

OC Oraciones



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May 2025

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Editorial Board

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oración

1. nombre femenino

Acción y efecto de orar.

«Llevó una vida de oración».

(Action and effect of praying. “He led a life of prayer.”)

2. nombre femenino

Palabras con que se ora, generalmente sujetas a una fórmula establecida por la liturgia o el culto.

(Words with which one prays, generally subject to a formula established by the liturgy or worship.)

OC Oraciones is supported by Odessa College’s Sigma Kappa Delta chapter. It was founded in 2024 to give OC students, faculty, and staff a place to express themselves creatively—to share their voices, thoughts, and passions with the campus community and beyond.

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Editor's Note

This has been a busy year for OC's Sigma Kappa Delta, Psi Alpha¹ chapter. Since August, we have:

- Held two Poetry and Storytelling Nights
- Volunteered with the Literacy Coalition of the Permian Basin
- Collected and donated dozens of new books for newborns in the NICU at MCH
- Raised group funds by selling cool Japanese-eraser-filled eggs
- Hosted three creative writing workshops, the last of which was led by visiting lecturer and professional poet, Noel Quiñones
- Collaborated with the LRC to help spread the word about our work
- Had Dr. Karra, our chief advisor, represent us at the national SKD conference
- Seen our group's student membership more than double
- Released two issues of *Oraciones*, and
- Been named OC's student group of the year

Any one of these accomplishments is reason enough to be proud of our students. Taken together, they demonstrate a healthy appetite for reading and writing—and the arts more broadly—in west Texas.

The desire for such a community has always been there, and so has the talent. It was only a matter of channeling it—and of taking risks. The contributions of those who put themselves out there in submitting to our first issue paved the way for many more to share their work in this one. In just two short weeks, *Oraciones'* editorial board received more stories, poems, essays, and artwork than it did in two months this past fall.

Our theme for this issue is *Personal Puzzle Piece in Society*. We asked for submissions addressing how members of the campus community see themselves fitting into the broader community. As the work here attests, this can sometimes be hard in a place like Odessa, but it can be done. *It has* been done. The work you'll read here deals with those struggles, and it does

¹ Sigma Kappa Delta (SKD) is the English honor society for two-year colleges.

so from a range of perspectives. Some pieces are funny; some are serious; each of them hits on truths as lived by people brave enough to tell their stories.

In our last writing workshop, Professor Quiñones mentioned that storytelling has the potential to save lives. We believe that, and we hope that something in this issue speaks to you in a meaningful way—makes you laugh, cry, reflect, want to tell your own story, or make a difference in someone else’s life. If that happens, even if it is just for one reader, it would be cause for celebration on a par with, if not far above, our group’s accomplishments this year.

Josh Cook
Assistant Professor, English



To Infinity and Beyond
Mallory Sanchez

Nonfiction

Little Shit

Brance Davis

I was a little shit when I was a kid. My mom would probably disagree and tell you otherwise (bless her heart), but I've heard the stories.

In one of my biggest instances of childhood shittery, I won a game of hide and seek against my babysitter. I can see 4-year-old me now. Debbie the babysitter is counting in the front yard: "1...2...3...4...5." My heart races as I try to think of the perfect place to hide. The creak of her family's small bamboo forest beckons me with its siren song from the backyard.

"...6...7...8...9...10."

I run over as quietly as I can manage and slink into the 4-foot-deep bamboo forest, wedging myself in just the right way to where she could never find me.

"...19...20. Ready or not, here I come!"

She probably narrated her actions as she searched for me.

"Is Brance hiding in the bushes?!" No luck.

"How about the shed?" Not a chance.

She even comes and looks around in the bamboo, but she just misses me. Two more steps in and she'd find me balled up in the darkest corner. It's at this point that she panics, begging me to come out of my hiding place, telling me the game is over. "This isn't funny anymore, Brance." I know it's all part of her evil plan to win. Does she take me for a sucker? Not today, Debbie.

She runs around the corner to the front of the house. I can still hear her calling for me for a few more minutes before she goes inside. I sit there sweating my butt off for 20 victorious minutes. It isn't until I hear a siren whoop-whoop in the front that I realize I screwed up. I make my way out of my dank hovel, certain I was about to be carted off to jail. I didn't know that winning hide and seek got you in so much trouble, but it was time to face the music. Debbie is out talking to the cop, giving him my description, face wet with tears. The cop sees me first and points me out to Debbie. She turns, tears sizzling off her face. She was going to kill me. Thank God the cop is here.

The cop gives me a stern talking to and leaves me with Debbie. She yells at me for a few minutes, puts me in time-out, then sits silently on the porch until my parents show up.

Debbie fires me that day and I never see her again.

Moments like this litter my past like trash clinging to a fence on a windy day. As I got older, and tried to learn from my mistakes, they weren't as frequent, but they never truly went away. I couldn't help but be a screw-up.

Saying the Wrong Thing at the Wrong Time

For example, one day in 5th grade, Mrs. Pinkstaff was going over a math problem with us that no other students would answer. She was playing coy with the class, saying something like, "Come on, guys, someone has to know it."

So, being a jokester, I blurt out, "The answer is 31..." and without a beat, added "...woman!" I got the answer right, but my little add-on cost me. It got laughs from everyone including my teacher (it could have gone a lot worse if my family didn't know her outside of school). She knew my family, so she called and told them what happened and had a laugh with my parents that day after school. I got in so much trouble that night. This is mortifying to share now because of how embarrassing it is, especially since I knew better than to say something like that, even jokingly, but I couldn't stop myself.

College

I'm a serial procrastinator and have been so since I was a child. In college, I could always count on an all-nighter when essay season came around. I'll never forget the anxiety and guilt, not only because of the procrastinated work but also that I lied about why I was so behind. I couldn't tell them that I was just lazy or played too many video games or got lost in a book unrelated to the class, so I hadn't even read the book I was writing the essay over. I couldn't stop myself.

Fear of Rejection

To piggyback off the college example, part of the reason I procrastinate so much is my fear of failure. Even the thought of not doing well or meeting my teachers' expectations sent me spiraling. Not to mention if the essay that I wrote overnight got anything less than praise, I'd become depressed. I couldn't stop myself.

Criticism

It's ironic, considering I'm a writer and English professor, but depending on the thing being criticized, I tend to handle criticism poorly. For example, I used to spend summers with my aunt and uncle in Dallas. I'd always have a great time, but my uncle likes to share his opinion, especially if it's related to something that's an affront to his narrow sensibilities. I was probably 15 at the time and was reading/rereading one of the Harry Potter books. It was my favorite series at the time. He saw the book and asked, "Why are you still reading kid books? You should be reading something else by now." Instead of ignoring my uncle and enjoying what I enjoyed, I got so embarrassed that I stopped reading the book on that trip and struggled to read anything publicly years after for fear of my uncle being right and me being viewed as anything other than normal. I couldn't stop myself.

To be perceived as less shitty, and more 'normal' in these and other metrics, I had to mask parts of my personality. It was a survival mechanism that I never really questioned. We all wear masks to some extent, right? We may have work masks, social masks, family masks, and so on, but the extent to what the mask is hiding varies greatly. They're made of observations we make, rightly and wrongly, about the familial, social, and generational environments we exist in. From a young age, we try them on, seeing what gets us chased out with pitchforks or gets us welcomed with open arms. The mask may chafe a little, but discomfort is ok if you can blend in, right? Here are some of my masks:

1. Impulsive hide-and-seek champion leads to internal adoption of "troublemaker" as a key personality trait.
2. Always saying the wrong thing at the wrong time leads to introversion, self-consciousness, and social anxiety.
3. Serial procrastination leads to me feeling like I'm lazy, stupid, or worthless, plus massive guilt and anxiety.
4. Fear of rejection leads to perfectionism and fear of failure, and more anxiety.
5. Trouble taking criticism leads to people pleasing or not trying at all for fear of failure, leading to anger at myself and others.

I truly believed that I was just kind of shitty, lazy, and overly emotional by nature, and there was nothing I could do to fix it. It's what I'd been told my

whole life by others and by myself, and it seemed like my actions spoke for those assessments.

It wasn't until my YouTube algorithm rudely hinted that something else was going on that my self-image started shifting. In October 2021, I got recommended a video. YouTube was like, "Here's a video about ADHD. You probably have it." I ignored it at first, but like a pushy parent, it beat the video recommendations over my head until I finally relented. I'd recently had a depressive episode that was affecting all areas of my life, so I figured now was the time to figure stuff out.

Sure enough, as a YouTuber named 'How to ADHD' went through a list of common ADHD symptoms, everything started to make a whole lot of sense.

- **"You can't sit still." I'm always bouncing my leg, clicking a pen, fidgeting in some way.**
- **"You bite your nails." I did for years until the guilt and shame got to me. I still pick at my fingers if I'm really anxious.**
- **"You're either completely lazy or trying to do everything at the same time" I was told I was "Lazy but smart" by teachers and family while growing up. Felt like I'd never reach my "potential."**
- **"Your sense of time is now and not now." Mmhmm.**
- **"You don't have files, you have piles." A quick scan of my desk shows this to still be true.**

(PS - Sorry if my list is leading you to question your own ADHD status.)

This random YouTuber knew more about me than I knew about myself, and I didn't like it. I watched as many videos and read as many books as I could to learn as much about ADHD as possible. It became my hyper focus du jour (another ADHD thing). I was officially diagnosed with inattentive-type ADHD in November 2021 at 30 years old.

After the doctor confirmed it, which for some reason is the only thing that validated my diagnosis, the real self-reflection began. In an instant, 30 years of my life meant something completely different than it used to. It's like I had a weird version of amnesia where I still remembered everything, but the meaning of those memories completely shifted. It was distressing as hell.

I went through moments of hating myself, hating my parents, hating my teachers, hating the fact that I had ADHD, hating that I didn't have the kind that was easier to diagnose. Hating that the massive panic attack I'd had in my

mid-20s could have probably been avoided, because all the map markers that led to the panic attack were clearly ADHD-adjacent. All I could think was, what the hell?

It felt like a curse. All of my potential was laid bare at key moments in my past, and since my ADHD entails an active mind/imagination, I couldn't help but linger on all of the what ifs. What if I was diagnosed as a kid? What if I had been treated for it? What if my introversion is a coping mechanism for all the times I spoke out of turn in class or got too hyped up about what I was focused on at the time? What if I'd have been more successful in school?

What if..? What if..? What if..?

On top of that, I had to think about my present. I was falling behind at work, had been dealing with depression, and now this? Again, what the HELL?! I got on medication in November, just after my diagnosis. That and simply knowing I had ADHD made things much easier to manage.

Luckily, I'm the type of ADHDer whose brain loves reading. I eventually came across words of wisdom that helped me process my past shittiness differently. I got into Stoic philosophy a few years back and a key goal of Stoicism is to be mindful of the things that are and are not in your control. Here are two quotes from Seneca that I found helpful:

“Two elements must therefore be rooted out once for all, – the fear of future suffering, and the recollection of past suffering; since the latter no longer concerns me, and the former concerns me not yet.”

“We are more often frightened than hurt; and we suffer more from imagination than reality.”

These are pretty common-sense statements, but humans (especially this human) are proud and hard-headed and need to be led to water sometimes. My takeaway from these quotes and Stoic philosophy broadly is that the past is an imaginary land. It exists in an instant and is left behind as a memory. And memory can't be trusted. All that we have is right now.

My diagnosis allowed me to review my past through a new lens. If I got buried under the what-ifs, I'd be no better off than I was before my diagnosis. The past would still be dictating the present. It feels like the moment in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets when Tom Riddle tells Harry that, “Dumbledore has been driven out of this castle by the mere memory of me.” I can't let memories and what-ifs derail potential growth. It isn't sustainable

and only adds more weight to the million other ADHD symptoms I was dealing with at the time.

So, what now? For starters, reframe the past. This will make it easier to remove the masks entirely, or at the very least, make those masks look more like me.

My little run-in with the law at 4 years old looks a lot different from this angle. I may have been a little shit, but I was a little shit who wouldn't know they had ADHD until almost 30 years later. My impulsiveness, time blindness, and difficulty reading my babysitter's despair were as uncontrollable as a sunrise.

My penchant for speaking out of turn in class and other situations continued to build my internal troublemaker narrative to the point that I had to fold into myself. I became quiet, closed off. I suffered silently for years, occasionally speaking out of turn and getting in trouble, but usually letting the guilt and shame of being me hold me back. I coped how I could, but I don't have to now. It got to where my body would respond to even the prospect of being chosen to speak in front of others. My hands would get clammy and start shaking, and my heart rate would skyrocket. This is how things were until my diagnosis.

Understanding my ADHD took me most of the way toward changing my responses to these stimuli, and my medication picked up the slack. Since my diagnosis, I've pushed myself well out of the hole I buried myself in and while I still have trouble speaking in front of others, the fear and my body's response to it are diminished.

Procrastination is still an issue I deal with today, but since I have a better understanding of the baseline of my ADHD, things are going much better now. I'm much better at balancing my time and focusing on work.

I'm still a perfectionist and struggle to take some criticism but am working on it daily through personally-mandated exposure therapy. I'm forcing myself to write all the way through instead of stopping myself every other word to overthink things and edit. I've also been sharing writing with students (much more stressful than you'd think it would be) and submitting more writing for others to read online. It's been amazing to see how things have panned out since I started this process.

There are going to be setbacks, especially when there are so many out there who fight to exclude those who don't quite fit the broader society's mold. After all, there's a reason masking is so common for the neurodiverse (though I prefer neurospicy because it's more fun). In an ideal world, we wouldn't need

to wear masks, but in our less-than-ideal world we have to because our survival may very well depend on it. So, it makes sense why I was so affected by my past, and why even now I struggle with my self-image. And even though it feels amazing sharing this part of my life, it's also terrifying because there are people out there that want to overwrite the existence of the neurospicy with shitty science and dehumanizing rhetoric. It's not like we have worms in our brains or anything, we're just a little different than most.

There are so many other things I've left out about my past and how it relates to my diagnosis, but I think this is a good foundation to get to the point of why I'm sharing parts of my life. We are naturally defined by our pasts because we're shaped by them. We've all taken doofus pills at different times and made all kinds of mistakes, which can shape how we perceive ourselves, but what's important to realize is just as our past can affect our present, so too can our present affect our past. My diagnosis forced me to re-examine my whole life and work to override what I believed was my reality. A new reality emerged, and while I still am a doofus sometimes, I understand that my mistakes and quirks as smaller parts of my larger personality and I'm able to better accept the good in me as a result, which is essential to my survival.

Cancer: Life Lost

Jeannie McCoy

I will start by summarizing words from a television show called *House* and words that came directly from my dad's mouth. Cancer and chemotherapy are like having your body ripped into with broken glass. Your stomach fills with bile and vomit. It feels like someone is forcing a white-hot hammer into your organs. Your soft skin is tearing. Your fresh blood is dripping on the back of your throat, choking and gagging, with a burnt taste of flesh. You're on fire. You're freezing and the next second every pain sensor in your body is going off at the same time. Your only reality is hallucinating, dreaming of death and the race begins in your body. You live, you lose, you die.

Cancer is a word my family and no family ever wants to hear. What do you do, what do you say, there is no real rulebook to foresee or rewind to make it all go away or fix it. My dad was diagnosed in August of 2021 with

stage 4 liver and colon cancer. As I stood there and watched the doctor's mouth move, my mind was already moving at the speed of light. My throat was dry, my hands were sweating, I couldn't move or breathe. I moved my eyes towards my dad and saw the tears pooling in his eyes. As much as I would never like to see that kind of pain again ever in my life, it still pursues me throughout my days and my nights. That's what cancer is: PAIN. It is emotional, physical, financially draining, brutal treatments, time consuming doctors' appointments but in the end, there is still hope.

The physical toll is relentless. My dad, my hero, went from being a brutally handsome, 6', 250 lb. Man to a whopping 150 lbs. His voice became crackled and low. He was always so strong and full of life. The challenges that arose for him, however, we could have never expected. We were told the chemo would slowly kill everything in him. It did. He did not eat. He would barely take sips of water. I would have to bathe him. The doctors told him that he had the choice to quit chemo. My dad chose chemo because he was a warrior and a fighter. Had he gone and gotten a colonoscopy then we could have caught it sooner.

Finances became short. The cost for treatments was staggering. Treatments ranged from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Depending on what kind of extra medication my dad would need, the frequency, and the type of medication would all determine a different price. Costs quickly add up and sometimes insurance doesn't cut it. Cancer costs not only money but lives and my dad's life was more than money. So, we fought as a family.

The doctors' appointments were more than time-consuming. They were awful. One minute we would hear so many words of hope and then the next minute the words had changed to dire circumstances. You breathe air in and then your doctor has you in a choke hold around your neck and you feel like your life is being drained from you then he lets go and you draw a deep, soothing breath. That's what doctor visits were like.

The Hope House was a great refuge during this war with cancer for our mental wellness. They were an excellent source available to us in our time of need. They helped with not only a way to vent, but also through material items such as wheelchairs, walkers and handrails. One of the most important roles they played was that of a sandwich maker. They served lunch to all of those who were taking chemo and their families. The lunch bags were filled with a sandwich of your choice, chips, juice and a dessert. They were always so kind to my dad.

On a beautiful Sunday morning, January 28, 2024, God chose to take my dad home. The house was full of his loving family. My brother and I laid in bed with my dad and held his hand. Then he just stopped. He gave up the fight and it was a gallant and bold fight. His love was stronger than any disease. His love lives on through me every day. My dad, Darrell Adrian McCoy, will be forever missed but never forgotten.



The Big Bus
Barry Phillips the Younger

Vase Life Research Paper

Rachel N.

Written under the leadership of Professor Salman Mushtaq, Horticultural Science, Odessa College, April 2025

Abstract

With the arrival of spring, and with it a bounty of plant life flourishing around us, many of us enjoy the chance to not only keep our gardens fresh with blooming flowers, but our homes as well. Cut flowers and bouquets

are a great way to brighten up a room, but of course they don't always last as long as we might hope. Are there perhaps some ways that we can improve the life of cut flowers and from this lengthen the blooming time? The Horticulture class at Odessa College saw this question as an opportunity to perform some tests and find what could be the possible answers to this.

The Experimentation

Our class gathered together different mediums that the flowers would sit in over a period of 3 weeks. The mediums chosen were distilled water, water with powdered sugar, vinegar, apple cider vinegar, lemon juice, water with baking soda, and water with the flower nutrients powder which came with the store bought flowers we used. There were three beakers of each medium, each beaker containing one daisy, as well as three beakers without any medium but each one containing a daisy as well. In total there were 24 beakers used for the experiment. The flowers remained in a controlled lab environment close to a window, each receiving about the same amount of light, temperature, and additional conditions as all the others.

The Results

No Medium

As might be expected, the three daisies which were placed in beakers empty of any medium died very quickly. Within 4 days they had already dried up and wilted, having received no water or nutrients.

Baking Soda with Water

Baking soda is a product with a great variety of uses, but keeping cut flowers alive is not necessarily one of those uses. We found that within only the first couple of days, two of the flowers had already died, and the third was just surviving. Soon, it was dead too, and the stems of them all had browned quickly. I can certainly say this is not the medium I would recommend, or at least not in a strong concentration.

Vinegar

The flowers placed in white vinegar had some of the strangest results that we saw. I can't say that I recommend putting your cut flowers in this medium, but I can say that it did keep them alive for a long time. The downside to this was that the components of the vinegar being taken in by the flower cause it to become brown in both the stem and the centers, and the petals were streaked with brown as well. Despite their abnormal look and new coloring, which could easily deceive someone into thinking they were either rotting or dead, they were still very much alive and remained so for at least 4 weeks. The flowers were soft, showing their continual health, but the petals did somewhat droop, adding to the sickly appearance.

Apple Cider Vinegar

Very similar to the results of the daisies in white vinegar, those in the ACV remained alive for at least 4 weeks, but also had quickly gained a brownish and unusual appearance. The only noticeable difference between the two is that while the petals of the daisies in the white vinegar drooped in an outward fashion, those in the ACV were in an upward position, appearing to close up some. The reasoning behind this is unclear, though it is an interesting observation.

Lemon Juice

Being highly acidic, lemon juice on its own is probably not the medium you would want to keep your cut flowers in. The flowers in this medium did remain alive for about 4 weeks as well, but by the end of this period at least 2 of the flowers were definitely close to dying. I wasn't sure exactly what to expect from this medium, but the results from this definitely surprised me. The flowers did well for about 2 weeks, continuing to stay alive and even thrive, but by the end of the second week the stems started browning. It didn't stop there though, as during the 3rd week the stems were not only browning, but areas were becoming bright pink! The centers were browning by then as well. Finally, during the 4th week we saw even the lemon juice itself begin to turn pink on the surface, and the contents became chunkier. One flower stem became taken over by a white fungus, and they all were beginning to wilt.

Flower Nutrition

While I would not rank it as the best out of all the mediums we tested with, the water mixed with flower nutrition powder did do rather well. For the first 3 weeks, the flowers were basically thriving, with not much else to comment about them. After a while, bits of the carpel (center of the flower) did begin coming off and eventually were slowly rotting by the 4th week, while the bottom of the stems began to brown. At this point they were still alive and doing decently well, though perhaps not thriving as much as the 2 best ranked mediums.

Sugar Water

Not only do you have a sweet tooth, but - figuratively speaking - your flowers do too. The daisies which we kept in sugar water seemed quite satisfied with this medium and were thriving most of the experiment. Even up to the end of our recorded 4 weeks, they were still alive and well, and just ever so slightly starting to appear weaker in the petals.

Water

Finally, the last medium used was just distilled water without any additives. This medium also proved to be very successful and perhaps shows us that in some cases simplicity is the best. For the first 3 weeks the flowers were thriving and looked great. By the 4th week, the carpels were beginning to rot slightly, but besides this they looked healthy and beautiful. Like the sugar water daisies, these only looked ever so slightly weaker.

Conclusion

Out of the mediums used, I would consider there to be a tie between sugar water and regular water as being the best mediums to use. Our research was of course limited, and I feel there is still so much to look into regarding this. Most of the mediums that we used can be successful, as long as they are not the main medium and are added in much lesser concentration. For example, a variety of sources recommend using lemons or lemon juice mixed with other mediums to keep your flowers lasting longer. Adding small amounts of vinegar can be recommended as well for its ability to kill bacteria and lower the pH in your water. Even baking soda

and bleach are used in small quantities for this sometimes, though they of course have to be mixed with other mediums. Overall, there are many different combinations you could try.

Jokingly I had told my professor at the beginning of this experiment that we might as well just put the flowers in some lemonade, but seeing how sugar water was so successful, and perhaps adding a lower concentration of lemon juice for the benefits as well, this might not be such a bad idea! Just keep in mind that different flowers will also desire different things, but these are the results which we found and would recommend.

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Grief

Jeannie McCoy

Grief is such a terrible subject to want to speak about, but I suppose it is therapeutic. Plus, it's at the onset of my thoughts all the time. Since my dad's passing in January 2024, I have been unable to sleep. The doctor continues to give me sleeping pills, which I would like if they kept me asleep, but they don't. My mind wanders off at odd times during the day and night about what his hair felt like or how gruff his voice was. My dreams are of him. Feeling disconnected and uncomfortable in my own skin sometimes are other parts of this baggage. This is a deeply personal journey that I am on at the moment with no definitive timeline. Experts say that time heals all wounds. I just begin to wonder how much time is that? I know that there are many resources out there available to me to navigate through some of my wounds, yet I am unable to do anything but write in this journal and compose essays. I know I need to see a grief counselor and put these resources into action yet still to this day; I am boxing it up inside myself and decorating it and reminiscing on every memory and holding them as tight as I can right now. I visit the graveyard at least three times a week, wipe down the monument and put flowers in the vases. Friends tell me I

should just stop because My Daddy is not there. I know this. I know he is not there. I know that he is in heaven with God and that he is with me every single day and every single second I feel his presence like a warm blanket wrapped around me. Although I know part of him is down there 6 foot under in that coffin, the part of him that is his hand that I used to hold and his beautiful smile that I used to love to see, so till I can get a grip on all that, I will continue to visit him there, and in my prayers and my dreams. Grief isn't supposed to be easy, but I know at some point it will be manageable. Hopefully, through this journal writing I can help those in the same grief moment that I'm experiencing.

Who Are We

William Bess

I think America has always aspired to be great. Even when we failed, we tried. Are we still trying? We subscribe to having ideals and values, but how do they reveal themselves? Have we always been a fragile and ticking time bomb, just waiting for the right or wrong person to light the fuse? Have we severely overestimated the goodness of people? I have pondered this question lately. I was always taught that Americans were good and decent people once you get past petty differences. Are we? I have questions.

Let's start with slavery, which was a horrific stain on this country's history. Many say, "It was just the times we lived in." Some have dismissed the notion that many of the Founding Fathers were racist: they were simply men of their times. If that were the case, why were they not all slave owners? Historical research reveals that 17 of the 55 Constitutional Delegates owned slaves. George Washington, our first president, was one of the largest slave owners. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, was a slave owner, as was James Madison, the architect of the Constitution. Eight of the first 12 presidents of this country were slave owners. Not ALL the great men were slave owners, and there were white abolitionists in those times, so at least some people knew slavery was bad. Do the Founding Fathers get a pass when they could have made the same decisions as the non-slave owners?

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution highlight individual rights, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They were written

by men who some did not necessarily mean those promises for “thee,” only for “me.” Some scholars acknowledge many of these men knew slavery was evil, yet still participated in and benefited from it. Of course, these men did great things for this nation, but it still took a civil war to end slavery. The Constitution was meant to be fluid because seemingly the Founding Fathers understood that while America aspired to be great, it lacked in many areas that would probably need correcting. For instance, has there ever been a time in American History when the majority population did the right thing on their own, or were they always forced to do so?

Why was there a need for the 14th Amendment? To grant citizenship to formerly enslaved people and to protect them from discriminatory laws and practices prevalent at that time, in particular “Black Codes,” laws specifically designed to limit the rights of Black people. The 19th Amendment guaranteed women a right to vote. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) banned racial segregation in public schools. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment and public accommodations. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 addressed voter disenfranchisement, particularly for minority groups. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 banned discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on race, color, religion, or national origin. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 extended the protection of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include federal employees. Title IX, signed in 1972, banned discrimination for denying educational benefits based on sex.

History has shown the courts ordered the American populace to do the right thing many times. It took a constitutional amendment to make the majority treat people fairly regardless of the color of their skin or race? The courts have to make men allow women the right to vote. The American majority did not realize that separating children in school based on their race was unfair, unjust, and morally wrong. The courts had to do it for them. But the thing is, we needed laws because we were always aspiring to be great. The addition of these laws helped America become that place others looked to for guidance. The tricky thing about laws is they are just pieces of paper. America is made up of a collection of individuals. It is the people who has to make the laws matter. All these ideals are meaningless without the people. Our democracy has only been strong because of the people, not just the rules and regulations. Our democracy has always depended on the goodwill, good behavior, and integrity of the men and women entrusted to

uphold the experiment called democracy. There is a reason the Constitution does not specifically say a person who is a convicted felon cannot be president. There was always an assumption that the American people would not put the person in that position into the highest office.

I gave my son rules of behavior when he was a little boy. I never told my son to avoid kicking puppies. I just assumed my kid was a good little guy and he would not kick a puppy, so it never occurred to me that I needed to tell him. The Founding Fathers made many assumptions when they created the country's rules. They assumed presidents would always respect the separation of powers. They assumed no one person could disrupt an entire nation, much like a dictator or a king could. They assumed their safeguards would prevent things like that from happening. Perhaps they didn't recognize that none of what they wrote would work unless the people agreed to it. We are in times now when there is defiance of court orders by one branch of the government, and no one knows how to rectify it because the assumption has always been that it would never happen. We have millions of people happily on board with people in power ignoring the law as long as the people ignoring the law are people they vote for. Is that a democracy?

We constantly hear Americans proudly proclaiming the United States is the best country in the world. We are—at some things. We are the wealthiest country. We have the most powerful military in the world. We have the most educational “opportunities.” We also have the largest prison population. We have the lowest healthcare system ranking out of the ten highest income nations. Our educational system is 13th. We rank 131 out of 163 countries in violent crime. We are great in some things and terrible at others, so what makes us the best country in the world? Many say our democracy.

I remember sitting in federal court as a court officer watching court proceedings. I remember on one occasion, we had a Spanish-speaking defendant, and a German-speaking defendant. Court was delayed for a while to an interpreter for both defendants. I remember being proud to be in America on that day. I knew there were many countries where they could care less if the person being charged could understand the proceedings and they certainly would not pay money to find interpreters for them. But we did and we do. Due process is one of our most outstanding principles as a democracy? It does not matter where you are from and who you are, if you

find yourself entangled in our criminal justice system, you will receive the same protections as our citizens.

If we decide the rules can be arbitrarily applied and those in power should decide when to apply them, who are we? If we celebrate law breaking for certain people, who are we? If we are willing to sacrifice our rights as long as people we don't like are being hurt, who are we? I know who we say we are, but really, who are we? When I was in the Army and traveling abroad, I would be approached by the natives of the country I was in. I remember the pride I felt when strangers would come to me in broken English to thank me for being in their country. I remember more than a few saying their dream of living in America. America has always been flawed, but collectively I believe we have always tried to be great. Now, I am not so sure.



Sunset Over Monahans
Sylvia Medrano

Moments

Jeannie McCoy

The moment I'll never forget in my life would be when My Daddy leaned over to kiss me on my cheek for the last time. I came home to Odessa after years of being away to care for my dad. He had gotten what I call a death sentence four years ago. We were told that he had colon and liver cancer. It was a hard pill to digest for me, especially since he was my biggest hero and my best friend. I can only imagine how it overtook his mind. We went to chemotherapy twice a week. We would wait in the waiting room forever for him to get the blood test done, and then they would take us back where they would commence with the chemo. I would always bring him an electric blanket and sit with him. He was always so very cold in there. It was a miserable four years of going through chemo. His doctor suggested many times that he quit and live a more vibrant life, but no, my daddy was a warrior; he did not want to go. Don't get me wrong. He wasn't scared to go. He just didn't want to leave us, and I didn't want him to leave me. I've never seen anyone so strong, he never complained about his hurts or his aches. I never saw him cry, although I saw the look in his eyes when he was told, and it broke my heart. He passed away on January 28, 2024, at 10:30 in the morning. The day before he passed away, I was trying to understand what he was saying to me, but it was so garbled so I leaned in to put my ear towards his face where I could hear him better and maybe I could be able to understand; at this point he reached over and kissed me. He couldn't speak words to me, the only thing he could do was to kiss me and let me know that he loved me and that he was still in there. The time that I had with him was the best and saddest days in my life. There isn't a day I don't cry. There isn't a day that I don't miss him. Sometimes it feels like the world circles around me, and I'm standing still. Watching a person go through colon and liver cancer is unlike any other pain you will ever experience. To conclude this, I will just say that kiss meant love beyond measure more than a thousand words.

On Creation: Emily Dickinson's "I dwell in Possibility"

Dr. Ashok Karra

INTRODUCTION

Helen Vendler close-reads literature in the most enviable way. I do have doubts about the value of always extracting deeper meanings from each syllable or overreading between the lines. But then I remember why I wanted the skill of close-reading in the first place. Objects which I first saw as scribbles on a page or a patch of pretty colors changed into conversations I desperately needed. For example: I have found myself stumped about humankind being a "learning animal," a statement of Aristotle from the opening of the *Metaphysics*. It looks fairly direct, a statement we do not need to examine further. But then we have to consider that very few have earned the title "the master of them that know," as Aristotle did. Which leads me to wonder: does Aristotle, who also describes humankind as a "talking animal" and a "political animal," have reservations about our desire for knowledge?

Vendler's specialty is poetry. In her volume on Dickinson, she discusses *I dwell in Possibility* as devoted to exploring the differences between poetry and prose. I believe another interpretation may be useful. Perhaps a few love this lyric because they wonder about the limitations of prose. I suspect more people care because they would like to dwell in possibility. If you've been told your whole life what exactly counts as success, what you ought to be doing, and who you have to be, then dwelling in possibility appears a most attractive alternative. If this poem takes a detour into matters of form—*I dwell in Possibility – / A fairer House than Prose*—it does so because genuine expressions of identity are nothing less than poetry.

In what follows, I simply want to sketch out the impact of a few of Dickinson's choices. How does her poem speak to us today? How does it create a direct confrontation with who we are?

I dwell in Possibility (F 466)

Emily Dickinson

I dwell in Possibility –
A fairer House than Prose –
More numerous of Windows –
Superior – for Doors –

Of Chambers as the Cedars –
Impregnable of eye –
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky –

Of Visitors – the fairest –
For Occupation – This –
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise –

“A FAIRER HOUSE”

Dickinson’s phrase “A fairer House” both lends itself to and steers away from self-construction. On the one hand, we do try to make the places in which we reside reflect who we are. I do know some hostile to that notion. I have met jaw-droppingly abusive parents who wouldn’t let their kids decorate their rooms. I’ve also met people who always talk about decluttering or simplifying in an obsessive, unhealthy way. As if by throwing out stuff, they could erase their guilt or even those they felt guilty about. In either case, the presence of an individual is strongly felt, leading some in cruel directions. They want to erase expressions of identity or the things which remind them that other people live on this planet too.

On the other hand, what about our obsession with remodeling homes and selling them? Aren’t beautiful houses impersonal, a construction of anything but the self? Here we run a gamut of ironies. Truth be told, I don’t want to judge. I too watch HGTV and think certain fireplaces are a bit much. A “fairer House” does seem like a reasonable goal. But are there some using a “fairer House” to dodge anything of consequence? Our culture has tied relationships and family matters so strongly to home ownership that the physical home can blot out the work of love. A couple can’t be an aesthetic, no matter how much social media insists otherwise. In the end, you’ve got

to go to doctor's appointments, help each other get through school and work, and deal with family difficulties. None of that is easily understood as beautiful, no matter how nice the Thanksgiving dinner was.

Still, "[a] fairer House than Prose" asks us to be beautiful and well-made. Like a song we keep singing to ourselves, discovering new depth each time.

THE PROBLEM OF CHOICE

Dickinson allows her House to make no sense. It is possibility, after all. There are "numerous" Windows, letting you see so much. But then there are "Superior" Doors, keeping things firmly inside or outside. "Chambers" as "Cedars," "[i]mpregnable of eye" gives a flourish to this same theme. Enter one room and you will not see another. The outstanding questions: Is freedom located in possibility or choice? Can the two be reconciled? You want as many possibilities as you can have, but in order for them to be meaningful, you must make a choice. When that is done, many of the others—if not all—fall away. It feels for a moment like there are limits to possibility, but we are told of an "everlasting Roof," "The Gambrels of the Sky." Or, you could say, complete openness to the sky.

It's not just that you have to make a choice. It's that possibilities have to contradict to be possibilities. I bring up Plato a lot when writing about literature, but that's because the figure of crazy old Socrates as a "rational animal" often anticipates the concerns of later writers. In this case, there's a short Platonic dialogue, the "Lovers," where an interlocutor of Socrates wonders if a lover of wisdom is the second-best knower of everything. The best, of course, would be the person expertly practicing a craft. Is a philosopher an armchair quarterback for every activity conceivable? Are they "[m]ore numerous of Windows," open to the sky, but lacking doors and chambers?

The question of a "lover of wisdom," a philosopher, implies a choice has already been made. There is a moral commitment to knowledge which differentiates someone who truly wants to know from a hobbyist or dilettante. I suspect that as we construct our identities, we mirror the philosophic life. We make choices to build ourselves, and the poem's silence on the consequences which follow is notable. Dickinson prefers to talk about possibilities and openness. The moral commitment is real, the

consequences unspoken, and the situation always *fluid*. There are possibilities beyond the possibilities we see.

That's a literary answer. Does it suffice for us personally? You're more than likely reading this because you like to write or create things. Dickinson's rhetoric would be most useful if it could alleviate the anxieties involved. Some choices are humiliating and devastating and quite accidental. The more I do that's incredible, the more I have to let go. I've found big successes and big failures coincide more often than not. That's my own experience and a mild statement of the problem. A more significant anxiety: What happens when you cause people to tune you out?

“OF VISITORS — THE FAIREST”

“Visitors” in “Possibility” may be angels, the “fairest” beings there are. The gathering of “Paradise” Dickinson locates as her fundamental task prompts me to consider this. But for those who want to be seen or heard, what does it mean to posit supernatural beings as one's audience? This feels like dodging a very real fear. We create so we are taken seriously by other people. Needing holy ghosts to attend us may not relieve any problems and instead mock the optimism of the first line, the reason why anyone reads this poem.

I have to be real: it is much easier for me to produce with the appropriate employment. I do not have to explain to everyone and their mother why I am owed the most basic respect. I am asked questions which have to do with my field. People express trust in me and vouch for me. I can create and people will consider what I have to say. Creating was not easy when I was unemployed or in uncertain jobs. I am in awe of who I was not so long ago, when I was throwing in application after application and still blogging. I'm not sure where I learned to be so resilient, where I didn't doubt for a second that something important could be said about the human condition even if I was worried about the next paycheck.

I had credibility of a sort I hope I will always recognize in others. Often I think of credibility as emanating from social circumstances. Credibility in a higher sense, that is, not just frat boys mindlessly promoting their worst members to powerful positions in society. How is one credible? By reaching out to others, listening carefully, taking the time to explain their conclusions, demonstrating relevance to others, and appreciating the time, effort, and presence others give. “Adulthood” is fake except when it isn't.

There is a very real maturity independent of professionalism whereby someone knows they have grown. It's a maturity which art speaks to, *especially* art made for children.

It is hard to believe you have to be the angel to receive the angel. It makes no sense, especially in situations where you feel neglected or bullied. In my experience, I could not see what I was doing right in tough circumstances. Neither could those around me. Even the advice of "you need to change where you live" didn't seem right, because surely if things are going wrong, there must be something I can fix? Life doesn't work like that. It does not always let us dwell in possibility. Well-meaning people can be blind to how deep some wastelands are. You have to be an angel to understand what you have. To be committed to the motion and willing to announce it. *The spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise.*

Learning from *House*

Jeannie McCoy

The TV series *House* was created by David Shore. The medical drama series premiered on the Fox channel on November 16th, 2004. It ran for 8 Seasons. The main character is played by Hugh Laurie. It highlights the daily life of Dr. Gregory House and his medical team. He is a brilliant, sarcastic and cynical diagnostician. To myself, it is more than just a medical drama. I feel that Dr. Gregory House not only provides an enormous array of medical diagnostic puzzles throughout each episode, henceforth he also teaches valuable life lessons into a different kind of caring. During every show I always end up searching the internet to verify the medical facts. Therefore, not only can one gain wisdom in the medical world but also through the friendships that are built throughout each episode.

The show stands out because of its complicated characters. The main characters, of course, are Dr. Gregory House and his colleague and best friend Dr. James Wilson. The dynamics that these two friends share is the theme and importance of the show. They constantly challenge, forgive and disappoint each other. The four-person Diagnostic team really pulls it all together. This group of characters enables the audience to view the entire cast as a dysfunctional but loving family. As I watched episode after episode, I began to realize how their relationships were just a mirror of

many of my very own relationships. It also made me take a look back and ultimately see where I could have corrected many mistakes I had made in the past with my friends. All throughout the show I began to realize that friendship wasn't about perfection, it was about presence. When House tells Wilson "You're the only one who's never given up on me" (House, season 5 episode 24). This quote reminded me to constantly be steadfast and loyal in my friendships and to understand that just being present is such a big deal.

Another friendship that is important in this show is the romantic friendship with his boss Dr. Lisa Cuddy. They tend to drive each other crazy throughout the entire show. Tragically, her friendship was not very long-lived on the show compared to that of his team. Especially after he commenced to drive his car into her house while her family was eating dinner. After that show of insanity, she tells him "You're afraid to be happy because you think it's a sign of weakness" (House, season 6 episode 15) She constantly challenged him and forced him to confront his behavioral problems. That episode showed me how we, as adults, tend to push away those we love.

Beyond friendships, what was so important to me were the medical mysteries and how they were diagnosed. As I watched each episode, I began learning such a large array of medical terminology. This series shows how patients are used as guinea pigs to some doctors and how much effort goes into diagnosing what the problem is and finding a name for it. I found that after watching this show, I could put the knowledge into my own situation of caring for my father who was diagnosed with liver and colon cancer. Many of the options or plans that they put forth to some of the patients going through the same situations, I also used with my father. This form of extreme learning from television taught me how to walk into my father's doctor's office and be able to not only understand the doctor but comment and ask questions intellectually.

This series took me on a journey of logic versus emotion, medical ethics and human connection. Dr. House is constantly seeking the truth no matter what the consequence. House is famous for stating "Everyone lies" (House, season 1 episode 1). Within this show I found hope, joy, truth and knowledge. The ending of the series was the most brilliant, yet saddest episode in the series. His friendship with Wilson was in turmoil, due to Wilson being diagnosed with cancer. As a result, House was scared and ends up faking his own death for the opportunity to spend precious time the

friend who stood by him throughout every smart remark and wisecrack. Every episode left me with something to think about. It helped me make it through the hard days of cancer.

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My Answer

Antonio Guerrero

When your best trait growing up is being able to blend in—able to interact with every crowd—you lose a sense of who you are. There is no stake in the ground to come back to and remind you. There is only the perception from others, guiding your actions and personality to fit into their world. Forcing you to become a fake, dressed up version of yourself, to be well perceived. Never revealing your true self to anyone. Wearing a disguise like a spy, careful not to get your cover blown. I never saw how much I conformed, until a mentor asked the question “Who do you see when you look at your future self?” This is probably the hardest question I must answer. To answer the question of who I want my future self to be, I must first answer who I have been and how this shaped who I am today.

I heard a quote that hit my core. “I am a different person to many people. Annoying to one. Talented to another. Quite too few. Unknown to a lot.” Who am I to me? The answer always changes. At school, I am Antonio the student. To a friend I am Tony. To my pastor, I am a brother in Christ. But when it comes to the man in the mirror, “Who am I?”

For a while, I didn’t want to know the answer to “Who am I?” I didn’t want to do the hard thing and look at my past. I didn’t want to acknowledge the hurt, the loss, or the feeling of loneliness. Who wants to willingly share

that their mother, the person who is supposed to love you forever, left you behind to chase a high? Who wants to lie every time they are asked, “What brought you to Odessa?” Saying “my mother, chasing *her* dream.” Knowing that the dream was her next fix. Am I the little boy who cried and begged her to stop doing drugs at my birthday party? Having no support in the home, having to pick up the slack, and making sure my siblings didn’t see what she became, but ultimately failing. Being the parent figure to your brother, who is three years younger, creates a dynamic that isn’t natural. Shouting at him like I am his father, while never knowing what it’s like to have one. Nurturing newborns 14 and 15 years younger than you is a task I wish on no one. Changing diapers while studying for exams, parenting kids that are not even mine. Am I the child that missed out on my childhood? The thoughts and self-beratements on the couches of friends and strangers hit the hardest. Wondering where my place is in the world and asking, “why, of all people, why must *I* go through this? Why is there no one in my corner?” Am I really this worthless? I was abused, abandoned, and shattered. Lost, left questioning if I really mattered or if anyone would miss me if I were gone.

I remember in high school not caring about anything: the cycle was work, school, sleep. Sometimes I could sleep in class. I wonder if the teachers knew what was going on? Did I hide it well enough? Did I hold back the negative emotions, not to infect those happy-go-lucky people around me? My so-called friend invited me to church, and I went a couple of times. Only for him to get up on stage and brag about how he brought the person who was the most down on his luck and who “needed God the most.” Proclaiming that just because he brought me, my life would change for the better, while still wondering where I was going to sleep that night. Is this really who I am? A series of unfortunate events? Just a figure for people to see but never get to know? A placeholder in people’s lives until the next thing comes around? A background character full of pitiful stories to pull at your heartstrings so that you can know that you’re not numb to the world?

My past and my struggle are not the whole story. I am not just the boy who was broken, but also the man who survived. Yes, I’ve carried the weight of abandonment, the pain that comes with that. I am more than that. There’s a version of me—one that I get to choose—waiting to emerge from these shattered pieces. Someone I get to build out of hopelessness and hurt. I’ve spent years blending in, pushing people away, masking the parts

of myself that hurt the most. Hiding from the past because I don't want to feel the way I felt again. Yet, in all that hiding, I've forgotten that rebuilding doesn't mean erasing. It means taking what's left, every jagged edge, every painful memory, and forging something new from it, like a blacksmith.

Forging anew is not about pretending the hurt didn't happen or that the past isn't real. It's about accepting that I've survived it and deciding that it no longer gets to define me. It's about picking up the pieces, not to return to what I once was, but to create a version of myself who I needed when I was younger.

I see the past and the things I could not control. The things that I have done and the goals I have achieved. Working to pay the bills and to understand what *I* want to do in life. Seeing role models in friends' dads, bosses, mentors and wondering the kind of man I want to be. Understanding that I don't have all the answers but willing to find them. Being knocked down but still getting back up. If that is who I have been...who am I?

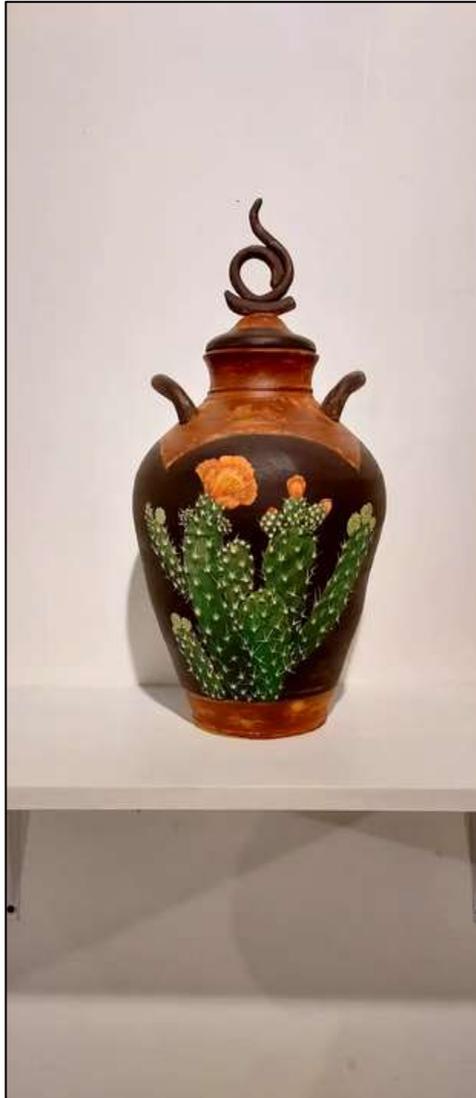
My name is Antonio Guerrero. I am the son of a drug addict, who never knew my father. I had to raise my siblings until they were given back to their fathers. I have had to fend for myself, depending on the generosity of others more than I would like. I have had to figure out a lot of things on my own. Despite the hardship, I am a first-generation high school graduate and first generation Honors college student. I am a hardworking, goal oriented, methodical man who wants to build a life of purpose, despite the adversity. I know where I want to be in life, and I want those around me to laugh and smile with me, along the way, while I am heading there.

When we ask ourselves "Who am I?", remember we are not our past. We can change our present. We get to find out who we are every day; every day we get to change the man in the mirror. It takes hard work and time, so be kind to yourself. I can't wait to see the person you are destined to be.



A Bug's Life
Mallory Sanchez

Poetry



Cholla
Danielle Collins
40

This is What It's Like to Chew Five Gum

Dylan Garcia

The joy of trying a new thing for the first time
The mystery of the black packaging
With a color swatch splashed onto the edge
The excitement evoked from the cool names
Cobalt, Rain, Flare
A sense of joy as you take a stick out
And admire the shiny wrapping

And then, when you pop the piece in your mouth
It's a strong mint flavor you taste
You're not sure what it is
But it feels different, more...full almost?

Then you get to school
You can feel proud as everyone asks you for a piece
For a day you feel popular, you feel wanted
Then you run out of pieces
You throw away the box and feel empty

Then, you buy more
The cycle repeats
You become known as "The 5 Gum guy"
People always ask you for a piece
You always oblige because it makes you feel good
Makes you feel wanted

Eventually though, you can't afford it anymore
No more gum in your pocket
Just emptiness
People still ask you for gum
You tell them you don't have any
They ask what you're good for then

You're left then with two feelings
The feeling of emptiness in your pockets
The feeling of emptiness in your heart

The Things I Never Say

Irlanda R.

Lying on the left side of the bed
Thinking all the weird stuff in my head
Wondering if there's another way
To put this weight out of my chest.

Reading, singing or screaming
Even when I feel like nobody listens
Sleeping, eating or talking
Just the way somebody recounts it.

Is there any other option?
Is there something special? (Is there any other chance?)
I think that yes
But it feels like maybe.

Don't have the answers
Don't have the emotion
Just the pain inside my heart
And the tears around my eyes.

Maybe, with some time
I can be myself again
Laughing all the time
(and) not crying every night.

I feel confused

I feel distracted
I find myself lost
On the thoughts I never talk about.

Not everything is bad
I am not completely alone
But, this whole and insane feeling
Is because I need a little bit more.

Lying on the left side of the bed
Thinking all the weird stuff in my head
Wondering if there's another way
To put this weight out of my chest.

Pieces

Alexa R.

Everyone fits so perfectly together
They all look so beautiful in their unofficial uniforms
Beautiful at least to themselves
Beautiful in a way I don't understand
I don't see what they do in this landscape
I'm not attracted by paper-like jeans
Or enamored by loud trucks that make eardrums burst
Neither do I have straight caramel hair that reaches my waist
With bedazzled nails to match

I am not one of them
I doubt I ever will be
I doubt I'll ever want to be
Yet it feels lonely to be different
Even when I am surrounded
By a crowd every day
In their faces, I see strangers

In this wide panorama of people
Where do I see myself?

I see myself as the missing piece
The one that connects these seemingly unrelated parts
A melting pot for people
I am where others find refuge
When they, too, feel lost as I did
No one can connect to a finished puzzle
So they come to me

They join me
Even if momentarily
And we create a full picture
I take their spare pieces
The ones no one else knows or cares for
I hold them dearly in my heart
For a moment, I am one with the rest

I will never be like them
Somehow, they still let me in
They find room for me
In their tight tables
In their busy nights
In their uniform society
This is where I belong

I am not meant to be one of them
Instead, my purpose is to be next to them
When they snap a picture of all of us
Maybe I'll still stand out
But at least I know in their hearts
Maybe I won't

Desert Poems

Dr. Anthony Buenning

1

I've returned to the desert.
Always a layer of dust the rain never washes,
Only the dirt and wet blended into a sticky mud.
I am a sticky mold of water and dirt.

2

Desert animals claw out of dry caves desperate for water.
The rain, then, is a celebration of life.
Too bad it's a celebration for both predator and prey.
Water is blood in the desert.

3

Deserts are lonely,
Desert life is patient and efficient,
But lonely nevertheless.
The small rodents may be bountiful,
But only because they know how much they will lose.
The coyote and bobcat thrive, knowing
That to link up with another may benefit for a time,
But responsibility over another can get them killed.
Prey survive through mathematics.
Predators survive through distance.
Which am I: predator or prey?
Neither. I lack desert-survival skills.

4

So much to see in the desert when I look up:

45

Sunrises and their blood-orange skies
Sunsets and their pink-purple clouds,
Stars and planets glittering the night,
And memories of us,
The version of us that found safety in the dark.

5

Love for the desert-born is like the rain.
Desert animals can drown in an arroyo if caught unaware.
Desert animals can die of thirst if trusting in a remembered stream.



Stone, Spines, and Sky
Mallory Sanchez

Breathe Again

April P.

I was a bride before I was grown,
a teen with a ring and a dream
That turned into four babies and a silence
so loud it shook my bones.

I smiled through the years,
learned how to walk on eggshells
without making a sound,
kept peace with a man
who made war in our home.

The bottle and the pills came first.
Then came the lies.
The bruises weren't always visible,
but the damage
it lived in my chest,
tight and quiet,
like I was holding my breath
for eighteen years.

I stayed, not because I was weak
but because I was fierce.
Because if I left,
Who would protect the kids
when I wasn't there?

So I stayed.
And I watched.
And I waited.
Until life cracked open.

He went away.
State prison.
And suddenly

I could BREATHE.

I didn't know how heavy he was
until he was gone.
Didn't know how much I carried,
Until my hands were free.

I dropped fifty pounds
and not just the kind you see.
I started working at an elementary school,
A place full of small voices
and second chances.
I went back to college.
I started laughing more.

Birthdays are fun again.
Family outings don't come with dread.
The kids,
they smile more now.
They cheer me on.

And still,
there's guilt that hums in quiet corners:
Why didn't I leave sooner:
Why did I wait so long?

But I remind myself
I did the best I could
With what I had.

And now,
I'm building something better.
For me.
For them.
For the version of myself
who forgot how to dream
But never stopped trying.



Frozen Pond
Christina R.

New Mom

Jordan Tarpley

“*New mom*” they say,
it is like a pin in my ear.

“*You are a mom now*” they mention casually,
my jaw clenches tight

While I may be new to the *whole* experience, I am not coming in to my role so green.

Being a full-time eldest daughter, with part-time parents, is a sure-fire way to gain a few maternal scout badges.

“Mature and Responsible”, I would glow with pride hearing these as a child, not truly understanding what they mean.

“Strength and Resilience”, the traits so many praise but those that maintain them grow weary

“Selflessness and Empathy”, highly revered but not so healthy when you are 7

“*You finally joined the club*” they exclaim,
I bite down on the edges of my tongue

“*This will be your first Mother’s Day*” they mutter,
I quietly hold my breath

My full evolution into motherhood was not sudden. It took a few tries. For you see, sometimes positives turn in to negatives.

But alas, I have surpassed the scout badges earned through my fast-tracked adolescence.

“*Congrats on becoming a mom!*” they shout,
A lump starts to swell in my throat

“*Oh, Jordan is a new mom*” they tell others in passing,
I feel my heart skip a beat

Though I am new to *this* journey of motherhood, I am not new to nurturing, I am not new to adapting, I am not new to sacrifice, and I am not new to unconditional love.

They mean no harm, I can’t hold it against them, but I doesn’t help the discomfort I feel when I am classified as a “new mom.”

The Little Star

Eliza A.

She is a star in the night sky
Surrounded by darkness
But she still shines like nothing has changed
She is the light in someone’s day
The person who keeps on smiling
She is a light that shines so bright that she doesn’t even know how bright she’s shining
She is the star that people wish on
The light people follow
Guiding them along their travels of the sea
Some stay on the path of the star
Others disappear giving up hope in the star
The star doesn’t fade, she doesn’t cower, she only shines brighter each night
Looking at the celestials and the moon, the cosmos and the universe
She is the brightest
All stars shine as they do

but she is the smallest in the dark hue
Though she is small she has the biggest heart
and this little star has just barely had her start
Those on this journey following this star will go through the sea of finding
who they are
Not knowing the unknown and the journey ahead
This little star will find her rest
She has been fighting long and hard for someone to catch her falling heart
The heart's been broken and mended many times
in fact it seems it may have grown in size
With proper care this stars heart will glow and seem just more than a prize
Even then broken the star will still shine
Remaining with hope that one day it will be her time

This But Also That

Chris Tarango

I am a fellow human being
But at times feel alienated among society
I far as I can tell, I exist on some level
Although I'm more so an NPC at times
I want to be alone like Garbo
But to not be plagued by loneliness itself

I have a mind that goes from zero to sixty
But I do keep returning to those that matter the most
I can be deep in thought about certain subjects
While other tasks vanish and then reappear like a nightmare
Others have the outlook of optimism on their side
And I navigate through the world of pessimism and melancholy

I am well aware of my surroundings
But are my surroundings aware of me?
I claim to be among the world before me

And then I ask myself “am I really among them?
I can have a full range of emotions
Yet i only show what I want others to see
I sense the world’s troubles and pain
But some only care for the mundane like coffee and fame

I would enjoy the true sense of happiness
Then again “what is the definition of true happiness?
I wish to tell others “I Have, I did and I done this”
But I am haunted by “I could’ve, would’ve and should’ve done that”
I embrace those who are authentic and true themself
As I am writing this, I still wonder who I am myself.

I want to share and accept a love with another
But I must first learn to love and care for myself.
I appear to struggle from the inside as well as out
But I am doing the best I can
From my work I appear to be melancholic and pessimistic
Yet It’s the microscopic ounce of hope that keeps me going
I end this piece with I am this
But also I am that

What Am I Worried About?

Abisue R.

What am I worried about?
I used to ask myself every day
Why were you so afraid?
I was looking for an answer.

Everything happen in my head
I don’t know why I felt so confused
I just wanted to know what was happening to me, in my head.

What am I worried about?
Somebody told me once
“You are better than that”
But their words only made me question more.

Was exhausting
Carrying all those thoughts,
Worried about looking perfect
Worried to see those faces
Worried about what they will say.

But I forgot, that I’m a person
That i could feel all those feelings
that it took me a while to realize
That the imperfection is alright.

What am I worried about?
If everyone makes mistakes,
If everyone stumbles sometimes,
Isn’t that how we grow?

Think for a moment
Mistakes don’t define you,
They shape you.

Breathe in, stand tall,
you’ve got this.

Where the Moon Found Me

E. St. Claire

I drove until the road forgot my name.
Until cell towers gave up and time loosened its grip.
Until the desert rose like a memory I’d never lived,

and the sky above Terlingua cracked open
like a wound that never healed.

No one told me the stars could hum.
Could call.
Could drag the truth out of you
without speaking a word.

I didn't come here for salvation.
I came because something in me was *howling*.
Because I couldn't breathe where the world kept trying to make me small.
Because the ache in my chest wasn't grief, it was recognition.

And under those unblinking stars,
the moon rose like a god I remembered from another life.
Not the gentle kind.
No.

She was savage and ancient,
a mirror to everything I was told to hide.
my rage, my longing,
my wildness.
She didn't ask me to kneel.
She *dared* me to stand.

And so, I did.
I stood barefoot in the dust,
chest cracked wide,
eyes full of salt and starlight.
And I remembered.

I am Moon blooded.
Born of shadow and stars.
Daughter of witches and wanderers.
Named by storms, not men.
Called not to obey, but to burn.

They tried to civilize me.
Tried to fold me into something soft,
something silent.

But the desert does not reward the obedient.
It feeds the ones who break.
The ones who bleed without hiding it.
The ones who come lost
and don't apologize for the sound.

In Terlingua, the stars did not comfort me.
They stripped me bare.
And by doing so, I was *known*.

The wind tasted my name
like it had been waiting to speak it again.
And the moon...
The terrible, beautiful moon...
she reached down and touched my face
and said:
“Welcome home, my child.”

The Multitude

Dr. Anthony Buenning

The internal editor that sits
at a comfortable, safe distance
examines my work.

Today, his attacks are fortified
by those mercenary soldiers,
Depression and Anxiety.

And so, I can only write this.

A single bullet against an army.

Today, I may only have a single bullet.
Tomorrow, I'll have another.
Hordes are created when one joins another,
until, word by word, I have an army of my own.

New Beginnings

Valeria G.

April 7, 2025

To new beginnings,
A moment in time where we have an opening to try and start anew
Every soul has dealt with yearning for a chance to redeem themselves
What better way than to start in the Spring,
How angelic it is when we see the leaves bloom and everything starts to
look rich again.
I for one am looking for a new journey.
Something that sparks my dimmed fire.
I try my best to not be a victim to my sadness and the worries of my life
but,
I ended up going into a pit of darkness that I let myself flow into.
Not having the discipline to keep going and take charge.
Days I spent crying and feeling useless, looking at myself and wondering
why...
Why can't I just get up and keep going? Why do I have to sit in my self-
pity?
As I look at the oak leaves sprout, I find myself admiring the feeling of
change;
Wanting to feel the exact same in my life.
How do plants feel when they try to wiggle their leaves out or
when a corn snake starts to feel their skin detach from their body.
As I finally caught the perfect timing to change, I will take that leap.

I will finally pick myself up and run towards the vision I want.
So let's have a toast... To new beginnings!

Remains

Dr. Dan Donovan Abella

“Drink and be whole beyond confusion,”
Robert Frost says, of a simple time
Of woods and brooks and playhouse things.

But a time past cannot be recovered,
(Nor confusion stayed), only felt—
The impression on a sofa,
The curls of smoke loosed from ash,
A broken cornice of a faded square.

They walked there once, I think,
“My people”—but whose are these faces
Detached part from part? An eye,
A smile, a hope? I know their touch
But not the hand. And when the shoot
Is cut from the branch, can the trunk
Claim its leaf?

All this to say: we are an ever present
Whose clothes and shoes are and will be
Friends of the moth. There are no
Playhouses—no spirits who see us.
But did they know that the silence of nature
Would be pregnant with their murmurs?



At the Center of the Universe
Mallory Sanchez

The Thing in the Mirror

E. St. Claire

I walk like I belong,
but I don't.
Not to this place,
not to this time,
not to the name stitched on my skin.
People speak to me
as if I am whole,
as if I don't hear the static behind their voices,
as if I don't feel the world slipping through me
like smoke through broken glass.
I smile.
It cracks.
I nod.
It echoes.
Inside, something older paces.
A creature made of silence,
raised on forgetting.
It remembers things I shouldn't know,
a language no one speaks,
a grief that doesn't wear a face.
There's a mirror in my chest
and I don't recognize what's inside it.
The reflection doesn't blink.
It watches.
It waits.
And maybe that's what I am now,
not haunted,
but haunting.
Not lost.
Just misplaced.

Elegy

Dr. Ashok Karra

You're growling at the television,
doing a complicated dance in your mind.
look, it's a beautiful living room --
right out of the magazine,
shades of brown that go well with light,
even the sun itself. you've got everything,
and you're blaming the people on tv.
they never knew anything, but you agreed with them,
and now they know less.
you don't know where you are. i imagine
this is the afterlife, thoughts abandoned by reality,
ideas a jumble of words, no sense of sense where we are.
Socrates said there was a realm where red was really red,
and who is to point to anything red any more?
but this story is a bit different. some got divorced with fury
over their feeds, tongues tied to anchor's words.
you're not them. you died but never died to life.
there were books, outpourings of words, where meanings
built churches and castles and bridges and let
the space between fill with the wealth of gardens.
Orchids and lilies and dandelions and all kinds of
pinks and oranges with a light their own.
a light other than the continual blue of the screen,
informing us as citizens we are present.

Where the Stars Do Not Shine

E. St. Claire

I'm a broken thing,
stitched together with silence,
held in place by the weight of words I never said.

There was a time I burned,
not like fire.
But like the echo of it,
the smoke after the blaze has taken everything worth saving.

I live where the stars do not shine,
In the forgotten spaces between memory and marrow,
where grief sits like an altar
and every breath is a prayer for something that never came back.

You wouldn't know it to look at me,
but there's a cemetery behind my eyes,
names carved into the backs of my thoughts,
dates I never speak out loud.

He was one of them.
A name.
A moment.
A promise I kept long after the world stopped asking me to.

And still,
I wake.
I move.
I wear this skin like armor.

But if you press your ear to my chest,
you won't hear a heartbeat.
You'll hear the ocean.

You'll hear the storm.
You'll hear the place where I buried him.

And maybe,
just maybe,
you'll understand
why I stopped looking up at the stars...

Playgrounds

Dr. Anthony Buenning

Playgrounds are pockets of gravity.
Adults and kids cross the event horizon into time's collapse.
Shaking hands, past and future coexist in moments.
Though unaware of gravity's hammer and chisel,
The kids bend and break in becoming.
And time folds forward.
There's the future frat kid, all unrestrained excitement,
Wielding a bag of chips and a large soda as a shield,
Practicing for future parties,
Practicing for future pain.
Over there are the best friends built in a glance.
Best friends who will be lost to the sound of crunching gravel.
And time folds backward.
Old adult wounds rip observing the new:
Friends lost by chance, but forever chained to that moment,
Resurrected as gravity's waves crash into them.
Still, in addition to the waves, knives, shards, hammers, and chisels,
Time's playground carries a needle and thread, too,
Like the best adults, ever ready to mend time's lacerations,
Ever ready to guide the gash onto its journey toward a scar.

Alexia

Valeria G.

April 11, 2025

Since your passing, life has been on the move.

New events in my life have occurred and I have changed in ways that you can't be here for.

I think about you and begin to weep, wishing you were still here.

I desperately wanted to get to know you more.

I took for granted the time I had with you and wish I didn't isolate myself like I usually do.

As sad as it sounds, you have already fulfilled your purpose on earth, whatever it was

I know that you made a big impact in my life.

When I feel myself getting shy or timid, I think of you pushing me to take charge.

You were such a high vibration, your energy shook the atmosphere.

The day I found out, I instantly felt my body go still and my brain trying to convince me that this wasn't real.

You didn't deserve to die because you finally had the courage to speak up, God forbid a girl getting her justice for being sexually molested for years... #fuckbrad

You didn't deserve the life you had but I pray you are now, somewhere your energy is dancing and glowing brighter than when you were on earth.



Pecos River Bridge
Sylvia Medrano

Fiction

World of Obsidian

Lucas R.

Elijah, a sixteen-year-old in tenth grade, was a troublemaker. He broke the rules all the time. He usually got caught, and his parents were outraged when the police brought him home after catching him trying to commit grand theft auto. He never liked the rules. They seemed like boundaries people put in the way of themselves. They seemed to have no purpose.

Just like he seemed to have no purpose. At least, that's what he thought. He didn't get work done on time for school. He never got any chores done at home.

He liked to sneak out a lot. He'd see friends, he'd take food from stores, and he'd even take cars.

One night, Elijah went for a walk. He saw a group of people gathered around a woman who looked terrified. "Hey!" He hollered. "Leave her alone!" The group of people turned to him. They were all pretty muscular. "What are you gonna do if we don't?" "I have zero clue," Elijah responded. One of the biggest guys pulled out a gun. "Now, wait a minute," Elijah said, backing up slowly. "You don't need to take that out." Elijah tripped backward off the curb. He heard honking, the screeching of tires. He looked right and saw a car hurtling towards him.

Flashes of images. An ambulance. His parents are leaning over him. A doctor. Noises. Sirens. Honking. Chatter. Crying. Then, he heard nothing at all. He saw nothing. It was eerie. *Hit by an ambulance, he thought. The chances.*

He woke up. He was in his bed. Not a hospital bed, his bed. His room. He got up, looked around, and saw nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing but a piece of paper on his door. He got up, walked towards the paper, and read it.

Dear Elijah,

I hope this finds you well. I know what Pan did. He gave you a second chance. He gave you time. I'm about to take that away.

It's unfortunate, though. You can find me at the Last Place. I'm here with your parents. You better get here soon, or it's their lives. You have three days. Three is a lucky number. Hopefully, it's on your side. Good luck.

-Minos

"Minos," Elijah said, "Huh. That's the best thing my parents could've done to try to trick me? I guess I got the house to myself."

He heard a crash. Someone running up the stairs. His bedroom door burst open to reveal a man. A man who was solid black but gleamed purple. He approached Elijah, then punched him in the gut. Elijah was flung backward, barely keeping himself from vomiting. He got up and looked at the man. He no longer had two hands. Instead, one of his arms was replaced by a blade. A solid black blade. Elijah stumbled back, closing his eyes in terror. He heard a whoosh, then something fell to the floor. He was lifted off the ground by someone who looked to be his age. Elijah was pulled down the stairs and out in his front yard before he yanked free of his savior's? Kidnapper's? He didn't know. He yanked free of their grip, and they turned towards him.

"Who are you?" Elijah asked, "What was that? Did my parents hire you? Are you a hitman?"

"I'm going to stop you there," the "new guy" said. "That letter you got was from Minos, the son of my mother, I think my mother. I'm not sure. Anyways, we share a parent, making him my brother, which is something I still find weird, and I'm here because I sensed, well, more like my sword sensed, a magical presence here."

"Okay," Elijah said, still clueless. "You still didn't tell me who you are."

"My bad. My name's Jason."

"Okay, now can you please tell me what you're doing here?"

"I already told you, I came to find..." Jason paused. He looked around, walked towards the tree in Elijah's front yard, took out a wooden sword, and stabbed the tree. Something in the branches shook, a golden object gleamed, then started falling.

"Watch out!" Elijah yelled. He dived towards Jason, barely saving him from whatever was falling towards him.

“Thanks, but you better pick that up,” Jason said. “You’re going to need a weapon.”

Elijah looked. There was a golden sword on the ground. He cautiously approached it, picked it up, and nearly got blinded as it started glowing.

“Why doesn’t my sword glow?” Jason asked.

“Okay, look,” Elijah said, “I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know why you’re here, and I don’t know what’s going on.”

“You already said that,” Jason interrupted.

“All I know,” Elijah continued, “Is that a note was left on my door, and then a thing came and tried to kill me. Then you saved me, stabbed my tree, and a golden sword came out. What’s going on?”

“Listen,” Jason said, and he told Elijah his story. From the world turning to sand to him busting into Elijah’s house.

“Now, any questions?” Jason asked. Elijah shook his head.

“Okay, where did the letter say your parents were?”

“I never told you my parents were gone,” Elijah said.

“I kind of saw the part where it said, ‘You better get here soon, or it’s their lives. ‘“

“Oh. Well, it said ‘Last Place’. Wherever that is.”

“I know exactly where that is. It’s where I fought Minos the first time. Well, in a different dimension, but the same place in that dimension.”

“Oh.”

“Comeon.”

And they left. They walked and walked and walked. Passing stores, houses, schools.

“Why can’t we, like, take a cab?” Elijah asked.

“Because of that,” Jason responded, pointing towards something.

Elijah looked and saw an entire city block replaced by obsidian. He blinked, and then everything was made of obsidian.

“Wha... How?” Elijah asked, bewildered.

“What you saw was an illusion. You haven’t been home in a while.”

Elijah stayed silent. They walked for what seemed like hours before stopping.

“Finally,” Elijah said, “A break.”

“Nope,” Jason said, “A battle. Arbor!”

A sprout broke through the obsidian ground, quickly growing until it was a full-sized tree, around 25 feet tall. The trunk split open, and out came a tree guy. He was a tree but moving like a person.

“Hi, Jason,” it said, “Who’s your new friend?”

“Elijah, this is Arbor,” Jason said. “Arbor, Elijah. Now, I need you to protect Elijah while I take care of—”

He was interrupted by a thunderous crack. A huge, bulky obsidian guy was crawling out of the ground. He was forty-five feet tall and twenty-five feet wide.

“Wow,” Elijah said, “You can take care of this one.”

“Elijah,” it said in a raspy voice, “You’ll never find your parents in time.”

Then it left. It simply walked past them and left.

“Weird,” Arbor said.

“Yeah, strange,” Jason said.

“Peculiar,” Elijah said.

Arbor and Jason turned towards him.

“What?” he asked. “I thought we were blurting out synonyms for ‘weird.’ “

They continued to walk, seeing many more obsidian giants, but none of them attacked. They got to a place surrounded by obsidian spikes. They approached what looked to be the front gates. Then, Arbor was bombarded with obsidian spikes.

“REALLY, MINOS?” Jason yelled, “THAT’S THE SECOND TIME YOU KILLED HIM!”

“He should’ve stayed dead the first time,” a voice said from behind them, chuckling. They turned and saw another person who looked to be around sixteen.

“Minos,” Jason said.

“Yes, me,” Minos responded. “Hello, Elijah.”

“Hi?” Elijah responded.

“Leave his family alone,” Jason said.

“You still have five minutes to rescue them,” Minos responded nonchalantly.

“They’re about to be dropped to the center of this world.”

“You can’t fool me again,” Jason said. “I know this isn’t Earth.”

“This isn’t Earth?” Elijah asked.

“Who said it was?” Minos said, looking at his watch. “Four minutes.”

“Come on,” Elijah said, “I need to save my family.”

“Let’s go,” Arbor said.

“Before you do,” Minos interrupted, “I’d be careful of my pets.”

They ignored him and ran inside. The obsidian structure was a maze. There were too many twists and turns. They turned what seemed to be the millionth corner, and Elijah gasped. His parents were tied up, dangling above a giant hole, unconscious.

Behind them was a throne, occupied by someone who looked like they could be the world’s best Center in all of football.

“Hades?” Jason asked, puzzled.

“Hello, Jason,” Hades said. “Or shall I say, son.”

“You’re my father?” Jason asked.

“Yes, and I expected you to join Minos, but instead, you went against him, dying, coming back to life, and nearly destroying all of Sasdonatru.”

“Sas-er-done-a-true?” Elijah asked.

“Shut up!” Hades, Jason, Arbor, and the booming voice of Minos said.

“One minute!” Minos said, appearing at Hades’s side.

Elijah ran towards his parents but skidded to a stop when an obsidian giant jumped from the hole.

“I am not in the mood right now, dude,” Elijah told the giant. “So please get out of my way.”

“Ten seconds!” Minos said, a look of victory on his face.

Elijah charged toward the giant. The giant stepped back, surprised, and Elijah slid through his legs. The rope tying his parents snapped, and they fell. Elijah leaped with incredible power across the hole, grabbing the rope as he went.

“I got you!” he yelled to his parents.

He struggled to hold on to the rope but slowly started pulling him up. The giant, whom Elijah had forgotten about, reached out and cut the rope.

“NO!” Elijah yelled.

There was nothing he could do as he watched his parents fall down the hole, into the nothingness below. Elijah dropped to his knees. Tears streamed down his face. His body began to glow.

“Elijah,” Jason said, “What are you doing?”

Elijah ignored him, filled with a sudden anger. He stood up, turning to face Minos and Hades.

“I’m going to KILL YOU!” Elijah said, a determined fierceness in his voice.

“NO!” Jason yelled, “You can’t kill a god without the consequences of no rule over their domain!”

Elijah didn’t care; he was already glowing with maniac power. Jason fumbled around in his jacket pocket, pulling out a leaf. The leaf, as Arbor created a shell around him. He whispered a name right before the room exploded with light.

Elijah couldn’t see anything. He couldn’t feel anything. The light slowly faded.

Hades’s crown was sitting on the ground. Minos was still standing. The shell around Jason disappeared. Arbor was nowhere in sight.

“How?” Minos said, at a loss for words.

“I couldn’t let you die, brother,” Jason said.

“You saved him?” Elijah said, dumbstruck.

“Yes,” Jason said, walking to join his side.

“He has been sending me dreams,” Jason said, “Visions of what the future under his rule will look like. It’s amazing.”

“HE JUST KILLED MY PARENTS!” Elijah yelled, furious.

“I know, and that was a necessary thing to do.” Jason said. “Without that, you wouldn’t have been able to discover your power or your real father.”

Elijah looked like he just discovered that dinosaurs weren’t alive anymore. On Earth, at least.

“My real father?” he asked.

“He should be showing up soon,” Minos said. “Goodbye, Elijah.”

Minos and Jason disappeared right before the sky started glowing. A humanoid figure appeared in front of Elijah.

“Hello, Elijah,” they said. “I am Apollo, god of music, the sun, and other stuff that I don’t feel like talking about right now. I am your father.”

“You know,” Elijah said, “I have been bombarded with information, killed a god, and watched my real parents fall into a giant hole. I’m probably losing my mind.”

“You have a lot more ahead of you,” Apollo said, “But before you go off to win the war for the World of Creation, you need to visit someone.”

“Who?” Elijah asked.

“Jason’s parents.”



Rainy Day
Sylvia Medrano

Identity Theft

Lucas R.

He was a lonely kid. He walked around town, not knowing where he was going but, knowing all the same. His friend had died a year prior, doing exactly what he was about to do.

When he got to the interstate, he stopped. He looked left. Looked right. Then said, “Let’s get going.”

He took the first step. A car honked at him, rushing past right in front of him.

He got to the second lane. A car sped past behind him.

He got to the third lane. He was nearly hit.

He reached the middle turn lane. He heard police sirens in the distance.

He got to the fifth lane. He saw the police car about two blocks away.

He got to the sixth lane. He was almost there.

He stepped on the final lane. Everything went black.

Flashes of images. An ambulance. His parents. A doctor. A mask going over his face.

He woke up in a hospital bed. It was early in the morning. He turned his head right to face the clock on the wall. 7:39 a.m. He turned his head left and saw a woman, asleep. He didn't recognize her. He got up, noticing his entire body was in pain. He got halfway to the door before he fell, yelping. The woman woke up, looking around. She looked at him, and said, "Hey, are you okay? How are you feeling?"

He put both hands on his head, screaming. All he felt was pain. His head felt like it would explode. He closed his eyes and saw the woman from the hospital room. She was bringing pizza to him and another kid. He didn't recognize the kid. She put the pizza box on the table, and said, "Don't let Nathan take all the pizza, Carlos."

He opened his eyes and he was back in the hospital bed. "Hey. How are you feeling?" It suddenly clicked in his head. That woman was his mother, Amanda. His name was Carlos.

A man walked in. He looked in the room, glancing at Carlos' mother before setting his eyes on him. "What were you thinking? Why would you do that? After Nathan died?"

His head started burning again. He closed his eyes. He saw an interstate. The interstate.

Nathan was there. In the middle of the road. "Come on, man." "Don't worry I'll be fine." One second, he was there, and the next, gone. Replaced by a car. An elderly woman got out, pulling out her phone.

He opened my eyes again, and was yet again in the hospital bed. He turned right. His mother was there. "Who am I?" "What?" She looked shocked. "Who am I? Who's Nathan? Who was that man?" His mother stared at him, blankly.

A doctor came into the room. "I'm sorry to report, but your son has a special case of amnesia." "What?" Carlos cut in, "Well, no shit."

Both the doctor and Carlos' mother looked at him. "What? She's a friend of mine."

The doctor gestured for his mother to go out of the room so they could talk. They left, and Carlos sat up. He looked out the window. He got up and moved toward the window, opening it. He climbed out so that he would be sitting on the windowsill, looking out at a city. He thought it was a gorgeous city. He heard a shriek. He didn't bother to look back or resist as he was pulled back into the room. He was placed on the hospital bed, and he fell asleep instantly.

Three years later....

Carlos sat in school. He watched the second hand on the clock. Thirty-two more seconds and he could leave. He really wanted to leave. He had to get ready for his date.

Twenty-eight more seconds. Time seemed to go by slowly. He hoped he didn't have another flashback. His flashbacks told him more about who he was before he got hit. He didn't remember it. He just knew it. Sixteen more seconds. Sixteen.

Sixteen.

He was taken by force to another flashback. A flashback that even he doesn't understand.

...

He woke up in a hospital bed. He looked left. He saw a clock. He didn't bother reading it.

He looked right. He saw Lillian. His girlfriend. "Hey," he said. "Hey." "Did I miss our date." "Yeah, but don't worry. The corn was great company." Lillian was always bad with jokes. Carlos looked at the ceiling. He'd been pondering the same question for three years. "Do you ever wonder who you really are?" "What?" "Do you ever wonder who you really are? What your identity is?"

"No, why?" "After i got hit three years ago, I've been confused about who I really am." "You're my amazing boyfriend, and you're an amazing person. Seriously, don't worry about it."

A doctor walked in. “You’re free to go.” He sat up, grabbed his folded clothes from the foot of the bed, and walked towards the bathroom to change. He didn’t expect this one. Another flashback. This one revealing more about himself than any other one before.

...

He woke in the hospital bed. He stared at the ceiling. He knew who he was. What he was. “I’m a felon.” “What?” His girlfriend asked. “I’m a felon. I killed him.” “Killed who?” He looked at her. He was afraid. Of himself. Of his answer. “I killed Nathan.”

The doctor gasped, standing in the doorway. She ran out. Lillian looked at Carlos. She was shocked, scared. “I walked with him on that interstate. I pushed him. I had been on the run for years. Then I finally tried to end it. I only delayed the timer.”

Lillian looked concerned. A cop walked in. “We had hoped you wouldn’t remember what you did.” “Me, too.” The cop cuffed him, and took him to a holding cell. When he went to court, he pled guilty. He wasn’t sent to prison. He was sent back to the hospital. Not a medical emergency hospital. A mental emergency hospital. He was insane. He was a murderer. He wasn’t “him” anymore. He had no identity. No one came to visit. He never left. He never got out. He rotted away.

Carlos woke. He was in a hospital bed. He looked left. He saw a clock. It read 7:58 p.m.

He looked right. In a chair sat Lillian. His best friend. “What happened?” “You were hit by a car.”

“How?” “You were crossing the road with Nathan, and a stupid car hit you.” “I had a crazy dream.” “Before you tell me, I should probably tell you something.” “It can wait. I need to talk about my dream. That dream honestly made me question my identity.” “Nathan was also hit.”

“Is... Is he okay?”

...

“He’s dead.”

About the Contributors

Daiken Asakawa teaches art at Odessa College. He had this to say about his submission: “How do you deal with colors when you can’t see them? Sticky note labels! Sticky notes that don’t even stick to the clay and people switch them around regularly as a joke... Or my attention span!!”

Mallory Sanchez is a librarian at the Odessa College LRC. She loves to take photos of interesting shapes, colors, and textures in nature. She can often be found strolling around looking at plants and bugs.

Brance Davis is an Assistant Professor of English at Odessa College, where he mostly teaches Composition I, Composition II, and Technical & Business Writing. Brance believes writing is great way to exercise the demons, which is why he enjoys writing horror fiction and personal essays, though he’s not sure which one is scarier. His story “This Little Piggy” is currently being adapted into a short film. When he’s not grading essays or procrastinating, he’s likely watching *Jurassic Park* with his wife, Gabby, and 3-year-old daughter, Evelyn, whose favorite part of the movie is when the T-Rex eats the lawyer off of the toilet.

Jeannie McCoy is an Odessa College student.

Barry Phillips, III, a.k.a. Barry Phillips the Younger, has been a member of the Odessa College art faculty for over 35 years. He is also a former member of the board of directors for the Texas Association of Schools of Art (TASA). Professor Phillips holds a Bachelor’s degree in Philosophy from Texas Tech University and a Master’s degree in Fine Art from Texas A&M - Commerce. His studio work has been exhibited in over 100 shows nationwide. He is the past recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Regional Fellowship in Drawing and Printmaking as well as a Kimbrough Award from the Dallas Museum of Art. In 2012, he was named Community Statesman for the Arts by the Heritage of Odessa Foundation.

Rachel N. is a 2025 Odessa College Entrepreneurship graduate, and former Bible school student. She has enjoyed learning about horticulture through

Odessa College's Horticultural science class and plans to implement this experience through growing her own gardens.

William Bess is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Odessa College. He also serves as the Lead Advisor for the Eta Tau Chapter of PTK and as an Advisor to the Texas Region of PTK.

Sylvia Medrano writes under the pen name **E. St. Claire**. She is drawn to nature and its raw beauty, the silence of mountains, the truth in deserts, the way stars speak without words. She has Mexican roots and a free-spirited soul. She belongs nowhere and everywhere, shaped by movement, memory, and longing. Writing became her way of making sense of it all, holding on to the sacred, the broken, and the becoming. She doesn't chase perfection. She chases honesty. Most of what she writes is emotional, sometimes dark, sometimes healing. A little myth, a little reality, but always soul deep. Currently living in Odessa in the flesh but wandering the infinite in dreams, she balances academic life with raising children, tutoring, and writing stories shaped by fire, moonlight, and longing. She draws inspiration from the raw places, both internal and external, where truth hides in silence and survival becomes its own kind of poetry.

Dr. Ashok Karra teaches Government at Odessa College. Feel free to sign up for his Introduction to Philosophy course. His newsletter can be found at <http://encouragement.ghost.io>.

Antonio Guerrero is a student at Odessa College, where he serves as President of the Sigma Kappa Delta chapter and is a member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. With a deep interest in history, law, and storytelling, his academic journey is rooted in a passion for justice and a commitment to growth through education and creative expression. Antonio plans to continue his studies with the goal of becoming an attorney, while using writing as a tool for reflection, connection, and advocacy.

Danielle Collins is a mixed-media artist originally from Louisiana. She has lived in Odessa since 2009. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Art with a minor in Music, as well as an Associate's degree in Small Business Management. Currently, she serves as the Assistant Director of Fab Lab

Permian Basin, and she has been working as an artist for eleven years. She likes to depict elements from nature and space in her art, using any medium necessary to bring her vision to life and create unique pieces that captivate viewers. In her free time, she appreciates pop-up art shows, assists with West Texas Empty Bowls, and dedicates herself to giving back to her community.

Dylan Garcia is a poet who started out doing slam poetry. He is now working towards putting together his first poetry collection. Outside of poetry he also cohosts a wrestling podcast called *Wrestling in the Middle*.

Irlanda R. is an Odessa College student.

Alexa R. is an artist in every way, when she writes poetry, paints, and dances. Her inspiration comes from great artists like Frida Kahlo, Sandra Cisneros, and Michael Jackson. In her various artistic disciplines, she strives to be as raw and real as possible. She expresses herself honestly in everything she does, and she hopes that people who experience her art will find confidence to express themselves freely as well. Additionally, she is currently a paralegal student, and hopes that with her knowledge, she'll be able to make an impact on the world. She is proud to be a young Latina woman and to share her poetry with the world in hopes that other people will find comfort in her words.

Born and raised in Odessa, **Dr. Anthony Buening** was reading and writing even before he knew how to decipher the black marks on pages. As a toddler, he remembers turning pages and scratching marks on to paper with intensity. He took that intensity and propelled himself into earning a PhD in English and becoming a Professor of English at OC. Anthony's favorite writers include Virginia Woolf, Adam Silvera, Toni Morrison, and James Baldwin. He will gladly infodump on movies and Shakespeare at the slightest provocation. Anthony's writing can be varied depending on his mood, which changes daily, sometimes hourly, often by the minute. He primarily writes in prose, yet sometimes he drops a poem or two.

April P., or Parker, as she prefers to be called, is a mom of four, back in college and juggling life like a pro (or at least pretending to). Teaching is

her next big adventure, and she is excited to help kids discover what they are capable of, while trying not to trip over her own two feet in the process. When she is not in class or chasing her kids around, she is either buried in a fantasy novel or sneaking a moment of peace (if that ever happens). Life's messy, but she is figuring it out, one laugh and one chaos-filled day at a time.

Christina R. is an Odessa College student and lifelong Odessa resident.

Jordan Tarpley is an Odessa native, Odessa College alumna, and fellow creative human. She tends to be socially awkward, so she typically keeps to herself, but she still considers herself a friend to many. She enjoys spending time with her family, surrounding herself with good people, laughing and making people smile. Like many of us, she is just trying to make her way through this crazy world and keep her sanity while she is at it. To her, art is a big part of what makes life worth living so she likes to surround herself with it whenever she gets the chance.

Eliza A. is an Odessa College student.

Chris Tarango is a current student who is graduating in the spring of 2025 with an Associate's Degree in English and then pursuing his Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Texas El Paso with plans to obtain his MFA in Creative Writing in the future. He believes that stories matter whether they are fiction or nonfiction, as they can tell a lot about a single person or even an entire culture. As the current world is trying its best to silence many voices, it's more important now to share one's story with others to make the world a better place and to leave a vital piece in the puzzle we call society.

Abisue R. is a student at Odessa College.

Valeria G. has recently started to get more into poetry and writing. She wrote two poems in SKD's recent writing workshops and presented them on Poetry and Storytelling Night. The first, she wrote about the theme, which was Spring, new beginnings, and sprouts. She wanted to express the feeling of Spring in her own life. She has been going through hard, life-

changing situations that made her feel like she took a few steps back in trying to balance her equilibrium. If she's being honest, writing this poem made her have the mindset of changing her perspective. She decided that this will be her moment of change! Her second poem is about her friend Alexia, who passed away three years ago. She will never understand what Alexia did to deserve the life she had. She never acted like she was struggling and made sure everyone was smiling in her presence. She had so much energy, she was hardly afraid to walk up to someone and talk to them. They were the exact opposite and she inspired Valeria in so many ways. Alexia was sexually abused by her stepfather Brad since she was ten years old. At sixteen, she was talking about it with a friend—about how she was tired of being in constant paranoia at home. Angelina told Alexia to tell her mom and that it was time. After telling her mom, she kicked out Brad and took him to court. Everything was perfect... Alexia had her first boyfriend, was able to go out with her friends, her relationship with her mom was going better than ever, and she was finally at peace... Until May 8th, 2022. Alexia and her cousin Mario went to Party City to grab Decorations for Mother's Day. As they walked out of the store, Brad was waiting outside in his car ready to shoot them. He killed her and her cousin then killed himself right after. Valeria doesn't have the words to express the tragedy of what happened to Alexia and Mario. She still grieves about her and thinks about her every so often. Life has gotten busy, but she always has a moment to question what Alexia would do if she were still here.

Dr. Dan Donovan Abella is a professor of English at Odessa College. His scholarly work focuses on literary modernism and Anglophone Philippine literature.

Lucas R., a 10th grade student and Odessa Collegiate Academy, is a creative writer working on finishing his first book, *War for Old America*. He has written 35 songs but has yet to perform them. He has a great passion for writing, and it has been a great outlet for him. He loves writing and enjoys reading even more. He wishes to break a world record set by Christopher Paulini, youngest author of a best-selling series. He wishes to be an English 2 teacher at OCA and a well-known public speaker, as well as a publisher. He strives for a creative lifestyle and works best in an unorganized and messy area.

