

## The History of the Wood County Poor Farm

by Dr. Alicia Matheny Beeson

Poor farms were established to aid those in need. Unlike our current state and federal governmental systems that support individuals living in poverty, individual counties assumed the majority of this responsibility in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. As historian Jerry Bruce Thomas explains, “Before the welfare reforms of the New Deal, county farms, also known as county infirmaries or poor farms, played a major role in the care of people who because of poverty, infirmity, or old age were unable to care for themselves. Early West Virginia law followed Virginia precedent, making counties responsible for care of the poor.” The land at West Virginia University at Parkersburg was once the location of the Wood County Poor Farm.

The first recorded owners of the poor farm property were the Kincheloes who maintained a farm primarily of grain and cattle. The Kincheloes also owned slaves, including an individual named Morgan who he bequeathed to his wife upon his death, as well as Ninny and Samuel who he willed to his son Nestor (“Last Will and Testament of Daniel Kincheloe, Deceased”). Most of the property was willed to Daniel Sr.’s sons Daniel and Elijah. In 1858, the Kincheloe family sold a portion of their land to Thomas Bartlett, and in 1864, “the Wood County Overseers of the poor purchased the [nearly 300 acre] area of the former Cedar Grove Plantation from Bartlett for \$6,000 to be paid in six years” (Allen). The county poor farm started operating soon thereafter. A caretaker oversaw the operations of the farm and lived in a farmhouse near the infirmary; a county-appointed supervisor (a two-year term) directed the infirmary and resided within the building.

The Kincheloe home, which was the original structure used for the poor farm infirmary, was not sufficient to meet the demands of the community. In 1901, reporter Will J. Cooper explained that the tin roof on the one-hundred-year-old building “forms but poor shelter for the inmates.” He explains that in the men’s quarters, “daylight can be seen through the cracks and crevices of the white-washed walls without any great strain on the eyesight.” The food, however, was “substantial and well cooked.” In 1902, a member of the court, Mr. Stahlman, similarly wrote, “a new and much larger and more modern house is a necessity. The house now in use is much too small; it is poorly ventilated, and is not built on proper plans for an institution of the kind. At this date there are but 27 inmates, but as soon as winter comes there will be twice that number in all probability” (qtd. in “New Building Contemplated”). Prompted by the negative reports, concerned citizen W. H. Karl visited the infirmary and wrote, “I found the place as neat and in as good order as it could be...The beds were clean and there was nothing that I noticed that looked as if the best of attention hadn’t been given.” Though community members held differing opinions about the status of the poor farm, most agreed that improvements would be beneficial for those in need.

These changes finally came in 1916 when a new sixty room, brick infirmary was established on the land by builder Joseph Hile and architect Theodore T. Sansbury (Allen). The superintendent of the infirmary lived with his family in the center of the building, while the women resided on the left side, or to the south, and the men on the right side, or to the north (Allen). Earle R. Bee, who lived nearby, recalls his visit to the infirmary: “The rooms were small but kept neat and clean by the inhabitants, sometimes by coercion. . . Often those of better health would assist those less able to work” (qtd. in Allen). There was also a “pest house”

located approximately where the college's main building now stands that was "used for people with contagious diseases" (Allen).

In addition to the infirmary, pesthouse, and farmhouse, the Wood county poor farm property also included a spring, "a milk house, a chicken house, a smokehouse, and a pig barn" (Allen). The farm produced crops such as strawberries and raised animals like Jersey cows (Allen). Additionally, "an orchard of cherries, peaches, and apples [was] located near the present main entrance to the college's campus" (Allen). In 1913, their "crop of wheat yielded 412 bushels, the corn crop 600 bushels, and in addition there were many tons of hay and cowpeas" ("Saved His Corn"). Residents of the poorhouse, often referred to as indigents or inmates, would assist on the farm as they were able.

In 1950, the infirmary building was destroyed by a fire thought to have originated in one of the boilers (Enoch 96); of the twenty-nine residents at the time, one, Lewis Coffey, died in the fire, and three other residents were hospitalized (Woofter). A smaller infirmary was built to use for the following decade, but the rise of new forms of welfare lessened the emphasis on poor farms (Thomas). Some reports indicate that Wood County "ceased to operate the facility in 1956" (Enoch 96). The building was used as a nursing home by a private party from 1960 to 1980, then it became a personal care facility (Hawk). It still operates today as an assisted living facility, Cedar Grove, on Nicolette Road.

Shortly after the transition of the infirmary, the County Court agreed to permit "a portion of the old Poor Farm property" to be used for the construction of "the Parkersburg Center of West Virginia University" (Allen). Construction began in 1969, and in 1971, "it became the State of West Virginia's first comprehensive community college" (Allen).

The most prominent visual reminder of the poor farm is the cemetery near the parking lot of WVU Parkersburg, located near the original site of the Kincheloe family's graveyard. In fact, in 2001, it was called "the only active cemetery on a college campus in the United States" (Saulton). Even as recently as 2012, county officials reported that "there are an average of seven [to] eight burials a year in the old poor farm cemetery" for those who cannot afford other options (Brust, "Record"). Bob Enoch and Jeff Little, members of the Wood County Historical Society, presented the names of 800 individuals buried at the Wood County Poor Farm Cemetery. According to Enoch, the graves go back to at least 1888, though some were likely buried in the cemetery before that date (Meitzler). Though the cemetery is covered with white crosses, Bob Enoch explains that they "don't necessarily mark gravesites. They are more just ornamental" (qtd. in Brust, "Record"). The crosses serve as a remarkable reminder of the lives of our local ancestors, friends, and neighbors who endured hardship. Additionally, the cemetery serves as a reminder of the centuries of community effort to support those in need.

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# The Poorhouse Rag

## The Poorhouse Rag 2021 Prize Winners

**Foundation Prize:** “Steampunk” by Kimberly Matheny

**President’s Prize:** “Gender Dysphoria” by Coleen Lynn Nicoles

**Poetry Prize:** “To Be a Boy” by Coleen Lynn Nicoles

**Fiction Prize:** “Painted Black: A Piece of Wall Art” by Sedonie Ernak

**Nonfiction:** “Stereotyping Addicts Increases the View Addiction Is a Choice” by Amber Ward

Produced by the Poorhouse Rag Editorial Collective with thanks to the Parkersburg Community Foundation and

West Virginia University at Parkersburg

## A Note from the Editors

Welcome to the third edition of *The Poorhouse Rag*, West Virginia University at Parkersburg's campus literary magazine featuring the work of the campus community and our larger community. Since the release of our first issues in Fall of 2019, we have promoted writing and art that speaks to issues surrounding social justice, and this year was no different. Even amidst the on-going pandemic, WVU Parkersburg's students, faculty, staff, and alumni have once again created honest and vulnerable work to share with the community.

Though there was no specific theme for this issue, the pieces submitted began to speak to one another and revealed some common themes centered around social justice issues. We organized the pieces around the themes of philosophy, racism, angst, family problems, gender, and substance use. All of the themes join together to highlight social justice and equity issues on varying levels.

We know many of us are still overwhelmed and suffering from pandemic fatigue, but contributing to *The Poorhouse Rag* gives everyone the opportunity to have a voice and be heard. As we sit around still trying to make sense of the new day-to-day routines the pandemic continues to cause, we can all take solace in knowing that one thing the pandemic can't take away is our voice.

Making a difference starts with one voice. One person willing to step out, step up, and say enough is enough. One person who is willing to be vulnerable can inspire change. Creating comes at no monetary cost, but can come with the ability to move others. This is what we want this issue to do for our campus and surrounding community.

Our goal is to continue to inspire others to create, no matter the form. Find what inspires you within this issue. Find what tugs at your heartstrings and causes you to have a reaction to the content of the work you read or art you see. Then, take a deep breath, and create. Only through creating can we make sense of human nature and humanity. Isn't that what all great literature and art should do?

Finally, we thank each and every person who has had a hand in contributing, proofreading, building, promoting, encouraging, judging, creating, supporting, and marketing our newest issue. We couldn't produce this magazine issue without your continued support.

Write on!

The Editorial Collective of *The Poorhouse Rag*

Dr. Alicia Matheny Beeson

Joyce Stover

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Dr. Sandra Kolankiewicz

Dr. HG Young

Dr. Lauri Reidmiller

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\***Cover Image: Steampunk** by Kimberly Matheny, *Foundation Prize Winner*

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\* Denotes Prize Winners

## Fall 2020 Poorhouse Cemetery Clean-Up Collage

Art by Dr. Lauri Reidmiller

Members of the WVUP Fine Arts Committee, the Wood County Historical Society, the WVUP Art Club, and other community members joined together to clean-up the cemetery and replace worn crosses.





**Through the Woods I Go**  
Poetry by Jadon Sandy

I feel the breeze through the trees,  
As my mind runs through the memories.  
The things I've done,  
The ones I loved,  
All the flowers I had to leave...

To rot and decay  
And fade away  
Slowly out of my head...  
Turning me into a man as good as dead.

The trees, they shake in blissful wind,  
Reminding me when I was a kid.  
When branches were not yet broken,  
When ties were still woven.

And though I made mistakes along the way,  
Done some things I'm not proud to say,  
I still journey through those joyous trees,  
Hoping to be the person I need to be.

**Long Ago and Here Tomorrow**  
Poetry by Jadon Sandy

Long ago are the days of life,  
Though we can live eternally,  
For nature now is in a strife,  
Yet we can't put her out of her misery

The sands of time have been blown away  
By our industrial-sized fans,  
By the beds in which we lay,  
And by the cities in which we stand.

No more grief and no more sorrow,  
Though what is happiness without so?  
The only funerals we have are for the ones who want to,  
The ones who found the truth that there's nothing else to do.

What happens when we live longer than the money we print?  
What is of value and what isn't?  
We have infinite opportunity in eternity  
Yet we'll forever be trapped within ourselves, won't we?

I feel I should give up right now,  
Surrender my possessions and go  
Into the great unknown, yet I know I shall  
Be still here tomorrow.

## **Life**

Poetry by Hannah Dearth, Ethan Weikart, Logan White

The petals are colorless  
the distinguishing transparency.  
They serve their purpose  
leaving a legacy.  
I remember when it first bloomed  
the warm spring showers.  
My joy felt unmoved  
with the popping of flowers.  
But alas, the time comes to an end  
everything moves on without struggle.  
It is taken by the wind  
the flower released from its snuggle.  
As the days freeze  
I reminisce on the memories.

**Global Sign of Humanity**  
Art by Lauri Reidmiller



## FICTION PRIZE WINNER

### **Painted Black: A Piece of Wall Art**

Fiction by Sedonie Ernak

I walk in from the dark blue kitchen, Anchors Aweigh paint, by Sherwin-Williams. It is a bold color that I find suitable for our kitchen and dining space. Walter sits in the sunroom with his phone in his hand.

“Hey Walt.” I announce myself as the robust scent of basil and thyme herbs that fills the air makes it way to my nostrils.

“Hey Fate, what’s going on?” I sit on a white and naturally antiqued chair. Proud of its patina finish that resembles what many DIY project seekers aim to achieve.

“I love the sun. Don’t you?” I wait for his response as I stare out the transparent window panels that lets in rays of sunshine along with prying eyes.

“Mmh,” he says, “why do you always have to bring up our race?” He sighs, “The sun feels like a hot spatula against my skin.”

“Well, that’s too bad,” I tease, “It makes my melanin happy. Do you want to do anything today?” It has been six years since we moved from North Carolina to the Mid-Ohio Valley with our children, Marcus who turned four in October and Cruise who is fifteen months old. I am not acquainted with the area as I would like because Walter has a full-time job, and I am a full-time college student.

“Maybe we can go for a drive to Pittsburgh, it’s a ways out.” I can tell that he is tired from how far he is slouching into the double papasan chair while he scrolls through YouTube.

“Sounds good,” I say as I put feet and cross them over each other onto the paisley themed footstool. “How far away is it?” Did I make everything about race, or did he not make enough about it? I divert my attention to the African mask that hangs on an old rustic ladder. Its wooden face painted black with rows of yarn for locks plaited down on the sides of the mask. With a crescent shape for its exquisitely decorated yarn beard and seashells to outline the chin, its eyes are circular and outlined with red paint. On its lips, the upper and lower vermillion border are painted with reddish brown while leaving the mouth slightly open. It is a tribute to Africa and its people; it is my connection to a place I know from social media.

I feel like this African mask. I do not answer his question because I am not in the mood for a debate. The thoughts of I do not belong here when people ask me, where I am from and how long I have been here bounce around knotted on my tongue. People stare at me like I am a piece of wall art. The words I did not say because there is no way for him to understand.

I return my focus to Walter as he explains to me where in West Virginia we are located by using his hand. “Alright, Fate, look, this is how I was taught growing up.” He holds his right hand facing towards himself, palm open while bending his pointer, ring, and pinky fingers. Proudly flipping me off as he lets out a chuckle with a smile that heightens his cheekbones. “It starts with a hitchhike and ends with fuck you.”

“Ok, you’re flipping me off,” I chuckle, “where are we located?”

He points to his thumb, “we’re located between the first and second knuckle.” I look at his pale hand, doing some quick math in my head. The boys had been cooped up all day, and the thought of keeping them in the car to trek halfway across his palm sounds like a chore.

“Ok,” I say in a slight nasal tone, “I am not in the mood for a long drive today.” I look outside the screen door to calculate the flow of traffic. “How about I take the boys for a walk around the neighborhood?” I extend my arms towards him with a smile on my face, “You’re welcome to join if you want.”

His eyelids fall as he sighs, “Well, Hun that sounds good, but I’m gonna stay here and relax for a bit.”

\*\*\*

The weather is warm, and the wind feels cool. The trees are no longer bare and naked from winter blues but are now a lush and vibrant shade of springtime green. I walk through the neighborhood with my children, as I attempt to assure myself that my family and I are safe. Look at your sons, what do you see? What do you see? You know this feeling. That is happiness, you’re happy, there’s nothing to be afraid of, they will grow up. They will have friends. They will be happy. Take a deep breath, just breathe. Exhale. “I’m ok.”

Marcus is laughing and being silly. “Look Mom, I’m wobbly!” He rocks back and forth on his scooter and rides onto one of the neighbor’s lawn. I am stuck in place and thought. I see him in my mind. An older white male standing on his porch with a shotgun in his hand. “Get off my property, you niggers.” I don’t know what to do, my brain feels enlarged, my ears are thumping. Marcus passes for white. Well, no, one drop rule. I sigh. My ancestors must be angry at me. “We’re not angry,” they say in a whispering and calm voice, “you’re helping the world.”

“Marcus get over here, now!” I bent down to face him with one knee on the ground, “look, we do not go onto anybody’s property without permission.” My heart is beating fast, my body stiffens, and I feel like a bird moving my neck to scan the area for threats. I need to calm down. I take a deep breath, in through the nose, exhaling slowly out through the mouth. I open my eyes and smile. I observe as Cruise looks around with bright eyes at all that is new to him. The awareness of his expressions eases my anxiety.

The joyous tune of the birds chirping can be heard in the nearby trees. I gaze at my children and watch as they stare at the clear blue sky while pointing towards the singing of the birds. Marcus begins to count a flock of birds that fly from a large tree that is fluffed with vivid green leaves. “1 bird, 2 birds, 3 birds, Mom-mom look, there’s a lot of birds!”

Cruise looks up at the sky with a bright glare of awe in his eyes. He lifts his hands into the air, clapping and shouting. “Bir, bir bir.”

“Move over to the side Marc, there’s a car coming.” I put my foot in front of him to prevent him from running into the road. A shot of adrenaline causes my mind to flood with thoughts and I begin to feel tightened and hot within my skin. Did the neighbors call the police? My heart rate increases, my armpits are itchy, and my hands are twitchy. Time slows down as I see my reflection in the passing police car. I see the bold, yellow four-letter words ARMY on

my shirt. I'm ok. The skin between my brows forms waves, conjoining them as I smile nod at the officer.

I sigh with relief that I am a veteran. I am Jamaican born, and I signed up for the service when I was 19 years old to show my gratitude to the United States of America. I am proud of my service. But I would not feel safe if I were not wearing my Army t-shirt.

I explain to Walt what occurred on my walk with our boys.

He nods and tells me, "Honey, you're ok. We will be ok; this is not a racist area."

I sigh, "You're right, I wish I could feel normal here."

We make plans for the flea market in town. This flea market is one of my favorite locations in the town. I like it there because some of the vendors are like family and I do not feel my skin tightening whenever I visit.

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The mountainous drive to the flea market is lined with yellow lily flowers and red rose bud trees.

"The flowers are so beautiful. Did you know that we can use Red rose bud petals to make jam?"

"I didn't know that, and I didn't see how beautiful it was here until I moved away. It's amazing that we can survive off our land." He looks out the window and smiles.

"No, not everyone gets rolling hills and creeks in their backyard." I place my hand on top of his and he takes hold of it. "I like that there aren't lots of buildings around, it's not like large cities that become cramped and dirty." I sigh, "It's just us and nature."

"You look amazing, green looks good on you," Walt says as he glances over and resumes his attention to driving.

"Thanks babe," I grin, "I love you." I look through the window. There is a doe and her spotted fawn grazing alongside the creek. I think about her family being picked off during hunting season. My cheeks are warm as tears gather within my eyes. When will hunting season cease for Africans?

\*\*\*

We are at the flea market, and I look in the back seat and see Cruise is sleeping. I take the baby stroller and bag from the trunk. I open the door and gently unbuckle his straps to remove him from his car seat and Walt does the same for Marcus.

Marcus, takes notice of where we are and jumps, clapping his hands, "Yay." He looks up at me. "Mom, can I have coins?"

"Sure Love, what will you get?" I await a response, but I see that he is distracted. His little feet are busy tapping to the end of the taillight on our truck and back towards me.

I walk with my family through a set of double doors that leads us to another set of doors before we are inside. To the right is the little restaurant which is self-seated. I scan the area and see an empty squared table one booth away from the females' bathroom.

"I don't like sitting so close to bathrooms in a restaurant."

"I don't either." He tells Marcus to stay seated as he places his phone into his jeans pocket. "Same as usual?"

"Yep, burger and fries for the boys and pancake and sweet tea for me." I smile at him. "I love you."

"I love you too, I'll be right back." Walt walks away with his head held high and shoulders back.

The restaurant is packed today. There is an older white man wearing a 3D face mask who stands out amongst the crowd. I look at the mask and at the man to lock the memory of him into my mind. The mask color closely blends in with his olive peach complexion. The seven teeth that are printed onto the mask are larger than the average human teeth and are sparsely gapped. I smile and nod at him. He and his lady friend smile at each other and he nods back. I feel light as though some of the fog that clouded my mind has been blown away. The sense of humor on the older population during the Coronavirus pandemic lightens the mood.

There is a man sitting in front of me. He is staring at me. He is smaller built with scraggly and silver hair. His face is thin, and his clothing is oversized, faded, and discolored. I glance at him with hopes that he will look away, but his stare magnifies.

One of the vendors, an older lady, stops by our booth to say hi to the boys. "Hi sweeties, how are you today?"

"How are you?" Marcus peeps.

She smiles and runs her hand through Marcus's hair. "His hair is beautiful."

"Thanks." I don't know what to say when people compliment Marcus for his loose brunette curls.

She looks at Cruise and smiles. "Are you being good for mommy?"

Cruise's lower lip puckers forward and he lowers his head while staring up at the lady with the long silver hair.

"Stop by my booth on the way out."

"Yes, ma'am." I look at her as she limps away at a pace that would make a turtle fast.

The man is still staring. I feel my throat tightening as I hold back my frustration. My legs are crossed, my right foot is fidgeting, and I am picking at the cuticle around my right thumb as I gnaw at the inside of my lower lip.

Walter walks over with our food. "Hey, the waitress gave the boys two ice cream cones."

“Aww, that’s so sweet.”

“Is everything all right?”

I shrug my shoulders. “That man behind you keeps staring at me.”

“Come sit over here and I’ll sit there.”

“No, this is my problem. I want to ask him what the fuck is his problem.”

“Let it go Love, it’s not worth it.”

“Our skin colors are different, our hair textures are different, even the foods we eat are a little different by the spices we use.”

“I know, Hun. I’m sorry that this is happening.” He sighs and hands the tea to me. “I’m here.”

With my husband’s support, I eat my food and for the duration of 15 minutes I glance on and off at the man staring at me.

I can sense that Walt is frustrated by how he shoves his cheeseburger into his mouth.  
“Comfort builds on the approval of others.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you recall when I purchased my hat?” He taps his hand on top of his black Scottish Tammie beret.

“Ok, what are you getting at?” I shove a fry into my mouth and glance at the staring man.

“Smart people don’t let others push their buttons.”

I take a sip of my sweet, iced tea, “Thanks babe, I appreciate you saying that.”

“I felt awkward at first, in my hat, but your immediate approval confirmed that I looked ok.”

“Tomorrow I will wear a wig instead of my tightly coiled afro hair,” I snark, “maybe that will make people more comfortable.”

I look up at the man who is two tables away, I nod at him. A habit I learn since living in West Virginia. He smiles. He fucking smiles.

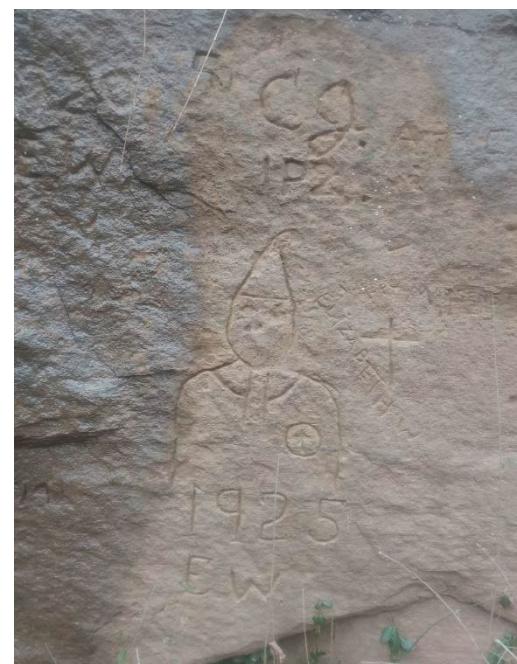
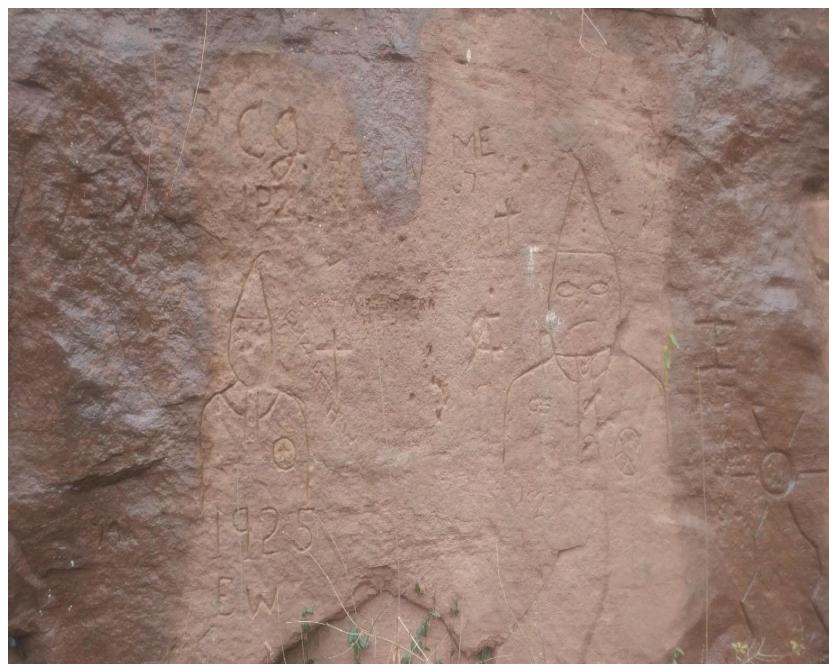
“Good looking boys you got there,” he says.

“Um, thanks.” I smile with furrowed brows, still irritated that I must take the higher ground daily when all I want to be is normal.

**20th Century Petroglyph, Marietta, Ohio**  
Poetry by Dr. Sandra Kolankiewicz

They must have used tools to do it, would have  
taken hours to cut so deeply through the  
rock, the image they created dated  
1925, two Klan members side  
by side in their hoods, round insignias  
still clear, the trim at the edges of their  
robes carefully etched. Back then hillsides were  
bare, shorn of all trees for the clear cut. To  
create their tableau they would have stood in  
the sun while they carved the great, flat piece of  
exposed sandstone for all the faces to see  
from the porches of homes long since collapsed,  
foundations become nothing, sites marked by  
old fashioned snowdrops, yellow daffodils  
in the spring, just one old homestead leaving  
behind a chimney constructed from the  
type of composite cement that suggests  
one hundred and fifty years have passed since  
its construction out of bricks from the yard  
once found at the bottom of the hollow  
where the path now ends, the beehive kilns long  
forgotten, pavers smothered by asphalt.

*Ninemile Magazine, January 2019*



**Othering**  
Poetry by Martha McGovern

9 minutes with your knee pressed into my neck

5 ghosting months with your foot on my heart

200 years of repression –

lynchings and beatings and rapes

lifetimes of small slights, stinging slices into the core

Still I'm strong.

Oh, I'm strong.

I've persevered and survived, tasted

moments of acceptance and success.

But am I not a human

made of breakable stuff?

And won't I finally

break under the pattern of repeated

promise and rejection, the

bending of spirit finally snapping the soul . . . ?

## Mixed Media Collage

Art by Amee Shah



## **Alphabet Soup**

Nonfiction by Coleen Lynn Nicols

A person would be hard pressed to find anyone who has not heard the abbreviation LGBT or one of the many variations of this abbreviation that are so commonly bantered about now. There are so many ways a person can express their gender and sexual identity. Currently, there are eleven letters in the current full abbreviation. Those letters are L, G, B, T, Q, Q, I, P, 2S, A, and A. Each of these letters represents a way in which a person may identify themselves to others. Before I continue, I would like to point out a historical footnote on this topic.. Prior to the late 1980s, sexual identity was mostly broken into two main categories. One group was usually considered “straight,” meaning they were sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender, while the other group was considered “gay,” which was meant as a pejorative term meaning “homosexual”. However, as civil rights activists became more active in representing marginalized homosexual communities, a need to better identify subgroups quickly arose. Over the past several decades, the line of distinction between one non-straight group and another began to grow. As a result, classifications of not only gender but also sexual identity are now more precise.

The first letter to consider is the letter “L”. This abbreviation is short for lesbian. Most people already understand that lesbians are people who identify as female and are sexually attracted to others who identify as females. Notice how I worded the previous sentence. If one wishes to understand the discoveries of modern medical science, then one needs to understand that the way a person’s gender is arrived at has nothing to do with the external trappings of their anatomy. A transgender woman who is attracted exclusively to cisgender or transgender women is very much a lesbian. The prefix *cis-* is based on a Greek word meaning “of the same side” while the prefix *trans-* is from a Greek word meaning “of the opposite side”. People who are transgender, therefore, are those whose physical and mental gender identity are incongruous while people who are cisgender are not incongruous.

Next, there is the letter “G”. This is the first letter in the word “gay.” Gay is often used as an umbrella term for all homosexuals, regardless of gender, but in our current context, this word refers to homosexual males. I cannot say so definitively, but I suspect the word is used in this way because historically society oftentimes turned a blind eye to gay women while taking great issue with gay men. In the late 1800s through the early 1900s, the term “Boston Marriage” was commonly used to describe two women cohabitating. Sometimes these arrangements were simply born out of friendship, but often the two women were romantically involved. Nevertheless, society has gone to great lengths to characterize men as being dominant in all facets of life. Contrariwise, those same men all too often would have women be objectified as sexual objects, incapable of serving any other real purpose. Double standards based on gender are certainly nothing new.

“B” is our next letter and refers to people who identify as bisexual. As in the two previous groups mentioned, this group is yet another way of expressing one’s sexuality. Bisexuals are attracted to their own gender as well as the opposite gender. The term bisexual, like lesbian and gay, exist with the premise that gender is binary. For many years, society at large held to the misconception that there are only two possible genders, male and female. Modern

medical science has debunked this supposition a great many times in recent years. This truth will unfold more as we look at the next several letters of the topic at hand.

Next, I am a member of the group represented by our next letter, “T.” T is the abbreviation for the word “transgender.” Unlike the first three classifications we have considered, the word “transgender” is an expression of one’s gender identity rather than their sexuality. Transgender people are those who have been identified by others as one specific gender in spite of how the person in question identifies themselves. My parents assumed I was male because I had certain anatomical features when I was born. As I reached the age of sexual maturation, however, I realized more and more with each passing day that I was not a male at all. In the past two decades, modern medical science has delved into this disparity and has overwhelmingly concluded that the litmus test for gender has been misapplied for most of human history.

“Q” is the next two letters in our list and is associated with the words “Queer” and “Questioning.” Depending on the context of what is being discussed, these two classifications can be the same or different. When I was younger, “queer” was considered a pejorative term. In general, the word was used to imply one was a “homosexual.” The word has evolved in the past few decades and now is used to indicate someone who simply does not identify as a member of any traditional gender or sexuality identities. “Questioning people” are those who simply have not settled the question of who they are, a struggle that many people deal with as they try to shed the preconceived notions thrust upon them by well-meaning parents who misgender them at birth. Queer and questioning people are often the same group, though in the case of the former, the individual may find their lack of non-conformance best describes who they are, while the latter group oftentimes still seeks to discover their truth.

Intersex is the next group to be considered. Those represented by the letter I are a fascinating group, indeed. Intersex people are those who have physiological elements of both male and female. The existence of this group stands in direct opposition to a great many philosophical approaches to the question of gender identity and sexuality. One cannot make the argument that gender is definitively binary when the reality of intersex people exists. Most people tend to think the existence of such people is extremely rare, but this assumption is incorrect. There are a great many ways in which a person’s gender may be non-binary. There are well documented case studies on the subject where gender is considered from many different factors. I was taught in high school that gender is linked to chromosomes. Women were said to have two “X” chromosomes while men have an “X” and “Y” chromosome pair. While this is often true, there are some cisgender men who do not have a “Y” chromosome at all. To make things even more complicated, modern medical science has documented cases of cisgender women who are born with “Y” chromosomes. In fact, there have been over sixty combinations of “X” and “Y” chromosomes thus far identified, with more being discovered as the question of gender continues to be studied. Please note that this is just one of many methods of considering gender from a physiological perspective. If you are interested in understanding more about this topic, there is an excellent article on the subject on The Intersex Society of North America’s website (<https://isna.org/faq/frequency/>, “How Common is Intersex?”).

Our next letter to be considered is the letter “P”. This letter represents a group who identifies their sexuality as being pansexual. Pan- is a prefix that comes from a Greek word that means “involving all members.” In contrast with the term bisexual, pansexuals find themselves sexually attracted to people outside of the consideration of gender. People of this category do not view the issues involved in the mechanical interface of intimacy as obstacles when forming interpersonal relationships with others, regardless of which genders may be involved. Simply put, pansexuals love whom they are attracted to. I personally find pansexuals enlightened in the sense that they place physical attraction behind more important metrics that gauge the quality of people, such as compassion, kindness, and selflessness.

The next step in our progression is “2S”. This abbreviation is short for Two-Spirited. Every major religion in the world, including Christianity, teaches that the Divine embodies both the masculine and the feminine. Historically, nearly all religions believe in a subset of people who are said to be Two-Spirited. Such a person is believed to also possess elements of both extremes of gender. As such, a Two-Spirited person is believed to be a bit closer to the Divine than others. The term “Shaman” refers to such a person in many cultures. A “Shaman” is a person believed to be a naturally born religious leader, and as such was given both a masculine and feminine nature to better equip them to guide the people they watch over. Moving away from the realm of religion, there remains a foundation for a group of people who identify as a blend of genders. Like our next group, Two-Spirited people fall under the umbrella term non-binary.

In contrast with Two-Spirited people, androgynous people, as represented by the letter “A” in our abbreviation, stand as their antithesis. Androgynous people tend to reject the notions of gender identity and, as such, do not consider any gender stereotypes as valid. In both personality and deportment, an androgynous person feels most comfortable in a state of gender vagueness. Should such a person choose to wear a dress, for example, they do so out of personal taste rather than out of a sense of expectation. Androgyny is an expression of gender rather than sexuality. Such people may prefer one gender over another, either gender, or chose to refrain from intimacy altogether.

Our final letter is the letter “A” as well. Asexual people are those who have no interest in sexual activity at all. An asexual person may identify as male, female, or one of the other gender identities we have discussed. Some asexuals will engage in voluntary sexual activity for reasons other than pleasure, however. Procreation is a powerful motivator, after all. I suppose this group of people is the hardest for me to fully understand personally, but that designation does not mean I hold any misgivings in accepting such a person in all sincerity.

Gender and sexual identity are very important to understand if we wish to comprehend the world around us. Many people resist the notion of gender and sexuality as being on a spectrum. Religion is a very powerful influence in all of our lives. I consider myself a very spiritual person. However, my spirituality is governed by reality. Gender and sexuality classifications are the result of decades of scientific study. To claim to embrace the tenets of any religion while rejecting the truths proven by science is anything but spiritual. More to the point, this conflict results in a great many suicides every year. As a transgender woman, this truth is all too real to me. My demographic, transgender, is estimated to have a forty-one percent suicide

rate. Resolving my truth with the so-called truth imparted on me by society when I was younger very nearly drove me to fall on the wrong side of that statistic. For many years I felt I had to choose between self-acceptance and hell. The only reason I exist among the living is because I made the decision to change my spirituality to match reality. I have always appreciated Albert Einstein's opinion on this matter. He is quoted as saying, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

## PRESIDENT'S PRIZE WINNER

### **Gender Dysphoria** Nonfiction by Coleen Lynn Nicoles

When you look in the mirror, who do you see? For most people, the answer is ourselves. However, for many, there is a different answer. Occasionally, a person sees someone in the mirror who isn't who they are at all. How can this be the case? Sometimes, things in nature aren't quite so cut and dry as we would like to assume. Such assumptions are all too often the case when dealing with gender identity. The plight of transgender people is one that I well understand. You see, I am a transgender woman, and I suffer from gender dysphoria. When I look in the mirror, I see someone I do not know looking back at me. This has been the case my entire life. I would like to tell you, in my own words, in light of my own life, about gender dysphoria. Gender Dysphoria is the feeling of discomfort or distress one feels when their gender identity and their assigned sex at birth are incongruent.

Before I begin, let me first dispel some notions about gender dysphoria. Many assume the condition is just a phase. We all go through a litany of questions about ourselves as we strive to reach maturity. We question what kind of person we wish to be. There is much to consider, after all. Are we athletic, or do we prefer another form of expression? What kind of music do we enjoy? Our environment is huge, so our questions are many. We understand how the answers to these questions help shape who we are and how we wish others to perceive us. Certainly, we do go through phases. When I was young, I enjoyed country music. Later, my tastes shifted towards classic rock and roll. I even went through a phase where classical music was the only genre I preferred. This shifting of taste is quite normal for someone trying to define who they are. However, when dealing with our gender, things get much more complicated.

For most of us, our minds have been filled with years of gender stereotypes, based on our parents' perception of who we are. When confronted with a disparity between one's own perception of reality and the perception of one's parents, a person's life can suddenly become very difficult. I was around twelve or so when I first noticed something about myself that made me feel very uncomfortable. My body was beginning to transform from a child into an adult. I was certainly excited, but at the same time I felt very confused. I was suddenly forced to realize I wasn't happy with the changes I was seeing in the mirror. I was turning into a young man, and the eventual end of that process was the problem.

Every thought in my mind told me something was terribly wrong. Logically, I understood what I had always been told; I was a boy, and I was becoming a man. However, my entire world suddenly changed as I pondered how I felt. I knew what I was feeling, and I knew I was very unsettled by those feelings. Trying to keep my perspective, I did my best to dismiss how I felt by telling myself I was simply trying out the thought of being a girl in the same way I had tried out different kinds of music. My conscience was appeased for a while, but how long does a phase have to last before it is clearly not a phase at all? As I recall, I was first confronted with the questions I had about my gender in 1977. To be perfectly honest, I felt the same in 1987, some ten years later. In fact, I felt the same in 2018, some forty-one years having passed since I first sensed I was conflicted about my gender identity. In all those years, my taste in music changed, my taste in fashion changed, and even my taste in food changed. However, the questions I had about my gender remained. Clearly, my gender dysphoria wasn't a phase at all.

I suppose I should mention now, before proceeding any further, that the experiences of my lifetime are not necessarily the same as those of other transgender people. Certainly, each person has to resolve the question of their gender identity on their own terms, just as I did. For those who are able to find a way to resolve and eventually dismiss such questions, a feeling of being whole can finally be enjoyed. However, many transgender people find that with the acceptance of who they are from a gender perspective comes a necessary increase in gender dysphoria. There is a common misconception held by many bystanders that a person feeling the effects of gender dysphoria is simply bearing the repercussions of having made a choice. I find this notion a bit repulsive, to be perfectly honest. To begin with, why would I assume such personal liability for making such a choice?

Let us count the cost of my so-called “decision.” First, I lost my career. I previously made a modest living as a quality consultant in the field of manufacturing. My phone stopped ringing the moment I announced to the world that I was a woman. Moving on, people I have known for many years, many of whom I assumed to be true friends, suddenly wanted to distance themselves from me. The cost of my “choice” ran much deeper, however. I was assaulted in front of my house recently, solely because the two men passing by took exception to my being transgender. After taking a thrown bottle to the face, I managed to remove myself from harm’s way. On more than one occasion, I have been confronted for using the bathroom associated with the gender specified on my driver’s license, which reads female. What is my point in mentioning all this? My neighbor shared a nugget of wisdom when I came out to him. He told me he used to think of people like me as “having made a bad choice,” but then went on to say that as he watched the plight of transgender people, he had come to a new belief: “Why would you choose to be who you are?” he asked me. My neighbor is not of the same political cloth from which I am cut. We do not agree on a great many issues facing our country, but his words rang true. My life would be far easier if I just fell in line and lived the way my parents had envisioned. Indeed, I did not choose to be transgender, nor to suffer from my resultant gender dysphoria. How I feel was and is a mandate usurped by my truth.

I remember discussing my feelings with a psychologist when I was a teenager. Please keep in mind the generation to which I belong. A lady does not like to dwell on her age, but suffice it to say I grew up in a time when even the medical field was not very accepting of my truth. In fact, my doctor told me something that caused me a great deal of distress when I spoke of what I was feeling. What was my diagnosis? I was told I was a sexual deviant. In essence, I was told there was something very wrong with me on a moral level. I did not grow up in a particularly religious family, but what my psychologist told me was well in line with what I had been taught already.

May I be candid? My desire to live my life as a female, coupled with some inconsistencies in my sexuality, made for some very conflicted feelings. When one considers my doctor’s pronouncement, my parent’s teachings, and the predominant view of society around me as a whole, one can quickly see how I found maintaining any semblance of self-esteem impossible. To be honest, the collective interpretation of so many people hung around my neck like an albatross. I will spare you, the reader, the details of how I found myself faced with oblivion more than once, and that by my own hand. I had come to believe, based on my feelings of gender dysphoria, that I was, in fact, immoral. I count myself lucky I survived long enough to discover the fallacy of this notion.

Knowing my very life was in the balance, I set out to educate myself. I began to audit the whole of what things I believed to be true. In time, I came to realize I held on to some notions I had no real basis to believe at all. In religion, in philosophy, and even in modern clinical psychology, I found much dissent from the notions of gender taught to me by my parents and society as a whole. Only then did I find the courage to begin the process of transition to help alleviate the gender dysphoria instilled in me by society as a whole. Indeed, my truth was not a matter of morality at all. I am not a deviant. I am simply who I am. I weep often for my brothers and sisters who did not survive their journey as I did.

If the gender dysphoria I suffer from is not the result of succumbing to a phase, nor the result of a choice, nor even the result of an immoral nature, then what is it? Let me tell you, first and foremost, that my condition is a cry to exist. I am a woman, and my very soul demands I be recognized as one. In March of 2020, I was faced with a horrible dilemma. I was sitting at home, doing my nails when the phone rang. A client called and needed to meet with me. I was only three months into transition and I was in a panic. My customer was unaware of my being transgender. I quickly removed my makeup and nail polish, then took a shower. However, something happened that day that changed my life. As I sat on the edge of my bed, trying to select a male appropriate outfit to wear, I began to cry. I could not help but feel I was betraying my truth by putting on the “boy” clothes once again. I felt these powerful emotions because gender dysphoria is a subconscious demand to be recognized as who I really am. Coleen was calling out, begging me to not hide her away one more day. The thought of dressing as a man even one more time seemed unthinkable. No matter what the cost, I knew I had to exist as who I truly was. In the end, the customer who called didn’t really care when I arrived as the woman I am.

So what, exactly, is gender dysphoria? I dare say this condition is the soul’s attempt to correct a mistake. Please understand my words at this point. Am I a woman? Yes, I certainly am. Why a child develops into one body and into a different mind is the subject of much study. In Her infinite wisdom, nature chose who I am. However, I must still point out that my gender dysphoria is an attempt by my psyche to correct a mistake. There is much research being conducted on the subject of gender identity, and while I do not feel compelled to delve into those findings at length, I will point out that gender is not what we have been taught to believe, historically. Gender is not determined by anatomy, nor is it determined by chromosomes. Gender is about who you are.

Religion and philosophy have gone to great lengths to explain that part of us which makes us unique. Some call that uniqueness our soul, or our spirit, while others call that aspect of our existence our eternal self, or even our life essence. How you define yourself as an individual entity in the universe does not really matter. The simple truth is, every person is unique. So wherein lies the mistake that needs correcting? I dare say the mistake was committed by society as a whole. Whether the cause was through simple ignorance or something more nefarious does not really matter. To force someone to live in denial of their true gender identity is unnatural by definition. When I attempted to live my life as a man, I found it impossible to find peace with myself because I was denying myself. By this reasoning, one can plainly see how my gender dysphoria is the evidence of nature trying to correct the error society had made.

Gender dysphoria is one final thing. The condition is persistent. I and many others like me are unable to ignore the primal feelings we possess. Gender dysphoria will not be ignored.

This is perhaps the most difficult example of my existence to discuss. May I be frank? I attempted to end my life on more than one occasion. In my lifetime, I attempted to be the man I thought I was supposed to be. I have done free form rock climbing as well as free form diving, knowing a mistake in either endeavor would mean the ending of my life. None the less, let me state here and now that my disregard for my life was not always so veiled. I know what it means to sit with the barrel of a pistol in my mouth, asking myself why I can't just be like other people. I have finally come to find the answer to that question. Gender dysphoria is a demand made by one's soul to be recognized. On more than one occasion, I had to choose between my truth and my convenience. My soul announced to my mind that she would rather cease to exist than to continue as a lie. That is a hard truth to understand. I am a woman. Let me say that again. I am a woman. I could quote all the reasons why current research shows that to be true, but none of that matters to me. Every time I look in a mirror I am reminded of who I really am. I am Coleen. I am a woman. Nothing will ever change that truth.

What is gender dysphoria? Gender dysphoria is an uncomfortable truth that must be accepted, regardless of the cost. There was a time I dreaded the distress of seeing the wrong person in the mirror, but now I draw strength from the experience. To quote Lady Gaga, let me leave you with this thought. "I'm on the right track baby, 'cause I was born this way."

## **One More Day**

Nonfiction by Coleen Lynn Nicols

If you had a chance to spend one more day with someone who had passed on, with whom would you spend it? I can think of a great many people I would like to see again. I never got to tell my mother goodbye before she passed on. The same could be said of my eldest brother. I could name other people who have had an impact on my life, but there is one person I wish more than any other I could spend a day with. That person died December 12, 2019. In a twist of irony, the person I wish I could spend one last day with never really existed at all. You see, that person was who I spent a lifetime trying to be.

Please let me explain. There was once a young man named Bill. He was not unlike other boys growing up. He liked to fish and play war games with the other young boys in his neighborhood. Bill idolized the soldiers and sailors from the strong military community where he grew up. Yes, he wanted nothing more than for his father and heroes to be proud of him. However, I know his reasons for wanting to do well were much more important to him than anyone ever realized. Deep down, Bill was in conflict with himself. The young lad had a terrible secret he wanted to make go away more than anything else. Deep inside his soul, when he shut out the world and listened to the voices from within, Bill could hear a second voice. It was the voice of who I really was all along. Over the next five decades, the voice of the woman inside grew louder and louder until the day Bill decided to it was time to go. So, if I had one more day with Bill, what would we do, and what would I tell him?

Above all, I would tell Bill thank you. He came so close to just quitting on more than one occasion. I know the burden of carrying me around, oftentimes against his own will, was more than anyone should ever be asked to do. I know I was the source of Bill's fear, anxiety, and dark depression. I also know I was the reason he nearly ended both our lives on more than one occasion. I am alive today, filled with the joy of being who I was always meant to be, and yet I know my joy came at the cost of his. I owe him a great debt I can never repay. I weep for Bill with great remorse when I think of how my happiness came at his expense.

I have not forgotten that night in college when Caesar held Bill in his arms. It was the first time I ever really felt alive. I know my indulgence that night only served to add confusion to his life. Bill was never really the same after that night. If I could, I would take him by the hand and repeat that evening, this time explaining to him what he, and I, were feeling. I would take away Bill's guilt for betraying the values society had instilled in him. I would tell him he did nothing wrong.

I have never forgotten the guilt he felt over my sexuality. I am reminded of a story from when Bill was sixteen. He had found himself on probation. It doesn't really matter why, but suffice it to say he had gotten in trouble. Mr. Henry, his probation officer, liked to use wilderness hikes as a way to help those in his charge. But when the man lost his wallet, all eyes were turned to my former self. I remember Bill sitting in the chair at the police station at Zephyr Cove as they hooked up the polygraph. It seemed the entire world was certain he had stolen the man's wallet. I remember the look of frustration on the officer's face when the machine's reactions to Bill's answers proved he was innocent of the accusation. I am certain it was out of frustration when the policeman asked one final question: "Have you done anything wrong at all?".

Bill, I remember how our heart skipped a beat. You knew the machine would betray you, but you also knew you could not possibly admit the truth. ‘No’, Bill answered. I remember the sound of the machine scratching frantically as it recorded its opinion of the answer he gave. “You want to tell me about it?”, the officer asked. “I haven’t done anything wrong!” Bill insisted. I knew then just how much guilt Bill carried for allowing me, the woman inside him, to indulge in my desire.

I carry Bill’s guilt with me. In the end, I know Bill made the most noble gesture of all. He laid down his life that I might live. It is for this reason I strive to be the best version of myself. To do anything less would be to make his sacrifice meaningless. Bill bore my pain, and for it he was the better person. I will never forget that. Here’s to you, my friend. Go with all my love.

POETRY PRIZE WINNER

**To Be a Boy**

Poetry by Coleen Lynn Nicols

I'm sure one might think that being a boy  
Would be the source of very great joy,

After all it is hard for one to deny,  
The world favors men until the day that they die.

It is not my intent to slander the male sex,  
But rather to note they're at society's apex.

For me to suggest this in my fair prose,  
a notion your heart does avidly appose.

Before you depart from reading along,  
Perhaps I should make my case very strong.

A boy is a hero for his every conquest,  
While the girl is shamed, and at his behest.

A man can be rude to get his job done,  
While a woman must smile lest her deeds go undone.

A man goes to work then rests in his chair,  
Thinking a woman's efforts do not compare.

A man is allowed to put a woman in her place,  
At times by bringing his hand to her face.

How quickly it's assumed that such things are an exception,  
When the statistics suggest this is no deception.

We need not discuss the topic of rape,  
Nor her abortion prevented by needless red tape.

And what of the workplace, where both sexes go,  
Of this I am sure, her pay will be low.

This disparity is certainly a very grave injustice,  
So it is important that we all discuss this.

Why did I chose to have such a talk,  
Not caring if anyone would listen or baulk?

My life is unique, which allows me to render,  
An opinion that comes from my being transgender.

I lived as a man for much of my life,  
And now I desire to be a good wife.

To speak out as a woman, I do apprehend,  
Knowing my old life, I needed to amend.

I now see the issues we all need to solve,  
So I live as a woman who has great resolve.

I may have been guilty of things before hand,  
But the flames of reform, they must be fanned.

So this I remember, in word and in deed,  
That the cause of women we must all heed.

I long for the day when all things are well,  
That it will come, only time will tell.

**Inner Freedom**  
Art by Matthew Stuckert



## **Living as a Man Versus Living as a Woman: A Comparison**

Nonfiction by Coleen Lynn Nicoles

Have you ever stopped to consider how different your life would be if you were not the person you are today? Can you imagine how different life would seem if you viewed the world from another person's perspective? Under ordinary circumstances, one could only imagine the answer to this question. For me, however, life has been anything but ordinary. As a transgender woman, I have had the unique opportunity of seeing the world from two perspectives. First, I previously lived my life as a man. I should point out that I have always been a woman, though coming to terms with that truth has been a long and difficult journey for me. Prior to coming to understand my correct gender identity, I viewed the world much in the same way most men do. For the past year and a half, however, I have lived my life as the woman I truly am. Now that I see the world through female eyes, each interaction I experience in the world around me has drawn me to an unanticipated realization: The life a man experiences is very different from the life a woman experiences.

When I lived as a man, I was never really aware of how biased society was towards the desires of men, nor could I see how disinterested society was in the opinions of women. I am a bit embarrassed that I used to embrace phrases like "a man and his wife." I felt I had a duty to instill in my daughters that they would not be complete until they had husbands. I wholeheartedly believed the mantra "a woman's place is in the home." After all, I had always been taught that women did not have the mental fortitude required to make the big decisions that govern the world. That the opinion of a woman was considered less relevant than the opinion of a man certainly worked in my favor, so I simply accepted the notion.

In contrast, let us consider my life now that I am living in my correct gender. I now realize just how unfair society is to women. Would I now seek to put myself under the thumb of a man? The thought of relinquishing my right to self-determined direction in my life is abhorrent to me. While I do not deny my desire to have a man in my life, I have no intention of allowing that person to be anything more, or less, than my equal. However, I quickly discovered men oftentimes do not fancy women who buck the system. In fact, my very first date with a man ended in the same hour in which we met. From the very beginning of our time together, I quickly discovered how he had envisioned our evening would go. We would eat at a restaurant of his choosing, then watch a movie he had wanted to see. My date even made a point of hinting at his idea of how the evening would end, presenting this information in a way that suggested a sense of entitlement based on the fact that he would be picking up the check. In that moment of humiliation, I quickly learned how very different life would be for me living as a woman.

Society has gone to great lengths to ensure men are comfortable. I do not begrudge this fact in general, but I have discovered there is great incongruity in how products are designed for men in comparison to how they are designed for women. This is most evident in the fashion industry. In my old life, the matter of getting dressed was little more than five minutes of effort. With the donning of a comfortable pair of khakis and a pullover shirt, along with a pair of loafers, I was ready for all but the most formal of affairs. When I did take the time to wear something more formal, perhaps a suit and tie, I found myself showered in compliments for taking the time to dress so nicely.

However, as a woman, I can say with great certainty that comfort has little to do with how I leave my home. For example, I find wearing a brassiere uncomfortable, but not as uncomfortable as the stares I get from strangers when I opt to forgo wearing the garment. I can certainly wear a pair of jeans, but only if they are tight enough to limit my movement and sometimes my ability to breathe. How can I possibly not see the unfairness in being expected to wear more expensive clothing all the time just to be thought of as being acceptable? Most of all, I miss the old days of wearing comfortable shoes. If you have not walked up the twenty-two steps of the courthouse in the town in which I currently live while wearing four-inch heels, you may not realize just how little regard was given to the comfort of women when the building was designed.

Third, I have discovered that society deals with the issue of reputation very differently when considering men versus women. For men, a reputation of achievement is everything. Men are admired for how much money they make, how much property they own, and how many women they conquer. I was taught from the time I was born that the measure of success of a man is his ability to provide for the women and children in his life. On the surface that assumption may seem a worthwhile attitude, but all too often men have used this sentiment as an excuse for bad behavior. Masculinity has become toxic as generation after generation of men have tried to prove themselves to those who have come before.

Contrariwise, a woman who dares ask for the same wage as a man is called domineering. There is always a presumption that a woman who owns a corporation or a large estate did so by marriage or inheritance. That less than ten percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women is widely understood. Competition amongst males is already intense, so allowing women to join the fray is unthinkable to most men. This prejudice is why so few women are ever given the opportunity to prove themselves capable of higher responsibility in a male dominated society. For each successful woman, there are a handful of men with bruised egos. That bruising carries over to other interactions between the sexes as well. One need only consider how women are viewed should they choose to enjoy the company of more than one man. A man feels his validity as a male is being challenged by any woman who is less than completely fulfilled by what he alone brings to the table or to the bed.

Next, I have noticed men are allowed to shirk observing the tenets of reproductive rights and responsibilities. All too often, when a man finds himself infected with a sexually transmitted disease, the blame is put on whomever he had spent intimate time with. Promiscuity is a label that is all too infrequently placed upon men. Most males can also walk away from a chance encounter after a long night of drinking without bearing the responsibility of an untoward pregnancy. To add insult to injury, when a man is found culpable in such cases, there is an outcry as to how unfair his being held financially responsible for the child is.

As a transgender woman, I do not have to fear an unwanted pregnancy, but that leeway does not mean I do not have to concern myself with sexually transmitted diseases. Like most women, I am expected to provide a way of mitigating this risk. If a woman has the forethought of bringing some form of protection, she is still faced with the task of convincing her partner to agree to use it. Even when these hurdles are overcome, many mistakes still happen. Many women are shamed for having a child out of wedlock, oftentimes without considering there was a man involved to begin with. Indeed, one would have overlooked the obvious to not see how the engineering of our society was designed by men. You do not believe this assertion? Let us

consider the fact that most medical insurance policies would not pay for birth control prior to the Affordable Care Act, which was signed into law in 2010, and yet those same policies had provisions for erectile dysfunction medications, such as Viagra, starting in 1998, the year the drug first became available. The message sent by observing this disparity is all too clear: Our society is more concerned with ensuring men can enjoy intimacy on demand while the desires of women simply do not matter.

Finally, I have discovered the overall mental load placed on men is far more manageable. In my old life, I certainly tried to be responsible. There were bills to pay, after all. As the man of the house, I had been taught that the burden of responsibility for ensuring my family had all they required to survive fell to me. I remember coming home from my job each evening with the expectation of being appreciated for all that I did. We had a house, a car, and plenty of groceries. I felt my contribution to our family stood majestically over the trivial chores my former wife performed.

My life is so different now. I am a single woman facing the world alone. I abhor the notion of established gender roles in that they perpetuate the reality of toxic masculinity. However, for the sake of clarity, please allow me to point out that I have to fulfill the traditional role of both a male and a female in my life now. I still have to make a living. I still have to pay my bills. However, my mental load does not end there. I have laundry to tend to and dinner to cook. When was that car insurance due again? Oh dear, I have forgotten I had a doctor's appointment earlier in the day. My parakeets are squawking. Did I forget to buy more bird seed when I went shopping today? My life has become infinitely more complex as a woman. I can see very plainly how, even if I did have a life partner, my mental load is simply much greater now.

My experiences are my own. How I was taught as a child still affects how I view the world around me today. Am I suggesting my observations are absolute? Obviously, the answer to that question is no. I am happy to say there is certainly more flexibility in society today with regard to gender roles. I take this encouraging truth as a sign that mankind is continuing to evolve and for the better. However, we still cannot overlook the many ways in which life is so very different for men and women. In spite of the fact that the first part of my life was very uncomfortable for me, I count myself fortunate to have lived as both male and female. As a result of my experiences, I believe I have a better understanding of the world around me. I believe with my entire being that I am a better human, not because I am a woman, but because I understand we all need to work towards creating a society where no gender is considered superior to another.

## The Effects of Being Denied Your Gender Identity

Nonfiction by Coleen Lynn Nicols

On a typical spring morning in 1977, something happened in my life that would take me years to understand. I was coming of age, and while I felt excited about entering the next stage of my young life, I also felt very confused. The prospect of becoming an adult answered something primal inside of me. What new secrets of life would become illuminated as I began my rite of passage to adulthood? My emotions ran high at first, but soon I sensed something was wrong. I was beginning my transformation from being a child to the young man I had been raised to be. For me, this moment of realization was nothing short of non sequitur. Everything I had ever been taught told me it was time to become a man and yet I suddenly realized deep down in my soul I desired nothing more than to become a woman. Every fiber of my being objected to the path before me. I felt as though I had been sold a ticket to take a journey, only to realize my destination was not where I thought it should be. Like a locomotive engine that had been derailed from its tracks, this first realization that I was a female made me realize I might never arrive at my desired destination. Over the next four and a half decades of my life, I would face a series of consequences resulting from being denied the opportunity to live according to my true gender identity.

First, as I have already stated, I found myself confused. My family lived on a military installation in Southern Spain when I first discovered the incongruity between my gender identity and the gender assigned to me by my parents at the time of my birth. The gender stereotypes that were omnipresent during the era in which I lived were further emphasized by the small military community in which I lived. I had always bought into the notion that the service men I grew up around were heroes for saving us from the “Red Menace” even if hindsight tells me my perceptions of world politics at that time may have been a bit skewed by circumstances. I do not wish to convey the suggestion that women who serve to protect our nation are any less notable for their sacrifice than men, but in 1977 that truth was not often acknowledged. How could I possibly grow up to be a brave soldier if I were anything other than a man? For the first time in my life, the ideals of my childhood were challenged by desires being usurped by my very soul. I wanted to be a woman. I did not know why, but I knew nonetheless.

The confusion I felt wasn’t just limited to who I would be in the years to follow. The change of life I was going through also marked the early manifestations of my sexual identity. I very much considered myself a boy, as there was no reason at that time to think anything would ever change that reality. In more practical terms, I was confused over who I was supposed to kiss. The thought of kissing a boy went against the grain of everything I had ever been taught. In fact, there were bad words to describe that sort of boy, and I certainly did not want to be thought of in those terms. To this day, I find it odd that the idea of girls kissing girls isn’t really thought of in a negative way in light of the prevailing opinion most hold concerning boys kissing boys. I do not know if my decision to kiss a girl, something that would not happen for at least another couple of years, was so much a decision of choice as it was a decision to play it safe.

The confusion of my youth continued to grow, much in the way a small snowball grows as it rolls down a hill. As I entered the latter half of my high school years, I found it more difficult to ignore the confusion I felt over my gender. I tried to be good at sports, not because of a desire to participate in such activities, but rather to try and make the feminine feelings in me disappear. My attempts to find a girlfriend, something demanded by the peer pressure of high

school society, were awkward at best. What I can see in hindsight today I could not see when I was a freshman in high school. My interest in girls was simply an interest in understanding girls, not in actually pursuing a relationship with one.

My confusion took an evolutionary step brought about by something that happened in the summer after my sophomore year. A fellow male student had made some vague hints I found myself unable to ignore. I was not at all confused by the proposition before me. In fact, I understood what he had suggested with absolute clarity. In that moment, my confusion gave way to conflict. My confusion over my gender identity had been an internal struggle to that point. Now I felt myself in complete conflict. The logic in my brain screamed to refrain, but a whisper from somewhere deep in my soul silenced everything in my mind until I could only hear one single word: YES.

From that moment forward, my life was in constant conflict. Something very primal in me awoke after the incident with my classmate. I found myself very aware of my desire to answer the biological imperative that exists between males and females of most species. The only problem was that I wanted to answer that imperative as the woman I felt I was supposed to be. A disturbing trend began on that day which followed me the rest of my life. I continued to deny my femininity by over emphasizing my masculinity. I pursued any number of stereotypical male activities like bodybuilding, free form rock climbing, and even free form diving. In spite of my best efforts to embrace the stereotypes of masculinity, some men seemed to know they could make propositions to me. To make matters worse, I found myself unable to decline such invitations.

The conflict within me continued to grow as time went by. With each indiscretion, I found I was growing angry with myself. After all, I was a man, and a straight man at that. How could I possibly resolve my perceived truth with my actions? Overwhelmed, I decided to seek help. That help came in the form of a therapist. I did not disclose to the gentleman anything having to do with my gender. After all, I was still convinced I was a man. While it is true that gender identity does not necessarily relate to sexual identity, most believed otherwise in the mid-1980s. With this misconception in mind, I chose to simply explain to the therapist how I found it difficult to refuse sexual advances from other men. After an extended conversation, the man rendered his professional opinion of my condition. I remember leaving his office with the words "sexual deviant" echoing in my mind. My will to continue one more day was crushed. The conflict I struggled with spawned within me a dark depression that I struggle with to this very day. Every part of me believed I was defective. The universe had obviously made some grand mistake when I was formed.

Depression is a powerful emotion that can compel you to behave in ways that are rarely in your best interest. My day-to-day activities became more and more risky and belligerent with the passing of time. Abusing alcohol became commonplace as I found myself preferring the numbness of inebriation over the feminine feelings I could not make go away. Like a cog in some great machine, I simply existed from day to day, repeating a pattern of existence void of any desire to amend myself. I was convinced my problem was systemic and, as such, incurable. With each passing day, the depression I felt continued to grow. Hopelessness, despair, and lethargy were all that remained within me. My health was beginning to wane. With each passing day, I found myself wanting my life to be over in the way that one wishes a boring movie to just get to the end. My depression was on the verge of giving way to something new.

I sat on my bed, tears rolling down my cheeks. The pistol in my hand seemed my only means of escape from the dark place I found myself trapped. I allowed my mind to ponder my life one last time, perhaps looking for a reason to stay a decision I had already made. I could not deny I had lived a good life in many ways. I had traveled all over the world. I had raised a family. My career had been mostly successful. However, the depression in me had birthed the only offspring the dark condition was capable of. I could not bear the thought of continuing one more day with the unresolved feelings I had been unable to rid myself of over my lifetime. I was broken and ready to be tossed to the scrapyard. Even the depression that had led me to that day seemed to take a back seat to my desire to just end my life. The sequence of events that followed me through my life was about to come to an end. With one final deep breath, I nodded my head. I had made my decision.

I cannot explain why, but I didn't follow through with what I had intended that day. Whether my reprieve was a quirk of fate, an intervention from something otherworldly, or something in between, I cannot say. I just knew there was one possible explanation for my condition I had summarily dismissed on more than one occasion. What if everything I had ever been taught was a lie? What if the feelings of femininity I had fought against for so long were an indication I really was a woman? Over the next several months, I began to explore the topic of gender identity. I soon discovered the lessons of my youth concerning my gender were anything but facts. I quickly discovered that most of the notions of gender I had clung to for so long had been debunked by modern science quite thoroughly. The dysphoric moment I felt when I started my change of life was my soul reaching out to my mind. On December 12, 2019, I began the process of medically transitioning from a male body to a female body. Once and for all, the chain of effects caused by being denied my true gender identity came to an end.

**Broken 2**

*The second image in a series of 4 photographs*

Art by Dr. Lauri Reidmiller



**Life with Depression and Anxiety**  
Poetry by Amber Ward

Someone asks how you are  
You reply I am doing good  
They say that's just life just keep going  
You think to yourself if they only understood  
You try to find words to explain

The pain and emptiness inside you  
Because inside your broken again  
    Someone asks if you are ok  
    Like a robot you respond I'm fine  
    They cannot really know about  
The war going on in your own mind  
    All you want is to just be alone  
    Although you know being alone only makes it worse  
You need to talk to a friend but you cannot make yourself pick up the phone  
    When you have asked for help in the past  
        You still felt alone because  
        No one helped when you asked  
So, you sit alone with your thoughts, emotions, and anxiety  
    You overthink every single event of your life  
    You feel so weighed down how can you ever be free  
        You try to plan today and tomorrow  
        Worried about what you have done wrong and right  
        You cannot push past the pain and the sorrow  
    Family and friends wonder why you won't answer the phone  
    Your children need you to teach them, love them, and be their mom  
    How do you tell your family, friends, and family to leave you alone?  
You feel so drained and exhausted, but you need to find the will to live  
There is so much going on in your mind that reality seems so far away  
Your worry has stretched you so thin that you have nothing left to give  
    You miss the days when you laughed, smiled, and loved  
        Every day you struggle to just get up out of bed  
        You keep praying for solace from the Lord above  
        You just want to sleep to get out of your own head  
        Your mind is a traitor always feeding you lies  
The plans you made last week sounded great at the time  
    Now socializing is too much for you to even try  
    You think about the appointment you have tomorrow  
But the thoughts of leaving home, of driving, and being in a crowd  
    Just bring you to an obsessive and overwhelming sorrow  
    You know you should pray, talk to a friend, and stay busy  
        You have lost track of the days and time  
The thought of getting a shower and getting dressed make you so dizzy  
    You just cry out your heart and soul instead  
    You feel unworthy, misunderstood, and hopeless  
    Feeling completely lost you just curl back into your bed.

**Blue Jays**  
Fiction by Nicholas Reidmiller

Go to sleep.

Escape life.

Adieu, fear.

Goodbye, pain.

Is it that easy? What are you leaving?

A family? Friend? Your Aspirations?

The tree is covered with snow,

But come Spring, it emits life.

There is always a tomorrow

Always a second chance.

You can stop.

Open up.

Hello, Joy.

Wake up.

His eyes sprang open, a sweat beading on his pale forehead. His bed creaked grudgingly as he turned his head to look at his clock. Shakily, he brushed aside the opaque, green medicine bottles to look at the dimly lit LCD alarm clock. 12:20 P.M.

He sighed heavily, and looked back up at the ceiling. The last few days had been torment for him. The past always seemed to be the present, and the future never came.

The star shaped textures on the ceiling beckoned him. They seemed to point out vital lessons. We are all beautiful individually, they said, but together, we create a masterpiece. A star is a bright light by itself, but billions together form a universe.

He was silent for a while, listening to the hum of the furnace, and the chirping of birds outside of his window.

Birds.

He rotated his frail body out of a lying position and sat up, feet resting on the floor. He kicked aside some mail, which he presumed to be more bills. Placing his rough hands on his skinny legs, he pushed himself to stand up. Immediately, but with hesitation, he traversed to the closed window.

The chirping got louder, and more frequent. He reached the window and rested his hands on the edge of both sides of the curtain. With a breath, he pulled aside the curtain.

Sometimes.

You don't know

All you're missing

Until it's all gone.

Richard gazed out at the scene that was presented to him. To his left, a 24-foot blue spruce became the new home of a group of blue jays. They zipped in and out of the branches deliberately, tending to their young. To his right, he noticed his tulips, which had remained dormant for quite some time now, were beginning to bloom. And center, and almost directly overhead, the sun emerged with all of its brilliance from behind a white, fluffy cloud.

A pause. Now, Richard began to weep as he processed what he witnessed and realized this was reality, and it was now, and the future held more like it. All it took was strength and trust in himself and those around him.

He turned away from the window and walked to his bedroom door. He placed his hand on the cold, chrome door handle and twisted it. He pushed the door open and stepped out of his room. Turning left, he headed to his living room. The landline sat on his sofa table. The answering machine was flashing; he'd missed numerous calls in the past few weeks.

Floorboards whining as he stepped over them, Richard arrived at the sofa table. He reached his hands towards the blue phone receiver and paused. He knew it was right. Click, went the receiver as he picked it up, and he began to dial a number. A voice spoke on the other end of the line after a few rings.

"Mid-Valley rehabilitation center, this is Dr. Gupta."

"Dr. Gupta," Richard said tentatively, "I'm ready to start my treatment. When should I come in?"

The Blue Jays flew past the living room window, sunlight glinting off of their shiny feathers.

## NONFICTION PRIZE WINNER

### **Stereotyping Addicts Increases the View that Addiction is a Choice**

Nonfiction by Amber Ward

At the age of fifteen I was a naive and sheltered little girl because I had lived in an isolated part of West Virginia's hills my entire life and I had never been anywhere beyond those rolling hills. The summer I was fifteen I went to visit with some distant family in North Carolina. I had no idea what illegal substances, drug abuse, or addiction were, but I soon found out more than I would ever have liked to know.

One night at a beach party my older cousin gave me a pill that she said would help me stay awake. I was so trusting that I did not ask any questions or doubt my cousin at all. I took the pill, which I later learned was Adderall, and when it hit me, I felt invincible. I did not sleep for twenty-four hours and I did not consciously know how much time had passed, because the only thing I knew was how great I felt. That was the first of the many times I got high and when I look back on the experience now, I do not believe I became an addict from a choice I made. Yes, I took the pill willingly, but I was clueless of what it was or what consequences it would lead too. I was a child and was simply doing what I had been taught and that was to listen to my elders. My cousin was thirty-five years old, and I trusted her. Why would I ever have thought that she was giving me something illegal?

That was twenty-one years ago, and after many trials, shame, hurt, and soul searching, I can proudly say that I am a recovering addict. I have been clean for six years, and that makes me one of the lucky ones. Drug addiction is the cause of much controversy in the United States. According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics (2019), in 2019 over 67,893 deaths in the US were caused by drug overdose (Drug Overdose Deaths, para.1). The NCDAS (2019) also reports over 31million citizens had a substance abuse disorder in 2018 (Drug Overdose Deaths, para.2). The NCDAS (2019), to no one's surprise, states that in 2018 the state with the highest percentage of overdose deaths was West Virginia, with 51.5 deaths per 100,000 people (Demographics, para. 1).

If you look at the statistics of substance abuse addiction and deaths, it is easy to understand why there is so much debate about addiction. The government debates what kind of policies to create to end addiction and whether addicts should face harsh criminal implications or be given the option to seek treatment, and this is just a small sample of the debates on addiction. The most controversial and important debate is about whether addiction is a disease or a choice. When people view addiction as a choice, they most likely believe the stereotypes of a "typical" drug addict. The stigma that surrounds addiction and the view that addicts have a choice go hand in hand and create a never-ending cycle that is perpetuated by society.

Addiction was declared a disease in 1997 by the American Medical Association, and many other organizations like The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), and the National Institute of Health (NIH) label addiction as a disease or a disorder. In the article "Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction" by the NIDA (2020), the definition of addiction is that

it is a chronic and relapsing disorder that involves compulsively using and seeking drugs despite the negative effects (p.4): "Addiction is considered a brain disorder, because it involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress, and self-control" (NIDA,2020, P.4). My personal experience with substance abuse addiction confirms my stance that addiction is a brain disorder, because when I was actively using, I had no control over my cravings, mood swings, or even my thought patterns. I still have days when I crave drugs after six years of active recovery, but through intense treatment and learning, I now recognize my triggers and know how to avoid giving in to my compulsions.

The other most prominent view on addiction is that addiction is a choice. The people who view addiction as a choice usually claim that addiction is a learned behavior and that since there are many cases of addiction that end in recovery, then addiction must be a choice. In this view, addiction is about self-control and the idea that many addicts voluntarily stop using substances by the age of thirty. The phrase, addicts choose to end their addiction in recovery, is mind boggling to me, because for most addicts recovery never ends. Recovery is an ongoing process of learning to rethink and becoming accountable for your actions, and recovery teaches an addict what their triggers and flaws are so that addicts can rejoin society as productive members. Recovery never ends. I know people who have been going to Narcotics Anonymous meetings for thirty years or more, and they must keep coming back to stay clean and healthy.

In the book *Chemical Dependency Opposing Viewpoints* (2003), Sally Satel, a lecturer at the Yale University School of Medicine, (2001) writes in her essay "Addiction Is Not a Brain Disease" that drug addiction is not a brain disease, instead it is a behavioral phenomenon, and she argues that "addicts are capable of self-control...The fact that addicts seek treatment and try to quit drugs when they recognize the negative consequences of drug use is proof that chemical dependency is a voluntary decision" (p.63). Unfortunately, Sally Satel is not alone in the view that addiction is a voluntary choice and viewing addiction as a choice increases the negative stereotypes that addicts face in every stage of their disorder.

Stigma has always surrounded addiction and sadly the stigma of addiction is negative and discriminatory. The stereotyping of addict's affects not just the addict, but also their families and friends. Many people view addicts as lacking self-control, immoral, and useless beings who do not deserve any attention or to even live. In his book *Inside the Opioid Addiction Crisis- And How to End It: American Fix*, Ryan Hampton (2018) lists samples of comments he gets every day on his social media posts; one example says, "You made your bed, now lie in it. No one forced you to become an addict. We spend too many tax dollars on you all already. 'Opioid addicts on their way to recovery.' No way, more like opioid addicts fixin' to lose all their free handout lifestyles." (anonymous, p. 171). Hampton (2018) uses these examples to show the hateful and hurtful way strangers feel they have the right to talk to him. This is a small example of how society treats addicts in any stage of recovery (p.172).

Negative stereotypes impact addicts in negative ways and create discrimination toward addiction and addicts no matter what stage of the disease they are in. In an interview with Brandy Platt, a case manager at Harmony Ridge Recovery Center (personal communication, July 14,2020), she stated that saying addiction is a choice makes society view addicts as having moral

failings. Platt (2020) also said that when higher-ups view addiction as a choice, the rates of incarceration increase for people suffering from addiction and the rates of addicts in recovery decrease. The terms junkie, crackhead, lowlife, and even drug addict are all derogatory words that hurt people suffering from the disease of addiction. Families of addicts suffer almost as much discrimination from the stigma of addiction as the addicts themselves do. In her book *The Weight of a Feather: A Mother's Journey Through the opiate Addiction Crisis*, Lynda Araoz (2019) describes what it was like for her while her son was addicted to heroin. Araoz states that if you tell someone your son has cancer or some other serious disability, they will flock to you ready to help in any way they can, but mention that your child has an addiction, and everyone will run away and make a point of keeping a safe distance because it is a shameful act to have an addicted child or to be an addict (p.54).

We need to do everything we can to help reduce the stigma that surrounds addiction, and if we succeed, more people suffering from addiction will feel less shame and seek treatment. By reducing the stigma of addiction, not only will more addicts seek help, but they also will not face as many challenges when they are first in recovery or even after years of recovery. In her book, Araoz, explains what she learned along the long road to her son's recovery. She states, "There doesn't seem to be any consistent way of viewing an addict. Is the addict a victim or do we hold an addict entirely responsible for his or her actions?...There is a unique stigma associated with addiction that isn't attached to other medical conditions" (p.93). This attitude persists even after the process of recovery; addicts cannot get a job, a nice apartment, or any financial aid to go to college if they have a criminal record of drug charges. Moreover, there is no help available for an addict to transition from treatment back into society (p.93).

We must come to a compromise on the debate of whether addiction is a disease or a choice if we are going to help end the addiction crisis and reduce the stigma of addiction. Both sides already agree that addiction usually starts as a choice, so I believe that would be a good starting point to find some type of agreement of the classification of addiction. We need to convince the opposing side that, after the initial choice, addiction becomes a progressive disorder of the brain. In my interview with Ms. Platt believes the best way to come to an agreement is for more people to talk about their experiences with addiction and recovery. She stated that if more addicts talk openly and honestly about their struggles with the disease of addiction, then the people with an opposing view will have no choice but to start listening. We need to get the word out, and the more real stories are heard by the general public, the more people will start to open their minds up and realize the truth of addiction, that it is a disease, and the stigma of addiction is only harming addicts further (personal communication, July 14, 2020).

Addiction does not discriminate; it affects people of every gender, age, class, religion, and ethnicity. Most people do not gain any understanding of addiction until it strikes someone they love. We must open our minds and our hearts to addicts and addiction. Society needs to stop discriminating and stereotyping addicts. Those of us living with addiction need to start insisting that our lives matter. Every human life is important, and we need to do everything we can to change the way addiction and people suffering from the disease of addiction is viewed. In his book *American Fix*, Ryan Hampton (2018) says we need to change the language we use to

identify ourselves and our progress with addiction. “The extremely negative connotations of the word “addict” have taught me that we need to be really careful with how we talk about addiction” (p.172). Hampton (2019) goes on to say that addiction is a negative term that affects people's lives, and the term addiction is like a modern-day scarlet letter. He says the terms he uses are “person with substance use disorder” or “person in recovery” (p.173).

The most important focus in the addiction crisis should be gaining more attention about reducing the stigmas of addiction, increasing funding to help addicts in recovery transition back to society, and realizing addicts' lives are important too. We need to hear the story of every person in recovery and celebrate the fact that they are warriors. Society needs to stop blaming the addicts and start helping them feel wanted, valued, and accepted. We need to stop arguing about the classification of addiction and start putting our time, money, and energy toward saving those with addiction.

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## The Stages of Grief

Poetry by Amber Ward

You are feeling so many emotions.  
Your sad and empty.  
Your heart feels as if it has been ripped in two.  
Your heart and soul are crying out.  
You are so angry and have no way to release the anger.  
You are afraid and you feel completely alone.  
Your mind and sense of time are distorted.  
Your mouth wants to shout why?  
You want to scream why, why, why?  
Why now?  
Why him?  
Why this?  
Why her?  
Why did you leave me alone?  
Why was the person I love so much taken from me?  
Your fear starts to become about your own mortality.  
Your eyes have dried up and have no more tears to shed.  
Your prayers are a mixed-up jumbled mess.  
Your hearing is fuzzy and sounds like white noise.  
You want to ask everyone to please stop!  
Just please stop, stop, stop!  
Stop telling me everything happens for a reason!  
Stop saying we all have a time set by God!  
Stop saying you are sorry for my loss!  
Stop looking at me with pity in your eyes!  
Your anger is back with a vengeance.  
Your just craving solitude because you feel trapped and claustrophobic.  
You only need ten minutes alone to adjust your mind and emotions.  
You are telling yourself that it is your duty to be the strong one.  
You feel like your close to your breaking point.  
You cannot get past the shock and anger.  
Your thoughts keep drifting to mindless matter as a self-defense mechanism.  
Your time alone is so close now as people start to leave one-by-one.  
You know you just need to release the pain, anger, and fear.  
You just need to cry.  
You just need to cry, cry, cry!  
You cry from the heartbreak.  
You cry when you think of the good memories.  
You cry while listening to certain songs.  
You cry from all the pent-up rage inside you.  
You cry from your selfish resentment.  
You cry until your existence no longer seems real.  
Your completely exhausted now.

Your emotionally spent.  
Your physically just an empty shell of yourself.  
You must sleep now.  
Your body needs sleep, sleep, sleep!  
You fall into a deep unconscious dream.  
Your dream seems so real.  
Your dream becomes a nightmare.  
You are trying to make yourself wake up.  
You just want out of this nightmare because you know this cannot be real.  
Your positive that all is well.  
Your finally awake.  
Your drowsy yet aware.  
You are replaying it all in your mind.  
Your conscious mind knows the truth.  
You realize your loss and that you are going through the stages of grief.  
Your processing grief, grief, grief!

**Best Friends**  
Fiction by Lois Spencer

"Thank goodness," my mother said when the for-sale sign came down from the old Dover place and the Mitchell family moved in. "Maybe now you'll have somebody decent to play with."

I trailed a step behind as Mom marched up the street, casserole in hand. The green shoots sprouting in Mrs. Mitchell's flower beds and the freshly swept front porch received an approving nod as Mom lifted the brass knocker. While the women got acquainted, I endured the itchy sofa fabric and the monotony of piano scales somewhere in the house. The scales ceases, and a girl with limp brown hair and skeletal thighs appeared. Somber blue eyes in an unsmiling face indicated a total lack of adventure. Compared to my best friend Margie, Andrea Mitchell looked about as exciting as ditch water.

\* \* \*

Margie Baker and her mother had lived across the street from us for nearly a year. Mrs. Baker wore too much make-up, had the voice of a Harpy, and never mentioned a Mr. Baker. Margie showed up, uninvited, for my birthday party in February, and after the party money was missing from Mom's change purse. To hear Mom tell it, Margie might as well have burned down the house.

Before the Mitchells came, Margie was the only other kid in the neighborhood, and after the birthday incident, I avoided her, knowing if she ever invaded our space again, Mom would ground me for life. Then one morning during recess, I sat kicking dirt in the hollowed out well under my swing as a group of eager girls converged on Margie. When she saw that I wasn't among them, she made an impatient "come here" gesture. I went over.

Margie said the facts-of-life talk the health nurse had given us girls was the watered-down version. Hers was far more explicit and, in my view, beyond credulity. I hadn't met a boy, I announced, I'd let into my pants, and never would. The other girls snickered, and Margie's sharp green eyes focused on the nay-sayer, her freckles standing out in huge splotches against the winter-pale face. I'd stolen her thunder, and I wondered how and when she would seek retribution.

The following Saturday, I was scuffing around in the cinders on the sidewalk when Margie leaned out her front door and yelled, "Hey, Annie. Come on over."

Curiosity about what the run-down house with peeling paint and crooked window blinds was like inside overrode my caution. Besides, Mom's vacuum cleaner hummed upstairs. I dashed across the street.

The Baker house was dark and cluttered. Mrs. Baker was at the kitchen table in a satiny red robe. A stained coffee cup and topped-out ashtray sat amid the scattering of newspaper sections and breakfast leavings. A blue haze of cigarette smoke hung over her head, seeming to absorb the room's oxygen. Odors of stale grease and moldy dish towels validated my mom's

opinion of her housekeeping. Curiosity satisfied, I abandoned good manners and backed out of the kitchen.

"Mom doesn't know where I am," I said.

Mrs. Baker's throaty smoker's laugh followed me to the door. "I'll bet she doesn't, honey."

\* \* \*

If I had offended Margie, you'd never have known it. Soon after, she invited me to join in her rambles. Mom stopped just short of forbidding them. What she really lamented was the fact that Daddy didn't make enough money to move us into the new addition on the edge of town where I could keep better company and she could have a better house.

Margie and I headed uptown and made a pass through the five-and-ten and the drug store, fingering merchandise and ignoring wary-eyed shopkeepers. Then we cut down the alley behind the supermarket and Cole's Cafe where the pungent odor of liquor seeped out of the dumpster. She had two favorite spots. One was the lock next to the bridge crossing the Muskingum River. She would hop the damaged wire fence and walk out onto the wall, peering into the nearly empty channel. Eventually, she coaxed me into venturing a few feet onto the wall. I knew Mom would kill me if she found out, but that knowledge only added another layer to the enticement.

Her other favorite was the cemetery. Huge oaks and elms surrounded monolithic tombstones as old as the trees, the air extra loamy and moist. One tall stone with a hovering angel had a crack running along its base. Any minute, Margie said, the ghost of the five-year-old who was buried there could send the angel crashing down on our heads. Skepticism prompted my hearty shove on the angel's backside and Margie moved on. Far back the winding gravel lane was a tool shed. A cross timber held the door shut, and a padlock kept everybody out except the caretaker, an ancient man who looked like he'd feel more at home under the sod than on it. As May progressed, the carpet of grass became thick and deep and we watched the old man trim weeds around the stones and tree trunks like a movie played in slow motion.

For all her braggadocio and ability to shock other fifth graders, Margie had no real friends. Come Saturday, she'd appear on my back porch and wait while I finished the short list of chores posted on the refrigerator. When Mom asked what we did all day, I reeled off walking down various streets, visiting the playground, picking up discarded soda bottles and recycling them for a nickel apiece; I never mentioned Cole's Café, the lock wall, or the graveyard.

One reason I stuck with Margie was her insight into the seamier side. And, I recognized her as a spirit set-apart, a loner by nature or circumstance. I valued her enough to keep quiet when she slipped merchandise into her pocket. I took a drag from a Camel cigarette while we sat on the lock wall. The acrid smoke went up my nose, and I jumped to my feet. I could have fallen into the murky water if Margie hadn't grabbed my arm to steady me. Later, recalling the fierce grip of her hand, I realized that Margie, for all her lack of refinement, was my friend.

\* \* \*

The morning after Mom and I visited the Mitchell's, I was sent up the street to escort Andrea to our house. We spent the morning dressing paper dolls and scooping up jacks from the hardwood floor between bounces of the hard rubber ball. We were having cupcakes and lemonade at the kitchen table when I heard Margie's voice. Mom beat me to the door and told her I was busy.

Margie could look right through the screen and see us. A pattern of tiny squares muted her coppery hair and obliterated her freckles, and I realized that something far more impervious than screen separated us now that Andrea had entered the equation. I felt cheated, forced to share chocolate cupcakes with a silent partner who never dropped a crumb on the oilcloth. Later, when Andrea walked back up the street, I saw Margie hunched in her porch swing with a stack of comics, looking small and skinny and abandoned.

"It wasn't my idea," I told her later, knowing I could never explain the impossibility of ditching Andrea without dire consequences. Margie and I made our usual rounds, but she passed through the five-and-ten without nabbing a thing. I half expected an ultimatum. I should have realized that Margie was cagier than I'd first thought.

Once Andrea could venture beyond her street, our pair became a threesome and the addition doused our adventures with cold water. Margie tressed lightly at first, but once she realized I had decided to remain neutral, she launched her opening volley. From the playground behind the school Margie pointed out the classrooms where the meanest teachers inflicted cruelties on newbies. Andrea's face drained of color, guileless blue eyes seeking mine. I gave her the slightest of headshakes. Margie grabbed Andrea's hand and dragged her to the swings. She shoved her onto a seat and pushed the swing higher and higher until Andrea was shrieking and twisting, close to slamming into the posts. Andrea avoided us for a week, but as lonely a soul as Margie and I, she found our company better than none at all.

\* \* \*

For a couple of days late in June, a haze hung over the valley; distant rumblings of thunder tantalized gardeners whose withering plants demanded daily watering. "I'm starting a club," Margie informed us on one such morning.

"What kind of club?" Andrea asked, apprehensive after her experience on the swings.

"To be in it, you have to pass the initiation." Margie led us abruptly into the alley behind Dexter's Grille, where exhaust fans spewed out a greasy invitation.

"And since you're new, you're first." Margie whipped a blue bandanna out of her pocket and twisted it into a blindfold. "This is how you show your friends you trust them."

Andrea's expression begged me to object, while Margie's prodded my approval. It wasn't going to hurt anything, I decided, to lead Andrea around town blindfolded. "Don't be a chicken, Andrea," I said.

Margie tied the bandanna tightly around Andrea's eyes, and we led her between us through the alley to the street that curved along the Muskingum River. "I hear the dam," said Andrea, walking hesitantly between us, unsure of her footing. "And cars on the bridge."

Abruptly, Margie jerked us in the opposite direction, and we rounded the block into another alley. She seemed determined to get Andrea to the lock, possibly even onto the wall. I debated how I would handle that situation. I couldn't let Andrea get hurt, but adding her to the mix had ticked Margie off mightily, and it was hard to tell how she'd react if I didn't back her up.

"I hear the dam," Andrea repeated as we neared the fence a second time. Getting Andrea across the crumpled wire strands would require my cooperation, and I hadn't yet decided where my stronger loyalty lay. I didn't hear the patrol car until it had pulled up beside us.

"What do you kids think you're doing? See that sign, 'No one past this point'?" The deputy marshal's squinty eyes held suspicion, but his bulk pinned him between the steering wheel and the back of the seat, proof that a foot chase was unlikely. Then his radio chattered, assuring me there were alternate methods of capture at his disposal.

Margie yanked the blindfold from Andrea's face. "We're on our way home. It's going to rain." Andrea's first glance fell on the dank water in the lock, her second on me—with disgust.

"Well, run along then. See that you stay out of trouble."

Before the cruiser was out of sight, Andrea had dashed across the street, not even checking for cars, and into the alley leading to Main. Rain began to fall as we watched her go, huge drops splattering into wet circles on the pavement, drops with weight enough to feel solid as they hit.

"I don't want to be in your club, Margie Baker!" Andrea yelled from a safe distance. "Or yours either, Annie!"

"Good riddance," Margie said, her words intended for my ears only.

\* \* \*

June slid into July. Rich summer smells invaded the neighborhood: fresh-cut grass, backyard barbecues, home-made goodies bursting with fruits and berries. Our rambles resumed, but any pretense of comradery between Andrea and Margie had dissolved with the lock incident, and I was on shaky ground with both girls. One thing I was sure of—another scheme was brewing in Margie's fertile brain.

The afternoon Margie snatched a Snicker's bar off the rack in Huff's Market, open war became inevitable. Andrea's pale blue eyes grew huge. If Margie hadn't stuck the candy into Andrea's pocket a split second before the clerk came around the corner, she would have been toast.

Outside, Andrea threw the stolen goods at Margie. "Don't ever do that again!"

Margie caught the bar and slowly opened the wrapper. She broke off half and held it out, skewering me with a look. I stuffed the gooey chocolate into my mouth and forced it down. Margie savored the other half, and Andrea watched us consume the spoils, indignation and disappointment fighting for predominance in her face.

The scorching pavement beneath us seemed unbearable as the afternoon temperature reached its peak. Andrea looked as miserable as I felt, and Margie's bouncy red topknot had wilted in the heat. All I wanted was a cool place to lie back and recharge. As if reading my thoughts, Margie suggested the cemetery; its shady green slopes and nonintrusive inhabitants offered the perfect environment. So the cemetery it would be.

We reached the wrought-iron gateway as the ancient caretaker, his work finished for the day, passed us in his pickup. Dust kicked up from his tires and the bed rattled as he turned onto the main drag through town. Reaching the shadiest area where ancient limbs drooped low over those long-forgotten, we flung ourselves onto the welcoming green, oblivious that our sweaty shirts and shorts were magnets for grass stains. It wasn't long though before Margie got to her feet and headed toward the tool shed at the end of the lane.

Before I could get up to follow, Andrea said, "Stay here with me, Annie." Her lank hair was streaked with sweat, her baggy shorts sticking to toothpick legs.

From the comfort of my grassy couch, I marveled at Margie's endurance. The heat didn't slow her gait; she trotted on up the lane as if it wasn't ninety-five in the shade. She was gone a long time, and I began to wonder what she was up to. "Come on, Andrea. Let's see what's going on."

We covered the ground Margie had and saw no sign of her. Beyond the old tool shed, the woods began, and I couldn't imagine Margie venturing into the undergrowth of prickly vines with her legs bare. Then I noticed that the door to the tool shed was open, the cross timber lying on the ground and the padlock hanging loose, neglected by the octogenarian caretaker. "She shouldn't be snooping around in there," Andrea said, close behind me.

We edged through the door, Andrea keeping to my rear. The place was dim and damp and filled with tools. In the back of the shed, we could hear Margie rummaging. "Hey, guys, come look at this."

Andrea and I were picking our way through a jumble of implements when Margie surged from a corner, wrestled Andrea to the ground, and pinioned her arms to her sides with some sort of binding. Andrea's screams were cut off by what sounded like a blow or a kick to her stomach. She whimpered, and I stood frozen in the closed, dark space.

Then I felt Margie's hands on my arms, and I shoved her away, stumbled over a protruding handle, and fell to the moist dirt floor. Again, Margie grabbed for me, but I scrambled up and made for the doorway. Outside, I could hear Andrea's whimpers turn into wails and feel Margie's hot breath on the back of my neck. I whirled to face her. In the dazzling sunlight, her hair glowed like neon and cast a red aura that lit her face.

"That will teach her a lesson," Margie said, swinging the door shut. She slid the cross timber into its slot, trapping Andrea inside, helpless and alone, her only light coming between the crack in the doors.

"You can't do this," I said as Margie took hold of the padlock. "You can't just leave her here."

"And who's going to stop me?" Her expression issued the same kind of challenge she'd given Andrea about the candy bar.

She swung the hook of the padlock toward home just as my fist slammed into her mouth. I had never hit anybody before, and I was surprised to see blood oozing from my knuckle where her tooth had sliced it. She had dropped the lock and blood trickled from her lip. Her mouth looked painful enough to make her give up, but I couldn't take a chance. So I plowed into her again, this time with both fists and the full force of my body knocking her away from the door and into the grass at the side of the building. Slowly, she got to her feet, blood smeared from mouth to chin and up one cheek.

In our scuffles, Margie and I had knocked the padlock from the door. I scooped it up and threw it as far into the woods as I could. I slid the cross timber out of its brackets, and light from the open door penetrated the interior. I loosened the binder twine that bound Andrea's arms and led her, sobbing and grateful, outside.

I may have taken the moral high ground, but my feelings were in the tank. What remained of my precious summer would be idled away playing jacks and cutting out paper dolls accompanied by Mom's approval dished up in cupcakes and platitudes.

When I saw her again, Margie was well down the gravel drive, her small, square shoulders defying heat and the humiliation of loss. Along with her went all possibility of risk and discovery, leaving behind the appealing ghosts of our summer rambles.

### **One of Millions**

Poetry by Katie Lemon, Elyssa West, Wyatt Norman, Garrytt Horner

I woke up in a dark filled room  
trying to catch my breath.

I blew it off, it's just a cold  
until I lost my strength.

I struggled to get out of bed  
then watched the news at noon.  
My symptoms were rushing below.  
I needed to get help soon.

My arrival, it was abrupt.  
The workers rushed like bees,  
alone in this monstrous building  
plagued with ghastly disease.

It felt like my body failed me  
in these chaotic halls.  
I knew my time was coming near  
just as the darkness falls.

As footsteps begin to approach  
the doctor is in view.  
“I’m sorry to have to say this,  
I don’t think she’ll pull through.”

**Breeze**  
Art by Dr. Lauri Reidmiller



## Storm on the Horizon

Fiction by Danielle Kelly

Layla wants to look back but she doesn't because contrary to what her momma told her there ain't nothing good ever worth looking back at. Lonnie's truck tires spit out dust as he peels away from her. The dirt flecks sting as they hit her. The bits and pieces of the world now a dust cloud that blankets her skin and she doesn't dare flick any of it away.

Now, here she stands on some godforsaken gravel road only her and the wind and the dust left from him. The wind picks up her red curls, flattens them against the nape of her neck, and for a moment, she thinks about raising her arms to tuck the loose pieces behind her ears, but she doesn't in fear Lonnie will take it as her signaling him and come back to get her. No, she knows now she is better off without him. Just like her hair she don't know what restraint means any more. Lonnie and her mother Jean made damn sure of draining every ounce of her "yes, mam's" and "no, sirs" until she was running on empty yet full of her mother's promises of Layla marrying him.

But out here, Layla stands on her own two feet, feeling more filled than she has in years. She digs her feet in the gravel, planting herself and she feels as solid as she's ever been. A black crow lands near her in the grass. It pecks at some old carcass of what looks to be the remnants of a field mouse, but she can't be sure. When the crow turns, its smooth black feathers turn deep blue in the waning light. Layla meets its eyes. For a few seconds the two look at one another as if making sure neither would interrupt the other's journey on the now empty road. The crow extends its neck, and lets out a caw before releasing Layla's gaze.

As she moves with the crow, cautious not to interrupt it once more, she can't help but replay Lonnie's voice in her head. No matter how hard she tries to forget his smooth, drawn-out tenor, his voice is as much a part of her as the storms that keep the crops growing. "Honey, there ain't another one like me who will take someone as damaged as you." It's what Lonnie told her over again, until she too, began to believe it.

And, if she was being honest with herself, it was true. She knew it. Her momma, Jean, even knew it which is why her momma wouldn't even let Layla wear the only white dress they had in the house.

"Only good girls wear white," her momma had said.

"And you and I both know you never been good a day in your life," Lonnie had said.

She can still see him, sitting at the kitchen table this morning, clear as the center of any tornado that swept through the fields when the skies grew unstable. His mud-crusted boots kicked out in front of him, one arm resting on his lap, and that slow smile spreading from one cheek to the next.

"I sure don't care what she wears," Lonnie had stated. "The only thing that matters is that ring on her finger that makes her mine."

"I'm not doing this, if I can't wear that dress," Layla had said.

The three of them had sat at the kitchen table like some messed up version of the holy trinity. She had watched the shelf clouds roll in and the blades of grass turn over preparing for a storm that none of them realized was coming. And when Lonnie forced her in his truck later that day, wanting to hit the road before the storm came in, she took that white dress her momma wouldn't let her wear and shoved it into her only bag.

Now, here she stands, that white dress more ivory than white, stained from a few minutes exposed. Layla pulls the dress over her head, right over the long sleeve shirt and work jeans she still had on from that morning. She knows the temperatures will drop fast and turn against her, so every layer will count in a few hours once the clouds push the sun out from the sky. But none of that matters right now. She has the sleeveless, off-white dress and now not one person could take it away from her. She may not have been good, but she's damn sure she looks just as good in ivory and better in it than her momma every could look in white.

## **Mom's Old-Fashioned Cooking**

Nonfiction by Amber Ward

My mother was born in 1950, and she grew up on a farm, where she was taught traditional cooking methods and other life skills. Mom was raised in an era that did not afford many rights for women. Back then, women were expected to get married, raise children, and cater to their husband's needs, and she spent her entire life raising kids, cooking, and caring for my father. She was the oldest of seven children, and her family did not have a lot of money. Mom helped raise her siblings, care for the animals and farm, and she cooked many family meals. My mother married my father when she was sixteen, and my brother was born shortly after. She did not graduate high school or pursue a career because she was a country girl turned homemaker, and for a married woman to work or attend school would not have been "proper." My parents had three children: my brother, sister, and me. Shortly after I was born, in 1984, she went to work. At first, she took care of elderly people, and then she started cooking in restaurants, which is what she did until she retired.

My mom is an intelligent woman with a vast knowledge of the old ways of cooking and preserving food. She started learning to cook when she was eight years old. She is a great cook, although her methods and skills are antiquated. Cooking is important to my mom. To my mom, food is the foundation that love, family, and life are built upon. She amazes me with her patience, talent, and ability in preparing food. My mom taught me patience and the concept of hard work by teaching me her old-fashioned ways of cooking. Mom's unique cooking skills and work ethic are what I love about her the most. My mom uses old-fashioned ways to prepare and preserve food, such as cooking on her wood cook stove, making bread from scratch, and canning fresh fruits and vegetables.

The way my mother was raised and the skills she learned have made her a distinctive woman in society nowadays. To begin with, my mother is the only person I know who still uses an antique wood cook stove. Her stove was made in 1843 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The stove has four burners, two warming ovens, and a water reservoir. Cooking on a wood cook stove is not an easy task. Cooking this way requires quality wood that has been seasoned correctly. Keeping a wood cook stove at a steady temperature is exceedingly difficult. These stoves do not have a knob to turn that adjusts the temperature, so both skill and knowledge are needed to keep the fire burning a steady temperature. Keeping a steady temperature requires feeding the stove wood often, which can be difficult while cooking because in order to put wood in the stove, you must lift the front burner, which often requires moving the hot pans around. Cooking on a wood cook stove is hot, arduous work that takes a lot of time and patience. Despite the challenges, the wood cook stove is mom's preferred method of cooking.

My mom uses her stove often for cooking and home-canning foods, as well as a source of heat. For instance, I love when she cooks chili and cornbread on the wood cook stove. She usually makes her chili in a big five-quart cast iron Dutch oven. Mom always bakes her homemade cornbread in a cast iron skillet in the wood stove. The wood-fired oven gives the cornbread an amazing taste and texture. When I walk into her house, all I can smell is wood smoke, tomatoes, chili spices, and fresh cornbread. As a result of all these scents enveloping my

senses, my mouth starts to water, and my stomach starts to growl in anticipation of her homemade comfort foods!

A second unique skill my mom has is making bread from scratch. She does not own a bread machine; she does all the work by hand. Watching her go through the process is mystifying. For example, she first gathers the ingredients and her big, old, yellow, mixing bowl. Once she has what she needs, without measuring any ingredients, she adds yeast and warm water to the bowl, and then she stirs the water with a wooden spoon until the yeast is dissolved. Then she adds honey, salt, and canned milk, mixing until all the ingredients are combined. Then she starts adding flour until the dough gets too thick to mix with her spoon. After checking for the right consistency, she then spreads flour on the table and dumps the dough on the flour.

Next comes my favorite part, kneading the dough. First, she starts pulling more flour into the dough as she pulls the dough toward her. Next, she begins folding and kneading the dough until she has worked the dough into a nice firm, round shape. She then pushes her finger into the center of the dough to see if the dough needs more kneading. If the dough is not ready, the hole goes back together. If the dough is ready the hole stays open. When the dough is done, she then covers the dough in oil. At that point, she just patiently waits for the dough to rise, which can take a couple of hours, depending on the room's temperature. Once the dough has risen, mom cuts the dough with her pastry cutter, and then she places the dough pieces in greased loaf pans. Now, she will let the dough rise a second time until the dough reaches the top of the pan.

Once the dough rises to the top of the pans, she puts the pans in the oven to bake for about an hour. Baking bread in the wood cook stove is not easy. This task is where her cooking talent really shows because she must check and feed the fire often so that the oven stays a steady temperature. She also rotates the pans of bread every 15 minutes to prevent burning. When the bread is done, she flips the loaves out of the pans onto a clean towel and spreads butter all over the crust. Let me tell you, there is nothing that compares to a warm slice of fresh baked bread! The crust is a crispy golden brown, and the middle is soft, warm, and moist. The bread just melts in your mouth with its buttery flavor. As a result of her demanding work and patience, we now get to enjoy her delicious homemade bread!

Another old-fashioned skill my mom uses is preserving foods by cold packing them. My mom spends weeks every summer making jams, jellies, and preserves. She also cans fresh fruits and vegetables. One of my favorites is her homemade vegetable juice. First, Mom will gather tomatoes, celery, bell peppers, and onions from the garden. Second, she cleans and cuts the vegetables. Third, she lets the vegetables cook for 45 minutes. Next, comes my favorite part: she works the veggie mix through her old Victoria juicer. The Victoria juicer is an old silver tool that fastens to the edge of the table. The juicer has a funnel-like top and a handle that turns. The juice comes out of the bottom and the vegetable skins stay in the strainer part of the funnel. When she is done making the juice, she puts the juice back on the stove to simmer for two more hours. The last part is pouring the vegetable juice in the jars and placing them upside down on a towel until the lids seal. Mom uses the vegetable juice for making chili, beef stew, and homemade tomato soup.

In addition to vegetable juice, Mom also makes fresh strawberry jam. I love her strawberry jam! I have never tasted any other jam that is as good as my mom's. To make the jam, she gets fresh strawberries and rhubarb. She then cleans, cuts, and crushes the berries and rhubarb before putting them in a kettle to cook down. The strawberries cook for about 45 minutes. Then she adds Sure Jell and sugar and brings the jam to a hard boil for 3 to 4 minutes. Meanwhile, she has another pot with lids and bands heating inside. When the jam becomes the right consistency, she spoons her jam into the jars. The last part of the process is sealing the jars by adding the hot lids and bands. My mother's hard work, time, and patience allow us to enjoy fresh vegetables and fruits, no matter what season it is. Mom believes home canning is more healthy than canned food bought at a store. She cans foods at home because she knows exactly what preservatives are in her home grown, home canned foods. Therefore, she gets a sense of satisfaction from seeing the cellar shelves stocked with colorful jars in neat rows.

Last of all, my mother's cooking skills are unique and impressive because, no matter how many people she is feeding, we always have plenty of food to go around. Mom never complains about all the hard work she does to keep us fed. My mom's favorite saying is, "If you leave my table hungry, it's your own damn fault!" For instance, when she cooks a big breakfast for the family, she cooks enough food to feed an army! She will have bacon frying in a cast iron skillet and buckwheat pancakes cooking on the cast iron griddle. Mom usually has sausage gravy in a Dutch oven warming on the wood stove. She always has hand-made biscuits browning in the oven, and she has a big kettle full of homemade hot chocolate warming on the wood stove. She has fried potatoes crisp and brown, sizzling in the leftover bacon grease. She also has hot coffee in the percolator. Oh, what a feast! No one ever knows what to try first. My mother is right! With all that food, if you leave her table hungry, that is your own fault!

These are my favorite kinds of meals, but for reasons more important than the food. The most important part is the sense of family unity we get sitting at my mom's table together. Her hard work is rewarded with love, laughter, and happiness. My mom thinks families do not gather around the table often enough nowadays. She says sharing meals with family is important. She says meals are a time to bond, share, and communicate with loved ones. Her meals are her gift to us, food made with love to unite the ones she loves. Mom's hard work, time, and patience bring us all together for great food, love, and family. My mom is the base of our family's foundation. Her meals are her way of keeping our family connected.

My mother is unique to the world we live in today. She relies on the skills and knowledge she learned as a child that has helped her survive and take care of our family. She grew up in a time that was much different from our current time, so she lived her life in a very uncommon and distinct way, and she raised us kids the same manner as she was raised. I love her old-fashioned methods of cooking and her strength and core values. Her skills and knowledge make her stand out from the crowd. She is one of the last people of a generation that was not lazy or afraid of hard labor. She is not scared to work hard to be able to live a good life. I feel blessed to have a mother who has taught me skills about an aspect of life that is not common anymore. I respect my mom for always working so hard to make sure we had enough food. I love my mom, and I am thankful that she taught me her understanding of the principle of hard work. I am also

grateful for the patience she has instilled in me. My mom's old-fashioned way of cooking requires both hard work and patience. Therefore, through my mom's teaching me her antiquated ways of preparing and preserving food, I learned about hard work and patience as well.

## The Unexpected: What We Do for The Ones We Love

Fiction by Jadon Sandy

The Anderson's kitchen was very old-fashioned and had a slight scent of the wood that still holds it together nearly one hundred years since its creation. John had gotten home from work to the smell of breakfast food sprinkled with sawdust - this was the case with any food made in the house.

"Smells good in here honey," Johns told his wife before kissing her cheek. She took the apron off she had been wearing for the past half hour, the grease stains showing its age, while John took off his work safety vest. They sat at the table, as rustic as the day was long, waiting for their daughter to join them. "Get on out of that bathroom Emily!" John yelled with his silver fork clasped in hand. "Time to have some grub!"

Emily was in the bathroom holding onto the sink for dear life, praying to God and pleading it not be true. But she knew it was. A little part of her wanted to smile for a second, but the moment passed when her thoughts unspooled further.

She unlocked the door and came into the kitchen quite slowly. She grabbed a plate from the cupboard and gave herself some breakfast helpings from the counter where all the dishes sat. Emily got a little more fried potatoes and bacon than she usually would.

They all held hands for grace. "Dear Father," John spoke. "Thank you for this delicious food and bless it to our bodies that we may serve you better Lord. Amen."

"Amen," they all said in unison while opening their eyes.

"How's your sister doing Hon'?" John asked his wife.

"Oh, good I guess," Angela answered haphazardly. "She says little Timmy started teething."

"No kidding?" John responded with excited surprise. "He's gotta be almost two now, right?"

"Actually, he's been two for about a month or so now. 'Member his party at my Ma's house?"

"Oh yeah that's right," John answered back while chowing down on his third biscuit with plenty of sausage gravy. "We got him a... Oh, what was it?"

"I've got something to tell you both," Emily blurted out before John could get his thought together.

"Well alright then, is this about your school? Because you know I love hearing about how smart my baby is," her Mama told her.

Hearing this made Emily wince at what she'd done. She went over the words to say in the bathroom over and over again but still found herself at a loss for words. "I... pregnant," she managed to whisper through a nervously swelled throat.

"Honey what?" Emily's Mama asked.

She did not want to say it again. "I'm... pregnant," Emily said slowly to them both.

"Are you pulling my leg?" her Pa asked.

"No, I swear it's true. I didn't wanna tell ya but I just don't know what to do now," she told them before placing the positive pregnancy test on the dinner table.

"Emily you're seventeen!" John shouted at her. "What're you doing getting knocked up out there with some hoodlum. Who even is this boy?"

"Tyler is not a hoodlum he's a working man."

"Man?!" Her Mama asks her quite loudly. "Where's this man at right now?"

"Oh, he'll be back," Emily answered. "He's down south going to tell his family about us and the baby and he's gonna hopefully get some money from his folks."

"And how far down south do his folks live?" John asked.

Emily took a deep breath before answering since she knew what Tyler was really doing. "Georgia, he said."

"Honey we don't have to tell you cause ya already know, but he's leaving ya high and dry," Emily's mother told her while rubbing her shoulder in an attempt to comfort her. And with this, Emily felt the tears coming in floods. "I know," she said sobbing and while wiping her snotty nose with the inside of the neck of her shirt.

"Well, I suppose we could, ya know, take her to one of those clinic places."

"John!" Angela yelled in a short burst. "Be serious," she said while still holding on to her little girl.

"I mean isn't it something every mother at least considers? Even for a small moment?"

And when John said that, Emily's head lifted up in disgusted realization. Emily wondered how that discussion went down. She wondered how anyone could discuss such a thing, and which one of them convinced the other to keep her. And soon enough Emily was thinking about it for her own, and hating herself for it. Emily was done thinking, done listening, and was ready to simply do something about the situation herself.

"That's it! I'm going to raise this baby myself in a loving environment!" And with that, Emily stormed to her bedroom, packed her bags as best as she knew how, and left the house in hopes of a good life for her child – not quite knowing what that good life would be.

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"It's not much, but you're welcome to stay as long as you want?" Emily's friend, Katie told her. Katie wasn't Emily's best friend since pre-school or anything like that - she was a person, Emily knew, who knows what it likes to be in a similar dire situation.

"I really appreciate it Katie, but it shouldn't be too long. I've got a fair amount of money saved up if you need some kinda rent," Emily told her as they stood on the sidewalk in front of her apartment.

The apartment itself looked as though no one had resided in it for years, which was almost true. Its siding needed redone and the door knob didn't work properly. Katie told her earlier that she doesn't spend much time at her own apartment because she said, "I got plenty of places to stay around here if ya know what I mean." Emily didn't quite want to know, but she did.

"Nah you keep that money, you're gonna need it. Alls I ask is that you clean up after yourself if ya have an accident," Katie answered. Emily wasn't sure how to respond. Katie punched Emily's arm lightly. "Ha ha ha. Aw I'm just messin' with ya. Stay as long as you need, shoot I'll even help ya with the baby if ya want?"

Emily wasn't sure which way she was suggesting to help her baby. She knew this wasn't the place to stay, but that's not what Katie's place is intended for. "No, I'll be out of your hair before he comes," she told Katie as she rubbed her soon to be plump stomach.

"He?" Katie asked.

"I just got a feeling, ya know?"

"Not yet I don't, ha ha ha."

As she laughed, Katie reached into the back pocket of her cut-offs (the kind of cutoffs that got her into those guys' apartments) and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. "I will tell you though I'm a bit of a smoker too. I don't know if that's a something that's gonna bother you? Or you can have one if that's what ya want?"

Emily stared at Katie's offer and was reminded of Tyler.

Emily never really knew what she wanted. When her high school had career day, she would wonder around saying "I don't know" to all the job setups. The same applied to her dating life, and with that, she would accept the boy who simply gave her attention. Tyler. She would see him almost every day just outside the school zone smoking a cigarette while posted up on his Pontiac he bought for next to nothing. He wasn't looking at the girls, just her – that is when his eyes weren't closed from taking a good drag. It was the day when Emily waved to Tyler, while waiting for her bus to get to school, that Tyler waved her over to join him. She had to make sure no teachers were watching, as if they ever were, before running over to Tyler and his Pontiac. Up close, she got a better look at his sleeve tattoos and was more intrigued than before in their snake-like designs. Emily said hello and introduced herself and asked Tyler about all his tattoos. Tyler, having said nothing, took the cigarette out of his mouth when Emily was done talking. Tyler asked, "Wanna see something?"

Emily then stopped remembering to keep herself from feeling even worse about her situation. "No, I'm good, all yours," she told Katie as she walked towards the apartment door, trying not to trip in the cracks of the concrete.

"Aight then," Katie replied. "I'll probably see ya again sometime tomorrow. There are ramen noodles and other stuff in the cabinet. Help yourself."

“Okay, thanks,” Emily answered. She twists the door knob all the way and drove her side into the door the way Katie showed her how earlier. It opened. She went into the apartment, and shut the door behind her – not locking it.

She hoped for someone to come in. Someone to come back.

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Emily finally got Joseph, her nearly three-year-old, to go to sleep after an hour of singing “You Are My Sunshine” and was ready to crash on the couch which her neighbor gave her at the trailer park since she had gotten a new one. She didn’t dislike the Westwood trailer park there in Northern Kentucky (only an hour or so drive from her parents’ place), but it wasn’t what she had dreamed of when she would write in her diary “I can’t wait to have children” just years before in high school.

Emily took a second to close her eyes while slumped on that dog scratched couch before she took a look at her phone – the same iPhone 5 she’d had since she was sixteen. She scrolled through her contacts looking for her dad’s number. Emily’s mom had called on multiple occasions throughout the past few years, but she had rarely spoken to her father. She hadn’t seen either of them since that day in the kitchen, but felt a need to still keep in contact with them. She calls her father with hesitation.

“Hey Em’,” her Pa said.

“Hi Dad,” she said.

“So, umm, I actually wanted to call you to see if you guys were by chance interested in visiting sometime to see Joseph?”

“Oh my! Yes of course we would love to! Something happen to make ya feel this way Hon’?”

Emily then walked a few steps over to Joseph, who was lying in his crib he was too big for, and glanced at her little angel. “No,” she told her father. “Time is all that’s changed, Dad.

**Dog's Paw**  
Art by Kimberly Matheny



### **Betrayal**

Poetry by Grant Barnhart, Erica Davis, Jessica Lipscomb, Madison Scott

Laying still in this stranger's sunken bed,  
My thoughts wander back to my wife at home.  
Regret and sorrow swarm throughout my head.  
Stumbling in, our bed reeks of cologne.  
He rummaged my bed, which used to be ours  
My feelings for him have been dead for years.  
The minutes I spend with him seem like hours.  
For I've found another to save me tears.  
I'm the family photo she neglects.  
Now she holds him in her warm, loving arms.  
For I'm the love that she chose to reject,  
And he is the one that she chose to charm.  
Thinking of her brings my face to a smile.  
But the truth is, she's been gone for a while.

### **Tragedy**

Poetry by Olivia Birkhimer, Riley Boley, Anondae Hesson, Hailey West

The chilly, September air filled me with a sense of warning.  
It's strangely quiet in the city that never sleeps,  
for just your average Tuesday morning.  
My husband scurries off to work without a peep.  
Ring, Ring, my Husband's work again,  
this internship could lead to big things.  
Breakfast has yet to begin,  
the baby's cries overlap the phone rings.  
To calm the baby, I switch on the television.  
My heart sinks when I see Channel 4 News,  
displaying a replay of the collision.  
Oh my dear Husband, if only he hit the snooze.  
I worry for my family, my heart grows sore.  
Alas, there is a knock at the door.

**Progress**  
Art by Dr. Lauri Reidmiller



## Wealth

Nonfiction by Stephen Fadlevich

Wealth is defined as “abundance of valuable material possessions or resources” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., wealth noun, transitive, 1.), but what are those valuable material possessions or resources? Most people think of things like money, clothes, or fancy gadgets, but to some, valuable resources could be food, family, or transportation. Everyone has their own experiences growing up. Some get lucky enough to be born into money or simply a stable family, but some aren’t so lucky and are born or sometimes stuck with a poor and dysfunctional life. So, depending on the situation, wealth can be looked at in many ways.

One resource of wealth is food for some. A lot of people will never have to experience not knowing when their next meal will be or having to wait for school to be able to eat. To some, food is something that is always in the fridge or pantry, but for others, food may be waiting in line at a church hoping you get something even if it’s expired. Some parents will go days without food to ensure their children are fed even if it’s just a little bit. People don’t appreciate what they have when it comes to food; for example, some will stay away from generic foods thinking they’re too good for them or complaining because their steak isn’t cooked right, but for others those generics brands are their favorites, and they have probably never even had a steak. A lack of food can cause one to become creative in combining random foods that they can find to make a meal. While some people spend their lives eating out at fancy restaurants, some people may see the dollar menu at a McDonalds as something special and a rare occasion.

A second form of wealth is family. Some people have these huge families that have get-togethers and all sorts of things, but some people may only know the few siblings they have or have no family at all. People with big families may get tired of all the family commitments, but someone out there is wishing they had a family party to go to. Having to grow up without a dad or mom can be hard, and one may blame themselves for them not being around. While one person may have multiple people to go to when they need someone to talk to, another person may only have themselves to talk to. For some people even though they have siblings, they may not share the same parents and can cause one to feel alone. Growing up watching other families can be difficult on those with no one. Some people will never know the feeling of not having someone there at award day at school to watch them get that award.

The final thing wealth can also mean to some is transportation. For some being driven to school is an everyday thing, and they would never think of riding the bus. For others, the bus was the only time they rode in a vehicle. Having a means of transportation is so important and many people live without it. To some people, the city bus is crucial for getting around town whether that be for work or going to the store. Some will never know how it feels knowing if something were to happen to a loved one away from home, there’s no way to get to them. Some watch their friends get cars when they get their license while others have to work to earn the money to buy what some may see as a piece of junk, but others may see as freedom and the joy of not needing to walk or bum rides anymore.

In conclusion wealth may mean “abundance of valuable material possessions or resources” (Merriam-Webster, n.d., wealth noun, transitive, 1.), but for some people, wealth is things like food, family, and transportation. Many people grow up with the lack of what is everyday things to some people. What may seem like nothing to some may be wealth to others, so cherish the things you have whether that’s a lot or little because there’s someone out there that has less. No one chooses to not have things in life; it’s just how it is sometimes. Some people go without while others have everything they can think of. Some people are fortunate enough to have things like food, family, and transportation, but for many people these are things that they dream of having.

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## Prom Dress

Fiction by Tyler Martin

Myersville was a stereotypical small town, like one that is seen in the old 90's teen coming-of-age films. A small main street lined the town, filled to the brim with mom and pop shops. These shops stood the test of time for decades, with new generations continuing their legacy. One shop stood the longest, and that was Mrs. Mauve's sewing shop. The shop's exterior was made of white brick, and the strips of paint were slowly peeling off. An old wooden title sign lined the front wall above the door, indicating the shop's title and presence. The sign had noticeable brush strokes running across it and hand drawn flowers that were painted like the blue hydrangeas that grew on a trellis outside. The inside of the shop was no worse for wear than the outside and clearly showed the building's age. Cracks lined the wooden floors, appearing like large jagged crevices on the ground. These cracks sprawled up the old floral wallpaper, which was slowly peeling off in layers. The parts that had fallen to the ground exposed the drywall that was growing massive green mold spores. Objects littered the interior area of the shop, placed as if to appeal to customers. Mannequins stood proudly in the windows, sporting hand sewn dresses that looked like they came from a 1920's women's magazine. Large white shelves stood against the walls, appearing to cover the larger cracks in the walls. The shelves were lined with a wide range of fabrics, some ranging from rose printed whites to sparkling blue glitters. A large rusted sewing machine stood by the shelves, with a thread still lined in the machine.

Esther Mauve sat at a large wooden counter in the middle of the shop, planning her next garment. Esther was a frail woman, who some say was just as old as Myersville itself. She had seen the town grow and evolve over the years. She saw many people grow up and had watched some wither and fade away. Esther had a reputation within Myersville, and that was being the lady who ran the old sewing shop. The remarks that came with this were either nice or scathing, some people praising her longevity within the town and some berating her business. Esther did not let these comments affect her, and moved on with her life. However, Esther felt like she was more than what other thought about her. She was a mother, a grandmother, and a costume designer. Esther turned her thoughts back to the dress she was designing and continued to sketch on the paper. The dress was a beautiful red floor length gown, which was dazzled with rhinestones and beads. Esther had begun to design the dress in hopes that her granddaughter, Elise, would ask her to make a gown for her senior prom at Myersville High School. She had made Elise many dresses before, which were welcomed with excitement. However, that was not the case this year.

Esther put down her pencil and recalled the memory of the conversation that had occurred two weeks ago. Elise had entered the shop almost skipping in joy, eager to share the news about her prom dress with her grandmother. A bright smile laid up on her face, which was framed by her brown curly hair.

"Grandma, I'm here, and I have something to tell you!" Elise had called into the shop. Esther peeked her head up from her counter, as she had been designing a sundress that she was planning to make. A grin made way on to her face upon seeing her granddaughter's infectious smile. Elise always had an air of happiness about her and was able to light up a room with her

smile. Esther had adored her from the moment she saw her in her daughter's arms and thought the girl was a gift given to her family.

"Oh hello, sweetheart! You caught me at a perfect time, what do you need to tell me?" Esther had replied joyfully. Elise's face appeared to have faltered for a moment, which was not amiss to Esther.

However, the grin returned to Elise's face as she spoke. "Well, I know you make a dress for me every single year and I really appreciate it." Elise had paused for a moment. "But I don't think you'll have to do that this year, because I'm going to a dress supply store with some of my friends." Elise had trailed off nervously as she spoke, almost mumbling the end of the statement. Esther had felt like the wind had been knocked out of her at what she said. Her granddaughter didn't want her to make her dress this year, and it had felt like a kick to the chest.

Esther questioned her granddaughter, "Elise honey, I just don't understand. Why would you want to spend money on a dress when I could make one for free?" Elise's face had dropped upon seeing the sadness that wrote its way upon her grandmother's face.

She desperately tried to reassure Esther, "Grandma, I just don't want you to make me one this year. You're getting older, and you may not be able to make the dress I want." If Elise's earlier statement had been a kick to the chest, then this one was like a knife to the chest. Tears brimmed into Esther's eyes, threatening to break like a dam. Her granddaughter didn't think she was good enough to make her dress. Elise was doubting her own grandmother's abilities, and that broke Esther's heart.

Esther's voice began to break apart as she spoke, "Elise, I think it's best if you leave now." Elise had opened her mouth to interrupt, but Esther had simply pointed her bony finger towards the doorway. Elise had turned on her heel and hung her head in shame as she walked out.

Esther wiped a tear away at the memory of the scene and gazed upon her paper. The dress was finished and was one of the most gorgeous garments she had ever designed. She thought about how beautiful Elise would have looked in it. Her brown hair would have complimented the deep rouge of the fabric. Esther was startled out of her thoughts by the door of the shop slamming open, surely leaving a crack by the sheer force of it. Elise stood in the doorway of the shop, cheeks red with tears streaming down her face. In her shaky hands she held a tattered and torn blue dress, which had similar rhinestones to the one Esther had designed. Elise had begun to sob harder and pleaded with her grandmother.

"Grandma, I-I don't know what happened. I pulled it out to try it on, and it started tearing apart. Can you try and fix it?" Esther had already known that it was impossible to fix, as a large tear had run along the hem of the dress. It was littered with smaller tears around the bodice, as well.

"I'm afraid I can't my dear, it's torn beyond repair." Esther spoke to her with sympathy. Elise's breathing began to quicken as she sputtered, "What am I going to do now? Prom is

tomorrow and I have nothing!” Esther had let out a chuckle at her granddaughter’s panic, a slight smirk growing on her face.

“Calm down and breathe deeply sweetheart, I can just make you another one. This is a simple dress to make.” Esther had spoken with confidence. The woman stood and crossed over to the shelves, pulling out the sparkly red fabric. She reached for the box rhinestones she kept on the shelf, and sat down upon her chair. She laid out the fabric and threaded her sewing machine, and began to get to work.

A few hours of hard work later, and a mannequin bore the floor length gown. It was even more elegant in person, and it looked like a gown fit for a royal queen. The rhinestones glistened all over the dress, shining as bright as the stars in the sky. Elise looked at the dress with wide eyes, appearing astonished that her grandmother had made this only in hours. Esther spoke with a grin,

“Why don’t you try it on, sweetheart? I just want to make sure it fits you.” Elise took the dress off of the mannequin, careful to not have a repeat of the previous dress. She retreated to the back of the shop and returned minutes later with the gown on. Esther was right. Elise looked absolutely ethereal in it. The gown complimented every part of her form perfectly, and the red made her features stand out. Tears began to track their way down Elise’s face as she turned to her grandmother.

“Grandma, I’m so sorry that I ever doubted you. This is the most beautiful dress you’ve ever made me. Will you please forgive me?” Elise had spoken softly. Esther’s already formed grin somehow grew even bigger at Elise’s statement.

“Of course, I forgive you dear. I forgave you as soon as you burst through that doorway.” Esther had assured her granddaughter, her hands coming up to wipe Elise’s tears off. Esther spoke, “Let’s put it away for tomorrow, and go get some dinner.” Elise nodded her head and left to change back into her clothes.

Myersville High School always hosted an outdoor prom walk before each dance, and allowed students to show off and model their outfits for the night. Esther sat patiently waiting in a lawn chair, excited to see Elise walk. As Elise and her date began to approach, several gasps were heard from around Esther. Nobody that night had compared to Elise, and her beauty was unmatched in all areas. Esther couldn’t help but smile at the sight of Elise, and especially at the conversations occurring around her. Esther listened in as a young woman wrapped her hand around her fiancé’s arm, the statement following bringing her great joy.

“Did you know that her grandmother made that dress for her? It’s the most incredible dress I’ve ever seen. I think I want Mrs. Mauve to make my wedding dress.” Esther knew then that her abilities were timeless and that she still had it. She would never be stifled by her old age. Esther shook her head with the grin stretching upon her weathered face and began to look on at the other students walking by.

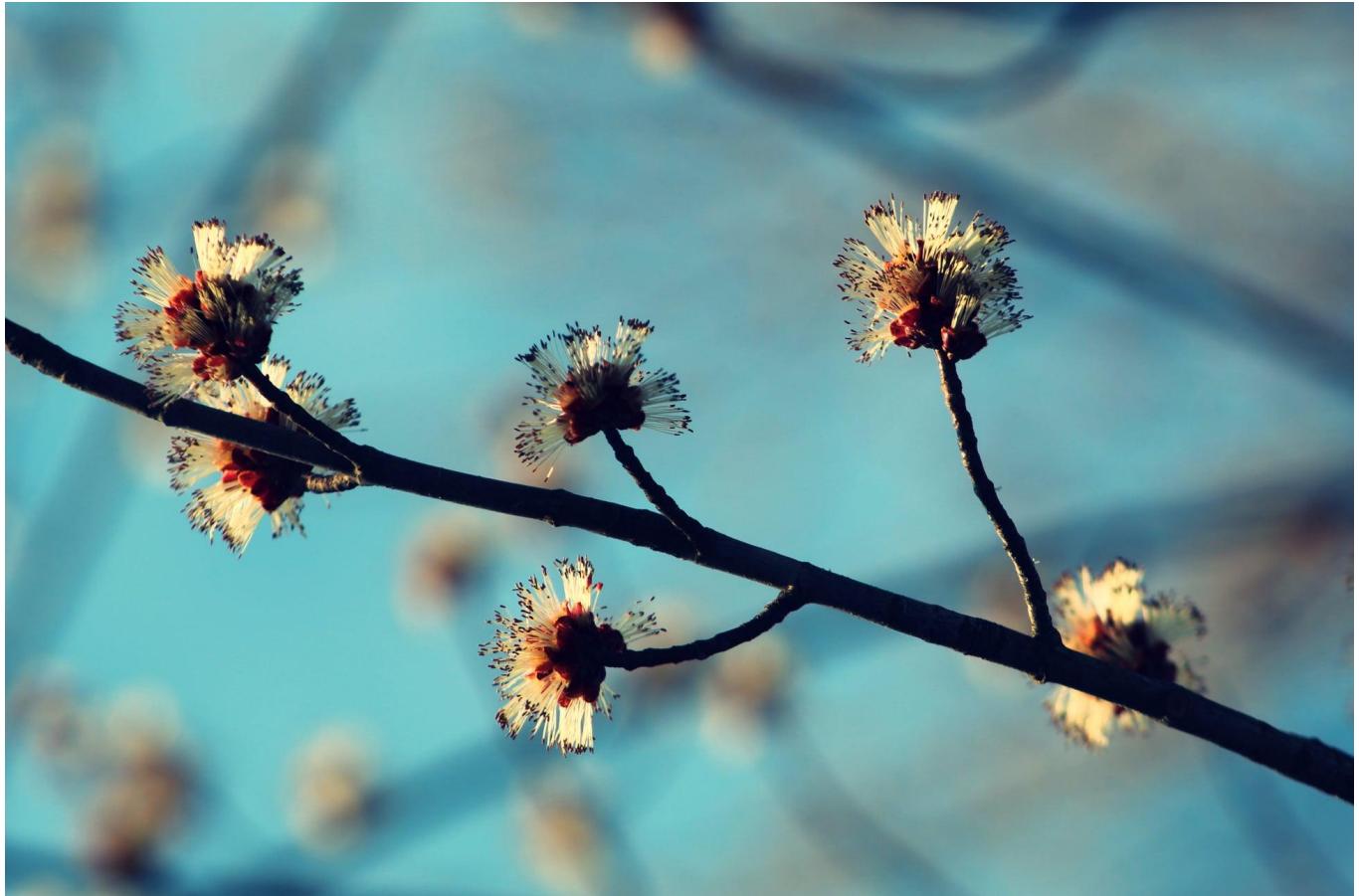
### **The Slender Sidewalk**

Poetry by Paul Gordon, Millie Kehrer, Brandon Lawhon, Natalie Malone

Their laughs echo from the picnic table.  
I sit back, wondering what I did wrong,  
Thinking back to when my life was stable  
My feet fall behind, I'm trailing along.  
These days, the sidewalk is too small for me.  
I try to keep up, but they won't make room.  
They are everything that I want to be.  
Because of them, my life is filled with gloom.  
My mother tells me to keep my head up;  
Prom queen in high school, she can't understand.  
Father says to never be runner-up,  
It's hard to keep up, sinking in quicksand.  
Now I no longer need validation,  
This is my sidewalk, my firm foundation.

**Jezebel**

Art by Traci Mills



## Alone

Fiction by Daniele Ellison

Five years ago, everything changed in the blink of an eye. Mentally and physically for the rest of my life. Turning time back, I was an athletic person who worked hard for what I wanted in life. I was a cheerleader and gymnast and was probably the healthiest a person could get. I even had a full scholarship to University of California. I had a wonderful job at the time working with furry animals at a veterinarian clinic and was always smiling and enjoying life to its fullest. I would have never thought that my health would go downhill so quickly, but it sure did.

### **Five Years Ago**

I remember waking up around 6:30 on a Monday morning and was getting ready for work. For some reason, this typical morning seemed to be a little different. I felt sick and weak. My head hurt, my body ached, and my vision was blurry. After taking a warm, steamy shower and getting my scrubs on, I figured it was just a cold. I managed to drive to work which was only 5 minutes away from home. The sky seemed gloomy and the smell of rain coming from the south filled the air.

Soon enough everyone realized something was wrong, as I looked pale and could not balance myself. I am usually prepared and committed to work hard, and that day could barely concentrate. Around noon, my boss noticed I was not doing well, and she had never seen me like that before. She ended up calling the doctor and my husband, and she drove me to the clinic herself because my eyesight seemed to come and go. When we got to the doctor's office, my husband was there waiting on me. He grabbed my hand tightly and never let go. We walked in together and sat down. Nervously, I was shaking and hoping it was nothing to worry about. The doctor came into see me immediately, and she knew something was wrong. She went ahead and examined me and found that my eyes were not following her finger that was right in front of my face. When she went down to examine my legs there was no reflex in my right knee when she hit it with a plexor. Finally, she went down to my toes and pinched my left side.

“Can you feel this?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said.

She moved down to the right foot and did the same. This time, I could not feel anything. The doctor was as curious as I was. Why was my body acting like this? When Doctor Sandra was done with my physical, she told me to go home and get some sleep and if I was not better by tomorrow morning to go to the hospital so they could run some tests on me and see what might be going on.

Morning came and I felt worse than yesterday. My whole right side became a limp, and my vision was still blurry. I ended up calling off work and called my husband who was at work to come help me get to the hospital. When making it to the hospital, I was rushed into the emergency room. They placed an IV Catheter in my arm and took about 30mL of my blood to run all sorts of tests which all came back negative.

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After staying in the hospital for the nearly a week, the doctors found nothing wrong with me until they decided to do a spinal tap and an MRI. A couple hours later, Dr. McKinley appeared in my room. My husband held my hand. Both of us hoped for some good news, but we were told something that we did not expect to hear.

“Good morning Mrs. Gallispie, I got the results back from your spinal tap and I have some news to share with you and your husband. It appears you have something called Multiple Sclerosis. It is a disease that affects the central nervous system and there is no cure for this disease. This results in nerve damage that disrupts communication between the brain and the body. The MRI also showed a spot on your left side of your brain which explains why your functions on your right-hand side of your body are not working. I can write up some medication to get you feeling at ease, but I am deeply sorry to share this news with you, and if you need anything, I am more than happy to help.”

Hearing this news from Dr. McKinley was like a shot to the stomach. I could barely swallow and immediately started to cry in the arms of my husband. I had no idea what this meant for my future, but all my husband kept telling me is that he loved me and will be by my side no matter what.

Driving home the next day after figuring out the prognosis, I was distraught. I kept looking out my window; the sun was so bright, and the air was so clean. I kept thinking to myself why. Why could God let this happen to me? I tried to hold back tears in front of my husband, but fear was controlling me. I thought to myself, “God made this day beautiful knowing my life was going to end.” I felt like it was revenge more than giving me hope or happiness.

As the days and weeks went by, I felt more and more isolated. No more gymnastics or cheer, my friends stopped coming by, and when I did see them, there were only pitying looks. My husband tried his best to help me, but still did not understand how I really felt. He wanted me to clean and cook every day, but all I wanted to do is lie down and rest. When going to the store, I would have to park in the disabled spot in the very front, and everyone would just stare at me. I would sometimes get rude comments like, “Why are you parking there, others need it more than you do.” Or “There is nothing wrong with you.”. There was nothing positive in my life anymore, and I surely did not want to live. I had no need to live. I had hatred towards God now. Sometimes I felt that it was my only way out, but then again, I thought of my sweet husband who tried his best to love and care for me when he could and how he would be devastated if something were to happen to me. I knew soon or later I would also be bound to a wheelchair. I was young, I still had a full life to experience. Now what, what could I do? I was alone. At this point all I knew to do was take my life.

My husband was at work and the house was quiet. Every step I took towards the bathroom, I was fearful, determined, and lost. Voices in my head made me feel like I was going crazy. One foot in front of the other I walked into my bathroom where I just stopped and stared

at myself in the mirror. I looked a mess. I was frightened by my own reflection. It was not worth putting my husband through all this stress. He would be better off with some other beautiful girl who was healthy and could make him happy. I did not do any of those things anymore. He wanted kids, and I was afraid I could not give him that since my body had changed. He always wanted to travel, but I could not go with him because I was so weak.

The memories of us running on the beach together smiling and laughing. He was so handsome. When we got back to the room, he would lie down beside me and look me in the eyes and kiss me. His kiss was remarkable, it was soft and smooth, it so gently touched my lips. From there his hands would run down my body and we would make love. That memory kept running through my mind of what we used to have together. It would have been a beautiful story to tell our children and grandchildren, but I could not. He had to move on. I turned my head towards the medicine cabinet and opened it up. The first thing I grabbed was diphenhydramine. I shook the bottle and realized right away that it was halfway full. I then started to cry, I was scared and afraid. I did not know whether I was going to hell or not. I had a rough time believing in God. Where do I go from here?

I closed my eyes as I held a glass of water in one hand and the bottle in the other. On the count of three, I flushed the medication down my throat and waited. I walked over to the corner of the room where I sat down and waited to see what would happen next. My phone was next to me as I was sitting there starting to get sleepy. As tears were flooding my face, I managed to call my husband.

“Hey babe,” said my husband.

“Hi,”

“What’s wrong?”

“I just wanted to let you know...”

“Sara! Sara!”

The next thing I remember is waking up covered in my own vomit and my husband standing over top of me. He was crying hard as he threw his bulky arms around me and wailed as he was happy that I was alive. I was confused yet blessed he saved me. Right then and there I knew I did a terrible thing, and I would have hurt someone that I genuinely love and who loves me back. I lay there on the floor until the ambulance got there. We both cried and he never stopped holding onto me.

“Don’t do that ever again, you scared me!” said my husband.

“I’m sorry.”

“I love you Sarah and always will.”

I got the courage and strength to look up at him and smile. Five minutes later the ambulance showed up and transported me to the emergency room where I was given meds and twenty-four-hour care. From there I got the help I needed, and my husband was by my side through it all.

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Years went by and I got my courage and strength back. God gave me a second chance to live after trying to take my life. I then realized I had much to live for. I had a wonderful husband who saved my life that day and I have met hundreds of inspiring young and old women with MS. They have made me strong, and I have been going to church every Sunday now to praise God and thank him every day for what a beautiful place he has given us. I am almost finished with college and I am about to have a baby girl named Aspen Grace. It is unknown whether my daughter will inherit my disease, but I will raise her with love. When I thought everything was going to be falling apart, it all got better and I saw myself as not only a fighter, but a warrior. I go out to lunch every week with a girl I met in my own town who also has MS. Of course, we all do not have the same symptoms, but we can relate in so many ways and I am overwhelmed with happiness and joy. What else can I ask? I have a great husband and a beautiful daughter to be. I can finally say, I am not alone anymore!

**Forgiven**  
Poetry by Amber Ward

A life filled with sorrow and grief.  
Self-inflicted pain without any relief.  
A heart that's been broken time and again.  
A soul cold and empty without any friends.  
Sitting day after day hating my life and circumstances.  
Not realizing the pain that I've caused with my own two hands.  
Nothing in which to believe is my thoughts.  
Pouring out feelings of guilt that I've caught.  
Sinning through my life day after day.  
With nothing left to lose I decided to give life another chance and I pray.  
I prayed for God to fill up my soul.  
I prayed for his forgiveness and for his love to wash away the cold.  
I prayed for the Lord to lead me and guide me.  
I prayed for his will to be done, and for him to just take control.

## The Day that Changed Me

Nonfiction by Mel

There have been many lessons throughout my forty-three years that have made me be the person I am today. Like any daughter, sister, mother, or wife, I experienced a host of things that were both good and bad. I have loved, cried, laughed, crawled, danced, sang, and fought my way throughout life. However, if I had to go back and pinpoint one key event or date that embodies who I am, I would choose April 17, 2021.

It began in January 2021 with my sisters, my niece, and myself planning a girl trip to go ziplining. Over the last four years, we have tried to do something once a year that we normally would have never gotten to do before. Whether it is to just go fishing or camping, as long as we are all together, nothing else matters. These trips may not seem special to a lot of people, but they have been deeply meaningful as the majority of us have experienced marital abuse. We also grew up in a very traumatic and abusive home. It's our way to keep us close and to support each other. We can be honest and real with each other. They know my flaws, and I know theirs, but we still love each other.

The ziplining trip was around two hours long. As we got there, we acted like our normal goofy selves, but I could feel our underlying nervousness. However, by the love of God, we were not going to let one of us out-do the rest. We were such brave souls that day. We didn't know just how much we needed each other there because we were facing our fear of heights and truly the unknown. As we climbed higher and higher on that first tower, I could see their smiles falter and quiver, but I would never let them know I saw it. I love them too much. With each new step, my knees got weaker and wobblier.

We climbed until we got to the top of the first tower which sat at the peak of a big hill. When we got strapped in and cabled off, we were then given the instructions by two wonderful guides whose smiles were encouraging and understanding. My first sister stepped up to go first. She was like the rest of us and wanted to get it over with. As she zipped away, my stomach was in my throat and my nervousness could not have been any more apparent. After she went another sister followed and more of my nerves began to surface. Now it was finally my turn! I stepped up to the platform. I froze up a little as I looked over the edge. I could see the ground so far below me. I couldn't distinguish the rocks from sticks. My heart was racing. I kept asking myself if I was really able to do this. Could I really take that first very long step out away from the edge? Would I be ok?

I swallowed hard and prayed and did just that. I took that huge leap against my fears. It took me only a second to realize just how freeing it was to fly through the trees and over the water. I could feel the air swish around me. I remember the smell of the soil and the water. It was as if I were above the world, yet an intricate part of it. I was small but felt powerful. I was able to get a personal perspective of a physical world that you can only get by doing something yourself. Soon I was soaring through the sky from one platform to another. I was getting braver and braver. So brave, that I was able to zip with one hand on the line. With each step off the platforms, it had gotten easier and easier. When we got to the super zip, we were given the

chance to fly like a superhero or zip as we had on the other lines. We chose to be superheroes. As I was getting into the new type of harness, I was scared to allow someone to have control over me and my body, but when I was released, it was exhilarating and moving. I did it! I had flew like a hero through the sky.

On the car ride home, I had time to think about my life, about the other scary things I faced, and how I slowly overcame them. I have triumphed over childhood molestation, being gang-raped by the age of six, seizures, parental abuse, teenage pregnancy, foster care, marital abuse, having a child with cancer, divorce, watching someone try to commit suicide in front of me, and then truly loving someone deeply only to have let them go. I had added one more thing to that list.

I overcame all of this, but that is only a small part of who I am. I am so much more than that. I am a woman who can love people with all her heart; a daughter who can forgive; a mother who is showing her kids that she is strong and can break generational curses; a sister who will stand up for you; a friend who is strong and reliable; and ultimately, a compassionate human being. I am so much more than my past, present, and any future trauma. I am so much more than my happiest of days. I realized that as I flew across the sky that day I had been my own superhero.

I have wonderful support from my family and friends, but it is God's love for me and my own determination that shaped me into this version of me. I am proud of who I am. I know I am not done yet because I have so much more to give to this world. I know I don't have to settle for a mediocre life because I know I can handle more than most. I will continue to love deeply, play hard, believe in hope, and be true to myself. I will expect great things but will appreciate the comfort of the smallest of things. I know that I am someone God wanted on this Earth for a reason. I have purpose here, I am needed, and I have value. My destiny has no limits.

**Watson**  
Art by Traci Mills



## In Praise of the Ordinary

Nonfiction by Rebecca Phillips

Why do so many people hate squirrels? People joke about ways to get rid of them. There are horrifying Youtube videos of squirrels being shot to death. Even some animal lovers have issues with the furry thieves that find so many ingenious ways to get at expensive birdseed. I remember the (admittedly lighthearted) “wanted” posters and mug shots of squirrels sold at Wild Birds Unlimited (a favorite store, the one in our area now sadly defunct). Because I have just had the delight of watching a pair of the furry-tailed rodents chasing each other up and down the pine trees in our back yard, demonstrating a level of energy that I am unlikely ever to have again, I feel the need to put in a few words in defense of squirrels.

First, let me concede that squirrels and humans have sometimes been in competition for food. Early settlers in Ohio described how masses of squirrels could take hours to pass through the trees overhead; one (probably tall) tale recorded by the Ohio Historical Society asserted that an “army” of squirrels took nearly a month. Squirrels raided the cornfields on which these early settlers depended, and farmers in the mid-1800’s had to submit squirrel pelts when they paid their taxes. If most of us still lived at this basic subsistence level, I could understand the antipathy, but most of us in the US have the privilege of more than enough to eat, generally readily available and not wrested from the ground by the sweat of our brows. So let us consider the common eastern gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*).

These rodents were hunted nearly to extinction in the late 19th century. Once killing them was no longer the price of property ownership, they began a comeback, but the world they came back to was not the world of their ancestors prior to European settlement of eastern North America. The gray squirrel evolved in the eastern hardwood forest, that blanket of tree cover that once spread (almost) uninterrupted from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. Given that such forest density is not compatible with most agriculture, clearing of the forest accompanied the increase in the numbers of humans. One might expect that such habitat loss, especially combined with extensive hunting, would be the death knell for a species, but such was not the case for the gray squirrel.

It was the case for the only other species that, as far as I know, existed in greater numbers than the gray squirrel. The Smithsonian Institution posits that passenger pigeons once composed more than twenty-five percent of all the birds in North America, numbering in the billions. The Europeans who came to these shores marveled at the size of the flocks, estimating them at over a mile wide and 300 miles long in the early 1800’s. Because the pigeons existed in such great numbers, they were exploited as cheap food for slaves and were killed in almost unimaginable numbers, often as many as 50,000 in a single day’s hunt in a single roosting or nesting area. Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in 1914. I for one am glad that the gray squirrel escaped such a fate.

Our world would be seriously diminished without the presence of squirrels. While I don’t ever intend to hunt them myself, squirrels are an important food source for bobcats, foxes, hawks, owls, and eagles, and I don’t want to imagine a world without sightings of such creatures.

Many of us in urban and suburban areas are used to thinking of trees as things that we plant, ordering them from nurseries where they are specially tended and sent out for special events like Arbor Day, but the truth is that wild forests are partially planted by squirrels. Because squirrels are so industrious about storing nuts and seeds in numbers that even they cannot consume, they make much forest regeneration possible. Think of that the next time you see an oak, walnut, or hickory tree.

Besides, I admire the squirrels' persistence. These creatures with brains the size of the walnuts they eat have managed to make our human habits work for them. When the hardwood forest shrank, they moved into our neighborhoods and made themselves at home. When wild nuts became less common, they found that sunflower seed feeders work at least as well as oak trees as food sources. When we put up baffles and "squirrel-proof" bird feeders, they figure out new ways to get at the seed they want (providing many hours of wildlife-watching amusement for some of us). When we attempt to move them to new places, they often find their way back, sometimes swimming distances as great as two miles, with their furry tails held up out of the water. The only human habit they can't adapt to is cars, as the numbers of dead squirrels on our roads attests.

I admit it—I enjoy and encourage the presence of squirrels. No other common animal is as smile-provoking as a furry-tailed rodent running up and down a tree, or sitting upright using its little hands to stuff its face with as much food as will fit. Today, I praise this "ordinary" animal for its extraordinary ability to brighten a winter's day.



**A New Theme for English B**  
Poetry by Jadon Sandy

A page tonight  
What shall it be about?  
Shall I write on behalf  
Of somebody else  
Because it seems to me  
That I would come off as rather boring.

Should I then write about the  
Act of writing  
“Heavens no, you want  
to be a hack?”  
Well, if Kaufman can do it  
Why can’t I do that?

Should I write about the beautiful nature?  
“The world’s a cruel place doesn’t you know?  
Stranger danger is the new motto!”  
But look at the ocean it’s waves a gust  
“And the pollution in the air, what disgust!”

Oh, shut it you, you cynical nitwit.  
My head - my head, be gone! Get out of It!

And with that, the page had been fulfilled,  
And the writer writes even still...

**Magpie Sunset**  
Art by Traci Mills



Artist Note: *Magpie Sunset* was done during quarantine with things I found around the house. In the tree there are shiny trinkets collected by the fairies. The tree top lights up (unable to catch properly in a photo) to look like lighting bugs. The tree trunk is made from small pieces of wooden dowels. Cut, painted and sanded to look differently. There are stones collected on a vacation. A favorite bead attached to the top of a metal shaving to look like a yard globe. And various types of moss. The background was a beautiful piece of wood my husband picked up for me thinking I would like the wood itself. Then I hung the piece in a vintage wood frame. It has become one of my favorite pieces and reminds me that no matter what life throws at us, there's always beauty to be found.

## **Isolation**

Fiction by Mariah Sands

It was beautiful the day the world burned. Everyone thought that it would end with a bang, showing how the media influences our thoughts, but in reality, it was a quiet affair. In the books it's usually depicted as ash covering the fallen world like snow, decrepit buildings, and the last of humanity fighting to survive. Living through it, however, has been a different experience.

It was shocking, the relative ease with which I adapted this new way of living. In some ways not much has changed. Buildings still stand, not yet disrupted by nature; it hasn't been long enough for the lack of human existence to further their decay. The only thing different now is the quiet. The murmur of people going about their daily lives is no longer present. Familiar streets have turned unrecognizable in the silence.

Even so, I do receive some comfort walking down the same streets I always have. I had always used walking as a way to clear my head, I find myself needing to do it more now than ever before. My walk is accompanied by the heat; the warmth of the sun's rays wraps around me, creating something tangible I have to wade through. The water and food that fill my bags weigh heavy; the physical discomfort coincides with the thoughts that weigh heavy on my mind. Resources are still easy to come by, abandoned stores nearby remain mostly untouched.

Gathering necessities takes up little of my time, even now grocery shopping is still dull. It is free now though, so I guess it does have that going for it.

I should be more disturbed with my simplistic routine. However, there is a perverse sense of freedom in being alone in the world. A world without expectations, who thought that that could ever happen? Maybe it didn't; maybe I still haven't escaped my own.

There are various things that I have to do now that have deviated from my previous life. I have access to supplies, but I am still surviving on my own. Water is a priority, that I do know. I gather it whenever I can. Also, I have amassed quite the collection of canned foods. Things that can keep are key. Although while I still can, I make sure to take advantage of the fresh fruits and vegetables that I have access to; they won't last long.

Another benefit to this life, I can travel wherever I want now. I guess even now I still haven't stopped running. Is it possible to outrun what's in the mind?

I have always had the urge to leave, like an itch beneath the skin, one I could never scratch. Now I have an excuse. Travel is going to be inevitable. The city isn't the best place to survive any more, the lack of humans will show here before anywhere else. Too many things could go wrong without the proper maintenance as time goes on. There are many places that are safer, away from everything. It would be best to not to linger much longer; the effect of rainwater has already made an appearance, with no one to manage the pumps the subways have already filled with water. I'm reluctant to stay and witness what will fall apart next, unsure of what that could be, or how to prepare. It would be nothing I could solve. Traveling is the best choice. There is no reason to stay, no sentiment to hinder my leaving.

It's sobering. The only things that have ceased to function are the things humanity has made. So many things that I used to be consumed by are gone now, so many things are impermanent.

I can plan to evade hunger and even thirst. I cannot, however, dissuade the loneliness. The solitude that seeps into my bones and leaves them feeling hollow is an unforeseen consequence of my situation. One that has no remedy.

Sometimes I think I'm going crazy, but is it possible to be cognizant while losing your own mind?

Sometimes I find myself talking aloud, just to make sure I still can. As if my voice might have disappeared without there being anyone left to hear it. It's funny, I suppose I hear myself better now, there's nothing left to drown it out. The quiet is the only thing left to hear anything I have to say.

Sometimes I feel lucky. I don't think I had ever seen the stars shine so bright before. It didn't take long for the lights to go out, never to turn on again. I'm the first person in a long time to truly witness the world go dark. Without the artificial light, it was like seeing the sky for the first time. I never realized how the things people created impacted how we were able to see the sky. At night I can hardly look away from the sky, the view finally unobstructed. I don't feel as alone then, with the warm air, billions of stars above me, and the darkness wrapped around me like a blanket.

I feel secure in this world. Devoid of anything but me.

The world is beautiful without the filter of humanity. Nature are quickly take it back, no longer imposed upon by people. Nature is more resilient than we are. Although, I feel resilient too.

I am the lucky one. I'm lucky to still see the stars, to be free, truly free.

There's a common phase that used to be said. I heard it all the time. Oh, to be the last man standing. It always carried such a positive connotation; it came with a sense of pride; albeit it was used figuratively in most instances. But to live the phrase, to actually be the last one standing, well pride isn't really a strong enough word.

I am the last one standing.

I won.

I outlasted humanity. The only thing left to surpass me is nature and the silence. The quiet will outlive everything, vast as it consumes everything. It will be here when I am gone, remaining uninterrupted.

It's a powerful feeling. Living with freedom came with the price of living in solitude. Such an easy choice to make, the ends really do justify the means. Who wouldn't make the most of the opportunity to live like this?

The end of the world was just a common topic in the media; it made books and television shows, it was entertainment for people to consume. There were a multitude of ways people wrote how it would all end. What occurrence could pose such a threat to the human race.

It was never meant to become reality.

But isn't the world better now? Everything is more peaceful now. Everything seems still. No one was hurt. They never even saw it coming. There wasn't even a moment from them to mourn what they were about to lose.

I'm not entirely sure what possessed me to do it. Maybe I was bored, desperate for something to change. A part of me thinks I just wanted to know what would happen, that I did it just because I could. Maybe it was just my selfish way of making time stop.

There were so many ways people dreamed that the world could end. They were all wrong; none of them ever involved me.

### **At Daytona During Corona**

Poetry by Mariah Evans, Caraline Lancaster, Cara Masters, Josey Moore

As I walk across the barren beaches,  
I see a mask in the blazing white sand.  
I think about the governors' speeches.  
I knew the world had a problem at hand.  
Realizing most the globe was locked away,  
Attempting to escape the horrid scene.  
Resigning to a life of drab and gray,  
Repeating the same day in quarantine.  
When everyone across the great blue sea,  
Witnessed the entire world close its doors.  
No one anywhere shouted out with glee,  
As I can see on these vast, lonely shores.  
All I can do is pray for the next year,  
That this dreadful disease will disappear.

## Contributor Biographies

**Grant Barnhart** is a junior at St. Marys High School, a 3 year-letterman in golf and basketball, has earned 3 scholarship letters, and was a part of the 2019 and 2020 State Championship golf team. He is a member of National Honor Society and Super Teens Achieving Regional Success. After graduating, he plans to attend college and play basketball, while majoring in education or business.

**Dr. Alicia Matheny Beeson** works as an assistant professor at West Virginia University at Parkersburg where she teaches literature and writing. Her scholarly interests include American literature, the Progressive Era, utopian and dystopian work, women's literature, and gender studies.

**Olivia Birkhimer** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of Science Honorary and National Honor Society. She enjoys playing video games. She plans to go to WVU Parkersburg to be a teacher.

**Riley Boley** is a junior at St. Marys High School. He is a member of National Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta and was 2nd Team All-State lineman and a 3-year letterman in football and wrestling.

**Erica Davis** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Spanish Honorary, and Science Honorary. She is a member of the cross country and track teams. In the future, Erica plans to go to college to be a pathologist while also continuing her passion for running.

**Hannah Dearth** is a junior at St. Marys High School. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and the Science Honorary. She is the FFA secretary, 4-H vice president, and Class of 2022 vice president. She plans on attending WVU and majoring in health and well-being and then applying to a physician assistant program.

**Daniele Ellison** was born and raised in Ripley, WV. She currently is a student at West Virginia University at Parkersburg where she hopes to get her degree in Nursing. While in school, she works at Ripley Paws Veterinarian Clinic in Ripley, where she is a receptionist/vet tech and assist doctors as needed. On her free time, she likes to kayak, fish, camp, and travel. Daniele has been to about ten different states at the age of twenty. Looking into the future, Daniele hopes to have her RN Degree in Nursing and work either in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit or the Labor and Delivery Unit. She hopes to reside in Ripley, where she will grow a small family.

**Sedonie Ernak** was born and raised in Jamaica. She moved to Florida at the age of 14, and from there, she enlisted in the Army at 19 years old. She moved to West Virginia with her family where she currently attends West Virginia University at Parkersburg. She will receive her Associate of Applied Science in December 2021. She will continue her education to earn her bachelor's degree in accounting. In addition to her achievements, Sedonie enjoys cooking, working out, and spending time with her family.

**Mariah Evans** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she serves as a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Science Honorary, and Super Teens Achieving Regional Success. She is the president of the St. Marys High School Class of 2022, the president of the St. Marys High School FFA, and the vice president of the Middle Island Ramblers 4-H Club. Following graduation, she plans to attend WVU in an agricultural field.

**Stephen Fadlevich** is a first-year student at WVU Parkersburg. His essay is about wealth and how people view it differently depending on their life. He wrote this based on his own personal experiences.

**Paul Gordon** is a junior at St. Marys High School where he is a member of Mu Alpha Theta. For the past three years, he has earned an academic letter.

**Anondae Hesson** is a junior at St. Marys High School where they are a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Science Honorary, and the ACT 30 Club. They have lettered in cheerleading for three years and have also earned three scholarship letters. They plan to go to college to be a physician's assistant.

**Garrytt Horner** is a junior at St. Marys High School and is a member of the Science Honorary and Mu Alpha Theta. He plays tennis as well as serves as the Class of 2022 historian. Upon graduation, he plans to go to The Ohio State University to major in veterinary science.

**Millie Kehrer** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Science Honorary, and Super Teens Achieving Regional Success. She is a three-year letterman in both basketball and volleyball. She plans to go to either WVU or West Liberty and major in communication sciences and disorders, and then get her Masters in speech pathology.

**Danielle Kelly** was born in raised in West Virginia, but now resides in Ohio. She serves as Assistant Professor of English at West Virginia University at Parkersburg. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her work has appeared in *Hedge Apple Magazine*, *rkvry*, and in *Women Speak* vol. 5 and is forthcoming in vol. 7.

**Dr. Sandra Kolankiewicz** is a professor of English at WVU Parkersburg. Her collection *Turning Inside Out* is available from Black Lawrence Press. *The Way You Will Go* and *Lost in Transition* are available at Finishing Line Press. Her poems and stories have appeared widely. She lives with her family in Marietta, Ohio.

**Caraline Lancaster** is a junior at St. Marys High School, but has already earned 30 college credit hours. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and the Science Honorary, as well as a 3-year letterman in basketball and 1-year letterman in cross country and track. In fact, she was a member of the 2020 basketball team who made it to the state tournament. Furthermore, this past year in cross country, she was 4th in the region and 30th in the state. Following graduation, she plans to attend WVU Parkersburg and major in nursing.

**Brandon Lawhon** is a junior at St. Marys High School. He is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and Science Honorary and has been in Student Council 2 years and earned an academic letter the last 3 years. He has lettered in basketball and golf, where he was a part of the 2019 and 2020 State Championship team. He plans to attend college in state somewhere and become a radiologist.

**Katie Lemon** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she serves as a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and the Science Honorary, and as Student Council treasurer. She plans to major in exercise physiology at WVU.

**Jessica Lipscomb** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she serves as a member of National Honor Society and has earned 3 scholarship letters. When not at school, she works at the St. Marys Fitness Center. She plans to attend college and major in business.

**Natalie Malone** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and Science Honorary. She has lettered in marching band for three years and hopes to be field commander next year. She has earned an academic letter for three years as well. She plans to go to college to either become a forensic psychologist or an elementary teacher.

**Tyler Martin** is a student in his junior year within the MDS program. His areas of concentration are Literature, History, and Communication. He enjoys writing prose and poetry and sharing his experiences within them. He is also a singer with the College Chorale at WVU Parkersburg.

**Cara Masters** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, and the ACT 30 Club. She was selected to attend the WV Governor's Honors Academy in the summer of 2021. She plays softball and volleyball. She plans to attend college to pursue forensic science.

**Kimberly Matheny** is a junior at WVUP where she hopes to earn a Regents Bachelor of Arts. Her work has appeared in previous issues of *The Poorhouse Rag*. Last year, she entered a handmade Christmas ornament in Kathy Justice's Christmas Tree ornament booklet remembering healthcare workers during COVID. She also helped paint the mural on the outside wall of The Parkersburg Art Center.

**Martha McGovern** was a long time English and Education professor and is active in the community, writing and making the world a better place.

**Mel** is a nontraditional student at WVU Parkersburg pursuing a nursing degree and has recently wrapped up her first year at the institution. She has always enjoyed writing and English classes from high school to college because the classes have opened her up to the opportunity to vocalize and share the hurt she has endured and how she has prevailed.

**Traci Mills** is working towards her BA in Drafting from WVU Parkersburg. Married to her high school sweetheart, they have two children and are looking forward to welcoming their first grandchild later this year. Along with taking photos, Traci also enjoys reading, nature, creating

art out of old random objects, and learning about other cultures and old houses. She had a poem published in *Moments of Solitude*. After she graduates, she plans to travel and help disaster relief efforts with affordable, stylish, modern housing.

**Josey Moore** is a junior at St. Marys High School and is a member of the National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Science Honorary, and Spanish Honorary. She has lettered 3 years in basketball and cross country, where they were state runners-up in cross country during the 2018 and 2019 seasons. Josey plans to attend WVU and major in exercise physiology and earn a doctorate in physical therapy upon graduation.

**Coleen Nicoles** is a transgender woman of 55 years. She started transition/HRT 14 months ago and has accepted her truth for about 2 1/2 years. Her transition cost her a career, so she is building a better one. She hopes one day to be a licensed Therapist, specializing in Transgender Needs.

**Wyatt Norman** is a junior at St. Marys High School where he serves as a member of the National Honor Society and as the FFA treasurer. He enjoys playing football, basketball, and baseball. Following graduation, he plans to go to college and major in engineering.

**Rebecca Phillips** was a long time English professor at WVUP and an avid gardener and protector of the earth.

**Dr. Lauri Reidmiller** is a painter, photographer, textile artist, and educator. She received her PhD in Art Education from The Ohio State University and her MFA in Painting from Radford University. Dr. Reidmiller is an associate professor and teaches all levels of studio classes at WVU Parkersburg. She also serves as the faculty advisor for the WVUP Art Club. She is the recipient of the West Virginia Higher Art Educator Teaching Award and was recently awarded the WVUP SGA 2020 Faculty of the Year Award. Her artwork has been accepted into juried, invitational exhibitions and solo exhibitions. She creates a diverse array of contemporary abstracts in acrylics, using contrasts in form and color to underscore emotion in each piece. Her art reflects a wide range of moods, from light and joyful to deep and mysterious.

**Nicholas Reidmiller** is a Freshman at West Liberty University to study Music Technology and Percussion Performance. He enjoys writing song lyrics and prose as a hobby. When he graduates from college, he plans to work in the Music Industry.

**Mariah Sands** lives in Vienna, West Virginia. She is currently a college student at WVU Parkersburg with General Education as her major. Her love for words is furthered in various interests such as reading and writing.

**Jadon Sandy** is a student at WVU at Parkersburg and is studying to get an Associate of Arts. Once having the Associate's degree, he will pursue getting a Bachelor's degree at WVU in Morgantown. With his Bachelor's degree, he would like to teach English while writing, and hopefully publishing, novels/short stories. He has won first place in the West Virginia Young Authors short story contest for Wood County in his Junior and Senior year of high school. He

has also placed in the top three of the *Wood Whisperers* short-story contest for Wood County, WV in those same years.

**Madison Scott** is a junior at St. Marys High School where she is a member of the Science Honorary, Mu Alpha Theta, National Honor Society, and WVU Parkersburg's Phi Theta Kappa. She is a 3-year letterman in Academics and a 1-year letterman in cross country and basketball. Following graduation, she plans to attend WVU and major in political science before moving on to law school.

**Amee Shah** is a student of WVU at Parkersburg. Living with autism she transforms the daily challenges into creative expression of art through greeting card making, knitting, painting, and pottery. She loves to meet people, make friends, and connect on social media. Each of her works is a unique expression of her love for others.

**Lois Spencer**'s memoir, *In the Language of My Country* (2017), is a tribute to women of her generation who earned degrees as nontraditional college students and began careers later in life. Earlier writing appeared in Volumes 1-4 of *Ohio Teachers Write* as well as other publications. More recently, her short stories have been published in *Women Speak* (Women of Appalachia Project), *Anthology of Appalachian Writers* and *The Poorhouse Rag*. She earned her BSEd and MSEd at Ohio University. She also has a Master of Arts in Liberal Learning from Marietta College.

**Matthew Stuckert** is a third-year college student with a computer technology major. He resides in Fleming, Ohio with his family. He enjoys exploring art in all forms.

**Amber Ward** is a first-generation college student at West Virginia University at Parkersburg where she serves as a member of Phi Theta Kappa and of Ecohawks. Amber loves to write nonfiction, research papers, and poetry. She loves WVU Parkersburg and is proud to be part of the West Virginia University at Parkersburg family. She plans to attain her MDS from WVU Parkersburg and her Master's degree in Sociology at WVU. After her education is finished, she wants to open a restaurant in the Mid-Ohio Valley and continue to write.

**Ethan Weikart** is a junior at St. Marys High School. He is a member of National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta, Science Honorary, and the ACT 30 Club. Following graduation, he plans to pursue an accounting degree.

**Elyssa West** is a junior at St. Marys High School. She is a member of the Science Honorary and the National Honor Society. She has earned 3 scholarship letters, 1 volleyball letter, and 1 mat maid letter. She plans to attend WVU Parkersburg and major in nursing.

**Hailey West** is a junior at St. Marys High School. She has earned a Scholarship letter 3 years. She plans to attend college and get a degree in zoology and marine biology.

**Logan White** is a junior at St. Marys High School and is a member of the National Honor Society and Mu Alpha Theta.

