

WESTERN WYOMING COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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# BOARS TUSK



*A CREATIVE SOURCE & OUTLET FOR  
OUR COLLEGE & REGIONAL COMMUNITY*

**2019**

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# 2019 Editor's Note & Staff

## Note from 2019 Editor in Chief:

In a project this ambitious, there are a lot of people behind the scenes who help make things go smoothly, and I would like to thank those people first and foremost. The *Boars Tusk* would like to thank our main financial contributors: Dr. Karla Leach, the President of WWCC, for her continued support and funds for a large amount of our printing costs, as well as Sweetwater BOCES and Wesswick Foundation.

Thanks also to Leesa Lee in the BIS Lab with her flexibility in letting us use her facilities, and Jason Hilty for his help in reviewing submissions. Dave Gutierrez was also a major help to this project, and we thank him for his expertise and time in assisting us as Graphic Design advisor. Former English Prof. Rick Kempa and current English Prof. Cecily Brunelli were outside readers for several works also helped with their advice.

I personally would like to thank the staff; it was truly a joy to work with all of them, and I looked forward to each class, knowing that they would be prepared and enthusiastic about the good work we were doing.

Of course, this entire literary journal would be impossible without the many authors who contributed their artistic genius, and the reason for this magazine's existence is due to the many writers, photographers, and artists in Sweetwater County. While reviewing the submissions, I experienced pieces that made me step back, works that made me laugh or roll my eyes, poems that touched my heart, and many new perspectives and ideas. We appreciate each and every contributor for their hard work, creativity, and willingness to share their experiences with our little corner of the world.

P.S. For those who may notice that there are entries from some of the editors, I would like to inform you that each submission was reviewed blindly. Our advisor removed each name before review and each member of the team assessed the work for its artistic merit. Moreover, we made use of outside readers for several pieces to make sure that we had picked worthwhile works in an ethical way.

## Editor in Chief:

Rachel Winward is an English major from Farson (the little town with the ice cream shop). When her homework and housework aren't encroaching on her spare time, she enjoys playing the piano, making perfect toast, and pointing out any dog in the vicinity. Her backpack might be ripping at the zippers and be the main cause of her back pain, but it is organized within an inch of its life. She will be transferring to Utah State University in the fall and continuing her education in English.

## Literary Editors:

Kyla Ditges is a sophomore English major who enjoys binge watching cheesy cop dramas in her free time (read: never), and has many complex color coded organization tools that lend her life the illusion of order. Kyla grew up in a small town outside of San Antonio, Texas. She moved to Wyoming after graduating high school and has come to love it (but gets desperately homesick every time the temperature falls below freezing!). Kyla intends to continue studying English at UW in the fall.

Savanah Walker is a first year English major here at WWCC. She has lived in Wyoming all of her life. Her hobbies include hurting poor boy's souls, making perfect s'mores, and being a freelance sandwich critic. She is a strong believer in sandwiches as art. Her roommate (see photography editor) likes to tease her about how annoyingly organized she can be. Nothing stands between her and a good homemade brownie (but not the pot kind).

**Non Fiction Editor:**

Chancy Lowinske is a music major who has caffeine for blood. She frequently naps and can be found at your local Subway making sandwiches for sad hungry people. When not being a sandwich artist, she is reading or watching TV shows pretending that homework doesn't exist till the last minute.

**Photography and Art Editor/Media editor:**

Hannah Christensen is a Technical Theatre planning on studying Art (with an emphasis in photography) at Dixie State University this fall. Hannah grew up in Cedar City, Utah, home of the Shakespeare Festival. Finding herself close to many national parks and other sites, she tends to cling to the outdoors. She loves to hike, swim, wakeboard, snowboard, and many other things. When she's not in school or on an adventure, you can find her cuddled up with a good book or scavenging through the internet to find underground indie bands and music artists.

**Assistant Editor:**

Cynthia Shereda is a dragon who occasionally has the patience to deal with humans. Her meowjor is Communication Disorders and Deaf Education. ( I know it's a mouthfu--long story short I'm becoming a speech therapist). Next fall I will be at Utah State

**Faculty Advisor and Layout Grunt:**

Chris Propst, a WWCC English Faculty member, grew up in Alaska, got his MFA in in Creative Writing: Fiction from Texas State University, was the editor in chief for Texas State's *Persona* literary journal, and was an editorial assistant for *Texas Books in Review* and *Southwest American Literature*. He's still grooving on a Spring Break trip to the Grand Canyon where he weathered the infamous beginnings of the "bomb cyclone."

**Graphic Design Advisor:**

Dave Gutierrez is an Adjunct Instructor at WWCC. For almost a decade, he worked at Western as Director of Independent Study Lab and as Director of Distance Education. He has also worked over twenty years as a high school English teacher and as a graphic designer/art director for 15 years. He has an MA in English from Washington State University and an Advertising Design degree from Colorado Institute of Art. He is a Rock Springs native and remains active in all things related to Actors' Mission, photography, art, and our glorious landscape.

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## **Hands**

My hands mold into the shape  
of dreams and fears I own.  
Creators of the universe,  
they are imprinted into stone.

The calluses on my fingers  
grow harder every day,  
yet they cannot stop working,  
Even once they've withered away.

Nails that used to be sharp, and long,  
are now bleak and dull.  
For they have served for many years,  
but now the giving cup is full.

My time has come, the mission complete.  
Long have I expected this day to come.  
For what takes thousands of days to create,  
can easily be destroyed in one.



by Matt Henley

## Landing

I was running late, trying unsuccessfully not to speed through the last few streets leading to the airport. My husband's plane was expected to land right as I pulled out of the driveway, and I had promised him I would be there right as he landed so that I could welcome him home. That was the plan of course, but when I was leaving the house I couldn't find the pictures. Don't ask me how I lost them, I don't know how I do these stupid things.

But after tearing through the house, I finally found them. Only at the expense of my being on time. Sure, Clay might be annoyed that I wasn't there when he got off the plane, but when he saw the pictures, none of that would matter. We would be together, happy, and everything would be okay.

I sped straight past the area marked "Arrivals" and headed toward short-term parking. It was important that I go inside and meet him, so we wouldn't have to worry about impatient drivers and complimentary airport shuttles vying for our attention. Once I finally found a parking spot, I started walking back toward the airport while checking my purse to make sure the pictures were still there. And they were, in all of their unassuming, streaked black and white glory.

I tried to suppress my grimace as I crossed the street over to the building. I have always hated airports. It makes me feel sick just to walk into one. I hate the rush of careless people shoving past each other and haphazardly dragging their things, yanking their children by the hands and whisper-yelling at them: *move faster, pay attention, stop running ahead of me, do you want to get lost?* I hate the noise of muffled announcements and plastic wheels scraping across floors. I hate the smell of airports: old coffee and floor polish, some kind of jet fuel-injected dust, and a dozen different kinds of overpriced food. But most of all, I hate airplanes. I always told Clay, "people aren't meant to fly. It's unnatural." He would just smile at me and say, "so is drinking milk from a cow, and you know you love ice cream. Don't worry so much, love."

My husband worked as a photographer for a general interest magazine, so he spent a lot of time travelling. He would fly for hours and hours all across the world to take photographs. He loved the whole process: the adventure, the seeking and finding. He told me it was all about capturing expression, light, shapes. Holding on to a moment. For his sake, I brought a little camera with me to the airport along with my photographs. Even though the location wasn't perfect, I hoped this would be a moment to hold on to.

The thought that turned my grimace into a small smile as I pushed through the revolving doors leading inside was that this was the first time there would be big news when Clay came home, rather than before he left. I've always thought it was funny and a little tragic that every big relationship milestone Clay and I had was connected to him leaving.

When he asked me out on our first date, he had to call five minutes later and postpone because he forgot he was flying to Los Angeles that day. He proposed to me by stopping at my house on his way to the airport. He brought me tulips, my favorite flower, and their scent swirled together with his as I hugged him. It reminded me of a secret garden. A safe place to stay.

Even the day after we got back from our honeymoon, he had to fly all the way to Ireland. He wanted me to go with him, and I wanted to go, but I couldn't even bring myself to buy an airline ticket. I knew there was no way I could get on the plane. At the airport, I had smiled even though it hurt that he was leaving so soon, and I joked about him running off to lead his double life now that he had me secured. He chuckled, but then got serious, taking my hands and holding them tightly as he said, "Don't be silly, love. I'm with you, forever." I looked into those clear green eyes of his that always made me feel safe, and I tried my best to believe him. Those eyes could make my dizzying world stand still. It was only when I looked away from them that I started to worry he might not always be there.

Clay knew the real reason I hated airports, even though I would never admit it to him or anyone else. It was because a plane meant someone was leaving. I was sick of people leaving. When I was seven years old, my dad packed his things and flew to New Mexico in search of any tan young woman that wasn't my mother, and any life that wasn't his last one. I woke up crying every night for weeks afterward, because in every dream I saw him, stern-faced and cold as he flew away. Three years later, my older brother who I had relied on for advice and security left to study abroad as an aspiring writer. He told me he wouldn't be gone long, but being overseas changed him, and when he visits home we can't find much to talk about. I guess I was afraid that would happen to Clay, too.

I knew it was silly, but every time he left I said a prayer. I don't really consider myself religious or anything, but every time I stood at the airport or on the front porch watching him leave, I prayed before I had time to think about anything else. I always whispered, *dear God, please let me keep this one.*

Clay had never given me any reason not to trust him. He was always home when he said he would be, and he brought me gifts from all the places he visited. I have jewelry from Beijing, Russian nesting dolls from St. Petersburg, and pressed roses from the City of Love, along with so many more beautiful things. Through all five years we have been married, he has always been the sure one, so confident in us. But times had been hard lately and I had started to wonder if that tension was the beginning of the end.

We had been trying to have a baby for about three years, with no success. We went to see doctors and tried vitamins and treatments, all sorts of things. But there was nothing. Of course it didn't help that Clay had to be gone so much. The wishing and waiting had started to wear on us. Clay acted calm when I worried and paced the floors, but I knew he wanted a baby even more than I did. When we went on walks and would see someone pushing a stroller or holding a toddler's hand, he would look at me and beam with such intense longing in his eyes. He was so hopeful, and I just wanted to make him happy.

That is why I was able to walk into the airport with confidence, with my sonogram pictures in my hand and a t-shirt that said “Mommy In-Waiting.” I had made it myself as soon as I found out I was pregnant. He had just left town on this trip, and I waited, through a torturous six weeks of secret-keeping from the person I wanted to celebrate with more than anything. But I wanted to surprise him. I had to see those green eyes light up in person.

As I stepped inside, I ignored the feelings that usually surfaced when I entered an airport, and quickly scanned the baggage claim area, expecting to see the signature jeans and button-up shirt that Clay wore on coming home days. But he wasn’t there. In fact, there weren’t many people there at all, other than some newlyweds giggling in an attempt to get their luggage out of baggage claim, a father on the phone trying to call a cab for his family, and a tired-looking receptionist. I walked to the Arrivals/Departures board and skimmed it until I found my husband’s flight. It simply said “DELAYED” in red letters. I was relieved for a minute as I realized Clay wouldn’t be upset with me for being late, but then I thought, *he was supposed to land over forty-five minutes ago*. I had never experienced this kind of delay, especially from the reliable airline that Clay’s work paid for him to travel with. Of course I immediately started worrying, so I walked to the receptionist to find out what was going on.

She was sitting there with a dazed look on her face, doing something on her computer. I cleared my throat to get her attention. She looked up and gave me a plastic smile.

“Excuse me, can you tell me what is happening? My husband’s plane was supposed to land almost an hour ago, and the board just says his flight is delayed.”

“Well, his flight is delayed.”

“I understand that. I was hoping you could tell me what is going on with the plane to make it so late. Did they delay takeoff for safety reasons or something?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t have that information for you.”

“Can’t you call someone? Please, I just want to make sure he is okay.” “Ma’am, I really can’t tell you much other than—”

I am not usually the kind of person who makes threats or bargains, but something about her condescending tone made me lose all of my patience. I needed to find out where my husband was, and if I needed to go pick him up from another airport or something. This was supposed to be our moment to reunite, and this receptionist was keeping me from that moment.

“I don’t see how you can’t make a phone call to appease a customer. I am simply concerned about the safety and whereabouts of my spouse. I just don’t believe it’s impossible for you to call someone and figure out where he is. My husband has flown faithfully with you for years but if you don’t value our business, then I can—”

Her fake smile had quickly faded. “Alright, slow down, I’ll make a call. What’s the flight number?”

I gave her the number and she picked up the phone. I stood there, tapping my foot as a way to ease my nerves and frustration while she repeated the number over and over again to whoever was on the other end of the line. Finally, she must have gotten through to him because



she looked at me with an impatient, showy smile. She listened for a long time, and I watched her eyes slowly widen in shock. She put a hand to her mouth, then stepped back as she whispered something into the receiver. I rushed to the edge of the counter.

“What’s happening? Hello? Please tell me what’s going on. Is my husband okay?”

The woman opened her mouth to speak, but it was an eternity before she made a sound. When she did, she spoke slowly and softly, with worry all over her face.

“Ma’am, you may need to sit down.”

“I don’t understand. Why do I need to sit down? Please tell me something, anything!” I was yelling now. I couldn’t help it. What else could I do?

“Your husband’s plane...it was experiencing some heavy turbulence and difficulties after taking off. They were unforeseeable. The pilots and people here were doing everything they could, but it wasn’t going well. The plane started going down... about 75 miles from the shore.” Now she spoke even slower, painfully. “They can’t find the plane... and they think it went down in the ocean.”

My mouth opened and I looked at her in disbelief. She stared back at me pathetically. My body, my face, my voice didn’t know what to do. I started laughing. “No. No, no, no. Clay said he was coming back today. He is coming to see me here. He is coming back for me, here. Today. They probably just had a hard time getting settled for takeoff. He wouldn’t just leave me. I have to tell him he is going to be a father, and he is going to be so excited. He can’t just leave me. See this shirt? I made this. Don’t you see these pictures?? He has to see these pictures.”

“I’m so sorry ma’am, but...”

And then I couldn’t hear anything we were saying anymore. Suddenly I could feel the environment of the airport seeping into every bone in my body. I could smell dirty suitcases and stale donuts, and I could hear shouting and whispering and the clattering of heels on tile. And the light, it was so bright and cold, plain unfeeling white. My head was spinning. I felt a weight on my chest and on my head, pushing me down into the floor, and I was breaking as it kept on pressing. I could taste blood as my laughter turned into loud, quivering breaths, and they kept getting louder and shakier until they became sobs. I felt my legs trembling and my knees slowly bending, though I didn’t tell them to. The receptionist was trying to speak to me and touch me, but I couldn’t move. I couldn’t get any air, I just kept gasping and holding on to my stomach. The little black and white photographs slipped out of my hand, and as they hit the floor, the commotion of the airport faded out of my consciousness.

I looked down at them, slowly, and I saw my baby. She was looking up at me, crying. I had woken her from her nap, She looked worried, and asked me through silent tears, *when will my daddy be here to see me?* I looked into her clear green eyes and said *Oh sweet thing, I’m so sorry. He has flown away, and I don’t think he’ll be landing anytime soon.*







Autumn Too Soon by Jessica Dean

Eddie Delbridge

## **Fly Over People**

When the sun comes up  
The houses come alive  
Assuring each other  
Their world has survived

Big jet airplanes  
Flew right threw them  
I bet the engines  
Had no problem

There's work to be done  
Money to be made  
New products to try  
Souls to be saved

Fly over people  
Tell me  
What's in a name?

Fly over people

There's clothes on the line  
Toys in the yard  
Some words to the wise  
A few heart to hearts

Some people losing  
All that they've got  
While sirens are playing  
Ready or not

Fly over people  
Tell me

Night is descending  
Knees are bending  
Prayers from this town  
Heavenly ascending

Savanah Walker

## **Mundane Daily Routine**

inspired by “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

Morning’s sweet subdued sun rises, timidly

following still night into chilly dawn.

With delicate birds warbling careful songs into the cold, watching  
the world wake. Sunbeams, crystalline, warming the soil.

The sun rises and strengthens, cold disappearing, leaving  
rapidly. The earth baked, cracked. Grass withering  
before rays that attack and devour.

Burning the faded earth and parched soil.

Setting slowly, sun.

Rays: slowly extinguished starbursts  
dying a colorful, explosive death. Too quickly,  
sunbeams retreat, night arrives with  
stars’ muted, healing light.

## The Monkey's Murder

I had just spent 48 days in solitary confinement, or “The Fish Tank,” as the inmates referred to it. I had finally been processed, given an inmate number, and placed in my designated Pod.

You wouldn't think it, but even in prison, a person can accumulate quite a bit of personal effects. My muscles ached as I carried the awkward brown box that had all my belongings in it through “D Pod”, (my new home). Other inmates roamed around freely, playing games, watching T.V. and generally bullshitting with each other. I wondered why my muscles would ache now, since I had been doing 300 push ups a day, for the duration of my time in “The Fish Tank”. As I scanned the large two tier room for my cell number, I couldn't help but notice the cleanliness of the place. The walls, floors, and ceiling all seemed to have a glare, like a bald man's freshly shaven head. I spotted my cell number – “D 11”, and bee lined it straight there, so I didn't have to set my box of belongings down before reaching my destination. For some reason, I felt as if I had to get to my cell before putting the box down, or I would be showing weakness.

I reached my cell and immediately dropped the box to the ground. This made a loud slapping sound, which echoed throughout the small fifteen by fifteen foot cell. This is when I was first introduced to my new cell mate. He was a chubby, red haired man, in his early forties. He was sitting on a plastic red lawn chair that he had brought in the cell from the day room. He gave me a curious look through the thick prison approved prescription glasses he was wearing. He didn't say hello, or even introduce himself, he just pointed to the top bunk indicating that this is where I would be sleeping. I gave him a small nod and picked my box back up and placed it on my new bed. Just as I began to unpack my box, “Lockdown!”, was yelled over the intercom, informing all the inmates to return to their cells and lock the doors behind them. My cell mate got up from his chair and reached for the door, pushing it shut without even having to take a step. He went back to playing his video game and without even looking at me, he mumbled, “Chow time.” I had already learned that every thing that happened while in general population, happened at ten minutes to the hour. I looked at my watch and made a mental note of it being ten minutes to noon. Just then the loud click of the heavy steel doors unlocking caught my attention. I observed for a minute what my cell mate was going to do. After several seconds of him just sitting in the seat, I took it upon myself to leave the cell and go figure out what to do. I saw a large line forming at the front of the day room leading to the main entrance. I fell in



line and began the first of my many journeys to the cafeteria.

The cleanliness and shininess of the prison continued as I walked deeper into the facility. I could smell the food as we got closer to the cafeteria. A sour smell that almost burned my nose filled the air. It smelled of dough, mixed with bleach, from all the chemicals that kept the shine on all the surfaces. My stomach rumbled at the thought of food, even if it was served with a side of Clorox. I was hungry and nothing except food was going to stave that feeling.

The line got longer as I entered the cafeteria, and I felt like I was in line for a roller coaster at the county fair, with all the noise and laughter going on around me. The echoes from the building seemed to magnify all the sound by at least three times. The cafeteria was white, shiny, and matched the rest of the prison. The tables, chairs, and serving area were all stainless steel, which gave off even more of a reflection throughout the place.

I was finally given my food tray, which was fish, because it just so happened to be fish Friday. After being handed my tray, I was unsure of where to sit, but was quickly rushed to a seat by one of the prison guards. He directed me to the exact spot he wanted me to sit, which seemed very odd to me at the time. I decided I better just go with the flow, and took my seat. There were three inmates already seated at the table. An ethnical mix, of a black man, Hispanic man, and another Caucasian like myself. This is where I met, “The Monkey Man”.

Monkey had on a pair of the thick prison-issued glasses that matched my cellmate’s. (They were the only kind a prisoner could get, if they didn’t own their own pair). He was balding and had a big mole on the side of his head, along with an unusually wrinkled forehead. He had a strange way about him, and I couldn’t quite understand what his major malfunction was.

“Hi, they call me Monkey... what’s your name?” he asked as soon as I took my seat. I introduced myself, and we chatted for a minute about my crimes, and how long I had been there. It seems an odd thing to think of doing, until you’ve been in the correctional system awhile. The three inmates all seemed reasonable enough, and even very polite.

After my introduction, it was Monkey’s turn to tell his story. He went into the story as if on cue. It started like many others I had heard, but then he mentioned the fact that he was serving a life sentence for murdering his best friend. I just casually kept eating my fish, (which was actually quite tasty), and listened to his story. He and his friend had a fight over a drug deal, which lead to him stabbing his friend 63 times, and dumping his dead body into the bath tub. While he was telling me the story, I noticed the casual, calm, almost nonchalant way he told it, like he had told it a million times before. He was buttering his bread, when he told me, what he considered to be the strange part of the story.

“ They all said I was fuckin’ crazy, but I ain’t the crazy one. My wife is the one who kept taking showers while his rotting corpse was in the bathtub”, he said, in a very matter of fact

way. These were his last words before the subject got changed.

The conversation continued as we finished our fish, but I couldn't recall a word that was said after the Monkey's story. Now, I had heard quite a few stories while being incarcerated, but that one stuck with me. Watching the way the other two inmates at the table didn't even react to the story, and how it was just another fish Friday in prison, really made me rethink my situation in life. I knew then that I had to make the best of the time that I had to serve, but I also knew that this was a place that I didn't ever want to come back to.



Ranch View by Michele Irwin

Myra Peak

## **Done**

I am done

It is over

Gone

Away

Never again

Out the door

Blown away

Covered up

Daylight no more

Power out

Love diminished

Anger bubbling

Pop

the blister

Kyla A. Ditges

## **Richard**

Love  
is being  
five-foot two  
and learning to  
leverage  
your six-foot three, still-built-like-a-cop husband  
off the floor,  
because sometimes he falls and  
forgets  
how to stand back up.

Love  
is petitioning  
for caregiving  
classes at the local Y  
because no one ever teaches  
you how to do  
this:  
Because *The Handbook of Everything*  
*You Need to Know About*  
*This*  
explains in detail how  
your husband's neural synapses end protein swathing  
functions at 53.7%  
optimal performance –  
but never  
once  
tells you how to feed him  
when he

forgets  
how to eat.

Love  
is trading  
*Cosmo for Caregivers Today*,  
because that inflatable  
bed-bath tub with the  
faucet-connecting showerhead extension  
really is the best  
invention  
since individually wrapped  
Tootsie Rolls.

Love  
is crying  
yourself to sleep  
every night  
because your husband's  
hospital bed  
isn't big enough  
for both of  
you;  
because, for the first time  
in sixty-three years  
and 7 months,  
you can't  
fall asleep  
wrapped in your husband's arms.

Laura Stewart

## **Tap Class**

Shuffle hop, step, f-lap step.

I stretch

Black leather shoes over my feet,

Slowly tighten silver screws,

Pullback the laces

In preparation,

And step into class.

Shuffle hop, step, f-lap step.

We are scattered and loud.

Tap toe-ball-heel

Practice pullbacks, drawbacks,

graboffs, riffs.

We follow silent

metronomes: individual, internal.

From the outside

it sounds like dissonant rain

With indulgent thunderclaps.

This is both the calm and the storm.

A few minutes later we unite

Shuffle step, hop, f-lap step

Start slowly with shuffles, spansks, and slurps,

Then complicate, make intricate rhythms.

Brush back, buffalo, perfect tri-pl-ets

Hop-step-leap, Eleanor, Shirley Temple.

We are soldiers, marching

toward a common goal.

We are scouts, each making



our own trail

Shuffle hop, step, f-lap step.

One more time and one more time

we drop and dig and strike

the floor with vigor.

She says "Take it from the top,"

So we stop talking and tap

like children,

comparing, competitive, eager to impress.

Show off three wings in a row, or four, or five,

a mid-flight sound that's daring and bold.

We drill paradiddles and ruffles

Until feet are numb and minds frayed

From counting "a one and a two,

spank-three, knock-four,

Step together, listen better,

Shuffle step, hop, f-lap step."

When the room fills with sweat and concentration

We do improvisation.

Finish with a shave and a haircut.

Out of the classroom, we burst.

I peel leather back off of my feet

Moisture clinging to my forehead and sleeves

And I am full

Of electricity and sound.

Frustration and peace clatter together

And I take a deep breath thinking,

"Shuffle step, hop, f-lap step.

Next time, I'll..."



by Rose Klein

## Forlorn

Every day is the same when my footsteps echo through the stairways as I make my way to my featureless, insipid dorm room. The halls smell no better than my room, for I have gotten used to the faint scent of burnt wood. The cold, light brown carpet welcomes my feet as I stumble inside my second home. As usual, the vicious wind slams the door behind me as I set my torn up backpack on the floor.

Slumping into my fairly fuzzy chair, I booted up my dusty computer and watched as the boxy monitor flashed to life. Another day of classes was over with and now all I have to do is homework. So much reading, writing, calculating, and regurgitating. It's a tedious cycle that I feel wears down my mind rather than enrich it. Nonetheless, there is a pit in my chest and my eyes struggle to stay open as I attempt to absorb what's written on these thick packets of paper in front of me, all sprawled out. Turning on music from my computer doesn't do much other than add a little flavor to the silence I've dealt with for almost a couple years now.

Half-assing a couple assignments, I moved onto bigger tasks that required even more reading. Perfect. I groaned when sentences were too long or certain paragraphs didn't click, and it just made me resort to mindlessly skimming in the end. Fortunately, it was time for dinner down at the cafeteria. I sprinted down the black, grated stairs and made my way outside and into the campus building. I looked down until I got my meal. Folks fled to their friends while the more timid students isolated themselves. I recognized the certain faces and voices of my friends and acquaintances, but never aimed to join them. Zoning out and letting the noises fade, I ate what the cooks called food and drank my cracked cup of flat soda.

I put my dishes away and left without a word. Slowly pushing open the automatic doors, I walked back up to my dorm and stared at my homework like a pile of dog crap before sitting down and trying to process what I was reading. The sun had set and the gray sky changed to a mixture of blues and blacks. The text on the paper started to distort into absolute gibberish, but the only parts I understood remained normal, such as summaries and emboldened definitions and sentences. Suddenly, several stacks and packets of paper appeared all around my desk and everything went silent. Did I really have this much stuff to do?

I touched the top of the shortest stack, causing the rest of the stacks to barrage me. They started burning up yet forming these long arms that picked me up and slung me at the wall. I groaned as I struggled to stand up, watching my monitor detach itself and be absorbed by the burning papers, making it display black, blue, and white static. Shortly after, I found myself star-

ing at a creature that seemed to ‘glitch’ in and out of reality, as if it was struggling to exist. The monitor screen began to crack as the thing wailed at me. Despite it standing as tall as the ceiling, it scintillated towards me with incredible speed, screeching as it did so. I dropped down on all fours and crawled towards the bathroom door. I couldn’t help but watch as its head snapped around to stare at me before the rest of its distorted body snapped with it. It lifted its arms and wailed louder as I quickly opened the bathroom door.

As I slammed the wooden door behind me, it shattered like glass as the doorknob stuck to my gray hand. I dropped it once it started to hiss in my grasp. It melted into what was definitely not the white bathroom floor, but a black, blue, and white checkered floor that was sprinkled with ash, wood shavings, and dried out drops of blood. I immediately gagged at what smelled like burning plastic, drying paint, and rain.

My coughs echoed throughout this strange place until it blended with soft static, echoing whispers and howls, and a distant thumping. The bathroom door was gone and I wrapped my burlap arms around myself, shivering as I looked around to see nothing but darkness stretch out as far as my tired eyes could see. I began to run in case that thing was still following me somehow. The pit in my chest from before not only felt deeper, but empty too.

Suddenly, a few lampposts flickered into existence with a loud snap. Their light was pathetic but allowed me to see twisted, dead trees stretching in bizarre ways. There were tall mountains that reached into the sky and looked like crooked, black teeth. Looking into the sky made my heart sink, so I locked my focus onto the ground. I still ran. I didn’t know where an exit could be, but still ran.

The unsettling noises from afar along with the vague shapes hidden in the dark tricked my senses. Suddenly, I came across a circle of tall, rusty, white pillars. I jumped as they started shifting in place while making scraping sounds. In the middle of this formation were four, cloaked figures, surrounded by a whiff of smoke. My legs wobbled as I barely managed to speak to them, “H-hello?”

I was ready to start running again after speaking, but the pillars stopped shifting and the figures slowly turned towards me. They each had snow white faces, which were huge and adorned with distorted smiles and big, black eyes that were as deep as wells. However, for the skinniest figure had a rope tightened around its neck, the fattest had cuts all over its arms and throat, the tallest was missing half of its head but emitted smoke from what was left, and the shortest had fractured arms and legs. It was as if I had stepped on their pet based on how I felt from their gaze.

“Can you all hear me?”

The shortest one’s mouth creaked open, its mask moving with it like a cheap animatron-



ic, and hissed, “You have the smile”.

“His mask matches ours,” uttered the tallest one, its jaw oozing some tar-like fluid as he talked.

“Mask? What mask?” I asked. “Like yours?”

“Kind of,” the fattest one blubbered. “But yours is not your actual face. Not yet at least.”

“Our masks are fake, but we can’t show you what lies beneath. However, we can see underneath yours, Rance,” the skinniest one croaked, striking a chill up my spine.

“How do you know my name?” I responded with a crack in my voice.

“We know everyone who ends up here,” The tallest one added. “Do you like our friendly smiles, Rance?”

“What? I don’t think so, they’re just part of your masks.”

“Exactly,” they all said in unison. Their voices both resembled a mix of old computer generated ones and ghostly whispers. “Your mask is only going to be an addition to what is to come, Rancid Rance.”

“What is to come? What do you mean? And hey, what did you just call me?”

“Rancid Rance,” chuckled the fattest one, “We shall give you a nickname, for it is the only amount of fun we are allowed to have in Nadyreth. I am Cutthroat Carl.”

“I am Dangle Derek,” said the skinniest one.

“I am Plummet Penny,” giggled the shortest one.

“And I am Bam Bruce,” groaned the tallest one.

“Nice to meet you, I think,” I added.

“Likewise,” they exclaimed together. “Your time is almost up, would you like to stay with us until then, Rancid Rance?”

“Time? What do you mean, time?!” I cried.

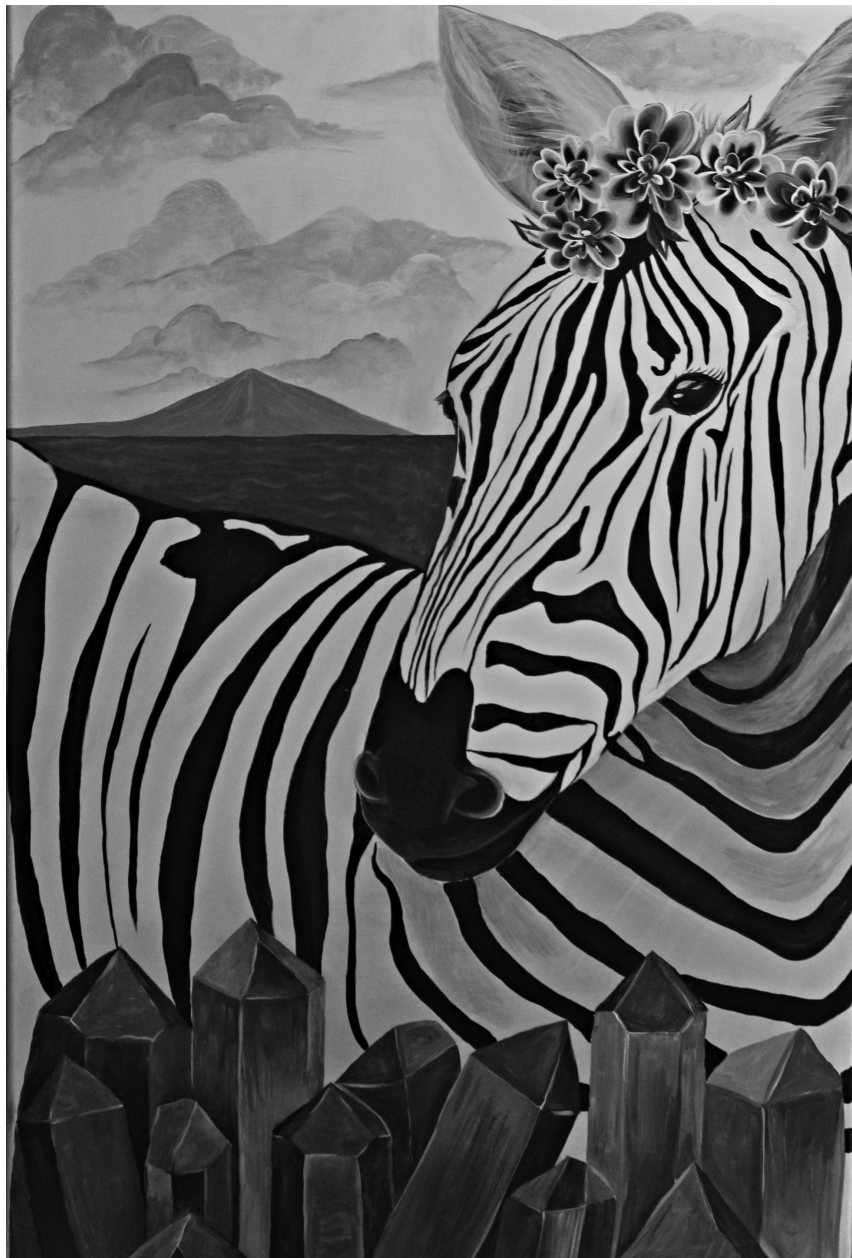
“Your time in Nadyreth, Rance,” explained Penny. “It appears outside factors are limiting your time here.”

“I still don’t understand, but sure.” I replied.

They shrugged and twitched for a few seconds before turning their backs on me. I went over to a pillar that wasn’t moving as much, and plopped my potato sack of a body against it. Within a few seconds, the sounds and smells increased and everything in front of me quickly became white, then black. The scents and noises disappeared as I found myself gasping for air in the middle of my steel-framed bed.

*Author’s note next page:*

*Note: Hi, thank you for reading my short story, which is actually a segment of a bigger story I am currently working on. This narrative aims to amplify and encapsulate what it is like for me to have both autism and depression, for I wrote this while I was going through a rough patch a couple months ago. While I am through it now, things are still a bit rocky. However, if I had not reached out to my family, friends, and the Wellbeing & Accessibility Center here at Western, I would be much deeper in that patch. So please, if you are going through a dark time, know that you're not alone and don't be afraid to reach out because you don't have to deal with it all by yourself.*



Smokey Quartz Zebra Art by Brooke Andreasen



Team Written by the Fall 2018 Intro to Creative Writing Class at WWCC

A Found Poem (a type of poem by taking words or phrases and reframing them)

## **The Epidemic of Loneliness**

Social media  
—from Facebook to Twitter—have made us  
more densely  
networked than ever. Yet for all this  
connectivity, new  
research suggests that we have never been  
lonelier  
(or more narcissistic)—  
and that this loneliness is making us  
mentally and physically ill. A report  
on what  
the epidemic of loneliness  
is doing  
to our souls and  
our society.

Sarah Kropf

## **Home?**

The crackling of the fireplace  
like a whip over a horse and carriage.  
Their footsteps crunching murky snow  
like broken promises.

The chairs are empty, no one's been fed.  
No one is around to pick up a plate,  
clatter a spoon,  
give a toast, break a glass,  
No one is home.

Maybe a haunting ghost would appear  
of promises finally kept,  
unshattered, like the empty glasses  
unscathed of greasy fingerprints.

Horses hoofbeats stop the rhythm  
of a hallowing carol.  
The carriage awaits,  
Empty and cold.  
It's time to go home.

But where is home?

Is it where the heart is?  
But yet, a home can't be a broken heart.

Promises never kept should never be made.  
They only lead to empty chairs,  
empty wine glasses,  
empty picture frames,  
an empty heart, an empty  
home.

Home is where we all want to belong.  
When the winds don't cease to moan,  
when the dogs bark down the street  
and the light of an unfamiliar flickering lamppost  
doesn't rock you to sleep,  
quite like home does.

Home isn't there.  
You can't go back to that street,  
that address,  
that ruby red mailbox with the shrinking handprints.

You can't go home,  
When home lies inside of a broken mind,  
a broken heart,  
and a broken promise.

## My Fear of Silence

If I lay here and concentrate hard enough I will be able to see it more clearly. *Did it move?* Oh God, it's looking at me. What do I do? I try to muster up the will to get my stupid limbs moving, but everything is frozen solid. My irrational fear paralyzed me. For too long the shadows have haunted my way of rational thinking, but finally I have found the truth to overcome my fear of the paranormal.

When I was just three years old my sisters and I visited our great grandma's house often. A time that was very traumatic for me as a child. Experiences that even with my new-found truth, are still hard to think about. I recall lying in bed; the darkness of the room began to close in on me. My sisters hushed breathing filled my small, delicate ears with the knowledge that I wasn't alone. To me I was alone. They were asleep; I was not. *I am alone.* The room we slept in had a potent aroma to it. The smell of wood, dust, and leather was all around me; not like the glorious sensation of cast iron cooking in the kitchen below my bedframe. The aroma was that of the quiet feeling of uncertainty in a young child's mind.

My bed faced the door to the room. A door that my father insisted on keeping open in order to check on us if needed. He claimed he did not want to accidentally wake us by opening it. His concern was fairly placed; the door would creak and crack when touched even in the slightest way. But upon having the door kept wide open it gave me a front row seat to the narrow hallway on the other side, and beyond that the winding stair case. The stairs were lined in old moth-eaten carpet. The walls surrounding it were based in dark brown wood coated in dust and spider webs in the corners. When you ascended the stair case the step count was ten then you took a sharp right turn upon facing the dingy wall, only inches from your face. You continue forward with another narrow turn once again to the right, and down the remaining three steps to the main floor. The sight of this stairwell through the entry way of my bedroom door has haunted me my entire life. *Oh God, what is that? Help! I can't move!* I prayed for my daddy to come and check on us; to check on me.

My blankie became my shield to the unknown. The horror that filled my mind manifested into a hot, sticky sweat beading on my forehead. There was a cold, black figure standing before me. Just a few feet down on the stairwell it stood. Staring through my open doorway, right at my small delicate form. I clung to my yellow, soft blankie. *Please, I thought, please go away.* I blinked to try and clear my tiny vision. After a few tries I began to notice that the black figure was moving forward. With every blink of clarity, the being crept closer, stunning me into submission.

I stared at the black figure for what appeared to be hours. When I awoke the next morning, I couldn't figure out when or how I fell asleep in the first place. Perhaps, the exhaustion finally gripped me into a deep slumber. Many more experiences happened quite like this one, all of which included a dark figure standing outside my room.

These terrifying experiences have inspired me to find some skepticism. But it wasn't until Ryan, a highly enlightened close friend, came along and helped me to overcome my irrational fear. He always brought me back from my thoughts; rationalized my brain to think of the scientific reason behind what was going on.

The stairwell was dark; so dark in fact that you actually couldn't see a thing. So why did my young mind believe that there was something standing there? I personally think we create the belief in ghosts, because we don't like believing that the universe is random. It seems to be more common when we feel less control over our lives. Back then I had no control over what was going on. I mean, how could I? I was only three years old.

My parents were getting a divorce during this event, and I felt like I was always being left behind. That feeling affected me by means of wondering if I would always be left behind in every aspect of my life. I still struggle with it from time to time, but my scientific outlook is helping me with knowing that even though I feel something like this, it does not mean it's true. I am creating it inside my own head. Just like the paranormal. I created this so that I would feel like I was never truly alone. As frightening as it ended up being, that's how my young mind decided to cope with my situation.

My belief is the simple fact that my brain created situations to help me explain what I didn't understand. Coincidentally, I was afraid of nothing truly real. I was afraid of always being alone. It was the fear of silence.



Pine Canyon by Michelle Irwin

Michele Irwin

## **Wild Horses**

Your breath steaming  
You wait, prancing, dancing  
You look me square  
In the face  
Your eyes say,  
“Let’s run!”

I breathe in the clean air  
Carried by the wind  
We race tumbleweeds  
Across the prairie



Written by: Denny Lee Skinner  
Submitted by: Talor May Skinner

## **The Ride**

I dreamed one night I passed away,  
And left this world behind.  
I started down that lonesome trail,  
Some of my friends to find.  
I came to a raggedy sign on the trail,  
Directions it did tell,  
Keep right to go to heaven, rein left to go to hell.  
Raisen, hopeless boozin' rake,  
And I knew there at the cross trails,  
The trail I'd have to take.  
I spired down the rocky trail,  
It would lead to Satan's place- and shook-  
Within not knowin' just what I'd have to face.  
Ol' Satan met me at the gate,  
"What's your name my friend?"  
I said 'I'm just old sober Lee who's come to a sad end.' He pondered over some files,  
'You've made a mistake I fear, you're listed as an alcoholic, we don't want you here.'  
I said I'm lookin' for my friends' A smile stole over his face  
'If your friends are alcoholics, they're in the other place.'  
So, I went back the other way,  
The cross trails I did see  
I rode right to heaven as happy as could be.  
St. Peter smiled and said,  
'Come on in, for you I have a grub steak, you're an alcoholic, you've been through hell on earth.'  
I saw grandpa and Ike too and a cousin and I was tickled,  
Cause I thought they'd gone to hell.  
So partners, all take warning, learn something from this ride.



You've got a place in heaven if you try hard not to slip.  
If someone tempts you with a drink when you're not feelin' well,  
Just tell 'em you're going to heaven and  
They can go to hell.



Tollgate Mustang by Michele Irwin

## **I Can't Tell You. . . I Can't Tell**

I can't tell you how much,  
how much I miss your smile,  
your laugh, your touch, your light.  
I seek hugs from other people,  
hoping one will be evocative of your embrace.

Your embrace.  
Like a cold pool of water you cannonball,  
But I don't know how to swim.  
Your embrace.  
Like a scalding cup of caramel hot cocoa,  
Burning your tongue, yet tasting so good.

People talking about long forgotten kisses and past loves,  
Like its a Goodwill sweater worn by mothballs.  
But when you've never been loved, and your lips are still clean,  
Then it's a Mercedes Benz at the dealer.  
Too costly and out of your reach.

Sometimes I get distracted by the memories.  
Late night drives,  
Casual cuddles,  
Mistaken relationships.  
It's hard to live a functional life  
when everything I do is reminiscent of you.

Sometimes I hate you.

I hate your perfect hair,  
and your perfect eyes,  
and your perfect body.  
And how you make me feel, perfect.

Maybe I hate how lonely you make me feel  
but only when I'm without you.

Being without you.  
Is standing in the pouring rain at 2 am.  
Your on the edge of pneumonia but its beautiful.  
Being without you.

Driving 80 miles an hour down a country road with the windows down,  
With no driver's license in a school bus.

When someone's gone you can't tell if you're still loved.  
Words can say I miss you I love you I need you.  
But nothing means quite as much as a  
Stroke of the hand through the hair.  
An embarrassing glance at the lips.  
An "accidental" hold of the hand.

Nothing will be the sane til they're there.  
There by your side like a fever that last weeks,  
Or a lost puppy in the street.

It's a love/hate relationship you play with yourself  
Cause they're not there to play the game with you.

Or say they truly love you back.

Jess Fahlsing

## **Upon Her**

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

She wears a cowboy hat sometimes.

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

She is too shy to unless not sober

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

Too shy to start to start to start

She said she didn't want to ruin anything and I

Was not confident enough to tell her

She wouldn't.

Moscow Mule, Molly, and Coffee Stout were my drinks

Not sober, not sober me neither.

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

The stigma against mental illness

The unavailability of mental healthcare

Dying from depression

Me in a passive way farther in the past, she

Actively

Not sober and then those pills

*Cowboy up*

The Iverson saved her.

Matthew Shepherd belongs to Laramie,

Not to Rock Springs.

I didn't accept I was lesbian until

I met her

Before the attempt

Her attempt

Thank God her friend saved her.

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

I myself have asked, To be or not to be  
And Rock Springs almost killed me  
The memories still haunt me  
A scar like the massacre  
I am an Outsider.  
Mental healthcare  
Sexual assault  
The existence of both is denied here too often  
The Community College did nothing for my friend  
When she was assaulted  
Except put up some flyers.  
And sometimes to escape,  
You have to be a flyer  
Flying to dreams we know not of  
The sleep of death  
Dear Hamlet.

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*

Not sober when we  
First got  
Together  
Which we should have done  
Weeks before  
We both had wanted to but  
The barriers  
Our shyness  
Homophobia  
My own questioning  
Her questioning of life  
Perhaps we are meant to be.  
The cowboy mentality



Has yet to kill us and perhaps  
It even brought us  
Together.

*Cowboy up, Cowboy up*  
I like that hat upon her.

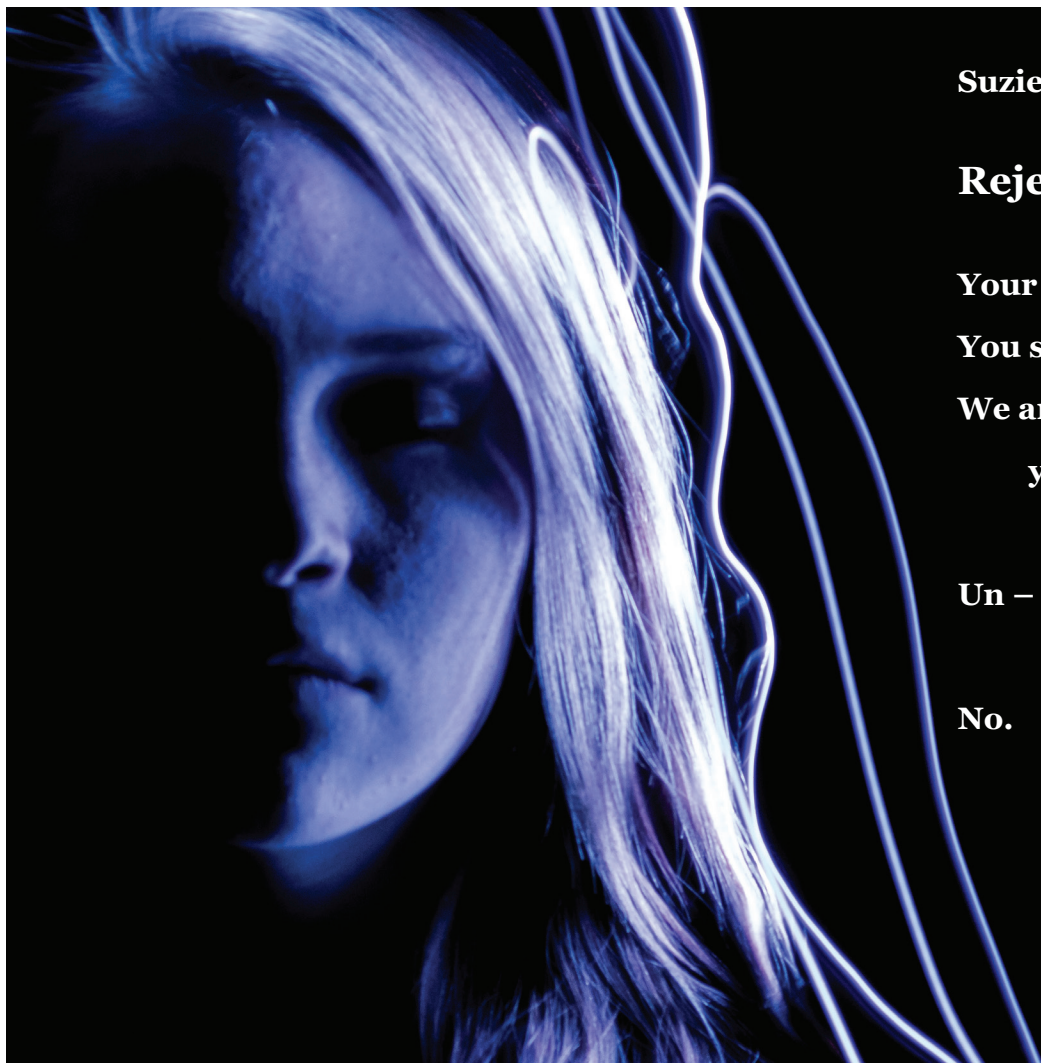


“Merely Players” by Kyla Ditges



by Kyle Trivett





**Suzie Baker**

## **Rejection**

**Your interest is appreciated**

**You showed great enthusiasm**

**We are impressed with  
your accomplishments**

**Un – fort – u – nate – ly**

**No.**

Photo by Hannah Christensen





by Kyle Trivett









by Hannah Christensen

Fusoku

## Holly

One does not know true panic  
Until they have been roused by a call from afar  
Through the muted hiss, every single shudder  
Is a poisoned blade, injecting fear and agony into the heart

Crimson rivers flow through a sea of static and distance  
Unsuccessfully drowned out by the imprisoned freedom of intoxication  
Hours of pleading until the voice is but a whisper  
Go heard, but unheeded, answered with a departure

If it's true that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery  
Why were you not stirred when I followed in your footsteps  
Adding to the red tide that washed us both out to sea  
Only to be met with tears and empty promises

Time and time again, words of repentance uttered  
Only to be forgotten in the heat of hardship  
Black and bloodshot eyes, signs of your dependency  
Draining away your life, to the complacency of all but myself

Countless streams of salt and iron, shed in the name of your redemption  
Yielding the results of yet another disappearance  
Silence for a score, then conversing resumes  
Dragging my heart right back out of the grave

No regrets, no apologies, for the damage inflicted  
Only dead eyes and influenced laughter  
An interminable silence, thought wrongly to be the end  
I must murder my feelings, before they tear me apart

~~*This Is Suicide Season*~~



The Amara by Taylor May Skinner





by Rebecah Winward



by Rachel Winward



## A Complete Profile of Humanity from a Girl Who Knows Nothing

I just needed to relax. I told myself that all the time. Breathe in for 8 seconds, out for 8. Repeat. Hand on the heart, it makes you feel like you're in control. It's easy to get distracted though. Easier than focusing on breathing because if you're focusing on that, then there's other things up you're missing out on so you need to focus on those instead, but, oh, no, you're not breathing again. In for 8, out for 8. Wait, what did she say again? Something about a bill... for... dogs? I mean, I probably agree, dogs are amazing, but what if she proposed a bill on getting rid of all dogs and I just voted for it? Oh, no, everyone knows I'm not listening. No they don't, relax. In 8, out 8....

In 8, out 8....

It was like that a lot at Girl's State. When you get it in your head that everyone around you is some sort of unattainable level of superiority, you can't take yourself seriously. You kinda block yourself off from inside of a bubble boy parallel you build for yourself inside your mind. It's not a great way to live your life when you're trying to get elected. Lucky for me, I've had years of experience with the 8 second rule, and I got to utilize that experience while sitting in the back row of chairs in the conference room where everyone was giving their general election speeches. The primary elections already happened. I had given a speech already. I was elected the State Representative for my party. So, really, I brought this upon myself. Standing in front of 100 girls talking about my qualifications and passions is hard when my vision is fading from the outside in, kinda like a bad migraine. You know, No one told me to go hard or go home, but Tiffany sure did, and dang it, I'm a risk-taker! I can do scary things! Why was my body still vibrating, then? Where did my peripherals go?

"Hey, Tiff," Hannah's voice interrupted the noise. "You doing okay? You nervous?"

I said something back. I didn't know what it was, but she laughed, so it must not have been something terrible.

"You got this, girl," she smiled reassuringly.

Hannah always said things like that, colloquialisms and generalities, but she sounded so cool when she said it. I know if I said that, it would probably make the girl I'm trying to make feel better cringe and die.

The elected county positions gave their speeches, then the district court judges, then the senators. Every speech was given a tick on my sheet of paper with the list of people and positions, and each tick shortened the space between the current speaker and me. Do you know how contortionists can twist their bodies so their butts touch their forehead and their stomach looks

like a wrung-out rag? Yeah, that was the feeling. I was gonna throw up. I could feel it.

I tell myself to get distracted, stop thinking about the nerves for a while. I stared at the scratches on the metal on the back of the chair in front of me. I started thinking about how imperfections don't always disturb the function of something. Something like little scratches in metal don't take away the fact that the chair is a chair and you can still sit in it like a chair. Perfection got me thinking about Hannah again. Hannah was my roommate. I think she was from Cheyenne, and she had the most on-fleek eyebrows I have ever seen. Super funny, too. She had one of those personalities that's hard to describe. I think it was more of the presence she had. Being her roommate was probably a lot better for me than it was for her. Even though she put herself out as this perfect girl with perfect brows, she knew the pain of having a mind that always seems against her. It kinda bothered me that she wore her insecurities a lot better than I did. But that didn't really matter because it was nice to be her pal. She somehow always knew what to say to me.

At this moment, it was "Hey, there's blood coming out of your nose."

I looked down at my shirt, and, sure enough, there was definitely blood coming out of my nose. So, to the hallway I ran, and, oh, was there blood coming out of my nose. Gallons it seemed. Buckets and buckets. I was so scared that my head was literally draining itself to get out of the situation. What a jerk of a brain.

I learned while in that hallway that you don't know who your true friends are until you're sitting on a chair next to a trash can with blood spattered on every surface within 2 feet of you. You might realize that your only friend is the nurse. You might realize that the only person you can see is the nurse because she's six inches away from your face spraying yellow magic onto tampons prepped to shove up your nose. You might realize that you have to give a speech in two minutes and the blood is spraying from the conclaves of your face faster than it can access the brain and your brain is screaming, "Oh My Gosh what am I going to do, this is my only chance to give this speech and it's the most important speech of my entire life, am I going to die? I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm going to die, but I can't die because I have to give a speech like, right now. Should I scream? No that's bad. Bad. Bad. Bad. Bad. Bad. Bad. Bad oh, no, I'm throwing up. Is that blood in there? That's definitely blood in there. How can I give a speech if I'm throwing up? I can't, duh. Can't talk if my mouth is full. Stop. Stop thinking. Stop. Shhh."

I told myself to breathe. 8 seconds in, 8 seconds out.

Man, was I lightheaded.

After a low-effort glance of my surroundings, I realized that a couple of young adult supervisors were out there with me. They were making a lot of jokes to distract me that I had been laughing at but not really listening to. The nurse asked me what caused the bleed, and I didn't

want to tell her that it was the anxiety mixed with the effects of anxiety meds because people don't like to hear that, so I told her that I didn't really know. She gave me a skeptical glance, and got up to leave. She handed one of the supervisors, Chayla, a handful of tampons and a can of yellow spray.

"Try to make it stop. Tampons aren't cheap."

She walked away into the office. I later learned that she was about to call an ambulance to get me. I'm glad she didn't tell me that until after. How embarrassing would that be to have to get in an ambulance because of a stupid bloody nose?

A few minutes of losing blood brought the hysteria. I just started giggling. Hiccuping like I was legitimately insane. I snorted the tampon in the trash and more blood on the wall. Chayla tried to get me to stop, but I didn't know what was wrong with me. Everything was funny but I was terrified. My legs and arms were diseased by goosebumps and shakes. I must have looked like a horse when a fly land on its skin. I still had to give a speech at some point probably. Maybe. I didn't really know how it was all gonna work out.

Then Chayla said, "I'm gonna go tell them to skip you, alright?"

Huh. I didn't even consider that as a possibility. I entertained a fraction of a second's worth of thought to the peace it would bring to not have to worry about the speech, but it was immediately replaced by the hydraulic pressure of guilt I would have if I never gave it a shot.

"Hey, uh," I said through a mouthful of blood, "I can still do it, don't worry."

She gave me a look that said, "Honey. Think again," but she talked with the other girl, and left into the room again. She came back to the hallway, out-of-breath, with a mic.

"Kay, Tiff." She hurled the mic at me. "You're gonna give it from out here. I'll tell you when you're up."

Oh geez, okay. Awesome! I threw up again. More blood.

Chayla watched the speeches from the room, the other girl watched Chayla through the window on the door, and I watched the girl, staring at her hand, flinching at any movement she made, mistaking it for a signal.

Deep breaths. Count to 8. Relax.

Chayla came into the hallway again.

"Okay, go! You got this!"

I pulled the mic up to my lips, took one last breath and tested it with a couple "Hello"s and "Hey"s.

The mic worked, so I started the speech. My mind immediately went to a story about how there was a historical queen that used to drain people's blood and bathe in it because she

believed it was good for her skin. After giving a summary, I said, “Well, if that worked, then the next you see me I’ll be glowing.”

I thought that was pretty good, and the loud laughter from inside the room eased the good feeling on, and the nurse and girls were laughing and giving me thumbs-ups, so I went for the rest of it. In the moment, I forgot about how scared I was and let my passion flow through my words. The pile of bloody tampons under my face didn’t exist, the blood on the wall didn’t exist. All that was there was me and my words. It really helped that the feeling of my skin burning from all the eyes on my wasn’t there.

I finished. Faint applause echoed in my ears. I sat back in my chair next to the garbage, blood blew off my lips and dripped off of my chin, and I just kept breathing. I didn’t count for how long.



Gordale Scar by Jessica Dean--Second Place Art and Photography

## Wild Child

**A**ny kid was blessed if they got to grow up in the sage-covered rolling hills of Wyoming's high desert. The Red Desert covers much of the south central part of the state and is filled with all the things that fascinate children.

My brother and I were lucky enough to be two of the kids who grew up roaming the wide open country south of Rock Springs. Our dad worked for the gas company and we lived at Mullen Camp, comprised of a single house, a huge garage and several gas metering buildings.

We spent hours roaming the hills and gullies, riding our bikes along rough gravel roads with our dog Mikey following along, our fearless protector. Mikey helped us catch gophers and horn toads, which our mother immediately made us release.

I remember one summer when Mikey brought us a baby gopher he had caught and dropped it at my brother's feet. It was too scared to run and my brother scooped it up and put it in a basket. I got a blanket that belonged to one of my dolls and we made the baby rodent a nice bed. We named him Chico. For the next several days, we sneaked milk out of the house by putting it into one of my doll's baby bottles and feeding it to Chico. We didn't try to take him into the house -- Mom would have had a fit. We left the basket and Chico in the garage. One morning about a week after his capture, we discovered Chico's basket was empty. He either found a way to escape or one of the barn cats had him for dinner. I've always preferred to believe the former.

Our desert playground was full of wildlife; antelope, deer and wild horses were abundant. Cattle also grazed freely through the summer. When winter came, the cattle were moved closer to the ranches.

One of my greatest pleasures was going with my dad when he changed the charts in the meter houses in the area. The charts tracked the pressure of the natural gas as it went through the pipeline at each location. On those days, my dad traveled through an area that covered 100 square miles and it took most of the day. My brother never wanted to go. While my dad was busy in the meter houses, I explored the surrounding area, looking for pretty rocks or maybe a lizard.

Many times one of the meter house would be surrounded by antelope. My dad would "bark" at them with an "owff, owff, owff." They would all look up from their grazing and begin walking slowly toward the pickup. It fascinated me. I tried to mimic the sound but all I did was make them run in the opposite direction.



My dad just laughed his deep belly laugh and told me, “You’ll get it someday, Princess.”

One day when I went with my dad, after he had finished checking all the charts, we continued along one of the many dirt roads that cut through the landscape like dusty serpents, twisting and turning in the sun.

My dad started singing, “Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do. I’m half crazy, all for the love of you.”

I tried to join in but couldn’t get the words right. Daddy laughed and told me I shouldn’t plan on a career in opera or anything like that.

We had reached the southeast side of Aspen Mountain where a road turned off into a thick grove of trees. We turned onto it and my dad said, “Watch for deer. This is a good place for them.” I watched with my head out the window as we meandered along the road.

The trees thinned and there was an old cabin that was falling apart. My dad stopped and got out of the truck. I followed him as he walked to the cabin and peered inside.

“Don’t go in. It’s pretty shaky and the floor might fall in,” he warned.

Behind the cabin was a small spring coming out of some rocks. Lush grass and brush grew around the spring. As I turned back toward the cabin, I noticed a rope swing hanging from one of the trees.

“I’m going to go swing on that,” I told my dad, pointing to the swing.

“Pull on it and make sure that rope isn’t completely worn out,” he said.

I ran to the worn swing and sat down carefully. It held and I tried to figure out a way to sit so the rope didn’t pinch my bottom. After I got settled I slowly went back and forth, trying to go higher.

I saw my dad coming toward me when he suddenly stopped.

“Kathy Ann, get in the truck.”

I immediately got off the swing and went straight to the truck. My dad only called me by my full name when I had done something wrong. I didn’t know what I might have done but I didn’t argue and climbed into the truck. My dad headed that way. He opened the door and took the rifle from the rack behind the seat, leaned over the hood with the gun aiming slightly upward and fired. There was a loud thud as something hit the ground.

It was a mountain lion.

I screamed and started to jump out of the truck.

“Stay there. Let me make sure it’s dead,” my dad said. I slid to the ground as he poked it with the gun barrel. It was dead and it was huge. I later found out it weighed just under 200 pounds. I watched as my dad pulled it to the truck. He got in the truck bed and pulled it in.

The big cat had been in the tree right above me as I played in the swing. It was watching me from a limb right above.

I was afraid it was gonna jump on you,” Daddy said as he gave me a hug.

It turned out this big cat had been preying on sheep and cattle in the area and the local ranchers had asked my dad and others with the gas company to keep an eye out for it as they made their rounds. They had put together a \$100 reward and my dad collected it.

He gave me \$5, and told me that was my payment for being “bait” for the mountain lion. I’m pretty sure he was joking.

Myra Peak

## Clean Up

“Clean-up in the commons”  
is the announcement on the intercom  
as children and parents, most unwilling  
to rise from metal chairs,  
dart eyes like prey in a trap  
between the teacher at the table  
and the direction of disaster.

Is clean-up for the Coke of a three year old  
or the bottle of formula on which a father forgot  
to tightly screw the lid?  
Could it be the cookies donated by “anonymous”  
trampled by heavy adults still hungry  
from no supper?

Is it the explosive reluctance of a child  
to meet with the P. E. teacher whose meanness  
can't be taken out like wringing a wet bath towel?

Could a custodian sweep away the sprinkled cursing  
on teenagers' tongues like railroad workers  
on a derailment?

We shove down our dreams  
of vocabularies with “elution” and “rascal”,  
songs in perfect pitch two-part harmony,  
algebraic equations to figure our wages' deductions.

And hope for faith that they will become curious  
about shrinking Monarch butterflies' habitats  
and the intelligence it takes to wrench  
oil and gas and coal out of the Earth to power  
cell phones, I-pads, and furnaces in winter.

Suzie Baker

## **If They Only Knew**

Middle class white suburbia straight lace

That is all they see

Married with kids everything in its proper place

Sex on a schedule and special holidays

That ain't me

Conservative clothes and quiet manner

misguides them all

Dark biting retorts fight to escape

between my lips

Snarky asides and bitter quips slide with ease

No white picket fence or special holidays

In the middle of the morning

or deserted park after dark

Are ways to please

Take your preconceived ideas

And run

My easy smile protects you

from the boiling storm inside

## The Tire Shop

It's late. I've just finished my school work and am, finally, on my way home. Well, I haven't actually finished, because you can't actually finish your work in college – there's always one more paper to reread, one more bio-psych fact to memorize. But, for the night, I am finished. I am headed home to mindlessly watch tv for an hour before falling onto my pillows and curling up under the quilt mamma made me.

I fiddle with the radio as I drive, but four of the six stations are playing long-winded sports recaps, one's stuck on a commercial asking people to donate their used car to Heritage for the Blind (because the blind need cars to drive. Desperately.), and the last is playing some new pop song that's worse than the sports. I sigh and flip to NPR, hoping for something tolerable; a squeaky voiced woman praises this political party and blames that one for the government shutdown. I sigh as I reach over to turn the radio off. The silence is better anyway. I can let my over-worked thoughts drift out the open windows.

I relax into my seat as I turn back to the road. I love this time of the night, when the rest of the cars have gone back to their suburban garages and the roads and parking lots are empty in the glow of the streetlights. I enjoy the emptiness as I watch the little strip mall pass, the bridge, the carwash. Then the tire shop. Big O Tires. I see it lurking in the shadow between street lights and I glare.

I hate the place. The over-painted white brick, the fake plastic tire where an actual sign should be. It's ridiculous, presumptuous. And the staff. I don't know who works there at the moment, but I have no doubt that they're as incompetent as the people who worked there two years ago.

Two years ago, I had taken summer classes for the first time and, despite everything, I had finished. Finally. I had four whole weekends with no textbooks to read, no brainless facts to stretch into 300-word discussion posts. Three whole weekends with nothing to do. I had been looking forward to this break for months. I was going to shut myself in my house and speak to no one for the entire weekend. Let everything disappear in the drone of utterly mindless TV.

I'd felt a little guilty for taking a weekend for myself; I needed to go visit my grandpar-



ents. I hadn't seen my grandma in almost two months. Plus, my mom had taken leave from work and was staying with my grandpa to help out. I really needed to go see them. I should have gone to see them. But I didn't. Because I'd also, desperately, needed a weekend to myself. Just one. One weekend to decompress. So, I reasoned that taking one weekend for myself wouldn't hurt. I had time. Plenty of time.

Thursday morning (because you don't get actual weekends off when you work in health-care) went perfectly to plan. I woke up early and spent the morning dozing on my couch, vegging out to the newest season of *Royals*. But I soon found a kink in my plans: I had no food in the house.

Reluctantly admitting that my weekend would be significantly less pleasant if I starved to death, I decided to temporarily suspend my self-imposed isolation in favor of a junk food run. I never actually made it to the store though. The sunshine and rare good music spilling from the radio pulled me past the store and onto the open highway outside of town.

On this particular day, after all the built-up stress from college and my family, I completely lost myself to the road and decided to explore, in my little four-cylinder Toyota, the back roads around Boars Tusk that, somehow, I had never been on.

Unfortunately, there was a flaw in this plan, as well: my car wasn't exactly built for off-roading.

Twelve miles off the highway, with no cars anywhere in site, and a single bar of service, I ended up buried up to my hubcaps in sand. And, what's worse, when the sand had finally grabbed my tires and forced my car to a jarring halt, I had heard, like an omen from God himself, a crack from somewhere around my left front tire.

Luckily, that one bar of service was enough to call my dad and talk him into driving out and digging my car out of the sand. It took us two and a half hours.

The sunshine quickly became significantly less wonderful.

The final cost of my little desert excursion was a slashed tire, a worn donut, and an ominous clacking sound that was, undoubtably, the result of that omen from God himself. I'm not an expert in cars, but I knew what that sound meant: an expensive repair and possible a missed weekend with my family. I seriously considered ignoring the sound, but I decided not to push it. The way my luck had been going lately, I'd probably end up careening into a cow outside of Rock River.

Desperate to have my car fixed in time to drive to Wheatland for my upcoming three-day weekend, Dad and I took my car to Big O Tires, where they promised quick service and reasonable financing.

After an exactly careful inspection, which included checking under hood and in the tailpipe, the shop guy diagnosed me with a broken axel-thingy and said he'd have to order a what's-it from Salt Lake. With a careless wave of his hand, he assured me it take less than a day to fix my problem. I could still make it to see my grandparents easily.

Full of relief, I booked an appointment for Wednesday morning, the only morning my work schedule would allow. I would have to borrow my brother's car for work that day, but I reasoned that the shop could fix my car Wednesday and I could still leave Thursday morning for Wheatland. That would still give me my entire three-day weekend with my family.

So, according to plan, I dropped my car off on Wednesday morning, reminded the shop manager that I absolutely needed my car done by that evening, trying to impress on him the importance of my trip without sounding like I was digging for sympathy. It seemed to work. The manager accepted my urgency without comment and assured me that my car would be ready in more than enough time. I left feeling reasonably confident; the manager had seemed honest enough and I took him at his word.

I shouldn't have.

Big O Tires didn't have my car fixed that night. They didn't have it fixed the next day.

They didn't have it fixed for the next three and half days.

It was noon on Friday before I finally got out of town. I was angry, and disappointed at the half-wasted weekend – I'd have to leave on at 4 pm on Saturday to make it back home for work Sunday morning. I would get less than a day with my mom and grandpa. Even less with my grandma.

My dad had offered me his truck, after it became apparent that I wouldn't get my car back in time. But I had turned him down. With the price of gas and the repair bill for my car, I didn't think I could afford to take his truck all the way across the state. I decided to wait for my own car. It would mean losing more time, but it would save me money. And, I still had two more weekends before fall semester started, so I could go see them again.

It seemed like good reasoning – at the time – but I still felt guilty for not taking the offer. Dad probably would have lent me the money for gas, knowing how important this trip was, but I was too proud to ask. I shouldn't have been. But I was.

So, at five pm Saturday evening, I finally parked outside the tan brick building with the rock sign out front assuring visitors that they had indeed found the Isaac Warren Hospice Center.

Following my vague memories of the last time I was here, I wound through the maze of halls, my carpet-cushioned steps echoing in the oppressive silence. I followed the maze to the far edge of the sprawling building and finally found my grandmother's room.

My mom and Grandpa were already there, the remnants of lunch still spread across the little round table off to the side. Grandma was asleep, but woke up as Mom and Grandpa and I hugged and exchanged those little sympathetic shoulder pats and watery eyes that are, thankfully, found only in places of grief.

Trying to wipe my eyes before she saw, I walked the few steps to grandma's hospital bed and hugged her, navigating around the wires and oxygen cord, careful not to disturb the shoulder where the cancer had eaten her bone away. To this day, I will never understand that peculiar ability of grief that makes a person equally glad to be with loved ones and desperate to be left alone to break in peace.

Mom and Grandpa left shortly after that, to make the hour-long drive back to Grandpa's house in Wheatland. Grandpa and I said our goodbyes, I assured them I'd follow before too much longer, and then I fell into the most interesting conversation I'd ever had with my grandma. She told me stories I'd never heard about growing up in Wheatland, about the trouble she had gotten into, running around as a teenager, harassing the local cops. For the first time, I was meeting my grandma as a person, with a wild side and a penchant for trouble, and I couldn't wait to hear it all.

I sat entranced as Grandma told me about the time she and her friends had snuck up on a sleeping patrol officer and jacked up his car without his knowing. We laughed over stories of her brothers growing up. She told me about the time my great-grandma had blown up a home-made still in the spare bedroom, trying to make wine. Sitting with my grandma, I never wanted that night to end.

But it had to.

Grandpa's cousin stopped in for a visit and the mood was broken. Grandma and I were both suddenly back in the looming hospice room. The pictures of a carefree girlhood faded in the harsh hospital lights and the knowledge of what would come.

I left shortly after, needing a break from that room. I could have stayed –should have

stayed – but I had told Mom and Grandpa I'd be back before it got dark. I didn't want them to worry more than they already did. I didn't want to tire Grandma out too much. I didn't want to impose. I didn't want to keep her from needed rest. And, of course, I still had Saturday. I reasoned I could come back the next day and pick up where we'd left off. I could get another glimpse at the wild and free girl Grandma had been back in 1950, before marriage and kids had made her into the dutiful farm wife I had grown up knowing.

But I didn't go back on Saturday. Mom and Grandpa didn't go see Grandma on weekends. They left those days to the rest of the family, who had to work Monday thru Friday. So, I didn't go either, even though I could have. Even though I should have. I knew the rest of the family would be there to keep Grandma company, and I could spend time with Mom and Grandpa before starting the four hour drive back home that night. I still had two more weekends before fall term swamped my schedule again, so I could come back the next Thursday and see Grandma again. I still had time to spend with Grandma.

Only I didn't go back the next Thursday. A kid got sick, my co-worker called in to stay home with her, and I ended up covering a shift on that day. I should have told work no, but it's hard to say that in the healthcare field. It's hard to turn away from patients who need you. And I did have one more weekend I could spend with Grandma. It really wasn't enough, but I reasoned that I could save money, get ahead on homework, request time off, and come back for Thanksgiving, too. Thanksgiving with Grandma would make up for missing these two weekends that I could have spent with her.

I actually did make it back that final weekend before fall term started. I ended up staying an entire week, in fact, even though it meant missing the first two days of term.

I had woken up early that weekend. In the middle of packing, I had reached absently for my phone. And had stopped, frozen in the middle of my bedroom, with clothes strewn around me, and that stupid red shirt still hanging on my door frame to dry. I stood there and stared into the glaring face of my phone. *Five Missed Calls from Mamma Cell.*

Two years later, I glare at the Big O Tires sign as I pass it in silence, on my way home after another endless day. I hate the place. They didn't do what they said they'd do. They stalled, again and again. They put off doing what they should have done. They should have been better. They should have been more organized. They should have done what they'd said they'd do. I lost the last few hours I would ever get with my grandma. And it's their fault. *Their* fault. Not mine. Theirs.



by Tiffany Whitby



Laura Stewart

## **Spill**

What if I stopped holding back?

What if I let myself

spill?

My tensed shoulders would drop and cans

of silver paint would fall.

I have balanced them for so long.

The silver would drip down into misspelled words,

first-grade bullies with sweet smiles,

and “you’ll never be enough.”

Next, my eyes would pour out

the white of bleached bones,

the black of being afraid of the dark.

My stomach would be sliced in two,

and this paint would be yellow

for chapped lips and forgetting my wallet.

My feet would slip on green

for reaching up or curling up.

For Christmas mornings,

And the smell of mud in grandpa’s backyard.

Then my heart would unlock

And purple would

spill out

holding hands in the grocery store,

drying tired eyes,  
and letting someone into my mind.

My fists would pry themselves open at last  
And orange would gush out  
in a waterfall, uncontrollable.

This is the betrayal of a friend  
irretractable tongues of fire,  
and tiny bodies tossed away, lives unlived.

Then I would stand  
completely poured out and  
Consumed by myself

As the colors mix and churn  
Into tumultuous brown,  
And I think I'll be destroyed  
I think I'll fall in  
and sink

I will see a new color  
from somewhere else, apart from myself.  
And I will think it is too dark to heal.

It is dark red.  
Blood.  
This is the color of grace.

It will pervade this troubled stew

and begin to dissect the colors,  
recomposing.

The blood-paint will weave and shape and shade  
until the hues swirl  
and a tapestry starts to appear.

Messy, irreverent,  
completely changed, yet the same,  
I cling to this blood.  
In divinity's gentle storm,  
my colors are redeemed.

My soul's chambers shatter,  
choosing this ochre puddle of hope  
where my fears have drained away.

## Empty Frame

Watching the undulating waves of red gowns as they slowly drained out the door, I felt something fill my throat, an unnamed emotion. Too soon, I would be wearing that same gown, sitting among my peers—people I had never met but shared a college graduation date with. The only thing that felt real was the bench, the light wood holding years of sports, celebrations, and commencements. I had never sat on it before, and would probably never sit here again. For a moment, I felt completely unnoticed, as if I closed my eyes for too long, I could lose myself into the noise and raw humanity that pressed up against me from all sides. The darkness behind my lids was familiar and comforting, not in a sad way, but in the way that relief fills when you finally fall in bed after the end of a hectic day, or the first bite of a hot comfort food that you close your eyes to more fully enjoy. I wanted to remember this day.

My future self was watching that same spot where I sat now as a freshman, and for a moment, I could feel my eyes on my seat, an older, hopefully wiser Rachel who had traveled, made memories, regretted decisions, gotten haircuts, made and lost friends, and come to conclusions. It wasn't my conclusion here yet, but it was *a* conclusion, which is what life is made of. Beginnings and endings, all intertwining and tangling, some completely separate and indifferent of the others. A whole year of college complete.

I realized that the unnamed feeling was the uncertainty and blankness of a liminal space. The library is one of those places. I feel like the silent mornings are another world, one where my work gets done and the loneliness is suspended. Past conversations that I've had in 'our' study room flash behind my eyes, but they aren't distracting, just present. Brainstormed ideas that never came to fruition, the stressed essays and assignments, the orange I cried over, jokes we probably shouldn't have told, the chair we moved in because the other one was uncomfortable. The chair is still there, I don't know if anyone ever noticed we switched them.

The memories swirled in my eyes, clouding my vision until I gradually came back to reality in the graduation ceremony. Almost everyone was gone, the last few teary-eyed parents shuffling out the door. I waited, feeling weighted in place, the same feeling of invisibility hovering over my head. At last, I was alone in that massive space. The enormity gaped, and I felt pulled in every direction at once, my body's attempt to fill the spaces of others.

Finally deciding to go home, I started walking down the stairs, my shoes echoing across

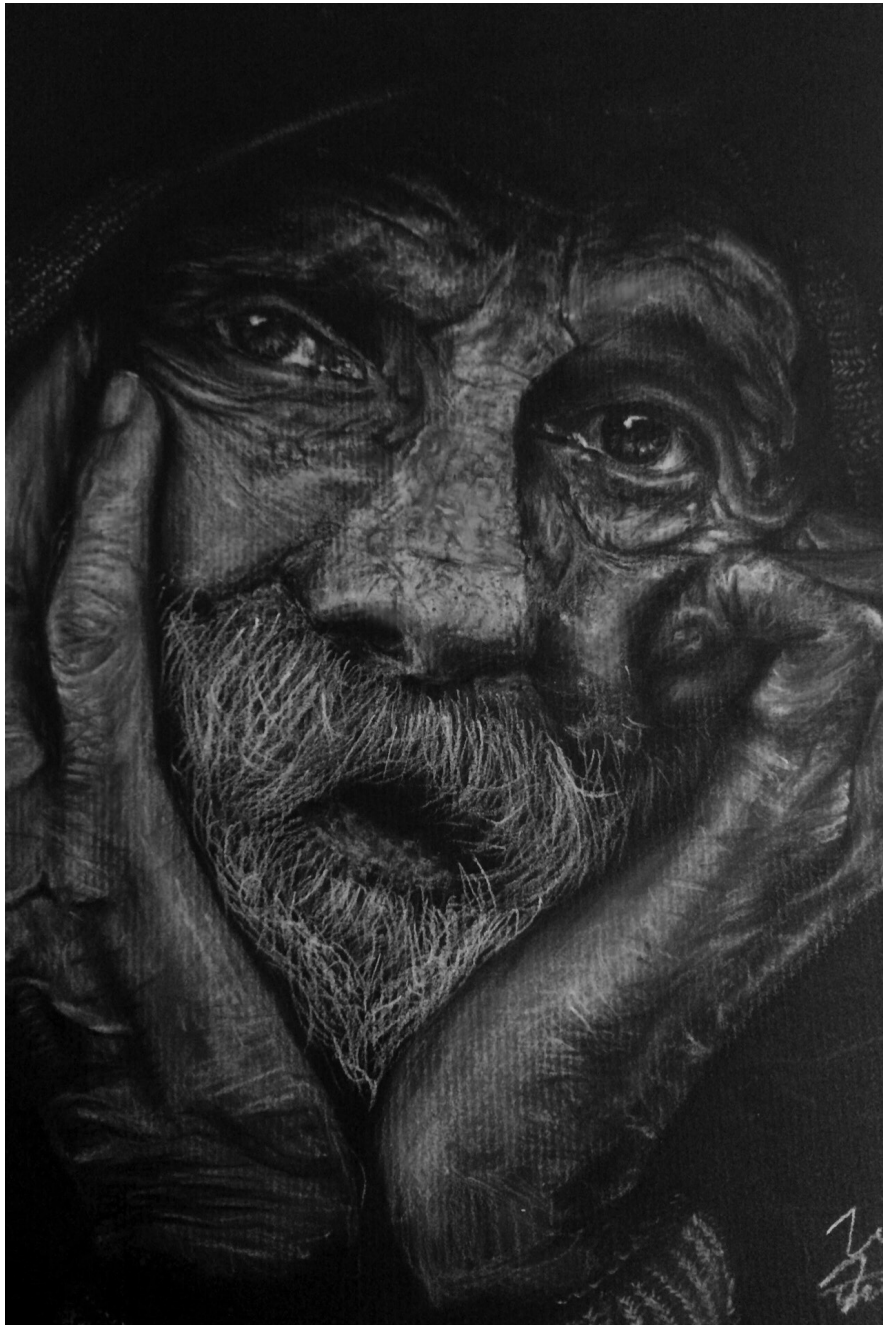
the banner-covered walls. Hallways suffocating with people proved a stark contrast to my momentary peace, and I hurried home, maneuvering between jostling shoulders and locked office doors. Despite the clamor, my mind remained clear, as if it had remained in the post-graduation gym, a disconnect between my heart and body refusing to let go of the momentary peace I had achieved.

It was the emptiness a frame feels as the outdated picture is removed, but before the new photo is inserted. It was the moment right before waking, when the night is almost over, but the morning hasn't quite arrived. It was the realization that time is its own entity, removed and too large to comprehend. It was the hours of stargazing, when the initial awe has worn off, and the feeling of contentment and wholeness that can never quite be described holds you absolutely spellbound; staring up at the stars that wink and turn, timeless and elegant.

Standing just inside my front door, I leaned back against the wood, head tilted to face the ceiling. A few empty tears escaped my closed eyes, the whirl of hugs from graduating classmates I would never see again weighing heavy in my arms, but serenely in my chest. Music vibrated through the walls from neighbors above me, indistinct and distantly familiar. I felt insulated, secure inside this little dorm I had called home. Soon I would move out, move in somewhere else, move along as time progressed, and move on from the 'me' who was clinging to my skin. For a moment, clarity blazed behind my eyelids, a vision of the days, years, decades to come.

Future me, who is loved and surrounded by friends and people, is still the same person as me, who is sitting in her empty house, who is sad and doesn't see a point to going on. You just have to hold onto the memories you have of this same space, picture the people who have been there, and trust that they will come back and be there again in a time that isn't quite here yet. These walls know the sound of your laughter. Just because they're not hearing it now doesn't mean that it's all over, and you'll never laugh again, it's just a little bit in the future. You know your place in other people's lives, you're not an island that's unconnected to anything, my actions in the past are what brought me to right now, and my actions right now are what will shape my future. Just hold on until that future arrives, because *I* trust and hope that it will come.





by Tiffany Whitby--First Prize Art and Photography

## **The Liquid that Scars**

*Prohibition is not accepted*

To live here you have to drink

It takes off

The desert's edge

*Prohibition is not acceptable*

No one tells a cowboy how

To live

Not even the desert

*Prohibition is not accountable*

For the dryness of this desert because

Alcohol still flows

A new spring for Rock Springs

*Prohibition is not accredited*

To anything more than a reactive

Urge toward excess

Like my father after his mother condemned the drink

*Prohibition is not accountable*

For my father's near alcoholism

It has long since been repealed

Even if it never truly existed in Rock Springs

*Prohibition is not acceptable*

In Rock Springs' denial, defiance  
As a form of self-medication or for  
Cowboying up—Drink to be tough drink to not feel

*Prohibition is not accepted*

To live here you have to drink  
It takes off  
The desert's edge



by Destini Keller





by Rachel Winward

## **A Christmas Letter from the Thompson Family**

**M**erry Christmas and happy holidays to all! Many apologies for the timing of this update. The reason for its delayed arrival should become apparent as you follow our ups and downs. The Thompson clan and friends certainly had a memorable year, and we're thrilled to share it with you.

### **JANUARY**

As has become expected at the start of every year, we faced the usual waves of Viking berserkers. Their tactics are predictable, but that doesn't make them any less brutal.

Seeking to catch us unaware and hibernating under the white embrace of winter, the Norse annually attack when the days are short. Those who ignored the informative pamphlet left by the chamber of commerce found themselves at the mercy of the howling hordes. Having spent countless hours reinforcing our defenses, we easily repelled the onslaught on our abode.

Not everyone on the street was so lucky. We'll miss our next-door neighbors, the Jacksons, and their barbecues, but there's a reason why the town motto is "Land for the strong." We hope a heartier and better prepared family decides to rebuild on their fire-cleansed lot.

### **FEBRUARY**

Representing our country at the Winter Olympics was a one-of-a-kind experience. I felt most like an American when participating in the Parade of Nations. I wasn't the one carrying our banner among the multitude of flags, but I was there when the standard bearer tripped. Seeing Old Glory on the ground, I quickly followed proper disposal protocol. Burning the U.S. flag in the ceremonial Olympic flame put me in the spotlight, and I was proud to share it with our noble colors.

I wish I could have converted my passion into points, but as the sledshot judges repeatedly explained, "That's not how it works, Mr. Thompson." The combination archery and bobsledding race remains a little-known spectacle, like curling used to be, though it ranks among the highest in injuries, especially when you factor in spectators.

I did not come home with any medals, but I did earn Miss Congeniality, which was an unexpected surprise I accepted with grace and humility.



## MARCH

When an Egyptian mummy disappeared from the local museum, I was the first person the curator called. Having discreetly relocated an extremely lost yeti that tried to move into the bike park last summer, my name topped the list of those equipped to deal with the unknown.

Dusty records showed the Egyptian king had been dug up in the 1800s, shipped across the Atlantic and “donated” to the museum to cover gambling debts. My investigation determined the sarcophagus was placed with a collection of tin soldiers, where the mistake remained unnoticed for over a century. When an intern cracked the crate to see why such a large container was labeled “toy soldiers,” he unleashed the forgotten pharaoh’s fury.

Having learned more about my quarry, I knew how I’d lure the mummy out of hiding. When Easter morning arrived, we put the kids in military dress uniforms and told them to search the neighborhood for eggs. Some might question of the ethics of using your children as bait for the undead, but you can’t argue with the results. The groans alerted us to the presence of the reanimated corpse just before the smell did. Once we ensnared him in an oversized net, everyone pitched in by rewrapping the mummy in duct tape, and we dropped off Tutan-whatever at the museum just in time to make it to Easter church service. For the King is risen, indeed.

## APRIL 1865

Due to the hole in time and space that opened up in my shower, I found myself naked and confused in the middle of a stage production of “Our American Cousin” in Washington, D.C. A thunderclap sounded, and I looked up to see a spectacle in the presidential box.

John Wilkes Booth had found my sudden, soapy appearance literally disarming, dropping his derringer and causing it to discharge harmlessly. Presidential security descended upon the would-be assassin, and once I was loaned some pants, I was heralded as the hero who saved Abraham Lincoln.

Of course, time flows like a river and is difficult to divert. The deviation in the timeline created anomalies that threatened to nullify all existence as we know it. String theory isn’t my strong point, as former classmates and teachers remember, but our solution to the chrontal calamity created a Schrodinger’s cat paradox where we were simultaneously dead in 1865 and alive in the present day. Since it was my fault he was a man out of time — in addition to owing him for things like preserving the nation — we offered him a place to stay.

The children love to listen to the stories told by “Mr. Abraham,” and my daughter’s oratory skills are becoming exceptionally convincing. So if you stop by and stay the night in our guest bedroom, you’ll know why we call it the “presidential suite.”

## ANOTHER APRIL

One of the short-term side effects of time travel, apparently, is the ability to predict the

near future. Having set a personal best record when playing paper-rock-scissors against the kids, I followed the wife's advice to take it to the next level. It started small with trivia nights and contests to guess how many pennies were in jars. It escalated to televised game shows, a real-life underground Fight Club, and the most expensive gambling dens in the world.

Now I am banned from participating in national lotteries in 178 countries and can get no closer than 500 miles to Las Vegas. I'm also barred from the local bingo hall for talking about Fight Club. Our notoriety would be more widespread had the precognitive power not worn off in the midst of a high-stakes poker game. These were the type of people you can't walk away from, but it turns out they're very forgiving when your losses enrich their winnings. Didn't see that coming.

Fortunately, Mrs. Thompson is a whiz at numbers, which her bridge club confirmed before I got booted. While the losses on the last day involved more zeros than I'd care to admit, having enough for the children's college fund takes a load off.

## **MAY**

I joked that it was a paperwork error, but honestly my new bank account is what led to my appointment as the trade representative to Lithuania. The ambassador certainly said as much.

Since the school year was almost over anyway, the whole Thompson family pulled up stakes to take up residence in our new home away from home.

It was a pleasure to meet so many people — the politicians, the celebrities, the business leaders, the scientists, the decision makers. The only thing that could have made it better was being able to speak the Lithuanian language. It is a beautiful yet elusive tongue.

That communication gap is what led to the limited nuclear exchange. The wife and I still debate which was more surprising: the fact that the Lithuanians had the bomb, or the fact that they used it over a perceived insult regarding the first lady (which is a shame, because all I had been trying to convey is what a beautiful hat she was wearing).

Those ex-Soviet eggheads had certainly done their homework. No one expected them to trigger the tectonic sweet spot that would send California into the Pacific, but they did. Last I heard, surfboard sales were up globally, so the trade mission wasn't all bad.

## **JUNE**

Back stateside, we returned to our old address, though some changes had occurred in our absence.

Abraham had been a good caretaker and said he revealed in the rewarding work of splitting rails and restoring the homes shaken by the great earthquake, but geology fights dirty. In

the seismic aftermath of the continental shift, a volcano had arisen in the backyard and a tar pit had oozed up in the front. We always challenge the kids to look for the silver linings, and they came up with more than expected.

First, this ought to give the Vikings something to think about when the winter equinox nears. Personally, I can't wait to see the shocked look on Havardr the Red's stupid bearded face.

Second, we'll see savings in the heating bill.

Third, Mrs. Thompson had always wanted a water feature, and now she has one with lava.

There was some friction when the homeowners association tried to object, but there's nothing in the rulebook that excludes this landscaping. Attempts to post notice either ignited instantly or were pulled into the depths of eternal midnight. From here on out, I'm calling the backyard my "complaint box."

## **JULY**

Between the two-minute war with Lithuania and the smoldering giant that glows outside our windows every night, the Thompsons were tired of fireworks when the Fourth came around. Nevertheless, we found time to revel in Americana with a friendly baseball game.

The neighboring dirt lot provided the perfect place to play. Local kids turned out from both sides of the railroad tracks, and Mr. Abraham served as the umpire.

"You must have a good bat and strike a fair ball to make a clean score and home run," Lincoln advised the players.

The team names were based on the athletes' neighborhoods, and though the South squad started strong, the North pulled ahead for good in the fifth and final inning. While some on the losing side were bummed, smiles abounded when everybody got ice cream afterward.

"Maybe if we'd tried conciliatory confections," the president said softly.

I still don't know if he was joking or lamenting.

## **AUGUST**

Timing isn't my strong suit. Just ask my wife, who loves to tell the he-proposed-at-the-amusement-park-and-lost-the-ring-on-the-love-roller-coaster story. Joining the Columbia Record Club to take advantage of its 10 albums for one cent promise is just the latest example. My timing was poor, not only because my CD player stopped working the same week, but also due to the fact that the company filed for bankruptcy in 2015.

This led to a \$5 wager, where I bet Lincoln I could find an attorney to take up my ridiculous case. The sad news is that the firm of Clarence, O'Neal, & Flywheel assures me that aggres-

sive litigation can restore my losses. I'm out a hefty retainer fee, but the former president owes me five bucks.

A question arose when discussing denominations and tributes: If Benjamin Franklin is famous for saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned," how come Mr. Bifocals is on the \$100 bill and the great emancipator is on the penny? This conundrum keeps me up at nights.

Also in August, our little girl was kidnapped by pirates. Spitfire that she is, she rose through the ranks quickly and reigned as a stern, but fair, pirate queen. However, since that story was extensively covered in the media, there's no need to dwell upon it here.

## SEPTEMBER

It started with the sound of a familiar song. Wondering who was blaring oldies music, the wife looked out the window. She called me over to see a young man carefully coming up our sidewalk, which always takes a lot of determination and coordination.

"Look at his hips move!" said my daughter who had pulled her eye patch to the side to get a better view.

He reached our porch and nodded respectfully. "Grandma Regina and Grandpa Tomas sent me."

Instantly I realized the identity of our visitor. It was the clone of Elvis Presley.

While traveling abroad, I met the brilliant Dr. Dovydas and her husband. These cutting-edge genetic researchers loved our kids and practicing their English. One night, in whispered tones, told me they were hunting scientists engaged in the illegal cloning of famous figures.

On our doorstep stood proof that our friends had infiltrated the operation and helped one of the subjects escape. Young Elvis said he had been told he could seek sanctuary with us.

The Thompsons did better than that. We granted him friendship and a place in the family. It's around-the-clock karaoke in the house right now. Mr. Presley and the kids keep teaching each other songs. When there's a music break, Abe and Elvis trade Underground Railroad stories.

Dr. Dovydas had said the rogue geneticists were fixated on the physical and how biology makes a person great. My boy rolled his eyes and said they should have asked him to sing from the heart.

Looking back on Regina's smile, I think that's when we earned her trust. Now our house is filled with music and dance.

## OCTOBER

Our house was filling up, and it got even more packed with the addition of Flopsy and Mopsy. The kids asked for more responsibility and a pet, not in that order, and what's a better test than raising a baby rhinoceros? The Thompsons can tell you. It's raising two rhinos.

We're always asked how to tell the difference between the siblings. Flopsy has light brown eyes, a blunt front horn, and tiny ears. She is more likely to commit property damage. Mopsy is a protective brother with dark brown eyes who has a pointier front horn and fatter ears. He prefers to charge moving targets.

Our patience and durability were put to the test. Holes steadily appeared in walls, furniture, and unwary visitors. The wife and I weren't sure how much the house could take. The support beams had already been weakened by seismic shifts, and you never knew if tar or lava was going to flow from the taps in the basement bathroom.

"A house divided against itself, cannot stand," Lincoln observed.

Threatened to be torn apart from within, we came together against an external foe. The home association reared its head again. While countering with our standard defense that there was nothing in the guidelines against rhinos, we tripled our house-training efforts. By the end of the month, the rhinos' daily destruction had shrunk to a minimum, Elvis agreed to perform at the next neighborhood fundraiser, and the association issued us a lifetime exemption. But we're still not getting our deposit back.

## NOVEMBER

Due to claims by Disney lawyers that the events I intended to relay bear an uncanny resemblance to the movie "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids," I regret that most of this month's misadventures will go unshared (and the same goes for my brief tenure as a live-in nanny for an English family). There is extensive documentation of what we experienced, but on the advice of legal counsel we've been told to wait a few years, or at least until the inevitable franchise reboot.

In lieu of copyright-challenged exposition, please accept this fudge recipe that my mother posted on Facebook that neither one of us has personally tested: Bring 2 cups of sugar and one-half cup of milk to boil. Boil for two and a half minutes. Remove from heat and stir in 1 teaspoon of vanilla and a three-quarter cup of peanut butter. Let cool and then serve. Bon appétit.

## DECEMBER

The kids all agree that I wore the best Halloween outfit this year. Thanks to determination and papier-mâché, I created a life-sized Tyrannosaurus rex costume. Mr. Presley recorded menacing growls for me to play while the mechanized teeth clashed and the tail wagged.

The design was so intricate, and we were so busy with the rhinos and REDACTED BY



DISNEY ATTORNEYS, that the dinosaur getup wasn't completed until the start of December. Fortunately, I thought, that was a week before the lighted Christmas parade.

To make my appearance a surprise, I didn't sign up for the parade. I mapped the route so I could surreptitiously slip in among the floats. Taking advantage of the extra days and leftover material, we expanded our Cretaceous menagerie. The strategic addition of horns and head-dresses turned Flopsy and Mopsy into tiny triceratopses, and we couldn't wait for the big day.

We watched a beautiful sunset while waiting for the parade to begin. Everything was fine until a fire engine blared its siren to signal the start, which spooked the rhinos. Without thinking, I raced after our frightened pets.

As my wife put it later, the sight of a two-story carnivore charging down Main Street in pursuit of two armored bumper cars made a physical and psychological impact. Festive floats were upended, decorations and strings of lights were torn down, and storefronts were smashed. Motorcycles and horses sped away without their riders, leaving candy wrappers, papier-mâché and tinsel fluttering in their wake. The vintage tractor transporting Santa made an unscheduled stop in City Hall. I don't know or care what happened to the clowns.

The chaos aided our escape. We corralled Flopsy and Mopsy and herded them back home. No discussion was needed to decide our next move. We dumped the incriminating evidence in the geological features — the horns in the tar pit and the regalia of the king lizard in the volcano.

I found myself saluting as the flames consumed the T. rex. Glancing over, I saw that everyone — even the wife — had joined me to observe the end of its terrible reign. Then we roasted s'mores.

"God bless us, everyone," my son said with a mouth filled with marshmallows.

So all in all, it's been a great year for the Thompsons. We got to travel, we made new friends, and we are ready for the Vikings.

The kids' grades have never been higher, especially in choir and American history, and we're looking forward to the Elvis clone and Lincoln releasing their first duet album, "The King and Abe."

So from our every-growing family to yours, Merry Christmas!

— *Mr. and Mrs. Thompson, the kids, Abraham Lincoln, clone Elvis Presley, Flopsy, and Mopsy*

# Contributors' Notes (if given)

**Jessica Dean** is new to Wyoming. She moved to Sweetwater County to teach English at WWCC. She is a farmer and forager at heart and enjoys experiencing ecologies around the world, especially learning how folks cultivate, celebrate, and protect land and food in their community.

**Kyla A. Ditges** is an English Lit major at WWCC. She will be graduating in the spring of 2019 and intends to continue her studies at UW. Her eventual goal is to become a journalist.

**Jess Fahlsing** is from Sweetwater County.

**Kathy Gilbert** was born and raised in Rock Springs, attended Rock Springs High School, graduated from WWCC with a degree in journalism and from the University of Wyoming with a bachelor of science degree. She worked as a reporter for the Douglas Budget and the Green River Star. In 2012, she became the publisher of the Green River Star. She was the adviser on the Mustang Express at WWCC for several years. She retired in 2015 but got bored, so started working part-time at VIRS Respite Care.

**Garrett Heggenstaller** is attending WWCC as an English major who is seeking a creative writing certificate. He is from Afton, Wyoming and graduated from Star Valley High School. He is hoping to become an author in the near future that produces works of science fiction and fantasy.

**Matt Henley** started photography as a teenager mostly so he could document his skateboarding. Later he became a long haul trucker just so he could take pictures of the desert as often as possible. Eventually, he realized he could probably just move out west, which he finally did in 2018.

**Michele Irwin** is an outdoorswoman and political activist with a passion for Wyoming's wild lands and wildlife. She and her husband live with their three Airedales and a small herd of bison along the Green River on their family's cattle ranch. She currently teaches Political Science courses at WWCC.

**Destini Keller** is currently a student at WWCC and will graduate with an Associate's degree in Business Management this May. She loves being outdoors and taking photos of nature.

**Sarah Kropf** is a freshman musical theater major here at Western Wyoming. She's participated in Young Authors throughout middle and high school, receiving awards at the county level. Poetry for her, is a form of art to express thoughts and feelings. She's enjoyed it all her life and hope to continue writing.

**Myra L. Peak** is adjunct faculty in WWCC's Workforce Development. She is past president of WyoPoets and received a poetry fellowship from the Wyoming Arts Council in 2007. Myra's poetry and fiction have been published by *The Owen Wister Review*, Western Wyoming College, WyoPoets, and other regional publications. She lives in Green River, Wyoming, with her teenage daughter, Emily.

**Caleb Michael Smith** is a Wyoming transplant who was born in Missouri. He and his cat live in a house crammed with books in Sweetwater County, Wyoming. He says talking about himself in the third person is sometimes a necessary evil.

**Laura Stewart** is a second-year Musical Theatre student at WWCC. She is particularly interested in the dance, acting, and musical side of the arts, but has felt drawn to writing since the first grade, where she was tasked with writing short stories based on Chris Van Allsburg artwork.

**Rachel Winward** is studying English as a sophomore at WWCC. She is an amateur photographer, and her favorite joke at the moment is, "I can cut a piece of wood in half just by looking at it. It's true! I saw it with my own eyes!"

**Rebecah Winward** is a Junior at Farson-Eden High School and has begun taking a college class at Western. She recently discovered photography and enjoys it as well as writing, acting and listening to music.

**Tiffany Whitby** is from Star Valley, WY. And concurrently enrolled at WWCC, but she plans to attend UW in the fall semester. She is eager to further her passions through education, and she's so grateful for this opportunity.

# WWCC Visiting Writers Fall 2019

**September 6, 2019**

**C.J. Chivers**, a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning, *New York Times* writer, and Iraq war veteran, will give two readings, at noon and 7 pm, with a panel discussion about topics related to veterans and the stresses of being a soldier at 2pm.

He will be reading from and discussing his 2018 book *The Fighters*, which details the lives of several veterans; it's an unvarnished account of modern combat, told through the eyes of the fighters who have waged America's longest wars. "A classic of war reporting...The author's stories give heart-rending meaning to the lives and deaths of these men and women, even if policymakers generally have not." —*The New York Times*

He's also written *The Gun*, which is a history of the AK47 which traces the invention of the assault rifle, following the miniaturization of rapid-fire arms from the American Civil War, through WWI, Vietnam, to present day Afghanistan when Kalashnikovs and their knock-offs number as many as 100 million, one for every seventy persons on earth. "What makes *The Gun* readable is its humanity. . . Chivers wants to show a richer context. . . and succeeds admirably" *Military Times*.

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**October 15, 2019**

**Carine McCandless**, a best selling author, and **Annette McGivney**, an award winning writer, will give a combined reading from 6:30 to 8:30 pm, and a writer's workshop from 2:30-4:30pm.

Carine McCandless' memoir *The Wild Truth* was a *New York Times* Best Seller and was selected by *Newsweek*, Amazon, and others for Best Books lists of 2014. As the sister of Chris McCandless of *Into the Wild* fame, her memoir is about growing up in an abusive household. She also gives presentations about domestic violence, and will be doing a fundraiser in Rock Springs on Mon. Oct 14. NPR says, "*The Wild Truth* is an important book on two fronts: It sets the record straight about a story that has touched thousands of readers, and it opens up a conversation about hideous domestic violence hidden behind a mask of prosperity and propriety.

Annette McGivney, an editor for *Backpacker* magazine, wrote *Pure Land: Three Lives, Three Cultures, and the Search for Heaven on Earth*. It's the 2018 National Outdoor Book Award Winner: "[It's] the story of the most brutal murder in the history of the Grand Canyon and how McGivney's quest to investigate the victim's life and death wound up guiding the author through her own life-threatening crisis. On this journey stretching from the southern tip of Japan to the bottom of Grand Canyon, and into the ugliest aspects of human behavior, *Pure Land* offers proof of the healing power of nature and of the resiliency of the human spirit."

**Fall 2019/Spring 2020**

## **WWCC Creative Writing and Literature Offerings**

If you're interested in developing your own creative writing skills or reading more great literature, please consider these classes next year:

### **Fall 2018**

ENGL 2230 Introduction to Shakespeare  
ENGL 2250 Women in Literature  
ENGL 2064 Creative Writing: Journaling (online)  
ENGL 2065 Creative Writing: Memoir Writing  
ENGL 2091 Creative Writing: Publishing Your Work (1 credit Online)

### **Spring 2020**

ENGL 2340 Native American Literature (online)  
ENGL 2215 Medieval World Literature (online)  
ENGL 2065 Creative Writing: Memoir Writing  
ENGL 2080 Creative Writing: Poetry (online)  
ENGL 2100 Literary Journal Production

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## **Creative Writing Certificate**

### **Earn a Creative Writing Certificate**

The Creative Writing certificate is a 16 credit program for students to experience a wide range of creative writing genres, develop and improve as a writer, and feel confident in transferring to a university level creative writing program. Through workshop methodology, studying professional writers, and doing exercises, poems, stories, and essays, students will become well-rounded writers and readers of literature.

Course	Credits
ENGL 2091 Creative Writing: Publishing Your Work	1
<hr/> Subtotal 1	
Choose any five (15 credits)	
ENGL 2040 Creative Writing:	3
ENGL 2050 Creative Writing: Prose I	3
ENGL 2060 Creative Writing: Prose II	3
ENGL 2064 Creative Writing: Journaling	3
ENGL 2065 Creative Writing: Memoir Writing	3
ENGL 2080 Creative Writing: Poetry I	3
ENGL 2090 Creative Writing: Poetry II	3
<hr/> Subtotal 15	
(Topics vary by term. May be taken up to three times)	Total Credit Hours 16





by Suzie Baker

Thanks for all your great submissions this year. We'll be calling for new submission in the Fall of 2019 in December and would love to see your photos, art, poems, stories, and essays.

Also, come join our staff next year. You can either enroll in ENGL 2100: Publications Production in the Spring of 2020, or you can commit to meet with us once a week. If you have questions, please email [cpropst@westernwyoming.edu](mailto:cpropst@westernwyoming.edu).