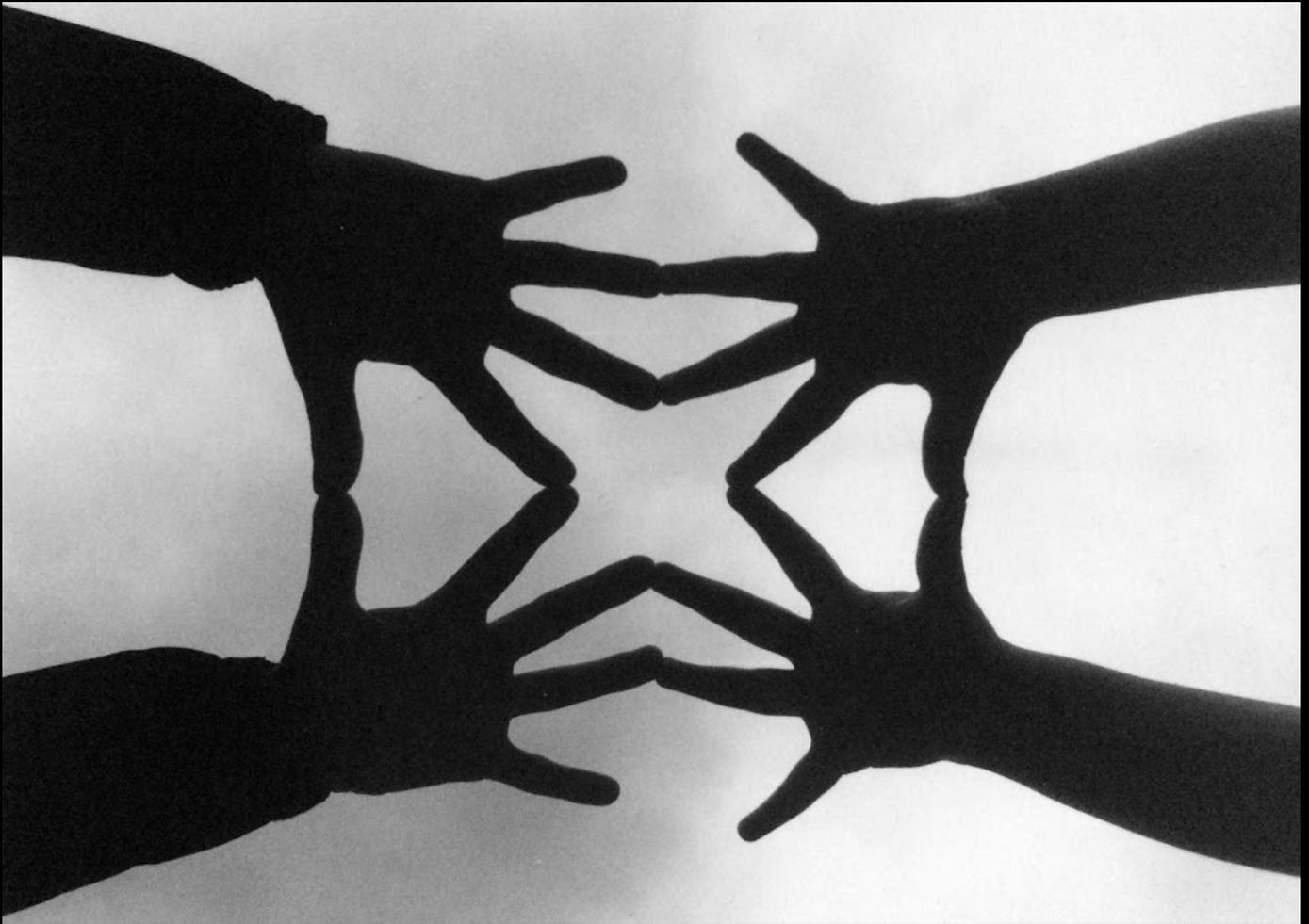


Full Circle



Nicole Powell, darkroom photography

2017 Huron High School Literary Magazine
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Full Circle is a publication of Huron High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Writing pieces printed in this magazine are selected from submissions to the River Rat Writing Prize by the PACC Writing Club and the advisors of the River Rat Writing Prize. Original artwork images printed in this magazine are selected from student work created in the Huron High School art program. Authors and artists retain all rights to their own work.

The River Rat Writing Prize seeks to provide a creative outlet and authentic audiences for students. We believe that the student work produced at Huron High School deserves to be celebrated within our school community and with the community at large. Winners receive public acknowledgement and financial reward for their inspiring work. We encourage all students to enter the competition.

Go to:

riverratwritingprize.com

For more information about the prize, to see past winners' submissions, and to access a link to this literary magazine. Print copies are available for purchase through the link on the website.

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Thank yous:

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* 2017 River Rat Writing Prize winning entry



Gray Snyder, darkroom photography

Ignorance

Roselyn Ignacio

childhood friends who knew no better
than the fledglings up above,
wailing for their lost mother to return.

promises exchanged;
they told of forever, timeless companionship.
not unlike the trees and flowers, growing amid the cacophony
that was the forest

they played and laughed
cried and fought
forgave and forgot—
their differences set aside to accommodate
the unity of two orphans

but even the trees and the flowers burn in Time's wildfire

both became unrecognizable beasts aware of the nature within,
Instinct told them to hate—
merciless waves of passionate disgust washed away
what they had once been.

two equals locked in violence;
internal conflict tearing each apart.
friend or foe?

kill or be killed?

ignorance had not been kind
to the fox and the hound.



Brenna Johnson, hand painted darkroom photography

Gator Girl

Jillian Groth

“Are you sure you want to sit on the alligator?” my mother asks. My sister nods vigorously, her blonde ponytail bobbing up and down. “Well, okay then,” Mom says. Jocelyn bounds down the concrete steps as I rock back and forth in my seat, my hands clenching into fists. She hands her ticket to the GatorLand employee before walking into the sandy pit where the instructor, and the alligator, await her.

The alligator is a long, scaly green beast with black electrical tape sealed around its wide, toothy snout. I eye the tape, scanning for any fraying edges. Jocelyn, with one ear cocked towards the instructor, slowly sits down on the alligator’s back. It doesn’t move a muscle. Despite the boiling heat of the Florida sun, I feel a chill go down my spine. Jocelyn places her hands over the tape as the instructor gingerly lifts the alligator’s head, then slowly backs away. I can’t help but laugh, realizing that it appears my sister, with her little hands and a cheeky grin, has wrestled an alligator to the ground and yanked its snout into the air.

When the photo is taken and Jocelyn slides off the alligator’s back, she comes leaping up the steps two at a time and plops down next to me, out of breath. I ask, “Did you like it?” as my fists unclench.

“Yep!” she chirps cheerfully. Then, her voice raised loud enough that it echoes around the entire arena, she adds, “And the alligator was soooooo cute!”

That Christmas, we hand out cards with the photo of my sister on the alligator and laugh at their bug-eyed expressions when we tell them it wasn’t a plastic alligator. Once all the guests leave and all of the shiny wrapping paper has been stuffed into the garbage can, we hang our last card on the refrigerator with the same pride a parent displays a report card.

Almost a year and a half later, my father and I come home to an empty house, a wall of weary silence between us. In the kitchen, Dad tells me I can have a snack before trudging down the hallway, his shoulders sagging. I grab a box of Cheerios and start to pour them into a bowl, but once I hear the bedroom door close with a soft click, I am truly alone. Without my sister. My vision is soon blurred

with tears. My head sinks into my hands as I collapse against the countertop, a sob welling up in my throat. I try to wipe the hot tears away, but they continue to sting my eyes and trickle down my cheeks. Images flash in my mind of my sister lying in a hospital bed, wincing as an IV is injected in her arm. She turns almost white when the doctor says to our parents, “The blood tests are confirming that she is a type one diabetic.”

I am jolted back to the present. I feel a scream ballooning in my chest as I fight the urge to cry out at the unfairness of it all, the idea my sister will have to struggle with an incurable disease for the rest of her life. Then my head turns towards the fridge, and I see the photo of Jocelyn on the alligator. I look at her relaxed stance, her casual grin, and I feel as if I’ve been stabbed, thinking she’ll never be that carefree again.

Then I see the glint of eagerness in her eyes, the grin being almost a smirk at the camera. I realize that she knew it would be a challenge, but she tackled it head on anyways. And I laugh a little. If my sister can sit on an alligator and call it cute, who was to say that diabetes would break her?

I sigh. It will be a challenge. There will be moments when we simmer with frustration, or wish that we could go back to the days before the diagnosis. But in that moment, standing alone in the kitchen, I know she won't let diabetes define her. I lean against the counter for a moment, then go back to pouring Cheerios. We will be okay.



Lauren Rose, colored pencil

One in a Billion

Henry Zou

When Bill walked into his seventh hour on Friday, he wished he hadn't. He forgot that it was the school geography bee. Every social studies class in the school held a contest, and the top three from each class got to compete in the school-wide one, for a chance at the state competition. After taking attendance, Mrs. Webster announced, "Alright class, as you all know, today is the Geo Bee. I would like you all to line up now, so we can get started." Bill walked to the end of the line and stood next to his friend, Ryan.

"This is gonna suck," Ryan said.

"Well, at least it'll be over quickly. I didn't study at all." Bill didn't mind that though. He didn't care what river led to what sea, or what mountain range went through what country. He was just fine with sitting back down at his desk and watching his classmates struggle. Bill glanced up to the front of the line. There stood Patrick, and his friend, Jason. They had borrowed some Geo Bee study books from the school library, and were in the middle of quizzing each other on the capitals of Europe."Hey, look over there," Bill whispered, pointing to the front.

"Nerds," Ryan replied, chuckling.

"We're ready to begin now," Mrs. Webster said, "Remember to take your time, and think through your answer before you give it. The top three students from our class will qualify for the school-wide competition, but for the winner of our class, I have a small reward." She reached into her purse and pulled out a bag of gummy bears. Bill loved gummy bears, but there was no way he was getting them. He was did well in all of the other subjects, but struggled in geography. He didn't have the motivation to memorize all of the different geographical features and landmarks. "Ok, Jason, you're first. What is the largest city in terms of population in South America?" Mrs. Webster asked.

Without a single moment of hesitation, Jason answered, "São Paulo."

“You are correct,” said Mrs. Webster as she continued down the line, slowly inching closer towards Bill. When she reached Ryan, she asked, “Ryan, what is the capital of Kansas?”

Ryan replied, “Well that’s easy, it’s Kansas City,”

“I also thought that question was easy, but apparently it was too hard for you. The capital of Kansas is Topeka.” Ryan’s face turned red as he walked back took seat, right next to where Bill was standing. The whole class laughed at him. Mrs. Webster looked at Bill, and said, “Are you ready?”

“I guess....” he replied, wanting to avoid the same fate as his friend. He stuck his hands in his pockets, and readied himself for his impending doom.

“What is the capital of Djibouti?”

Bill put on a stern expression. He had no idea where or what Djibouti even was, much less the capital of it. Maybe he heard her wrong. “Djibouti?” he asked, making sure.

“Nice job Bill, you are correct! The capital of Djibouti is Djibouti,” Bill had a stunned look on his face.

“What? You’re kidding me.”

“No, I’m not kidding you. The capital of Djibouti is Djibouti. Let’s move on now,” Mrs Webster said, as she walked back to the front of the room, ready to give the remaining students another round of questions. Bill leaned back against the wall, still not quite sure what had happened. He watched as his classmates slowly began getting eliminated. His heart raced again as Mrs. Webster neared. When she finally got to him, Bill was starting to break out in a sweat. He took a deep breath as Mrs. Webster started to speak. “What country has the Al Hajar Mountains at its North, and the Dhofar Mountains at its South?”

Bill put his head down, thinking intently. The names sounded familiar, but he had no idea where they were. “Oh man,” he mumbled, as he tried remembering all those lectures Mrs. Webster had given.

“Wow, I’m amazed,” Mrs. Webster said, “I clearly remember you were asleep in class the day we went over the Middle East, but your answer of Oman was correct. I guess you went home and studied it.” Bill was speechless. He had no idea how he was doing so well, but he decided not to question it, and just started mentally preparing for the next round.

When Mrs. Webster came back around to him, Bill was one of only six or seven remaining students, Patrick and Jason obviously among them. Bill began thinking to himself, “What if this keeps on going? What if I win the whole competition doing this? Will anyone find out that I’ve actually don’t know anything? Does this count as cheating?”

His thoughts were interrupted by Mrs. Webster. “So, Bill, what’s the answer? Were you listening, or were you busy doing God knows what?”

Bill’s face turned red. He had no idea what Mrs. Webster had asked him. He made a quick glance at Ryan, who just smiled and shrugged. No help there. Bill looked up at Mrs. Webster’s eyes glaring at him unrelentingly. He had no choice but to come clean. “Sorry,” he said, hoping Mrs. Webster would take pity and repeat the question.

“Wow, I apologize,” Mrs. Webster said, with a look of disbelief on her face.

“What?”

“It was my fault. I thought you weren’t paying attention, but I guess I was wrong. The question was, ‘Which county in Southeastern England shares borders with Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Hampshire, and Berkshire?’ Your answer of Surrey was right. I’m genuinely impressed. Even I wasn’t sure of the answer until I checked.” Bill smiled and began to relax. Even if he got eliminated now, Mrs. Webster was sure to remember his epic performance, and maybe even go a little bit easier on him in class. He leaned over to Ryan and began to start a conversation.

“I have no idea what’s going on.”

“You studied all night last night. I know you want those gummy bears. That’s what’s going on. Just didn’t know you were such a nerd.”

“I’m telling you, I low-key have no idea how I’ve gotten so far. I legit guessed all of them.”

“Yeah, right. Anyways, want to hang out after this? It’s Friday.”

“Sure, sounds good. Want to watch a movie?”

“Yeah, which one?”

“Batman?”

“I’ll accept it, Bill,” Mrs. Webster said. Her voice seemed to have come out of nowhere.

Bill looked up, and nearly jumped. Was she listening in on their conversation? Was he going to get disqualified? Detention maybe? “Wh-, what?” Bill stammered.

“Do I need to repeat myself?” Mrs. Webster said. “Maybe if you weren’t so busy talking to Ryan, you would have heard that you were right. The answer to the question, ‘The largest oil field in Turkey, the Batı Raman oil field, is located just outside which city?’ was Batman. Well, technically, the correct pronunciation is Batmanê, but it was close enough.”

Bill smiled and looked around. It was only him, Patrick, and Jason left, meaning he had qualified for the school-wide competition. But that wasn’t important to him. Bill had his eyes set on those gummy bears, and only had two more people to get through. “Alright, congrats to Bill, Patrick, and Jason for qualifying, and representing our class in the school-wide competition. Don’t be surprised if these final few questions are a bit harder.”

Now that we’re done with that, let’s get started again. Patrick, what is the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world?”

Patrick thought for a while, and replied, “Is it Kiribati?”

“Good guess, but not quite. The most remote inhabited archipelago in the world is actually Tristan da Cunha. Nice try Patrick, but maybe next time,” Mrs.

Webster said in an empathetic tone. Holding back tears, Patrick went to his seat. Now, only Bill and Jason remained. Bill could almost taste those gummy bears in his mouth. They might as well be his. Mrs. Webster looked down at her list of questions and nodded, as if she also knew that Bill had this in the bag. “What is the fourth most populated country in the world?”

Bill barely listened. “EZ Money!” he blurted, confident that whatever he said would be the right answer. Half a second later, what just happened sank in. “Wait, wait, it’s Indonesia, the fourth most populated country is Indonesia! That’s the easiest question in the whole book!”

“Sorry, Bill, but rules are rules. Your first answer is your final answer, and it was EZ Money. Unfortunately, that’s not the fourth most populated country in the world. In fact, as far as I know, it’s not even a country.”

“But...” Bill said, waiting for his luck to return, but it didn’t. He slowly dragged his feet back to his desk, with the taste of the gummy bears still in his mouth. He looked in pain as Jason successfully answered that the capital of Yukon was Whitehorse, and took home the gummy bears.

As the bell rang, and everyone began leaving, Bill stopped Ryan. “Actually, I can’t hang out today,” he said.

Ryan looked shocked, “What? Why not?”

“The school contest is only a week away, and I have to study.”

Ryan laughed and said, “Hah, good one. Come on, let’s go.”

Bill shook his head. “No, I’m not joking. I actually gotta study. This contest is the real deal. I have to get serious. I can’t just rely on luck to win, you know.”



Ethan Kuo, mixed media

Inheritance

Julie Heng

I can probably label myself a typical millennial: perhaps often sidetracked by a free wifi hotspot, but still an independent-minded spearhead of my own destiny. I'd like to think that I take orders from none, that I am immune to peer pressure, that the political views of my parents have no lasting effect on me; I ingest a diversity of information presented by a growing world and learn from it what I will. My ideas are shaped by Sartre, and Nietzsche, and Markus Zusak, and Savannah Brown. I am fully in charge of myself and my vocation as I see fit.

(Or so I say.)

Yes, this is a theoretical rather than a legitimate trademark of my identity. It's shockingly obvious how most of my family's DNA has quite literally and metaphorically made up my footprint on this earth. I mean, every time I fill out a form on a common assessment, I have to bubble in the placeholder for "Asian"—it's inevitable. But beyond that, it's also time for me to acknowledge that I follow the ebbing flow of every generation's wave onto life's beach. My family's stories have shaped the opportunities I have and the person I am today.

And we don't even have to begin oh-so-long ago, with ancestral primates: the most visible patterns begin at my grandparents' branch of the family tree, where our family's cherished values of learning and consideration have been easily illustrated.

Of course, it's true that individual interesting stories are more numerous, and for good reason: every person leads a unique life. Back in the day, my grandfather (on my father's side) was a radical young man who wished to better the state of the nation, and after graduating from college, had become the city mayor by the age of twenty-one. It's not an episode that has been yet replayed in our family, as far as I

know. To me, my grandfather's case proves just how much more interesting it is that your family still inherently keeps similar characteristics.

But what are those similarities? Perhaps it may be easiest to point out career statistics on my mom's side of the family. Considering the fact that my grandfather was a doctor specializing in Chinese medicine, my grandmother was a hospital accountant, my aunt a dentist, and my mom a working hematologist/oncologist, one could easily conclude that hey, the gift of medicine runs in the blood! Or notice the university positions on my dad's side of the family, and call it a classic case of academia. But let's be honest—that would be surface-level scratching. Such an answer would scuff the gem rather than cut a clean, brilliant bevel.

What binds my (or any family) together are our commonly instilled values.

Sure, the backdrops might not be the same. My great-grandparents spent their entire lives in China, my grandparents became frequent international flyers, and my parents immigrated here... I was born in Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, raised in Windsor, Canada, and shuffled around Michigan for junior high before landing here for high school in Ann Arbor. The parameters seem barely comparable. But consider this: each generation more or less aimed to provide a better set of opportunities for the next, a larger menu with more appetizers and more satisfying desserts. Thus, despite all the variances, we are, as a family, more similar than I used to think.

For example, although every generation has its differences, whether that be geography or resource based, a common trend in *our* family is the primary focus on education. Whenever possible, it seems we go for post-graduate degrees. I mean, one could say the PhDs and MDs run in the family! But in reality, those certificates represent more than their letters' worth, as they truly embody our dedication to pursuing higher levels of knowledge, accomplishment, and service.

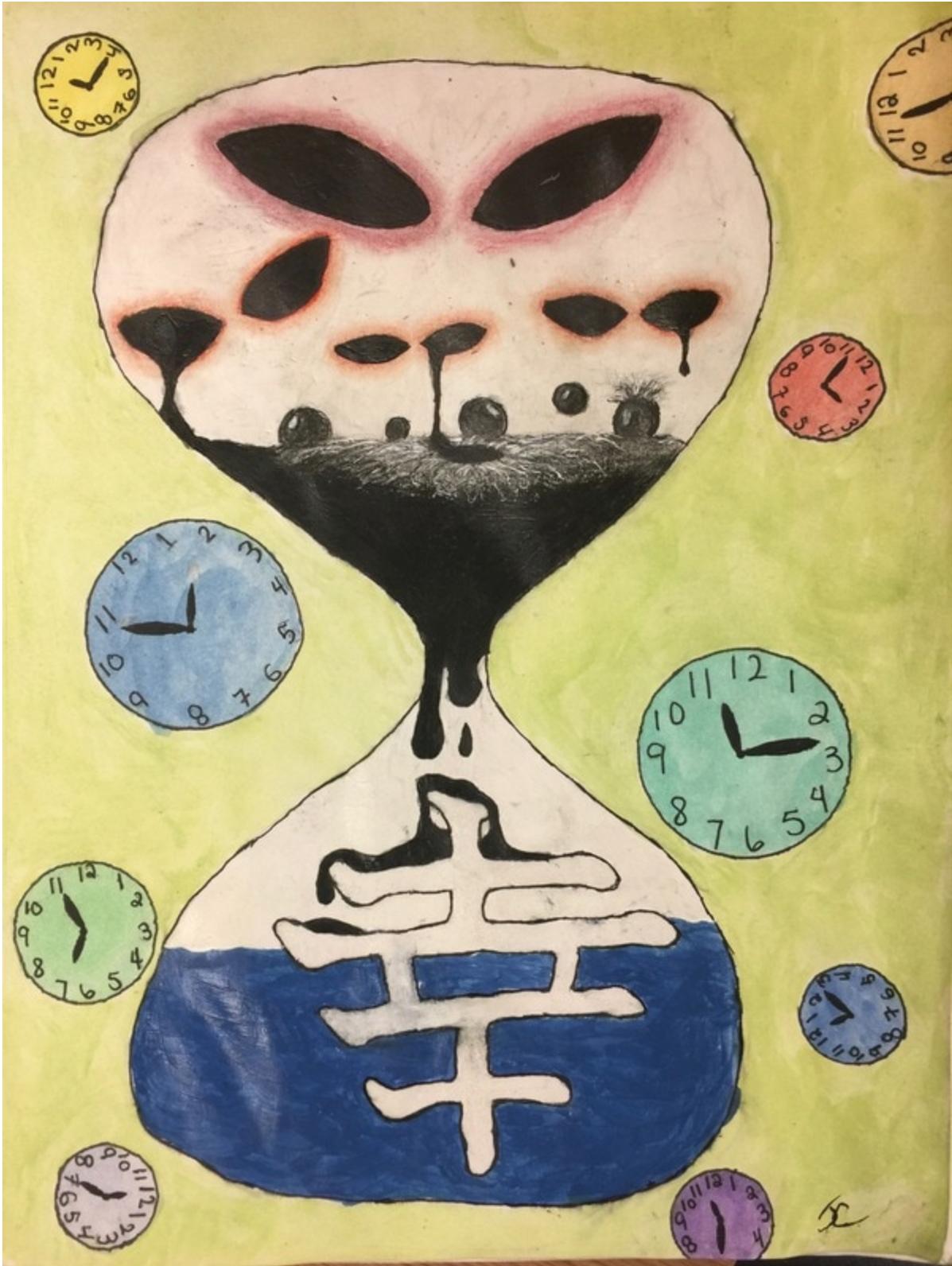
If anything, this can all be symbolized with a ritual my dad formulated (that I intend to keep). The rules are simple: every generation must double the number of books published by the former. The content could be anything from speculative political commentary to thrilling mystery. What matters is the wealth of analytical, creative, or inspirational thought.

Thus far, my grandfather is working on his second book, on ethics and social function, which then puts the pressure on my dad, who is striving to catch up (he's currently finishing his second oeuvre, on changing the paradigm of cancer and molecular research).

So it seems I must leave it at that; I have a few books to go write, and a few more seeds of my family's legacy to plant!

But first, one final note.

Every family inherits its own unique characters carrying out its own distinctive screenplay, with interchanged plotlines, settings, and contributions. My friend has three generations of engineers in her family; my piano teacher's family is packed with musicians... We are all different, and yet we are all the same. We have unique DNA within each individual and their family, but we all share the identical genome of humanity. As we trace back political heritages or beloved recipes, it's important to remember that each one of us are shaped by history and shall continue to act as agents of history in the making.



Joseph Casarella, mixed media

Waiting

Roselyn Ignacio

the old man was alone

the house, silent as death—

if a man is alone does he make a sound?

two armchairs, side by side;

one...invisible,

the other tattered and worn.

a lonesome ship:

hole ridden, mast-less, without a soul save for its captain...

ready to explore the world under the sea, above the skies.

a tree amid its concrete world:

tough, unyielding, exhausted.

trunk full of rings and

reminders of its companions;

gone and withered.

branches drooped and caressed the rough stone beneath

gently with understanding.

the tree without leaves, despite the summer months,

defeated.

this world is no longer its home.

a single deity, a single star.

it will die alone.

Hyades, Pleiades—burned out.

gas escapes its being,

but slowly. and teasingly.

years upon years with death in reach

though never present.

the rest is dark—it is the only light left.
and it is dying.

he sat on his bed and marveled at himself.
oh how he used to be young and spry!
a handsome man full of ambition to change the world,
to have an impact.
to see the Seven Wonders and to place himself as the Eighth.
aside a girl, mind wrecking itself in a panic since he lacked charm and bathed in
awkwardness.
oh what a life he used to live.
and now?
just him.
crippled, defeated, welcoming.
he counted down the seconds until the time of the Reaping and waited
'til he was no longer alone.



Barman Nasirpour, pencil

The American Dream: Heinz Heissenbuettel

Morgen Heissenbuettel

Heinz Heissenbuettel grew up as any young boy would in Germany during the Second World War—playing in bunkers with his friends and avoiding his farm work. Now at age 81, he peacefully sits back and recalls his life story, a story of some hardship but also of adventure and success. In his own way, Heinz could be considered one who has achieved the American Dream.

Glancing around the room to the elegant painting on the wall of Öttersteiner Straße, the main road where Heinz grew up in the small town of Worpsswede, he smiles and recalls his childhood, “We started working on the farm as soon as we could walk. We had pigs, and cows, and chickens that all need to be taken care of.”

For the first five years of Heinz’s education, he only went to school every other day for three hours at a time. “We had one teacher between two different schools, but in those first five years of schooling, I learned more than any American high schooler did at the time,” he says as a grin widens across his face. “I knew every capital city of every state in the United States, every capital city in most countries, every river and ocean name and whatever else there was...we knew all that.”

He sighs as German Polka music plays quietly in the background, “We were eighteen miles outside the city of Bremen, and at night when it was dark you could see lights from the distance, and the planes dropped bombs and the artillery fired back at the traces, it was a chase...and you could see lines of red, green, blue, yellow balls flying through the air.”

He paused and closed his eyes. “It was like fireworks you’ll never see in your life...and every once in awhile you would see a plane burst into flames and come crashing down.”

Heinz was surrounded by one of the most brutal wars in history.

“At the end of the war there were planes that came and attacked the farmers in the field plowing. They attacked anything that moved with machine guns, a car in the road for example--but not many people had cars back then.”

“One time, my friend and I were playing in a bunker and we looked up and two British soldiers were pointing guns at us. But, seeing that we were just kids they gave us candy.”

Even with all this going on around him Heinz recalls feeling fairly safe, with a few exceptions. Near the end of the war, his family was required to house both German and British soldiers in their house and barn. They parked their artillery and tanks right outside the house. That did not lead to a good night's sleep for a while.

Heinz remembers thinking about America and the adventures it could provide for him. As he spent his teen years working at a local convenience store and farming, he recalls not knowing much of what was going on in America. “We had to continue farming to provide food for ourselves and so many others who wandered by from the city, looking for just a sandwich or some potatoes...just to get by.”

When he was nineteen years old, Heinz made a life changing decision. He was faced with a choice: stay in Germany and receive his father's entire inheritance, or leave Germany and not obtain any of it. Heinz chose to get on a boat headed towards Canada. “That was the first and only time I've ever seen my father cry,” he remembers sadly.

“I wanted adventure, a chance for a life of my own. I wanted to see the world.” Heinz's plan was to start in Canada, make enough money to move to America, make enough money to move to Mexico, and continue this journey all the way through South America.

He was well on his way through this journey until he got to Tucson, Arizona. “I was living there when I received a letter,” he exclaims. “ ‘Greetings from the President, your friends and neighbors have selected you!’ it said. I kept looking around...I was working for this guy and I was sleeping in my car behind his shop and I looked around the alley. Where were all these friends and neighbors?” he says as he laughs at his own joke.

Heinz was then drafted to the United States army for the Korean War. He spent two years in active duty, two years in active reserve, and then two years in standby reserve.

The draft order was what gave Heinz the possible freedom to continue his adventure. If he would have jumped back on the next plane to Germany he would've been safe, but he would have lost his new found freedom. He saw this as cowardly and unwise as he yearned for the chance to be his own free self.

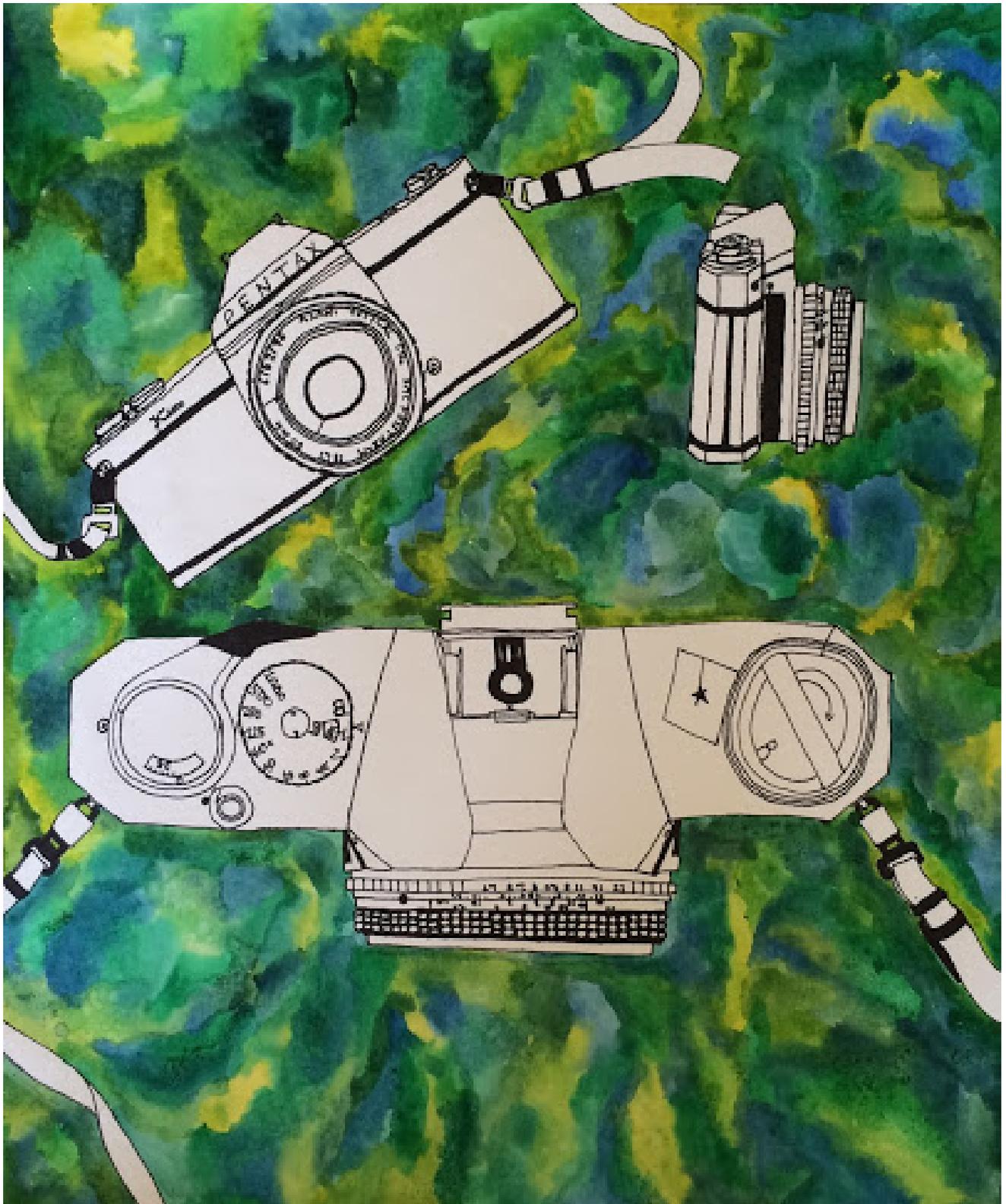
After his service in the army was complete, Heinz began working for a sheet metal and air conditioning company in southeast Michigan where he built up a sufficient salary and a pension.

"I joined a union and I got all my insurance and retirement pension from the sheet metal company," he remembers and leans back in his chair, pausing to think. "I've often thought about how I would have never received this opportunity in Germany, and how I shaped my life and raised a family in America. Even though this is my homeland now, I still miss Germany sometimes." He reflects that he could have worked in Germany as a sales clerk his whole life, instead of farming, but the look on his face seems to show that he doesn't regret his decision. "I was happy with the sheet metal union and became lucky to stay with it".

Heinz became an American citizen in 2005 and he was proud to do so.

When I asked him whether he believed he has achieved the American Dream, he looked at me and then glanced up at the painting of his beloved Öttersteiner Straße. "I haven't achieved the wealth and luxury that so many people often foolishly strive for, yet I'm a happy man." He grinned and then paused to raise his water glass to the end of a traditional polka, singing "Eins! Zwei! Drei! G'suffa!" and laughing. "I've shaped my own American Dream. I got my adventure, I got my job, I've got my family, and I've got my beer. I've created my own dream and lived it out."

Heinz Heissenbuettel found the American Dream without wealth and power. He found it through family, happiness, and satisfaction with his life.



Sara Soroka, mixed media

Amaurosis

Jasmine Xu

vision.

I know nothing with any certainty

Once upon a time, there was a princess who was loved by the stars - but every time she awoke they were gone.

“Your highness! Please wake up!”

Rubbing her eyes, Lucienne rises from her bed and knocks into a watercolor painting.

Glass shatters.

There’s a frenzy of shouts, and her door crashes open.

“Your highness. You need to be more careful!” The servant says, meeting her eyes. “I suppose it can’t be helped.”

The servant helps her up and they head downstairs, bits of a conversation cutting in.

“**...pollution...**”

“**...eyes...**”

“**...princess...**”

The servant pulls Lucienne to the dining room. The help bows, avoiding her eyes.

They eat together. Isolated in a tower, Lucienne takes all the company she can get.

“How were the stars yesterday?” Lucienne inquires.

There’s an awkward pause before someone exclaims, “They were beautiful!”

Lucienne smiles at the thought of their glow against the night sky. Just once, she'd like to see the stars again.

After eating she returns to her room, contemplating the words she heard earlier. No, she didn't just hear fragments. She heard everything.

"She's so stupid. **Pollution** makes seeing the stars impossible."

"You know how her **eyes** are. Don't bully a blind girl."

"Who's bullying her? She thinks she's a **princess**."

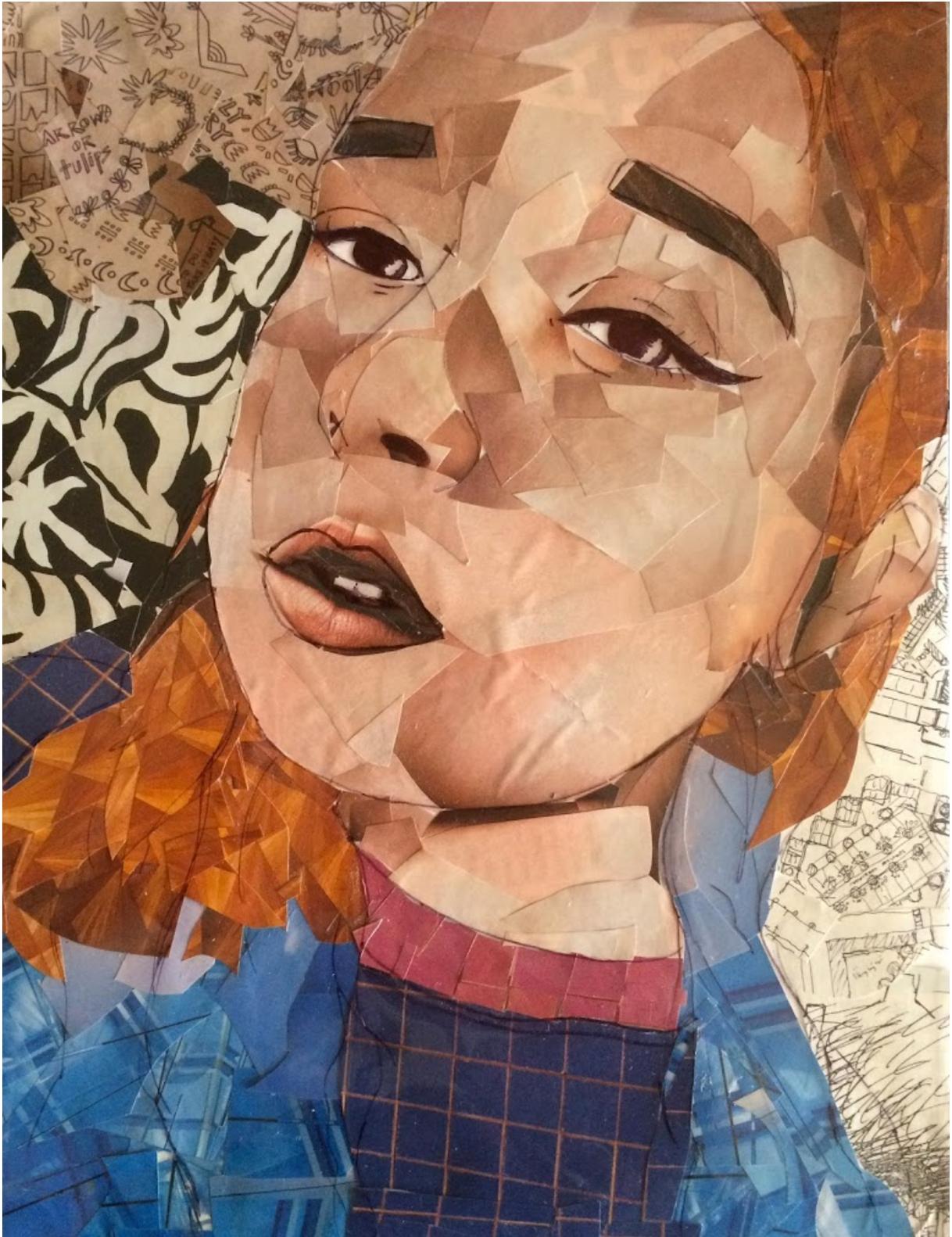
"Just let her be, okay? Maybe she's not really a princess but at least she's happy and she remembers the stars. She's got dreams. All we've got is smog."

No... I can see.

I can see the stars.

I swear I see them.

but the sight of stars makes me dream.



Kaitlyn Rose, collage

The Clearest Memory

Anna Scott

The day was bright, clear and warm. The field smelled like peppermint; the dew was starting to melt into the air. The yellow frisbee flew in a lazy arc, landing bumpily on the ground in front of me. I stopped it neatly with my foot and tossed it back to her. She grinned and I smiled.

I met Laura in gym. It was the second semester of freshman year, and I only had a handful of friends, none of whom were in this all-girls gym class. I don't know how exactly we met. One day she was just a classmate, the next day she was a friend. Laura was like that. She was effortlessly cool, so cool I was sometimes intimidated by her. She was also magnificently kind. Not just nice, but truly, deeply kind. She and another girl named Cierra became my only two friends in that class. Cierra was hilarious, smart and sarcastic, easy to hang out with. The three of us formed a quirky trio.

I don't know why I remember this particular day the best- there were other days that were funnier, or more meaningful, but I remember this day the best. It was early spring, and the trees were turning a delicious shade of green. Mrs. Marshall-Diver, our gym teacher, had gotten tired of telling us what to do, so it was a free day, and we could do whatever we wanted. Most people decided to meander along the cracked red track, but Cierra grabbed a frisbee. She chucked it at me, but of course, it flew in the opposite direction, as frisbees often do. I ran to get it and tried to throw it at Laura. The uncooperative frisbee landed in an arc behind her, and she walked over to pick it up. Her sleek, choppy brown hair fell forward as she bent over, and she tucked it behind her ear with a flick of her hand. There was a black hair tie nestled between the dimples of her slender wrist.

I can't remember what we talked about. All I can remember are these perfect images, like looking back in time through a crystal clear window. I recall how green the football field was. It's not usually something I would call beautiful, but on this day it was. The sun made it seem fresh, like the newborn buds on the trees. The air was crisper, dewier on this particular day. I could smell the peppermint gum that Laura

was chewing, the gum that she always kept in the outer pocket of her button-covered backpack. For some reason, this particular day has stayed clear and preserved, refracting light into darker moments.

Laura is dead now. She jumped off a parking structure and hit the asphalt. When I heard what had happened, the floor seemed to skid out from underneath of me, and my stomach went into a freefall.

One time, when I was little, I was climbing the monkey bars and I slipped. I fell straight down like a stone and landed hard on my back. When I tried to sit up, I couldn't breathe. It was like my lungs had just forgotten how to work; like they weren't capable of containing oxygen any longer. I spent the next ten minutes sprawled on the ground, inhaling raspy breaths, coaxing the air back into my battered lungs. Laura's death was much worse than that.

It was raining the day we found out. The grey water dripped on the windows of classrooms, soaking the autumn leaves that still clung to their branches. My fingers and legs wouldn't stop twitching the whole day. I heard crying in the hallway during second hour. I had never heard someone cry in the halls before.

I prided myself on being pretty good at handling death. For me, it seemed rather clinical, just another part of nature. I had known this girl for five-ish months. In the grand scheme of someone's life, that isn't that much time. Who was I to feel sad about her death? I was just a friend, someone she might recognize in a crowded room. The clearest memory I have of her was that gorgeous day we threw the frisbee around, and I can't remember a single thing she said.

I never really coped with her death because of this, and I kept those emotions bottled up. I believed that my sadness would detract from others who knew her better. Others who had grown up with Laura, others who had loved her. I just knew her. In fact, I barely knew her. I barely know anyone. I sit next to people and categorize them on what they are wearing or what they are saying, but I don't really know them. I see them through the haze of my own opinions, that blurry fog that distorts who they actually are. I suppose everyone is like this, though. I guess Laura was like this too. She barely knew me. She probably didn't know that my favorite color is green, or that I love the Pacific Ocean because it is so large you can't help

but feel something when you stand beside it. Maybe this is part of the reason she jumped off of that building; maybe she felt that crippling loneliness we all occasionally feel. I don't know. Like I said, I barely knew her.



Kevin Liu, graphic design



Pavel Kharin, experimental darkroom photography

The Boondocks

Miela Foster

It only took one twenty minute episode for me to accept my unique “blackness.”

3 am, on a summer night, I found myself searching Youtube for some sort of entertainment, and there it was: *The Boondocks*, season 2, episode 14. As I watched, I faintly remembered my dad mentioning the TV series to me years ago, but the show was on Adult Swim, and my own fears about what might air on the Adult Swim network hindered me from ever viewing the network. But even more so, my knowledge that *The Boondocks* was a “black” show prevented me from watching it. I firmly believed that the series was built on ignorance to give a black crowd a good laugh. Yet, here I was, bored at 3 am, watching an episode.

One should understand that living in white suburbia skews one’s perception of what it means to be black. The culture of afternoon playdates and summer day camps muddled my identity. So, when I grew up and began to read the news, and follow social media, I became very confused. The person I’d always seen in the mirror never thought of the idea of being black, I was just myself, darker than most of my peers nevertheless. Now, I was being forced to grasp the serfdom of my skin color and the ton of burdens that came with the “black” package. I had an awakening about my hair, my voice, and my personality. Never once had I looked at my intricate cornrows with such animosity until now. The perception of looking black to my peers was now a fear, dictating every step I took. And as my fear deepened, my mind also began to numb the realization that I was in fact a woman of color. Then, I began to straighten my hair everyday, changed my voice, and became that “different” black girl.

Only during my sophomore year of high school did I begin to change. With high school, came the black people who I’d never been surrounded by. I had dealt with the covert comments by white people that effectively demeaned me for being black, but now came the comments by my own people, ostracizing me for rejecting black culture, calling me a “sellout”. My tenth grade English teacher encouraged me to write about these struggles. And I did, and along the way I found a gaping hole in

my identity that was my unique “blackness”. It was at this stage that I questioned what it even meant to be “black”? Was it a personality? Was it measurable? I was on a journey of self discovery and *The Boondocks* was a gateway to that understanding.

Every episode followed the adventures of Huey, Riley and their grandad, exploring the different elements of “black identity”. *The Boondocks*, although rich in explicit language, was at heart a political commentary on “blackness” in America. The main character, Huey Freeman, spoke to my soul. He broke down black stereotypes in his suburban town and spoke with a vigor no one could ignore. Huey spoke to both black and white audiences, showing them their ignorance, their faults. But, he also told them how to improve. This radical, small child somehow was able to convey deep racial issues in a comical and satirical way so that anyone could understand. Huey inspired me not to just question my “blackness” but act on it, and change the world’s view of it. If anything else, Huey made me accept my unique “blackness”, and told me that I was okay. *The Boondocks* liberated me from the shackles of black stereotypes, and knighted me to become a soldier for civil justice. I felt comfortable with my skin color for the first time. I’d found land in the boondocks of my identity.



Anissa Alam, mixed media

Candy

Camryn Bank

Only special kids

– special girls –

like Candy.

Candy comes

one by one

or

in big bags.

You can get

Candy

from your

cousin

or your

Uncle

or your

Aunt

maybe your

teenage lunch buddy.

Candy is exchanged

in secret

in the dark

or

the basement

or

behind the house.

Candy is

Usually

sweet,

but good girls don't complain when

it's

sour.

Sometimes Candy

can be chilling

– like ice –

which doesn't make

sense because

my Candy Man is

nice.

Sometimes the Candy

is so hard it

cuts your

tongue,

making it

difficult

to tell people what

the Candy Man's done.

Though most girls

love sugar,

like diamonds

or pearls,

I would like

just a little less Candy

in my Candy World.



Hope Vaughan, oil pastel

Aylin Gunal

The Desert's Violins

Wind cascaded down the dunes, taking sheets of sand down with it. The air in the desert was as dry as ash, and the sun's heat canvassed the periwinkle sky with a white glow. Dull brown patches of trees were scattered through the desert, appearing to the rare lone traveler as skeletal hands, waving their gnarled fingers in the arid breeze.

As well as sand, myths and rumors sailed the desert winds. In particular, the legend of the traveling gypsy caravan had rooted itself in the mind of Ara, a young man with a violin that never left his side. This gypsy caravan was said to play the most beautifully haunting music in the world, and it only appeared in the town of Kuura. Kuura was one of the few cities that stood at the brink of the great desert, and served as a destination for food, water, and entertainment for all travelers in the region.

At dusk one summer evening, the bus that Ara was aboard screeched to a stop before the gates of Kuura, sand snaking up in clouds along its wheels. The passengers disembarked underneath a deep indigo sky, which accumulated shades of blue to become darker as the evening progressed. The bus sped away unceremoniously, and the group of travelers trickled in through gates of Kuura.

Ara grasped the violin case tightly to his body as he traipsed through Kuura. He meandered in between colorful brick buildings and took in the scents of spiced meats and pastries dripping in sweet sauces in the restaurants. He wandered through town squares filled with travelers and natives alike, discussing the politics of desert tribes and the latest town scandal, all underneath the dancing lights of torches and candles. Merchants and peddlers strolled through the streets with knowing smiles, gesturing to their cases of water and offering luminous stones to the women that sashayed by in vibrant scarves.

“Have a bottle of water?” A merchant thrust a gourd underneath Ara’s chin. Ara found himself in the midst of a group of peddlers who swarmed around him like a pack of gnats in a pocket of humidity.

“No, thank you,” Ara responded politely, attempting to brush the man away.

“That is a very nice case there, I can polish and clean it for just two!” another man claimed, this one with a yellowing smile. Vaguely wondering what the man meant by ‘two’, Ara swung his case to the other side, away from the man’s grasping fingers, nearly hitting a passerby in the process.

“So sorry,” he mumbled, quickly stowing the case underneath his arm and turning away from the men. But then he paused and turned on his heel, back to face the eager eyes of the merchants.

“Actually, there is something you could do for me,” he said slowly. “I want to see the gypsy caravan. The one that plays music. I hear that they pass through Kuura quite often.”

The smiles were suddenly gone, like candle lights suddenly winking out in a dark room. The peddlers grunted their apologies, and vanished from sight. Only one remained, the one that had originally offered to polish and clean Ara’s violin case. He was a short man with impressive facial hair, gray and stubbly around the lines of age and laughter carved into his face.

He stepped towards Ara, his smile still intact. “I will take you to the gypsies. Just for two!”

Ara laughed in relief.

“Two of what, exactly?”

The man grinned and gestured to the nearby bakery in response.

After Ara bought the man two flaky pastries adorned with nuts and powdered sugar, the pair set off through the city. The merchant babbled on about the music business in Kuura for the duration of the walk. Violins, he said with a flourish of his hands in the direction of Ara’s case, were rare. Very beautiful, but very rare. Reedy instruments, like flutes? Much more common.

“Why do you care for the gypsies?” the peddler asked after his lengthy critique of the instrumental population in Kuura.

“I love violin music, and perhaps they can teach me to play better than I ever could on my own. Why did the other merchants run so fast when I mentioned the gypsies?”

“They are buffoons,” the man said as he plucked a flower from the ground and waltzed down the cobblestones. “They believe the gypsies are ghosts, creatures of another world.”

“Well, are they?”

The man smiled. “Only if you choose to believe in the myths of the desert,” he said, suddenly bowing so his ragged shirt caressed his crossed knees. He smirked at Ara’s puzzlement, and marched on without another word.

They arrived at the edge of the city. They walked past the last few buildings that made up the outer edges of Kuura, and Ara found himself gazing upon the place where the city finally met the desert. He watched how the light of Kuura dissipated

as it grappled with the dark shadows of the desert, just a mile or so within the building farthest from the city center.

The peddler prodded him forward towards a grand circular patio, the last manmade structure before the desert began. The patio was situated on a short cliff above the beginnings of the desert, not unlike a watch tower looking out upon the sandy plains. A number of other people stood against the rails of the patio, leaning to glimpse into the desert. Ara mused that this must be how it felt to be at the top of a lighthouse, a dazzling pinpoint of light in a sea of murky shadows, watching and hoping for something to emerge from the obscurity. The group that had gathered on the patio was quiet, only listening to the fervent murmurs of the wind.

Ara glimpsed back towards the light of the town, but the peddler had disappeared.

He went to the railing of the patio, and joined the ranks of the silent crowd. They waited, and waited. Sand whisked against the railing, not unlike waves lapping up against a shore.

“There.”

One hushed remark by a woman veiled in a turquoise scarf lifted the apprehension and the crowd pressed together. In the distance came a light. As it drew closer, the crowd could see that it was not a single light source but rather several, all dotting a group horse drawn carriages.

“The gypsies!” a man in the back hooted.

They were bright, bizarre, and terrific. The structure of the carriages was just slightly off, one side of each vehicle just barely lower than the other, and so each car teetered from side to side. Cyan and neon pink swirls of paint were chaotically distributed along the outside of the carriages, and the juxtaposition of other wacky

colors were spotted as decorations on the various other carriages. With the arrival of the caravan came the electric scent of an oncoming storm, although the night sky was clear of clouds.

The gypsies were dressed in a melange of mismatched clothing, floral and gaudy tones splashed all across the fabrics upon their bodies. Their clothing was baggy and flopped in folds over their ankles and elbows. Their skin glowed a burnt golden tone, and their facial features were dark and sharp. Ara stood with his mouth agape. Perhaps it was his eyes playing tricks on him, but he thought that the gypsies' bodies were translucent against the colorful backgrounds of their carriages.

Then they began to play. Ara watched one young woman with obsidian curls whip out a polished, caramel violin. The music was unlike anything Ara had ever heard before. The young woman stood in the front, her bow cutting into the desert silence, bleeding a pithy melody that Ara closed his eyes to listen to.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" murmured the woman beside Ara. "It's the song of the desert. Her instrument sings of the tales of the battles, the heroes, and the lone travelers of the desert."

The rest of the gypsies played, but the violinist with the beautiful black hair had entrapped Ara's ears for the next few hours. As the performance tapered into a finale - one final, grandiose note that melted into the night - Ara touched his cheek to find it streaked with tears.

The caravan did not disappear back into the desert, but rather set up camp just outside of Kuura. After the musical performance, their lights had gone out, and Ara had not heard or seen a soul enter or leave the caravan.

Ara climbed off of the patio and down to the edge of the desert, where he gazed out to the caravan, and into the star studded sky. A flicker of movement within the carriage that he had seen the violinist play from caught his eye, and with one last glance back to the halo of torch light that surrounded Kuura, he stepped into the desert, towards the caravan.

It was as though he had stepped into a cave. The light and the noise were shut out, and the silhouettes of the carriages loomed eerily over him as he came closer. Every crunch of a pebble shifting underneath his shoe seemed to have the magnitude of noise of the fall of a glacier, and the bitter cold of the night stung his face.

“Why are you here?”

He whipped around, but the speaker was not on the ground beside him. He flailed for a moment to see her before straining his eyes to spot her perched atop her carriage. He could see the woman’s eyes, gleaming in the light of the stars, against her shadowy figure.

“What is that in your hands?” she asked.

“It is a violin,” he said. “I’m... I’m looking for a violinist. She has black hair... She played very beautifully tonight. I wanted to tell her.”

The woman disappeared from the top of the carriage, and suddenly appeared in the window by Ara. Her hair was rich and raven. A gust of wind carried away what little remained of Ara’s voice as Ara looked upon this beautiful woman. Her outline was fuzzy, as though she was only a mirage rather than a real, breathing human.

“She thanks you,” the woman said, leaning against the windowsill. “But I feel as though there is another reason for this midnight visit, other than to flatter me.”

“Yes,” Ara choked out. “I—I’m a violinist. I want to learn more. I want to learn from the very best. And I think that... That is you.”

The woman inclined her head, and a faint lilt of laughter accompanied her voice. “You would like to join the caravan.”

Ara nodded, and a smile formed on the woman’s bow-shaped lips.

“What is your name?”

“Ara.”

“My name is Anahtar,” she said. “Shall we play?”

Ara answered by promptly unlatching his case. Anahtar had already pulled out her own violin from thin air, cradling it against her hip like a baby.

They began to play. Anahtar’s violin sang and cried, and Ara fiddled furiously to respond in harmony. The sounds of the two violins intertwined and rose like a budding flower into the midnight air. The woman leapt and whirled like a demon, her torso bending with the melody she molded with each tug of her bow, and Ara followed her dance through the gypsy camp. Ara paid no mind as she led him farther and farther away from the myriad of carriages, and deeper into the desert. All he saw were the moon and stars, and how they shone straight through Anahtar’s ghostly figure, and all he heard was the sound his violin’s high sweet sound wrapping around Anahtar’s jaunty tune.

Ara awoke the next morning in the middle of the great desert, his mouth having been gently covered in a scarf. He twisted onto his belly and retched into the sand. His throat burned, feeling as though sand particles had etched lines into his

windpipe. He struggled to his feet, the wind whipping at his clothes, and stumbled forward. He needed water, he needed food-

But as he coughed himself back to fetal position on the ground, he did not desire those things. He only wanted Anahtar, and to play alongside her once more. His leather case was still somehow beside him, and he hugged it to his chest.

Several days and nights passed, and Ara's body began to shut down. He had made a few feeble attempts to crawl to civilization, but the desert had fought him back down, enveloping him in sand and tumbleweed.

The moment Ara died, he finally questioned. As his eyesight ebbed to black and his hand ceased to grip his violin case, Ara pondered why Anahtar had brought him to this painfully dry death.

But as he passed into a brighter world, one which was a reflection of the physical world he had just been borne from, he regained his strength, and propped himself up on his elbows to see a dot of color approaching him from the horizon. The dot became several dots, which became multiple carriages in outlandish colors, carrying gypsies; one woman with ebony black hair in particular, who sounded the arrival of the caravan by letting loose wisps of a triumphant melody into the desert air with her violin.

The carriage drew closer, and the beautiful violinist tucked her instrument away, leaving her slender hand free to reach for Ara. Ara curled one fist around the handle of his violin case, and then embraced Anahtar's outstretched hand with his free hand.

...

The old peddler was never one to watch the gypsy bands play their music, but a year after he had last seen the young, ardent violinist, he ambled down to the patio on a summer night, where it seemed that the performance had already begun. The gypsies were playing their songs, and they were led by the two violinists upon the lead carriage. One young woman, and one young man.

The old peddler's smile was tinged with sadness, and the young violinist saw him. Their eyes met, and the old peddler bowed deeply to his knees. The violinist laughed, and struck up a jubilant tune, and the crowd on the patio began to sway in time to the music. The old peddler himself danced until morning light.

After the caravan had crept back into the desert, the old man waltzed back into town. He bought himself a pastry, as it was early enough in the morning for the bakeries to have opened for the day, and he chuckled as he bit into its sugary folds.

The myths of the desert may just be myths, but the exquisite music by the violinists was very much real. As dawn arrived, spilling buttery yellow light across the desert and into Kuura, a new batch of travelers poured into the city as well. Among them, the old peddler saw a few instrument cases, and he beamed as he rose to greet them.



Ibrahim Joseph, pencil

Language

My family tree is a forest split by an ocean.
An ocean so wide that each coast feels like another world.
Each world is so different, yet I come from both.

I believe that language ties me to my family.

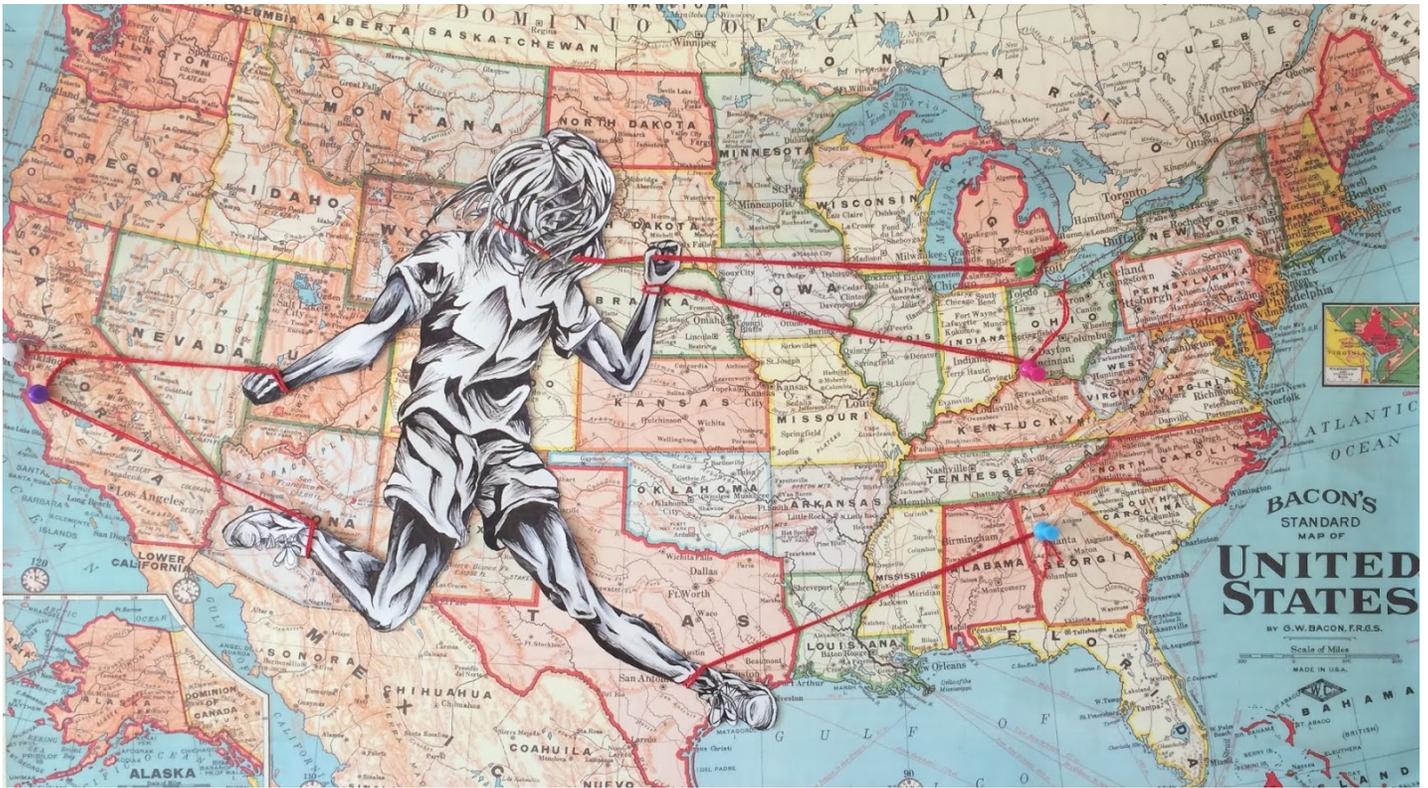
My father was born and raised in Mahres, Tunisia; a small fishing town in a small country in North Africa that no one really knows about. The native languages are French and Arabic, and my father and the rest of his family speak both fluently. My immediate family can only visit Tunisia once every 4 years, due to travel expenses and safety in that part of the world. When I look back on past trips, I remember the late nights I spent with my cousins running through the gardens but always remembering to watch out for scorpions and snakes hidden in the vegetation. Even though we could not understand each other's language, a great smile and a blissful laugh were all that was needed to express our love of spending time with each other.

While this form of communication was easy to use when we were 8 years old, I now wish to be able to understand them on a more personal level. You can't exactly tell your life story through smiles and "Thueban!" and "Burj aleaqarb!" (phonetic translations of snake and scorpion). My father has always told me wild stories of his childhood and his life growing up in Tunisia, and after each one comes to a close, I'm always wanting more. Maybe it's the fact that I can't relate to my father's life that makes me feel a pulling need to dig deeper. Maybe it's my thirst for culturally rich societies that make me obsessed with trying to learn the language of my ancestors.

My dad has always tried to teach me and my sisters simple phrases in French and Arabic in the past so we could start to talk to our family more. However, taking time between school, sports, and other priorities to sit down and learn languages became hard, and soon enough we just stopped altogether. My sisters have lost

interest in learning French and Arabic and I now feel pressured to learn them for the sake of communication in our family.

One day I know my dad will die, and I won't be able to rely on him to translate for us. Learning these languages could be my only chance to have any connection to my family. I feel like losing this connection would mean that I would lose a part of myself. I believe that language ties me to my family. The ability to communicate to one another derives from the ability to speak different languages, and mutual understandings between one another in today's world is vital.



Rebecca Galler, mixed media

Write About It

Karley Misek

It's my first therapy session and I'm anxious. My heart tightens every other second like a rubber balloon stretched taut. All of a sudden my mom and I are getting out of the car and walking into a counseling center. The waiting room has green walls and a white noise machine on. Calming colors and sounds. There are maybe five others seated. They all look uncomfortable. The receptionist gives us paper work and I sit down hesitantly. A girl maybe six years old is called for her appointment. Blonde curls bouncing as she walks away. I wonder what's wrong with her. I wonder what's wrong with the people around me. I wonder what's wrong with me.

Over three months ago my doctor diagnosed me with anxiety. It took me three years to talk to someone. But I guess better late than never, right? I nervously check the boxes from a list of symptoms on a paper. Correlating which symptoms match to certain illnesses, I turn numb with silent realization. That's a lot of symptoms.

A chipper voice calls my name.

My therapist introduces herself enthusiastically, chatting while leading my mother and I up to her office.

"It's so nice to meet you, I'm so happy you are here," she exclaims.

Her voice sounds artificially sweet, like Splenda. The couch I'm sitting on should make me comfortable, but I feel rigid and out of place. The walls are yellow. I hate yellow. There is a tissue box next to me. I remember my friend said that when in therapy, you should expect to cry. The digital clock blares red, like a time bomb tick-tick ticking until it explodes. My therapist talks and I don't hear a word she says. I had check marked "trouble with concentrating" on my symptoms sheet. My mom speaks next, to "give a good idea of where I'm at." 25 percent of what she says isn't true. Another 25 percent is hyperbolized. Not that I blame her, even though she's one of the few people I enjoy talking to, I can't bring myself to discuss my real emotions with her. I engross myself with the extraordinary excitement of my shoelaces.

“So, now I want to hear a little bit from you,” my therapist says.

Oh right, talking. My second least favorite thing in the world. My mom could talk for hours. She’s always so friendly and confident. I don’t quite think she wants to believe there’s something wrong with me. She knows about my anxiety, but not my depression. Well, no one knows about that. I rub my thumb against my palm and speak.

“I’ve always been kinda quiet, shy, and nervous I guess...”

I have no idea where I’m going with this. Just say it, say you think you have depression, say you know you have depression. But I don’t. I ramble on a little longer, open up a tad. My mom leaves so my therapist can speak with me alone. She talks more and more and cleverly sneaks in questions. The questions start out innocent, gentle, but then she’s asking about my symptoms and I can tell she’s diagnosing me and I feel like a specimen being observed underneath a microscope.

“And do you ever feel sad?” She questions.

Every day.

“Yes,” I say.

“Can you elaborate on that?”

She is no longer that warm, exuberant person I was talking to a minute ago. Now I see her framed college degrees. I see her scribbling on an insurance info sheet. I see her calculating my words, editing my emotions into medical terminology, viewing me no longer as a human being. I see her computing me into a number, a statistic, another one in four who will develop a mental illness. I see myself checking boxes on future questionnaires—do you have a mental illness? So tell her; tell her some days you feel nothing, and other days you feel too much. Tell her you’ve lost friends because of your depression; tell her you’ve failed tests because of your anxiety. Tell her you just want a little magic pill to make you happy again. Tell her you feel like you’re wearing a mask. Tell her about all of your panic attacks and intrusive thoughts and impulsive worries. Tell her you’re a mess.

I give her my textbook answer.

“Sometimes I’m sad for no reason, sometimes I don’t enjoy the things I used to love to do, sometimes I isolate myself.”

I see the psychology-graduate logic shift and click on her face.

“Alright, so I’m gonna diagnose you with general anxiety and a single episode of major depression,” she recites.

Tell me something I don’t know.

I already knew what she would diagnose me with, but the words carry this eerie harmony that I did not anticipate—a sort of two part choir meticulously pieced together that when played, creates a requiem for my sanity. It’s not a pretty song, but gives me relief. A diagnosis to justify my illness. We talk more and I open up more, but she misinterprets some things. The actual therapy part is far from what you see on TV. No chaise lounge, stiff tweed-coat doctors, or moronic blubbing about how much life sucks. It’s really just talking, but I hate talking. I hand her dead ends, and random bullets of anecdotes. She doesn’t understand. I’ve written so much about my depression it feels weird to have to talk about it, I wish I could just write it down and show her. She calls me an intellectual when I tell her I already know all the coping strategies she recommends. I don’t tell her they don’t work for me. I talk to her in poetry but she responds with scantron multiple choice questions. I get bored of talking and we end on what she declares improvement. Her prosaic words remind me of monotonous macroeconomic lectures.

“We’ll meet once a week for nine weeks, and go with that, sound good?” Her voice sounds like every other doctor I’ve ever met. She asks if I have any questions.

How much do we have to pay you to make me happy again?

“No, I think I’m good, thanks,” I say.

My mom seems content with my appointment. I tell her about my diagnosis, her reaction is comforting because she doesn’t push, but I wonder if that means she doesn’t believe it. I mean who wants to hear that their child has a mental illness? I’ve learned to keep my illness quiet, and it feels odd to have it out in the open all of a sudden. I wonder if therapy will actually work. The cynical part of me doubts it, but the shred of optimism in me is hopeful. People always talk about hope fixing everything, but how can you be hopeful when you’ve suppressed your problem for so many years? Besides, there’s no “cure” for anxiety, why should I waste my time

working towards a false hope when I can figure out a healthy lifestyle that accommodates my mental illness. I'll never understand optimists.

Six weeks later I quit therapy. People always say you have to talk about depression to fix it, but I think they're wrong. Some people just need to write about it.



Jalen Yockey, oil pastel



Dave Crisostomo, graphic design

Pepper

Roselyn Ignacio

Oh!

What a curious sight you are to me

You are black and brown and gray and everything in between,
while I am only... a lonely opaque white.

Oh!

How similar are we?

Coarse in nature

Bringing out the best in everyone.

Oh!

We are far from the same,

You, meant to dampen what is disliked.

A mask for the pungent,
though only to be used in moderation.

Me, a common solution for the dull; sans taste.

I accentuate what you cannot:
the underlying tones, colors.

Oh...

I believe that I can safely say—
we were meant for one another.



Elle Makar-Limanov, mixed media

April 5th, 1888

Sophie Madsen

She can imagine it piercing the sky, once it's finished it'll extend the city to new heights. Maybe even the world. A new revolution of similarly French proportions, but more architectural than governmental. Though, if they kept making those builders work at such great heights with nothing but their own grace saving them from certain death, they'll have a strike on their hands and the tower might never get done on schedule. Curiosity leads Louise to take the shortcut right underneath and the girl walking with her stopped all conversation to tell her all the possible ways she could get hurt from this. Jeannette, along with nagging about safety, began slipping her obvious disdain for the structure into her lecture. She protested, but Louise persisted.

"What an absolute waste." Jeannette scowled up towards the sky. It usually matched her eyes but today it was a lot lighter and dotted with cotton-like clouds.

"I quite like it." Louise loitered as she looked up through the middle.

"I don't see how you could like something so obnoxiously large and unnecessary," Jeannette tried her best to pull Louise out from under an unsteady looking steel beam. "And dangerous."

"Well when it's finished it'll look a lot better."

"Or a lot worse. What were they thinking? Letting this thing get built in the middle of *le septième arrondissement*. This city's carefully constructed reputation of elegance and class will be tarnished." Louise rolled her eyes at her. Always the pessimist. The two women proceeded on to their walk, moving away from the offending tower in progress towards the river. As they walked across the bridge Jeannette continued to express her distaste for the new Parisian structure and the girl by her side continued to listen without complaint. By now she knew it was better to let her talk until the topic was exhausted than hurt her feelings by telling her to stop. Her voice sounded quite nice carried by the spring breeze anyways, even if the tone was irrationally irritated.

"I wonder what Monsieur Eiffel would say if he heard what you thought of his tower," Louise chuckled.

"I doubt my opinions would offend him more than what the rest of France thinks," Jeannette responded with her usual witty expression. "Everyone I know hates it as much as I do."

"Well you do spend a lot of time with the snootiest and richest of *Paris* all day long." They giggled together before moving onto more interesting topics. Topics such as coworker gossip, a favorite among the two. Up ahead, they saw a young boy begging to passerby. Feeble and poor, but quite confident in that moment, he tried to pickpocket a gentleman more concentrated on wooing a girl half his age in a green dress. As if Jeannette could sense Louise's strong urge to act, she grabbed the boy by the back of his trousers as he tried to walk away inconspicuously. He jumped and looked over his shoulder at them with panic. Jeannette gave him the stern raised eyebrow and he sheepishly handed over the wallet. To the boy's delight, instead of returning it to the owner, she opened it and took out the thirty-odd francs inside before handing them to the boy and closing it once again. His face lit up and he yelled a giddy *merci madame!* before running off.

"You could be arrested for that," Louise mock scolded and the other girl shrugged her off as she walked over to the gentleman whose wallet it was. She tapped him on the shoulder and explained how she saw a boy pickpocket him, intentionally leaving out the fact there wasn't any money in there anymore. He was so thankful he forgot about the young lady in front of him and she was able to slip away like she'd been wanting to for some time. He offered to buy Louise and Jeannette *déjeuner*, but they declined and he persisted. They rescued the boy and the lady in the green dress, but in the process entangled themselves in an unwanted conversation with a mustachioed self-proclaimed lady-killer. He only finally backed off after much resistance and once Louise mentioned they had husbands waiting for them *dans les Jardins du Trocadéro* nearby. Though it was a lie, he believed it and went the opposite way across the bridge.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph," Jeannette sighed in relief.

"You're welcome."

“Our husbands *Jean et Louis*? very subtle, Louise, very subtle.”

“Hey, he doesn’t know us, there’s no need to be subtle.” Louise bit back a smile.

“And besides, that fake husband you write home about is named Louis anyways,”

“Do you read my letters?” Jeannette asked defensively and on the brink of anger.

“*Non, non*, I just, sometimes happen to read a few words, or sentences, over your shoulder whilst I walk by, on accident.” Jeannette shook her head at the response she got.

“The jig is up then,” she sighed.

“The jig?”

“Well now you know all the lies I tell *ma mère* about you and me.”

“Ah *oui, oui*-- wait--”

“I’m sorry but you know how she is, she was fit and ready to marry me off to the village baker at thirteen. He was old enough to be my father you know”

“Well yes but--”

“And it would probably make her keel over to learn I’m living with another woman in the big city of *Paris*.”

“Okay wait,” Louise stopped dead in her tracks. “I only knew about the fake husband, what other kind of lies have you been telling her? What does she know about me and you?” Jeannette froze at the end of the bridge once realizing she’d said far too much. Louise stood there with a look encouraging her to continue spilling all her secrets. She cleared her throat then mumbled something unintelligible before turning on her heel and walking quickly, almost running as much as she could in petticoats, towards their destination. Rolling her eyes, Louise struggled to keep up, trying to grab onto Jeannette’s sleeve to stop her. They must’ve looked rather silly to the other Parisians walking the streets among them. Some people scoffed, tied to the notion that women shouldn’t run places but politely walk. They weren’t even technically running, but still they dodged pedestrians and still Jeannette held a good distance between them.

After a block or two, Jeannette stopped at the steps of their apartment building. A shambling thing but best their shared salaries could get them. Hat shops

and doing people's laundry couldn't get them much more than thin walls, peculiar neighbors, and chipping paint. But it was still habitable. Louise called her name, and with a huff asked her why in the world she'd rather run than explain. She stopped and stood on the first step, clutching her skirt.

"Are you mad?" she asked in the small whispery voice she usually saved for those late nights where neither one could get to sleep.

"Jeannette," she moved closer and took Jeannette's hand. "I honestly don't give a damn whatever you've told your mother about us, I won't get mad I'm just curious." The girl in front of her finally looked up and bit her lip. The thoughts flickered through her eyes of how to stall this moment longer but nothing seemed came up and she sighed.

"Well... I don't, necessarily, completely lie to her."

"Then what do you tell her?"

"Well... I just tell her most everything we actually do, but you're not Louise, you're a man, named Louis. Whom, I'm married to, in a big house, with a garden and all that. She thinks I have a house and a husband, that I'm set for life." An uneasy silence passed that made Jeannette increasingly more nervous by the second. It really wasn't that bad, Louise would understand, but just the fact she'd been keeping secrets was what made her unsure.

"We have a dog named Alphonse," she tried to break up the silence with a bit of humor. Something ridiculous to lighten the mood. It worked rather well, causing Louise to burst into a fit of laughter. Jeannette joined in with relief crashing over her in a large wave.

"You named the fictional dog after our mailman!"

"You're not mad?"

"*Bien sur!* Ah, *ma chérie*," Louise put her hand on Jeannette's cheek, running her thumb across it. "I'm not mad. Actually, I think it's very brilliant you designed your husband after me." She exhaled somberly. "I'm just sorry I can't give you a life like that."

"I'd rather live on the streets with you than like a queen with anyone else."

“Me too, *mon bonheur*, me too.” She moved closer just before Jeannette started to lead them both inside. She closed the door and did a quick look around before pulling Louise and herself into the nearest corner. They closed the space between them and sweetly kissed through smiles, just out of view of the rest of the world.

Though it was *trés magnifique*, it was very short lived. After hearing footsteps coming down the stairs they sprung away from each other, and once the neighbor passed with a casual *bonjour mesdemoiselles* they climbed the stairs to their apartment. The two young ladies entered an empty hallway and took full advantage, kissing again just before opening the door.

“There’s a letter from my mother in here,” Jeannette waved the stack of mail in front of Louise’s face as she took out her key and unlocked the door.

“Are you asking me to join your story writing session?”

“Perhaps.”

“It’s about time,” they entered the apartment with laughter and smiles gracing their features, and the promise of an interesting evening.



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