



Horizons

*Waubonsee Community College
Literary and Arts Magazine*

Waubonsee Community College's
Literary and Arts Magazine,
HORIZONS

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Motherhood Stress

Hailey Parejko

The clock ticks loud at 4 p.m.,
and so do you—
small thunder in a living room sky.
I am tired in my bones,
thin as the last thread of patience,
stepping over blocks and spilled milk.
But when your storm breaks into laughter,
I remember—
even chaos has a heartbeat,
and it calls me Mama.

Raincloud

Natalie Lycan

Wire, 18 x 6 x 4



The Beautiful Loner

Imisioluwa Adekoya
Mixed Media, 12 x 9 x 1



A Little Girl's Guide to Grief

By Breanne Berenyi

Denial

A little girl sat in the middle of her living room, buried in a mountain of blankets alone with her eyes glued to the television. She watched as the two identical redheaded girls were made to go to summer camp by their parents and met for the first time. The little girl watched with anticipation as the movie continued. Before too long, the two girls on screen were plotting to switch places after realizing they were sisters and quickly after that they were attempting to get their parents back together. The little girl's heart beat in time with the movie as her brain ran a mile a minute. She started to plan how she could do the same thing the girls on the television had done. Her mind ran through all the different things she could do to get her mom to dump her boyfriend. There had never been any interest in going camping from her parents, so pushing her mom's boyfriend out into the middle of a lake wasn't really an option for her. Locking the bathroom door while he was in the shower seemed like a close enough plan to her. And just like that she felt her chest grow warm with hope for the first time since her mother had left.

As the movie came to an end, the little girl was too focused on scheming how to get rid of her mother's boyfriend, to have noticed that her dad had sat on the couch to watch the last ten minutes of the movie. This was the first time the little girl hadn't noticed her dad enter a room. He liked to make an entrance that made everyone laugh, especially her.

His goal had always been to make her smile, but the movie had caught his eye. As he watched the happy ending, he knew he'd never have for himself and for his daughter, he felt his chest tighten. It was almost as if he couldn't breathe. It was hard to pull his eyes away from the screen, but when he did, they landed on his daughter. Once again, he could feel the shattered pieces of his heart stabbing through his chest as he realized how much hope was in her eyes. He'd been worried about her the past year. She came home most days from school crying. The worry got worse when he heard from the mother of his daughter's best friend. He'd been friends with the girl's mom since high school and hadn't been surprised to hear from her, though he was shocked when she told him she'd heard his daughter had been getting bullied at school because her mom had left.

Before he realized the movie had ended, the credits were rolling and the music was accompanied by a few faint sniffles. He looked at his daughter again as she stared at the screen, clearly not ready for the movie to be over. A few small tears ran down her face and past the brightest smile he'd seen her wearing in over a year. It was too much for him to handle. He knew there was nothing he could do.

"I don't think," he said as he got up and started towards the VHS player, "I don't think this is one we're going to watch again for a while."

As he moved through the room to grab the tape the little girl watched him, his back facing her. She'd been confused until he finally turned around to walk past her. While the little girl was still young enough to be playing with Barbie dolls, she could tell by the look on his face how upset he really was. She could feel the glue holding together the shattered pieces

A Little Girl's Guide to Grief

of her own tiny heart bursting in disappointment as he walked out of the room, movie in hand.

Anger

A few years later the girl, who wasn't that little anymore, found herself standing on the stairs at home. The walls shook around her from the volume of the argument she found herself in, and there were already tears staining her flushed cheeks. Her father stood at the top of the steps, anger glinting behind his eyes as they traded harsh words. The girl couldn't understand why the argument had started. Though it wasn't unexpected. It felt like she spoke a different language than her dad, almost every time they were in the same room there was bound to be an argument.

A rift had grown between them in the last eight years since her mom had left, leaving him with a seven and one year old to raise alone. School had become an impossible task for her. Grades weren't a part of her problems though. It was everyone else around her, including her dad. There was a clear disconnect between her and the rest of the world. It was as if they couldn't see all the terrible things happening around them. Her world had shifted the day her mother had left. It was the first time she'd realized not everything was fair and not everyone was good.

Her own mother had made the decision to leave her, cheating them both out of a relationship.

After that, everything seemed to have lost its rose-colored tint.

What had been unexpected were the words her fa-

ther threw at her. “You’re acting just like your mother!” It felt like an arrow pierced through her heart as the betrayal settled deep in her stomach. She couldn’t breathe as she looked at him. They were words she hadn’t realized could ever be applied to her, and they would haunt her nightmares for years to come. Without another word she ran off to cry where he couldn’t see. Her sobs came from deep in her chest and echoed an ache of heartbreak that had haunted her for years.

Bargaining

It had been over a week since she’d seen the friend request come through, and she still hadn’t responded to it. The night it had flashed across her screen she’d sat down and told her dad about it. She still felt strange being able to have a conversation without arguing with him. A year seemed to have done some incredible things for him, like his new job. A lot of the stress she’d seen him juggling had melted away from him. She knew he wasn’t perfect now by any means, but he was trying.

She’d been disappointed when he told her that her mother had reached out to him asking if she could contact her and he hadn’t responded. But he’d left it up to her whether she wanted to talk to her mother now that she’d already reached out. Every night she found herself staring at the request, running through all the different outcomes in her head. Each one left her with an aching from her chest to her stomach. But finally, she accepted the request against her better judgment. She’d told herself it was purely to satisfy her own curiosity which had been eating away at her sleep since.

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Before she could manage to take any control of the situation, she found herself staring at her phone screen as it rang. An unknown number, belonging to her mother, danced across the screen. She answered the phone without having made the decision to do so.

“Hello?” Her voice cracked on the one word that escaped her. A silence followed, leaving her to sit in the emptiness that had invaded her mind. And then she heard the sobs on the other end of the line.

“I’m so sorry.” Her mother’s words floated around in the nothingness of her thoughts, never registering. “I should have been better. You didn’t deserve any of it. You or your brother. I, I don’t know what to say.” An icy hand seemed to grab hold of her, leaving her frozen as she listened to her mother. Those were the words she’d dreamt of hearing for years. She’d pictured this moment in the daydreams she held closest to her heart. Yet in none of them had she imagined she’d feel like this. There were a few she’d locked away in the back of her mind, determined to never touch again. Ones where she was put face to face with the woman who haunted her sleeping and waking mind. In these ones, instead of forgiveness she found herself filled with rage that simmered and boiled until she’d exploded at her mother. Screaming words of hatred and confusion and hurt. To her horror, the nothingness that was creeping from her mind was starting to feel eerily similar to those.

And all she wanted to do was end the call right there and then. Before she could though, her mother continued, “I know that I should have been better, but I was so young when I had you guys, I didn’t

know what I was doing. I hadn't even realized I wasn't ready to have you guys yet. But I am now. I want to be a part of your life. Please, I can do better this time."

It was impossible for her to decide which of the three voices she would listen to. Her mother, who was begging her, after years apart, to be a part of her life again. The teenaged version of herself that fought to be let out, so she could hurt her mother in the only way she could. Or the little girl hiding in the shattered remains of her heart, begging her to forgive the woman so she could have her mom again.

"As long as we start off slow, I'll reach out first for now. Yeah?" Her voice cracked as she spoke, hiding the pounding in her head begging her not to.

Depression

Two years of texting and calling between her and her mother had only made the emptiness she felt worse. There came a dread every time she looked at her phone over the past couple of years. Her mother had only let her take charge of their relationship for the first month. After that she seemed to get a text from her mother every day or so, and if she didn't answer, her mother would continue texting her until she got a response.

Now she was waiting in the living room of her boyfriend's house for the woman to pick her up. It was going to be the first time in over ten years that she was going to see her mother, yet there wasn't a flicker of excitement in her. There was a tight grip on her stomach that had kept her from having breakfast or lunch that day. Texting and calling her

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mother had been one thing; it had been easier to keep her grief in when she didn't have to look into the eyes of the woman who'd screamed at her, hit her, and abandoned her. There was no telling what she'd do when she saw her mother again.

The car pulled into the driveway, announcing itself with the roar of the engine. Loud only against the peacefulness of the neighborhood. She got in the car and was welcomed by a hug from her mother that seemed to numb her. After that it felt as though she'd blinked, and they were already sitting in the coffee shop, drinks in hand. It was a shocking feeling coming back to herself and finding her mother sitting across from her smiling like she'd never seen, as her two little girls ran around them. They were her half-sisters, neither of which was old enough to understand who she was to them. Both seemed to mirror a younger her. Smiling, giggling, and warm. She'd never gotten the chance to meet them, but she still found herself unable to not love them as she watched.

Though the longer the two sat and talked the further and further she felt from her body. She tried to carry on conversations that were interrupted by her half-sisters, though that wasn't what was causing the sinking feeling inside her heart. It was the fact that, no matter what the two little girls wanted their mom's attention for, she gave it to them without hesitation. Her mother had even chased them around the coffee shop, the three of them giggled through their smiles as they went. All she was able to see in those moments was a mother she'd always needed but knew she could never have. The sight was so unfamiliar to her that she could feel the

heart of the little girl she'd once been breaking all over again. This time in a way that may not be repairable.

Acceptance

This time around the girl was the one waiting for her call to be answered, it'd felt just like staring at her mother's first incoming call. She pictured her mother in her head as the call was answered. The woman was enjoying her day, she was sitting in her living room with the two girls. Though she knew the picture in her head didn't match up to the truth or her feelings. It had all gotten to be too much for her. It wasn't healthy, even if her mother had been putting effort into their relationship.

"I just wanted to call and talk to you really quick," the girl's voice had been breathy as she pushed herself to speak.

"Yeah, what's going on?" There was only a twinge of concern in her mother's voice and the only thought that echoed in her mind was 'too little too late' and with the thought came a sense of calm as the knot in her stomach disappeared. It was almost as if she'd always known this was how it had to end.

"I think it may be best if we stop staying in touch." The words hung in the air as her mother sat silently at the other end of the line.

"Is everything okay? I thought we were making progress. You said you were able to put aside what had happened?" It wasn't betrayal or hurt that she heard in her mother's voice, but there was anger. One that was far too familiar to her.

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“Look this isn’t meant to hurt you, but it’s a boundary I need to set for myself. It’s been a lot more painful for me to have you in my life than not. And yes, I have moved on from what you did to me when I was a child. But I’ve realized the hurt I feel knowing you isn’t worth all the energy it takes from me. Just because I’ve moved past what you did doesn’t mean you’re entitled to a second chance at a relationship with me. You’ve burnt a lot of bridges with people that you’ve been able to fix, but not all of them can be mended. This is one of them.” Her voice was steady and clear as she explained herself. Several times her mother tried to interrupt her, but she kept going needing her to understand. Still, inexplicably, she didn’t want to hurt her mother.

After she’d finished, there was another moment of silence where she assumed her mother was processing her words. “If that’s what you really want. But I’m always here if,” there was a sniffle from the other end of the line that hadn’t sounded quite real to the girl. “I’m always here if you change your mind, baby girl.”

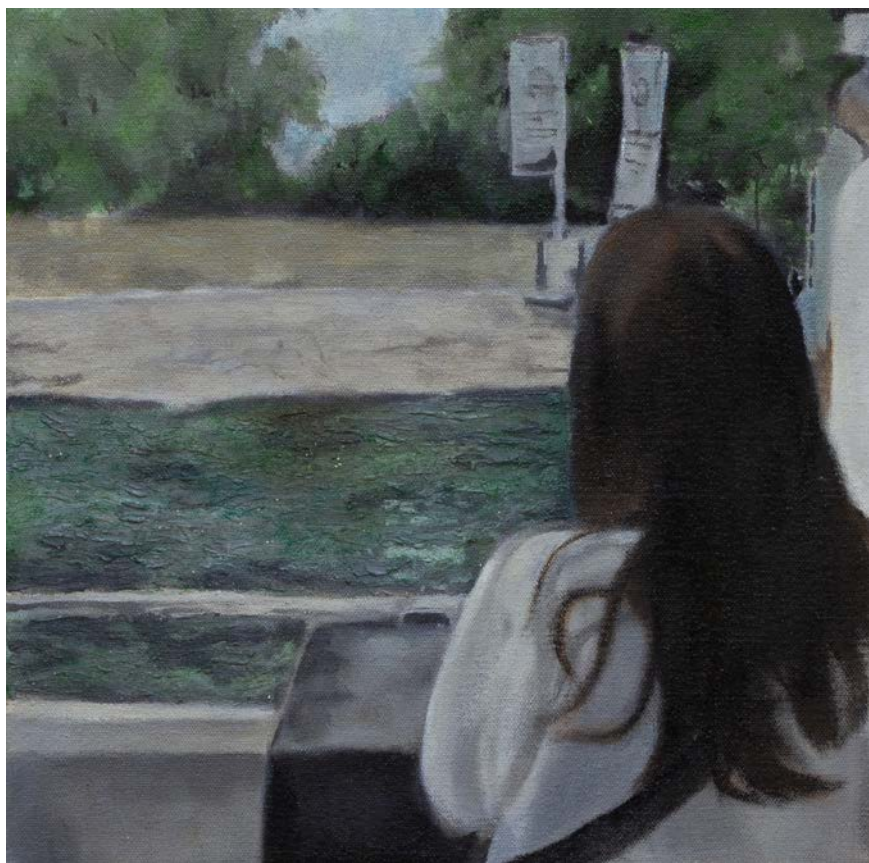
When the line clicked dead there was a feeling of weightlessness that enveloped her as she sat on her bed, one she didn’t think she’d ever felt before. And when she drifted off to sleep that night, for the first time since she was a little girl, her dreams weren’t haunted by the memory of a mother who’d left her behind.

Breanne Berenyi

Longing for the Shore

Iraina Whorton

Oil on Canvas, 12 x 12



Is This Me?
Teaghan Hardy
Graphite, 18 x 24



Forgetful

By Kain Helm

I can't remember what I was doing yesterday, this happens a lot. I do a whole day of activities and then I seem to just forget. I forgot that I drove my car to the market with my mother, I forgot that I left a sandwich on the table when I left, I forgot I was supposed to visit my friend today and I forgot to take a shower. My friends and parents laugh it off, and I laugh it off too, but I seem to forget what I'm doing almost every day now. Not just a few random days here and there in a month, I can't remember to pick up my kids from school or to pay a visit to my parents on Wednesdays, I can't even remember my own wife's name. I can't remember much anymore...I can't remember where I grew up, or the faces of my children even though I see them every day, I can't remember when I was taken to the hospital or what the name of the nice nurse who takes care of me is. I can't remember the color of my eyes or the feel of the soft stuffed animal that this loving child hands me when he comes to visit. I can't remember the kind lady who cries every time she enters the room or the old woman who looks so remorseful. I can't remember them, however much I wanted to....I can't remember what I was doing yesterday....

Redemption

By Crystal Velazquez

I can still remember, like it was yesterday, getting ready to walk down the stage to receive my diploma. My family members were overjoyed to know that I finished High School and was moving on to the next chapter of my life. My older brother pulled me aside and said, "I am very proud of you; at least one of us was able to finish High School." I gave my brother a big hug and thanked him for the kind words. Being a first-generation child of immigrant parents, and the pressure to make them proud, was present every step of the way. When I finally received my diploma, we had a beautiful family dinner, and at that moment, things could not have been better for me.

A week later, I began looking for college options. Waubensee was going to be my best bet. My mother would always tell me, "Mija, lo que te haga feliz, hazlo," meaning do whatever makes you happy. Walking onto the Sugar Grove campus made me feel like I was making a difference in my life by pursuing my dreams. When I spoke to the advisor, I was overly excited, overjoyed, and nervous. "I want to become a Veterinary Technician", is what I told my advisor. She recommended taking four classes so I could graduate by 2020, with my class. Walking to my car and looking at my schedule made my heartbeat rise, and I thought to myself, "Gosh, I hope I can fit all of these classes in my schedule." I quickly put the papers in a folder and tried to remain optimistic.

First day of classes, Fall 2016! I woke up three hours early and went to the gym. I could feel the stress releasing from my body with every drop of sweat that

Redemption

was neatly collected on my shirt. Walking to my first class of the day was an accomplishment already. I was living the dream my parents worked so hard for. Getting through lectures was easy, but the real work happened outside of class. As a first-generation student whose native language is Spanish and the proud daughter of immigrant parents, navigating college-level courses was difficult for someone like me. Having the college experience was new to me, and I had no one to fall back on when things got hard. Enrolling, advising, applying for scholarships, and financial aid were all done by me with little to no guidance. This journey we call “College” was truly lonely for me.

I didn’t want to admit that I was struggling to keep up. My ego was clouding my mind, and I could not come to terms with the fact that I was taking too many classes at once. Procrastination became my defense, and I gave up in every class because I was truly overwhelmed. I fell into a trap by thinking I had to know everything myself. I rarely used the resources available to help me succeed. The desire to earn good grades was there, but my unwillingness and lack of awareness prevented me from understanding what it really takes to earn them. Entering college with a high school mindset quickly served as a reality check for me. The difficulties in understanding material became a deep frustration, even during periods of extreme focus. The feeling of failure set in, and I did not understand how or when things turned for the worse. My lifelong struggle with low self-esteem felt validated by this event, which confirmed my harshest self-judgements.

High School felt like a breeze compared to this

experience. I could not help but wonder whether my former school had done everything possible to prepare me for this new chapter in my life. At the beginning of my first semester in college, I tried hard to keep up with all my coursework. As the semester progressed, my hopes of staying afloat were slowly dying. My peers who attended different high schools were able to handle all the coursework thrown their way. The skill set I was supposed to have mastered was nonexistent because I was not adequately trained for my new endeavor. The courses taken in high school were less rigorous, and the reading load went from 10 pages to over 100 pages a week. Time management was something I never had to worry about until now. I felt hopeless and ready to give up. I needed to step away and emotionally heal from this traumatic experience.

Dropping out of college was something I never contemplated, but I could not keep wasting my time and digging myself into a deeper hole of despair. Walking out of that building, completely defeated, hugging the books I purchased with so much excitement, was all for nothing. Nothing worse could have happened to me at that moment, and what to even say to my parents and my brother. The shame and embarrassment I felt when I told my family I was taking a break from school are something I will never forget. My heart felt heavy, my body wanted to rest, but my mind was too anxious. All the sacrifices my parents made, the hard work, sweat, tears, assimilating into a new country, learning a new language, and I could not even pass four classes, that is all I could think about.

Taking a 10-year break from school has helped me

Redemption

tremendously. My experience left me with a bitter taste I've long wanted to change. A lot has changed in my life, and now I am a wife and a mother. I could now see where I fell short on my first attempt at college. Now I know that it is imperative to use my resources efficiently; I am not alone. Waubonsee has excellent resources that make it easier to succeed, such as 24/7 online tutoring, in-person tutoring, professors who are always willing to help me grow, and various ways to attend class. It is very important to manage my time wisely, especially as a mother of two. Something that took me by surprise was how much the environment around me affected my success. Surrounding myself with like-minded individuals has helped me be the best version of myself. I now know that college is for adults, not for people who still have the high school mentality. Breaking bad habits has not come easily, and it has taken a lot of self-reflection. Being a mother of two young kids, I must set a good example and encourage them to follow their dreams. This time, things will be different. I picked up the broken pieces, glued them back together, and now I'm an improved version of myself. This is not only for me but also for Levi, Dalilah, Johnny, my brother, and my parents. My journey in school started all over again, and I could not be more excited. My time for redemption has come.

In the Parking Lot

By Nabihah Ahmed

As I exit the restaurant, I hold the door for a stranger. Taller than you, with a fringe of hair above his upper lip, skin tanned from the late-summer sun.

He brushes past me.

The next person passes through the open doorway, and I turn back to study the figure waiting in line for his order. You would have been that much taller by now, and the sun had been balmy all summer.

If only, I could have peered into his eyes. Then I would have been certain, if it was really you—the boy I left, without saying goodbye.

In the parking lot

I search for your brown Nissan. A swell of relief—just another day of seeing your mirage.

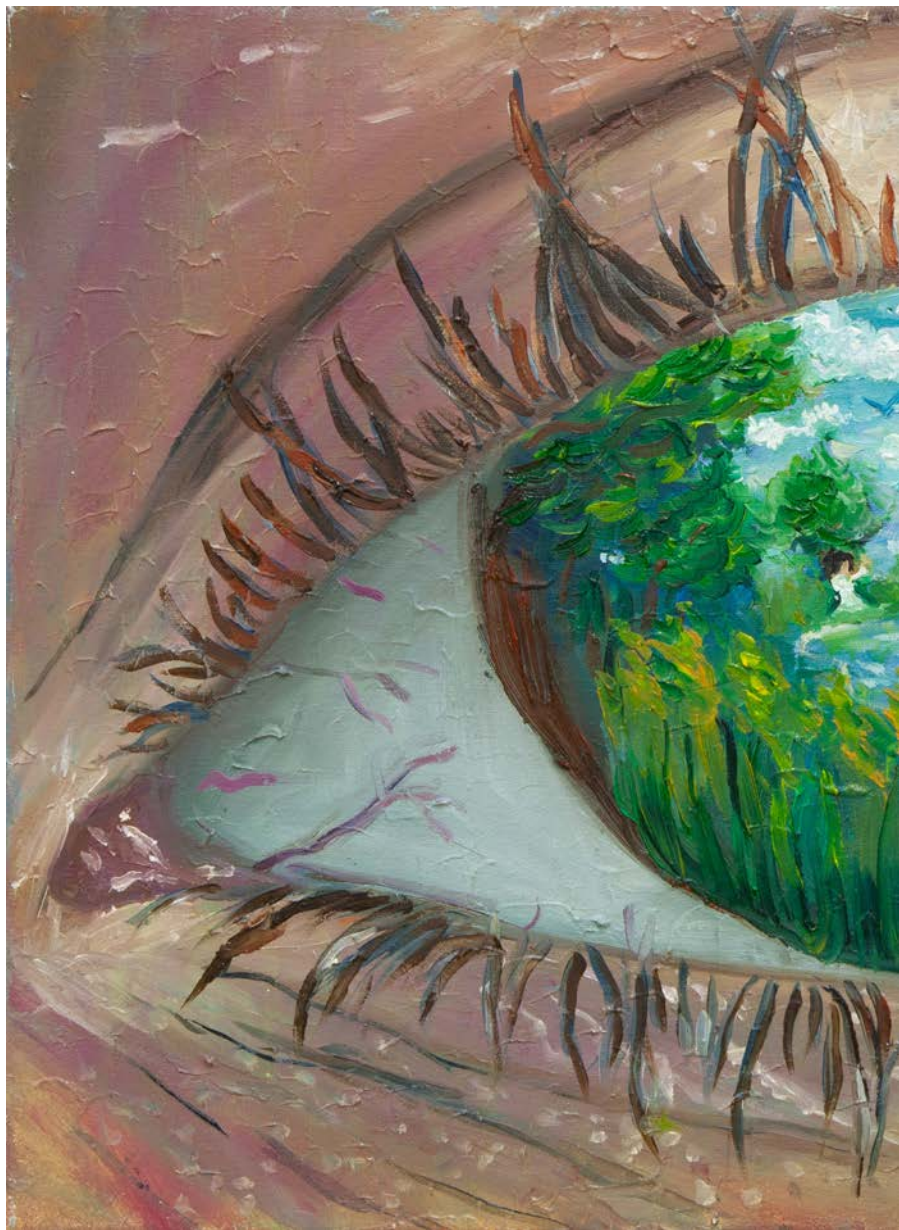
And how fragile I am to know all these changes could've taken place, but still be convinced that nothing could change what was in your possession: my heart

... I mean your car

Eyeing for Better

Emilia Chavez

Oil on Canvas, 18 x 25





Reflection

Ashley Hayes

Archival Inkjet Print, 8.5 x 11



Untitled

Jackeline Uribe Quiroz

Oil on Canvas, 16 x 20



Ode to the Playground

By Cecilia DeAngelis

Bulbous noggins seesaw
ear to ear,
complimenting the realm
they thrive in.
Oh, durable plastic slides
who liberate me,
who unleash the butterflies
that I swear flutter in my belly—
emancipation—
a sensation of which I still
don't know what to call—
you invent deliverance.
Oh, tire swing
who withholds the chains
of my imminent burdens
to lend me a good time...
you are a whirl.
Oh, aged oak
who stands tall as an observer,
who bids cover to James—

the first boy to ever call me beautiful—
you know your ground.

And I pass as a player!

Breaking The Silence

By Angelina Penuela

The room was silent, but inside my head, everything was already moving at double speed. The fieldhouse felt freezing, like the heat had given up hours ago. The mix of hairspray and sweat hung in the air, kind of like a fog you couldn't escape. The wood floor was sticky under my shoes, every step making this tiny sound that somehow felt too loud. The lights glared down on us from above like an interrogation room. The music echoed around the fieldhouse, bouncing off every wall. The mirrors stared back at us, like we were staring into them. My teammates stood completely still; nobody moved, not even to fix a slipping ponytail. Nobody talked either, not because they didn't want to, but because staying quiet was the safest option. I tried to match their stillness, but my knee kept bouncing, as if it had its own plan. I could already feel the coach's eyes scanning the room for the one person who wasn't locked in, and I knew it was going to land on me because I had a reputation for slipping, talking, and being the one she watched the closest. Taking that risk to speak or act differently felt like stepping into a storm I wasn't prepared for, leaving me even more isolated and misunderstood.

The quiet felt too tight, as if the whole room were holding its breath. My brain hated that kind of silence; it made me want to say something, anything, just to break it. I felt a joke forming before I even realized it. That's the thing about my brain, thoughts don't line up politely and wait their turn. They rush in, overlapping, interrupting each oth-

Breaking The Silence

er, pushing me toward action before I've even had time to think about consequences. That's something I didn't understand back then. I didn't know that ADHD wasn't just about being "hyper" or "distracted." It was about feeling like my mind was a radio stuck between stations, always buzzing, always humming, always searching for something to latch onto. Silence didn't calm me; it made the noise in my head louder.

So I leaned toward the girl next to me and whispered something stupid just to make her smile. Her shoulders shook as she tried not to laugh. And then, before the smile even faded, I heard my name cut through the room. I knew exactly what was coming, and I hated how familiar it felt.

Heat rushed to my face, but embarrassment wasn't new to me. Humor always softened the tension that everyone else seemed fine with, but I couldn't handle. Talking and making jokes made the whole practice feel less strict, less sharp around the edges. But my coach didn't see it that way. The second she said my name, her voice came down hard, sharp enough to make my eyes sting as I tried not to cry. It cut through the music like she'd been waiting for me to slip. She told me to stop talking and take things seriously, that I'd ruined the whole practice, and that I needed to get it together in front of everyone. It felt like a knife straight through my chest.

Every head turned toward me at once. My teammates didn't move, but I could feel their eyes burning into me, the annoyance settling over the room like a heavy blanket. To her, a whisper meant I wasn't focused, that I didn't care. But I wasn't trying to be disrespectful; I just needed to feel connect-

ed to the people around me. My thoughts never stayed still long enough to match the room. Holding everything in felt impossible, like trying to trap a spark in my hands. My teammates didn't have to say anything; I could feel the judgment in the air. On this team, silence wasn't just expected during practice; it was the number one rule. I wasn't trying to stand out; I just didn't know how to quiet myself the way they could.

I kept falling into the same cycle, no matter how hard I tried. Getting called out wasn't the first time, and it definitely wasn't the last. Every practice, I promised myself I'd stay quiet. I told myself to focus, to be serious, to match everyone else's discipline. But my brain didn't slow down just because the room did. The harder I tried, the louder my thoughts got. ADHD isn't something you can just "turn off," even though I used to think I should be able to. It's like having a motor inside you that never stops running, even when you're exhausted. It pushes you to speak, to move, to react, even when you know you shouldn't. And every time I slipped, it felt like proof that something was wrong with me.

I didn't understand why staying quiet was so easy for everyone else and so impossible for me. I thought I was just the girl who talked too much, the one who couldn't get it together. I started to believe that was who I was, the distraction, the disruption, the girl who couldn't stay in line. I didn't realize there was more to the story; I only knew I felt wrong in a place where everyone else seemed right. I didn't know that my brain worked differently, that the things I struggled with weren't character flaws but symptoms. I didn't know that the same brain that made

Breaking The Silence

me impulsive also made me creative, empathetic, and quick to connect with people. Back then, all I saw were the ways I didn't fit.

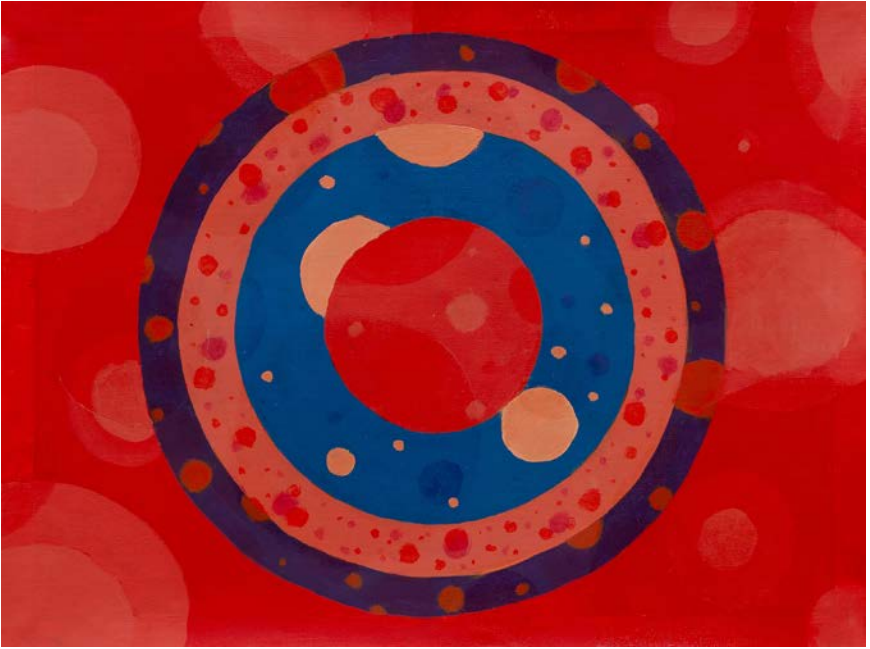
Looking back now, talking made me socially deviant on that team. Silence was the rule, the expectation, the unspoken standard everyone followed without question, and I broke it every time I opened my mouth. But that deviance, the thing that got me in trouble over and over, is also the thing that shaped me into who I am today. I didn't talk to be disrespectful; I talked because connection mattered to me. I talked because laughter made the room feel lighter, and honestly, a tiny smile from a teammate felt more important than pretending to be perfect.

Breaking the rules taught me that sometimes the safest choice isn't the right one, and sometimes the thing you get yelled at for is the same thing that brings people joy. I'm grateful for that now. I saw how a tiny whisper or joke could spark warmth in a place that felt cold and rigid. I learned that my voice had purpose, even when it didn't fit the room. I learned that being different didn't make me wrong; it made me human. Breaking the silence wasn't a mistake; it was my way of bringing light into an atmosphere that desperately needed it. And maybe, without realizing it, it was also the first time I started to understand myself.

Concentric Orbit

Nicholas Ramirez

Acrylic on Canvas, 18 x 24



Homage to Anni Albers

Alison Baker
Mixed Media, 22 x 12



In Case I Forget...

By Logan Malek

Entry 1: In case I forget I decided to start keeping a journal of my thoughts and observations. I want to be able to look back on them one day and be reminded of all the things my mind chose to leave behind.

Entry 3: I sat with my two best friends in the corner of a bustling party. Streamers, banners and Solo cups decorated the room. The corrosive smell of alcohol, mixed with the synthetic sweetness from cartridges and vapes, formed a miasma of neon smoke that caused an unscratchable itch deep in your nose. Dramatic take? Maybe. On my left was Juliana Rose, the most beautiful girl I have ever met, who somehow has remained a good friend of mine since the 7th grade. We first met through a school field trip to the zoo. She had been isolated from the group, just staring at the same elephant exhibit for the whole two hours we were there. Our chaperone was freaking out since it seemed like she had gone missing. I was sent to find her and I ended up going missing with her, captivated not by the elephant but by her fascination with it. On my right was my best friend since I was eleven years old, Stewart Gray. Ever since we met it felt like we lived the same life. For context, my name is Alexander Grey. When I was eleven my mother took me to a ski resort, it was my first time skiing and I wasn't very skilled. I wanted so badly to try to go down a big slope, the Blue diamond. I was too short to be allowed on the black, but I'm sure I would've if I could've. Short story short, I crashed into a fellow skier and broke my leg in three places. I thought I

would die like an action hero, bleeding out in the snow. Unfortunately for my superhero fantasies, I was saved by the very guy I crashed into. I was rushed to the hospital and put under heavy sedation. When I came to, I was greeted with a partner. There was another bed in the room I was placed in, and wouldn't you know it, Stewart Grey met my gaze. He told me a nearly identical story to my own, but with his dad. That he broke his arm while climbing an oak tree that stretched to the clouds. Since that day, we have been best friends. We have the same favorite cheeseburger, Culver's bacon butter burger with cheddar cheese and no onion, the same favorite music artist, Queens of the Stone Age, and the same favorite comic character, the Batman villain Clayface. See the parallel? It's like fate made us best friends.

Back to the party, I was probably admiring the freckle on Juliana's face when she asked me, "How are you liking your first high-school party Alex?"

I was shaken out of my trance like a baby bird snatched from their nest, caught off guard and uncertain what to do. She waved a hand in my face, forcing my response.

"Fun. It's really fun, yeah I love the noise, and the umm people, I can definitely see myself doing this all the time... all the time." I lied and it showed. Her face might as well have been a mirror because even I could see the distaste in my eyes. What was I supposed to say? That I could almost feel the smoke clogging my pores? The slight haze in my head from the noxious gas? Should I have said that I didn't really feel present and in the moment? That it felt more so like watching the other people through a

In Case I Forget...

screen? I couldn't fathom the idea that there was fun to be had here, surely all these people whom I recognized from class were pretending in order to fit in with their friends who were pretending for the same reason? I didn't say any of that, instead, much to my relief, and utter dismay, Tony Jones interrupted us. Tony was the magnetic host of the party, a nice guy on all accounts except for the fact that he was into Juliana.

"Wassup guys. You know you don't have to hide away in the corner right? HAHAHA!"

How repugnant

"C'mon Alex! Go mingle! Talk to some girls! You're probably someone's type HAHAHA!"

You look like a thumb

"Hey Julie... Want something to drunk? I mean drink."

Please say no, please decline!

Juliana smiled before replying with a simple "No thank you."

YES!

"Sorry Tony, my family has a history of issues relating to alcohol so I just choose to stay away from it. Besides, it's easy to get ADDICTED." She speaks with such a firm will that Tony doesn't push it any further. He simply shrugs and then reaches for something in his back pocket. An electronic nicotine delivery system, or an e-cigarette. A vape. Tony catches Stewart eyeing him, or more accurately eyeing the vape. "What is it, Stewart Little? Wanna bump?"

Did that asshole just offer him a hit?

Stewart shrugs, he hadn't vaped before, drank before, or done anything before. But Tony could tell he was curious. Curiosity is dangerous when peer pressure is involved. It makes it okay to be curious, okay to say 'Sure why not.' However, it's also possible to defeat this supervillain known as peer pressure. So, Stewart says "No, I'd rather not. Besides, I don't really know you." Boom. Juliana laughs and that sets him off. In a flash Tony grabbed poor Stewart by his collar, stretching his shirt to pull him up to eye level. I could hear the fabric of his shirt tearing and the anger in Tony's face. I couldn't help but smirk at his show of insolence. That amusement however, was quickly replaced with worry from my friend as Tony shoved the vape into Stewart's face, forcing him to breathe in the burning vapor. I stood up quickly, intending to interject but Juliana stopped me and shook her head. She did this and I knew why, and I didn't care, so I yelled. When Tony let go of Stewart's shirt, his face was red and he couldn't stop coughing. I was angry and it showed. I didn't want to cause a scene but sometimes it gets to a point where one must go beyond reason.

The details were shrouded by my anger. Assaulting Stewart, who lived a life parallel to me, was like assaulting me directly. So I fought back, I felt the sting in my hand before I even realized I struck Tony. Then, I was on the ground next to Stewart before I even realized he had hit back.

"Get the eff out of my house." Except he didn't say eff.

I don't remember actually leaving, but Juliana tells me that after that, she helped us out and into her car. Tony apparently tried to convince her to stay

In Case I Forget...

but she didn't stand for it. So much for my first party. I thought, but thoughts are no good when all you do is think about them.

Entry 12: After that day I began to realize that everyone is addicted to something. Most people do drugs, hell it seems like every last kid in my class is hooked on the same synthetic highs. For some it's more nuanced, their addictions are hidden, so hidden that they don't even know it themselves. For instance, Tony's addicted to his construct of popularity. He's hooked on hosting functions at his house, because if he stopped, then all the friends and attention he gets would stop too. It's sad, but it's also Tony... So who really cares?

Entry 13: A couple months after the thing with the party, myself, Juliana and Stew sat together at lunch. It was the same old slop, day old mashed potatoes and overcooked carrots, cold chicken breast and a dinner roll that's hard as stone.

"Maybe I'll just go hungry." Juliana says while sid-eyeing a carrot she swears she saw move.

"Haha yeah same." I laugh along.

God I'm so obvious!

Stewart- well, he's hyperfixated on his laptop.

"Today" he starts, "I am presenting a project on the practical uses for superpowers in the real world. Think about it, in real life, what's the point in having claws like Wolverine? Or the magic of Dr. Strange?" His eyes light up like magic. His wonder is infectious. "Alex, if you could have any superpower what would it be?" He asks, but he already knows my answer.

“Easy, teleportation. It’s practical and it’s cool.” I fold my arms, and my eyes flick over to see Julie’s reaction. She smirks.

“Oh, that’s ridiculous, how is that practical?” She rolls her eyes playfully so I bite.

“Umm, hello? No travel time? I can go anywhere I want for free.”

“Maybe so, but what happens when you teleport home and find yourself in the middle of a table? You can’t choose where you’ll land.”

“And why not?” Stewart chimes in. “I think knowledge of where you land comes with the ability. My concern is more scientific. Hehee.” He pushes his glasses up on his nose like a nerd in a disney movie. “Listen closely because this will probably go over your head. When you teleport, the matter that makes you up has to be transferred somewhere else. Since matter cannot be created nor destroyed, then it can only be changed.”

“And?” I ask, tensing my muscles.

“Not AND! SO. So... when you teleport, the matter that makes you up has to change before it can be transferred. Who’s to say that when you are reconstructed you’re still you?”

Juliana sighs, “What the hell are you talking about Stew?” He starts laughing.

“Oh ho ho ho!” He says mockingly, “I knew it would go over your heads. Let me put it this way: if a scientist made a perfect copy of my brain and put it in a robot that looks, sounds, and acts the same way as me, then that robot is me. “

“I don’t know.” I say, trying to follow along. “I dis-

In Case I Forget...

agree.”

Stewarts claps. “Yes! I disagree too! So, when you teleport and your brain reconstructs, it’s the same as a copy of your brain occupying a copy of your body. Therefore, how do you know that you are still you when you teleport? Maybe you die and a new you takes your place?”

“That’s stupid.” I say, but something about it stuck with me.

Entry 23: I’ve always believed in magic. I believed in Santa until sixth grade, and I still believe that there is some truth to the stories. However, it wasn’t until a year later that my belief became fact. Because Juliana Rose told me she loved me. I was elated at the news, I had what I’d always wanted. We went on long walks, ate way too much ice cream and talked about nothing for hours. I knew it had to be magic, since what else could it be? Couldn’t be luck, I don’t get lucky. It couldn’t be fate, because fate and free will can’t co-exist. So, it had to be magic.

Entry 31: Summer has just started and I have absolutely no idea what to do with myself. Juliana and I are still going strong. We’ve been together for 3 months as of last week. I’ve been spending all of my free time with her, it’s been great but now she’s on vacation with her family, and I’m stuck at home doing nothing. Not much to write about, but... what the hell, I want to make sure I’m consistently writing in this journal. What else... Oh I got a new phone. My mom switched providers. T-Mobile was working fine so I’m not sure why. Anyways, that’s all I have to write about today... yeah.

Entry 37: I found something... odd about my new

phone. My Wi-Fi's working fine, but whenever I open up my navigation app it disconnects from the house. I'm gonna have Stewart take a look at it since he's more tech savvy and I don't want to go into the phone store and get charged. So. Yeah.

Entry 38: I went to Stew's place later that same day and had him take a look at my phone.

When I got to his front door I knocked once, nothing. Twice, squat. "Ahh geez." I rolled my eyes and then unlocked the door with the code he'd given me years ago. It didn't seem like his parents were home, "Yo! Stew!" I shouted throughout the house but still got no answer. What the hell? Was he not home? I ran up the stairs, his room was the first on the right and the door was wide open. His walls were covered in posters from his favorite franchises, Star Wars, Pokémon, and of course superheroes. His room had a tacky orange paintjob. It was blinding. Laundry piled up in the corners of his room. I hadn't been to Stewart's house for more than a while, but I don't remember it ever being so messy! It was like he had let go of himself. His bed was undone, and as slivers of sun peered through his dark, heavy curtains it revealed a haze of dust and smoke. I couldn't believe my eyes, or my nose as I smelled the same saccharine miasma I smelled at Tony Jones' party. I couldn't believe the sight of Stewart Grey lying on his disheveled bed half asleep with stained eyes.

"Stewart?!" I yelled, and this time he heard me. He sat up groggily and met my gaze. "What happened to you man? Are you smoking?"

I went up and grabbed the vape from his hand. It was a weed pen. Stewart Grey was smoking marijuana and I wasn't privy to it.

In Case I Forget...

“Oh, Alex? I didn’t think you were coming over for a few more hours.” His voice sounded removed from reality.

“What? We agreed on the time, Stew. I didn’t know you smoked.” I didn’t mean for my voice to crack the way it did, but it felt like I had been betrayed. Everything Stewart said next doesn’t matter, because I don’t remember. Somehow, despite myself, Stewart convinced me to smoke with him. I didn’t think I ever would, I didn’t think I would give into peer pressure because my peers had never pressured me. But Stewart wasn’t just my peer, he was my best friend. So it wasn’t as hard to convince me as I thought.

Entry 39: Hello Journal! This is Alex Grey joined by my brotuh! Stewart! We have just uncovered something revolutionary! The other day when my mom changed my internet provider I got superpowers! Oh yeah! Stewart is looking at my phone right now because I thought that my Wi-Fi was just messed up. It works fine everywhere else but in Google Maps it goes totally wack! He just told me that the Wi-Fi changes depending on the location typed into the search bar. But.. I bet you’re confused. Let’s assume that I typed in the address for Culver’s into google maps, well, the Wi-Fi on my phone then switches to Culver’s even though I’m not there. WHAT??? I know, that’s what I said.

I AM A STOOPID PERON MYNASME IZ ALEX

Ignore that, haha Stewart is high as shit right now. He wants to explain what’s going on because apparently I’m too stupid.

THIS IS STEWART, THE SUPERIOR GREY.

ALEX HAS ISSUES SO HE CAN'T EXPLAIN THE THING. ACCORDING TO MY SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS, THIS SUPPOSED BUG IN HIS PHONE IS ACT-SHOE-ALLY THE ABILITY TO TELEPORT!

Like Nightcrawler! This is me, Alex!

YES LIKE NIGHTCRAWLER THE X-MAN. ANYWAYS WE'RE GONNA TEST IT OUT SOON!

"Dude you suck at spelling." I say, and put down the journal

"Dude c'mon just test it out. Where do you want to go? Anywhere?" Stewart is too excited, but it's hard not to be. I ponder for a moment. I could actually get Culver's, but... Then I have it. I type in the address to Juliana's vacation house.

Entry 40: I realize that the things I've told you probably don't seem very important, or connected, but I promise it's important. Because unless I write it all out for you, how am I supposed to know that you are me? I can't risk the memories of the friends I love. I can't risk not being the same person anymore. So if you read this and you don't remember the stories the words spell out, then memorize it. Carry this journal with you at all times and memorize it each time you forget.

Entry 41: I guess I didn't expect it to actually work. I was high after all. I wrote the last entry because of what Stewart said during lunch that day... I wish I knew if it was true or not, but... luckily I kept my memories, right? After I pressed the big green 'GO' on the map I found myself surrounded by a forest on my left and a tropical ocean on my right. In front

Beneath the Veil of Hypocrisy

Kora Medina

Digital Illustration, 6.8450 x 10.24



Layered

Clarissa Gilligan
Silver Gelatin Print, 8 x 10



Guess We'll Die

By Clair Arndt

Scene Ten

Beck: So what was that exit for? Are we chopped liver to you?

Nicky: Yeah, you know he's just going to work.

Marcy: Yeah, yeah, it's whatever, haha.

Beck's phone rings

Beck: Hold on, it's Ben! I'm just going to pop it on the speaker

Beck: Hey, I'm so excited to-

Ben: I'm not going to be at game.

Beck: Oh, crud, is work holding you back? That's all good, the seats always open.

Ben: No, Beck, listen to me, I'm not going to be at game. Ever. I mean, it's all world-ending stakes with no emotional fluff, and it's just not mentally stimulating to me. Going out to New York for school taught me how to actually challenge myself, and your little games don't cut it. I don't know if you've gotten it into your noggin, but we're adults. We're moving on, or at least that's what we should be doing. For some reason, you and the rest of this group can't seem to understand that. You all sit in the same bum town working the same dead-end jobs, and thinking it'll bring change and life to it, but no. You are just like your parents and your parents' parents, well, news flash, I'm not. Period end

of story. Life is all about change, and it looks like I'm the only one with the balls to change, so I'm cutting y'all off like the pathetic vestigial tail you are. I mean, you can't be surprised, it's not like

Beck: I-

Marcy: Who do you think you are?

Ben: Marcy?

Marcy: Shut up. You don't get to talk to any of us like that. You should feel ashamed of yourself. What, just because you moved out to New York, you suddenly think you're so much smarter than us? If that's all we were to you, I'll help you pack because I never want to see you again. It's clear we were just a means to an end. Isn't it funny how as soon as you get a potential out you take it.

Ben: Don't say that. I did value the time we spent. We just have to part, and that's just life.

Marcy: Just life? No, just life is when you and a friend slowly lose touch until you're nothing but Facebook memories, ok. As you said, you're cutting us off and now backpedaling the second someone is calling you out, and this wasn't a natural thing; you just wanted to leave us.

Ben: No, I didn't.

Marcy: Really? Then please enlighten me. Was it you or us who were always "too busy" to hang out whenever you were in town? Was it you or us who, when we finally did hang out, showed up 2 hours late? Was it you or us who was on the phone the whole time we hung out, please I'm actually curious, go on tell me. And for your information, I'm moving next month to Paris, for the next five years, but unlike the heartless monster you are, I actually feel bad about it.

Ben hangs up, tension fills the room

Guess We'll Die

Nicky: Erm... that just happened...

Nicky forces a joke out, hoping to break the tension and failing hard

Nicky: You aren't actually leaving, right, Marcy? You said that as a clap back right, right?

Marcy: No, I actually am. I was offered to teach English at a French Primary school. I'll still be back for winter and summer break.

Beck: That's what Ben said.

Marcy: I'm not going to do what he did, I promise, ok, you guys gotta believe me when I say that. I will never ditch you, and if I'm not that active, it's not because I'm getting bored with you fellas, I promise, it's just because of the time difference. I'm serious, I will never just ditch you guys. I couldn't imagine the pain or fear of doing that and then having the audacity to make it sound like your fault, ok.

Nicky: I love ya, dude

Beck: I need to go to the bathroom.

Scene Eleven

Beck enters stage left

Beck: I can't do this, I can't do this.

Father of the Brim: Why would you put such stock in those people? It truly is a sinking ship. You've talked to your parents, and you know they barely know anything about their high school friends anymore, just a faded, dead memory. Ben was right,

this is all obsolete, you should do better.

Beck: No, no, stop saying that.

Father of the Brim: Fine, but at least face the facts. Nicky is more pathetically codependent than you. Alex is busy actually doing something with his life, and Marcy is just like Ben. It's funny, you spend so long complaining about how annoyed you are with people who beg and whine about things like this. Why should you do the same? You are alone due to your own creation. This is what you wanted, right? This was your goal when you kept everyone at arm's length, right? So tell me, why are you so upset about it?

Beck: I didn't! I didn't want this, I swear.

Father of the Brim: Mhm, your denial is all the evidence I need. Your hatred has consumed you. Is that not why you play D&D? Little pathetic Beck too weak to stand up for themselves in real life, so they make a world where they can be god, but oh no, everyone still leaves you, because deep down you're the problem.

Beck: No, no I'm not. They actually like me, I know it.

Father of the Brim: Oh, really, why don't you ask them?

Nicky, Alex, Marcy, and Ben all enter the stage in a zombie like trance

Nicky: Seeing Beck run and hide every time they're faced with a challenge makes me feel better about my insecurities.

Guess We'll Die

Alex: I only stick around you so I know how to trap more dumb customers; you're just cattle to my meat grinder.

Beck: No, what are you saying!

Marcy: Ben is right, you're a child, too scared to do anything with your life, so you just play stupid games

Ben: I really am embarrassed I stuck around with the parasite you are. Maybe if I had the guts to cut you off, you'd actually do something productive

Beck: SHUT UP PLEASE.

Father of the Brim: Look at how pathetic you are. You're not just making a strawman argument, you're letting said strawman kick your ass.

Beck: N-no, you're the one doing this, this is all your fault.

Father of the Brim: How could you possibly be so stupid? I am you.

Nicky, Alex, Marcy, and Ben start to circle Beck like sharks and yell in unison

All: Failure! Failure! Failure! Failure! Failure!
Failure! Failure! Failure! Failure! Failure! Failure!
Failure! Failure!

Beck: ENOUGH!!

The stage blacks out as the group leaves. A dim light dawns over Beck as they are left alone. There's a knock at the door.

Nicky: Ya, good in there?

Beck: It's fine.

Beck enters stage right with the Father of the Brim looming behind them, and they ignore Nicky

Beck: Alright, let's just get this done, you all get back to see the freshly obliterated corpse of Carbin.

Arabeth: Oh my god, what happened!!

Gorda: I- I don't know, we were in trouble and he just... I don't know.

Nicky: Arabeth starts slamming on Carbin's corpse

Gorda: Please get back, please, please, gods bring him back, please.

Marcy: Gorda will gently rest her hand on Arabeth.

Gorda: Please, Arabeth, this isn't how you want to remember this, remember him.

Arabeth: Shut up! I can fix this, I have to fix this, just let me fix this.

Nicky: Do wizards have any revive spells?

Beck: Nope

Nicky: Perfect, Arabeths starts to flip through his spell book in a clear panic, trying to find a spell.

Arabeth: I can fix this, I can fix this... I- I can't fix this...

Richter Glumpus: Why would a moron like you be able to fix this?

Guess We'll Die

Gorda: Not now, Richter.

Richter Glumpus: Shut up hag!

Beck starts cackling as Roar's "I Can't Handle Change" Starts playing.

My life is hell. You psychopaths, have made my life hell, and seeing this pathetic, shattered corpse doesn't even fill me with pleasure because of the sheer suffering you have all put me through.

Beck: You are all pathetic, disgusting blights ruining everything. Why can't I just have a good life with good people? Answer: because of you, all of you. My life is nothing but endless meaningless tasks meant to serve a bunch of pathetic, apathetic losers leeching off of my creativity! I should be doing so much more but instead I find myself entertaining the masses like a god damn chimp in an organ grinder to you children. You want to make my life hell? Well, how about I do the fucking same; I cast Power Word kill on all of you.

Marcy: What are you doing?

Nicky: Beck, you're joking, right?

Beck: Joking? Am I joking? Does my hate sound like a joke to you? My hate is nothing but genuine to you disgusting filth. All you're going to do is abandon me, so I might as well make it easier by hating you. I hate hate hate you.

Nicky runs and hugs Beck over as Jack Stauber's "Dinner is not over" Starts to play

Father of the Brim: What is happening?

Nicky: I don't care if you think it's pathetic. I'm never leaving.

Father of the Brim and Beck: Get off me

Nicky: No.

Marcy joins the hug

Marcy: I may be across the sea, but I will always be there.

Father of the Brim and Beck: You're lying!

Marcy: Why would I do that?

Father of the Brim: Well, that's just stu-

Beck: I'm sorry... I'm so so sorry, please, I didn't mean it. I promise I'm sorry.

Nicky: Shh shh, we know.

The group embraces before letting go and moving back to their seats.

Beck: Richter looks in horror as he sees that not a single use of the power word kill worked.

Richter Glumpus: No, this was supposed to be my moment! My cries for revenge were heard by voices beyond us, and I was to gain justice.

Gorda: Justice for what?

Richter Glumpus: For everything! For my treatment for my uhm... uh I... I think I just want to hurt...

Arabeth: But you don't have to.

Guess We'll Die

Beck: Richter has a loading screen circle on his face.

Richter Glumpus: But... what am I without it?

Arabeth: One of us.

Gorda: Now come on, I think we have to get revenge for our tin man

Beck: I think we'll call session there, because I need to call my mom and cry, sounds good?

The table agrees, and Beck walks them to the door.

Marcy: Expect monthly postcards. She hugs Beck and leaves stage left

Nicky: My apartment is a five-minute walk away. Don't be a stranger.

They dap each other up, and Nicky leaves stage left

Beck stays for a minute and cleans as Richter Glumpus walks back out as "Alright - Acoustic" by Maxton Waller plays

Richter Glumpus: They kept true to their word, all of them. And sure, new people came and left, and the table came and went, and they even started to play at Alex's store, as the deal ended up working out in their favor. I know it's cliché and admittedly, I was disappointed that we didn't get a tpk, but I can confidently say they all lived happily ever after.

The End.

Rage #2 February

Jenny Sampson

Oil on Canvas, 14 x 14



Rage #3 March

Jenny Sampson

Oil on Canvas, 14 x 14



How the Sun Sits on a Bullet

By Cecilia DeAngelis

There was a gunshot in my neighborhood today.

What's special was the bullet's gleam
as it dispersed before piercing me.

The sun rode it as a surfer does a wave:
steady, loose, and ready
to perform a thrill of an act.

To coast in heavy—but weightless
in its radiance.

That's how the sun sits on a bullet
who wears a copper sheen
as it beaches up on shore.

Then its luster scatters like the crowd watching;
a sightless, episodic grace;

I watched it before it did—
before it slid right into my banishing.

I was evicted by a gunshot
fired in the broadness of day.

But damn, was that a buoyant bullet:
ethereal in its flight; in its targeted range—
for its form laid untouched but

unmatched laid its aim.

Houses sat flickering in the sun
as that bullet dazzled and drove down fleetly
to greet my lane and park;
to slam its doors and tunnel its way
to putting out my spark.

And these are my_

By Jovi Phillips

And these are my wiles: silence, a good book on a
fall afternoon

with the windows open, Hollywood's Bleeding by
Post Malone;

Driving too fast, lowering the coilovers on the
Mustang I can't drive yet;

Singing songs I don't know the words to in the
shower,

A bottle of wine and a man much taller than me,

An occasional flirt with strangers in a crowded room

Falling in love for a night, enough to forget his
name in the morning

but never forget the scent on my pillow

Hanging my head out the window of a fast car,
feeling the wind in my hair while he holds onto my
thigh

Watching Laura Ingalls on a Saturday night

Throwing words at a wall in a hurry- and calling
that shit Poetry.

My Neighbor

By Kain Helm

To visit my neighbor
who lives down the street.
Boy, are they annoying,
with their loud music
blasting at all hours of the day.
And their yard
covered in debris from their 3 rowdy
Loud children.
I don't hate them,
those children,
to be clear.
It's the parents.
With their fancy fancy clothing
Covered in ruffles and neat,
perfectly sewn buttons.
To hope that they move away
as soon as physically possible.
With those 3 kids, and that old dog
who I don't really hate either.
But they always let shit on my lawn.
Either way I visit them
To tell them hello
It's the nice thing to do.
And I'm a nice neighbor,
Whatever I may think.
So I will bring cookies
Made by my wife last week.

The kids will like them,
Maybe the parents too.
However this goes,
I hope they move away soon.

To go into their house
With toys littering the floor
Like confetti.
From a birthday party
Where the mother tells her kid
“Make a big wish”
As he blows his candles out.
But there is no confetti
Just a messy, messy room
Littered with toys
Children ignoring them as they run through
They offer me tea
It’s not well brewed.
Tastes like dirt and grit
Did they put in the tea leaves too?
I handed them the cookies
Which the children snatched away
Running off to their room
Likely to go play

To sit on their couch
Which is the cleanest thing I can see
Minus their clothing
Almost glowing, enough to blind me.
They are surprisingly nice people

My Neighbor

When you sit down for a chat
The husband tells me about his job
I didn't even know they had a cat.
With its fluffy fur
Groomed.
Well loved.
Prowling about the room.
Oh it seems I stopped listening,
He just seems to drone
On and on,
Like my mother on the telephone.
He works at a clothing store
Manager, somehow
He tells me he saved money on clothing
So he and his wife could dress to wow.
Then his wife is talking,
Telling me quietly
That she couldn't get a babysitter
And was wondering if I would volunteer.
I'm hesitant
I know.
Three children is a lot.
They tell me they can't afford it
But would be happy to cook me a meal.
So I've been drawn in
Captivated
Like watching a bird with a broken wing.
And I agree
Their smiles are bright.

Donut

Robin Kittleson

Wire, 15 x 15 x 5



Still Life with Skull

Eric Scheider

Oil on Canvas, 24 x 32



The Nest

By Breanne Berenyi

Moros paced the dark living room, wondering where to start. The house, which he'd purchased less than a month ago, needed major renovations to even be considered habitable. Floors and walls needed to be torn out and replaced, the plumbing was completely useless, and wires hung from the ceiling waiting to send a jolt of electricity through the next person to touch them. He meant to start working on it as soon as the sale had cleared, but his brother had promised to help with the renovations. So, he kept putting it off, hoping Jared's schedule would clear up soon. Finally, last night his impatience had boiled over when his brother had called to tell him he was going to have to push it off for at least another week. He decided then that he was starting the renovation process in the morning, with or without Jared.

Now looking around the house, with its peeling wallpaper and ceilings covered in spiderwebs, he wished he'd waited for Jared. Honestly it really wasn't the months' worth of work and dedication that was making him rethink his decision, it was the spiderwebs. Even the thought of a spider being in the same room as him made his skin crawl. So, it was easy to understand why his stomach was in knots as he looked around him. When he purchased the house, it hadn't had a third of the spiderwebs. And he was hoping more than anything, he would be able to send Jared in before him to knock most of them down, though his brother had always had a major procrastination problem. Moros should have anticipated this outcome – alone with the spiders,

just like in his nightmares.

Instead of focusing on the spiders too hard, he jumped into the day's work. Though frustratingly enough his first task would have to be knocking down all of the spiderwebs throughout the house. If he was honest with himself, it would make it easier for him to focus on the renovations after. So, he went about the rooms carefully standing as far away from each web as he could while still being able to reach it with his duster. He watched with an intense focus as he knocked each web down, jumping back and yelling out anytime he thought he saw a spider. As he went, clearing the ground floor first and then the second, the knot in his stomach started to untwist itself. By the time he'd finished the last of the rooms he found himself whistling the song that had played on the radio on his way over that morning.

Moros paused as he finished the daunting task of facing the spiderwebs to stretch his muscles. His neck ached from staring at the ceiling for an hour. He rolled his head feeling the strain in his muscles. He went to scratch his neck, but his phone rang before he could. Looking at the screen, he was surprised to see Jared's name pop up. He answered it as he continued to stretch.

"You're gunna like what I'm about to tell you," Jared's voice echoed through the speaker as Moros answered.

"What's that?" He asked as he pulled his head to the left stretching the muscles.

"I got my boss to let me off an hour earlier tonight, so I can swing by for an hour or two after work to help with the renovations." There was pride

glowing in his brother's voice.

"Aye! Thanks man, I appreciate it. Though I wish you'd been here this morning." He shivered as he thought back to the sheer number of webs there had been. "I swear there wasn't an inch of ceiling that wasn't covered in spiderwebs."

"You got them all down already though?" Jared asked quizzically, surprised Moros would have tackled that specific task himself.

"I wasn't going to be able to get anything done before that. It felt like they were watching me. I wasn't convinced they weren't going to come out in droves and attack me for knocking them all down." He started but froze when he felt something crawling on his neck.

With a scream he viciously brushed his neck, needing to get what he knew was a spider off him. From the corner of his eye, he saw the little black creature fly as he finally knocked it from his shoulder. But that wasn't enough for him. Instead of running from it, he found himself marching in the direction he'd seen it fly determined to kill it. He'd just knocked down all their work; there was no way they weren't pissed off at him. But he was more pissed off at himself than the spiders were. Why was he, a grown man in his prime, so scared of an itty-bitty spider? All it had that he didn't was eight legs and too many eyes to count.

He ignored the concerned questions coming from his phone as he hunted for the spider on the floor. Finally spotting it he responded calmly, "Sorry, there was a spider." He watched as the it was crushed under his boot.

After that his work felt easier, like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. That was until he'd broken through the first wall of plaster. The space between the walls was filled with more cobwebs. There were so many, he'd had to peel pieces of drywall he'd already broken from the webs. He continued to work hoping it was just that one spot. It wasn't. Almost every room was the same. Webs so thick that broken pieces of fiberglass and gypsum would only fall once peeled from the webs. With each piece he peeled away he found himself squishing more and more spiders that seemed to be fleeing their nests. And with each one the knot seemed to return to his stomach, but he kept going. Moros was determined to avoid Jared's teasing about his fear of spiders when he showed up in a few hours.

Finally, he'd reached the last wall that needed to come down. He was sweating from his day spent using a sledgehammer. He could feel the sweat dripping down his face and back as he took a moment to breathe, resting most of his weight on the hammer at his side. It was already starting to get dark out, which meant Jared would be arriving soon. Moros thought for a moment about leaving the last of the demo for his brother, but he was already there staring at the wall.

Instead, he lugged the sledgehammer over his shoulder and set his stance before he swung. He took one more deep breath before he finally let the hammer fly through the air. Moros could feel the reverberation of the wall breaking on impact, though again the pieces refused to fall. He repeated this across the whole wall, finding it quicker and easier to peel the pieces away from the spiderwebs all at once.

The Nest

When he had finished, he took the sledgehammer out into the hall. He'd made the mistake earlier in the day of leaving it on the floor while he removed the drywall. When he went to look for it, he ended up spending half an hour searching, only to find it buried under the piles of drywall and webs.

When he walked back into the room, he had to turn on his battery lamps, having flipped all the fuses in the basement before he started. He was too worried about hitting a live wire by accident to care about using lamps. The lamp light made the shadows starker against the broken walls. He tried to shake off a chill that was running down his spine, but it didn't seem to be going away. Instead, he ignored it.

As he started to peel the pieces from the wall, he was horrified when spiders began fleeing the webs in droves. They skittered up the walls. It started with maybe fifteen or twenty spiders, which was enough for Moros to jump back, dropping the drywall in his gloved hands. He was going to run from the room, but he froze when the spiders began multiplying as they poured from the other cracks in the wall. There were hundreds of them, and when they reached the ceiling, his brain kicked into overdrive as he rushed to the nearest doorway.

The spiders began falling from the ceiling as he shut and locked the door behind him. Only then did he realize he'd used the wrong one. Instead of escaping to the hallway where he could run outside, he'd locked himself in a tiny bathroom. Worse yet, the door had a half inch gap between it and the floor. More than enough space for the spiders to get through. Within moments, his thoughts were

proven right as the spiders began invading his tiny prison. He looked around frantically, and the only other barrier he could think of was the shower in the corner of the room. He rushed to barricade himself behind the floor to ceiling glass.

Once safely inside he rested his head against the shower wall with his eyes sealed shut. He was trying to breathe through his nose, knowing he was moments away from hyperventilating. He needed to call Jared and get him to bring a few dozen gallons of Terro, but when he patted his pockets for his phone there was nothing there. Moros's eyes flew open as he realized he'd left it down in the kitchen when he got lunch. He thought about grabbing it, but decided against it, knowing Jared already had a key to the house. As he stared down at the shower floor, he spotted a stray spider crawling up his pant leg.

That was the last straw for him. With a scream and a jump, he shook the spider off, knocking it to the ground where he then proceeded to stomp on it as he fought back the prickle of tears that stung his eyes. Once he'd stopped, through his peripheral vision he saw something growing taller. Turning his head very slowly, he wasn't sure what to make of the scene in front of him. The hundreds of spiders were still filing in under the door, but they seemed to be huddling together in two small mounds. He turned to watch in horror and curiosity. As more spiders gathered, a figure started to take shape. It wasn't until there were already two feet, legs, and a pair of hips made of spiders that he realized what they were doing.

He'd never heard of spiders working together to

mimic human behavior before, let alone working together to build a body. He actually knew for a fact that they couldn't because he'd had an eerily similar dream to this as a child. The only way his mom could get him to go back to bed was if she looked it up and showed him. Now here they were doing just that, and his brain was racing through his different options.

He could open the shower door and run to escape. Though that would mean stepping into the carpet of spiders that now covered the broken bathroom tiles. And even if he made it to the door, he was sure that they'd abandon their current task and start climbing him like they had the walls until there wasn't an inch of him left.

He could try reaching for the can of hairspray that was still left on the counter and start spraying the spiders with it, hopefully paralyzing them once it dried.

More likely than not the canister was empty, and that wasn't a risk he was willing to take considering there were already dozens of spiders crawling across the counter. Even with the counter being only a few feet away, he wasn't sure how quickly the spiders would start invading the glass castle he'd locked himself in.

Or he could turn on the shower head and pray to God the water pressure was strong enough to break apart the spiders.

The decision was made for him when he realized the last few spiders had finally joined the arachnid body that had been forming before his eyes. At the same time, they both reached out. The spiders towards

the shower door handle, and his to the shower faucet. The door swung out much quicker than he'd expected and as he twisted the faucet, he stopped breathing waiting for the cold water to hit him. But there wasn't even the tell-tale sound of water running through the pipes, as he remembered he'd also turned off the water in case he hit a pipe while working. Instead, he could feel his salty tears finally slide down his face as he watched the arachnids step into the shower with him, closing the door behind it. Effectively blocking his screams from escaping the room.

As Jared walked through his brother's front door, he was surprised to find a silent and still house. There were no lights left on even though the door had been unlocked, and he hadn't gotten a text saying Moros was leaving for the night. He called out a few times hoping for a response from somewhere deeper in the house. But there wasn't one. Instead of worrying, Jared walked through the ground floor checking to make sure the windows and doors were locked. He must have been exhausted, he told himself as he looked at the mess of dry wall covering almost every floor and the spiderwebs that seemed glued to every piece. Turning to leave he spotted Moros's phone on the kitchen counter and chuckled as he grabbed it on his way out. Must have gotten over that fear of spiders to have spent his whole day here. Jared thought as he whistled, locking the door behind him. He flicked a spider off his shoulder as he went.

Waxing Crescent

Nathaniel Yakushina

Mixed Media, 24 x 18



Scribble Line Composition in Arbitrary Color

Olivia Bailey-Powell

Pen on Paper, 18 x 12



Sensations of a Misty Day

By Rosemary Lockard

Cool, fresh air.
A hint of fall on the way;
A soft sweater,
Its hood resting on my head
As an invitation to come into my cave:
Come and rest awhile,
Be soft,
Be tender,
Be at rest,
Ease up on yourself and others.
I alight out of my truck and
Am greeted with that air I smelled earlier,
But now I feel it.
It is gentle, cleansing;
A soft tear from the sky
Lands on my cheek.
I smile inside.

As I approach my cozy
Two-story cottage
I see my bright orange
Fluffy cat “Leo”
Curled up on my backsteps.
I love my cat so much.
He is inviting and guarding at the same time:
PEACE.
A reminder of what I come home to.
Do we create these spaces on the outside because

This is what we need on the inside?

In I go, not to a perfectly kept home,
But one that is cozy and mine.
Those dirty dishes from last night
Are still firmly in their place!

I pad upstairs to take a shower.

Gush!

I turn on the water and

While I wait

I turn to the open window.

I smell the beautiful breeze again,

Naked at this point.

I am free and

I am safe.

I attempt to stick my whole

Top half out the window,

Feeling halfway to flying - -

Then a school bus turns on my road!

I chuckle.

That ends that lil' moment

Up in the clouds!

The water in the shower is warm,

My perfect temperature,

And the water tinkles in my ears like rain.

crisp pops

Such a good music of

Cleansing,

Bubbling,

BLISS.

Am I Different?

By Zoe Hopp

School is hell for a lot of kids, and I was not the exception. What separated me from them was my intense and debilitating fear. Throughout my life, I always felt different. I didn't know why, but I felt separated from everyone else. I was always so nervous about everything, worrying about the smallest things. I think I had, and probably still have, a form of hypochondria and social anxiety. The latter has been officially diagnosed.

To start, when I was between 8 and 10, I learned there was a nuclear power plant in Joliet. I don't remember where I heard that or why I was so convinced it would affect my life. Somewhere, I must have learned about Chernobyl and the nuclear disaster that occurred there. Something about that just disturbed me. I also heard about the nuclear man. His name was Hisashi Ouchi, and he was exposed to the highest level of radiation any human in history had been exposed to before. He was kept alive for 83 agonizing days at the request of his family. He was going to die, and he desperately wanted to die, but his family told the doctors to take extraordinary measures and keep resuscitating him. His skin peeled off, and I even heard that his organs began to rot inside his body. After hearing about the dangers of nuclear energy and radiation, it took over my thoughts. I remember lying in bed at night staring at the ceiling, wondering when a nuclear power plant would explode and expose me to radiation, or when a nuclear bomb would drop in Chicago. I researched what would happen if a

bomb were dropped there.

In Oswego, where I lived at the time, I was far enough away from the city that I would not die from the explosion. I would live long enough to experience the nuclear fallout. Even writing about this stuff now makes me feel anxious. I guess the fears from my childhood will always follow me, even 13 to 15 years later.

Another time, I became convinced I had cancer and made my parents take me to the doctor so I could get checked out. I was around 13 when that happened. Obviously, I was fine and did not have cancer. I was ashamed to tell them why I actually wanted to go. I don't know why, and I don't remember the lame excuse I probably used to drag them there. I just knew I had to go. I remember the car ride there. I was petrified because I convinced myself I was actively dying and would never go home again. At that point, I didn't realize that test results don't come back right away. So I truly believed the doctor would tell me, "You have stage 4 cancer, and you can never go home again. You need to say goodbye to your parents." When she didn't say that, I was shocked, embarrassed, and even a little disappointed. All that worrying and restless nights for that, for me to just be okay? According to the doctor, I was healthy. That fact reassured me I was okay for at least a week. That was just until the next thing came along; maybe it was a mole that I didn't remember seeing before, or a strange feeling in my stomach when I pressed a certain spot. Regardless, there was always a new fear that came up. After that doctor trip, I became too ashamed to seek medical attention again.

Am I Different?

Being a hypochondriac wasn't the only thing that tormented my youth. Thoughts of death and dying haunted me before bed and when I was alone. When I was around other people, I was scared for a different reason: I didn't know how to act or behave around them. I worried that somehow they would figure out I was different, that I wasn't like them. I changed as much about myself as I physically could so that I wouldn't stand out. I dressed like everyone else, even if I initially thought it was ugly; I eventually began to like it.

I remember the first time I saw Converse shoes. I did not like how they looked. I don't know why, but I just didn't. Somehow, after seeing every girl in my school have them on, I now wanted a pair. I found myself asking my uncle for a pair for my 15th birthday. I asked for a size too small because I was also insecure that I had bigger feet than most girls my age. Every day, I shoved my feet into tiny foot prisons and painfully limped from class to class. "Beauty is pain," I told myself.

As I made it through high school, my fear and social anxiety got worse. I was really good at putting on a fake face and pretending I didn't care about anything. I started skipping class so I didn't have to sit in a room full of other kids my age and feel their eyes on me. I'm sure no one cared, but I was certain everyone was talking about me behind my back and watching my every move. I convinced myself the kids behind me were saying things like, "Oh my god, did you see how she misspelled that word? How embarrassing, she can't even spell." "She just dropped her notebook and had to pick it up; that's so awkward." I know now these were all imagined

worries. Everyone was focused on other things and not watching me as I thought. At the time, those worries were as true as water being wet and the grass being green. Skipping class was easier than feeling that way. It felt like a break from the terrors of the outside world. Sometimes, I had friends I would skip with. I brought vapes and pills, and they thought I was the coolest person ever because of it. Really, it was just another attempt to fit in. I honestly preferred skipping class alone. I may have had friends I felt comfortable around, but I was still around people, so I felt I had to act a certain way. When I was alone, I didn't need to pretend or act.

After graduating from high school, things genuinely started to improve. I needed to learn who I was so I could be myself around other people. I ended up losing all my friends. I hated being alone, but looking back, it was necessary. I now have better coping skills and real friends.

I still struggle with anxiety and fear, and probably always will, but it is nowhere near as debilitating anymore.

Assignment 2

Eric Grochowski

Acrylic on Canvas, 9 x 9



**Hawak ng Dagat, Layo ng Lupa, Translation
from Tagalog:
Held by the Sea, Distant from Land**

Alexia Reyes
Ceramics, 15.5 x 16.5 x 16.5



Literary and Arts Magazine of 2026:

Creative Writing Club

Join Fellow Writers!

The Creative Writing club is an inclusive club that allows for anyone interested in writing to be able to practice and gain feedback from peers. Our goal is to bring more creativity to our campus and to promote the art of writing in all forms. We meet weekly to exchange writing pieces, practice prompts, and talk about writing. We also do other activities such as Open Mic Nights, Field Trips to important writing locations, the Skyway competition, Write-Ins and even Trivia Nights!

Face-to-Face Meetings:

Our meetings happen Wednesday from 12:30 to 1:30 PM.

Check in with the Student Life Office (STC 126) for room locations

Art + Design Club

Join Fellow Artists!

The Art + Design Club meets every Wednesday in Von Ohlen 201 from 3:00-4:00 p.m. We do all sorts of fun activities like designing charettes, workshops, visiting artist lectures, etc. Most of the time, we just hangout, listen to music, and make art.

Face-to-Face Meetings:

Our meetings happen Wednesday from 3:00 PM in Von Ohlen, 201.



HORIZONS

LITERARY AND ARTS MAGAZINE

**Imisioluwa Adekoya
Nabiha Ahmed
Clair Arndt
Olivia Bailey-Powell
Alison Baker
Breanne Berenyi
Emilia Chavez
Cecilia DeAngelis
Clarissa Gilligan
Eric Grochowski
Teaghan Hardy
Ashley Hayes
Kain Helm
Zoe Hopp
Robin Kittleson
Sophie Lindstrom
Rosemary Lockard
Natalie Lycan
Logan Malek
Kora Medina
Hailey Parejko
Angelina Penuela
Nicholas Ramirez
Jovi Phillips
Alexia Reyes
Jenny Sampson
Eric Scheider
Jackeline Uribe Quiroz
Crystal Velazquez
Iraina Whorton
Nathaniel Yakushina**



HORIZONS