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PATTERNS

62

PATTERNS 2020



PATTERNS

62



Art is work. It's hard work.

If you don't think so, well, to borrow a phrase from Detroit-born poet Phil Levine, then you don't know what work is.

Artists start with an idea. Or a fragment, or a vision, or a glimpse out of the corner of the idea. But many of us mere mortals have those, maybe all of those. But turning that tiny, flashing shard into art - real, thoughtful art? That's work. Maybe the artist is driven to work that tiny bit over and over until something bigger or sharper emerges. Maybe there's just a deadline. Either way, the artist is compelled to work.

But art also requires work from the reader or the viewer. As the writer David Foster Wallace once said, 'serious' art will "force you to work hard to access its pleasures, the same way that in real life true pleasure is usually a by-product of hard work and discomfort." Art requires you to think, or to challenge yourself, call up memories and feelings you'd rather not, maybe even put yourself in someone else's shoes — somebody you may not know, or may not even want to know. Art requires you to engage.

But like most work, there's a payoff. There's a shift somewhere inside you, the reader or viewer of that art. It may be a small shift, unmeasurable by any standard we know, but it happens. You have that flash of surprise and recognition — and it connects you to another human being, or maybe to another world. Sometimes the payoff comes later — you come back to the work, and it hasn't changed, but you have, and you think, oh that's it. And sometimes, if you're persistent and lucky, you may get a payoff right away — but, when you come back to that art work or that poem later in your life, and you see it again, you see it—and the world—in yet another new way.

So yes, art is work. But it's work that pays, over and over again. To that end, enjoy the work of this 62nd edition of *Patterns* magazine. But come back to the works within these pages, again and again, and these works will keep paying you for that effort.



IN MEMORY OF **KIRBY DALE SMITH**

1946–2019

Beloved artist and educator Kirby Dale Smith taught within the Visual and Performing Arts department for St. Clair County Community College from 2012 up until his passing in 2019.

Professor Smith's experience in the classroom spanned thirty years, teaching at several colleges and secondary schools throughout Eastern Michigan. He was an experienced, well-respected ceramicist within the Port Huron community, and an active participant in the SC4 Fine Arts Gallery, as well as the Potters Market. His last show at the SC4 Fine Arts Gallery was exhibited during the summer before his passing, and showed a retrospective of his life's work. His talent and contributions to SC4 created a positive and lasting presence for students and colleagues alike, and the absence of his gentle presence on our campus is felt.

With sadness, we honor his passing and dedicate the 62nd edition of *Patterns* in his name.

THANK YOU'S AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SC4 Friends of the Arts is a committed group of businesses, community members and SC4 faculty and staff that support the arts at SC4, including music, theatre, creative writing and visual arts. They are building community through the arts.

Programs and activities supported by Friends of the Arts include:

- Educational Arts Outreach projects in music, theater and visual art
- Free Noon and Night Concert Series
- Free Summer Concert Series
- Outreach choir concerts
- *Patterns* magazine
- SC4 Symphonic Band concerts
- Special art exhibitions
- Special musical performances
- Student, alumni, and faculty art exhibitions
- Theatrical productions with the SC4 Players

Thank you for your financial support.

Every donation is critical to arts programming and promoting arts opportunity in our community. Your community college appreciates your commitment to the arts.

THE FOLLOWING SPONSORS HAVE MADE DONATIONS TO SC4 FRIENDS OF THE ARTS SINCE JULY 1, 2019:

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AWARDS OF DISTINCTION

FOR WRITING AND ART

**ELEANOR
MATHEWS
AWARD &**

**PATRICK
BOURKE
AWARD**

You will note that each year five special awards are given, named for past faculty members who made extraordinary contributions to the arts and literature on campus and to *Patterns* in particular. The Patrick Bourke and Eleanor Mathews Awards are awards of distinction that recognize students who have done exceptional work overall in art and literature.

The Blanche Redman, Richard Colwell and Kathy Nickerson Awards are given for the highest quality submissions for that year in poetry, fiction and essay writing, respectively.

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD



MACKENZIE HILLER

When you read Mackenzie Hiller's works, whether her short story "Our Circumstances of Being" or her essay "Share It Fairly," what you realize is this: she is fearless. For Hiller, it's damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead, as the old saying goes. First-prom stories, first-crush stories — those are complicated enough. But this year's Eleanor Mathews Award winner is not afraid to ask what becomes of those hetero-directed traditions when one young character decides to take a chance. Hiller's all in, creating a fully-realized character, Vincent, who makes a reappearance in this year's Second-Place Short Story. Last year we were introduced to Vincent as a small-town high-school freshman who is trying to find his place in the cruel social hierarchy that is American high school. Oh, and he's blind. This year, Vincent is back, but now Hiller pushes him further — right into his first crush on the star high school jock. In her essay, "Share It Fairly," Hiller is also not afraid to confront what she sees as shortcomings in a Gregg Easterbrook essay on the impact of wealth on one's mental and emotional states. Easterbrook is an accomplished and well-known author, but it doesn't stop Hiller from pointing out where his logic fails and his examples get fuzzy. She's not afraid to disagree, nor is she afraid to agree — the mark of an independent thinker and a courageous writer. Whether in short story or essay form, Mackenzie Hiller is not afraid.

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art or design student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual arts disciplines and has been an advocate and emissary for art at St. Clair County Community College. This year we honor Sophie Steinborn, who helped design the 62nd edition of *Patterns* magazine. Sophie is a prospective 2021 graduate seeking her Graphic Design Associate Degree at SC4. After graduation, Sophie is planning to continue her studies in Advertising Design with a minor in Business at the College for Creative Studies — one of the nation's leading art and design colleges.

Sophie's work projects a clean sense of design and attention to detail. She excels at digital illustration and has an innate eye for layout and color. This year her work was selected by local business *Patrick and James* for an advertising campaign aimed at promoting their business using print and social media platforms. In addition to this, Sophie has competed for national awards and internships.

It is with utmost pleasure that we award Sophie Steinborn with this highly competitive award of distinction for her contributions to *Patterns*, and for her excellent talents in the field of fine and applied arts.



**SOPHIE
STEINBORN**

BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD FIRST PLACE POETRY WINNER



BRENDAN PITTIGLIO

1

BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD

A WALK IN THE FOREST

FIRST Brendan Pittiglio

I stand beside you in our windswept glade,
to once more savor its lung-burning air.
It carries the sweet-pepper smell of nightshade,
along with the fall-candle scent of your hair.
Bare branches hiss in the bone-chilling breeze,
no doubt lamenting their annual fate.
You and I aren't unlike the leaves,
as our love also withers, and our season is late.
Know I'm at peace, though I have one request:
drive through my cold heart, that ice shard you hide,
and when the last leaf spirals down to its rest,
I hope that my hope will have long since died.
Red-hooded girl, I love you more than life,
but since you do not, then yank out your knife (it's rusted).

2 SECOND

SECOND PLACE POETRY

BEDSIDE TABLE

Kayla Plenda

Do not drink
Alcoholic beverages
While operating this camera.

If the shooting range
Is too close to the
Subject,
It may cause
Drowsiness.

When red lamps
All blink,
Take one
Shot
Once daily.

The shutter
Is
Addiction.



SADNESS WITHOUT CAUSE

DIGITAL MEDIA

Alejandro Bueno

3
THIRD

THIRD PLACE POETRY

KEEPSAKE

Kaitlyn Ziehm

along the aisles of the never-wanted lay nameless dolls,
none beautiful enough to be a keepsake.
the dolls desire possession,
but their clothes,
their jewels,
and their figures are far more worthy.
wet, clumped hair falls alongside bruised necks,
itchy materials accentuating their mouth-watering features.
voices become brittle from never-ending screaming,
begging for a place to call their own.
coarse hands roam their bodies,
claiming properties that were never theirs.
fearsome weeds hide the only thing that brings them joy;
the flowers struggle to find any life.
the dolls deserve something gorgeous to lie beside,
something to share their treasured selves.
however,
they wear the dark markings, the nameless tags,
and the sadness of never being their own.



BY THE DOCKS

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sabrina Mason

SEASON OF MYSTERY

Breanna Sylvia

This warm, humid air
clouds above a silhouette
the sun and her rays
leap off bare shoulders
pale daffodils
ready to be revealed
the sun
nourishes the flowers
along the metal fence
lilacs take time
to grow so full
a delicate perfume
heightened from the sunlit dew
'til the season hits its peak
flushed cheeks where freckles lie
working hands tattered from thorns
robins and swallows return
the water nears the edge
signals the bath is ready
sun makes her way from rise to set
the moon takes her time
as the flowers do
the season
teaches patience to all.

BALLADE

Stephen Muzzi

Just one for two beats
And then it unfolds
To hold more.

Soon there are six
That spread out all
As one.

It rides
As a mule,
Moving from high into low.

A brighter theme
Jars the old
And shows the new, then it

Soon dies
And disappears
Into the old.

A hint of tension
Pervades
And reveals a darker theme.

The darkness
Does not last
For long.

A new tension
Resolves in a
Blissful Hope.

The one is joined
By others
Now.

The brighter
Theme
Returns.

Four larger things
Now end
When only one began.



UNTITLED

DIGITAL MEDIA

Rebecca Wend

ROMANCE FROM A SCIENCE BOOK

Kayla Plenda

We could turn inwards,
And name the nature of
Your body.
The height of our closeness,
Like the magnitude of
Earthquakes.
We are the distance,
And the destination.
Fingers, nerves, hot breath
Relay messages of
Intensity.
Vital parts,
Both useless without
The other.

MY NAME IS DEPRESSION

Kathryn Oliver

I am a little girl
Visiting my father's home
Its Victorian shape is slouched with age
Cracked white paint covers each wooden shake
A curved broken walkway
Wrapped in a million strains
Of emerald grass

In pink boots
I tiptoe over each crack
And sneak through the creaky front door

I jump into his arms
Then realize we are not alone
My heart pounds as I stare at it
The black figure
Has returned

Unnaturally tall and slender
Its face is bare
And its body emits a cold fog
That sends a shiver down my spine

The black figure invades my father
Weighs down his shoulders
Hides his eyes in darkness
And eats away at any sliver of happiness
Until he is as empty
As a corpse buried decades underground

It imprisons him
Pushes him across the cramped room
And forces him into a fetal position
Onto the small red couch

I follow
Then collapse to the floor
Hot tears run down my cheeks
As I stare at my father's hunched back
Watch his slow heavy breaths
And silently wish
I could save him

The black figure
Lingers
And its hand
Never leaves my father's shoulder



MONTAGE

DIGITAL MEDIA

Alexis Scott

EXISTENTIAL BLISS

Kaitlyn Ziehm

trees dance alongside me as birds flutter with song.

a breeze pulls my hair and body as it sings.

plump peaches sway from limbs,

carrying the weight of the wind.

their hues vibrant, their fuzz soft,

their taste angelic.

the ocean screams for my love,

as if she hadn't been embraced before.

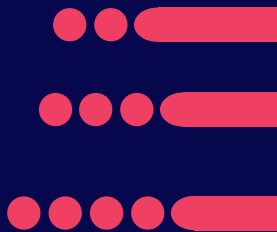
i open my arms wide and welcome her.

her saltiness burrows into my skin.

she sizzles on my tongue.

where else could i possibly be?

i glow in the sea as she beckons for more.



KATHLEEN NICKERSON AWARD FIRST PLACE ESSAY



REMY REYNOLDS

1

FIRST

KATHLEEN NICKERSON AWARD

A MODERN ODYSSEY

Remy Reynolds

I received a Facebook message just after midnight on December 10th, 2017. This message said, "Hey wanna help me with something?" from a longtime friend of mine whom I'll call Tim. "With what?" I replied. "I'm about to rob this dude I met in rehab. You won't have to do much; I just need a ride." My heart skipped a beat, not because it was a very surprising proposal from him, but because my heart always skipped a beat when I thought about the possibility of using. At least, that's what it always felt like. "Do you have a dealer ready for afterward?" I asked. This was somewhat a redundant question, yet an all-too-important point to clarify. If there was no dealer ready to sell us dope, there was no point in robbing anyone at all. "Yep. He's waiting on us," he said. Another skipped heartbeat.

I grew up in Port Huron, Michigan. I was brought up in an upper-middle class environment from the beginning. My mom was a manager at AT&T, which had a branch in downtown Port Huron by the city library. This was the bulk of the family income as my dad worked mostly as a semi-driver and later a city bus driver. I am the oldest of four children, three boys and the youngest a girl. I was always a quiet kid, interested in history and politics from a young age. I was very polite from as far back as I can remember, and I did my best to fit in at school. Being shy and quiet was just a part of my personality at a young age. There were no warning signs I can recall of what was to come – this would soon change.

I took great pains deciding on helping Tim that night, but I knew the entire time the temptation would be too much to say no – Tim knew this too. My car was currently on flats; my only option was to steal my mom's for the "short time" it would take. The plan was very simple on my end. He was meeting someone on foot who would be parked by a gas pump at Speedway on 24th and Oak. He told the guy he was meeting that his dealer would not want to see a new face, and therefore he needed to grab the money and walk a block away to get the drugs while the guy waited at Speedway.

The fact the guy already agreed to this chain of events made success nearly certain; if the guy was willing to trust him

with taking his money out of sight, then that's all that was needed for this to happen. I was to park behind Speedway, and simply wait for Tim to walk to my car and give him a ride to the dealer's house – after he blocked the number of his victim.

"Let me know when to leave" I said.

I originally was a good student in school, as I had a tendency towards learning. It was around the 7th grade that I first smoked marijuana with an older cousin. I don't remember falling in love the first time, but before long, and certainly into 8th grade I was a regular pot smoker. In high school, I took drug use to almost a sport-like level. I had a clique of friends I'd buy various drugs from, an older crowd who was already out of high school, mostly opiate and anti-anxiety medications. I'd then sell these drugs to a different group who went to school with me. This was just to maintain my own drug use; when any of the people involved got a new "connect" we'd let the others know. We were all in a constant search. This hurt my grades badly, and I barely graduated in 2015.

I pulled up to Speedway from Division Street to get a spot behind the building. I waited what seemed like forever, but eventually Tim walked up and hopped in. "All good?" I said while we smiled at each other, "Yeah, we're good, head to 10th Street." I had never heard of the dealer he was using, as by this time our "clique" was less inclined to share such valuable information with each other. The days of sharing connects had been over for years at this point. We all understood why this had changed without ever verbally addressing it – plus half of us were dead by now. I remember him having trouble getting ahold of the dealer at first, even though he had just talked to him. At the time, I had no idea what a life-altering ordeal I was driving into; it seemed so normal. Eventually, he got the go-ahead to pull up to the dealer's house. We pulled into his driveway, which was on 10th Street, just north of the Black River. Of course, though, the guy stopped responding. To make a very long and boring story short, Tim eventually worked up the courage to just go knock on the door. He took forever inside, apparently due to the dealer's drunk uncle, but eventually came out with two twenty-dollar bags of dope. I had to drop Tim off by 26th and Minnie anyway, so I immediately headed towards 24th street. "Where are we gonna do this, man? I ain't tryna wait" I said. "Kroger?" he suggested.

After high school I started working in a factory called Eissmann Automotive on 20th and Beard. I had no interest in

college and was too into drugs for that to realistically be an option. I started doing dope soon after. Life was amazing for the first year after graduation, never-ending fun and a constant state of an opiate-induced bliss. This, however, did not last. It's hard for me to sum up what happened next in a single paragraph, but I'll try: I started dating a girl who got addicted to dope as well. We soon were in and out of rehab and jail by the time we were turning twenty. Homelessness was something I dealt with, given my mom was stricter than my girlfriend's and kicked me out a lot over drug use. Although her mom was less strict, she knew we were trouble together and didn't give me refuge. During these times I slept in my car for sometimes months at a time – even while working a factory job. I was a somewhat spoiled kid growing up, and the feeling of homelessness ended up having huge effects on me that still last to this day. It's a very awful feeling you don't easily forget. I began contemplating suicide on a regular basis. It seemed to be my only way out of addiction, but I was scared to go through with it – which made me feel much worse. I often hoped for a fatal overdose.

We pulled into Kroger on 24th Street and began opening and pouring out the contents of each bag. The dope was very hard and took awhile to crush. Tim began to put his in a spoon he pulled out of his pocket, along with a needle and some water. I didn't inject it, but snorted, having always hated needles. I snorted my half at almost the same time he injected his into his left arm. As you would probably expect, his hit him a lot faster – he soon went unconscious. This, surprisingly, did not concern me much. It was not the first time I had seen someone pass out after a shot – plus I was beginning to feel high. I began shaking him hard and slapping him a bit to try and wake him. The next thing I remember was pieces of glass all over me.

As my life was spiraling out of control I had one option I had always considered as an "out" – to join the Navy. I was in a junior Navy oriented program as a kid called the "Sea Cadets" on the USS Grayfox, stationed in Port Huron behind our family home. There are a lot of terrible things I'm skipping over here, but eventually seeing that it was my last chance at a normal life I told my mom I was joining. She agreed this was my best option and offered to help me in the meantime while I waited. I was very happy to receive a high score on the ASVAB and was therefore given a wide selection of jobs to choose from. My shipment date was May 19th, 2018 – it was finally all over. When I was down at the recruiting station though, the higher-ranking officials made it clear – one more infraction with the

law and I would be dropped. I had a very bad driving record and a few minor misdemeanors. It took some waiting around before I got the news I was approved at all, on the condition I didn't get in any more trouble while I waited for bootcamp.

The last thing I remembered was trying to wake Tim up. Suddenly, I was woken up. At first, I was in a "drunk-like" state of consciousness – or lack of consciousness, rather. I had glass shards all over my body, and my shirt was cut in half, lights everywhere. I soon realized what had happened. Looking to my left, while still sitting in the driver's seat, I saw a woman standing next to me. She was short and blonde, and the sign on her uniform said "EMS." There were several police officers behind her. When I looked them in the eye, they looked down at the ground – they were embarrassed for me. I had just been resuscitated with Narcan – an overdose. This wasn't my first time, but it would turn out to be the most impactful. Two years prior, I had snorted some dope in a gas station bathroom on 11th and Lapeer and on my walk home I awoke to a cop leaning down over me. I was laying in the middle of 11th Street between Division and Minnie flat on my back. He saved my life, dropped me off at the hospital, and an hour later they let me go. This time was set to be much different.

Apparently, while I was trying to wake Tim up, I passed out myself, but not before sliding into a snow bank in the same parking lot. By some stroke of luck, Tim woke up and called 911 for me. He left my blinkers on, per the operator's instruction, so the police could easily find me, and he left. As the officers approached the vehicle, they saw that my face was blue, my lips purple. One cop told me I was taking a single breath per minute when they reached me. He tried to open the door; realizing it was locked (Tim forgot or didn't think to make sure the doors were all unlocked) he smashed the driver's door window, cut my seatbelt and shirt off, and stepped aside for the EMS woman to take over. When I woke up they helped me get out of the car; glass fell off my lap as I walked towards the ambulance to take me to the hospital. The ride to the hospital was terrible. At first, I tried not to think too hard about it. I said, "Thank you for saving me...I really appreciate it." She said, "You're welcome, we don't get many thank yous." Soon, though, it hit me. I had just ruined my opportunity to join the Navy. Quite symbolically, I was wearing the U.S. Navy shirt they gave me to report to bootcamp with, as I was proud of it. It was now cut to shreds. I even remember pleading with them when I first realized what was happening, that I was joining the Navy – I was soon to be nobody's problem anymore

MOSS TEA CUP

MIXED MEDIA

Katriana Deangelis



LOLA

PHOTOGRAPHY

Sabrina Mason



— to no avail. I was charged with Operating while Intoxicated, Driving while License Suspended, and Use of Narcotics. I was given three months in jail followed by two years on probation. This, without a doubt, was one of the scariest and most depressing nights of my life.

Looking back after some years have passed I think I'd like to help people get out of addiction one day. I got the idea from first hand treatment – I don't think many addiction therapists take the best approach. I think the first step in getting someone off drugs, out of the three necessary steps, is proving to them their life would be much better without the drugs, and that it'd be worth it to do so. This seems obvious. Granted, many drug users would agree with this. But I'm choosing my words carefully; whether they agree or not you should prove it to them with real data. You should have hundreds of first-hand testimonies printed out, like mine, to hand to the person and have them read. Once they without a doubt agree their life would be better without drugs and it'd be worthwhile to get off the drugs, they're ready for step two. Step two is to prove to them getting off the drugs (or alcohol) is possible. You do this the same way as step one. You find cases of people who had it worse than them in a variety of ways, and still pulled through. It doesn't even have to be with drugs. If Victor Frankel can get through the Holocaust, surviving off a few dozen peas a day (if he was lucky), from my point of view that's good evidence you can stop drinking. The third step is the most difficult; the action step. What are you doing to do with the information from steps one and two? This is your life. The only one you have – the only thing you have. If you are lucky enough to survive in addiction, you will just be lucky enough to live miserably. You know you are wasting your life, you know you can fix it, you know there are people who had it worse than you who did it – even in places you might not expect.

2

SECOND

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

SHARE IT FAIRLY

Mackenzie Hiller



PEACEFUL SCENE

MIXED MEDIA

Ann Mole

"Momma said there's only so much fortune a man really needs and the rest is just for showing off," narrates Forrest Gump (played by Tom Hanks) in the 1994 film *Forrest Gump*. While his mother is not wrong in her morsel of wisdom about wealth, a few moments earlier in the film has Forrest himself giving the audience a more innocent yet equally-important piece of knowledge: "[Lieutenant Dan] said we don't have to worry about money no more, and I said, 'That's good. One less thing'" (Groom, et al.).

Despite this optimistic outlook on the power of wealth on one's mental health, the discussion of how money affects us still rages on today. For example, Gregg Easterbrook's article "The Real Truth About Money" was published in *Time Magazine* in 2005; Easterbrook's 1,703-word article speaks of the dangers of having too much money. Overall, the article can easily be summed up by the old saying of "More money, more problems." Easterbrook writes about the effects of having excess amounts of money, such as depression or reference anxiety. He then ends his article with a surprisingly comforting thought: that there are more important things in life that need to be focused on, such as friendships, esteem, self-actualization; basically, everything on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (a checklist for happiness in the world of developmental psychology.) However, Easterbrook's article not only misrepresents people, but he also assumes that every one of us is focused on nothing other than our own greediness and self-destructive tendencies. Despite his use of many scholarly facts and quotes and statistics in his lengthy article, Easterbrook falls flat while trying to relate personally to his audience.

Overall, Easterbrook devised a very factual and credible article covering the effects that money has on happiness. His article's main points include the idea that money cannot buy a person's happiness, that feeling envious of others will lead people to the disapproval of their own lives, and that depression can be caused when people overthink their finances. The purpose of Easterbrook's article is to not only inform audiences about how people, specifically those living

in the United States, think about money and how there are many more important things in life that make people happy, which are worth more in the long run, but also to convince us as readers to understand the negative aspects of wealth.

First, Easterbrook speaks about how a person's focus on wealth can cause depression, specifically in paragraphs three through seven. However, he does not seem to stick to one specific cause of depression. On the one hand, in paragraph six, Easterbrook states that "there is ample evidence that being poor causes unhappiness;" on the other, he goes in the other direction in paragraph seven, saying that more money actually does not cause people to be happier after a certain point. Among these statements, Easterbrook quotes a study by the Harvard Medical School, which estimates that each year, one in fifteen people in the United States suffers from a depressive episode. Depression is one of the most commonly diagnosed mental illnesses, even being diagnosed in young children. How is it, then, that more money leads to depression? Yes, the amount of money in the United States has risen throughout the years just as the number of people diagnosed with depression has, but this does not necessarily mean the two are related as Easterbrook is proposing. Yes, the number of people with depression since 1950 has been growing at an alarming rate, but this could simply be because depression can easily be diagnosed today at a checkup with a primary care physician. Treatments during the 20th century for mental illness were complex and, overall, inadequate; lobotomies, electroconvulsive therapy, the prescription of medication for people with tuberculosis, among others. However, research into depression grew drastically during the 1950's and 1960's, when it was discovered that depression was a psychological illness and not a physical one (Nemade, et al.). The number of people diagnosed with depression has risen substantially since then, which is due more to the fact that psychologists were then better able to diagnose it correctly, rather than people were suddenly becoming depressed. Though the number of cases of depression and the amount of money in the United States has risen and will most likely continue to rise, it is unlikely that the two subjects are related.

Now, the saying that money cannot buy one's happiness is very prominent in the overall theme of Easterbrook's article. Though the first quote from *Forrest Gump* about only needing a certain amount of wealth to be happy goes along with that notion, the second quote goes on to dismiss the word of his mother

(played by Sally Field) by saying that having wealth is important to one's mental health as it decreases the amount of stress one has. However, neither Forrest nor his mother is wrong in their beliefs about money. Having money cannot directly purchase people's happiness, but it can certainly give them something more valuable: the feeling of security. Insurance, medication, and homes are just a few examples of the things that money can purchase, which makes people feel secure. However, it is with greed that systems begin to break. People begin to feel envious of others when they deem it necessary to buy the biggest house or the fanciest car or the newest cell phone. Easterbrook calls this feeling reference anxiety, or, simply, the feeling that the grass is always greener on the other side. His article discusses reference anxiety in paragraphs eight through ten, speaking mostly about reference anxiety over the size of houses. Envy is a natural human emotion, something that everyone is bound to feel at some point in their lives. Does it happen to be more apparent in the United States? Absolutely. Many countries, specifically in Europe, have a fairly equal distribution of wealth. In the United States, most of the wealth in the country is controlled by a small number of people, with one percent of people controlling over a third of the country's money (Egan). It's hard not to be envious of people in the United States when people flaunt their money easily; Americans aspire to be unique in exhausting ways. Many houses in European neighborhoods look nearly identical to each other, built in the same style and painted with similar colors. Real estate in America is much different, with houses newer, bigger, more expensive. Because of the rise of the Internet and social media, people are now able to see the lives and homes of the rich and famous, most of whom live in the United States. Those who are able try to replicate those lifestyles, while the rest of Americans sit back and watch and grow envious of them and disappointed in their own lives. People want more, and many are unable to achieve more. However, people do not need more. Disposable income is a luxury; the ability to purchase things that are wanted, not needed. In that way, both Forrest and his mother are right about wealth: yes, having a specific amount of money can make you feel less stressed about the issue, though many people earn more money than they require, turning the excess wealth into bigger houses or fancier cars. In that way, wealth is both a blessing and a curse. We can't live with wealth, nor can we live without it.

Published in 2005, Easterbrook's "The Real Truth About Money" was written during a time in America where the economy

was beginning to falter. However, the article is written in a way that makes the audience feel as though it is their fault for being concerned about wealth in a time when the economy of the United States was understandably worrying. Overall, the article is somewhat still relevant today, though the references and numbers would have to be updated in order for audiences today to relate more to its content due to it being written in 2005; even between 2005 and 2019, inflation has taken its toll as \$1 in 2005 is now worth \$1.33. Similarly, the logic and credibility of Easterbrook's article are appreciated, with each quote, statistic, and reference to studies written easily for audiences to understand. He gives his article an academic approach to a personal topic. Though his article relies on science to become reliable, Easterbrook fails to create a personal connection with his audience. There is no appeal to emotion in his article, no stories or jokes or anything to let the audience know that Easterbrook is writing an article aimed to persuade them to agree with his side of the topics at hand. Even though he uses many instances of logic for the purpose of persuasion, that purpose comes off as rather cold and impersonal. To pull off a successful and memorable article, whether informative or persuasive, authors need to create a piece that is appealing to logic, emotion, opportunity, and ethics - to create a piece that makes people both think and feel at the same time.

Though this article was most likely written with the best of intentions, Easterbrook simply wrote an article that creates assumptions about people and their beliefs. Depression is rarely due to one factor in a person's life, rarer so would it be due to wealth; multiple psychological factors go into the development of mental illness. Though Easterbrook does mention that wealth is rarely a cause for someone's happiness, he does go on to say that "for many, more money leads to depression." As many people (mostly between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five) experience a major depressive episode at some point in their lives (Morin), it could be considered a bit demeaning that Easterbrook implies that depression is due to one issue in a person's life. However, Easterbrook presents a valid case when it comes to the issue of reference anxiety, as it would be hard to find someone who experiences this form of anxiety where the issue has not stemmed from a financial issue. This is also interesting because it provides insight into the power of wealth into today's world: above all, wealth buys temporary contentment. Fads come and go today like never before, with today's newest app or meme or clothing style quickly becoming out of style. The same

goes for houses in Easterbrook's article. What's comfortable for you today will quickly become cramped tomorrow. On and on the cycle goes.

In conclusion, wealth is unfair in the United States. No one person needs more money than any other person. Not only is it distributed unfairly in the United States, but the rich and famous are quick to display this unfairness to the rest of the world. Millions of people scroll through photos of the wealthy on vacation in Europe or relaxing in their absurdly large homes in Beverly Hills, all while creating a feeling of dissatisfaction with their own lives. By comparison, people are unhappy with the comfortable and secure lives they have. Gregg Easterbrook's *Time Magazine* article "The Real Truth About Money" aims to inform readers of the unhealthy feelings that they are fostering, and to convince them that - among other things- life is more than the number of digits of your boss's salary or the size of your neighbor's house or the brand of car that your brother-in-law drives. Life is about the memories that you create with the ones that you love. Despite its flaws, Easterbrook's article shows audiences the real truth of not money, but life.

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CROW OF PRIDE

MIXED MEDIA

Emma Thurman



3

THIRD

THIRD PLACE ESSAY

FAILURE LEADS; SUCCESS FOLLOWS

Zacchaeus Gilbert

Failure. Medically, heart failure “is a clinical syndrome characterized by a constellation of symptoms (dyspnoea, orthopnoea, lower limb swelling) and signs (elevated jugular venous pressure, pulmonary congestion) often caused by a structural and/or functional cardiac abnormality resulting in reduced cardiac output and/or elevated intracardiac pressures” (Kurmani). Wow. That’s a lot to take in. If I could, I would find myself asking Brutus, “Et tu, Brute?” Was killing Julius really your accomplishment, Brutus? What now? Even with the intent being ultimate power for one (Cassius) and the protection of Rome for the other (Brutus), Brutus felt ashamed of himself, but the job had been done. The medical definition demonstrates the incompleteness of one’s life while Brutus illustrates the incompleteness of one’s growth. Heart failure provides a generalized story of one’s life that has ended, which prevents other stories to form, like Brutus’s. Then we have Brutus’s journey to protect Rome from Julius’s rule. In this journey, Brutus’s innocence and honor came to an end; that is, if he chose life instead of death. Either way for Brutus, his opportunity to continue various stories came to an end as he mentally couldn’t bring himself to physically continue to venture out. With both an individual’s story of heart failure and Brutus’s story leading to his loss of innocence, there is the lost potential to have more stories unfold, making both events failures.

Failure is a killer. Failure takes purpose and makes a challenge out of it. You’re at the beach because you’re motivated by the thought of swimming in the depths of the ocean that shares many friends in the deep blue sea; you run into the large body of water. Playing hide and seek, you choose the color blue as your hiding spot as you’re immersed in the water. As you look around, you notice the features of sea: You notice that the coral shares many colors with the rainbow. You recognize the orange with patterns of white on the clown fish as they really stand out against their friends the sea anemone. You worship all the colo- “but I don’t want to go down there!” A pulling force is working against you, the water! No matter how much you oppose the force, you couldn’t fend off nature’s

rhythm. "Ugh! I didn't come here to fight!" Your vision fades to black. With your new friends helplessly swimming around you, there was no fun to be had at the beach anymore. This is failure.

Failure is comfort. It's enjoying the warmth from lying underneath your blanket to the point that you don't want to wake. It's the relaxation that comes from having life's many wonders at your front door. As soon as something's not delivered where it usually is, you don't know where to go to get it. You're left stranded walking through a maze encased in the thick walls of leaves and thorns to keep you running away from nothing while approaching nothing. That was me when I needed to get a job. In the past an education was a given, but then I had to think about the money that comes with education after I graduated high school. This had me worried. I was afraid of the failures that would come with trying to find a job, whether it was my reputation suffering or my not setting the standard that I wanted. I was aimless and afraid of what could come from my actions, but my fears never materialized. Neither did my success. I didn't know where to start, and I didn't want to either. This is failure.

Failure is fixation. It's a look at the immediate but short pleasures that you subject yourself to everyday. The shortsightedness clings over your eyes like goggles that coil around your head tightly. To see, you must squint your eyes to the size of raisins, shriveled up, absent of the life that made it a grape before. You could take the goggles off, but it's a struggle you don't want to engage in. Instead, you search for a flashlight to help your vision. That was me when I only enjoyed playing video games. I didn't even think to discover what else I could truly enjoy in life because my eyes were covered by what was happening on a screen. I was happy enough playing games, but that changed when I realized there wasn't anything substantial in the activity. Was this me achieving success, success in recognizing that what I was doing wasn't going to work? No. I didn't do anything because I didn't want to. This is failure.

Failure is misalignment. It happens when you recognize that the goal that you've set for yourself doesn't match with your ambition, which was the mold to cast this day: I was on the track. Everybody was stretching, practice running, hydrating themselves, doing everything in their power to be as ready as they could be for this race. The sun showed up that day with its coat off to give the black asphalt a shine. The grass was swaying from the light breeze.

My parents were watching as well. Everything seemed to be set. The competition being as fierce as each of their coaches wanted, my competition was ready for this race. The coach blew the whistle, and we all took off; however, with my expectations being too low, I was stumbling over each hurdle that was set higher than my expectations. The race ended, and I placed last. Strange how easy it is to talk about everything prior to the race, yet it's hard to talk about what happened during the race because traces of my pride were left with each hurdle I couldn't jump over. With my words, I was trying to be impressive, but my actions didn't emphasize that. I was trying to be the kid that claims, "Look at what I can do!" but getting first was what I didn't do. My family trusted my words, yet I didn't truly believe them myself. This created an infectious discomfort; what were they supposed to say or do with me in disarray? My family was curious to see where my efforts went before my race started, but now they were ashamed of the answer. My expectations didn't line up with the outcome because I didn't want them to. This is failure.

Failure is an enemy. Like they say, "Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer." I didn't want to admit my failures before, let alone address them. It's inconceivable to think that clinging on to my worst enemies would improve my life, but I knew that "It is only through experience that we learn, and what is failure but very intense experience" (Parsons). It was very tough to get started, but once I started applying what I learned, I started to put forth more time in the activities that I should've paid more attention to before. I was being rejuvenated with the ability focus on what's important again by evaluating everything I avoided. Something was happening.

In a moment of complete ambiguity, a hand reaches out for you. The person on the other side helps pull you into a rather familiar land. It was the moment when the water was done hugging you when you could feel the wind from nature's aquatic rhythm breezing past you. You resting on the sand face down. Surrounding the beach were the familiar trees arcing over many in their shadows. A figure leans over to you. "Haha! I found you!" "Ah! My savior! How will I ever repay them!?"

Success is a best friend. It's the one that will pull you up when you're going down with that friend knowing that the purpose is worthwhile. They'll give you a shove in the right direction, giving you the determination to not only set the standards, but to surpass

them because you've got that best friend to remind you to keep going. It's a comfort that'll help you out when you're down, but, like a friend, it's a comfort that's not always there, but when they are, they'll surround you with the many pleasures of life like the many sea creatures that live in the sea.

Success is being uncomfortable. It's knowing that being put on the edge is what's getting you further than just the front door as before. You can see opportunities as adventures instead of obscurities. You've got a map and a compass now. Even if life puts you through a maze, you will know your way out. That was me when I got a job. Because I was able to make the money to afford school, I could reach out for more opportunities than I was able to before. I relish the reward from the stress, which is school. School plays the role of reminding me that each mistake that I make is a failure that needs correction. If I were to let each mistake that I made stand as is, then I wouldn't be prepared for the tests to come later. I would be abandoning each opportunity to do well on tests before I even get the tests because it would be cowardly to do this. I wouldn't want to embrace the pain that comes with the learning process. It's about making the mistakes now so you don't do so when it's most necessary later. Whether I'm learning Linear Algebra or Calculus II, I continue to struggle through these opportunities, so I'm still pursuing success despite the stress. I'm still going.

Success is intelligence. It's the ability to evaluate each situation that you're in to find your working solution. You've taken those goggles off, and the world suddenly looks vast in the number of options that you have now: each educational branch, each job opportunity, each hobby to invest in. You no longer have tunnel vision to the world around you. This is me now that I've explored my interests so far. Turns out, I really enjoy looking at art. Themes are captured in art pieces that usually contain no words. It's as if each art piece is inviting you to an adventure in itself. I also like to explore science and math. I'm looking into career options that match my enjoyment for both now. I'm able to look at life in broader terms. I'm still looking!

Success is alignment. For me, I received four numbers: 2, 3, 4, and 5. These are my AP scores from the year 2018. I wanted to strive to at least pass my AP tests this year which is getting a 3 or better. I only failed one test, which is a lot better than failing them all. Just a year prior to this, I also got four numbers as well: 1, 2, 2, and 2. Every time I think of this moment, I think of the lack

of ambition before. Thinking back to these four numbers reminds me of my time on the track. Both moments are enough fuel for me to maintain my pace as this helps me feel less stressed. I now have more control because I knew I was setting standards that I was meeting instead of stressing out over not doing as I should. My family was ecstatic because they knew that I wanted to pass, but I even went beyond that! Well is what I wanted to do; amazing is what I did instead. If I was back on track, I would've gotten second place. I'm still doing well!

Failure is a reciprocal. It's only a fraction of you, so once you flip your thinking around, you're suddenly putting more than a hundred percent into your life. Success is a reminder that failure is horrible, while failure is failing to remember that. It's why we keep our failures much closer to us than our success, because dwelling on the success that we're entrenched in would be a failure to keep going. Our achievements would be minimal. Our stories would be much shorter. Failure is ending a journey. Success is the continuation of adventure despite failure.

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RICHARD COLWELL AWARD FIRST PLACE SHORT STORY



RILEE MEYERS

1
FIRST

FIRST PLACE SHORT STORY

BAKERY BOX

Rilee Meyers

Rancid sweat hung in the air, traveling between the last remaining barflies. The smell of alcohol and greasy food mixed into the odor, penetrating the torn red vinyl cushions and lingering in the green felt of the pool table. As the smell intensified, so did the intoxication of the patrons. When “one more round” became six or seven rounds, the bartender was forced to be stricter. He advised many of them to stop drinking and sober up. That didn’t set well with some of the regulars, who protested their right to drunkenness with a slur and a hiccup, but no objection held; the bartender was just as stubborn as they were persistent.

Noah was not as drunk as the others around him, which motivated him to finish each glass poured. Before Noah knocked back each shot, he would stare at its contents, admiring the dark color. Holding it up to the dim bar light made each drink appear rich and honey-like. Each time he imagined the colors lingering in the glass, he would force back the shot, slowly becoming numb to the burn, but it only made him feel hollower. He wasn’t quite among the living, but not exactly a spirit either. The warmth that spread from his chest to his limbs reminded him of summer days at the park, eating and playing in the grass while the midday summer heat beat down on their skin. As the summer days grew shorter and the heat more bearable, the artificial warmth resonated within him.

From the depths of the bar, an unkempt man approached Noah. Hair stuck to his forehead, complementing his shirt, haphazardly tucked into his pants. The man nearly tumbled, but the bar offered him support. Noah shifted away, hoping he wouldn’t have to engage. Even with his senses numb from drinking, and a cloud of alcohol lingering in the air, Noah could still smell the liquor-infused sweat clinging to the man’s ill-fitted clothes.

The man Noah was trying to distance himself from knocked over a beer bottle, allowing most of the contents to pour onto the counter and drip off the side of the bar. He muttered an “oops” while he stared at the mess. Then, as if it

had only just occurred to him, he placed the bottle upright again.

"You're cut off, Dan," the bartender said, wiping up the fresh spill before it could spread.

Dan dismissed the bartender with a lazy wave of his hand. He steadied himself with the bar's surface and leaned against the edge to keep his barstool from teetering. When he knew that he was finally stable, he stared at Noah, with his hollow, bloodshot eyes. Before Dan could find the words to say, loud cheers at a table of revelers sounded from the back of the bar, catching the attention of both men. The emptiness Noah felt multiplied upon hearing the group. He was afflicted with a burn stronger than alcohol, so he forced himself to look away.

While the commotion distracted Dan, Noah shifted from him and pulled his shot glass close to his face, worried that Dan might take it from him if given the chance. Noah's eyes flickered to the bartender who was probably counting down the hours until it was time to close.

Dan's words tumbled out in a slow, calculated manner as he suppressed hiccups that fought to surface. "I haven't seen you here." When he looked at Noah again, he noticed the dark gray pants and matching button-down shirt. "You... uh..." Dan made a sweeping motion with his hands fighting to remember the word for Noah's occupation. When it finally came to him, he clarified himself.

"You a janitor?"

Noah nodded, his lips pressing into a thin line. He sighed, reminded of how quickly he left his apartment after he got home. He hadn't even bothered changing out of his uniform because there, on the kitchen table, sat a small, white box from the bakery. The image was so clear in his mind that, for just a second, he could see the box sitting on the bar in front of him. He blinked, but a shake of his head freed him of his memories.

"I know that look," Dan remarked.

"The uniform is pretty much universal."

"It's not."

"What would you know?" Noah countered. After a moment of silence between them, Dan took a different approach.

"You wanna see a picture of my little girl?" Dan reached for his phone before Noah had the chance to answer. Dan lifted his phone to reveal his lockscreen background. It was an image of a young girl, one with the same shade of Dan's hair and similar face shape.

Noah frowned; all he could see was the little girl's face replaced by the one he was there to forget. He recalled her toothless grin when she announced that she lost her first tooth and the pattern of freckles on her cheeks.

Noah nodded solemnly. "Daughter?"

Noah saw that Dan's smile was missing something when he put his phone away. "Seventeen years now."

It grabbed Noah's attention. His eyes flickered to Dan's, glossed over now. "Does it get better?" Noah asked, swallowing his fears down with the liquor in his glass.

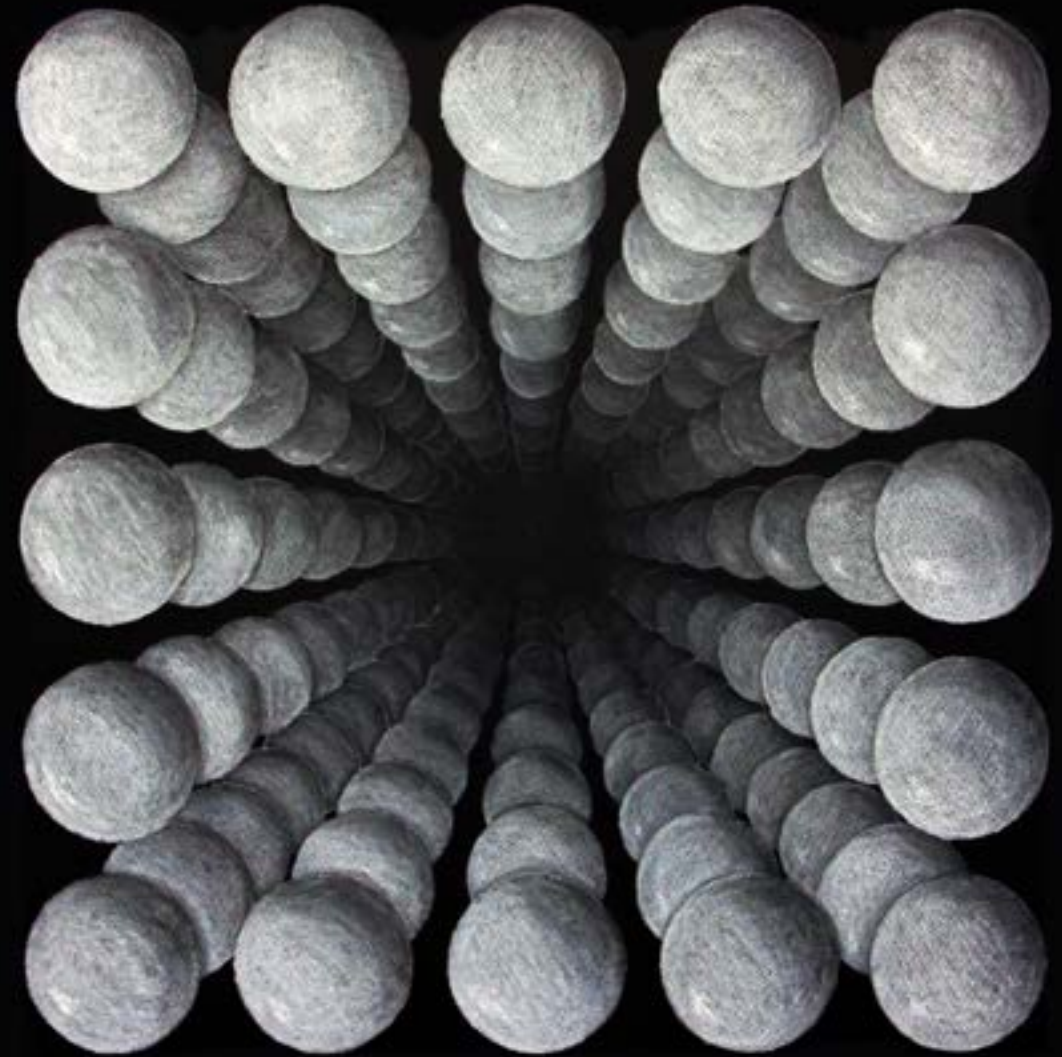
Dan huffed and offered Noah a pitiful smile. "Maybe it's not supposed to." Dan lifted what remained of his drink high in the air and expertly emptied the contents into his mouth. Silence followed with the hum of the bar drowning out Noah's thoughts. A lump in Noah's throat made him incapable of drinking anything else.

With no liquor to offer him sanctuary, he managed to walk back home, ready to face the bakery box. Only a half of cupcake remained after his wife, her mother, had her share. The word "Happy," written in blue frosting, was the only part of the phrase left behind. He sliced the cupcake in half again, for tradition's sake. He stuffed the quarter slice into his mouth, wishing to be released from his condition. His chest felt like an empty cavity, begging to be filled, but no amount of liquor or sugar could fill it. So, he remained in the dark, wondering how to turn on the light.

1 **FIRST**
PLACE
VISUAL ARTS



SOREN
SWEGLES



DESCENSION
CHARCOAL ON PAPER



NEW LIFE

PHOTOGRAPHY

Melissa Dekett

2

SECOND

SECOND PLACE SHORT STORY

OUR CIRCUMSTANCES OF BEING

Mackenzie Hiller

It wasn't an unusual occurrence, being a sophomore that was asked by a senior to go to prom, though I knew from the moment I was asked that it was unusual due to my rather unique situation as well as the fact that I was asked the day before the annual event at the school. I had only talked to my date a few times before being asked to the Senior Prom; my older brother, Jude, was mostly to blame for me being asked at all. He was a genius with a paintbrush (or so I've heard, as I've never actually been able to witness these pieces with my two unworking eyes) and was recruited that particular spring to repaint the logos on the softball and baseball dugouts after school. Being the exceptional brother that I was, I opted to stay and aid tremendously with this task by stirring the paint as well as occasionally providing the much-needed distraction by flicking the paint-coated stirring stick at Jude, earning me a mouthful of obscenities that I was all-too-familiar with.

We were put to this task for a week, though it became vastly more interesting on the third day. I could hear a dozen new voices through my headphones as I sat on the cold bleachers. Though as a whole they became clearer when I pulled the headphones away and set them down next to me, they remained nothing more than an amalgamation of voices, none of which I could recognize. Starting to doubt that my brother was still existent in this sea of people, I called out to him.

I heard Jude sigh. "They're just here for practice, Vincent. I'm finished with painting for today, so I'm just cleaning up and then we can go home. Tomorrow we'll get to work on the baseball dugout, which is a lot more work since we - and I mean you - get to scrape off wads of gum and clean the siding before I can paint anything."

"If you're turning me into your personal assistant, does that mean I get to drive you home?"

"The only driving you'll ever do is driving people insane, and you do that tenfold, bud."

After directing a sarcasm-filled bit of laughter at Jude, I turned my attention back to my headphones, which I began

to wrap around my Walkman as I waited for my brother to return from putting away his painting supplies. I gripped the device tighter when I felt someone clamber across the metal bleachers in front of me, mostly due to the sudden noise rather than that I was actually frightened (or so I tell myself when I replay this moment in my head).

“Cool sunglasses.”

I turned my head towards my right to face the person talking to me, feeling instantly intrigued by the voice, which I tried to dissect from those two simple words. It was a very pleasant voice, one that caused my cheeks to flush. I painted a picture of this person in my mind quite rapidly, as I saw a person that was beautiful despite a few rough edges. Their voice told me this about them, for it was a bit gravelly, but at the same time, I wanted to hear more.

“Thanks, you too.” I felt my face heat up, a nervous chuckle just barely escaping through my lips, “I mean, not that I would know if you’re wearing sunglasses. But if you were, that would be a crazy coincidence. I guess a lot of people wear sunglasses outside so it’s not that crazy, though. I don’t really wear them just to make me look cool, obviously.” I gestured vaguely towards my eyes, towards those unseeing objects that, while useless to me, provided the same use to others: a window into myself, a window that I consistently kept hidden for fear of what they might find there. Shaking away those thoughts, I took a short breath during my anxious ramble. “But don’t go around telling people that, I can’t have them thinking that I am actually not a perfect picture of coolness.”

With that, I heard a coarse laugh, one full of the same amount of joy that I felt just by hearing it. I dropped my hand back down to my side, fidgeting awkwardly with one of the loose threads of my shirt.

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. I think Jude’s got you figured out though.”

“Jude’s just about as cool as the Sahara, so I won’t lose any sleep over that one.”

My head turned instinctively when I heard a handful of names being shouted, one of which – Hurwitz - was repeated several times before I felt the stranger next to me step down a row of the bleachers before hopping off them completely.

“That would be me. Hurwitz, I mean. Thomas Hurwitz, though most people just call me Tommy. I think it’s weird when people call me Thomas.”

“I don’t think it’s that bad of a name, Vincent isn’t exactly any better. What’s the point of being named after an artist when I can’t even see the stuff he’s done?”

“I gotta go before he makes us practice another hour. Coach is getting crabby ‘cause I’m missing practice. Which is ridiculous, making us practice the week before prom. I’m supposed to be out finding some glittery dress or something. ‘Do you think this blue matches my eyes?’”

It was my turn to laugh, though I wasn’t exactly sure what I was laughing at- whether it was what Tommy was saying or how it was said. I could hear him walking away, judging by the sound of footsteps in the gravel growing distant, but that smile on my face remained there no matter how hard I bit at my lip or how hard I tried to hide it behind my hand. That smile stayed plastered on my face for what felt like an eternity before my brother finally returned.

When Tommy asked me to go to the prom with him two days later, I felt like I could barely breathe. Of course, I mean that in the best possible way. Even though he made it seem like it wasn’t that big of a deal, through those two days my thoughts of it evolved in such a quick fashion that I wasn’t sure I was processing the information correctly. It had started with me replaying that handful of words that he sputtered out to me and quickly evolving to accepting the fact that yes, I, Vincent Bodenstien, had developed a crush on the school’s star pitcher (his left-handedness proved useful in the position). But at the same time, I felt a bit of regret when Tommy asked me to go to the prom with him as his date despite it being something that I wanted to accept without any hesitation and with great enthusiasm. We wouldn’t arrive together, which was fine with me, as Tommy had made plans with some of his friends beforehand; actually, this would also be somewhat of an ideal situation for me, as my parents were unaware of this current . . . development in my life. I felt somewhat guilty for this whole endeavor, though, as Tommy and I would be doing this event together, purposefully, and I had allowed it by agreeing to go. I wouldn’t see the looks on all those faces in that gymnasium, but I would understand the feelings behind them nonetheless.

I thought these things over as I stood outside my mom’s minivan next to the school, her hands smoothing out every last crease in my cropped pants. I had asked my mom earlier that day to pick out my outfit for the event, something she greeted with immense enthusiasm as she hadn’t been asked to do such a thing since I was

twelve; since then, she most likely had to watch me wear the most color-clashing outfits possible, though I do respect the space she had given me. According to her, I was wearing a dark pair of jeans and a brown cable knit sweater which matched — and I quote from her — “super cutely” with my dad’s derby shoes. I kept the sweater tucked into my pants and the sleeves pushed up to my elbows, mostly because the sweater felt like it was about two sizes too big for me.

“Mom, it’s fine. No one’s going to notice the wrinkles on my pants. I know I won’t.”

“You might not appreciate it now, Vincent, but all the other boys in there have spent a very long time making sure their outfits look nice. What kind of girl asks someone to prom the day before? Are you sure you weren’t asked last month and just forgot to tell me?”

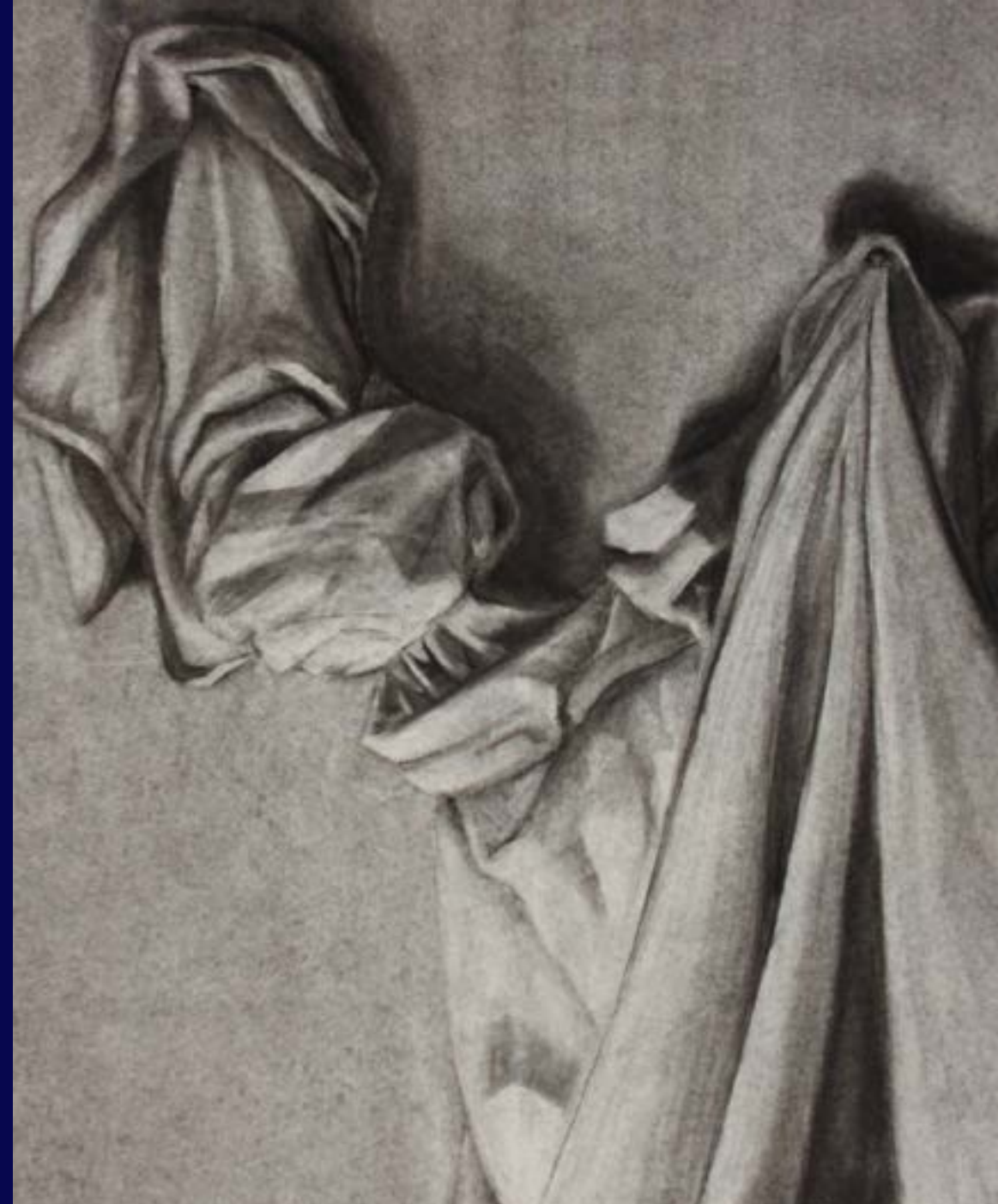
I groaned at my mom’s questions, swatting away her hand as I started walking towards the school; I had walked through the doors to the gym enough times to know exactly where I was going and how long it would take me to get there. It had been almost eight months since my parents let me continue school at a regular high school, not that being homeschooled was all bad, but I wanted to be treated like a normal person and experience all the normal-person things. At the same time, though, I couldn’t help but wonder anxiously if it was “normal” for two guys to go to prom as dates. Still, here I was, making my way to the prom. Jude and his girlfriend of the last year, Kimmy Zhou (or Zoey, as everyone knew her), decided to go to the event with a group of their friends, which left me arriving alone.

I waded my way through the human ocean as my ears searched for a recognizable voice, though all I was able to make out was the music that blared out around me. I made my way to what I guessed was the end of the crowd, judging by the fact that my hands no longer brushed up against people but rather a cold brick wall. I turned and pressed my back up against it, feeling some of the threads of my sweater stick to the rough surface. Though it felt like hours had gone by, only a few songs had been played through when I felt my brother’s familiarly small hand grab my shoulder.

“Jude?”

“Yeah, come on, let’s go outside. I can barely hear anything in here.”

I nodded as his hand moved to grab my wrist, dragging me along before I felt a cool breeze hit my cheeks as Jude let go of my arm. “I’ve got to take Zoey home. Will you be okay here by yourself?”



A STUDY OF FABRIC

CHARCOAL ON PAPER

Elaina Penn

MUSCHBOGHDOTLHBECH

PEN AND INK

Kirsten Brown



I nodded before saying anything, as I was appreciating the cool air and the overall less-overwhelming feel of the sidewalk outside of the school. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, she just hurt her ankle when we were dancing. I'll be back in like fifteen minutes, alright?" He paused, taking in my current situation. "I'll go find Tommy for you, I'm sure he'll want to dance with you at some point."

Instinctively, I nodded at the offer. Still, though, I could feel my face contort into an expression of complete confusion. I knew that this event was a dance, obviously, and that people danced together. Homecoming was in the fall, and I had gone to that event as well, but already the experiences were completely different; prom was different; more serious, somehow. And I had a date this time. Jude picked up on my overwhelmed state, sighing as he put his hand on my shoulder for the second time that night. However, this time it came with an extra weight that I neither understood nor wanted.

"Hey, you'll be alright. Just stay here, okay? I'll go find him for you."

Even after I heard Jude walk away, that weight remained there; however, it had moved from my shoulder to my chest. I don't remember exactly how much time passed or how I ended up sitting on the sidewalk, but I do remember that weight. I knew who I was, I knew who Tommy was, but at the same time, I didn't fully understand *what* we were. I knew that Tommy had a voice that cracked often, one that was somehow always thick with sleep; that his sport was baseball; that after two days, he decided that he wanted to go to his prom with me. It wasn't my blindness that I was afraid would ruin the experience, but rather something else entirely. Despite these modern times, in this small town, we would never be able to be greeted lightly, and deep down, I had known this moment would come. Before, Tommy was simply a friendly stranger, someone that invited me to a harmless event. I hadn't attached any expectations, any intentions to the invitation because I was not aware of them. All of a sudden, though, Tommy meant something a lot more, something that I didn't even know that I wasn't ready to confront.

I tossed my glasses down at the ground, rubbing at my eyes; partly out of exhaustion, though also to hide the tears that began to form. As I heard someone shoving the door open next to me, I quickly and haphazardly wiped at my face, hoping that whoever it was didn't notice that I was there. I heard the footsteps approaching me, and I remained frozen. Jude had said he would find Tommy for me, but this felt too soon,

and I felt too unready. I knew he was standing in front of me, but at the same time, I couldn't help but feel as if he was a million miles away. Eventually, I held up my hand and waited for nothing. I could feel my cold, clammy hand shaking, my calloused fingertips grasping at nothing but the empty air as my left hand instinctively flew up to my cheek to wipe away the tears that were half-dried there. Though it was a voice I wanted, I received a lot more when a soft, warm left hand grabbed my arm and slowly pulled me up from the ground.

"I've been looking everywhere for you. Are you okay?"

I choked out some semblance of Tommy's name before he wrapped me in a tight embrace. I could tell he understood, just by the way that he held me for that one moment. I had been selfish, thinking that only I took into consideration our circumstances of being. I was with him and he was with me, we were together and that was all that I had both wanted and feared. He laughed softly when he let me go, though neither of us moved from where we were.

"Are you as uncomfortable as you look? You don't come off as the sweater type."

"My mom picked out my outfit, actually," I pushed at him playfully, feigning annoyance. "Hey, what did you expect? I didn't have much time to find something better."

"She did a nice job, then. I was just saying you don't usually wear stuff like this. But that's okay, that's sort of the point of all this, I guess."

The silence then was daunting, as I was unsure of what to say next. I wracked my brain to form a sentence, a question, a joke - anything to be able to improve this rocky situation.

"What do you look like?"

Tommy laughed nervously, unsure if I was being serious. "What?"

"Usually, I hate when people tell me what stuff looks like. But I want to know what you look like."

"I'm not sure why that matters."

"It doesn't, it really doesn't. I just want to know more about you, you know? I can tell that you're pretty short, but everything else I know about you is just the way I see you. I see that you're nice, since you took the time to come out here and talk to me, and you're weird, but not in a bad way. You just have a strange sense of humor."

"I didn't come out here just to be nice. I've been looking for you all night but there are just so many people and you know how

loud it is in there. I came out here because I really like you, Vincent. Why do you think I asked you to be my date? You're hilarious, you're really smart - I'm not talking about like school smart, but life smart. All these other kids think that this stuff is important, all these proms and homecomings and how many likes they got on a picture that they posted on Instagram. That stuff doesn't matter, and you get that. I get that." I felt his fingers loosely lace with mine, though I was mostly surprised that he didn't hesitate or pull them away after feeling my cold and clammy hand. Tommy holding my hand felt awkward, of course, but it didn't feel wrong. "If you really want to know what I look like, I'm not really short, you're just a beanpole. My eyes actually are blue, I wasn't making that joke for nothing. My hair is insane most of the time, I'd say it's about the same shade of black as your hair. My hair's definitely not as cool as yours, though."

I nodded at the words, though I wasn't sure if I had been processing them properly. What I was processing, rather, was that somewhere along the way, that weight had been lifted. Some part of it was still there, as it would always be, but most of that weight had been shaken away voluntarily. However, I did pause when Tommy started to pull me back towards the school, pointing to the ground with my free hand. He bent over, somewhat pulling me with him as he didn't let go of my hand, before pushing my glasses back onto my face crookedly.

I groaned as I picked them off and shoved them into my back pocket, blinking a few times as we slowly started making our way back to the building; I could hear the soft echoes of the music inside as the modern slow song changed into an upbeat rock song from the 1970's. I stifled out a yawn as the door opened in front of me, causing Tommy to laugh loudly.

"I haven't gotten to dance with you yet, so you better not be getting tired on me, Vince."

"Of course not."

Though my yawn could have said otherwise, I was most certainly not tired. Tired of society, sure. I had lived, and still live, in a world that tells me that there are two things wrong with me. I had no choice with either of these things, yet society tells me that one of these things is worse than the other. In that moment, though, I didn't feel as if I was any worse than the rest of the loud, jumpy teenagers in the gym. I might not be a normal person, especially at that moment, but I was content with the person that I was; in a way, I might have needed that feeling a bit more. That, and the warm hand of a certain baseball player, of course.

2

SECOND
PLACE
VISUAL ARTS



VERA
KILMOVICH

CHANGE IN CLIMATE
DIGITAL MEDIA





PURPLE PLIGHT

PHOTOGRAPHY

Virginia Regan

3
THIRD

THIRD PLACE SHORT STORY

MONDAY MASSACRE

Skyler Streeter Fye

It was a Monday. It was a gloomy and rainy Monday morning to be exact. Just like that day that changed Tyler's and his mother's life forever.

Tyler sat in an empty room with a musty-brown briefcase laying on the desk in front of him, trying to get ready for his presentation. The briefcase had no copies of PowerPoints or reports – just memories from his past, including that one rainy Monday morning.

Tyler unhinged the clasp of his briefcase. It sprang open, revealing a frail newspaper clipping lying on top of all his reports. He stared at the yellowed paper blankly until it came into focus. He stared down at the date – twenty years ago today. Then his eyes glanced over to a picture of his brother – his tenth-grade school picture.

That day started out like any ordinary day where Mama and Tyler had blueberry pancakes that she had made fresh. Mama always made the pancakes fluffy with a golden tone indented into the doughy pastry. Something that Tyler missed now, very much, even twenty years later.

On that morning, the rain made little tapping sounds on the window located in Tyler's room and every so often there would be thunder rolling in the distance. Tyler grabbed the bucket that was filled with multi-colored building-blocks and poured them on the floor in which they scattered in every direction. He ended up sitting on his bedroom floor where the beige-colored carpet carefully kissed his small legs. Fiddling with a red block that was near his foot, he studied the grooves and the humps that were carefully engraved on its hard surface pondering on what he should build. Suddenly, it came to him. He was going to build a school. He began placing one block after another on the carpet in front of him, flattening the soft fibers. The school structure was now growing taller and taller with every block he put on top of one another until they were all gone. Tyler had one block left and it was the one he was fiddling with earlier, the red one. The thunder was very loud now, and a flash of lightning showed through his window which radiated a white hue throughout the room. He placed the

block on top of the structure and it suddenly came crashing down with a large boom of thunder.

As Tyler scanned over the newspaper article, he heard that voice – that newscaster’s solemn unforgettable voice – saying the words that had dropped his mother to her knees: “There has been a mass shooting at Kingston High School.”

On that morning, those words resonated from the television in the living room. Almost immediately after, Mama let out a horrified scream. After a second, she stopped and was now sobbing harshly into her hands. Scaring Tyler at how loudly Mama was crying, his heart was now pounding very fast against his ribcage; however; that didn’t stop him from being curious. He carefully got up from the carpet and began to tip-toe into the living room, which he did very slowly, trying not to startle her fragile figure. Mama was sitting on her knees in front of the television screen with her white, frail hands cupping her face. Her long brown hair sheltering her face, while it soaked up the salty tears. Tyler laid a hand softly on her bony shoulder where she jerked slightly but didn’t even bother to look up.

Tyler didn’t understand what was going on. The only thing he knew was that his older brother, Mikey, went to Kingston. It just didn’t make sense to him as to why was Mama crying like this. Why was she? The confusion that Tyler was feeling made him frightened, but he had to know what was going on. Why was she crying like this?

“Mama...” Tyler gently spoke.

“Tyler, honey,” she croaked.

Tyler stared again at the newspaper article in his briefcase. How many times has he read it? How many times had he wondered what he should have done? But what could he do? He was a seven-year-old boy at the time who was nowhere near mama’s height. Mama was a mess on that day. Her makeup had cascaded down her cheeks.

Mama suddenly wrapped her arms around Tyler’s small body and engulfed him into a tight hug. Her hug was warm and made him feel not so afraid anymore.

“It’s okay, Mama.” He quietly spoke while touching her soft brown hair. “Daddy is watching over us, just like you sa-”

“It’s not okay, baby,” she whispers. “Your brother has done a horrific thing.”



ISLAND
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
Sabrina Mason



SELF-PORTRAIT

CHARCOAL ON PAPER

Soren Swegles

Just then the newscaster said, "Suspect has been found shot in the temporal lobe it what seems to be an apparent suicide." That's when they flashed a photo of Mikey's face on the television screen.

When Tyler remembered that very vivid detail, he looked over at his brother's photo in the newspaper once again, studying it. Even now, Tyler wondered what had led Mikey to do such a crime. Had they failed as a brother, as a mother? What could they have done to try to stop it? Unfortunately, they never got the answers. They never would.

That day changed Mama and Tyler's daily routine. Tyler remembered the golden and plump pancakes that his mother had always made fresh that resonated a sweet smell into the air; however, days after the shooting it was no longer a sweet smell. Tyler would wake up to the sound of the smoke detector that sounded in the narrow hallway and the aroma of pancake dough resonating from the kitchen, but it wasn't a sweet smell anymore, it was a burning smell. The burning smell was very strong, stronger than the other days. This made Tyler quickly pull the blankets off his small frame and made him run to the kitchen.

"Mom?" He asked while running to the kitchen where black-colored smoke hung in the air.

Mama was crying as she tried flipping the pancake that was now shriveled up like a raisin in the shallow pan.

"Mom, I got it." Tyler gently spoke to her, putting her hand on the crest of her spine.

"No, baby. You need to get ready." Mama talked like she was in slow motion.

Tyler shut off the stove before returning to his bedroom to get ready for the funeral. It was a day that he and Mama would have never expected. He grabbed some black colored pants and a shirt with a tie that mama bought for him just a day before. He slipped the pants over his stubby legs and slid the shirt over his slender torso. After looking at his reflection in the mirror, he wandered back to the kitchen where mama was waiting for him near the front door.

"Prepare yourself." Mama told him.

"Prepare yourself," Tyler whispered to himself. This was something that Tyler always told himself before walking out on that stage, talking about something that was "so close to home" to him. It is also something that would forever haunt him, a phrase

that escaped from his mother's lips before Tyler, at a young age, experienced how truly hurtful and heartless people can become.

"Prepare yourself," he whispered again before reading the article where he left off. "Kingston High School shooting has left citizens outraged."

Before Tyler could ask Mama about what was going on, Mama opened the front door where hundreds of angry citizens flooded their front yard. There were also newscasters present with cameras aiming at Mama and Tyler.

"How does it feel to be the mother of a murderer?!" One person yelled. "You should burn in hell with your son!"

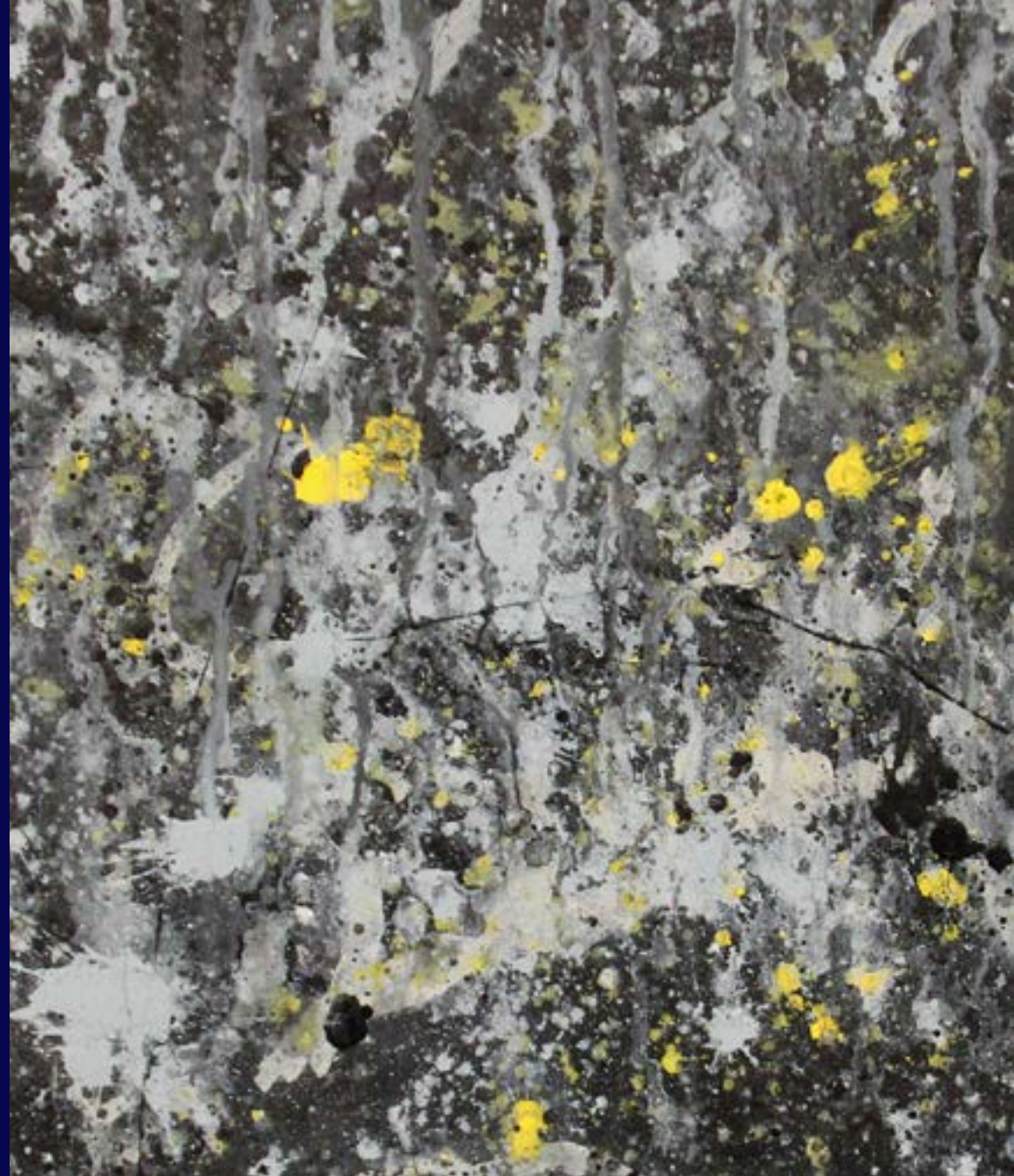
"Your son murdered my daughter!" Another person shouted in the distance.

Mama's eyes were starting to fill with tears again. Tyler grabbed Mama's hand and squeezed it tightly, feeling frightened and confused. Mama grabbed Tyler's hand tighter and ran through the swarm of people, fighting to get to their car. Mama grabbed the door handle of the car with a shaky hand while tears engulfed her face. Tyler got in the backseat of the car; his brother always sat in the front. Now, the front seat was empty. Tyler looked at his mother, who was resting her head on the steering wheel as protesters continuing chanting at her.

"Mom?" Tyler gently spoke.

His mother said nothing in return. Tyler looked out the window where citizens and newscasters were surrounding the car. Mama's head still rested on her steering wheel. Despite the shouts and screams, Mama did not look. Tyler looked at the empty front seat; it looked like a hole. Leaving his backpack on the in the back, he scrambled into the empty front seat.

A newscaster tapped on mama's window and began demanding that questions needed to be answered. "Why did your son commit such a crime? How does it feel being the mother of a son who has committed such an atrocity?" Mama continued to sob. She managed to get the key into the ignition, and when she turned it, the car crackled to life and made a violent humming sound. She put her head on the steering wheel once again and took a deep breath. She looked up and looked at the citizens around her. As she took another deep breath, she put the car in drive and began nosing through the crowd. Now Tyler sobbed in the seat next to her.



OBJECTS IN MOTION

ACRYLIC ON PAPER

William Patterson

Tyler stood up from his desk and made his way to the window that was behind him. The sky above was a dark gray with dark clouds swirling overhead. When he looked at the ground below him, small raindrops pelted the hard concrete just like the way the raindrops pelted the top of Tyler's and his mother's heads on that day – the funeral. The only two people who were there, besides a few protestors who were still wishing death threats upon Mama. The bright yellow police caution tape held back the outraged and depressed citizens who were saying how terrible of a mother she was for raising a psychopathic son.

"We are gathered here today to say farewell to a loving son, brother, friend, Michael Bailey," the priest began.

Mama held Tyler's hand tightly while looking at Michael's gray casket in front of them. Thunder started rolling in the distance as a slight cry escaped mama's lips as she pulled out a handkerchief and gently patted her moist eyes. Tyler was staring directly at his brother's casket. Raindrops would gently bounce on the firm base and then cascade down onto the soaked ground.

"Michael was a very loving and sweet companion towards his brother and his mom." The priest continued. "He will be greatly missed."

"He shall rot in hell like the devil he is!" A protester screamed in response.

Tyler grabbed Mama's hand for comfort as the protesters shouted and the mortuary employees began lowering Michael's casket into the ground, six feet below. More whimpers escaped Mama's lips. The fact that he would never see his brother again made Tyler's heart break even more with every breath that he took. It felt as though a stake was being driven into his beating heart.

Mama looked down on Tyler. "Tyler, sweetheart." Mama spoke between sobs. "Is there anything you want to say to your brother one last time?"

Tyler froze up. What could he possibly say without bursting out into a violent cry? What was there to say? There had been so many unsaid words. The priest handed Tyler a single rose.

"Just throw it in when you're ready," the priest choked out.

Tyler walked up to the opening where Michael's casket was lowered into the solid crust of the Earth. Tyler's lips were trembling. Who was going to play video games with him now? Who was going to push him on the swing set in the backyard now? Who was going

to eat breakfast with him and Mama now? Everything felt so surreal. Was this real life? Tyler stared down at Michael's casket and a teardrop plopped down on the hard surface.

"I won't ever forget about you, Mikey." He tossed the delicate rose into the hole.

Mama walked up next to Tyler with tears spilling out of her eyes. She looked down at the casket which carried her son.

"You'll always be my baby," she choked. "I love you so much, Michael." She then threw down the rose that the priest had also given her.

A year after the funeral: Mama parked the car on the narrow road closest to where Michael's gravesite was. Tyler got out of the passenger's seat with a picture in his hand. When Tyler and Mama approached Michael's tombstone the word "MURDERER" in large red letters was sprayed across his entire tombstone. Mama pulled from her purse the cloth and the bottle of cleaner she used to clean off the vandalism on her son's grave, which hadn't stopped. She wet the cloth and began furiously scrubbing the cement with all the force she had.

"Why isn't it coming off?!" Mama threw the cloth at the stubborn red words.

"Mama." Tyler spoke. "I can help you."

Tyler picked up the cloth and began scrubbing off the paint. Mama pulled another cloth from her purse. They scrubbed the hard surface until the paint finally started to wash away, giving the cement its natural gray color. The granite shined now with the words "Michael Bailey. Loving brother and son" indented in its surface. Mama got on her knees and wrapped her loose arms around the stone and hugged it tightly. Tyler got on his knees as well and saw his reflection in the shining granite.

"Me and Mom miss you, Mikey." He said as he placed a polaroid picture of Mama, Tyler and Michael at the edge of the stone.

For what seemed like the rest of the day, Mama and Tyler laid next to Michael's gravesite and stared up at the sky where the sun was finally shining through the clouds.

"Do you think he knows we're here?" Tyler asked.

"He's always with us, Tyler." she said as the wind softly brushed against the grass where their heads had been laying.

JOURNEY

GOUACHE ON PAPER

Skylar Todd



Tyler stood on the stage in the gymnasium in front of students, teachers and others. He gripped the edges of the podium and took a deep breath.

"The last time I saw my brother was April 15, 1999. It was when he was getting ready to go to school. My mother and I didn't know that it would be the last time we would ever see him again." Tyler gripped the podium more tightly.

"Later that morning, we heard that a school shooting had taken place at Kingston High School - the school that my brother attended." Tyler paused, and looked around the gym. "We soon discovered that my brother ended up murdering over sixty people, including himself."

Everyone was silent, staring at him. That was the part that he hated most. It looked like pity. He wanted to educate people about what his brother had done, so it wouldn't happen again.

He stared down at the podium before continuing, "My brother was a well-educated student. He brought home good grades. He always had a smile on his face. My mother and I didn't expect anything like this to ever happen. We missed all the signs and that is why I am here today. I am not here to scare any of you. I am here to educate you on the things to look out for to avoid this from ever happening."

Tyler looked up and saw a boy in the audience wearing a green-colored shirt, a shirt that looked like the one that his brother put on before he left the house that morning. He even had the same hairstyle that his brother used to have, one that was spiked up with hair gel. The boy sat on the bleachers and showed no emotion. Tyler started feeling a knot in his stomach.

"It never gets easier coming up here, on this stage and talking about what my brother has done and all the lives my brother impacted. My brother was hurting, and my mother and I never caught that. Please, look after one another. If you see someone having a bad day, talk to them. Smile at someone in the hallway, in the community - a smile can always go a long way," Tyler said as he continued looking at the boy.

"Life is hard sometimes, but no matter what you're going through you can always get through it. Hurting yourself or others doesn't have to be the solution."

Tyler smiled at the boy, a sad, knowing smile. And he could not be sure, but Tyler thought he saw a glimmer of a smile in return.

3

THIRD
PLACE
VISUAL ARTS



EVA
KUE



SUSHI BOX PACKAGING
DIGITAL MEDIA



UNTITLED
CHARCOAL ON PAPER

Natalie Loznak

REMEMBER THE NAME

Makenna Joppich

The cheering yelling of the crowd was nearly ear-shattering as I stepped into the gymnasium. There was nothing more adrenaline-pumping than people cheering your name. Sure, there was tons of cheering during football, but they were just cheering for the team. When you step onto that mat, sometimes you are the only one that somebody is cheering for. If you live in a small town like mine, sometimes you feel like the weight of the whole town is on your back.

"This regional tournament is dedicated to Glen Dale Heights Bulldog Rhett Bailey, who was tragically killed in a car accident two weeks ago." The bleachers erupted in a chorus of cheers as Rhett's senior picture was shown on the jumbotron in the fieldhouse ceiling. I looked over into the crowd, where Rhett's parents were tearing up from the overwhelming support.

Rhett was my best friend. We lived next door to each other since we were kids. We were born at the same hospital within days of each other. I think it was our destiny to be as close as we were. Some of our other friends would say that we were nearly inseparable. Where one of us was, the other wasn't so far behind. We had been in the Thumb Area Football League and wrestling together since we were six years old. We liked the same shows and movies and even the same music.

A couple months ago at practice, we were learning a new takedown technique that I couldn't seem to grasp. It was a long day after school and with the number of us in the wrestling room that day, it was quite warm. So, it just goes without saying that tempers were flaring that day. It was the double leg takedown. It was supposed to be a simple technique, but I just couldn't do it. There were multiple frustrating attempts, none of which were successful.

I could tell that everyone, especially Rhett, was looking at me as Coach took me aside and sent me to the locker room to calm down after my temper had flared too many times. It was embarrassing. However, Rhett abandoned his practice partner and stopped me before I could get the locker room door open. We partnered up at the edge of the mat and he spent the rest of practice teaching and re-teaching me the new technique. He

didn't have to help me, but he did. I would never forget that.

Practices came and went, with some being harder than others in preparation for the upcoming regional tournament. At least four wrestlers from our team advance to states every year, so it was very important for all of us to work hard to get there. There was one point where all of us just needed to take a break, so we took the opportunity that was given to us, because breaks like that do not happen very often.

There was a group of us in that car that cold and bitter November day. Part of the team decided to go out for dinner and a movie after a grueling day at practice. We all piled into Rhett's truck and started the half-mile drive down to the theater. I vividly remember "Friends In Low Places" by Garth Brooks blasting through the speakers. It was Rhett's idea to roll down the windows and grace the small town of Glen Dale with our singing talents.

"C'mon, Mav. You gotta sing!" Rhett elbowed at my ribs. "You can't just listen to Garth Brooks and not sing!"

I shook my head and chuckled. "I don't sing, man!"

Rhett rolled his eyes. "You don't sing. You don't dance. So what can you do wonderboy?"

I looked at him right in the eyes. "I can whoop your ass at practice!"

Rhett shook his head. "Nah, that can't be. I always remember whooping yours!"

"That's because you have the memory of a baboon!"

That's when it happened.

A beat-up F-150 barreled around the corner and t-boned the driver's side of the truck. The sheer force of the collision sent the truck tumbling and rolling down the road. I don't remember how many times we rolled, but the police said it was at least three times. From there, I can't tell you very much.

I only remember four boys piling into that truck and only three making it home.

It wasn't until later that I found out that the other driver was drunk and trying to change the radio station. He was so drunk that he even told the cops that he crashed because of the new Shawn Mendes and Camilla Cabello song. He apparently wanted to change it to something "better."

My best friend is *dead* because a drunk asshole didn't like Billboard's Top 100.

It wasn't until the funeral that I could fully comprehend what had happened that day.

The scene was nearly impossible to take in. I had never seen so many people gathered in one space in my entire life. The pews were packed full with family members and friends. The flowers were perfectly arranged in front of the casket. Rhett's senior portrait stared at me from where it was placed. Family members gave tearful eulogies and sobbed at the altar.

Rhett would hate every single second of it.

He would have wanted Garth Brooks and George Strait blasting over radio speakers. He would have wanted his funeral to be a party. That was just the type of person Rhett was.

He wouldn't have wanted us bawling like a bunch of kids as we passed his casket. He wouldn't want us crying over him period.

The only ones who stayed after the burial were the members of the football and wrestling teams. It wasn't until I saw Rhett's now-repaired truck pulling up on the path leading up to the headstone that I heard it. "I'll Drive Your Truck" was one of Rhett's favorite songs by his favorite country artist, Lee Brice. It was blasting over the speakers. Wrestlers and Football players alike joined in with a mumbled chorus as the truck got closer.

I was jarred out of my thoughts as a calloused hand grabbed and shook my shoulder. The sounds of the wrestling meet echoed in my ears. Coach was standing there, trying to get my attention. "Maverick, your match is next. They've put you against Atwood."

Danny Atwood was a senior from the rival high school, Jefferson High. He was a one-time state champ and two-time state qualifier. He was ranked second in the entire state of Michigan. I could spy him from across the gym, doing sprints and shifting from foot to foot as he pumped himself up, making a total scene. Rhett and Danny's matches were the most exciting to watch.

Their animosity towards each other was palpable, and it only got worse when Rhett lost the last match they had against each other. It had almost ended in a fistfight when Danny started to trash talk as he was walking away. Everyone knew that he couldn't care less about what had happened to Rhett. Danny had made it blaringly obvious on more than one occasion that he hated Rhett's guts when he was alive.

After Rhett died that spring, Coach approached me about taking his spot on the varsity team. I agreed, knowing that Rhett would want me working my ass off to bulk up and keep my spot on the team instead of moping around.

I've been wrestling for almost twelve years. I've had tough matches; almost everyone who wrestles has. However, I never had to wrestle someone with Danny's aptitude before. He just seemed to have a natural skill that I have never seen before. So, nothing could compare to the adrenaline I felt as I stepped onto the mat. Nothing.

This was Rhett's match. I was doing this for him. Not me. Not coach. Not even my parents. Not for anybody else. Just him.

I grabbed the green strap from the center of the mat and velcroed it around my ankle as Danny did the same. The sound of the referee's whistle cut through the sound of cheering parents and friends, signaling the start of the match.

Danny's sharp hazel eyes locked with mine as he lunged for my leg, hooking his arm around my thigh and using his head to push against my chest until I lost my balance. Anger bubbled up in my chest as I hit the mat. I just let him get two points on me. Two points that he shouldn't have scored in the first place. I squirmed to the edge of the mat, forcing both of us out of bounds.

The ref's whistle echoed in my ears as I forced myself to stand up. My jaw clenched as a growl forced itself out of my throat. That definitely was not going to happen again.

"Remember the name," I mumbled.

The sharp shrill of a whistle cut through the air.

"Remember the name," I growled as I lunged for Danny's knee, using the same technique that Rhett had taught me that one day at practice. Danny's head practically bounced off the mat as he lost his balance.

Danny rolled himself onto his stomach, trying to force the both of us out of bounds, just as I had moments earlier. I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins as I did everything in my power to flip him onto his back before he got to the edge of the circle.

The crowd cheered; the Glen Dale Heights side and the Jefferson High side mingling together as I flipped Danny onto his back. I threw my body on top of him, trying to keep him pinned until the ref called the match.

I felt the vibrations as the Referee's hand hit the mat.

One.

Two.

Three.

I stood up quickly, removing the green strap from my leg before the referee raised my hand. I pointed my index finger in the air as I made a fist. The gesture was Rhett's signature after he won a match, so nothing made more sense than to use it when I won this match.

The team waved mockingly as Danny punched the mat and was escorted away before he could shake my hand. I saw my team rushing onto the mat as Danny was escorted off. I swear that I saw Rhett in the crowd surrounding me, clapping and cheering. Red-hot tears fell down my face.

It wasn't long before a chant echoed throughout the field house.

"Remember the name."

"Remember the name."

"Remember the name!"

After the match, I took my truck down to the cemetery to visit him. There was no way that I could have won a match like that and not tell him about it. It was eerily silent as my truck's engine switched off. The wind whipped around me as I tucked my coat tighter around myself. I slowly made my way through the headstones until I could see his name. When I finally reached it, I carefully removed the medal I had won from the tournament from my pocket.

I shouldn't have won this. Everybody knows that Rhett would have won it himself. He worked the hardest and had the most mat time out of all of us. So it only made sense that I unroll the ribbon and place it in front of his grave. I read over the engraving one more time before taking a deep breath and heading back to my truck.

It was only fitting that "Friends In Low Places" began to play as I drove down the small dirt path leading away from the cemetery. It wasn't long before I caught myself beginning to hum the lyrics. I smiled softly. I guess that Rhett did get me to sing after all.

