

On the Other Side

On the Other Side

A Collection of Writing by Cleveland Teens

On the Other Side: A Collection of Writing by Cleveland Teens is a Lake Erie Ink production.

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The writing and artwork published in this anthology is original to each individual author. The opinions and ideas expressed in each piece are the individual author's and are not necessarily the opinions of the publisher.

To the people who have lost their lives in the fight against COVID-19—may you have a peaceful journey on your way to the other side.

This book is also dedicated to those with words to say and stories to tell. To the stories we are afraid to write and the words we shout from the rooftops. To the stories that will live on for generations to come, with words that make us laugh and cry and feel.

To the stories that make us come alive.

Table of Contents

Foreword by Honey Bell-Bey 011

An Introduction from Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board 013

Chapter 1: Self and Soul

Movie Moment by Kai Gyorki 016

A Pane of Glass by Elana Ernst 018

Sad Little Stray by Naomi Hardin 020

Moonshine by Indigo A'Rielle..... 022

When It Comes to Me by Abigail Bellavia 023

Reflections by Mary Jo Baetzold 024

An Unknown Fallacy by Kelsey Mize..... 027

Untitled by Reyna Verma 029

Death's Fool by Lily Compton..... 030

Her by Alaysia King..... 031

The Dream by Noelle Jones..... 032

Lonesome by Emily Dicevicius 033

What Color Are the Walls That Are Caving In? by Naomi Hard 034

Dear Alice by Grace Wilde..... 036

I Will Always Love You by Halle Preneta 038

C+ by Grace Wilde..... 040

The Dark Room by Ava Kline 041

I Wish by Maryam Yakout 042

Do You Ever . . . by Diana Ludu 043

Before by Rowan Kozinets..... 044

Beyond the Storm by Ryan Lawson 045

Foreign by Ryan Lawson 046

Space of a Memory by Camille Boyer 047

Chapter 2: Innocence and Experience

Youthful Bliss and Innocence by Lexi Milligan 050

Crouching into Childhood by Rowan Kozinets 052

Lucky by Meghna Bettaiah 053

Cassette Side A by Elana Pitts 054

Rebirth by Jacques Curtis..... 056

Outside World by Nina Serna 057

Cassette Side B by Elana Pitts 058

On the Outside Looking In by Rowan Kozinets 061

<i>Choose Your Path</i> by Nora Nathan	062
<i>Butterfly</i> by Mandi Lu	063
<i>Going the Other Way</i> by Tevyah Hanley	065
<i>Your Rose-Colored Glasses</i> by Mia Maurer	066
<i>fade</i> by Leila Metres	068
<i>Moonlit Drive</i> by Tal Rothberg	069
<i>Michael the Gas Station Attendant</i> by Tal Rothberg	071
<i>Homely</i> by Kai Gyorki	072
<i>Future</i> by Tevyah Hanley	075
<i>A Straight World</i> by Halle Preneta	076
<i>The Things I Never Say</i> by Lila Schubert	079
<i>Beautiful Words</i> by Amulya Viswantha	080
<i>Childhood</i> by Tina Longino	086
<i>Either Way</i> by Nora Nathan	087
<i>The Other Side of Childhood</i> by Sophia Leone	088
<i>Enough</i> by Fiona Burnham	089
<i>Line Photography</i> by Rishabh Mehta	090

Chapter 3: Struggle and Sorrow

<i>Flint</i> by Anabel Bach	092
<i>Broken</i> by Arielle Damanti	093
<i>Brilliance in the Night</i> by Hannah Holt	094
<i>A Look Beyond the Year of Covid</i> by Mary Jo Baetzold	095
<i>Memory</i> by Ananya Yadati	096
<i>The Other Side of the Door</i> by Jackie Lonsway	097
<i>Her Whispers</i> by Maya Webb	099
<i>Looking Down</i> by Hannah Kinczel	100
<i>Words</i> by Julia Pentasuglio	101
<i>Untitled</i> by Rebecca Abramovich	103
<i>Rainstorms</i> by Camille Boyer	104
<i>In the Fire</i> by Anabel Bach	105
<i>Breathe</i> by Alaysia King	106
<i>I Carry This Disease Called Blackness</i> by Cherish McNeil	108
<i>The Country's Protector</i> by Cherish McNeil	109
<i>Living without Eyes</i> by Rebecca Abramovich	111
<i>Am I Trapped, Am I Free?</i> by Tevyah Hanley	113
<i>The Other Side of the Divide</i> by Dominic O'Neal	114
<i>Tunnel of Despair</i> by Emily Dicevicius	115
<i>Hungry</i> by Nina Serna	116
<i>He Is Kind</i> by Nareus Hardin	117

Chapter 4: Imagination and Euphoria

<i>Quiet Place</i> by Katelyn Simpson	120
<i>The Wall</i> by Jackie Lonsway.....	121
<i>In These Walls</i> by Maryam Yakout	122
<i>Solar Return</i> by Naomi Hardin	123
<i>The Second Side</i> by Nora Nathan	124
<i>Vacation in Pluto</i> by Indigo A'Rielle	125
<i>The Dark Side of the Moon</i> by Juliana Simpson.....	126
<i>Oh, Fair Dreamer</i> by Sydney Ference	127
<i>StormSick</i> by Lisandra M. Wheeler.....	129
<i>Thunderstorm</i> by Alexander Kosmos Zunt.....	130
<i>The Prism</i> by Tevyah Hanley.....	131
<i>Staircase</i> by Rebecca Abramovich	132
<i>A Glimpse of Heaven</i> by Natalie Miller	133
<i>Mother Nature</i> by Jacques Curtis	134
<i>The Blue That Was Met by You</i> by Mia Maurer	135
<i>On the Other Side</i> by Yonglin Wu	138
<i>The Little Girl</i> by Fiona Burnham	139
<i>Higher</i> by Leila Metres	140
<i>Untitled</i> by Rebecca Abramovich	141
<i>Sandwich Wars</i> by Flynn Gilbert	142
<i>Crossing Paths with an Alternate Reality</i> by Tal Rothberg	147
<i>Little Seed</i> by Ava Kline	148
<i>Peek-A-Boo</i> by Laila Shotwell	149
<i>The Mirror</i> by Alyssa Sanders.....	150
<i>Give Me Your Hand</i> by Sampurna Sarkar	151
<i>Cloud</i> by Lisandra M. Wheeler	152
<i>Solace</i> by Nareus Hardin.....	153
 Acknowledgments	155
Contributors	156
Meet the Teen Editorial Board	161
About Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth	164

Foreword

by Honey Bell-Bey

Honey Bell-Bey holds a BA in Broadcast Production Technology from Bethune-Cookman University. A motivational poet, writer, educator, and community advocate, Bell-Bey is an Ohio Certified Prevention Specialist and the founder and director of The Distinguished Gentlemen of Spoken Word, a character-based performance troupe for adolescent males who perform on topics of disparities and social injustices. She has performed, directed, and choreographed Spoken Word performances internationally and has received numerous awards and accommodations for her service and activism utilizing poetry as a tool to unite communities around issues in social justice and equity. She was appointed the poet laureate of Cuyahoga County in January 2020, the first poet in sixteen years to hold the position, and lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

I have been on a journey with many stops, turns, and reflective road signs gently guiding me “On the Other Side.” On my way, young travelers, pointing the way through pages of developing wonder, sojourned with me. I am honored to take the journey with them. Readers to come, I will not selfishly hold them, know the freedom of walking these pages with them.

Poets, you bodily, bravely, brilliantly mend the wedding garment worn by homophobia in “A Straight World,” and I dream of colorful worlds—worlds draped in pink, clothed in blues, and fully expressed in polka-dot hues.

I’m transfixed by the power of “I Will Always Love You” . . . the beauty, the passion, the obsession, the beautifully bitter wonder of unrequited energy . . . may we all know its intensity without being burned by its intensity.

Young authors, you are that “Brilliance in the Night.” You are braced in this pandemic and produced amidst its uncertain devastation.

I explored capitalism and examined “The Other Side of the Divide.” I continued on this beautiful walking ride and was forced to close the pages for a few days after experiencing an “Unknown Fallacy.”

I sat with this piece and owned it, fought back tears with it, closed my eyes with it, opened my eyes with it, mentally hugged the young author, and then gave myself permission to hug myself.

I longed to whisper, “You are beautiful” to the subject in “Her Whispers.”

“The Other Side” made me smile. I smiled with hope, as I am a product of what small bites of Hope and Love become. I read this and longed to hold a mirror to an author who can write so vulnerably.

At the end of the road, I stopped and was grateful for the invitation to have journeyed with you. May every reader experience this majestic journey of poetic brilliance.

Honey Bell-Bey
Cuyahoga County Poet Laureate

Introduction

by the Teen Editorial Board

Throughout the 2020–2021 school year, Lake Erie Ink’s Teen Editorial Board met to compile this book from start to finish. Teen editors Joshua Banks, Henry Campbell, Jenna Guiher, Anthony Koonce, Dev Peyrat, Perin Romano, Halle Preneta, Jasmine Neumann, Sanjanasri Vedavyas, Sarah Voss, and Zoe Zappas worked together under the guidance of Lake Erie Ink’s Teen Coordinator, Cordelia Eddy, with help from Amber Gray and Aaron Babcock to carefully read, discuss, and hand-edit submissions for this anthology. Below is a bit about the experience from their perspectives.

New circumstances bring great uncertainty, but they also bring room to learn, grow, and change. In September of the infamous year of 2020, each of us editors cracked open our laptops and clicked on the “zoom.us” link, wondering what was in store for us on the journey we were just beginning. This would be the first time that a Lake Erie Ink teen anthology was created entirely online, and we were facing a behemoth task. We knew we had to get to the other side of a finished book. Meanwhile, we collectively stared down a blank Google Doc, wondering where to begin.

The first and most foundational task was to select the theme around which the anthology would be built. Many ideas were proposed and subsequently crossed out in the process of finding “the one,” but from the battlefield arose “On the Other Side,” victorious. As we looked at each other from the other side of our screens, we hoped that Cleveland teens would feel as drawn to the theme as we did.

And were they ever! Words, images, and beautiful metaphors crashed down upon us like water from an opened dam, giving us a record number of submissions, and thus the longest Lake Erie Ink teen anthology yet. The interpretations of the theme ranged from being on the other side of the pandemic to the other side of life, the other side of childhood to the other side of a memory. During blind reads of the submissions, where we were met with words in a poem or story, devoid of context, name or history, we were touched by the diversity of insights, backgrounds and experiences represented in the work.

Despite only having online meetings, the work we read was truly what made the experience tangible and memorable. Sharing memes and

laughs, and creating videos along the way, we paged through submission after submission. And though this year was unconventional due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the pieces we received made it all worth it.

Reading every story, every poem, each carefully crafted sentence and lovingly typed adjective; every single element brought so much emotion, inspiration, and sheer joy to us editors at Lake Erie Ink. So, we would like to say thank you. Thank you, all you writers and photographers and painters, artists of every background and identity. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to make beautiful memories in the process of curating this book. Thank you for being brave enough to share your voices and innermost thoughts. And thank you for making this anthology a reality.

Words are the most important tools for growth and change and healing; never stop sharing yours with the world because there's always something that hasn't been said yet, and there's always someone who will listen.

Chapter I

Self and Soul

Movie Moment

by Kai Gyorki

I am shuffling through apps
And folders and web pages
While sitcoms and dramas and romcoms
Flicker on the walls
Reflect in the windows
Wash out my skin
And I find myself only praying in apologies
Hands up, eyes on the ceiling
In a way I was too
self-conscious to do at church
Speaking to God
Like I know him
Like I can hold him accountable
Like he owes me anything
I have always been talkative
even when I cry
The gasps and sniffs
Sound like half-baked sentences
I hope that the omnipotent can decipher,
Crack the code
on me asking
For anything I don't deserve
Haven't worked for
Is in any way implausible
God please
If strangers don't like me
And people who know me don't like me
And people who love me don't like me
Big tears
That come with the climax
of a coming-of-age movie
When the actors blend with the characters
And the plot blends with reality
For a moment
I believe the movie is real
The movie is me
my chest catches on the violins
On the purple lighting
The actors wavering voice

Sometimes
When I pray
I have to remind myself there is no
Well-composed score
I have nothing to prove
To a director or an audience
Sometimes I have to remind myself
That no one else is there
Appraising or disparaging
My chest heaving
Sometimes I have to tell myself
That everyone else feels zipped into skin
Too tight
Tell myself
That all stomachs are made stuffy and heavy
It's not just mine
We are all dragging our bodies like rocks
Sewn into the pockets
Of someone who doesn't trust themselves
To reach the ocean floor
and not change their mind
I don't know if this is true
I ask God this
My hands no longer touching
But pushing against the heavens
That collapse in on me
Like a rotting ceiling
Does everyone feel
Like a jar of old change
Does everyone feel this way?
God God God
Please
I want to never think about myself again
I want to be unaware of every move I make
I want to be air
I want to be nothing
God
There are not enough distractions
Or diversions to allow myself
To be

A Pane of Glass

by Elana Ernst

There's a girl I see by the sea,
her hem stitched from the froth of the
forgotten waves
as she waves
through a pane of glass.

This pain of glass,
this pane of glass
She is trapped
on the wrong side
of a pane of glass.

If you asked
if I cracked
I'd say I'm masked,
I'd say I'm broken and
wearing a gauzy-sort-of-cast,
a sailship with a shattered mast.
I'm the fog seeping in circles through straight rows,
the lone fiddler on a rooftop, changing with every way the wind blows.
A tree struck by lightning when nobody is around,
I crash, I break, but even I cannot hear myself cry out.
I can come unwound, but nobody hears.
The girl standing solemn on broken piers
but nobody hears.
Nobody hears.
Nobody hears.

The eye of a tempest,
wreaking havoc on its own,
a forest fire,
singing tree roots and losing the way home.
Smoke billows through the sky,
I've tried to escape—
trust me, I've tried.
But I've made friends with the shadows
and I shy away from light.

I'm a broken bird, unable to take flight.
Alone in my mask,
alone in my chains,
alone on the ground,
alone and without my wings.

Because I am trapped on the wrong side of a pane of glass.
This pain of glass,
this pane of glass,
this pain of glass.
But . . . my mask is perfect and nobody can see.
My eyes are happy,
though I cannot breathe.
I fall and break,
edging those piers.
But nobody hears.
Nobody hears.
Nobody hears.

Sad Little Stray

by Naomi Hardin

Some gruesome days have passed. The smell of hopelessness lingers throughout my home. A plate of burnt toast and smeared jam sits on the couch. The fridge is as bare as my soul and the dishes are piled to the moon. I quickly toss on my corduroys and tennis shoes before heading out the back door in order to not be seen. My satchel is tossed messily across my shoulder. All I can hear is the sound of my curls blowing through the wind. It's like a whisper, enchanting almost. Making my way down the pavement, I see trees lined with ripe, peachy fruit. On the other side of the road is a pack of children jumping in rain puddles. If only puddles were portals to a different universe, I think.

I head into homeroom. Jaded. Before I can even sit in my seat, Mr. Raven gets a call for me to go to the office. I haven't a clue what they want. When I arrive, the principal pulls me into her office. She says she's been ringing my mom's phone and getting no answer. Little does she know, I've been having the same problem. I don't tell her this though.

"Oh, that's quite strange Mrs. Jaffray. She's been picking up extra hours at work is all. I'll be sure to tell her you called."

"Not a problem, Devon! How's everything going at home?" she asks.

"Lovely!" I say, in my best actor voice.

She dismisses me back to class. The day goes by and school is out. In my mind, I'm hoping today is my lucky day. The day momma comes back. I head to the store on the corner of 115th Street to pick up some groceries. Milk. Cornflakes. Noodles. Sausage. Pop Tarts. The same stuff mom buys. When I get to the register, I grab some of those fragrant little Christmas trees. \$19.65 is the total. I hand the man a crisp twenty-dollar bill and pocket the change.

As I head into the house, I see a sad little stray peeking through the other side of the fence. He coos, as if he misses his momma too. I toss down the groceries to play with him. For just a moment I forget all of my worries. Like a fever dream. He tries to lick my face, but I won't let him.

Momma would be furious if I did. The transparent, exposed darkness parades the sky. I hop the fence, saying goodbye to my new friend. I have to go to bed now. I'll come back for you. As I struggle through the front door, the scent of decay creeps up on me.

I head into the bedroom and kneel down to say my prayers.

*Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take
If I should live for other days
I pray the Lord to guide my ways*

I hop into bed, tucking myself tightly under the blankets. As I flick off the nightlight, I turn to the side and kiss her cold forehead.

Goodnight mom.

Moonshine

by Indigo A'Rielle

I hate hating you because it disappears at night
Because you reappear at night
Your daytime is my midnight
And you always come back with sunburn
I always treat you with moonshine
You go back out to the light anyway
And expect my stars to shine for you

Pick another galaxy
You have to pray for the stars to shine now
Beg for the moon's light
I've learned to illuminate even if it's just for myself
And lighting you up takes energy
That is moonshine I could be giving to myself

So enjoy the sun's rays
Love the tan the broken skin leaves behind
Don't cry when it hurts to touch

You couldn't stand the healing burn of the moonshine
Even though it was only short-lived
And when you did, you decided to go all over again

So don't ask to get drunk off of me again
Don't come to me thirsty
And don't expect my stars to shine without sacrifice.

When It Comes to Me

by Abigail Bellavia

When it comes to me
There is a side that I want the whole world to see
The side that is happy, fun, positive and free
But when it comes to me—
There is a side that's dark and sad and has no glee
I try my best to hide it deep down
But sadly, the dark side holds the crown
I get overwhelmed and filled with anxiety
But the most I can do is deal with it quietly
I have a pit in my stomach all night and day
That never quite seems to go away
I've been lied to and broken by so many people
So sometimes my thoughts can get pretty lethal
I guess now it's hard to make friends
All because people want to pretend
So I shut myself off to the world
Maybe one day I'll
Unfurl

Reflections

by Mary Jo Baetzold

Flicking on the bright yellow lights of my mold-filled, paint-chipped bathroom, I pick up my straightener, grab a chunk of hair, and slide the metal down to the split ends. Dabbing on my \$3.00 lip gloss from Walmart, I pucker my lips. Smoothing out my hand-me-down bright blue minidress, I stare into the fingerprinted mirror before me.

"You look horrendous, Jack." I mutter under my breath as I try to pin down my disobedient cowlick.

"Hey, girl!!! You ready for tonight?"

My roommate, Jess, is a partier. I'm more of a stay-at-home, watch some Netflix, and take-a-fat-nap kinda girl. I glare at her, she knew I was dreading this.

"I've told you a million times, Jack, if you don't put yourself out there you're never going to find your McDreamy, get married, have two boys and a girl and live—"

"Happily ever after . . . I know." I roll my eyes and tug on my sleeve so the ruffle is exposed.

"I'm just saying, no guy is going to come knocking at the door while you're aggressively stuffing your mouth to the brim with stale popcorn and chugging down a Diet Pepsi . . . and just because it's diet—"

"Does not mean it's better for you. . . . Again, I know, Jess."

"You know I'm right, Jack. You can't just complain about your boring old life and tell me you're not fulfilled when you're not even trying."

"Jess, I'm trying . . . I'm try—"

"No Jack, you're not. You can barely walk out that door to go to class without my help. What's up with you? Put in some effort."

“Woah! Don’t tell Miss 4.5 GPA about effort with your 2.4. I work my butt off, I just can’t . . . I just . . . can’t-”

“Can’t what, Jack?”

“Look at me. Stare into this mirror and take a good, long look at me.”

“Umm . . . I’m looking and I see two late-to-the-party girls staring right back at us.”

“No, Jess, look at you. Then look at me. See, you got this gorgeous blonde hair that flows like you’re a princess riding on a horse in slow motion, saving the entire kingdom. I look like I just got struck by lightning and I tried to put out the flames with a gallon of water.”

“Well, we can’t all have my beautiful golden locks, but—”

“There are no buts, Jess. No guy is going to look at me at this party and want anything to do with me. If anything, they’ll look at me and throw up faster than Mindy after five drinks.”

“Why are you looking at some stupid mirror and letting that reflection reveal who you are?”

“It’s what people see, Jess. No one wants to really know who I am. They see this. I’m a mess.”

“Well, then you’re talking about the wrong guys, Jacquelin. You need to have some confidence, honey. Of course guys look at the outside, it’s what they see first. Your confidence will tell others about what you’re like on the inside . . . it’s the other side that matters. On the other side of all this is a beautiful, intelligent, funny girl that radiates the most amazing energy.”

“Well, Jess, you don’t have to make me cry.”

“That’s not my intent. You need to understand that that mirror before you doesn’t let you explore more than your exterior. It reflects your image, but the true reflection of who you are is on the inside. It’s on the other side of your skin, embedded in your heart. You’re never going to

find your someone if they just look at your ‘mirror image.’ They’re gonna be amazed when they look at your internal reflection and see your beauty shine from the inside out.”

“Damn, Jess. That was pretty good.”

“Rightttt. I should probably drop everything right now and become a motivational speaker.”

“Let’s just play it safe and stick to what you got going on now.”

“Haha, okay. Now are you ready for tonight?”

“You know what? I am so ready. I am hot. I am sexy. I am intelligent. I am going to knock the socks off these college boys.”

“Yeah! Just never say that again, okay?”

“Aye, aye, Captain.”

“You’re really pushing it today, maybe shine a teensy bit less.”

An Unknown Fallacy

by Kelsey Mize

A morphing of worlds
is the only thing keeping me sane.
My cold hand glides through the incessant void,
flowing in the mirror frame,
heart pulsating with the waves of the unknown.
Hand,
half,
whole.
My body sinks into the glass door as luminating forces surround me.
I am here.
Eyes open to the decorated wonders presented before me.
Creatures of all shapes and sizes welcome me with the warmest of hearts.
Trees of blue leaves and purple berries adorn the forest like art,
while the grass and roots smell of succulent honey and peppermint cocoa.
Viewing the settled scene,
tears fill my weak eyelids.
Small arms wrap around my body like a cape of certainty
as the tremors of hope and reluctance ring in my ears.

They take me to their village,
quaint cottages made of mahogany trees and mushroom caps
adorned with fragrant fig trees and forget-me-nots.
They gather around the small pink fire that lies in the middle of the homes,
And lock hands with the radiating power of adoration and appreciation.
They sing the melodies of that sweet, serene hope they know so well.
Joining hands with the creatures of the mirror,
a staggering force pulls at my back.
Pushing and prodding,
a thousand small thorns seize my back and soon, my whole body.
They look at me with fearful eyes as I start to slowly
float away.
Closer and closer to the captivating portal by that same vibrant forest,
I disappear like a cool breeze on a midsummers night.
I hurtle back out of the mirror as glass breaks and my body shakes
in the hospital bed I rest in.
My mother's eyes light up as she awakes from a sleep she was having in

the chair next to me.

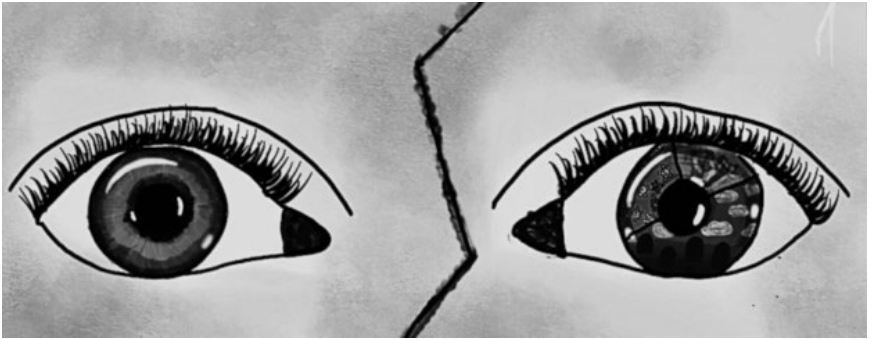
Honey, you've been in a coma for 3 months, tell me . . .

Do you remember anything?

I lay in a pool of confusion as wires run through my limbs and bruises
cover my skin—Where's dad?

He's in prison sweetie, you're safe now.

Just you . . . and me.



Untitled

by Reyna Verma

Death's Fool

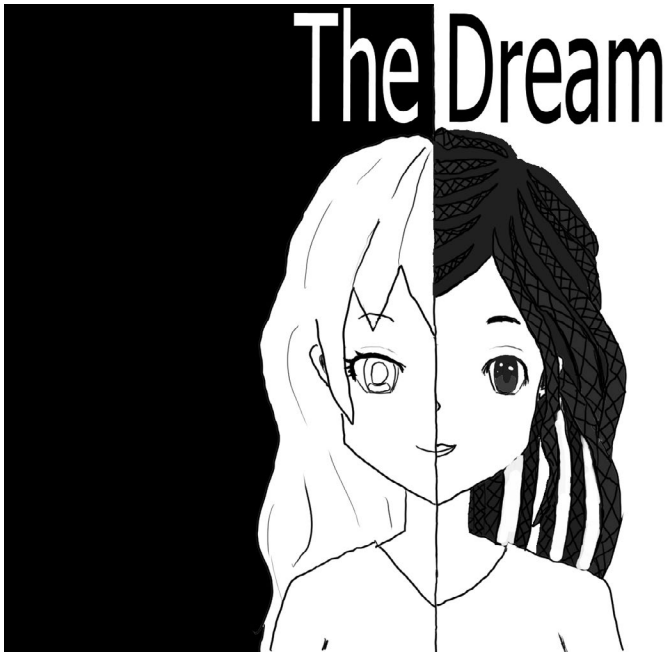
by Lily Compton

Life is short for some.
For others it seems too long.
Truly I ask of you—
What does life mean to you?
Why do you hate those who love you?
Why do you love those who hate you?
Quit going back to your past disappointments.
Go to the lake.
Stop holding your tears captive.
Release them and let them rejoin their host.
Welcome the clouds' cold joy.
They rejoice at the return of your victims.
Peace mocks you.
Misery accompanies you on your walk.
Its hands pushing your head
down . . .
on your way to nowhere.
You pass death.
You ask,
“Now?”
He says,
“No.”
You pass him again.
“Now?”
He says,
“No.”
By now you begin to understand
he's been messing with you.
This whole time you've been walking in circles,
waiting,
searching for death.
But you've already
died.

Her

by Alaysia King

I don't know who she is
I don't know *what* she is
But I know she comes and never goes
And I know she's not afraid to let herself show
I don't know why she's here
I don't know what she wants
But I know she wants me
I know she's not afraid to kill me
And if she has to take herself too, then let it be
I'm scared of her
She can't be controlled and she knows
She's hurting me
I try and I try but the door won't close
When she comes, she overstays
When she leaves . . . well she never really goes away
She wants my body
She wants my soul
She wants to take over and dig me deeper into this hole
They say I can control her
I wish they knew
They say I can control her
But they don't see my point of view
I don't know who she is
I don't know *what* she is
But I know she comes and never goes
And I know she's not afraid to let herself show



The Dream

by Noelle Jones

Lonesome

by Emily Dicevicius

I looked into my old, dirty mirror. My arms pressed up on my raggedy vanity, holding up all my weight. Scruffy black tears fell from one eye, from the other. I couldn't seem to stop it. I started to think about how I even got there.

"Why am I so sad? Are these feelings worth my time? Am I a fool for standing here?"

I didn't know.

I had let myself down every time I tried to stand up. I fell over and over again. It seemed as if everything I tried to do right was wrong. That in some way, somehow, I was living my life wrong. Mistake after mistake, there was no end in sight. I was lost within my own mind with no escape. I wanted to know what was on the other side. To genuinely feel at ease and to be able to escape this tortuous entanglement. I felt as if every second of the day went by too quickly to comprehend, but too slowly to break free from. My mind couldn't handle the overload, the burden weighing my shoulders down into the deepest depths of the dark. I couldn't seem to pull myself out of it. I tried and I tried but it was never enough.

All I wanted was to smile as pretty, run as quickly, sit as patiently, sing as lively, and live as freely as everyone around me. I felt alone. As if I was the only one in this world who felt this pain. I watched as others sat comfortably at the top, without a care in the world, without a stress in their minds. They were unlike me—together and happy. I wondered what life would feel like if I was not lonesome.

I stared up at them, with hopes of getting to the other side.

What Color Are the Walls That Are Caving In?

by Naomi Hardin

Today's a glamorous day. A day where hundreds of high school students gather to strip bare the pain of longing for love. Not me though. The only way I know love is in my dreams. I dream in colors that don't exist. Colors that scream inside my heart. Colors that only one who hasn't had an interrogation of self can see. These colors live inside of me. They lay beneath me. Yet, I don't know them in real life.

I head to the cafeteria in my dingy, plaid pajamas. I grab a cup of coffee and a banana nut muffin. The same as every other day. I'm so sick of being at this shelter, I think. The shuffle of children's happy feet and voices echo through the building. I don't know whether I should feel agitated or relieved. Relieved that they won't remember times like this. Me—I'll remember this forever. I'll always suffer through the loss of what could have been. I head back to my jail cell—I mean my room of sordidly arranged furniture. My favorite blanket, perfectly draped across my bed. The smell of cinnamon and old socks swirls through the air.

I lay down on my bed, and write a lyrical autopsy on my childhood to pass the time. Each line rots a little piece of my brain. I gnaw away at my emotions like a great beast with terrible teeth. Each bite pierces at the old me just a little bit more. I do this every morning. It's the only way to feel something. A horrid and complicated fact. Parents always try to protect you from the world. I wonder why they never protect you from yourself. Truth is, I'm the only monster I know.

My mom walks in to tell me the time.

"Get up, Naomi, it's 2 o'clock!" she hollers.

I kick and turn under my covers, sliding off the bed slowly. I quickly throw on my favorite sweatpants and hoodie. The ones with the chocolate stains from last year on Valentine's Day. My bag is packed with my dress and heels. As we head out, the ladies at the front desk wish me a good time.

"Thank you so much!" I say disingenuously.

We catch the Rapid over to my aunt's apartment for me to get ready. I look out the window to see the fierce October weather. The sky is painted an opulent orange hue. The sun shines on the trees, and they look as though they've been dipped in freshwater, born anew.

We arrive at the apartments. A morbid slab of red brick. I head to the guest room, making sure to lock the door behind me. I look in the mirror, preparing to do my makeup. Staring back at me are innocent, blood-shot eyes. I paint my lids a soft rose gold. The shine clashes against my brown skin quite beautifully. I use concealer to cover up the jagged edges from nights spent remembering. My hair is curled. The dress, made of crushed little stars, hugs against my body. I head into the living room, bombarded by the clicks of several cameras. I feel like how a country girl would if she were in Hollywood.

My mom drives me to the school in my aunt's car. Two women saying goodbye. I strut down the fake red carpet, indulging myself in as much fame as I can for the night. Teenage fever and whimpering anxiety fill the school cafeteria. I join my friends on the dance floor. The disco ball parades above me. It spins and spins and spins. "All of the Lights" plays in the background. The tempo begins to tango with my heartbeat.

Pleasure encases my soul. I close my eyes and kiss the future with all my heart. The walls begin to cave in, but tonight I'm forgetting.

Dear Alice

by Grace Wilde

Dear Alice,

It is not only incredibly risky, but also incredibly hard for me to write this. If my parents were to find this letter—or anyone for that matter, it would be at the expense of being outed or even hated. I can't afford that, but I need to be with you, even if I'm not with you.

It scares me so much to have my raw feelings in writing. Nevertheless, I need to get these thoughts off my chest. So here's the deal. I like you, Alice DiCenzi. I always have. I've had the biggest crush on you for my entire life. The minute I saw you, I was taken aback by the possibility of love. I was thrown into this whirlpool of questioning myself, my thoughts, and my feelings. It took years of denial for me to realize that I care about you so much. I have a crush on you that's way bigger than any boy would have.

But here's the difference between boys and me. All a boy has to do is gain the courage to ask you out, and he already has a fifty-fifty chance of getting with you. I, on the other hand, don't have that privilege. I can't just try to woo you, send you a heartfelt letter, or spend hours baking you a cake to gain your love. I can seldom speak to anyone at all about my crush on you because if my parents found out that I like a girl I would have to sever all ties with you. And I really, really don't want to do that.

I've become accustomed to the fact that I can never be anything more than a close friend of yours, but I worry that even being a close friend is too close. The more I hang out with you, Alice; the more I speak to you, hear of you, and see you, the more I fall for you.

Alice DiCenzi, your brown eyes say enough. The way they light up when you get something right—the way they squint when you do your adorable smile. The way they get so big when you're excited or surprised. I don't know if you realize this, but whenever you're focusing really hard you make this cute little face. Your cheeks scrunch up and a tiny dimple forms on your forehead. I love that. It's hopeless, Alice. It's absolutely hopeless. I'm hopeless. I'm a silly gay-falling-for-a-terribly-straight-girl kind of hopeless.

It's typical, and quite honestly embarrassing. Because of this, every day I try to think of a way to attack myself. I can't help but tell myself I'm just following the crowd, that I'm a terrible person who's just leeching onto this idea of being head over heels for someone rather than actually being head over heels for them. But I can't keep lying to myself. I'm stuck in this constant loop of watching you be happy with other people. Looking in from the outside, wishing it were me. Wishing it were me hugging you, asking how your day went, and telling you how much I love you. And then I have to remind myself that I'm on the other side of this. I'm never going to live the narrative I long for. We all know I won't get the love I so desperately want. We all know you don't want me. And yet, I'm still so naive and blind to fall for you. And call me manipulative, call me jealous, selfish, ignorant, stupid—heck, call me a sinner. But I know I'll never stop caring about you just a little bit more than everyone else, Alice DiCenzi.

I adore you.

Daisy Jones

I Will Always Love You

by Halle Preneta

On the outside
Always looking in
You'll never know
The sudden joy I experience
When I'm around you
How my heart lights up
At your smile
At your laugh
At how you stand
At how you speak
You'll never see
How the whole world stops
When you enter the room
Or the spell you cast upon me
Every time I think of you
You'll never feel
Your intoxicating presence
And how it takes my breath away
On the outside
Always looking in
I see
Everything
About you
That you will never see about
Me
I see the small infinity tattoo you have
On the inside of your wrist
I see your cowboy boots
And how they strike the floor when you walk
I see your radiating confidence
I wish I could possess
I see your flashy smile
And hear your enchanting laugh
I see the pain in your eyes
From all the hurt it took
To get you to where you are now

But you will never see the pain in my eyes
Or feel how my heart sinks into my chest
Like a rock sinking into a pond
When I break out of my reality
And realize
You will never love me . . .
But I will always love you

C+

by Grace Wilde

Rapid learning,
short “to-do” list.
Shoulders relaxed, mind focused,
a mindset of “I can get things done.”
I feel happy and not outrun.
All the assignments are piling up,
head in hand, droopy, eyes look puffed.
I tell myself the work will never stop
and yet, I do nothing and my grades drop.
I’m proud of what I do.
My family reciprocates the kindness that I spew.
I’m happy, so enlightened by the ease from day to day,
and nothing seems to stop me from acting so okay.
And yet—
I’m back at the start.
Exhausted, overwhelmed, and quite frankly falling apart.
I can’t understand the things I learned in math
and I’m stuck in this cage of only knowing what I lack.
I’m so sick and tired of this little game of back and forth.
I try so hard to accept the swings
but it never works—I guess that’s part of going through this prison we
call school.
I have two sides to me,
and I feel like an absolute fool.

The Dark Room

by Ava Kline

On the other side of what you see,
I'm in a room that's dark and lonely.
I scream and cry,
but no one hears.
I want to open up
but don't know how.

I feel like I'm drowning.
Somebody help!
I desperately try and try to escape
and put back on my happy face.

I sit there in pain
while everyone watches.
My feelings break,
then I start to get nauseous
from all the time
spent crying.

Inside, it feels like I'm literally dying.
My hands shake and breath quivers.
I walk out of my room,
put on my fake face,
the face that says everything is ok.
When people ask me how I'm doing
I say, "I'm fine,"
but am I?

I Wish

by Maryam Yakout

Your image wraps up this soulless body of mine
I mean ours
You are the very thing I created
Yet you do not live here
An image created from a memory
A memory created from past events
And those events that would lead to wounded bodies

I do love you

These words trip down into my lap
We stare at one another
Me sitting in this empty room
The smell of dirty plates and unwashed bodies
You in a utopia with lakes of milk and honey
Staring back with that great
Big
Smile
Beaten-up hands that claw for you
Yet in return the touch of cold glass keeps me company
I wish to be you
I want you
Anything besides this
You are everything
A creation of my own
I wish to be you
Yet you do not live here
Living on a side that I have created
Yet a side I am not allowed to enter

Do You Ever . . .

by Diana Ludu

Do you ever feel like the ground is crumbling beneath your feet?
Do you ever feel like you've lost the rhythm and the beat?
Do you ever feel like you have goals you aren't going to meet?
Do you ever feel like just giving up in defeat?
Well I do.

Do you ever feel like you're empty and dark inside?
Do you ever feel like you have nowhere left to hide?
Do you ever feel like there is no place to confide?
Do you ever feel like you are on the sad, miserable side?
Well I do.

Do you ever feel like you have wings but can't fly?
Do you ever feel like all you can do is cry?
Do you ever feel like everything is just a big lie?
Do you ever feel like it's impossible to give it one more try?
Well I do.

Whenever you feel sad and depressed,
Whenever you feel panic and stress,
Whenever you feel like a desperate mess,
Just remember you are not alone.

Before

by Rowan Kozinets

I walk over to the yellow paper freshly ripped from a legal pad and held in place by a near-empty salt shaker. The label is peeling off and my fingers itch to tease it from the plastic. My eyes drop to the paper. My sister and I are home alone, so I know what is coming. The usual note from our mom telling us what we should eat for breakfast, if our dog has eaten yet, when she'll be home, etc. Oh, and the part that I dread. The "Good morning, girls!" After trailing my eyes along the rugged edge of the note, I hesitantly let them scan over the page, but what I see pleasantly surprises me: "Good morning, lovely people!"

I tear through my school, terrified of being late. I feel like a lot of people are staring at me, but I can almost convince myself that it's just my imagination. I tug on the sleeves of my shirt, wanting to slip the hood over my eyes and curl up over . . . there. Yeah, that's a nice corner.

I wanted to wear my sports bra today, but for some reason it was digging into my armpits more than usual. At least I changed my hair.

I hunch over my notebook, my hand scrambling to cover the page as my teacher's eyes bore holes into the top of my head. One word, written over and over and over.

I ask my cousin to call me something different. I'm met with narrowed eyes and suspicious inquiries. Stuttering, I backtrack and hastily return her attention to decorating for Halloween.

I dance dance dance. My carefully constructed hair falls into clumps against my sweaty face. So much for trying to look a little more like myself.

I complain to an acquaintance in the class about how I just want my hair *away*. But how I have no idea how I want it to look, so I can't permanently change it. That part I don't say. He tries to remember what a hair tie is called. I supply him with the word. He cocks his head at me and says with a smile, *I don't know it because I'm not a girl.*

Me neither.

Beyond the Storm

by Ryan Lawson

What if, beyond the storm, there's a rainbow like the world always told me?

What if the only storm around is in my head?

Will there still be a rainbow after it's cleared

or just a better understanding?

Should I board up my eyes just in case,

bury my face in my pillow

or stand tall with the wind blowing in my ears?

Foreign

by Ryan Lawson

Abstract thoughts build colosseums, battling to make it out of my mouth. Three stories of arched entrances, I sit at the very top watching insignificant ants fight one another. Everything made of stone and concrete, crumbling from age. Abstract thoughts making it to the other side, falling out of my mouth, familiar like I've said them before. A language understood by a small group of people. I only understand it sometimes. I'm relearning how to speak this language of life that's still confusing.

Space of a Memory

by Camille Boyer

On the other side of my mind there are rows.
Rows and rows of shelving.
Full of boxes.
Every container overflowing with memories—
Try my best to organize it.
(That's what I do in my sleep.)

I always ask—
What would happen if I gained a memory too big?
Taking up all the space—
Cramming up against the walls
Expanding and expanding
Throughout my entire body
Until I explode.

But it happened.
And now—
Now I can't wonder what happens after this.
There's no more room.
What happens on the other side of this memory?

I suppose I'll have to reset my mind
Clear out some of the thoughts.
Leave behind this reminiscing.
Make up some memories to fill the empty spaces,
For the things I don't remember.

Echoing
Echoing
Silence.

Chapter 2

Innocence and Experience

Youthful Bliss and Innocence

by Lexi Milligan

Childhood is a noun. By definition, it's the period of time that you are a child. I don't really like that definition. It's boring and holds no emotional value.

More of a state of mind than a period of time, childhood is the feeling of all worries and stress washing away. It's the state of being carefree. Don't mistake this for carelessness, it's just carefree.

Most think that after childhood comes adulthood. Why is that? Why can't we have both? After childhood should come more childhood, just with more complexity.

I suppose you could say that the term childhood is just used to explain a stage in one's life. I guess that makes sense. However, this introduces connotations. Think. What's the first word that comes to mind when you think of childhood? If it was something negative, it was probably immaturity, naïveté, ignorance, or something similar. Can't children be mature, worldly, and informed? These connotations apply to something more than just a person's age.

Most would say that on the other side of childhood is adulthood. I don't agree. The other side of childhood is a box. It's the box we put ourselves in once we tell ourselves that we have to start getting serious, that we can't enjoy what we want to enjoy, that we have to walk away from our fantasies of magic and bright tomorrows.

Why is it that people can't be serious and buoyant, while also responsible and carefree? I believe that there shouldn't be such a thing as "another side to childhood." Can't we all just be people who do what we do, who are interested in what we are, who don't care what we're labeled as? I'm not sure if that's entirely possible, but I'm going to keep dreaming my childish dream.

As it stands, the other side of childhood is one that is, frankly, depressing and not one that I'd ever want to live in or encounter. As it stands, the other side of childhood is the reason that adults wish they were kids

again. The thing is, children are not taken as seriously as adults. So why would anyone wish to live that way? It's because the other side is so unbearable that the life of a child is preferable.

I'm a childish person. That's more true now than it was when I was younger. I often missed out on the things that many people think are staples of childhood. I often felt older than I really was and felt the pressure to grow up quickly. In a way, I'm trying to make up for it now. However, even with a more childish attitude I still often feel the same pressure to act older than I am.

Even so, I'm youthful, still enjoying at least some of the luxuries of childhood. Even when I'm no longer deemed youthful by society, I'll still act childish. I'll be imaginative and curious and carefree. I'll be mature and responsible and well-informed, too. Why not? I won't be placed in a box of complacency and vapidty. I'll live as I choose without giving a second thought to that other side.

I hope that one day my childish dream becomes reality. For the sake of adults now and adults of the future, I'd like to see the other side as something that is cooperative and welcoming. Not parallel to childhood but not completely the same. And even so, there will still be problems in the world. That's just life. But at least there will be one thing that can be taken out of the pile of broken nothings and somethings.



Crouching into Childhood

by Rowan Kozinets

Lucky

by Meghna Bettaiah

Lucky am I

the one who skips—

free of any real cares or stress.

Dancing in freedom and liberty,

and holding my life in my hands.

I never once realized

how lucky I seemed

until I realized this wasn't the case for everybody.

I used to think luck

wasn't with me.

I didn't know what was in front of me.

Cassette Side A

by Elana Pitts

Play that little tune that used to hum through the house

The tune that went up when you felt down

Down when you felt up

Sent you through the roller coaster of emotions you never felt before as
you dance to the beat

Dresses a-swingin’

Shoes tappin’ and stompin’ as the new boys sing along

The tape would wind itself to halt from all the times we would rewind
just to hear ol’ Bessie sing that note that sent Mama to her knees

The note that caused Papa to get down on one knee

The note I came out a jigglin’ to in the Bayou

The snaps to the chorus

The lovers of the sinful blues would dance until their feet fell off at dawn

Mama said once that she used to make see-ins with the devil himself by
the way the music would take control of her

She swore her soul conjured up moves from the great beyond

Her feet would start to move and arms would stretch out for a partner
to swing her around

Her hips moving in time with the music as the spirits took over

Papa used to say that the night he became brave and took Mama on

Her eyes sparked a great fire that couldn’t be tamed

She held him tight and told him to keep up

He called it, “trial by fire,”

There was no denying it

She would deny the richest of men her hand if they stepped one step off
a half beat

Yet, somehow that night my Papa became the lion tamer and hit every

move with precision

He has nothing but left feet when it comes to dancin'
Mama would hoot and holler about where his "dancin' soul" went
He always replied, "It went straight to you and you gave it to them"
Mama would smile as she watched, turnin' the volume up every so often

"Music brings souls together and joins them in unity if they
harmonize."

a teacher once said after the music wound down
She stood in front of us, pantin', wipin' the sweat off of her brow
Gathering her wits as she breathed with the slowed tempo

We listened as the tempo picked up in full swing,
our bodies buzzin' with excitement

Turn the sound up and let it vibrate
Let it make your leg tap and head shake.

Rebirth

by Jacques Curtis

Blur still covered my juvenile eyes as I sat up
surrounded by the silence of stressed mothers,
scents of saffron and other soulful spices,
and the glee of those my age bordering the room.

Sitting within me was what the adults had wound up.
My mother's meditation mat made me no calmer,
nor was I washing away wistful worries
that a nine-year-old should never have.

On the wall was a landscape that shot far up.
Baby blues bordered the blank ceiling we sat under,
A soft, snowy sky sprinkled down the walls around us
and a dark brown dirt color filled the floor below.

Even in certain zen, my youthful unrest refused to let up,
I began to absorb the anxiety across from my sister,
her gaze galloping around the grand ground of peace
as we both failed to reach the other side of consciousness.

After eons of waiting, the parents floated up.
They thanked the shastri as if they now knew a new nirvana,
But they had not attained the breath of birth anew,
not that any of us knew what these practices preached.

Next, there was a surprise that would make any child's eyes light up.
The semi-transparent plastic was placed softly in our palms,
packed with vivid tidbits: a spinning top, and a lollipop.
Waiting to fail to reach rebirth was worth our woes.

Yet, as life sometimes goes, you just have to look up.
While I wished out into the weather, devoid of warmth
the snowflakes stirred to the snowbeds just shy of my scope.
Sometimes happiness isn't found sitting around
but rather is on the other side of a window.



Outside World

by Nina Serna

Cassette Side B

by Elana Pitts

It was December of 1998

Each intake of breath came out as a long lingering fog from our mouths
Regina and Tommy brought over little Angelise

She was dressed in her pretty little bright blue dress her mother picked
for the coming of the new year

Angelise shouted, "Hi Auntie," accompanied by a hug and became a blue blur
Rushing into the house in search of her cousins
Her mother shouted at her to slow down
It is unladylike to run in a dress
Her father smiled and sat on the porch swing with me

We sat in silence taking in the shimmering sky as the moonlight reflected
our complexion
like one of those river spirits my mama used to whisper about into the night

The house came to life as the kids came tumbling out, screaming about
who would make the best snowman

The howling of the wind picked up as me and Tommy swung on the
porch swing

"Angelise is just like you, bullheaded and a spitfire. She gave her mother
so many grey hairs." His laugh entered the air, just as deep and rumbley
as I remembered

"Is that so?" I covered myself up more with the cover that was supposed
to keep me warm.

Lightly laughing at his comment, my eyes wrinkled at the ends
A small smile stayed on my lips as we quietly bantered
I watched as the little Angel incarnate made a snowball in her tiny hands,
before launching it at Roy
hitting him in the back of the head, yelling "Bullseye!"
Roy in turn made one and threw it at her face
sticking his tongue out and causing the others to laugh

Little Angel wiped her face in a huff before lunging at him
They begin to tussle in the snow
Angelise shoved his face in the snow before getting thrown off by Poppy

A gingery sweet scent filled the frosty air
David's cookies, our haven
Saved Roy from being turned into an ostrich
And saved Angel from being turned into a snow imprint

The kids became still, snow plans forgotten as they raced back inside
Hot chocolate on the tables, waiting for their grabby hands

Tommy and I wandered in, shivering and laughing
My nose felt as though it would fall off with just a sniff
Regina monitored the kids, interrogating Angel and Roy
Asking them why they were covered in snow
The sound of cookie munching and drink slurping filled her ears and
she went unheard
David gave me and Tommy a plate of cookies and two cups of joyous
warmth
We sat by the fire, carrying on about old memories

The fire crackled and danced as we warmed our toes and noses

That's when little Angel came up to me with a tape in her hands

Bouncing on her toes asking if we could play the music on the tape

Rewind

The fire became a little too warm as a piece of wrapping paper blew into
the flames

Rewind

The fire spread as me and Tommy grabbed the kids Little Angel held on
to the tape
Regina ran out with her purse in tow
David stayed behind to get the dogs out and to get his beloved cassette

Stop

It took him a little too long to come out of there as the fire became wild
The once light air became heavy as we waited with bated breath
Waiting for David to step out with a smile

Fast Forward

We were sitting in a church as the pastor talked about God's will and
how we are lucky to be under him
David and I had to send the kids to my mother's home while Tommy
screamed at Regina about her selfishness

Rewind

We were gathered by a fireplace
Laughing and singing to the tape that Tommy and I used to dance to
Tommy and I belted out the lyrics to the song we dubbed our own
Regina sat there with a frown, disinterested in what was going on
David gathered all of the dishes and took them to the kitchen

Roy and Angelise danced around while the others clapped them on
I hugged Tommy close and thanked him for coming over
Then glee-filled laughter turned into to horrified screams

Play

David, Tommy, Regina and I stay under one roof
David stays as happy as he can be, bound to his wheelchair
Tommy and I listen to the tape when nothing can pass our lips
Regina becomes distant
Everything that night became apparent when that look washed over her face
The same blank look

Angel and I visit the kids with David and Tommy
Mama plays the tapes as we sing to ol' Bessie
Singing about the good ol' days

On the Outside Looking In

by Rowan Kozinets

It feels too quiet to be watching something so loud
Each noise a heartbeat's echo
Each breath a kite snagged on a tree
Expectations pressing into the chest of discovery
If only they knew the feeling of fingers loosening
Smelling what might be ahead and breathing it in
Faster than they ever thought possible
Freedom twirling through their chest,
Shooting out of their toes
Pulling themselves through the air—
But I can't tell them this.
Hopefully, hopefully
they will learn.



Choose Your Path

by Nora Nathan

Butterfly

by Mandi Lu

When I was very little, my grandma told me that life fell from the sky. It fell to Earth along with stardust. It landed on the wings of butterflies, which carried it around on their wings and spread it through the world as they flew.

“Why butterflies?” I asked her. “Why not a bird, or a ladybug? Or perhaps a helicopter? They can fly just as well.”

My grandma smiled and told me it was because life is constantly transforming, and butterflies are the Keepers of Transformation. They do not fear change. Butterflies transform greatly in their lifetime. If they did not, they would have no beauty. And the flowers that they fly to and from would also have no beauty. The butterfly understands that transformation is beautiful. So only the butterfly can spread life.

I was still confused after hearing her lengthy explanation. But I nevertheless nodded in understanding. I’d probably understand when I was older. After all, I thought, older people understand everything.

So why can’t I make sense of her words yet?

I stand in front of my new school in North Dakota, thinking about that conversation my grandma and I had so many years ago. People walk past me, trudging through the thick snow on their way into school.

But my feet refuse to move forward. I stand there. Confused about my past. Scared of my future. Feet rooted in the icy ground.

My life had transformed.

And it was far from beautiful.

It was as far as North Dakota to Florida. As far as a butterfly and a helicopter.

When my mom and dad sat me down at the dining room table, their faces

as hard and cold as statues, and told me the news, it was not beautiful.

Living with my dad in North Dakota, so far away from my mom in Florida, was not beautiful.

Looking at all these faces floating by me unable to recognize a single one was not beautiful.

Whatever did fall from the sky and onto a butterfly was surely not my life.

I stare at the brick building in front of me and the waves of people flooding in. Then, I stare down at my soaking wet boots. My hands grip the sides of my white jacket. Wrinkles radiate outward from where my hands are clenched.

Breathe in. Breathe out.

As I finally start walking towards the entrance of the school, where the rest of my life will begin, I decide that it's probably too cold here for a butterfly anyway.

Going the Other Way

by Tevyah Hanley

A sea of people, all going to the same place,
I start to follow, but I feel called not to chase.
Everyone following, but they really don't know who,
who is truly leading, actually none of them do.

Where they are going, what the end result will be,
none of them stop to look ahead, to take their time to see.
Places to go, people to see, this way just feels right;
they won't even know when the end is in sight.

But not me, I stand straighter as I turn the other way,
breaking past the normal, charging through the mundane.
I start to walk, but I break into a run.
Who knew being unique could be this much fun?

As I am running, I see some heads turn my direction.
They know deep inside that they feel some connection.
Some start to follow me, some look but don't really care
Some do not even look, and others just turn and stare.

Someday soon, I know that others will join the ranks
and creativity and wonder will go infinite lengths.
What does it take for this joyous movement to start?
It is the choice to be different, spreading love to each other's hearts.

Your Rose-Colored Glasses

by Mia Maurer

Me vs. You

Flowers?

For me?

Do you want me to start off with an, “Oh my god, they’re so pretty.”

How about instead I say the truth:

get out of my life.

Stop saying I’m a good daughter, a good sister and a future wife.

If you keep playing with this snake, you’re gonna get a bite.

Don’t look me in the eyes and tell me it’s ok.

You push the murk to the outside and you think that it goes away.

Now it’s you vs. me and me vs. you.

It’s fighting one against one and never becoming two.

The problem isn’t me, this is all because of you.

It’s your stupid rose colored glasses that keep blinding my path.

You see a bee making honey,

I see getting stung and attacked.

Don’t all the things I said about you make you want to punch me in the face?

Oh, I forgot you’re incapable of that since your life is only flowers and lace.

You see, Ms. Perfect, there’s not always good in goodbye,

One day all of your roses will shrivel up and die.

You vs. Me

Yes, the roses are for you and they’re not out of pity.

They’re for your strength and your resilience and they’re more than just pretty.

Keep giving me your worst, say whatever you need.

But don’t think for a minute that I let my rose colored glasses mislead.

I’ve been here too, and you know what I see,

I see a girl who’s just like me.

A girl who’s lost and waiting to be found,

a girl who’s whole world got tossed to the ground.

a girl who didn’t have a face that wasn’t a frown.

My rose-colored glasses didn’t put blinders up.

They made it easier for me to breathe when times got tough.

Yes, I've pushed some murk to the side but at least I didn't let it build up.
Don't you dare try to interrupt.
Your blood's not all cold.
You're not the sad toy in the window, waiting to be sold.
Now, do you want to hear the truth?

My family died in a car accident too.

fade

by Leila Metres

from the outside
looking in
i see kids running
around the playground
laughing and shouting

but i'm not with them
he and i aren't with them
we sit off to the side
with our differences,
growing out of us like horns

i know i have words
of hate and horror
scrawled across my forehead
in big black letters
i don't know who put them there,
but they've always been there
they're never gonna fade

we might be looking in
from the outside
but the outside is a little
brighter with him.

we're never gonna fade.

Moonlit Drive

by Tal Rothberg

We drove around for hours
Nowhere to go and nothing to do

The streets were abandoned
But the snow kept us company

Down the winding roads
We retraced our lives and our loves
And all that we'd lost

The stillness made it seem like a dream
A dream in which the city was ours

As we passed the houses which had raised us
The skies became blue and clear
The night turned to a summer afternoon
The clock in my car began running backwards
And the ghosts of my past peppered the streets

They smiled and laughed with one another
and I longed to join in
But when I glanced back, they had gone and winter had returned
The laughter had faded and I was alone

The crowds had moved on to better things
But here I was still waiting around after the show
What was I waiting for?

As I cruised along through the dead of night
Through this fever dream of the past
In the frigid winter air
I couldn't get warm
No matter how high I turned up the heat

Billy Joel filled up my car and I turned the music up
His voice echoed through the silence

As he sang of all my ghosts
And all my broken dreams

His music now had meaning
But the meaning had a price

It was a night of what might have been
But also what couldn't have been because it wasn't

In the backseat
Side by side
Sat knowledge and wisdom
And they dictated our lives back to us

Maybe this is what life is
A road we followed
Branching out into a million roads we didn't

A search for meaning
When you don't know what you don't know

So I'll leave this where it left me
At the start and at the end

For all our lives we drive in circles
Yet we must,
We must
ride on.

Michael the Gas Station Attendant

by Tal Rothberg

On a snowy November night
one of those hazy ones
still in a food coma from Thanksgiving dinner
we pull our Prius into an empty gas station.
Midnight—somewhere near Boston.

All around the city a warmth lingers.
Children are tucked safely into bed.
Food is piled high in fridges.
Husbands and wives reminisce over red wine
and we ride on.

It's frigid outside and our bones are tired
but "Michael the Gas Station Attendant" dutifully approaches.

Michael can't be much older than 20.
Slender and tall.
All business
as he pumps the gas with a faraway look in his eye.

Perhaps a student.
Perhaps a spy.
Perhaps Michael harbors dreams of the stage.

But not tonight.
Tonight Michael stands in his blue t-shirt
in the freezing cold.
And pumps gas.

Homely

by Kai Gyorki

Okay

Like the wooden-ness

Of a flushed face

Eyelids

Heavier than a lover's weight

On your chest

Collapsed in damp pillows

Feet shackled in sheets

Repeat your own thoughts

To the waitress

Specifying that the eggs

Should be poached and not cooked

Solid to the center

Specifying yes, we are not from around here

Yes, we wish we were

Yes, we feel proud that you guessed right twice

Let yourself laugh along

Like we could become regulars

Like our pictures could get hung

Next to the football team

And the owner's best friend's niece

When she got her acceptance letter

To a DI school

Oh to lay your head

On the little red table

Still sprinkled with

The previous occupants

Stray sugar granules

To sleep until the coffee pot recirculates

And the waitress gently nudges

Your shoulder

Until she slips into our booth

As she refills the ketchup bottles

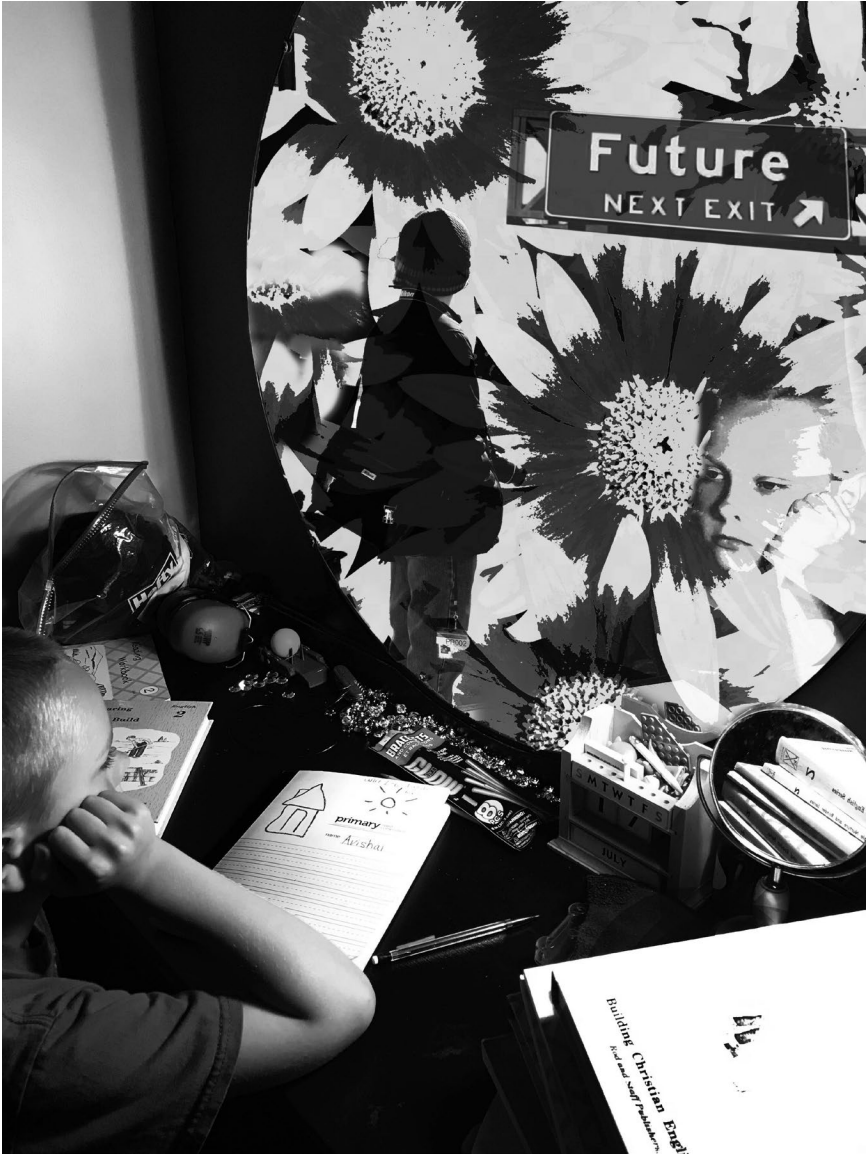
Okay

You will sit on the bus

Without introducing yourself

To the older woman next to you
Without her telling you
Why she is using her plain canvas bag for groceries
Instead of the embroidered green one she prefers
You will ride all the way home
Without laughing along
To the 19-year-old's telephone argument
With his mother
He was supposed to pick up groceries
You would roll your eyes at him
You would say something along the lines of
It's his own fault
He could've gone to Dave's
It's right by his work
He just forgot
And he would roll his eyes
Then smile
"Not you too"
He would say
Okay
It's hard but you will walk past
Hundreds of thousands of houses
And not enter each one
Not know where the pens are kept
Or which stairs creak
It's hard but you will never
know the directions home
From every building
Not be able to reach up
And brush a stray hair
From just anyone's face
Know their order
How they take their coffee
Or why they hate the color yellow
It hurts
Not to hug when you first meet
Not to say I miss you
When you introduce yourself
Not to reminisce on moments
That never happened

It will make you ache
When you don't recognize every scent
Every opening chord
It will sting
The familiarity
Of unfamiliarity
Will be a shock of
Tobacco scented skin
When you didn't know they smoked
Let me tuck you into a stranger's bed
I understand when you wrap your arms
Around my hips
You want me to tell you it's yours.



Future
by Tevyah Hanley

A Straight World

by Halle Preneta

A huge billboard for a wedding dress store looms over me as I drive past it. A woman in a flowing white dress next to a man in a tuxedo, both smiling wide, with the text “For Your Perfect Wedding, come to Hartford’s Bridal today!”

Mom never called to congratulate me on getting married, I think.

I shake my head to shake the thought away.

Whatever. It’s not like we needed her there anyway.

As I continue down the street, I notice men and women openly holding hands and people’s TVs playing reality shows about straight couples.

“Look at little Johnny, already a lady’s man!” I hear a woman say.

A few minutes later, I hear part of an argument.

“How do you not understand such an easy concept?!”

“If he wants to wear pink, then so be it!”

“But that’s not how it works!”

I remember when Sandra proposed to me. She took me to my favorite restaurant and after dinner, we camped out under the stars, where she finally proposed. It was beautiful—just me, her, and the stars. No one else around. We could finally be happy. We could be ourselves.

“Hey! What the hell man?” someone yells at me.

“Sorry!” I yell back. *Crap. I must not have been paying attention.*

“You almost killed me!”

“I said I was sorry!”

“Just watch where you’re going next time!”

“Alright!” *Geez.*

I keep on driving until I find a parking garage close to where I need to be. I park, feeding the meter as many quarters as I have, and start towards the line of shops. Looking in the windows, there are all kinds of items. Books, clothes, even jewelry! Sandra would love the bookstore. It’s small but has a whole section dedicated to detective novels. She used to read them to me in college so I could fall asleep. I remember, when she first started reading them to me, I thought they would keep me awake because I was afraid I would be murdered but her soft voice always put me right to sleep.

I smile at the memory, continuing my walk down the street. Out of the corner of my eye I can see a window with some chocolate on display.

I should get Sandra something while I’m out.

But right as I walk into the store, a small box labeled “Chocolate Eggs” with some of the wrappers colored pink and some blue greet me, the edges of my face becoming warm.

They seriously gendered chocolate eggs?

“How can I help you today ma’am?” a kind woman in a pink apron asks me.

“N-nothing,” I quickly reply. I leave.

I continue walking, when I pass another store, this time with soaps, some labeled “For Women” and some “For Men.”

Seriously? Gendered soap? What is happening?

I walk faster, feeling like the street keeps stretching on for miles. More men and women smiling and holding hands walk past me.

They get to be open. Have their entire family show up for their wedding. All we had at our wedding was friends and our two dogs.

After what feels like forever, I finally reach my destination. A small shop

with various prints in the window. Sandra found this store online and when she showed it to me, I knew I had to check it out. I go to open the door when I find something horrible greeting me.

On the door is a small circular sign with two pairs of those people on restroom signs, a pair of men and a pair of women, with a red x crossing them out. Small text reads “No shirt, no shoes, not straight, no service.”

I can’t take my eyes off it. My hands start to shake, my face feeling warm again. Anger that I don’t know what to do with bubbles up in my chest.

“Ma’am, are you ok?” someone asks me.

I don’t reply. I leave, walking all the way back to my car, past all of the straight couples who get to be open. Through the shops with their useless gendered items. Through the memories of Sandra and I together, our wedding, how neither of us received congratulations from our families. I trudge through everything, feeling like I can’t breathe until I finally make it to the car.

I get in and drive home. Home, to where Sandra is. Home, a place where I can escape the reality that everything that could possibly exist has been turned into heteronormative propaganda. Home, to where I can be free. Home.

I just wanted to go home.

The Things I Never Say

by Lila Schubert

I wonder
at what age does your heart stop yearning
for the smell of dandelions,
the sound of rain.
I hope that for me
it's never.
I dream
about how long you'll stay,
if the sweetness in your voice will stick.
I sometimes worry
that it won't.
We move
in ways similar to water,
holding our breath in mid-air.
I try to capture
a moment for later,
or maybe two or three.

Beautiful Words

by Amulya Viswantha

You don't realize how precious life is until you live a lie of it.

Once, when I was much younger and more naive than I care to admit, I had it all planned out. I had stashed a small backpack in the back of my closet, behind all my used-up agendas and American Girl doll clothes that I had wasted money on for years, packed with my favorite clothes. It sat in the back of my closet for one week. Then another. Then a month. Then one more.

My mother had noticed that I hadn't worn my favorite shirt in two months. She became suspicious. She found the backpack, the spare toothbrush and toothpaste, the water bottle, the extra pair of shoes, the clothes. She found my favorite shirts, all packed away. I watched her, perched on my bed, as she hung back up some of my clothes. She asked me why I had packed everything up.

"I was at Isabelle's for a sleepover. Remember?" I lied.

She seemed to believe it. I don't know how she did. But then again, now I do know.

At that moment I had found out something about myself. At twelve years old, I had discovered a skill that I started working to master. It was almost too easy for me. It was too easy for me to come up with a believable story, working my head around all those angles and corners. Parents believed me. Teachers believed me. Friends believed me. And after a while, my own heart started to believe me.

I started lying so much that my heart stopped clenching whenever I did so. Numbness spread and took root in my soul.

My friends watched me go through life. When they touched me, I would flinch and snap my hand away. My mother once told me that I was the kind of girl who wouldn't tell the world if I was hurting even if it was to save myself. I considered it and I didn't want to believe it. But I knew somewhere deep inside me, where that skill sat on its throne, it agreed

with her. It hissed at me, *you're doing everything right. Keep going.*

And so I did.

I hurt. I bled. I drowned. And I didn't tell a soul.

"Where do you want to be in ten years?"

It had been a simple question, a question that I didn't expect to shatter me as some questions usually did. But the most unexpected questions in life have that sort of effect.

My friends answered the question on their papers. I watched Allison write down, "Finding a job, settling down, living simply."

Selena wrote, "Finding love, maybe working for a good company. An engineering company."

Working at a firm, finding friends
Searching for a job as a manager
Starting my medical degree
Hopefully passing my midterms in college.

I stared and stared. I asked to go to the bathroom. My teacher looked concerned. My face remained blank.

In the bathroom, I cried my eyes out. I cried for the words I wanted to write. I cried for the words I'd never be able to write.

By the time I returned to class, most people had turned their papers in. My friends didn't comment on my red-rimmed eyes, though I knew they noticed. I scribbled my answer on that damned paper.

"I want to study biology and help people live."

I turned the paper in.

Done. Another beautiful lie.

The skill, the voice, the thing on that throne—deep in my chest, it

chuckled. It held my heart in its hands the way a lover would. It threatened to squeeze the life out of me.

“What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Another question. This time from a living, breathing person. It didn’t help that my father and mother were mere feet away, listening to my answer, eager for a chance to analyze whatever I’d say.

And once again, my heart squeezed, my chest contracted, stomach heaving, lungs crushing. That thing hissed. *You know what you have to do.*

So I said, “A researcher. I really want to help people live, and I want to work in a lab. I love doing projects, and that sort of thing.” I even plastered a beautiful smile on my face. A very believable one I’d practiced that I knew worked.

While others practiced the piano, soccer, or dancing, I practiced the emotions everyone expected from me.

My father’s friend Sam returned my smile. “That sounds wonderful. You’d be helping people, saving lives.”

I nodded.

Later that day, another one of my father’s friends, Dave, asked the same question. I forced myself not to hurl a bunch of insults at him. Dave was more like me, quiet and reserved. He was also observant. When I gave him the same answer that I had given Sam, he asked me another question.

“Do you want to serve the world or do you want to do what society tells you to do?”

Dave watched me with earnest, open-minded eyes. That was startling.

And when I thought about the question, I had my answer. It was from some corner of my heart that refused to bow to that throne inside of me.

“Serve the world.”

I had answered honestly for the first time in years. And I felt as if I could

jump off a cliff and not give a damn. I heard the disapproving growl from the throne. I ignored it. That wasn't easy.

When I was alone, I liked to think I was on the other side.

The doorway to my room had become a threshold point for me. The second I stepped into my room, my heavy heart disappeared, and the throne faded into a temporary oblivion.

This was me. The real me.

Most times, I'd read to fill my time up on the other side. I let myself drown in words. It was a sea that I could swim in for the rest of my life and not come up for air. It all seemed like paradise in comparison to whatever I did outside.

Whenever I read a scene, I painted the world. The words came to life. My heart soared. I read until I forgot who I was, where I was, or what I did outside. My imagination came alive when I read.

In fourth grade I wrote my first story.

I still remember sitting in front of a ridiculously large Mac computer, my legs crossed in my father's office. My hands flew over the keyboard. My fingers always felt at home whenever they were typing.

I don't remember the moment that I recognized the exhilarating feeling I had whenever I wrote. It's still one of my biggest regrets in life.

Because whenever I write, I come to life.

That's what the other side was. The other side was me living. Living as truly and freely as I wished I could live.

The summer I turned sixteen we were in quarantine. The epidemic had shaken lives across the world, but it just meant more movie nights for me and my family. With more movie nights came more heaviness in my chest. It lounged on that throne expansively.

I fed them every bit of detail they needed to hear from me, even if my

heart was breaking, even if I could feel each lie tearing me to pieces. I fed them until they were full, convinced of who I was, someone I knew I could never be.

This particular movie night, we watched *Little Women*.

I watched the movie, seeing myself in Jo, seeing her smile in mine whenever I bothered to look in the mirror. I blinked back tears when I saw her published book, forcing my throat not to close up.

All I could see was that beautiful book. Those handwritten words, every one written with passion and love, hard work with determination.

That was the first time I'd ever gone to the other side with other people around me.

The thing on the throne whispered, *weakness*.

After that movie, I went upstairs. I started to cry as I passed the threshold to the other side. The other side enveloped me in a hug. I felt the other side's presence, its soft hands wiping the tears from my face, brushing hair away from my eyes.

I broke into a thousand pieces. Shards of my heart surrounded me. I dreamt about writing another answer on that piece of paper from two years ago. *Where do you want to be in ten years?*

I want to be happy.

I woke with a start. I felt the thing in my chest, the pain so terrible, I was afraid I'd burst. I dragged myself out of bed to live another day in the life of lies I had built.

Everyone says to have a happy place. A place to go when you need to calm down. My happy place was a field. Long green grass, as tall as I was, blocked my view as I wandered around. I picked out a white dress for the occasion.

The only way I could see clearly was if I laid down.

So in my happy place, I laid down in the grass and watched the clouds

pass by. And when it rained I closed my eyes. I let the rainfall refresh me. It washed me of lies. It rebirthed me. I wasn't the girl with a courtroom in her heart, I wasn't the girl who lived in fear. I wasn't the coward too afraid to cross into the real side.

So here I am, still waiting for that rain.

And when that thing on the throne cringes from something I said in defiance, I feel that storm brewing. I can almost smell the wet pavement. I can sense the wetness of the water on my skin. I wait for that glorious storm.

The other side was my safe haven for a long time. The place I ran to for solace.

Now, I feel the thing easing off the throne. I find ways to help myself insert reality into the other side.

I look for the beauty in the real world. Simple things, like coffee in a cafe with a laptop open, as I write. That's beauty. Or the joy when dance class finishes, after all of the sweat and hard work. I let myself taste it, just a bite. Enough to overcome the destruction I used to focus on.

Right now, I feel the keyboard in my fingertips, words on my tongue like spells I have memorized. I know who I am. I know who I want to be.

The other side was a facade. It wasn't real. It entranced me, pulled me in with words that mesmerized me. The other side was perfect. But not real.

I wait patiently for that storm.

Maybe someday, I'll find something worth fighting for. Something not on the other side. Maybe someday I'll find something beautiful in the world.

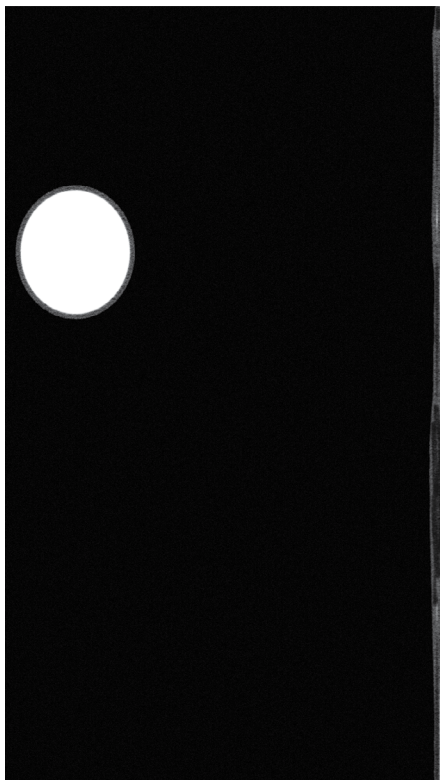
Maybe. Now, isn't that a beautiful word?

Childhood

by Tina Longino

childhood is
laughter
joy
childhood is
playing tag
hide-n-go seek
childhood is
playdates
and sleepovers
but childhood is
over

Now we enter a world of
sorrow
mourning
Now we live in a world
with little friends
little fun
The other side of childhood is
complicated
The other side of childhood is
cruel.



Either Way
by Nora Nathan

The Other Side of Childhood

by Sophia Leone

Waking up at 7:53 am every day
Gazing at the bay across the way
Rushing out of the door
with a big brown briefcase in hand
walking the busy streets of San Diego.

I stop and notice an overflow of children hopping out of a bright yellow
bus
Their tiny feet sprint through the decorated door.

On my right side
I glance and see teenagers pulling into the high school,
preppy backpacks on one shoulder and mass groups socializing.

My mind stops and I have a vision
Memories flow back like a collision
I glance down at my navy ankle pants and grey cashmere sweater
Work attire.

Coming to my senses
I realize I wished the best years away
way back when I couldn't wait to get out of school
And here I am.

Not a day would go by where I didn't think about my future
I would pray for this right here, for going to work
But now, I realize I shouldn't have taken that teenage freedom for granted
wishing it away.

I'm twenty-six years old now
I stare at the beating sun, pull myself together,
and head to my boring office job
I walk to my building with sadness on my face.

The Other Side of Childhood.

Enough

by Fiona Burnham

Eyes flutter open. Blink once, twice, three times, though nothing comes into focus. There is no confusion, no disorientation, and only one clearly shaped thought pushing itself through the fuzz of my consciousness. I am dead. I know this like I know how to breathe—or once did. This knowledge is embedded in the same way that I once knew for certain that I was alive. Isn't coming to realize you're in the afterlife supposed to be a big shock? It seemed like that in the movies. Shouldn't I be reeling in disbelief? In regret? In . . . fear?

I sink deeply into myself for a moment, observing. An inventory of my mind and body reveals none of these emotions, and in their place is something I don't believe I felt pre-mortem. It's a certain stillness. I don't even have the urge to do anything as instinctual as breathe. I simply *am*, and that is enough. For the first time in my existence I feel, in all aspects of the word, enough.

The darkness around me doesn't feel like empty space. It's massive and all-encompassing, intangible in translucent fingers, yet pressing against me with the same comfort as a weighted quilt. If this is the other side of life, I don't know why I ever feared it.



Line Photography

by Rishabh Mehta

Chapter 3

Struggle and Sorrow

Flint

by Anabel Bach

Mind like apathy
Precious pride
Blind, send calvary
Selves divide

Skin from soul
Body turn, prone
Ambition burn
Fractured, firm
Hands like coal
Grave dug, hole
Sick lesson learn
Massa be, stern

Cotton be bloody
Sunken shawl
Water be muddy
Wounded crawl

Bologna brown hues
Hungman gonna lose
Affixed between knot
And the gallows
Cough up a blood clot
Aim the arrows

Fire
Steel
Flint

Broken

by Arielle Damanti

Wall-mounted glass I glare
Trimmed in ornate bronze
With cracks thin as hair
Fingers grazing through the seeps
My reflection spilling beneath my feet
Shattered fragments of beauty

Feet Body Head
Pulled through the gap
The Other Side reveals itself with soft-spoken whispers
Invited to dance with the unknown

Hurtling down with blurs of green
Waking up to the sight of the past
The sun lets her rays cascade onto the world
Bark carved by her newborn rain
Sheltered by tall grasses that wave golden
Birds' melody in the breeze

If this is The Other Side, imagine our world back home
It is shattered beyond repair
Can't make it whole again
It was too late to care

Brilliance in the Night

by Hannah Holt

The stress is always there, standing in a shadowed spot by my side, slowly creeping up or already within me.

Droplets of disease fan out into the world, and there's a growing sense of fatigue in my core.

But even the most brilliant crystals are trapped in rock.

I stop and scavenge around in my sea of thoughts.

There's uncertainty, stress, and suffocating fear tunneling into the center of my thinking like a blurry winter storm at midnight.

That fear, a cruel sun that intermittently burns and dims, threatens to blaze at unexpected moments.

And just like fear, the virus, spreading with invasiveness, takes the lead in public torment.

Reality becomes more unpredictable and strange. Day by day, night by night, the news lights my mental sensor.

As conflicts sit stubbornly in our path, the future in our heads transforms into a vague and constant mind bender.

But the hope? It's still there. It's the tiny light that can explode into a spectral supernova.

However, true belief in this possibility is rare.

The pandemic, a reminder of our fragile humanity, dominates like a stoic moon in the cold of dusk. It drains our dwindling motivation and mutates into a sickly weight on our back.

Despite such external devastation, and even though people stay inside, there are other ways to change this woeful vibe.

A chance at self-improvement, to learn more everyday.

Another opportunity for seedlings to grow a different way.

Whether it be journaling, drawing, sewing, or baking, there's potential for many skills to be refined in the making.

Where I am: reading, playing the cello, or drawing—

I mingle with my wrestling team and improve a fierce double to single.

I know there are others in isolation that are finding a way to keep occupied.

When days are better, our honed skills will germinate into an excellent guide.

The personal triumphs we have in this decade are tiny sprouts of initiative.

A Look Beyond the Year of Covid

by Mary Jo Baetzold

2020 has been filled with uncertainty.
Day after day, we're locked up with insanity.
But what lies beyond this eventful year?
A year of hope, gratitude, or even cheer?
Will the vaccine made by Pfizer
let us see beyond the horizon,
to a new world where we don't need gallons upon gallons of hand
sanitizer?
Maybe we can leave our houses with our smiles shining
because there is no denying
that masks only keep our happiness in hiding.
Maybe we can hug our friends.
What seems to be an eternal imprisonment coming to an end.
The warm embrace of another's arms
will set off joy in us like an alarm.
Maybe we will see the day
when we don't have to tell people to stay away.
We can mix and mingle every single time
instead of just waving our hellos and goodbyes.
It might not change the second the clock strikes 2021.
All the millions of cases won't disappear into none.
But every day will be one giant step closer
to a time when Covid is destroyed
by our mask-wearing, social distancing bulldozers.

Memory

by Ananya Yadati

I want you to stay.
Never leave,
your memory being the most
precious thing in the world to me.
But it just won't happen.

The memories of you flood my head
but then they go away.
I wish I could still hear your voice
but it's almost fully faded.
I want to see you
but I can't remember how you look.
I want to be with you
but I don't even know how anymore,
so I'll have to wait.
See you on the other side.

The Other Side of the Door

by Jackie Lonsway

She slammed the door, bits of cracked paint falling from the frame.

Bleak gray light poured through the window, basking the apartment in somber tones. Her movements were disjointed, her pacing frantic as she tried to work off her energy. Tears pricked her eyes and the small room became suffocating.

Her thoughts were overpowering, scattering before she could fully comprehend them.

He was gone. Her son, the one person who she should be able to protect, was gone.

The idea of it was too much for her to handle. In her panic she paused, catching a glimpse of her face in the mirror. It was pale and grim with wrinkles under her eyes that she could've sworn weren't there when she'd left for work in the morning.

But, then again, a lot had changed since she'd left for work.

She stared into the mirror for who knows how long, her eyes unfocused, her thoughts wandering. The adrenaline slowed and her mind became murky with uncertainty and fear.

When she finally mustered the energy to break the staring contest with her reflection, she looked down the hall to his room, chills running down her spine. She approached it cautiously, her eyes softening at the hand-drawn pictures surrounding the doorframe, the spare toys scattered on the hall carpet, his name in crooked bright blue letters.

Her thoughts quieted as she stood in front of his room like she had so many times before. In the familiar spot it was easy to think nothing was amiss, that the room wasn't empty.

Maybe when she opened the door he'd be in his bed, asleep, or on the ground playing with toy trucks. Maybe the police and the teachers and

the recess monitors were wrong, and she could call the school with a sigh of relief and let the mistake fade into a memory.

Maybe when she opened the door he'd be on the other side, and her heart rate could slow and her nerves could calm.

With this thought echoing in her mind she turned the doorknob, opening her mouth to let out a greeting.

But on the other side, there was nothing.

Her Whispers

by Maya Webb

Silence is a gift, one I must earn.

I hear her—her sickly sweet voice that fills my mind with honey
as she upturns my self-confidence, filling my heart with distaste.

I stare at her through the polished glass.

She is everything I loathe.

She stares back, her cunning smile digging its way into my brain,
sending tremors down my spine as her voice drags
itself over my subconscious, full of pity.

She understands, though, and she wants to help.

She points, my eyes following the trail of disapproval she wants me to fix.

The room seems blurry as the weight on my chest rocks through me.

My world fills with regret and her whispers claw their way through me
as I look back through the glass at the person

I despise most in this life.

She greets me when I wake, her voice beckoning me to the dark habit.

I know I can't quit, yet I feel at peace as she looks back at me,
pride shining through her cold, sunken eyes as they take me in.

Her smooth voice fills my head telling me there's still more work
to be done as she guides me through the motions,

pushing me past my limits, as her whispers

invade my mind, plaguing my thoughts with images

I can't help but shudder at,

whispers that follow me all day,

saving me from ruining all her hard work, as she says.

I would never have made it this far by myself.

I see her again before bed as she gives me a mental list of the things she
hates.

Her voice rises, the pressure building on my lungs
as they fight for oxygen.

But her whispers fill my head, her voice multiplying,
each one saying a different thing until my head feels full
and the world is spinning.

I run into the bathroom, upturning my dinner
as she pats me on the back saying good job,
and she'll be back again tomorrow.

Looking Down

by Hannah Kinczel

I'm looking down.

I see her walking around.

Talking about

being so proud.

Doing what she wants without worrying about the others around.

Sinking in her teeth, making sure not to retreat

because of her sensitivity, her unwillingness to lead.

Her old ways are the only things that are gonna be obsolete.

Happiness will lead.

Taking no crap from her fellow peeps.

You see.

I wanna be like her.

I wanna be heard.

I wanna stand tall in front of all these nerds.

Of course I can't do that right now.

I have to wait for the woo wee woo wee sounds.

For the people to get me checked out.

And, before I can count, I'm hit by a loud, bang of a sound.

A dark green metal moving machine crashes right into me, just now.

Words

by Julia Pentasuglio

The principal's words fell against the desk, bouncing off of the hard shell of a boy forced to listen. Stupid. Lazy. Careless. Foolish. A thousand times over, the boy listened to the verbal assault while he made his way home from school. The school that was supposed to help him.

The prison that was supposed to fix him.

The empty bowl that tried to nourish him.

If he hadn't been verbally abused so many times, maybe it would hurt a little more, cut a little deeper. But he had. The boy was passive to words that would draw any kid's blood. Sighing, he wondered again about the other side. The boy imagined how it might feel if the teacher asked him about his weekend instead of his eyebags. How he was doing instead of where was his homework. He pictured a warm backseat, contrasting with the brisk wind that plastered his hair to his forehead. With the cold tightening around his skin, he longed for a coat with a big, Nike swish instead of his jacket with more rips than it has seams. The boy was used to the feeling of wanting. Wanting for a coat, for a car, for a meal, for someone who cared.

It was useless.

The other side was for them, and the real world was for him. While the kids over there were anxious to open their doors when they reached their houses, the boy dreaded turning the knob. His home was not a home at all, it was filled with anger and fear and distress and pain. When he crossed the line from out there to in here, his house swallowed him whole. When you don't have hope and you don't have love, it is easy to be seen as stupid and careless.

His mother lounged on the couch; the remnants of her breakfast and her beverages claimed the broken coffee table. The boy wondered if the other side's coffee tables were littered with mugs instead of bottles. He paced up the stairs silently in his socks, stepping near the wall to avoid the creak of the hardwood. Most mothers seem eager to have their chil-

dren home, but the boy did not dare to wake the snoring woman.

He traced the deep holes in the drywall and fixed them. Using a stapler to attach a ratty tablecloth to the holes in the yellow, cigarette-smelling walls, he instinctively held his breath. On the other side, kids aren't forced to clean up their parents' messes, but he was a slave to those who raised him.

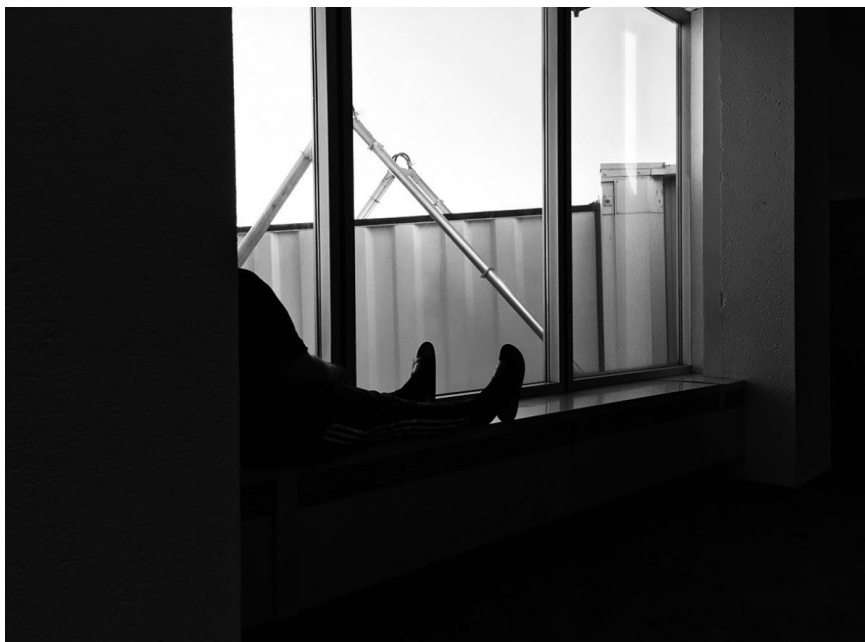
A slave to their anger.

A slave to their mistakes.

What the teacher mistook for laziness was only exhaustion. It is difficult to focus on math problems when the issues from your life absorb your sleep, your time, and your care. To the other side, the boy was foolish, but when you don't have any care left to give, what are you supposed to do?

While the other side swam in the luxuries of love and hope and care, the boy drowned under the weight of what the world thought he was.

Stupid. Lazy. Careless. Foolish.



Untitled

by Rebecca Abramovich

Rainstorms

by Camille Boyer

sleep in the rain
and rest your head
by morning gone
when you awake
someone will be there for you
and I will be gone
like a ghost into the night

sleep in the rain
it's dawn's early light
you wake earlier than
the birds in the sky
the moon is still tucking herself away

sleep in the rain
and walk away
down the path gone
it's dawn's early light
and you have traveled
far away from me

for rain is loud
it fills your head
walk in comfort
keep your mind
I might not be able to let you go
but for now
rest your heart

sleep in the rain
you have gone from me
too far away
away
away

In the Fire

by Anabel Bach

stereotype built on a story
of pain and loathing
blood boiling
burning cross
the brown in the fire
lumber burns drier
with hate in the air
and fear in the dirt

the battles of words
made souls become birds
ravens and crows
nip at ropes
loosen a knot
shackling
a neck from a heart
sapling
grows from the spot
he fell

flesh is seeds
death is deeds

as bird he breathes
then flies

Breathe

by Alaysia King

To breathe

Inhale

Exhale

Breathe

Something us minorities cannot do.

Look at what our society has come to.

They act like we're nothing,

like we don't have dreams we want to pursue.

Taking a stand is long past overdue.

When are you going to realize it does involve you?

Being black is a crime,

but that's never something y'all want to get into.

Stop looking at just one angle of the view.

We need to stand strong and break through.

Police are supposed to be the ones we can turn to,

not the ones killing and arresting us while people sit around thinking it's
"cool."

Oh, and let's not get started on "white privilege,"

that's something y'all never want to dig into.

Cause when it's a white cop, with a white citizen, they forget all the laws
they're supposed to live through.

But a white cop with a black citizen, WHEW.

That's all I got to say because you took the clue.

They just got to see black skin to get their blood to brew.

Oh, but you knew.

It's something we see every day,

and the nerve of these police to think they deserve a "thank you."

To breathe

Inhale

Exhale

Breathe

Say their names

Aren't y'all tired of all this pain?

How are we not burning this country to flames?

I'm so tired of all the games.

Don't y'all remember us being wrapped in those chains?

Our ancestors working on those plains?
Black and white separated into two different lanes?
How they mad at us for the blood they put in our veins?
Cause believe it or not, it wasn't all peaches and cream.
Being molested was an actual thing!
Did the bell in your head finally ring?
Are you listening to the song I'm trying to sing?
Pay attention to the awareness we're trying to bring.
SAY THEIR NAMES
SAY THEIR NAMES
We need more protests, more campaigns.
We need more than BLACK LIVES MATTER painted down our road
lanes.
We need the police defunded or they will continue to reign.
"I CAN'T BREATHE" is a sentence from which we need to refrain.
Justice is what we must reclaim.
"SAY THEIR NAMES," is a sentence I will always proclaim.
SAY THEIR NAMES
SAY THEIR NAMES
SAY THEIR NAMES
To breathe is something we wish to regain.
To breathe is something we wish to maintain.
To breathe
Inhale
Exhale
Breathe
REST IN POWER TO ALL OUR BLACK KINGS AND QUEENS

I Carry This Disease Called Blackness

by Cherish McNeil

I carry this disease called blackness,
a disease that has stripped me of the American dream.
I carry this disease called blackness,
where I cannot raise my voice too high without being seen as scary.
I carry this disease called blackness,
with a take-as-needed prescription called
“Be quiet and don’t move when a police officer is talking to you”
and a daily pill called “code switch.”
I carry this disease called blackness.
When white people speak improperly, it’s accepted
but when I do, I get rejected.
I carry this disease called blackness
that is contagious
and will be carried on to any child I bring into this world.
I carry this disease called blackness
where there are people that fear
I’m going to steal or pass my sickness on.
I carry this disease called blackness
that is incurable and disgusting to many.
I carry this disease called blackness
that involves so much pain that it
causes restless nights.
I carry this disease called blackness
which will forever be seen as such my oppressors.

The Country's Protector

by Cherish McNeil

This was his homeland and he had to protect it. It didn't matter the cost. His family, his job, his country, *his president*—that's what mattered. So he planned this moment, where it was going to be, and what weapons to use. He went through all of the steps to protect his country. This was the *right* thing to do and no one, not even his mother who once tried calling the police about his so-called gun problem, could tell him he was wrong.

He thought about what could happen afterwards, as he watched the animals mixing with his people, tainting them as beast and human shook hands. He hated it. All of the doubts he was having washed away as he glared at this inhumane performance. This just drove him even more mad. Besides, his fans would be disappointed if he didn't follow through with what he promised. Everything was easy, from getting the gun to making his way to El Paso. No one suspected a thing, except for his mother, and it didn't work out for her.

So now, he sat here with guns in his trunk that could go 600 red-dot sights per minute with the intention to kill. No, with the intention to *protect*. He was doing this for his country, no matter what the news said after the fact. The president would *praise* him. He nodded to himself with assurance. This . . . was an act of bravery.

He gripped his key, turning off his car, and leaned down to pop his trunk. He opened up his car door slowly as the angel on his shoulder pushed him to go on, to protect his people, as the devil begged for him to stop. The angel was a bit louder and he swiped the devil away as he picked up his bag of weapons. This will surely kill the beasts.

He looked up at the large Walmart sign and grinned. He was about to save everyone. He put his stoic face back on. This was not a time to show happiness. This was serious. He straightened his black bulletproof vest and walked into the building, his head slightly down, trying not to draw attention to himself. He followed a couple and their baby. What a service he was doing for the country. It was like a jungle. Monsters were on each side of him and he was the hunter, ready to shoot the beast.

He pulled out his gun and aimed at them.

He fired and watched their eyes drain of life.

He found beast after beast and aimed, again and again, hitting *everything* he could. He thought about all of the praise he would get later, so he shot again, his rounds hitting the floor and screams hitting every corner of the room. Then he heard the sirens and started to flee. The police were coming. Why? He was saving everyone. They shouldn't be calling the police—they should be thanking him. He ran for his car and started it, adrenaline pumping through his veins. He heard the sirens behind him. Maybe they were coming to thank him. He stopped and got out of the car as the police did the same.

He grinned as he said, "I'm the shooter."

Living without Eyes

by Rebecca Abramovich

Living with sight
Seeing the dream
Having the now
Able to feel the ground beneath my feet
Sturdy and steady
Able to drive to the edge of infinity
Able to strive without breaking every bone in my body
I can see the colors in the sky
Blue, black, green
Feel the sweet sense of spring inhaled through my lungs
There are lots of things I see and know are real but are still a mystery
Invisible to the naked eye but seen in the stillness of dust.

Living without eyes
Breaking down
I stumble on every corner
Lost in the safest streets
Scared in the kindest neighborhoods
Holding on to a piece of plastic that keeps me sane
This will not be forever
for this is only the start.

The final stop
The sun shines no more
I can't even see the floor
No way to express myself creatively
Can't even see a key
Blind as a bat
Dead as a doornail
Stuck in a box, running in circles like a rat in a maze
Blinded into not knowing where to go
What to do.

Got to go
Pushing to see again
Praying to walk and run, knowing where to go

Trying to live in peace with sight
Making it to the next piece of the pie.

Snipping, pruning to be perfect
Trying at all costs not to be stuck
in this infinite loop I stay astray,
falling to my own demise.

For two days I see the sun
One second, then I'm blind

Cursed to live with shells of eyes.



Am I Trapped, Am I Free?

by Tevyah Hanley

The Other Side of the Divide

by Dominic O'Neal

Planted atop the heap that is earth
sit a few beings that clutch all of the worth
Through passiveness and greed
they extract all that they do not need
And only by hoarding the means of production
do they keep themselves away from destruction
But is it even valuable in the end
to perpetuate conflict that will inevitably descend
Being outnumbered by the proletariat
who will in time dismantle the oppressive chariot
Those whose existence relies on nonstop labor
that disintegrates each and every one of their neighbors
All the more reason to become dissatisfied,
it's crucial that they struggle to narrow the divide.

Tunnel of Despair

by Emily Dicevicius

What you see now
is a fake reality
The darkness
The struggle
This tunnel of despair
of loneliness
At the end of this tunnel
shines a light so bright it's blinding
How do we get to this light?
How do we survive?
The only way out is by trust—
to trust that you can get there
is as simple as believing so
At this moment in time
you stay behind
You are untrusting in your efforts
You fall a step behind as each day goes by
You forget that it is simple
It is so simple to trust
to climb
to succeed
to reach that light
And as soon as you do
you get there
You reach that everlasting light and bathe in the triumph
So leave that darkening mind behind
Open your eyes
Follow the light
And you will reach fulfillment



Hungry

by Nina Serna

He Is Kind

by Nareus Hardin

standing in his line of sight
his dark eyes like headlights
I am scared that he'll decide
to leave me on the other side

every second, minute and hour
from then on, he's on my mind
although this isn't the first time
now it hurts, because he's kind

his body's sculpted like a statue
but there's a beating heart inside
he's a tomb and not a shrine
drop-dead gorgeous but still alive

I can handle red flags and signs,
inflated egos and fractured minds
but tears are falling from my eyes
because I am hurting and he is fine

because I am hurting, and he is kind

Chapter 4

Imagination and Euphoria

Quiet Place

by Katelyn Simpson

It was silent, foggy.

On the other side,

across the crack in the road,

separated, abandoned from humanity,

lies the dead, soundless place.

Large footprints, chains clattering

in the quiet place.

Cross the road and there is no coming back.

Gravel blowing in the high wind, nothing in sight,

strolling in farther, the mist blowing off the trees

in the quiet place.

Muted chatter, groaning as the door creaks open,

this place looks like nothing but mistreatment.

No desire

on the other side.

The Wall

by Jackie Lonsway

Each moment it stands,
its shadow looming,
casting darkness over her mind,
impossible to cross.

She can only pretend for so long,
deny its existence,
reject its power,
put on her familiar act.

Time does little to crack it.
There are seconds where she can see through it,
when pieces crumble and the weight is lifted,
but it's fleeting.

There's no ladder,
no simple way to jump over it.
She'd allowed it to build for so long
that it had grown alarmingly tall.

What lies on the other side?
What does it look like over the wall?
Her greatest fear
is never finding out.

In These Walls

by Maryam Yakout

Living in these walls
City entrenched in this dreamlike hell
Destroyed by its own creator
Bloodshed and tears creating your flesh
Longing for an escape to the other side
Tales since birth of wonders unknown
Warm kisses that we've longed for
Angels falling from failed missions
There is no hope
Yet we long for the unknown
Fallen friends
Take space in our minds
Their bodies latching onto our ankles
As they wish to see the other side
We have no escape
Yet we dig with these bloodied hands
No mercy can atone for the sins we committed
We have nothing
Yet we want everything
Is outside really worth it?

Solar Return

by Naomi Hardin

Venturing through a breath of wild.
Creatures howl
from unknown crevices.
Fallen leaves and party favors mark my path.
Hours pass.
I tremble at the outskirts of life.
Disinvited from the rest of the world,
my cold blue skin ruffles.
Slowly fading into the trees,
soil no longer mars my feet.
Only sins lay beneath me.

I arrive at the non-place
on the other side.
A sordid arrangement of seats awaits.
Not a friend in sight.
“Happy birthday,” the wind howls.
Balloons burst,
a swift madness.
I cannot bare these shades of gray
any longer.
Dreaming.
For hours.
In colors that don’t exist.
My body becomes lost on me—
made of crushed little stars,
a stunning excavation of human heat and light.
There will be no solar return tonight.
There will be no looking up at the stars tonight,
though they probably shimmer quite beautifully.

The Second Side

by Nora Nathan

There is a second side to everything.

A reverse.

A mirror.

Opposites.

Everything is backwards

when you are

on the other side.

Everything is

different

but the same.

On the other side of

truth is a lie.

Lies are true.

What you know

is wrong.

What is wrong,

you know.

The other side.

A reflection.

Truths and lies

bouncing back at you.

Lost, alone.

This is what it is like

on the other side.

Vacation in Pluto

by Indigo A'Rielle

Would you like to come visit Pluto? I am queen here, I am a deity. I take both cash and gold as offerings. I take loyalty as sacrifice. Nobody stays for long. It rains glass here and I always end up inviting people that are scared of their own reflection. I like to bring people into this world of mine, look into their minds and see what can be healed. But, like I said before, they fear what is on the other side of themselves. Nobody stays here for long. My planet gets chaotic with extras anyways. And no one will ever give a sacrifice. I guess no one can afford to stay on Pluto. And that's fine. I get to live in a world of my own, see the other side in my mirror. It's fine on this side of the galaxy.

We drink beetlejuice and it's bittersweet, like our enemies. We feast on buffets every day. And we have a Garden of Eden too. Adam and Eve hold space for peace. The garden lies in the back of the castle. We grow pomegranates and strawberries. Hibiscus flowers complete the color scheme. Inside, we grow roses. Jupiter comes to visit sometimes. Their queen is beautiful. She loves the gold and rose quartz floors here. She's my rock, grounds me because gravity won't. She saves me when I go back to my homeland looking for more people to bring to paradise by reminding me that people fear what they are not used to. They fear the best in themselves.

When I am betrayed, I banish people from the Milky Way, but they always manage to come back to partake in the fruit of my garden. And who can blame them. But every time they are close to settling in they try to burn my world down. I don't know what I've done wrong. I've tried to be a fair ruler. I've even tried letting them rule alongside me.

Come visit Pluto. I can't tend to this place all alone.

The Dark Side of the Moon

by Juliana Simpson

Bright light illuminating the clouds.
On the moon, there are no humans allowed.
They say they're just illusions
which leaves us with such confusion.
They keep their existence hushed
but way out, at a distance,
we look with persistence
for creatures like us.
Green and small or human like us
fall from the sky
from up so high.
Nobody knows
when they'll expose
their hidden commune.
on the dark side of the moon.

Oh, Fair Dreamer

by Sydney Ference

Oh, fair dreamer in the night,
open up your starry eyes.
Step down from that throne of glass and bronze,
and walk towards the light.
Peer through the mystical looking glass.
See the beauty and the color.
Rest one hand along the carved frame,
the other on the flat panel of glass.
Feel the coldness that it possesses.
How frigid your hand must be.
See a figure approaching you
from the glass itself.
Listen to what this figure of ice and thorns has to say.
You hear of a forgotten land at the edge of the world,
ravaged by centuries of war,
by an unknown force.
A land that needs a victor to save the day,
a champion forged in love and wonder,
one that is far away.

Oh, fair dreamer, they are referring to you
for you have a heart that is pure, a will that is strong, and a wonder that
goes unquestioned.
The figure of guilt and shame
is telling you to walk through the flat panel of glass
to become who you were always meant to be—
a hero who will bring light
to a land of endless darkness,
who will bring freedom
to those held captive by years of tyranny,
who will bring hope
to the hopeless.

Oh, fair dreamer, what says you?
Will you follow this figure of blades and shadows through the looking glass?
Will you bring freedom and diplomacy to those who have been enslaved?

Will you be their hero who fights for them
until your last dying breath?
Will you think that you are in a dream of your own concoction?
Will you think that you do not have what it takes?
Will you drown in the thought that you left legions of people to die
while you contemplate the reality of it all?

Oh, fair dreamer, walk through the looking glass.
Fend away your doubts and trepidations
and let your heart be your guide.
The figure is reaching out a hand for you.
Will you take it?
Grab hold of the figure's hand of truth and valor
and let them guide you through the glass.
Each step that you take will lead you one step closer to starting your quest
and making your dreams become reality.

Stormsick

by Lisandra M. Wheeler

I see my soul in the moon's gaze
because it touches every bit of surface.

But even then, there are shadows
that exist in my presence.
Simultaneously, in my absence.

There is a standoff in my mirror.
The reflection is not my own.
I wait for my own eyes to see me
but even my shoulder is cold
and I can't seem to remember a time that it wasn't.

Who do I turn to
when the sun rises and the wind no longer sways quite the same?
The weighted air on my shoulders only told me that I was real. And I
can't remember
whether I was truly awake or just dreaming.
I wait.
And I forget.

Thunderstorm

by Alexander Kosmos Zunt

Rain trickles down from rooftops, creating small, glossy pools of water. The gentle plink of the rain grows louder, creating a steady rhythm. Worms start to wriggle their way out of the ground, enjoying the cool rain. Suddenly, lightning flashes in the sky, shooting hot blue tendrils of electricity through the atmosphere. Trees fall, crack, and splinter. The angry, hot blue bolts of lightning shoot out of the thunderous clouds at random. Thunder rumbles, making any other sound almost inaudible, even the steady patter of the rain. Somewhere from the brick confines of a raindrop-covered home, a child pulls the covers over his head, frightened by the storm. Then, the thunder grows quieter, and the pounding rain begins to ease into a light drizzle. Worms slither frantically back to the safety of moist soil, and the looming dark clouds disappear. The sun makes its way out of the now soft, white clouds, shedding light onto the puddle-ridden streets. Families start to wake up, basking in the warmth and light of the morning sun. A rainbow emerges—its collage of colors lifting the spirits of children. Puffy, white clouds scatter at random throughout the light blue sky, which fractures and splits into baby clouds.

At last, the thunderstorm is over.

The Prism

by Tevyah Hanley

I look through the prism
and everything is turned upside-down.
Wrong is right;
Left is right,
a smile turns into a frown.

Where sorrow turns to pure joy,
and curiosity is met,
for everything is backwards, outlandish,
you have seen nothing like it I bet.

Staircase

by Rebecca Abramovich

Up and up
Higher I climb
Starting out fast
But getting slower
Full of air at the bottom
Out of breath by the last step
Spiraling, zigzagging, up, 1, 2, 3
Losing count, seeing how far I can go
Muscles cramping, higher and higher I go
Up I go, never backward, always facing forward
You can never face the wrong way on a staircase
Going down is a lot easier than going up
You are relaxed, taking your sweet time
Never out of breath going down
Not worried about numbers
Not counting the steps
Still full of energy
Going down

A Glimpse of Heaven

by Natalie Miller

Almost there.

A girl stops to catch her breath.

Screams echo from nearby.

A flash of light. More screaming, this time louder.

Get to the other side.

She sets off running.

Another flash of light and a metallic smell.

Blood. She is bleeding.

She calls for help, but no sound.

Just a bit farther.

She looks back one last time at the remains of the city.

What were once magnificent buildings and delightful little homes are now unrecognizable to her.

The girl is crying now. Her tears mix with dirt from the explosions.

She remembers her mother's last words to her. She must find the other side.

What other side? She wonders, but runs faster.

After what feels like hours, she falls to the ground.

She pictures a door in her mind, waiting for her.

She pushes it open.

Smiling faces welcome her. Her parents. Her little brother. Neighbors and people from their city.

On the other side, there is no screaming.

There are no men with guns and no explosions to run from.

It is beautiful on the other side.



Mother Nature

by Jacques Curtis

The Blue That Was Met by You

by Mia Maurer

Hello everyone, my name is Kara Marie. I am before you today to tell you my story. To tell you the story of Ocean Blue.

It started when his bright blue eyes gleamed down at me. With one gaze, all my walls tumbled to the ground. I was lost, lost every time our eyes met. His ocean blue eyes. The ocean tide that takes me away every time. The ocean that connects beautifully with the sky. The ocean that takes me off my feet all the time.

Suddenly, I was in a whole new world. It was just him and me, the girl who will always be by his side. I can still picture the day I saw what was on the other side, the day I opened the door to what was behind his eyes. The day he showed me what was really in his mind. The day that I took his hand and we went somewhere more amazing than when Peter Pan took Wendy to Neverland.

We were down on the street where people danced when my tall, blonde, curly-haired boyfriend asked me to take his hand. "Take your hand?" asked. "You want me to dance in front of all these amazing dancers in the heart of New York City!?"

His hand hung there loose as he explained. He said, "Look me in the eyes, would I ever lie to you? Just come on, once in a while you need to have fun." That was the first time I really looked him in the eyes. The first time I recognized that there was something deeper, something bigger going on inside. So, I grabbed his hand and we were transported through space.

We were no longer in New York City, we were in the ocean, dancing with all the waves. We were out in the ocean where the sky meets the sea. There it was, more pretty than heaven, more lively than life. It was like a missing puzzle piece was found that night. I went to dunk my head into the great sea. I needed my hair wet. I needed to feel the salt on my face. I needed to escape the breeze that was making me freeze. So I went underwater, and somehow I was able to breathe.

“What is happening?!” I screamed.

My arms were floundering in the water. My legs were kicking, my body shaking, my eyes stuck. What was happening to me? I thought that my time had run out.

My boyfriend yelled out, “You can breathe, you are alive, you’re just alive somewhere else. You’re alive in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, you’re alive where the world really counts.”

We swam as deep as our eyes could see. And for miles and miles, there was nothing but beauty. There were starfish as pink as embarrassed cheeks, whales much bigger than you and me. There is no word to describe this beauty.

Just then, we bumped into this weird looking coral reef. It smelled like a fresh oil spill and it looked like a scene out of Stephen King’s new horror movie. My boyfriend then explained the disaster I saw.

“We hit the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, this is all human debris,” he said.

My blood became cold and I began to shake.

I was struck by the horror people could commit, the monster we created. I could now see what the pain was that I had always noticed in my boyfriend’s eyes. It was the pain of knowing of this rotting world that might not survive. That’s when I understood why my boyfriend would always say, “Kara, the world isn’t so pretty, humans are beasts who think they dominate the world because they made a big city.”

My boyfriend caught me drowning, not only in my thoughts, but in the water that was pushing me down. He grabbed me by the hand and told me to look him in the eyes. We were transported back to the city where we began to dance, safely on the other side.

Having thought back to that day many times, I have come to the conclusion that when there is good to be found, there is always some darkness to go alongside it. There’s pollution in the city that makes our brains rot, and there is garbage in the ocean that destroys life. We caused this,

and we don't know when to stop. We have the capability to spread love, we are spreading pain.

That's why I started this group. That's why you are all here today. This group will turn the world bright blue. We will see what's on the other side, what garbage can really do, and what it is really like to destroy life. So, join the team. Try to keep this world clean. Come on an adventure. Let's make a better sea.



On the Other Side

by Yonglin Wu

The Little Girl

by Fiona Burnham

The Other Side came as a little girl
with pigtails tied up high.
She took my hand and led me
and said, "You're the first today that didn't cry."
I expected more of a climax—
maybe a fall or bright light.
But darkness swaddled me like a baby
and I felt safe—perfectly fine.

She took my spirit in her small hands.
It was glowing like an ember.
She shook her head minutely.
If my soul was weighed, I don't remember.

We spoke for a while,
Walked at least 5 miles,
With no breath to be exerted,

Then the little girl sighed,
Looked me right in the eyes
And said, "Your end has been averted."

I was thrown into the Other Side
After swimming through the black
The Other Side laid its hands on me,
Then the Other Side sent me back

Higher

by Leila Metres

the world is spread out below me
a tiny version of everything i know
i can barely see the cars and towers
littering the winding city streets

higher, i fly
higher

my heart flutters in my chest
beating harder than my wings
i just feel so alive
when i'm this far up in the sky

higher, i fly
higher

i part the clouds with my beak
pushing through the unknown
cool mist coats my feathers and
i break through to the other side.



Untitled

by Rebecca Abramovich

Sandwich Wars

by Flynn Gilbert

A screenplay inspired by “The Boundaries Game” in “Pineapple Fever” (Season 6, Episode 25) of *Spongebob Squarepants*

PLOT: *Eight teenagers stay after school in detention when they find a sandwich that they all want. So they fight over it.*

CHARACTERS:

Ms. Donna Williams

Nick Roberts

Emily Brown

Melody Edmunds

Gianna Page

Apollo Sheldon

Darren Wright

Isaac Lovat

SCENE 1: *Michelangelo High School. Inside the school, in detention, Ms. Donna is teaching.*

MS. DONNA Now, we’re gonna make up all the work you guys didn’t finish. We’ll go through the classes you all skipped. [*Does the potty dance*] I have to go to the bathroom. [*Leaves*]

NICK Hold on . . . she’s gone . . . we’re free!

GIANNA Yeah!

NICK Now, I say we stand out of these chairs and get the heck outta here!

[*The kids run out of the classroom*]

ALL Freedom!

[*They run to the hallway, but stop and sniff around*]

DARREN Do you smell that?

MELODY Yeah, but what is it?

NICK I think it's coming from there! [*Points to another classroom*]

[*They all run in to find a sandwich next to a chocolate bar, on a table*]

APOLLO It's a sandwich!

EMILY Look at it! It looks delicious!

DARREN Let's dig in!

NICK Wait, Darren! We can't! That sandwich is very small. Only one of us can eat it.

APOLLO He's right.

MELODY But who will get it?

NICK I know! Why don't we play a game called "Sandwich Wars?" I will draw a line separating us. [NICK *walks to the hallway as the others follow. He takes out a pen. He is closer to the door than the other kids are.*] This will be my side and that will be yours. [NICK *draws a line in between him and the other kids.*] It's just a little game.

GIANNA Why are we playing this game anyways?

NICK Uh . . . no reason, Gianna! [NICK *runs into the room and takes the sandwich*] Phew! That was a close one! [NICK *runs out of the room. DARREN gasps.*]

DARREN He's got the sandwich!

[NICK *turns around and sees that the back doors are locked.*]

NICK Drat! [NICK *looks at the other kids as Western music plays in the background. He runs to the other side of the line.*] ONWAAAARRDDDDDD!!!!!! [APOLLO *trips NICK who drops the sandwich.*] Whoa! Apollo! [NICK *tries reaching for the sandwich, but APOLLO takes it first.*]

APOLLO Halt! This is the other side of Sandwich Wars. This side's ours, not yours. Whatever lands on our side, we get.

NICK But Apollo, I need it! I'm so hungry . . . Wait! I'll just take it myself! [NICK *grabs the sandwich and runs down the halls, laughing maniacally*]

APOLLO Stop him!

ISAAC [offscreen] CHOCOLATE!!! [ISAAC *runs down the halls and chases the other kids away.*] CHOCOLATE!!! CHOCOLATE!!! CHOCOLATE!!!

[*The kids get away from ISAAC and run to NICK who is sitting down, about to eat his sandwich*]

EMILY OMG! He's got the sandwich!

DARREN We can see that perfectly fine, Emily!

EMILY Shut up, Darren!

DARREN After him! [DARREN *jumps on NICK, who tries to escape, but DARREN holds him*]

NICK I won't let go of the sandwich for as long as I live and breathe!

MELODY That sandwich is mine!

DARREN It's mine first, Melody! Let go, Nick!

NICK But all I wanted was something to eat!

APOLLO Did somebody say, "something to eat?"

ISAAC [offscreen] CHOCOLATE!! [ISAAC *chases all the kids down the halls*] CHOCOLATE!!! CHOCOLATE!! CHOCOLATE!!!

[*As the kids run, they slip on water on the floor and get knocked out. The screen turns black. After a while, they are shown laying on top of each other*]

NICK My food! [*He runs away*]

MELODY “Your” food? [MELODY *runs away*]

APOLLO Hey, I want some too! [APOLLO *runs away*. DARREN, EMILY, and GIANNA *get up and run away*.]

[*The group is running in a circle, making wild animal noises. DARREN takes the sandwich, but EMILY grabs it from him. She runs away with it, but GIANNA runs like an animal and takes it from her. APOLLO topples over her and grabs the sandwich. MELODY wrestles it out of his hands. NICK jumps on MELODY, takes the sandwich, and runs away with it. DARREN jumps on top of NICK, knocking him down. He grabs DARREN’s feet, EMILY grabs DARREN’s feet, APOLLO grabs EMILY’s feet, MELODY grabs APOLLO’s feet, and GIANNA grabs MELODY’s feet. They move across the floor like worms while NICK still holds the sandwich. NICK jumps to his feet and tries to run away. The other kids get up and try to wrestle the sandwich out of his hands.*]

ISAAC [*offscreen*] CHOCOLATE!!!

NICK Aw, man!

[*The kids run through the halls. ISAAC chases them*]

ISAAC CHOCOLATE!!! CHOCOLATE!!!

[*The kids hide in one of the lockers and NICK holds up a pencil case to defend them. ISAAC runs up to them and laughs maniacally*]

ISAAC FINALLY! [ISAAC *takes the pencil case from NICK and throws it across the corner.*] I’VE BEEN TRYIN’ TO CATCH YOU FOOLS ALL DAY! NOW THAT I’VE GOT YOU RIGHT WHERE I WANT YOU . . . wait. That’s not my chocolate bar!

[*The kids look at each other, confused*]

ISAAC My bad!

NICK Hold the phone . . . is this your sandwich?

ISAAC Yeah, but who cares? What matters is that it’s not my chocolate bar.

GIANNA That chocolate bar was yours, too? We had no idea!

[Cut to the chocolate bar on the table in the other classroom. Then, back to the kids in the locker with ISAAC]

THE KIDS *[all together]* We didn't eat it.

ISAAC I believe you! You guys can split my sandwich. I just want my chocolate bar. *[Walks away.]*

NICK OK, then! We can split it when we get back, if we can make it before Ms. Donna sees we're gone.

SCENE 2: *The kids are back in detention, each eating a part of the sandwich. Ms. Donna returns to the classroom.*

MS. DONNA Hello, kids!

THE KIDS *[In exaggeratedly innocent, sing-song voices]* Hello, Ms. Donna!

THE END



Crossing Paths with an Alternate Reality

by Tal Rothberg

Little Seed

by Ava Kline

Little seed, grow for me.

First make a little bud,
then grow into a tree.

Cherry blossom, dogwood, aspen tree—
shade, comfort, beauty, that's what you mean to me.

On the other side of what you see—
this is my little tree.
It is not perfect
but it belongs to me.



Peek-A-Boo

by Laila Shotwell

The Mirror

by Alyssa Sanders

Normally, mirrors can only go one way.
In some very special cases you can see both ways.
Imagine looking at yourself, seeing something no one else sees.
You made a promise to stay hidden, you took an oath.
There's a version of yourself that you really are, but don't let people see.
There's no telling what could happen when that "other you" gets out.
"Don't go over to that side."
Those words repeat in your head, like a scratched CD.
There's a normal girl on one side and a devil-like embodiment on that side.
She'll be there without a doubt.
Reach your hand through,
grab her hand, and let her pull you.
"I can't let that happen," you say.
But she's screaming for you like crazy.
If you scream loud enough, hard enough, she'll hear you too.
Feelings of utter fear and sorrow make your vision hazy.
Maybe you should give in, how bad could it be?
"Come through the mirror, grab my hand, it's okay."
How bad could it be?
Yeah, you're right, you agree.



Give Me Your Hand

by Sampurna Sarkar

Cloud

by Lisandra M. Wheeler

In a world so saturated with evil, there are fireflies
dancing on specks of dust that I cannot see.
There are thoughts of another universe
where there is no peril.
That thought comforts me.

In a dimension where the sky bleeds purple
and I bleed green,
a soul lives,
attached to me.

Where rain is sacred and heat is savored,
there is no condition in which my happiness will waver.
Because I'm alive, don't you see?
That soul on a cloud is attached to me!

Oh, how wonderful it is
to see fairies in a tree.
Maybe I have a pair of wings
that we can't see.

My best friend is a spider
and he talks to me.
He tells me stories
of life underneath
where his family calls home
the roots of a tree,
where lightning is celebration
and at night they count the stars,
one, two, three.

There is a soul there that is attached to me.

Solace

by Nareus Hardin

The first drop of water was a tear,
which of course began to freeze
in a world before the sun.
But then, another tear fell
from the eye of something bigger
and suddenly things were better.
Not less sad,
not less cold,
but less alone.

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Thank you to all those who have helped give someone a voice in this book, and to you, writer, who have found your voice.

Contributors

Rebecca Abramovich, Orange High School

Owl with paintbrush, pencil, and camera

Indigo A'Rielle, Mayfield High School

the cross between Jupiter and Pluto

Anabel Bach, Cleveland School of the Arts

Black, Activist, Woman, Photographer, Powerful, Free

Mary Jo Baetzold, Mayfield High School

Define me? How 'bout slant rhyming?

Abigail Bellavia, Mayfield High School

I try to be my best.

Meghna Bettaiah, Solon High School

A calm wave in an ocean

Camille Boyer, Mastery School of Hawken

a quiet whisper breaking the silence

Fiona Burnham, Mayfield High School

Student, artist, and part-time human being

Lily Compton, Cleveland School of the Arts

An artist who wants to expose

Jacques Curtis, Mayfield High School

Living Vicariously through 2010 Pop Hits

Arielle Damanti, Mayfield High School

I'm a voice not an echo

Emily Dicevicius, Mayfield High School

Committed, Driven, Intelligent, Creative, Calm, Friendly

Elana Ernst, Silver Creek Middle School

I am a gust of wind.

Sydney Ference, Mayfield High School

The weirdly mysterious absent-minded professor

Flynn Gilbert, Newton D. Baker School

A puppy with much to say

Kai Gyorki, Campus International School

Wednesday watermelon, on Tuesday coffee, us

Tevyah Hanley, homeschooled

Bringing color into a mundane world

Naomi Hardin, Eastern Michigan University

Dream in colors that don't exist.

Nareus Hardin, Bowling Green State University

waiting to be abducted by fairies

Hannah Holt, Charles Brush High School

Colorful wind flowing in different directions

Noelle Jones, Hathaway Brown

An aspiring artist for any genre

Hannah Kinczel, Mayfield High School

I know my strengths and weaknesses.

Alaysia King, Cleveland School of Science and Medicine

The flower hidden under the snow

Ava Kline, Hathaway Brown

If it's not right, don't bother

Rowan Kozinets, Desert Mountain High School

Never-ending bursts of colorful fall leaves

Ryan Lawson, Cleveland School of the Arts

Prolific writer overthinking about this life

Sophia Leone, Mayfield High School

Funny, Kind, Polite, Caring, Brave, Nice

Tina Longino, Mayfield High School

17, Growing Girl, Goofy, Trusting, Loving

Jackie Lonsway, Mayfield High School

Shy, introverted, creative, responsible, creative, reserved

Mandi Lu, Solon Middle School

I'm always either drawing or reading.

Diana Ludu, Highland Middle School

An old soul who likes academia

Mia Maurer, Mayfield High School

Positive, Adventurous, Enthusiastic, Outgoing, Creative, Understanding

Cherish McNeil, St. Martin De Porres High School

With strength and kindness, I rise.

Rishabh Mehta, Solon High School

The beauty of the unseen nature

Leila Metres, Mastery School of Hawken

stories trapped inside, yearning for freedom

Natalie Miller, Solon High School

a girl with a cereal obsession

Lexi Milligan, Hathaway Brown

Full of curiosity and adventurous passions

Kelsey Mize, Mayfield High School

Wings lost in the vast sky

Nora Nathan, Hathaway Brown

Sleepy dragon being stubborn and kind

Dominic O'Neal, Mayfield High School

A concoction of mildly creative ideas

Julia Pentasuglio, St. Vincent–St. Mary High School

Creative, adventurous girl. Loves to laugh.

Elana Pitts, Hiram College

A journal you can always read

Halle Preneta, Kenston High School

Aspiring writer trying to navigate life

Tal Rothberg, Beachwood High School

tall but short . . . short for talented

Alyssa Sanders, Mayfield High School

Down to breathe. Alive and well.

Sampurna Sarkar, Mayfield High School

nerdy, optimistic, go-getting girl with goals

Lila Schubert, University of Rochester

My chicken scratch is my testimony.

Nina Serna, homeschool

a person not confined by limitations

Laila Shotwell, Cleveland School of the Arts

A flower that blooms with grace

Juliana Simpson, Mayfield High School

Lover of art, creativity, and uniqueness

Katelyn Simpson, Mayfield High School

I love spending time in nature.

Reyna Verma, Hathaway Brown

Mighty eyes with good and bad

Amulya Viswanatha, Solon High School

I write for dreamers like you

Maya Webb, Mayfield High School

Quiet, but my mind is awake

Lisandra M. Wheeler, Cleveland School of the Arts

The walking cloud that doesn't rain

Grace Wilde, Mayfield High School

a student with passion for music

Yonglin Wu, Solon High School

a serene mind up in the clouds

Ananya Yadati, Hathaway Brown

Why did I just do that?

Maryam Yakout, Charles Brush High School

A girl who overthinks too much

Alexander Kosmos Zunt, Old Trail School

Best friend of my dog Sam

Meet the Teen Editorial Board

Lake Erie Ink's Teen Editorial Board is responsible for choosing a theme, collecting submissions of original teen writing and compiling and editing them into a professional publication. The editorial board learns about the editing process and publishing industry firsthand while giving voice to youth from across the region.

Joshua Banks, Cleveland Heights High School

Joshua goes to Cleveland Heights High School. He plays golf, bowls, and enjoys hanging with his friends and playing video games. He's never really been a big fan of poetry and finds it difficult to write. He usually writes short stories and is now set on writing a book.

Henry Campbell, Homeschooled

Henry enjoys music and hopes to get a job in some music-related field someday. He likes to collect vinyl records and video games, and he has sizable collections of both (according to him, at least!) This is his second time editing the annual anthology, but it won't be his last!

Jenna Guiher, Walsh Jesuit High School

Jenna Guiher has always had a passion for writing. In 8th grade, she qualified and competed in the state finals Power of the Pen writing competition. In spring of 2020, she participated in the "Write About Now" teen writer's program and wrote an article that was published on Cleveland.com. Jenna attends Walsh Jesuit High School in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. She enjoys swimming, surfing, and volunteering. She hopes to one day study aerospace engineering and chemistry.

Anthony Koonce, Homeschooled/Tri-C

Anthony Koonce has participated in Lake Erie Ink's book project four times. He has a longtime interest in filmmaking and storytelling. In addition to writing a variety of plays, he has written for Cleveland.com and Tri-C's student newspaper, *The Voice*. He also spends time creating short films and informational videos on YouTube. This fall, he plans to major in film production and directing at John Paul the Great Catholic University.

Jasmine Neumann, Hathaway Brown

Jasmine sits down at her desk, phone in hand, ready to type up a bio. She knows it should be an easy task. It shouldn't be very hard to write

about yourself, right? As she taps on the Google Docs app, she slowly starts to realize that she has no clue what to write. She titles a document “Bio” and stares at the too-small keyboard on her phone. The letters almost seem to mock her. She furrows her eyebrows as she starts typing, typos gracing her writing with an aura of messiness. After a few minutes, she finally comes to the realization that it looks like, and sounds like, the purest form of hot garbage. At this point, she might as well start throwing a fit. She doesn’t, however. Instead, she deletes the hot garbage and starts anew. This time she decides to passionately write about how trashy and utterly terrible the first draft of her bio was.

Dev Peyrat, University School

Dev Peyrat attends University School and is a first-time editor at Lake Erie Ink. When he’s not procrastinating, Dev spends his time writing, watching movies, or doing research for the latest debate topic. He is currently working on a documentary as well as a variety of perpetually unfinished short stories.

Halle Preneta, Kenston High School

Halle enjoys writing short romance, sci-fi, and horror stories along with poetry and gets her ideas from life experience and fanfiction. She’s had works previously published in Purpled Palm Press’ *Recording Corona* anthology, three prior Lake Erie Ink anthologies, The LGBT Center of Greater Cleveland’s writing blog, and more. When she’s not writing, she’s either watching YouTube or playing Animal Crossing. This fall, Halle plans to major in English with an emphasis in creative writing at Kenyon College.

Perin Romano, Hathaway Brown

Perin Romano attends Hathaway Brown School, and has written for both her school and camp magazine. She plays field hockey and lacrosse for her school, and she was so grateful to have a season this year. Although she goes to school in Shaker Heights, she lives on the west side and enjoys making the long drive daily. Even though Perin is a big procrastinator when it comes to homework, she loves school. You can catch her watching Criminal Minds, reading a good book, or listening to her extensive record collection.

Sanjanasri Vedavyas, Solon High School

Sanjanasri Vedavyas attends Solon High School, is a bit of an English nerd, an ardent lover of science, and is in a committed relationship with

cookie dough ice cream. In her free time, you may find her juggling three books, watching random science videos online, or unconsciously tapping out the choreo to her newest Indian classical dance piece. This is her second year as an editor of Lake Erie Ink's annual anthology. Her creative work has gotten published on Cleveland.com, through Crossword India's national "I Want to Be an Author" contest, and right here through Lake Erie Ink.

Sarah Voss. Gilmour Academy

Sarah loves to read, write, cook, bake, and figure skate—often crammed between great bouts of procrastination. Sarah does a lot of extracurriculars like her school's yearbook club, improv club, and writing club, as well as opportunities with Lake Erie Ink and the Cleveland Institute of Art. She's interested in studying psychology and English at Kenyon College, and she's super excited to be a part of Lake Erie Ink!

Zoe Zappas. Hathaway Brown

When Zoe is not in the dance studio rehearsing for an upcoming performance, you can find her serenading her neighborhood on skates or attempting to learn one of her favorite songs on her viola, which usually doesn't end up going well, considering that violas are neglected and it's hard to find mainstream music written in alto clef. Although dance and homework consume the majority of her time, Zoe tries to write a little poetry here and there or at least tries to enjoy writing her required essays for school.

About Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth

Lake Erie Ink: a writing space for youth provides creative expression opportunities and academic support to youth in the Greater Cleveland community. Since its founding in 2011, LEI has served more than 2,500 youth annually through out-of-school time creative expression workshops and in-school writing residencies. These programs improve youth access to the arts, increase opportunities for self-expression, build confidence as valued participants, and help develop literacy and life skills.

Creativity matters. Creative thinkers become better problem solvers, and studies show that when children engage their creative minds, they improve their linguistic resources as well as their cognitive and social-emotional skills. We know that when children and teens in our community engage in positive self-expression and connect with their peers in positive ways, they become better communicators and citizens, especially important during a time when social isolation, anxiety, and a downslide in academic outcomes are on the rise due to the pandemic.

This year, as we celebrate our tenth birthday and come out “on the other side” of a very challenging year, we couldn’t be more excited to launch our fifth annual teen writing anthology. This project is the “why” of what we do.

At Lake Erie Ink, the voices of youth are at the center of everything that we do. We believe in the transformative power of creative expression and envision a community where youth discover their voices, share their ideas, and inspire each other.

If you are a parent or guardian, a teen, an educator, or a community member looking for more information on how to get involved with Lake Erie Ink, visit our website at lakeerieink.org or call us at 216-320-4757.

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