matter to me: just knowing they walked these hills was reason enough to reach The Moors, ever more poignant to me, as I have read of them my entire life - and never set foot - until now.

Jane's voice once more whispers in the wind: *"I am not an angel, and I will not be one till I die---I will be myself..."* (Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë, 1847).

Another hour, and I realize that I haven't seen a tree in a long time, the trail is changing once more and so am I. There are no more birds, no more sheep. The path has become rocky but impossibly neon green fern-fields hug the path edges and curl in the gusty moor-wind. How is it in this odd place all of my favorite colors have converged so uniquely? Purple moor plants cover the hills now and it is getting harder and harder to breathe in the altitude. The wind never quits. I am tired and hungry. In the distance I see a building of stone on the horizon, surrounded by nothing but big lapis lazuli sky. I feel *safe*; protected even--

With my target in sight a new energy fills me with a quickened step. Looking behind me has become a habit and off on the opposite horizon I see a wooded evergreen forest, that was once a tiny speck in the foreground when I began the trail, massive as I hiked past it, miniscule now it has become a speck once more, though far behind me.

"And it makes me wonder."

How *far* have I really traveled?

How *far* did the Brontë sisters travel?

How brilliant, how inspiring, how brave, and how free...ing. Roughly forty minutes further and I am euphorically upon my destination. The ruin is unimpressive and yet perfect. It looks like a Hollywood set that has fallen into disrepair: real and unreal at the same time, blissfully itself in its rawness, truth, and disheveled purpose, alone even around people, picked apart brick by brick, beaten, engraved upon, manipulated, misunderstood, misguided, misloved.

Abandoned.

Rather cut away, pushed around, and pummeled by the encounters of its life---still, steadfast, hopelessly romantic in spirit, and upheld in grit --just like The Brontës.

Charlotte's words embrace me on the wind:

"It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. [...] but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves [...] It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex." (Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 1847).

I think...I am home.

I can finally hear my voice.

"And it makes me wonder."

Verywell, it's done then. It's decided.

The wind whispers from inside me this time, the voices of my beloved literature converging:

"I can live alone, if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss. I have an inward treasure born with me, which can keep me alive if all extraneous delights should be withheld, or offered only at a price I cannot afford to give" (*Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë, 1847).

There is one stubborn moor wind beaten tree left standing, where a small crooked wooden bench hides in its comforting shade. Under that tree, upon that moor top, I devoured my sarnie,

crisps, and chugged the remaining water. Smiling at familiar ancient stones, and The Moor, and the knolls of fern, and the voices on the wind: I said 'Hiyah' to my eleven year old bookish self and slowly took out my pencil.

"There's still time to change the road you're on."

"I have an inward treasure born within me."

My sisters, Thank You.

Onward.

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Responsibility

by Becky Curtin (SI 20)

She never enjoyed driving, especially with others in the car. It required too much responsibility - for herself, the children who sat in five point harness seats in the back, and her mother, who sat in the passenger seat next to her. The radio could never be turned loud enough to drown out the screams in the backseat over the "who is badder than bad", nor quiet enough to block out the mundane noise made from the gossiping being next to her. The presence of bodies in the car did not even allow for Caroline to escape inside her own head. The bodies were too loud.

"Do you remember James Smith? He lived on 287 Westview Street?" was the beginning of yet another annoying story to break the silence only thirty seconds into the trip. Caroline had just backed out of her driveway, and was not even at the stop sign at its end when the gossiping began. Her mother hands pressed together, mindlessly rubbing them between her large thighs. Her handbag was placed on the floor in front of her, but with her large body, and seat adjustment as upright and forward as possible, the space was overcrowded.

"He came into the office the other day. I wouldn't have recognized him if I hadn't been looking at his chart..." the story had continued. She worked in a doctor's office administering pre-employment physicals and drug tests. This line of work provided her with the opportunity to cross paths with many of the families Caroline went to school with; however, Caroline had left the town she grew up in twenty years earlier, and cut off all ties with anyone she may have known. She was grateful for her childhood, but ready to move on. She didn't think this would matter, either, because when she was younger and living at home, her parents never invested any effort into getting to know her or her friends. It was Margaret, her older sister, that lived for the "glory days" of high school memories. "Party at Margaret Collins" was the anthem whenever she would return from her "western adventure". In support of her sister's return, Caroline reluctantly attended these parties, counting the hours to when she would be picking up the beer bottles from the front lawns, and putting her sister to bed.

"No, mom - that was one of Margaret's friends..." Caroline begrudgingly retorted.

Not seeming to have heard Caroline's response, or blatantly choosing to ignore it her mother went on. "Well, James is doing very well. Looks like he got his act together, he is out of rehab, has two girls, one is eight and non-verbal autistic. I think he's focused on being a father, he has trouble getting dates..."

Her ignoring of her daughter's obvious disinterest was an indication of their fractured relationship. What does James' life have to do with Caroline's? Or even that of her mothers? Caroline wondered as she shifted the 2012 black Jetta into fourth gear, gaining speed as she turned onto the highway's onramp. She was heading south towards the shore, to a goat farm her mother had found while scrolling FaceBook a few days ago. As Caroline was shifting into fifth gear, all that gear shifting finesse she had been working on to eliminate any sudden forward lurching was actively ignored. The time in the car with her mother didn't seem like the time to avoid this otherwise unpleasant feeling. The kids enjoyed the jolt - it was an adventure to them.

"Woah that is so cool!" he sing-songed in the back. It is innocence that is wasted on the young, Caroline thought, not youth.

Caroline had been voluntold to chauffeur this trip. This was probably for the best: that one car seat her mother had was rarely buckled in correctly. "I had the fire department do it for me, I can't believe they did it wrong" was a line of bull Caroline couldn't even bring herself to respond to, but she heard it time and time again.

"I wonder if the weather will hold out today," the passenger in the car had started up again as she shuffled her feet in front of her, moving her knees up and down. "I watched the news late last night and the cute weatherman said 'probably scattered thunderstorms.' I think his name was Nathan."

She was fidgeting with her iPhone X, when she said this, the latest piece of technology to join the "I don't know how to use this" Apple purgatory that littered her mother's coffee table. Scrolling through FaceBook feeds of her friends and their children. Caroline's hands tensed on the steering wheel as she merged to the traffic coming on her left. She was not used to driving with the added weight in the car, and with the air conditioning on, the poor Jetta only had so much power to keep up with cars.

"You know Michael Thomas right? He grew up by the lake, and his mother is friends with Joyce, and it seems like Michael hasn't been able to see his newborn son in six weeks! Covid. That must be so hard for him."

The car's passenger had started up again about some person Caroline knew in passing. Michael Thomas, she thought, had been a boy in the graduating class one year younger than hers- but she wasn't sure. Margaret probably knew him, even though there would have been a five year age difference. Did he attend the last party Margaret threw when she came home for Christmas that year? She couldn't remember. She knew that Michael Thomas and his newborn had no impact on her life. None. She found herself daydreaming of what it would be like to have a conversation with her mother about topics not relating to small town gossip or the weather when she was interrupted.

"Do you think it will rain today? The weatherman said it wouldn't...you can never trust them. There are clouds in the sky."

"You could use the radar on your phone to see if there are any passing showers coming our way," Margaret had begun to say, but she wasn't sure why. She knew her efforts would be futile. Looks were important, knowledge was not.

"Why would I do that? I don't even know how this thing works. Can you show me?" Her mother's defeatist attitude when it came to technology struck a particularly annoying chord with Caroline. Her mother spent \$1000 to look at FaceBook.

When Caroline peeked at the children in the back of the car she saw that they had fallen asleep, necks contorted to what seemed to be ninety degree angles facing the windows. The girl was drooling as she held her pink unicorn between her small hands, and the boy was quiet, though aggressively clutching the fire truck that sat on his lap. Caroline wondered where her life was heading. Was it wondering about the weather by looking at the sky? Living out old high school dreams? Her thoughts were interrupted once more:

“Did you hear Margaret’s son said ‘grandpa’ the other day? Good for him! That Margaret must work so hard.”

Margaret’s son was two and a half, and delayed socially and cognitively - known to all but Margaret. Their mother liked to share the successes of her grandson as if he was the only one she had. The two in the backseat were just bonus people. They both had a working vocabulary before their second birthday, and were engaging in meaningful conversation by two and a half.

“That’s great, mom,” Caroline responded. It was no use asking her mother to praise her other two grandchildren.

The exit ramp was approaching as she began to downshift into fourth gear. She shifted again into third as she got closer to the stop sign at the end. Dropping her mother off at the end of the exit ramp was an idea that lingered in her mind for longer than a few seconds. It was soon interrupted. “I just don’t know about this weather. Do the clouds look dark? I bet it will rain. The app says there’s a 70% chance. I just don’t know.” Caroline took a deep breath. She gently pressed down on the brake and clutch as she approached the stop sign ahead. She looked to her right and had a thought.

Just unbuckle the belt, reach over, open the door, and push!

Responsibility. It’s what Caroline hated about driving with others. Responsibility.

Jo's Bread

by Denise Barstow (SI 20)

They say olfactory memory is the most powerful sense, so a scent is worth a thousand words. Even just the thought of the golden, crispy, yeasty, symphonic scent of my mother's fresh homebaked bread triggers dozens of memories.

She has just popped a dozen loaves of piping hot baguettes out of the oven, steaming and crackling onto the cooling rack on the dining room table. The tantalizing scent fills the kitchen, wreathes up the pine stairs, and wafts to the outer reaches of the log cabin. At the first whiff, we can already see the salted creamery butter melting into tiny air pockets on each dense, diagonal slice. We tumble down the stairs faster than the clanging cow bell that called us for Ratatouille ever could. There is no time for a rushed hug of thanks around her curved figure, such is the yearning to devour her bread. I bite into the honey-colored, crunchy, thick crust. My teeth sink into the satisfyingly soft, chewy, doughy center. I cannot stop until the third or maybe even fourth hedonistic bite. The slice is gone by now, anyway. Sheer bliss. Nothing fulfills my soul like Jo's bread, fresh out of the oven. Now I steal a warm arm around her hunched shoulders, a squeeze of thanks for her magic touch.

In eastern Connecticut, some know it as Jo's Bread, but to me it is Meme's bread. For half a century I have watched her in the evenings mix up her sloppy, sticky bread dough in a large white plastic bucket with a wooden spoon as long as her arm. She seems to slap it together, carelessly measuring piles of snowy King Arthur unbleached flour and a mason jar and a splash or so of water, a scant handful of yeast, a dash of salt. Deceptively simple. For over fifty years she has stretched that messy dough into those long, narrow trays, then gone off to read a book in the bath while the yeast worked its silent magic into the long evening and overnight. For over half a century, she has risen at dawn to shepherd that white dough through the double-rising process, into the furnace oven, and has pulled out the golden loaves in time for lunch. No bakery in France can produce a baguette as satisfying in texture, and none so filled with love.

Over the years, my mother has offered to teach people how to make baguettes, but not one has ever successfully replicated the texture of hers. She has generously shared all her bread-making secrets: the sloppy, sticky wet dough, the long overnight rise, the scorching hot oven, the water-spray to ensure a crunchy crust. Dozens of would-be homebakers have apprenticed for a day, been instructed and guided through the process. None have ever come anywhere close to achieving that special texture. Not even her children. We've all tried and failed. Ours are halfway decent, tasty loaves, we have even managed to achieve crunchy crusts, our loaves are beautiful just because they are homemade. But none of us can make Jo's Bread.

I remember as a child, trailing along with her when she used to deliver her wicker basket of golden loaves. She stashed them upright in the giant vertical basket so as to cool without the loaves pressing down on one another. We made the rounds, first to a gourmet store in the Mall. Then, to the posh Depot restaurant. To the Latin American Studies Department wine and cheese gatherings. Jo's bread was known and coveted all over town and beyond. People ordered a dozen loaves for their dinner-parties and retirement buffets. Close friends always enquired, on the

off-chance she might have a few extra loaves available. Unbelievable! Mr. B- used to exclaim loudly when we delivered his dozen to his doorstep. Unbelievable! as he took his first bite. (He could never wait for his evening guests to arrive.) Unbelievable! when we brought loaves all the way to his Maine lake-side cottage. There was Mr. C-, who had a highly-developed nose for her bread. And for her desserts. He would turn up on our doorstep unexpected, always just in time for the loaves to come out of the oven, or just when the creme-caramel or peach crumble were to be served. He brought good fun and excellent conversation, so she never minded.

She never attended a friend's dinner party without bearing the requisite golden loaves as gifts. My mother rarely bought gifts, never went shopping, never bought anything for herself. But she always came bearing homemade gifts of jam, pesto, lemon curd, chutney, violet syrup and of course, her bread. (I secretly, gleefully, wished them well, those unfortunates who were given chutney.) She even made homemade rootbeer one year, though her British taste-buds swore it tasted like mouthwash. She makes the best pastry I've ever tasted, buttery and light, flaky and satisfying. She could turn leftovers into a flaky-pastry Pasty that we all wolfed down no matter the contents, just because her pastry was so perfect. Her mince-pies are to die for. But everyone loves her most for her baguettes. In French, the word baguette also means a magic wand, 'une baguette magique'. My mother's magic ingredient is love. Love is work, and Jo's bread is Love.

For Shelly: On Not Giving Up

by Tracy Waring (SI 20)

Part I: Wreckage

I've known you almost all my life. Do you remember Girl Scouts, when my mom was troop leader and we used to have lock-ins at that local church? We pretended the custodian was an axe murderer, and we stayed up all night just to be safe. By high school, we'd become inseparable. Do you remember sitting on the hallway floor during first period study hall? We made a pact to never attend a high school reunion, unless we somehow lost track of each other. Then we promised to go, in order to find each other again. Do you remember going to your camp in Tionesta, dropping acid, sneaking out, getting caught? The next day was blazing hot, and your mom made us move the wood pile to teach us a lesson, which I'm almost sure we didn't learn. We debated over music: You liked country and punk; I liked the Grateful Dead. We talked each other through traumatic break-ups, fights with parents, and anything else teenage life could hurl our way. I remember laying in fields, philosophizing, looking up at the night sky, and feeling free.

The summer after high school, I dragged you to your first Dead show. You dragged me to parties in Oakland. And the summer after that, we drove cross country in the Pontiac Phoenix, out to the west coast shows. We were 18, exploring, waking up in a new place with each rising sun. Do you remember writing our names in the sand in the Great Salt Desert, or how small we felt walking out into it until we could barely see the car? Or the first time we saw the Pacific ocean? Or swimming in the salt water then sleeping in the open air on the beach in Santa Cruz? Remember when the car broke down, so we gave it away somewhere in California, then caught rides together all the way back to the east coast. God, things were good back then. All sunshine and open-roads. Even hitchhiking, we felt safe.

Our lives ran parallel for the longest time. In the summer of 96, we met the "cute boys" who would quickly become our husbands. Before long, we were starting families and settling down to raise them. Me in Rhode Island and you in Pittsburgh, but even with the distance, we stayed intact. You were my biggest cheerleader, and my most rebellious co-conspirator. And I was yours. We vacillated between the hilarity and the insanity of it all. And we laughed, a lot. We bought houses, grew our families, went back to college... we matched each other around almost every turn. Four children each, and part way through our bachelor's degrees, we walked in step. We did it together, and we felt safe.

Looking back now, it's hard to pinpoint exactly when it started to happen...
your addiction...
the divergence of our roads.

We've been through so much together, you and I.

I try not to think about the bad times, but they still haunt me...

This is what I remember:

I remember the night you fell asleep with a cigarette and burned down your house.

I remember the lies. The frantic pleading in your voice. The panicked phone calls. The desperation.

I remember spending all day on the train. I was coming to pick up your boys so you could go to rehab. You got in a fight with your husband and fell down your front porch stairs. He left. You sat in your front yard, drinking vodka and crying until I got there, hours later, well after dark.

I remember talking to your mom and your bitch of a sister in your living room. She didn't want your mom to pay your phone bill while you were away. She didn't think you deserved that. She scoffed at me, "I don't think you understand how bad it's gotten." I wanted to wring her prissy condescending neck. The hours I had spent on the phone with you, the phone calls to rehabs, the plan making, the pep talking... I hadn't just spent 15 hours on a train for the fucking fun of it! I was up to my elbows in this crisis... in the goddamn trenches every fucking day.

And you didn't even end up going to rehab that time. You'd broken your foot from the fall, and you made up every excuse not to go. I didn't know it then, but it was right after that when you did heroin for the first time. If you as a drunk wasn't bad enough, you as a "junkie" was so much worse. I remember the Easter that you got put in the psych ward after having a breakdown, and the cigarette holes you burned into your arm. A neat, orderly pattern. Circular, like those burns had no beginning and no end. They just went around and around.

I remember the wreckage. They arrested your husband. So you sold your paid-off house for 40,000 dollars and moved into a week-by-week motel. The DCYF workers showed up to take away your kids. With no anchor, you blew that money on heroin in less than two months.

There were long stretches of time when you didn't call.

I remember when you got clean for the first time. When you relapsed. When you got clean again. I remember out-patient rehab. You went every day and you lived in your car at night. We'd talk every evening; flesh out your motives and your guilt. And I think it felt like healing for both of us. I remember the homeless shelter once it got too cold to sleep in your car. What might be perceived as a low point to many, felt like a victory to us, because at least you were sober. You were working the steps. And we started to laugh again.

And then, relapse...

You withdrew from everyone you loved. You stopped answering calls and texts. It shattered my heart. You gave up, but through the darkness of who you'd become, I remembered who you were. Once, after not hearing from you for at least a month, I sent a text that just said, "I love you. I thought you might need to know." You answered that time: "Thanks. I love you too." Then gone again. But I stuck by, waiting for you to decide to try again. Not knowing if you ever would. And I wasn't the only one either. There were a few of us who never gave up. Jeramy, Mandy, your mom... We kept each other afloat. We saved money for plane tickets to go to your funeral, and prayed we wouldn't have to. Mandy kept her funeral money in a shoe box underneath her bed. I remember how you slowly erased every line you used to have. You promised you'd never use a needle, but you did. You said you would never steal, but you did. You said at least it was only from the big stores, and they could afford it. Then you took your daughter's last twenty dollars and denied that it was you.

Then finally jail. And the pure relief of it. Everyone who loved you agreed, there would be no bailing you out. I'm not sure that you understood it at the time, but it was jail, or your life. So we choose your life.

I remember talking to Mandy about "rock bottom." Could this finally be it? There had been so many lows when we were sure you must have hit. But you always found a way to prove us wrong.

This time was different. Alone in that cell, body ravaged with detox, the fog finally beginning to lift, you made a new choice. You focused on a tiny pinhole of light.

I remember the slow crawl out. The flickers of your old self. The leaving behind of destruction and the rebuilding of all that was lost.

Now the pride in how far you've come. The fear that you could still turn back. The hope that you won't. The love without conditions, even if you do.

Part II: Redemption

You called me today just to say thank you.

It's been two years and five months since you got clean.

Shelly,
Best Friend,
Warrior of resilience.

You do not owe me thanks

I love... *all of you*

The wreckage and the redemption
Since you will always be everything that you ever were.

And I know that is hard to rectify,
Hard to face sometimes,
But we can not sacrifice joy to the unchangeable.

You are living, breathing hope.

You are all that is beautiful and all that is broken,
But most importantly, you are still here.
And that means

Everything

You have something left to give to this world

Your gratitude
Your humility
Your survival
Your strength

You are proof that it is possible
Which is to say, recovery is real,

Shelly,
Warrior of resilience, best friend.

Hoarding

by Ginny Light (SI 20)

Like a beaver that busily culled materials to build a dam, Nick hoarded. Unlike a beaver, though, he wasn't *building* anything—just collecting stuff and making it harder for Valerie to keep the house in order. His collections piled up. Years later, when the 4,500-square foot house felt like an apartment, instead of getting rid of his collections, Nick purchased a bigger house.

If he bought one item, he needed another—and another and . . . Valerie noticed this habit of purchasing years into their marriage, after she thought she knew him. She came to realize she knew nothing.

First, Nick needed pillows. For the bed. For his head. Plush, fluffy, full-down pillows. He reminded her of “The Princess and the Pea”—as if engineering were so arduous a profession that his head required all those layers of downy softness to fully rest his exhausted brain cells.

Valerie didn't understand why he needed so *many* pillows, but he kept going to Bloomingdale's and buying more and piling them one on top of the other. He was insomniac, and the pillow pile allowed him to sit upright in bed to watch CNN late into the night.

As she tried to sleep, aware that the length of time until she had to wake the kids for school was diminishing, the TV's blue light bounced upon her eyelids. Her closed eyes shut tighter, a surge of energy tightening around her forehead.

“Can you turn that off, please?”

“I need to watch TV to fall asleep. Why don't you go sleep on the couch?”

Valerie thought that Nick should be the one to remove himself from the bedroom. But he and his pillows remained.

Eventually, Nick plucked pillows, one by one, from his back on his gradual descent into slumber. As he did, Valerie lined them up, creating a white divider down the middle of the bed, and pulled her own pillow tightly over her head.

Hoarding 2

Soon, 8" x 13" flat brown parcels began arriving in the mailbox. In the early days of the Internet, Nick filled the voids in the house and his childhood with plastic-wrapped originals of *Superman*, *Batman*, *Popeye*, and *Scrooge McDuck*.

Valerie looked at the plastic bins from Bed, Bath, and Beyond that began to line the hallways of the house, which began to resemble a college dormitory. She kept thinking that Nick might more wisely invest in a pension plan or long-term, slow-growth stocks.

“Why do you keep buying these?”

“My mother threw out all my comic books when she was cleaning my room when I was in seventh grade. I’m replacing them.”

“But you don’t even read them. And the bins are lining the halls, but you don’t want me to put anything on the walls!”

“That’s different. Someday, we can sell these, and we’ll make a lot of money.”

“It’s not right. My mom gave me a couple of her paintings, and I want to hang them.”

“What if we decide to move? Then, the walls will have holes in them. That’ll lower the value of the house.”

Valerie looked at the floor, and it occurred to Nick that she might complain to his mother or one of his sisters, so he decided to compromise.

“Hang *one*.” He pointed to a somber, bluish watercolor of a pond that his mother-in-law had painted. “In your office.”

Valerie hung the painting that day, lest he changed his mind and she lost the opportunity. It was just one painting, but she was glad to see something that looked like she lived there.

But it was a tiny victory. They lived in that same house from 1987 to 2007. Twenty years of mostly bare walls—in case they moved.

Horrible Parenting **(Or, they turned out great *despite* their upbringing)**

As Nick’s comic book collection grew, so did the kids’ video games—and Valerie’s anxiety. Every night, after dinner, Nick would yell up the stairs, “Who wants to go to the mall?” *Every single night. Whether homework was done or not. No chores. No accountability.*

“Is your homework done?”

“Aw, that’s all right. They’ll do it when they get back.”

When they got home, the kids ran upstairs, ripped open their new games, and played until late into the night. By 10:00 p.m., Valerie went into their rooms and saw them with their controllers in hand, their eyes glazed, fixed on their television screens.

“Tomorrow’s a school day. Time to brush!”

“Five more minutes.”

She walked from bedroom to bedroom, picking up laundry along the way, and gave a five-minute warning.

At 11:00 p.m., they acquiesced. Then, Nick called from the kitchen, “Pizza!”

The kids ran downstairs for some boardwalk food, and the momentum to get them to go to bed was lost.

At 7:00 a.m., Valerie’s alarm went off. Only her daughter made it. Valerie tried to rouse the boys, but it was useless.

Later, when Google Earth was put online and they looked up their address, they could see the middle son’s white car in the driveway at midday—a sign that he’d slept through another one of his high school days.

The Unspeakable Bond

by Jamiah Bennett (SI 20)

“Ja...Jami...Jamiah?” the nurse said hesitantly as she turned the corner and peaked into the “room” I had been waiting in. I’m not sure if it was even a room. It was a long section of the hospital where all of the surgery patients were being prepped for their respective procedures. Between each patient was a wall with some kind of decoration. My wall had at least one hot air balloon on it but I don’t remember the other designs around me. I was too focused on the tightness of anxiety building up inside of me.

It was October 11, 2011. All I could think about at the time was being a 14-year-old scoliosis patient at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center about to have a spinal fusion surgery.

There were anesthesiologists, surgeons, and nurses around me every two minutes. They were moving my arms to take vitals, touching my two french braids to make sure nothing was in my hair, and writing on my back with markers that looked like Sharpie. “That better come off,” I thought to myself.

In school and at home, I had been having conversations about taking ownership of the vehicle I drive every single day - my body. But in this moment, I felt as though I had no control of the body that I was in. Instead, it was in the hands of medical experts, many of whom I had just met, and that terrified me. I could no longer fake the strong face and attitude I had the whole morning. The thought that strangers would be in control of my body, especially working on my spine, did not sit well with me. I had heard horror stories of spinal surgeries gone wrong and I did not want that to be part of my narrative. I became silent, crossed my arms with my right hand over my left, and just stared into the distance.

At some point during that moment, my mom’s motherly instincts went off. “Jamiah, you are going to be okay. You are a strong girl and these are the best doctors,” she said in a calm voice as she tried to hold back the tears I saw building in her big, wide, brown eyes. Even though I could tell she was nervous about her daughter having a very serious surgery, there was a sense of comfort in her voice.

I wanted to provide some support back to my mom. I knew she was not looking for me to say anything but I searched for words to say. She and I had been through a lot together and we learned how to communicate in various ways. So, looking at her and using my body language would portray whatever was on my mind. When I couldn’t find the right words for the moment, I relied on my body to say what I was thinking.

Before we knew it, I was being wheeled into the operating room. The nurse asked me to put a clear mask over my mouth and nose. “Breathe in. Breathe out,” the anesthesiologist told me. After about two breaths, my chest began to feel tight. No matter how hard I tried to resist, the anesthesia would not stop. With my own tear-filled eyes, I looked over to my mom and extended my hand. This time, she was at a loss for words but her eyes said it all. *You are going to be okay. You are a strong girl and these are the best doctors.* Before I knew it, everything went dark.

The very next thing I remember is hearing my mom say “I love you, Jamiah.” But it sounded like I was underwater and she was about a mile away. I did not see her. Yet I could still hear her voice. Then, I heard a faint beep in the background. Then another. And another. I dug into the depths of my mind to understand what was going on.

My next thought was to open my eyes. *Maybe I was under water. Maybe my mom was a mile away.* I tried using all of my strength to fully open my eyes but it felt like gravity was one hundred times stronger than I remembered. I could not get them open for the life of me. My heart rate increased. I felt trapped but I still sensed my mom near me and I had not communicated anything back to her. Somehow, I found the strength within me to push against the heavy gravity weighing on my body to raise my hands to make the shape of a heart.

During my recovery, I did not always have the strength to verbally describe how I was feeling. And, let me tell you, I was feeling a lot physically and mentally because I was still not in control of my body. Every two hours, nurses came in to turn me on my side because I could not do it myself. They did their best to be gentle but there was pain. I felt every twist and turn. Four days after my surgery, I faced the challenge of standing up and attempting to walk. At this point, it hurt to lift my feet even a half inch off the ground to move forward. I did not know how to tell the medical professionals this. But my mom did because my face and hands said it all - something only she would know.

There is no love like a mother-child love. I am super grateful for the privilege of knowing that the love my mother and I have for each other stands beyond any obstacles. We will push through challenging times and celebrate triumphant experiences. No matter where we are in life, we will always have some way to communicate and express our needs.

Today, I am beyond happy to say that, thanks to the two titanium rods and 14 screws that have straightened out my spine, I can stand tall and strong right by her side as we walk through this journey of life.

Saturday Sessions

The Joy of Hand Washing

by Alexandra J. Carey (SI 11)

We have all heard the commandment by now: Wash your hands. A sacred duty to protect ourselves and each other in the midst of a global pandemic.

Often, says the CDC, and with soap. Soap breaks up the oils into smaller droplets. One end of the soap molecules is hydrophilic - they attract water. The other end is hydrophobic - they repel water. The hydrophobic ends of the soap attach to the oil, while the hydrophilic ends stick out, causing a particle of oil to drop. This magic of soap allows for the mixing of that which should not mix - oil and water.

The soap suspends these particles of oil, and the yuck and is pulled away from the hands and suspended in water. The water washes away the grime - a baptism in the sink basin.

20 seconds, we have memorized by now, is the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice. A song. A moment to rejoice. A celebration. A rebirth.

This seemed like a long time - and admittedly, I was not washing my hands for that long before the pandemic. But the commandment to do this was a moment of reckoning for me. It gave me permission to slow down, and to really focus on this ritual.

20 seconds of meditation. Feeling the warm water cleanse the surfaces of my hands, pouring softly over hardened cracks, and purifying underneath my nails. I feel each knuckle and each joint of each finger, the smooth underside of the palm, the softness of the flesh on top and the imprints of the bones inside. The suds bubble up as each hand takes its turn massaging the other, cascading across the smooth bar of soap with scents such as lavender, chamomile, and sometimes even a citrus tang like orange adding floral notes to my little bathroom.

Friday nights growing up, we would invite Shabbat, the holiness in time, into our home. Her spirit blew through our home like the wind, and we would wash our hands at the large basin, a signal of the queen's presence in our home. At three years old, my mother had to reach the vessel for me, as I stood on a stool, counting three times for each hand as she poured the water from the vessel and let it splash from my hands to the sink. And we recited the prayer together, my three-year old tongue stumbling over the Hebrew words until they finally spilled fluidly from my mouth as easily as that vessel would pour the water: "Barukh atah hashem (blessed are you our God) elokeinu melech ha'olam (king of the universe) ashker kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu (who has sanctified us through your commandments) al netilat yadayim (on the washing of the hands)." That vessel remains at the sink today, copper-toned and tarnished, used only for the ritual washing.

Ritual hand-washing extends beyond Judaism. Holy water is sprinkled on the hands before the consecration of bread and wine. Muslims will observe hand-washing and hygiene for purity. Purity of the body as part of the 8-limbed path. The Ba'hai wash before prayer; Hindus bathe in rivers; the Cherokee in moving streams; Shinto visit waterfalls.

Our ancestors imparted this wisdom without knowledge of germ disease, or the use of microscopes to aid their vision in detecting viruses and bacteria. They could not see the coronaviruses, with their spikey protein crowns that attach to the lungs. Viruses, covered in fat, stick to our hands, and won't rinse off with water alone, just like trying to mix oil and water. But soap, made of lipids, will dissolve the fat that coats the virus once it is mixed with water, breaking it up so that it will rinse away.. This is a purification process, a sacred act. The little bathroom sink serving as an oasis of peace and protection.

Washing hands is a medically and spiritually sound practice, one that we can enjoy and savor. It is simple, and the world is being summoned to perform this single, caring act - caring for ourselves and each other with each turn of the faucet.

Jello Shots and the End of the World

by Mandy Flachsbart (SI 19)

Before restaurants and bars were shut down, before we were advised to avoid groups of 10 and over, and before the virus tore through Connecticut, my wife Katie and I attended a St. Patrick's day party. On the day of the party, we admitted to one another that we weren't entirely certain that it was a responsible idea. We thought about who would be there and evaluated our trust in their judgement. The ultimate deciding factor was an odd faith in my one of the hosts, my friend's husband, feeling as though he would never make a reckless decision. Finally, we decided to go, bargaining with the universe that if we made it through this then we'd buckle down in our home and only leave for the necessities.

Upon arriving, we entered the kitchen where friends and friends' relatives were gathered around hors d'oeuvres and half-consumed bottles of whiskey, sipping Irish beer and laughing boisterously. They sported their St. Patty's day themed T-shirts: "Ain't No Laws On St. Patty's Day" and "I Need a Beer Right Meow" (with a cartoon cat, of course); and a sexier fit one that said *Lucky Charm* in sparkly letters. I was soon ushered into the next room where a friend greeted me with a warm smile and a disclaimer that she *is not currently hugging people*; immediately after, I was plunged right into the arms of my friends' cousin Lindsey. Grinning, she announced that *she* was hugging, because "*who cares; we're all going to fucking get it anyway!*"

Katie shot a look at me, her eyes wide with a mix of terror and indignance. "I don't want to get it," she hissed at me. (It should be noted that these friends are technically *my* friends and somehow I felt like I'd had the final say in the decision to go; thus, anything that went wrong would be on my conscience.) Within moments of greeting one another, we all shared our stances, agreeing that it was probably good not to hug and admitting that we had all wondered if we should be attending a party like this at all. But for that, it was too late.

Lindsey started pointing at people and imploring, "jello shot?" shouting approval to those who said yes and admonishing those who turned her down: "Oh come onnnn it's St. Patrick's Day! LAME!" I was so concerned about her hypothetical reaction to my decline that I considered taking one because, well, it was seeming increasingly possible that the world was ending anyway. In my discomfort, I looked over at Katie but she was busy inspecting her feet.

As Lindsey dispersed bright green and orange jello shots, we chatted about how directly the virus was impacting us, who was going to work and who wasn't. Eventually we got to comparing how we'd stocked up. There was quite a range. A couple of people had enough food to last months. Of course, the most passionate conversation of the evening revolved around toilet paper. Several people had multiple packages at home already; others felt that the need was overblown, that it was much less important than food when push comes to shove. If it weren't for this conversation, I never would have known that the price in bidets have risen exponentially.

Other talk was of how fast the virus spreads. My friend Sara, in a calm, matter-of-fact tone remarked that at least 1 in 5 of us in attendance was bound to have it. Katie's eyes popped wide open. She grabbed Sara and cried, "IS THIS TRUE?" and then shot an evil look at me like it was all my fault that we came to this party and were now most definitely going to contract the virus.

A wide range of ages were represented: babies and folks in their 60s. Even with a looming global pandemic, you can't be in a bad mood at a St. Patrick's Day party. People oohed and ahed around the babies in their miniature leprechaun outfits while I chomped on celery and carrots dipped in Ranch dressing and my friend made a joke that her husband, who was sitting in the corner away from the crowd, was already practicing "social distancing."

It occurred to me that this phrase had emerged, making a seamless transition from a phrase I'd never heard or uttered to a phrase that became both commonplace and ubiquitous. We at the party were *not* social distancing. A guy whom I'd never met came out of nowhere and plopped down on the couch with such force that my cushion slumped towards his to the point that we almost collided. He smelled of beer and said, laughing, "I hope you don't mind if I sit here, it's nice and cozy." I squeezed out a chuckle and started trying to inch myself toward the far end of my cushion without him noticing.

Finally, dinner was served. Not only do I not drink alcohol, but I don't eat meat; I am actually the lamest St. Patrick's Day party attendee imaginable. I grabbed some cabbage and carrots which were probably saturated in beef broth, loaded up on soda bread, and assembled myself at the dining room table with a mixed crowd of friends and friends' cousins and the host's 65 year old uncle. Chewing on juicy corned beef, Uncle Jim informed us that he wasn't at all scared of getting the virus and that anyone who got it would be fine. He and my wife then traded conspiracy theories, the most compelling of which being the one that China started it and that they have the cure, for which they would eventually trade Trump in exchange for lower tariffs. Another story linked it to North Korea.

The recurring subject about stocking up entered the conversation. One person, who lives alone, shared that she had three 12-roll bags of toilet paper prepared. Another person had filled the freezer in her basement with food. Yet another had a plan to go on a second grocery run the following morning. Katie turned to me and demanded, in a whisper, that we stop for toilet paper on the way home.

Over brownies and cookies and more soda bread, we played a game of which celebrity would you like to be quarantined with. We shamed each other for our choices and got into serious debates about the value of each person, noting that most of us picked only for the level of attractiveness. Things got particularly heated when one of the guys selected Kim Kardashian as his partner-- a couple of the women at the table roared with hostile disapproval.

Finally we started saying our goodbyes, and it felt as though we were all separating to follow our own dangerous adventures from there. Lindsey bounced around the table, kissing us all goodnight and bestowing her well wishes. One guy ducked before her lips could reach him, yelling out "NO WAY, NO KISSES," and after Katie received her kiss she wiped the saliva from her cheek, again looking at me as though to blame. We all agreed to stay in touch as we said our goodbyes, promising that we'd see each other on Facetime.

I admit that, lying in bed that night, I Googled: What are the odds of contracting Coronavirus right now?). A week later I found out that the drunk guy who sat with me on the couch had gotten it. I waited as long as possible to share this with Katie.

Sneakerhead

by Terri White (SI 19)

I logged into the site and waited for the page to load. I had fifteen new messages. Nine of them were for my Air Jordans that I had listed late last night.

I had gone to a poetry reading over the bridge in Williamsburg, and after walking back from the subway, decided it was time. When I wrote the listing I was pretty high on Cathy Park Hong. It was the first time I had heard her read and her *All the Aphrodisiacs* made me a little giddy and worn out and pensive. I had been waiting to list this pair when I needed more cash. Strand's and Lyft kept the cash flow trickling, barely. And it was time. Rent would be due in two weeks. I knew they would go quick.

I typed slowly thinking about when I had bought them. Actually Mom bought them. She had just gotten off work. Her shift had ended sometime in the afternoon. I was sure that she had cashed her paycheck the day before. It was a Saturday in November in New York and the wind whipped down the sidewalk and through the intersection like it was forced at gunpoint. Eight years ago and I remember the wind, the weekend.

"Mom, they'll be all gone if we don't go now. We have to," I said. She huffed, but we walked on until the storefront. I pointed out the sneaker through the glass, a glare obscured the shiny cleats for the laces, but I knew what I saw. They were Air Jordans 12 Retro Wings Playoffs in black and gold. I didn't even want to try them on. Mom told the man size ten and a half and she laid out most of her paycheck. We had cereal for dinner and watched Spiderman on TV.

The first three emails were in another language. Chinese perhaps. I deleted those. The fourth email had come in at 2:01 a.m. It was from a Jifzzer01 and I decided to write him back. His question was this:

The stitching be like mad dog pretty

I see my face in that gold

Planting one on Keturah

Who'd finally say yes

If I was wearing these here.

You take 4, bro?

And I thought of all the aphrodisiacs that brought people together. What had Hong said? Blowfish and tutus, words and ginseng, strips of white cotton and the sight of shoes around telephone wires. These here shoes might get this boy laid and I thought/
couldmakethathappen.I'madamnnearmatchmaker.I'lladdittomyjobtitles.

“Yes, I’ll take 4,” I typed. I wrapped the original box up carefully that morning and walked to the post office on Ninth. Mom would be getting off her shift later and I texted *dinner?* I was in the mood for Korean bar-b-cue.

Benjamin at Sixty-four

by Joan Seliger Sidney (SI 81)

First cousin, nine months younger
than my brother, Ralph. Child
of aging Holocaust survivors
read the Britannica Junior from A-Z.

When did your voice start
to stutter, your eyes wander away
from the assigned pages?
When did you start staying naked
in your room?

Benj—the name you gave yourself—
as if to declare independence from your parents'
past, their first Benjamin, the secret
you stumbled upon after your father's death,
that your mother refused to discuss,
immersing herself in you and pushing
your father aside, was this your mother's
expiation?

A curtain of smoke,
your inheritance, always the smell of tobacco,
the lighted cigarette. You stepped far beyond
the Bronx and weeks at a time, hiked through
thick pine forests, climbed wind-eroded cliffs,
became certified to clear paths, chainsaw trees.

Did your mother bribe you back with their fortune
squirreled away from your father's furrier years,
her years as seamstress at the factory, coming home
to eat little more than the bread she baked, to drink
black coffee? Your mother wearing the two house-
dresses she sewed, never allowing herself clothes
from Loehmann's or even Alexander's, or
an afternoon movie. But for you, she broiled rib
lamb chops, New York strip steaks,

Too late! Today, Ralph went with you
to the pulmonologist's, the oncologist's
to hear about your useless lungs.

And now you barricade the door
to your Bronx apartment, threaten to use

two pistols on yourself and anyone
who answered Ralph's 9-1-1, after
you'd just told him, "I can't breathe."
Is this how you seek to transform
the disappointing strange story of your life?

Once you worked the trail through thick pine,
alongside a glacier wall, sleeping in rustic huts,
chain-sawing lightning-stuck oaks, clearing brush,
unblocking the route from Georgia to Maine—
Benj, can you remember that, and unlock your door?

Contributor Bios

Kyle Kibby teaches juniors and seniors at Suffield high school. He is currently in his sixth year of teaching English Language Arts. When he is not teaching or reading, he enjoys spending time hiking and playing basketball.

Max Bakke is a high school English teacher at Tolland High School. Formerly, he worked as a reporter and editor. He lives in New Haven with his wife, Caroline, and daughter, Eliza.

Gwen Crosby began writing as a 6th grader when her teacher, Mrs. Johnson, asked her to imitate my favorite author. She chose Henry David Thoreau. Writing became a way to decode life's confusing moments. As an inner city middle school teacher, she has continued to use the internal journey to help adolescents discover self and other. The world continues to provide many reasons to substantiate the work.

Becky Curtin has been teaching both middle and high school English classes for the past eleven years. A graduate of the University of Connecticut she earned two undergraduate degrees, English and Classic/Ancient Mediterranean Studies. Unsure of "where to next" she pursued education with the University of New Haven, and found her passion to teach. When not teaching, she can be found creating obstacle courses in her backyard (or inside her house) for her two young, energetic children to enjoy.

Clarissa Tan is a first-year teacher at Farmington High School, where she teaches Freshman English and has kickstarted an American Sign Language program. She graduated from the University of Connecticut with a B.A. in English, B.S. in Secondary English Education, and M.A. in Curriculum & Instruction. When she is not teaching, she advises social justice clubs and one of the school's student councils. Outside of the classroom, she can be found spending time with her loved ones, making Teacher TikToks (@msclarissatan), hiking, rock climbing, or discovering new music.

Tracy Waring has been teaching High school English for 10 years, most of those in Providence, Rhode Island. She recently moved to Connecticut and currently teaches at Manchester High School. Despite all of the stresses, she loves teaching! When she is not teaching, she enjoys spending time with her husband, their four children, and her german shepherd puppy, Marshmallow! When she has time to herself, you might find her hammocking with a good book, or absconding to the beach!

Moir Cassell teaches 12th grade English at Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven. When she is not receiving eye-rolls from students, she can be found running, gardening, walking her dog, doing yoga, and enjoying the company of her husband and two sons. She promises to make more time for writing--when she's not planning or grading.

Natasha Schweitzer is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, where she will graduate from this upcoming spring with a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. For her current internship placement, she is co-teaching a 10th grade English class at East Hartford High School and researching constructive classroom talk in an online learning environment. In her free time, Natasha loves to spend the night in with friends (just a few of them, for quarantine reasons), can be found most often taking the back roads home, and is known by others for having a unique (strange)

spontaneity. While she is passionate about the reading of sad books, she found such joy in experimenting with various genres from the other side of the page during the Institute.

Sadie Robinson recently graduated from UConn's Neag School of Education for Secondary English with her Masters in Curriculum and Instruction. She is currently in her first year of teaching at Farmington High School in Farmington, CT teaching freshmen and sophomore English. Outside of school you might find her coaching, playing tennis, running, paddle boarding, hiking, reading, or drinking coffee!

Jamiah Bennett is a recent graduate of the University of Connecticut. In early 2020, she accepted an offer for admission to the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education's Independent School Teaching Residency program. Although her enrollment has been delayed for one year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she plans to begin her graduate studies with UPenn starting in 2021 as she works towards pursuing a career in education.

Denise Barstow is an American Literature and EFL teacher in a public lycee in north-western France. To the inevitable question of how she ended up teaching in France after leaving CT, she always answers Destiny! Her mother's French cuisine and both parents' love of France and the French language led her to settle there, and her Master's In Education from the School for International Training gave her the tools to forge a rewarding teaching career in France. Her students' thirst for travel and to understand the English-speaking world are met with her enthusiasm for inter-cultural experiences fostering growth and peace. She reminds her students that Shakespeare is the ultimate escapist antidote to the ills and worries of modern society!

Ginny Light, a 2020 Connecticut Writing Project Summer participant, has an MA and MPhil in English Language and Literature from Fordham University, as well as a Certificate in Advanced Graduate Studies in Secondary English Education from Pace University. An Upper School English and UConn Early College Experience instructor at the Bi-Cultural Hebrew Academy of Connecticut, she is currently earning her MFA in Creative Writing at Stony Brook University and writing creative nonfiction. Ginny has three grown children and lives in Southport, Connecticut, with her fiancé. When she isn't teaching, writing, or planning, she enjoys babysitting her grand-dog, Harry, and watching British murder mysteries.

After twelve years of teaching middle school language arts, **Kimberley Perschmann** made the move to high school this year to teach 11th grade American Lit and 12th grade Writing Workshop. A recent Fund for Teachers fellow, she received a grant to attend Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and hopes to establish workshop methods in the high school setting. Kim strives to foster a passion for learning, a life-long love of reading, and a commitment to the teacher-as-writer model. She is a native Texan, a mom to three beautiful children and one adorable dog. Kim is a member of the Connecticut Poetry Society, and writes poetry in her free time.

Amanda E. Abbott teaches British Literature and is the Assistant Drama Director at E. O. Smith High School. She is also a third year Ph.D student in the Arts & Humanities, English Education Department at Teachers College, Columbia University, researching Drama Pedagogy. There she

teaches *The Teaching of Shakespeare*, to graduate students in the M.A. program. When a regular old human, she is an avid reader, writer, hiker, foodie, traveler, dancer, artist, and performance art goer. She is the proud Mom of a four year old with a vivid imagination.

Kaye Bishop is a second year English teacher at Norwich Free Academy. Kaye also co-leads the GSA club at NFA. Prior to returning to graduate school to become a teacher, she was a web developer and graphic designer. Kaye graduated with a Master's in Education from Eastern Connecticut State University. Her undergraduate degrees are in creative writing and digital art and design.

Danielle Phillips is a high school English teacher at Avon High School.

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