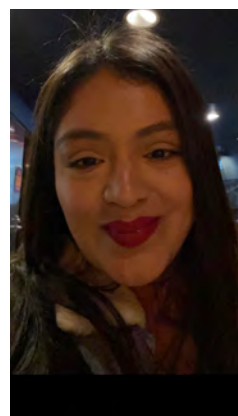
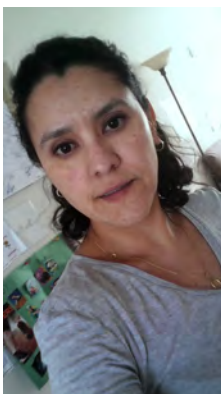
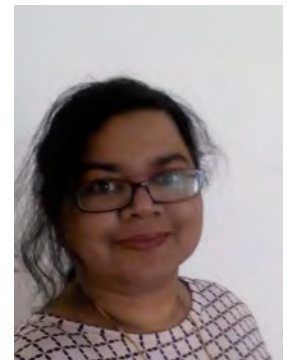
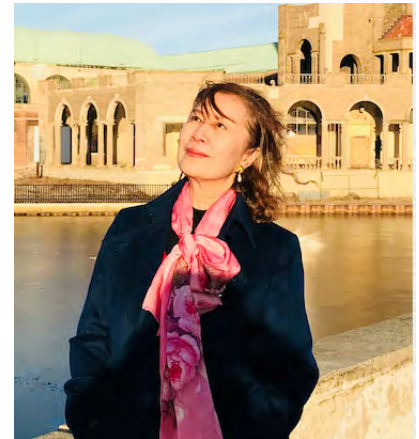


INSIGHT 2020



The New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning Learner Writing Contest



INSIGHT
Volume Six, 2020
New Jersey Association for Lifelong Learning

This is the sixth year NJALL has held an adult learner writing contest. We continue to be grateful that we can provide an audience for adult learners across the state. This year we had over 80 submissions, with memoir and poetry being the most popular categories. Notably, there were more non-fiction submissions than in any previous years. We encourage all learners who are in programs to participate in the contest. Whether a writer's submission received an award or not, we hope that the process of refining their work and taking the big step to submit it to the contest is a rewarding and learning experience.

For the last few years we have invited some the learner winners to read their work at our annual conference. This is always a highlight, as the writers get to interact with an audience eager to hear what they have to say. It is also a great opportunity for the writers to meet each other and share ideas. Of course, this was not possible this year because of the pandemic - we needed to cancel the conference. However, we adapted and held a virtual meeting in the spring at which a few students read their work and talked about their writing process.

Thanks again to all the writers, teachers and reviewers that made this magazine possible. We look forward to reading the submissions for next year's contest and celebrating students' work in whatever capacity is possible.

Stay safe.

Erik Jacobson

Chair, NJALL Learner Writing Contest

Additional 2020 Reviewers: Melissa Backes, Carol Cochi

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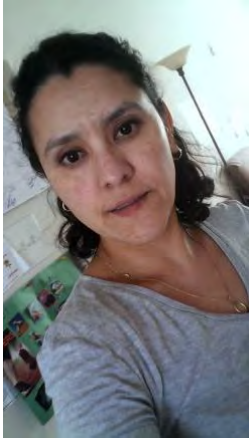
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ABOUT THE WRITERS

Georgina Ramirez Alzaga



This is Mrs. Ramirez. I'm from Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico. I'm really grateful with people who have helped me in different ways.

My little ones: Diego and Natalia, my huge motor and my husband for supporting us.

I love spending time with my kids, knitting, writing, walking, reading, taking photos and volunteering.

Thank you Literacy NJ, for giving me the opportunity to use my Spanish language to help others. Thank you NJALL for selecting my work, this inspire me to continue writing.

Evelyn Booker



My name is Evelyn C Booker. I am 31 years old. I grew up in Newark NJ, where I faced a lot of challenges. I ended up going through a period of addiction but finally decided to get clean and get my life back on track

Mehmet Cetinturk



Mehmet Cetinturk is from Turkey. He graduated from law school in 2008. He worked as a lawyer in Turkey for 8 years. However he had to leave his country because of the reasons what he wrote in his article. He has been living in New Jersey with his wife and son since 2017.

Rose Cheng



My name is Rose Cheng. I came from China and have been in the United States for 9 years. I am a Mandarin teacher at the CACA Mid-Jersey Chinese School and also an ESL Student in "Writing in English".

Patricia Dunston



Patricia Dunstan moved with her family of 9 from Jamaica, WI in 1970. She grew up in Baltimore and went on to college in CT. She pursued a career in healthcare field and insurance industry for 25 years. Pat joined Memoir Writing to express her feelings of never giving up as she fights Parkinson's disease. Her writing, sewing, and dancing bring joy to all.

Karina Gonzelez



I have always preferred my own imagination to escape the dreariness of reality. It is what compelled me to indulge in poetry at the mere age of thirteen. Through my poetry, I adore telling stories, conveying complex situations and feelings with only my imagination and my own writing. Despite what I am feeling, despite my day being "good" or "bad," I am *a/ways* writing, no matter what. My Puerto Rican background, full of rich culture and history, is a constant inspiration to me. Considering that I am only nineteen years old, I admit I still have a long way to go, a lot of work to put in, and a lot of critiques to consume before I am able to perfect my poetry style. Even then, it may not be considered perfect to others, but until it is perfect to *me*, I will keep writing. Even afterwards, and forever until my very own last breath.

Rasheeda Grove



Hi, my name is Rasheeda Grove, and ever since I can remember, I have been a family oriented person. I enjoy being with and taking care of those I love. I also enjoy cooking, watching old black and white movies, bowling, and listening to jazz music.

My friends have always referred to me as their “Doctor Phil” because I’m a good listener who gives sage advice. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why I enjoy being in the medical field. To meet my short term goal of being a Clinical Social Worker in Behavioral Health, I have to put in the hard work of being a serious student. To accomplish this, I was referred to JVS. There I was introduced to a great team of administrators and instructors. I look forward to receiving my high school equivalency diploma and pursuing my degree in Social Worker.

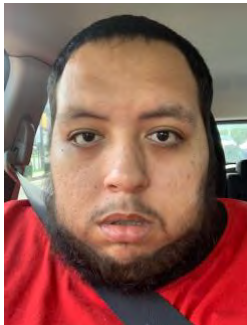
At this time I thank you, Ms. Laura Decesare-Preziosi for all your words of motivation and the push I needed. I dedicate this winning effort to the person who has always influenced me the most. I thank you, mom for supporting me and always telling me to stay encouraged.



Elidia Guzman

Elidia Guzman is originally from Guerrero, Mexico. She grew up in NYC , and now resides with her family in Orange, NJ. She enjoys reading poetry and writing short stories and poems.

David Jones



My name is. David Jones . Born & Raised in Newark NJ. I’m 30 years old. I joined JVS School in 2019 of May 18th and I ended in February 5th of 2020.

Tatiana Korneeva

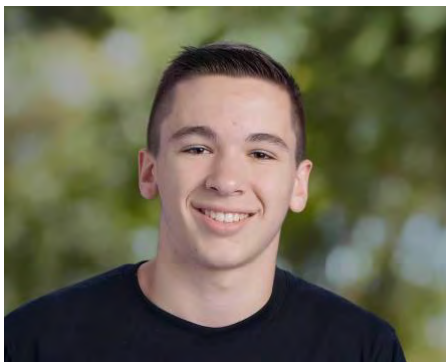


My name is Tatiana Korneeva, I was born on 01/09/1965 in Moscow (Russia). I came to the United States in 2014 and became a citizen in 2017. I am happily married to my husband Alex). Here, in the USA I am working as a bookkeeper. In Russia, I graduated from Sechenov Medical University in Moscow as a pharmacist and worked there about 30 years before I came to the US. Since I came here, I have the dream to become certified as a pharmacist. In my free time, I like to make jewelry and work in my little garden.

Mariam Merced



Drew Robinson

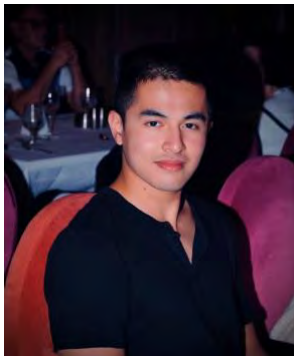


Drew Robinson is an Oakcrest High School alum where he played baseball and was a member of the National Honor Society. He is currently a student at Atlantic Cape Community College and plans on transferring to a four year university. He is studying Biomedical Science and wishes to pursue a career in the medical field as an Orthopedic sports medicine doctor. In his spare time he enjoys playing and watching sports as a die-hard Philadelphia fan.

Janice Rodriguez

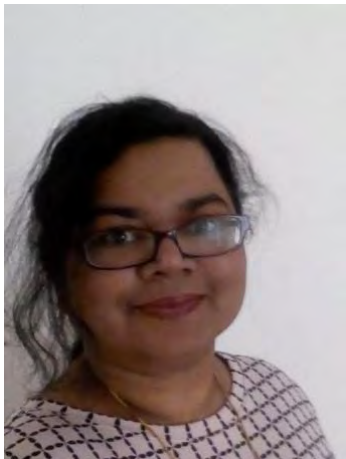


Alec Kyle T. Santos



Alec Kyle T. Santos is a student majoring in General Studies for Science at Atlantic Cape Community College and a member of the Archery Team. He's taken elective courses in both creative writing and media, including video production and photography. He first began writing in middle school and developed his writing ability from there, with heavy inspiration drawn from video games and other forms of media. His favorite genres of literature are Fantasy and Science Fiction.

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja



Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja, a teaching professional from India, currently living in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. She is passionate about both writing and photography. She believes that photography as a first language: a photograph can speak to the world without any words.

2020 Award Winners

Memoir - First Place

My Father

Tatiana Korneeva

I would like to tell you about my father, about the man I loved very much, who was and remains for me the best of the best men.

My father was born in 1935 in Moscow. When World War II began he was only six years old.

At that time, people fled toward the eastern part of Russia to escape the German troops. My Grandma, Dad's mother, decided to go toward the west where her mother lived. She counted on finding food and shelter there. She ended her trip in her little town, Kondrovo, about 100 kilometers (KM) from Moscow. I don't know how long it took. Now, it takes an hour to drive there. I think my Grandma thought that the Germans would never come there. She was mistaken! They were there by November, 1941, not long after Grandma and Dad arrived. The Germans drove my family out of the living area of her mother's house and forced them to live there in the cellar. Some of the Germans lived in our house, over them in the traditional living space. This is why it was not burned down like many others.

It was a horrible time! Everywhere: murders, executions, violence, robberies. All kinds of atrocities! The Germans burned entire villages, often with the inhabitants still in them.

My Grandpa's family had been Cossacks and my Great Grandpa was a colonel in the Royal Army. In memory of him, my father had gotten a "Bashlik"- a special Cossack hood made from sheep's wool. It was a cold winter. One day my Father was walking on the street and one of the Germans took it away from him and pushed him into a ravine. Thank God that didn't kill him.

Sometime in 1942, my father's father came home after the fighting in Stalingrad. He was very sick with gangrene and died very soon thereafter. My grandma married again and she gave birth to two children. As often happens, my father, from the first marriage, felt unwanted. So, he was sent to his Grandma where an easy life did not await him: no Mother, no Father, no good

food and not enough of that.

The people in the Soviet Union had a very hard time after WW II. In 1946/47, the harvest was very bad. My father told me how he and his friends caught little fish with baskets and stole bird's eggs for food. Actually, most of the time they had to eat very bad food: soup with only turnips and a drop of oil.

My Grandma changed my father's day of birth to one year earlier so that he could join the army. I think that many documents were lost after the occupation and you could give any date as your birthday or for anything else.

My Dad chose Nautical school in Baku, one of our warm republics where there have never been any Germans. It was very nice and friendly in those times. And it had not been ruined by war or occupation.

My Dad had a marine uniform, food, and a future---the excellent profession of a navigating officer. What a change!

My father was an excellent nautical professional. He was offered military Naval service in many different places. He chose the Black Sea; I think because it is in the south where the weather is moderate.

But my father, although he was well trained, really did not like military service. Remember, he was born in Moscow and he had many other interests. So, when our army started to be reduced in the 50s, he left it. Then my father went to University, became an engineer, and started to work in an automobile plant in Moscow. Coincidentally, he met my mom at the university.

After about 8-10 years, my father also graduated from another university as an economist.

After this, my father found a more interesting job in the automobile plant. He was also the President of the plant's football team. This combination of talent took him to many interesting places all over the world.

My father also loved Russian nature very much. Consequently, while my mom and I were on a vacation in Crimea (where the weather and the sea are warm), my father was spending his vacation in very different places. For example, it might be in the Polar Ural or Siberia. It was a vacation of extremes but my father loved it, and fortunately, he had friends who loved it too.

We have a million photos of these journeys, the likes of which you have never seen. I

mean the beauty of nature. Have you seen the huge crystals of amethyst or rock-crystal? Huge, meaning larger than a human body. Red swamps, because as far as the eye can see there is red cowberry. He went to many, many other very interesting places: very wild places. Usually, my father's team was dropped with their belongings out of a helicopter to the river (where the river began) and they floated down the river by kayak enjoying the wild terrain.

All the fantastic journeys happened before my Dad turned 55/56 years old. After this, he started to spend his vacations with my Mom in different places in the world. They were in Canada, South Africa, Cuba, the Russian Far East, North Africa, and Europe.

When my Father retired (and my Mom too), they started to live in our house in a village in the Moscow region. They spent almost all of their time there because it is a very nice place with a good house and with very big forests surrounding it.

My Father always liked to pick mushrooms and berries and he did it often when they lived in our village.

He had one very nice and touching tradition: once a year, in June, he went to the forest especially for orchids for my Mom. Of course, in the Russian forests we don't have those lush orchids which we can buy in the stores. These are delicate northern flowers, they are very touching but they are, indeed, orchids.

I can write about my Dad endlessly, I loved him very much. He taught me so many good things and I am infinitely grateful to him.

He passed away when he was only 76.

Every day I remember wonderful times with him. I speak to him. I have dreams about him but less and less. I don't understand why. Before bedtime, I look at his picture, pray for him, and ask him to dream of me.

His voice is getting quieter and quieter.

2020 Award Winners

Memoir - First Place

My Childhood Memory

Ann Fu

I was born in Taipei. This city had all of my childhood and growing-up fondest memories until I left there several decades ago. Taipei has gone through drastic changes during those 40 years. The transformation has changed her from a simple urban place to a metropolitan city.

My parents fled to Taiwan from China when the civil war broke out in 1948. They finally settled down in Taipei and started a family. The house they lived in was a one story Japanese style long-row wooden building with only paper thin walls to divide each household. Privacy was almost impossible. It was not hard to know your neighbor's business. It was also quite challenging to keep each family's business private as well.

Our houses were surrounded by rice fields, fruit trees and a little creek. Those natural areas were our sacred places. We played, chased, laughed and fought on those open grounds. With the older kids in charge we sometimes adventured far away or even parent-forbidden places to explore. We even brought (or truly said , without owner permission) exotic fruits to show our parents. Most of them came from northern parts of China and they had not seen tropic fruits before.

'Safety' was a rare topic. As long as we could make it home before dinner time things were fine. Going to see movies or concerts were luxury things to do. Materially we did not have much but with all the abundant free and natural resources around us we made toys or anything with our hands. Imaginations were wild and unlimited but the results were always a surprise. We invented our own games to play. Creeks became a natural swimming pool in summer. Climbing trees to get bugs or fruits was a good exercise that consumed our massive energies.

The city only had several unreliable bus routes to connect our area from different places. No such public transportation system existed at that time. Most people used bikes to commute.

My father biked to his work every day. It was nearly an hour's ride each way. I still remember that my mom carried me to wait for him in the evening. The joy of seeing him on the far away alley is still inked in my memory. Since my parents passed away I did not go back often. All those smells of hot summer grasses, the noises of kids shouting and aromas from each house seems so remote.

2020 Award Winners
Memoir – Third Place

Change
Pat Dunstan

What would I change? What would I tell my 25 year old self if I knew then what I know now? What would I say that could have made a difference in the person that I am today? What would I tell my 25 year old self that could have transformed my life so every ordinary day could be extraordinary? I know for sure that the person I am today would not have arrived without yesterday's Pat.

I am the 25 year old girl who didn't know what she didn't know...who believed she could do anything she put her mind to...who was foolish, self-assured, could conquer the world, and lived confidently and independently. I am the girl who walked in the dangerous Seaside Park late at night without any appreciation for the potential harm that may come my way. I am the girl that danced until 2 in the morning then laughed with friends as I drove my stick shift towards the rocks of the Long Island Sound without a license.

I am the girl who learned how to be resilient as I lined up the baby bottles on the night table so when my son cried I could just pick up a bottle and push it into his mouth without opening my heavy eyelids. I am the maturing girl who learned how to save for a rainy day as I became intimately familiar with every hamburger helper recipe and every type of pasta known to man. I am the girl who learned the value of exercise as I walked to the store to buy groceries so I could save gas to get to work. I am the maturing girl who learned the value of kindness when my babysitter said, "Go home and sleep then come back and get him." I am the maturing girl who recognized when friends became family and are forever a part of my life.

I know the value of people dreaming with me and pushing me forward. After three years of a night program of a four-year night program, I wanted to quit school. A classmate said, "You didn't quit when you couldn't see the shore, but now that you can see the shore, you are going to quit? You can't quit now!"

I have learned that change always is. I have grown and developed into the woman I am today only because of my appreciation of the experiences of the 25 year old girl...I am so clear that God has a plan for our lives from the beginning so there is nothing I would tell my 25 year old self. I wouldn't change a thing!

2020 Award Winners

Memoir – Third Place

The One Who Saved My Life

Evelyn Booker

Let me tell you all a story, about the girl I used to be-

before I became the woman I am today...

Nearly two years ago I found myself-lost and alone. I was in this dark space, a place otherwise known as *ADDICTION*. How I got there-I don't exactly know. All I do know is one day I looked up, and there I was, trapped in this place, with no way out.

The disease had me feeling as though I had no family, no friends and no one to love me. It tried to convince me that *it* was my best friend-and all I needed.

On I went, down this path of self-destruction for nearly a year, and then I happened to meet the man I thought was just for me, my happily-ever-after. Little did I know my saving grace would actually be found in someone else who would far surpass this "special" guy, in each and every way.

Before I reached that realization, though, I had to experience screaming matches, fist fights, self- deprivation, humiliation, and so much more. It's true: I played my part, and I put up with this primarily because I was in that dark place. He knew how strongly my addiction had a hold on me, and he used it to keep me there, subject to his every whim and always wanting more.

As time passed, we began to drift apart. With each recurring blowout he'd come around less and less. My supply dwindled, and I began to experience some nausea on a regular basis. I attributed this to typical withdrawals. Little did I know it was something much more than that. When I finally got to the doctor, I learned that I was pregnant! My first thought was, "Oh, hell no-I can't have a baby-not now! Look where I am. At this point in my life, it just wouldn't be fair to the child!"

For a while, I actually contemplated terminating the pregnancy. What was left of my relationship was so toxic, I just wanted out. It seemed a baby would only complicate things.

For so long, I knew leaving was the best thing to do. To that point, I just hadn't been able

to gather the courage I needed to do it, so I stayed a little longer, and I tolerated the madness. Within a month, I'd finally had enough, and I did it. I disconnected myself from anything that wasn't a positive force in my life, and I walked away-far away. I felt so bad for my baby who had no choice, but to go endure all of the stress with me. Certainly, it wasn't her fault; she deserved to have a good life. It was at that point that I realized I couldn't go it alone, so I signed up for help. I'll admit, initially it was scary. The mere thought of going through complete withdrawal made me want to run the opposite way, but I stood my ground.

With everything in me, I began to immerse myself in my program. As I got clean, my baby continued to grow. She and I were doing so well; we were actually thriving-until my eighth month. Then my daughter was born prematurely. She had to stay in the NICU for thirty days. For what I'd done to her, I felt so ashamed, so dirty and so trashy, but I stayed in the hospital with her every day for hours on end. I'd talk to her and tell her that I promised to stay clean from that day forward. Even now, when I think of looking into the eyes of my tiny, precious miracle, it's hard to hold back the tears.

Legally, I wasn't out of the woods yet. I was threatened that my baby could be taken away from me by Child Protective Services. Just the idea that I could lose her paralyzed me. I needed to show how capable I was of being a good mother. Eventually, I stopped beating myself up over my past mistakes. I acknowledged to myself that I'd made some wrong choices in life, but since the moment I decided to keep my baby, my eyes have been wide open. You can now understand how Symone Booker-Scott saved my life. I'm forever grateful to have her as my daughter, and I will always be there for her. It's safe to say, without her, there could very well be no me today.

They say when getting clean, we should do it for ourselves, but I believe that sometimes, we need something that's worth it enough to push us forward to getting clean, and without a doubt, that's what my little girl did for me.

October 20, 2028 was the last time I used any drugs or alcohol. As of today, I'm still clean and going strong in my sobriety, one day at a time. Thank you, Tamarah, Zamora, Armani and Symone. Mommy couldn't do it-without you.

2020 Award Winners

Non-Fiction – First Place

Soul and Sound

Alec Kyle Santos

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once said, “Music is the universal language of mankind.” This concept is perhaps one of the most recognized in the world, that sound is a way to transfer meaning, allowing someone to communicate their ideas to one another. Music and sound is one of the most important aspects of media today, whether it be television, movies, or video games. Too often do individuals overlook this, and only when it is absent does one realize the true importance of the phenomenon that is sound. There is a series of games that truly represents this particular concept, the titles created by developer FromSoftware and Hidetaka Miyazaki, the *Souls Series*. These games not only possess excellent sound design and music quality, but also ingeniously meld the tracks together with the game’s mechanics while also reflecting the atmosphere represented within each title. Rhythm, ambiance, and the overall soundtrack are carefully crafted to create a stellar experience for players as they journey through the *Souls Series*, one that influences their behaviour and affects their overall immersion.

The lands of the *Souls Series* are as beautiful as they are desolate. Each territory has been ravaged, overrun and befouled by the presence of monsters and demons. The player character is alone in this vast world, the story’s sole hero, the chosen one who will tilt the scales of balance, either restoring the former glory of civilization or finally end it all. The music scores throughout each game represent this, each song giving off a feeling of despair and loneliness, yet just as well, the sound design also accomplishes this feat. When there is an absence of an accompanying music score, all the player is left to hear is the environment: the creaking of old doors in dilapidated buildings, the droning moans of the undead surrounding the player, and the very footsteps the character makes as they move throughout the area. All these sounds combined together make for a very immersive experience, putting the player on the edge as they consider the world around them. The player has to proceed cautiously as they explore each area, using the in-game sounds and music to gauge the atmosphere of the environment, taking each into careful

consideration lest they suffer an untimely death (“The Sound Design of Dark Souls”).

Perhaps the most iconic aspect of any Souls title is the boss battles. These encounters make-up the most difficult and enjoyable parts of each game, every single one memorable and unique. Just as well, the accompanying tracks for each boss are distinctive, similar to the bosses themselves, not one track is quite like the other. Often these tracks are blood-pumping, adrenaline-fueled mixes that keep the player focused and alert throughout the fight. However, there are exceptions to this, most notably the final boss of *Dark Souls*, Gwyn, Lord of Cinder. Most of the encounters leading up to this final battle have been heart-pounding orchestral scores, but Gwyn’s theme is melodic, a piano piece that emphasizes the saddening end that had befallen the former lord, the sense of crushing loneliness and despair present throughout the game. When the player lands the decisive strike that ends the battle, the song reflects what has occurred, sputtering to a close while failing to pick back up the momentum previously built. It is an allusion to the Lord of Cinder himself, how Gwyn fought desperately to delay the inevitable before finally succumbing to the end. This directly affects the player, influencing their behavior and interpretation of what has just occurred. They’ve reached the very end of the game, defeated a god-like entity and are now left with a choice that will determine the fate of the world therein (“How Dark Souls Turns Motifs Into Music”).

The notion that the songs and music are intrinsically tied with the player and game mechanics is not mere speculation, but rather a veritable fact. For the entirety of the series, there is this focus on rhythm, a back and forth dance between the player and the game. Movement and actions caused both the player character and enemies are calculative, occurring at set intervals once engaged and lasting within a specified window of time while being broken up into frames. There is a call from the environment, and the player is expected to respond. When an enemy attacks, the player must respond if they are to survive, and vice versa. If the player sets off a trap, a sound follows alerting them and they react. Similar to learning music, the light motifs of combat and nuanced song of the *Souls Series* are picked up by the player through repetition, due to simple necessity. If the player is to form an effective response to the games’ call, then they must learn and adapt accordingly. If successful, the result is nothing short of exhilarating (“The Secret Rhythms of Dark Souls!”).

The sound effects in the *Souls Series*, though not sounding quite as the player might expect them to, all give off this sense of satisfaction when heard. The heavy metallic clanks of

weapons, the thunderous thuds of an enemy's attack, and especially the signature parry sound effect followed by a riposte. That very last one alone has an interesting impact on players depending on the circumstances, either allowing them to relish their victory or drown in the misery of defeat.

From the music to the ambient sounds effects, the *Souls Series* is a pinnacle example of masterful sound design and music quality. Everything from the soundtrack to the footfalls of the player character are carefully crafted with a certain intention in mind, to influence the behavior and immersion of the player. As it stands, the work of FromSoftware nothing short of incredible, each and every sound of the Souls Series like music to the ears, truly a work of art.

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2020 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – Second Place

Turkey Life
Mehmet Cetinturk

I usually wake up at 7 a.m. every day and I wonder what's going on there. Where? You ask? Where is there? There is Turkey. Why am I wondering? You ask.

I am wondering because I hear bad news every day and I am worried about Turkey. A lot of human rights are being violated there. Let me give you some examples:

Every day - kids go to jail,

Every day -pregnant women go to jail,

Every day - people are die,

Every day - vulnerable pregnant people die,

Every day - ill pregnant people go to jail,

Every day - older people go to jail,

Because of Erdogan is regime. Because of all of the political reasons. President Erdogan wants to be the only man in control in Turkey. He says; "Everybody must obey my rules, my request, my desire... etc." At the same time he doesn't want to be controlled because he says, "I am a genius and there is not any opinion without my opinion."

In addition Erdogan tells all the officers, "if somebody doesn't follow are my rules, they are enemy. "Some people take advantage so they don't object. Some people are scared so they don't object. Some people object to Erdogan is opinions so they become victims.

Turkey has a constitution, regulations, and rules, but those are not enforced. People must accept the current unlawful treatment. They can't complain in court or file a lawsuit. There are too many victims people, right now in Turkey.

I hear bad news every day and all of it is real.

2020 Award Winners

Non-Fiction – Second Place

Wicked Woods of the Net

Drew Robinson

A typical day in my childhood was spent outside. Whether it be creating new sports like our infamous “PorchBall” with my brother, running through the sprinklers in the backyard, or playing pickup football and baseball with friends, the outdoors was a comforting haven. Fast forward to today’s society, where only 48 percent of kids enjoy playing outdoors. The disconnect between children and nature is becoming more prevalent in the future generations. No longer are kids using their imagination and exploring the great outdoors, no more scrapes from running around outside, no more stains from playing in the mud, no more pickup games in the fields.



Figure 1: Childhoods in a Digital World

Being the son of an elementary school teacher, I have been aware of the new generations of young children each year and the more uninformed of the real world they become as the years progress. My mom always came home and delivered a new unique story about things her students would say or do each day. However, never in my life would I think my mom would tell me she asked her students to take out their textbooks and have a student respond, “What’s that?” A book that has always contained all the answers during my childhood is now a figment of the past. The main source of entertainment and information is the never-ending world of technology. The source that consumes the lives of children and taking over the brain’s imagination and critical thinking.

Had Hansel and Gretel been playing with their iPads in separate rooms, AirPods in each ear, totally distant from the real world, their fate would have been decided by their parents. Their parent’s late night scheming would be drowned out by the Spotify playlist and Fortnite YouTube videos coming from the children’s room. The technology would isolate Hansel and Gretel from the real world problems which laid ahead of them, leaving no hope for their survival in the

woods of the unknown. Would Hansel have known to drop the stones behind him as they trudged through the forest, marking their path? Or would he be checking his cell service in a desperate attempt to call for help? Not only does technology cause adults to fall victim to the instinctive reliance on the battery powered machines in their pockets, but it holds an even greater impact on the children's ability to face and overcome problems in the early stages of their lives.

It's easy to blame the children for becoming addicted to this newly welcomed technology exposed to each generation, however the parents deserve punishment. The parents today find an easy escape in handing their child a device and passing their parental responsibilities to a hypnotic trap. This technology "epidemic" starts with the parents. They toss their children into the endless network of the Internet, unaware of the dangers hidden inside, just as the parents of Hansel and Gretel abandon them in the middle of the woods, exposed to any threats lurking. Hansel and Gretel's parents could no longer maintain the responsibility of providing for their children and giving them the food they needed, leading to the conclusion of throwing them into the wild. Today's parents could no longer maintain the responsibility of providing for their children and giving them the attention they deserve, leading to the conclusion of throwing them into the wild woods of the Internet. The children stumbled upon territory they should not have been exposed to at the witch's house, just as children today are exposed to parts of the Internet not meant for them. The oversight of the children's use online can lead to interactions with the "witches" in the world, also known as predators.

When I decided to visit my mother's fourth grade class and get to know about her students, I saw the effects that technology held on them. When she asked the class the simple question about their summer vacation, I expected the typical stories about the beach, or traveling to another state for the first time. It shocked me to hear that almost every single student in the class, boy or girl, raved about how much they played the new videogame, *Fortnite*. It sent a spark through the room, as each kid got even more excited simply talking about it. It was as if they had all taken a bite out of the gingerbread house that was *Fortnite*, as a buzz came about the room, and they began sharing their stories and encounters in the fantasy world. Little did they know that just as the gingerbread house gave a false sense of nourishment to Hansel and Gretel, the video game was hurting them more than helping. It was at this point I realized these kids no longer experience their true imagination, exploring their backyard or digging to the center of the Earth with beach shovels. They would rather explore the fictional world coming from someone

else's mind. The physical pain of falling off a bike was outdated as being killed in a videogame hurt much more.

Seeing this new problem in the classroom was bad enough, but witnessing children's behavior in restaurants glued to their screens was just as upsetting. The amount of time spent looking at a screen rather than someone's face is immense. Families no longer share stories about their day over a nice meal; the kids would rather stay attached to the device controlling their life.

This problem takes away the social aspects of life. No longer do children learn to make eye contact, to shake someone's hand when meeting them, or how to hold a genuine conversation. Kids don't know how to work out a problem with each other, and get uncomfortable arguing face to face, as hiding behind a computer screen and saying words they'd never speak in person is much more convenient. This takes away the ability to manage a relationship, and causes young children to become awkward and uncomfortable in person.

Until parents stop abandoning their children in the wicked woods of the net with witches and predators lurking in the darkness, technology will continue to take over the lives of the younger generations. I fear the time in future where children's brains are microchipped at birth, and everyone's eyes become glossy and empty, as the everlasting use of technology slowly damages and melts away their brains.

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Figure 2: Screen Time Dominates Kid's



Figure 3: Childhoods in a Digital World

2020 Award Winners

Non-Fiction – Second Place

The Real Serpent in the Garden

Hunter O'Brien

“One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” These are the spoken words of honor for the American people, and yet, they still reflect the world’s archaic past. In today’s society, references are made to the Christian God as often as they seem appropriate. The secular times of human history’s most recent past has all but made references to God a figure of speech; instead of praying to a being with ultimate power, a “dear God” or a “hail Mary” is sprinkled into even the most redundant of whims. However, dating back hundreds of years in the height of the Middle Ages, Roman Catholic worship was not only practiced by almost every European, it was mandated by the state to be in such way. Daily mass was attended by those who could physically make it, regardless if they understood the Latin sermon or not. Actions and reasonings were said to be determined solely on God’s will acted upon by the figureheads of the church. Almost every aspect of society had a religious component to it, despite many facets having no true religious ties.

It is easy to think that through the Protestant reformation, urbanization, and the rise of technology and science as a whole, religious influences have faded out along the Plague and the Crusades. While it is not as blatant as it once was, the Roman Catholic church still has a tremendous influence in the world today, especially in the United States of America. Many still see sermons as the true word of God, and with American religious freedom, they are free to act out such intentions as they seem fit. The basic fact that the Catholic Church is power hungry is still occurring: the line between church and state is becoming increasingly blurred, and eventually it will cease to have any legal standing. With the threat of outdated church doctrines still prevalent today, the modern Roman Catholic needs to establish their views and band together to revolutionize the church, bringing it and its ideology into the contemporary world.

Christianity has been around for over 2000 years. Originally starting as a Jewish sect, Christianity quickly spread throughout Europe and the Middle East, becoming one of the most

widely followed monotheistic beliefs throughout the world. After many centuries of development and growth, Christianity broke into three branches: Eastern Orthodoxy; Protestantism; and Roman Catholicism. Out of all three, Roman Catholicism is the most popular, both then and today. Over 1.1 billion people follow the Roman Catholic faith (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). However, with such a large number of those devoted to the faith, a complex and effective hierarchy of leaders was put into place centuries ago to help maintain and control the growth of the religion. It is in this hierarchy that allows for the development of abusive behaviors to flourish and give rise to the Catholic church present in the modern world.

The beginnings of Catholicism are in line with those of Christianity. The religion follows the Bible, a book encompassing the lessons and stories about the true son of God, Jesus Christ. Followers of every Christian faith are expected to learn to be better inhabitants of Earth from such teachings, as they are said to be divine truth by God himself. In the early Middle Ages, however, Catholicism became its own unique religion after being established as the main church of Rome. It is from this identification that allowed it to further spread into the masses. In order to maintain its control, the Catholic faith became composed of “sacred congregations, archdioceses and dioceses, provinces, religious orders and societies, seminaries and colleges, parishes and confraternities, and countless other organizations” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). This widespread involvement in both community and religion lead the heads of the faith to be at the front of public view, further increasing their power.

As it spread throughout medieval Rome and the surrounding lands, it was not long until it was a dominant religion in Europe. (Roman Catholic, *Encyclopedia Britannica*) With followers growing by the thousands and both money and strength going to religious figureheads, the Catholic church became a staple in everyday life. People went to worship every day, followed the doctrines of the church without question, and paid taxes, or tithes, to the church every year (The Crusades). This not only caused the Catholic church to become popular, but also powerful. The Crusades themselves are a perfect example of this power. Pope Gregory XIII used the cover of “religion” to wage these so called “holy wars” for Christ, but in actuality he wanted to prove his military strength to the kings of the region. The Pope wanted to prove that he was essentially above the rulership of the land he lived on.

As the American sociologist James Hunter states, “To be Christian is to be obliged to engage the world, pursuing God’s restorative purposes over all of life, individual and corporate,

public and private. This is the mandate of creation” (4). The true political power of the Catholic Church is through the politics that originally are set to allow free worship. Catholic figureheads use this law to place immoral mandates on their followers, and with the pretense of free religious speech, no one is spared from “God’s restorative purposes”. Stemming from the founding of the Catholic church in Rome, this doctrine has been applied to the continual actions performed by both church heads and common followers alike. With the excuse of “spreading the word of God,” abuse powers can be explained in a theological sense. This religious based reasoning is hypocritically defended throughout the ages, all the while said abusers revoke the rights of other humans that have varying points of views. A quintessential component of this ideology is the Papal summoning of the so called Holy Wars, known today as the Crusades. Although it was preached to the Catholic followers that the sole purpose was to reclaim Jerusalem, in actuality the goal was for the present pope of the time, Urban II, to show his political power and that his word was that even above kings (“The Crusades”). This discourse, beginning with the very doctrine the Catholic faith preached to their masses, has withstood the ages and is still prevalent in today’s society.

In the modern world, many argue that the times are more secular and focus on the individual. The Constitution of the United States even specifically calls for a separation of church and state, allowing for the religious freedoms of all American citizens to be protected under law. Yet, if this is to be the case, why does Vice President Pence repeatedly boast “I am a Catholic first, a politician second.” Despite the outcome of *Obergefell v. Hodges* that legalized gay marriage across the United States, a majority of states chose to ignore this outcome. This is done on the basis of state’s rights, which allows for an ideology that can protect individuals from issuing marriage license to homosexual couples based solely on “religious beliefs.” This is no mere loophole in the systems of laws-this is a fundamental flaw strengthened by the Catholic Church’s influence on its followers. The same defense that has enabled medieval abuses of power is still strong in today’s society as well- Americans cannot violate theological ideology due to the fact that there is no proof to counteract any wrongdoings in the first place. Accusations of misbehavior cannot be made in a country with religious freedoms as long as individuals state that they are following their own beliefs. Although wars are not being fought solely on a whim for power, the Catholic institution present in the world today follows the same abusive practices that have been allowed for the millennia beforehand.

In the middle of 2018, one of the largest coverups by the Catholic Church was exposed. For over 70 years, “the Roman Catholic Church covered up child sexual abuse by more than 300 priests.. persuading victims not to report the abuse and law enforcement not to investigate” (“Catholic Priests Abused”). After a year of investigation, more church individuals were indicted as well. Even some of the most powerful members of the faith, like Cardinal and post-Vatican Treasurer George Pell and Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, were each indicted on multiple accounts (“Catholic Church”). For something this serious, and even with a papal statement condoning the actions of the specific section of the Roman Catholic church, the whole situation was more or less forgotten in a matter of weeks. There was no legal punishment for Pell or McCarrick. They were forced to resign by the archdiocese; but for committing sexual assault, there was no court ordered jail time or even fines. This prime example shows that the church continually clings to its medieval practices. Officials of the Roman Catholic faith will go to any length to manipulate their followers to keep any negative aspects of their actions hidden from the public eye. The culture of the church is set up to protect those in charge at the expense of the common follower of the Catholic Faith. Those in charge do as they please, and everyone else is expected to turn a blind eye. For an institution that is protected by American laws, how can one entity exist that is so blatantly against individualism that was given by God himself?

While it is evident that corruption is still occurring in the modern Catholic Church much like it has for most of the faith’s history, the fault lies with a specific group of individuals. It is not the following that enact these abuses. The youngest of worshippers, whether it was in the year 1200 or 2019, were simply doing what a trusted member of the clergy told them to do. And even those individuals-priests, bishops and even cardinals- were following tainted traditions set by the select few that rose to power in the church’s early days. It was the pope who called for the Crusades to begin, not the populus at the time or lower church officials. The coverups of today were perpetrated by some of the highest members in the faith. To change the Roman Catholic religion, to make it suitable in the modern world, it must evolve to meet modern religious requirements and cast off antiquated practices that allow for maltreatment.

The question still stands if the Catholic Church still practices these behaviors today. While a series of long wars can no longer be declared by a religious institution, there is still the essence of such ideology. From large scale coverups in the newstream-such as the instances seen with the altar boys-to the everyday squabble found in parish politics, the concept of being above

the law is still found today. The modern Catholic Church appears to be having the same types of fallacies they experienced ages ago, all in an attempt for the figure heads to ensure their grasp on power at the expense of the new generation of worshipers (Kaveny). While it may seem logical for a church to pay taxes on non-essential income, it is not inside the IRS' tax code. That means that nearly anything can be written off as tax exempt and become a profit for parishes across the country. This is much a kin to robbery; however, robbery made legal once again through the protection of religious freedoms. This tax evasion all translated to the common theme expressed by the Roman Catholic Church-accumulation of power. By not doing what every other citizen agrees to do through loopholes in laws, the church once again sets themselves above man. It is this attitude superiority that the institution embraces that leads to all forms of abuse in the modern day. Despite this ongoing attitude, the solution has always been with this new generation, as they hold the power of the masses to decide what is the course for the religion in future years.

While the laws for the United States of America call for a separation of church and state, both church and state seem to ignore this very fact. Places of worship do not pay taxes and they are excluded from other fiscal laws (Tax Guide, IRS). Yet, despite this large tax break, donations are still collected at every mass. While this might appear to go towards helping the local community, in actuality it is to pay for non-essential renovations for the building. It should be urged that the place of worship should release expense reports. If the Catholic Church wants to continue to collect donations for its own personal endeavors, that spending needs to be transparent for the public. But the call for action does not lie in the government's hands, as they are bound by the very laws that are abused by the figureheads of the church. The worshippers must band together to demand insight into religious-based spending. Even the simple act of not donating during mass will be enough pressure for compliance. After this simple act is enacted, money can no longer be allocated to pay off a possible scandal and such abuses will eventually fade away.

While it is not possible to put a widespread tax on places of worship themselves, the figureheads of the church should alternatively be taxed. Currently, if an individual is considered a member of a church and preaches to a group of followers, they are excluded from paying income tax. However, members who are paid by non-profit organizations have their incomes taxed. (Tax Guide, IRS). Both leaders help their surrounding community, donating time and

work. Both live on American soil. Both have all the benefits of being an American citizen: yet, only the non-profit leaders pay for the privilege.

Catholic figures, conversely, are handed those benefits like offerings. It is clear that in today's society, the separation between church and state is a mere formality. Religion stills plays an essential role in politics (Encyclopedia Britannica). This will most likely remain the norm for decades to come, just as it has been the truth for centuries in the past. But now, there should be a call to tax the incomes of church figureheads. They have a career like all of their followers. They enjoy the same benefits as any other American citizen. And like all members of the United States, those advantages should be paid for through the form of an income tax.

While a seemingly daunting task, this can be achieved much in the way the United States was constructed to-through the power of the people. If the underrepresented youth of the Catholic Church came together and demanded an ultimatum, the older religious figureheads will be forced to comply at the risk of losing followers. This youth needs to combine their views for a modern church and bring it out of the Dark Ages, with a new Enlightenment occurring again. The Roman Catholic church preaches a religion full of compassion, love, and individuality-characteristics held very dear in this generation's mind. All it will take is for the people to coalesce into a driving force for change. There is no better way to fight abusive power holdings then to fight back with power in hand of the many, and let democracy formulate laws.

The call for reform must happen in the next five years for the best effect to occur. This era suits the conditions for individualistic movements, with technological advances becoming the norm and social media connecting the world around us. Together, the followers of the Catholic faith can modernize a much needed religion and fully live the life defined by the Bible. If the call to reform remains stagnant, the condition that the religion is in will only worsen. Those in charge will only continue to consolidate power until the metaphorical separation between church and state is no more. Political views and actions will revert back to the methodology performed in the 1200s. Religion will once again dominate secular ideology. It is this death of thinking that will shatter the very writing of the Constitution of the United States, making America divided and void of liberty and justice for all.

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2020 Award Winners
Non-Fiction – Second Place

Press'n On
Rasheeda Grove

Like many people, I used to think of bullying as "kid's stuff," not something in which adults engage. With time, I've come to see how wrong this idea actually is.

Being bullied-at any age- is upsetting; the fact that it can continue into adulthood, or even begin then, is equally troubling. One has to wonder what reward lies in store for the person who picks on others so relentlessly. There appears to be a sense of delight in public manipulation and control. I understand what it means to be bullied. I've been on the receiving end.

Workplace bullying is one of those things we tend to think of as "happening to others". Little do we expect it will ever happen to us. In my particular case, once the bullying was directed toward me, I felt continuous waves of fury and frustration. Because I couldn't allow my feelings to be directed at my coworkers, they remained deep inside and were later manifest as anxiety and depression. Too often, I felt consumed by rage and apprehension. I was edgy and overwhelmed. This in turn, led to a toxic work environment for me. I was unable to concentrate; I knew it was simply a matter of time before this would affect my job performance.

Not one to go along with the crowd, I had to decide whether to change who I was just to fit in, or to go against the tide and be myself. Once I realized that my bullies' tendencies were changing me as a person, I decided to take that energy and redirect, it in a positive way, toward myself. I thought about what I could do-apart from my job-that would make me happy. It occurred to me that reenrolling in school just might be the alternative. I wasted no time, and I registered for some college courses. Fortunately, I was able to reduce my work hours in conjunction with my class schedule. It was the best feeling I'd had in years. With less time available to focus on the negative aspects of the workplace, I actually felt a renewed sense of calm and self-confidence.

Today I'm completely removed from the toxicity of my former job, and I am able to look at my bullies from a new perspective. I actually feel sorry for their shortsightedness. It is clear to me that a bully's personal insecurities are what lead to such an outward disrespect of others. From where I stand,

life is too short to waste on others' negativity. These days are better spent with a constant focus on my goals. I live each day with an open heart and mind knowing that there's no greater gift I can give myself than the realization of my potential and the pride of knowing exactly who I am.

2020 Award Winners

Fiction – First Place

Red Lipstick

Elidia Guzman

Outside I may look like I am very much a shining star, but inside I am a massive black hole.

Everyone compliments my smile and spunky attitude. I'm always walking in to work with a huge smile on my face. My red lipstick leads the way. My appearance is often misleading and although I may seem put together I am secretly very overwhelmed and fragile. Like a sandcastle just waiting for a wave to pummel me down.

I'm the only daughter and there's always much pressure on my shoulders. I can't remember a day when it wasn't this way. My parents have always been very strict. They say "parents are not supposed to be your friends." Sheesh, you don't say. Could they at least try to treat me like they treat the old lady that lives down the hall? "She's lonely" my mom says. Yeah, me too mom.

Mexican parents have a way of making you feel like you're responsible for everyone in your family. Even the family we don't talk to. "Así es" my dad would say. That's just the way it is. My dad was one of 12 sons. He doesn't have a soft word in him. Not even if he tried, which he doesn't. He's always wearing his plaid shirt, his thick leather belt and his light washed jeans. He's set in his ways. He says "I said what I said, that's the end of it."

My mother lived her life at home. Her...whole...life...at HOME. She raised me and watched over me my whole life. All 22 years, every second of my life. I'm not entitled to privacy and even at my age I can't lock my door. "You can lock the door when you pay the bills" my dad always yells at me. He has such a way with words.

One day I came home to find mail on my bed, it had been opened of course, "just inspecting it for anthrax" my mom would laugh. They really never realize how they make me feel. So I decided enough was enough. I waited for dinner to be over and I said "I'm moving out."

Their faces filled with anger and shock. I had never seen my father turn bright red like a Christmas ornament. My mother on the other hand turned white! I could swear I was looking at a ghost! “What is the meaning of this?!” Both my parents yelled. “I’m not respected here. I’m 22 and I’m not treated like an adult. I’m an adult now.”

My dad took a sip of his soda. I could smell the grapefruit scent from my seat and started to feel sour myself. He and my mother just looked at each other and said nothing. My dad got up and walked off to watch his soccer games. He’s watching the rerun of the rerun I thought. My mother got up, picked up the plates and went to do the only thing she knew. Wash dishes when she was stressed. I sighed so loud I felt like the neighbor down the hall had heard me.

The next day I tried to pack my clothes but my clothes were missing. “Mom, where’s my stuff?” I said. Anger bubbling inside my belly. But she said nothing, she didn’t even look at me. I had to leave for work and they had taken my clothes from me. This must be some sick joke I thought. They wouldn’t act this petty. Not because I’m demanding....respect?

My parents came in to my room and said “we’re the authority and if you don’t like it, leave but with nothing. You must go out there and make it on your own.” I felt sick to my stomach. I couldn’t feel my legs. How dare they? I thought. I worked for the things I have!! My mother sobbed covering her mouth with a white handkerchief she had embroidered herself. They thought they had control over me. I snapped. I said nothing and just left my house. They started to yell but I couldn’t hear a word. My mind was going 80 miles an hour.

All I had was the outfit I wore the day before. I drove off crying inconsolably. Once I arrived to work I wiped my tears and even though my black mascara was running down the sides of my face, I put on my red lipstick. I let it lead the way.

2020 Award Winners
Fiction – Second Place

Choices

Ruihong (Rose) Cheng

It was a warm day in May, the sky was blue, the wind was like an angel's fingers touching people's faces. Xiaomin and her husband Xiaogang were sitting on the beach. They were drinking coffee and having soft conversation.

Xiaomin was born in China in 1957. She was the second of four children born to Shuying and Yi. When Xiaomin was a little girl, there were not enough food in China because natural disasters for three years. Shuying, Xiaomin's mother, dug some wild dandelions in the spring, summer, and fall, cooked porridge for her children. Xiaomin didn't have breakfast in the morning and one day after school, Xiaomin felt dizzy because she was so hungry. She got stomach spasm. She had to sit on the ground against the brick wall. Xiaomin had a dream. She dreamt that when she grew up, she would make a lot of money, then buy a lot of eggs. She would put the eggs into a big urn, and put some salt in it, then she could eat eggs every day.

As Xiaomin grew up, Chairman Mao was powerful and the people fearful. She went to high school. When Mao wrote articles, the students read and memorized them. Memorize them was demanded. Xiaomin became a beautiful girl with big black eyes. Her eyebrows looked like the leaves of a willow. She had a small mouth like a red cherry, and she was slim like a small poplar. Everyone around her praised her and liked her. She was clever and studied hard. Her teacher often read her essays to her classmates. Her desk mate, a handsome boy, was attracted to her. He often borrowed erasers and books from her. His name was Xiaogang. Xiaogang was also a good student. He was tall and strong. He liked to play basketball. A lot of girls liked him, but he only liked Xiaomin though he didn't speak to her.

After Xiaomin graduated from high school, She was ordered to become a factory worker. Xiaogang went to the countryside to become a peasant for farm the land. They lost touch. Two years later, Xiaomin's mother introduced Xiaomin to the son of a friend of hers. Xiaomin didn't have any affection for him. But her mother said, "He is a good boy with a rich family. You would

live well if you marry him.” The following year, Xiaomin was forced to marry him. They had a baby boy, but they didn’t love each other. Five years later, her husband fell in love with another woman. He wanted a divorce. Xiaomin didn’t say a word, but she was hungry for something ,and she could no longer imagine her dream of eggs.

After the divorce, Xiaomin cared for her son, worked hard and studied hard. Several years later, she got her bachelor’s degree in Economics. She switched jobs and made more money. Her son grew up and graduated from college. He got a good job at a big company. Xiaomin was still single. Her friends often introduced boyfriends to her, but she refused everyone.

Several decades later, Xiaomin’s high school classmate called Xiaomin and asked her if she wanted to attend the reunion dinner party. During that party, Xiaomin met Xiaogang again. It had been 40 years since they had last seen each other. “How have you been all these years?” she asked him.

“It is a long story.” Xiaogang said, “When I was in the countryside, I met a village girl. She helped me a lot when I was lonely. She was a nice girl. She cooked for me, cleaned my room, washed my clothes. We got married and had two children, one son and one daughter against state’s law, ‘one child, one couple.’ I attended college while in the countryside. After that, I started a small business.”

“I am happy for you!” Xiaomin said, “How are your wife and children now?”

“My children have grown up.” He hesitated, then he continued, “My wife died of colon cancer five years ago.”

Xiaomin felt so sad. She also told Xiaogang her story.

After the dinner party, they started to call each other and fell in love all over again. When Xiaomin told her mother the news, her mother said, “Dear Xiaomin, I shouldn’t have chosen a husband for you. He was not the man you love. In China, you love one man but marry another. It was wrong. It made you spend a bitter life. Now go find your real lover. I hope you will be happy forever.” Xiaomin hugged her mother with tears in her eyes.

Xiaomin married Xiaogang one year later. They have had a happy life. Xiaomin cooks breakfast for them every day. Sometimes she cooks 4 or 5 eggs. Xiaogang scolded for her, “It is better to eat only one egg every day. It is not healthy to eat more.”

“In my childhood,” Xiaomin said, “I have eaten few eggs and many dandelions. So I shall

eat more eggs now. This is a balance.”

They both laughed because the choices now are open to them.

2020 Award Winners

Fiction – Third Place

Suzanne's Biggest Challenges

David Jones

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Suzanne. She and her family lived in Sacramento, California. Suzanne was the youngest of four siblings. She had two brothers and a sister.

One day, while at school, two bullies started picking on Suzanne. From then on, they picked on her relentlessly, making her sad and upset. She would tell them to stop, but they would just persist.

The bullies criticized her. They called her names like “Ugly”, “Fatso”, and “Zit-face”. With time, they threw things at her, and they blocked her path whenever they had the opportunity. Inevitably, they’d coax her to keep walking, and once she attempted to proceed they’d trip her. Her scrapes and bruises were too many to count.

At night Suzanne lay in bed, unable to sleep, thinking about what she could do to get back at the bullies. She imagined all the things she would do to them-if only she could... If only she could give them a taste of their own medicine... The physical torture was one thing, the harassment and humiliation took it to a whole other level. How could she even begin to do to them what they’d done to her? Eventually, she realized she was way out of her league. She felt totally dismayed and defeated. By the time she finally considered telling her mother what had happened, she realized she should’ve never kept this from her in the first place.

Her mother reacted just as Suzanne anticipated. She told Suzanne that she was going to the school to talk with the principal, and the very next day, she did just that. When she met with Mr. Joseph, Suzanne’s mother told him that if he didn’t handle the situation immediately, she would remove her daughter from the school, and take legal action against both him and the school board whose responsibility it was to protect all of the students. In the meantime, she produced a letter she’d written; she calmly read it and told Mr. Joseph she was prepared to release it on social media, if that’s what she needed to do to get some satisfaction.

The day after the meeting, Mr. Joseph brought the bullies into his office. He told them that he was not tolerating their behavior in his school. They couldn't dispute the accusations because the school's security cameras produced enough evidence to support Suzanne's allegations. The principal promptly called the bullies' parents and told them of the repercussions facing their children, and with that, the bullies were expelled.

The following day when she returned to school; everything was calm and quiet. The bullies were gone, and Suzanne was finally able to exhale. At peace with her surroundings, she was able to excel, and that June, Suzanne was honored as Valedictorian of her class.

2020 Award Winners

Poetry – First Place

To Linetta

Karina Gonzalez

I still search for you
In the clouds,
In every face,
Hidden inside every crowd
And I never find you.

You left me here.
Why am I here?
Sitting in a room
Full of people I've known for years.
I'm in a room full of years worth of strangers

It's funny,
How when you're lonely
You look at every broken tile on the floor
Act as though it is a piece of the greatest art
And make the story of how it came to be
And how it was abandoned
Like nothing
Molded into the floor of a church;
One broken among a sea of healed.

You've lost so much sanity
That you pray for it.

You pray for the single tile
Thinking that it'd pray for you
In return
Like wishing on a shooting star
Knowing that though God is listening
Humanity is its own type of selfish
Rejecting criticism like a poisoned apple.

Coming back
You find it is gone.
It has not been fixed
But replaced,
A New square in its place
And yet everyone goes on and
Over it
As though nothing ever differed in the first place
But you know.
You saw.
You witnessed it being here.
You know that at one point it was real

And your silent cries get drowned
By the hymns coming from the next room,
Get drowned out at the end of youth group
As the prayer intentions are asked:
'I hope I pass my next test',
'Hope practice goes well next week',
'Let's pray for the intentions we keep secret
In our hearts'.
I pray that someone tells the tile
I remember

I miss you.
You've missed so much.
I tried to look for you in the pages
From the 40 notebooks I have.
For a second I felt you peek out
But felt you fade back inside again
After every last sentence.

I leave the light on
As I sleep,
Hoping you'll take the invitation
To come inside and talk.
Door is always locked
But I know you remember
How to get in.
Please,

Don't be a stranger.

2020 Award Winners
Poetry – Second Place

Break Up

Janice Rodriguez

Am I ready for this-
or do I need more time?
Why I am so afraid?
Don't I have the strength?
Will I ever be the same-
or will I change
completely?
Why does this hurt so much?
Can anyone tell me-
WHY?
Will all the memories remain-
or will they fade away?
Will he see my face when he hears my name-
or think of me when he hears our song?
Why do I even care anymore?
Actually...
I don't!

2020 Award Winners

Poetry – Third Place

Knitting

Georgina Alzaga

Knitting my dreams
I feel proud of myself
because every day
I can create new memories.

Sometimes,
I wake up as a tangled
but I have the patience
to archive my desires.

I show you
my LOVE every day
different ways
but always strong
like a stitch.

Our bonds of love
will never end
you can keep and remember them
at any time.

2020 Award Winners
Photography – First Place

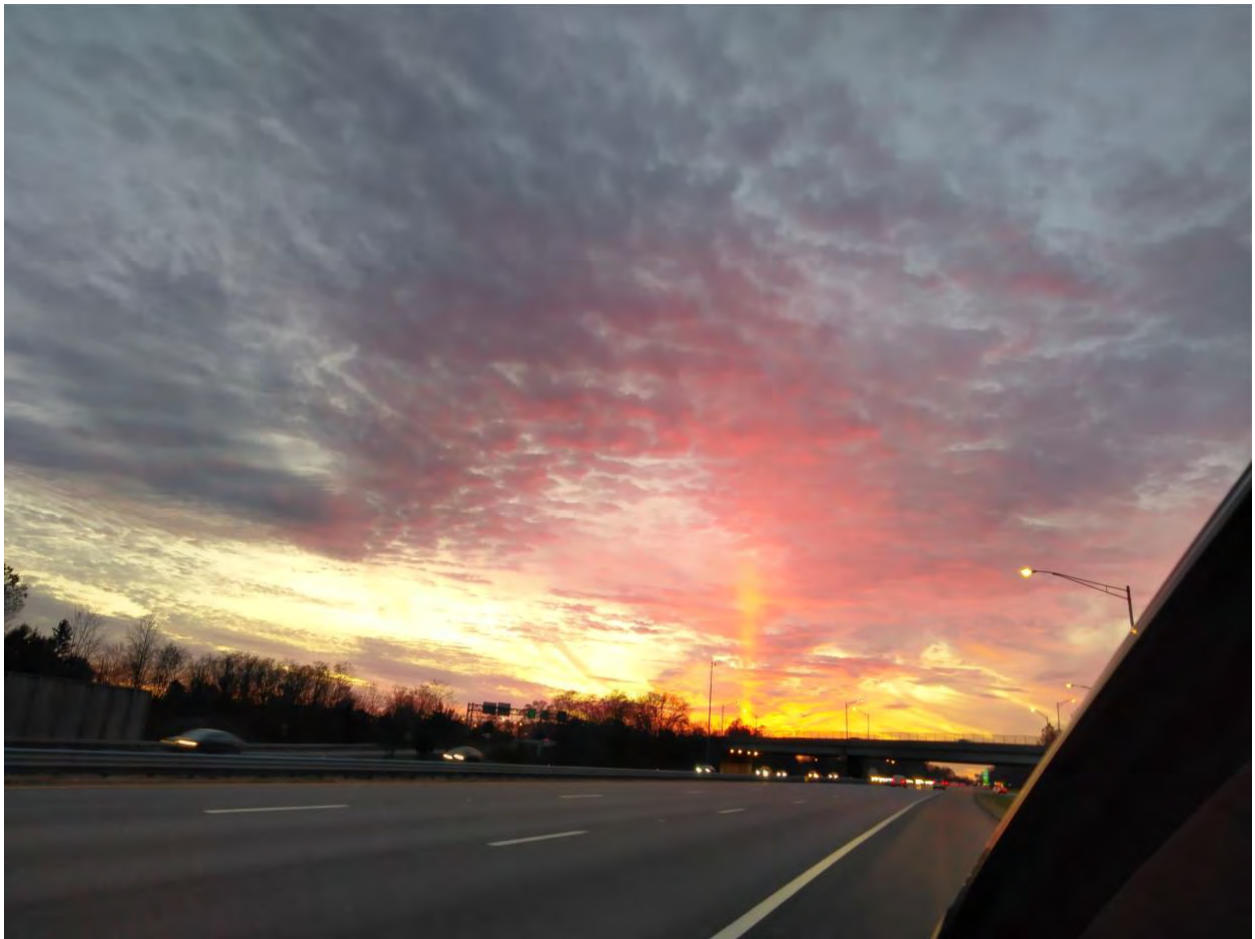
Untitled (House of the Sun)

Alec Kyle Santos



2020 Award Winners
Photography – Second Place

Colorful Sky
Georgina Alzaga



2020 Award Winners
Photography – Second Place

Made for Each Other
Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja



Memoir – Other Submissions

Choosing Between a Career and Family

Georgina Alzaga

I was born in Mexico, a Country with many problems especially economics, corruption and overcrowding.

My life as an adult was normal with a career, with job where I enjoyed to work hardly. Suddenly, I discovered that something was wrong in my life. I felt empty. I cried many times, alone, trying to understand what happened? and asking by myself: what is going on with my life?, why I'm not happy?, If I'm healthy, I've a job, husband, material things, etc.

When I was 34 years old, my husband and I decided to have a baby, one of my most beautiful experiences. My beloved Son was really expected gift.

I decided to stay home with him and give up my career. Two years later my beloved Daughter came to complete our beautiful FAMILY. Many challenges have passed in my life, those are part of me.

I will never change the amazing opportunity that life's given me. Taking care of my babies, staying in with them, seeing how they are growing up, enjoying moments day by day, and taking thousands of pictures of them too. These bonds of love will never disappear, these are my best rewards.

My family inspire me to continue in this life, fighting, following my dreams my crazy ideas. I don't giving up in adversity.

Grandmother said and my Mom says: the God's time are perfect and all things come to you in the right moment. I'm totally agree with them.

Thank you to my Husband for support us, for your love, we're really GRATEFUL.

One of My Memories

Fereshteh Azarfar

When I look back into the past, I get very sad because I had a lot of good things on my side, that I don't have now. For example, I had a father and a mother that I don't have now, and I've never been able to find that pure love or affection that they gave me. I had a close friend that I lost and my mind is full of memories of her that I will remember forever. I also had a big youthful kind heart that didn't know politics, treason, cruelty, war, hunger, or grief... without having any particular reason I was happy. I saw everything through rose-colored lenses. I enjoyed my life and liked repeating my days. As I've grown, I've faced many new experiences in my personal life, which has led me to gain new perspectives on life. I remember when I was only 11 years old, in 1980, when the war started between my country, Iran, and our neighboring country, Iraq.

I've witnessed people caring a great deal about one another. I've seen young people sacrifice their lives to protect their countries from cruelty. Several times many Iranian cities were attacked by missiles and a lot of people including women and children were killed or lost their homes. It made me upset and depressed because I lost many family members and friends. Every day was a challenge to survive, I had to learn to deal with so many new situations and it was not easy. Now everything has changed, I still have people in my life that are very precious to me like my children, new friends, wonderful family, knowledgeable teachers, a good job, and I have had great experiences that I worked very hard for, But, I always question why I came into this world to pass all difficulties and happiness. I think people make our lives comfortable or hard. It depends on their personality and how we are connecting with them. Some people are kind, sympathetic and generous and some people are mean, hard-hearted, and selfish.

Anyway, I've learned that life is very complicated. It has made me strong. And, living with hope and helping others has brought me great satisfaction, and gives me more energy and well-being.

Advice About Coming to America

Lillian Abou Chacra

Immigrants give advice to others about coming to this country. I have received and given advice.

First of all, I would like to mention a few things about my experience in the United States. I am a Lebanese lady. I always dreamed to travel to the United States. In 2012 I got the chance to visit the United States. I visited different states, such as New York, Florida, and Georgia.

The United States is the most beautiful country I have ever seen, where you may encounter people from many nations, cultures, and traditions.

A friend of mine advised me to come and live in the United States, mentioning that I can live happily, guarantee my life and retirement when I grow old, and the government provides full support toward a child's education, fully covered health care, and Medicare for the people who are 65 years old and above, as well as for disabled people.

I would extremely advise people to come to the United States, where they can find their safety and support from the government. This country has plenty of rules and regulations, and these can be considered as benefits for a newcomer, where they can behave and act accordingly, as per the law.

American people are very friendly and respectful. You can learn many things from them in order to improve your lifestyle and your future vision.

A Memory in the Past

Meral Cicek

Now, I am going to tell you about an interesting story; that started with a boring and annoying exam.

After the exam, my friends and I went to relax on a quiet hill. We were three. We sat down and took in the view. While we were chatting, suddenly, I saw a turtle and I showed it to my friends.

One of my friends was really afraid of the turtle. I took the turtle and tried to scare her. She

started screaming and ran away from me. I had never seen her run so fast.

It was a fun interesting and exciting moment. It was a great day for me. But my friend was afraid. And, I felt sorry because I had frightened her. I decided not to frighten her again. A turtle is a small animal and I am not afraid of it, but my friend is. People can be afraid of many things. We have to respect them. I'll never forget that day. I always laugh when I think about it.

It's Never Too Late To Learn

Norha Colon

My name is Nohra Colon. I have been living in the United States since 1981.

I should say "thanks" to God for giving me this opportunity to be living in this great nation. It wasn't always easy. Starting from zero in a new country was difficult because I did not know the language and I was here alone. The only family I knew in America was by cousin Leonor who had not seen me since I was ten years old.

Now, immigrating to the U.S.A. at 25, Leonor was like my big sister and I stayed with her until I was settled. I managed to get a job in a factory and worked in a few places. I met my husband. He is very good and a hardworking man. We fell in love and were soon married. My husband was very supportive of me. He worked so that I could stay home with our two children until they were grown.

Now, it is my time to further my education and return to work. I became a licensed home health aide, a profession that I find deeply rewarding.

I also found a good program for improving my English at LVA. It is never too late to learn something new.

A Year of Change

Milton Elliot

1986 was a year of change for me.

At 13 years old I arrived in Montclair, New Jersey from Montego Bay, Jamaica. América was all about money was something I had heard over and over again. My first impression was nothing like I had been told. The reality for me is that hard work brings the success you want. My upbringing in Jamaica prepared me for the challenges I would experience here in the U.S. My strong work ethic combined with my appreciation of being in this country helped me to realize how easy it is to move forward. People saw my drive and enthusiasm and helped me along the way.

In Jamaica no one saw “color” but they saw differences in economic status and family values. I credit Montclair and the friends I made at school for teaching me that there was no “color” barrier.

Everyone in my circle of friends was accepting of each other regardless of color. There is a saying “You can only bend a tree when it is young”. I am thankful for the values I was taught as a child in Jamaica. I often referred back to this when raising my own children. I want to give my children the values I was taught of respect, responsibility, manners and accountability.

It is not that money grows on trees as I was often told but the way you go about achieving your goals that bring about a successful life. I took every opportunity that was given me to live a good, joyful life; the life I have been living since 1986. The lesson I would share is to be thankful for every opportunity and work with enthusiasm.

The Power of Prayer

Marie Eloy

In my life, I have had some wonderful experiences with the Lord. One time I was fired from my job because of my belief in the Lord Jesus. My boss asked me to choose between my job and my belief in God. I chose my God at that time even though I had a mortgage to pay. I left the job knowing God would provide. At the beginning it was very hard because of the shortage of food. One day when I didn't have food, when I went to bed

I prayed to God. I said, "Lord, I need you to send some food, and I need bread." While sleeping, I had a dream. I saw a big basket full of bread. In the morning when I woke up, I saw a lot of groceries on the floor. The two drawers of my fridge were full of food and \$100 was on the kitchen table. My cousin had come from New Jersey, and she brought lots of rice, vegetables, meat -- everything I would need. God provided while I slept. In Psalm 127:2 it says, "It is in vain you rise early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil. For the Lord gives to his beloved in sleep." Psalm 121:2 says, "My help comes from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and Earth." Yes, God provides for me. I will never forget this miracle, how God provided for me while I was not working.

Another time, while I was sleeping, I had an unusual dream. The week before, I went to the mall and I saw a beautiful pair of white shoes; the designer was Mark Fisher. I loved these shoes. I went home and I prayed to God and asked Him to send me some money so that I could go to buy the beautiful shoes. God answered my prayer and gave me \$100 to go buy my shoes that cost me \$90. I got my white shoes, and I saw they had them in black also, and again I asked God to give me some money to buy another pair, but this time in black. At night God came to me again and showed me a lot of hungry people. In the morning I had only \$100. I took it and sent it back to Haiti. It was 10:00 AM. The same day about 3:00 PM my son came to see me and gave me \$300. In addition, my daughter asked me to go to the mall with her. We found the black shoes on sale for \$40, and she said to me I will buy them for you.

Give, and God will give it back to you three times more. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 it says that if you give a lot, you will receive a lot. Isaiah 61:7 says that God will give you double for your trouble.

My Pathway to the American Dream

Chunyu Geng

What is the "American Dream?" Different people will give different answers to this question. For me, the meaning changes from time to time.

I had an American Dream when I was 21 years old. That was 1990, and I was in my senior year of college. Just one year before, college students all over the country struck and marched for political reforms, but ended with being suppressed by the government. After that, many students chose to go to America for the reasons of freedom of speech and political democracy. Yes, that was my American Dream at that time too. I applied for an American college, but I finally decided to stay instead of go.

I had an American Dream when I was 29. That was the year 1998, and I was working for a law firm. I hoped I could go to America for further education so that I could have more chances in my career. The American Dream to me at that time was better education and more opportunities with it. But finally I went to the UK instead of America. After that, I worked; then I stopped working to take care of my family. Day after day, I forgot about having any dreams.

When I immigrated to America this year, what the American Dream means became a realistic question for me. I agree that whatever your American Dream is, it is achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work rather than by chance. I also think that the American political regime is a better system; people under this system enjoy more freedom and justice. Being one member of this system, I'll work hard to do what I have to do for my family, to improve myself to be a better person, to give any help I can to the people around me.

Egypt

Meranda Gouda

I was born in Cairo, Egypt. It was a very nice town. I was surrounded by my family all the time. My Grandmom's house was close to my school. After school we played in the street and the boys liked to play soccer.

On Sunday we went to church. We went on trips to the zoo and to the pyramids.

My town is very famous now, because we have a big actor who worked on the Disney movie. My friends and I played jump rope. The main street had the train. We liked to go in the street to drink the sugar cane juice. It was yummy.

I got married and had two kids. My parents asked me to come to the USA to visit. My husband and I decided to come and leave Cairo for a better life for our kids. After I arrived in the US, I had my third baby. I have been in the USA for 25 years now. I like it here and my husband has his own business. My kids loved the school and graduated from college and got married and I have my grandbabies now.

Someone told me about how to learn English, so I called the office and they gave me an appointment. When I went over there, they gave me a test then they sent me over to the library. It was very helpful for me. It helps a lot.

This Is My Story

Blessing Mamman

When I was in Africa, I started looking for money. I would go to the farm and pluck vegetables and then take them to market to sell. Sometimes I would go to school. After school I would go to the market. It was not easy for me. My friend and I ran to the river sometimes to play with water. I found it so hard sometimes because I wasn't able to concentrate on my books, because when I got back from school, I would be thinking of what to do the next day. The money I earned I used to pay my school fees. My parents were not able to afford to pay them. I was one of the lucky girls in my village to find myself in the United States of America. I'm so happy to take this English class, because I want to improve my writing and reading scale.

War Alert

Silvia L. Miller

Listening to the news these days (especially in the last couple of weeks) brought back some memories of the past having to do with war and news of war. When I was 8 or 9 years old I can recall being at my grandparents' farm, which was across the road from a wide open field. This was during the forties and some soldiers were on maneuvers in this field. Not only were they armed with shotguns, but they were riding around on army tanks. We were not threatened in any way, but as children we were curious. My sister said she remembered that they left behind a lot of utensils they used in preparing their meals including the items they ate off of. They were all made of tin.

I also recall their air raid drills. At home during the times of the drills we had to close all the doors, pull down the shades and blinds, and turn off all of the lights. At school when the siren sounded, we had to go inside if we were outside and either lay on the floor or get under our desks.

Now this reminds us of what it is like today to prepare for active shooters. I can recall that the sirens were loud. Remember, there were no emergency warnings on TVs or alert warning calls on phones.

Prayerfully, we will not have to relive war alert warnings ever again.

Envision for My Future

April Mills

What I envision for my future: In the next year, to complete my High School Equivalency (HSE) class, and to receive my High School Diploma, then start an Ultrasound Technician Course.

What I envision for my future: In the next year, for my 3 children, and I to all be reunited and live in the same home together as a family.

What I envision for my future: In the next three years, to start looking for a place to start my own Ultrasound practice.

What I envision for my future: In the next three years, to see my oldest daughter off to prom (something I didn't do myself), and see her walk the stage graduating high school.

What I envision for my future: In the next five years, to sit on my beach front porch and smile at all my accomplishments for raising myself, and my children to becoming better people.

What I envision for my future: I can tell you today, three years ago, I didn't envision this future for myself.

The White Garbage Can

Alka Misra

In 2006, we moved to California in from India with two kids. It was a big change for us and for our family back in India. I had mixed feelings about leaving my country. I was an only child and grew up in a very protective and pampered environment with lots of affection and love. I didn't want to leave my parents alone there since the USA is so far from India. My husband told me we would stay here until his project was completed.

I was overwhelmed by the excitement to see the new country. I was curious about the place and the people here. California was very beautiful and the weather was amazing. Everything was so different from India: the people, the places, the food, the culture, and the language. I was not very fluent in English so communication became a big problem, but somehow I managed.

One day my husband surprised me with the news that his project is going to end and he got his new project in New Jersey. I heard that the east coast's weather conditions were not favorable. I was not used to the extremely cold weather and the snow. Again we packed our bags and moved to New Jersey. Here we took an apartment in Edison (an Indian community).

We moved to an apartment in January 2007 when the weather was freezing cold. It was quite a lonely winter and moving at this time made my life a little harder without any license or

any car. My apartment was on the back of the building. When I would open the balcony window, I would see a parking lot and a huge garbage can. The can was green with a few words written on it. Every day I woke up and removed my curtains from my window to see outside. The first thing I see is the same green huge garbage can.

My 5-year-old son started going to school and my 1-year-old son was always with me at home. One day he woke up with the loud sound, a motion must have caught his eye which made him run to the window and I followed. There was a big garbage truck. We watched it take all of the garbage from the can. My younger one was very happy to see it and from then on whenever it came, he started jumping with joy. After a few days I started feeling a connection with the garbage can. It looked like it wouldn't go anywhere like me. Its presence always gave me a feeling that I'm not alone.

One weekend morning, I opened the curtains to see a totally different view outside. The earth of yesterday was covered as white as any new page. There was heavy snow and the parking lot was white. The world outside was dangerously cold. The snow held the house down and the people inside. Though I had some images of snow in my mind, I never thought that it would be like this. I opened the window and inhaled the crisp, cool air. The ghostly wind broke the peaceful sound of silence. The branches hung low with the weight of snow. The street looked like a big white canvas as if it was waiting for me to go out to finish an unfinished painting. My balcony floor was as smooth as cake and the snow fell like a huge blanket of icing powder. I was happy to simply walk in it and create a few footprints of my own. Each flake was swirling and dancing and it looked like I was in winter wonderland. That moment was very wonderful and memorizing but wait, something was missing. Where did that garbage can go? It was there, but the white snow turned the green garbage can into a white one.

Time passed and we settled down, we moved to a different city in a big house. Now the view from my window is different. But whenever the snow flies down for the first time, it gives me a nostalgic feeling and reminds me of the same garbage can covered with snow.

A Difficult Time in My Life

Alejandra Sava

Many years ago, I lived during terrifying times in Peru. It was a very hard time in my country because there were many terrorist attacks in different cities.

The Sendero Luminoso was a terrorist group whose leader was Abimael Guzman. They detonated bombs constantly and the population had no light because they broke down the high voltage towers. We were always forced to buy candles. We lived in constant anxiety and fear because almost every day a lot of policemen, soldiers, politicians and civilians died.

One day, my oldest daughter was playing in the garden and suddenly she saw a backpack hidden among the plants. I did not think it was dangerous and I allowed her to pull it out and sit on it. However, a relative came and screamed, “A bomb, a bomb!” She called the police, and all of us, including the neighbors had to leave that place. Then, a huge flame of fire burst. We were in shock and we just cried. The police said that this bomb was directed at our house because many politicians met there.

Years later, the leader of this terrorist group and others were arrested and they were sentenced to life in prison.

Now, there are still some terrorist hiding in the Peruvian jungle, but they are limited by the police. Fortunately, my daughter and I survived that terrible situation and today we know how dangerous terrorists are.

My Most Memorable Event
Wanderlucy Duarte de Souza

My most memorable event was my daughter's first birthday. It was my daughter's first year of life. I prepared the food and decorations with love.

First, I picked the theme Princess Sophia the First. I chose this theme because I like the movie and my daughter's name is Sophia. I bought a big banner with a picture of Princess Sophia on it. Then I put the balloons around the banner. Next, I put some flowers and cake on the table. I also made other desserts and favor boxes.

After that I started to like making decorations for events at church, friend's parties and birthdays. Making decorations for event makes me relax. I found this is my hobby.

All There Is In A Name
Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

It was the fall of 2014; I came to Somerset, in New Jersey. The first two months I was spending my time doing the cooking, watching TV and reading books like every other Indian housewife. I felt bored very soon. After failing to find a job, I decided to study something new. I had done several online courses, but was not satisfied; I need to go to a conventional class. Fortunately, I found out a computer class running nearby public library which was sponsored by the county.

One day the following Spring, I went to the library and registered for spreadsheet classes. In the first day of class I went half an hour early and took a seat in the front row. All other students were natives; I was the only Indian there, the 'odd man out '! But when the class started, that thought changed. The instructor helped each and every student and it was a very good class. While taking the portion of Mathematical Functions, he asked us a question, "Does anyone remember the name of your 9th grade Mathematics Teacher?"

Suddenly I raised my hand and I was the only one who did so.

Teacher: "Please tell her name?"

Me: "I am from India."

Teacher: "That's not a problem".

Me: "Her name was Suvarna Kumari".

The most interesting thing is that he couldn't pronounce that name, so he left that topic. During that short interval, I went back to my high school days in India, Suvarna Kumari teacher taught us on 9th and 10th grade; more than just Mathematics some values too. She was really an inspirational and loving teacher. Later I saw her as Principal in our school. Now she is retired and living peacefully with family in India.

On the last day of the class, the teacher called every one's name and gave them their certificate. When he picked up my certificate, he smiled and asked me,

"How can I pronounce your name?"

I replied "It is Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja.."

He waited for a while. I knew that he couldn't call my name.

I continued, "I have to repeat two or three times to every new person I have met in the United States and most of them can't pronounce it; wisely they would leave that task".

He told to me the famous quote of Shakespeare "What is in a name?"

But I believe that "All there is in a name..." and I am enjoying the uniqueness of my name.

Navigating the American Dream

Coralía Palencia Tobar

When I hear the words "American Dream," a lot of good things come to my mind, but the most important meaning is the opportunity of living in peace. Living in America has given me the opportunity to spend more time with my family, taking care of them and enjoying them.

Life without the menace that someone is looking for you with the idea of harming you is my ideal of life. To me, the American Dream does not have anything to do with money; to me it is peace, family, future, happiness.

From my experience, I would like to give advice to newcomers to this country. First, you

should know very well the source of your information because there are a lot of people saying things that they hear from the television or from other people's experience, but they do not have all the facts. Look for official sources of information. On the Internet you can find a lot of information, but try to choose what comes from the official offices. For example, if you are looking for help about education, you can go to the web page of the board of education of your city, and so on with other matters to make good choices in your life.

The Challenge of My Life

Claudia (Pen Name)

My name is Claudia. I'm 28 years old. I'm from Mexico. I'm mother of three beautiful girls. I'm currently living in the USA.

When I was younger, I remember that I was very shy and I did not have friends in school. I always talked with my cousin. She was my best friend at school, but when she moved to another school I felt that I was alone.

All my classmates ate together at lunch and I always ate alone. When the days passed away, I saw other students were in different sports like basketball, soccer and volleyball.

The coach was inviting all students of other grades to be part of the team and then be able to compete.

At that moment I was thinking about the sport, so I finally decided to take this opportunity to meet new people and make new friends.

Also, soccer caught my attention and I liked it.

When I enrolled in soccer and had our first meeting, the coach introduced each of the team members.

Then we practiced and trained to achieve our goals, our team coach told us in a few weeks we would have our first competition between our school and another school.

They gave a prize to the school that wins the competition.

The prize was computers for the school. That is why we worked so hard to win that game. When the first competition day arrived, we were very nervous, but finally we won 2-1 and when the game ended our team and the coach went to celebrate.

This game changed my personality because I was too shy and now I'm more confident

with myself. I'm more comfortable to have conversations and have new friends.

Playing taught me that all I want I can do.

I need to work very hard, be strong and confident with myself and be very focused and I will realize all my dreams.

One of my dreams was to come to the United States with my parents. Ten years ago I moved to the United States.

My dreams are to improve my English, get my GED and buy a house for my family.

I want to let my daughters know they need to work very hard and be persistent to get all their dreams and never give up.

Non-Fiction – Other Submissions

An Unforgettable Memory

Rizwana Arshad

We came to America in 1998. Everything was new for us in the United States. With our parents, we visited so many places in New York City. One day, we went to a park with them. We enjoyed our time together so much. At one point, my three sisters and I were together and wanted to explore on our own.

My father said, “We will meet at this gate of the park after some time.” Then, that good day became a very bad day for us all. After exploring the park for some time, we tried to find the gate to meet up with our parents. We couldn’t find it! My parents were searching for us while we were searching for them. They were very upset and so they decided to call the police to help them. Everyone now was looking for us with no success. By evening, my sisters and I decided to go home by ourselves but we didn’t have any money among us. We talked about getting help from the police to go home. In the meanwhile, we spotted our parents shouting at us and rushing over. They even slapped my younger sisters.

We were shocked by what they did. But, now that we are parents, too, we understand why they acted that way. We know that our children are like parts of ourselves. We can’t live without them. Children are still in our lives when they are lost, our hearts break until we are reunited. My parents’ reaction of both joy and anger was a natural one.

My Love Story

Stephane Valencia Camacho

I used to live in Colombia, I was a videographer. I used to work with models, dancers, actors and singers; and during the first week of January of 2019, I went to Manizales, a city that is near my hometown, of Pereira. I was working with my photographer friend, Antonia, we were working for Wikka, Byey and J-Tan.

They had a manager and he rented a bus for us and for another band that we didn’t know,

Syntchronique. On the road we talked with two of them, Matt and Sancho, they were really funny and kind people, we laughed the whole time.

After two hours, we arrived at “La Gran Karpa”, the concert venue. It was 8:30 p.m. when we got there and the guys’ performance was at 11 p.m. So Antonia and I decided to take a look around to see which angles would work for certain shots, afterwards we went back to the bus to rest a while.

The place was full, the people were screaming, excited to see our friends sing. Antonia and I started taking pictures, we took some shots on stage, recorded and photographed throughout the place, the show lasted about 45 minutes, at the end the crowd was still loud with excitement. When Syntchronique took the stage, I took some videos of them with my cellphone and I posted them on my social media.

The following day, I got a message from one of the Syntchronique’s members, Jordy I hadn’t spoken with him the night before. He was the producer and DJ of the band, he left his number and asked me if I could send him the videos that I had posted. I sent the videos and after that we started to talk about him, about me and about everything.

We talked every single day for a couple of weeks, then he invited me out on a date, and we went to the cinema. He brought me a gift, a keychain he knew I would like. It was a special day, I really felt a connection, like we had known each other for a long time.

After our date, we couldn’t stop writing one another, and we saw each other very often. A few months later we went to a restaurant that we love, he had a surprise prepared for me, the waitress brought me a piece of cake and, on the plate, was written in chocolate “Do you want to be my girlfriend?” I was so happy and my instant smile let him know I meant yes. He is such a good and sweet person that makes me happy all the time, he has great details, making me smile when I’m sad, leaning on me and making me feel unique by his side.

Every day we fall in love and now despite the distance, because he’s in Colombia, we love each other more, we support each other more, we understand each other more, we solve all our problems together, and no matter how hard this road is, we build our future every single day, we do our best to be together as soon as possible.

And there you have it, two beautiful stories come together. Doing what I love, I found the love of someone who loves me every day.

One For My Own Time

Hi Kyung Cho

Seven years ago, on a Friday night, I watched the movie “Bucket List.” Since, then, I’ve made 12 bucket lists. And I’ve repeated the same list because I couldn’t accomplish some of the things on it. One of things that shows up on the list over and over again is K- Pop aerobic dance. Two years have already passed since I started working out.

Someone told me, there was a K-Pop aerobic dance class in Koreatown, Palisades Park, New Jersey. The first time I went, I felt like it was a little far from home. It took 25 minutes to get there. But now, it doesn’t seem far at all. I work out 3 or 4 times a week, at least. While I’ve been exercising, I’ve found out the difference between sports and dance. Dance is an art form that expresses rhythmic body movement using music and sound. Sports requires competition other players, quickness, endurance and a player’s own technique possibly to achieve setting records. In general, non- athletes do not need to compete and there are many kinds of exercises from working to jogging that improve health. And aerobic dance is that! It combines sports and dance as a work out.

Many of my friends who know me, cannot imagine me doing aerobic dance. Even my husband used to make fun of me because I am too stiff to do aerobic dance. By the way, I was on a high school track team until I graduated. At that time, I thought I was gifted in sports until I started aerobic dance—I was completely wrong. My aerobic dance instructor told me not to be rational, not to think so much, just let it go it’ll come naturally. However, I still have two left feet. My body and mind are still competing with each other.

Two years doesn’t seem like a long time, but it has been. I learned a lot of Idol’s songs and I am able to catch on a little faster when the music starts. Little by little, I followed along quicker and quicker, I exercised, and began to be excited. Above all, what motivated me to move was my passionate instructor, who breathed and sweat. I was envious and impressed. I wanted to sweat like her.

The Painter, Pierre Auguste Renoir said that a woman who reads book is the most beautiful woman in the world. I want someone to see me as beautiful when I am doing K-POP aerobic dance, the way he sees women who read.

I don’t need the stress of competitive sports. I need to work out to sustain my physical

fitness in order to keep myself healthy in life. Aerobic dance is still a little tough of a workout for me, but it is very enjoyable to listen to and dance with Psy's "New Face" and Black Pink's "Like the Last time." I intend to keep going hard until I'm drenched.

The Gun Epidemic In America

Nohra Colon

The guns in America have been an epidemic for a long time, because the government has no control over them. I was thinking about how the gun business is very lucrative to the government until the criminals take possession in the streets and in children's schools. The violence does not recognize color or race. It does not have respect for NOBODY! Some families are anxious because they don't know when and where we will witness the next shooting.

When I came to this country, I thought it would be safer than Columbia, where I was born. The gun epidemic makes me feel very unsafe. I believe that if the government has more control over the gun business, the people will have more awareness, and families will be less anxious. Ending the gun epidemic in America will make it a better country to live for us and our children.

Keep Going

Carol Hamilton

I am one of thirteen children: Eight girls and five boys. We all grew up in one house in Trinidad with two parents. My father went to work and my mother stayed home and looked after the house and the children. Our parents liked to keep all the boys together and all the girls together so we could play in the yard together. We didn't have a lot of friends since there were enough girls to play together nicely.

I was big and strong, and I used to fight and beat up on my brothers. I was afraid of nobody. Our mother was always the peacekeeper.

My oldest sister walked me three blocks to school every day. There was a tamarind tree in the schoolyard, and the children used to run to pick the tamarinds, crack the long pods open and

eat the seeds.

When school was over at 3:00, I went home to do my homework and chores. I had to clean the house, scrub the pots, and sweep the yard. We were allowed to listen to the 7:00 news and by 8:00, we were all in bed.

We love how our parents raised us. We worked our problems out together. Now we try to set good examples for our children the way our parents did for us.

Balancing Motherhood, Work and Learning English

Georgina Jerez

The most important thing in the life of a mother is how to keep balance between a healthy family and work, without fully knowing the same language, while being an example to them.

As a working mom with two children, I have to take care of them and make sure that I keep a healthy family at the same time. I have to give them healthy food, vegetables, and prepare the food with extreme care. We have to constantly keep an open communication about what kind of food they are going to eat or drink every day. It is important that they are aware of healthy options, since I am not there with them all the time, due to work.

As a mother, I need to have a balance of all things without fully speaking English. If I were speaking English correctly, we would have a better communication. Even without me fully knowing the language, I try to keep a set of rules and chores everybody can follow without my being there. I keep things simple, but at the same time, I am persistent with the rules. It doesn't make a difference if they understand me all the time, but it helps that they are aware of what I am speaking to them.

As a mother of two, I want my children to see me as an example for them. I am sure that they are aware that I have time for them, and not only for work. I dedicate a lot of time to share moments, like cooking, cleaning, and doing homework. That way, they know there is a balance between work and life at the same time. They will know I care for them without leaving my other responsibilities.

The most important thing in my life as a working mother is a balance between a healthy family and caring for them without leaving my job responsibilities. In addition to that, I am

learning to speak English more fluently so that I can communicate better with my children and set a good example for them.

Cherish Others

Charlie Kim

James (who is a very smart friend, my class mate) became a great success in the business world. Through others' eyes, his life appears to be the epitome of success. However aside from work, he has little joy. In this moment, lying on his sick bed and recalling his whole life, he realizes all the recognition and wealth that he accrued and has so much pride in, has paled and become meaningless in the face of impending death.

What is the most expensive bed in the world? The sick bed. Material things that are lost can be found. But there is one thing that can never be found when it is lost—life. When a person goes into the operating room, he will realize that there is one book that he has yet to finish reading the book of a Healthy Life. It doesn't matter what stage in life people are at right now, with time, we will all face the day the curtain comes down.

Now he realizes when people have accumulated sufficient wealth to last a lifetime, they should pursue other matters that are unrelated to wealth. Something that is more important; perhaps relationships, perhaps Art, perhaps a dream from a younger day. Non-stop pursuit of wealth will only turn a person into a twisted being of failure. God gave us the sense to feel the love in everyone's heart not the illusions brought about by riches. The wealth that we have accumulated in our lives we cannot bring with us. We can only bring the memories precipitated by love. That's the true wealth that follows you: Accompany you and giving you strength and light to go on.

Treasure love for your family, love for your spouse love for your friends.

Treat yourself well and cherish others!

In the end, wealth is only a fact of life that he became accustomed to.

A Day in the Forest
Geetha Sri Harsha Samayamanthula

It was a calm overcast day, and I found myself resting at the side of an oak tree, admiring the beauty of the woods that surrounded me.

There was a gentle breeze, creating the single sound of rustling leaves. A lazy mist hazed my vision, making the horizon seem like one from a story book. The cloudy sky covered the woods over the treetops which created a canopy over my head. The whole forest was filled with fall foliage colors and the leaves appeared as though they were dying to fall out of the tree and join their companions on the forest floor. Together with pine needles and other flora the leaves formed a thick springy carpet for me to walk upon.

Resting underneath the shade of the trees, I found myself appreciating the scent of pine needles; The ambience of Christmas. I watched as a single sparrow soaring above the emerald forest. A few feet next to me an eager chipmunk hastily scampered from tree to tree, awaiting the chill of winter. Beyond the horizon I could see the community of newly formed saplings. They appeared as little children, learning under the guidance of their grown and fully matured parents. A walk through the deciduous forest was a delightful experience. On my way to the forest I met with a wide assortment of animals and insects, which created a concert of humming, thrumming, buzzing and chirping sounds. In the distance I heard the babbling sound of the shallow river over smooth rocks and at one place I spotted a starving deer gazed a bit of the trunk and made an ugly scar on it. Along the way fallen timber accompanied thickets of weeds.

The magnificent view of the sunrise and sunset amazed me a lot. The pleasant atmosphere of the forest totally distressed me. I didn't feel like going back to the hustle, bustle of city life. In minutes, a blanket of darkness overcomes the light. An owl hooted in the distance and animals went home to roost. A cool breeze was coming from the north lulled me into a deep sleep. The forest I realized was home to many wild creatures. It provides food and habitats for animals and livelihood for humans. It is a key source of quality of air. But nowadays people cut the trees and spoil the forests for their own benefit. It can cause rapid soil erosion and also bring a decline in rainfall on a major level. We must take drastic steps right away to prevent any further damage. "Plant a tree, grow a flower-let's give mother earth back her power." "Save trees to save life."

Letter
Mike Smith

To my 1st born,

I'm writing you this letter to remind you that I love you and I think about you all the time. You have a mother who deeply cares for you and is going to make sure that you have everything that you need so I'm not worried about that. My main concern is that you don't forget that you also have a father that loves you and wants to be able to share unforgettable memories with you. I hope that you don't feel resentful towards me because of my absence, but your father is far from perfect and I have been struggling keeping myself together.

I want you to know that I'm doing a lot better now and I'm making plans that will put me where I need to be. I can't wait to be able to see you again and finally spend some time with you. I don't want you to ever feel like I don't love you because I haven't been there, I just needed time to fix some of my problems I have been having and afterwards I will be able to be the father you definitely deserve.

The last time I spoke to your mother she told me how good you are doing, especially in school. I'm proud to be your father and of how smart you are becoming. All I ask from you is to not give your mom too much of a hard time and keep learning as much as you can, because with knowledge, comes power.

Two Sparkling Eyes
Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

About 10 years back, I have got a chance to visit a responsible doctor at her local dispensary located at a small remote village in India. While she was consulting her patients, I was sitting in front of her by leaf through a magazine. After a few minutes, I pause that; I instantly realized that she knew most of her patients personally and I found out an affectionate bond between the doctor and the patients. I saw she provided some medicines to deprived patients, at her own cost.

An elderly lady nearly eighty years old who was suffering from old age diseases came for consultation. While adequately describing her health conditions, she was eloquently expressing her distress in her personal life too. That grandma's family members didn't take care of her. I was eagerly watching all these and instantly tears came out to my eyes. After the consultation, that woman started her way back home.

Then the doctor withdraws some money from her purse and gently told me,
"Give this to that grandma".

At that time, she reached the gate of the dispensary. I ran away to her and granted that money. While taking that she regarded and smiled at me with her "two eyes" which are sparkling with the gratitude towards me because she misinterpreted that I was aiding her. I tried to explain to her "who is behind that." But she didn't change her smile.

I, always remember that face, especially those eyes.

Some faces are like that they can't eliminate from our minds.....

Facing Reality

Madalyn Sudol

Imagine someone believing they spent a few months in a mental institute, only to find out it had been 4 years. In Matthew Quick's novel, "Silver Linings Playbook", Pat Peoples is adjusting to life outside the mental institution he has spent the last four years in. Through his obsessions with working out and reading, as well as therapy visits with Cliff, Pat believes he will win back his wife Nikki. Pat suffers from an unnamed mental illness, which clouds his judgement, and perception of the people and places he once loved before entering the mental institute. Although Silver Linings Playbook takes place in 2006, much of how Pat handles his illness is relevant to how those suffering now, handle theirs. Due to Pat's obsessions and his longing for Nikki, countless visits to therapy, and relationship with his father, Silver Linings Playbook is an accurate representation of mental illness in today's society.

First, people who suffer from mental illness may find themselves not wanting to face reality, and thus, obsess over certain things in order to cope. Pat obsesses over working out and reading his wife's books that she teaches. Pat does this because he wants to make himself a better person for Nikki, he wants to appreciate the books that she teaches. Pat, while talking about how

running makes him feel, says, “when I run, I always pretend I am running towards Nikki, and it makes me feel like I am decreasing the amount of time I have to wait until I see her again” (Quick 20). These obsessions for Pat keep his mind busy. He only wants to make himself look better and seem more intellectual for Nikki, not for himself. Obsessing over something, is never good in the long run. For Pat, while it only temporarily relieved the pain of missing out on the last four years, he also couldn’t come to face the truth that Nikki would never be back. Without receiving help, those like Pat could go on for years, compulsively obsessing and creating a sense of false hope, that would only do more damage.

An obsession like Pat’s may cause someone to seek help and in receiving help for mental illness, most would consider therapy. Pat’s experience with therapy while in the mental institute is less than helpful. Dr. Timbers, his old therapist, was cold and refused to go along with Pat’s dreams of seeing Nikki again. After Pat is taken out of the institute, he meets his new therapist, Dr. Patel, Pat says, “I know right then that Cliff and I are going to get along, because he does not preach pessimism like Dr. Timbers and the staff at the bad place; Cliff doesn’t say I need to face what he thinks is my reality” (Quick 16). Mental illness is vast and affects people differently. In today’s society, there is more research and knowledge available about mental illnesses and how to treat them, then ever before. Pat treats his mental illness with therapy and medications. Since research is expanding, there are more professionals equipped for handling various mental disorders. Therapy is moving away from the cold, cliché therapist like Dr. Timbers, and more to the relatable, and funny, Dr. Patel. Cliff doesn’t put Pat down for believing he will see Nikki again; instead, he helps him cope with the separation from his wife, and how he can move on, by allowing Tiffany to enter his life and be a good influence. “Silver Linings Playbook” captures how modern therapists treat their clients, instead of out of date, old fashioned ways of treating those with mental illnesses.

Although Cliff was a positive influence after the mental institute, Pat’s father, Mr. Peoples, acted as a negative one. Those suffering from any mental illness, may encounter individuals who don’t seem to understand what a mental illness is and how it impacts that person, like Pat’s father. While Pat is talking about his father, he says, “I remember him yelling at me the only time he ever visited me in the bad place, and he said some pretty awful things about Nikki and silver linings in general” (Quick 8). Those suffering from mental illness need support, and Pat’s father is doing the opposite of that. Pat’s father could offer encouraging words

and advice to his son, but makes the choice to remain introverted and uninterested in his son's life. It seems that his father glorifies Pat's successful brother Jake, leaving Pat feeling left out. When a person in someone's immediate family acts like they don't care about them, it can do severe damage to their mental health. Therapy is only able to help to a degree, it is up to the people at home to create an environment where one feels welcomed and safe. Luckily, Pat has his mother, who at times is overly caring and sensitive but she makes sure he takes his medications as well as getting him to his therapy appointments every week. The family life created at home for Pat is not ideal for someone suffering from a mental illness, and having episodes every so often. In society right now, more awareness is being brought up about mental illness, but not everyone chooses to acknowledge it. Pat's father represents those who choose to ignore the problem, not actively taking steps to better the situation. It is a difference in generations. Those who have mental illnesses want to feel normal and a sense of community, when ostracized, it may bring out the worst of their illness. Leaving them to feel they have to fight their battles by their self.

In a modern society, much of the topics explored in "Silver Linings Playbook" are accurately representative of those suffering from mental illness. Pat, who suffers from an unnamed mental illness, copes with the separation from his wife through hobbies such as working out and reading. Hobbies allow mental illness sufferers to create goals, and progress towards those goals each day, as long as the hobby is not negatively impacting them. Pat also seeks the help of Cliff, through therapy, which allows Pat to see therapy as less of a negative experience. When therapists create a positive environment, it allows their patients to feel better. Pat's home life is not the greatest due to his father avoided talking to him. Negative home lives can seriously impact the mental health of people, and worsen the health of those already suffering from mental disorders. Books like "Silver Linings Playbook", are shining light on the harsh realities of living with mental illness.

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Difficulties with Obtaining Health Care as an Immigrant

Ali Uyanik

If you are an immigrant or new resident in United States of America (USA), you probably face many problems from the beginning. Why? Because, you start to live another country that has different culture, laws, habits etc. Adapting to these changes takes a long time but it doesn't mean it is impossible. You just need to follow what US citizens are doing.

One of difficulties you face, is to enroll in a health insurance plan. Some people, who are new residents in USA, are hesitant to join an insurance plan. Several reasons for lack of health insurance, citizenship status, financial costs, limited English proficiency etc.¹ On the other hand, health insurance coverage in the United States is provided by several public and private sources. Statistics show that 91.2% of Americans had health insurance coverage during the year 2016.² At this point, these statistics indicate that what immigrants have to do. Everybody in US must obtain an insurance plan.

If you decide to enroll in health insurance coverage, there will be a lot of undefined and unclear concepts. This can daunt you. Don't worry. I give you a few tips.

- Firstly; you should get a consultant or somebody who has enough information about health insurance plans. Because when you select plan, you face the need for more knowledge than you have about the plan.
- Secondly; you should find an agency or internet platform to help you decide between health insurance plans. For example; at the end of every year, Healthcare (known as Obamacare) starts. When you sign up on website, the system shows that a lot of health insurance plans according to your income.
- Before you decide on your health insurance coverage, you must think what the health needs are for yourself and family. For example: If you think you are young and healthy, you can select a plan that has low coverage and low cost. But if you have a medical problem or use

¹ More information at: Tsoh, Janice (January 2016). "[Healthcare Communication Barriers and Self-Rated Health in Older Chinese American Immigrants](#)". *Journal of Community Health*. **41** (4): 741–752.

² Bureau, US Census. "[Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2016](#)". www.census.gov. Retrieved October 11, 2017.

routine drugs, you have to select an insurance plan that provides drugs to treat your illness or condition.

- Don't forget that If you have low income, you may not need to pay. State or federal government benefits cover your health insurance cost.
- If you want to get used to living in USA, you have to overcome the difficulties that you face.

Health Insurance is very important for your health. You have to learn information about health insurance details and enroll in a plan that best fits your needs. Don't forget most of the American people obtain health insurance.

Fiction – Other Submissions

The Baby Bunny

Meranda Gouda

This is a story Meranda Gouda told to her son when he was a toddler. She said she told it every night. She included it one week in her journal entries.

It is a beautiful day. Mommy Easter bunny prepares food for her baby bunny,

Hi Mommy, I'm hungry what do you have for me?

I have carrots and lettuce.

Baby bunny everyday eats carrots and lettuce.

I'm not eating. I will go look for food outside.

He found a baby dog eating a small bone.

I'm hungry he told the baby dog.

OK come eat with me. This is a very yummy bone.

No thank you. I cannot eat bone and the bunny walked away.

Hi I'm hungry, he said.

He found a baby cat.

Hi I'm hungry, he said. No thank you I'm not drinking milk and he went away.

He found a baby bear.

Hi I'm hungry

Baby Bear came.

Eat with us fish it is so good.

I can't eat fish.

The day was almost over and the baby bunny had not eaten anything.

I'm hungry. I have to go back to my mom.

She was happy when she saw her baby bunny.

I'm sorry, he said.

Mommy got him carrots and, lettuce, and he ate it all up.

M4 Weapon Contest

Clifford Henry

During their military training, soldiers have to disassemble the M4 weapon so it can be cleaned. We take parts off the weapon and put them in different sections. Then we reassemble the pieces. We add the barrel, the trigger, the bolt, the spring, the firing pin and the rest of the twelve pieces.

If the weapon should jam in a real situation, we might have to do this operation in the

dark. There is a contest to disassemble and reassemble the weapon blindfolded. We practice first with our eyes open doing it many times. We focus on the pieces.

Then we do a lot of practicing with our eyes closed. We take the weapon apart and feel the weight and shape of the pieces. We want to find the quickest way to put the weapon together. What piece should go first? Which goes next?

We are blindfolded. The sergeant says, "Are you ready?"

We say, "Yes."

The weapon is on the table. We cannot touch it until we hear Start. We have to go slowly. It takes time because the weapon is in one hand and the pieces are picked up in the other hand. As we try to put the pieces back together, we can drop a piece or grab the wrong one. If the piece is dropped, we have to search for it. We might have heard where it dropped and feel that location on the floor. We can't waste time. We should finish what's on the table and pick that piece up afterward.

Changes

April Mills

Dedicated to all the girls, young ladies, and women fighting cancer...

Once upon a time there was a gorgeous fairy named Unique with the most beautiful long hair. Each day she awoke, and said "What will I do with this long hair today?" So she washed it, let it air dry so it can stay curly. The next day, she pulled it into a ponytail, the day after up into a bun. Each day it was something different until one day Unique had no idea what to do with her hair. So she decided to cut it all off. She had nothing to do with the short hair but change the color or wear a head scarf over it as months went by she looked at old pictures of her hair, and started to wonder what had she done. After about three months, her hair started to grow back, and she was oh so happy, and started to appreciate the long hair, and so many different styles that she can do. That's when Unique knew how beautiful she was with or without hair. So she then decided that she'll never again cut off her pretty lengthy hair, and within all of that, she realized that sometime change can be good, and she was once again that gorgeous fairy with the most beautiful long hair...

Fractured Fairy Tale

Alec Kyle Santos

Dear reader,

This tale is not one bespoken of originality, nor is it a work of greater renown. This is in fact a fractured piece, one created with the author's own personal vision. The inspiration is drawn from bygone stories, archived and written for the retelling today. Those who might know the original tales hold a distinct advantage against those bereft of said knowledge, and as such, I find it only appropriate to recommend that you read those beforehand. The titles of those works are the *Tinderbox* by Hans Christian Andersen and the *Blue Light* by Jacob Grimm. Consider this humble piece a recognition of their own, as they are deserving of more than just mere mention. - Alec Kyle T. Santos

The olden tales speak of a time long before, in a distant land and faraway kingdom, where two races, men and dwarves, waged war. Their reasons had fallen away, vanished in aging and years past. Generation after generation fought with nothing but simple contempt for the other, and yet that alone was enough.

After much time, the king of humanity grew weary. He knew, defeat for his people, it was all but certain. Dwarves were master smiths, ingenious with their clever designs and war machines. Battle after countless battle, it was becoming an irrevocable truth; the dwarves would arise from this conflict, victorious.

This, the king would not accept. Something had to be done. As most men do in dire times, when cornered like an animal and left with nothing, the king became desperate. He resolved himself to commit an unforgivable sin, to consort with dark forces and nefarious magic, what would ultimately become his folly.

He met with a witch and demanded of her in exchange for a place by his side, a method, a way to win against those who opposed them. She agreed eagerly, and presented to him a lantern. Now this was no ordinary light, she would explain. Resting her hand atop it, she spoke a single incantation.

"Harken now. Hear thy call and heed thy summon. Words spoken for three, answer me... My loyal servant!"

A blue flame appeared within the transparent case, brighter than even the stars at night. It flickered, its mesmerizing dance drawing the eyes of whoever should look upon it, encapturing their eternal gaze. Her words, though spoken low, carried within it a power, a certain force that bent nature itself. The space around them seemed to come alive, the very air becoming distorted, shadows closing in, before an enormous creature, a hulking beast appeared.

It was unlike anything this world had ever seen, a nightmarish parody of a hound, as if sent from the gates of hell itself. It was colossal, filling the king's chamber completely with its presence. Its heads, numbering three, had eyes as wide as towers, black peerless orbs that stared straight through you, as if seeing your very soul. Jaws lined with razor sharp teeth, leathery skin as dark as night, with demonic fire oozing from every pore and opening. This creature, it was unnatural, indeed it followed the very definition of a beast.

"Master, what do you command?"

The witch, at its words, smiled wickedly. She turned toward the king, offering him the lantern.

"This, my king, is how you shall win."

Within a year, the king's victory was assured. Using his beast, his creature of war, he tore the legions of dwarves asunder, reducing their machines to ash. Bereft of hope and unable to continue the fighting, the dwarf king sought for peace.

A tentative truce was formed, the conditions though unfavorable were accepted by both parties. The dwarves would continue to rule, but the majority of their lands would be ceded to humanity, reduced to those below ground.

The human king, regretful of his actions and hoping to ease his guilt, would seal away the beast and lantern, and banish the witch from his kingdom. On the fateful day that was her exile, she said this, "O' king, dreadful as dreadful can be. Thou art a liar, and truest fiend. Mark these words, thou shalt suffer, but not at my hand. Thou shall falter and come to fall by thine own folly, brought to the knee by those who were ally, servant, and enemy."

With that, she left, disappearing into the world. It would be years later that the prophecy would come true, and only then would the king remember. His ally, a discharged soldier. The servant, that awful beast. And the enemy, a black dwarf. It would be these three, they who were mentioned only in prophecy, to whom he would bend the knee.

Blood is Not Thicker Than Water

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

After two months of leave, Samantha rejoined the office on that day, her mind and body were weak. She couldn't concentrate anything. It's around 8.30 AM; she was sitting in the office, one lady with a sweet smile came and took the seat in front of her. She looked like a current employee.

"Are you Ms. Samantha?"

"Absolutely, I'm"

"I'm Rithu. I joined last week."

"Oh. That's nice. Pleasant meeting."

Their conversations started at that moment. They were together barely in two years in the same office.

Sometimes their colleagues mentioned one point,

"You both look alike..."

Samantha was so happy to hear that because Rithu was so beautiful.

"If I look like her, I'm also."

Last year, Rithu's son told Samantha the same,

"You look like my Mom."

More than the physical looks, they shared a lot...

Once in a vacation, Samantha asked her husband Ervin,

"Have you ever gained the ambiance of your own home from some other place?"

"No..."

"If anybody experiencing those feelings, they were fortunate..."

Samantha was explaining her affection for Rithu.

"My dad passed away on that day; I was surrounded by a group of people; I can't differentiate good and bad. Two of them require my signature on some documents. I objected to a 'Big No.' That made a massive impact on my life. They started their cruelty towards me. On those days, Rithu was with me. She provided me shelter; accepted me like a family member of her. Without any blood relation, we were like sisters."

Ervin hadn't any idea of these incidents and he said, "Blood is NOT thicker than water."

“Yeah, Ervin. Sometimes. ”

Samantha continued,

"After I had moved from my home town, I had barely in touch with her. After three years I got a contact of her, and I called on that number.”

Samantha stopped for a while,

“What happened later?” Ervin eagerly asked.

“Nothing extraordinary, we talked like sisters.” She beheld Ervin with a smile.

Poetry – Other Submissions

What Does Family Mean to Me?

Georgina Alzaga

My Family
makes my life
fantastic, unique
with a lot of felicity.

Maybe doesn't exist
correct words to describe
how amazing adventures
I've had with you.

Memories
come to my mind
and I can feel
the Infinite power.

This Love
is immense, infinite
vital in my life
as the air to the birds.

Young, I feel this
when you smile with me
because you're
my BEST REWARD.

F= Felicity, Fantastic, Forever.

A= Awesome, Amazing, Award, Adventures.

M= Memories, Moments.

I= Infinite, Immense.

L= Love, Legacy, Life

Y=Young, you

What Makes Me Love You? (To my Husband)

Georgina Alzaga

Millions of things makes me love you
many years to stay with me
as accomplices
because our connection is special
unique and extraordinary.

You know some of my secrets
and even so you accept me
with you, today I have two huge reasons
they make me go ahead, have dreams
to fight and never give up...our kids.

People say that is routine, habit
I think are more of those things.
Our life's experiences, fights,
discussions, laughs, crying
anguish, felicity, and some others
make us more strong like couple.

Women and men are complicated
both are sensible, fragile
with defects, weaknesses and strengths.

I just want to say: thank you LIFE
to getting me the opportunity to meet you,
this path has not been easy to walk
but at your side, it looks more bearable.

The Fall
Rizwana Arshad

Fall has arrived now in the United States of America. Here, we have four seasons: Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall.

Fall comes after the hottest time of the year. It is my favorite season because I don't like the heat of summer.

Some people like the change of weather while others enjoy the coming winter with the promise of snow, especially children who look forward to school closing and having fun in the snow.

Beginning around late September and continuing into October which is my favorite month because it is around my birthday month. Probably that is why I like the Fall best.

In this season, the winds start blowing, sometimes hot and other times cold. All the trees begin losing their leaves.

At this time also many people do get sick, affected by allergies and colds which are due to the changing weather.

People also get irritable and feel a little unsettled by the blowing winds and rainy days that come with hurricanes and other storms.

Christmas Spirit

Luciana Bastos

Christmas is the most important holiday for many families who get together, once a year, to celebrate the baby Jesus' birth.

The colors, red and green, presents, special food, a pine tree, lights, Santa Claus and reindeer, all of them represent the magical and saintly holiday.

Our heart start felling full of love. At this time of year, acts of charity and donations are done, especially, giving toys, so many toys to keep children full of happiness.

About my family, we prepare a traditional Portuguese dinner, which consists of cod fish, potatoes, eggs and cabbage. For dessert, particular cakes, which are made just at this time and provide a unique floating aroma through the house.

The kids are anxious for the Saint Nicholas' visit. Before we go to bed, everything needs get ready for his visit: cookies made for him, a cup of milk and carrots for the reindeer; they work hard all night, and need to be fed. They usually eat almost everything. We can't forget to put the socks on the tree and keep the window open, since we don't have a chimney at our house. Now, everything is ready for Santa's visit. Then the family need to get straight to bed, since, Santa will come only if the children are sleeping, so they fall asleep in seconds.

The next morning, the cookies and carrots are not more than crumbs, and the children are surprised and delighted seeing the presents under the tree, chocolates and candy in the socks.

There is a lot of hopefulness in the air, suddenly, like a miracle, we realize the we are all family, children of the same father, Jesus. It is called the Christmas spirit!

Although, a few days later, we start to forget. We run into our selfishness, conflicts of interest, gossip and fights between family and friends.

But, fortunately, every year, we receive Christmas' salvation, then the Christmas spirit is reborn. This is God teaching us a lesson, for as many times as we need it!

Cold Gun
Arima Brathwaite

I remember my cousin
6'1" or 6'2"
His cornrows were freshly done
Looking so crisp and clean
He lay there in a casket

I'm confused over his death
Such a tragic loss
Never fully experiencing life
People don't think before they act
Committing a murder

Wish and pray I could bring my cousin back
His body lay on the ground with 5 bullets
Why did they have to pull it?

Cold gun don't care
Took my cousin out of here
So young, no kids, no wife,
Someone who didn't care
A deadly gun took his life

He was a son, nephew, brother and cousin
The pain I feel words could never explain
A day I wish never came

Cold ground cold gun
I want revenge

My Cousin is gone
God, where are you in all this pain?
It's no wonder I went insane

People need to understand
Death is final twenty years later
I still remember him
I will never be the same
A loss is a loss
No one never can be replaced

Prayerfully my cousin went to heaven
When he left this earthly place

A Midnight's Regret

Karina Gonzalez

The night comes blue,
As it always has,
And the last time the wind spoke
Her somber lullabies through this place
Was the time before the moon
Cried out all her stars into the night.
And so here you are.
Alone amongst blue inked sky
And teardrop stars.

Can you remember
When you last saw the sun set?
It's wonderful array of colors
Cloaking a dark sky come soon to replace it?

You chose the night and therefore should be content;
You get to witness the Earth's secrets
It spills beneath the origami roots of the trees
And inkwells of the rivers.
You get to hear the echoes of the crow's caw,
The whispered lullabies
The wolf howls to her young.
You get to know much more than any,

And yet you find yourself yearning
For the pigments that meld in the sky
At Sunset,
Look back on what the lake's reflection looked like

In pure daylight.
You find that you miss the fresh caw of the crow
And the chatter that filled the streets of the city.
You miss seeing the bright green of paper stock leaves
And the glistening crystals present in the ballpoint ocean.
You can no longer see the way gold glitters
Or how light of a blue the sky really is.
All that remains of humanity's heartbeat
Is the small thrumming beat in your veins
Present every time the night lays down its silence
And nothing has ever been more deafening.

Certainty melds into doubt,
Content into crisis,
Rapid beats into flat lines,
But the loneliness that you swore would leave
Is the only reminder of the past and the coming future.

Friends do not appear at nighttime
Nor did they appear at daytime but at least then
You could dream of all you
Encompassing one table, laughing, enjoying,
But now dreams become just that
And though you thought starlight
An unimaginable beauty,
Now in your own dimness
You aren't so sure.

In the End, Icarus Always Dies

Karina Gonzalez

Honey, let me bleed.
Let my eyes shed my shame
And sorrow in one night
Where the sun can't find me
And I can't remember my
Own name
By the time it does.
But I guess,
Can you remember my name,
Is a better question.

We last saw each other
At the river,
The dried bank with its course dirt
And fish bones
And you with your hands so dry
You bled from your elbows
And I, my eyes.
And so the cycle went on and on
You wiping away the red
Staining my cheeks
And I peeling the skin from your arms
And together we bled.

The first night,
You told me your name,
Asked for my own to which I rejected,
Told you to call me Icarus

And I silenced your name at the river.
Said you were my Midas.
My very own King of Gold.

I came by the shore
Into your presence,
Dead yet living,
Weak yet hopeful,
Something yet nothing at all.
Treated you as a god
But you are only a man
That turns anything you touch
To the gold you so love.
Straw to gold.
Gold from flesh.
Copper to gold.
Gold from cloth.
Mortal Wax to melted starlight.
Feathers dipped in sunlight
Chains made from grace
But

Skin made from gold can only give so much warmth
Till it starts to burn

I gave up flight for such sun
To dazzle across my skin
And carry me to a tomorrow
I could remember.
But I am no Zoe.
I cannot come back

From a total encasing.
Dionysus does not free me
When Midas cries out his sins.
Apollo does not melt the eternal wax
Seeped into my bones.

No one comes.

And the river swells forth.

And a deep, flooded trench now separates
You and your kingdom
And I and my wasteland

And I see you
Dancing across your throne
With the music beating with the waves,
Citizens prancing about
While the wasteland stands still.
Dust swirls but not a thing else.

My wings have never felt heavier,
Never felt so blood-soaked,
Never so tired or angry,
My wings have never been so attached
To my being
That I can feel them at all.

The night's almost up.
I feel the burn on my body once again.
The dried up river has started to flood

And with the moon
We too fade away
To people not so familiar,
To another Icarus and Midas
Unknowing of Apollo and Dionysus' horrors,
Unknowing if this time
Love will win;
It won't.
But there is nothing left to wonder besides--

Can you tell me my name?

Orange
Karina Gonzalez

When the flavor
Soaks your tongue,
With the citrus blooms your memories
Of going down to the Bodega with Abuela,
When you saw the fruit and she told you
To pick any your heart desired.
The sour pricks away the sweetness
Losing it in an avalanche of pure orange,
Forcing you to remember
The sour taste of losing your mother tongue
Though you were too young
To imprint it as mother
And you never had the desire
To look for her corpse and revive her
In the tombs of your childhood.
But you do look for a frog
That you've never seen,
A small coqui that croaks
Throughout the mazes that make up
The halls in your mind.
The color of the fruit reminds you
Of the orange color along its skin
As potent as its cries of coqui.
The first taste is always the sweetest.
Good times flutter past your eyelids like
Old film,
The family celebrations at the house
Where Papa blasted salsa and reggaeton

And the house was warm with laughter and stories
And the only worry was when you could
Eat the pernil, first or last.
Processed juice always remains flat
Never having the true taste,
Always being a bit behind close,
Always never close enough
Like cheap shots at reviving memories
Trying to redo every move, every emotion
Only to always fall flat
And realize that it'll never be the same.
And oh god
When it rots. . .
Yes truly,
Most days oranges are bittersweet fruits.

Perhaps and Maybe So

Karina Gonzalez

Perhaps
I should've known
The river would dry up
In the East.

The signs of constant drought,
Dry-tongued remarks
Hidden between every crack
In the dirt,
Even tears could not fill
The bank with
Enough salt to keep
The fish alive,

Could not help the sand
From turning to glass,
Radiation too much,
Radiation too deep,
Wounds too fresh to be constantly bled
Onto our family photos,
Crystalline screams too sharp to be hidden
In every home-baked good.

You know it's bad when Mama's face
Turns sour.
Says,
'There's not enough sugar'

But we've never lived the sweet life,
Sour so much more a crazy flavor,
Sweet too mainstream,
Sweet too senile,
Sweet too unachievable,
That it made sense to simply take
All the sour given.

They say life has a lot of sour
And you need to know what it tastes like
In order to enjoy the sweet
But damn,
Every time some form of sweet
Has come my way
I've had only seconds to savour
Till it's in the mouth of
Someone else

It's always simple, isn't it?
Taking candy from any baby?
Small baby, big baby,
Too grown to cry baby,
Too young to know baby,
Too old not to baby,
Always makin' up stuff, baby
Why you always gotta lie, baby,
I know it was you, baby,
We're all we got, baby,
Shouldn't of done that, baby,
I love the way you smile, baby,
Why the hell you grinning, baby,

You know you deserved it, baby,
Open the door, baby,
It was only one time, baby,
Open the door. Baby,
I'm sorry,
Crybaby.

The sour has numbed my tongue
To all sweet.
They tell you to call on them
If the sour is ever too much
But when the breaker of my jaw falls
They tell me,
I'm just not tasting it right,
Tell me,
It is my job,
To add more sugar,
Make it taste as it should.
I try,
I try,
I fail,
Every damn time
Mouth so dry I tried to drown myself
In that very East River,
Find escape in the chaos
Only to find desert.

And when the Hell Storm leaves after
3 years
And I am free,
There are no apologies,

Just questions, just blame
Just why I could not do more,
Just why I could not flood
A dead river
With the water of my
Dehydrated body,
Just why I could not bring storm clouds
To rain on the dried lands,
Just that I should've seen the signs.
And they're right in a way.

Maybe, I should've known
That the river, would dry up,
In the East.
Maybe, I should've known,
The sweetest flavor I'd ever taste
Would be that of the
Blood in my mouth.

I'm Doing My Make Up

Elidia Guzman

I'm doing my makeup
Getting ready to catch the 9:22 am train South Orange bound
Dreams are on my mind
foundation on my face
One tear rolls down my cheek
I blend it in with my beauty blender
every drop of pain mixed in with who I look like
Racing with my thoughts
Fighting myself
You should go to school today
My inner voice says
Why are you even doing all of this?!
I have so many hopes and dreams
But yet I'm still the "cleaning lady"
I'm still the invisible person that
makes their bed and cleans their kitchen
I am no one
Yet I am someone
They can't see me I see me
Today I choose yet again
who I want to be
But everyone only sees the girl with pretty makeup.

Broken Wildflower

Hailey Krumfolz

She struggles each day to look in the mirror, if only she opened her eyes and looked a little clearer. Stretch marks and scars run down her thighs, smeared makeup and tears fill her eyes. She struggles with self-love every day, if only she knew recovery takes time and everything will fall into place. She pinches her fat and wishes to be thin, if only society wasn't so subjective, being plastic is the only way to fit in. She paints a smile to make it through another day, but her soul was slowly falling apart, each day she decayed. She was like a rose so frail and delicate, if only she knew their words were irrelevant. If only she saw her true beauty, she was exquisite, enchanting, bewitching, she was one of a kind. She was like a wildflower in a forest, so unique and rare to find. If only we learned to love ourselves and see our true beauty, to be proud of who you are, diverging, uncommon, exclusive, to love yourself truly. But we live in a generation so obscure, people are blind to see that were all made so beguiling and pure.

Two Broken Souls

Hailey Krumfolz

If I can go back in time, I'd go back to the days when it was just you and I.

Where we lay on the roof beneath the stars, talking for endless hours promising we would never drift apart. You'd kiss me and tell me everything's gonna be alright, you healed my wounds, you let me see the world and showed me the light. Before I met you I never believed in love. But as time passed, we became inseparable, two souls in love, I became addicted, it was young love. You made me feel so loved and safe, it was the kinda love I can't express or ever replace. Us crossing paths felt like fate, our two souls connected, everything felt quintessential since our first date. In a field of roses I was a deceased rose, but you saw the value in me, I was the rose you chose. You fixed my broken pieces, you relieved all my pain. A love so pure, you can never obtain. I thank the universe for letting us meet, you permeated that empty spot in my heart, you made it complete. Our two broken souls became connected, they loved so diligently

they never wanted to be disconnected. One day, everything changed, the colors turned dark. The two broken souls grew apart. They walked their separate ways, one contented, the other dispirited. One moved on, while the other held her broken pieces together to stay strong and carry on. The one soul was slowly deteriorating each day, while her love moved on and walked away. Our love felt so secure, but the one soul decided to take a detour. A love story to be left untold, two souls in love and ending left unknown.

Untitled #1

Hailey Krumfolz

Each day gets worse, you feel as if your trapped in an immerse
You pull yourself together to stay strong, but as the days pass you can barely carry on.
Your hearts racing, you can hardly breathe, you light a cigarette to feel relief.
You feel yourself slowly fading away, You wanna give up but you chose to stay.
You paint a smile and tell yourself that everything will be alright. You sleep all day, but you stay up all night. Your mind's racing, you can hardly think, the tears stream down your face as you pour another drink. Your mind is trembling, you can't even think straight, there's only so much pain a soul can take. It feels like you fell into an abyss and you can't get out, you're trapped in this dark hole, you scream and shout. Silence. No one sees your pain, how your withering, there's only so much heartache you can obtain. You are broken, you are lost, you are hurting, you feel wistful. You try to pick up the broken pieces, put yourself back together to feel full, but you breach. You are broken, your pieces have shattered, your alone, your emotions are left unspoken.

Untitled #2

Hailey Krumfolz

You walked into my life and brought so much light, but left me with nothing but a battle to fight. The thoughts of you race my mind, but broken pieces is all I find. Each day that passes gets worse, was meeting you a blessing or a curse? We fell in love and you became my best friend, and suddenly were strangers again. I'm slowly breaking, my heart feels numb, things changed so fast look what we've become. You broke the heart of a lost soul, you took a part that was once whole. I pinch myself to wake up from this dream, to only discover it is what it seems. Our love is so strong, it can't be replaced, all that's left is an empty space. I love you but I must let you go, maybe we'll cross paths again, but time only knows. It's time for me to say goodbye, my love for you will never die.

A Mother's Love

Mariam Madrid

When I came to this country, I was 20 years old.
I felt scared,
I was alone
for a short time
My son was born two years later
His birth changed my life,
it opened a new world
I saw life in a new light and its true meaning,
And I had to dedicate mine, to making sure my son
lives his best life.
As a single mother
I was poor, I sacrificed
working very hard
making money

I was so happy to have a beautiful son
And was so excited to be his mom.
I worked very hard to be the best mom,
I worked many jobs
Sometimes two jobs
Mostly manual labor
Until I found
myself, the only female
Printer among men
Challenging, I pushed through
Knew to provide
a better life for my son
to offer my him the opportunities
I didn't have
My son, now 28 years old
An Engineer in New York City.
I am proud of him.

Little Wonderful Things

Marily L. Osorio

I want to talk about the small things
I love about life
It's beautiful when I go to the park
And walk around,
I enjoy seeing the children playing,
By themselves. Surrounded
By so much innocence and love,
I really love watching butterflies fly around,
It's so beautiful to be able to appreciate nature
Again and again,
Breathe the pure air
And know that I'm alive
And what I'm watching around me is real.

I think the small things
Are not really small,
Those are the most wonderful things we have in the world.

I ask people,
Isn't it beautiful
To see and appreciate nature, animals, children and their innocence?
Watch the birds fly and trees bloom,
How the water runs in the river and its sound.
It is also nice to see people in the park
Sharing, talking and exercising.
Those are the reasons
why I love going to the park,
for me it means disconnecting

and going to another dimension
where everything is perfect and beautiful,
a place where you can be really peaceful
and grateful about what you have in the life.
So that is the life
Enjoy the little wonderful things.

One More Day in One Less Day of Life

Yutlandia Paredes

I had an idea,
As if I were Dulcinea,
Look for freedom
That I did not have,
Somewhere north, in a country that can be cold, but has many freedoms
taking this step at my age, is not easy
leaving everything behind, is not easy
leaving part of my family, is not easy
Nevertheless, I packed my bags, and left
with my bags full of doubts, I left
with my heart broken in two, I left
with the desire to soon return, I left
forcing my eyes not to see reality
creating excuses, not listening
saying goodbye was hard
I was feigning, I did not react
Cry, cry and kick
but, here, I am believing in me
I do not stop, I am taking steps,
now I walk the world as if I were Dulcinea,
inspiring everyone to follow, to believe.

New Beginnings
Vanessia Sanders

Endless fields of dreams- bleak and barren
Broken “bones”- everywhere,
Mere skeletons
Of what used to be.

A wasteland of despair
The drums of war once beat
Echoes through the air

Around me it would linger
The smell of sweat and fear

The past just slipped away,
Like sand
Through
Open
Fingers
How each had fallen- victim
To the battlefield-
Gone-
But not forgotten.

They all looked the same, but in reality, they were not.
The truth is,
They were my warriors.
Each-
One I might have been:

A teacher
A preacher

A dancer of the street.
Standing over what remained,
I asked
“Who, exactly, am I?”
“All of them,”
I answered.
Why- then, after all this time- have I been at war with myself?

Through all the hurt and shame
It appears:
A glimmer of hope-
A breakthrough.

By the Grace of God– instilled, at last,
No longer do I need to fight.
I have the right
And now I see, I am *what* and *who* I was meant to be,
I am free-
to be myself!

Beyond
Alec Kyle Santos

There exists a place,
A realm of infinite possibility.

It lies beyond the scope of reach.
Far beyond what the eyes can see.

To find the path, the journeyed way.
Look not outward, but within.

Seek that which fulfills,
And grants thine heart rest.

Through this the gate shall be opened.
The path revealed.

Let It Be
Alec Kyle Santos

I could feel the dark creeping in.
And with it my strength had ebbed.
The light has faded.

Too far a reach of which we cast aside
our lurking dread, no false promise kept.

T'was but lies and a desire.
Bitter truths for which we seek.
The answer, shall set our souls free.

And so it is.
We must let it be.

Ode

Alec Kyle Santos

Oh how dost thou beckon.
Oh so sweet, so gentle nothingness.
Oh how rare indeed, thou verily few moment.
Oh 'tis true, that which is spelled in due subsequence.
Oh thou art graceful, and fraught with kindness.

Prithee, answer thine question honest.
Art thou not misspoken, a luxury in people's conscience.
Minds dark they remain, unbeknownst to thine promise.
Til' later found, realization in absence.
Now longing for thou know'st as silence.

Waking World

Alec Kyle Santos

A touch of moonlight,
streams still yet cut the night.
Curtains drawn, the windows closed.
The wind howls and blows.

Dust has settled, sitting atop the wood.
Hidden between each and every nook.
Thou liest there, in that place of rest.
The dream a host, and thou but a guest.

Wanderer Above the Sea Fog

Alec Kyle Santos

You stand here on the precipice.
Looking out toward that torrential, unbridled sea.
Your mind, soul and heart, completely at peace.
There is much found here, gentle waters lapping at your feet.

You are a traveler, a wanderer from afar.
Your journey, both long and arduous, has brought you here.
And it is with fate determined, you feel that your destiny grows ever near.
Perhaps it lies, just beyond the scope of reach, within the distant waves that
you can hear.

You set out, with thoughts of grandeur and adventure in mind.
Never knowing exactly what you might find.
You simply let the sea take you, leaving nothing behind.
Forward and onward, the journey of a lifetime.

A Smile

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

"A Smile,
It's a strength in the trouble,
It's a support in the struggle,
It's a friend in the distress,
It's a leader in the challenges,
It wipes out some tears,
It speaks in the silence,
It encourages, everyone,
It's a key to every heart,
It's a treasure,
It gives pleasure,
It invents beauty,
It lays a foundation of Love,
Affection, and Friendship...."

And They Tolerate Me

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

Once we were "Strangers",
But he gathered us Together.
Then we were in a Cluster,
But we captured Each other.

We become "Friends".
We shared Sweet.
We shared Bitter.
We shared Everything.

We Loved each other in Troubles.
We Supported each other in Struggles.
We Guided each other in Challenges.
We Give Values to each other, Everywhere.

They became my "Siblings".
They understood me in my Silence.
They remember me in my Absence.
They pleased with my Presence.

They walked with me in the Darkness.
They hold my hand when I Needed.
And they tolerate me....

Pearls of the Arabian Sea

Sreeja Muraleedharan Sreelaja

'A big salute' to them who had saved our land.
They work hard without thinking of whether
They were in the Sun or in the Moon.
They rescued us, without a wait for anything.

They conquered the flood,
They are the Heroes of our land,
They are the Treasures from the South,
And they are the Pearls of the Arabian Sea.

Photography – Other Submission

Untitled

Wanderlucy Duarte de Souza

