OAKWOOD | 2016
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Oakwood editorial board would first and foremost like to thank the South Dakota State University Students’ Association for their continued support over the years. We would also like to express our appreciation for the support of the SDSU English Department, especially Jason McEntee, as well as the College of Arts and Sciences.

Finally we would particularly like to thank Steven Wingate, Oakwood’s literary advisor, without whom the continuation of Oakwood would not be possible. We give our sincere gratitude to the SDSU Print Lab for their involvement and support.

ANITA (SARKEES) BAHR AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTOR:

KAYLA HEMMINGSON

Anita (Sarkees) Bahr has been a long-time supporter of South Dakota State University’s English Department, especially Oakwood. Thanks to her contributions, Oakwood will continue to provide an excellent opportunity for young SDSU writers and artists to publish their pieces in this journal.
Lexicography
Kasey Wahl

Plant me a seed—a tender vowel.
cradle the bud as it forms on your tongue,
blossoming, branching, bearing
white shoots to rolling Dakotah plains.

Craft me a spile
to tease sweetness of song
from cacophony. Sharpen a knife—
sunder what lives from what is alive.

Whittle me a tool from a piece of yourself,
carve to the roots and shed the bark.
But leave the knots, the grainy rings:
let your language bear ancient scars.
An Interview with Dr. Chuck Woodard

Taran Ezzell

When I first met Dr. Charles Woodard my junior year at South Dakota State University, he seemed to fill the room with his presence. Dr. Woodard could capture the attention of even the most apathetic of students. He never had to raise his voice, never had to stand on a desk proclaiming “Oh Captain, my Captain!” Dr. Woodard let the class come to him by posing a question and letting the stillness of the room coax a thoughtful discussion. I was quick to learn that he listened as well as he spoke. No matter who you were, when you spoke, you had his attention, and though somewhere in the back of your mind you knew his knowledge far surpassed your own, in the classroom, no idea was unworthy of discourse.

In spite of his patience and his willingness to listen, Dr. Woodard picked his moments to share his expertise with us in class, drawing from a deep pool of experiences for which he has received seemingly countless accolades. He is a former chair of the South Dakota World Affairs Council Board and created the Brookings Area Reconciliation Council and has chaired it for 25 years. He is on the Center for American Indian Research and Native Studies board. In 1985, he received a College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Service Award. He was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in 1989 for Ancestral Voice: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday.

Since 1975, Dr. Woodard has either founded or co-founded various community diversity programs, many of which are still active. Additionally, Dr. Woodard co-founded the Great Plains Writers' Conference and founded the Consider the Century: Native American Perspectives Conference, both annual events. He also played an integral role in establishing the annual South Dakota State University Wacipi.

Dr. Woodard served as the faculty advisor for Oakwood for several years, guiding its vision, content, and production. As Oakwood enters its 40th year of publication—a rare milestone in the literary world—I took the opportunity to interview the man who set such a strong precedent of literary excellence and artistry.

What was your involvement in the early days of Oakwood?

In its early days the SDSU literary magazine was called Calliope. Oakwood was originated by English professor Dave Evans and a student named Doug Cockrell shortly before I began teaching at SDSU.

But I began working with them during my first year of teaching here in 1975, and I was the faculty advisor of Oakwood for several years, as well as helping establish and serving as the advisor for what was for quite a while a
very active student writing club.

What was Oakwood like in those early days?

Much the same as it is now. The basic idea of Oakwood has remained pretty consistent. We worked with more than just the English students, bringing in the art program and publishing art and photography as well.

What were the original goals of Oakwood?

To value and even celebrate local and regional writing. That emphasis is what was new about Oakwood. With that was encouragement to use the vernacular to write as these plains spoke, not with what might be thought of as traditional poetic language.

In other words, an emphasis on the local and on the Americanization of English and on how people feel and speak here. The language of place.

What are some things the average person might not know about Oakwood?

The early emphasis on regional and local writing. It took on a well-known place name that reflected that emphasis. We encouraged students to believe that writing could be home grown; it did not only happen long ago and far away. As the poet William Stafford said, “All art is local somewhere.”

Faulkner also knew that if you write well enough locally, it will become universal. Faulkner’s place was Jefferson County, Mississippi, and he was so passionate about that place that his writing has become global.

Has Oakwood changed much over the years?

I think language of place is still important to Oakwood, but the magazine might be a little more national in scope now. I think over time there has been less need to emphasize the local and the regional. Since now many more voices are heard and the Midwest is no longer such a mystery.

Have you ever had any of your own work published in Oakwood?

I don’t think so. I have been, and still am, more interested in being useful to other writers, be that with feedback or by providing other kinds of help.

You were also involved with the Oak Lake Writers’ Society and the Great Plains Emerging Tribal Writers Award, correct?

Yes. I co-founded the Oak Lake Writers’ Society, and while I did not create the Emerging Tribal Writers Award, I did work with its founder, Professor Steve Wingate, using the Oak Lake Society network to help gain submissions.

For those who don’t know, can you tell us a little about the Oak Lake Writers’ Society?

The Oak Lake Writers’ Society is a statewide tribal writers’ society focused on doing culture-based writing. It is named after Oak Lake, which was once a girl scout camp that was acquired by SDSU to function as a biological field. That is why we had access to the location and it is where we have been ever since.

Do you have any advice for aspiring writers?

Writing is discovery. As the English novelist E.M. Forster said, “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” You write to discover what you know and to understand what you need to learn. And language is survival. We become, through language. Life is all about finding the right words. So, commit yourself to the lifelong process of becoming more articulate. Through finding the right words, you will deepen yourself and your knowledge of the world in which you live and you will be able to contribute more meaningfully to that world.
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Autumn Light
Robert Semrad
Oil
Life Rivers
Jodilyn Andrews

Mountains hover like helicopters. Black birds ribbon through hay bales. Helicopters ribbon through black mountains. Hay bales hover like birds.

Rivers vein and spread the Earth’s life blood. Clouds fray like embroidery floss. The Earth’s clouds spread embroidery floss; life rivers fray and vein like blood.

Moons oversee terrestrial activities. Constellations glitter like bronzer. Terrestrial bronzer glitters like constellations oversee moons activities.

Black terrestrial constellations hover like birds and bronzer through hay bales. Helicopters oversee the Earth’s activities, spread blood like embroidery ribbon. Floss clouds fray. Mountains vein like moons glitter, life rivers.
Covelo, California
Erika Saunders

Indian days follow a hundred Yuki miles
tears flood the valley floor, Round Valley’s inundation.
Stomping feet tamping hardened earth
dust swirls and settles, traceless footprints.

Generations of man spring up as quick as Manzanita- can’t be milled
just torn up, pulled down, deadwood: a fire hazard.
Only branches of brush piles left; poets, madmen
wannabe root-stumps that can’t sucker
only weep sweet sappy tears
blind themselves, oozing
Minds numbed, propped up by 215.

He survives gun shots and stabbing and beatings
school boys joking, “Kill him.” for sport.
Immortality is a damned scary possibility.
Rez dogs- fighting packs of dangerous numbers
Monty Hall’s nonsensical sense.
She stubbornly called toughness: love
stayed until he chained her
shot guns keep him just off range.
Trip wired and booby trapped so it
went up in a meth cloud that night she got free.
A dangerous place—and he kisses me with a sly grin.

It is hard to live here—the hills call your bluff.
Stillness blankets day like the fine mist of dust trapped in spider’s web.
Weep for Bear who lost his growl watching Acorn die.
Lumbering hulk crashing through night, tears blinding the way
scratching blackberry patches embed the poison oak
solace in Earthen dens confessions with a rosary of shotgun casings.

Circles upward like hawk lazily spiraling prayers
On warm draft vents to the sun.
Then the stars snap on.
Disappointment dear Jacob as I find
my ladder is too short for the moon.

Spirals zoom focus downward
the dust, the fog, the dope man’s haze.
Years of drought can’t break this place
or fire, or bloodshed, or hunger.
Big men though to flood it but couldn’t make it past
the unabashed stare of generations.

They hold on, hold out, munching fry bread
hope in young and old
everyone in the middle lost or wandering,
perhaps over at the coast clinging to flotsam
bobbing abound outside Captain Flint’s window.

They walk and talk circles in the earth
then stop, lay down, stoned stones.
Someone comes along using a pry bar
rolls them off the road, over
into the wild, wandering Eel
or heaves them heavily, out truck beds
planted in mom’s yard to die in the dust of
foolish hope, fairy tale endings
only for those that dare
unfurl wings and fly the valley.

But,
it draws you back.
One highway in, a dirt pass out
there’s medicine up there still.
Mountains cut down for profit, anthills that crumble
but are endlessly patched up with an abundance of careless souls.
Coming home, running the gauntlet ridge between earth and water
racing too fast winding roads to feel their hearts beat,
most alive as they soar for seconds like brother hawk,
but snakes breed without rattles—
more deadly when stumbled upon, unaware.
So much promise slips over the edge
only to be found and drug back up in the spring.
Cyanotype 1
Rachel Funk
Mixed Media
Leaves of the oak tree obscured the majority of the view from Emelia’s third floor window, but when she sat just so, her wheelchair positioned just right, she could almost perfectly see the corner of Sterbend and Verloren Streets. Not much happened on the corner, but if something did, Emelia was there to watch and wonder.

She wondered a lot. First it was just about if anyone missed her out and about, but soon the wondering turned to the lives of the people she observed, crossing through her line of vision on the corner of Sterbend and Verloren. She wondered who they were and where they were going. She wondered what their dreams and passions were. She wondered and she created lives for them that extended past herself in the chair overlooking the oak tree that blocked the view from her third story window.

It was on the twelfth of August when Emelia’s most impressive story came to be. She watched as a young lady arrived at Sterbend and Verloren from the east, a young man arrived from the north, and a taxi that pulled to the curb in front of them, facing west. She observed the young man open the rear door and extend his hand to his companion, helping her slide across the seat before entering the vehicle himself. As she watched and wondered, seeing the taxi pull away and drive out of sight, she began to weave the story of Niles Hawkins III, Madeline Rothschild, and a mysterious phone call.

Niles Hawkins III walked south on Sterbend Street, contemplating the upcoming minutes of his life. A few weeks ago, he would have been perfectly fine flying back to England without saying goodbye to anyone in the city, but something had changed within those weeks. When he thought about it, Niles believed that he was the one that had changed. That thought stopped him in his tracks.

Blinking in an attempt to clear his thoughts, he glanced around and let his eyes take in the view that suddenly assaulted him. The storefront directly to his left was filled with decadent chocolates and candies, the price tags glinting in the window. One pound of dark Swiss chocolate for ten dollars, he mused. Must be delicious. I wonder if M likes dark chocolates. With that question in mind, Niles Hawkins III walked into the candy shop and purchased a half pound of the uppity-up chocolate, which most people considered overpriced.

Walking west down Verloren Street, Madeline Rothschild wondered if the taxi she had ordered would arrive at the designated corner on time. Her timetable gave little room for variations, and she absolutely hated being late when arriving at the airport. According to her calculations, which had taken her two days to perfect, she and Niles would have to arrive at the corner and be in the taxi in exactly seven and a half minutes. Once in the car, they would need to pull into the airport’s drop off area precisely twenty-three minutes later. Her time table would then give them thirty minutes to receive their tickets and pass through security. Unfortunately, it did not give
them any spare time to be pulled aside for the
random searches, but she wouldn’t know that
for another fifty-two minutes.

Niles and Madeline converged on the corner
just as the taxi service was pulling to a stop.
“Perfect timing,” she noted as Niles gave her a
quick once over. She thought he was admiring
her lithe body. He was wondering how a
person could be comfortable in a pencil skirt
and starched blouse on a trans-Atlantic flight.

“Yes,” he replied, bringing himself out of
his musings as he watched her return his
observational overview. She noted his casual
outfit and held back a sniff. “And I see the taxi
is here too. She gave him what most would call
a cheeky grin, but in reality was just her normal
smile, and pointedly looked at the car door.

Getting the hint, Niles stepped forward
and opened the door while at the same time
extending his other hand for her to take. She
placed just the tips of her perfectly French
manicured fingers in his hand and slid in,
their gestures ingrained from birth by nannies
and etiquette tutors. Niles slipped in beside
Madeline and gave the driver the address.

“Take the Westport Bridge. Traffic will be
better and we are on a tight schedule,” ordered
Madeline, pulling her designer purse onto her
lap and carefully rummaging for her compact.

Niles spared a quick grin for the driver
as their car pulled away and then turned to
Madeline. “I stopped and picked up some
chocolate from the confectionery shop on
Sterbend Street.”

The click of the compact reverberated
through the car like a slap across bare skin.
“You could have been late. We are on a
schedule, Niles. Her tone was identical to
the one Niles’ mother used on him when he
decided to deviate from her plans.

“I made it in time,” he argued.

“That does not matter. What if you had
been waylaid in the shop. Where would we be
now?”

He figured it best to not reply and hoped that
Madeline would drop the topic. He was wrong.
As she continued on her hushed tirade of his
failings, he allowed his mind to wander over
the past few weeks.

Emelia paused in her creation of Nile’s life
and wondered if a gentleman like him would
really ignore the woman on his left. Thinking
and staring out at the empty street corner, she
decided that any man would ignore Madeline.
He would tune her out and think back over
the past weeks that had changed his life.

The first time Niles talked to the woman, he
had been trying to contact the public library to
see if a new novel had arrived. Her tentative
hello was the first sound he heard on his
journey down the rabbit hole that became his
life.

“Is this the library?” he asked, pacing in front
of the park bench, decorated by weathered
wood, faded bird droppings, and a plaque that
read In Loving Memory of Pappy Jones.

“No,” replied the tentative voice. “But don’t
hang up.. The second part came in a rush,
as if she hadn’t talked to anyone and feared
what her life would become if the connection
between her and Niles was lost.

He stopped his pacing and lowered himself
to the bench. “Why shouldn’t I hang up?. He
scooched around a bit, trying to find a slightly
softer section of the bench, and decided that
Pappy Jones had a lack of love for comfortable
seating.

“Because then who would I talk to?” came
the soft voice.

The answer seemed reasonable enough. If the voice wasn’t talking to him, then who would it be talking to. “So you don’t talk to people much? The question just seemed to pop out.

A pause filled the line and Niles hoped the woman on the other end hadn’t disconnected.

“No. Not really.”

Niles’ breath came out in a small whoosh as a smile crossed his face. “Well, I would be happy to talk to you.. He wasn’t sure why he was so happy, but this little hiccup in his day didn’t feel like something bad. It felt instead like something wonderful.

“Really?. The voice on the other end seemed hopeful and at the same time so timid.

“Truly.. He laughed, causing her to laugh as well. “But I don’t know your name.”

Another silence filled the line. “M,” was the eventual reply. “You can call me M.”

“Miss M,” Niles laughed. “I am pleased to meet you. My name’s Niles, an old and silly name.”

“Much better than M,” she countered. “Tell me what you see.”

He did. He started in broad strokes and then filled in the details with amazing accuracy. The park surrounding Niles was filled with families enjoying the bright summer day. A couple, Niles guessed on their third or fourth date, had spread a black and gray checkered blanket in the shade under a grouping of ash and were dining on cold-cut sandwiches, watermelon, and sweet tea. A little boy, missing both of his front teeth, threw a blue ball for his cocker spaniel to fetch. The dog skidded to a stop after each retrieval, flopped next to his master, and awaited the next toss.

Miss M laughed and smiled at his accounting abilities as he told her of the many people in the park. “And what of the weather?”

Niles closed his eyes and leaned his head back. “It’s sunny and warm. Eighty. Eighty-five. A light breeze is blowing and once in a while a gust comes along.”

“Sounds perfect,” her voice wistful in the receiver.

“You should go outside, just for a bit.”

He could tell that Miss M was shaking her head before her answer came. “I wish I could, but I can’t.. A long pause strain the connection. “I better let you call the library,” she finally said. “It was very nice talking to you, Niles.”

“Can I call you tomorrow?.

Niles was shocked at his boldness, shocked that he had asked a stranger such a question. He was more shocked at her answer.

“I would love that.”

“Any particular place you want to see?”

“Art. Tell me about art.”

“I will. Bye.”

“Goodbye, Mr. Niles.”

The line disconnected and Niles slowly lowered his cell phone from his ear. He glanced at the screen and shook his head. 57 minutes he mused. He had talked to a complete stranger, a misdialed call, for nearly an hour and couldn’t wait to tell her about art.

Standing up slowly, he grinned at Pappy Jones’s plaque. “I have a date tomorrow,” he said with a laugh in his voice. He took a calming breath and then gave into the joyous laughter that erupted from his chest. He had a date with a woman he had just met, and he was thrilled for the simple fact that for once in his life, he was doing something out of character… and was looking forward to every
He called the next day at ten sharp, excitement buzzing in his voice as she picked up. “Miss M!” he exclaimed, running a hand through his dark hair. “I hope the rest of your day was nice.”

“Your call was the highlight,” she confessed. “Will you tell me about art today?”

Niles spun in a quick circle, taking in his surroundings. “I wanted to take you to the art museum, but they don’t allow cells. It would be extremely hard to tell you about art if I can’t walk you through the museum.” Miss M voiced her agreement. “So I found a museum of sorts outside.”

“Outside?”

“Graffiti. Street Art. It’s beautiful. It’s wonderful. You’ll love it.”

Pausing again in the weaving of Nile’s and M’s story, Emelia pondered at the possibility that there would be graffiti and street art enough to satisfy both Niles and M. “And what of Nile’s upbringing?” she mused out loud. “Would he have gone in search of graffiti?” She watched the shifting leaves for a moment or two and then decided that the spontaneous conversation with M had opened a new world for him, so why wouldn’t he do something crazy. Yes. That would explain his actions, Emelia decided pondering over what M would say in response to Nile’s enthusiasm over graffiti and street art.

“Tell me what you see, what you feel,” M pleaded. “I want to know it all.”

Niles did. He described the almost gaudily sprayed colors on bricks and wood. He explained the areas of town he was in and how he had found it. He talked, she listened, and together they experienced.

The different sections of graffiti wasn’t just vandalism, Niles realized. They were much more than colors splashed onto the wall of a dilapidated neighborhood. The street art, in his mind, was a cry bright for the rest of the world to stop and look at the horrors that lay just next to them.

“So much can be expressed through art,” whispered Miss M after Niles had fallen silent, telling her of his realization. Words seemed to be at a loss for Niles. He attempted to talk, but gave up.

“I’ll talk to you in a few days,” Miss M said softly. “Go home Niles. You saw what they were trying to say. Now it’s time for you to go home.”

“Yeah,” Niles said. “I’ll talk to you in a few.”

A few days turned into over a week, Niles reverting back to the life he had been living before he misdialed Miss M. Walking into the country club’s dining room, Niles forced a smile onto his face and greeted the different patrons with a regal nod. He had been dreading the annual pre-return to university meeting his father insisted on having. Each year, they would meet in the dining room of the best country club in the city, wearing their best suits, and sip the best martinis this side of the Atlantic. Niles would fiddle with the stem of his glass and his father would berate him on his lack of manners, lack of ambition, lack of a “proper match – possibly with that nice young Miss Madeline Rothschild,” and so on. Niles would pretend to listen, thinking over what disapproving activities that he could get into during the upcoming year.

They were halfway through the list of Nile’s
failings in respect to familial duties, when Nile’s phone rang. He dug his offending device out of his inside breast pocket of his jacket and snapped out a “This is Niles Hawkins the Third. What do you want?”

The reply took a time to come, and when it did, it came out tentatively. “Hi Niles. Is this a bad time?”

Biting back a curse, Niles shoved his chair back and stepped away from the table when his father disapprovingly waved him away to take the call. “Hi, M. Sorry, I was talking to my father.”

A puff of air sounded through the receiver, a shot fired. “I’ll let you get back to him.”

“No, please,” Niles interjected forcefully. “I really want to talk to you. Give me ten minutes to wrap this up. We’re talking about higher education.”

“College.. The word was wistful, something that Niles could tell M would never experience.

Niles walked over to his father, his cell phone still at his ear and whispered, “Dad. I got to go. A friend.”

Another dismissive wave was sent towards Niles, who shrugged off the tiny sting that accompanied the gesture. His father was finished with him. “M. I’m back.. Another pause of ringing silence filled the receiver. “Did you ever go to college?”

“No. The accident was when I was in high school. Six years ago,” she confessed. “But you’re in college?”

What would Niles Hawkins III go to college for. That was the question that rattled around in Emelia’s mind as she watched the corner of Sterbend and Verloren slowly disappear into the shadows of the evening. It would be something exciting, but old, she decided.

Nile’s father would want him to become distinguished, but Niles would want to have adventures. The answer to Emelia’s original question came to her then.

“I’m at Oxford,” Niles confessed. “I’m studying Archeology. One year to go before graduate school.”

“Sounds… exciting. What’s the coolest thing you’ve done with that?” queried M.

The answer came without thought. He told her of the ancient ruins in Central America that he and a team uncovered and examined. She laughed when he explained how a girl believed there were ghosts roaming around the dig site and scared herself nearly to death when a squirrel monkey dashed across her path on the way to an alternate dig site.

A wistful sigh came. “Your life is so amazing, Niles Hawkins the Third..”

“No fair,” he laughed, lounging against a wall outside of the restaurant he had been dining at. “You know my name, but I don’t know yours.”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Yeah.. This time it was his voice that was wistful. “I want to know all about you.”

One of her famous pauses followed Niles’ admission. “If I tell you, it’s just between you and me, Niles Hawkins.”

“Just between you and me,” he agreed.

“My name… my name is-”

“Niles. Are you listening to me?. Madeline’s shrill voice cut through Niles’ thoughts. He pulled himself out of the past and back into the taxi with the flesh and blood woman beside him who wasn’t Miss M.

He ran a hand across his face, a gesture he
usually reserved for only when he was alone and said, “Yeah. I’m listening.”

“No. You were not. We are here and are on a schedule. Chop, chop.. She slid from the taxi, not waiting to see if he would follow. He followed though, just like she knew he would. He always followed her, first in elementary school, then to private school, and finally to University in England. College, he thought sadly. M would never go to college. She would never walk a campus as the leaves changed in the fall. She would never slip to the back stacks of the library to kiss the guy she liked. She would ne-

“Seriously Niles. Are we going to do this the entire trip?”

Niles looked up to see Madeline tapping her Louboutin clad foot in a tight staccato rhythm as she pointed to the ticket counter. “Sorry, ma’am,” Niles said to the cute woman behind the counter. “Lost in thoughts.. He passed across the appropriate documents with practiced ease.

“No problem,” the woman smiled back. She clicked and clacked away at her computer, passed Niles back his documentations, waited a few moments and then passed his ticket across the counter. “Enjoy your flights!”

“Thank you,” glared Madeline. “We need to go, Niles. Now. Schedule.. Her manicured index finger tapped the face of her diamond studded watch. A nod of the head was all she received as Niles stepped before her and wound his way around the lines of people towards security.

By the time Niles had passed through without a hitch, and Madeline straightened her clothing after having gone through a full body search much to Niles’ delight, the pair was running a horrible nine and a half minutes behind Madeline’s schedule. “We are going to miss the complimentary champagne in the lounge,” she hissed, throwing a glare at the agent who had searched her.

“The champagne sucks,” replied Niles without flare. “All you’re going to do is complain about it.”

“I don’t complain,” she snapped, stopping to turn her glare on him.

Niles pursed his lips and set his face to a frown. “I am pretty sure that’s all you did the entire way here.”

“You were not even listening. I was telling you about the poor service I got on daddy’s yacht.”

“Complaining.”

He began to walk towards their gate, ignoring the High Flyer’s Lounge, not caring what Madeline thought at that point. His thoughts had drifted back to M and the way she made him feel. The way she made him smile even when he didn’t want to. The way she had him looking at the world. The way she had him thinking about himself.

Niles stopped and felt Madeline’s body slam into his from behind. “What are you doing?” she demanded through the ‘uff’ that came from her upon impact.

“I’m not going back to school.. The decision was made as so many other decisions had been made over the past few weeks. Suddenly. Madeline could only blink.

“I’m staying here. I’ll find a program in the States and study here.”

Finally, Madeline let out a harsh laugh. “What is her name?”
“Huh?”
“Her name. What is her name. Who beat me out in the competition. Who is keeping you here?” Her tone was one of resign, like she had known Niles wouldn’t be accompanying her back to England, and he was only just realizing it. She was disappointed, but she wasn’t heartbroken. She nodded her acceptance of fate and raised a brow at Niles.

A smile crossed Niles’ features, settling in his eyes. He gave Madeline a quick peck on her cheek and watched as she walked away and towards her gate. Pulling his cell phone from his pocket, he dialed the now familiar number, never having entered it into his phone’s memory. “Emelia?” he said when M picked up. “I’ll see you on the corner of Sterbend and Verloren.”

**Neighboring Disparity**
Amanda Jamison
Photograph
helpful hints from a pamphlet about rape recovery

Anonymous

“Always remember it was not your fault.”
But what about this feeling
in the geographic center of my chest, like it’s full of
silt-mud that forms
near stagnant, brackish lakes, the kind
that will suck your
sandals right off your feet?

“You might feel dirty.”
Sure, but why do I choke
on the urge to flinch away from
myself and feel more
camaraderie with motel sheets and
refuse in road ditches than
I do with the girl in
my high school yearbook photos?

“You may have some flashbacks.”
Okay, but what about when they emerge
unannounced, like when I’m folding
clean laundry and
suddenly remember the burn
on my cheeks, shake
in my bones as I buried
my favorite running shorts
at the bottom of the garbage can?

“You may feel better after confiding in family members or other loved ones.”
I get that, but
what about when my sister
locks herself in her room and —
though I can hear her sniffing —
no amount of handle-jiggling will
coax her out or let me

reclaim my admission so
I can only lean my back on the other side
of her door and listen to her cry as
she listens to me cry and feel as though
the problem has been multiplied rather
than divided?

“Don’t blame yourself.”
I heard you.
I don’t.
I blame the man who
turned me into the girl
still holding herself together with
an arm across her stomach
and holding yet another
stupid fucking pamphlet about rape
Socks
Tessa Armstrong

At twelve, I knew my big sister wasn’t supposed to look younger than me, but in that moment she did. Her sixteen-year-old frame looked so small with her feet tucked underneath her body crisscross-apple sauce, while her socks glared at me from across the room. I can’t remember what she wore, only that it was nondescript. Nothing like her signature neon colored pants or checkered vans. I noticed only her socks. They were a dull navy blue, with turquoise rubber pads on the bottoms. I wondered if they were designed to prevent from slipping, like the textured floor mat in my grandmother’s tub. I wondered why they worried about her falling when she was under constant watch.

At twelve, I didn’t understand why we had to take off our belts, shoelaces, jewelry, and leave our purses when my family visited my sister. I didn’t understand why two security guards patted us down before we entered this particular hospital ward. I didn’t understand why we went through two sets of doors that could only be opened with a key card. I didn’t understand why the curt receptionist meticulously picked through the bag of toiletries we were supposed to bring.

I wondered why we couldn’t bring my sister’s socks. What could she possibly do to herself with socks? The receptionist removed them from the bag, and placed them behind her desk, and began explaining hospital policies. Apparently, she had already gotten a pair of socks when she arrived. My family stood in front of this woman and pretended to listen but no one heard a single utterance that came out of her mouth. Her words came out muffled and slow as if she was talking underwater.

I watched my parents fall apart. My father silently stood with lips drawn into a thin line. One of his rough hands pressed into the small of my mother’s back, stabilizing them both. My mother wrung my sister’s favorite T-shirt in her nervous hands like it was the only thing tethering her to reality. She had been so adamant that we bring the shirt with us, repeating that my sister would need something to make her smile. The shirt was emblazoned with the words “Bacon Makes Everything Better.” I got it for her for Christmas because I hadn’t seen her smile in a very long time.

At twelve, I wished bacon could make this better.

The hospital ward’s white walls were bleached to sterility. I shuddered to think of my sister alone in this place. No laughter lived here. No mismatched, multicolored socks were allowed. Only desperation and the drone of the receptionist echoed in the colorless hallways. I felt a wave of relief when her rambling finally ceased and she led us through another set of key-carded doors. We followed the clicking of her high heels on the cold tile into a windowless room illuminated only by dingy lighting. Four numb people sat around a table seated for five and did what the room was designed to do, wait. Uncomfortable in the chair and silence I wondered how long we had been in the room. Minutes? Hours? A lifetime? Finally, a man in a crisp white coat brought my sister into the room.

I didn’t expect her to look broken. Her sandy blond hair was damp from a recent shower, and not a drop of makeup marred her smooth face. With her head hung low, she took a seat
in the empty chair. As she looked up, trails of water ran from her cheeks and the tips of her hair, staining the front of her shirt. My mother wrapped her in a tentative embrace as the words “I’m sorry” slipped out between sobs. I didn’t hug her. I didn’t want her apology. In that moment, I hated her, but I couldn’t stop staring at her damn socks.

At twelve, I didn’t know about the disturbed man who had raped her four years earlier. I didn’t know she blamed herself. I didn’t know guilt permeated her every thought. I didn’t know she wasn’t broken. I didn’t know that this wasn’t her fault. I didn’t know.

I didn’t want to bear the fact that that she almost took herself away from me. I should have hugged her. I should have told my parents about the times she came home from school with the bitter tinge of alcohol and cigarettes on her breath. I should have told her that I could forgive her. But I didn’t do anything of these things. Instead, I sat there and stared at her socks, stewing in selfish anger because of what she almost did.

At twelve, I almost lost my sister.
At seventeen, I almost couldn’t talk the pills out of her hands.
At twenty, I still worry.
The Present
Pamela Merchant

A gift
Sheltered between
Old news and reckless dreams

Cradled
For a moment
Carelessly flung adrift

Between
Rear view glimpses
And the vast unknown
The Hummingbird
Tessa Weins
Watercolor
Impatiently Patient
Grace Feinberg

Her smooth, claw feet flow
shaped like an “s”
to form cabriole legs.

Crafted in opulent
mahogany with a
red-brown complexion
and a glossy finish.

Flowing curves follow
to the cresting rail
where intricately
carved flowers adorn.

Her shoulders, broad and
her arms, open. Formed to
cradle those who sit.

Her lustrous, emerald
silk clothes with diamond
tufting. Sitting in
pristine condition.

After countless years
she patiently waits
longing for someone
to appreciate
true value and worth.
When I have fears that I may cease to be

John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night’s starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

Reply to ‘When I Have Fears’ by John Keats

Sierra Close

The wand’ring look thy eyes do give, I see.
The pensive thoughts of fear ‘gainst what I wish. . .
For if thou livest not, what chance hast we?
Oh, what of thine the world and I shall miss!

When I have fears, I fear the same as thee,
And fear this too: that in this life, without
Thy tender presence and thy wond’rous mind,
All beauty should grow weary in the drought.

Lose not thy love, nor lose they will to write
Though all thou dream’st to write may ne’er be done.
Forgetest not my love in darkest night
When thou do cease to be and quit the sun.

That fame may fade or catch, you ne’er can tell,
So worry not thyself, nor fear thy knell.
Miranda Schwanke

8 Minutes, 19 Seconds...

Bart slunk into his trusty recliner, miffed and disgruntled at the world for the eleventh time that week. All he wanted out of his retirement was some peace and quiet. But there was always something going on in the world that worked the good people up into a constant frenzy. On Monday, it was the news of some celebrity couple that got divorced after three days of marriage, which sent an uproar amongst the neighbors of Bart’s small suburb community. Thursday, the doll who rung up his soup mix and bread at the store could not stop yammering about how the global warming crisis was upon us or something to that extent. Even today his own wife, Muriel, was blundering around the house lost in a fit because of something she heard on the radio. “Gossiping pills, all of them.” He muttered under his breath and cracked his knuckles.
Bart hadn’t served with honors in two wars and survived a bullet to the leg just to end up retiring in a society where the media published hog-wash stories about meaningless events, and scientists plastered half-baked findings about potential global crises that may not even happen for thousands of years. Bart grimaced and reached for the television remote. He had hoped the country he fought so valiantly for would eventually grow out of all this glamorized nonsense. But as the decades passed, it became apparent that it probably never would.

7 Minutes, 37 Seconds…

Bart switched on the television and flipped through the channels. However, the same breaking news story interrupted every regularly scheduled broadcast.

“Not this again.” Bart groaned and continued to switch between channels. It was the same story his wife was frantically babbling about in the kitchen: *The End of the World!* For the third time this century. Apparently, some yahoo lab researcher aimed a fancy telescope towards the sun, only to find that it was blinking out. *It’s becoming a white dwarf!* The science community concluded. Whatever that meant. *The sun has burnt out! Humanity is at an end!* The reporters on the screen proclaimed. It takes approximately 8 minutes and 20 seconds for light to travel from the sun to earth. And I’m sorry to say now, that the last of the sun’s light is making its way towards us, after it arrives, the world will freeze instantaneously. The original researcher reported oddly calm on a televised interview.

Bart sighed. Speaking of ludicrous and exaggerated news, why did so many people believe they could predict the end of the world? Of course none of it was true. How could it be? After all, many people thought the turn of the century marked the end of life as we knew it simply because we were entering from year 1999 to the solid, rounded off number of 2000. 2012 was also proclaimed earth’s final year because the Mayans carved a calendar onto stone and ran out of room on that particular date. And would you look at that! Several years past both doomsdays and the world was still spinning, even though its purpose for spinning grew less and less important by the looks of the newest generation of people.

5 Minutes, 17 Seconds…

At the sound of the television shutting off, Muriel came bursting into the living room from the kitchen. Her normally tied up silver hair fell messy around her face and a coat was half-way thrown onto her shoulders. Her little arms and legs shook like a Chihuahua as Muriel shuffled over to Bart’s recliner, picked up the remote, and turned the T.V on again.

“Bart you old coot!” She chastised him. “Don’t you see what’s happening out there? The sun has given out and we are on our last bit of light!” Her voice shook almost as much as her wobbling knees. “You leave
that television on and keep an eye out for any updates. A lot can happen in a few minutes."

“Or absolutely nothing at all.” Bart muttered under his breath. Muriel threw the remote onto his belly and huffed at her husband’s stubbornness. Bart recovered the remote and placed it back on the stand beside him. Knowing she wouldn’t talk to him the rest of the week if they left the conversation there, he tried to end things on a less sour note. “Muriel, why are you wearing your coat?” He asked. His jittery wife hugged the thick navy wool material around herself and shied away.

“Oh you would just think I’m being unreasonable if I told you.” She refused.

Bart rolled his eyes and sat up straighter. “Fine, if you don’t want to tell me…” He baited her. Muriel slumped her shoulders and wrapped the coat tighter.

“Well if you must know,” She began, “Since the sun is burning out, there will be nothing to keep us warm anymore. And though I know it won’t do much, it makes me feel better to put an extra layer on in preparation for our impending doom.”

Miranda Schwanke

Bart did his best to disguise a snicker. “You’re right.” He admitted.

“I am?” Muriel asked surprised.

“Yes, I do believe you’re being unreasonable.” Bart scoffed. Muriel let go of her jacket in defeat. With nothing else to do, she then slumped into the rocking chair next to her husband and turned her attention towards the news.

“You never could take anything seriously.” She mumbled under her breath.

3 Minutes, 56 Seconds…

There was no change in the state of the world other than a rise in panic. The elderly couple could hear it in the background noise of the news and outside their house as well. Their neighbors scrambled back and forth trying to figure out what they could do in the few minutes they had left to live. The Johnsons sounded like they were packing up and leaving town. They argued rather loudly about what luxuries to bring and if they should leave their precious poodle behind. Bart prayed they wouldn’t leave Mr. Jingles here. The dog’s incessant barking kept him up at all hours of the night and he would hate to finally get his hands dirty and call animal control.

Somewhere down the street, the Greys’ fourteen-year-old son was drag-racing against someone else. Causing trouble as per usual. Bart knew it was him because he’d been caught doing it before. Bart always thought of the boy as the hooligan of the neighborhood. It’d be good riddance the day he finally gets arrested and carted off to suffer in the pathetic excuse America has of a legal system. Oh, and was that Jason outside their porch on his tricycle? Yes, it had to be. Nobody else had a bell attached to their bike around here. Where were his parents? Regardless if the world was actually ending or not, now is not the time for a defenseless six year old to be lollygagging out in the streets. How irresponsible of them.

“Oh Bart, look at it all.” Muriel said in dismay, regaining her husband’s attention. “Are we really going to just sit here for the rest of our lives?”

Bart thought about it. “No, you could make us a sandwich. Then we can eat our last meal.” He partially joked. All the chaos was starting to make him hungry.

“Will it kill you to take this seriously for a moment?” Muriel nagged. “I want us to go
do something! Anything!” She stood up and pleaded with Bart. Bart checked his watch to see how much time they supposedly had left.

2 Minutes, 44 Seconds…

“Muriel, even if all this blarney is true. What can we possible do in less than three minutes?” He challenged his wife. But Muriel was ready for his question.

“We could go out in the backyard and sit on the swing. Neither one of us has used it in years!”

“And for good reason. We both weigh too much and my butt is too big to fit in the seat.” Bart dismissed the notion.

“Alright, then how about we go for a walk and see how far we get? I bet we could make it to the pond before time runs out.” Muriel offered. Bart tested out his knees and shook his head.

“Nah, the old joints are acting up again. Besides, I don’t want to go out in all that commotion.”

“We can sit in the garden feel the sun on our faces before it disappears?” Muriel didn’t lose hope.

Bart wouldn’t entertain the idea. “Where’s the fun in laying in the dirt and getting pollen in my sinuses?” He argued. But his wife wasn’t done yet. Muriel paced over to the bookshelf and pulled out a dusty book.

“Let’s look through some of the scrapbooks then! Take a trip down memory lane.”

“Sure, and we can pretend that the smile you forced me to make in all the pictures is genuine. Anymore brilliant ideas?” Bart countered.

Muriel set the scrapbook back and crossed her arms. She had one last option up her coat sleeve, her last resort.

“Fine, then we can shut off all the lights and you can join me in the bedroom. What do you think of that?!” She huffed. For once, Bart didn’t have a snappy comeback. He took a full twenty seconds to stare confusingly at his crotch and then at his wife. Finally he answered,

“Woman, do you have any idea how old we are?” He exclaimed. Muriel flung her hands in the air.

“I give up! If the apocalypse can’t get you out of that chair, what chance do I have?!”

She collapsed back into the rocking chair and fumed silently.

1 Minute, 18 Seconds…

Bart tried to ignore the spite radiating off his wife in heated waves and began to flip through the channels again. By now, a lot of the news broadcasts had either been caught up in a riot, unoccupied by a reporter, or replaced by static all together. It didn’t make for much of a distraction for Muriel and her hushed rage.

“Has your life been so much of a disappointment thus far, that you can’t commemorate it as it draws to a close?” She mumbled, so quietly, that Bart wasn’t sure he was meant to hear it. He sat back deeper into his recliner and thought about it. He didn’t think of his life up to this point as a disappointment. Just the opposite in fact. He had a decent enough childhood up until the war. He was an only child, but had many cousins and friends. Bart used to run in fields at his uncle’s farm in Ohio with them and chase ducks whenever the opportunity presented itself. By all accounts, he was happy. Then the war began and Bart was first in line to sign
up for the cause. He wanted to be a part of something bigger than his small town farm life. His cousins and friends had the same idea and enlisted as well, but Bart was the only one who returned home relatively unharmed. To this day, he held their memories close to his heart.

Then soon after the war ended, he met Muriel at a local pub in his small town. And despite the grumpy, standoffish mood he had today, he couldn’t be more thankful that he did. He loved Muriel more than he hated celebrity gossip. Which was saying something. She put up with his disgruntlement and taught him not everything modern society had to offer was despicable. Though he would frequently forget her teachings and let his negative opinion run rampant at times. Just the same, meeting and eventually marrying his wife certainly wasn’t a disappointing act in his eyes.

Bart glanced in Muriel’s direction, he decided to tell her as much, but not until after the doomsday scare passed on. He figured, after she realized how ridiculous she was acting, he would swoop in and comfort her and he would remain on her good side for the week. Who knows, maybe then she would make them a sandwich?

0 Minutes, 19 Seconds…

They sat in silence for a few seconds before Muriel spoke up again.

“I know what you think about what’s happening out there. But will you just humor me?” She half-begged. Knowing it would only contribute to his plan, Burt hid a grin and turned to face his wife.

“Depends, what do you have in mind?” He played along.

0 Minutes, 4 Seconds…

“Will you at least take my hand?” She reached out one arm from her coat and held it out for him. Bart stared at her hand, wasting one second. He wasted another to roll his eyes and quickly chuckle to himself. Then with the third second, he leaned over slightly and grasped Muriel’s hand in his own, giving it a gentle squeeze.

0 Minutes, 1 Second…
An Interview with Dr. Christine Stewart-Nuñez

Jena Christianson


To me, Dr. Stewart-Nuñez has always been a professor. She was my first creative writing instructor as an undergraduate, and now—six years later—she is one of my last writing instructors as a Master’s student. She has taught me new ways to use language to wrestle with tension and human experience, has given me a greater appreciation for poetry, and helped me understand the importance of each word in a written work. Her book of poetry coming out in May of 2016, *Untrussed*, artfully unravels the desires of the present, the reflections of the past, and the possibilities of the future of a woman in the middle of heartbreak.

I met with Dr. Stewart-Nuñez in busy little bagel shop in the heart of South Dakota State University: the student union. The bustle of the surrounding students reflected Dr. Stewart-Nuñez’s busy lifestyle, and provided a background noise for a comfortable interview with a woman I had chatted with colloquially on multiple occasions.

**When did you first decide to become a writer and why?**

I don’t know when I decided to become a writer. I think I started to see myself as a writer when I was in junior high or middle school aged and I wrote lots of poems for my friends and their boyfriends and their breakups and everyone kind of knew and was like oh, we broke up will you write me a poem? So I wrote those really generic friendship poems and breakup poems. Like, I really didn’t have a boyfriend to write about myself so I just wrote about my friends.
And then I think, in high school I had a teacher who was really progressive. He would always have us write whatever we wanted to in our journals and I would always write poems or something, and one time he said, “did you plagiarize this or did you do it yourself?” And I was like whoa it must be good if he thought I plagiarized it because I know I didn’t. When people started saying that I was good at it then it became more than something I just did fun.

**Do have a specific place or time that you write—a certain routine or atmosphere?**

I think rituals and talismans are really important for writers and over my lifetime of writing I’ve had different kinds of them. I think when I was free without children, it was certain places, certain times that helped me get into writing, but now I need to be more flexible so it’s really just having something hot to drink like tea or coffee. And, um, usually in my writing process, before I finish the writing session I give myself an assignment for the next session so it’s easier for me to get myself into that session and I have a clear sense of what needs to be worked on, or what I need to do so I have less time spent with my wheels spinning.

**How has your writing process changed over the years?**

The writing process has changed because I’ve needed to be more flexible, and I’ve written a lot more different kinds of things so I’ve needed to learn a lot. I know myself enough and I have a ton of tools, so I kind of know where I need to be in any particular thing.

A few years ago, I started this thing called Dakota Women Poets and I asked nine other women poets from South Dakota and North Dakota to come together because I needed a workshop manuscript. I had a manuscript that I needed response on, and I needed people who didn’t normally see my work, people I respected, and it would be good for all of us together, so it was kind of self-serving in that I only invited women who I knew would have a manuscript—a book—ready to go. And I couldn’t travel very easily because I was really pregnant with Xavier, and I had Holden, it’s really hard for me to travel with his needs. So I kind of created that space for us.

I think in terms of the product, it hasn’t really changed. I really use art and place as kind of like a springboard for the self, for personal experience, and as ramps, as a ramp through. And so, I think that I find myself writing about the same things I’ve always written about. Whatever’s on my mind, wherever I see tension, and whatever seems to be a possibility for a creative piece, really.

**You tend to write about the most jarring emotional experiences in your life. Why?**

My two chapbooks aren’t personal based like that, like these—the recent—are. But that doesn’t mean that my personal experiences aren’t informing them or it’s not there. I don’t feel like I write from pain per se, what I do when I’m writing is I’m capturing some sort of emotional tension—something I’m trying to work out. Something I’m trying to figure out. It’s a much more analytical and intellectual process than just, you know, naming the emotions and conveying the emotions, but in poetry it tends to be distilled to the degree that it can be a singular emotion or a singular
moment it’s tied to.

For me, it’s like, I have had so many people tell me ‘before I read miscarriage poems, I had had miscarriages and I never knew I could talk about them. I never knew it was okay to put language to them, or narratives to them, or images to them,’ so I think that I’m willing to take that risk because other people see value in that story and sharing that story, and you know, Audrey Lorde said “your silence will not save you,’ and she knew best. Being silent on something, it might feel safer because you don’t think anyone’s going to judge you, but it can just be like a cancer inside of you. Your silence can be something that just eats away at you.

In *Untrussed*, the poems sometimes featured Wonder Woman as a protagonist. Why

**Wonder Woman?**

That’s funny. Um, complicated question. Um. I typically use iconic women as another sounding board for different stories or different perspectives, and one of Wonder Women’s poems was originally a Barbie Doll poem, and I revised it because it didn’t seem to fit her anymore. Like I wanted, Barbie was not enough, she doesn’t have enough responsibility.

Wonder Woman is somebody who seemed to have a ton of responsibility to save people, to save her man, she came from this Amazonian all-women, which as a feminist is really interesting to me, like she came from this all women place and yet in the TV show she’s really just focused on—the Linda Carter version of her—she’s really focused on saving her man and getting him out of trouble. So I think that that worked a lot for the kind of themes in the manuscript where interpersonal relationships and the disillusion of relationships of heterosexual love, right? really. So she became more of a generative icon for me than others. I wanted see what is she like at home? What is her personal—what is she really thinking?

**What is your biggest motivation?**

The reason I publish stuff, or I send them out….For me, I want to join the conversation. I know that what I’m writing about is important culturally. I believe that. I’m not saying like, my work in particular, but I think that what I have to say is very important.

**One piece of advice to aspiring writers?**

Make time for it. No one—no one—even someone who has the job of a writer, no one’s asking you ‘when’s your next poem coming out? Or when’s your next fiction story coming out?’ Unless you’re like one of the crème de le crème writers. Even the best writers, how many people are like ‘Oh my God, I can’t wait for the next novel to come out, I’m just dying for it.’ You know, it doesn’t really happen.

So you have to value that process. You have to love the process, you can’t just love the product. The majority of time is spent getting to the end. You have to love that, or else you’re going to hate half of your life, or a quarter of your life or it’s going to be abysmally, horribly—you have to, even though it’s hard work, you still have to love it. Or else you’re not going to do it. So making time and finding value in the process.

Poetry is a great genre because you can write inspired by personal experience and yet have it not be about your personal experience and I think one of the poems—a lot, most of the poems—in my book *Untrussed* are inspired by but not about people and there’s this one poem in there that was inspired by a day my mom and I spent in Italy, but you would never know that. It seems like a romantic couple.
[Laughs] you know, and it was me and my mom. And I think that that’s one of the great things about poetry: that you can play so much with perspective and point of view. In a way, it can be so fictional—poetry can be so fictional, even though it seems more intimate because it’s poetry and first person—etc. I like that about it.

At the end of the interview, I requested to put one of her poems in the article, and Dr. Stewart-Nuñez asked if I had one in mind. I chuckled and told her I have a favorite, but she’s not going to want it in the article. Which one? she inquired. Oh, I replied, “Wonder Woman Does Dream Dirty.” She burst into laughter and said that is the only one you cannot put in there. Oh God! No, no, no. This launched into a conversation about how she had felt tempted to cut the poem entirely from Untrussed, but had to leave it because it served a pivotal moment.

Needless to say, the poem features some delightfully risqué (and—as always—clever) content.

From that jovial jumping off point, Dr. Stewart-Nuñez inquired about my plans after graduation and started to mock interview me for a teaching position. Not only is she a professor, a poet, and a mother, but she is also a mentor. She is someone you can share a coffee, laughs, and intellectual conversation with. One moment you can be talking about how her poems about miscarriage have helped others cope with their own losses, then the next you can giggle about Wonder Woman’s perceived orgasms. I remember a class period in which she was talking to biology majors about how a report on water quality could potentially save the world, and she stopped, smiled, looked at me, and said, “Your writing [fiction] will save the world too, right?” I smiled and said, of course it will, as the class giggled. But neither Dr. Stewart-Nuñez nor I was joking—not really. Creative writing can help heal the mind; it can help people cope with tragic experiences, or the dull of the day the day.
Fifth of July

Christine Stewart-Nuñez

For five nights, fireworks have burst into orchids—red, white, and blue stamens sizzling every seven seconds against the black blanket of sky. Outside the bedroom window, smoke tendrils kiss the Dipper and orange-hued orb. Do I still stir you? Tomorrow, firecracker confetti will stick to snapdragons, a neighbor’s origami orgy gone awry. Charcoal snakes will scar sidewalks, lawns spiked with sparklers. Bottle rocket spines—purple, frayed—will stand for one more try inside empty Coors cans. Forget the cookout’s burgers and egg salad, parade of bands, bike-riding Shriners, sweets filling candy bags. Our first Independence Day, sprays of light crossed and re-crossed the sky. Summer’s simmer might stretch across the year, but do you miss the hot nights you searched for a new wick, a fresh match?

Dr. Stewart-Nuñez’s book of poetry, "Untrussed," will come out in May of 2016 from the University of New Mexico Press, and will include “Fifth of July.”
The Art of Self Loathing
Jena Christianson

Yesterday,
you clapsed your fingers
around my throat
and skid my bare ass
across the concrete—
chilling skin fast
as I carved chasms
into your back
deep enough for
blossoms of blood
to drip into my
spasms, flooding
the floor.

You left
bruises on my neck
of a beautiful blue,
musing the curious,
confusing the few
serious enough to fret
over who caused
such flaws to beset;
but I left you
souvenirs
just as dressed,
pressed into your
flesh: streaks of red,
raised and strewn across
your back in a fashion
of crosshatching.

Tomorrow,
you’ll knock my ribs
askew after I chew
a kiss into the canvas
of flesh below your pecs
and you’ll shatter
my cheekbone
against the shower
wall; I’ll sputter
and spit scarlet
bliss that will
feed the metal
teeth:
you always know
how to give me relief.

Nude Tryptich
Rachel Funk
Watercolor
Fall Chores
Karissa Kuhle

Our spirits, leaves falling from trees
Roosters blew morning’s horn
with droopy eyes we piled out of bed.

Chicken eggs, jam and baked bread
waited on the butcher’s block.
Mom’s face, a beaming light.

Holding a mop bucket and broom,
She tapped her foot. Watching
us eat was like watching paint dry.

Fall walked through our door.
Windows speckled with fingerprints,
needed a scour and scrubbing.

Dust and dirt filled carpets
waited for beating. Filth hung on
everything in our small, cozy farm house.

Water and a dib dab of carbolic acid tackled
the cobwebs. Floors, mud-streaked, called
for sweeping and hands-on-knees mopping.

Mattresses, flattened from in and out
guests, bedding need washing,
fluffing and bed bug inspecting.

We rolled rugs, beat them outdoors
with a carpet beater, flimsy and metal,
made from an old wire hanger.

To tie up loose ends, we starched
hand-made lace curtains. Our house,
a whistle, without a sock out of place.
Two Showers Later
Rachel Funk
Photograph
Honey Summers

Kayla Hemmingson

I hate promises. Promises were created to make people feel better. It gives them hope instead of worry. But promises are lies, and people lie. They lie, lie, lie. They feed you a bunch of bullshit about loyalty and never leaving you. But nobody can really make that promise. Because life happens and seasons change. And I hate change. It makes everything unreliable. And you can’t predict change, so before it happens you begin to believe and feel good about everybody’s stupid, bullshit promises. Your life will start out in summer. In summer, the sky is the perfect shade of blue and there are no clouds. In summer, there is a distinct sort of warmth that envelops your life and makes it good. Summer is good and you start to believe in a person’s permanence because humans have a tendency to stick to you when life is good. But that good will drift away on a subtle gust of wind with the leaves, and eventually autumn will fade away into winter. Winter will make you too cold and too numb to realize that everybody you thought you had at the beginning of summer disappeared. It’s what I call a honey summer. I’ve experienced enough honey summers to know that people will leave when winter comes. When life frosts you over and you’re shivering and layering on as much protection as you can just to survive. Then before you know it, the snow is melting and you realize that you spent the entire winter alone. All because of one, stupid season of cold. I wasn’t naïve. I could tell when people were making me bullshit promises. So I started to leave people before they could leave me. That’s what I did with Kevin. That’s what I should have done with my family. That’s what I tried to do with Thomas. Except he wouldn’t leave. Thomas stayed all winter.

It’s spring now and Thomas is still in my house. Still sleeping on my couch. Still doing my dishes. Still invading. Invading, invading, invading. I should start calling him The Invader. That’s all he’s done since he forced himself into my life. His power is invasion and he invades the un-invadable. If I could choose, I would be The Infiltrator. My power would be infiltration and I would infiltrate Thomas’s mind, and maybe then I would finally understand the mystery that is Thomas Arrington. I would understand why he’s still here, in my house, in my life. Even after everything I’ve done to make him leave. The dinners he cooked that I refused to eat. The nights I’ve woken him up because I couldn’t stop screaming. The mornings where I’ve ignored him. The things I’ve done to jeopardize his trust. If I were The Infiltrator, I would understand how he was able to break down the wall that I’ve built up and spent years strengthening to the point where even God himself can’t see over the ledge. But Thomas walked through my wall like there was a doorway made just for him. He forgot to shut the door behind him and now everything that I’ve shut out for years—feelings, relationships, life—has started to stream through that open doorway with no end to the torture in sight. The Infiltrator and The Invader.

But I’m not The Infiltrator. He is The Infiltrator. And The Invader and The Intruder.
and The Instigator and The Initiator and arrrrgh! Why is he still here? I just want to be alone. I’ve always just wanted to be alone. I can only hurt myself, but I’m so numb and empty that there’s nothing left to hurt. I don’t feel pain. I’m in a never ending winter. And that’s how it was supposed to be for the rest of my life. I was supposed to live a lonely, innocuous life so I could die alone. And when I died, nobody would be hurt because nobody would care about me anymore. It was sad and pathetic, but it was ideal. For me anyway.

I am The Isolator. I live in the cold, inescapable ice of isolation.

But apparently Thomas thinks otherwise. He thinks that company and love can solve all of the world’s problems and that everybody needs somebody else and then we’ll go frolicking through the meadow full of daisies.

Maybe he’s right. But maybe he’s not. I was fine with the life I lived before Thomas invaded. I was fine with my wordless music. I was fine with my colorless rooms. I was fine with my existence of solitude.

I wasn’t fine. Deep down I knew that, but I could make myself believe that I was. I was under my own spell. A spell that I cast to convince myself that if life was just a blank page void of color, then I would be fine. But then Thomas invaded and infiltrated and intruded with his stupid music full of words and his stupid, incessant need to care.

He’s always asking questions. Where is your family? What do you want to eat tonight? Did you sleep well? Are you still ignoring me? I rarely answer his questions. It’s pointless. Because two minutes, weeks, years from now—whenever he finally decides to leave—the answers to his questions won’t matter. He’ll be settled down with a nice, conventional wife who has supper on the table every night when he comes home from work, and his kids will wrap their arms around his neck screaming, “Daddy’s home!” and it won’t matter that my family lives underground in Side Hill Cemetery or that I wanted to eat ravioli or that I never went to sleep, afraid of what awaited me in my dreams, or that yes, I was still ignoring him. I’ll be nothing more than a memory that he shoved into the back of his mind to make room for the memories that matter.

He sets down a plate with a golden panini on the coffee table in front of me, and returns to the kitchen. I glare at the plate. I hate what it represents. Every plate he sets down in front of me represents a small sliver of hope that maybe, just maybe, he won’t actually leave. He’s been here for 276 days. That’s 828 slivers of hope. Sometimes, I let them build up. But then I remember why I live the way I do. The reason I am the person I am. Why I lost the who of who I was. So I tightly clutch my metaphorical tweezers and painfully pluck out all 828 slivers until I’m restored to a bleeding hopeless void in the shell of a girl.

He returns from the kitchen with his own sandwich. I watch every movement he makes. I watch the way his arm extends as he sets his beer bottle on the table, his biceps elongating while his triceps shorten. The way he crosses his feet and bends his knees, folding onto the floor Indian style. He moves his beer to his
right, leaving a trail of condensation on the glass of the table, and sets his plate over the water marks. “So how was your day?” he asks. I continue to stare at the spot where the trail would be. His plate obscuring and covering the only thing I want to look at. “Did you do anything interesting when I left for work after lunch?” Why wouldn’t he use a coaster? They’re sitting basically right in front of him. Why didn’t he just grab one of those, instead of leaving water marks on the glass? “I saw your smock in the laundry room. Did you paint when I left?” He places his hand on the top piece of bread and presses down, flattening his sandwich until it’s almost paper thin. Why does he always do that? This breaks my focus from the point of the hidden water trail. I follow his hand to his arm to his neck to his chin to his lips and then I’m staring into a dark green chasm. I hate his eyes. They remind me of moss. Swampy. His eyes are swampy.

“Why are you here?” It’s the only question I’ve ever asked him. On occasion, I’ll answer some of his questions with a gesture or a brief sentence, but I’ve never asked him anything other than this. And he’s always given me the same frustrating answer.

“Because you are.”

I show no reaction. I stare blankly into his swampy eyes. After what feels like perpetuity, I rise from the couch and walk up the stairs to my bedroom. I walk directly into my bathroom and strip. I turn the shower to a degree just below scalding and step in. I do nothing other than stand under the spray. I feel it cascading down every inch of my body, but it’s not cleansing. It’s never really cleansing. I still feel as dirty as I have for the past eight years. For 15 minutes, hours, days, eternities, I stare at the white tile in front of me. I try to think of anything, everything, nothing, but my mind stays fixed on the one thing I never want to think about. Thomas.

Thomas makes me think about how the scientists lied. How they told us that the world was round. The world is flat. I would know. I was thrown off the edge and I’ve been trying to hold on for eight years. I used to try to climb back up but it’s almost impossible to beat gravity when nobody is willing to give you a hand. All this time, I’ve been dangling by my fingertips, preparing myself for when I finally have to just let go. But then came Thomas. He didn’t just hold out his hand. He gave me ropes and nets and a parachute and held out all four limbs. He was a one man rescue team, willing to sacrifice anything to pull me over the ledge. But it’s been so long since I’ve seen a hand that I’ve lost the courage it takes to reach out and grab on.

I shut off the shower and step out. I wrap a towel around myself and walk into my bedroom. I don’t even bother to put on clothes. I lay down in my bed, still wrapped in my towel. I contemplate whether I will sleep tonight or not. The nightmares don’t come as often as they used to, but when they do, I’m paralyzed for days after. I haven’t slept for three days so I’m hoping that my body will be so exhausted that it will shut down and my brain won’t have the power it needs to plague my dreams. Because tonight I need to sleep. I need my brain to shut off and take me away from the reality of my life. For once I want to dream about sunsets and beaches or whatever else normal people are privileged to dream about. I don’t want to think
about water marks or painting or irritating males on my couch. Eventually my body gives in to exhaustion and slowly, I slip into a dreadful oblivion.

“IT’s okay, Princess.”

“No.” I shake my head with such force that I can almost feel my brain hitting the insides of my skull.

“Everything will be alright. Just relaaaaaxx.” He draws the word out like Absolem, the caterpillar from Alice in Wonderland.

“No,” I plead. “Please don’t. I just want to go home.” My head whips to the side from the force of his hand slapping my cheek. He bends down close to my ear.

“This is your home. It’ll do you good to remember that,” he whispers harshly. His mood quickly changes and his lips move over, leaving a gentle kiss on my reddened cheek. “I’m so sorry, Princess. I didn’t mean to hurt you.” He sits up on the bed and starts brushing his fingertips across the spot he slapped. “What do you want to do tonight, instead?” he asks softly.

I slowly turn my head to look into his eyes. They’re so dark, almost black. I slightly shake my head. Tears pool in my eyes. “I just want to go home,” I whisper.

I see the change happen instantly. His teeth clench, his jaw ticks, his hands become fists, his whole body tenses, his eyes turn obsidian. His breathing becomes deeper, like he’s trying to calm himself down. It won’t work. It never does.

I know I shouldn’t have said that. But I’m past the point of caring what he does to me that I’ve basically done everything I can to get out of here besides ultimately giving up. I’ve even resorted to begging.

He stands in one fluid motion. I can practically feel the heat radiating off his body. If this were a cartoon, he would have steam coming from his ears.

If this were a cartoon, maybe I would have laughed. But this isn’t a cartoon and I know that whatever is about to happen will be something haunting.

He walks out of the room, only to return with his treasured Colt Diamondback revolver. He opens the cylinder and empties all of the bullets into his hand. I watch as he slowly releases 1 bullet, 2, 3, 4, 5 bullets onto the floor. I watch them roll and settle into the small cracks of the wooden floorboards. He holds the last bullet between his fingers, showing it to me. I follow the bullet as it’s placed back into its chamber. He clicks the cylinder back into place, and spins it with his fingertips until it locks.

I look up to his face. He’s smiling at me. “You want to go home?” I hesitantly nod once. “Then let’s play a game.” He holds the gun up to the underside of his chin. “If I die, then you can go home.”

My eyes widen in shock. This can’t be happening. This is a game of chance. He never leaves anything to chance. But there’s no mistake in what I see. The silver barrel of the gun is pressing into his smooth skin. His finger is placed over the trigger, readying to squeeze.

Click.

Nothing. The blank sound of the trigger rings through the room louder than any gunshot ever could. I can’t help the disappointment that I’m sure is displayed on my face. A victorious grin spreads across his face. He pulls the gun away and walks over to the bed, where I’m still sitting.

He grabs the gun by the barrel, holding out the black handle to me. Fear claws at my chest. No. I won’t. I look up to his amused face. “Your turn.”

I sit up in my bed. I hear screams. I realize they’re my screams.

The door flies open and Thomas bursts into the room. The screaming stops, but now I’m
racing to catch my breath. My chest rises and falls in rapid succession. My throat burns from the exertion of my screams. My naked body is drenched in sweat. I run to the bathroom just in time to empty the bile from my empty stomach.

Thomas is there. Holding back my hair. Rubbing soothing circles on my bare back. Telling me everything will be okay. Once my dry heaving stops, I go back into my bedroom and pull a night gown from my dresser. I slip it over my head and return to my bed. I slide in under the covers and stare at the wall. I feel the bed dip behind me and Thomas’s body folds around mine. He holds me. He doesn’t say anything. He doesn’t ask me why I was screaming. He doesn’t shy away from my sweaty body in disgust. He just holds me, like he does every night I wake up screaming from the reminders of my past.

But tonight it doesn’t make me feel better. All of his Shhhhhhhs and his It’s going to be okays make me angry. Those are promises. He doesn’t know that it’s going to be okay. He doesn’t know that. He doesn’t know me. He may have lived in my house and invaded my life for 276 days, but he does not know that it’s going to be okay. It’s a promise. A lie. And he doesn’t know if it’s one he can keep.

“It’s going to be okay. I’m here,” he says soothingly. In a barely audible whisper he adds, “I’ll always be here.”

At his whispered words, I feel the strings inside of me snap. The strings that have been holding me together for eight years. The strings that have kept me tethered to my sanity. I throw the covers off of my body, release myself from his hold, and stand up. I turn to face him. “Why are you here?” I shout.

His face shows no reaction. He’s calm when he says, “Because you are.”

I. Am. Livid.

“What does that even mean?” I scream.

“Why would you be here because I am? You don’t even know me!”

He sits up in the bed. “Then show me. Show me who you are,” he pleads. “If you think that I’ve got you pegged all wrong, then let me in. Let me know who you really are.”

I’m so confused. I’m the girl who ignores him. The girl who doesn’t thank him for a single thing he’s done for me. The girl who bashed his windshield with a baseball bat because he asked me to paint him a picture. The girl who wakes up screaming almost every night and the only thing that helps is the arms of a stranger. I’m crazy. I’m helpless. I’m numb. I’m empty. Why would he want to know who I really am?

“I’m nobody.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I don’t care.”

He lets out a sigh. He rubs his palms down his face. With a defeated look, he pulls back the covers and pats the space where I sleep. He’s giving up for the night. He’s not in the mood to put up with my tantrum. “Please, just go to sleep.”

“Go to hell.” I’m pushing him away.

Everything within my body tells me no, but I have to. It’s to preserve what’s left of me. To preserve the very last string, even if it is frayed and barely holding together. If I let him in, then that would be giving him the power to ultimately end me. There’s not much of that power left, so if I want to survive then I must keep it to myself.
His face hardens. He’s mad. Finally. He throws the covers back and stands in front of me. “What do you want?” he yells. He’s never lost his cool before so I know my efforts in pushing him away are working. Why does that make me feel sad? I know what I have to say. But it’s not what I want to say. I want, I want, I want. What do I want?

I want you to stay. “I want you to leave.”

His stone-like features melt into a puddle of defeat. I see the emotions bleed into his features. There’s hurt then anger then confusion then…I can’t look anymore. I can’t see the way I’ve made him feel. He nods once. He takes a step back. I want to reach out, pull him back, apologize. But I don’t. I never do. He takes another step back. I put a brick in my wall where his doorway used to be. Three steps back. I clamp down on the pressure in my chest, hold my breath, fighting back the sobs clawing to get out. Two steps back. I lay another row of bricks. One last step. The step that puts him on the other side of the door. The step that says goodbye. He reaches for the handle and slowly inches the door closed. I unwillingly catch his gaze. It’s hard not to see the hurt. The betrayal.

His swampy eyes are glassy. Right before the door closes, I see one tear drop fall. The door closes. When I hear the latch click, 1. . 2. 3. 4,fifty thousand pieces of feeling stab me in the heart all at once. I close my eyes, walk to my bed, and lay down. I open my eyes and stare at the wall. I’ve never asked him to leave before. If I knew that’s all it would have taken to get him out of my house, out of my life, I would have done that long before. Long before he created cracks in my life and sluggishly seeped through those cracks like molasses, deliberately suffocating the demons that torture me from within. I would have done that 276 days ago.

I am crazy. I am helpless. I am numb. I am empty. I am nobody. Thomas Arrington the Invader was a honey summer. But that’s a lie. Because I left him.

For hours after Thomas left, I substitute my sleep for my new mantra.

I am crazy. I am helpless. I am numb. I am empty. I am nobody. I am a liar. I am a honey summer.
Remember
Alexis Becker

We were John Wayne Saturday nights and Sunday morning Frosted Flakes – no thoughts for tomorrow and live life as it comes. We were two hour drives down dusty side roads long forgotten by county graters. We were ‘Dinner’s on in five’ and ‘No, that dress looks great’ while you thumbed through television stations jacked from unsuspecting neighbors. We were talks until dawn so let’s call in sick just for today. Now, we are old movies packed high on shelves gathering dust instead of laughs. Now we are meandering walks, trying to remember the exact spot we fist kissed and why we didn’t go back. Now we are ‘Honey, I’m...’ and ‘I talked to your mother today...’ while I realize just how much an empty apartment can mock the living. Now we are one-sided conversations in cold cemeteries, tracing etched letters on marble.
The Icicle Effect
Allison Kantack

Fossilized tears
frozen into a
downward dagger
reaching, pointing
to nowhere,
which is where
I’ll remain
until I break
or, at your
gentle
touch,
melt.
Red Fox
October Greenfield
Photograph
Caterpillars
Madelin Mack

We plucked eyebrows from the clover, caterpillars contracting as we pinched each one between our plump baby fingers, expanding as we lined them on each other’s arms—wooly train cars. They would ripple blindly, segment by segment, scoot across the floor of the rusty coffee can we’d prepared for them so carefully—braided hairs of grasses, flowers, twigs, stones and all—a crude and cruel imitation of their clover, but certainly better, somehow.

We were sure.
Subjective Bliss
Amanda Jamison
Photograph
Paradise Found
Justin Charnell

“Josh, you need a job, dude.”
Josh didn’t really need a job. He was collecting checks from the government every month for his post-deployment disability. Josh didn’t have a disability. He found an untestable way to get 70% disability from the VA by claiming anxiety, allowing him to get a check every month for around $1400. In Thailand, that was king status.

“What do I need a job for?”
He didn’t. I didn’t know what I was talking about, either. I’m the one that needed a job. It’s a bit hard to build up a blog I could make money from while having a partner in crime living with me doing whatever he wanted, daily. Progress was slower than I anticipated and my credit cards had a limit I was approaching closer and closer each day. Procrastination was my second best friend, and Josh was my first.

“You right.”
Day in and day out we enjoyed our breakfast mixed with a conversation about nothing in particular. Some days we would enjoy our fried chicken and rice in complete silence. I couldn’t decide whether that was more enjoyable than our inane conversations about what we should do, could do, and ultimately did do that day.

“You wanna go ride an elephant?” Josh would ask me once in a while and I would have to explain to him, once again, how unethical I thought it was.

“You know they torture those beasts, it’s pretty fucked up.”

“I don’t care, I just want a picture on one.”

“Enjoy it, I’ll be here working.” He would never go, and I would never get work done. What I would do for sure was smoke my morning cigarette. “I’m going to go chain a heater, you want one?”

“Yeah.”
We stepped outside of our local favorite diner to smoke, coffee cups in hand. I couldn’t think of anything better to do than smoke a cig with black coffee. For some reason, the taste of shitty menthol smokes and shitty mud coffee were a match made for a nice morning wake up.

Our apartment building was right next door to the diner, right along the Gulf of Thailand in beautiful Pattaya Beach.

Every time we sat outside and smoked we saw plenty of interesting things. People that say New York is the city that never sleeps have never been to Pattaya. It was early in the morning, yet there were plenty of people out from the night before on the beach still enjoying their Singha or Chang beer and shitty menthol cigarettes. Girls were stumbling along the sidewalk trying to make it to wherever their destination was. Three-wheeled taxis, tuk-tuks, cruised by as their drivers were yelling at people trying to give them rides and take advantage of their prospective passengers by overcharging them. Only foreigners fell for their pitches.

We finished our smokes and headed back inside to finish our coffee and pay. Enter Drake, our fellow foreigner who really took a liking to the local culture. He liked it so much he had a new piece of culture every night.

“Hey buds, how are y’all? Did you have a blast like me … if you catch my drift?” We knew exactly what our good friend Drake was talking about. By good friend I mean not our friend.
“Drake, I swear one of these days your dick’s gonna fall off from black syphilis. Every damn time I see you, you’re with a different girl. It must be awfully expensive taking all these girls out on dates.” Josh knew damn well there was no date involved with Drake’s interaction with these women.

“Shit, I wrap it up. Don’t you worry about me, you only live once,” Drake replied, as though he knew the risks involved but didn’t mind the consequences. “Besides, you two smoke. What difference is that, bud? Y’all got some black lungs.” He had a point.

“Yeah, whatever Drake, who was that last girl, anyways?” I was always curious where these people came from.

“Don’t worry bout it,” Drake never told us, but I always asked. “You want sloppy seconds, bud? That’s too damn nasty.”

Josh and I both gave Drake the look like when a dog is confused by something, head turned at a 45-degree angle to the right or left, eyes squinted, and eyebrows mashed up together. He promptly left. Drake didn’t seem to understand that if a girl was a working girl, there was no concept of sloppy seconds. Single digits didn’t apply unless you only counted that evening.

“Man I don’t like that guy,” Josh claimed. “He always speaks in haikus.”

“For real?”

“Yeah, listen the next time he talks. It’s eerie as fuck. Dude’s a goober.”

“What about the fact that he objectifies women and contributes to human trafficking?”

“Man, sit yo wannabe intellectual ass down and finish your coffee. Always trying to be politically correct and shit.”

I sat down and finished my coffee.

~

There was something funny about walking around during the daytime in Pattaya. One could see odd mismatches of couples everywhere, as well as people who flat out looked like they didn’t belong, myself and Josh included.

The very obvious sex tourists stood out like cold sores. Nowhere else on earth would someone be able to see a fifty-year-old bald, out of shape man with crusty white lips walking around with a girl who was barely two decades old. They were probably a bunch of bankers or politicians, slapped with a scandal or two who fled their country in search of peace and quiet. And some butt. After a while of seeing it, day in and day out, you get used to it. When I first arrived I was so confused by it. Now I understand the power of a dollar.

Next there are the guys who look like they were in the military for twenty years, got hooked up with a nice retirement plan, and are spending their forties drinking cold beer and bullshitting with their old and new buddies. These guys always had a story to tell, but it was so difficult to end a conversation you started with them (or they started with you). Most of them were heavily tattooed, had short haircuts, and walked around with bodies that looked like they once were into fitness but are now wrinkled up and well … retired. When you have a guaranteed check coming every month, you really don’t have to worry about much in life. They had it the best, I would say, minus their more than likely brutal divorce. I guess you have to cut a few ties to live in paradise.

There were a few people there with families,
on vacation. Some of the fathers would buy knockoff purses for their wives. I take that back, all of them would buy knockoff purses for their wives. There’s a saying in Thailand that the merchants on the street or in bazaars would use, “same same, but different.” It looks the same, it smells the same, and anyone without a keen eye would say that as well, but it was different. Fake. Bootleg. Knockoff. Same same, but different.

Then you had guys like myself and guys like Josh. Young Thundercats who were trying to take advantage of the excellent exchange rate and incredibly inexpensive cost of living. Guys who could get by every month with only a few hundred dollars. Guys that were able to party all night and work, or attempt to work, all day the next day. Guys who were “in search of themselves,” but in all reality were tired of the monotonous bullshit of the day-to-day life that came with wherever they were prior to going on an adventure in faraway lands.

The locals were pretty different as well. One of the first days in Pattaya, Josh and I were walking down a side street doing some general exploration. There were groups of people all sitting outside of small shops. They weren’t doing anything, just sitting there staring at nothing. Women and children and old men, just sitting there staring like they were shell-shocked. As we walked down the street, confused and slightly spooked, we looked into a random store and an older woman decided to pull one titty out and smoosh it against the window and put it on display for us.

“Aye Josh, is that a titty?”

“Yeah, that’s a titty alright.”

We turned back around and went to the main street. I like breasts and all that, but not one pushed up against a window, smearing all the dust and fingerprint marks around. Thanks, but no thanks.

~

All morning and afternoon, I didn’t accomplish a damn thing. I had a bit of alone time while Josh went out and looked for fake Oakley sunglasses. Sitting in front of my computer, I had nothing to write about. I don’t believe in writer’s block, but damn if it didn’t creep up about 90% of the time. It was early evening now, and I hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast.

“Josh, I’m hungry. Let’s go get some chow.”

“Let’s go get some of that spicy shrimp shit from Angel’s. Is your Angus peppered?” That’s what Josh would ask if my butt was prepared for the onslaught.

That spicy shrimp shit was tom yum goong. It was a mix of assorted local plants and spices, lime, and too much chili. It was like a firecracker in your mouth, and I’ve never literally broke out into a sweat eating food before. Needless to say, it really cleaned out the bowels and intestines. Hot coming in, hot going out. End up feeling like a dragon when you eat it, and a rocket ship when you expel it.

Wallet and passport? Check. Keys and burner cell phone? Check. Underwear? Check. Thailand has some weird ass laws, like you have to wear underwear. Off we were to our destination of mastication.

We made it out the front door to our apartment and started whistling “A Thousand Miles” by Vanessa Carlton. That was our thing, whistling it anytime we started walking anywhere, up until the orchestral part when
we would drop the whistling and start doing ‘buh duh dum’ sounds effects. We could do it a few times in the four block walk.

Block one down and we could already point out two pairs of odd couples. Gross. We were offered the chance to buy some boom boom pills, which could be anything from Cialis to ecstasy to baking powder. Hard to pass up (not).

Block two was defeated, as my hunger grew deeper. Two chicken drumsticks and sticky rice doesn’t last very long when you’ve been working so very hard all day. It doesn’t last long when you haven’t done a damn thing all day either. A taxi driver yelled to us a proposition to see a donkey show. My hunger has top priority right now, sorry honcho. That and the commotion up ahead was too good to pass up.

“I swear if Angel’s is getting raided right now I will murder a hooker.” Oh Josh, what a kidney. On occasion the local law enforcement, if you could call them, would storm local bars in search for under age drinkers. That’s what the passports were for, to verify we were who we were and to verify that our visas were current. Yeah, that and extortion.

As we got closer, we saw that it was one fool they were attempting to arrest. Attempting, and it looked like there was a bit of struggling. The police were struggling, that is. Curiosity got the better of the two of us so we had to get a closer peek.

“Yo! That’s Drake’s dumbass trying to fight off those little Thai police!” Josh had a pair of eyes and he knew how to use them. “Dumb motherfucker!”

Since we’ve known him, Drake was never one to use the right side of his brain, or the left side for that matter. When he wasn’t paying for butt he was usually drunk. I had to figure out how he got into this mess.

“Hey man, what’s going on over there?” I talked to the first guy I saw. Turns out he didn’t know a word of English so I got slammed with an earful of Thai. Unfortunately, I don’t know a word of Thai so I had to go through the crowd that was forming and find someone who knew a word of our native tongue. Luckily Angel stepped out from behind the wok and dropped some words of wisdom.

“You friend did the bad thing! He ripped the king.”

“First off, that’s not our fuckin friend,” Josh chimed in with the correction extra quick. “That dirtbag gets whatever comes to him. Who cares about ripping the…?” Fortunately, I was able to smack the taste out of Josh’s mouth before he could finish his sentence with what I assumed to be the word ‘king.’

“Bruh, read a book. It’s like, capital offense to disrespect the king.”

Oh yeah, it was. That on top of fighting off the police was going to land Drake in a world of physical abuse and fish heads.

Angel continued to explain the situation, which unfolded like this: Drake was getting his daily dose of Chang beer and wanted a bit of food. He hopped into a tuk-tuk taxi and arrived at Angel’s. Drake paid the driver and decided that the driver was taking too long to give him his change back so in his infinite wisdom thought snatching it out of the driver’s hand was a good idea. The driver had a good grip on the money, so a few bills were ripped in half. Since Drake was the foreigner, it was his fault. The police were promptly called to
the scene because the driver yelled for them and there were two on every damn block in this city. Now Drake has the drunk strength and isn’t going peacefully. It’s not hard to resist arrest from a couple 5’4” 130lb rookies, even if most of them are fairly proficient in Muay Thai. Amateur mistake, Drake.

Drake was able to resist for a bit in his drunken state and being unable to feel pain. Unfortunately for him, they had something perfect for a guy like Drake.

“Yo! He just shit himself!”

Josh was right, Drake shit himself. And he pissed himself too. I guess it’s true that you lose a lot of your bodily functions when you get hit with a pair of stun probes. Probably more so when you get hit by two pairs from a couple of rookie cops that don’t know how to properly turn them off. This was probably, no, hopefully, the last time we ever had to see that goofy fool again.

“Angel, you still have a bit of tom yum goong, right?” I had to ask.

“I never run out!”

Clutch.

Josh and I enjoyed our soup the best we could while we were sweating bullets, basically acting like what we just saw didn’t just happen. It was hard getting the image of a grown man wearing light tan khaki shorts with a big dirty dookie stain on the back out of our heads. Just a normal day in Pattaya I suppose. The evening will be filled with alcohol and debauchery, but alas, I still didn’t get any work done today, and Josh still didn’t need a job.
Clifford Taylor
Introduction written by Chuck Woodard and Sarah Hernandez

Clifford Taylor, a member of the Ponca Tribe, is the winner of this year’s Emerging Tribal Writer Award. This award, launched in 2013, is intended to increase the number of Native writers dedicated to using poetry and other forms of literature to express their cultural beliefs and values.

Clifford submitted several poems that examine American Indian identity in modern society. In this series of poems, the speaker travels throughout the Great Plains region contemplating “the painful distance and the painful nearness of the past” (“Dog Soup, Ln. 10). Throughout this journey, he learns to stop mourning this painful past and starts to realize that it has strengthened and empowered him. He, like many other Native people and communities, are the descendants of survivors who have the power to reclaim their cultural beliefs and values. This series of poems was selected for its rich imagery, emotional intensity, and thought-provoking themes.
Dog Soup
Clifford Taylor

‘what important stories do you have to tell?’ she hands me a bowl of the dog soup and I pass it on to the person sitting next to me/ I keep handing off hot bowl after hot bowl until everyone has one and I’m blowing on mine to cool it off/ I think about her question/ I think about all of us wild young things in Columbus wanting to be artists/ I think about the painful distance and the painful nearness of the past/ I think about putting my hands on the Sundance tree and praying alone there in the dark/ she hands me half of her frybread/ I dip it in my soup and take a big soggy bite/ kind of savor it for a second actually/ ‘I think untold stories are probably the greatest source of pain in the indian person’s soul.’/ she bumps me with her elbow and smiles in that kidding-but-not-really sort of way/ then she says, ‘so, what do you think?’
The Run
Clifford Taylor

driving fifteen hours from Lincoln to Cheyenne River. one new windshield wiper picked up at one gas station, one jump-start at another, and then some indians pushing us out of a snowy ditch in the middle of nowhere. all to reach the run. my brother and a handful of others running 180 miles to honor the massacred and the survivors of Wounded Knee. my friend and I get into an argument over gangster rap and I burst into thick, sticky anger. we move slowly down the road with the caravan of other supporters, maybe ten or eleven other vehicles. ‘I’m gonna run,’ I say, needing to get out of the car, not wanting my anger to pour over onto my sweet friend. ‘you are?’ in my winter coat and jeans I run with three other runners in the utterly silent South Dakota night. a guy in a grey hoodie tells a story about children who died nearby of their wounds from the massacre, their ghosts shattering his back windows three times before he fed them -they just wanted someone’s attention. my brother runs up beside me, hands me a staff. I keep running in the dark, surrounded by a vastness of space and earth, one heavy-breathing indian in a pack of unkillable others.
Cornish
Clifford Taylor

I danced out in the arena
kind of looking for you
out of the corner of my eye

the white girl with the speck
of indian blood
gorgeous blue eyes
your grandfather’s cheeks
Cornish Art College graduate
flying all the way across the country
to photograph your tribe

in my fantasies on the car ride up
you stepped out into the arena
and danced up beside me
our shadows crossed behind us
me in my street clothes
you in your blue and yellow regalia
we didn’t need to talk to know how
good we were together
we circled and smiled and looked
at each other
no one else was around us
the stars shone overhead

love is always so close
even when it doesn’t happen

I danced and I never saw you
because you weren’t there
because you didn’t make it
this summer

I danced and I knew you
weren’t there
but I looked for you anyway

Back in the Day
Clifford Taylor

When we start to smell that stink-smell
about seven of us all run to the tree
at the edge of the field

we all climb up into the tree and then
we watch
as a herd of about 70 black bigfoot
goes running through all the wind-whipped
grass

‘can you imagine the herds of things that
used to run through here back in the day,
before everything was either killed off or
scared away?’

I don’t say anything in response to my
cousin’s question
I just watch the last of the bigfoot, a few
small child-like ones, vanish like a blur
into the woods behind the rest
Repose
Samantha Kokesh
Watercolor
Grey Owl
Clifford Taylor

Grey Owl is dying...
Grey Owl is dying...
Grey Owl is dying...

I wake up, hope the woman taking care of Grey Owl hasn’t called me back, because it’s my day off and really I’d rather go to the coffee shop than go visit this man who I haven’t hung out with in six or seven years.

‘...it’d mean a lot to Robert -to me- if you could come and visit him...’

‘...come over, I’ll cook us some of my incredibly bad frybread and maybe some buffalo burgers. all right, we’ll see you in about 20 minutes...’

I drive out to the edge of Lincoln, to a house in the country. Hanna comes out. we hug. ‘Robert’s right over here,’ she says, ‘sitting under these trees.’

Robert Grey Owl has stage 4 lung cancer. he was diagnosed in June. it’s now September. when he got out of prison eight or nine years ago we met and became friends, road tripped, went to sweats and ceremonies together. then he went back to his old ways, we had a falling out, and he’s spent the last six years living and drinking on the streets -except for different periods when Hanna sets him up with an apartment and pays the rent for him for a while. he’s from Ft. Thompson. he’s 64 years old.

‘what’s up, Grey Owl?’ I pull a chair over beside him. there’s a tube coming out of his shirt into a bag where his infected lung is draining out. he’s smoking. when he talks I can barely hear him.
he talks in half-whispers. a tear runs down his face. we talk about old friends. ‘should I sing a couple songs then or what?’ I sing a couple ceremony songs and then share a smoke with him. he says some more stuff but I can’t really make it out. I put my ear close to his face and he whispers.

he rolls a joint of K2 (synthetic marijuana) and we talk about weed. ‘one time I was at a Sundance,’ I say, ‘and I heard Crow Dog say peji was the first medicine. he said it to these two old guys who were talking shit about weed. so, shit. I don’t know.’ he nods and smiles and smokes.

we go inside to eat. Grey Owl nods off, comes to, nods off. he’s pure skin and bones, concentration camp skeletal, hair patchy and thin with about a thumb’s worth of a ponytail.

we talk indian movies, indian books, the missing and disappeared indian women, child-stealing, the achievements of the Ponca, of the Ho-Chunk, Canadian Indians, the history of the indian community here in Lincoln, its ups and downs, its decline.

I tell Grey Owl I’ll come back next Thursday, bring him some DVDs to watch. I hug him, pat his fragile body. he asks me what I’m doing tomorrow but I deflect back to seeing him Thursday because I don’t want to get in the situation of suddenly becoming his go-to friend/companion/visitor. I’m given a leftover bucket (ice cream container), some books from Hanna, and then I leave.

I go straight home, wash my face, and then go down to the bars.

I spend the next nine hours drinking, laughing, going nowhere with all the usual people.
two days later I go into work and my big indian 
friend Felix from Alliance comes in. ‘did ya hear?’ 
he says, smiling, always smiling. ‘what?’ I say. ‘ol 
Grey Owl passed away five hours ago.’ ‘what?’ I say. 
’yup,’ Felix says, ‘now he’s off to the Happy Hunting 
Grounds.’

I talk with another street indian who confirms this 
for me. ‘they’re going to cremate him and spread his 
ashes up in Ft. Thompson,” she says. ‘there’s not going 
to be any service for him’

a skinny guy from my hometown drops off a marijuana 
cookie. Grey Owl and I’s conversation had spilled into my 
Thursday night bar-talk with this guy and now he’s hooking 
me up. ‘thanks man,’ I say, slipping him a ten dollar bill. 
‘thanks.’

I pray for Grey Owl, think about his passing in disbelief. 
Felix orders us a pizza. when everyone finally leaves I think 
back to the song I was singing to myself on my walk to the 
bars that Thursday night.

the song: Grey Owl is dying…
    Grey Owl is dying...
    Grey Owl is dying...

the next night, Sunday night, tonight, I write this poem 
for Grey Owl. rest in peace brother Grey Owl. this one’s 
for you.
Alter Ego
Marisa TenBrink
Mixed Media
Til Kingdom Come
Evan Phillips

To the man who killed me: I know who you are.

I know how you wake up at six o’clock every week day no matter when you’ve fallen asleep the night before. I know how you skip breakfast and detest the taste of coffee, yet you still have a coffee maker and a toaster in your house. They’re never used, but they pull the place together, make it look a little less homely and a little more homey. I know how you wear a tie, always red on Monday and always black on Friday. You pick a black one today. You’re a bit more habitual than I’d expect, but maybe not being expected is what you do best.

You get in your car by seven, after you’ve finished showering and brushing your teeth. You get to work by seven-thirty, parking close to the building because most people arrive at eight. Always early, first in and first out. The place is big and square and as equally unimpressive outside as it is inside, as if the architects were told to make the thing as dreary and dead as life within would soon become.

You work on the fourth floor under bright lights. It feels like a hospital. Off the elevator you greet Sandra, who briefly looks up from her computer and smiles. You smile back, of course, and as soon as she puts her attention back to her computer you take a glance at her chest. Every time, like clockwork. It’s just a thing you do now. You wish you could take her home, splay her on your bed, and fuck her until she screamed. I know how much you’d like to rip off that blouse and titty fuck her and come on her face. You’d like that. The thought used to make your dick chub out, but now you hardly feel that blood-fueled stirring. Maybe you’ve gotten bored of the thought and just haven’t realized it yet.

Your cubicle is away from the windows, and that fact makes you dread coming to work because you know exactly what you have to stare at for the next eight hours. When lunchtime comes you take it outside. It feels calmer there. You try to forget how many years you have left until you can retire. You try to forget how miserable this place makes you, how it makes you feel like a character in a TV show, how it makes you feel trapped in a square within a square. When you get back from lunch you spend a lot of time in your head. You don’t get much done.

You leave, and Sandra is picking up to leave, too. You look at her ass and keep going, pulling your tie loose against your neck. She’s nothing to you but a hot body. You wish you didn’t feel that way but you do.

I go with you back home. “Carry On Wayward Son” comes on the radio. You turn it up, you sing along. It helps you unwind. You need to unwind. Today is Friday, after all.

Pouring yourself a drink also helps you unwind. Mixed. Rum and Coke. You’re not very original. The side of the glass has a picture of Shakespeare on it, above the phrase “Brews Before Shrews”. Sometimes you think it might be true.

You microwave some leftover chicken and take a seat in front of your computer. You sip your drink as it boots up. You go on Facebook, on Reddit, on Youtube. You drink, you unwind, you make yourself another drink. The dirty dishes clink against the others in the sink, all of them rinsed out. Rinsing them
out makes them easier to wash, and you try to
avoid doing dishes until the very last moment.
Saves water, you say, but you just don’t want
to do them.

You don’t want to do a lot of things these
days.

I wonder if I cross your mind, even if it’s just
a little bit. I think I might.

You sit back down at your computer, sip
your drink. You think about going down
to the bars, but you probably won’t. Maybe
tomorrow. Only certain types of people go to
the bars alone anyway. As the glass reaches
your lips you pause, wondering what the
difference is between drinking alone at the
bars and drinking alone at home. At least the
bars have a social atmosphere, they make you
feel less alone. And tapping away on your
phone can make it seem like you’re waiting on
someone who will never come. Sometimes you
feel like you’re waiting on someone without
having to go out.

You have an account on dating websites.
OkCupid, PlentyofFish. You have Tinder, too,
swiping right on every girl just to see which
ones think you’re attractive. Most of your
matches are bots, but you swipe anyway.
You go on OkC and PoF, scrolling through
girls you’ve seen before, looking at match
percentages and chemistry results as if they
mean something. As if algorithms can tell you
you’ll like someone. You don’t think you’ve
ever liked any of these girls, not in that way,
but you’ve gone on dates with some, slept with
others. They all end up the same way, with you
backing out of a relationship you don’t want.
You think that you really just want to be left
alone, that being alone saves yourself drama
and money and sanity. But you can’t help
feeling lonely once in a while, you can’t help
pining for some sort of human connection. You
think that the dates, the sex, the contact helps
you in the same way that a drink helps a thirsty
man. Once you’re no longer parched, you stop
wanting that water. You wish it weren’t true,
but you can’t change how you feel.

You browse, you scroll, you swipe, looking
at these girls arranged as if in an online store,
as if they’re something you can buy. You come
across some who make you horny and you go
into the bathroom, using the iPod you have
specifically for porn. You find something that
strikes you — most things do, you like to tell
people “My dick don’t discriminate” because it
makes them laugh. You remove your shirt, you
jerk off into the sink. You look at yourself in the
mirror, wilting dick in one hand. The eyes that
stare back feel like they belong to someone else.

You take your drink into the living room,
push aside the blinds just a crack. The trees
wave in a breeze. You feel like a detective
standing there, one hand on your hip, drinking,
trying to figure it all out.

You finish your drink and make another. The
alcohol starts to hit you.

You decide to watch TV, flipping through
channels until you find something that
interests you. Some cop drama. You’re a
detective, after all. You pull out your phone
between commercials. Facebook, Reddit, OkC.
You stumble when you try to get up for
another drink, but you make it. You pour more
Captain than you normally do.

You fall back onto your couch, set the glass
on the coffee table that has never seen coffee.
You lean back. Your eyes turn hazy, automatic,
watching characters on a screen whose lives are
as fragmented and fabricated as your own.
You’re glad you keep all of these thoughts hidden from other people, you’re glad you keep them so distant. It makes you feel like a puzzle: A big, pretty picture from far away, but up close you start to notice all the cracks. Too many cracks.

You pour another drink, drop it, curse, clean up, pour again. You down this one fast and fill once more. You’ve lost count at how many. Shakespeare still tells you Brews Before Shrews. You believe it this time.

You drink, you watch, you drink again. Your mind trails to the Governor in your room.

You get up.

Your thoughts are a blur, none of them good. You unlock the case, pluck three bullets from the moon clip, load the Governor. You spin the chamber, snap it shut, point it at your temple. You pull the trigger.

Click.

If you pulled again you’d have your .45 ACP, but you can’t do it.

You can’t do a lot of things these days.

You empty the Governor and place it on your bed. Your hands are shaking as you collapse to the floor. I watch you break down, tears dripping off your nose. I wish I could do something, but I can’t. I am, after all, still dead.

That child you once knew—that child you once were—is still dead.

To the man who killed me: If you decide to take the gun again, I won’t blame you. We shouldn’t have turned out like this anyway.
Issues
Robert Semrad
Oil
adolescent
dynamics
amanda cecil

girls are beasts screaming behind closed mouths and boys are viruses worming through veins with vain heads and crystal-shard teeth and raw meat kisses like pink dead fish bloody and soft.

boys rip through girl’s capillaries and girls sew spilt ends with needle and thread and thimble heads and girls vomit names of boys between bile-sput in toilets: henry luke charlie eli.

the sound of a shrieking beast protecting her hopeful nest. dropping worms in her babies’ open throats.
Painter with Parkinson’s
Andrew Hyde-Strand

He wishes to paint expressions
explicit of his soul’s impressions.
Leaving old paintings behind,
shaky hands can’t express the mind.
Even the slightest shake in stroke
makes art into a joke.
Staring at space, he doesn’t sleep.
Unable to trigger beauty, he weeps.
Empty white walls laugh
and tear his heart in half.
He knows mountains that fill skies
and stretch above clouds—snowcaps fly.
He dreams surreal: the placid smile
of green from a floating isle.
He sees eyes that have continents
surrounded by blue, bottomless.
Alone in the studio, he screams.
He’s only a painter in his dreams.
Driving metal tool in direction.
he’ll exit with one piece of perfection.
He forces hands steady
and splatters a canvas cherry.
Dripping streams of his warm paint
will cause the first arrival to faint.
Wait For Me
Katelynn Gebauer
Mixed Media
Fingers Travel
Amanda Cecil

fingers travel the body, slip
in hip canyons.
those lingering traces make
goosebumps dot our arms.
stars dot the half-light
sky. bite
lip ear shoulder. lower,
fingers linger travel trace.
our canyons.
goosebump hips slipping in the half-light
-stars, stars
dot our arms.
Manipulation
Katelynn Gebauer
Mixed Media
Mr. Linden’s Library
Kendra Hinton

The bell above the door jangled as the woman opened it, echoing through the otherwise quiet library. Lisette glanced up at the noise before stepping further into the aging building. It was not a very big library, from first look. Shelves lined the walls, stacked with book after dusty book. They ran in an almost maze-like pattern through the center of the room, stuffed with thick and thin volumes alike. Dust particles swirled in the air on sunbeams that shone in through the windows, kicking up in small vortexes as Lisette wandered through the labyrinth.

Lisette was not entirely sure what she was looking for, exactly. She had run out of books to read at home, did not have cable, or a reliable internet connection, and was becoming very, very bored. Even her cat seemed bored, laying across the sofa and sighing deeply whenever she walked past. Out of desperation, Lisette had decided to finally visit Mr. Linden’s Library, which she had walked past countless times, but had never seen anyone go in or come out.

Now that she was in, she could see why.

From what she could see, all of the books looked a hundred years old or more. “Is there anything new in here?” she muttered to herself, trailing the fingers of her left hand over the spine of the books as she walked past. Out of desperation, Lisette decided to finally visit Mr. Linden’s Library, which she had walked past countless times, but had never seen anyone go in or come out.

Now that she was in, she could see why.

From what she could see, all of the books looked a hundred years old or more. “Is there anything new in here?” she muttered to herself, trailing the fingers of her left hand over the spine of the books as she walked past. Rough leather and dusty paper chafed against her fingers. Through a gap in the shelves, she caught sight of the front desk, located near the back corner of the library. Something moved, making Lisette jump and cover her mouth to hide the yelp, her heart trying to pound right out of her chest. Was there anyone else in here? She didn’t hear anyone else. Who else would be in here?

A moment later, a stooped, frail old man straightened behind the desk, his robin’s egg blue eyes fixating on her behind the thick lenses of his glasses. Lisette lowered her hands and immediately moved out of sight of the old man.

That had to be the librarian. Mr. Linden. It would only make sense that he was here, in his library. The thought comforted Lisette, calming her pounding heart and soothing her fears. She wandered further into the library. The scent of dust and something earthy, like mold and mildew, hung in the air and made Lisette sneeze three times in a row.

A raspy “Bless you,” drifted across the room to Lisette. She rubbed her nose but didn’t reply.

The books seemed to get older as she delved further in, the layer of dust ever thickening. Her fingers stopped quite suddenly, and she slowed to a stop to take a look at the book that had caught her hand. It didn’t seem like anything special, other than it was old. A cracked and faded red leather served as the cover, with barely visible gold leaf for the title engraved on the spine. Intrigued, Lisette pulled it out, grimaced as dust billowed out into the air. She waved a hand through the cloud and blew on the cover, sending more dust swirling around her. The owner really needed to clean more.

A sudden need urged Lisette to take the book home with her. She was not sure what the book was, or what it was about, but she found herself walking towards the front desk, book in...
her hands, before she had really decided to. Mr. Linden watched her walk up, one eye squinted almost shut, his brown suit coat almost as old and decrepit as the library itself. His thin, wispy white hair seemed to be still attached only through strong will. A strong breeze could blow it away.

Nevertheless, Lisette set the book down on the counter and rummaged for her wallet.

“I’d like to take out this one please,” she said.

The old man stared at her for a long moment, then down at the book, and then back at her again. “Are you sure you want to do that, lass?”

_Lass? Who called anyone lass anymore?_ Lisette paused in searching her purse and looked up at the librarian, trying to hide her shiver as she met his eyes. “Uh, yeah, I want to take out this book.” She plopped her library card down on the desk. She didn’t exactly know if she needed it or not, or if it still applied to this library, but she would give it a try anyways.

The librarian kept staring at her, breathing deeply, though it sounded like it took a great deal of effort to do so. “I would strongly recommend against it.”

Lisette frowned, and then opened up the cover and let the pages flutter against her fingers before dropping it closed again. Mr. Linden winced as she did so, shuffling away a step.

“Why?” she asked. “Is it _cursed_ or something?”

“It is, lass,” Mr. Linden rasped, meeting her eyes once more. “And you should not take it lightly.”

“Oh, okay,” Lisette replied in a decidedly dubious tone. “So how can I check it out?”

The old man glowered at her, then pulled out a yellowed and lined sheet of paper below the desk and a fountain pen. “Fill out your information here,” he said, his voice irritated. Lisette smiled pleasantly at him and filled out a line with her information about halfway down the paper. The last few entries in the log were several years old, and higher on the paper, _decades_. The library had clearly been open a very long time.

“Thank you!” she said as she hugged the book to her chest and exited the library. She could feel the pressure of his eyes the whole way out.

What she didn’t see, however, was Mr. Linden shaking his head and sighing, saying to himself, “I tried to warn her. I really did.”

~

Lisette didn’t start reading until she tucked in for the night, her cat settled between her legs as she pulled the book into her lap.

“Let’s see what a scary book you are,” she said, running her hand over the cracked leather before flipping it open.

The story began as a sort of seventeenth-century mystery, she supposed. She wasn’t exactly sure where it fell on the timeline of the world, but she was pulled in nonetheless.

A few pages in, a strange bump began to form in the middle of the spine. Lisette prodded at it, but when it felt like nothing but the small bump it was, she went back to reading. She couldn’t explain it, but even though the story was only subpar, she couldn’t stop reading.

Every so often, she would notice the bump had grown, the further into the book she got. Around chapter two, a — a _plant_ began to bloom from the bump in the spine. She stared at it for several moments, trying to figure out _how_. She poked at it with a finger. Yes, it was real.
She stared at it for a moment longer, eyebrow raised, before she decided that she did not care and continued to read, noticing that the plant grew with every page turn.

Several hours later, well, well into the night, Lisette was still reading. She had to finish the book. She had to. She had to she had to she had to. The tiny vine had spread from the spine. Her eyes burned as they sped over the pages, taking in words but not processing them fully in her mind, almost all of her attention focused on that tiny vine that was now spilling out of the book over her lap.

She was nearing the end when her exhaustion finally caught up to her, weighing down her limbs and making her chin droop to her chest. Her cat wasn’t moving. Why wasn’t she moving? She turned the page, her eyes all but slits. She tried to stay awake; she really did. But no matter how hard she struggled, sleep pulled at her, dragged her to unconsciousness. Finally, she gave in, let her eyes drop closed.

The last thing she saw before they closed was a bright, blooming red flower.

~

Mr. Linden sighed as he locked the door of Mr. Linden’s Library behind him for the last time. Closed by City Health and Safety Department read the sign hanging on the door, in big, blocky red letters. Underneath, smaller but no less severe, Due to infestation of toxic mold. If experiencing hallucinations, insomnia, or fatigue, you are urged to visit your nearest health professional immediately.

He shook his head as he shuffled away. “I tried to warn her about the book,” he murmured to himself. “I tried to warn her.”

Himeji
Marisa TenBrink
Mixed Media
Mother’s Footsteps
Irene Elliot

Danielle pressed her hands against her back, satisfied with the popping that followed. She thanked her hostess for the spare futon, but the straw padding gave little reprieve from the hard wood floor. The sleepy fishing village was more than accommodating and the inhabitants amicable despite her outsider status. Her stay was going to be brief anyway.

“One more day.” She said to herself, bringing her mother’s pendant to her lips. She kissed the intersecting stars in its center and let it drop back under her tank top.

Danielle hefted her pack on her back. The village woke up far earlier than she did. The villagers bustled with their morning chores, moving past her without so much more than a glance. She closed her eyes, breathing in the humid air filled the smells of steamed rice and the docks at the far end of the village. She would miss this place. She opened her eyes, inspecting their simple bamboo huts reinforced with stone for the last time. The wall surrounding the village was made from the same material, but topped with bamboo sharpened into spears. A large gate was the only way in or out of the village; they were very protective of their people despite their laid-back nature.

The gatekeeper sat on a wooden stool by the door. At Danielle’s approach, he rubbed at his receding hairline and pulled his shirt down to more effectively cover his paunch.

“Leaving us again so soon?” He said in Chinese, smiling broadly. “Where do you go on these long walks? Do you need company?”

Danielle looked down at him as he was eye-level at her chest when he stood, much like the rest of his people in the village. She chuckled and crossed her arms, responding in his native language. “No, no. Not today. I’ll have some company.”

He looked defeated, letting his gut hang out. “Ah, then where will you be going with this lucky person?”

“I’ve been to that bamboo forest down one of the paths a few times. I’d like to see it one more time before I leave.”

“What?” His smile vanished. “No. That place is dangerous!”

Danielle held up her hand. “I’m sorry. I’ve made up my mind to go. What I’m hunting is out there.”

“What kind of hunter can you be?”

He motioned toward her. “You have no equipment.

You have no gun.”

She patted the machete at her hip.

His shoulders lowered and he rolled his head back. “Yes, yes. You have a very big knife, but no muscle. Too thin! You’re a woman.”

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

“You will still go despite what I say, but listen. The forest is dangerous.”

“As you said.”

“You do not understand!” He shouted, spittle flying from his mouth. “We have lost many men in that forest. But, if you’re going to go, listen. Watch for tiger traps. There are many forgetful hunters and their traps are still out there. Stay on the paths for that reason. Also…”

“Yes?” Danielle said, watching the discomfort extinguish the last of his humor.
“Don’t talk to any strangers.”
Danielle looked past him toward the worn path outside the village.
The gatekeeper stepped aside for her, muttering a string of Chinese too fast for Danielle to catch. She walked past him with a faint, thankful smile.

Past the gate, the valley was filled with vivid greenery unlike anything that Danielle had seen in her past travels. The valley held a newness that was un tarnished by pollution or ruined by tourists common to areas like this one. The air held a quiet peace with a soft fragrance of the native fauna and lazy, white clouds slept in the sky. The villagers wore a path into the dense foliage with their trading carts. She followed the path to a fork in the road. One path connected to the sister village. The other was mostly covered by grass and speckled with powder-blue forget-me-nots. It looked forgotten and abandoned, but Danielle was always fond of the path less traveled.
The path led to the forbidden bamboo forest that the gatekeeper warned of. The bamboo grew in tight bunches, but there was still a navigable way through. Danielle stepped into the forest. The stalks created a claustrophobic path around her, brushing against her arms and leaning on her as if to keep her from further entry. It wasn’t long before she heard another set of footsteps coming up from behind. She paused; so did the steps.

“Don’t sneak up on me.” Danielle said.
“I was only trying to surprise you, Danielle. It was meant to be fun.” She recognized her mother’s soft voice, coming from somewhere deeper in the forest behind her. The soft rolling French r’s were tell-tale sign. Her accent never left even though she traveled abroad so frequently.

“You didn’t.” Danielle said, resuming her deliberate gait through the forest
“I’m happy to see you.” Imogen said, closing the distance on her daughter. “Did you have any problem finding the place?”
“Obviously not.”
“Oh. Well, it is good to see you, even if you’re tired.”

Danielle said nothing, continuing along the narrow path that finally began to breathe. She checked their position. She memorized a few landmarks along the way: a large rock that looked like a hunched old man in the shadows, a budding narcissus flower there, and a freshly cut bamboo stalk to her left. They were on the correct path. She hadn’t expected to run into her traveling companion so soon.

“It’s been awhile, hasn’t it?” Imogen said. Danielle felt the smile in her voice. “You’ve grown so much. And, oh, why did you cut off all of your pretty hair though…?”

“It makes hunting easier. Doesn’t get grabbed in a fight. Won’t get tangled in anything. You know, stuff that Dad taught me.” Danielle said, wincing and brushing the buzzed backside of her head.

“It’s a shame.” Imogen said, creeping up behind Danielle.

“Don’t do that.”
“Don’t do what?”
“Don’t get so close. It makes me feel uncomfortable. We need to keep moving. We have a lot of ground to cover before we’re through.” Danielle said.

“It’s just been so long since I’ve seen you, my petite souris. I thought we could talk.”

“Isn’t that what we’re doing now?”
“And I suppose a hug…?"
“No.” Danielle said. The mere thought of touching the woman behind her made her skin prickle with disgust.

Defeated, Imogen said, “Whatever you want. I’m here for you, Danielle.”

Danielle slid her machete out of the sheath and found comfort in the grooved handle that fit her fingers so well. She cut through the errant fledging plants along their path.

“How long has it been—” Imogen said, her breath hitching with each chop of the machete. “Since our—oh. Our last meeting?”

“Two years ago, France.” Danielle said quietly. It was back when they stayed in the small cottage just outside of Paris. It was the night that Mom left and, after that, their family was never the same.

“Danielle? Did you hear me?”

“I don’t know.” Danielle said loudly, snorting at Imogen’s urgency. “Years.”

“It was out in Ireland. You and I. Your father couldn’t be trusted to deal with the delicacy of that situation. He would have squashed those poor pixies before they had a chance to speak their piece. You know how he is…”

Danielle kept quiet. She knew her father well enough that he favored the stick to the carrot.

“How delightful were they, non?” Imogen laughed, a lyrical sound that Danielle missed sorely. “Their kind are quite whimsical, but terribly clever. Remember how they tried to sway us to stay with a lavish party and exquisite gifts?”

“Yeah, we had to refuse or we would have been bound to them. Everyone knows that’s how fairies work.” Danielle said, wiping the machete’s flat edge on her pant leg. “It’s just what they do.”

“This place also holds so many fascinating creatures, but I am more interested in the quiet, mysterious one keeping me at arm’s length right now.” Imogen said, reaching out for Danielle.

Danielle lurched forward, moving out of the way of her touch. “Then why didn’t you stay?”

“I had to go. You can’t twist my words around like that.” Imogen said. “I’m here now, non? That’s more that I can say for you. You hid in the furthest corner of the world away from your family. Our family. How can you accuse me of such things?”

Danielle balked at her mother’s barbed words. She stiffened, trudging through the thicket.

Imogen sighed. “It doesn’t have to be this way, Danielle. This little adventure can be good for us.”

Danielle slashed through the last of the thick brush ahead of them. The path opened up into a hidden glade. In the center, a reflecting pool encircled with rocks sat alone. Pink lotuses floated in its waters, but no wind dared move them. The bamboo stalks curled and shaded the area, which cooled the air considerably.

Danielle’s skin dimpled when she stepped inside. She shivered and stepped over the stumps in her way. She heard Imogen’s footsteps follow behind her.

“I’m sorry.” Danielle said, making her way to the pool. “You can’t expect me to roll out the red carpet for you when you show up out of nowhere after leaving us.”

“I’m sorry too.” She said. “But, that’s all in the past. We are in the now. That’s what is important.”

Danielle reached the edge of the pool, looking down into the black mirror. She saw her reflection staring back up at her. Her heart-
shaped face reminded her of her mother’s silhouette. Their faces were similar, down to their steely blue eyes. When she was a child, she laughed at the idea she would be anything like her mother. Now, years later, her own reflections haunted her.

“We can make things right again. If you would stop being so stubborn and give me a chance. I am the only mother you have, Danielle.”

Danielle looked around the pool. She noticed a small stone with a little x etched into the moss.

“Then we should do what we do best.”

“And what’s that, petite souris?”

“We’re hunters, right?”

“I-It is what we do. I, however, followed you, my dear. What is it we’re hunting today?”

“We were in China before, remember?”

Danielle positioned herself carefully in front of the marked stone.

“It has been a long time. I barely speak the native language let alone mine anymore.” “We were hunting jiangshi.” Danielle precisely took a step backward.

“Oh. Oh, yes, I recall. The hopping vampires. I remember those troublesome creatures.”

Imogen said, a slight tremor in her voice.

“What are you doing?”

Danielle heard Imogen step backward, mirroring her own movement.

“Dad took care of them. Tore them to pieces with a knife made from a peach tree. He usually takes more of a hands-on approach than I do. You know that though.” Danielle prepared herself, taking another step backward. Imogen did the same. “We’re hunting something more clever than that.”

“Nothing is more clever than the both of us.”

“Do you remember what Xìntú means?” Danielle said, stepping back once more.

“X-Xìntú? I told you. My Chinese was not what it once was.” Imogen stepped back again.

“It means ‘follower’ roughly.” Danielle continued her pace as if walking on a balance beam in reverse. Her mother’s footsteps mirrored her own.

“Yes. I-I recall that. You should have told me we were fighting such a clever monster. I could have prepared better.”

“They can’t touch their prey, not until they voluntary look at the Xìntú. It’s part of their rules. You can’t acknowledge their presence either, or that gives them free reign too.” She counted her steps carefully.

“Danielle, we should formulate a plan. I have a spell book and there’s some magic we can use to trap this thing. I can show you the spell and we can work together to stop it.”

“And just so you know, my mother was killed a year ago by something far worse than a miserable creature like you.” Danielle took one more step back, a full thirteen paces from the stone she marked by the pool. She heard the ground give way as the creature masquerading as her mother fell into the pit trap. The Xìntú shrieked in her mother’s tone as it fell onto the spears below.

Danielle shook her unease away and sat down at the edge of the trap, dangling her legs into the pit a few feet out of the creature’s grasp. It swung at her feet weakly, sputtering blood out of its frog-like maw. Its bald dome was crowned with a ring of wispy, moss-colored hair that was flecked with blood. A spear punctured through its hunched, gray back and another through the front of its throat.
It was nude, speckled with dark scales that looked like smooth pebbles jammed into its skin.

Danielle pressed her lips to her mother’s pendant and waited. Soon the creature would be dead. She wouldn’t have to wait long to collect proof of her kill. Her and her family were hunters, after all. It’s just what they did.

Irene Elliot: An SDSU Alumnus Author

Jena Christianson

In a dream, there are no rules. Horrors lurk as realities—creatures, murderers, and your most embarrassing moments can rip you apart in a flash—or in protagonist Olive’s case, with the snap of her fingers. Olive has a gift; she can visit and manipulate the dreams of her peers, her parents, and her enemies. That’s a lot of power for a high school girl.

Self-proclaimed “homebody” and “nerd,” South Dakota State University alumnus, Irene Elliot features Olive in her first novel, Lucid.

When I first asked to interview Irene, I bought the book on Amazon Kindle with the plans of skimming it, but I quickly consumed the entire thing, word by word, and proceeded to talk about it with everyone. However, this wasn’t my first encounter with her work.

I first met Irene in a fiction workshop class in college in 2010. The class contained maybe 12 to 15 students, and we had to read and generate feedback for each of them. With its real-yet-surreal nature, Irene’s fiction stood out as anything other than typical. It was dark and disturbing yet laced with humor and sarcasm to kept things seeming light (even when blood and guts were dripping in your face).

In class, she dabbled in supernatural horror, yet somehow her monsteresque characters still seemed more tethered to the real than most realism: a high school girl obsessed with a boy, told in first person, the narrator hiding behind dumpsters where he works, lurking in the shadows—tentacles and teeth meet a lonely and desperately hopeful young girl. Spoiler: she eats him. My favorite part about her fiction was that no matter the plot or characters, you could never predict the next move. This rings true in Lucid, which has quickly become my favorite Irene Elliot piece.

You first started writing as a teenager, but like many other authors, did not always plan to write as a career. When and why did you decide to pursue writing?

There wasn’t a specific time that I woke up and decided being a writer was the thing for
me. I wrote a number of pulpy horror and hokey science fiction stories back in high school. While I enjoyed it, I never really thought they would branch out to anything meaningful and my writing sat on the back burner for a long time. When I started at SDSU, I took all the writing courses I could and that flung open some doors for me. The university setting changed how my stories formulated and—as a result—they turned out much better. Shocker, I know. As far as my career, it just sort of fell into my lap after college. An amazing opportunity came to me that allowed me to write full-time; so, I took it. This resulted in my first novel, *Lucid.*

I identify you as a supernatural-horror writer who teeters somewhere between the real and surreal. How do you identify what genre you write in, and why?

While I like to think I’m a horror writer, that’s not quite as true as it used to be. I’ve written a bit of fantasy, science fiction, non-fiction, and some pretty terrible poetry. However, my heart stays with horror since it’s what I know after years of surrounding myself with it. So, while I don’t write as much horror anymore, I do incorporate those themes into my stories regularly.

In your writing, you develop diverse characters that seem to embody their own realistic personalities. Do your characters exhibit traits that come from you, others, or somewhere else?

Whoohoy. I’m a bit of a worrier—an anxious sort of personality. I’m an introvert on top of that, so I tend to keep to myself. If I wrote myself as every character, it would probably make for a pretty boring read.

However, I think every writer unconsciously writes themselves or people they know into roles in their stories even if only to a small degree. The characters I write change pretty drastically through each draft. Mostly, I want my characters to be relatable in some way or another with my readers—that’s what’s important to me.

**However, character development doesn’t happen overnight.** Most authors—even the big-named, practiced ones pumping out their 20th book—will spend multiple years on multiple drafts for each novel. What was your process?

*Lucid* took several years to complete with about six drafts. I started *Lucid* with the idea of it being a young adult trilogy with completely different characters and agendas that would have been expanded throughout the books. As I went through different drafts, it started to evolve into a smaller piece that focused more on Olive than any other character. Ultimately, I’m happy with the end result of *Lucid*, but I sometime wonder if a longer series would have helped my career more.

**Having read the novel from front to back in a mere few days, I hungered for more of Olive and her devilish nightmares and cheeky dream alterations.** Have you considered writing a sequel?

This is a question I get asked a lot. *Lucid* was not intended to be a series. However, because I have received this question frequently enough, I have considered writing either a short story follow-up or even a novella sometime in the future.

**As a budding author getting her first work out into the world, how do you stay motivated**
to write everyday?

Honestly, there are some days that writing feels like the dumbest thing I could be doing with my time. While my husband and friends are a tremendous help, I have to stay self-motivated. Writing is the thing I love to do, and because I have a great support network—even on my worst days—I can bounce back. I want to be successful and get my stories out there, but I also have realistic expectations about what that means.

What do you see as your biggest weakness or obstacle regarding her writing career?

A few years back, The Onion wrote an article entitled, "Today The Day They Find Out You’re A Fraud." It outlines exactly how I feel when I’m at my worst with my writing. Honestly, I don’t know who doesn’t have "fraud days." I let myself have time to wallow in my misery, but then I’m back on the horse again. There’s not much to do to overcome the anxiety and doubt that goes hand-in-hand with writing, other than shut up and keep writing.

Is Lucid your first novel-length piece?

Lucid is my first completed and polished novel. I have written a few other novels for NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), but to be completely fair they are horrible messes of contrived plot twists, terrible dialogue, and pretty confusing characters.

Though, on that note, I am working on fixing up one novel I wrote during NaNoWriMo, and it should be in its final draft sometime in 2016 (with any luck).

Can you lucid dream?

While writing Lucid, I did try to lucid dream. Initially, It was more work than I thought. Avid lucid dreamers suggested keeping a dream journal every night and fall asleep with different mantras like “I am awake” over and over before conking out. I couldn’t keep up with it. That being said, I get on the cusp of lucid dreaming, but I can’t control anything. If I woke up, I could fall back asleep into the same dream; that’s the closest I ever got to lucid dreaming.

After we graduated from college, Irene and I joined the same writing group and exchanged work for a year or so. Unfortunately, the group drifted apart due to work stresses, and I hadn’t reconnected with her (with the exception of the occasional Facebook “like”) until conducting this interview. Consequently, I have remembered amidst my graduate reading how much I enjoy unusual fiction—a luxury I have missed sorely. For that, I sincerely thank Irene for introducing me to a novel I never planned to read but couldn’t seem to put down.
Who, Me?
Robert Semrad
Oil Paint
Your Weekly Trip Downtown

Alexis Becker

I stare at you as you walk
down the alley, black glasses
obscuring your hazel eyes. You wander
down to Thirty-Fourth Street
and stop at the ice cream shop.
You’ll get a chocolate twist cone,
licking it as you dodge traffic cones
blocking the bustling sidewalk.
Other pedestrians will look into shop
windows, observing displays behind glass
store fronts. You pause at a street
vendor’s cart before you wander
a little further. “Don’t wander
too far,” I whisper, eating my own cone,
slipping into shadowed side streets
careful to avoid your notice as you walk
across a grassy park. Pretty glass
figurines catch your eye so you shop
around, smiling at the grizzled shop
keeper, moving slowly as you wander
around the store. Smoky glass
obscures my view, my cone
of vision broken until you walk
out, moving to the Golden Street
Theatre. I watch from across the street,
waiting in front of the book shop
that your last boyfriend used to walk
past on his mid-afternoon wanders.
You always loved the purple cone
flowers he bought, placing them in glass
vases. You even got a little glass
flower last Christmas – I watched street
side as you smiled. Now I duck behind a cone
shaped statue as you exit from another shop
excites me. Will you wander
towards me on your long walk
home? With sunglasses back on, you window shop
down one street, and up another, wandering
past my cone’s shadow as I watch you walk.
Creating Harvey Dunn's “Feminine Images”
Shelby Bauer

Last November, South Dakota State University students and faculty members dove into an experience of a lifetime. After seven years of collaboration, The South Dakota Art Museum, alongside SDSU students and faculty, performed at the Donor Auditorium, bringing the production to the stage in a three-night live performance of Harvey Dunn’s twelve “Feminine Images.” The production brought the women of Dunn’s paintings to life, each performance reaching out and touching the hearts of the audience and all those involved. With the dedication of the tech crew, performers, and head collaborators Lynn Verschoor, Darla Biel, and Melissa Hauschild-Mork, Dunn’s magic merged all forms of the arts, showcasing literature, art, dance, music, and film.

One of the Harvey Dunn Collaborative Projects’ earlier iterations took the stage of the Performing Arts Center in the spring of 2013, and was the product of Lynn Verschoor’s vision and Darla Biel’s poetry for Dunn’s “Feminine Images” exhibit at the art museum. Melissa Hauschild-Mork joined the team soon after, marking the start of what would evolve into an ambitious creative project, which culminated with November’s show. Sitting down with head collaborators, Lynn Verschoor, Darla Biel, and Melissa Hauschild-Mork afforded inside look into the project’s roots, development, and impact on the community.

What sparked the idea to put an event like
this together, or in other words, what were the different motivations behind it?

Darla: “In 2007, I believe, The South Dakota Art Museum had an exhibit of Dunn’s work called “Feminine Images” that featured paintings and illustrations with female forms in them. The SDAM Director, Lynn Verschoor, asked if I would write poems in response to the show, and the museum subsequently published them and Dunn’s images together in a small book, a “chapbook.” Some time after, Melissa Hauschild-Mork and I were asked to be on a panel discussing women in the arts, and she and I happened to be seated next to each other during the presentation. As I talked about the ekphrastic poetry I had written in response to Dunn’s work, I could feel her interest, and she turned to me and said, “Oh, we should do something with those!” She was the one who first had the idea to do choreography with the poetry. So we tried a little, and it turned out we liked it, so we presented an early iteration and found that other people liked it, too! In that first iteration, I literally sat on the stage and read the poetry with a penlight while she and her studio danced. I would read; they would dance. It was very static compared to the final version. Even though there was about a four-year gap between that and our April 2013 iteration, people who had seen that early version kept telling us, “You know, I always remember that Harvey Dunn thing you did!”. After that, it grew organically and kind of got away from us, finally evolving into the November show that feels complete.”

And what about you Melissa, what would you say drew you into an event like this?

Melissa: The idea of being able to create work that had greater depth with such a spherical, holistic quality was just so appealing to me. At the time of the first iteration, there was discussion in higher education concerning collaboration. Because I am interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning, I was interested in understanding a collaborative experience for not only myself, but also for my students, and how it might affect how we learn.

A large portion of the project was to not just create this collaborative piece of art, but to experience teaching and learning alongside students in a non-traditional learning environment. This project has provided an opportunity to develop a line of inquiry that supports research efforts in engagement experience.

Lynn, what is it about Darla Biel that led you to approach her for the first collaboration? Were you at all surprised, or moved by what she came up with?

Lynn: I worked with Darla on a National Endowment for the Arts grant project titled “Dakota Reader” so I knew the quality of her work and invited her to compose written work based on the exhibition featuring the depiction of Dunn’s “Feminine Images.. I was really impressed with how poignant her pieces were. We hosted a public reading and the response was overwhelmingly positive so we printed the catalog of her work with the paintings. The work continued to inspire other artists. There was an improvisational piano recital by SDSU professor Mary Spencer. Darla read the poems and Dr. Spencer responded to the words. It was really powerful. Then the dance piece developed and the rest is history.
I was very moved. I spent a lot of time looking at and thinking about Dunn’s work. Dunn was tied to South Dakota; he had a deep connection with the land that lasted a lifetime. His understanding and respect for women was forged during his early years as a homesteader. He was an observant young man and he witnessed firsthand the essential role women played in homesteading. His mother worked in the fields when necessary and took care of the domestic chores, but most importantly she took time to nurture the children and help them identify ways to enrich their lives. She spent many hours drawing with Dunn by lamplight. Dunn shared a very special bond with his mother; this encouragement sparked his passion for art. As a result of Dunn’s observations and experience he instructed his students that they needed to “paint women strong, to be feminine is strong not weak.” Dunn depicts women as strong central, grounded figures. Darla absolutely grasped that notion and did an amazing job of illuminating characteristics of the women Dunn depicted; anything you do with Dunn is magic.

**Darla, what did you personally want to convey through your poetry during the performance?**

*Darla:* I think that the audience probably came away thinking that Dunn’s working was relevant to them even today. Maybe they had thought of his work as old-fashioned, but, hopefully, the way that we presented gave them new insight into how it can be relevant to their life today. All the paintings were feminine images with a female figure in them, so while writing the poetry, I put myself mentally in the place of the woman in the painting. I asked myself what she was thinking, what qualities she had and just tried to think about different experiences all women go through—and really what we all go through. I wanted to capture that human struggle and emotions, while also celebrating the perseverance and grit of those who’ve come before us.

**What was it like to witness and be a part of the collaboration of so many different campus groups? How did they work together in this event?**

*Melissa:* We all speak the same language. Each group had a different way of describing specific things, but we learned to recognize the connections. Art is art; we all speak the language of expression. As faculty members, we can say we learned and grew through the project with our students.

Creativity is messy with just one person, putting many of us together, all with different ideas, was even crazier. We got off topic on many occasion and someone had to reel us back in. What happened was we connected; people came on board, not because they wanted creative scholarship or research, they participated because the project interested them. They invested in it because they wanted it to work. There was a lovely give and take about the way we worked together, so the joy of the collaborative spirit overrode whatever was going on in the undercurrent.

*Lynn:* I really loved watching the students dive in and participate in the creative process. Everyone worked so hard. I had the great pleasure to work with some of the theater students on props. They were incredible; they dove right in and had a ball felting. It was a messy, long process but they hung in there. I
have such a profound respect for the student commitment to the project. I also have the utmost respect for all the collaborators. All the energy, drive, and thoughtfulness it took from everyone to create the whole piece was amazing.

*Darla:* It was fascinating! I love poetry and writing poetry and putting it on a shelf, but this was so much more interesting to me—as a person, and as an artist. I think the poems can stand alone, the music can stand alone, the dance can stand alone on its own, but when you put it all together, the layered experience becomes much more than any one element. It was humbling, in a way, to think that I was able to be a part of this unique production. I mean, for a university to have so many different departments working together to create a production like this isn’t common, but we were able to do it because we had incredible support from our department heads, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the SDSU Provost, and other people at SDSU such as University Relations and Yeager Media. And our students, of course! This couldn’t have happened without them; I am most proud of how many students were involved in the production. After being part of this production, they have a larger sense of what types of collaboration are possible; for example, one of the students who was in the earlier version, now lives in Rapid City, and is now doing her own collaboration there with dance, music, and a permanent sculpture exhibit in the Downtown area. Whether or not she would have done that on her own, I don’t know, but I think her work has been influenced by the experience she had here with the Dunn collaboration. She was able to take that with her to somewhere else in our state and that’s exciting to me, because one of the goals our group has always had is to challenge and expand the expected forms of art in our region. I am just grateful I got to do one little piece, and hopefully create some lasting impact.

Were different insights given by each group participating?

*Melissa:* My role in the project was that of movement/dance director. I was deeply invested in the creative process with my students. I never walked into a rehearsal feeling like this was my work; we spent time looking at the paintings and talking about their textures, using visual thinking strategies to identify the themes. We inquired about how the painting connected with Darla’s words, and how movement could capture the essence of meaning. It was a very creative and messy process. I would bring information back and forth between the collaborating groups. Sometimes there would be pieces we didn’t have all the music to; this caused a bit of stress for dancers who were not used to working this way. But, we all learned to trust in the process. Through our research in student engagement, we learned it was a real eye-opening experience for dancers. There were challenges, but through the craziness, learning and gratitude prevailed...we all learned about ourselves as people and as artists.

How did you expect an event like this to impact the community? What were the reactions?

*Darla:* At first, we didn’t think too much about what kind of impact it would have on the audience; we just thought the project would be interesting and fun. As we pursued
our own artistic ideas, however, we found that people got really excited about it because they were already familiar with Harvey Dunn’s images. Our work simply gave them a new way to see and understand Dunn and the content of his work; in doing so, they were actually engaging in new ways with this landscape and regional history, so we began to understand our work from that perspective. The creative work and artistic product were worthwhile in and of themselves, but we found great satisfaction in realizing that we were actually helping people think in new ways about historical events and the lived experiences of the people who went through them. People were very supportive and positive about the work throughout the long process.

**What new insights of Dunn’s paintings were brought forth to the audience and performers?**

**How were you impacted as an artist?**

_Melissa:_ I grew up a block away from the SDAM; I spent much of my childhood flying through the museum on the way to the campus green. Dunn’s work hung in my family’s home. There was meaning in his images I had not detected until this project came about. As we worked with the painting entitled “Motherhood” we gazed upon mother and child, read the poem, and reflected on experience; I recognized had I been that woman, home alone on the prairie giving birth, that my child and I would have for sure died together during childbirth. Speaking with my dancers regarding this insight, they recognized that art is not something that hangs on walls, but rather in some instances, a mirror into our own humanness. For us, this project provided opportunity for faculty and students to share common space, a framework to speak about art, creative process, and humanity.

_Lynn:_ It was pretty profound; people were touched by the performance. When talking to audience members some of them would tear up; the work touched them deeply. Their responses confirmed the power of the paintings and their continued relevance. Here at the museum, we are always looking for new ways to engage audiences and to find new ways to interpret Dunn’s work. His work is timeless.

**How did the final product solidify?**

_Melissa:_ Corey Shelsta, lighting designer, jumped on board and we produced the first of three performances in the project series. The project went dormant for several years, yet there was a yearning to bring a musician on board to create newly composed music specifically written to support the Harvey Dunn images and Darla’s poetry. This was the beginning of the next phase of exploration in the project, Aaron Ragsdale, percussion director, Cable Hardin, animator, Billy Wilburn, costume designer, and Bruce Anderson and Lowell Haag from Yeager Media Center all joined the collaborative. Friday mornings, the newly established collaborative would gather and exchange ideas for the next phase of the project. This time, the performance featured four of the Harvey Dunn paintings specifically focused on prairie images, as the performance coincided with the anniversary of the Morrill Act on the SDSU campus in April of 2013. Following this performance, Rocky Dailey from Journalism and Mass Communications, and Laura Diddle from music, joined the collaborative. We
then began to explore avenues to complete the last eight of the original twelve paintings featured in Darla’s chapbook. The final performance iteration featuring all original artistic composition from diverse disciplines was finally unveiled in fall of 2015 on the SDSU campus.

A tornadic spiraling of collaborators formed as artists kept joining the collaborative. There was never one person in charge, just a lot of ideas gelling. It was a spherical openness and graciousness; that was the beauty of the project. Everybody was willing to let go of personal egos and preferences to see what was best for the greater whole. It was never about an individual’s most grandiose effort, but rather, each artist’s most gracious effort. Whatever one created, never over-arched the boundaries of what someone else was doing. A lovely layering of simplicity formed as a result. Our focus during the whole project was that many layers of simplicity creating an interwoven synthesis of interesting compositional texture.
Contributor Biographies

Jodilyn Andrews
Jodilyn grew up in Brookings, South Dakota. She has always been a Jackrabbit, starting with her parents meeting at SDSU. They have a picture of her as a one-year-old with a Jackrabbit temporary tattoo on her cheek. She graduated from SDSU with a degree in English Education and is continuing her education as a graduate student in the English department. She is writing a creative thesis, focusing on poetry.

Tessa Armstrong
Tessa is currently a sophomore English Education major, pursuing a Spanish minor and an English as a Second Language endorsement. She was born and raised in the heart of the Black Hills in Rapid City, South Dakota. While she loves South Dakota, her future plans are to teach high school English in a metropolitan area, such as Denver or Minneapolis, while continuing to foster her love of writing.

Alexis Becker
Alexis has always loved writing, so becoming an English major at SDSU was the perfect choice for her. Originally from Hinton, Iowa, she has honed her writing skills while at SDSU, and has been published in past issues of Oakwood. After graduation, Alexis plans to continue writing and to share her work with the world.

Chelsey Bertelso
Chelsey is a third year student pursuing a Studio Arts major with a minor in Theatre. She calls Sioux Falls home, but currently resides in Brookings, South Dakota. Chelsey plans to relocate to Florida to teach art-and-wine painting classes on the beach, and continue to work as a freelance painter along with whatever career opportunities life brings her way.

Amanda Cecil
Amanda was born and raised in Brookings and is now a junior SDSU student majoring in English and minoring in professional writing and dance. In the future, she hopes to teach English as a second language abroad, to pursue a career in technical or marketing writing, and to continue writing poetry.

Justin Charnell
Marine Corps veteran, real world rookie, and a sophomore advertising student with a knack for slaying Bandos. When Justin was a little boy, Sioux Falls was his home, and he has another home in Rimmington. In the future, he’ll probably be found dead on his computer because that’s where he spends most of his time. Justin hopes he didn’t just decide his own fate. Find him on MySpace.

Jena Christianson
An English major—the cliché, the broody, the dark writer and soulful storyteller; the Master’s student. And a bit of a satirist from time to time. Jena is in the last semester of her M.A. in English. She specializes in creative writing, psychoanalytical theory, and advanced tomfoolery. Her future plans include finding a job, writing her fingers to the bone, and continuing to survive.

Sierra Close
Sierra came to SDSU as a freshman journalism and psychology major from Bozeman, Montana, with the goals of establishing herself as a writer and preparing to be an editor. Besides being published in Oakwood, she has written for The Collegian and currently holds an editor-in-chief job with The Odyssey. She also enjoys serving as an International Diplomat on campus and working as a production assistant at Yeager Media Center.

Irene Elliot
Irene Elliot emerged from the endless cornfields of South Dakota to write. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English from SDSU. Her plan is to return to the safety of the stalks and continue to write books and short stories now that she’s seen a bit of the world.

Ashley Farrand
Ashley grew up on a small farm right outside of Aberdeen, South Dakota. She is a junior at SDSU and is pursuing degrees in Early Childhood Education and Art Education. She is extremely passionate about working with children and creating art. In the future, she hopes to combine these two passions by teaching. She wants to share her love of learning and art with children to give them the tools to better connect with the world around them.

Grace Feinberg
Grace is a senior Interdisciplinary Studies major with a minor in Interior Design from Buffalo, Minnesota. Her plan of study centers around her love for creativity and desire to work with houses and to run her own business. She discovered her love for writing poetry and creative pieces through a creative writing course at SDSU.

Rachel Funk
Rachel is a senior Art Education student seeking certifications in both Ceramics and Art History, and enjoys seeking out experimental methods of art creation that she can transform into lesson plans for her future students. Her art is largely inspired by the human figure and its many facets. Though she was born in Idaho, she grew up in south-central Kansas; Rachel transferred to SDSU in the summer of 2014 to finish her degree.
Katelynn Gebauer
Katelynn is a junior Graphic Design student and the Senior Visual Editor at the student-run newspaper, *The Colleagian*. She’s been a creative soul from the start and now expresses that through her art and, currently, through her blue hair. Sioux Falls is considered home for her, but this summer Katelynn will be living in Brookings and interning at Hitch Design Studio. In the future she hopes to find herself in the Seattle/Portland area.

October Greenfield
October grew up in Canton, South Dakota and is currently pursuing a M.S. degree in Wildlife Science at SDSU. October is currently researching grassland birds. She is passionate about wildlife photography and capturing animals in their natural environment. Upon completion of her degree, October hopes to continue working with birds and continue photographing wildlife around the world.

Shaina Harris
Shaina is a fifth year senior at SDSU pursuing a degree in Art Education. She is seeking certificates in Art History, Printmaking, Animation, and Graphic Design. She is originally from Las Vegas, Nevada, but moved to Brookings her senior year of high school. Next year she will be graduating from SDSU and plans on moving to Washington state to be an art educator.

Kayla Hemmingson
Kayla is a sophomore student at SDSU majoring in both English and Athletic Training. She is from the itty bitty town of Bradley, South Dakota where she grew up with her parents and three sisters. As of now, Kayla plans on pursuing a career in Athletic Training and keeping writing as more of a hobby, but plans can always change!

Kendra Hinton
Kendra is an SDSU student majoring in English with a Creative Writing focus, Spanish and Professional Writing minors. She originates from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and found her way to SDSU to swim with the SDSU Swim & Dive team. When she has time, she works on her writing and hopes to one day be a published author. More realistically, she wishes to become an editor for various novels.

Andrew Hyde-Strand
Andrew is a senior attending SDSU. He grew up in Eden Prairie, Minnesota and is an English major with an emphasis in Literature. For now, his future plans consist of working for a public affairs firm in DC, but he also hopes he can continue exploring and crafting all forms of literature throughout his life.

Amanda Jamison
Amanda is from Sioux Falls, South Dakota pursuing degrees in both Architecture and Art at SDSU. Living her life behind the lens of a camera has taught her about space, design, part to whole relationships, and importance of details. Through this lifelong method of exploration lies an opportunity to learn and grow while implementing her inspiration into architectural designs.

Allison Kantack
Native to Brookings, South Dakota, Allison currently studies at SDSU and majors in English with a specialization in Writing. She also contributes to the Theatre department and serves as their Head of Print Media. After graduation, Allison hopes for a career in writing, either at a publishing firm or in the theatre industry.

Samantha Kokesh
Samantha is currently a first-year student enrolled at SDSU in the College of Design. She grew up in Rapid City, South Dakota, and is majoring in Studio Arts. In the future, she plans on either becoming an educator, working for an animation company as an illustrator, concept artist, or character modeler, or seeing what else the future may bring. She is also interested in traveling overseas to study and possibly teach.

Karissa Kuhle
Karissa is a full-time writer for University Marketing & Communications. She is also a graduate teaching assistant for the Department of Journalism and Mass Communications, in pursuit of a master’s degree in Mass Communication. Karissa graduated with her bachelor’s in Advertising from SDSU in 2013. She grew up in Howard, South Dakota, and resides in Brookings with her 5-year-old daughter, Brooklyn. She writes about their adventures and her pursuit of living a meaningful life on her blog karissakuhle.com. Passionate. Patient. Present.

Madelin Mack
Madelin, a senior English major, grew up in Redfield, South Dakota. She’s been writing since she could read, encouraged by teachers who desperately wanted her to do something other than distract her classmates. She plans to pursue a career creating content in the marketing or public relations world. Or something.

Pamela Merchant
A senior undergraduate student of history and nonprofit management at SDSU, Pamela lives with her daughter in Sioux Falls and works as Program Associate at the Sertoma Butterfly House & Marine Cove.
Long a resident of Brookings, she worked as a graphic designer, grant writer, and served in public office. A farm girl from North Dakota, she loves the landscape and the people of the Midwest. Her poems reflect musings on her childhood, travels, and middle age.

**Evan Phillips**
Evan graduated from SDSU in 2012 with a degree in English Literature, and his home since then has been right here in Brookings. As far as future plans are concerned, he could probably go out for some Guads, do some laundry. He needs groceries, too. Might grab some drinks later, get his jam on, and live after midnight just like Judas Priest told him.

**Erika Saunders**
Erika is a technical editor working in aerospace who moved to Brookings, South Dakota four years ago where her husband is an assistant professor at SDSU. She is also a mother of three who practices writing through a blog about hiking and travel, with plans to include more poetry moving forward.

**Miranda Schwanke**
Miranda is a Studio Arts major at SDSU with an emphasis in Animation. First and foremost, she is an artist. She has a great love for creative writing and animation so her goal is to combine the two together and bring characters to life on the big screen. She is from Watertown, South Dakota, but currently calls Brookings home.

**Robert Semrad**
After retiring from United Methodist pastoring and Air Force Reserve Chaplaincy in 2005, Robert enrolled in the SDSU Visual Arts program and graduated with a BA in 2010. Following graduation, he continued to take art courses and now is pursuing a BFA degree. He plans to continue enjoying his retirement as an artist.

**Marisa TenBrink**
Marisa is a freelance graphic designer specializing in editorial and identity design. Marisa and her family live and farm near Astoria, South Dakota. She received her undergraduate degree from SDSU in 2012, and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in graphic design at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her future goals include teaching design and staying involved in regional arts and design organizations.

**Kasey Wahl**
Hailing from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, Kasey is a senior at SDSU majoring in English with a writing specialization. He enjoys writing poetry and fiction both for leisure and as part of his academic studies. Outside of his academic studies, Kasey is an active participant in the local marching music scene, working as a designer, consultant, and clinician for several area high school marching bands.

**Tessa Wiens**
Tessa grew up in Grand Rapids, Minnesota and currently studies Pre-Pharmacy at SDSU, with minors in Biology, Spanish, and Studio Arts. In addition to pursuing her medical career, she continues to follow her childhood passion: drawing. She enjoys working with a wide range of mediums—charcoal, graphite, acrylic, watercolor, and oil pastel—as well as exploring the ways in which her future profession and current avocation diverge and intersect.