



THE  
SPOOLS



# TIDESPOOLS

2025 vol. 39



# Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

When we meet someone, we often ask, "Where are you from?" In this new issue of Tidepools, you will meet artists and writers who show you *who* they are from.

This collection of works honors grandparents, parents, and the selves we become through struggle and resilience. By celebrating their lineages of selfhood, these writers and artists also showcase the enduring power of creation.

On behalf of our contributors, student graphic designers, editorial committee, interns, support staff, and administration, we hope you enjoy meeting yourself through the works of others in Tidepools 2025.

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# SIXTEEN WEEKS OF STRENGTH

Sixteen weeks felt like climbing a hill,  
With textbooks open and quiet nights still.  
Math stared back, a mountain to scale,  
But I fought through the numbers—I would not fail.

Mornings began with three sleepy faces,  
Packing lunches, not forgetting Chromebooks in backpacks.  
Their laughter reminded me of my why,  
Even when the hours dragged and my shoulders sighed.

Work came calling, deadlines loomed,  
Tasks and chores filled every room.  
Yet, between the chaos, I made space,  
To dream of success, to keep up the pace.

Sobriety anchored me, firm and strong,  
Each “no” is a verse in my own redemption song.  
There were moments of doubt, but I stayed true,  
For myself, my children, and the life we’d renew.

Essays written by a weary hand,  
Inspired by Lewis and Oz, I took a stand.  
Each book became a friend, a guide,  
Their lessons of courage carried me inside.

Sixteen weeks, and still I rise,  
Through sleepless nights and tearful cries.  
A mother, a student, with dreams in sight,  
Juggling life, yet holding on tight.

Each step I’ve taken, each choice I’ve made,  
Carved a path for my future, stone by spade.  
Through love, through grit, I’ve come this far,  
Sixteen weeks of proving just how strong we are.

## **Stephanie Spenny**

*I am a 41-year-old student,  
sober single mother  
of three, and someone  
who enjoys writing as  
a way to express myself  
and explore my creativity.*

*In “Sixteen Weeks  
of Strength,” I reflect on  
my journey of resilience  
and self-discovery.  
Writing helps me share  
my experiences and  
inspire others.*



## Being Human

Luna Crabb

Being human is a unique experience. From material possessions to meaningful connections, from natural disasters to war, we stand apart as a species. Despite the ups and downs, we persevere, embracing all that life offers until the end. To be human is to live fully, as much as we can.



## Suburban Transgender

Noraa Zenger-Snaer

Suburban transgender explores the lives and self-presentation of young transgender adults in suburban America.

# I AM WOMAN

*By Nora Altman*

“I am WOMAN, hear me roar,” the mother proudly bellowed in a stern voice, smiling, while she looked down at her daughter’s big brown curious eyes.


The inquisitive little girl loved watching her strong-willed mother rush around the sun-filled room, counting each freckle that graced her beautiful face, while she quickly dressed in her business casual attire, gracefully fluffing her short, tight brown curls upon her head with a red, wide toothpick comb. For just a small moment, time stood still, allowing the girl to capture the warm, harmonious moment before it was abruptly interrupted by the screams of her sisters fighting over the early morning problems, like who got to use the bathroom next or who drank the last of the milk.

“Time to go!” the mother of four yelled as she quickly snatched her mug filled with lukewarm black coffee from the cluttered counter. The three older sisters, appearing identical in looks, with their deep brown curls brushed back from their faces and held tightly in a ponytail, rushed from the kitchen table grabbing their overstuffed backpacks from the floor, as they bumped into one another laughing.

The young girl, dressed in her clean, tidy school uniform, adjusting the length of the skirt to ensure it brushed slightly above her knees, walked slowly behind them, dragging her black Mary Jane shoes with every dreadful step. As she reached for the doorknob to leave, she turned her glance to the dirty mirror hanging near the door. Staring at herself, she noticed something she had never really noticed before. Little brown dots gathered around her nose and her cheeks. But where had she seen these familiar little dots before? A faint image of her mother flashed before her eyes and without hesitation she recalled the very moment.

It was a memory from two years prior when she was just ten years old. It was at her track meet, hosted on a warm, sunny day in mid-June. The air was bursting with the hum of bees and the melodious chirping of birds as the girls prepared themselves for the mile run. Filled with nerves and anticipation, the young girl caught a glimpse of her mother standing proudly in the stands waving her hands and cheering. The rays of the sun graced her face so gently, highlighting the clusters of freckles that kissed her nose and cheeks. A wave of comfort and reassurance swept over the young girl in that fleeting moment, just as the track coordinator began the countdown, “3 ... 2... 1... Go!” Suddenly, her older sister’s piercing voice rang out, “Let’s Go!,” jolting the girl from her pleasant trance and pulling her back into the tight clasp of reality.

**The rays of the sun graced her face so gently, highlighting the clusters of freckles that kissed her nose and cheeks. A wave of comfort and reassurance swept over the young girl in that fleeting moment, just as the track coordinator began the countdown, “3 ... 2... 1... Go!”**



Many, many long years have passed since I have recounted memorable stories such as this one. Perhaps the melancholic echoes that haunt these recollections are what keep them contained in my brain like a sardine. The loss of my mother at the early age of twelve was such a crippling blow, leaving me feeling as though pieces of my identity had been viciously ripped from my core.

I remember my mother as a strong, spiritual Black woman who commemorated Kwanza and always threw it down in the kitchen. Her prominent dish was an eclectic soul food spread consisting of chitlins, gooey mac and cheese, and collard greens complemented by fluffy cornbread. Even after two decades, the pungent fumes of chitlins flooding the whole household still linger fresh in my memory.

**The loss of my mother at the early age of twelve was such a crippling blow, leaving me feeling as though pieces of my identity had been viciously ripped from my core.**

My mother always kept a proverb for every situation. If we ever expressed insecurity or self doubt about our skin color, she would proudly reassure us with a smile, “The darker the berry, the sweeter the juice.”

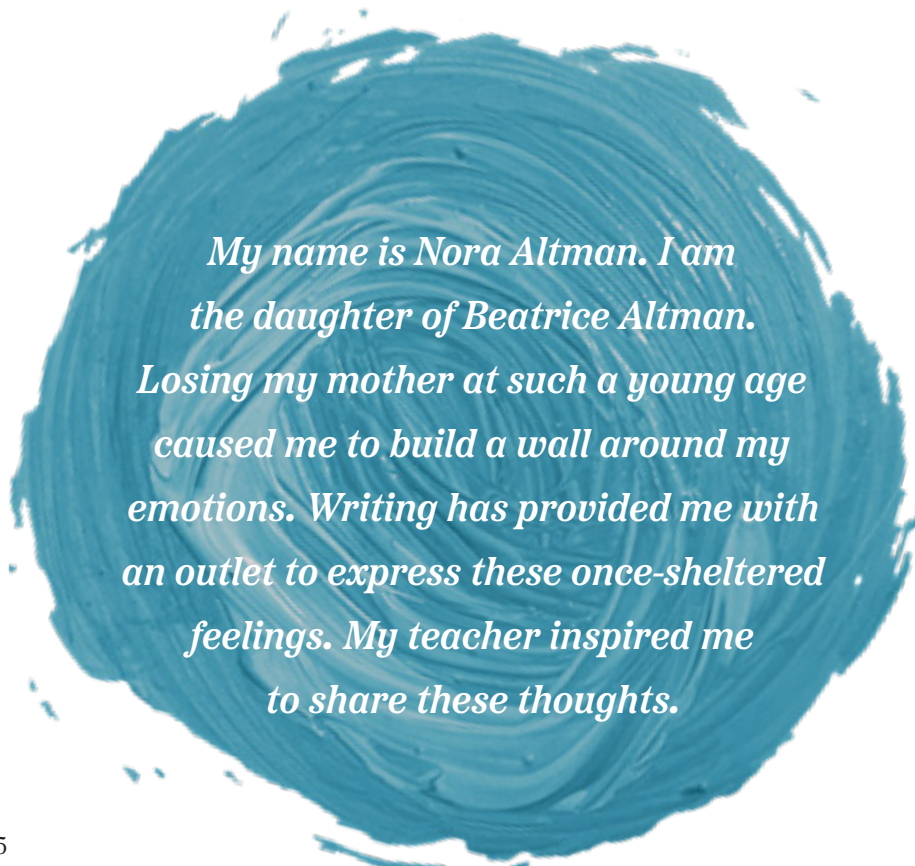
And when one of us protested or grumbled about a chore, she would bluntly say “I am WOMAN, hear me roar!” Applauding us for using our voices and expressing our opinions even if they may not be correct.



I am beyond grateful for the wisdom and cultural heritage my mother imparted to me and my sisters. These lessons will remain engraved in our hearts forever.

It took me some time and deep reflection to understand that the physical absence of a loved one does not equate to their spiritual departure. They continue to live on within us, steering us through life’s restless journey. ■

**“I am WOMAN, hear me roar!”**



*My name is Nora Altman. I am the daughter of Beatrice Altman. Losing my mother at such a young age caused me to build a wall around my emotions. Writing has provided me with an outlet to express these once-sheltered feelings. My teacher inspired me to share these thoughts.*



**Howard Vi**

*The most popular kid at the back of the classroom, making people laugh sporadically since 2015. There's always something to make fun of.*

Hi, it's me. Your inner voice. We haven't spoken in a while; just wanted to catch up. Heard you're at cocommunity college now. That's great. How's that degree coming along?

A part-time job? In this economy? Lucky you. This time next year you'll have been replaced by an automated system.

Hey, congrats on barely passing those three-unit classes your parents are paying for, by the way. The struggle is real.

Did I forget to mention you're an adult now?

Speaking of, you know that weird pain in that one spot you woke up with one morning that just never really went away? Yeah, it's terminal.

Not that it would really make a difference, anyway. It's not like your obituary's gonna be a New York Times Bestseller, if you get my drift.

I have it on good authority (me) that none of what you've done so far matters.

This isn't "a low," this is life.

Mum and dad are very proud of you, kiddo.

Tomorrow will be worse than yesterday, and nothing will ever change.

You can't succeed, you won't succeed, and you might as well be called Murphy because everything that can go wrong will go wrong.

I'm not gonna bother getting into specifics because we both know the possibility of horror is enough to dread.

Also I'm lazy.

So yeah, keep on keeping on. You're everything you wanted to be and more.

Oh, and one last thing to keep in mind:

**Don't ever listen to me.**





## hindsight

Sanaee Walker

As a whole my work explores themes of the past, now, and future enmeshed by birth, growth, decay and death. *hindsight* symbolizes an enmeshment of time. Images of death, windows, a woman, and the body reflect pieces within my life recurring and ever changing. Seemingly constant yet always in flux.

# ADVICE TO MY YOUNGER SELF

*As a recent retiree, I have many stories to share in the Lifestories class--especially from having four kids. "Advice to my Younger Self" could be considered a modern-day adaptation of the poem "Desiderata," written by American writer Max Ehrmann. For nearly a century, his poem has inspired people how to achieve peace and joy, and to "be gentle with yourself," no matter what life throws your way. Thanks to MiraCosta College for the opportunity to share!*

**Diane Hornsby**

Dear Little Diane,

If ever there's a time when you think I'm not looking, I'm there over your shoulder. When you feel as if no one cares, I care. When you feel invisible and no one can hear your voice, I see you and I hear you. I've been here all along; I am you. I am your past and your future. Always remember that we are descendants of those who have walked the earth before, and messengers to those who come after us.

Today, you are so very young and at the threshold of your life. I am here to show you some things you'll understand later. I'm the "older you" that wishes I could've done a few things differently. Consider it a gift of wisdom to a sweet little girl who was born just this morning, the second daughter to Bill and Sharon. This is quite an unusual present that I give you, but one that you'll appreciate as you go through the trials and tribulations of life.

Growing up as a middle child (*spoiler alert: you will become one next year*) is challenging, and some days you'll feel squeezed in the middle. Not bigger with more privileges like an older sister, and not a coddled baby like a younger one. You'll be relied upon to be more mellow than the others; you'll learn the



*I've been here all along; I am you. I am your past and your future. Always remember that we are descendants of those who have walked the earth before, and messengers to those who come after us.*

important skill of patience and knowing how to wait your turn. This will follow you all your life, and you will always be appreciated for this trait.

I happen to know that you'll be labeled as an "introvert" while you're growing up, and you won't like that word very much. An introvert watches and observes the things around us. We pay attention. We notice details. Instead of being overly concerned with external things, we reflect and enjoy our solitude. We are frequently the writers and the artists, and that's a good thing.

Be confident with the person you are. Love yourself "as you are." In a world of cookie-cutter people where everyone feels compelled to be and look alike, don't be afraid to be your own self. Embrace your uniqueness, and never feel embarrassed about that. The relationships you make in life will be more authentic that way. Never underestimate what you have to offer. Don't feel tempted to always follow the crowd or let them become a yardstick for the things you want to achieve in your life.

Maybe you will have an issue with "people-pleasing," sorry to say. Yes, it's the path of least resistance, but don't ever be afraid to voice your opinion. There's something innately satisfying about speaking one's mind and being okay with that. Remaining silent can be construed as tacit agreement—even when you don't agree. Always be true to yourself. Nothing is worth trading your integrity for.

I don't have to remind you, dear one, to be kind. It's in our DNA to be that way. Our parents, our grandparents, and our great-grandparents have

always shown a willingness to help others and a desire to do good—not only in their professions, but also in their relationships. They gave of themselves to others, and you will too. Never forget their willingness to give, to understand, and to be kind with people from all walks of life. Even to those with whom you disagree. Before we get off the subject, I need to remind you to also be kind to yourself. Forgive yourself when you're less than perfect. Be as kind to yourself as you would be to your best friend.

Lastly, never forget your roots. As your life flourishes and grows, always pay homage to those who came before you. Before your birth this morning, your ancestors numbered about two thousand people in only two hundred years. You carry a piece of every one of those ancestors in your bones. Honor their lives; cherish their stories; write down your memoirs. Do this for the children of tomorrow. We are truly a colorful tapestry of lives, carefully stitched together with golden threads of love.

There's something innately satisfying about speaking one's mind and being okay with that. Remaining silent can be construed as tacit agreement—even when you don't agree. Always be true to yourself. Nothing is worth trading your integrity for.

We are truly a colorful tapestry of lives, carefully stitched together with golden threads of love.

Now, go out there and live. Grow and be happy. Live with purpose. Find your passion. Have the courage to be different. Be authentic. May this, the first day of your life, mark the beginning of a wonderful lifetime. There isn't—nor will there ever be—anyone in the world quite like you. Have a good life, my dear Diane.

All the best,

A Much Older Diane +



## The Secret of Loneliness

Claudia Vela

This is a batik style painting. I experimented with tempera paint and India ink. My inspiration was the pigeons of San Francisco and how I related to them at the time when I lived there.

# CHASING LIGHT

How long will I spend chasing the light?—

I ponder this question as I gaze the golden crowned clouds outside my window. The sun canvases her beautiful light upon the empty clouds. Five thousand feet above ground, a new beauty, a blessing of sight, known only to the people on this flight.  
Sunset.

How long will I spend chasing the light?—

Her golden ambers grab my gaze, entrancing me with her beauty. It's all I've ever wanted, the sensation of this sunset. The sight that beholds me in this moment, right now. She's the only thing I want in my life. "You're all I'd ever need," I tell myself. The fool I am, listening to drunken desires.  
Dusk.

How long will I spend chasing the light?—

It seems like I'm matching speeds. But ever so slightly she slips from my grip, and begins to disappear in the distance. Her golden grace dances into the horizon ahead, slowly, leaving me. As she strays, the darkness around me slowly encloses. Engulfing whatever vision of mine remained, until she shows no more. The colorful canvased clouds wiped clean, now all I see is black.  
Night.

How long will I spend chasing the light?—

I ponder again upon this question, watching the blinking light outside. How long will I spend chasing her in the dark? The sparkling sunset I saw in her once, now wiped to distant memories of my past. Do I spend my life chasing the golder girl she was before? I know she wouldn't be the same. Should I trail behind until I catch up? Or turn around to see the next sunrise. A decision needs to be made.  
Dawn.

How long will I spend chasing the light?—

Why waste my time chasing someone I knew in the past? Someone who's now a figure of my imagination. When there's something better for me waiting on the horizon. I don't want to drag out my evening, spending extra time in attempts to capture a sight I won't see again. But rather turn around, and look forward to the new light that lays ahead.  
Sunrise.

**Marcus West**

*I'm not actually that good at writing. Just inspired by events in my life.*

# Ticking Time Bomb

*By Savanna Giles*

Jeremy was experiencing internal conflict, he just couldn't control his emotions anymore. One minute he was crying his eyes out listening to the "Sound of Silence" on his shattered iPhone wailing in his truck in the driveway and the next he would be threatening the cashier at McDonald's for forgetting to give him a straw. He changed his clothes about once a week and always smelled like Blue Spirits, which he chain-smoked in the pick-up lane at his daughter's high school. He and his wife hadn't had a civil conversation in years, and he had no urge to spend time with her. He didn't want to be loved by his wife or worshiped by his children anymore. Jeremy only wanted two things. To be alone and for his head to stop hurting.

Over time, he had fallen into this routine. He spent the nights awake creeping around the house. The sixty-year-old single story had only hardwood floors and the creek of the floorboards and the ringing of the bell on the chow's collar was the background noise in the children's nightmares. Jeremy walked through the house examining it as if it was a museum displaying his consequences. He would leave the second living room full of the furniture used for decoration and slide the wooden door to enter the hallway leading to the children's rooms. He walked by his son Leo's room and stared at the white wooden door leaning against the wall. He thought about fixing the hinges but decided it was best to just replace the damn thing. Jeremy

didn't peek inside because he knew his son wasn't home. Sneaking down the hallway that led to his daughter's room, he smelt the aroma of weed and lemon-scented Lysol, noticing her light was still on. Walking towards the door, he tripped over a rug and heard a gasp. The lights went out, and he heard the click of the door as it locked. As he was leaving, he swore he heard counting, as if she was counting how many steps he took before he was gone.

Later in the night, he would go to the kitchen and pour mounds of sugar into a plastic Little Mermaid bowl and eat it over the sink, listening to the howls of coyotes out in the fields. Jeremy had no appetite during the day and after years together with his wife, her recipes he used to fantasize about during the long work days now had no flavor. After about three or four bowls, he made his way and plopped on the genuine brown leather couch he bought with his disability back pay. Turning on the TV, he changed the channel to CNN and began yelling at the reporters. His yells echoed through the house, but no one dared to approach the beast while enraged. If he took one or two of the blue ovals, this would go on for several hours until he was worked up, he'd begin to tire himself out. His snores were so loud, but to his family, this meant he was down for the count, and they would be able to eat a quick breakfast before he would wake up and wreak havoc.

**The sixty-year-old single story had only hardwood floors and the creek of the floorboards and the ringing of the bell on the chow's collar was the background noise in the children's nightmares.**

He usually started the morning walking the property with his dog. Originally, this was a gift for the family, but he told himself the dog was his emotional support. The problem was Jeremy had no urge to take care of anything and found the repetitive tasks of taking the dog out to pee and changing the food bowl annoying. He told his family that the dog would help calm him down and that he would have fewer "outbursts." But, the dog pissed him off with the whining and panting, and it turned out to be another thing Jeremy thought he wanted but ended up disappointing him. The only reason he spent so much time with his dog was because he liked to talk to himself and somehow talking to a dog looked less concerning. Jeremy would ramble about everything on his mind and try to remember his story because in his head the pages were now blank. He'd ramble about his days in the service and how it built character. This was usually followed by a PTSD moment, and he would scream about bombs falling down on him.

Sometimes he ranted about his children and sometimes they heard him. His daughter's room had a sliding glass door that led out to the pool, and she could sometimes hear him go off.

"Well, I guess you're more like me than you thought!" he yelled, examining the roaches in the ashtray on the patio. There was no response.

After walking the dog, he'd usually take the pickup down the road to the local donut shop where he'd get a black coffee and talk the ear off the cashier who spoke very little English but always nodded politely. Jeremy would sit with his coffee on the bench outside and smoke two Blue Spirits reading his Yahoo news. Usually, after that, he'd drive to the filling station to work on his truck. After he totaled two trucks, his doctors told him he shouldn't be driving, but he felt his truck was all he had. He vacuumed the felt red seats at least once a week and spent hours scrubbing the exterior and adding modifications. He'd always had manual labor jobs and enjoyed working with his hands. However, the nerve damage was bad, and he often burned himself and wouldn't feel it, causing even more damage. Usually, after a few hours, he would admit defeat and make his way back home.

The rest of the day was spent getting increasingly more and more high. If his family was home he'd stick to the devil's lettuce, but if he had a few hours to himself, he'd go in the closet and grab the pink shoebox, move the tissue paper, and pull out an orange bottle with the blue ovals. Jeremy wasn't good at making new friends, but he was great at finding a dealer. After living in California for a little over a year, he met this guy, Ted, at the vape store cleverly named WESELL-VAPES. Ted was a single dad and stereotypical surfer dude with sandy blonde ringlets and

**If he was sober, the pain in his head would worsen and the voices would get louder. So he made sure he was hardly ever sober. Jeremy would be stuck in the clouds all morning and crash in the sun around noon.**

badly done tattoos from the '90s. Ted also was the best dealer in the area and after his doctor stopped prescribing the blue ovals to him, Ted was more than happy to play doctor. They weren't friends, but they were friendly.

"Jeremy my dude! This new stuff I just got will blow your mind! I took it before surfing the other day and had an out-of-body experience, man." Ted always had a sales pitch.

Jeremy hated how "California" Ted was. Jeremy hated everything about California and repeatedly told his wife how much he resented her for moving them back to her home state. He hated the "radicals" ruining the country with their backwards politics. He hated the crowded beaches and the hot sand sticking to the sweat on the skin. But most of all, he hated how expensive it was. His family was living off his social security check and, even though they didn't pay rent, the money in the account at the beginning of the month only lasted a few days after paying the bills and setting some aside for the substances he'd purchase each week. Jeremy justified hiding some of the money from his family by telling himself his addiction made him "tolerable." If he was sober, the pain in his head would worsen and the voices would get louder. So he made sure he was hardly ever sober. Jeremy would be stuck in the clouds all morning and crash in the sun around noon.

**His yells echoed through the house, but no one dared to approach the beast while enraged.**



**No woman would want him, so he had to keep the one who was still obedient.**

His family never woke him, and it was honestly the only time they were able to leave the property without getting questioned or screamed at. His naps would last a few hours, and he'd wake up in a cold sweat with blurred vision. He often had nightmares and wrote them down in a note app on his phone.

Nightmares this week:


Running through the desert. Shirtless with a gun in hand. I'm dizzy and overheated. I fall to my knees, and I'm approached by a face so uncanny...it's Dad. I shoot. I miss.

Laughing with my buddies in the Army. Our base is attacked. Gunshots went off for several hours.

My bike is stuck on the tracks again. This time it didn't start. I only see bright light and hear the shriek of the wheels.

In the evening, sometimes he chose to have dinner with his family. His children hardly ever joined them, but his wife, Marilyn, always made sure food was made each night, even if it wasn't eaten. He found this pathetic. Cooking him meals he no longer found appetizing, waiting for her "good girl," acting like the chow. If he sat and ate it was never for very long and his

wife usually said something to piss him off. But, the fighting meant he didn't have to stay. He sometimes started arguments for the sake of being able to leave. Jeremy knew this made his wife anxious, but it kept her submissive. Even after being verbally abused for years, she still got up each morning to do his laundry and clean his house. And if Jeremy was forced into having a long conversation with his wife, he learned over the years how to drown her out. Jeremy thought about leaving her but knew it would be

inconvenient. He was now decaying and disabled. No woman would want him, so he had to keep the one who was still obedient. That and he liked the idea of having children but wasn't going to take care of them or give them the attention his wife did. Leaving wasn't an option. He was stuck in this hell he created for himself. He resented everyone, including himself. Jeremy lived the same day over and over. Impatiently waiting for the time bomb in his head to explode. 



*Savanna Giles  
is a writer and is currently  
studying English at Mira Costa  
College, planning to transfer to a  
four-year university. The genres  
of her writing include poetry  
and fiction. She has had poetry  
published in local media and is  
currently working on  
her first novel.*



# CONCIENCIA

As a kid I loved when my mother would braid my hair before school  
I would walk in tall and proud  
Feeling like a fresh new dollar bill  
But at some point my mind played tricks on me  
You see  
It became uncool to walk around school with braids on your head  
It became uncool to speak spanish  
It became uncool not to kiss boys  
It became uncool to be a beaner  
It became uncool to love the culture you grew up with  
I would run to the school bathroom as fast as I could, covering my hair with a hoodie of  
shame,  
And untwisted my braids as fast as I could before anyone could see me  
The real me  
Those braids were created by my mother's strong hands



Each section of the braid untwisting my culture  
Untwisting my ancestors  
Untwisting mis raizes and where they came from  
Deceived by the wave of mainstream media  
Deceived by pop culture  
Deceived by my insecurities that are now called virtues  
I was an uncultured prick like the rest of the kids  
You see, I did not care if I hurt my mom when I came home with my hair tucked neatly  
behind my ears  
The brown eyes of milk and honey  
Stereotypes growing and overpowering who I really am  
A Chicana  
A Latina  
A leader not a follower  
The long tail that no one can step on  
Because I am quick-tongued to defend myself  
And with every Latino generation born in the land of the free we break the cycle of  
oppression  
Call me by my real name Julia without the American accent  
Let each syllable sink in  
The cycle of oppression that was once held tightly in between your fists has now soften  
Too soft  
The cycle of mija calladita te miras mas bonita  
translated to...



Mija, you look way more beautiful when you are quiet  
Silenced....  
El silencio llama The silence calls  
But is no longer heard in between my braids  
I decipher your thoughts of prejudice and sexism I no longer care for  
I am no longer searching for mainstream but the upstream  
Into the altar of the sun and moon  
The cradle in which my body lays, a maca in my abuelos house, rocking back and forth  
as I slumber in the heat  
The sweat dripping down my neck as I drink my tio's famous licuado, que cura el calor  
en el verano  
I am braided into existence, la fuente de amor y cultura  
De la tierra madre  
Conciencia

**Julia Garduno**

*Hi, my name is Julia and I am taking English 100. I used to write poetry in high school many years ago. I had forgotten how much I loved poetry. This is one of my recent assignments. Hope you like it.*



## My Sweet Girl Miranda

Desi Gamboa

I like Photography and the moments it brings that last forever. This is my Daughter Miranda. She's so little and innocent. Life is before her. Family is everything to me. This picture is black and white with color oils added.

# WONDER WOMAN HAS A NAME

*A mother-and-daughter relationship isn't always perfect; however, it's also important to remember to be grateful. To cherish the small things.*

**Leslie Cruz**

## Growing up,

65% of children see their mothers in a content, stable relationship with a father figure present, otherwise known as the “ideal” way of having a family. I, on the other hand, was fortunate to have fallen in the 22% category that grew up with only a mother. I did have a father; however, he wasn't present for a majority of my life growing up. This led me to depend on my mom for a lot of things, such as, feeding, clothing, and keeping up with me to make sure all my needs and wants were being met. My father did not meet a simple expectation—for example, paying \$12 a month for child support. One thing was for certain: he was great at making sure there was a beer in one hand and a woman in the other.

I did not ask my mom to do anything for me, but she did it out of the kindness of her heart, regardless of whether she had a partner to help her or not. My mother was a part of the 40% that were single mothers in the US. She immigrated from Mexico to Vista, California, at a young age, along with the rest of my family. Elicene was her name. My mom did not like her name because of the way people would mispronounce it, as well as being the only

person she knew with that name. However, I love her name. In my eyes, her name stands for intelligent, hard working, creative, and lovable.

I did not ask for my mom to be seventeen, a junior in high school, when she had me; and yet, she still handled her “mistake” and took care of me in the way she knew how to. Based on my descriptions of my mom, you would assume we are best friends and do everything together. Your assumption would be wrong. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate everything she has done and sacrificed; however, she was young herself when she had me and was not an expert when it came to being a mother. My mom would get mad at me for the littlest things. I couldn't read a word wrong when she would test me on my reading and writing homework. I couldn't drink soda as a kid when all my other cousins could. I couldn't go out walking in the neighborhood with the other kids or my cousins. Those weren't the worst things that would happen.

*My mom did not like her name because of the way people would mispronounce it, as well as being the only person she knew with that name. However, I love her name. In my eyes, her name stands for intelligent, hard working, creative, and lovable.*

My mother often discusses her regrets to me. Something as small as getting face piercings as a teenager, to something as significant like choosing the father of her child. So, when I look back at the times she would get upset with me for accidents that would happen, I now understand why. My mother was preparing me for something much bigger, life. She's aware of a lot more than me, especially with eighteen more years of experience than me.

She had to sacrifice the rest of her high school experience to spend time with me and make time for herself as well. She has sacrificed the enjoyment of taking and picking up her child from school, due to her working two jobs in order to support the both of us. She's had to sacrifice her image as a person because she was a young Hispanic teen parent. For me, things she would tell me growing up were the following:

“Don't do drugs.” “Don't drink.”

“Choose your friends wisely.”

“Don't waste your time on a boy who does not value you.”

I failed at following her instructions. Growing up in a middle school where everyone thought they had to follow each other's footsteps, I sadly accompanied them and did what everyone else did, so I was exposed to a lot of things at the ripe age of fourteen. I would say my mom didn't know what she was talking about because I “knew” everything. Everything led me down the wrong path. I did the wrong things, and came across the wrong people for me. I did everything she told me not to do. I would get

I was irritated with the world and started to feel pity for myself. These feelings got me nowhere, except the deep void of feeling lost. I felt as if I were a white rose that had been crushed and stripped of my innocence.

off the school bus with a plug waiting to sell me a vape or edible. I would sneak off with people thinking drinking in the apartment's playground was "cool." I let a boy take advantage of me because we were young, "in love," and I believed him when he said we were going to get married one day. Now looking back, a part of me has a voice with the consistent phrase of asking:

"Leslie, why would you allow this to happen!?"

A part of me wanted to believe that everything would go well, that there would be no consequences to my actions. Now looking back, I had no self respect, so then I had time to reflect on myself. A psychological explanation would be because I had no male figure really there for me growing up, and the fear of being left alone absolutely terrified me. Suddenly, all the regrettable feelings started to pour in. I was irritated with the world and started to feel pity for myself. These feelings got me nowhere, except the deep void of feeling lost. I felt as if I were a white rose that had been crushed and stripped of my innocence. My mother

could see these changes in me, and instead of trying to acknowledge the mental alterations I was going through, she would get frustrated with me and take the anger out on me:

"You're being dramatic."

"You're a bad daughter."

"You're a lot like your dad."

All these things would hurt me, especially coming from my mother because all I wanted was for her to understand me and be there for me. I grew resentment towards her.

"She doesn't know what she's talking about"

I would say it all the time when she and I would bump heads. I would tune her out whenever she was trying to give me advice because a part of me didn't feel like she was saying it to be helpful.

Rather, it felt like she was trying to make up for the times she would wound me with her words instead of owning up to her own mistakes. The bitterness of feeling unwelcome by my mother, for simply being the daughter of my father, is what made me believe she didn't love me. I believed she had hatred towards me because she regretted having me. All these situations caused us to drift apart. I struggled to not let our problems get the best of me because I know she was just trying to look out for me but didn't know how to because of how she grew up herself.

I wish I could go back in time to see the young version of my mother. I want to go sit beside her through the times she cried, laughed, and felt anger. I want a better understanding

of her and why she would say or do certain things that I don't agree with. I want to ask her about her dreams and tell her what she should avoid for her dreams to come true. I want to tell her to ignore all the people who would tell her to go for the bare minimum.

"Don't work too hard."

She worked hard in order to support the both of us, regardless of what they told her. My mom deserves everything good to happen to her, even if she insists that she ruined my life.

Approximately, 39% of young mothers become depressed due to these difficult developments they encounter. My mother was one of these women. I had read somewhere that depression could also possibly be passed down through generations. It's a known fact that about 50% of depression was passed down generationally. This fact could explain a lot, considering that the women in my family were mistreated and it was bound to happen to those next in line. I want to break this cycle.

The bitterness of feeling unwelcome by my mother, for simply being the daughter of my father, is what made me believe she didn't love me.

As time passed by, I started to get to know my mom. Our fights decreased as we grew as human beings. It was time for us to accept our flaws; but, there's a difference between forgiving and forgetting. As we sit down and talk about our personal mistakes, we reminisce about the good times as well.

My mom deserves everything good to happen to her, even if she insists that she ruined my life.

I don't want to be in my twenties, living on my own, and to continue having a grudge against my mom. I shouldn't, after all the sacrifices she made for me, the hard battles she fought in order for me to live a better life than she did. She started to teach me about self-love, to be smart about my decisions, and to stop the need to please people.

My mother taught me many lessons she learned herself growing up. I find it refreshing knowing my mom and I have come a long way to become the people we are today. My mom is also courageous for trying her best with the little knowledge she has about parenting. I try to remember: We're both still learning and growing. Elicene is my superhero.



MAMA

Y NME

DAD

### S10 Chevy

passes by  
much like my dad's  
when he was 17.  
i see him  
and my mom  
inside  
she's hopeless,  
and he's hopeful  
for a son.

### Heart Shaped Letter

high school  
sweethearts  
white pick-up, flowers, the smashing pumpkins  
SHHH  
pose, hold her, smile!  
CLICK  
jealousy, notes, Ice Cube  
SHHH  
Hold her. Smile. Pose.  
CLICK  
trust, Sex. exit  
WAAH  
Diapers. disappear. Bottles.  
WAAH  
Diapers. Diapers. disappear. Bottles. Bottles.  
WAAH  
Fold his underwear. Search his pockets. Feed the baby.  
WAAH  
Another baby  
his,  
but not theirs

### Password Keychain

daddy tells me all his passwords so  
i can play word games on his phone  
he says they make me smarter  
my mommy asks me for the numbers  
why does daddy not tell mommy his passwords?  
i'm so smart for knowing them when mommy doesn't  
i tell her the numbers proudly

then it's midnight and i keep my eyes closed as i listen  
to mommy on the phone  
she speaks in a hush but i still understand her  
my body becomes a mush  
i try my best to pretend to be asleep

It's morning and mommy tells me daddy's moving away,  
again.

but mommy doesn't know that i'm smart  
i'm smart enough to pretend

I learn to pretend about everything  
I pretend to not be smart anymore  
So no one fights anymore

So Mom and Dad stay  
Asleep with me.

### Giselle Resendiz

***Giselle discovered  
poetry as a healing  
practice early in  
her college career.  
She has journals  
filled with  
miscellaneous pieces  
and a notes app  
full of things like  
grocery lists and  
names of older  
celebrity crushes.  
This small poem  
collection is an  
attempt at making  
sense of these words.***

# MOTHERHOOD

*My journey is driven by the  
desire to create a better future  
for my family while staying  
true to my identity and  
commitment to making  
a difference in the world.*

### Magdalena Audelo

**When I think about my life, I see duality everywhere.**

I'm a mom of two beautiful and amazing kids, one who's autistic and one who's considered "typical." Aside from being a full-time college student, I'm also a first-gen college student, a DACA recipient turned U.S. resident, and someone trying to break cycles of toxicity, struggle, and negativity while carrying the weight of what feels like the world on my shoulders. My life isn't picture perfect, but I'm proud of the journey I'm on. It's messy, beautiful, and full of contradictions, and being both a mom and a student has taught me lessons I never imagined I'd learn.

To really understand me, you have to know where I came from. Growing up, I was surrounded by gangs, drugs and abuse—just lots of toxicity in general. Because of that, I tended to act out in school. I was always that kid who got into trouble but still managed to pull good grades. Some teachers didn't know what to do with me; one minute, I'd be getting detention, and the next, I'd be passing a test and then you'd find me in the middle of a fight after school. Being sent to juvie part of my freshman year and coming back my sophomore year and still having perfect grades, I was a walking contradiction. The "chola" always getting into

trouble but being on the honor roll with perfect grades and a 4.00 GPA. Many of my teachers saw the potential, others saw the emotionally unavailable parents who didn't care if I passed or not. After juvie, I noticed a lot of my teachers would talk to me about college, and I decided to take it a bit more seriously, even though I was still getting into trouble along the way.

That duality stayed with me as I got older, especially as I became a mother. On the outside, it might seem like I'm juggling everything effortlessly, but inside is a constant battle to keep going and become a better version of myself.

### The “chola” always getting into trouble but being on the honor roll with perfect grades and a 4.00 GPA.



That tension that I carry is part of who I am, and it's shaped the way I approach both motherhood and school. I honestly even did some reflecting on my youth as I was reading Danielle Estes' article: “It wasn't until I had a child that it hit me, like okay, I need to stop goofing off and I need to do this... Now I don't feel like I'm going to school just for me. I am going to school for her to make her life better, and I think that's what gives me a little more drive to get stuff done. Whereas before when I was going to school, I didn't think I had that much ambition.” Like, I really sat down

and reflected. Ever since having both my kids, I have done nothing but push myself for the better.

Being a mom is already a full-time job. Add being a full-time college student to that, and it feels like I'm being pulled in many directions, being in many places at once. My days are filled with diaper changes, therapy sessions for my autistic child, homework, and endless house chores to complete. Sometimes, I feel like I'm barely holding it together. What makes it harder is the criticism. I've heard people say I'm not a “real mom” because I'm in school and not spending every second with my kids. Those comments hurt, but I remind myself that I'm doing this for my family. Research backs up what I feel. In their study, Brauer and Foust note that student-parents face “multiple and competing demands that require them to carefully manage their time and resources.” That's me in a nutshell. I've learned to multitask in ways I never thought possible, like studying for an exam while making dinner or writing papers late at night after the kids are asleep. It's not ideal, but it's my reality. It is part of my perseverance but also just as overwhelming and mentally draining.

Being the parent of an autistic child adds another layer of complexity. Therapy sessions, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, and advocating for my child's needs take up a lot of time and energy. I've lived that reality every day. It's not just about balancing school and motherhood, it's about advocating for my child's needs, too. Waters and Friesen describe how parents often feel “overwhelmed by the complexity of transitioning from individualized early intervention services to a more structured

preschool setting.” That was me when my son started school. It felt like I had to fight to make sure he got the support he needed, while having to manage my own education.

  
  
I've learned to multitask in ways I never thought possible, like studying for an exam while making dinner or writing papers late at night after the kids are asleep.

One thing that has helped is working closely with his teachers and therapists. As one parent in the study said, “When we're on the same page, everything works better.” That's the truth. When everyone is working together, my son thrives. But getting to that point isn't easy. It takes a lot of communication, patience, and persistence. Waters and Friesen also highlight how “parents of children with disabilities face added layers of complexity, especially when navigating school systems and balancing their own goals.” I've felt that pressure every time I've had to choose between attending a class or a therapy session for my child. It's a constant push-and-pull, but I remind myself that my education is ultimately for them, too. My neurotypical child has their own needs, and I try to ensure they don't feel overlooked. It's hard, and there's only so much of me to go around. But I want both my kids to see that it's possible to chase your dreams, even when life is messy and complicated.

Being a former DACA recipient adds another layer to my already chaotic life. For years, I lived in limbo, not knowing if I'd be able to stay in the U.S., let alone go to college. Now that I'm a resident, I feel like I have more stability, but the fear of losing everything never really goes away. That experience is part of why I push myself so hard. I know what it's like to feel like you don't belong, and I want my kids to grow up knowing that they do. This duality of being both grateful and scared is something I carry with me every day. Amsler and Motta talk about how systemic inequality can make people in marginalized communities feel like they need to overperform to prove their worth. They describe it as “a burden to constantly ‘do more’ to counter societal narratives of inadequacy.” I see that in my own life. Whether it's as a mom, a student, or a former DACA recipient, I feel like I have to work twice as hard to be taken seriously. I feel like I'm always trying to prove myself, to show that I belong, that I'm enough.

One thing that keeps me going is my husband. He's my rock, always going above and beyond for me and our beautiful kids. We don't have much help; my parents and in-laws aren't really in the picture. But we make it work as a team. Even with his support, though, being a first-gen college student can feel lonely. No one in my family really understands what I'm going through, and that isolation can be tough. Danielle Estes describes how student-parents feel torn between their academic and family responsibilities, saying, “The demands of schoolwork often clash with family obligations, creating a sense of guilt that weighs heavily on parents.” That resonates with me. I've learned to adapt and prioritize, but there

are still moments when I feel like I'm failing at everything. It's in those moments that I remind myself why I'm doing this: to break cycles of poverty and limited opportunities for my kids.

**It's a constant push-and-pull, but I remind myself that my education is ultimately for them, too.**

Not everyone understands my journey, and I've had my share of rude and petty comments. People have told me I should drop out and focus on being a mom, as if pursuing my education somehow makes me less of a parent. But for every negative comment, there are moments of encouragement that keep me going. Hearing someone say, "You're doing great!" or "You're an inspiration!" means the world to me. It's a reminder that what I'm doing matters. But the one comment that I take to heart is that of "You're a good mom."

Research by Kirkpatrick and Lee shows that social comparison, especially when it comes to motherhood, can impact how moms see themselves. They note, "The pressure to conform to idealized versions of motherhood on social media can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy." While I don't compare myself to these Instagram perfect moms, those comments sometimes make me question if I'm doing enough. When I think about the comments I've received, both the good and the bad, it's clear that society doesn't quite

know what to do with moms like me. Dickson and Tennant captured this perfectly when they quoted a faculty member saying, "The accommodation I make is turning a blind eye." This speaks to the broader issue of how institutions often fail to fully support student-mothers. It's not just about accommodations. But rather it's about recognition. People don't see the nights I stay up late studying after putting my kids to bed or the mornings I wake up early to finish assignments before they wake up. They only see what they want to see: a mom who's "not traditional" because she's pursuing a degree. But then I look at my kids and remind myself that I'm building something bigger for them.

At the end of the day, all I want to do is keep pushing. I want to break all these generational curses. My biggest desire is to break cycles and give my kids everything I need. I grew up in a toxic household where help was hard to come by, and I don't want that for my kids. I want them to see that it's possible to chase your dreams, even when the odds are stacked against you. As a first-gen college student, I'm paving the way not just for myself but for my family and future generations. In the article, Brauer and Foust also state that, "while student-parents face a disproportionate amount of stress compared to their peers, many report that their academic goals are inextricably linked to their desire to improve their families' circumstances," which is something that resonates with me deeply. Van Rhijn and Lero argue that self-efficacy, which is the belief in your ability to succeed, is the key for student-parents. They explain, "Belief in one's capabilities plays a critical role in navigating challenges and achieving goals." That belief is what keeps me

going. I may not always feel confident, but I know deep down that I can do this. Every class I pass, every paper I write, and every milestone my kids reach is proof that I'm capable of being both a good mother and a good student.

My journey isn't just about me, it's about showing others that it's possible to balance motherhood, school, and everything in between. There's a bigger conversation to be had about the need for better support systems for student-parents. From affordable childcare to more flexible class schedules, there are so many ways colleges and communities can step up to help people like me. Adding to the challenge is the inconsistent support from schools. Dickson and Tennant point out that, "faculty support for student-mothers is often informal and ad hoc." That means a lot of the time, you're left figuring things out on your own. I've had professors who were understanding when I had to miss class because of my kids, but I've also had others who didn't care at all. It's a gamble every semester, but I will be forever thankful for all the professors I have had who had let me sit in class with my child, helping me not feel embarrassed or ashamed, but rather uplifting me with such kind words. The Washington Post article on Head Start centers in community colleges highlights one such solution. It states, "Providing on-campus childcare services allows parents to focus on their studies without worrying about the safety and care of their children". That's the kind of change we need, and I hope one day it can become true to help other student-parents like myself and make their journey a whole lot easier than what mine has been.

My journey as a mother and a first-generation college student hasn't been easy, but it's one I'm incredibly proud of. The criticism I face only fuels my determination to prove that you can be a

**When I walk across that stage at graduation, it won't just be my achievement. It will symbolize breaking cycles, defying expectations, and paving the way for my children to dream bigger and aim higher than me.**

good mom, and pursue your dreams at the same time. Being a mom and a student isn't easy, but it's worth it. It's a journey full of contradictions and moments of doubt, moments of triumph, feelings of isolation and feelings of pride. I'm not perfect, and I don't have it all figured out, but I'm doing my best. And at the end of the day, that's what matters. In this messy, beautiful duality, I've found my strength. It's in the late nights, the early mornings, and the moments in between. It's in the love I have for my family and the determination I have to succeed. And it's in the belief that, no matter what, I'm doing something that matters, and not just for me, but for the people I love most. When I walk across that stage at graduation, it won't just be my achievement. It will symbolize

breaking cycles, defying expectations, and paving the way for my children to dream bigger and aim higher than me. It will represent a step toward changing how society views and supports its student-parents. The bigger picture is about building a world where balancing motherhood, education, and personal growth isn't seen as just extraordinary, but rather it is seen as supported and celebrated. I know I'm paving the way for a brighter future for my kids, and that keeps me going. Despite the challenges and the loneliness I have felt along the way, I'm determined to succeed because my family and I deserve it. I would like to add one last thing though: coming from someone who was surrounded by gangs at a young age, I think the hardest hood I have ever been in was motherhood. ✦



## Intersect

Luna Crabb

Overlapping strips of green and red illustrate the unbreakable bond between humanity and nature. As humans, we hold a dual role, both as part of the natural world and as beings distinct from it. Our lives and the environment around us will always intertwine and shape one another.

# THE SUN DOESN'T SHINE AS BRIGHT FOR SOME

Apollo Poole

Though some people don't experience it, everyone knows it exists.

That intense divide between the world and neurodivergent people. How some individuals never experience hardship at work or school, or in relationships whether they be platonic, romantic, familial, or with yourself. Most neurotypical people have little to no struggle getting through day-to-day life activities. They *know who they are*. We neurodivergent people sometimes never figure out who we are and, if we do, it's much later in life. Growing up is much different. School is painful. Work seems to be impossible.

Friends come and go and, sometimes, we don't make friends until we're out of childhood. Neurodivergence ranges from person to person. It is a spectrum and not a very well-known one. When someone who isn't well versed in the subject thinks about a neurodivergent person, most of the time they will picture someone with visible disabilities. This person that they picture most likely cannot

Growing up is much different. School is painful. Work seems to be impossible.

verbally communicate and, if they can, it is very little. This person probably cannot hide their stimming, which is a physically active form of releasing tension and excitement or nerves.

This person might have never been to a public school. This is not the case for every neurodivergent individual, and it is not my case.

I was diagnosed as autistic very late in my life. The reason was because I "mask" extraordinarily well. Masking is a technique used by neurodivergent people to try and "blend into society" as an ordinary person. This can be subconscious or conscious. In my case, I was subconsciously masking my entire childhood. Even though I didn't talk until I was about five years old and was in continuous speech therapy, my mother refused to believe there could be something wrong with her first-born child when her second-born child has Down syndrome. I was to be the perfect child. No flaws were allowed. Of course the struggles were intense and loud, but I couldn't show that. My mother was troubled. She was quite young when she had me, and had quite the expectations for me as her first born. My mind was different. It was loud, it was colorful, it was vibrant and musical, but it was also terrifying and too much at times. I could write incredible stories and write songs at the age of seven. I was the kid who had the most spectacular ideas for

playtime. We were to be astronauts who could walk on the stars. However, once recess was over and it was time to focus on my studies, I struggled severely. Numbers didn't make sense.

The endless nights of crying over homework and feeling like a failure made me a husk. I didn't understand why I was so different.

High school was a different demon. It was much more intense. Every day felt like the world was getting progressively heavier, and I had no clue as to why. I was able to achieve good grades, but that was only because of the fear of bringing home a subpar report card. The idea of failure was horrifying, and what would follow after was worse. I couldn't speak up for myself. There was no shield, and there was no way I could tell someone I was struggling. Until very recently, I did not realize how severely dissociated I was. To realize that every day, every week, every month you lived through was all on fight or flight, and to have extremely vague to little memory of what was what, was very surreal. It took fight after fight with my mother to prove to her that I needed help, that I wasn't her perfect child. I wasn't neurotypical. And on top of it all, I wasn't her daughter either. I was her son.

Friends come and go and, sometimes, we don't make friends until we're out of childhood.

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The pain of telling your mother who you really are when she lives vicariously through you can echo through a soul, but to be shunned and kicked out of the house for a year could shatter it. I knew I was transgender from a very young age, and the only people who didn't refer to me as a male was my family. Every friend I made knew, and most of my teachers did as well. It took years to build up courage to tell someone in my family, and the first person I happened to tell was my father. He was supportive, but terrified. Not because his child was trans, but because he knew how my mother would react. He begged me to wait until I was at least eighteen before telling her. At the time, I thought it was because he didn't want me transitioning until then. That wasn't the case. He knew I would be away at university when I turned eighteen. He wanted me out of the house, and I did not realize at the time that this was because he knew how my mother would react. I did not wait until I was eighteen.

There's this thing I became obsessed with studying called Chaos Theory. The Chaos Theory implies that any minor difference at the start of a process can change the entire outcome dramatically. I told my mom I was transgender at fifteen. I got kicked out and was living with a friend for a year. While living with this friend, I

began therapy with the help of my father. I fought for good grades and, by the time graduation came rolling through, I knew where I was headed for college. I had been accepted to Northern Arizona University (NAU), and I was never coming home. I began my transition there, to the horror of my mom. I got better therapy and an official diagnosis for autism. I made lifelong friends. I did three semesters at NAU and came home after a mental break. I took a year off of school to focus on bettering myself. My mother and I mended our relationship slowly. But, even with all of that, I wonder what would have happened if I didn't come out to her at fifteen. What if I had listened, and waited until I was eighteen?

To realize that every day, every week, every month you lived through was all on fight or flight, and to have extremely vague to little memory of what was what, was very surreal.

The pain of severe gender dysphoria, and not knowing what is wrong with your mind all at the same time, is a battle I wish upon no one. It starts so small when you're a child, unaware of any difference in your mind and the kids next to you on the playground. You don't realize

My mother and I mended our relationship slowly. But, even with all of that, I wonder what would have happened if I didn't come out to her at fifteen. What if I had listened, and waited until I was eighteen?

you're different until kids around you become a little meaner. Words are thrown around, and that feeling of maybe you always knew you were different comes into play. When puberty hits, it feels like you're dying. There are feelings words cannot articulate, but the pain of feeling trapped within a body and mind you had no say over is intense to say the least. To feel your brain shut down when it becomes just slightly too overwhelmed. To see the stacks of homework pile up and, as hard as you try, you just can't seem to start them. To finally getting around to doing the homework you so desperately wanted to do when it was assigned, but points being docked because it's three weeks late. You knew that would happen, but you couldn't start. To need to buy expensive prescription hormone injections so you don't slip into a deep depression episode, and to just feel like a human being. Wanting to feel like a human being. Wanting to succeed in life, but worrying you'll fail over and over again because of an invisible disability that no one can see.

As a child, I had high dreams. I wanted to be an astronaut. I wanted to live on the International Space Station (ISS) and study the planets. I wanted to spread love and kindness to people, and be that person that someone can lean on when they need a shoulder to cry on. As a twenty-one year old, I still want to spread love and kindness and be that friend everyone can rely on. I want to be an archeologist who investigates the ancient studies of astronomy. I want to go far, but it's difficult when you struggle so deeply inside your brain. My dreams never die, but the motivation does. The fear of failure and disappointment heightens when I see my grades drop and drop. To have a hidden disability that no one can see feels like a bird in a dense forest calling out over and over again but to never receive a response. The sun appears to shine brighter on those who face fewer struggles, and I am hoping one day I can feel the warmth on my back. ✦

My dreams never die, but the motivation does.

# THE PHONE HASN'T RUNG SINCE JULY, ABUELITA

The phone in the living room stopped ringing.  
Yes, it was old,  
but that's not why we haven't heard it ring anymore.  
It's still fully functional,  
but there's no one left there to call.

The bedroom off to the side has been emptied.  
Pieces of clothing were removed hanger by hanger  
and packed away in storage containers.

The bed was taken apart.  
The sheets and pillows were stripped,  
the mattress was removed,  
and the entire bed frame was disassembled.

We boxed up never ending amounts of yarn,  
enough art supplies to paint a mural,  
and enough beads to make a necklace that could wrap around the world.  
All of which were saved for crafts *she* will never get to make.

I watched all these memories of her get taken away in a loaded U-Haul trailer,  
and I remembered how just a few weeks before,  
I watched *her* get taken away in a black mortuary van.

I've watched Grandma leave the house before in Dad's truck,  
going to the emergency room because she got sick again,  
but every time she left she always came back.

My family stood there in a puddle of disbelief,  
holding each other in the driveway as we watched the van that held Grandma leave.  
Mom said, "It's hard to believe she's not coming back home this time."

She had left home for the final time.

Signs that the end of her story was coming  
revealed themselves in small,  
but painful ways  
that made her death so surreal.

A copy of the rosary prayer guide appeared on my mom's desk one day.  
I knew the end was coming.  
In our family, we seem to only pray the rosary when *someone dies*.

I heard Dad crying in the kitchen one day with Mom.  
I knew the end was coming.  
I've only ever seen Dad cry when *someone dies*.

The church was called,  
so the priest and deacon came.  
I knew that in our faith,  
the "Last Rites" are only given when *someone is dying*.

A hospital bed was delivered one day in mid-July.  
Nurses started visiting her frequently.  
I knew that all of this meant the end was coming.  
In my mind, hospice only meant one thing.  
*Someone is dying*, and the truth I couldn't begin to fathom hit me all at once.

*Mi abuelita is the one who's dying.  
No- this can't be real.  
It can't be her time.  
She's always been strong, she'll get through this...right?*

She watched me grow since the day I was born.  
From taking my first steps to graduating high school,  
she saw it all,  
but our short time together was still not enough.  
Ninety-eight years is a long time to live.  
As a little girl, I thought she couldn't get any older.  
Although I'm now grown,  
that little girl wasn't prepared to lose her grandma so soon

Goodbyes became risky,  
because another hello wasn't guaranteed.  
I grew afraid to leave the house,  
afraid she would pass while I was gone.

My friends didn't see me for weeks,  
knowing I didn't want to miss the time I had left with her.  
Time became a troubling concept.  
I hated how we went from time enjoyed spent  
to anxiously anticipating the end.

How did I go from watching her crochet in the kitchen  
to sitting beside her deathbed?  
How did I go from playing the piano for her to saying my final goodbyes?

*"Tocame la Cucaracha, mija!"  
"Pero no se como tocar la Cucaracha, Abuelita."  
"Te quiero mucho, Abuelita. Que descanses en paz."  
...*

I'd anxiously count down  
the minutes left at work,  
waiting to see her again at home  
in the same spot as always on her recliner.  
Until the day she decided she wanted to use her hospice bed.

*She wants to use the bed now?  
She was so opposed to it before.*

Her choosing the bed over the recliner  
felt like a heartbreaking sign of acceptance.

*At least now she'll be more comfortable for...when it's time.*

The hospice nurses were nice.  
Sean was my favorite.  
His gentle kindness touched my grandma's heart.  
"Bless her heart," he would say, admiring her strength.

He made my family comfortable  
in moments of terrifying uncertainty.

*"If you ever need anything at all, do not hesitate to call us.  
We're here for your family as well."*

He sympathized with us,  
knowing that the weight of Grandma's care  
fell between the same few people who never left her side.

*"Where are her other kids to help her?"*  
The nurses and doctors always asked that  
at every hospital visit Dad took her to.  
Sean and the other hospice nurses wondered the same.

How come a widowed mother  
was only receiving care on her deathbed  
from two out of five remaining children?

Dad had been monitoring Grandma's health  
solo for the last twenty years,  
because his siblings showed us  
that unconditional love  
doesn't seem to run as deep as blood.

Her final hours slowly encroached on our time.  
Visits from hospice went from once every few days to daily visits.

*That can't be good.*

Then, her meal intake lessened by the day.

*She finished a whole cup of jello today.*

*Maybe she's feeling better.*

Then, she started communicating less.

*"She hasn't been awake since she ate Monday morning at seven."*

We were thankful for FaceTime,  
allowing distant family to say their goodbyes.  
My sister left work early that day to come over.  
My brother was on his way back from Mexico.

*"I really hope he makes it back in time."*

*"Is he almost home!?"*

Then, a final nurse came by at noon.

*"They tend to pass when no one is around. When you least expect it."*

So no one left Grandma's side.

Chatter filled the living room  
that late afternoon  
as if we were under normal circumstances.

As if this were a typical Wednesday  
and she was just watching her novellas.  
As if I was a little girl again coloring with her at the table.  
As if it was Christmas time and we were decorating the tree together.

As if it was a boring weekend afternoon and I was teaching her how to play bingo, or teaching her a few English words, or showing her a new craft I made. As if I was coming home from school and hearing her say, "Hi mija," as I walked through the door.

Those were normal circumstances.

For a brief moment,  
like the calm before the storm,  
I almost forgot the reality of the situation  
because *when you least expect it*,  
the storm hits and then—

*"I don't think she's breathing anymore!!"*

### **Analisa Ramirez**

*Analisa Ramirez is a college student majoring in English who wants to pursue her passion for writing in her future career. She enjoys reading and writing poetry in her free time, focusing on emotional genres like mental health and love. She hopes to touch hearts with her emotionally driven words.*

MiraCosta College

## Get Up

Canada Kerwin

Allowing Yourself to  
Create what truly  
moves You ~ Opens  
so many doors from  
Within and from  
Outside your World.  
It's the unexpected  
Connections that are  
the Best Reward.





# The Men and Tio: Even If You Forget Him

*By Ryan Caven*

“Oh, come on!” My king was wedged between two white rooks against the side of the board. One rook took the corner of the board while the other rook took the tile next to it. With nothing to block the corner piece, I was forced into checkmate. “That’s so stupid! How was I supposed to beat that?”

“It’s not about how you beat it,” my great uncle chuckled under his breath as he began resetting the board. “It’s about how you prepare for it. You used your pawns aggressively at the start and you were overconfident with your queen. Chess isn’t about taking every piece you can, Ryan. It’s about taking the right pieces at the right time.”

I huffed in frustration. Overconfident? He was just afraid of me, I thought, afraid I would beat him eventually. I’d show him! “Again!”

My great uncle Gary was undoubtedly the best chess player I’d ever seen. His visits to my grandma’s house during Christmas were a test of everything I practiced throughout the year. I was fueled with determination to beat him just once. I would practice with friends at school, against computers at home, and against my family when they had the time and patience for my insistence. I could beat them just fine, so why couldn’t I beat him?

In December of 2009, I finally had my chance. I was eleven years old with a lot of experience under my belt. As we set up the checkered board, Gary decided to make things a little more interesting: “If you beat me, I’ll give you all the money in my wallet.”

My face mimicked his white chess pieces. I reached into my pockets and pulled out lint and a Jolly Rancher wrapper. My voice shook with trepidation, “I don’t have anything to bet with, Uncle Gary.”

He simply chuckled and reached into his wallet, handing me three crisp \$100 bills. “There you go, it’ll be an even fifty-fifty. If I win, you simply give it back. If you win, I give you the rest. Sound fair?”

The stakes had never been so high. The most cash I had ever held at this point was a \$20 bill. I was the wealthiest kid on the block with those three \$100 bills alone. Our battle of wits commenced, and at last I triumphed over him using his own strategy against him. I chased his king into a corner using my queen and a rook, and that was the end of it. The smile that spread across his face betrayed a sense of pride in me, and part of me believes he let me win just to see me happy. From then on, he taught me

**I'll never understand what my dad was going through to cause him to throw away the family he worked so hard to build, but despite paying the price for it he's been working to improve himself.**

directly everything he knew about chess, which progressed to everything he knew about writing, shooting, fishing, and anything he saw I had an interest for. In some ways, he became like a second father to me. Lord knows I needed one.....

After the divorce, my dad and I moved into a small apartment in my hometown. Craig had lost his job teaching high school drama after nearly twenty years, and there were no postings anywhere for a similar position at any nearby schools. As I grew into my teens, his search became broader and more desperate to get us back on our feet. After three years of that miniscule living space, he finally found an opportunity five hours away from everything we knew. I said goodbye to my friends, he said goodbye to his family, and we were on our way into the unknown with uncertainty and dread. I didn't last long at the new school and eventually moved in with my mother back upstate, and my dad has lived alone ever since.

My dad takes medication for bipolar disorder and chronic depression. A large part of why my parents divorced was due to his own self-destructive habits. He didn't beat me often, but when he did I knew it was because he wasn't himself. I never had it in my heart to hold it against him, but my mother was a different story. She gave him too many chances to improve, but he only got worse. She could tell she wasn't enough to satisfy him,

and there were times I would see him with other women when he thought we weren't around. I'll never understand what my dad was going through to cause him to throw away the family he worked so hard to build, but despite paying the price for it he's been working to improve himself. It's hard not to worry about him.

Technology was surprisingly exhausting to be around as I grew into my teens, so my mom, grandma, Gary and I decided to take a trip to Lake Tahoe to escape it briefly at a dude ranch called Greenhorn. This is where Gary taught me how to fish, and the ranchers had great game in their ponds! One day, he and I went to our usual spot and he began adjusting his line. I was hooking a worm when I felt something sharp tear into my hand. It felt like someone's hook snagged into my skin and was trying to pull it out. When I looked down, I realized it was a wasp biting me like I was the last piece of meat it would ever eat. I screamed and jumped onto my feet and ran as fast as I could to the hotel lobby. It only took me about a minute to get there, and they took good care of my bite. About fifteen minutes passed, and the stinging was at last subsiding when the front door opened.

"Ryan? You okay?" my uncle called out to me. His summer shades and already failing vision were a poor combination that didn't help with locating me in the room.

**In some ways, he became like a second father to me. Lord knows I needed one.....**

“I’m okay, Uncle Gary!” I called out from the couch as I tried to keep my voice steady. “I got bit by a wasp!”

“Oh!” he responded. There was a beat, and finally he said, “Okay!” And with that, he walked back to the pond.

I know it seems like a silly moment to remember so fondly, but I really appreciate the effort he put into checking on me. Remember that it took me a minute to get to the hotel lobby, but it took him fifteen minutes to cover that same distance on his own. This is not a testament to my speed, but how frail he was at this point in his life. He stumbled over rocky pathways and wooden bridges just to check on me.

A few years later, my mother met a man named Daniel. He was a biker, a trucker, and an all around ass-kicker. He had a beard thicker than the smoke clouds puffed from his cigars, and his hands were the size of dinner plates. His bodacious laugh shook the walls, and his glare could pierce a grassfield rat while freezing a river solid. Needless to say, I was intimidated to even look his way. By this point I had recently turned fourteen and was preparing for high school, and my body had gone through changes that left me looking like a twig lost from its tree. He knew I needed guidance, but wasn’t sure if he was the

man I needed it from. He had never been a dad before, and helping raise two teenagers during the hardest time of our lives wasn’t exactly what he signed up for when he began dating my mom. Nevertheless, he gave it his best shot, and looking back on it now makes me laugh at just how nervous he was!

The second time I met him, I think he wanted to try and break the ice with me a little and shake off his intimidating image. He took me for a walk around the neighborhood and gave me my first cigar, and as he passed it off to me he said, “Don’t tell your mother.” From that day forward, I could trust him with anything. He helped me with my homework, taught me how to deal with bullies

at school, and even helped pay for my JROTC training. He knew he could come to me, too, as there were several instances when he would show me something he was considering buying for my mom and he’d ask me if she’d like it. This isn’t to say he wasn’t strict, though. He would put me to work in his yard, tending to his flower garden in searing 100 degree weather when his back bothered him. When I was done, however, I would come inside to a pitcher of fresh lemonade and the sight of him dancing with my mom in the living room to classics on their record player.

It dawned on me just how well I was getting along with him after they married, and I woke up crying one morning completely overridden with guilt.

**He knew he wasn’t my father, that he could never fill the void leaving my dad created in me.**

They both came in, asking “Ryan, what’s wrong? Did you have a bad dream?” I was sobbing as my mother rubbed my back, and I looked up at Daniel as he stood in the doorway with an expression of pure uncertainty. He knew he wasn’t my father, that he could never fill the void leaving my dad created in me. I looked at him through tear-struck eyes and said, “You’ve done better.”

The year was 2015. I was seventeen years old and starting my senior year at the Army and Navy Academy in Carlsbad. I was feeling much more confident in my studies, and elected to try out two AP classes for my final year before college. Unfortunately, I missed my summer assignment for AP English when my uncle started dying. I can’t remember the last time I saw him healthy, but I do remember the last time I saw him. My mom, grandma and I drove Gary from the hospital to a senior home where they could take care of him. I saw him being wheeled out to meet us outside and I ran to meet with him. My great uncle, prozio, tio abuelo... He looked up at me through darkened lenses and could barely speak the sentence that breaks me.

“Where’s Ryan?”

Masculinity is too often associated with toxicity these days. We think of masculine men as these big, burly dudes with muscles and cocky atti-

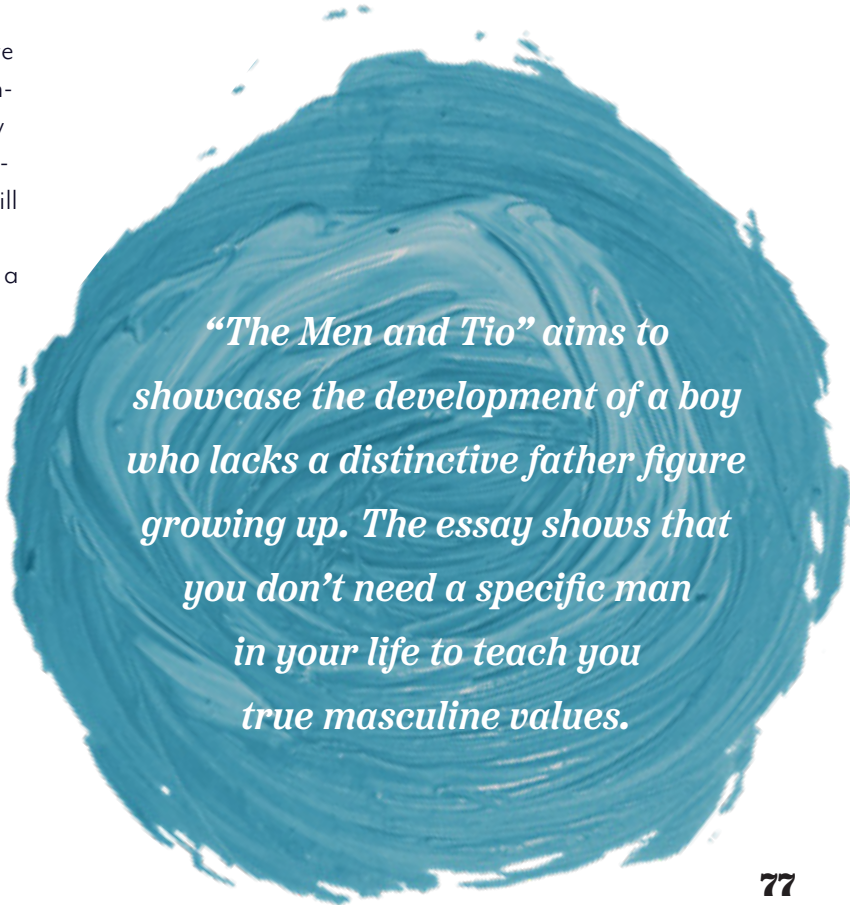
# A man doesn’t harp on what’s right, but focuses on what can be better.



tudes. Thankfully I never grew up with masculine role models that exhibited permanent toxic traits. They could be self-destructive or intimidating, but they ultimately realized their faults and strove to improve themselves for the sake of others. A man doesn’t harp on what’s right, but focuses on what can be better. Craig taught me that even if you believe you’re irredeemable, there’s always someone to improve for. Daniel taught me that looks can be deceiving, and even the loudest voice can come from the softest spoken. And Gary taught me the most valuable lesson...

Nothing is forgotten. Memories live on. What we do dictates who we are, and how we are remembered dictates what we did. Teach a boy to play chess, he will conquer the minds of his adversaries. Teach him to stand up for himself, and he will stand up for you. Teach him how to fish and... well, you know the rest. Teach the boy well and as a man he will never forget you...

Even if you forget him. 



*“The Men and Tio” aims to showcase the development of a boy who lacks a distinctive father figure growing up. The essay shows that you don’t need a specific man in your life to teach you true masculine values.*

# THE CLOSET

**Michael Umhra II**

*Mike U., 36 years of age, first born of four, first-generation American by my father, bi-racial Jamaican/Mexican descent, North County native, Veteran 12 years Army. This is a moment of time to release 30 plus years of trauma and ideas. I am riddled with internal demons and faint memories of happiness. But hopefully I can turn negative into positive. Education has been freeing and healing. Thank you to my professors who got me to this point.*

i was scared of you, An object that houses so many instruments of pain

They hung in order from length size and color

Brown black beige

Leather, the buckle the buckle i scream

i prayed for dull versus sharp

i showed you my might,

with me restraining my sniffles

I Hate you, I pray for my time to overcome you

But I couldnt I was weak, but so so strong

As I was instructed to pick the object who has no feelings;

I question how it can cause so much pain

Time and Time you beat me

Time and Time you try to break me

I screamed but I am silent you can feel my might, you won't break me

You can't get reactions, 'cause I had left, you couldn't touch my spirit

I transcend, I move forward

Loyal to a fault, I don't hate you, I pity you.

Father

You were my first lesson what people can do



## Simone Rattone With Ceramic Mugs

Kaia Kazma

For these three 18x23" drawings I used charcoal to draw pictures that I captured of mugs that I threw as well as my cat.

# THE BEST COFFEE IS FOUND AT AA MEETINGS

*A reflective piece on  
alcoholism and recovery.*

Alexa Orodio

**Another day, another hangover.**

I wake up in a foggy haze and try to play the game where I recollect my memories from the night prior. Luckily, my alter ego from last night provided a glass of water for me to swallow down the cotton mouth. As I begin to formulate the plan of how to navigate the day, I realize I am late for work. It is only Tuesday. There's no way that I can get caught drinking again at work. My bosses/supervisors/co-workers already identified it's a problem. I was told the next time, they would be sending me to rehab. The great part about being active duty military is the free healthcare, but the worst is that we are government property, and they make sure their assets are well taken care of. Technically, I'm destroying government property every time I slowly poison myself.

My recruiter always talked about traveling the world and seeing foreign lands. What he failed to mention was that the majority of those port visits would consist of being inside dodgy nightclubs and bars. After weeks out to sea, my shipmates and I couldn't wait to hear, "Liberty call! Liberty call!" as soon as we would moor into a berth. We'd check the watch bill to make sure who has to stay behind with the ship, change into civies, and find our first beer. I was hardly one of the worst. I knew a few people who would have to hide small liquor bottles in their lockers to sip on underway, to stop the shakes from withdrawals.

Technically, I'm destroying government property every time I slowly poison myself.

On this particular day, it's either come to work late and get in trouble or try to go to the military-run drug and alcohol meeting across base. The rule is: they make us take a breathalyzer test when we walk in. I'll take my chances; it's the best choice I have. In the shower, I wonder how long I can keep this up. I'm exhausted. Exhausted by lies I keep making to hide this habit, exhausted by the sleep I never get, exhausted by the pain in my right side. It's probably my liver telling me she's tired too. I'm making sure to use the alcohol-free mouthwash and reach every crevice of my mouth, hoping to

remove all the evidence. It's time to throw on my uniform and make the drive, praying the whole way I get away with it just one more time.

I park my car and walk into the building. I am a familiar face. The nurses know me. I've been coming to these meetings for a few weeks now. I'm a good participant. I engage in conversation during group meetings. I do the inner work. I am trying my best. Truly, I'm a great pretender. The official term is "Functional Alcoholic." Today is different though. At check-in I smile and I am confident I made the right choice. The nurse hands me the breathalyzer. I blow. 1...2...3... analyzing... 0.83%. I let out a sigh of relief. I have no idea what happens next. Somehow I've always gotten away with it, but for the first time I'm exposed. I'm no longer alone. I'm scared, of course, but it's no longer up to me how to proceed. A few moments pass by and a female psychiatrist walks in. She greets me by name and escorts me to her office. Before her are two stacks of paper: on the left are discharge papers to start the process of removing me from the service, on the right are papers to begin the process of

I'm exhausted. Exhausted by lies I keep making to hide this habit, exhausted by the sleep I never get, exhausted by the pain in my right side. It's probably my liver telling me she's tired too.

inpatient rehab in a town an hour away. There are fears, concerns, hesitations, and excuses, but ultimately I've been given a choice. My will is growing weary. This habit is all consuming. Every day, all day I think about drinking. I've been doing this for years now, asking, begging, pleading for a break and failing to find a way, failing to know an answer. This is my answer—dressed as a threat.

I'm not ready to let the Navy go just yet. I am allowing myself this chance. Celebrities go to rehab, maybe this can be a luxurious respite. My entire chain of command comes filing into the waiting room. They had spent that morning back at our work center. They were in the middle of turning over responsibilities to my new supervisor and had to leave to address this. Would they have even noticed I was late? What a wonderful first impression. He'll be the one to drive my cigarette smoke saturated car back to my house. I will be taking a ride back home with two other superiors, packing a duffel bag and coordinate accommodations at the local kennel for my dog

Before her are two stacks of paper: on the left are discharge papers to start the process of removing me from the service, on the right are papers to begin the process of inpatient rehab in a town an hour away.

to stay. As I pack, I am fully aware of the half bottle of Sauvignon Blanc in the refrigerator that will be here when I return. We head to drop off my dog and then begin the ride to Wilmington Treatment Facility, for a month-long stay. I sit in the back, silent. Should I have finished that bottle in the fridge? The two people up front carry on with their casual conversation about alternative routes to the city.

There are fears, concerns, hesitations, and excuses, but ultimately I've been given a choice.

I've never explored the area, being too invested in getting home as soon as work was over. I could plot all the liquor stores within a thirty-minute radius though. Always switching between each location, hoping to conceal the sheer quantity of alcohol I was buying. Always having a meek smile and ready response for the cashier asking some invasive question or making an awkward comment. How appropriate would it be to ask to pull over so I can have a drink before we arrive at our destination? Do people usually show up sober?

We pull up to the empty parking lot. It's too late now. I think I saw a CVS two blocks away. We walk in together, my head hanging low. The receiving nurse welcomes me. I wave goodbye to the only people I know.

Stranded. No car. Just a suitcase and the hope one day they'll be back to retrieve me.

Three days of detox, one week in the big house, and the rest spent in same-sex sober living homes offsite. My days are filled, packed with attending group sessions with other patients, some here voluntarily and others court ordered. I'm making friends and feeling seen. I'm the youngest alcoholic. Most people my age are here for pills or heroin; most with my addiction are in their late fifties and older. I smoke tons of cigarettes in between breaks and have the most random moments of clarity. Sometimes my emotions come flooding in; I feel like I'm drowning, struggling to catch my breath. The food is ok. It's nothing to write home about. I do get to call my family in California in the evenings to catch up. It's the first time I've called them sober since they can remember.

**I feel like I'm drowning,  
struggling to catch my breath.**

After dinner every night, we are invited to attend the 7 PM AA meeting at the big house. Until then, I had never heard people speak about sobriety with so much love and gratitude. Different people would share testimonials as they clutched their coffee mugs. These meetings were open to anyone, but usually attended by former rehab patients who lived out in the community.

These people were here of their own volition— to sit and share. I always wondered if they would spike their drinks. Why would anyone choose, willingly, to stop drinking? Why would anyone be happy about it?

**For my past, I am thankful, for  
without it I could not be who I am  
today. For my future, I am excited  
for what will be. For my present,  
I love most of all for it is mine.**

After graduating thirty-five days later, the first place I stopped was the kennel to pick up my pet and then the gas station next door for two bottles of wine. It took me several times to finally grasp the concept of surrender, and within the next few years I would start and stop again. On November 29, 2020, I had my last drink. I proudly can say my cup is now filled to the brim with love and gratitude. I'm not the perfect alcoholic. I attend meetings when I can; I give myself grace to work the steps my own way. For my past, I am thankful, for without it I could not be who I am today. For my future, I am excited for what will be. For my present, I love most of all for it is mine. ✦

## a mimir

Michaela Garcia

Michaela Garcia explores childhood and physical touch in her series, "pretend." a mimir is a lithography piece created with only her fingers, lips, and nose in order to emulate the destructive touch the body has on a loved childhood stuffed animal.



# SUMMER SUNDAY

Returning to a time  
when family gathered in the  
shade of the backyard  
to forget the week of work and worry

Men sitting on wooden chairs  
drinking ice-cold beer  
wearing freshly laundered undershirts  
telling tales and listening  
to the Yankee game on the  
transistor radio

Returning to a time  
when simmering marinara sauce  
cooked for hours on the stove,  
kitchen window open,  
the sweet aroma filled the  
shaded yard  
where children played

And later in the day  
when the sun set and the  
evening cooled,  
we gathered in the dining room  
to eat the Italian feast the women made  
twirling spaghetti around our forks,  
red wine flowing and  
grandpa peeling apples and oranges  
with his small penknife

At night when all was calm  
we joined the darkness  
where the crickets chirped in the distance,  
the men smoked cigars on the stoop,  
the women talked in whispers,  
and cousins snuck up behind  
lightning bugs to catch them in a jar.

**Donna Grabel**

*I graduated MiraCosta College with honors, earning my Associate's degree in 2004. This exciting experience expanded my education and sparked a passion for writing and art. I am currently enrolled in a creative writing class at the MiraCosta Community Learning Center which encourages my writing talent.*

# THE BOG

*By Christopher Rivera*

## **DAY 287**

As the sun settles to the ground, the sky clots with blood before scaring into the night. The Short Man marches on the forest floor, his short stature embellished by the seventy-foot tall red spruce trees that stand eerily still. Like a cockroach, he skitters around the dry leaves, stomping his foot on the soil that is starting to freeze. Back at the cabin, The Man carefully scans his shelter, his swollen, dark eyes flickering around in paranoia. An aluminum wired fence surrounds a desaturated orange log cabin. It has only one small window facing the sunset.

He was lucky today, able to find an emaciated squirrel to eat for dinner. He closes the barbed wire fence, As he stomps toward a hollow shack where he skins animals, if he can even find any still alive to skin, he stops suddenly.

In his pathetic vegetable garden, one of his tomatoes has fully ripened. It's small, disfigured, and splotchy with yellow spots. He shifts the broken squirrel to his left hand, kneels down, and with his shaky, blood-dried hand, picks the tomato from his garden. He turns around to his wife's grave and sits for a moment. A faint smile cracks like glass across his face.

"Hey, Bee. You wouldn't believe what I was able to grow!" He bubbled. "I know how much you love these disgusting things. Once the others grow I'll make you—I'll make you that tomato basil soup you've been missing. Well—maybe the basil plant died a while ago, so—it's just the tomatoes, but that doesn't matter. Here, have a taste of this one, for now." His hand hangs over the rocks and pebbles and he crushes it with his hand. The tomato bloats up then bursts, spilling the tomato blood clots and seeds over the cold stones. As it feeds into the soil he places the popped tomato on the stones. He hovers there for a moment, and the rawness in his chest glows in pain, as if he'd been whipped. The pain manifests under his ribs. His heart, overwhelmed, swells with blood and his lungs drain into raisins.

The last of his aches is exorcised with his breath. Like the tomato-pasted rocks, his heart is cold and stained. He returns the broken, putrid squirrel to his right hand. He stomps to the shack and obsessively combs through the animal's fur before he YANKS the skin off its shriveled body, GRINDS the ribs and tiny bones for the buttery marrow. He DIGS into the muscles and fat to smoke it into jerky and HARVESTS its organs into a bucket to make some crappy stew. At nightfall he locks himself inside his cabin and hangs his rifle by the door. He removes his clothes and begins boiling

them in a pot. He doesn't have enough water to bathe himself tonight, so he must endure the layers of sweat, dirt, and animal blood that have accumulated for the past few days. In the kitchen while cooking, his stew releases an unpleasant odor. He tries relieving it with funnel cake-scented candles, but in an awful concoction it mixes with the stew and mold of the living room carpet. The resulting smells churn his head into a clogged toilet bowl.

At last his food is ready. He lumbers across the decaying wood onto the stiff carpet and sits on a sofa couch in the living room. Two feet away lies a box TV that when turned on, shows what he assumes is the burned image of Channel 8 news.

It only plays static. White and black noise dances on the screen in an inconsiderate mess. He stares endlessly into the noise. As he begins his meal, he treats himself to his favorite part of the stew: the intestines. It takes so long to clean the literal shit out of the gut, but when salted and boiled, the chewy texture tastes like steak. At least how he remembers steak used to taste.

The bone marrow also tastes pretty good. It's like butter, but more like the taste you get when you chip your tooth and you eat some of it. He imagines eating a chunk of butter while gnaw-

**He stomps to the shack and obsessively combs through the animal's fur before he YANKS the skin off its shriveled body, GRINDS the ribs and tiny bones for the buttery marrow. He DIGS into the muscles and fat to smoke it into jerky and HARVESTS its organs into a bucket to make some crappy stew.**

ing at the bone paste. The liver tastes the worst, but is unfortunately the healthiest option for his diet. The squirrel's heart isn't much better. He chews fast and swallows hard, rinsing his mouth with water after every bite. He makes sure to finish every last bite before placing his bowl with the other dirty dishes on the floor by the couch. Tension returns to the Man's face. He stares at the screen.

He watches the binary light form into a figure. The figure is having a seizure, convulsing into a knot centered around his stomach. The Man grabs his hand, offering some sort of comfort.

The figure's palms are uncomfortably soggy and clenched surprisingly tight. The figure gags, attempting to remove the demons that live inside his stomach by sticking his fingers into the back of his mouth. A puddle of stomach acid, mucus, and saliva stains the hospital bed. In the vomit is a singular, mucus-colored egg. The Man is frightened that it is large enough to see.

The Man presses the nurse call button by the bed. At this point the figure tries to dig into his stomach, his nails breaking through skin. The staff comes in and holds the figure down. They opened his gown. Everyone could see under his red skin, his belly like a water balloon filled with

worms all trying to make room for each other, to pop the balloon. The figure's screams suddenly begin to choke. Something scrapes its way out of the balloon's mouth. The balloon POPS and the water spills across the floor hugging the Man's boots. But it isn't water, or even blood. It just looks like egg yolk. A balloon filled with egg yolk and worms, flinging their bodies like centipedes at all of the shoes. The Man turns off the TV and goes to bed.

#### **DAY 294**

#### **THUNK**

The cabin shakes the Man awake. The walls of the cabin flex and moan loudly. It sounds as if someone struck the house with a whip and it was bellowing in pain. The Man opens his bedroom door, peering into the living room and kitchen. He approaches the laundry room, expecting to see the morning sky through the window as he does every day, for nearly the past year.

#### **“What...What the fuck!?”**

The sky is covered in a sheet of running blood. The sun's rays translate itself through the blood, illuminating the laundry room in a dark red. The Man could have sworn his heart is about to

break through his chest. He ties his boots and takes his rifle off of safety. He can't see anything past the gore of his window.

With each beat his heart twitches his fingers, his pulsating hand reaching out towards the door handle. He swings the door open. He can see Bee's grave, untouched, with the now moldy tomato resting on the stones. He looks past the wire fence but sees nothing but the infinite sea of trees. He jumps down the stairs and waves his gun around, looking for something to shoot. He turns the corner.

Lying beneath the window, and resting next to his tomato garden, is the body of a mutilated deer. It is decapitated, only the base of the exposed neck left. From the fence to the window, the deer's intestines are spilled all over the grass. Its legs are broken, some twisted off completely. Barbed wire has been sewn into the deer's body, like a snake strangling its prey. The Man turns to the fence to see some chunks of fur that got caught on the barbed wire. The fence warps towards the cabin, as if the deer was launched like a cannon.

The Man stumbles around the cabin's fence, looking for what threw the deer's carcass. His molars grind against each other while he searches, but finds nothing. It was absolutely

QUIET. Back at the mutilated deer, he sees yellow specks littered through the fur. He leans in. Parasitic eggs. Inside the open neck, sleeping in its open guts, and hanging in its fur, are dozens of eggs.

The Man screams, as if he is looking at his own mangled body on the floor. He quickly puts gloves on, grabs a shovel, and begins digging outside of the fence in the clearing. With every huff of his breath he spins around the hole, trying his best to stay aware of whatever is out there.

As the Man pounds the ground to death, he questions what could be out in the woods with him. It was well known that the deadliest aspect of the outbreak wasn't people getting infected; rather, the parasite could live inside almost every mammal, bird, and reptile. Before humanity even noticed, the parasite had already migrated across multiple ecosystems throughout the world.

Sure, there was medication and countless procedures that would kill the parasites that lived in our bodies, but the animals? It would be impossible to quarantine billions, no, trillions of animals. How do we cure a whole population of birds? Or rodents that live in our cities, where we couldn't even completely exterminate them ourselves, even if we wanted to. Humanity

was destined to have a strained, slow death. It probably wouldn't be another CENTURY until all of humanity dies out.

This might be it. This will be where the Man finally dies. It must be watching him now. It has the strength to throw a fucking deer carcass at the window, nearly destroying his fence in the process. It has more than enough strength to mutilate the Man like it did the deer. He imagines his own body, his legs twisted, stomach open, a BREEDING ground for those fucking worms. Perhaps whatever it is wouldn't tear his head off his body. Maybe it preferred the parasites to burrow into his skull. He could feel them in his head now, tiny tentacles trying to hot wire his brain. Maybe The Man should be digging his own grave, next to Bee. He bludgeons the dirt, his palms aching red. No, The Man REFUSES to die.

**“This is NOT Hell!”**

Now finished, he grabs the mutilated flesh by the hind legs and begins dragging the carcass to the hole. While tugging he realizes the legs are loose on the animal's hips, and the joints tear off right as he is passing the gate's entrance and falls over. He gets up and tosses the legs in the hole. He pushes the carcass towards the hole, his hands burrowing into the open flesh, blood

**The balloon POPS and the water spills across the floor hugging the Man's boots. But it isn't water, or even blood. It just looks like egg yolk. A balloon filled with egg yolk and worms, flinging their bodies like centipedes at all of the shoes.**



*The Bogs Stomach, Name Withheld, 12/24*

seeping through his gloves, the tiny holes by the fingertips letting in waves of flesh, filling his exposed fingernails with the animal's waste.

While he is tugging, one of the eggs getst caught on his arm hairs. It is uncomfortably wet, the mucous membrane easily able to grab onto anything with enough texture. With his fingers, he squashes the murky, milk-yellow egg like a pimple. He cleans the stain on his once white shirt. He throws the body in the hole. Looking in, the Man notices how there aren't any flies. He rushes back to collect the spilled organs and independent clumps of hair from the fence.

But in the exposed digestive track, thin, milky, and featureless worms sway side to side like a King Cobra. Their "heads" have small hairs and tendrils, likely smelling their new environment. They were maybe a few days old, not resilient enough to survive outside of its host for longer than a day. Holding his breath, he transports the organs. He douses the hole with lighter fluid and burns the body. He throws his shirt in the fire pit. The burning fur sears his nose. He watches the parasites shrivel up in the heat and burn away.

He locks the gate—in vain. The smell of burning flesh is overwhelming his sensitive nose, and he pukes. He is already exhausted, but he can't stop yet. The sun is approaching the horizon.

He has to finish the cleansing before night falls. He goes inside to grab a lantern, ignites it, and returns to look for any parasitic eggs that might have remained in the wood and glass. There were two eggs glued to the blood of the window, four more in the crevasse of the wood logs, seven in the grass where the body was, and four more in the garden. He crushes every egg with his fingers. One of the eggs in the garden begins hatching. A long, barely visible parasitic worm slithers towards the tomatoes. The Man EXECUTES it with his boot. He wipes as much of the blood as he can off the window.

Now that he is certain he has crushed all of the parasites, he returns to the fire pit, now smoldering, and starts shoveling the piles of dirt back. As the last whispers of light fade behind the wall of trees, The Man washes the blood off of him outside of his door. He strips himself of his clothes and tosses them towards the fence. Before he enters the cabin, he checks his boots. They are clean. He hesitantly rubs his hands through his beard to feel for any parasites but he finds none. He inspects his rifle too and finds nothing. He grabs his knife and begins severing the hair off of his head. He cuts as close to his scalp as he can, then sweeps through his hair and sees a parasitic egg. He shudders.

**It is uncomfortably wet, the mucous membrane easily able to grab onto anything with enough texture. With his fingers, he squashes the murky, milk-yellow egg like a pimple. He cleans the stain on his once white shirt.**

He walks inside the cabin, locks the door, and blocks it with an old drying machine. He looks at the window. He can still see the blood smears on the glass. There is no way he can barricade the window with furniture. He spends the next thirty minutes hammering planks into the window seal with brittle iron nails. They nearly shatter as he hammers them into the wall. He knows it won't be enough. He barricades the laundry room entrance to the kitchen with the washing machine.

He collapses into himself, like a knot, around his stomach. He still feels the rot in his fingernails, even after washing them ten times with his last bar of orange-scented soap. His imagination tricks him into believing there are worms crawling in his beard. He has to constantly physically check himself for worms. The Man feels swelling under his ribs, and he can't stop the pressure from rising. His back contracts with fear. He wants to shriek. To scream and cry and flail around on the floor until he loses his voice forever. He wants to hold himself back, to keep it all in. If he had hair on his head to pull out, he would have been able to contain himself.

His wails were of a man wrongly sentenced to Hell.

The hardwood floor makes him realize he never moped before. Laying sprawled out now feels worse than death. Out of breath, he grabs a flask of water, checks it before drinking all of it. The flask feels heavy in his hand, his arms now weak from the hateful digging, and his back aching from the pulling. More than anything he feels guilty. He should have shot the deer. It would've been merciful. If only he knew its fate. Her prophecy will be his fate. Was she right?

The Man wobbles over to the kitchen. His stomach whines. He doesn't have much food, but he has been saving something for a special occasion. Oatmeal. He loves oatmeal. He has his last bowl inside the food pantry. After everything, he deserves to eat the last bowl of oatmeal he'll ever have.

The Man opens the cabinet, his guilt fading. As he reaches out to the bowl of oats, he sees the oats shift. There is something...peach... pasty, wiggling. Like a lion perched on a rock roaring for the world to hear, a more developed parasitic worm rises from the oats. It is three fingers thick, its mouth surrounded by pink hairs, and red tendrils smell the air. Its tendrils shiver, smelling its prey. Its mouth widens, revealing crumbs of oats in its suction like teeth. A terrible low screech fills the cabin.

It lunges at The Man's face, but he is able to grab the nearly foot long worm by its tail. Its tendrils force itself inside the Man's nostrils, carving inside of his nose. He pulls it out, drawing blood from his sinus, throwing the worm onto the ground. It slams with a thunk. The Man raises his leg to crush the worm, but the parasite slithers between a crack, right where the wall and floor intersect.

Hate. Pure hatred fills The Man's soul.

The Man grabs his knife, prying the crack open more. He sees a glimpse of the worm slithering across the drywall. He starts stabbing the wall where he last saw the worms. He can hear it push through the installation, heading towards the living room. He turns and jumps over the washing machine to grab a hammer in the laundry room. He slams the head into the kitchen walls, ripping the wood out. Whispers of a scream cry out from his broken voice box as he pounds the walls, tearing open crevasses across the kitchen. He thinks he sees a glimpse of the worm, slithering in the living room walls.

He tears the baseboard from the wall. He shatters the floorboards apart. He opens up all of the walls in the house. He murders his sofa, ripping through its frizzled fluff. He throws everything out of the cupboard, looking for the

parasite or eggs it could have laid. Drywall is scattered across the floor; wood chips are in his foot; his nose is gushing with blood. He stands, quiet for a moment, trying to listen for the worms' pulsating movement. He hears a groan in the walls and throws his hammer right where the noise came from, caving into the wall. Nothing is there. It's gone. It's going to kill him in his sleep.

Fatigue and fear overwhelm him. He hasn't eaten all day. He curses in his mind and goes to his bedroom. How am I going to stay up all night? He throws everything out of his closet, including his wife's clothes. He can still smell her BO as he throws her shirts into the living room. He grabs one of her shirts, red with ladybugs on it, and puts it in his back pocket. He throws his bed frame out of the room. As he is removing it, he notices for the first time the floorboards are weak under his bed. He places the mattress against the door and kneels down.

He slides his knife between the floorboard and lifts. He looks in and sees a black void. He grabs his lantern and shines it through the cracks, revealing an empty basement beneath his room. He peels the floorboards off, jumps down with his rifle and lantern, and inspects this uncharted room. The floor is dirt, and the walls are jagged, cut stone. It seems like it was an abandoned renovation project. It is a very small

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area, and The Short Man is unable to stand up straight. The basement seems to go under only his bedroom and bathroom. He weakly hoists himself back up and brings the mattress down to cover the hole. He sits at the opposite end of the hole, holding his gun and Bee's shirt.

He lays out his knife, water, two cans of food, and his lantern beside him. He tries to stay awake for as long as he can, staring at the hole. How could it get in the house? It is obviously much more developed and must have been a different worm than the ones that were hatched. He touches his nose, remembering how the tentacles felt trying to claw into his face. He shudders, still smelling the oats at the end of the tentacles. He feels sick.

The Man mourns his oatmeal. The thought of eating oats makes him nauseous. What a horrible fucking day. I am going to stomp that fucking worm to death for fucking with my oatmeal. The basement is so dark that the dim lantern only illuminates the hole just enough to see if anything crawls in. The Man reflects, there is something in the woods trying to kill him. No, it would have killed him already. Is it,

trying to torture me? Is this some cruel punishment from God? The Man checks his chamber in his bolt action rifle. Three rounds. Is three rounds enough to put down something that can launch a deer?

I think I am going to die here. The Man begins opening canned pineapple with his knife. It's going to kill me if I don't get out of here in time. It might be too late. The Man opens the can, an artificial sweetener cleansing his nose. It's funny. I used to hate canned food. If I would catch Bee cooking up some canned vegetables back at home, I would refuse to eat it. I would tell her, 'It's not even real! It's fake food! It's not even good for you.' The Man picks up a slice and slowly chews the fruit. It was so sweet, the sweetest thing he has eaten in a very long time. The tangy sweetness calms him down. She would just scoff at me and eat it by herself, and I would just watch her. Giving her a disapproving look. Look at me now, enjoying this pineapple as if it's my last meal. He slurps the canned juice, he can feel the juice flow throughout his whole body, refreshing his soul. He places the empty can down. This won't be the last thing I eat. ■



*Christopher Rivera,  
a student enrolled at Mira Costa  
College, is studying Creative and  
Applied Arts. He spends most of his time  
in the Printmaking Lab, outside of that he  
manipulates his imagination into horrible  
stories he hopes you read. The Bog  
is the beginning of a short-story  
Christopher is developing.*

Glacial with indifference or roused  
to effervescence by the scent of shame,  
she was opaque with power.

Yet I cared for her with tenderness born of tolerance  
painted her face in cadmium blue and goldleaf  
sewed cabochon rubies to her lips, tear drop pearls to her ears.

Together, we had planted lies, harvested chimeras  
toasting ghosted opulence with whiskey, neat,  
dribbled over tongues made anxious by recollection,

heedless as the fogs crept in, nudging her askew,  
until today it is 1945 her sixties the thirties or mine  
and we foxtrot jitterbug hopscotch nap

throw tantrums throw parties throw curveballs and stones.  
She is lightened, at the start; a burgeoning translucence  
accentuates her charms, fosters a girlish exuberance.

But the lightness fades, crystalizes,  
its transparency, a brutal lens, reveals the fragility  
of the myths that bound us, their tenuous untruths.

She fades as well, forfeits to the ease of the shadows.  
For a while, I watch our symbiosis shrivel.  
When it is a wisp, I abandon it—and her.

Unfettered, I am incandescent  
in the way of lava hissing over a cliff.  
I lounge in gossamer silks, travesties ablaze,

belting my anthems to a tangerine sky  
luxurious in its indifference.  
Her memorial is woven by other hands,

the pomegranate velvet of her raiment embellished,  
its corrosion masked with gaudy fabrications  
and slivers of ice masquerading as precious gems.

Just before the last pageant, she surfaces, ancient, bent, regally discomposed.  
For a moment I capture her gaze

before she unsees me and slips away.

**K. Dana King**

*I am a Coach in  
MCC's Writing Center  
and also a poet and  
experimental  
fiction writer.  
Thanks for reading  
my work—I hope you  
find something in it  
to connect with!*

# MY MOTHER'S LAST DAY

it was drizzling  
the ground cover lining the 15  
green, drenched, tightly closed,  
as if beginning to mourn with me  
when I'm sure  
my mother would have  
preferred clear skies

the night the doctor said  
that family should come now

we thought we were losing her

just like my mom to leave me  
with the weather of my choice  
rather than her own  
even on her last day

but it turned out not to be her last day after all

her real last day was more  
to her liking: a warm sunny day

with bright pink and orange flowers  
dotting the ground cover  
edging the 15 freeway



**CLS Sandoval**

*CLS Sandoval, PhD (she/her), is a Pushcart-nominated writer and Communication professor accomplished in film, academia, and creative writing who performs, writes, signs, and rarely relaxes. CLS is raising her daughter, son, and dog with her husband in Walnut, CA.*



## Transmission

Michael Duarte

Sculpture by Daniel Popper.  
Shot on 33mm film.

Tidepools 2025

MiraCosta College

# UNSEEN CROSSES

Ignacia Lucero is a 22-year-old Latina pursuing a career in nursing. She has always loved writing and will someday write a book about her life and experiences. She loves food, nature, and helping people.

## Ignacia Lucero Avila

“Fine, let’s decorate the tree then.

“Bring the box. Rosalio, can you help her please?” I yelled down the hallway to my boyfriend as he came out of the bathroom. He called out, “Okay!” Julieta ran to show him where the box was. Rosalio carried it into the living room, as my mom and I laughed and she got up to use the bathroom. Julieta, my ten-year-old sister, had been asking me to come over and help them decorate the Christmas tree for weeks now. There were only seven days left until Christmas, but neither my mom or I had felt in the spirit; however, this day I had told my boyfriend after work we would go to my mom’s house to decorate the tree and fix that.

My 15 year old twin brothers, Sergio and Jesus, were in their room down the hallway doing homework. So they didn’t come out to help us decorate the tree. Rosalio, Julieta, and I took turns hanging ornaments on the tree. Julieta snarked at Rosalio, “That’s not how you do it, it’s all ugly!” He responded, “Well, I’ve never done this before, my bad.” She scolded him, “Move, let me fix it.” She took over his ornament. I laughed at their fighting as I hung ornaments.



My mom’s phone rang. “I’ll get it, Mom!” I ran over to her phone. “Who is it?” she asked from the bathroom. “It says, ‘Tia Sara’! I’m answering!” I giggled as I picked up. “Bueno– Tia? Como estas? Soy Estefany.” I explained quickly and waited for her response.

Ten hija, te regalo un vasito de soda. No tengo mucho pero ten, un plátano y unas semillas. Quieres un burrito? Ocupas dinero? Ten hija, ten. No le digas a tu mamá ten.

A moment of silence on the phone. “Estefany, dile a tu mama que hubo un accidente con tu abuelo y necesita venir.” My smile faded. I assessed her voice and she sounded normal. Still I hung up, worried, and ran down the hall as my mom was coming out of the bathroom. “Que paso que te dijo?” I wasted no time, “Mom, we have to go. Grandpa was in an accident. We need to go, and I’m going with you.” I looked at my boyfriend, “Will you stay here with them? I’ll be right back.” Rosalio nodded, “Of course, go.” In seconds, I grabbed my mom’s purse and rushed out of the door with her.

I called my tia back, shaking as the line rang, “Tia, hola, ya vamos, por donde exactamente?” She was quiet for a moment, “Por la libreria vengán, aqui esta la policia.” She responded

hastily. “Si tia.” I hung up again, even more worried. “La policia, God it could be bad. Mom, what do you think happened?” She responded hesitantly, “Let’s pray that your abuelito fell off his bike again and twisted his ankle or something.” She was worried too. “Yeah you’re right, he’s done that before,” I responded. We were quiet. My mind filled with scenarios of what could’ve happened. *Maybe he was drunk and stumbled off his bike. Possibly someone stole his bike again. Perhaps he fell into a hole.* I tried to think of every moment I had ever seen my grandpa. I tried to remember what his voice sounded like. I tried to remember the last time I had called him, the last time I had seen him. It had been a while.

I had visited him a few weeks earlier. I stopped briefly by his house to drop something off for him. He started offering me everything he owned that I might possibly be interested in. “Ten hija, te regalo un vasito de soda. No tengo mucho pero ten, un plátano y unas semillas. Quieres un burrito? Ocupas dinero? Ten hija, ten. No le digas a tu mamá ten,” he insisted, as he forcefully tried to put a \$20 bill in my hand. I laughed and said, “No abuelito, gracias. Estoy bien.” I smiled as he poured me some Manzanita into a small styrofoam cup. I told him about school and my job and he sat proudly watching me and listening. “Hijole, hechale muchas ganas, Hija,” he would always tell me.

Now rushing to see him, my mom and I were frantically praying out loud, “Por Favor Diosito, protégelo, por favor. Please let it be nothing. Please.” Our voices were shaky. *It’s nothing. It’s nothing. It’s nothing. Perhaps he broke a bone. It’s nothing,* I repeated to

myself in my head. The twenty-minute drive was eternal. The sun had just set; it was another ordinary day in our hometown.

Finally, we turned the corner onto Cole Grade Road where the libreria was only a few hundred feet away. My stomach dropped. Flashes of red and blue. Police lights. I could see them from two stoplights away. Three of them. I tried to stay calm, like my mom, as we both rattled in our seats, with my palms sweaty, and a knot in my throat. As we got closer, my tia's car and my tios' cars parked just across the road from the library. My cousins stood tensely on the side of the road with my tia and tios. We ran out of the car. Yellow caution tape. My heart sank. *Today can't be the day. This cannot be happening*, I thought to myself.

### Everything was fuzzy. I felt dizzy.

"Where is he? ¿Dónde está mi abuelo?" I started hysterically screaming as everything around me slowed down and became blurry and clear all at once; I could see clearly behind the tape--a yellow lona. "Lo atropellaron." My tia uttered the words and immediately broke down sobbing uncontrollably. "No, no, no, no." I stumbled towards my mom, the world crashing around me. I looked around. His blue and gray bike, split in half on the side of the road. We fell to the floor in each other's arms, crying and screaming. We both ran to throw up. My mind was racing in disbelief, but there he was.

My Tio Pancho lunged toward my mom in an attempt to pick us up. "Tienen que levantarse." I snapped, "Dejela Tio!" I sounded like the angriest person alive. "Dejenos en paz," I screamed at him. We cried uncontrollably on the floor for what felt like hours, but was probably only a few minutes. My cousin gave me the most heartfelt hug; his grandpa had died a few years before. And I thought, *How did he do it? I feel like I'm dying*. I cried with my mom on the sidewalk, leaning onto her so I wouldn't collapse. Everything was fuzzy. I felt dizzy. Cars drove by and slowed to see the accident as a police officer directed them. We were part of the accident. My grandpa was gone.

I held onto my mom, completely disconnected from reality until the police asked for his family. My mom quickly stood up and walked toward the police officer. The whole family, more of my tia's brothers, sister and husband had arrived. They swarmed around him. Light headed, I followed behind. He introduced himself to us and asked, "Who is the family of Mario Lucero?" He spoke firmly but cautiously. "We all are," my tia was quick to respond. The officer cleared his throat, "Immediate family. Wife or children only. I'm sorry." Everyone looked around as I stood paralyzed, unable to breathe. "His wife and children are in Mexico." another quick response from my tia. He continued, "Then, it would be whoever would be next of kin. Closest relative." A short pause before she declared, "She is the granddaughter, and that is her mom." My tia and everyone turned to me as I emerged from the back of the group towards the police officer.

The rest of the details are fuzzy. He read us some statements. He told us it was a hit and run: "Family members that arrived on scene first have identified the victim as Mario Lucero. We are doing all that we can to investigate and find the assailant." I stopped listening. I heard a faint, but steady, ringing in my ears and my own heartbeat in my throat. I closed my eyes and continued to ask God, *Please God*. Please what? He's gone. This is real. My mind raced trying to process. *I'll have to put a cross for him on the side of the road*. The thought of his nonexistence on the Earth destroyed me. Only a wooden cross left to remember him.

The officer, interrupting my thoughts, handed me my abuelito's big black backpack that he carried with him every day to work or anywhere he went. I picked it up. It was wet and sticky.

I opened it up to find an imploded twenty-four pack of Tecate half empty, dripping all over the backpack. They took it to my mom's car. Next, a clear plastic bag containing his phone, wallet and cash. The officer referred to it as his property. I opened the bag and pulled out his small black flip phone. His front wallpaper: a pixelated



*I'll have to put a cross for him on the side of the road. The thought of his nonexistence on the Earth destroyed me. Only a wooden cross left to remember him.*

*I remembered anytime I tried to hug him he would pull away and say, "No, Hija, porque estoy mugroso." And I would hug him anyway as he stood stiffly.*

picture of my siblings hugging. I opened the phone: a picture of me smiling stared back at me.

The officer talked some more, and many other people came to talk to us. They asked us questions and gave us information. It was many hours that felt slow and fast all at once. I felt like I was fading in and out of existence. I was there, but not really there. The world was spinning around me. It didn't feel real; it couldn't be. Memories flooded my brain as I desperately tried to grasp every memory of him that I could before it was too late. I remembered my abuelito carrying me on his wheelbarrow through the yard because I was scared of the dogs. I remembered him pulling random herbs out of his backpack that he had collected for me when I had any symptom. He knew an herb for any situation. I remembered anytime I tried to hug him he would pull away and say, "No, Hija, porque estoy mugroso." And I would hug him anyway as he stood stiffly.

Many calls were made. To my dad's sister to break the news that their dad, that they had not seen for years, was now gone forever. To my grandpa's wife, to whom he was never able to return. To his sisters and relatives. Waves

of grief, anger, regret. Pain. Indescribable, physical, in your gut and head, pain. Hours later, my dad was the last to answer, after more than fifty missed calls. Eventually, we were allowed to go home. More like forced.

The drive home, even more excruciating than the drive there. My grandpa's absence heavy on our world. *How would we tell the kids?* My mom and I discussed and began arrangements for a funeral. I laid my face on the cold window and stared out numbly until something caught my attention. Something that I had never seen before, but had always been there. I began to notice on the drive home the faded, wooden crosses that stood unseen at the edge of the road throughout my hometown. Crosses that stood for people. I had never paid as much attention to each cross as I did on that drive home and for the rest of my life. I felt the pain of all the families that were forced to put up a wooden cross, as we would the next day.

I began to notice on the drive home the faded, wooden crosses that stood unseen at the edge of the road throughout my hometown. Crosses that stood for people.

When we stepped in the door the tension swept over me. The Christmas tree sat decorated. The kids were worried. We all walked into the living room and sat down. The silence was deafening as they waited for an explanation. I hugged my little brothers and sister as my mom uttered, "Tu abuelito fallecio." We all broke down, unable to speak for a long time. My siblings squeezed me, and I held them and cried. "How?" my brother cried out and we were forced to tell them what happened. We were forced to explain that another human being on the planet, for whatever reason, hit my grandpa with their car, killing him on impact, and then proceeded to flee. Didn't check if he was okay. Didn't call for help. Just left him on the side of the road on another ordinary day. The proper words don't exist; there wasn't much we could say, just heavy silence and sniffles. None of us slept that night. †



## Windows to Other Worlds

Ella Wargo

Windows to Other Worlds explores the boundaries between constructed and natural worlds through dynamic layers of collage using color, line, and perspective. This piece challenges perception and space, evoking a playful yet thought-provoking exploration of movement and the confines of traditional composition.

# The Last of the Giants

*By Rodrigo Centeno*

**March 2nd, 1895**

**O**ur voyage northwards to the Oregonian border from Sacramento was one of great effort these past few weeks. While the trainline was fine enough, the rugged terrain of our chosen destination made necessary the usage of fine horses for each of our motley band of ten. John, our Indian guide from the region, warned us of the perilousness of these mountain valleys in winter, how the Indian Giants were still not fond of White folk and would be quick to finish our excursion abruptly should we anger them. Not dismayed by this possibility, we made our stop near Mount Shasta, a supposed home to these Indian Giants. Previous gigantrophologists in the area knew of how elusive this race of giants had grown to be with the great push westward, but what we didn't know was how they'd always been this way, even with the natives. From attacks on hunters, lumberjacks and miners throughout the Cascades, we've learned that the Indian Giant is a hairy man, like the Woodwoose of Central and Northern Europe, but as territorial as the Snowmen of Siberia. We were prepared for anything, from large caliber rifles to offerings in the style of the Shasta and Klamath. One night, while camping within eyesight of the volcano, which admittedly is not hard to miss in the moonlight with its snowy cap, we heard the hollers. Trees were smacked, cracked like matchsticks. It was distant, but still shook us. The voices carried aptly through the valleys.

**Trees were smacked, cracked like matchsticks. It was distant, but still shook us. The voices carried aptly through the valleys.**

John was particularly vigilant, not to say none of us were at that point. It was him who suggested that we leave offerings for the giants down the hill, by a large rock we passed. Taking both him, myself, and one of the men who goes by the name Jacobo, we made the short trek through snow to the rock with torches in hand, food stuffs in our bags, and determination in our hearts. We splayed out salted meats on the rock, emptying cans of beans, jams, and vegetables in bowls besides them. John placed feathers and smoked salmon there as part of his own personal offering, knowing his efforts would guarantee the group's safety. As we rejoined our group by a now snuffed out fire, we could see a small train of about five large dark and hairy figures trudge through the snow. With binoculars we could tell they were the giants that had announced their presence earlier, or at least associated. Our cameraman Saul managed to take a photograph of the giants in the moonlight, though they were too far away from us for it to be well defined. That night we took turns on watch around the reinvigorated campfire, being sure to be careful.

Over the course of the next few days we trekked over the old trails that led through these Califor-

nia mountains of Siskiyou county until we finally reached our destination right on the border. When we arrived, we came across a bustling lumbersite and a small town called Williamstown. Williamstown's sole purpose was to supply said lumber to companies on either side of the border, transporting the logs by travois and onwards by train. It was here that we found the region's last Menhir Giants, the Keuntalek family. We were greeted at the head of the town by a crowd of onlookers, before them were the Keuntaleks. Among the Keuntaleks was the head of the family, Mr. Hector Keuntalek, an elderly giant of about 150 or so, his wife Mrs. Laura Keuntalek née Trelawny, age 143, his two sons Mr. Colin and Mr. John, both 65 and 50 respectively, and his daughter Ms Trinity, age 30. As is custom among their people, these first names of theirs are only public names; their true names in their language generally kept secret from non-giants and outsiders. I did not pry about these names, as it is best to organically learn them and be told in confidence. We greeted them in the customary Menhir Giant way, raising our arms in the sky as if praising the sun and saying the phrase "Kaijo, Anzinnaku Erakizalek!" or "Greetings, Builders of Old!"

The Keuntaleks, in unison, raised their arms as well. They answered as expected of them: “Onogi etolia ematen dizgu,” which translates to “We welcome you.” With these words, we joyfully approached the giants with open palms quickly shaken in hands that dwarfed ours. They speak in a West Country English, with injections of Cornish and Basque here and there, but given the amount of time their family has spent in the Americas it was no bother.

The old giant Hector could not stand very well on his own anymore, so he shook our hands with his

**We greeted them in the customary Menhir Giant way, raising our arms in the sky as if praising the sun and saying the phrase “Kaijo, Anzinnaku Erakizalek!” or “Greetings, Builders of Old!”**

right while he propped himself up on a cane fashioned from a log. He invited us to dinner at their longhouse, at the far end of the town, which we gratefully accepted. We had a photo taken with them, with the Keuntaleks standing tall behind us. With the crowd slowly dispersing afterwards we made our way to the gargantuan building in the forest, right by a little stream that ran quaintly past it through the land they claimed their own. The doors opened to a great dwelling, supported by a row of logs erected to a ceiling easily thirty or forty feet in the air. The hearth at the center was, and is, a great reprieve from the cold winter. Mr. Hector beckoned us to sit with them by the fire, which was tended to by the young Miss Trinity. Mrs. Laura came about us with a traditional meal of hunter’s stew, bread, and beer. While all ten of us travelers could be fed with whatever they had many times over on our own, their own bowls were modestly sized. It was over this meal by the hearth that I came to ask if I may begin an interview with the family, which was immediately given the blessing of Mr. Hector. I took notes of this interview, and I shall transcribe them here.

*“Now, Mr and Mrs Keuntalek, where were you born and raised?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “I were born in Liskeard, Cornwall.”

**Mrs. Laura:** “I was a Saint Austell Girl. Cornwall, as well.” Note that this was coupled with a nod.

*“That name, Keuntalek, that’s an old one, yes?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “Aye, older than any Englishman I’ll tell ye that.” Mr. Hector laughs with this.

*“How long have you two been in America?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “We’ve been ‘ere for ‘bout ninety or a hundred years or so, since yous smallfolk ‘ere broke away from the old country.”

**Mrs. Laura:** “Aye, it’s been quite the time. I remember those days well. America was the great light in the west, were it not.”

*“How old were you both when you arrived, and where did you first find yourself living?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “Well I were ‘bout fifty or sixty depending on whene’er we first came o’er, Laura ‘ere was ‘bout forty. We were very young then, just been married under arrangement by our fathers an’ mothers. To answer the end o’ that question, we arrived in North Carolina, so we worked there in North Carolina.”

*“From my understanding, such a young marriage is relatively common among your folk, yes?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “Aye, at least it were. Everyone did it, no excuses. Best matches made that way, considering e’eryones related some’ow. Small population, and all...” “Were you working on the coast Mr. Hector?”

“For some time, aye, per’aps. Seven or so years. Worked all along the coast there. Worked with them hoigh toiders as you Americans call ‘em.”

“They must have sounded very familiar to your ears.”

**Mr. Hector:** “That they did ser. That they did.”

*“And Mrs. Laura?”*

**Mrs. Laura:** “Oh I didn’t need to work much, just did me womanly duties is all.”

*“You both obviously didn’t stay long there on the coast, what changed?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “Well it were that an opportunity to move westward opened up for us. ‘Twas the

year 1809, before your stint with the old country. Laura and I were given an offer, ya see, for work in them Appalachians out in the backcountry. I'd do work for one o' them moun'ain men, do work on 'is 'omestead out in Cherokee lands. The sort of work that demanded tallfolk muscle, ya understand. We were the first of us tall folk out in them moun'ains. Idea were that if them Indians saw a tall bloke like me 'ammerin' posts with me bare hands, they'd leave that there 'omestead be."

*"Well, did it work?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "Not in the way ol' 'Omesteader MacKenzie wished. Them North Cherokee ended up lovin' me the same way they'd love one of their own braves. MacKenzie weren't in bad relations with them, just didn't want any of their conflicts boilin' over into his own land. Not that that even would 'ave 'appened in the first place considering only one of their tribes lived in the region, paranoid lad."

*"Can you elaborate on your relationship with this group of Cherokee?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "Aye, aye, they were good folk they were. Gave me the nickname 'Sulkaloo,' or somethin' along those lines. Apparently it be the name of one of their own tall blokes, some hairy feller who talks to animals and such. I

didn't mind it, just never got to meet the real one. Well, not there at least. Anyway, them Cherokee were good folk, never gave us trouble. They invited us over for supper e'ery now and then, good cooks too. Back then we knew some of their tongue, but don't ask us to repeat any of that. We can't remember any of it. We were there to see them make their own writin' script, what an experience that was. Met Mr Sequoyah 'imself when he came to visit us so called 'Sulkaloo and Tall Wife.'"

**Mrs. Laura:** "He was very well spoken, if I may say so meself."

**He raised his voice here, and his hands began to tremble into fists. "The Cherokee... they were good people. They tried."**

*"That's quite the interesting man to meet. Was there anyone else you ended up meeting in that timeframe?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "I believe we did end up meeting a Mr. Boone, ol' feller was one of them moun'ain men. Went out of the way to find me and shake me 'and."

*"Just how long were you folks out there?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "Oh, well, up to about 1838."

*"That's when the government moved all the Cherokee west, yes?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "Ye, it were a bad ordeal. Many friends forced o'er the mountains an' o'er the ol Mississippi. Lost many along the way. Couldn't 'elp but be full of wroth towards dem soldiers, an' dat Mr. Jackson feller. Same to Wool, Scott, and Van Buren." He raised his voice here, and his hands began to tremble into fists. "The Cherokee... they were good people. They tried."

Mrs. Laura put her hand on his back to comfort him. He eased up as she rubbed his shoulders.

I nodded to this. *"I understand. It was a tragedy. None of the Indians deserved it. Though, you said you were full of wroth, did you do anything against those soldiers in the removal?"*

He hesitated, nervous. Mrs. Laura appeared nervous as well. Mr. Hector only shook his head here and waved his hand. I took it as a sign to move on to another question.

*"What happened after the removal?"*

**Mrs. Laura:** "Well, it were right after that that we could no longer work for Mr. MacKenzie. Unforeseen circumstances. He understood, and he aided us in securing passage to the west as soon as he could. We had to say goodbye to many good people."

Mr. Hector nodded along with this. He seemed to have composed himself. *"As it were then, where did that long trip west take you?"*

**Mr. Hector:** "Through Osage country. Then onto Kansa and Missouri country. Then Pawnee country. Two Kettle country, Cheyenne country, Crow country, the whole lot of it. Through the moun'ains and over we went. We followed the Snake River to the Columbia, then made our way up the Willamette up to 'ere. Had Colin on the way here. Then John. Young Trinity was much more recent, did not expect her joinin' us."

*"How'd you find yourself working here?"*

**Mr. Hector:** “I got meself an offer from Mister James. Settlers were looking for hired muscle in those days, what better than a tallman. Settlers also needed lumber, no one swings an axe better than I.”

*“Like ten men, eh?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “Like twenty.” He grinned proudly at this. “Not anymore, though. Colin and John do that for me now.”

*“What do you do nowadays, then?”*

**Mr. Hector:** “I’ve been trying to arrange a marriage for my children is what. Too few of us around, distances too vast here.” He sat back. “Takes all me time, can’t even tend to the garden out back.”

**Mrs. Laura:** “The best prospects are the Trelawneys, my kin, down the Willamette. They only have daughters though, and we worry young Trinity won’t find a husband until late.”

**Ms. Trinity:** “I’ll find someone, don’t you two worry.” She was tending to the fire when she said this. A smile graced her fair face.

**Mr. Hector:** “None of them lumberjack boys you fancy so much.” He scolded her. “None!”

We laughed together.


**Mr. Hector:** “Too expensive to feed us anyway. Cheaper to get a machine to do our business anyway, ferrying logs and whatnot. Thank God, our current employer refuses to do away with us. I only worry for the others of our kin.”

I called it an end with the interview for the night, and we ten men enjoyed the hospitality of the tallfolk. Later on, after many mugs of ale and mead, I stood outside with Colin and John to smoke a cigarette. From what they told me, their father had an encounter with American soldiers back during the Cherokee removal. They’d ambushed a hero of the Cherokee people, beating his wife and killing their infant son. Allegedly, Mr. Hector took matters into his own hands and ripped in half two of the soldiers. One escaped, and this Cherokee hero thanked Mr. Hector for having done what he did. That man took his family into the mountains, where the United States made that man, called Charley in the brothers’ recollection, the scapegoat for the deaths. When the news of the capture and execution of this man and his family reached the ears of the Keuntaleks, Mr. Hector was devastated. Mr. John said that his

father took up drinking to try to drown his guilt, only through great effort on Mrs. Laura’s part did he stop the poison.

We’re to stay with the Keuntaleks for another few days, aiding them in their chores and taking notes on their stories. There are many yet to be retold. I pray that we may be able to grant justice to these people, these ancient friends of man.

*Excerpt from The Journal of Giganthropologist Timothy Haddock, San Francisco, on The Last Menhir Giants in the Oregonian-Californian Lumber Trade.*



*Rodrigo Centeno,  
child of sea spray and scrubby hills,  
raised in a library of trees, ruins, and  
myth. He spends his days tending to  
the gardens that are his worlds. He seeks  
to tell stories of lives beyond ours,  
of realities not unlike our own.  
Future Willamette Valley  
Sheep Farmer.*

# FOREIGNER ABROAD

*I am an outsider  
I do not belong  
We do not even speak  
The same mother tongue*

*I question everything I do  
Is this the American way?  
I am like a dancer in a play  
Who does not know the moves  
thinking  
*Do I swish?  
Dal spin?  
Do I sway?**

*Because what better should I do  
Than to assimilate  
Since I am tired of sticking out like the sun  
In the hot summer months*



You do not need to remind me  
That I do not belong  
With your questions  
Asking,  
*Do you come from huts?  
Did you have water?*

You do not need to remind me  
That I do not belong  
With your insulting questions  
Your mocking of my accent  
Your mocking of my customs  
And the pinching of your noses  
At my traditional foods

We are different  
You and I  
I know this

Because you have made it abundantly clear  
I am an outsider

**Ashley Black**

*Hey, I am  
interested  
in art, poetry,  
and reading.  
My name  
is Ashley.*



# ANDAZA

**A**

Altman, Nora  
Audelo, Magdalena  
Avila, Ignacia Lucera

**D**

Duarte, Michael

**K**

Kazma, Kaia  
Kerwin, Canada  
King, K.

**U**

Umhra II, Mike

**B**

Black, Ashley

**G**

Gamboa, Desi  
Garcia, Michaela  
Garduno, Julia  
Giles, Savanna  
Gabel, Donna

**R**

Ramirez, Analisa  
Resendiz, Giselle  
Rivera, Christopher  
Rattone, Simone

**V**

Vela, Claudia  
Vi, Howard

**C**

Caven, Ryan  
Centeno, Rodrigo  
Crabb, Luna  
Cruz, Leslie

**H**

Hornsby, Diane

**S**

Sandoval, CLS  
Spenny, Stephanie

**W**

Walker, Sanaeé  
Wargo, Ella  
West, Marcus

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Tidepools publishes original creative writing (fiction, poetry, essays, comics, spoken word, and screenplay), visual art (painting, drawing, illustration, photography, mixed media), and media arts (animation, audio, graphic design, imaging and illustration, installation, interactive media, and video). You may submit in more than one genre but must follow the submission guidelines detailed below.

MiraCosta students, faculty, staff, and alumni are all eligible to submit work. Please do not put your name in your file, as all submissions are read blind. Identifying contact info should only be included in the submission cover sheet at [miracosta.edu/tidepools](http://miracosta.edu/tidepools).

Tidepools is always open for submissions, and submitting is always free. At the end of MiraCosta's fall semester in December, all work submitted during that calendar year will be considered for publication in the following spring.

All submissions selected for publication will appear in the print journal and online at the Tidepools website, and may also be featured on the journal's social media: [@tidepoolspublishing](https://twitter.com/tidepoolspublishing).

*Comics*

*Installation*

*Spoken Word*

*Fiction or Essays*

*Photography*

*Painting*

*Graphic Design*

*Visual Art*

*Mixed Media*

*Imaging and Illustration*

*Animation*

*Screenplays*

*Drawing*

*Audio*

*Video*

*Interactive Media*



An abstract painting with a dark blue background. Several thick, horizontal brushstrokes in shades of light blue, red, and white are visible. Two white 'X' marks are painted in the lower-left quadrant. The overall style is expressive and textured.

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