

VOICES

MCHENRY COUNTY COLLEGE LITERARY/ARTS JOURNAL



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SMASHING
PRICES!

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New Luxury



LOW BANK FINANCE RATES

USED
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SOLD!
FACTORY FRESH



2024

NEW, FACTORY FRESH
SHIPMENTS ARRIVING DAILY!

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VOICES

LOW BANK FINAN

USED CARS

CASH FOR CARS

SMASHING
PRICES!

2024

AIR CONDITIONED

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MISSION STATEMENT

It is the mission of *Voices* to recognize and showcase the visual arts, musical and literary talents of McHenry County College students.

EDITORIAL STATEMENT

Voices publishes work that reflects the literary, visual, and musical points-of-view of contemporary community college students. Although *Voices* does not organize content thematically, the work selected represents the contemporary zeitgeist of the McHenry County College community.

Submission of any musical composition, sculpture, writing, drawing, painting, et cetera, is open to all students of McHenry County College. Selections are made by student editors based on quality, and other objective criteria through a blind critique process.

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To hear this year's selections go to
soundcloud.com/mcc-voices/sets/voices-2024
or simply scan the QR code below:



BEST OF MAGAZINE

Voices 2024 is proud to
announce Awards for the
Best of Magazine

LITERARY:

Layne Jepsen
Forgiveness

VISUAL ART:

Dale Morton
Chicken Kabob

MUSIC:

Aaron Lush
Rave Story 1-2

Voices wishes to acknowledge
students for their excellence in
literature, music and visual arts.

THE DAN RISCH MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The Dan Risch Memorial
Scholarship is awarded to
outstanding and promising visual
art students. This Scholarship is
generously funded by Dan's family
and friends in memory of former
MCC art student Dan Risch.

The 2024 Dan Risch Memorial
Scholarship winners are:

Isak Mayer
Alisia Duran



LAYNE JEPSEN

Poetry

FORGIVENESS

I am planning a funeral.
The service will be a quiet one
Held before daybreak
And I will be the only person in attendance.
I will sit with my anger.
I will reminisce on when it used to liberate me
Pay my respects in a dead language
And set the final rose from my long-wilted bouquet on its casket.
When I am ready, I will bury my anger.
I will draw a final labored breath
As it loosens its claws
And I find repose.

Forgiveness is not for the faint of heart.
Forgiveness is a matter of realizing that while wrath tastes sweeter than mercy and goes down smoother
It is a slow-acting poison, and you are your own antidote
But only if you choose to be.
Forgiveness is not excusal.
Forgiveness is valiant surrender.
A white flag in the face of a rage that no longer serves you
A funeral.
You may choose any morning you'd like.
You may take as much time as you'd like to pay your respects
And bring any flowers you'd like if you so choose
But do not forget to greet the sun.

STONEWARE, 38" X 8" X 8"



TOGETHER SEPARATELY

You can draft paintings that glimmer
if I can craft poems that weep.
You can keep rooms void of clutter
if I can store memories in boxes.

You can mansplain 'til your voice cracks
if I can spout causes at random.
You can eat food aimed to kill you
if I'm not a caregiver on call.

You can incur debts for a lifetime
if I can put money on interest.
You can suck marrow from each day
if I don't drink empty tomorrows.

You can look far to the future
if I can seek joy in the present.
You can believe in forever
if I am a part of it, too.

ISAK MAYER
Wring (Gathering I)



OIL ON CANVAS, 52" X 36"

EGG YOLK FINGERTIPS

We hold these truths to be self-evident
My first encounter with these truths
Brought to me like everything else
By my mother
Who did not bake
but never wanted her kids to miss out on a life skill
Who handed us truths like eggs
Not all knowing
All experienced
But confident in our young eyes
And taught us to separate the gold from the mess

We grew up with this truth on our fingertips
Yolk that yellowed everything that we touched
Gripped onto something my mother once said
Like a lifeline every time they asked me a question

We held these truths to be self-evident
And every night before we went to bed
she would wash the mess off
Every bit of what our classmates said

As we grew older, we learned to appreciate the yellows of our hands
Heard more egg whites by the day
The minute
My mom taught us self-evident
She always said my hands looked like her mother's
Something about the color

So now we hold these truths to be self-evident
Hold them like a lover
Tight and close and warmed by them
The way we did with our stuffed animals in bed

The way we held those eggs
The first time we were taught to bake
Tightly and carefully
but knowing they won't break

THE SILENT MUSE

When your poem needs music, but you have no song and
you wait for the voice to come to you in a
dream, or perhaps in the whispered words of some woman,
like the one you met the other day, who
looked at you square in the face and held
you captive with her eyes, then left you with a
promise unfulfilled, abandoned like a babe
who must fend for himself, against
the loneliness of not being with her,
of not being near the warmness of her bosom.
And your friends said
it means nothing that she did not speak to
you or inspire the song that you seek for us,
instead, you are left with nothing but thoughts of
her as you search for your own voice, your own children.

EDGAR ORDUNA
Transactional Moments



GINNY HATWICH
Echinacea Elegance



GELATIN SILVER PRINT, 8" X 10"

STONEWARE, 50" X 8" X 8"



ALISIA DURAN
Bloodletting on Gold



JEWELRY/METALS, 15" X 4" X .5"

JORDYN HOLLISTER
Ballerina Juice



OIL PASTEL ON PAPER, 24" X 18"

ABBIE WOOD

Serpentine



STONEWARE, 24" X 16" X 10"

MY LIMBS ARE YOUR LIGHTER

I let you swallow me,
As I did to you,
Careful knots and joints
Colliding to become one.

I held you for so long
That my fingertips
Became your ribs;
In our bed, we lay motionless.

Death is a cunning game
That we play together
And I will cheat it
For as long as you let me.

THE GIRL IN MY BATHROOM MIRROR

There's a girl in my bathroom mirror
with long dark hair and a dress draping across her body.
Her eyes glisten with tears as they snake down her cheeks
the smile on her lips always seems out of place.

There's a girl in my bathroom mirror
with freckles dancing across her face.
Her eyes seem to search mine with intense urgency.
I waved at her once, and her eyes flashed in surprise.
She hesitated before disappearing, returning with a wilted flower.

There's a girl in my bathroom mirror
who seems to delight in my company.
She waits for me patiently with sad eyes
and tries to put her hand through the glass to touch my cheek,
withdrawing her hand sadly when the attempt fails.

There's a girl in my bathroom mirror
who listens carefully to my stories.
She has a certain sadness about her,
something I can't quite place.

There's a girl in my bathroom mirror
Yesterday, she had a smile on her face
that reached her eyes and made them shine brighter
than they did when she had tears in them.

There was a girl in my bathroom mirror
Eyes bright with tears and smile barely there
Imprisoned no longer,
for that girl in the bathroom mirror is free.

DEANNE FERGUSON

Evening in Technicolor



STONEWARE, 10" X 6.5" X 6.5"

ASPEN JONES

Poetry

A WOMAN FROM LOS ANGELES

2 opposite souls
Yet similar circumstances
Both out of breath
We found each other
Same place, Same time, SAME DIRECTION
From opposite sides of the seaboard
She knows nothing about me
But wishes me nothing but luck

LINDA CANNIZZO

In The Mix



OIL ON CANVAS, 30" X 30"

THE AMATEURS

He likes to paint
And I like to write
He uses oils
Me...poetry
He loves Monet, Matisse, and, of course, Picasso
I love Plath, Elliot, and Thomas
His art is not very good...
Let's call it a primitive version of his favorites
My poetry is wanting...
One might say it's a feeble imitation at best
And yet...
He tells me my writing is brilliant
I tell him his paintings are divine
We tell each other these things
Because they are not true
But, as it turns out, we are not amateurs at all,
Rather, we are experts
In the art and prose of love

REAGAN JOHNSON

Les Champignons

STONEWARE, 17.5" X 9" X 17"



THE SEVENTH DAY

The old woman sat on a makeshift bench in the rooftop garden, taking a break from the weeding and planting. She turned her weathered face to the sun and sighed. There was no hurry to get her chores done; she had nowhere to be. She sat and savored the silence. Closing her eyes, she realized not even the birds were singing, and the light summer breeze barely ruffled the leaves of her tomato plants.

Munching on a long-expired granola bar, she thought about this next phase of her life and the circumstances—the dumb luck, really—that had gotten her this far. To this place, this level of...was it contentment? She thought maybe it might be, and she snorted at the irony. She'd never believed the adage that money couldn't buy happiness, and she'd spent most of her life trying to amass enough to prove it wrong. Up until this point, the thing she'd wanted most that she could never afford, that money *could've* bought, was *distance*. Most people, she felt, took up way too much space on this planet, and the majority of them were too stupid to realize it, even when she told them outright. And she did, back when it mattered— not that anyone paid her any heed.

She still felt her shoulders tense when she recalled all the unmuffled motors and leaf blowers shattering her peaceful mornings. How people blew their noses in restaurants, talked during movies, even flossed their teeth in the library. The library! All the while looking through her, bumping her aside, ignoring her glares as if she were not even there. She missed none of it. None of *them*.

Then, almost overnight, she'd gotten what she wanted. And she hadn't had to rob a bank, win the lottery, or sell off her assets. All she'd had to do was outlive all the poor saps who'd begun dying all around her. Slowly at first, but then at a rate that alarmed even her. At her age, there hadn't been much that surprised her anymore, but the sight of people literally collapsing in the streets, the riots and looting, and all the other stupid things people did in the face of chaos, well that had given her pause.

Once the power grid went down, she'd lost track of who or what was left, but over the past nine years, she'd stopped trying to find any signs of life that might still be out there. She'd decided it really didn't matter.

Yes, she decided, she was content. And pretty fit for an old broad, if she did say so herself. Between all the stairs, her daily rounds through the building and grounds, gardening, and moving things in and out of apartments, she was probably in better shape now than she was in her 70s, and she'd lost at least 40 pounds thanks to her two-meal-a-day diet consisting of freeze-dried or canned whatever supplemented by vitamins, her rooftop garden, and the occasional bottle out of the late Violetta Wilfong's wine collection.

She stood, took one more swig of water, and turned toward the Swiss chard. She had plans to thin it and eat what she pulled out for dinner. That's when she heard the sound. Distant at first, but then louder—the unmistakable drone of solar motorbikes, their whining engines sputtering and then dying out by the gate.

"What the hell..." she muttered, lifting the small bird-watching glasses she kept on a lanyard around her neck.

She could feel her heart thumping. There were two of them, one bearded, one smaller, maybe a boy. They were gaunt and dirty, dressed like scarecrows, but without the festive fall colors.

Early on in the pandemic, most people had been too sick and weak to make it over the wall of their gated "senior lifestyle" community. As society imploded, and as she and the handful of other survivors watched what had gone on beyond the isolation of their little enclave, the unspoken conclusion became obvious: They would have to shoot first and ask questions later. So they did. Her upstairs neighbors and poker buddies, Larry Wheeler and Crawford, took care of the few who'd managed to climb over, shooting methodically and efficiently with a matter-of-factness that she knew stemmed from long-ago military experiences that they never talked about.

Crawford—she never did ask for his first name, and he'd never offered it—had taught her how to load and shoot with the surprisingly robust stash of weapons they'd found in the various apartments. Few of their owners could see straight or hit the toilet in the middle of the night, but for some reason, more than a few residents in the low-rise building had been packing heat. Who knows.

These two trespassers, however, had managed to scale the wall without breaking any limbs because they eventually made it through the trees and native grasses to her building— where they paced, looking around and rubbing their closely cropped heads.

She swore under her breath and marveled at how much she still hated people, even after all these years. From her perch on the roof, she shouted down at them, making them both jump.

“Hey! This is private property, so we’re going to have to ask you to leave the way you came!”

“Who’s we?” the man barked back.

“None of your damn business,” she retorted. “You are *trespassing*. Please leave.”

“We’re just, you know, looking for food and stuff,” said the boy, shielding his eyes and squinting up at her. She could see his pink scalp shining through his uneven, blonde crew-cut, and his white teeth stood out from a bruised and dirty face. “Can you help us?”

She paused. Not to contemplate whether to help them but to think about the best way to extract information before getting rid of them. She recalled news reports about the virus, but details were sketchy, as were the fragmented statistics—49 percent mortality, six-times viral spread, three-year die-off... Judging from the spotty news reports she’d managed to catch before they faded out altogether, the World Health Organization was unable to keep up with all the mutations, but that was all she knew. She and the other survivors had all been too afraid to venture out at first. They were well stocked with garden-fresh produce, clean air, solar energy, filtered water, and all of the ridiculous staples people her age hoarded when they caravanned to Costco.

Against her better judgment, the woman buzzed the duo into the lobby, but not before stopping to get her favorite shotgun, a Beretta A400 Xplor Action Semi-Automatic—compliments of the late Harry Weaver in 410. She also grabbed a taser, a Ruger GP100 in a holster, several zip ties, and a small bag of food: a plastic liter bottle of water, two cans of hash, and some stale crackers.

She watched from a safe distance, shotgun ready, as they fell on the food like starving dogs— glancing up between gulps with either gratitude or cunning, she wasn’t sure which.

“How old are you,” the boy asked, “How long have you been here?” It was hard to tell the boy’s age under the dirt and rags draping his slender frame, but his eyes looked haunted and older than she had first assumed, and he moved like a feral animal—one that was prey more than predator.

“I’m about 87, I think,” she said. “Kind of lost track, but I’ve...we’ve been here the whole time, I guess, since it all started.” She was surprised at how easy it was to talk, and she watched as they listened. “Some of the younger residents died right away,” she recalled. “That was a mess. Disgusting actually. Still stinks a bit up on four, but it’s fading. Then we lost a bunch more, making a supply run. The van never came back, so...”

“How many here now?” the older one interrupted, scratching at his beard. “Just a bunch of old people here then, or what?”

She raised the shotgun an inch and looked him up and down, sizing him up. “You’re kind of rude, son. And you’re welcome, by the way, for the food.”

“Sorry,” the boy said, glancing at the man, “don’t mind him. He’s just tired, and we’re...we’ve been traveling for days, and we’ve been so hungry...”

“Shut up!” the man snapped, and the boy flinched.

“Thank you,” the boy said, moving away from the man. “Do you mind, I mean, would it be OK if we sort of camped out here for a bit until we get our strength back?”

The old woman inhaled through her nose and instantly regretted it. Good Lord, they stunk. Blowing out through her mouth, she nodded. The strangers were pretty pathetic, and she did have more questions. Plus, it made her nervous, the thought of them trespassing around out there like jackals. The buildings were secure, but she felt better knowing where they were.

“I suppose. For the night. Don’t bother trying to go anywhere,” she added. “All the stairway doors are solid

(Continued on page 26)

THE SEVENTH DAY (CONT.)

steel and locked. Elevators are off. I'll bring you some more food in the morning, and you can tell me more. There's a bathroom over there," she pointed with the shotgun. "Everything's solar and on sensors, and the water's filtered, but take it slow. It tastes funny, but you won't get sick. Probably." She eyed them again, noting the sunburn on both of their dirty faces, and, again, the scabs and bruises on the boy. "You need some first-aid or antibiotics or anything?"

The man had already kicked the empty hash cans aside and wandered over to one of the couches. He fell back with a groan, one arm over his eyes. She could see the relief in his limbs as he relaxed into the ugly vinyl furniture.

"No, we're OK," the boy said, limping over to retrieve the cans. "Where did you get antibiotics?" he added.

She chuckled a little. "This is a retirement community, kid; there's more drugs here than the mosh pit at a Nirvana concert."

He gave her a blank look and then slumped toward another of the couches. She made a mental note to bring them some blankets. And soap.

"If you go outside, stay away from the ponds," she called over her shoulder. "Unless you want to feed the alligators."

"Seriously?" the boy asked.

"How do you think we got rid of all the bodies?" she said, closing the stairwell door behind her with a soft click of the lock.

Over the next few days, she learned more about what had happened and where they'd been, plying them with more cans of hash, tuna, and even some chocolate. The man grumbled and complained, said he wanted more food-hated tuna- and accused her of holding out.

"This all you got?" he demanded every time she brought them a meal.

At least the boy seemed grateful. She brought him a dog-eared copy of *The Hobbit* and some aspirin, and he started looking a little less haggard, especially after a good washing up.

On the sixth morning, after she refused to fetch more food, the man threw a can at her and called her a stupid bitch. So, she tased him and made the boy zip-tie him to one of the decorative railings that separated the seating

areas. The boy did as he was told, dragging the paralyzed man none too gently across the lobby. She winced when the man's head careened off one of the chrome table legs, but the boy didn't seem to notice.

"Sorry to have to do that," she said. "He your father, or..." she trailed off when the boy barked out a mirthless laugh.

"Hardly." Turning his back on the now twitching man, the boy asked if he could help her with anything. Adding, "I'm pretty strong, and it'll give me something to do."

She reminded him there was nothing keeping him here but then ended up taking him to the parking garage, where she stored additional supplies.

On the way, they passed the weedy vineyard and a small stand of twisted apple trees, and she waited while the boy climbed the lower branches and filled his pockets with the hard, wormy fruit. She'd already gathered what had fallen or was low enough to pick, but her days of climbing around in trees were over.

"Here," she said, tossing him her straw sunhat. "Put the apples in here for now."

She keyed in the garage code, and the boy gave a low whistle when she told him what was in all the cars, how every day for weeks they'd donned goggles and masks and driven each car to places like Walmart, Cabela's, Costco, and Walgreens to stock up on whatever they could after the post-collapse chaos died away.

"At my age, this is pretty much a lifetime supply and then some," she told him. "Though I wouldn't mind going back for more books. Maybe some booze."

The boy nodded and smiled, started to say something, but then looked down and said he better go check on the man who was still zip-tied to the lobby. "We should probably cut him loose, don't you think," he asked.

The old woman shrugged. "I suppose."

On the seventh day, she felt only a fleeting remorse about shooting the man and even wondered if maybe she was a bit of a psychopath. She'd felt such a sense of relief to be done with it. He was messy and rude, and it was obvious he viewed her as the enemy. He was like a snake, waiting for the right time to strike, and this made her angry, especially since they were the trespassers.

Ears ringing, her shoulder aching from the gun's recoil, she'd decided it was self-defense. When that idiot had tried

to rush her, she'd had no choice but to shoot him. Who runs at someone with a loaded shotgun?

The boy had fallen back, gasping, on his backside—blood and a good bit of his companion's brains splattered all over the front of him. He looked up at her with wide, staring eyes, his hands over his ears.

"Clean this up," she said, not looking at him. "I'll send down a clean shirt with dinner."

Trudging back up the stairs, she paused on the landing. Her heart was pounding, but not from the steps. She sat, willing herself to calm down. She'd known it might come to this. While armed defense was usually Crawford's job, the man in her lobby wasn't the first "visitor" she'd killed, though she wondered if he'd be the last. And now she wasn't sure what she felt. Disappointment? Sadness? Anger? Maybe she was a psychopath, she mused.

Back in her tidy little unit, she cleaned, oiled, and reloaded the shotgun while her supper heated. And she thought about the boy, alone now in the lobby. Like her, he had no one. Though *she* liked it that way. Didn't she?

She didn't see the boy when she shoved the bundle of clothes and food into the lobby, but when she peeked in on him later, she noticed the clothes were gone; the food was still in the bag. She couldn't see or hear anything, and she wondered if he'd left. But why didn't he take the food?

Curiosity got the better of her, and she slipped further into the lobby. As she surveyed the space, she noticed the boy had mopped up the last remnants of the man and covered his body with a blanket. She wondered what the boy would do now and where he would go.

She was turning to leave when she heard the creak of the bathroom door, and she stood transfixed, watching him. He had tried to wash the blood out of his tattered shirt, and his hands shook as he draped it over a chair. Then she saw what hadn't been said, what he had been hiding. The grimy binder around his chest. The fresh bruises on his side. The incongruous bulge of his belly no longer hidden by the oversized shirt.

"You're not a boy," the woman said, dropping the bag of food.

Startled, the child—no, young woman—whirled to face the old woman, her bound breasts and pale, swollen belly on display. "God!" she gasped and tried to cover herself.

"You had me fooled," the woman said with a hint of admiration in her voice.

"It's just easier," she said, "traveling as a boy."

"But..." The woman gestured to the younger woman's midsection. "I'm gonna assume that's not from cheeseburgers."

The younger woman blushed and fumbled with the clean shirt. "No, it's not."

"His?"

A pause. "Yes."

The old woman squinted. "Your choice?"

The younger woman looked away and shrugged.

"Ah," the older woman said. And then, "You didn't take the food."

"I couldn't eat." Still not making eye contact, the young woman slipped into the clean shirt, busying herself with the buttons.

The old woman nodded and, leaving the food, turned once again to go.

"Wait!"

"What?"

"Do you think...could I just stay? With you? I know I could help you and...anybody else. Is there? Anybody else?"

The old woman didn't answer. She looked at the now trembling woman, blinked, and looked away. She parted her lips to speak but closed them again. The younger woman waited.

"Sorry," the old woman said, pointing her gun at the blanket-covered lump on the floor. "About your...about him."

The young woman nodded, hugged herself, and shrugged.

They looked at each other, not speaking.

"I'm Eva," the young woman finally offered.

The old woman snorted. "Really. Please tell me that asshole's name isn't Adam."

The young woman almost laughed. "No. He's...his name was Tyler. What's yours?"

"Martha," she said. "Or Marty. My friends called me Marty."

"Ok."

Marty backed toward the stairwell door. "Get some sleep, Eva. Maybe you can pick me some more of those apples tomorrow."

NEST OF KNIVES

I cannot sing
My wings are clipped
You drove me crazy and off a cliff

Give me a grip!
What did I do wrong?
That I had to end up below where I started?

Why were your words
Allowed to acquit me
From some sort of standard I smashed?

My freedom is a free falling from failure
Into nothing
Because of you
I am nothing but feathers and blood

You think I find Christ Risen
In running ragged to my ruin
I find cold and crazy
Obsessed
And a skeleton
Which are none of the items you owe me

I build a life around myself
That you pummel into prison bars
And I would rather fall
Than stay trapped in your expectations

KARA WADDINGTON

Squelch



MIXED MEDIA, 70" X 24" X 27"

KATHERINE GODFREY-MIKKELSON

Buzz



CERAMIC, 10.5" X 8" X 4"

NOTHIN' BUT...

Blue skies
still free
all you have to do is look up
and there it waits
available to everyone, no matter how
old or young
how poor or rich
black or white
it's unaware of what language you speak
or faith you practice
if you wear shoes
or not
there for everyone
until the wealthy folk figure out a way
to make it just for them
or the tax man makes us pay for it
but for now, it's ours to share
and wonder at its beauty
the world may be on fire, and yet...
right above us, the sky
stares down with that heartbreaking
color of blue
never once asking for a dime

MATERIALISM

*What is materialism,
if but a brief moment of joy,
that hardens and turns into something cold-
that you will someday forget.*

*All of the designer clothes are yours,
the best products and perfumes, the best shoes.
The newest cars, updated technology and your favorite types of jewels.
The biggest house, though empty and void, will soon be filled up
with everything you could ever want.*

*If it all disappeared, would you miss it?
Maybe small bits at a time, too full, for this grand house to notice.
It is okay to appreciate the things we have,
To want the things that bring us joy.
But they don't hold a candle to
our experiences, the people we meet, or the ideas we share.*

Because in materialism, there is less warmth.

MADALYN LEFEVRE

In Den Supermarkt



OIL ON CANVAS, 36" X 48"

ANDY LECHNER

Fancy Bowl



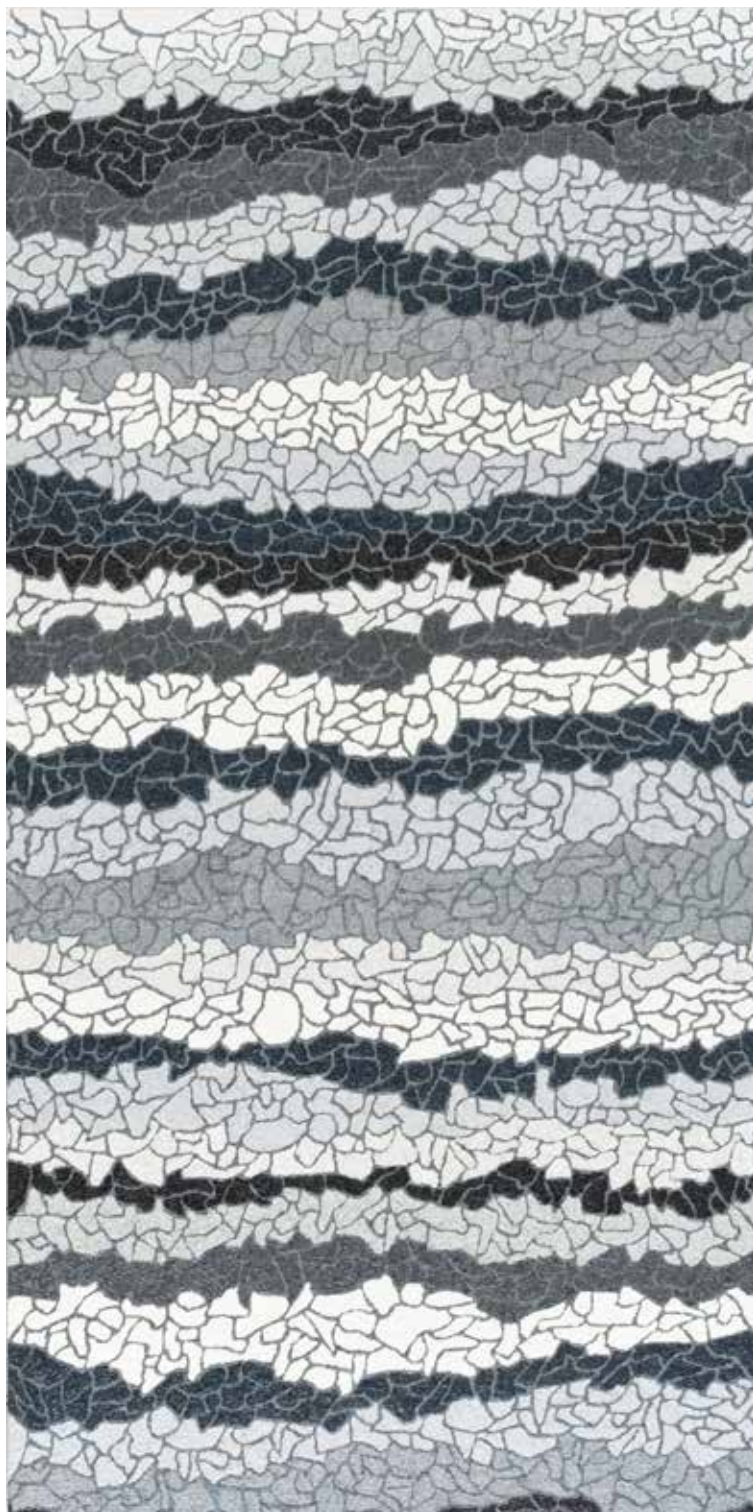
STONEWARE, 6.5" X 13" X 8.5"

A LETTER

Embroidered into the center of my chest is your hand,
And for all of the things you have handed me,
To which I cannot return,
I offer my fingers,
My cheeks,
My arms,
To hold me as tightly as you may,
And yet, I fear you.
I fear what you will think of me
When I am beaten down into the Earth;
Will you hold my bloodied hands as I run?
I fear what you will do when I fall into your lap;
Will you help me to forget the night's war?
I fear how you will handle my heart,
In its fragile entirety—
Does it beat in the softness of your palm,
Or will you feed it back into the ground
As time comes to disrespect me?

JACOB KNAPP

Folded Once



OIL ON CANVAS, 48" X 24"

AN ODE TO A BROKEN BODY

My body is like a vase
It has shattered multiple times
It's been slowly and carefully
Put back together
Kintsugi

The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery
With glue mixed with flecks of gold
An attempt at making a broken thing
Beautiful once more
Though I don't feel beautiful
I still feel broken

My imperfections are highlighted
For all the world to see
Proof that my body is broken
That it doesn't work the way it's designed to
the way it was supposed to

I wasn't careless with it
I didn't drop it
It just suddenly broke
When I wasn't paying attention
Leaving me to pick up the pieces frantically

My brain cells are scattered
Like marbles ricocheting off each other
As they fall out of their cloth pouch
Being sent so many different directions
I can't grab onto them fast enough

Before they roll out of reach
My legs struggle to hold me up
They ache terribly
They are growing tired.

My heart beats fast
Trying to keep up with everything
Trying to keep things moving
It feels heavy
Like an anchor keeping a ship in a harbor
The heart tries to keep everything in
All is fine.
Nothing is wrong.

The brain disagrees.
It knows something is not quite right
Though it cannot determine
What exactly is ailing me
It just knows there's something wrong
But is unsure of what to do about it

So, I ignore it, hoping it goes away
Thinking I can keep up this charade a little longer
I don't want to worry people
Everyone already has enough to worry about
I don't need to be worried about

My body says otherwise
It's been running on empty for so long

(Continued on page 38)

AN ODE TO A BROKEN BODY (CONT.)

I can't keep pouring in a cup of gas
And expect it to keep me going
The check engine light will eventually come on
Reminding me I can't pretend
things aren't slowly falling apart

No matter how hard I try
I can't keep pretending for long
I must ask for help eventually
But asking for help isn't that easy
It means admitting that I'm not the strong
person I pretend to be
It means admitting that things really are
falling apart
It means accepting that there are things this
body simply can't do

That it's defective
That it's broken
That it's not like the others
That it isn't operating the way it should be

I know my body is doing its best
At least, I think it is
I want to believe it is
It doesn't feel like it's enough

It doesn't erase the fact that
My body is slowly becoming more and more broken
And there's nothing I can do about it
But watch it crumble before my very eyes

Some people will view this broken body as interesting
An experiment
Something to be curious about
Because it's strange
Because it's unusual
Inside, I am slowly crumbling
I am simply not alright
I don't want to be anyone's experiment
I don't want to be poked and prodded

I don't want to be pitied
Don't people understand
Pity is a way for people to act like they care
While keeping their hearts locked away

I don't need for someone to be my hero
I don't need someone thinking they can save the day
I am not a damsel in distress
I am a knight in shining armor
But I suppose it gets tiring having to fight all the time
Sometimes, even the bravest heroes need other people
to help them fight their dragons.

EMMA OMIATEK

Hands of Creation



OIL ON CANVAS, 36" X 42"

AMBER STELL

The Inevitable Evolution



INK ON PAPER, 22" X 30"

ENOUGH

Thoughts and prayers are greatly overrated
when used as balm to heal a broken heart
that gun deaths have continually created.

Gun advocates take stances clearly stated.
With their assault guns they refuse to part.
Their thoughts and prayers are greatly overrated.

The sacrifice of lives goes unabated—
from Sandy Hook, Uvalde, Buffalo, New York—
that gun deaths have continually created.

Many feel our country's been invaded.
Their safety seems to have no counterpart,
while thoughts and prayers are greatly overrated.

In D.C., some gun laws have been debated.
Do they signal a hunger to outsmart
gun deaths that are continually created?

The need for change cannot be overstated.
The carnage in our land sets us apart.
Rote thoughts and prayers are greatly overrated
while gun deaths are continually created.

COLD TURKEY

The pocket on my father's faded denim work shirt always bulged with a pack of Camels or Lucky Strikes. As a judicious farmer, he would not smoke in the barn around the stacks of straw or bales of alfalfa. Nor would he smoke in the granary where oat and wheat dust filled the air. But, after breakfast, dinner, or supper, in the safety of his kitchen, he would scratch into that sun-branded pocket—removing and lighting a cigarette or two, which he savored, inhaling and exhaling, smoke circling his coal-black hair. Cigarette smoking was a welcome ritual for him—at least one pack a day.

My mother and dad were not perfectly matched. He had been raised by a mother who believed that “boys will be boys”; my mother, raised by strict but loving grandparents, had been taught that she “could protect anything she could put her hand over.” As a result, I heard their quarrels over sex. Then, too, they both had a bunch of siblings. Mother's bunch was much more churchy than dad's trio of free-wheeling brothers. So, my parents also disagreed about my dad's drinking with his brothers and his Poker playing with his cronies. But, never once did I hear Mother complain about his smoking.

My sister and I had watched Dad smoke most of our lives when we lived at home. Tobacco was a cash crop grown on a lot of small farms in southern Wisconsin, and the Almonds and Olsens, our closest Norwegian neighbors, planted a few acres each year. Near the end of the season, their families hung the fan-shaped leaves to dry in long rectangular unpainted sheds that dotted their properties.

Some farmers and their wives smoked, too, as did popular Hollywood stars like Barbara Stanwyck and Rosalind Russell. Cigarette smoking was the epitome of cool and glamour in those '50s days. So, Dad's smoking was not rare, and my sister and I accepted it as normal for many years.

But, one night more than 70 years ago, when the family had cleaned up and was ready to head for a Friday

night football game, my sister and I ganged up on Dad and badgered him into quitting. I'm not sure what our reasons were. Maybe his constant coughing as he walked to the barn on cold winter days alarmed us. Maybe after we read the 1952 landmark Reader's Digest article titled “Cancer in a Carton,” an article highlighting some startling scientific results concerning the perils of smoking, we began to worry about our dad's health. Surely, we didn't have the facts and figures now available upon which to make our arguments. But, on that early evening in 1954, we said whatever we had to say, and Dad quit—cold turkey—took the half-empty pack of Camels from his pocket, tossed it onto the bristly gray sofa in the living room, and did not smoke again.

My father missed his cigarettes, though. I never talked much to him about the missing packs—the addiction that claimed a part of him, the habit that he enjoyed. I never saw his hands shake nor noticed a marked change in his weight. But, after meals from then on, he would lean back from the table on the steel legs of his vinyl-backed chair and dig into his shirt pocket. Sometimes, he would find nothing; sometimes, he would find a pack of Juicy Fruit intended as a substitute, but it never was. The ritual was gone, the nicotine was gone, and with them, the joy.

Some years later, when Dad had sold the farm on Route 4, Beloit, and moved into town with my mother, when the farmer tan he had sported for so many years had faded, when his once calloused hands were Jergens Lotion soft, and when the oxygen he had carried with him for more than 10 years no longer worked, he said, “I must have been a really bad person to end up not being able to breathe.” He didn't fully understand the price he had paid for his pleasure, and he missed those cigarettes even then. They still owned his memories years after he quit, and we had something to blame when his lungs hardened and he died from emphysema long after his last smoke.

THE SINGULARITY

*In the back of your closet
Scratching under your bed
Holes in your wall
It rose down through your ceiling*

*A hand emerging from a ball of light
Pulling your frozen body
Mouth agape, palms crushing your mattress
You flew through into empty space*

*A white room
No body
You screamed until your eardrums burst
A brain, adjacent to your body, fingernails carving your porcelain face*

*Booming voices, break the silence
Black, devoid of any thought
Your body elongates, every sensation flooding back to you
DEATH, you think, an explanation*

*Seas of colors
Air compressed back into your lungs
A hole of light appears
And you're heading straight for it*

*So you scream
As your body is thrown
Looping through time and space
You crash into your wall*

NANCY TERRANOVA

Check This Out



PORCELAIN, 10.5" X 10.5" X 4"

DYSPHORIA

You're my sanctuary
Often, I'm reminded of your lush garden
As fireflies dance amongst the clovers
As the sun sets
As the animals sing symphonies of the night
I stare out into open space
Lost in fantasy

Maladaptive daydreams, Disoriented, Dazed
My mind's misplaced; a boy hidden
Birds singing, pink lemon haze
Engines revving, footsteps bang
Eyes opened
I am alive

Am I living, I am living
Fingertips graze my mirror
I am alive
Fist clenching
I am alive
Palms brushing my skin
I am alive
Gut-wrenching
I am alive
Throat burning
I am alive

My fist collides with my mirror
As your lips split into an insidious web
Glass shatters, cutting my knuckles unevenly
My tears, the salt in my wounds
This pain, teeth clenching, I am alive

But, I am not living
I say that as if my body means nothing
I am not living
I say that as if the closest thing to life isn't
Your eyes, our conversations,
Your touch, your voice
As you tell me I'm man enough

I say I am not living as if
I had not spent every moment attempting
Trying desperately to take my 1st breath of fresh air
I say that as if I've never felt joy, as if I'd never
felt love
I say that as if I am not afraid of dying
As if I had not longed to run and dance among
the fields of thoughtless luminance which is
existence
I say that as if I had not laughed yesterday
As if I hadn't fallen in love with you
I say this all as if I have been dead my whole life

COLOGNE

Your cologne is sitting on my nightstand
Half full, unused
I should have taken it down
But my heart refused

I couldn't bear to pick it up
Let alone put it away
It's all I have of you
A stupid little spray

That's what it always comes down to
A few shirts, a toy car from your case
Collecting dust and having no purpose
Only to take up space

I sometimes dream of a reality
That I'll see you there
You'll be opening presents at Christmas
Sitting in your favorite chair

I run to turn the corner
Waiting for your embrace
But I can't find you anywhere
You have been erased

Can I ask you for a favor?
Just a minute of your time
Please give me one more second
For you to be mine

They say it's for the best
It's what happens when you grow old
But that seems like an easy answer
To fit into their mold

After two years of grieving
Missing your love
I still smell your clothes
That I can't get rid of

So your cologne will sit
And I will cry when I see
That the bottle will never
Become empty

JESSICA OLSEN

Under the Sea



JEWELRY/METALS, 12" X 8.5" X 8.5"

MY APPRENTICE

Write what sleeps within you
Dip the pen into your inkwell
Tattoo the tree that falls by your hands
And lands
Without a sound
Seemingly sleeping as the stars
Dangling from the string called Chance
Who puppets them and makes them dance
We watch their corpses in the sky
As the sky weeps tears of bittersweet memories
Unknowing who is there and who loves him
You were my Chance
I was your star
Your memory keeps me company on the most brilliant of nights
You are my favorite
Who puppets the dead
And dances with them
Who tattoos the dead
With thoughts that sleep within
One flesh, one body, one beating heart
Start the car; I'm leaving
Shut the door; I'm seeking escape
You know why I cut our string
I can't go back to
The future of misconception and
The past of lost hope
Where we watch the funeral march of the stars
Where the strong trees fall by my hands
And my hands can never pick them back up
My hands can only hold the pen
And tattoo their dead bodies
Torn up and stitched back together

LEXI COX

Aw, man!



OIL ON CANVAS, 36" X 48"

THE GLOVES

This was it. He was going to do it. William Crane was finally going to face his undeniable innermost fear that had haunted him ever since he could remember. Living in Great Britain post-WWI era did a number on him and everyone else. While the rest of the citizens celebrated their victories, he huddled under the bleached sheets of his clean bed. Having been stricken with mysophobia at such a young age was never an easy thing as a child- always avoiding others, afraid he might get sick. He never stuck in public places too long, worried that they were contaminated. He was a grown man now- a coward who couldn't go to war, much less the park down the road- opting to hole himself inside his disinfected starch-cleaned flat. He wore white sanitary gloves every hour of every day unless he was washing his hands. He even wore them in his sleep! He took 10 minutes each moment he found himself at the sink, scrubbing and re-washing until his hands trembled, cracked and sometimes bleeding.

William would once, maybe twice a month, receive a note from his mother- now a much older and lonely woman- complaining that he never visits her. His friend, James, would often worry that William wasn't getting enough fresh air; how absurd! Of course, William had fresh air. Fresher than any outside source, certainly, than his beautifully kept flat.

However, James' petty comment had gotten to him- "I bet that if you continue to shut yourself away in here for the rest of your life,

you will not get anything accomplished, and you won't have lived a fulfilled life." 'I'll prove that to be wrong,' William would often think, though his attempts at being satisfied with his life were never enough. No, the floors had to be tidier, the windows needed to be scrubbed, his white cotton gloves touched too many things, so they had to be washed. He needed more soap but kept putting off the trip; he didn't want to go to the market because there was always that one non-considerate person who would cough without covering their mouth or would sneeze on all of the merchandise. 'The disgusting pigs,' William would think in disdain.

Sometimes, it got to be too much. Sometimes, he would sink into depression due to his situation. Hell, he would've considered taking his own life by now if the blade on a knife wasn't so rusty or if blood wouldn't dirty the floor.

"Wait a minute, what am I thinking?! I haven't fully lived, nor have I been satisfied with anything I have ever received! No, I can't end here!" Those dreaded words from James' mouth seeped into his mind like the defiling black tar of the world he hated so much. 'You will never be satisfied. You will never live again...'

Like hell, he will. He will live his life to the fullest if it's the last thing he ever does.

And with those words, he brought upon himself his current situation; he was still in his disinfected flat, hushed in the safe confines of his germ-free home. With a shaky breath, he

slipped his clean white glove off- all of the cuts and rashes were prominent on his withered hand from the vigorous washing. He curled his fingers a small bit and slowly, ever so cautiously, gripped the doorknob. One turn, one more step, and he would be outside and vulnerable to the cruelties of the world- without his gloves on. The creaking of the opening door echoed in his ears, his footsteps even louder as he walked past the threshold and out into the doorstep.

'It's so loud,' he thought. Though for a moment, he was able to see the sun setting in the western sky and the rays that were peaking out of the horizon. 'How beautiful.' If there was a small moment he could appreciate in his life, it would be this. This one minute in which he tackled his fear and almost felt... normal. Yes, normal was a good word. A word that William had never felt to be in his life that had been stricken with this phobia. However, the beauty did not last long. The sun dipped back into the horizon, and the absolute purity of the moment was washed out by the noise of civilization. The horse carriages ran through mud puddles and manure, the automobiles honked their horns viscously in traffic during this rush hour, and people bustled every which way, trying to get home. He could see black smoke pour out from the exhaust pipes, just the same as the factories; he could hear all of the coughing and sneezing- could feel those germs being carried around by the wind in the brisk weather. And the smell, oh god, the smell.

'The air is so polluted now; I feel like I can't breathe. I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe...' William immediately turned back and shut the door behind him. He felt

sick. He felt sick, but no, he mustn't retch on the carpet. Then he would have to scrub it fresh later. He felt sweaty and hot. 'I need to take a shower. Shower, shower, shower...' The floor spun out from behind him in an alarming frenzy as he quickly slipped his boots off at the doorway- don't track in the mud- and raced to the bathroom. With trembling hands, he turned the knobs on the wall- taking the extra time to rinse off the handle. He stripped off his clothes and got in to rinse off when he realized he ran out of the soap he wouldn't go to the market for. "I'm a bloody mess!!"

--

An excruciating panic attack brought William to his bed, soon contemplating the meaning of his existence after the recovery. 'If I was to be confined in this God-awful fear of uncleanliness for the rest of my life, then what is the purpose of my being? What am I meant to do with this meaningless existence?' He sighed exhaustively. 'There had to have been something good that came out of this event,' he thought wearily. He did admit that there was something slightly exciting about opening the door and not knowing the outcome. There was something exhilarating about seeing the world differently, for there was a small second when he thought he would be fine. Though the moment didn't last long, that little second had to count for something.

'I'll do it again tomorrow; I want to see another sunset. I might be less afraid; then I can start to fulfill my life.' He turned off the light and rested peacefully due to exhaustion, his white gloves left on the bedside table this time.

ALLISON DOWNS

Fairy Fizzies



MIXED MEDIA (PRODUCT DESIGN), 4" X 3" X 3"

NICKI CARPATIUC

Globs



STONEWARE, 22" X 6" X 6"

“, *BECAUSE...*”

I'm deleting “, because” for a day,
or maybe always.
It implies I need a reason to feel something,
and I'm done with reasons.
To love. To hate. Neither.
(Indifference needs even less of a reason.)
Who cares?

Today I laughed.
I prayed to the universe.
I swore.
I watched a man get shot in the street.
The why, apparently, isn't relevant anymore.
(Because I can.)
I am dismayed.

When I was six, I felt promise.
I hoped.
I prayed for no reason
other than I did what I was told.
I loved unconditionally
(as children do).
I asked why.

My parents, whom I loved unconditionally,
along with books, my teacher, and Snoopy,
had all the answers.
“Because I said so” was popular.
And, “You'll understand when you're older.”
(But I don't.)
I just feel betrayed.

When I was six, I feared unconditionally too.
The dark. Loud noises. Clowns.
My only defense was tears,
so I cried when I needed to slay dragons,

and I did so, red faced and breathless, without inhibition
(like children do).
It always worked.

And it left me wondering
if fear is worth more than pain,
if grief is worth more than fear.
And who's keeping score.
In the end, there's always fear
(because of Maslow).
But also everything else we need and are afraid to lose.

50 years later, I still fear unconditionally.
Being left behind. Cancer. Fucking clowns!
I wish I could cry like a child—
just give myself over to it, but I can't.
It probably wouldn't work like it used to anyway
(dragons being what they are).
I feel so defenseless.

It's freeing to delete the “, because”
and ignore the question,
forgo the explanation,
and eschew responsibility to define
what is essentially mine
(it's like porn—you know it when you see it).
It is what it is.

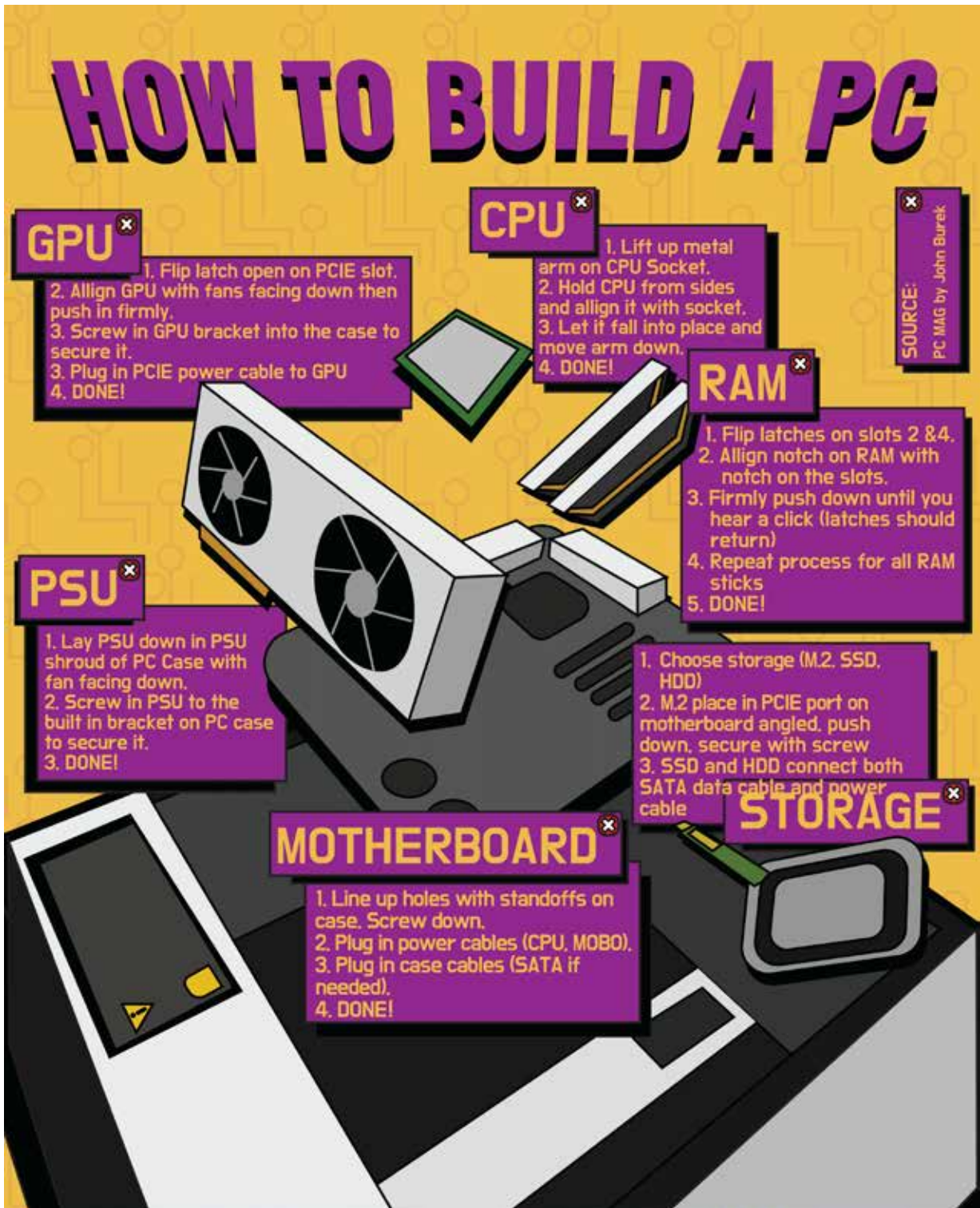
Which is, of course, no answer.
And the “, because” is really the crux of it all.
So say the therapists and self-help chapters.
We must still ask the question
Address the “, because.”
(Because we're all human.)
I'll always be afraid until I'm not.

ANDY LECHNER

Birch Log



MIXED MEDIA, 6" X 19" X 6"



CROWDED HOUSE

My house is a mess of brown and green,
Overgrown vines forcing themselves
Between cracks in the drywall.
There is barely any room to sit,
Or move;
Things get lost underneath the torn couches
As though they're taking shelter
From the breathing chaos
Trapped within my four walls.
When somebody dies,
I dump their ashes into a ramekin—
It is the only space I have for them—
Only to join the rest
In their attempted tombs,
In their little home away from home,
A home that surely isn't this one.

ADVICE ON CHILDREN FROM POET KHALIL GIBRAN

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said,
Speak to us of Children, and he said: “Your children are not
your children.”

I have one son and one daughter. Today, I’m going to talk
about my son.

He and I flew to Colorado a couple of weekends ago to attend
the wedding of my eldest grandson—his nephew. Joel and I
spent a lot of time together at multiple venues in multiple
cities: Golden, Pine, Littleton, and Conifer. Joel knew the
area somewhat because he had lived and worked in CO more
than 25 years ago. When I wasn’t sleeping or deciding what
dress to wear, or stressing about our tight schedule, I noticed
that he spent a lot of time checking out a motorcycle he
intended to purchase on his phone. I wasn’t totally cognizant
of what was going on, but I caught a glimpse or two of a shiny
Triumph that he mentioned was for sale near Fresno, CA.

Joel has always liked motorized vehicles. His dad and I bought
him a three-wheeler when he was in junior high school. His
wife is just as crazy; she just bought an Italian Vespa.

Your children are not your children. They are the sons and
daughters of Life’s longing for itself. They come through
you but not from you; and though they are with you, yet
they belong not to you.

At some point, I believe I asked what was going on, and
Joel said that if that particular Triumph were for sale in
the Midwest, the deal would already be finalized. My heart
skipped a beat because motorcycles worry me. He contin-
ued that the online negotiations involved getting the bike
to IL, and that detail needed to be solved. To make a long

story short, Joel and I flew home by noon August 7, talking
little about motorcycles. The weekend had been a whirl-
wind. Little did I know what was to come!

On Wednesday, my son drove to Woodstock to mow my grass.
When he finished, he told me that he had purchased the bike
and was flying to California on Friday (actually asked to use
my VISA miles). He was going to ride the bike back to Huntley,
where he lives. He was psyched about the adventure (on a bike
he had never seen in person, nor had he ridden it). He told me
that he had been riding Triumphs all summer in preparation
for purchasing one. I said I would pay for the shipping charges
as my heart thumped in my chest.

He said, “I know you would, but the companies aren’t reli-
able, or they won’t start for IL until they have a full load.
Also, there’s no guarantee about the condition of the bike
when it gets here.”

I said, “Rent an Enterprise truck, load the motorcycle, and
drive back.”

He said, “I want to see the country.”

You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they
have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not
their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may
strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you, for
life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday.

And so, on Friday, August 11, 2023, Joel flew to Califor-
nia, took an Uber to the seller near Fresno, CA, got on the
Triumph, and headed for home. The first day, he crossed

SEASON'S END

The cold November wind blows.
Oak trees release crisp leaves,
that scatter,
signal the end of a season.

She sits alone in her condominium,
thinks of him, reaches for his hand
that is no longer there.

She wonders if he knows how much
she misses his voice, his touch,
wonders how their years floated by
like leaves in the wind . . .

wonders if memories will be enough.

Arizona in blazing heat and could hardly breathe in the canyons but loved the scenery. The second day, he crossed Utah and into Colorado, where he stayed with friends overnight. On Sunday, he finished the trip, encountering blistering wind across both Nebraska and Iowa and pelting rain as he entered Illinois. Did I mention that this Triumph has no windshield to protect the rider from the elements!

My son pulled into his Huntley home, soaking wet, at 12:30 a.m. Monday morning, August 14. He took an

hour's shower to warm himself. After his wife texted me that Joel was safely home, I slept for the first time in four days.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth. The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far. Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness; for even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He also loves the bow that is stable.

AN ATTEMPT AT SELF LOVE LOOKS MORE LIKE COMPARISON

I wish I could stare at the sky
and not wonder if I'm good enough
because I know that I'm loved
and that knowledge is enough.

I love seeing people who dance in the rain
without a care in the world.
I find myself wanting to do that too.

I want to be a person who loves themselves
unapologetically.
I long for the day when I can look in the mirror
and say with honesty, "I love how I look today,"
Even if I look like I've just crawled out of bed
or haven't slept in a week.

I admire those who love fiercely
And are not afraid of their love being taken
for granted

I want to be that person too.
But I don't want my love to mean something
it does not.

I want to be praised for seeing things differently
not shamed for refusing to conform
to the ways "normal" people do things.
I want my differences to be celebrated
not viewed with scorn.

I want to be able to look others in the eyes
without feeling like they're staring into my soul,
extracting all my faults with a single glance.

I want to be the type of person
who can gaze up at the night sky
sit in awe of the universe
without feeling insignificant or out of place
But feel right at home among the stars.



OIL ON CANVAS, 22" X 16"

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VOICES

USED CARS

MCHEMRY COUNTY COLLEGE LITERARY/ARTS JOURNAL 2024



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