

OFF CENTER
OFF CENTER
CENTER OFF CENTER
OFF CENTER
OFF CENTER
OFF CENTER



OFF CENTER: A CREATIVE
MAGAZINE FOR THE MTSU
COMMUNITY

Table of Contents

1. EDITORS' NOTES

2. POETRY

Catherine Berresheim

Cindy Frank

Haley Roberts

Karmen Miller

Mavis Wolff

Tricia Cundiff

3. PROSE

Hunter Warren

Joshua Best

Shelby Bundshuh

Skye Kletz

Tricia Cundiff

4. PHOTOGRAPHY

Laura Loggnis

Kera Reynolds

Heather Trimis

Editor's Note: Miles

When did you last walk along the waters of your spirit?

Creation is a rhythmic ocean of our selves, and we are the sky that pulls it to the shore. We reach within ourselves to draw out of the waters great swells of ephemeral experience that tumble over one another. We roll, we surge, we curl back towards ourselves in a disruptive return that throws yet more of us into the air. Even under tranquil skies, our ripples naturally seek out the apparent edges of our soul to bleed beyond them, into the sand.

And as we sink from the shore, we leave behind the products of our vivacity: our creations. They stick out, half-buried, for the flesh of soles and palms to glide over. Passersby collect what we deposit, twisting artifacts around and wondering just how deep within our bodies they once lie.

I pose creation as an incorporeal ocean to emphasize its ever-present existence and depth. We are all filled with artistic potential. Invention is only a matter of displacing our waters to bring to the surface those treasures representative of our metaphysical realities.

Now, we face a time in which we are encouraged to route our waters to cooling towers that deplete and evaporate ourselves. I ask, are we truly willing to leave behind our water-borne charms in favor of heat mirages?

We must resist the inclination of outsourcing creativity. We must not reject the labor of creation. Do not turn from the tumultuous rush of your own waves. Face them. Reach for them. Urge them forward.

Off Center is a display of many oceans' efforts—a collection of shells, relics, and trinkets that glitter against the sun and suggest a bottomless continuum yet to emerge. Walk along our shore. Feel. Ponder. Trace the grooves of what you find and imagine the rumbles of the waters that shaped and carried it to you.



Thank you:

to the contributing artists of this issue, the sailors unafraid to embrace their churning seas and present the riches they found within.

to our production team, the treasure seekers that scoured MTSU's shores to find its shiniest pieces and display them in vivid lights.

to you, the reader, the passerby looking for things to hold. I hope you find your own waters moved by what lies ahead.

- Miles Wine

Editor's Note: Mavis

It is undeniable that art allows one to access themselves.

The pen is the trapdoor. Ballpoint, gel, those fancy felt-tips in the multipack—any drop of ink is a mirror. When I began writing, I merely saw it as painting with an alphabet instead of acrylic, but after years of devotion to the paper, it has been my chance to explore who I really am.

Writing, and art overall, is access. In a world where therapy costs \$150 an hour and a grocery trip breaks the bank, the time spent immersed in creativity is a ticket to unadulterated freedom. Everyone has the chance to let their creativity burn, and this literary magazine emerges from the ashes.

Off Center is for the strange, the offbeat, and the introspective. It is for all to access outside of the bounds of paywalls or institutional access. Amid the contention we are living in, Off Center seeks to be an avenue to fight for the future of solidarity. Like the zine culture born out of the Riot Grrrl and punk movements, this magazine is rooted in the passion of the community and could not exist without it.

When we compiled this issue, we wanted to pay homage to this precedent of accessing community through art. The authors of this issue have dissected their hearts on the pages, and I hope that we have created a space that uplifts the raw humanity in each work.

As you read this issue, I invite you to find inspiration in the boldly colored pages. Find your mind in the serif of each letter. Through the pen, the canvas, or the lens, we can stand and meet ourselves for the first time all over again.

- Mavis Wolff

Assistant Editors:

Hannah Weiss

Joshua Best

Mavis Wolff

Winner of the Will Brown
Creativity Award for
“Gypsum Iron Gypsum”

POETRY

CATHERINE BERRESHEIM

“In My Mother’s Skin”

CINDY FRANK

“Clyde”

HALEY ROBERTS

“Mother Earth Wept”

KARMEN MILLER

“I am No Body”

MAVIS WOLFF

“They Asked Me to Interview Her”

“Gypsum Iron Gympsum”

“Exam Room 1”

TRICIA CUNDIFF

“No Time”

Catherine Berresheim

I had the privilege of participating in a Spalding University Naslund-Mann Graduate School of Writing summer residency workshop with poet Molly Peacock. The title of our workshop was “From All Over the Place to Some Place: Critique and the Generative Process of a Poem or CNF.” We were instructed to find an inspirational object and freewrite from there. I chose a photograph of my mother, and in the process of revision I became preoccupied with how similar my (now older) face favored hers.

I chose key lines from the freewrite that resonated, and noticed they would work well in the Malaysian pantouns structure with its repeating lines. In workshop reads, Molly encouraged me to break form a bit and revise some of the lines, as she has become known for with her sonnets. My poem developed from there.

Author of:

“In My Mother’s Skin”

In My Mother's Skin

An apparition of my mother's face visits me in the mourning mirror,

as I apply wrinkle creams and serums.

(Not my young beautiful mother, the old and tired one preparing to die.)

I have lost my plump and pretty face, soup-bone cheeks hollowed starved.

Painless poisonous shots deliver results. GLP1-inhibitors really work.

The old weary mother's face, sunken cheeked, crêpey skin, baggy smoker's mouth.

"Is it worth it to be this skinny?" she would ask, if she were still alive.

"You betcha! Pretty is as pretty does." I beg her forgiveness.

Painless poisonous shots deliver results. GLP1-inhibitors really work.

Marionette lines just appeared one day, joining the other traumas etched in the epidermis...

“Is it worth it to be this skinny?” She would ask, if she were still alive. We all know pretty is more important. Top shelf products with big price tags: Botox shots, retinols, peptides, and acids remedy the problem areas. ...Tear troughs, crow’s feet—bitter traces of the puppet master I divorced some time ago, still yank the string. Motherless-ness leaves one deflated. Wrinkles worn like twin autobiographies; I carry her now.

Barbaric cosmetic procedures: microneedling, laser beams, permanent plastic fillers to temporarily delay the inevitable.

I have lost my plump and pretty face: Manchurian folds now loose and bruised. I am in my mother’s skin. Motherless-ness leaves one flattened. Wrinkles worn like twin confessionales; I carry her now.

Care-worn and wise she admonishes, “Enjoy your life, Kitten, before it’s too late to try.”

An apparition of my mother’s face visits me in the mourning mirror.

Cindy Frank

Last spring, I went to the Writing Center for the first time, with a healthy dose of fear when it came to putting my thoughts on paper. Upon writing this poem, I hoped to keep the process to one tutor due to feelings of frailty, but I was lucky to work with a variety of tutors who each had something to add. The sense of community I feel with this resource is overwhelming—I could not have asked for better friends. Looking back, I've not only strengthened my skills as a writer, but I have come to terms with Clyde's passing.

While I used to cry from hearing Clyde's echoes, I now feel that he is happy and in a better place, no longer in pain. Composing this poem taught me that overcoming grief and utilizing campus resources are important for students' health and stability. Before deciding to write out my grief, I thought that I was just feeling pure sadness, but now I can see that grief is an act of love. It is my hope that my readers facing similar losses can eventually heal from their pain and keep the love they had alive through memories.

Author of:

"Clyde"



Clyde

Your eyes are stars. Unblinking.
The sky cried for you today.

I wake hearing your paws,
they click along the floor to meet me.
Your body may be gone,
 but your spirit still lingers.
 An emptiness. Unyielding.

My soul is a heavy stone,
drowning,
weathered by the raindrops of grief.
My heart is riven;
you are everywhere I look:

 I see you in the faces of your family,
they are puddles of your innocence.

I stretch out my hand
to reach your reflections
until they are rippled and you are distorted.

The illusion is broken.

They are mirrors of our memories,
but they are not you.

My hopes are dashed upon waking,
there is nowhere to turn.

We walk together in my dreams.

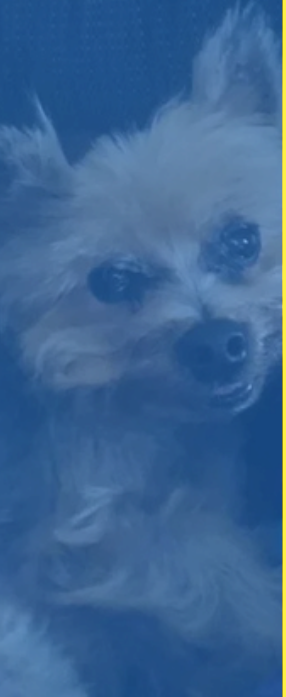
They morph as I fall away from you.

Into the waves,
your reflection calls me,
it pulls me ashore.

My waking hours are haunted.

When I see your shadow,
it's a reminder of what could have been—
a reminder that you're not here.





As the storm passes,
your golden face shines through.
I hold on to you and all that is good,
my sun, my friend,

Forevermore.



Rest In Peace, Sweet Clyde

Haley Roberts

This poem was inspired by deforestation and greed, two topics that have become increasingly relevant over the last few years and continued to rear their ugly heads. While writing, I wished for this poem to evoke the emotions I felt at gazing over bare fields that were once full of vibrant, plentiful trees in hopes of bringing awareness to the loss of our land. My hometown, Lynchburg, Tennessee, is currently experiencing the effects of losing our natural resources to corporate greed. As a lifelong writer and student, I wished to express these sentiments in an artistic form rather than simply stating the facts in hopes of sparking empathy and understanding.

Author of:

“Mother Earth Wept”

Mother Earth

Wept

They cut down all of the trees on a Tuesday.

Tuesday—the day named for the Norse god of justice and war.

This was not justice, but it certainly was war.

The sounds of chopping axes and the muffled thuds of trees hitting the ground replaces the ringing of gunshots, and the waved fist of an irate community assumes the position of protest.

Why, pray tell, would we do such a thing?

As a child, I remember the campaigns
for a greener earth
and the desperate cries to

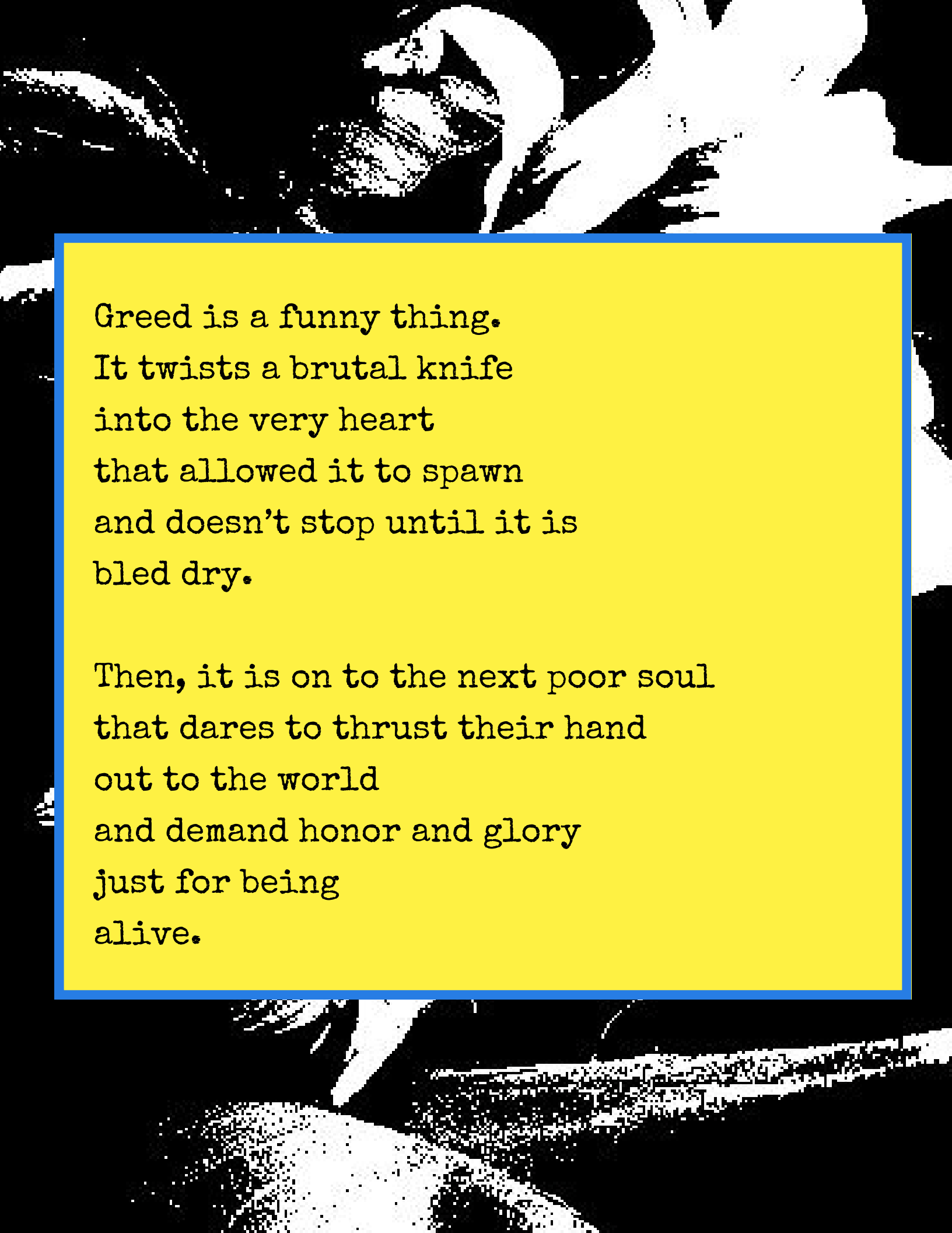
save the trees.

Deforestation is a real problem, you know,

though that doesn't seem to
stop the people that already have
sums of money and access to heavy machinery.

It was as if Mother Earth wept
for those first few weeks
in mourning of yet more
of her blessed creation.

Buckets of rain cascaded onto the land,
and the trees continued to fall with it.



Greed is a funny thing.
It twists a brutal knife
into the very heart
that allowed it to spawn
and doesn't stop until it is
bled dry.

Then, it is on to the next poor soul
that dares to thrust their hand
out to the world
and demand honor and glory
just for being
alive.

Karmen Miller

I wrote this piece after hearing a retelling of “Snow White.” In this retelling, she was not the princess but the witch in the woods. Surviving alone with only one companion, a wolf. One day, they find a girl who had been assaulted by the huntsman. Snow reveals that she, too, was assaulted by him and decides to set out to kill him after securing the girl in the safety of her cabin. While she does get her revenge, it comes at a great cost. I can appreciate the author’s story, but I wanted to give the survivor a happier ending. The poem “I am No Body” is a play on words based on my own survivor story.

I was in a horrible, borderline abusive relationship once with a man who decided one day he no longer saw me as a person, but as a body, and I let him convince me that I was nothing but a body. Through years of therapy and healing, I am happy to say I am past this. He is no longer in my life, and I have achieved things I never thought I would and probably would not have achieved had I stayed in that “relationship.” I am more than just a body now. This is a story for all the survivors of assault or abuse. Please know that you are more than just a body.

Author of:

“I am No Body”

I am No Body

I am no body.

For a while, I was convinced that's all I could be.

Convinced by him and by my own actions.

He never saw me.

He only saw a tight dress and legs wrapped in lace.

A feast laid before him whenever he rang the bell.

Slowly, I became nothing more than a body.

Until one day. I became more.

I got tired of being just a body.

I am a spirit, a voice, a soul.

I am a scholar.

I am an artist.

I am something greater, something unattainable to him.

I am no body.

I am me.



Mavis Wolff

Poetry is an abstract catharsis. It is reckless and bittersweet. Like Dickinson, I write on impulse. I have written since I was a child, and I have my mother to thank for that. The first poem I read was "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams. I pored over my mother's college textbook at our kitchen table, and I wondered why eight lines would be worth remembering. Now, with a weathered notebook and a ballpoint pen, I imagine my legs dangling over the mud-caked wheelbarrow that used to lay in our backyard. There are no white chickens, but everything is glazed with rainwater.

Author of:

"They Asked Me to Interview Her"

"Gypsum Iron Gypsum"

"Exam Room 1"

They Asked Me to Interview Her

I see the black and white photo,
smooth cheeks,
the way her teeth
gloss the matte paper,

the way the buttonholes in
her blouse
do not cleave open at the chest,
how the fabric does not grow
taut across her shoulder blades
when she stretches over her chair.

At my vanity,
I shove my fingers in my mouth
to make sure
my wet grin shines the same,

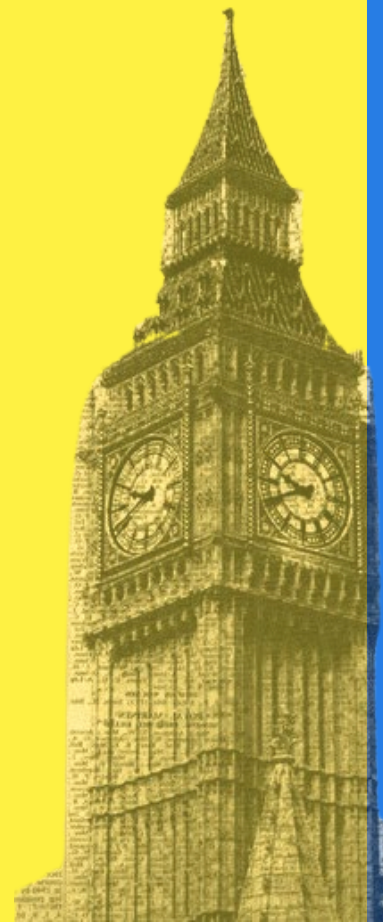


that my seedy pores are not craters
for her eyes to sink in,
and

that I have a bra
that will not stretch
my collared shirt,
the one that I do not have to wear
with the top three buttons open.

I hope she does not notice
that I wear too much blush,
as if I am proud of my naivete.

I am still trying to catch
the woman
trapped behind the rouge,
but I do not know
when her sentence ends.



GYPsum Iron GYPsum

Biting and gnawing and gnashing with
acerbic teeth

You hold my hand in one, and the other
works knots out of the corners of
my jaw.

Oral monsoon,
fuzzy electricity.

Soon,
mellifluous calling out and wild
screaming.

They are not about me, yet
when I dream of taut piano wire and the
straining tendons in your neck,
I wish they were.

It is one of those nights

tonight.

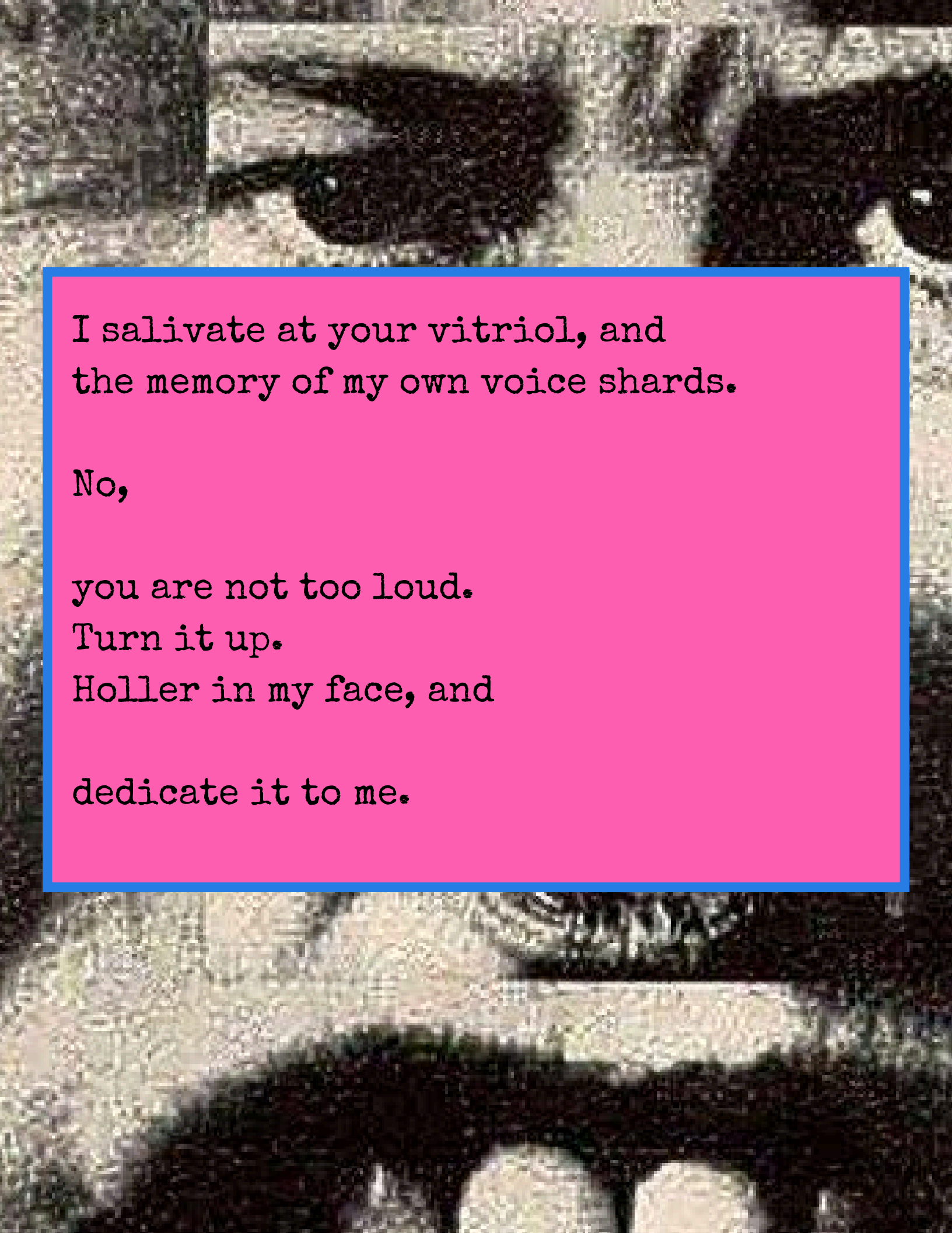
Iron sharpens iron, but

I can never be gypsum, the powder so
easily clapped off your palms.
Even when sweat loosens
the desperate grip on your euphonic
musket.

Aching breasts indent thin walls.
You swallowed my hardened voice while
the moon cowered, and
the sun hid under a fast-food, Walmart
skyline.

Your fingers fall into the shapes only I
can translate.

A chipping Rosetta Stone and my cold arms.
Your vocal cords whip
my sagging hinges into shape.



I salivate at your vitriol, and
the memory of my own voice shards.

No,

you are not too loud.

Turn it up.

Holler in my face, and

dedicate it to me.



Exam Room 1

My favorite tech
with the shiny ginger hair
whisks her away in
an inherited plastic crate.

I hover by the slim window,
peering into
the forbideen room.

She is led to the new scale—
a “baby scale.”

I imagine my callused heels
cracking the surface.

A pocket Bible,
the New Testament,
perches on the bench
where ungrateful children
snot and sob ephemeral salt
into their mothers' clutching arms.

A grimy, ivory front cover
The first two waifish pages
bent against themselves.

I turn my back
and feign apathy
because

I hate the Bible,
and I'm full of the Old:
wrath,
hellfire,
vituperative justice.

I wonder if I can muster anything else

as I sit alone on the bench,
choking on stale dog hair and isopropyl.

Needy fingers pry open
a yellowed, pleather cover.
The center page is screaming:

“he healed their sick.”



Tricia Cundiff

Inspiration for the poem “No Time” was born on campus in a class called “In Process,” taught by Dr. Claudia Barnett. The class introduced several forms of literary magic through visits from authors of various genres. Ciona Rouse, a renowned poet, was our first speaker. Talking to us about her practice of writing, and inviting us to join her in an experiment, Ms. Rouse prompted the class to walk around the room, blanking our minds and letting ideas and inspiration crowd in. Then, directing us to a window, she told us to take the ideas we had gained in the past few moments and imagine that we would see something through that window that would apply to our thoughts. That process inspired this poem.

Both of my parents passed away in the past few years, and I had read a short quote (unknown author) the morning of the In Process class that stayed with me as I drove to school. The quote: “One day my parents will pass, and I will walk this earth with no one left who remembers the whole of me.” Realizing that I was that person had revealed a sadness I kept with me since my parents’ passing. Looking out that window, and imagining the vision of everyone together—someday. The essence of time slipped away, and I knew that my parents and other members of my family, even though they are yet to be born, are together—in time.

Author of:

“No Time”

No Time

A window, a vision, a glimpse
Cutting into my grief, my sorrow,
my pain

I am alone, they are gone

Why does this vision come again?

Persisting until I look, until I
open eyes

These red eyes, these sad eyes.

A window, a vision, a glimpse

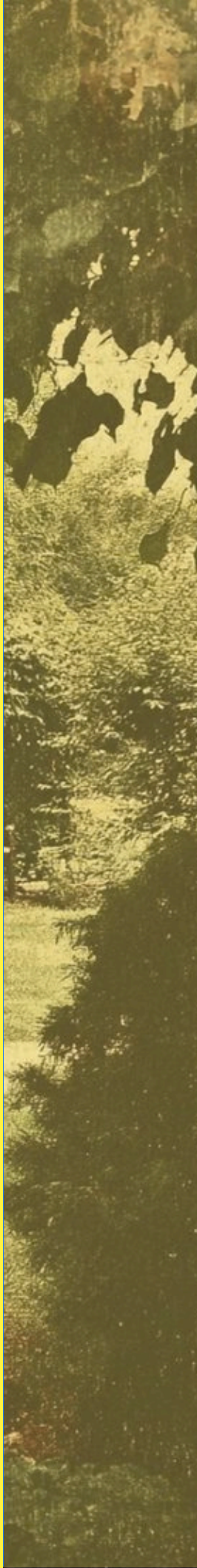
I can't see what I see

It's me and it's them

And it's more, more of us

But I lost them, they are done

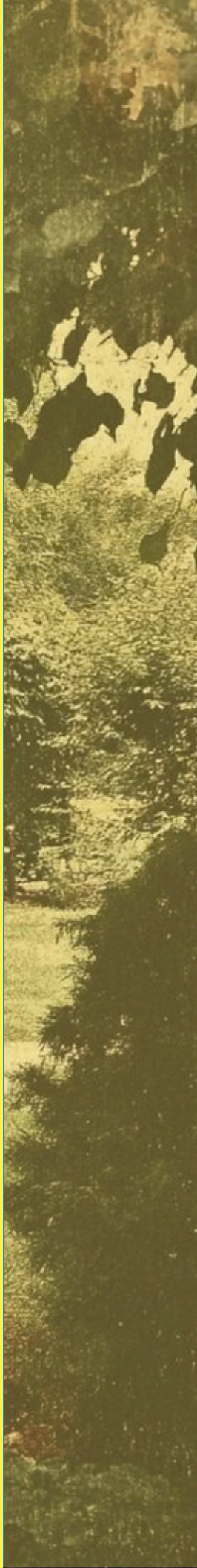
To rot, to rust, to ruin.



A window, a vision, a glimpse
I see my mom, my dad, and yes,
My grands and that must be,
Yes, all that's come before.
And it's me, and mine
There with all, in that window.

There is no time here nor there
Through the window, the vision
A glimpse of what's to come
When there is no time, no pain
When grief is gone.

There.
In the window, a vision, a
glimpse.



PROSE

HUNTER WARREN

“Lightning Crashes”

JOSHUA BEST

“Vignette of a Hollow Home”

SHELBY BUNDSHUH

“The Place Essay”

SKYE KLETZ

“They Speak a Language Not of My Ears”

TRICIA CUNDIFF

“The Backyard”

Hunter Warren

This was written during my Fiction Writing class. As a songwriting major, I quickly fell in love with flash fiction, as both art forms are brief but impactful. In this piece, I drew on my own experiences as well as the experiences of others and stories I read in class, like “Cat Person” by Kristen Roupenian. The song “Lightning Crashes” by the band Live also helped me shape the idea. I believe strongly in telling stories that address social issues and trauma, so I’m proud of how this one turned out.

Author of:

“Lightning Crashes”

Lightning Crashes

I stood outside in the storm under the awning of my dorm building, watching the tall grass stalks sway in the field. I stared at the spot where a bolt of lightning struck the ground, and I thought of my boyfriend, Ian.

He forced himself on me two weeks ago in the storage closet beside my science class. It all happened so fast—faster than I could say I wasn't ready, or not there, not then. Not in some dusty closet with mold growing in the corners and spiders for an audience. I said none of that. He didn't wait for me to say anything at all.

I felt again the weight of Ian's body over mine, the sharp burn of his nails digging crescents into my thighs. I thought about how, for one infinite moment, the sky split open.

And then nothing happened.

Afterward, I pulled my jeans back on, and he walked me to my class. He pecked me on the lips like he always does. Nothing changed between us. He didn't force me into the storage closet again. It was as if it never happened at all.

But in science class, my tailbone ached. My mouth tasted of the eggs Ian ate for breakfast. I ran my tongue over my teeth, trying to flush out the bits of food. But I couldn't get rid of the taste.

Days passed, and my gums became sore. All I could think about was how long it would be until I could brush my teeth again.

An eerie weight filled me slowly, like pressure dropping.

Staring out into the storm, I licked my tongue over my bleeding gums. Through the iron and mint, I still tasted eggs. I couldn't stand it anymore. I pulled out my phone to text Ian, even though I didn't know how to say what I was feeling.

Out in the field, between the tall, drenched stalks of grass, a wisp of smoke began to rise. I looked around as if for confirmation I was really seeing it, but I was alone.

I watched the field to see if anything would change, if after a few minutes I would look up and see nothing.

But in that spot where the lightning struck, the grass kept smoldering. Even when I watched the rain put it out, I knew that it had been there.

I texted him then.

"We should stop seeing each other."

I pocketed my phone and cried.

Joshua Best

This piece specifically speaks to my impression of my childhood. It's a strange mix of what I remember and what I have heard from my parents since. I wanted to give each member of this family their own moment, but to be accurate to the stringency and immediacy of "roles" in the family, exacerbated as they are by a heavy loss that none want to face directly. I think grief and loss, and the place of the family in life's throes, are all important to face and reflect upon.

I hope this vignette is a stark reminder of the importance of reflection—and, particularly, empathetic reflection—something the characters either lack or are too young to fully grasp. The characters of this story would be far better served had they grieved together, but their refusal (conscious or otherwise) perpetuates their hurt until it's almost impossible to bear.

Author of:

“Vignette of a Hollow Home”

Vignette of a Hollow Home

A hammerhead shark swam across the TV screen, each pixel relaying ocean and blood to viewers in each happy, sad, unique home. A father and his son sat on the couch, each staring at the TV, seeing the tool-shaped shark rip a much smaller fish to shreds. One life gives way to another. The father is wrenched from the reverie by the sound of dishes clattering in the kitchen. His wife never minded the sharp sound of ceramic scraping against ceramic, but for some reason the sound incensed him. But his own father taught him patience and restraint, so he opted to stand suddenly rather than shout away the pufferfish within him. The cushions of the couch rebounded with the speed and his son was tossed to his side.

The father looked down and said sorry but the son did not seem to hear him. The boy's eyes were fixed on the screen, on the shark, and the father assumed he was dumbfounded.

“Ain’t they scary?” said the father.

The son just shook his head slowly. The father left the room.

His wife wore pink latex gloves that squeaked and squealed like a dying pig in all the wetness of the sink. Plates, cups, mugs, bowls, forks, spoons, knives—dull, sharp, rounded, and pointed. She practically threw each and every item into the other, scrubbing with a vengeance at every particle of leftover, as if her task were to rid the entire world of stains. The man said, “Can’t you be a little gentler?”

The father looked down and said sorry but the son did not seem to hear him. The boy’s eyes were fixed on the screen, on the shark, and the father assumed he was dumbfounded.

She did not answer. He looked at the headphones draped over her head and ears, ever so slightly heard the sound of Prince. He shook his head, buried his anger—let it linger—and went to their bedroom.

He sat on the bed, faced the door like a man waiting for his executioner to open it. He drew in a long breath. He ignored the now-empty space of one of the room’s corners. The dust on the floor outlined the shape of a bedframe and threatened to make him sneeze.

He dropped his head to his hands at the sound of a plate falling loudly into its allotted place in the dishwasher. The only place to escape further from that noise would be his own head, and that is where his memory resided, and his memory was not one to be faced now. He put his hands over his ears, tried to create silence but only muffled the real sounds a little further. His body still felt the striking plates and knives.

He said, "Goddamnit!" He stood and tried with every bit of self-control he had to not look at that imprint of a child's bed on his way out.

He grabbed his keys from the kitchen counter and went out to the garage. He was so impatient for the door to rise that he kicked the ground in a feeble attempt to distract himself from the prodding of time. The door stopped halfway and he grabbed the red emergency cord to open it the rest of the way. His back and shoulder tensed at the same time. He winced and almost lost his cool, but he did not drop the door.

His son still sat transfixed by the hammerhead shark, wondering at the finality of its killing. The pure instinct and nature of death impressed itself upon him.

The threat of tears made the back of his eyes hurt. The father would be so proud of the boy's restraint, at his newfound skill of burying his troubles and maximizing his pain. Some day he would die, as would his parents, his brother. He would never see them again after some unannounced fateful day. All know this to be true, sooner or later. What mattered for Robert, the boy, was the immediacy, the effect of life and death, their totality and succinct togetherness. What Robert did not know is that years upon years upon years before this, his father had the same horrifying revelation as he watched his mother sob on her knees. The cord of the phone taut and dangerously wrapped around her neck. Both Robert and his father had the very same momentary thought: "Where's Daddy?"

The father was still out. The moon had taken the sun's place and the streets were bare except for those meandering home. The father passed by trucks emblazoned with the American flag, minivans pleading for patience, and all under a sky so indifferently dark with not a single winking star. The Tiger Market had two souls, one of which was tied to the cash register, the other pleading before the counter for a cheaper lighter.

The father stood behind the begging child (they were shorter even than his boy), and stared into a speaker in a far corner that monotonously spouted the news. Afghan something or other—our troops doing a wonderful job of delivering death and decimation in return for death and decimation—insinuating the ever-profitable, for a few, and free market of dying.

His mind recalled images, all from books and websites, of corpses strewn artfully in ditches, trenches, and barren fields. The buddies of his barracks thought it'd prepare them for what awaited them. All the dead American heads were turned away from the camera, as if they were simply sleeping and didn't want the flash of the camera to wake them. Anyone apparently not American was on full-fledged display, guts splayed chaotically, face contorted in hell-inspired pain.

He could feel his stomach churning now as the images were replaced by the face of his son. Baby-blue eyes washed dry to dead gray. Something threatening in his chest. He walked to the bathroom like a man wading through knee-deep water. He stood over a toilet and wanted to throw up. He pushed his fingers to the back of his throat to trigger the response, gagged up nothing, and dry-heaved until it hurt.

Splayed out and exhausted now, he could only swallow at the thought that the American, at the very least, got to look away from the camera.

He bought his usual pack of cigarettes and went back home. He lit up on the porch with the lights turned off in case one of the boys came looking for him. Callum, another son, found him once a few weeks back, saw the orange glow in the dark. The boy had a nightmare that night about some ember-creatures or other stalking him in a deep violet maze.

The father smoked and thought of his boys. Robert, his youngest son, still sat on the couch staring into the TV. The father thought Robert was mentally challenged. All that blank staring. He did not guess the boy had any depth of mind, for that stare went far and nowhere. His eyes were just like the father's, a deep emerald green with maybe a fleck of hazel. Sometimes it was like looking in a mirror for the both of them. But only Robert's mouth held itself open and spit would dribble out like an overrunning fountain. "How can one boy produce so much damn spit," the father would say to his wife, Kim, as he handed the boy over to her, wiping saliva off his own shoulder. She'd deny any abnormalities. He'd continue to acknowledge them anytime he was reminded of his boy's existence. His boy's eyes looked past everything.

As Robert still sat staring into the TV, his brother Callum played a Spider-Man game on his Gamecube in his new bedroom. The father tried to imagine how the room used to be. But just two days ago, Kim repainted pale green walls deep blue, deep cleaned the carpet until it was white as snow, and dragged every piece of furniture (bedframe and all) lonesomely and arduously up to the attic. The father had been at work. All he allowed himself were thoughts of quality assurance of speedy WiFi and working cell towers. Indeed, that very day—two days ago—a downed tree had taken down three whole lines. So the father was a secretary for many that day and could not spare a thought for his family even if he had had any moment to do so.

As the father's thoughts drifted into his work, Callum shouted and threw his Gamecube controller so violently at the opposing wall that the cord ripped from the console. The father—even through plaster, wood, and brick—heard the screech and put out his cancerous glowstick. Kim was already in Callum's room when the father got there. She was shouting louder than the boy had, with spit flying everywhere. Her face was as red as her hot hands, every ounce of blood poised for violence.

She cursed at the boy, and the father stood as his wife rabidly chastised their angry son. The boy's head was bowed. He looked oh so very penitent and good. Jehovah could not have taken the raging disciplinarian's vicious verbal lashings any better.


"Goddamnit, just shut up! As if that game ain't loud enough! As if the sound of the dishes clanking while I'm doin' them ain't enough!" Her eyes were watery with fatigue and the father wondered if soap had gotten in them. Her voice quivered uncertainly between ferocities. "It's just a damn game! And you over here crying over it? It's a game, Cal! A GAME! If you can't handle it, I'm taking it away."

At that last threat, Callum looked up, no longer a good penitent monk-boy but a genuine child. "No, please. I'll be good." His eyes glittered with that momentary sincerity of a guilty promise. His lip bobbed with an oncoming sob.

"I have no doubt you will when I give it back."

"Please, Mama, please."

Silence. She breathed in deep and breathed out fully five times. The tears that had been building finally ran down her cheeks, and she dropped down beside Callum to hug him.



“I’m sorry, baby,” she said. “I shouldn’t have yelled at you like that. It’s just a game. I just want you to be a little quieter, ok? For Mommy, ok? I love you, baby. I’m so sorry I yelled. I just don’t like it when you boys scream like that. I’m sorry, baby. I love you.”

“I love you, too, Mama.”

The father watched that statue of flesh and sorrow and submission masquerading as conciliation. Soon enough, she’d be shouting again. Both mother and son would cry at the raging lashings. The words would take on a different hue but the effect would be the same, and the effect would mount atop each word until a mountain of resentment buried any joy there was between them.

The father sighed, and returned to his pack of cigarettes.

Momma did not take Callum’s Gamecube away, but he did not touch the controller even after she shut the door. He knelt on the floor and felt the tendrils of fiber scratching his knees. The bend in his knees became too much. He fell back and lay staring into the light fixture in the ceiling.

It looked like an eyeball staring at him. Some other child might have thought more easily of a benevolent watcher, but Callum felt trapped and could not look away. This horrible eye bore into his head, right through the middle of his brow. His brain buzzed and roiled and tickled. He put his hands over his ears, could not close his eyes to dispel the frightening images appearing. Bees scurried around in his brain. Yellow jackets stung every bit of nervy meat their stingers could stab. He had once been surrounded by a whole nest of yellow jackets and his father had ducked his head into the water, a forceful baptism that nearly drowned him, and a memory that would never unstick.

He almost did not register the knock at the door. He opened the door and found Robert standing there, not meeting his eyes. Robert was a head taller despite being two years younger. He glanced down at Callum and immediately glanced away into the room before speaking.

“What were you playing?” he asked.

“Web of Shadows.”

Robert nodded. “I thought you’d be playing something else. Web of Shadows isn’t even hard.”

“Ok.” Callum clenched his jaw.

Robert glanced at his brother again, fighting his urge to avoid eye contact. Callum looked mature. His eyes already with dark circles and bags weighing them down.

Callum shook his head. He sniffled and kicked emptily at the door.

Robert tried to read his brother's body language, but he could only intuit based on what always happened—the screaming—and what resulted—tears and a deep, painful knot in the chest. “I heard her screaming. It sounded bad.”

“It wasn't Mean Mad Mommy.”

“Ok.”

Robert was sneaking glances at everything in the room. Never in his life had he crossed the threshold of the door. That room was not his, and it still was not his. He missed his brother. He missed Callum on the other side of the divide. Like a vampire at six years old, he waited for his brother to invite him in, but Callum just stared at him.

“You want to play something else? I got Lego Batman to work again. I wiped it off with Daddy's glasses towel.”

“That was my towel. I saw you do it.”

“No, it wasn't—”

“It was.”

“Your case is red. This one was black.”

Callum shrugged. He started pulling on his own sleeve, like a part of himself was just ready to go.

“Do you want to play?”

“Not right now.”

Robert stood with crossed hands and legs pressed together for another second, then said, “At least it wasn’t Daddy who got mad.”

The father was only angry twice a year, as far as these boys were aware. Christmas was a time to be aware and keep a little head on a swivel in case a bowl flew or a fist went through a wall. All the hot months of spring and summer, too, were times of practicing anxiety. The father did not express himself often, and thus hardly would he explode with the rage that was always there. When he did explode, it was nuclear. To a boy, a mountain suddenly became a volcano. But what the boy did not know until he was a man is that the mountain was always a volcano.

Callum’s eyes grew distant. Robert thought he could see through him.

Across the hallway, directly across from Callum’s door, was Robert’s room. The door was always open, a requirement of their mother. Robert glanced at the entrance to his room, looked back to Callum, and asked “Want to play?”

Callum said, "Daddy said we can't play the Gamecube past 8 o'clock."

"Oh, well you know he don't care that much. I sometimes play mine so long the sun comes back up before I'm done."

Callum looked at him and scrunched his nose like Robert smelled rotten.

Robert shrugged. "You're in a nasty mood," he said.

Callum brought his hands up and immediately let them drop to his side. He said, "I don't want Daddy mad at me."

He shut the door. Robert felt a pendulum in his chest drop. Every time it dropped, something else tried to rise past it. The pendulum pushed it down every time, deeper and deeper into a place nondescriptive but ancient. Robert knew it had to be a true place.

Instead of feeling the sting of his brother's rejection, he obsessed over his secret painful place beneath the forever-descending, forever-ticking pendulum. He believed this place had been real, that it was somewhere he could go, and it was the answer to the question that was on his mind all day:

Why don't we last forever?

He walked back to his room with sagging, swinging shoulders and lay on his bed.

Until the sun came up again, all Robert thought about was that hammerhead shark. A few times throughout the night he tried to sleep. But when he closed his eyes, the shark was thrashing him, biting him, ripping him apart. His blood corrugated the water like a new aether opening at his expense. He would start awake, sweating, and stare at his windows. Burned into his retinas was the shark, and burned into his conscience was his own death. Each time, he hoped his windows would be lit up with daylight. Each time, he was disappointed and fell right back to his self-imposed torture.

He tried playing his Gamecube. Batman always inspired him to be brave when he was alone. But in the game, Batman always had Robin with him, and Robert was more alone than Batman was. He distracted himself from nightmares and only became more aware of his solitude. Keenly aware of the lunch in his stomach, he left the game on and lay back down, and the hammerhead shark returned when he closed his eyes. "Don't think about it, don't think about it." But the shark insisted upon itself. It appeared every single time, and each time, it tore him apart until he woke up.

The shark reminded him of its permanence even when his eyes were open. Robert wanted to run to Callum's room, but was stopped only by the memory of Callum's hatred of being woken and of the giant framed photo of the hammerhead shark over the bed. But it might not still be there. Callum and Patrick had a love of sharks in common, but could Callum stand to keep Patrick's things in there? Robert could not figure the intricacies of others, but he spent a long time trying. He never felt satisfied. Whether the shark was above Callum's bed or not, it was ever-present in Robert's mind, and now he had another reason to never go into that room.

In the living room, father and mother sat together on the couch. The sharks still swam on the TV screen, killing for the audience's wonder, but neither parent watched. The father's eyes were on the screen, to be sure, but he wasn't watching.

"It's supposed to be your job," the mother said with a frown, and her eyes bored into his skull.

"Boys get mad," said the father. "The hell am I supposed to do?"

"Hit him a little? Spank him? I don't know, but you know what they call me?"

He knew. He didn't say.

“They’re supposed to love me, but they’re scared. Robbie said to me the other day . . . he said, ‘Mommy, why’d you kill Chris?’” Her eyes filled with tears so fast they were falling to her lap before she could realize she was crying. “He really said that, Jameson. To me.”

Jameson kept staring blankly at the sharks. “You didn’t kill him, though.”

“Tell our son that. If you ever talk to him at all.”

“You want me to hit him, or talk to him? Which is it?”

“I want you to be their father.”

“Well, I was Chris’s father too, but there are some things we just can’t help.” He shook his head. “I’m paying the bills. I’m paying for their school. I’m paying for his funeral. I’m providing, honey. I don’t have time to treat these boys.”

He stood and the chair rocked back, threatening to fall over. It teetered, and Kim watched transfixed until it returned to its right position.

Jameson was still ranting, “I’m working from dawn to damn dusk, and I’m even working Saturdays, and for what? For you to also ask me to raise these boys?”

“I need help, Jameson.”

“Yeah, well, don’t we all?”

“They’re your children too.”

“And I wasn’t no good with Chris, was I?”

Her indignation began to fade into sympathy. He lost a son, too. “Chris wasn’t your fault,” she said.

“Well, it’s all my genes, ain’t it?”

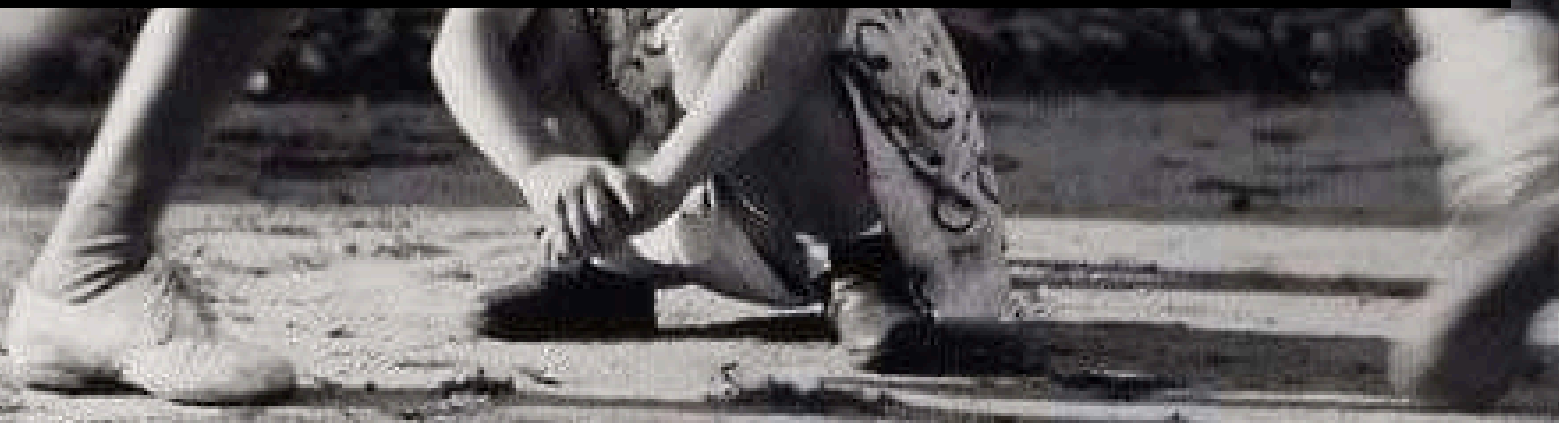
She opened her mouth to retort but hesitated into thinking differently. She frowned and did not at all feel like being sorry for him anymore. “You still need to be these boys’ father. It ain’t enough to just throw money at them. Did you love your daddy just because he gave you and your mama money?”


“Don’t.”

Jameson lost all expression. He stared down at the floor, dejectedly pawing at the floor with his feet. A creak ran through the wall between Robert’s bedroom and the living room.

Kim said, “You just think on that. And get wise.”

She left the living room. He heard a few sniffles in the kitchen before dishes started scraping and water running.





The hammerhead shark returned to the screen. The station must have been rerunning the same episode for those who missed it. Shark Week was about as repetitive as any other mainstay of nature. Someone or something needs to eat, and something or someone needs to be eaten. And now, finally, the father thought the shark might have been staring right at him. He stared back, alone and cold under the living room's ceaselessly revolving fan. Its black eye was an orb containing a void that held him, and what he was, in their natural stasis. Within the black eye of the shark, Jameson knew himself, and he was scared at what he knew. He knew he was hollowed out to make way for a new hungry void. Now the void was black, and he saw it reflected in that shark's eye. Assuredly the beast was going to chew him up, too.

It was only a matter of time.

Shelby Bundshuh

This piece is inspired by my grandmother, Mimi. I wrote it about a year after she passed just as a way to cope and understand my feelings, but now it's one of those pieces I feel very proud of. Mimi was like my third parent. She took care of my sister and me throughout our childhood. This story is about the final moments I can recount from the last month of her life. She suffered from depression and bipolar disorder her whole life. I just hope that someone can read this and know that their purpose doesn't rely on their own perception. The people in your life who love you give you a purpose. They want you here and cherish you—never forget that. Thank you.

Author of:

“Mimi's Home”

Mimi's Home

Mimi was my constant, my safe place.

My Mimi was one of the most important people in my life for the nineteen years I grew up with her. My grandmother was my best friend before I understood what the word meant. My younger sister Madison was always closer to my mom, so I think I naturally gravitated towards my Mimi. We have been two peas in a pod ever since I could remember. Mimi made my house what it is, her hands curating everything bought and placed to make it a home.

When I was younger, still learning social cues, I remember overhearing a conversation between Mimi and my older cousin. She called it her house, and being the smart aleck I was, I corrected her, telling her it was my mom's house. I got sent to my room for that one. The memory sticks with me because, technically, I was right. Financially, it was my mom's house. But Mimi was the one who made it feel like home.

While Mom worked long hours, Mimi was the one who cleaned every day, cooked dinner, and tidied up after all of us. That's what she did, and what she loved to do. Mimi's hands were always in motion, whether smoothing the fabric of a throw blanket on the couch or carefully choosing where her next painting should go. These acts felt like part of the heartbeat of the house. Taking care of others had been her purpose for as long as she could remember. As one of the oldest of seven siblings and later a mother of three, she had spent her entire life nurturing those around her. That home wasn't just a structure: everything reflected her care, her love, her presence.

My parents divorced when I was younger, and I don't know my dad's family either. His mom has never seemed to care to have a relationship with him, let alone his daughters. Mimi stood as the only grandparent we had. She really was the only blood relative we had. Mimi remained my constant, my safe place. I'd like to think we were closer than she was with my sister, though Mimi would never say that out loud. She called me her "heart" and had lived with us since I was around two.

We celebrated our own traditions: a weekly shopping spree at the local thrift shops, along with breakfast at McDonald's. We repeated this every Friday as though we were relieved to have made it through each week. On the days when we were feeling angsty, we would add Publix, maybe Old Time Pottery, and our favorite summer spot became Lowe's. We would create small talk about the practically empty social life I had, an easy guess given that my most exciting activity was going to the thrift store on Friday mornings with my grandma.

"Shelby, I can't be here anymore, there is no purpose for me here," she explained to me with tears welling up.

Early that October, feeling the bright sun flooding through the shutters, knowing that outside, leaves were falling in shades of yellow and orange. The crisp wind whispered past my window, a perfect fall morning, the kind that made me want to linger in bed a little longer.

Friday was supposed to be our day, the day we wandered through aisles of forgotten trinkets, adding to the warmth she had carefully built within our home. Instead of waking up to the comfort of routine, her voice pulled me from sleep, "Shelby, I need your help, wake up!" I jolted up from my bed and saw Mimi standing in my doorway waving for me to follow her. I quickly walked across the hallway to her bedroom. While creeping in, I saw a suitcase with a few brightly colored t-shirts, various orange pill bottles, and Mimi's dog, Izzy, lying next to the chaos on her bed, "Shelby I can't be here anymore, there is no purpose for me here." she explained to me with tears welling up.

She tossed clothes into her suitcase wildly, with no sense or reason behind what she picked. Yanking open the dresser she dug around for socks and undergarments. I had no idea what had happened or why she was in such a hurry. I drifted in a fog, barely awake. Then, she handed me the suitcase and told me to bring it downstairs.

Her voice was strained as she explained that she and Mom just had a huge argument with the conclusion being "she was done." I had a feeling this blow up was coming. It had been brewing for months. Mimi stopped taking her medications six months prior. We all were waiting for this. I stood there, frozen and confused. I remember that being the angriest and most distraught I'd seen her. I felt afraid to oppose her waves of sadness and anger, allowing her to take the car keys. She packed the suitcase, our two little dogs, and herself into our silver SUV. She told me she'd be back in a week or so, that she just needed some time to cool off or maybe find somewhere else to live.

As she was leaving, Gracie and Izzy's barking was muffled behind the glass, their tails wagging in confusion. I stood in the driveway, arms wrapped around myself. The morning air that once felt warm raised goosebumps on my skin. The house behind me suddenly felt too big, too empty. When I walked back inside the house, still half waking up, I saw our border collie standing in the kitchen.

I moved toward the living room, passing her, eventually collapsing onto the couch, my hands gripping the fabric as though that was the only thing holding me steady. The silence was deafening—no news channel playing in the background, no soft humming from the kitchen. It was just me and the dog, both staring at the door, both waiting for someone who wasn't coming back.

I returned from my fall break vacation two weeks after that day. As I walked up the garage stairs entering the kitchen, I set my bags down, already thinking about telling Mimi about my trip. I was quickly brought back to reality: she wasn't on the couch waiting for me. Instead, my mom sat there, her expression heavy. "Shelby, come sit down. We need to talk." Her voice was unusually soft. I hesitated. My feet felt heavier with each step as I moved toward the couch. The light from the window cast long shadows across her face, making her look older, more tired. I could see the worry creased into her forehead, the way she pressed her lips together before speaking: "After Mimi visited Madison in Chattanooga..." She exhaled, as if the next words were too heavy to carry. "She tried to take her life."

The room suddenly felt smaller. My ears rang, my stomach twisted. The words didn't register at first.

Not Mimi, not the woman who raised me.

My throat tightened as I whispered, "What?" I said with blatant confusion. Before she could reply, Madison walked into the living room.

Why is Madison home? She is supposed to be two hours away, what is happening?

My mom continued, "Mimi is okay, but you can't talk to her while she is in the mental hospital." Madison sat across from us. Madison sat across from us and stuck her feet out on the ottoman. Why is she so relaxed? Didn't she just hear Mom? As I looked at her, she began to talk slowly and shakily. "Aunt Pam called me, and I left my dorm to get her. When I got to her hotel room, she didn't answer my knocking, so I called her. Aunt Pam texted me saying 911 was on the way. They had to kick down her door. They brought her out and immediately took her to the hospital."

Madison explained all of this with her head down, almost looking disappointed. Why wasn't I called? I now realize it was better for me to be left in the dark, at least until I got back from fall break.

A couple weeks went by after that day. I was able to call Mimi two times while she was at the hospital. They weren't long conversations, but she refused to speak to Mom. Taking Mimi's place, I held her spot and took care of the house, still hoping she would come back. My thoughts reminded me that she couldn't stay away for long. Christmas was fast approaching, and we hadn't even brought boxes of decorations out. Christmas was her favorite holiday, as you could have easily guessed by the sheer amount of décor in our attic. She took care of storing items just as much as she cared for her home. A collage of cardboard dating to when me and Madison were little. Her closet was her collector's secret, filled with her favorite dresses she bought for Madison and me as we grew up. Her proudest moments were when she reminisced on our styled outfits from elementary school. The endless conversations we could have when unboxing these memories... I would have sat there forever if it meant she stayed that October morning.

These faces reminded me just how deeply Mimi had been loved, how much of a purpose she still had on earth, yet she died believing she didn't have enough to keep breathing.

The day she left the house was the last time she was there. Due to the complications from her attempt, Mimi passed on the evening of November 7th, 2023. That night when I got back to the house, I crumbled in the driveway. "I can't go in there. She isn't here!" Everything in that house echoed her presence. I couldn't even go upstairs to my own room because hers was right across the way, untouched since she left. Her water glass still sat on the bedside table, half full but long stale, a thin layer of dust beginning to settle around the rim. I should have cleaned it, yet I couldn't. The leftovers felt like the last trace of her daily life that I wasn't ready to erase. Her bedding lay exactly as she left it: the pillows slightly indented, the sheets folded back like she had only just slipped out of them.

As the weather got colder, the house began to gray. She was gone. The warmth that once poured in began to disappear. The living room sat vacant from any sort of company it used to hold.

The garden began to wither with the weather and time, the kitchen collecting dust from the unused surfaces. A person that once occupied these spaces became a ghost.

After her passing, we gathered for a celebration of life in Mimi's honor. My mom called my sister and me to the living room. She began thanking everyone for coming, her words weaving through the silence that had settled over the house. Then she turned to us. "Do either of you want to say something?" I couldn't. The lump in my throat made it impossible. If I opened my mouth, I would break. As my mom continued speaking, her words blurred into the background. I let my eyes drift over the room. The faces staring back at me were familiar yet surreal: Mimi's past coworkers, my friends who had loved her like a second grandmother, Jared, my now fiancé standing solemnly and knowing she had called him her "future grandson-in-law." These faces reminded me just how deeply Mimi had been loved, how much of a purpose she still had on earth, yet she died believing she didn't have enough to keep breathing. The collage of faces in front of me showed that we weren't alone in our grief.

Over time, I've learned that grief isn't just about missing someone, it's about learning how to live with the missing.

The house is becoming a home again, gradually in our own way. Some things don't look the same. Everything feels different, but we are learning to fill the spaces she left behind. My mom had lots of things redone since she passed. At first, the pale cream floors that were once warm chocolate brown felt sterile, almost too bright. But over time, I noticed the way they caught the morning light, how they made the space feel open instead of empty.

Rearranging the living room was the hardest. Every time we moved something the action felt like we were shifting memories, practically rewriting the way she existed here. Her garden isn't as tended to as it once was, but the flowers she planted still bloom in the spring. Her room stayed untouched, and her bed was occupied once a week by me for about eight months. Madison moved back home the following summer and took over Mimi's room so she could be close to me. My mom and I didn't always know how to talk about Mimi. At first, it felt like a weight between us, something too heavy to touch.

She tried so hard to be strong, but I saw the way her hands shook when she thought too much about her, the way her shoulders tensed when we said her name.

We were grieving differently. She was grieving a completely different person, a different role in our lives—her mother.

But grief has a way of forcing people together. Over time, the silence between us turned into something softer, a quiet understanding that no matter how much we hurt, we were in this together.

Grief is a draining journey, made even more challenging by the guilt that frequently lingers. I constantly wonder if I could have done more, if I could have noticed the signs sooner, or been there when she needed me most. The feeling of missing her voice, her hugs, her smile settles in my chest, heavy like a stone I can't move. Most days, the grief is quiet—just a dull ache I've learned to carry.

Over time, I've learned that grief isn't just about missing someone: it's about learning how to live with the missing. The house isn't as full of thrifted treasures as before, but we kept the pieces that meant the most, the ones that still whisper her name. Mimi didn't just live here—she breathed life into this house, shaping every corner with her love and care. Now, in her absence, we are doing our best to carry that forward. We're finding new ways to honor her memory, keeping her spirit alive in the little things we do, making sure that no matter how much changes, she'll forever hold a place here with us.

Skye Kletz

The idea for “They Speak a Language Not of My Ears” came to me at work, where I am a teacher of young children. I was watching a group of three boys and one girl playing together. The boys decided to put animal costumes on, but by the time the girl caught up with them to the dress-up bucket, all of the costumes had already been taken. The boys proceeded to try to frighten her by pretending they were animals, but she was entirely unfazed and laughed as they kept trying to scare her. As the boys ran around the room, one of their costumes slid off and the girl ran to collect it and came to me to help her put it on. By the time I had it on her, the rest of the boys had taken their costumes off, and she was the only one remaining in costume.

I found something in this moment to be quite intriguing, with many elements speaking to me.

The idea of monstrosity and otherness came to play in my head, along with the idea of the desire to fit in and seek companionship. What experiences shape our views of what is and isn't frightening? Does seeking companionship with a monster make us a monster, or does it make the monster human? These ideas came together to form my unnamed narrator in the unusual setting they find themselves alone in, with vague memories of past companionship shaping their desire to connect with creatures they do not understand.

While I could offer more clarity about the meaning of the story (does such a thing exist?) or some sort of explanation of the creatures or the narrator's past, I think this is a story best left up to interpretation. I have found myself quite intrigued by what people have had to say about this story, so I will allow you to do the explaining for yourself.

Author of:

“They Speak a Language Not of My Ears”

They Speak a Language Not of My Ears

They speak a language not of my ears in tongues spun like unraveling string spilling from gaping holes of what I can hardly describe as faces. They first crept in upon my lonely habitation at the edges of the rye field in the perimeter between my humble plot and the forest that encloses my understanding of the world. I cannot lie and say that my stomach didn't churn with a primal fear when I first glimpsed their darkness in my peripheral. An understanding of inherent danger seeped into my head as I dropped my gardening hoe into the dirt. The glint of the blade reflected the blinding light of the white sun into my eyes, burning an obscurance of violet into my vision as I tried to blink away the temporary blindness hindering my view of these foreign intruders.

As my vision came to, I stood, waiting for the beings to approach, but they never did. I could

ascertain, even from my considerable distance, that they were unusually tall and uniformly black as soot. Each moved with a small white object in tow in slow, systematic steps. I watched for perhaps an hour in complete stillness as their routine failed to change. In my frozen contemplation, I racked my brain for the exact schemata I held about human beings. After a moment, I concluded, on what little I know for certain to be true and what feels innate in my humanness, that these things were in fact not human nor were they animals like the ones that sustained my lone existence on this plot.

After prolonged observation, my heart was inclined to slow in rapidity, and my sense of ease inched its way back to me. These beings had not harmed me thus far, and what justification had I to remain still in my fear, waiting for these things to reveal themselves to me rather than to endeavor to figure them out for myself? I had not the privilege to expect the world to explain itself to me when I was employed in my survival to discover what it has to offer. I knelt down in the dirt and retrieved my hoe.

I did not take my eyes from the creatures as I trekked through the rye field, beaten at the hip by stalks of rye. I expected them to deviate from their slow rotation as I neared.

However, as they came more into feature, I observed that not one raised an extremity towards me or even acknowledged my existence. I ashamedly admit that this somewhat upset me. I do once recall knowing civilization. I know at one point I lived here on this land with many other humans who I can picture vivid in color but blurry in detail. Certainly, I can make out limbs, the distinction between smock and pant, a routine based in the distinction between day and night, a pattern of closeness to one another. I can feel an embrace without recalling who it was that held me. But I have no memory of the people themselves. Who they were to me. Why they were here. Why they disappeared. They stick to my brain like dandelion fuzz catching to fabric — flying off in the wind before I have the chance to pick them off and examine them closely between my pinched fingers.

I know I was once a being to be acknowledged. I had a name. I had conversations. I vocalized. I think others laughed. I remember a distinct hum — a soft, lovely voice from pink lips once graced my ears. Sometimes I swear I still hear the voice in the wind and subsequently get an ache in the amorphous space between my heart and stomach. I cannot rationalize why I think this way, but in the absence of fact and reliance on pure feeling, I have concluded I am derived from that voice. I do not

recall a start to my existence, but that voice, certainly, has been there since the beginning—now lost at the bottom of the well of my memory, diluted in still water into fine particles of sediment that may come together in dust, but will never quite reform into the solid piece from which it originally came.

When the beings did not deliver to me that familiar, far-off sense of what it means to be known, I grew forlorn. As I approached the perimeter of the rye field, my body positioned halfway between the crops and the grass, I recoiled in abject horror at the close sight of the creatures—roughly double in height the size of my humble cottage and solidly dark, featureless. In tow, I could now perceive the white object each creature pulled by leash with a spindling arm to be a lamb. The creatures still did not acknowledge my presence. From my distance to their towering frames, I could not make out the holes where eyes and mouths should be. But at the same time, I couldn't be certain they had no faces. They never stood still in one place, moving slowly with their heads attached to their slender torsos by a hunched neck. It was as if their faces were veiled and rippling like a current over smooth obsidian-like clotheslined bedsheets in the wind.

In that moment, watching them from the edge of my familiar terrain, I shifted on foot and a fallen

stalk cracked beneath me. The sound echoed to the tree line. The lamb nearest to me lifted its head to look in my direction. It blinked, acknowledging me. A warm sensation passed through my body from head to foot. The creature that held its leash kept moving. When I parted my lips to fully make my presence known, I realized I knew not the words to say when you first meet another. After a moment of thought, I felt it appropriate to tell them my name.

I spoke it aloud into the field, prompting no reaction aside from my discontent with such an inconsequential label that did absolutely nothing to describe who I was. I feared they would still not perceive me if I spoke again, yet I feared too that I was making myself known to something that sought to hurt me and towards which I had no means but a farming tool to defend myself with. I spoke anyway.

“I am a farmer. This is my land. Who are you?”

I received no response but the gentle gaze of each lamb that slumped past. A burning heat rose in my throat.

“This is my land! Who are you? Get off of it!”

The creatures continued to move. I had yet to step off the edge of my field. On a foreign impulse, I ran out into the grass where they trekked and stood in the middle of their path, repeating myself.

“This is my land! I demand you tell me what you are at once or leave!”

As the nearest creature approached, I worried it would trample me—that perhaps the being had no senses at all and truly could not perceive me. As I prepared myself to be surely walked over by this thing, it diverted suddenly from its path, curving around the impression of my body and back into its uniform rotation. I stood, perplexed, and watched as each of the identical creatures passed me in the same manner, with each lamb peering up at me with curious eyes, as if I were the first human they had ever seen. I counted twenty-four creatures and twenty-four lambs in total in the rotation that passed me. As they continued on, I was no longer enraged at their presence, and I only delved further into utter confusion. I had proved they could perceive me and possessed enough consciousness to decide to move around me rather than over me. These beings had, so far, not expressed any indication that they would hurt me. However, I could not shake the foreboding of their presence—what it suggested, and what it meant for my life that had been absent of meaning for as long as I could remember.

At that flood of unwelcome feelings, terror possessed my body, and I fled back into the rye—running at full speed away from them, dropping my hoe at some point in my escape. I looked behind me every so often, certain the creatures would be in pursuit, but to my surprise and equal

disappointment, they remained in their slow march at the edge of the field, shrinking with each backwards glance.

When I found shelter in my small cottage, I locked the door—at once realizing that this was the first time I had locked it in fear that something would enter. I wondered too why I had locked it each night before in my life when I had no reason to believe another would ever enter my home. I hid in my bedroom, watching the creatures continue their trek through my window. I watched until the sun fell, and darkness overtook the land so that I could no longer see the creatures.

I wondered if they had always circled the edge of my land there, coming at night when I could not see, and this was the first time they ventured into daylight. It felt unsaid and certain to me that these beings had been here before. But what was suggested of the lambs? Freshly born—bred somewhere I did not know.

The forest had once been the limit of my existence. I had never viewed it as anything but a solid and permanent border, but now the forest loomed from all around, boxing me into its cage as the unknown peered in upon me, unblinking. Where had all the people I'm sure I once knew gone? Were they out there in the forest? Were they somewhere waiting for me? My heart always told me no. I suppose

that is why I never thought of leaving to go look for them. But now I did not know what was true. Why did I have a name for the expanse beyond my land if I was not meant to know what it held?

I must have fallen asleep while listening for the creatures' arrival at my doorstep that never came. When I awoke, I started to the window to find the creatures were gone. I ran outside, circling my cottage to find, as I would normally, nothingness along the perimeter of my plot. I spent the day walking all over my land, suspecting the creatures to be on their hands and knees, creeping through the crops in towards the center where my dwelling sat alongside my dilapidated workshop and enclosure where I kept a few animals of my own—goats and cows for milk, pigs for meat, and chickens for eggs. When there were people, I recall once that hordes of sheep roamed this land, making wool for clothing. But when they left, I suppose the sheep either went with them or died out. I cannot know for certain what the truth is when I possess memories of things I have never seen. The creatures, which I named the Walkers, were completely new to me. That I could be certain of.

The Walkers did not return for thirty days of my perpetual disquiet, fear, and longing. When I awoke one morning to see them again, same as before, my heart leapt with an unexpected delight. Tension in my

cheeks pulled my lips apart into a smile. I ran out, with a similar speed from when I last fled them, and stopped only again when I was at the foot of the Walkers.

“Hello.” The word for a greeting naturally came to my lips though I was not conscious that such a word existed. It tasted ripe, earthy, and raw like a plant eaten straight from the dirt, worms and all.

I decided then that I would spend the day observing them. I would occasionally approach to discern minute details—the astounding length of their fingers, the delicately thin string that leashed the lambs by their little necks, which were just as small as the previous visit. I was unsure if the leash were given a sharp tug if the string would break or if the lambs’ necks would snap at the force of the pull. When night fell, I gazed into the sky to find only stars. The moon was gone. It would be gone each night the Walkers came. I would mark their impending return by the growth and decay of the moon.

I discovered on this second visit that after night fell the Walkers would retreat into the forest. It started with the deviation of the rotation by a singular creature into the woods, after whom the rest would follow in line until the last disappeared into the trees. I did not follow them on this second visit, as I was unprepared to venture

into the dark forest. The third time they came I was equipped with thick clothing and an oil lamp to go after them.

I dared this third time to touch one of them, finding the passing brush of their leg to feel quite leathery, decayed. When the evening fell and the first Walker started towards the forest, I prepared myself to follow—positioning myself behind the last creature. Their slow movements lured me with an invisible tether tugging from the heart of the woods. We trekked inwards for what seemed to be ages. I collected a large stick to mark our path in the dirt so I would be able to return home. My lamp was the only source of light in the pitch black of the forest. I made careful effort not to trip over the lamb in front of me, as it suffered from a limp, until I noticed then the Walker was no longer pulling the lamb. I turned back to check if the thing was straggling behind, but I could not observe long as I began to feel a gentle pull from my neck. My vision followed from my body up to the hand of the Walker and I observed the undeniable string of a leash in the space between us.

Dread crept up my limbs from the forest floor, which began to slope downwards at— first slightly and then into a steep descent. The trees of the forest morphed into grotesque and ugly shapes. The bark turned gray and rotten. The ground took a steady

crunch that grew louder as the decayed peels of dead bark stacked higher on the ground. When I looked up, the shine of my lamp did not illuminate anything other than the solid, murky black above our heads. The air dropped in temperature yet gained in humidity—an unnerving pairing that gave me both chills and sweat. I spoke not a word. I came to understand I had interrupted some sort of ritual. Or perhaps their presence on my land was their invitation for me to partake in it. The word “sacrifice” drifted across my mind in a cool breeze, shaking a flurry of thoughts down to the depths of my fear like leaves falling from high branches on trees.

The slope began to even out, and the creature that dragged me forward slowed in pace. The snap of a branch echoed behind me. I twisted my neck to find another Walker. I raised my lantern and squinted through the darkness to see the Walkers had, yet again, formed a rotation. This time it was around a thick tree, flushed with color and health amid the surrounding rot of the forest. The Walker behind me started for the tree. I watched its unbothered movements as it raised the lamb’s leash and tied it to the trunk. It returned to our rotation, while the lamb circled the tree alone. This process was repeated by each Walker. I could not figure out any reason behind this ritual. Certainly, it was orderly

and systematic, but no sense could I derive from it.

I grew worried about the leash around my neck. The small, compliant nature of the lambs next to the towering unknowingness of the Walkers and the fact I was being lumped into the group of innocence awoke something primal within me—my heart beat in my chest at a speed I had never conceived of before. The Walker in front of mine took its lamb to the center. I couldn't breathe. I clawed at the string around my neck, tugging until my fingers bled. As the one in front of us returned, my Walker stepped from the rotation and pulled me towards the middle. I screamed.

The Walker continued pulling me. I screamed more, realizing then I had no reason to believe harm would befall me, but I could not shake the need to avoid an outcome I couldn't be certain of. The Walker leashed me to the tree. I pulled and tugged, but the cord wouldn't snap. Then, the Walker did something that deviated from the routine established thus far. It approached me. The lambs froze as it came to stand in front of me. It leaned down until its face was parallel to mine. Mouth hole. Darkness. It did not have eyes. It brought its hands to my shoulders, touching me with a shocking gentleness that sent my world still and quiet, save for the singing notes of a distant breeze. Delicately, it removed the leash from my neck.

I expected myself to run free—bolting back home through the dense wood until I found sanctuary again, but I remained still—not frozen however, touched by a heat of ancestral familiarity. Something urged me to wrap my arms around this creature, but the parts of me still ignited by fear held me back. The Walker stood once again, and I followed it to the moving perimeter while the lambs resumed rotation, a gap where a twenty-fourth lamb should be.

I walked with the creatures, peering towards the middle as a hum filled the atmosphere. All at once, a high-pitched tone rose up alongside a primal, guttural croaking. I soon ascertained from the sheer volume that this sound came from the mouths of the creatures. In fact, as their voices quickened in beat, so did their step. I found quite abruptly I was running to keep up with them. The chant continued as the charge of static electricity overwhelmed the air. A howling breeze encircled us, crashing into my body like a thousand pins stinging my flesh until down came the roaring flash and explosion of a bolt of lightning into the core of the tree, sending sparks flying into the air like a horrific scene of summer fireflies shooting across the night sky.

The thunder boomed, the creatures shrieked, the wind howled, and a cacophony of lambs screamed as

the music of the night crescendoed. Then came the silence. The sizzle. The flash of the lightning had temporarily blinded me, but when my vision returned, I could see that the rotation of Walkers and the lambs had ceased. On the ground, steaming red flesh and burnt wool marked the corpses of the twenty-three lambs. The creatures moved inwards, except for my Walker, and feasted upon the fried carcasses. I remained where I was with the creature as the rest lowered their heads to the young. Flesh ripped. Bones snapped. Gaping holes slurped up their meals. I watched. Listened.

As they finished, the creatures slumped silently away into the woods one by one. I did not bother to follow them. I sensed I had seen all there was to know of these creatures. I stood until only my Walker remained. She—and I believed this one to be a she—then dragged her feet over to me and took me by the hand. I did not feel scared.

She led me in the opposite direction from where the rest of the creatures went, taking me back up the hill. We walked into the dead of night, back into the decaying forest until the trees regained their health and we reached the grassy clearing between the woods and my farm. Gently, she let go of my hand and returned into the woods.

I stood, solitary and confused for a few moments

before I started back after her. However, after a few paces into the forest, I could not find her where she should have been. She was gone.

They came with the next new moon as I anticipated. This time, though, the twenty-fourth lamb did not return, and I could always tell the female Walker apart by the absence of a lamb upon her leash. I soon felt quite bad she did not have anything to eat. I decided that fourth time they came that she could have one of my chickens for their feast. We descended that night back into the woods, my dumbest hen clucking in my arms. I leashed her to the tree while my Walker stood on, watching. That night, she ate the flesh of my hen and gently led me back to my land through the darkness. Something within me told me she was grateful. It made me feel good to help her. I sought to replicate that.

On their next visit, when the lamb still had not returned, I brought a pig. The visit after, a cow. Each time she feasted, I grew proud and satisfied that I was able to satiate her hunger. I gave her on each visit a different animal of mine until it came down to a singular goat I possessed on the twelfth new moon of their return. I had not given much consideration to the fact I would no longer have animals to sustain me after I gave them up to her. I was all-consumed, day and night, as the moon phased from fullness into darkness with making sure she

was cared for. I walked each visit in rotation alongside her, coming to understand the soft grotesquerie of the others through the gentle grip of her blackened, decaying flesh.

As the twelfth new moon approached, I contemplated what to do with my goat. To give it up would lose me its milk. However, I had given up its only mate and thereby my chances of having more goats to sustain me. I would be able to live without my animals, though the already limited diversity of my meals would become concentrated to only my produce. To give up the goat would also mean it would be my last sacrifice to the female Walker. To keep it would mean the hen on their eleventh visit was my last gift to her. Either way, I would have no more to give. I decided to be generous towards her. I figured she would be understanding once I had run out of anything to give her. And certainly, I could feed her with my crops. The creatures ate only animals as far as I knew, but surely they could eat plants if necessary. I descended into their wilderness with my animal sacrifice once again, ready to partake in their ritual feast. The lightning flashed, the wind howled, the creatures screeched, and the animals screamed of death.

We approached the center where twenty-three lambs and a goat lay, scorching. I held hands with the woman, and we knelt upon the scorched earth

together before the goat, lowering our lips to the red flesh of the dead animal—licking, biting, chewing, swallowing its meat. We shared this final carnivorous meal together and upon sucking the flesh from the last rib of the goat, I was overcome with the feeling of my soul being dug into the earth—a cosmic tether and joyous freedom binding me to this world with her. She and I strolled back home, scuffing our feet across the dirt and twigs. We emerged in the field, and I could now see the sky, full of stars and absent of the moon. I felt all at once a very sudden urge to take her in my arms and never let her go. I would lock my grip around her and hold her tight to this spot.

I resolved only to brush my cheek against her hand, inhaling the earthy scent of grass and catching the tune of the breeze to mark the music of this perfect moment, staring into the abyss of the sky. In my comfort, I allowed her to go, smiling with the knowledge of her upcoming return and pondering what gift I should procure for her in the meantime. She walked back into the forest and I to my dwelling.

Over the course of the moon cycle, I decided next I would gift her an apple from my small orchard that bore the red delicacies. On the morning of the new moon, I awoke and rushed to my window in delight, but in the distance where the Walkers always

trekked on the new moon, I saw nothing. I blinked, wondering perhaps if I had gotten the date incorrect, but I knew this could not be the case. I had been charting their arrivals in co-occurrence with the moon's cycle. Today was the thirteenth new moon since that first night of their arrival, and yet, out in the distance there were no creatures to behold. The fear that had overtaken me when I first glimpsed them returned to me at once. They had become a normal fixture in my life since then. A welcomed presence. But now it was the nothingness that felt so wholly unwelcome, and unsettling to the very core of my body.

I left my house and made for the forest, apple in hand, hoping perhaps the creatures were simply late to arrive or perhaps I had somehow slept an entire day and missed their visit. My lungs gasped for air. I hoped and begged something bigger than myself to make them emerge from the forest at once. When I made it to the edge of the crops, I found there was not a complete absence of life in the grass field. There, limping along in that familiar oblong rotation, was the twenty-fourth lamb lost many moons ago. She had no leash, no owner to pull her, yet she still limped agonizingly along the invisible path the creatures always walked. Without thinking, I moved towards the poor animal and in one motion, I scooped her up in my arms and squeezed

her close to my chest. Holding her close to me, I could see now by the watery blue cloud of her eyes that she was blind, or at least close to it. I waited with bated breath for the creatures to arrive, staring into the forest for a moment that never came. As my hunger grew with the day, I reluctantly brought the apple to my lips and bit until only the core remained.

I waited all day for the creatures. Once night fell, I brought the lamb back to my cottage and placed her on the floor of my kitchen after having held her all day. She immediately resumed limping in the rotation. All at once I wanted to hug her, kick her, kill her, and hug her again. I could not bear to look at her, so I retreated to my bedroom and went to sleep. The next morning, she had still not ceased limping around the kitchen. A tuft of wool sat caught in the floorboards along the path where she dragged her leg. I quickly realized I had not checked to see if the Walkers had come. I rushed to the window, hopeful I could return this dreadful lamb to the woman creature, but found, once again, nothing to behold. I checked daily for them. After a second new moon passed without their return, I ventured into the woods to find the lightning tree. I was familiar with the path, but after the number of paces that would usually begin to yield the slope of the ground and the decay of the trees, I found only

lush vegetation on flat earth. I cried almost every day in utter despair at the growing realization that these things were not coming back. I thought of the female Walker—how I loved her and gave her everything I thought she could ever want. I thought of her gentleness—in nature and in touch. I wanted nothing more than to crawl upon her body and hold myself there so tightly until I became one with her. But all I had was this lamb, woeful idiot, walking in circles all day—persevering in sheer darkness with a lame foot. I put her outside in the pen where the animals I had given up used to roam. Many new moons passed. The creatures never came. I farmed and worked. She walked in circles, small as the day she was abandoned in the woods. As I grew older, and she remained a lamb, and the Walkers failed to return, I came to the conclusion I would never again know another. I would die alone with this animal on this land I hardly knew, with the knowledge that there is a part of my heart that burns so intensely for the company of another. I would do anything to put back together the dust of my memory, even to hold it in crumbling clumps that slip through my fingers each time I grip it too hard. My memory is all I have and it is hardly much and more than anything I'll ever know at the same time. I hope for the return of those I've known or the introduction of those I haven't. In the meantime, the lamb limps in circles under the ever-changing phases of the moon.

Tricia Cundiff

For decades, my writing lived in drawers and boxes—a collection of journals and half-finished stories seasoned with a dash of Southern spirit. Though I considered myself a storyteller, my work remained unpolished until I returned to college after a fifty-year “sabbatical.” This return to the classroom has been a thrill, reigniting my creative fires and providing me with the tools to build a map of my family’s legacy. My goal is to leave behind a keepsake for future generations—a collection of answers to the questions I wish I had asked years ago.

Through Dr. Claudia Barnett's In Process course, I was privileged to learn from visiting poets, songwriters, and novelists. My story "The Backyard" was inspired by storyteller Kara Kemp. This narrative, which I later performed at an open mic event at The Bloom Stage in Murfreesboro, serves as a truthful tribute to my father.

Exploring diverse genres has been an educational and transformative experience. This journey has affirmed my commitment to storytelling, and I look forward to embracing future opportunities for creative expression.

Author of:

"The Backyard"

The Backyard

The year 1966 found me just shy of twelve years old, when Old Lady King filled her shotgun with buckshot and threatened us kids with trespassing. I earned my right to stand on an old hubcap designated as second base with a nice hit right over the pitcher's head. The small one-third acre existed as our world. My little brother, all of eight years old, swatted at mosquitoes in right field. Right field, in our backyard, was beside my parents' bedroom window. An air conditioner whirred in the bottom half, but, even so, the noise from a bunch of kids in the backyard playing ball during summer break would sometimes wake up Daddy. Daddy worked nights—the graveyard shift—at the Ford Glass Plant, and he slept during the day.

I had planted my left foot on the hubcap, right foot ready to take off. Mark, a neighborhood kid from two doors down, was up to bat. A year older than me, he stood as the most likely ever to hit the ball over our back fence. And that day, he did it. The crack of wood against that old ball still rings in my ears.

The ball seemed as if it would never stop going up, and then down it came, smack dang middle of Old Lady King's field. It was Mark's ball, and he wanted it back, and, well, we figured, he hit it, he had to get it.

All of us had run into Old Lady King at one time or another. She hated us kids, but who knows why. Mark climbed over and had run halfway to the ball when the shot rang out. We all ran inside my house, crying for Momma, even the ones that didn't live there. Any momma in a storm, right? Even Mark, after he got his ball and ran for cover.

Momma woke Daddy, and Daddy, pulling on his overalls, headed over to Old Lady King's front door. Now, we didn't follow, so we got it second-hand, but Daddy trotted over there mad. He returned calm and said that the old witch wouldn't be shooting at us anymore. Besides, he said, the old woman probably couldn't get off her back porch, and buckshot couldn't travel a hundred yards anyway. We stayed away from that back fence for a long time.

When my brother and his friends were older, they would sneak across Old Lady King's field to reach the swamp. Gigging for frogs was a thing back then, not that I had wanted anything to do with it. I hated it when Momma would fry up those legs, and they would jump all over that big iron skillet. My brother, though, never did run into any buckshot.

Daddy must've put the fear of God into Old Lady King. I never did see her on her back porch again, after the day Mark hit the ball over.

Daddy was my hero, but not only because he told off Old Lady King. Working nights didn't stop him from being at every ballgame we ever played—and we played a lot. I played basketball for school and the church, and softball for the church team. My brothers played football, baseball, and anything else that had a ball, I think. Daddy attended every game, every piano recital, every school play, and walked me to the library every Saturday morning.

I proudly claimed to be a Daddy's girl, for sure. I told my Daddy everything. How I couldn't quite figure out the jump shot. Why I needed him to help me convince Momma that it was time for me to shave my legs. Why I liked Ringo of the Beatles the best. We talked about the books I read, and why I couldn't get off my butt when he tried to teach me to ski. Daddy patiently watched as I tried, over and over again, to stand up straight with the rope in my hands, encouraging me and laughing along with me.

Yes, I told my Daddy everything—almost. Mark, the boy down the street? One year older? All of twelve, going on thirteen. One evening, just after dusk, we were sitting in the old swing in that backyard, waiting for the rest of the neighborhood to show up.

We had five jars lined up, holes already poked in the metal tops. A race to see who could catch the most lightning bugs before everyone had to go home. Mark leaned in close and whispered—I mean, somebody might have heard, right? The kitchen windows were open. I could see Momma standing at the kitchen sink washing up the supper dishes. He whispered, “I want you to be my girlfriend,” then kissed me, right on the mouth. A soft kiss, but perfect. My first kiss. I didn’t tell anyone for a long time. I wish I had told Daddy. He would have laughed, I’m sure, and made me laugh, too.

When I sit in my backyard, I think about my Daddy. He loved the outside, just like I do. Backyards don’t seem to be quite as important to kids today as they used to be. I remember Daddy sitting in the swing in his backyard holding my son, and singing along with him. Years later Daddy and I would sit in my backyard in my swing and watch my grandson, Daddy’s great-grandson, ride on a kids’ John Deere tractor and listen to him singing “Old MacDonald” at the top of his lungs. We would laugh and enjoy the absence of inhibition and the joy that surrounded that little boy. I remember those days. The backyard was our “safe space,” I guess is the right way to say it nowadays. Daddy watched him as I did, with such love and, well, delight. So maybe it’s okay that I didn’t tell him about the kiss. It was so long ago, and I can still see Daddy’s face watching his great-grandson. Maybe my backyard was enough.

PHOTO - GRAPHY

LAURA LOGGINS

“Roses of Sharon”

“Magnolia”

“Sunflower”

“Water Lily”

“Asiatic Lily”

KERA REYNOLDS

“Indiana Summers”

HEATHER TRIMIS

“In the Woods”

Laura Loggins

Photographing the nature around my koi pond brings a gentle sense of calm and inspiration. My backyard oasis is a quiet and soothing sanctuary. Birds, butterflies, frogs, and dragonflies drift in and out, while flowers bloom quietly along the edges. Each scene invites me to pause and notice the subtle beauty of the moment. Through my lens, I find a peaceful connection to the natural world just outside my back door.

Photographer of:

“Roses of Sharon”

“Magnolia”

“Sunflower”

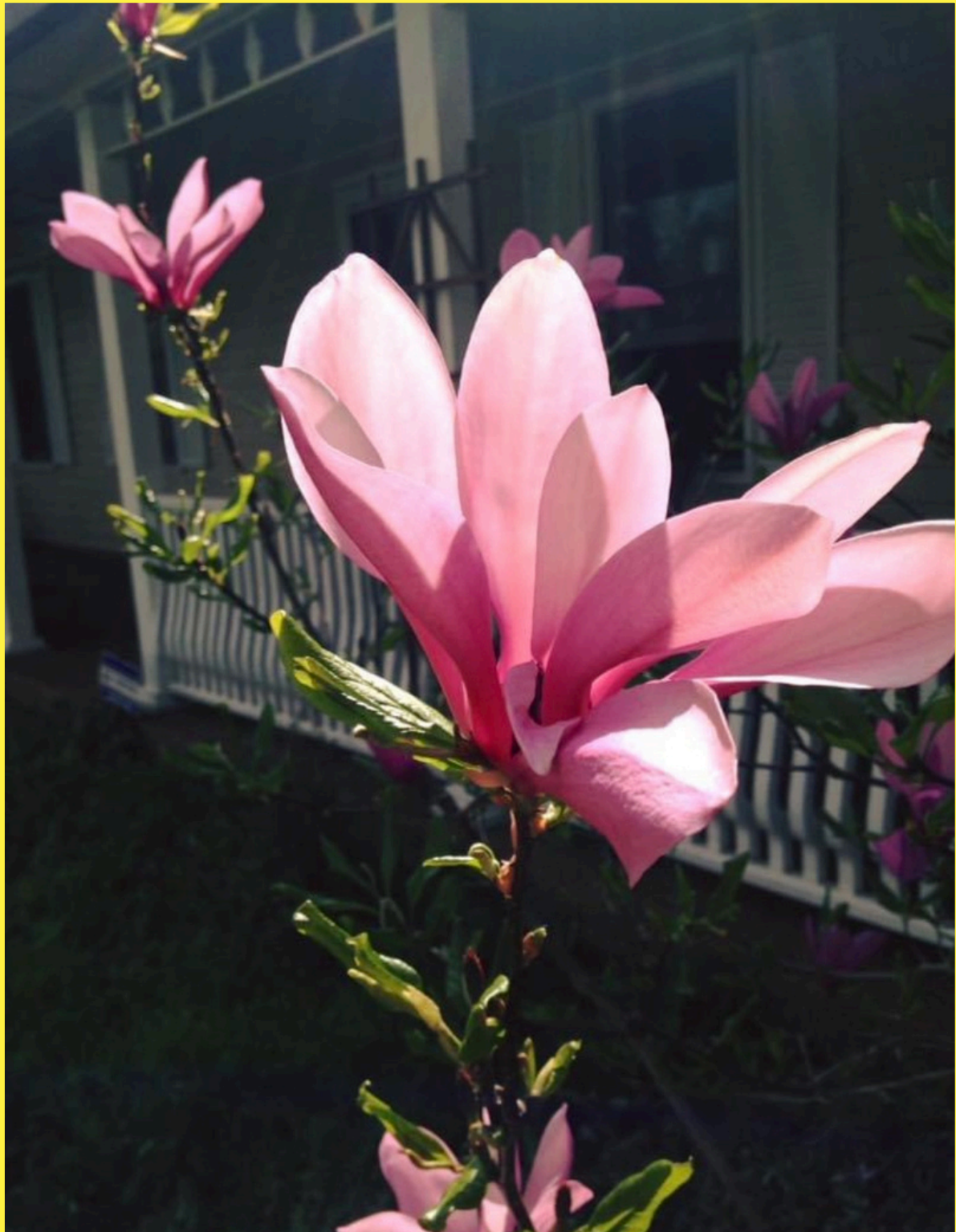
“Water Lily”

“Asiatic Lily”

Roses of Sharon



Magnolia



Sunflower



Water Lily



Asiatic Lily



Kera Reynolds

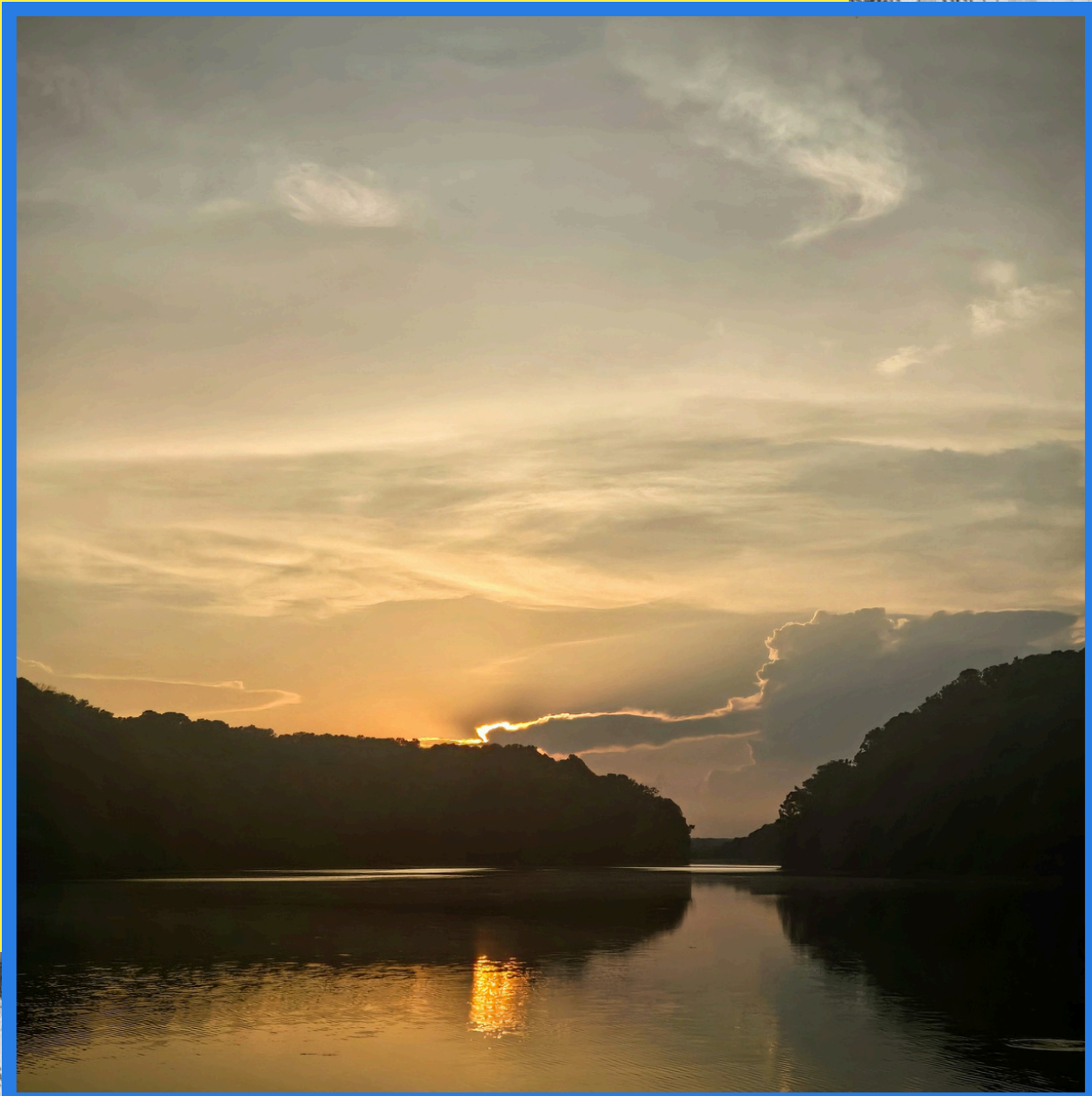
I'm a second-year graduate student at Middle Tennessee State University, studying administration and supervision. I am going into higher education administration but I write, capture photos, and create art whenever I can. I love capturing moments through photos and editing them. For writing, I enjoy poetry and short stories, exploring a variety of topics. I hope to pursue more serious projects, like start the writing process of my first book after graduation.

I took this photograph during a summer trip to Bloomington, Indiana. I was at the lake with some friends. It captures a memorable moment at sunset, marking the end of a fun day and reflecting the joy of being with people who support me. Friends and family guide my work and keep me motivated.

Photographer of:

“Indiana Summers”

Indiana Summers



Heather Trimis

The first time I saw a long-exposure image, I was hooked. The water was clearly moving at a fast pace in the moment, and yet in the image it was a mystical fog. There is something magical about the way the movement is captured in this style of photography. The shutter opens and in the delayed closure, the movement slinks through the frozen space, and is captured as a blur that can be smooth and graceful, ethereal, serene, and sometimes even eerie.

Photographer of:

“In the Woods”

In the Woods





In the Woods

Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate against students, employees, or applicants for admission or employment on the basis of race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, genetic information, or any other legally protected class with respect to all employment, programs, and activities sponsored by MTSU. The Assistant to the President for Civil Rights Compliance has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies and can be reached at Cope Administration Building 116, 1301 East Main Street, Murfreesboro, TN 37132; Christy.Sigler@mtsu.edu; or 615-898-2185. Also see crc.mtsu.edu.

Thank you for reading!