

English '57 Series: Spring 2019

Wordplay

renewal



“Instructions for living a life.
Pay attention.
Be astonished.
Tell about it.”

-the late, astonishing Mary Oliver, stanza from “Sometimes”

Whether fiction, nonfiction, or poetry, the facts and experiences of our lives bleed into creative work. It is precisely the most affecting ones, the ones that beckon our focus, which are the easiest to evoke. But what about the minute details, the nuances that escape us? Are these not as important as the glaring ones?

The undiscovered extraordinary lies in the ordinary. But to notice, we must be intentional about devoting our energy to it.

I find bits of the extraordinary in the work of the pages to follow. I sense authors that pay attention, and tell about their findings. I hope you, dear reader, will be astonished by what you discover. Enjoy.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all learners of the '57 series for opening up your walls to welcome in your consultants, and above all, your bravery for believing in yourself and the insight of your work. Thank you to the empathetic and compassionate consultants for readily accepting your duty to develop both writing and the writers who create it. Thank you to the UWSP English Department for supporting this wonderful collaborative experience and inspiring the love of literature and expression in your students. Thank you especially to Writing Lab Coordinator Emily Wisinski for trusting me and making me laugh; your character and your gifts are what make the writing lab an outstanding and inclusive place to learn. They are also why I love what I do and care so deeply about the writing lab. Thank you.

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Colton Bahr

"Colton's poetry has a relatability that is extremely refreshing to read. Most poetry I've read in my life has some kind of rhyming integrated into it, but I absolutely love how Colton doesn't rely on these rhyming schemes to create a clear mental image in the reader's mind. I've thoroughly enjoyed working with Colton this semester and he opened my eyes even more to the versatility of poetry!"

-Izzy Haugen

Physical Education

Groggily getting dressed in the morning,
You put on your shorts and grey gym shirt
Your friends greet you as you exit the Axe scented locker

The early morning wind feels like a cat's fur lightly rubbing your face
While stretching you can smell the plastic grass,
Standing up makes the chunks of plastic dirt fall off your clothes,
It's reminiscent of a dog shaking off water

The burning of your muscles is something you dread but also look forward too
You're tasked with running around the campus for your daily run
Your grogginess has faded and has turned to mild alertness

As you start running it becomes clear who's an athlete and who's not
They run like well-oiled machinery, while you run like a poorly-maintained Sedan
As you run off the track field to the baseball field, your feet are greeted with mud that smells of iron

While running you lose yourself in thought,
not worried about beating your personal best or even pacing yourself
The idea of striking up a conversation with the girl in front of you passes your mind

It's quickly squashed by an immense feeling of insecurity
After finishing your jog, you feel lightly winded
You're not last but nowhere near first.

Dispersed Camping

Winter has faded into obscurity,
It melted away like a Hershey's chocolate bar
All that's left is memories of a harsh snow

You and your friend pack your gear and prepare for a voyage
The backpacks are organized like a well-played game of Tetris
The smell of bug spray is nauseating when mixed with your sweat

The car reeks of tobacco and air freshener
Our road trip is entertained with gleeful conversations of our week
Pink Floyd echoes in the back of your head

Arriving to nowhere feels refreshing
The trail is long and twists like a snake,
With grass that smells of dew and wet clay

After walking for ages, you wind up at a lake which feels like it hasn't been seen in years,
The lake has been swallowed back by nature and is inhabited by only us.
It's resting like you after your long hike

The pitching of the tent feels like building a fortress in medieval times.
The sun has begun to fall, like a hummingbird, slowly landing on the ground.
You can see the moon surrounded by stars,
An image unimaginable in the city.

The food is a thick soup which is hardy and appetizing
Each wildlife booms loudly as if they were gossiping of our arrival.
The rest you'll get is like sleeping after a thousand days awake.

Ashlee Cheever

"I would like to take a quote found on Pinterest, a familiar of Ashlee's, "Beautiful minds inspire others", and it was Ashlee's beautiful mind that shaped our semester together. Her ability to paint entire pictures with her descriptive words begat meaningful dialogue over where our inspiration transpires. Our weekly sessions acted as a respite from more rigorous creative writing courses and allowed Ashlee to open up to her true creative expressions. She stays dedicated to writing honestly of what matters to her and for that, I have been truly inspired." – Aja Heuss

White siding

Black screen door

Opening it ever quietly

As to not wake our mother

Who slept away daylight hours

Each bottle drowning out the fears

That he'll come back, after all these years

Once we found the nickel and quarter collections

Our hearts were set on the next gas station adventure

Filling our pockets with coins and putting on our sneakers

Heading out the door with the biggest grins on a child's face

But only after making sure that our mother has her eyes closed

Slowly closing the black screen door, we head out into the unknown

Knowing that what we have in our pockets isn't rightfully ours in any way

But understanding that we mustn't just sit around in the house and rot away

One can only be condemned to the basement and their room for so many days

Before you have to try something new, something that will help you in the moment

To get away from the thoughts and wondering of why he never did come back anyways

But it wasn't until she was much, much older when she came to realize everyone had a way

Of escaping the pain that would always follow her and I around; from generation to generation

But we weren't the only ones with this inevitable pain; he walked around with much heavier weight

Weight that he just couldn't take, and constantly wondering why, why his life had always been at stake

Suffering from a problem we may all never overcome, but left to question his choices and why he had run

At least we had our memories, looking back on them now we seemed just like any other family on the block

But truly we weren't, and now the memories seem so clear, that this dysfunctional life has taken its toll on us

The drinking and smoking, the music and cribbage, the tears and lonely nights, all added up to memories of him

And how he could have done this, and left a family so broken, left to put together a puzzle with the main piece lost

Although his memory is left in that house he didn't spend much time there at all; just a small fraction of his existence

Now we're grown I'm left with an immense understanding, and he is left with none but of a father who never even saw

What the future holds or what we would turn out to be but that is okay, he may have drug us through the mud anyways.

Erin Ditzler

It has been an absolute pleasure working with and getting to know Erin through her English '57 sessions.

When she arrived for her first session, she expressed interest in writing poetry, even though she was not previously familiar with the genre. Her eagerness to explore this field of writing has allowed her to not only improve her skills in writing poetry, but also in her expression of thought and emotion, in her willingness to explore the genre, and in sharing her work with others. In the works that follow, Erin utilizes colorful word choice and thought-provoking ideas to describe everything from relationships to self-esteem to a tree in the middle of winter. Erin has surprised me with every poem she has written, and I have no doubt that she will continue to hone her poetry skills in the future. -Allie Mazurkiewicz

I call the shots

Do you know what it's like?
To inject yourself
With medication of blood thinner
That seeps into your veins burning of fire

Do you know what it's like?
To inject yourself
And be brave enough
to shove a needle into your own flesh

Do you know what it's like?
To inject yourself
So your body stays healthy
And fights off the enemies of the world

Do you know what it's like?
To inject yourself
To be the odd one out
Only to stay alive

Dear Best Friend

Lizzy Novak,
You are my sunshine
Something I cannot withhold,
God had a specific design in mind
Making you so beautiful and bold.

Lizzy Novak,
You light up the room with your smile
Your heart is so full of love.
With a constant busy lifestyle
You fit perfectly into my life like a glove.

Lizzy Novak,
I boil over giggling at your quirky sarcasm
My gullibleness will believe you making me feel lost
realizing you've made my heart have a quick spasm
For being so serious,
I feel like I have to pay you a cost

Lizzy Novak,
You have unexplainable talent in the music department
Everyone there finds you to be oh so nice
To me, you work so much harder than others
Your gift is so much greater to even hold a price

Color to the Blind

You are my smile
Dearest
You are my heartbeat
My love
You are my breath
Precious one
You are my thoughts
Gentle being
You have captured my soul,
My every waking moment.

You have become my reason to dance in the sun
How can I tell you, my love,
How can I show you what you've done to me?
I've sinned
You are my redemption
You came into my life
You showed me things I've never seen before
I thought I had loved before
I was wrong.
There are no words.
I want to shout from the rooftops what my heart proclaims
You've colored my blind world
And for that, I will love you till the end of time.

My Religion

How can I begin to exclaim my soul's song
Does it start with a melody?
The origin of what was, is unknown
Yet I cannot be separated from this angelic body
For I am a sinner in the hands of an angry God
For I am unworthy of my religion
My soul's song is what has driven me from the depths of Hell
For he knows not what he does
This angel can bring the heavens to my undeserving heap of a hovelled mess
His eyes
They are my religion

Lonely Tree

Oh lonely tree
How I watch you move against the frozen wind
I admire you
For you still stand
Nothing tears you down
You still stand tall
Spring must be your favorite season
You receive gifts
New buds
New leaves
And even new branches
Everything becomes new for you
I like spring too
I get to watch new things happen to you
You are beautiful
A natural beauty
You're simple
You hold a life I long for:
Quiet
Beautiful
You don't have to reason why you are what you are
Humanity doesn't think twice about arguing you
Be proud
You don't have to live in a world like mine

Sensory Overload

In the mind of an anxious person
Things can become too much
To the point, your emotions shut down
Yet every little thing that annoys you
Your usual pet peeves
Becomes more focused than normal
It isn't easy to not put focus onto those things
For you're too annoyed to speak
To concentrate
Or even eat
This is my story
Not exciting,
just different than others.
My heart pounds out of my chest
Making it hard to think
Creating fear that it'll go so fast I may die
I can't even focus on anything
The emotions become hard to control
Making me lash out at the humans surrounding me
Every cell begins to shut down on me
As my brain goes into overdrive
Who knew that the only way to cure this mess
Was to walk away
Just walk away
Walk away I say to myself
"Apologize and walk away"
And as I walk away, I can breathe again
Like I was coming up for air from drowning

Roses

To be the rose that someone wishes for is all I ask
And somehow, I am asking for too much.
No.
I **am** a rose!
A god damn rose
A red one
With thorns even.
I thought I was a sunflower
Yellow; full of warmth and smiles
No.
I **am** a rose
Don't tell me who I am when you want more
I am that more
The one who shudders to touch the thorn
Should never desire a rose

My Unapologetic Apology

I didn't come here for your sympathy
So you can mock me in my pain
Now, do you understand why I don't trust you?
Or do I need to explain

Your boastful attitude puts me in a deep rage:
Bitter and cold
God you make me wanna rip my hair out
Putting me through years of agony, to you, never got old

When I say years,
I specifically mean twelve
We used to go through everything together
And now you've placed me in your prison cell

Now I truly did care for you
I never knew where your heart was
People wondered why I always fell back to you
And to that, I respond "well... Because"

Now it is time for me to say goodbye
Though you really didn't give me a choice
False accusations don't gain friendships, sweetheart
So I'm deciding to leave in a rejoice

Nick Donisch

Nick's poems illustrate the universal anguish that arises from the rejection of Truths, the conflict between religions of peace, and the failures of morality - all through these poems of varying perspective, formats, and moods. A Writing Lab Tutor himself, Nick knew exactly what he wanted to write, how to write it, and how to improve afterwards. He practically ran his own sessions, most weeks! Nick designed this 4-poem cycle, "Song of the Silenced Profits," as a unified survey of today's faith, morality, and justice. – Jeremy Wolfe

Song of the Silenced Prophets

I heard a prayer

I heard a prayer on the wind this morning.
I knew the speaker not and God, for myself,
Only long ago. Never before had I heard a prayer, but
It, *and* the wind, seemed – *almost* – in mourning.
I am but your poet – I may be naught but hot-air.
I ask not forgiveness, and yet, I ask not to be –
Mantled upon the heretical pyre – some voice of any doom.
For my song was my hope: never before had I heard a prayer.
My song is all I've ever heard – the Hopes and Fears of Humanity:
My song is for all of us, to bring us home, to bring us our Safety.

Truths Unheard and lies widely believed

It is. I am. You are. She is. He is.
We are, and They are too. These truths, unheard
Through history, echo in painful silence.
The throb of blood after another punch to the ear.

Truths stand up to scrutiny and yet we believe
Lies instead: It is, but only almost; I am, but only
If I am more than You are; He is already, so She
Can't be; We must be, so They must be no longer.

To be. An unheard truth and the meaning of life.
To be *judged*. Not uncommon, though unnatural.
The judgement: lies spread far and widely believed.
The silenced prophets' message goes unheeded.

To be *wrongly* – strange and impossible.
To be wrong – the sin for which we refuse to repent
And the heinous accusation that doomed the
Message – We forsake the Truth we definitely heard
For lies widely believed. We, Each, All throb in painful silence.

Silenced Prophet

Their line leads us back to God's desperate plea:
From Muhammad to Jesus, Isa to Moses – the orphan Musa,
The brothers Ishaq and Ishmael, sons of Ibrahim, all saved by Noah.
He, through them, gave us Truth.
They spoke this Truth, for they understood God's fear:
We are ever more and they were only ever few.
Truth under scrutiny became truths over distance over
Time became conflict became bloodshed spread wide: became lies.
The last of that line will bear an impossible burden:
To unite we hungry for division, we starving for conflict,
To be our final peace. To tell us the Truth and never hold our trust.
To lead us into the future, we silencing them with every step.
The Silenced Prophet has come and gone, has spoken
Yet speaks still. They will continue to speak – to scream
Until ears deafened by judgement open, finally, to the Truth; or
Death take them, whispering as they go into our vacuum of hate:
"I'd like to go to school." "Would you let them speak?"
"No sir I will not sit down." "Could we be wrong?"
"I was wrong. We were wrong. This whole damn thing is wrong."
"They are beautiful." "Could you be loved?"
Bullets can never silence these Truth: the lies we tell have far more stopping power –
And Yet – That stopping power was always, was
Never Truly enough. They who can simply rise and sing again. The morning after our silence.

God's Desperate Plea

Let them be one, and love one another, and
Search for beauty in the ever-changing stream.
Let them confide in their sisters *and* brothers, and
Weave peace, unity into my fool hearted dream.

Let them hear, every word, every note, and
Close not their ears to cries for mercy, for help.
Let them learn: to learn not to destroy; to hope;
To invite others into their dreams – to make things better for themselves.

Let them try. Let them come together and at least
Try. Let Truth ring out, shine out, blast open their eyes
To the answer: their own Human Planet. South, North, West, East,
Each, All must be a prophet unto themselves. They must, they need to try.

There are no winners, it cannot be a contest: to simply be.
Let them hear me, please. Please. Let them hear my plea.

Gordon Gehrman

Throughout this semester Gordo shared pieces of writing that inspired emotion and challenged conventional thought. There were always interesting discussions after reading Gordo's writing. His words are original and one can't help but become intrigued by his thought process and inspirations. I am so glad I had the opportunity to work with Gordo this semester and know his writing in the future will continue to captivate any reader. – Rachel Zach

“When a man fears not death, nor prison, that man becomes unstoppable. His soul cannot be caged, and he weeps, for he bears an empty heart.”

i wear the -white smiles- like trophies

parading around without shame

despite it all

i can still feel it in my bones

begging me to destroy this home

it could be so easy

just to strike a match and

drop

it

Emily Hviding

Emily's ability to paint a mental image with her poetry is truly advanced and impressive. Every poem she brought into our sessions painted a vivid scene that inevitably sucker-punches you with an unexpected pang. Very few people possess the ability to write something that sends shivers throughout your body, but this is something I definitely experienced with Emily's poems. Throughout the semester Emily has been a non-stop writer, bringing in poem after poem, fragment after fragment, and working to create the best possible work she could. I have had a lot of fun workshopping Emily's poems and getting to know her mindset behind each one. Emily is a wonderful person with great talent and great potential. I firmly believe that she will have much success in her future creative endeavors. – Dillon Lehrer

Blackbird

I identify with the lifeless bird on the rooftop
Whom traveled this world alone without a choice
Flew straight into the violent storm despite the danger
Routinely followed the scattered stars that often changed
Trudged onward against the elements no matter the risk

When she could take no more and go no further
Strength left her wings and they became weary
A fallen victim to the endless demands of flight
She lay down to rest for longer than expected

I came to the rooftop and saw the pain in her eyes that refused to close
Her view became faded compared to the one from above the clouds
As I sat on that ledge and looked at her through the window pane
I felt as though I was looking into a mirror and seeing myself

MIDNIGHT AIR

Dark and profound
I lie on the ground
Absorbing every breath of air
Every sight, every sound
The night sky in all its essence has never looked this near to my eyes
A train whistle sounds in the dreary distance
From an unknown direction and for an untold reason
In the midst
Among the mist
Was there something I missed?

A Fight Against Fate

We're circling each other within the ring
Throwing punches at one another and missing
You're aiming to hurt me
While I'm aiming to dodge
The guard in my mouth acts as a barrier
Although nothing could truly protect me from you
I cave in from exhaustion and lean into you for rest
You push me away, your gloves against my chest
The bell resembles a call for ceasefire
Promising me only seconds of relief
And in that time, I am led astray as I abandon every belief

I stare at you from my corner
Your gaze refuses to meet mine
My coach is my gut, knowing what's best for me
Yet I fight with my heart, I'm punching what I can't see
No part of me believes that I stand a chance
Training alone was never enough for this moment
To cause you harm betrays every value I have
Across from me, I wish you were anyone else

There is no measure of time to collect my breath
Before my body meets the ground
My resilience narrows slightly each time I slowly rise
There is anguish in my eyes, something you fail to recognize
Blood and sweat mix as both fall to the floor
Bruises cover me inside and out
There is an aching in my chest where my heart should be
But you have taken that along with the title and my dignity
I can no longer endure this torment
With every single hit I suppress inevitable tears
Your haunting glare cuts straight through me
Becoming another one of my inescapable fears

Agony consumes me as I collapse to my knees in surrender for the last time
You raise your arms in victory as I lie hollow on the ring floor in misery
The crowd screams your name as you forget mine
Before the lights begin to dim, I glance at you one last time

Warren Johnson

Warren has been such a fun person to get to know personally and as a writer. From the first day, Warren showed a strong passion for writing and always came into the sessions with a goal-oriented mindset. We started the semester working on several short stories, which were nothing short of excellent. When Warren decided that he wanted to begin working on a dream journal instead, it became a learning process for the both of us. The creativity that went into his pieces continuously impressed me because it showed his dedication as a writer. Warren and I would be able to have conversations about his stories that lasted the duration of the session because they were so interesting. It was almost as if I could see the wheels turning whenever a new idea was sparked. The final product of "DREAM" was a way for Warren to address some of the common human fears through fantasy; I love that it leaves interpretation for the reader to draw their own conclusions, it is a unique piece to say the least. -Paige Zeratsky

Shadows

The man awoke suddenly in the night. He was unsure of what woke him up, confused and tired, he glanced over to his phone to check the time, which was 3 AM. He cursed to himself and tried to go back to sleep, but a strange feeling kept him up. For some obscure reason he felt he was being watched. It's impossible, he thought, he lived alone on the third floor of a small apartment with no pets. No one could possibly be watching him. His eyes opened and he became paralyzed with fear. Standing before him was a dark silhouette and although it was pitch dark in his room, he could guess by the curves it was a rather feminine figure. Instantly he told himself that it was just a trick his mind was playing on him and he was just extremely tired. However, there was a primal fear inside him telling him what he's seeing is very real and unexplainable. He cursed himself again silently for being such an idiot and knew instantly how to reassure himself there was nothing before him. Quickly, he moved his hands to loudly clap to turn on his lamp and it did indeed turn on and there was no shadowy figure before him. He breathed a sigh of relief and wondered how he, a grown man, could be so childish and afraid of nothing. Then someone else clapped and the lamp turned off and the figure was standing once again before him but this time much closer. He could hear her breathing as she stood towering over him. His eyes were wide with fear and he tried to get his body to move but was paralyzed with sheer fear and panic. His mind raced and he tried to get his hands to make the simple clap, but they just shook in fear. He closed his eyes and silently prayed to God and clapped again. Once again, the lamp turned on and he cautiously opened his eyes and once again there was no menacing woman in front of him. The man was intrigued to why he prayed to God, he was not religious and held certain contempt towards Christianity especially after a pedophilia related controversy from his home town's local church. As he reassured himself that he must've clapped and not realized it. His lamp was automatic and clapping triggers it to either turn on or off. This time, as he was looking at his hands, sweating and shaking with fear he realized it was not him. Now standing beside his bed, arms raised, was the feminine silhouette again. He gasped with fright and cowered to the wall, sweating profusely with fear racing through his mind. This is impossible, he thought, this can't be happening. What he defined as reality did not matter to the thing in front of him. Instead the creature reaches towards his arms grabbing them. Her hands grabbed his arms and they felt so unbearably cold. Before he could register what had happened it threw him across the room, and he hit his head against the wall. As his head ached with pain, he slumped against the cold wall. He opened his eyes as he saw the figure float towards him with its head splitting up into multiple heads that resembled that of people but there was something seriously off about each head. Their height was stretched to obscure limits and as the figure got near, he finally sunk into unconsciousness.

He jolted out of his bed the next day sweating and panicking with fear. As he calmed himself down, he realized it was just an obscure and awful dream, nothing more. However, something strange had happened to him he noted. His arms were sore, and his head ached. He looked to his arms and saw scratch marks. Was what he witnessed truly just a horrible dream? As he got on with his day he glanced into a mirror and was silent as he observed something obscure staring back at him. It was no longer him in the reflection but rather the shadow that haunted him.

Anger

He was awoken in a blurry of red. He couldn't understand why but the world around him was in a red blur as if the sun's very colors have changed to create an aurora of absurdity. The only thing he could now feel is anger, bitter resentful anger. As he walked throughout the day, he could see everyone's faces warped in an odd swirl. They gave off a menacing, disturbing swirl, grinning their eyes black and stretched. However, the man did not become afraid of these monstrosities, instead he became even more angry. His blood boiled, as these faces taunted him on an endless mission to torment him. Then everything became mute, he could not hear anything, and he began shouting at these creatures he no longer viewed as humans. The faces began to grin even more so with the corners of their mouths stretching to their very ears and their eyes became larger and larger and yet they remained black, devoid of life or emotion. The man screamed louder and louder, unable to control his rage and began to attack these creatures who in return did nothing to stop him. It was almost as if these creatures welcomed his abuse, as if they pleased themselves in his anger, his misery, his violence and lived to feel it inflicted on them. He did not stop to ponder over why they didn't resist, and he gave as little thought of to this as he did with the sun's new color and the very existence of these creatures. He beat these creatures; he smashed their heads in and stomped on them and creamed at them.

The man shouted and beat down on these monsters even though he couldn't hear any noise, just a horrifying deafness. The fear of not being able to hear a sound, the piercing unknown and loss of a sense gripped him. The very fear of the unknown turned to an anger. He no longer tried to scream any words or noises, but rather just tried to make noise. It was as if he forgot how to even make any noise from his mouth. As he beat down and saw the blood of these monsters soaking his hands he looked forward and out to the distance which had become obscured. Everything in his vision had become a murky red, he was no longer able to see anything but a shade of red. There were no shapes or outlines of objects, just red. Then he woke up on his bed, relaxed.

He glanced onto the floor where a note laid. The note says inside every person there are two wolves, one is anger and the other love. Both wolves have an insatiable hunger, but we choose which one we feed.

Falling

My eyes opened up and all I could feel was a simple feeling of loss. It was as if there was no ground below me like I was in the air. I looked down towards to the ground as if to prove to myself I was indeed on ground but to my horror there was no ground, I was falling. Panic immediately raced through my mind as I realized I was falling, and I couldn't even see the ground. I didn't want to die! I tried to scream but no noise came from my mouth. I tried again but all I could do was choke and gag as if something was wrapped around my neck preventing me from even making a noise. Tears swelled up in my eyes as I began to panic.

When will I hit the ground? I've been falling for what seemed like an eternity. If I had been falling for so long, I will surely die when I hit the ground. I wouldn't just break the bones in my legs, my entire body would be splattered across the ground once I hit it. I can't go out, not like this. Did I fall out of a plane? Why am I still so high up? It wasn't like something was pushing me up, I could feel myself being pushed down by gravity towards the ground but where was the ground? Suddenly, I felt a peace.

My body felt motionless, as if some homely feeling had just overtaken me. I didn't fear the ground anymore; I didn't fear this endless falling. I closed my eyes, waiting to embrace what I hope would be a quick and painless death. At the rate I've been falling it would have to be quick right? An eternity passed, and I could no longer close my eyes. I slowly opened them, confused to how I could still be falling. Then a panic overtook me again, I screamed but no words or noises came out. Before my eyes getting closer and closer was the ground. I tried to move my arms and legs to push it away from me but my body, my own limbs, I couldn't even move them! It's like something else controlled them now.

I woke up flaring my arms around, in my bed. My eyes focused and I was no longer in the air dropping to my death, rather I was in the comfort of my own room. It seemed I never was, rather that it was a horrible dream. Yes, simply a horrible dream. I got out of my bed and something unexplainable happened. The bed rose above me and I could see nothing was supporting it in the air. How was my bed floating in the air? Then I realized I was falling again

. The same horrific dream that I woke up from is occurring once again, an endless loop I cannot break free from. To repeat the same actions over and over again as if I have any control to change the outcome, it's a certain madness. This madness is my life, every day the same actions repeat as they merge together to become indistinguishable from one another as if every day was really the same day.

Shelby Kuehn

Working with Shelby this semester has been an absolute joy. There is something honest and heartfelt in her writing that makes her stand out. The first bit of creative writing Shelby brought to a '57 session was the first poem in this collection, "Frankie the Firework". The story Shelby created in this cute little package was so pure and uplifting that I suggested right then and there that she should submit it to Wordplay. Over the course of the semester, Shelby and I worked on perfecting her poems and paid particular attention to their rhythm and rhyme schemes. The first two poems, "Frankie the Firework" and "Sylvia the Spider", are adorable and showcase Shelby's rhyming prowess. The last poem, "Lost", is my favorite poem Shelby wrote this semester. It's packed with powerful emotion that oozes from each carefully crafted line. Shelby constantly amazed me with every new poem she brought in, and I hope she continues to share her poignant voice with the world. —Lizzie Strobel

Frankie the Firework

Every fourth of July
Up in the sky
A million colors flicker by

The fireflies dance through the trees
While the heat advances with ease

The night becomes cool, a small breeze in the
air
Frankie the firefly dreams of elsewhere

The fireworks crackle and thunder
Frankie wishes to be a wonder
A sight to see
The star of the show
Instead of stuck in a tree
Feeling hollow

Fly high and light up the dark
What a journey to embark

Showing his true light for all to see
Already floating around with glee
But what if no one will see?
Will it take more than me?

Frankie the firefly looked to his friends
As firework by firework transcends

By himself Frankie was dim
But together
Although the chances slim

The night sky would shine
But all of the fireflies must align

Frankie mustered up the courage
He shot to the sky
No other bug could flourish
Not even a horse fly

Frankie's tail continues to glow
Will his family join in the show?
Ashamed of his dreams
Will Frankie maintain his self esteem?

As Frankie's light brightened the sky
The others stood by
Unsure of what to do
Frankie began to feel blue

Thinking his plan hadn't worked
Frankie the firefly felt his wings jerk
Turning around seeing a wondrous sign
The other fireflies began to shine

One by one Frankie watched
As the others began to light up their tails
All fireflies, old and young
His plan had far from failed

No longer alone stuck in a tree
Now with his family and friends
Free

Sylvia the Spider

“KILL IT, KILL IT” they cried out

Scream after scream
Shout after shout

Sylvia the spider fled under the couch
Crawling into her own little pouch

Looking to the kitchen Sylvia began to sigh
“Why don’t they ever let me by?”
If only they would let me try

Eight legs and nothing to do
Just crawl around all day looking quite blue
Sylvia the spider had a breakthrough

She thought,
I’ll sneak in the kitchen late at night
And bake something so good
they will all want a bite

So that night as everyone tucked into bed
Sylvia made for the kitchen
And began with the bread
Using one leg to prep and the other to season
Sylvia the spider could think of no better
reason
For a spider to cook in a kitchen she thought
Using another leg to stir the pot

Three legs hard at work, five to go
Sylvia the spider reached for the coco
But instead grabbing a tomato
And squeezing it over the bread dough

Sylvia the Spider had left the kitchen dark
To stay safe for the journey she had to
embark
Unaware of her mistake
Sylvia the spider continued to make her cake
What goes best with a cake?
Nothing other than a milkshake

Using another leg she grabbed for the ice
cream
When all of a sudden Sylvia heard a scream

The lights shot on
But Sylvia the spider was already gone

The little girl Rosie looked all around
Not making one single sound
The bread with tomato, nice and browned

To Sylvia’s surprise Rosie didn’t look scared
Of the meal she had prepared
Rosie ripped off a chunk
And looked around once more
Sylvia the spider’s jaw nearly hit the floor

The little girl began to chew
And her thoughts began to brew
“Mmm” Rosie hummed
Even in the empty room, she knew

“Thank you”

Lost

Denial

Anger

Bargaining

Depression

Acceptance

“Experience brings familiarity”

The trauma we face, brings us to a different place

Giving us space to embrace the feelings of grief

When I lost you I used to come home from school and run up stairs

Imagining my family fooled me and you’d still be there

When I lost you I gained a shorter temper

When I lost you I lost my patience

When I lost you I found God

I talk to him often

Apologizing for my sins constantly

Don’t take me next

When I lost you I fell into a rabbit hole of emotions

I looked for you in everything

Lying in my bed day after day waiting for you to come home

When I lost you, I lost myself

But if I hadn’t lost you I wouldn’t have had to go looking

I wouldn’t have found this beautiful lens

Opening my eyes to divine people and paths

I would’ve taken more for granted

I would’ve said more *I can’t*s

I would’ve struggled finding myself

Looking for you, finding us both

Memories of you sit on a bookshelf

Knowing you only as a distant memory

Remembering your voice when I recall your laugh

No longer waiting for you as I lie in bed

Carrying you with me instead

It’s said “experience brings familiarity”

The image of you is burned in my mind

At nineteen years old, I’m not blind

In the presence of death

I’m no longer a stranger

Megan Leick

It has been so much fun working with Megan this semester. Each and every week, Megan surprised me with the diversity of her creative and thoughtful verses. Megan displayed a continuous desire to improve her writing skills and push herself to new heights in her poetry. Although it was difficult choosing between her many great poems, I feel the following pieces illustrate her skill and passion for her work. I am certain Megan will continue to delight people with her writing and I am excited for where it will take her in the future. -Daniel Maatta

take my afflicted edges
keep throwing me back,
let those soft summer tides
do work on my skin.
the water reminds me of the way
he holds my hand --
washing me back
to his shores
that pull me in stronger
every time he
beckons me to come near.
salt and dirt and scales
slip around these opaque edges,
who are different but the same
from when they were chipped and
scratched up
by those with weapons under
coats and on tongues.
but here, with him,
I am reminded of my softness,
of the thick emotion
layered throughout.
throw me back to the waves:
see how gentle I can become.

// sea glass //

a wet wet Wood...
where a slow spring
takes its time on
sweet Grasses, pores exploding with green.
and Trees

with bases like
wide smiles.
on whose arms Birds lull
each other awake with
their esoteric language.

and Those who
surrendered back down to the place
that began them.
hushed by Bugs slurping up their veins
and Moss cuddling around its shape,
coaxing it to softly succumb.

how sickly sweet,
the way a dead Tree
is the start of all fascinations
for a future Ecosystem.

// cyclic //

goodbye tastes like metal,
a dirty penny
on the tip of her tongue.

Bitter spit down her throat
makes her muscles clench and claw,
Rusty spit on the grass
outside the rolled-down window.

laughs that sit dense
on the air filled with exhaust
and echo jokingly
through the consequent silence.

words are heavy and ugly
as they drown in the moment
when reality checks the clock,
takes their hands...

guiding hers to the
Shifter – whose coolness
and power
makes her shake
as if it is a loaded gun –
and calls his up to the
corner of his Eye,
where emotion draws from
him like a well.

// is this *goodbye* or *see you later* //

Sierra Maatta

Sierra has been an absolute joy to work with this semester! Her work is creative and original yet pulls elements from modern dystopian novels to keep her writing relevant and intriguing. I looked forward to getting to read her work each week and am pretty bummed I won't get to continue on this path with her to see where this novel goes! Each week Sierra brought in new and wonderful ideas, which made our sessions fun, and conversation easy and free flowing. Sierra has chosen to submit a section of the novel she is working on. This section showcases the story from the point of view of two characters. I am very impressed with how Sierra is able to tell the story from two perspectives, giving the reader insight to the reactions and thoughts of several characters. I wish Sierra all the best with her future writing, and hope you enjoy reading her work as much as I have! – Mattea Schendler

Chrysalis

They shine the light in my eyes, and as I squint and try to look away, I hear a voice. “Hello? Who is there?” The person sounds friendly, almost caring. *Mental note: not the Key.* “Hello. We are looking for the school.” Kye lets his voice boom across the distance that is still between us and the light. He sounds confident and perfectly comfortable. My, he is a good actor. The person does not reply, but instead keeps blinding us with the flashlight beam. We all try to shield our eyes from the light, but also try to see around it to the person who holds it. “Do you mind not blinding us?” Worech remarks, sounding a little irritated. “Yes, of course” the voice replies, immediately beaming the light down to the ground. “So sorry.” The voice is obviously that of a man, averagely deep. As soon as my eyes adjust, I take in the appearance of who is standing before us. He appears to be in his upper twenties, similar to Cap and Trish’s age. He is dressed in a black, sturdy looking uniform which consists of dark pants and a dark jacket. The hood is up, which makes it difficult to make out any facial features. “So, you are all looking for the college?” We all glance at each other slightly, but just nod. Agree to what they say and hopefully things will go smoothly. For all they know, we are actually just wanting to go to school. “Well then” the man says as he pulls down his hood “You are in the right place.” I see his face for the first time, and I am startled by the easiness of his smile. “Welcome” he says, a grin spanning the width of his face and sweeping his arms out to the sides. “College is a wonderful place and will get you out of this dying town.”

He leads us down the side streets, farther into the prestigious neighborhood of Manson Cottages. I revel at the way it has changed yet is still the same. The bricks which side every home are still the dark grey that they always have been, but they seem higher end then they used to appear to me. *Has Pretton, changing so much in the past year, changed my view of everything? Has the Key, through changing my world, changed my view of the world?* I lose myself in memory. The day was fading quickly, I remember that as if it was yesterday. I had needed to get the product to Mr. Svensson before the sun sunk behind the horizon, so I wouldn't have to go through security. The day had been a warm and dry day, and I wiped sweat from my brow as I tried to make my feet go around even faster. My bike chain started to rattle, so I glanced down to make sure it was still on correctly. Nothing looks array, so I turn my face forward, set my jaw in a grim line, and make a last-ditch effort to get my delivery in today. Even as I remember it now, I shudder at how close I was to not reaching Manson Cottages in time. The clink of the gates locking THAT close behind me had haunted my nightmares for weeks. But I had made it, and that was all that mattered. I slowed my pedaling to a “girl going for a pleasure ride” pace so as to not draw any suspicion from the families that were on their porches enjoying the last

rays of sunshine. A little girl lost a pink ball across the street, and as I watched her as she patiently waited for me to pass before fetching it, she smiled and waved. I smiled back, being reminded by the sweetness her smile carried, of my own dear sister. *This is the life she deserves. To live carefree, away from stress and hunger, going to a private school where she gets free skirts and argyle stockings that go past her knees...* I lift the light cheese cloth that covers the contents I carry in my front bicycle basket. "Fifteen of them" I mutter to myself as I pedal. "One for each year I have existed." That is what the lady had said to me when I had picked them up, chuckling with sick pleasure. I had been too frightened to ask for another parcel, even though I knew that Mr. Svensson was expecting sixteen. *Fifteen had better do.* I jolt out of my thoughts, when I realize the others, including our escort, are staring at me. I sense they are expecting some sort of answer from me, and I inwardly curse myself for not paying attention. I toy with the idea of how to get out of this situation without blowing my cover of an eager, curious new student. When nothing immediately comes to mind, I try something new... I wing it. *You can act Chrissy, you did it all those years. Just play the part.* I let a laugh bubble out of my chest and put on a smile that I am sure even Sophia cannot tell is forced. "I feel as though I missed a question?" I speak confidently, embracing my courage. I see our escort grasp at the chance to engage in my conversation. "Ah, indeed" he says quickly, returning to me a smile even bigger than my own. "I bit nervous, are we?" I sense Kye, who is directly to my left, shift his gate uneasily at our escorts question. *This is my chance to prove myself to the others... this is my chance to prove my courage to myself.* "Actually" I quicken my pace so that I am in stride with our escort "I'm afraid my reason for distraction is a lot less noble than nerves. My thoughts were actually engaged in a task a lot more mindless than college, and I was simply trying to decide what name your parents may have given you?" I am not sure if it is the confidence of my manner, the sweetness of my smile, or his desperation to talk about himself, but he buys it. "Ah, my name!" he declares, as his smile spreads even wider across his face. "You all wish to know my name?" Our escort does not wait for an answer and simply assumes that I have spoken for our entire party. He also does not attempt to hide his pleasure, muttering "someone actually desires to know my name." *What a poor, stupid man; he thinks we actually care.* Normally I would feel remorse after a thought like this, but tonight I don't have the time or energy to waste on feeling guilty. Maybe I should, but I have to do certain things to survive. I let it go. I focus on my escort and try to remember the details. His stride is quick and short, rushed, but it is still so obvious to me that he is enjoying every step he takes. He is such a happy man and I wonder at the way he seems so clueless of the city's condition beyond Manson Cottages. Beyond the limits of this gated community. "Tup" he declares. "My name is Tup and ah! Here we are." We have rounded the corner and all stand facing a large, dark, windowless vehicle. It is not black, nor brown, just simply dark. Tup does not waste a moment to observe the vehicle from a distance, but instead walks up to the side door and slides it open. He steps off to the side and looks at us expectantly. I stand next to the others, none of us moving. The reluctance to board the dark vehicle that we all are feeling is heavy. "Do not lollygag children" Tup declares in his chipper tone. "We are on a tight schedule and have a college orientation to get to." I am relieved when Worech takes the first step towards the van. "Heck yeah" he says in general, and then directed toward Tup "do I get to be the driver?" I am thankful that Worech is portraying enough enthusiasm to cover for all of us, but I am still happy when Sophia plays along. "No way man, I am going to

drive.” She runs to catch up with Worech and playfully tries to keep him from getting in the van. I watch as she laughs and smiles as she tugs at his arm and he tries to shake her off. I inwardly want to be angry at how unconcerned they seem about this whole ordeal, but I know that they are acting, just as I was. We all are, and will continue to, until we finish what we are coming to do. *This isn't real, these feelings of joy aren't real. They are all an act, to help us stay alive, to help us defeat the Key.*

Worech

I thought this truck was cool from the outside, but the inside is even more amazing. Instead of matching the dark exterior of the vehicle, the inside is all white... white seats, white detailing; even the insides of the windows are covered with white window clings. “Wow” Sophia says as she slides into the seat next to me. I put my arm around her as I whisper, “a hot ride for my girl.” I plant a light kiss on her cheek. She just smiles and I try not to get captivated by her beauty. A distraction like her is something that is hard to resist. The seats are set up in a way, so they line either side of the van, facing the opposite side if one is seated on them. Chrissy and Kye slide into the seat opposite Sophia and I. Tup starts the engine. “Ah, listen to that purr.” It is true, I can barely tell the car is running, or moving, at all. The white leather upholstery is so spotless. I can tell that Kye and Chrissy both seem tense when we start to move. Kye doesn't waste time in trying to figure out exactly where we are going. “Where is this orientation you speak of taking place?” Kye's words display simple curiosity, but I can sense an underlying tone of uneasiness. I make eye contact with him and mouth “It's fine. He's really nice.” Kye gets exasperated at my answer, shaking his head and mouthing back “Too nice.” Chrissy and Sophia both shrug their consent to Kye's opinion, and I suddenly realize that I have failed to recognize what should have been a warning sign. Tup is too nice, and it is clear to me that this was obvious to everyone except myself. I start to see a certain shine on the white that covers the inside of the van. *It's too white.* “Just a short ride away, have patience, hold your excitement at bay children.” Tup's voice never loses its joyous, happy tone. Nor does his face lose the smile that is spread ear to ear. The uneasiness the others have apparently been feeling this whole time is quickly spreading to me as well, and I grip the arm rest next to me uneasily as the van glides along smoothly and unnoticeably. It is impossible to tell how quickly we are travelling, since there is no way for us to see out of the windows. I get lulled into a daze by the quiet hum of the engine and the intense stuffiness that is taking over the car. My brain is starting to feel foggy. *Kye and Chrissy are sitting across from me, but are they sleeping? Are they talking to me, asking me if I am alright? I am not sure...* “I'm great!” *Is that my voice? I sound so happy, so awake. Everything is so white, so clean. Where am I again? Oh yes, college.* The time passes sluggishly slow and I am not sure how long we have been travelling when we finally come to a stop. The air from outside comes rushing in as soon as Tup slides open the door (which is only able to open from the outside) and instantly my mind clears. I feel as if I have just woken up from a feverish dream. I am the last to climb out of the van and as my feet touch the ground, I am hit with a wave of dizziness. I reach out to steady myself on the side of the van. “Is everything okay?” I'm shocked when I see it is Chrysalis who has spoken. “Yeah” I say quickly trying to stand up. “Everything is fine.” As I say the words my head starts to spin and the fogginess I had felt in the van quickly returns and engulfs my vision. I struggle to focus it on Chrissy, and to focus my thoughts on anything at all. I struggle to understand what she is saying to me. We are walking now;

she is leading us in the direction of the others. As we walk my thoughts regain some of their crispness and I see that we have reached what must be the college. The large building I'm seeing is white; blankly white. No other colors are on the outside of it and I can't help but sense that the white interior of the van and the white outside of this building is somehow closely connected. I am still not sure where Tup has taken us, but I do know that we are no longer in the city of Pretton. The blue of the sky is so blue that it almost hurts my eyes, and the grass that covers the lawn outside of the building is a perfect shade of grass green if there ever was one. The sun is out, and it is clearly no longer night. "How long were we in the van for?" I direct my question at no one in particular, yet Chrissy is the only one close enough to hear it. "Awhile" she says flatly as she stares ahead taking in the same picture that I am. "But definitely not long enough for the sun to rise so far overhead." I am not sure what she is trying to say, and I am even more confused at what I am seeing. "But then... how is it daylight?" She finally takes her eyes from the scene ahead of us and turns to face me. We share a moment of silence, searching for answers to an unanswerable question within each other's gazes. "I'm not sure" she says quietly, just as we catch up with the others.

Jerry Markarian

I enjoyed working with Jerry throughout the '57 course where we focused on his sports journalism writing. As a conscious Packer fan myself, I, admittedly, still learned quite a bit about the NFL drafting process in football (maybe you, the reader, will too) by reading this biography focused on Shaquem Griffin. Jerry remarkably portrayed the theme of Shaquem being an underdog who persevered to get to where he is today throughout this piece. During the revision process, I was excited to see Jerry take control of his writing by finding places in the piece where he felt needed a bit of work. Jerry was able to convey sports information, which can be boring to some, in a way that captures the reader's attention with a captivating tone of voice. Overall, I believe this makes it both an interesting and inspirational story for all that read it. Jerry and I were both excited to see the end result of the semester's work and it definitely paid off. I think he has a promising future in the area of sports journalism. –Halee Fritsch

Nothing Comes Easy

An underdog is defined as a competitor thought to have little chance of winning a fight or contest. With that definition, Shaquem Griffin, who was born with amniotic band syndrome, which caused his left hand to not be fully developed was seen as a complete underdog from the very beginning. The pain that the condition caused was so severe that Shaquem tried to cut his hand off with a butcher knife at the age of four and his mother set up the surgery to have it amputated not long after. Many tried to tell Shaquem that his dreams could not be reached with the devastating disposition that was brought upon him through forces out of his control, but Shaquem did not listen. He instead used their unwelcomed words of discouragement to his advantage. “Nothing comes easy” is a sentiment that was echoed to Shaquem by his father time and time again from a very young age. Shaquem has credited those wise words as the main reason he would never give up, even through the toughest of times. He is not only a success story; he is an example of what someone with the heart of a lion is capable of, and a perfect role model to anyone who is in need of one.

Shaquem's love of football was born at a very young age, and so, too, was the chip on his shoulder. His chip was created when he was eight years old when his youth football team had a very important game that would take them into the playoffs if they had won. The opposing coach held the weigh-ins and said Shaquem was too heavy to play. When Shaquem's head coach weighed him, they found that he did, in fact, make weight. The opposing coach had lied. When questioned further, the coach said it was not about his weight, but it was about his hand. He said that Shaquem should not be allowed to play football with one hand as it is strictly a game for players with two. Shaquem credited that as the moment he knew he would have to prove people wrong, and he has done so ever since. Ironically, he began proving his doubters wrong that very same day. He was eventually allowed to play and ended up catching the game sealing interception and sending his team to the playoffs.

Shaquem would carry that chip with him into Lakewood high school, where he and his twin brother Shaquill would go on to become standouts on the football team. Despite his prolific high school career, I would be willing to bet the game that will stick with Shaquem until his football playing days are over was his last one. With only 14 seconds left his team had given up a game winning touchdown pass in the Class 5A regional semifinals of the playoffs. Shaquem, the team's starting safety, and one of the best players at his position in the entire state of Florida, was on the

sidelines for the crucial play. Despite everything he had given his team, everything he had done to show that he belonged, he was ultimately benched by his head coach on the most important play, of the most important game, for something that was out of his control.

Despite always having his fair share of doubters, it wasn't until after high school that Shaquem ran into real adversity. Shaquem was a 3-star prospect coming out of high school and chose to play close to home, at the University of Central Florida, where his brother Shaquill would soon follow. He expected to breakout and become an instant star playing on the team as confidence was never something he lacked, but that was not the case at all. Shaquem was redshirted his freshman year, before working his way up to second string going into his sophomore year. Inexplicably, before the first game of his sophomore year, he was moved to third string, and the very next week, Shaquem was moved to the scout team, effectively taking him off the gameday roster altogether.

While his talents were wasting away on the scout team, Shaquem felt more alone than ever before. This was because he never wanted to bring Shaquill, who was excelling at the time, down with negativity. Those times were so rough on Shaquem that he once again, for the first time since he was a child, considered quitting the sport that he so desperately loved. It wasn't until his fourth college season, under new head coach Scott Frost, that Shaquem finally received the opportunity he was looking for-- one he would unsurprisingly take full advantage of. All of his hard work paid off when Shaquem was finally given the starting spot at weakside linebacker. Shaquem made such a huge impact in his first season as a starter that he won ACC Defensive Player of the Year award for his efforts. Shaquem also had a huge impact on the success of the team, as he would help them turn around a winless season the year before.

Shaquem finished his breakout season with a stuffed stat sheet including 20 tackles for loss, 11 1/2 sacks, 92 tackles, 2 forced fumbles, and 2 fumble recoveries all while being extremely undersized for the linebacker position. He was second on the team in tackles, and first in tackles for loss and sacks. He also became an emotional leader of the team. He had all of college football buzzing about him being such a force despite having only one hand. Opposing teams would take notice of Shaquem's game wrecking ability, and he was often double-teamed as a result. On account of the added attention from opposing coaches, Shaquem's statistics would take a small step back following his breakout season. Nevertheless, he was still a force to be reckoned with on the field leading UCF in both sacks and tackles for loss. Shaquem has also gone on record to say that he does not want to be defined by his accolades and gaudy statistics, but rather by his perseverance through adversity.

Shaquem unsurprisingly had a much rockier path to the NFL Draft than most other rookie prospects. The UCF star didn't even receive an invite to the annual scouting combine (where NFL hopefuls go to compete in speed, strength, and agility testing) until he opened eyes at the Senior Bowl, where he dominated in practice throughout the entire week, and finished the game with four solo tackles. After seeing Shaquem dominate among his fellow prospects at the Senior Bowl, there was no way the league could keep him out of the combine alongside the best of the class. It was there that Shaquem would continue to turn heads when he ran a blistering 4.38 second 40-yard dash. The time not only made him one of the fastest players in the entire class; it also set the record for fastest time ever recorded by a linebacker at the event. NFL Network cameras caught his future

head coach, Pete Carroll, who was unable to hide his excitement, fist-bumping in the Seahawks press box after seeing the feat.

Shaquem was not yet done impressing, as he was also a standout in another test at the combine, and it was one that absolutely nobody would've expected him to excel at. Shaquem, while wearing a prosthetic hand, finished with an extremely impressive 20 reps of 225 pounds on the bench press. His mark was good enough to tie for eleventh best at his position, despite the fact that his competition had all been blessed with the luxury of having two hands. Shaquem, who excelled every step of the way throughout the draft process, had done everything in his power to improve his draft stock leading up to the big day, and his stock was absolutely soaring as a result.

After an eye-opening combine, teams obviously took notice of the physically gifted linebacker, and he was usually projected to go somewhere in the fourth round as a result. Some mock drafts even projected him to be a top 100 pick, which was a huge jump from the fifth and sixth round projections before the event. Shaquem not only caught the eye of teams around the league, he also caught the interest of league officials, who offered him a spot in the green room at the NFL Draft.

The green room is where top prospects go as they wait to walk on stage and shake the commissioner's hand when they hear their name called. It is an honor awarded to only a select number of top prospects in each class, and one Shaquem, who was as well deserving of the honor as anyone in the class, would surely not pass up. Of the 22 prospects who attended the draft, Shaquem was one of only four who were available past the first round. After the second round? He was the last man standing. Then came the third round, and the fourth, and there was Shaquem, still waiting. It wasn't until the beginning of the fifth round, with the 141st pick, that Shaquem would finally hear his name called. Oddly enough, the team that took the falling linebacker was the same one that selected his twin brother just one year earlier, the Seattle Seahawks. The only words that Shaquem could muster upon getting the call from Seahawks head coach Pete Carroll, the same call that he had been waiting for his whole life, were "I can't breathe". Shaquem was the 16th linebacker off the board, despite having a far more accomplished collegiate career than over half of the players selected before him. He was also drafted a full three rounds and nearly 100 picks after the 21st player out of the green room. These factors may be detrimental to the confidence of a normal person but Shaquem has never been, and will never be, that. He will surely use his draft position as further motivation to prove his doubters wrong, and, if it wasn't already, the chip that he carries on his shoulder will become an immovable boulder.

Many would have regretted accepting the NFL's invitation to the draft, seeing as he shattered the record for longest wait for a prospect attending the drafts green room, but Shaquem has said that he wouldn't have done it any differently if given the opportunity. When asked about his draft day experience Shaquem said, "That's an experience a lot of people can't say they did. I can definitely say the wait was worth it. It was a rough three days, but I'd definitely wait all over again for opportunity to get out there with my brother." It can be argued that Shaquem going to the Seahawks was as perfect a marriage of player to team that one could dream up. They not only are a team known for their prolific development of late round gems in the past, but they also play for a city with a very passionate fanbase with a love for underdogs.

Shaquem's rookie season began much differently than the average late round pick, as he was being endorsed by Nike before the regular season even began as one of their "changemakers" for their Just Do It campaign. His on-field play, however, mirrored what one would expect from a player taken in the fifth round. Shaquem the person was undoubtedly worthy of a top selection in any draft, but Shaquem the player was someone who was seen as a polarizing athlete with unbelievable untapped potential but was too raw to make a day one impact on anything other than special teams. Nevertheless, Shaquem defied the odds once again when he rose to the top of the Seahawks weakside linebacker depth chart before week one and was named the starter in the opening week of the season against the Denver Broncos. Shaquem, like any rookie who was thrown into the fire too early into their career, struggled mightily in the game and would be benched before the clock hit zero.

The Denver game would not only be Shaquem's only start of the whole season, but also the only one that he saw any significant playing time outside of being one of the team's core special teams' players. While his rookie season was largely considered a statistical disappointment, as many expected him to play a large role in the team's pass-rushing rotation off the edge, he still finished tied for fifth on the team with seven special teams tackles. Pete Carroll admitted that the team may have put too much on the rookie's plate at the beginning of the season and that played a large factor in his struggles.

Despite his rookie season being a disappointment from a playing time standpoint, Shaquem was still able to leave his mark on the league. On February 2nd, 2019, at the NFL Honors awards, Shaquem was awarded the honorable Game Changer award. The honor is awarded to someone who has had a positive impact on both the sport and community, as a whole. The first words out of Shaquem's mouth in his acceptance speech should come as no surprise: "Nothing comes easy." Also, in his speech Shaquem inspired hope to anyone going through adversity, saying that nobody should let negativity cloud their life. While his NFL career may have not yet followed the same skyward trajectory as his previous endeavors, I believe it is only a matter of time before Shaquem surprises us all once again.

Citations

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Kiera Meidenbauer

In our very first session, I could immediately tell that Kiera is an amazing writer. Her poems and short stories-or “stoems,” as we dubbed them-from earlier in the semester often fit the genre of gothic horror. Later on, they branched out in genre to reflect more realistic, down-to-earth human struggles. “Dark on me” presents a character who deals with depression, who is reminded that “tomorrow is another new day,” while “It is Funny” depicts a character going through a panic attack. “Hold Me When the Ground Shakes” is a tale inspired by two characters from the TV show *Teen Wolf*; one of its characters has depression and thought of committing suicide, but found both friendship and love in an unlikely place, and found the will to live again. “Light, dark, evil, good, silence” is a story about uncovering the truth-the truth of past events, of someone very close, and of the central character themselves-and learning how to cope with it. In this selection of troubled tales, “Her Name Was Rose” and “Lay Your Head Down” serve as a sort of “comic relief” for the heavier themes of the others, with an emphasis on happiness, love, and peace. No matter what the focus is, Kiera’s writing is absolutely fantastic, and always leaves the reader wanting more.

-Erin McCausland

Dark on me

Tell me a secret, just one.
Something you won't miss, until you are done.
I'll take it and weave it into a sweater, and gift it unto you again.
You'll wear it, and all will see.
Everything you never wanted them to see.
Give me a coin, and I swear I'll keep it.
Put it in my pocket alongside all the bitter lies.
Show you I'm trusted, despite my silver tongue and dark eyes.
Show me the sky, and I will fly.
But give me a white rose and I just might die.
Romance and heartache fit hand in hand.
You'd know, wouldn't you?
Used and abused for too long, you finally cry.
Give me back yesterday, before it all went awry.
Prayers heard; prayers unanswered.
You look up and see nothing but the deep dark sky.
Light at the end of the tunnel you run, seeking something you know not yet.
Until it is snuffed out against your palm, an angry burn lashing out at you from within.
You lose motivation, but never stop.
Because you know, if you do everything will be lost.
And your work shall lay to unpeaceful rest beneath the ivy and thorns lining your upset mind.
So, forge ahead you have, but lay to rest for you have tired along the way.
Close your eyes and let everything slip away.
For tomorrow is another new day.

Her Name Was Rose

You are a flower unlike any other I have seen
Majestic and bright as an autumn sky
Jitters and flutters are what I feel
When I think of you, everything seems to make sense
Lovely smiles don't hide a bitter past, I've only ever dreamed of someone like you
You are perfect I think every single day; I can't stop thinking about you
From the way your hair is the color of fresh cut wheat
To your clear green eyes that radiate light with every breath you take
You smile at me and I fall all over again
Taking my hand in your, you pull me up and I stand to be on equal footing with you
Confessions are exchanged and I cry
Happiness is the only thing I think I'll ever feel
You love me I hear you say and my heart sings
My dream comes true and I don't know what to do
I never thought this would happen to me
You surprised me in all the best ways
Like a shining star that's come down from the night sky just for me
I've been given a happily ever after
I allow myself to smile and cheer, for I am ever so proud to be here
Our love unfolds, and I finally see there was never anything to fear

Hold Me When the Ground Shakes

You make me feel. Everyone around me always asks me if I'm okay. *I'm fine.* The lies slip off my tongue like silver, coated in poison and believed just as so. No one knows the way the barbs dig into my flesh, bleeding me dry of everything but my own anxiety and fear. I am not fine, I am not okay, I'm a liar, a fleer, I just want to be left alone. I love you all, but I don't know how to tell you. I do everything I can just to protect you all, but who has my back, who looks after me, who will protect me if I fall? No one I had always believed. It is truly frightening to see the shadow of a familiar visage take form behind me when the earth begins to shake, and my footing is lost. Strong arms wrap around me, taking me up farther than I could have believed. He doesn't seem to mind the weight of my burdens, nor the lost look that adorns my face as I stare up into crystal blue eyes that shows both all and nothing to the onlooker. I know him. The man who tore through all our lives with the ferocity of a wild animal, and the insanity of a killer. He was. Death seemed to fix that little quirk. He came back halved, but no less sarcastic. He is smart, manipulative, savage, will kill if it suits him. But. He never hurt me, save for a few bruises left in the wake of his own revenge on those who have done him wrong. I close my eyes, and he walks, taking me where? I don't know, and I don't care. Take me away, don't take me away, I'll go if its with you. The only one who has stayed back for my apparent sake than go forth in time for their own gain. It is surprising and terrifying and makes me want to hide, the intensity in his eyes. The soft smile I'd never been able to imagine fitting him so well, with the smirks and bitter comments he throws like loose change. He is bright, despite the darkness in his gaze, placing me so gently back on my feet that I feel as if my knees would go weak with just the gentle caress of his skin to mine. It is wrong I am told by those around me, just another cliché story of a dark man and innocent soul, lured in by the manipulation of the prior. They are wrong, so very wrong if they think he would harm me. No. The world would burn, and he would walk upon its ashes with sure footing before he lets harm befall my person. They don't see the gentle way he looks at me, the way he always sticks close when I am unsure, the guidance and safety, and protection he has provided me when everyone else in my life had turned away. He is the anchor that held me down when all I could think about was the rising tide and panic setting in like danger. I am no less than I was yesterday, neither is he. If anything, I am better than before with him holding me down from escaping into the clouds with a set of wings and guilt to match the blue of his eyes. I love him. There I said it, admitted what I never said till now. I love him so much it hurts me whenever I am away for too long. My chest aches and my eyes water, I just want his presence to soothe the burn in my soul and take me into his arms and tell me everything will be okay. I love the way he wakes up before me, always having coffee ready when I get up and a good morning kiss to match. I love the way he will do anything to protect me, as I will for him, even if those methods of protection end in less than savory consequences for the opposing threat. I love the way he is himself around me, not hiding behind any masks of snark, acidic taunts or sneering smirks. He is everything to me, and always will be. There is no one rhyme or reason.....He just is and will be for as long as time permits our continued being.

It is Funny

It sinks in deep, raking claws through your confidence.

Despair.

It swallows you whole, sucking out your light.

Your heart pounds, you don't hear.

Hopelessness.

It holds on tight like a mocking embrace, cold and deceiving.

You think you're okay, you're not.

All the "*I'm fine*"s will not save you from the truth of a thousand white lies.

They grow darker, and with each passing breath it gets harder to breath.

Sadness.

All consuming, and wet in a way that makes drowning seem easy.

Take the hand that is held out to you, scars and weeping wounds bleeding red in a cataclysmic redundancy of selflessness.

It never lasts.

The high, the low, nothing ever lasts.

You've said it time and time again, *I'm fine*.

Lies.

Ever present and hidden within everyday conversation, so no one can truly see how deep the hurt goes.

Fools.

They never see. Ask the wrong questions. Say the wrong solaces. Its never right.

Bask in the knowledge that you are one who knows their own faults well, but essentiate and makes them bigger than ever.

They torment you, growing into wicked creatures of shadow and insecurities. You hide. Shove everything behind a façade of smiles that are so fake they have become real. You think there is something wrong with you.

You may be right. Will you ever know? Maybe, but that's not for you to find out until much later when you are on your knees and begging for a sliver of light in the endless darkness you have let yourself be consumed by.

Plead.

You are loved, but do not see what everyone means to you. Only ever imagining when they will be gone, and not taking time in the moment to ask how they've been. You are disgusted with yourself for putting so much from your mind that you forget it without a thought.

Reason.

There is none. Not that you can see. It is like an infection that has begun to writhe inside of you, twisting and ripping you apart like a monster that seeks blood and the sweet taste of you losing your mind to grief and fear.

You are lost.

So very lost within the labyrinth that is your mind, that you have forgotten to look behind yourself. Forgotten to see that shadow that walks beside and behind you, always there and providing the

company you never dare let yourself keep for too long a duration. For they always leave sooner than later, leaving you to weep once again as you take a rag to the blood spilling from your broken heart. It is funny you think, a bitter smile on your face. It is funny you think, the smile slipping from your lips. It is funny you think, a dull look in your eyes to match the blank downward curve of your lips. It is funny you think, the shadow of cheer long gone from your hallowed face. It is funny.

Light, dark, evil, good, silence

First light of the dawn feels so faithful, a sought-after melody not many realize has yet to come true. I thought I was still seeing stars when I was nine years old, but then some time passed and I realized the lie.

Morning light burned like a fire, bright and all-encompassing glee.

I tried to look far off, only to find the truth was far away from me.

Years pass like meteors, effortlessly, before I could catch a glimpse.

And everyday I spent away from you, everyday I spent staring off into the clouds.

They all ended the same, in my own pain.

Love and friendship were different, or so I've learned from times touch.

L'amour est un mensonge (Love is a lie), I know the scars it leaves behind.

Dig in deep and I prepare to reap, the sorrow of a thousand words withdrawn from bowed pink lips.

All the lies, the bittersweet lies an angel can tell you, lead you to perdition and then some with not so much as a smile.

Fall to my knees, I plead.

Lord in heaven above, please forgive this ignorance for I fear I have sinned.

Accept my words of regret, and let my apology sink in.

I would say she made me do it, but the lie isn't true.

I swore I'd come back to you, but I don't know if that can be true, not when I still hold the flames of a not quite dead heartbeat

Forgive me, for I have given into my own desire for warmth of emotions and heart.

I've gotten lost in my mind for days on end, staring up at the sky and wondering where all the stars went.

All the love in the world, poured into an ink well and ran dry.

Give me my due and lay me to rest with all the crimes I've let myself sow in the fields of an innocence now lost.

Rocky and rough, given up inside.

Unpleasantly burning hue, I've found what I have to do.

The truth never set me free, words are just pretty little empty fillers others use to trick us into believing they care.

Cynical, how hysterical for me to say these words.

Crystals were never that pretty when they gleam in twin streams of liquid emotion from the eyes of one who has been wronged.

The angel has fallen from grace, and the people have become blasé.

Won't you call my name one last time?

Even for a moment amongst the dark and gloom of a million broken promises, won't you say it one more time?

.....Or have your lips melted with your innocence, sewn shut with the treachery of your past, you've been silenced?

Broken wings, bloodied feathers, littering the ground with every iteration of sin, I feel no pity for you.

You never would have let me anyways, too prideful to let another try and console you, when your own eyes have yet to see the light that is supposedly at the end of the tunnel.

Laugh my dear, laugh or you just might cry again.

Laugh or your seams just might rip.

Laugh or you just might.....die.

Lay Your Head Down

Sleep in peace my friend.

Lay down your head in the lord's arms and I'll pray.

Travel in peace, I'll be here when you go to sleep.“

“Rest on my tired friend, let your soul go on.

Don't look back to the fire and smoke and burning house on the hill.

Just go on, venture forth to your loved land.

Carry on my dear, I'll be here when you awake.

So just close your eyes and rest peacefully, it will be alright.”

“Give me all your sins, I'll shoulder them while you take a break.

Room for one more, I believe so, climb inside and enjoy the peaceful ride.

Slumber as the world slopes around, to a better tomorrow.

You'll see the sun come up from heaven, all the flowers will bloom.

You may be gone now, but forever in my heart you shall be.

I love you, so just please put down your head and close your eyes.

I'll be here when morning comes.”

Romeo Miranda Aponte

It was great working with Romeo during our '57 sessions and seeing his creative spark and enthusiasm for writing. It was amazing hearing how something as simple as a phrase heard in passing could inspire him to write such a vivid and intricate poem. Likewise, the themes this learner tackled were those that society struggles to grasp and understand. I was impressed by the way the learner made these concepts tangible through various metaphors, and I enjoyed our interesting conversations surrounding topics like mental health and one's identity. The various poems published here demonstrate the learner's extensive talent and creativity. I hope that after reading these poems, readers are able to both enjoy and reflect upon what they have read while possibly gaining a new understanding of these themes. –Halee Fristch

A woman's' wound

Now her wound only has to hurt once.
She had been through this pain before.
Bleeding on people who hadn't cut her
But now any wounds that were the same, only does that wound have to
Hurt once.

Blissful ignorance

You were the reason why in high school when the question
"Is ignorance bliss?"
Was posed, caused a panic.
Making everyone fight for their side like we were in the colosseum.
Gladiator vs Gladiator
Whoever last to be standing
Was the victor.

Moon loved

You always came out on time.
Not once were you ever late.
Some people danced all day with your sister and would leave you all alone.
As if you were a pet they fully didn't understand and realized you were too much to handle, too
much to care for.
But do not fret, I am here to love you and bask in your pale but mesmerizing light, that gives me
your loving embrace under the stars.

Night love

I find peace in the night's dark embrace.
What most find as loneliness,
I found a sense of community.
Where one felt cold, I felt the warmth.

Crawling

You greeted me with an open arm.

Hugging you, I felt that warm embrace.

Your sweet knighting, I let you coerce me –

Doing and listening as you said.

“Don’t leave” you said.

“Nobody’s going to love you like I do” you said.

I revolted.

I fought back against. I covered my ears, closed my eyes, and sat saying to myself,

“I can do this”.

I CAN DO THIS

I CAN DO THIs

I CAN DO This

I Can do this

The glass breaks.

You smashed the glass and clawed through the walls I had around my heart and mind.

You snapped me up in your jaws and spat me out.

I remembered that I was something. Then I accepted I was worth nothing. That I wasn’t capable of love.

BUT YOU WERE WRONG!

See, loving you got me sick, got me suicide watched, and blue happy pills.

After the 40th day of crying. I begged you to leave and you would not leave.

But then, I saw an escape with protection. The very thing I needed to succeed. I took the very little faith I had. The faith I had hid away from you.

I JUMPED

Jumped into a place called the Psychiatric ward.

I felt at peace, better than I ever before. I started to grow, breathing clean air, and drinking clean water.

I got better.

I did do it.

It just took time.

I COULD DO THIS.

Vault

For, we are never alone.

In our hearts and memories is a vault that brings life of people who we’ve lost.

This vault holds every fiber and detail, as If when we thought of them, they were painted alive.

Man who couldn't

The man who wouldn't

Was the same man who believed he could not fly, could not believe in himself, and have truth to him.

What he failed to realize was, that

He could fly,

By finding his truth,

Which helped believed in himself.

Intoxication

At one point in time, I was able to think clearly.

But then I met you and like a bear to honey I became enticed.

Your presence was alluring. It was dangerous, captivating, and most vicious of them all it was warm.

I could never have a chance.

I was no match.

But like blood in the water, it was a frenzy of sharks. Everything being intensified.

Nothing felt right, even when the world was falling at my hands and feet.

I still looked past somehow,

I was intoxicated by you.

Out of Order

“Not working today here, happiness has been long gone”

For the 40th day in a row, after taking those blue happy pills.

I still didn't feel any better.

As if the pills were the person that would come by occasionally to fix anything wrong.

Then later another person to restock me with what I was empty in.

It was too much of a routine,

Even when everything was okay,

I still felt out of order.

Kellie Morgan

"Poetry is hard for most people. It's hard to create, it's hard to finish, and it's definitely hard to understand. Or so I thought before I worked with Kellie for a whole semester. Somehow, somehow Kellie was able to make differently themed poems each and every week. One week we'd discuss a light-hearted and humorous poem with a very specific rhyming scheme and the next I'd be learning about Kellie's job from home through symbolizing tasks and their respective difficulty with varying font sizes. Kellie's submission to WordPlay is really incredible. She thinks about the thoughts and patterns of behavior that she tends to show and voices those in a way that is very relatable and easy to understand. I was lucky to work with Kellie for a semester and I'm glad I did because I learned how fun and moving poetry can really be." – Izzy Haugen

A Little Bit of a Whole Lot

1.

Every day is a new day
Full of new adventures struggles
But I always wake up
With the same problems on my mind.

2.

I have my daily schedule down to a T
Ten o'clock- worry about homework
Twelve o'clock- remember to eat since I haven't yet
Two o'clock- think about my fast-approaching future
Four o'clock- tell myself not to worry, that it'll all be okay.

Then a half hour later, forget everything I said at four o'clock.

3.

Some people sit in class staring at their phones
(idiots, they paid sixteen grand for school but end up doing this in class instead)
Others are caught sleeping soundly
(idiots, they paid sixteen grand for school but end up doing this in class instead)
But I stare at the wall, considering all that life has handed to me- what I should take and what I should leave
(idiot, I paid sixteen grand for school but end up doing this in class instead)

4.

"You want to make sure your job gets you money and benefits"
"But don't get a job just for the money, chase after your dreams"
"But you're gonna get older, you'll achieve all your dreams, and then you'll need a good-paying job"
"But be yourself- do what YOU want, it's your life after all. Explore, be spontaneous, be wild"
"But don't be stupid"
"But be young while you can"

What am I supposed to believe?

5.

My mind is like an art gallery full of viewers. They walk around and enjoy all the pictures of my memories, good and bad, hung on the wall. But there are certain pieces that attract the most attention. These pieces are dark and rough, paintings labeled *Uncertainty, Stress, and Feelings of someone who is*

Different.

6.

I try to make pros and cons lists- because they solve everything, right?

Try to give myself an edge on what to do, what to become.

I keep in mind all the things I enjoy like swimming, organizing things, and buying unneeded shoes.

I keep in mind all the things I am good at like waitressing, playing piano, and volleyball.

I keep in mind all the things I want to do like travel to the West, learn to snorkel, and actually make those recipes I see on Pinterest.

I keep in mind all the things I don't want to do like stay in college for more than six years, sit at a desk all day looking at a computer screen, and doing laundry.

But every time I'm asked the same, dreaded question

“What do you want to do with your life?”

I always draw a blank.

7.

How is someone from a town of 700,
a town that consists of a salon, two banks, a cafe, a school, and 4 bars
supposed to know the kind of opportunities this world holds?

8.

“Don't put your life on hold,

Go out there and be bold!

Discover what this world has to give,

Stop sitting around. Get up and live!”

Stress has a large effect on young adults. It can lead to risky behaviors such as drinking, doing drugs, depression, anxiety, and even suicide.

What causes stress in young adults? There are numerous factors such as:

-The pressure to fit into society

-Having to pay for rent and college tuition with income from a low paying job

-Juggling school, work, sleep, family and friends, and any leisurely activities

-Spending an ungodly amount of time trying to acquire certain grade levels or else being seen as 'lesser', a failure, or stupid.

Tell me, where is there time to **live**?

9.

In the art gallery in my mind, placed in a corner, is a statue of Stephen King. He stares; at the pieces, the people, and sometimes nothing at all. Some of the gallery-goers speed up when they walk by, too unnerved by his cold and empty stare.

Others stop and observe, pondering why this dismal author overlooks the gallery.

The reason Stephen King sits in that corner?

In all of his pain and suffering, he wrote and created beautiful works of horrible things,

Just as my mind does.

10.

Doctors, lawyers, dentists

You want to stick your hand in peoples' mouths?!

Psychologists, social workers, jail men

You want to work with crazy people?!

Teachers, nurses, mechanics

You want to deal with snotty kids?!

Tour guides, air flight attendants, zoo keepers

You want to clean up after animals?!

Writers, models, musicians

You think you'll get that lucky?!

Good luck.

11.

I am like a turtle.

Slowly but surely making my way towards my end goal

Watching as all the others speed past me.

But I will get there,

I just need some time.

12.

So after all the people have left my art gallery, after all the paintings have been dusted and covered, Stephen still sits there, his eyes positioned perfectly at a small writing on the wall.

A piece of art that I have not yet placed on a canvas and proudly hung up, is a sentence written in Sharpie.

What am I to become

Collin Newton

Over the past semester, Collin has worked intently on a personal research project. Collin, along with a group of cohorts, have documented, tracked, and observed coyote and wolf populations in the Suring and Mitchell areas: exploring the conditions that led to two distinctly differing populations. Collin's passion for his wildlife studies has been matched with this ongoing research. Below is a portion of that carefully constructed research. I wish Collin the best in his continued pursuit in his field, knowing that his skills will only refine with time. – Jared Burkart

[*To view the complete study, contact Collin at cnewt347@uwsp.edu*](mailto:cnewt347@uwsp.edu)

Study of Wolf, Coyote, and other Wild Canine Behavior in Eastern-Central Wisconsin



Collin D. Newton
Evan P. VanderGalien
Dylan J. Weiland
CED Expeditions
February 2019

Study of Wolf and Coyote Behavior in Eastern-Central Wisconsin
The exact locations used for this Study are Mitchell, Wisconsin, and Suring, Wisconsin.



Wolf walking along main trail through the swamp 1-16-19, Suring, Wisconsin

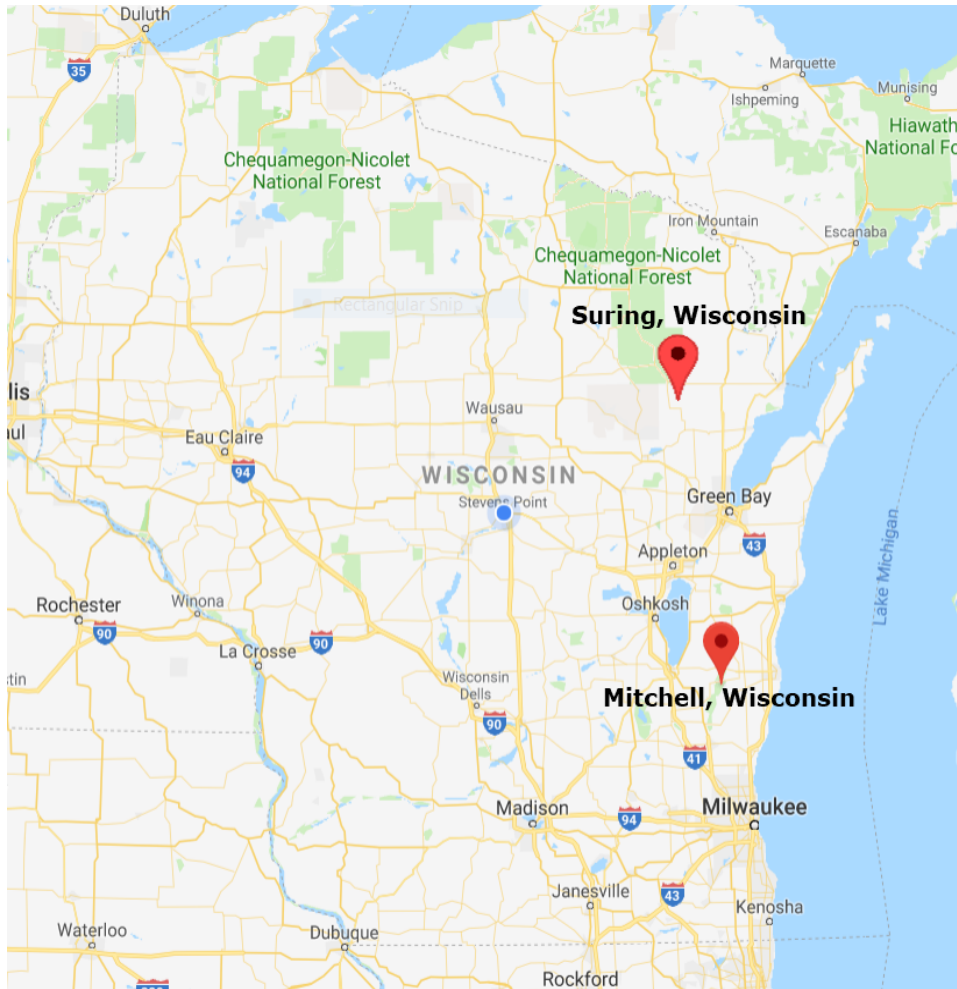
Objective Goals

Primary Objectives

- Prove existence of wolves in southern regions of Wisconsin (Fond du Lac, Milwaukee) **COMPLETED**
 - November 2018 - April 13th 2019
 - Voice recorder caught two wolf howls on the night of April 13th, 2019.
- Figure out if the relationship between wolves and coyotes could lead to pushing coyotes out of the northern United States or possibly to near extinction or if the two species could continue to co-exist with competition.
 - November 2018 - present

Secondary Objectives

- Discover if there is a behavioral difference between black wolves and common gray wolves
 - January 2019 - present



Map of the locations used for the study

Introduction

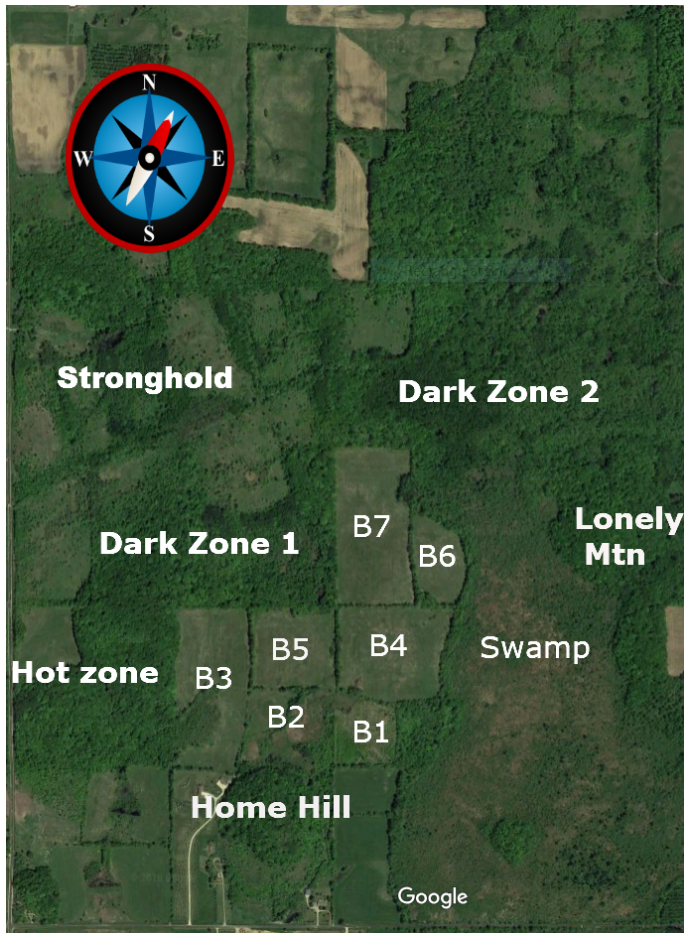
The team consists of Evan Vandergalien, Dylan Weiland, and Collin Newton. Evan, Dylan, and Collin enjoy going on night time “expeditions” in the forests of Mitchell, Wisconsin. They enjoy going out into the woods as an opportunity to study wildlife behavior and learn how different species of wildlife interact out in their natural habitat. They have been doing this since the Summer of 2018.

What got the group into this? One night during the early summer of 2018, Evan, Dylan, and Collin were walking around in fields and forests near Van Dyne, Wisconsin, until a small trio of coyotes made their presence known. The pack of coyotes were very close to the group of guys and they did not know what to do. Evan wanted to investigate what the coyotes were up to, Dylan wanted to go back to avoid getting in a mess, and Collin decided they should head back to camp and make sure they were not on or near private property. Later that night, they determined they were near private property. However, they really wanted to get back out into the woods to see some wildlife and learn how these coyotes behave and what they do in the wild. Dylan spoke to his grandfather and was given permission to use his land for their “expeditions.” He also showed the group all sorts of state land, in Mitchell, Wisconsin, that surrounds his land-which was open for exploration, study, or research.

Collin, on the other hand, has been exploring the forests owned by his grandfather for years. However, it has not been until the last decade that the local wolves have made themselves known to all in the Suring area. Collin has taken great interests into exploring areas of his grandfather's land that he has never seen before, for the purpose of learning more about the wolves and other wild canines in the area.



Expedition Land near Mitchell, Wisconsin (almost all state land)



Callout map of expedition land near Mitchell, Wisconsin
 Wolf Activity in both Mitchell and Suring, Wisconsin

Wolves are present both in Mitchell and Suring Wisconsin. Mitchell is about 20 minutes east of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, while Suring is around 40 minutes North West of Shawano, Wisconsin. Wolf activity is unheard of as far South as Mitchell. However, wolves have made their presence known in the area. They have not only vocally exposed themselves, but they have, as well, harassed local farmer cattle. A local landowner stated that he has seen a large gray wolf lying down in his backyard at around 6 O’Clock in the morning. Evan, Dylan, and Collin, have heard multiple wolf howls in the same area on public land. Evan and Collin had heard wolves harassing nearby farmer cattle and had a confirmed visual of a black wolf on 12-14-18, on the side of County Highway V, Mitchell, heading towards the action after it was all over.

In Suring, Wisconsin, the entire area is in prime condition for wolf living. The area consists of forest and farm land for thousands of acres and along with the forest there comes wildlife of all kinds all throughout. Collin has not only heard multiple wolf howls in the area, but has also seen both wolf tracks and stumbled upon a wolf pack’s den. The wolves here dug deep into the ground, creating a large burrow den for multiple wolves. Based on the structure of the den, the wolves snuggle in and tightly pack themselves in the den, as seen in Figure 1. This provides a sense of security for each other and helps to keep them warm during cold nights. As shown by Figure 2, in the general area of the den were found plenty of wolf tracks, some of which were as big as a large adult male’s hand and some smaller. Fresh wolf feces and dead animal carcass bones were found close together in the general vicinity of the den as well.

Bree Pleasant

Working with Bree this semester has been so much fun! It is our second semester working together, so we were able to expand on everything we've done in the past. She is such a creative writer, and I am always impressed by what she brings in. This story, "Song of the Monster," is something we worked on briefly and I love how it turned out. Bree wanted to leave this story up to the interpretation of the reader, which I think she accomplished! I really hope that Bree and I can work together again in the future. She has so many great ideas and I can't wait to see them brought to life. – Bailey Piepenburg

Song of the Monster

“Griffin, will you tell me a story tonight before you go?” the little boy asked quietly from where he peered out from under his covers.

“...I guess I can. What type of story do you want to hear?” The man gruffly asked before he walked from the doorway to the bedside, sitting on the very end.

“Will you tell me about my mother?” the boy trailed off slightly and softly.

The man stood still for a moment before he ran a hand through his blonde hair a slow sighed escaping his maw. “I have a better idea, how about the story of the moon?”

“What is a moon, Griffin?”

The man looked down for a second to think before he glanced back up. “Well a moon is a large rock-like...thing, that sits in the sky and glows, sending light down onto the planet for all, man or monster, to see at night.”

“Oh...Yeah I want a story about the moon.” the little boy said as he snuggled farther into the worn and tattered blankets. He let out a soft cough as he did so.

“Well, once upon a gloomy night the moon wanted a friend, but she had never had a friend nor did she know how to make one. She wanted a friend who would stay up with her all night. No one wanted to be her friend.”

“Why not?” the little boy asked as he coughed loudly.

The man softened his frozen eyes and ran a hand gently along his back. He sighed softly before continuing his story. “Because she was too beautiful. Everyone was scared of her and her beauty and feared she would leave them with only memories of their own ugliness. Because no one wanted to be her friend, she decided every night she would sing a beautiful song to help everyone sleep. She sang this song for anyone to listen to. It was a beautifully sad song because she sang her heart out, waiting for someone to answer her song.”

The little boy coughed again, only this time harder than before. He cleared his throat as the man petted the child’s red hair to calm him. “Sorry.” the little boy whispered.

“It’s alright.” Griffin whispered softly. “Then one night, when the moon was singing, a reply came to the heartfelt song. To the moon’s surprise this reply came from an ungodly monster, covered in fur, teeth, claws, and eyes made out of the bluest tears. It was an ugly monster, but still he talked to the moon, telling her about how much he loved her song. He wanted to hear her voice

more, to hear and feel the compassion and love she weaved into every song she sang. The moon was surprised to hear this but she wasn't about to turn away a friend. From that time on, every night the moon sang her heart out for him. Then one night, he joined in, singing along with her." Griffin said as he tucked the boy tighter into the blankets. "The monster may have been ugly on the outside, but his heart was pretty, and like the moon he sang with his heart. The two of them didn't stop singing for anyone, however one night the moon started to fade." he said gently.

" 'Why do you fade, my friend?' the monster asked the moon.

'Because I sang too much of my heart away for no one to listen to.' she responded.

'But I listened, and I love your songs.'

'I know, dear friend, and I love you for that, but you came to listen to my songs too late. You came when only a little piece of my heart was left.' she sighed softly, 'So I must fade away.'

'Do not leave me! I have never loved one like you.'

'I am sorry.' she cried, 'but I must go. Therefore I will give you my light to hold. Let it warm you when you are cold, and you must grow as it grows.' she whispered as a bright tear fell down her face. The monster reached up and caught the tear out of the sky as the moon went dark. The monster treasured the tear and held it close to his heart." Griffin whispered, the small child about to fall into a deep sleep. "And so the monster took her light and kept it, bathing the land in night. The monster decided that every night he would visit his old friend, and continue to sing, in hopes that her light would once again shine. "

"They must have loved each other very much..." the boy whispered as he gave a soft yawn that became a gentle cough.

"Yes they did." Griffin said as he petted the boy's head again. "It is about time for you to sleep."

"Can I see the moon, Griffin?" the boy asked.

"No, there are too many monsters in the night and it is not yet your time." Griffin said as he stood and walked back to the doorframe. He looked over his shoulder. "Goodnight, Badger." He told the boy softly.

"Goodnight, Griffin." the boy whispered softly as he fell into sleep.

As Griffin passed through the door, the moon shone again.

Heidi Propson

Heidi's poems strike their reader swiftly and powerfully with liberal formatting and beautiful imagery. It's been an honor to work with her, and to witness her literary prowess as it continues to improve. Heidi's included works place the reader in awe of nature's oppression, power, and beauty - and asks the reader where humankind stands in relation. -Jeremy Wolfe

Eroded Peace

Soothing brooks,
Caressing over,
Always moving,
Rarely slowing.

Caressing over,
Smoothing my face,
Rarely slowing,
While existing with grace.

Smoothing my face,
Eroding away,
While existing with grace,
I will eventually go away.

Smooth and flat,
Withered down,
My time has come, to Leave
With the flowing
Of the soothing brook,
Swept away,
The End
Of those peaceful days.

life's metal

cool,
smooth,
shiny,
solid,
not easily broken.

warm,
rough,
rusty,
crumbling,
easily pulled apart.

aging,
weathered,
falling to pieces.

shards,
once strong metal,
breaking up.

life,
once new,
cool,
smooth,
weathered away,
rusty,
rough,
falling to pieces,
aged.

Reckoning Force

Shimmering, Blinding,
Painfully Stabbing.
Harsh, Biting,
Icy-Heat.

Numbing, Drifting,
Aimlessly Shifting.
Brutal, Clinging,
Soaking Bones.

Forgiving?
Not a Bit.

Life Sucking

Soul Crushing

Life Stealing

A snowy tirade,
Just Hang On,

Don't.
Give.
In.

Smokey Dreams

Trapped in sound

no way to get out
this life you've chosen
no longer your own

A bird in a cage

needing to fly
constrained by vices
clamping on tight

The life you imagined

no longer in sight
Drowned out by others
Burnt up by the world
smoke on the Wind
curling away in the Sky

Those dreams lost

Stripped

Away
Gone
Nothing

Left

To

Fight

Nicholas Quisler

At the beginning of the semester, Nicholas knew that he wanted to improve his writing skills, but didn't know what to write. He decided to try some fun writing prompts; in our discussion of one of these, Nicholas told me in passing something funny from a trip he went on. After further inquiry and discussion, Nicholas realized he had a great story to tell: that of his and his family's trip to Utah. Nicholas's story features not only some unique experiences, but lets the reader in on some very humorous moments that occurred on the trip, as well. Being very attentive to detail, Nicholas put great thought into his story's word choice and sentence structure in the effort to describe his trip as perfectly as possible. Whatever the purpose is, Nicholas's dedication to writing as well as he possibly can is evident, and I'm sure that sort of determination will serve him well in his future enterprises. —Erin McCausland

Trip to Utah

August 2017, I got the wonderful opportunity to go with my older siblings and visit my uncle in Utah. First, we stayed the night at my father's girlfriend's house since we were leaving from Milwaukee to the airport. As we drove to the Milwaukee airport early in the morning, we realized how expensive parking was. Parking was so expensive, it may have been cheaper to get a taxi service to the airport. When we checked in to the airport, we were four hours early because my dad didn't want to be late to being early to be early. During those four long hours we played exploding kittens for like an hour, then we all went to watch our individual binge-worthy Netflix shows. When the plane came, I wasn't assigned a window seat, but I ended up sitting near a nice guy who didn't smell bad. Without communication, we both watched Logan on the free little televisions mounted on the back of the seats; we both found it cool how we watched the same movie and were seconds apart from being on the same scene! Later, after the plane ride, my wallet must have fallen out of my side pocket in my shorts, because as we left, I realized it was missing! Luckily, the plane was still there, and my father got my wallet back. This was a blessing: it had a lot of cash, as I didn't want to use my debit card in a different state. When we made it to the outside pick up area after getting our luggage, we saw our uncle and aunt; since they haven't seen us in a long time, we exchanged hugs. Before we went to my uncle's house that afternoon, we went to In-N-Out Burger. It was nice, my siblings and I have never been there, and we were super hungry. Once we sat down and ate, a bunch of police vehicles came out of nowhere and surrounded a nearby hotel on the block. We thought it may have been a drug bust or something of the sort. Later, we drove to Barnes & Noble and got the game Catan. At home, we ate a wonderful dinner prepared by my amazing aunt, who is quite the cook! After dinner, we exchanged laughs and played Catan. During our game, we needed two people on a team because we had too many players. At one point, I was losing as I was lacking clay and wood. My silly-natured family had to make a joke, "Nick can't get wood!"

When we woke up the next morning, we went to Krispy Kreme to lose our donut virginity. After we ate, we went to Sam's Club to fill up on gas. It was interesting; people were all entering the same way. Some people with fuel doors on the opposite side of the fuel pump would drag the gas nozzle across their car to the gas tank. I guess they don't understand how to fill up gas? The traffic in Salt Lake City was busy compared to what we have along our highways in Wisconsin. When we arrived at Krispy Kreme, we were greeted with wonderful music, a silly hat, and a clear view of the donut-making process. Later that day, we went fossil digging at U-Dig Fossils. The road from my

uncle's house to the site was long but full of scenic views. There was a random truck with many bullet holes throughout the structure. Further along, some wild horses ran along the car where we could almost reach our hand out and pet them. When we arrived at the fossil place, it was a field full of split rocks and a rocky mound. Using a pickaxe, we spent about two hours mining for trilobites. After getting the rocks cleaned, we went back to our car and noticed that it was at an angle; we had flat tires! We had to spend the next couple of minutes fixing the tires. While the tires were being fixed, my siblings and I munched on warm leftover donuts. They seemed fresh since they were in the scorching hot car. Upon driving along the rocky path for a while, we noticed it was getting difficult to drive. We pulled over and saw that all of our tires popped. So, we pumped more air into the tires. At this rate, we thought we were never coming home. That scared all my sisters because that morning there was breaking news about a man found dead in the desert. Unlike my sisters, I wasn't scared because I carried a bunch of high protein snacks and water because I wanted to be better safe than sorry. Even worse, we were in the middle of nowhere, where there wasn't even a lick of phone service. We could not contact my aunt, who wasn't able to come with us, about the situation. Luckily, there was another car in the distance, so we waved our arms, as if signaling for help. They stopped and offered us a ride to the nearest town, which was about an hour and a half away, so we could get the tires patched. It turns out they are a Mormon family who teaches at a school with about 30 children and multiple grades combined; their school even offered Advancement Placement classes. I talked to the nice teacher about my career goals, aspirations, and what it is like where I live, and how cheese curds are my favorite delicacy. Later, at the nearest town, we treated them for rescuing us and we went out to a restaurant. I made the mistake of ordering fish; it tasted like the tasteless frozen fish sticks. Along the drive back to my uncle's car, I talked about how Wisconsin is greener than Utah, which is mostly dead looking grass and sand. When reached our car, it was dark outside. Being interested in astronomy, I looked up and clearly saw the milky-way galaxy and thousands of stars, because of the lack of light pollution. When we made it home, my aunt burst into tears because she was so relieved to see us back alive; she imagined the worst, like that featured news story.

The next day, my uncle took us into the city. We first took the Transit Express (TRAX) train to the Clark Planetarium and saw a show with a simulated night sky presentation. After the show, we got root beer floats and took some goofy pictures in the Mars exhibit. I also saw a Foucault pendulum much like the one at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point, but bigger. Interestingly enough, Foucault pendulums help prove that the earth rotates, not the sky. Last, we explored other exhibits in the museum, including a 1,700-pound Nantan meteorite you could touch! Then we took the train downtown to the City Creek Center mall. From there, my sisters and my uncle left to go look around while I stayed with my father. My father and I went to the Apple store, and walked around the mall enjoying the scenery, like the beautiful simulated creek running through the outdoor corridor. My dad and I got bored fast because we weren't that much into shopping, so we sat down near the beautiful fountain. When we were leaving, my uncle came out with the Seafarers expansion pack for Catan, and we couldn't wait to play when we got home. We went to Scheels later that day and took photos with Abe Lincoln and several goofy ones. Inside, there was a giant Ferris wheel in

the store's midst and a 16,000-gallon salt-water fish tank. As we were leaving, there were clearance Utah shirts on display, so we all got matching ones.

The next day we climbed Bear Canyon Trail, which led across and up a beautiful mountain. Although it was a beautiful sight to behold, I only brought one water bottle, which I drank up fast. One of my contacts in my eye ripped; I still wanted to see the trail, so I ignored the irritation in my eye. My siblings and I stopped various times, either my dad or uncle would be behind. Sometimes, my sister, Ashley would trip and cut her knee, which we all laughed at, like the jerks we are! Along the trail, there was a little rocky under-path where we stopped and took photos and cooled down hidden from the scorching sun. At the end of our long journey, we reached the Bear Canyon suspension bridge, which scared some of my sisters when we crossed. To scare my sisters, I jumped and shook the bridge; that pissed them off! Later, we traveled to the Hogle Zoo in Salt Lake City. They had cool exotic animals, some of which I have never seen, and statues there, including Harambe (a gorilla). They also still had the Mold-A-Ramas', originally installed in the 1960s. We got into the World of Flight Bird Show where they had talking birds and trained ones. When the show concluded, you could hold up cash and a parrot would fly up to you, take it, and then put it in a donation box. At one of the gift shops, they had cool stuffed animals. With my shopping impulses, I had to get one as a souvenir. So, I got a white seal, while my sister got an otter; we named them Sealina and Mr. Otterton. After walking around all day, we got exhausted, so we sat in a nearby bench. As we were sitting, this big lady stood right next to us at an uncomfortable distance while talking on the phone. With everyone irritated, my uncle stood up with my sisters, looked at her right in the eye, and said, "do you like my sister wives?". She left. As we were going, I would never forget the Fennec foxes, which reminded me a lot of my dog, Zoey.

A different day, we went to Antelope Island State Park, near the Great Salt Lake. My father and I decided that it would be a cool idea if we both wore the same Deadpool shirt. You could tell when you arrived at the island because of the rotten egg-like smell, due to the hydrogen sulfide byproduct. The lake had a long sandy shore around it and many annoying bugs that would attack your legs. Because of these bugs, I went back to the car while everyone else went knee deep into the lake. My sister took a water bottle and filled it up with water from the Great Salt Lake. Later, we went to the museum and gift shop where I learned that exotic female spiders live longer than their male counterparts because they eat the males after mating. At my uncle's house, we took the water from my sister's water bottle and put it in the oven. It was a better and cheaper souvenir compared to what the gift shop offered.

On the plane ride home, I am reminded by how thankful I was to go on this trip. I am so glad I got to spend time with my aunt and uncle and go out of my comfort zone, away from technology, to do many wonderful outdoor activities. I hope that one day I will go on an amazing trip like this in Idaho, where my uncle lives now.

Lindsey Reiter

It was incredibly fun working with Lindsey and her writing during this past semester. I saw her grow exponentially during our 57' sessions as we collaborated on many pieces, but especially her Applebee's script. I've never worked on a script until this spring, so it was a learning process for both of us and we had a great time together. Some of our main focuses during our sessions was tweaking the dialogue to sound more natural and fleshing out details to expand the plot. Lindsey always came in with questions about her writing and was open to new ideas which made our sessions a breeze. Truly, it was a pleasure working with Lindsey as we shared many laughs in the booth over life and writing. Her positive outlook on life and creativity will take her far. –Jessica Wenzel

APPLEBEES: A TRAGEDY.

ACT I

NARRATOR: It was a cool fall afternoon in Stevens Point, Wisconsin when three roommates were very getting hungry. Shannon, Michaela, and Lindsey were discussing what they should eat for dinner.

Shannon enters the stage

SHANNON: WAIT! I have an Applebee's gift card in my wallet!

*Michaela and Lindsey enter the Stage *

MICHAELA: YESSS!!!

LINDSEY: OH HECK YA! I'll drive!

The three roommates run off stage

NARRATOR: The three roommates hop into the car and head towards Applebee's. They talk about angry professors, boys, and all the homework they should be doing instead of going to Applebee's. [scene change: three girls sitting in Applebee's booth]

NARRATOR: The three girls walk into Applebee's, almost trip over the welcome mat, and the hostess seats them in a booth.

waiter walks up to booth

WAITER: Hi there, my name is Jamal, I will be your server for tonight. What can I get you to drink?

LINDSEY: I will just take a water. With a lemon and no straw please.

SHANNON: Um, I will also take a water!

MICHAELA: Hmmmm... Can I get a Dr. Pepper please?

WAITER: You got it! I'll give you time to look over the menu and I'll be back with your drinks.

Waiter leaves

MICHAELA: What are you girls going to get for dinner?

SHANNON: I'm really not that hungry, I think I'm just going to get the Mozzarella sticks. I can't ever pass up cheese.

LINDSEY: I'm kind of craving a big ol' salad. The Garden Salad looks pretty good.

MICHAELA: MAN, am I the only one who is hungry at this table?! The BLT and the All-You-Can-Eat Fish is the same price... what should I get?

LINDSEY: Definitely the All-You-Can-Eat Fish, I'd like to see how much fish you can actually eat.

MICHAELA: HA. Good idea, I'll take that as a challenge.

waiter walks to the table

WAITER: Alright, have we decided what we are going to get?

SHANNON: Yes, I will have a plate of Mozzarella Sticks.

WAITER: Is that all?

SHANNON: Yes, I'm not that hungry.

WAITER: Great! *Looks at Lindsey* And what can I get you?

LINDSEY: Um, I'll take the Garden Salad with honey mustard dressing please.

WAITER: *Turns to Michaela* and you?

MICHAELA: What kind of fish is the All-You-Can-Eat Fish?

WAITER: Cod.

MICHAELA: Okay, I'll take that, does it come with fries?

WAITER: Yes - unlimited.

MICHAELA: *grins and squints eyes* Grrrrreat, even better! I'll take that.

WAITER: Okay, I will bring you your food when it is ready.

ALL: Thank you!

waiter walks away from table

LINDSEY: So, how was y'all's day?

SHANNON: Hmm *slight pause* the only thing that really sticks out is my lab partner in biology...

MICHAELA: Oh gosh, what about him?

SHANNON: Well he's been my lab partner for a while now and I'm still trying to figure him out. He pretty much comes to every class smelling like pot. He's always trying to cover his face with his hood and he has a very scary voice.

LINDSEY: Wow, he sounds like a great lab partner to work with.

SHANNON: HA, you can only imagine. You know how I've been blowing my nose constantly from this sickness my boyfriend gave me?

LINDSEY AND MICHAELA: Yes.

SHANNON: Well, today I was blowing my nose in biology constantly and I apologized to him because it was getting obnoxious. Then he came closer to me and said: "Don't be sorry, it's satisfying" in a very low and deep tone of voice.

LINDSEY: What in the world!!! That's actually terrifying.

MICHAELA: That's so sketch.

SHANNON: I know right! When he said that my eyes got really big and I didn't know what to say!

ALL: *Laughs*

NARRATOR: Lindsey how the beginning of her week went by talking about the comedian she hosted. This comedian flew in from California and called Lindsey last minute saying he needed a ride from the airport to the venue. He was very unappreciative and unapologetic by his last minute arrival. She began to rant about how she has had many instances with rude comedians off stage.

LINDSEY: But of course when they go on stage they act like these hilarious and likable people. Comedians are the biggest two-faced people I have ever met!

Waiter comes back to table and passes out food to the girls

WAITER: Okay ladies, I have the salad, mozzarella sticks, and the all-you-can-eat fish with fries. Can I get you anything else?

LINDSEY: Nope, this looks great. Thank you!

WAITER: *Looks at Michaela* I'll check back in with you later to see if you would like more fish and fries.

MICHAELA: Sounds good, thanks!

NARRATOR: The three girls continue to chat about their days while eating their meals. The waiter checks back in with Michaela to take her second order of fish and fries. 15 minutes later the waiter comes back with Michaela's second order.

waiter delivers fish and fries to Michaela

WAITER: Here you go! Enjoy.

Walks away from table

LINDSEY: *Suspiciously looks at Michaela's plate* Uhhh... Is it just me or does that plate look really unappealing...?

MICHAELA: *Stares at her plate unhappily* I thought the same thing when he was handing it to me. There's literally like 5 fries and a sad piece of fish... Is this a dirty plate too?!

SHANNON: Well, I don't think that will take you very long to eat. *laughs out loud*

MICHAELA: Is this seriously what the all-you-can-eat fish looks like?? I'll be interested to see what my next plate looks like.

NARRATOR: Michaela eats her small plate of food in 3 1/2 minutes. She expresses that her stomach is getting quite full but wants to order one last plate just to see what it looks like...

Waiter comes back to table

WAITER: Alright, how are we doing here? *looks at Michaela* Can I get you another plate?

MICHAELA: Yeah, I will take just one more plate please and that will be it for me.

Waiter walks away from table

SHANNON: *slouches in booth* ugh, he better bring that back fast because we've been here for a long time.

MICHAELA: How long have we been here?

LINDSEY: *Looks at watch, eyes open wide* Dang, it has already been almost an hour!

MICHAELA: Jeeez, that was fast! This will be my last order and then we can go.

All girls begin to slouch in booth as narrator is talking

NARRATOR: 10 minutes go by.....20 minutes go by... 30 minutes go by and Michaela still hasn't received her third order of fish and fries.

MICHAELA: Where in the HECK is my order?! It's literally been over a half an hour!! They might as well just forget about it because I'm ready to go home.

NARRATOR: Shortly after, the waiter finally comes back to the table. But this time, with no food in his hand for Michaela. He clasps his hand and says...

WAITER: So..... I really don't know how to tell you this *short moment of silence* but someone ate your food...

MICHAELA: *a short moment of silence* What do you mean someone ate my food.....?

WAITER: I mean someone in the kitchen ate your food.....

SHANNON: WHAT?!?!

MICHAELA: Ummmmm...

LINDSEY: You have GOT to be kidding me!! So what, are you going to remake her order?

WAITER: Yes, it should be about a 20-minute wait

MICHAELA: Just forget about that order.

LINDSEY: Yeah seriously, we've been here for a while anyways. Is the manager aware? Can we talk to him?

WAITER: Yes, the manager on duty is aware. I can bring him over.

LINDSEY: Yes, please. I think it would be best if we could talk to him about our experience here tonight...

WAITER: Okay, I will bring him over.

NARRATOR: As the waiter walks away, the girls are both in shock and nervously laughing. In fact, Lindsey was the most irate about this incident.

LINDSEY: You know, I've had so many bad customer service experiences at restaurants and I think this makes it to #1 on my list.

SHANNON: I mean seriously, who in what right mind would think about eating a customers' meal?!

MICHAELA: Well, I've heard that the people in the kitchen here usually come to their shift high or drunk so that already says a lot. *looks at Lindsey* can you just talk to the manager when they come because I feel like you are better at confronting people than I am. *laughs nervously*

LINDSEY: Oh, I would be happy to – I am already fired up about this.

NARRATOR: A very short and stubby man with glasses walks to the girls table with a straight look on his face – this is the manager.

MANAGER: I heard you would like to talk to me?

LINDSEY: Yes. My friends and I have been here for over 2 hours now. We haven't had the greatest service here tonight and on top of it all – one of the cooks in your kitchen ate my friends meal!!

MANAGER: Yes, I am aware that happened.

LINDSEY: So... what are you going to do about this?

MANAGER: I know who ate the food and I already talked to them.

LINDSEY: Alright, but she shouldn't have to pay for a meal that someone else ate.

MANAGER: If you wouldn't mind giving me a moment, I'll see what I can do.

Manager walks away

LINDSEY: OK, I am now even more fired up than I was before. How unprofessional of him – he didn't even show sympathy. That was TERRIBLE!!

SHANNON: Seriously?! I am never coming here again!!

MICHAELA: I hope he comes back and compensates our bill somehow otherwise I'll have my dad call and complain because he likes doing that kind of stuff.

SHANNON: He should call this place regardless!

MICHAELA: Oh, don't worry. Once I tell him about our experience he will GLADLY call.

Manager walks back to table

MANAGER: I have taken your fish and fries off the bill. Is that okay?

ALL: Yup.

MANAGER: Okay then, drive home safe.

Manager walks away

SHANNON: *quietly yelling* HE DIDN'T EVEN APOLOGIZE!!!!

MICHAELA: You know I hoped he would've but really didn't think he was going to.

LINDSEY: UGH, let's get out of here.

SHANNON: Hey, on the plus side - at least I had a gift card!!

ALL: *Laughs*

NARRATOR: The girls exit Applebee's loudly yelling in the parking lot about their frustration on the way to their car. They are in awe about their experience. During the ride home they begin laughing about the whole situation and realized that after all they had a good time telling each other stories and enjoying one another's company. The three girls are thankful for one more crazy story to add to all of their other cherished memories spent with one another.

McKenna Rentmeester

It has been a pleasure to get to know McKenna over this past academic year. Her passion for her creative writing was matched with the thought and energy she put into each piece. I was quite fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a learner who took everything said in the booth quite seriously; McKenna used the sessions to refine her style and ongoing stories. In every session, I was always impressed with what McKenna put forth, and I know she has both the tools needed and mindfulness to continue towards her path of successful writing. – Jared Burkart

[*To view the complete story, contact McKenna at mrent294@uwsp.edu*](mailto:mrent294@uwsp.edu)

The Struggle

The ball flew through the air before dive bombing and joining a pile of crumpled rejects. A long groan that sounded like a growl floated through the air. Most of the nights ended with utter frustration and disappointment. The shrill squawk of the chair being thrown back took over the room with hard footsteps echoing it. Nights like this seemed to be on repeat. Ideas came so easy, creativity flowed with the wind but was now terminated by never ending writers block.

The bitter aroma swept through the apartment while the sun greeted the new day. A steaming cup of coffee reached her lips and glided down her throat warming her belly from the inside-out. Gazing through the wall made entirely of windows, it seemed like she was already outside flowing with the morning commuter traffic bumping around below her. The skyline is littered with buildings of all shapes and sizes, where people were holding business meetings or photoshoots. Subdued sounds of traffic reached through the glass and breaching her serene silence. The sun peeked through the complex across the street and kissed her skin with steam rising from her mug and coating her cheeks. The light was bright even though life had grown dull, void of adventure and curiosity. No promising tomorrows, only endless today's.

Turning to the inside of the apartment she sat in a winged back chair, careful not to spill her coffee, and stared at the wall ahead of her. No pictures hung there, no lights shining to chase away the shadows that night would bring, just a wall. There were faded spots dotted along the walls that boxed her in, places where pictures and framed milestones were once proudly displayed. The faded spots only reminded her of what she had lost and yet to find again. The simple furniture that completed the ensemble offered a place to sit but came up short on comfort.

Unfolding herself from the vintage chair, she wandered past her desk that was covered in unorganized paper and went straight to her coffee pot with a fresh brew waiting for her. Filling her cup, she grabbed a granola bar and plopped herself in her desk chair. Writing was a safe place, no matter how challenging it was, it was familiar and safe. Yet, something that had been so natural now resembled a passing stranger on the street. Careful not to disrupt the chaos, she set her cup down and folded her hands in her lap. Most days, she would sit there for hours. The wrapper from the granola bar lay discarded on the floor and her hands still in her lap. Night descended when she picked up her pen to write a single word. Controversy.

Her mind is dormant except for a small spark of interest. Something she hasn't felt since she lost her feel for writing. She glanced at the taped box sitting in the dimly lit corner of her apartment. Out of the way and forgotten but ever present – the box hadn't been touched since she'd lost it.

She turned back to her desk eyeballing the paper sitting in front of her, full of possibilities. Her hand would reach for her pen but hover in the air before touching back down into her lap. The still silence taking over her apartment was broken by a growl from her stomach. The day had come and gone with no progress. She got up to grab the necessities before shutting the door behind her.

Crisp cool air breezed by her as she walked down the street. People flowed by her, carried by the current of traffic. But she walked against the crowd, a standout that others ignored. Shoulders brushed past her, briefcases jabbed at her thighs while people seemed to walk through her. Seemingly ghost like, she wandered through the crowd glancing at the different glowing signs promising delicious food and drinks. The chime of a bell followed her through the door and into the restaurant. Small tables were scattered throughout the dining room and booths lined the walls. She walked up to the counter taking out her wallet the cashier asked, “The usual?”

She nodded taking her order number and turning to face the dining room before walking to the booth in the corner. This was the spot she always sat at – running her fingers over the vinyl cushions feeling the cracks and where chunks were missing in some spots. Loud laughter came from the other side of the room where a family sat eating dinner, the parents making silly faces to their young children. Squeals of joy erupted from the tiny children and carried throughout the whole place. The chime of the bell from the door followed the newest addition to the restaurant up to the counter. The man walked quickly and directly to the cashier, murmuring quietly to her. The cashier responded, “Yeah, she’s over there.”

Her pasta plate arrived with her cup of water, bringing her attention back into focus. The pasta twirled with her fork, the same way it had last night. Immersed in her dinner, an incoming stranger saw the perfect time to strike, bounding into the seat across her table. “Hi! My name is Mike Stevenson,” he all but shouted at her, “and I can’t believe I am meeting you! I’ve been following your career since the beginning!”

Mike’s sudden outburst startled her so much that her fork flew from her hand, noodles flying and sauce splattering the walls. Putting a hand to her chest she tried to control her racing pulse, squeezing her eyes shut to block him out.

“Oh! I’m so sorry! I didn’t scare you, did I? I’m just so excited that I saw you here! Is it ok if I sit here? I have lots of questions to ask you,” he rattled off so quick his words ran together. She saw him watching her with wide eyes and a hopeful expression on his face. He didn’t seem to be going anywhere without getting what he wanted, she wondered why he was so interested in talking to her. People didn’t notice someone like her, someone who didn’t offer the world anything and didn’t expect any favors. She figured she was doomed to an existence where she wasn’t acknowledged like she once was, where she used to have luxury but faced hardships instead.

“Do you mind? I am a huge fan of your work. I hope to be a writer myself!” Mike roused her from the inner monologue running ramped through her head.

“What do you ... want to know?” she rasped. She didn’t talk to anyone, conversations seemed to be a privilege afforded to people who weren’t like her.

“Thank you so much! Okay, first where did you learn to write? Where did you study? What advice do you have for writers? Where did you get your material from?” Firing off question after

question, Mike pulled out a recorder and held it up. His eyes glinting off the lights in the restaurant, hopeful and excited.

She hesitated for a minute taking a drink of water, her heartbeat rising with each passing second. She second guessed her decision to talk to him but processed each question carefully, formulating answers she could remember.

Clearing her throat, she looked anywhere but his waiting eyes before she answered unevenly, “I...love... reading. Writing...makes... books. I ... learned ... how to write. Associate degree... journalism. Advice...”

She faltered on what to say next, unsure of what answer could really satisfy the question. Being plagued by writers block for years has left her hollow and undefined in writing. She didn't have to answer, there was no obligation here and yet, she found herself wanting to answer. Only a fraction of her felt this way, but it was there, clawing its way into the light – determined to be seen and not ignored. She wracked her brain for answer. Scrunching her eyebrows together in deep thought, she took a deep breath “Writer's block only lasts ... for as long as you allow it to control ... your work.”

Mike looked at her with slight adoration and awe, his recorder still pointed towards her. She hadn't spoken this much in such a long time. Her gaze was fixed on the table while she answered, not having the confidence to look at his face let alone his pinned gaze. She didn't know how to handle his reaction to her answers. Squirming uncomfortably in her booth, her knuckles were white under the table and crescent moons adorned her flesh. Her eyes darted back and forth from the table to Mike waiting for him to make the next move. She didn't understand what to do next and was growing more uncomfortable by the second.

Mike set down the recorder before speaking, “Thank you so much for answering my questions. I just have one more –” he paused and looked at her, “why did you stop writing?” She drew in a sharp breath and panic clutched at her throat. This was something that she had hoped to avoid, the skeleton that was lying in the box in her apartment. Not wanting to draw up an answer she shook her head slightly, trying to show she didn't want to answer.

The Hard 'R'

There is this girl who hails from the best Wisconsin has to offer,
Milwaukee

Yes, this is not a place to boast about
yet she wears her pride on her lips, spewing
this false confidence that melts away with her makeup.

When we met there was nothing I could gain
from simply knowing who this girl was,
she was not someone that I would find myself gravitating towards
even though she wormed her way into my life.

I accepted that she was here to stay through mutual
friendships, but kept my distance and only saw her at dinnertime
where she would tap her acrylics on the table so everyone
knew she was irritated.

There is this thing that girls will do to prove a point,
the extravagant hair flip that is supposed to be insulting
to others, this girl was a master shit talker
who had great hair. Can't say I blame

her for doing it, although she had no real reason to spout her nonsense
she looked me dead in the eyes and tried to convince me that I am a bad friend,
writer and an overall terrible human that she doesn't want to see
ever again. I sat up straight, held her gaze and executed a perfect hair flip

before I said,
I respect your feelings.

Abbigale Rohde

Working the Abbigale has been fantastic: she approached her work with determination and good humor every single week, we worked on her short story, *The Real O.G.*, for the majority of this semester, making several revisions and additions throughout. Though not included in its entirety, this story illustrates the injustice and agony that food-service employees face every day as they try to maintain a personal life amidst the chaos of an underpaid and under-appreciated job. –Jeremy Wolfe

The Real O.G.

“What people don’t understand about working as a server is that sweet relief of finally being off your feet after 10 to 12 hours, and as a server you will take any opportunity to do so, sitting in the back booth, sitting at the bar, sitting on a box of unopened red wine that still hasn’t been put away from last week’s truck. There is a whole lot of opportunities we will take, but a whole lot more that we don’t.”

“Is this good?” I say to one of our bussers

“Yeah, I think it perfectly describes that horrible feeling in our feet and how people are willing to do **ANYTHING** to sit down and be lazy”

“So your saying it sucks.”

“No, not completely. I think it just need to be put in a different way”

Jared was my go to busser, he understood how to start a really great conversation about anything, from football to chemistry, he was on the same level intellectually to me, from him graduating last semester with a bachelors in political science and me working on my last semester for a major in English.

“Paisley!” someone shouted.

It was Tori, another server,

“Do you have my strawberry margarita made?”

Quickly getting up to hear her at the bar window,

“Sorry Tori, I’ll start it right now. It’ll probably be like a minute or two.”

“Okay, it’s no problem, just put it in anyway” she giggled

“What? why are you giggling” I say as I’m adding all the ingredients, 4oz strawberry margarita mix, 1 ¼ oz tequila and 1 oz. sour.

“You, girl it is so obvious that you are in love with him and as I mention it you are blushing so hard right now”

I put ice on the blender and start it, glancing over my shoulder, I see Jared has left the bar top were I had left him.

“Shhh you will give it away, but I already know probably everyone here in this restaurant knows I have a crush on him since apparently I am the only person he ever talks to.”

“True and true”

“Here” I say as I hand her the margarita and walked back over to the bar top where I was sitting only a minute or two ago. Leo came through the door behind the bar with a plate of five cheese fanduda,

“Here ya go” he said with a big smile on his face,

“Awww thank you, you are now my favorite cook”

“I thought I was always your favorite”

“Yes, you always have been, but I like to remind you”

Okay, I have to go back now” as he walked back through the door I look over to see three other people at the bar top, so much for eating something today. I put my plate of chips and dip into a togo container, we are the hungerist of people, servers are, we get to see the food all day but never actually get to eat it.

“Hello everyone are we waiting for a table or are we going to be eating up at the bar top? I ask the three guests, they look at each other, whisper a little bit.

“We are going to eat up here, and we would like it to be snappy, we are in a hurry”

“Okay, what can I get you then?” I ask

“Well we will need a few minutes to decide.” The guest said snarky back

“Well that isn’t as quick as I thought you wanted it” I thought

I put down my order slips and go eat a chip from my Togo container, it was delicious but I had only an opportunity for one when the lady yelled,

“Are you going to take our order or not?”

“So I guess you had enough time to decide, what can I get you guys then?”

I take down their order

1. 6 oz sirloin made medium rare with a salad
2. Herb grilled salmon with a salad, and,
3. Create your own pasta with cavatappi, creamy pesto and grilled chicken and salad

“Anything else?” I question

“No” they all say in unison

I go into the back kitchen area and it is complete chaos, everyone was in everyone’s way shouting for servers to drop off food. servers, managers, Togo specialists yelling “in” and “out” as they come through the doors. Jared almost dropping a whole tray of glasses from someone not saying in or out

loud enough, some scrambling for their soup, salad, and breadsticks to get out before they get sat another table. The heat in the back from the grills and ovens didn't help either, they make it hot and unbearable at times but when everyone is moving around we can already feel the overwhelming sensation of the workday becoming unbearable, as well sweat making our skin glistening, even though we had only opened our doors not thirty minutes ago,

I eventually make it to the salad station

"I need a salad for three" I think as I place the bowl on the scale

5.8 oz of salad, 3 tomatoes (one per person), 1 spoon of onions, 3 black olives (one per person), and 3 banana peppers (one per person) tossing this all into the bowl, I place 3 scoops of our house famous Italian dressing on top along with a scoop full of croutons.

This is how we usually make our salads unless the guest specified to do anything different, placing the bowl onto a tray I get out three salad plates and three breadstick plates and place them on the tray along side the salad, making my way over to the breadstick heater, according to our standards within the company we are only supposed to bring the amount of breadsticks that match the amount of people within that order but I normally bring six because then each person at least get two one their first round of breadsticks. I place the tray on my shoulder and scream "out" as I anticipate to make my way through the swinging door, someone kicks the door in and hits my tray, knocking the salad onto my shoulder and chest area but also having the plates crash to the floor, but all I hear afterwards was Jared telling me not to move, I was surrounded by shades of plate and salad, "can someone make me another salad for three and get six more breadsticks on a tray for me" I yell

"I got it." I hear someone shout back

"Is it okay if I move" I ask Jared

"Yeah" he says back

I get to the sink and wipe up the dressing from my shoulder and some of my hair then moving quickly to get my new salad, it looks exactly the same, and try to attempt to leave again, this time making it through successfully, reaching the bar top I am faced with three stern faces;

"It's about time" said the lady who had asked for this meal to be a rush

"I'm sorry, I had a run in with the door, would you like cheese on your salad" I say apologetically while holding the cheese grater over the salad bowl

"Yes, but we're are their salads, every time we come here the other bartender gives us individual salads!" The lady angrily questioned.

"Are you all going to pay together?" I ask

"Yes of course, it is my treat today since... we- are- again-in-a-rush"

“Sorry but we treat any guest that sit, or pay together at the bar as if they were sitting at a table since you all have ordered together and have admitted that you were all paying together, so I have made 1 salad portioned out for three people as our standards state.”

I look over at the bar window, *“Gosh I have to make their drinks”*,

“But that’s not what the other bartender does he would always get our salads separated because we would come up to the bar just for him to serve us”

“There are almost six drink slip piled up on the printer, god damnit”,

“I am sorry, but this is the way that our standards say we have to bring a salad out”

“No, I am not going to accept this! Is the other bartender here to serve us instead?”

“I don't have time for this! This is bullshit! I got other things to do before the other bartender comes in!”

“Sorry, no he is not here, I actually am his replacement from him calling in sick and I will get a manager for you” I say through gritted teeth.

Walking back into the back kitchen I search for a manager, sometimes it’s like a game of hide and go seek but eventually after a few minutes you find one of the three managers that are on duty.

“Hey Tina” I shouted across the room.

Grabbing her attention we meet each other,

“Can you go talk to the three ladies at the bar top, they are complaining about the salad being in one bowl and I have drinks up to make, and I honestly can’t Handle them right now!”

“Yeah I can, I’ll let you know what they Say”

Going back behind the bar with her I start to make all the servers drinks while she explained everything the same exact way I’d previously had, all I could here was the same excuses from them. Them without realizing someone else was tapping me on the shoulder, but it couldn’t be the manager because she was still talking in the background,

“Hey! I’m here to take your spot”

Turning I see Hope,

“Oh thank god, it has been a day but everything should be in order, there are two extra bottles of sangria mix and extra fruit cut up” I say speaking quickly noticing the manager looking at me,

“Great! I can take over the rest of the drinks if you want to head out that’s fine”

“First I just have to finish talking to the manager then I will head out”

Walking the the manager she gave me a grim look,

“I can definitely understand why you were getting nowhere with them, they still didn’t understand even when I was telling them the same exact thing you told them, so they left, witch is fine by me. Anyway I’ll take you off the drawer and clock you out”

“Thanks! sometime I just wish people would understand what we go through and how they sometimes make are job more difficult than it has to be.”

“Yeah, me too, but there you are clocked out, have a good day”

“You too” I say ending the conversation while shifting closer to the coat rack.

Grabbing my coat and bag, I leave almost in a run, making my way out the door before anyone else could ask me to do something for them. Walking into the parking lot the sun hits my face, warming me like I have been in a cave for most of my life, walking around the building I walk to my car. My car is an added bonus to why I work at all, but it is one of my prized possessions. She is a sunflower yellow jeep wrangler with a removable black top with a giant sunflower painted onto the spare tire cover on the back of the car, this always makes me smile, and brights my day each and everyday because it is different from all the other cars in most parking lots, but what also brightened my day is that I see Jared standing there by my car waiting for me,

“Hey stranger, you like my beauty ” I ask as I slap my cars spare tire,

“Actually I do, it’s different but in a good way” he says

“Exactly what I thought when I got her, what can I help you with since you might have been here awhile?”

“Only a few minutes, I saw you talking to Hope when I was walking out so I thought to wait to ask you...” he started to stutter

“Ask me to finish my ess...”

Cutting me off

“will you go out with me tonight” he says almost so quaintly I couldn't hear him

I didn't even know what to say, I liked him and now I know he likes me but this was something that I never thought would happen, let alone to myself, standing there shocked I open my mouth and nothing comes out. He is about to turn when I practically shout in his ear,

“Yes, I... I would love to”

He is smiling ear to ear.

“Great I will pick you up tonight, what time works for you?”

Well I have to shower and clean up after working in that hell hole”

We laugh together which almost seems like something that has to be savored now,

“well what time is it now?”

“It’s almost 4:00pm,” he replied to my question

“How about... 7pm so we have enough opportunity to whatever your planning” I say also smiling ear to ear as well.

“Sounds great” he answers and pecks me on the cheek, which surprised me still, He wrote his number on the back of my hand with one of my pens from my apron, I stood there looking at him as he went to his car, he waved me goodbye as he drove past. I got in my car and drove home, but my home isn't any ordinary home, I live above a bookstore that owned by an old couple, the Harpers, I work for them part-time along with my job at Olive Garden, this helps me pay but also Helps me send My leftover money to my mother, I help her out because she is a single parent that was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer, she had lost her left breast but that didn't stop her from being the strongest person I know, with all the treatment she has been drowning in slightly shallow waters, Her medical bills keep coming but she pays them off one by one and I try to send her as much as possible to get her through paycheck to paycheck, I also do this because she was the one who had told me to follow what I wanted, so I went to school. The Harpers understand my desire to help my mother that is how I had gotten this apartment anyway, I was here in the very bookshop talking to Mr. Harper and suggested to look at the apartment upstairs, he gave me a chance, It looked almost exactly like the store itself a long wall of bookshelves covered with dusty leather bound books for exploring, but what caught my eye was a spiral staircase opposite me, I went up the stairs and there was a little lofted nook above the shelves It had even more shelves but empty, this would be the perfect spot for my collection and a study area. I loved it.

“Are you renting it?” I question him

“Yeah, we had It up for \$400.00 an month but, for you and your mother sweetheart, I would take cut it in half and only ask if you could help out downstairs because me and Mrs. Harper aint gettin any younger”

“That I can definitely do, for both of you, and for being so kind”

I shake his hand, and head to get my things

...

I place my arm through my knitted sweatshirt, I had looked at the weather it was supposed to be tonight in ... and it was supposed to be warm around 50 but have some winds, I didn't want to be cold because I didn't know what we were doing tonight, threw my nice jeans on and my mockers. I didn't really own any dresses except my prom dress that would probably be too puffy or extreme for this occasion so I stuck with comfort, which I was glad.

Dalton Sell

It has been a pleasure to work with a writer as talented as Dalton in the '57 sessions. Dalton's ability to make the reader feel as though they are present and experiencing what he writes about in his stories and poems is incredible. It was a lot of fun to get to know Dalton and the experiences he has had that inspire his writing, and I'm so glad I was able to see his writing grow during our sessions. The poem that Dalton has chosen to publish illustrates the type of writing he excels at and demonstrates the relatable themes he focuses on. I was impressed with Dalton's ideas and writing in each and every session, and I hope that his passion for writing never ceases. –Teresa Lind

Company

It was a night just like any other.
I watched old episodes of *The Office* when I should be sleeping.
I kept telling myself I'll stop after this one ends,
but that was five episodes ago.

A sudden sound from outside my room startled me,
and I muted the television to hear it clearly.
Time seemed to stop forever as I listened,
but I knew I heard something.

Footsteps.

They were quiet at first,
but got louder each second.
They got closer,
and finally stopped outside my door.

Which slowly creaked open.

I had no idea what would be on the other side,
but I would soon find out.
I didn't usually scare easily,
but this time was different.

Why? Because I live alone.

I remained in bed as the door swung wide,
too terrified to react.
It finally opened,
but there was nothing on the other side.

I grabbed my trusty baseball bat from under the bed
and cautiously ventured throughout the apartment.
Every second seemed like an eternity
as I waited for something to jump out at me like in the movies.

Nothing.

The front door was locked,
and the kitchen was empty.
The bathroom was clear,
and so was the guest room.

Must've been nothing.

I went back to my room
and locked the door behind me.
I crawled into bed
and shut my eyes.

But then I felt something.

The warm feeling of someone breathing against my neck beside me.

Angela Stoker

It has been a great semester working with Angela and getting to know her as a writer. Not only that, but her passion for writing and storytelling has made for some fun discussions in the booth. This semester we worked on fine tuning a short story she has been working on since last year. Specifically, we looked at developing her characters in a way that tests the complex friendship between two inseparable girls—Leanna and Madisyn. I know Angela will continue to dedicate herself to creative writing as she has done this semester. –Ben Vosters

Madisyn and Leanna had known each other for nearly their entire lives. When they were three, their parents both moved into the neighborhood in which they now lived, and almost as soon as they met, Madi and Anna were inseparable. If you found Madi, there was a big chance you would find Anna with her. The idea of the girls spending more than a day or two apart was something that by the time they were four, neither one of them could comprehend.

When the girls were old enough to go to school, their parents had to somehow, every year, convince the school board to let them be in the same classes. Madi and Anna would spend all of their time complaining, should they ever have to be apart for any length of time longer than a day. Even though they lived across the street from one another, they could not bear to be apart, and as soon as they would be apart, they were counting the hours until they could see each other again.

When they were in middle school, and puberty started it right along with them, Madi ended up falling for the boys, while Anna ended up going the other way and being much more interested in girls. Thinking their parents would never understand, the first –and only – person Anna told that she liked girls was, of course, her best friend Madi.

When Madi found out that her best friend liked girls and wasn't interested in boys like she herself was, for some reason, she felt relief. Since Anna would most likely never end up being interested in the same boys Madi might like in the future, she knew that they would never end up breaking their friendship over a boy like the girls on TV were always doing with their best friends. But on the other hand, she also felt... jealousy? She didn't know why, but she was never completely sure what these extreme feelings she had around Anna were all about.

The first thought that Madisyn had when Anna told her that she liked girls was of course, as it is with most people, "Does she like me?" Not wanting to ask her friend that obnoxious question and potentially ruin their friendship, she just simply asked, "Oh, that's awesome. Is there anyone you are interested in right now?" When Anna shook her head and told her that no, she hadn't met anyone she was interested in yet, Madi was relieved. If she wasn't interested in anyone at all, for sure it meant that Madi was safe, and their friendship was safe.

Over the next few months, Madisyn and Leanna would go to the mall almost every day, and they would order chocolate and strawberry milkshakes while they sat in the food court and people-watched for hours. Not only was this their favorite way to spend time together, they were also satisfying both of their desires for finding someone to be with romantically. Leanna would watch for the cute boys for Madisyn, and Madisyn would watch for the girls for Leanna. Sometimes they would trade milkshakes, but they each either seemed to prefer either chocolate or strawberry. Sharing everything had been something that they had been doing since they were very little, so naturally, sharing the responsibility of looking for a romantic partner seemed to come almost natural to them.

Over the course of their adventures at the mall and around their small town, Madi and Leanna started to realize what sort of person they were interested in. Their tastes seemed to be alike, except for the major difference of gender of course. Madi seemed to like blonde boys with muscles

and dark green eyes, and Leanna seemed to go for the girls with brown curls and blue eyes. It took them a few more years to realize why they ended up feeling these ideas of a partner.

When Madi would spy a girl that she thought that Leanna would find cute and nice, she would give an extra-large sip of her chocolate milkshake, and when Leanna thought that Madisyn would like, she would do the same with her strawberry shake. They would point subtly with their eyes, and when the person in question would pass by the table they were sitting at, either girl would give either a nod or a shake of her head. If they would end up being really interested in someone that they might see at the mall, they would come back to the mall alone later in the week, and they would try and wait for the person to come back and see if they could get a chance to talk to the person of their choice.

There seemed to be times when they would reach success with the person they were interested in, but most of the time, nothing ever came of it. If they would end up going home with the phone number of their respective love interest, they would go over to the other girl's house and tell her all about it. Since the girls were only twelve, going out on "dates" wasn't really an option, but spending time with their interested person with a few of Madi and Anna's other friends was fine. Being a small town and being a middle school of only about three hundred kids, their parents knew most of the kids, but none were to be ever left alone with either Leanna or Madisyn.

When they would get a call the next day after spending time with the person they liked, each of the girls would hope that it was not a call saying that the boy or girl didn't want to see Leanna or Madisyn anymore. However, living in such a small town in the south, it was nearly impossible to go without seeing another kid for more than a few days. Having classes of about fifteen kids, all stuffed in a school that was housed in one long hallway on the edge of the woods of the small town was something that made it feel like if you have a conflict with anyone, the whole school would be bound to hear about it at least by the end of the week.

When Madisyn and Leanna had been doing their ritual of going to the mall for about a month, Madi came to Leanna one afternoon, thinking she had met someone. "Who is he? Where did you see him? Give me all the details, please!" Leanna's face lit up when she realized that her best friend may have finally been successful.

"So, his name is **Logan**, and he is my advanced science class. He sits a few rows away from me, and he chose me for his partner for our science project due in a few weeks. He has a whole bunch of friends in our class they he could have asked to be his partner, but he chose me. We got to talking yesterday during the work time for our project during class, and he asked me if I wanted to go to the park for a picnic this weekend. I told him I would have to ask my parents if I could go, but most likely, I should be able to go. Would you want to come with us? Since you know, the whole we can't go alone thing. It would help me out so much, if you went with us."

"Of course I will go with you! I wouldn't miss it for the world. I just hope that he will not end up standing you up like **Marigold** did for me. She said she would meet me at the movie theater at five last Sunday for the movie marathon they were having. I waited for her until seven, and then she ended up telling me the next day at school that she had to do homework, so she wasn't allowed to go. It's a small town, she could have just come to my house for like two minutes to tell me." Shaking her head to get herself out of her own thoughts, Leanna realized that Madi was looking at her funny. "Sorry, we're not talking about me. We're talking about you, now. I'll ask my parents, too, and I will let you know what they say later. I'm so excited for you."

When Madisyn and Leanna both got confirmation of going to the park with **Logan**, they met him at the park down the street from the school. "Hey, Madi! Who is this?" he asked, pointing towards Leanna.

"I'm Leanna. I'm Madi's best friend. Our parents have weird rules that we aren't allowed to go anywhere alone with a date, so I came with her so her parents would let her come. I hope that's

okay.” Seeing **Logan** nod, Madi sat down on the picnic blanket next to him, and Leanna grabbed some of the food from the basket she and Madisyn had brought and went to sit at a picnic table about ten feet away. “I don’t want to intrude or anything.” Was her answer, when Madi gave her their customary what-are-you-doing look. Shrugging, Madi and Leanna both smiled to each other and Madi continued spending time with **Logan**, until it started getting dark so they all had to go home for dinner and to get ready for school the next morning.

At home that evening, Madi and Leanna traded messages back and forth through their bedroom windows, using the small white boards they had bought years ago for just that purpose. “I don’t know if things will work out with **Logan**. He kept looking at you when he thought I didn’t notice. I even told him a few times that you weren’t interested, but he kept insisting that I give him your information, so he could ask you himself.” Madi wrote over a few uses over her board, as she watched Leanna’s face contort in disgust.

“Definitely drop him like a hot pancake. He doesn’t deserve your attention, and you don’t deserve to waste your valuable time,” came the angry face and capital letters from Anna’s board. Trying to hide her smile at Anna’s protective reaction, Madi drew a huge heart on her board. “I love you, Anna. You’re the best. Thank you for being so amazing. Thank you for coming with me today. I don’t think it would have been nearly as easy to spend time with him if you hadn’t been there. XO.” She decided that once she saw Madi nod and smile, she was going to bed. She blew Leanna a kiss and an air hug, closed her curtains, and went to bed.

When Madisyn fell asleep, she was transported to a place where she almost didn’t recognize. She looked around and she looked in the direction of a small voice she heard behind her. Turning around, she saw Leanna, and she started to walk to her. “Anna? What are you doing here? What’s going on?” Seeing Leanna smiling at her, saying nothing, Madi saw Leanna coming towards her with a look she had never seen before.

When Leanna reached her, she didn’t even have time to think before Leanna’s lips met hers. It was something that Madi would never think about, and something even more interesting was that she wasn’t surprised. She had thought that since Leanna had told her that she preferred females, that with how much time they spent together, something like this was bound to happen. Kissing Anna back was something that Madi was surprised at, but something that she could not say was not something she had been thinking about for a long time. Madi knew that she loved her best friend, but she was also unsure if she loved her. Being with her was something that we could not imagine, but it was also something she couldn’t not imagine.

Confused, pulling away, and breathless, Madisyn looked at Leanna and saw her fading away, and when Leanna disappeared behind the tree she had started behind before the kiss, Madi blinked as she watched Leanna slowly fade. Blinking, she opened her eyes and she was back in her bedroom, panting. Touching her lips, she looked into the mirror over her dresser, and she saw something in her eyes that she had never seen. It seemed vaguely similar to a face she had seen before, but as she tried to think about where she had seen it, it slowly became more and more fuzzy.

Brianna Stumpner

I had the pleasure of working with Brianna last semester and was excited that I had the opportunity to work with her again. We continued reading through and discussing the learner's individual chapters which are part of a larger novel she is constructing. Time and time again, I am amazed at the learner's seemingly natural talent to descriptively detail certain characters, actions, or elements through writing. I am excited Brianna took the leap to publish a chapter in *WordPlay* this semester. This chapter was one that took us multiple sessions to review and is a good representation of the work she has done throughout the semester. To put this chapter in context, it is towards the beginning and describes the first time the two main characters meet.

When revising this submission for *WordPlay*, Brianna did a wonderful job of being cognizant of the background knowledge readers would need to know to understand the chapter. I'm proud of what Brianna has accomplished this semester, and I predict that this is only the beginning of her publishing career.

—Halee Fritsch

Chasing Demons

I can't shake the feeling that I need to be somewhere. It's that odd itch in the back of my brain, like I've forgotten something.

People step aside as I jog by with a limp, earning me looks of concern as well as disdain. Picking up the pace hurts, but I swallow the pain. It's not the first nor will it be the last time I need to get somewhere faster than my bad leg will allow. But it is the first time I've felt such a need to be there *now*.

Unlike in my premonition, the park isn't nearby. Though, with my focus being as all-consuming as it is, it feels like I've only walked for a matter of moments before it finally comes into view. The park is rarely patrolled by police, making it a nice hiding place. It's a good place for a drop off, too.

I do my best not to count the passing moments, as I approach. It's been too long, I'm almost out of time! But no, that's impossible. There couldn't be something here that would require me to get there in under ten minutes, I reassure myself.

Except my premonitions tend to be a carnival mirror of what will happen. Reality will be very similar to the vision, only it'll be changed in a way I couldn't have expected. It's very likely my premonition will be right, and I'll find a little, broken creature here. I only hope that if it does have wings – like in the vision – it won't have the humanoid form and striking blue eyes I saw. I can barely feed myself, not to mention a winged man.

"Carnival mirror, Mar. They're always similar, not the same," I chant, quietly. It doesn't make me feel any better. But I keep walking. The urgent *hurry, hurry* ringing in the back of my head, driving me on.

I stalk into the park, no one in sight – not at this time of night. My small knife is heavy in my boot. It's my only source of protection. I stride through the grassy plain that serves as the park's entrance, keeping an eye out for anything suspicious.

My heart pounding, I do my best to walk through my premonition. I'd been near the center of the park, by the jack pine – past the small pond, but before the gorgeous weeping willow tree.

Alright, so I'll head towards the pond, then take a right at the mossy rock that looks like a melting gummy bear, until I find one of the few jack pines in town, and I'll huddle under its neighboring fir. Then I'll wait for my bird man.

That's when I hear it. The first crash, followed quickly by a second and a third. Soon the foliage is alive with fleeing birds and chattering squirrels.

I'm late.

Breaking into a run – although an awkward one – I sprint for the fir.

I should be there already. I needed to be under that tree, watching. Wondering what the hell is coming through the forest at such a high speed.

Well, now the winged beast isn't the only one barreling through the park at breakneck speeds. Cursing quietly under my breath, I hop a log, not daring to let my cramping legs slow me in the slightest. My life – or another's – could depend on me getting there in time.

The pine's branches narrowly avoid taking my head off as I run. I duck just in time, stumbling as my center of gravity shifts –

The branches above me begin to crack as I fall, the snapping filling my ears. I awkwardly half fall, half roll into a large fern nearby. The ground shakes as the branches give way, falling to the ground only inches from where I'd been, a moment before. I resist the urge to run, scared to reveal my position.

My ears strain, listening hard for any noise – any sign of movement. Is it awake? Is it human? Animal? Or is it that winged monster from my premonition? When I hear nothing I slowly rise, peeking through green leaves, and my own coils of hair, to the source of the crash.

A man lays sprawled across the branch, limbs dangling limp. Unconscious... Or dead.

He has fair skin, dark hair and a muscular frame. And he resembles the monster from my vision too much for comfort. Though with his face partially obscured by leaves and branches it's hard to be sure. Especially because white, athletic man isn't the most outlandish body type, even on this side of town.

If he has wings, they're hidden under branches. Could the wings be a metaphor? It wouldn't be the first time something literal in my visions turned out to be something more symbolic in reality.

Standing slowly, I start to move closer. Maybe a better angle will give me a clearer view, let me answer whether he's human, or something different.

Something twitches under the greenery. It's not his arms, those are in plain view. Either way, I don't want to be in sight when he takes those leaves off from over his eyes.

Stumbling to my feet, I hurry over to the fir and burrow under its branches as quietly as I can. I think whoever is sending me the visions that there are only soft needles and not noisy leaves.

I turn to face the now stirring man, having to squint through the branches to see his twitching and fidgeting, as he awakens. A groan splits the still air, and his arms shake as he begins to right himself – like he's waking from a terrible dream. I stare at his back, scanning for anything out of the ordinary. But the tree's needles are too thick, as are the branches that have served as his landing pad, leaving me questioning as his arms give out under him.

It's obvious he's in pain. Should I help him? Is that what the vision sent me to do? To help him?

But what if he is a monster? And not just in the anatomical sense. What if he attacks me? Too many times I've trusted someone, only to have them stab me in the back.

Primitive fears jostle around in my brain. Such instincts are good for keeping yourself alive on these rough streets. But none of my premonitions have ever led me into any kind of harm. Most often, they're at least mildly helpful, if not downright life-saving.

I guess I could wait until he passes out again. It's likely, with how he's shaking from exhaustion and pain. But I have no idea what his injuries are. He could just as easily be shaking because death is right around the corner. Waiting could get him killed. I've never failed to complete a task from one of my visions before. I'd hate for my first failure to be me, watching someone die, and knowing I could've helped.

For just a second more, I mull over my options. But, really, the choice has already been made. I can't sit back and watch someone suffer. I've never had a reason to doubt my visions, and I'm not going to start now. Not while someone is suffering, and I can help.

Shuffling forward, my boot hits something heavy. Looking down I find a messenger bag. Peeking back through the branches, I check to see if he has moved. He hasn't, and so I dare to crouch, flipping it open.

Inside the bag is a first aid kit. It's all I need to see. A first aid kit and an injured man at the site of one of my visions? It's hardly a coincidence. I was sent here to heal him.

"Fuck!" I hiss to myself, drawing my knife. It's pitiful compared to the muscles I can see rippling through the tears in his odd clothing. But a knife, no matter how small, is better than nothing.

I sling the bag over my shoulder. Taking a steadying breath, I climb to my feet. Then, without letting my mind linger on the huge mistake I'm about to make, I shove aside the fir boughs, revealing myself to him.

His head snaps back at the sound, but he stops with a flinch. He tries again on the other side with about as much success.

I'm in his blind spot, covered by the same branches that are preventing me from finding his wings, if he indeed he has some. He turns his head as far as his tendons allow, but he can't catch a good glimpse of me from this angle. Maybe I was just in time, if I got such a perfect hiding spot.

He opens his mouth, and some foreign language pours out. I can tell it's related to a Romantic language from my limited Spanish vocabulary, but I can't make heads or tails of what he's speaking. Well, time to bust out my español.

"Hey, it's *bien*, I'll help you. *Te ayudaré.*" I whisper, soothingly, in a mix of English and my best Spanish. My knife wielding hand remains tucked behind my back as I slowly move into sight.

My eyes flick about, examining him for injuries – and finding quite a few on his six foot frame. Most of the ones I can see are small cuts and bruises, most likely from the fall. But from the massive damage to his clothing, I'm sure that there are more just beneath the surface. Especially with the blood staining what's left of his clothing – most likely a leather jacket and pants, though it's hard to tell. There are other stains on his clothes, but I can't be sure what it is.

I scan his face, checking his emotional state. His features are drawn tight, clearly in pain. Yet his eyes remain sharp, not taking on the glassy look of shock. It's those eyes that have my stomach churning. Those same icy blue eyes from my vision. They stare back at me coldly as he scans me up and down, evaluating me.

He's handsome, there's no doubt. Even through all the scratches and with a bloody nose. His hair is long and dark, cut in an overgrown mohawk or maybe a sidecut, with a few leaves sticking out of it. He has piercings, and I almost sigh in relief – that's a human thing. Maybe he's just a man. But I keep my guard up. Humans can still cause pain if we want to.

My reassurance has done little to calm him – only making his dark brows furrow further. My calming tone, however, is enough to have him stop fighting to rise.

"Help. *Te ayudaré. I will help you. Help you to get better.*" My informal, street Spanish causes his brows to furrow in confusion.

He speaks again in his language, his eyes going to the hand tucked behind my back. When I don't respond, frozen in fear, he meets my gaze. He slowly repeats the words as if that would make them clearer.

Do I show him the blade? Surprise may be the only thing I have over him if it comes to a fight. And despite his extensive injuries, the steely look on his face makes it plenty clear he's desperate enough to fight tooth and claw if need be. Given his height advantage and his musculature, there's a good chance he may be able to dish out a proper fight.

There's always the possibility he's saying something entirely different, I try to reassure myself. Not asking about whatever's in my hidden hand, but something else. But whatever the

words meaning, it's obvious he's spotted the potential of there being a weapon in my grip. My chance at surprise is gone.

"Qué tiene?"

Slowly, very slowly, I let my hand fall to my side, revealing the knife. It catches the light in the dim undergrowth. He follows the movement, a touch of surprise showing in his eyes as they flick to mine. Tension builds in the air, as each of us waits for the other to make a move.

"Tú me ayudas?" He whispers, searching my face for... something.

"Sí. I will help you, okay?" I try to smile, to force my face into a kind mask.

"Bueno..." He mumbles, eyeing me up and down. His gaze lingers on my bad leg, and for a second, I'm paranoid that he can see the scars and warped muscle through my jeans. But that's impossible, right? Even if he saw me limping, how could he target where the injury originates from?

"Puedes levantarte? Can you get up? O necesitas ayuda?" I ask, taking a step forward, my free hand outstretched. He immediately tenses, followed quickly by a flinch. I stop, raising my hands, a frown coming to my face. There's no way this is going to work if we're preparing for a fight every other second.

But the only one with a weapon to sheath is me. I look at the blade, hesitating. It's my only defense. The only thing keeping me from being just little, broken Mar, incapable of defending herself.

Taking a deep breath, I slowly kneel. Sliding the knife into its makeshift sheath, I remove my one hope of surviving a fight with him. But the muscles rippling throughout my new friend's body slowly relax.

"We're bueno. Estamos bien. Nobody gets hurt. We're okay." I reassure him, rising carefully. He meets my eyes, the odd look there freezing me in place. Then he starts pushing himself up. The branch laying across his back slides away –

Wings. He has wings. No, no, this can't be real. That's impossible. It was just a vision.

I stare, gape mouthed, as he forces himself to his knees. There he stops, having to steady himself on the largest of the fallen branches. He braces more of his weight on the bough and hauls himself to his feet slowly, inch by stubborn inch.

But I'm not taking much noticing of any of that. I'm too busy staring at his wings. They're the same as the ones from my vision, scabbed and shredded, powerful muscles and taut skin. They're just as beautiful. And just as terrifying.

For a long moment, I merely stare. My mind slowly fills in the pieces. The wings are real. They weren't a metaphor. The vision meant for me to find him. I've been sent to help him.

He isn't human.

Cannon Van Handel

Cannon always brought something new to each session in the Writing Lab. Prose and poetry, comedy and tragedy, urban detective noir and rural coming-of-age... Nothing seemed to be off the table. You can even see this diversity in his submissions featured here: There's a playful romp of language in the poetry, contrasting against a quiet, stark atmosphere in the short story. More often than not, though, Cannon's work is measured and contemplative. His stories often involve loss of some kind—sometimes a loved one, other times a more abstract trauma like a soldier's PTSD. His characters mourn the loss, sure, but they do not wallow in it. Cannon's stories try to find meaning in the misery, often flickering some hope in the process.

– Richard Wilkosz

Diner Nights

I worked in a diner at the time. A small place, greasy-spoon type on a backroad just outside of Columbia, Missouri called *Henry's*. Nothing to be proud of, but I earned enough to keep my lights on and put some food in my refrigerator. The whole college deal hadn't appealed to me back then, so I figured I'd best start putting some cash into my pocket as soon as I could. It was mostly nights I worked the diner, taking the graveyard shift seeing as it was open twenty-four-seven for truckers passing through to Saint Louis from out West. They'd come in tired as mules, having driven the road for hundreds and hundreds of miles, looking for a warm meal and a fresh pot of coffee to hold them over for the next stretch of the journey, whether that be the last leg of their trip to St. Louis or fueling up to go back out West. Yes, we were positioned just right at *Henry's*, the gateway in and out for the road warriors.

We got our fair share of regular folks passing through as well. Travelers making the same trips as the truckers, going down that same stretch of highway, either near the end of or just beginning some long journey. All I knew from working the graveyard shift was that people were tired from it all. I'd pour coffee and serve their food, rarely getting more than an appreciative grunt or nod. That was fine with me. I understood the toll the road can take. My old man had been a trucker all his life; only thing he'd ever known was the highway. He used the call himself a prisoner, in a fanciful sort of way, but I always saw him as an addict. Always looking for one more hit of asphalt, one more pair of lonely headlights guiding those eighteen wheels through the deserted night. I think he found peace on that road. 'Course, it was at the expense of leaving the rest of us without it.

I often thought about my old man during those long nights at the diner. It was hard not to, being surrounded by people who shared his employment. I wondered what I would say if he walked through that front door. Probably nothing too kindly, since he had never seemed to give a rip about his own family. He just fixed his wife with some babies and took off again. I guess I resented him for it, missing all my baseball games and never seeing how good of a pitcher I became during those late-night games under the field lights. But that was in the past. He's retired now, and he and my mother are separated. I guess she found it hard to forgive all that lost time too. Maybe she just grew comfortable with it. Either way, we had all seemed to move on with our lives. I grew up without a father, accustomed to never talking with him. If that trend continued, I wouldn't be too cut up about it.

One night, working at that diner, something came along that I'll never forget. It was June eighteenth, 1985, and three-oh-five in the morning on a Tuesday. I remember that because I had just checked the clock that hung on the mildew-stained wall of *Henry's* above the end of the counter. It'd been a slow night, and the few truckers who'd stopped by had moved hours ago over to the truck stop a few miles down the road for some shut-eye. I was wiping down the counter when I saw the car headlights shine through the front window, silhouetting the booths and nearly blinding me. Soon enough, they shut off, the light waning down to a dim orange before burning out completely. An old

gentleman walked through the front door, his presence announced by the chiming of the little bell that hung above the entrance.

I'll never forget the way he looked. It wasn't his clothes, as he was wearing a plain crumpled shirt under a disheveled jacket and slacks. It was the look on his face, the way he carried himself. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but if I had to say I thought he looked broken. But all the same he came and sat down at the counter, sliding over the stool and laying his keys in front of him. I figured he had to be in his mid-to-late sixties from the lines that patterned his face, lines that told a life of manual labor out in the elements, not some cushy office job. I slid him a menu and offered some coffee, to which he nodded.

"So what brings you out so late?" I asked, sliding the steaming cup across the counter to him. He took a tentative sip before answering.

"I just came from the hospital," he said quietly. I paused, as there were usually only two reasons someone was at a hospital this late at night; either visiting a new baby or an accident victim. By the look on his face, I didn't think it had been an occasion to celebrate.

"Why was that?" I asked, trying to stay conversational. "I don't mean to pry," I added, "it's just that at this time of night it gets awful lonesome around here."

He gave a brief smile, though it never reached his eyes.

"I understand. You know, I used to visit a lot of diners. Back in the day I talked to a lot of fellas just like you." I picked up some wet mugs from behind the counter and started absently drying them.

"Yeah? You travel a lot?" I asked, to which he nodded.

"Oh yeah," he replied. "After the war I was a lineman in Kansas, used to travel the whole state fixing wires. I spent a lot of late nights in places just like this," he said, gesturing around.

"Must've been interesting," I said, to which he nodded.

"It was honest work. Being out in the wind, working with my hands. I was never an office-type, couldn't stand being cooped up. I just had to be free out there..." He trailed off.

I finished drying one mug and moved on to another while the man sipped his coffee.

"How old are you?" he asked me. I thought it was an odd question out of the blue, but I told him anyway.

"Twenty-three."

He nodded again, taking another sip.

"You know, my daughter was about your age. Just married last year, to some nice boy from Joplin. They were expecting a baby come this fall."

"That's nice," I replied.

"That's why I was at the hospital tonight. They'd been driving home to Joplin when they hit a truck on the highway."

I stopped drying the mug.

"The driver was tired. He'd been going all day and must've been falling asleep at the wheel. Drifted into oncoming traffic, and..."

His voice broke as he trailed off, and he raised his trembling cup of coffee to his lips again.

"I had to identify them down there."

I hadn't realized earlier he had talked about his daughter in the past tense. I didn't know what to say.

"I always thought what I really wanted out of life was freedom. See, going to war, being a lineman, I liked the independence. I put myself before my family. Now I just wished I'd spent more time with them," he said shakily.

"I-I'm so sorry, sir," was all I could manage to get out. He gave a sad smile again.

"I'm sorry to put all this on you," he said. "It's not fair of me."

He sighed and wiped his eyes.

“How much for the coffee?” he asked. “I should be getting on home now, I just needed something to keep me awake.”

“It’s on the house,” I replied. He nodded and wiped his eyes again, staring down at the table in a far-off gaze.

“You just don’t know,” he said quietly, almost to himself, before looking back up at me. “You never know.” Then he picked got up and started walking towards the door. Before he got there, he turned and looked back at me.

“Thanks for the coffee and the time,” he said, giving one last sad smile before walking out the door.

I stared down at the counter as I heard the car engine start up, and the tires turn out onto the road. I almost couldn’t process it. There today and gone tomorrow, he had lost his daughter, his son-in-law, and his grandchild in one night. Maybe the only family he had left. He hadn’t mentioned his wife, maybe she wasn’t around anymore either. It was just so hard to think about.

I probably sat there for a good hour, staring at that old diner counter, listening to the buzzing of the lights overhead. To anyone else, I might’ve looked calm. But there was a war being waged beneath that calm surface, chaos brought on by that old man. A battle in my mind, maybe the only battle that really matters, the one fought between forgiveness and anger, the pain of old against the truth of what I was starting to realize. Tomorrow isn’t a guarantee.

After a while I made a decision, and it was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made. I had thought long and hard about what I was going to do, losing peace in the process during that interior struggle. But what I did in that moment has given me more lasting peace than I ever could have asked for.

I got up, pretty shaky, and walked over to the payphone on the wall. I fished around in my pocket for a quarter before finding one and pushing it in the slot. Then I dialed a number I never expected to ever dial, and waited for the voice of my father on the other end to answer.

Wristwatch

This watch on my wrist.

I wear it to stay on schedule,
casting frequent glances towards the little glass face
as I rush to another event.

This watch on my wrist.

Built by someone like me
bottling nature's ever-charging momentum forward.

This watch on my wrist.

It ticks and it tocks,
and sometimes keeps me up at night
even when I can't hear it.

This watch on my wrist.

Little arms stretch, one long, one stunted,
towards a numerical circumference.
Numbers that drive my day, my discussions,
my everything.

This watch on my wrist.

A battery runs this watch on my wrist,
but this watch on my wrist runs me.

Soles

We all have one soul but two soles.

Some people have only one sole,
some have a torn soul.

We sometimes say "they have no soul",
but we often lack the soul to give new soles to poor souls.

We walk on both soles and souls alike
without a care for the sole-less souls, save when
we fear for our own soul.

If we lose our soles, we turn to those
with a good soul and many soles to help console our sole-less souls
by providing us with new soles, out of the goodness of their souls.

We don't much care for sole-less souls that perhaps stole soles,
believing they have lost their soul.

When souls leave we bury their soles,
standing on our own soles it weighs on our souls.

Sometimes who's left is a sole soul, and to them we say,
"God bless their soul."

Super Vang

It has been a lot of fun to work with Super over the course of this semester. Super has a passion for writing and has been working to develop several different story ideas over the past few months. Super's work brings the reader into a fantastical realm where reality and fiction intertwine. His passion for what he does is evident in his writing and showcases his creative abilities. The following is a portion of the first chapter of Super's book, which he hopes to eventually turn into a series. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have! – Erin Gellings

Beginnings

Chapter 1

Loud wailings filled the small orphanage. A caretaker bursts through the door of a bedroom. She rushes to the crib in the corner and stares at the tears in the eyes of the baby. Another caretaker comes in with a bottle of milk. She cradles the small baby in her arms and immediately shoves the bottle into the infant's mouth. His cries stop, as he drains the milk.

"I think he's eating way too much," the caretaker admits.

"Don't fret so much Rebecca, this is normal for growing babies," the other caretaker advised.

"But, he's not even that big to be eating this much. I mean, where does it even go? He doesn't even go to the bathroom as much as he should Mary," Rebecca worried.

"Well, let's just make sure he grows up to be a great person."

It has been a couple weeks since the day the baby was dropped off at the doorstep of this newly built orphanage that was not to operate yet. But when the two women looked at the baby they couldn't turn him away.

"Just look at his beautiful eyes," beamed Mary. "I've never seen anyone with orange eyes before." The two women looked at the bright orange eyes of the asian baby that seemed to sparkle in the night.

"They sure are beautiful. It's a shame for the mother who never got the chance to raise him."

"It is a shame but at least we can give her baby our sole attention here. Little Sage Hyacinth," Mary said. "Look, he's finally going to sleep. Let's put him down and finally get some rest."

Later that night as the two women slept, dark smoke crept through the building. Fire erupted and spread through the orphanage. Rebecca woke up immediately with the burning smell spreading through her room. She quickly registered the situation and ran into the hallway. Rebecca hurried through the incinerated corridor yelling Mary's name.

"Get the baby!" Cried Mary from a distance.

Rebecca ran to the baby's room. She quickly scooped the sleeping baby and carried him out. She ran down the stairs of the two story building.

"Mary, where are you?"

"Hurry, over here. I'm at the entrance. Follow my voice," Rebecca rushed through the flames that singed her. All she could think about was the baby's safety. She finally reached the entryway and ran through the doors to the front lawn.

"Mary, I got the baby," she gasped "Mary, where are you?"

"Right here sweetie," Rebecca turned to see a hooded figure standing before her. She tried to scream for help, but not a sound came out. It was then that she realized she couldn't move. The hooded figure grabbed the baby out of her arms as tears rolled down her face. The hooded figure took out a sharp blade and pierced it through Rebecca's heart. Rebecca looked up at the eyes of the figure and she fell forward with a face frozen with terror.

“Don’t worry it will be over soon,” the figure said as the building burned behind them.
“We can’t have you in such a disgusting loving environment now can we.” The figure slowly walked away while glancing at the baby boy in it’s arms.

.....5 years later.....

A voice called out, “Sage, time for dinner.”

Little 5 year old Sage timidly walked into the dining room of his new foster home. He looked at all the food on the table and tried not to look at his foster mom, Kim.

“What’s wrong sweetie, come here and sit down,” she said setting the table. There was a knock on the front door and someone entered saying hello. Sage looked to see his new foster dad, Rob.

“Just in time for dinner, Baby,” Kim said kissing Rob’s cheek.

“Sorry I wasn’t here earlier to see you Sage,” Rob went to pat Sage, only for him to flinch. Rob pulled his hand back and smiled in sadness.

“It’s okay, I won’t hurt you like those other places.” Rob said kindly.

Kim came back with another plate of food and sat down.

“Okay everyone, dig in.” Kim said excitedly. As Kim and Rob filled their plates. They looked over at Sage with his empty plate.

“What would like to eat Sage?” Kim asked. Sage didn’t answer, so she grabbed his plate and began to fill it for him. Sage didn’t move and began to shake. His tears rolled slowly down his face. Seeing this, Kim rushed over and hugged Sage.

“What’s wrong sweetie,” Kim said carefully.

“Sorry, it’s been so long since I’ve had food,” Sage cried. Hearing this Rob also came and hugged Kim and Sage.

“It’s okay now, Sage. Think of this as your new home.” Rob said holding them.

Sage just sat there, being surrounded by his foster parents. Hoping for once, he could have a happy life with them. They finished dinner and put Sage to bed in his new room. Sage smiled happily as he went to sleep.

A couple hours went by before Sage was shaken awake by Rob. Sage opened his eyes to seeing his new room engulfed in flames. Out of patience, Rob grabbed Sage and put him over his shoulder. He hurried through flames and ran out of the house. He put Sage on the ground and knelt down.

“Stay here, I already called 911. I have to go back and get Kim,” He said before he ran back into the burning building. Sage slowly got up. He could hear the sound of sirens in the distance. He stood there afraid of the outcome. Was his hope for happiness just a dream? A couple of minutes passed and still no one was there to help them. Fear began to seep into Sage until he couldn’t stand it anymore. He began to run towards the burning building until he was grabbed from behind. Sage screamed and cried to be let go. He needed to save them. He turned to see who was holding him only to see a fireman. Sage was so in his thoughts, he didn’t notice there was a crowd of neighbors and firemen surrounding the burning building. Sage began to become more hopeful that, maybe Rob and Kim would be okay. These hopes lasted until he saw their charred bodies being carried out.

“Did you hear, people think the child started the fire,” Sage heard from behind him.

“Really, he must be the *Devil’s child*,” another voice boomed through the crowd.

“Maybe he didn’t do it. Maybe he’s *cursed* and the fire just follows him.” A voice said pitfully.

Sage was in shock. He didn’t know what to do or say, but what shocked him more were the voices behind him in the crowd. Was he really a child of the devil or cursed? Was he meant to never have happiness? Was he meant to live in isolation? On that day, Sage learned not to be hopeful for a happy ending.

Katelyn Voorhies

Working with Katelyn this semester has been a great experience. She loves to write stories that are filled with action and adventure that keep you guessing at every turn, so her writing was always fun to read. This piece took me by surprise. *Dream*, as a short story, expresses a vulnerability and emotional depth that we can all relate to, and it has a refreshing, raw quality that will really make you feel things. Katelyn is a very down-to-earth person, and that is a great attribute that comes through in her writing. I hope she finishes her book within the near future; I'd love to read it! –Lisa Parlato

Dream

Almost every girl dreams of her wedding day.

I dreamt of a beautiful wedding. Purple covering the walls with white sashes. Purple and white daisies upon each chair. The bridesmaids come down dressed in purple dresses with white ribbons. Each one holds a purple daisy and with the maid of honor holding a white one. The groomsmen are in black suits with white vests and the best man has a purple vest. Then the flower girl is dressed in white with a purple ribbon throwing out purple daisy petals. The ring bearer is in black with a purple vest holding a white pillow with the rings on it. Then the music plays and the doors open with my father in a black suit and purple vest with my hand within his arm. I hold on and see the man that is soon to be mine forever.

The five heartbreaking words crushed it for the first time, *I don't love you anymore*, at lunch in a high school filled with people, I both knew and did not. I felt crushed and for the first time, I cried in the open.

I had other relationships before him but I saw and felt warning signs that the end was near. I was caught off guard with this guy. I cried in my best friend's arms for a few minutes then I wiped the tears off my face. I took the promise ring off my finger and slid it into his shirt pocket.

"You give this to the girl you love," I said.

Then I stood up and walked outside to get away from him and get fresh air. I walked to the table outside in the middle of February. I cried. The tears stuck to my face a little. I sat there alone until the bell rang and I watched him go to class. I went to my last two classes of that day.

After school, I went home, grabbed the stuff he gave me, and drove to his house. This would be the last time I drove to or around his house for six months. I knocked on the door. He opened it. I gave him his stuff and left. I drove straight to work. I was almost twenty minutes early, so I sat there trying to stop the tears before I went in. I walked in, changed, and sat down with my head to the ground. I tried not to cry. It didn't work very well.

One of my co-workers came up to me, knowing something wasn't right.

"Are you okay?"

The waterfall broke once more and I wept. I love my work family but usually, it is because we can laugh, have fun and enjoy each work day together. This time one of us was hurt and someone understood the pain.

She knelt in front of me, "It is going to be okay. What happened?"

"He broke up with me," I sobbed.

"We all have break-ups. He just wasn't meant for you. You will hurt for a little while and one day you will forget he even existed in your life. You will smile one day because of someone else."

I looked up at her, "But it hurts."

"I know..." *Beep. Beep. Beep.* as the sound of the drive-thru interrupted us, "Wipe away those tears, let's see that smile you are so famous for."

I gave her a weak smile before she turned to answer the drive-thru. When she was out of view I thought to myself, "*That's right. Smile and you will start to believe you are happy.*" I continued to cry but a little less. Another co-worker walked up to me and tried to comfort me by telling me that I will

find someone who's better and actually cares enough to hold onto me. I gave him a grateful smile and the rest of my coworkers for that shift started to show up. I just put my head in my hands and willed myself to stop crying.

I drove home after work that night and left the radio off because all my CD's reminded me of him and if I turned the radio on it might play a song that brought back sorrowful tears. When I drove into the driveway to my house, I turned off the car but I did not go in right away. The light was on in the living room and I did not want to talk about today with my family. No matter how much they wanted to help they would not be able to. The light was still on when I went inside finally. I kept my head down and went to bed without a word to anyone. I plugged my phone in, turned over, and went to sleep with the tears starting to well.

I woke up to the multiple alarm ringtone on my phone. I got up and dragged myself to the shower. I wore a baggy sweatshirt and a pair of jeans. It was about 6:30 am so I looked around my room to see if I had forgotten anything. On my desk was a small bracelet. He gave that to me after he worked to win it in a game. I started to cry again. Then I grabbed that bracelet and threw it across the room.

7:00 am finally rolled around. My brother started to come down the stairs and we went to school. It was the last day of the second term. My classes were filled with fun and games or tests. I didn't want to do anything. When lunch came around I forced myself to eat. I ran through the lunch line and quickly ate my lunch. I then went outside and sat at that same table I did the day before in the cold Wisconsin winter air. I didn't cry though I just sat there and wallowed. My last two classes mostly played games.

When I got home my mom found out, somehow. She tried to comfort me but I just wanted to be left alone. I was broken and I would be like this for months. It hurt. A lot.

For six months I felt broken. Whatever I did I couldn't get him out of my mind. It not only affected me, but it also affected my family. I was depressed so I became angry. I lashed out at those I loved. I wasn't myself. I tried not to let it affect my work, but I was so upset for the first month or so that I tried to stay out of sight of the customers. At one point I managed to control it so no one saw me cry or become upset. I acted normal.

Once graduation came around I was able to distract myself and not think about him as much. I was happy for a little while but then I graduated and everything went back to normal. My friends gathered us together and we took a vacation together. While we were doing activities and having fun, he didn't even cross my mind but then night came. I woke up in the middle of the night and I started to think. I was jealous that my friends both had a relationship. One even brought her boyfriend with on the vacation. I didn't say it but I was upset that I wasn't able to bring him. We would have been celebrating our close to seven months together. I thought about how we would have gone in the pool and on the roller coasters. I would have clung onto him as we rode each waterslide. I woke up again at around six in the morning. My friends were sleeping so I jumped in the shower and started to cry again.

When we went home I was left in an empty room to think and no one else was home. I started to cry. I was able to enjoy myself when I was distracted but I was still torn.

Independence day came around and I signed up for a dating site to try to find someone new. A week later I went camping. When I came back there was a message. A guy was interested in me. We set up a date. I went out with him but he wasn't right for me. The next week I went on one more date. He only wanted sex so I turned him down. Then I continued to work, prepare for college, and tried to avoid the site. Another week went by and I tried another date. I thought this guy would be perfect but one thing was missing. It wasn't him. I finally deleted that account.

I counted down the days until I would be able to leave this town and forget about him.

Two nights before I left, I got a message on my phone.

Ding.

“Well, it looks like I might work with you.”

At this point, I already had left my job and had found a new job.

“Good. Why haven’t I seen you at church.”

We talked back and forth for a little while until I jumped in with a question. But I hovered over the send button and rewrote it multiple times until I finally hit send,

“What was the main reason that you broke up with me? Something bugged me that what you said was an only partial truth.”

He took a minute to reply and I got worried.

Ding.

“I felt I wasn’t good enough. I felt like I was not able to love you and to be honest, I do miss you.”

Then I messaged him that I still loved him even after months of being apart.

He replied, “I want you to have the best. I have been lonely since that day.”

I messaged him that I felt he was my everything and still is.

“I’d say let’s try again but I don’t know. It’s up to you.”

I said we could try again but how would we work with me going into college and him still in high school.

“I don’t care, I just feel alone without you, you help me share my feelings. You make me, me. You are my rock.”

I asked him what he was doing at the moment then my mom came downstairs to do laundry. I asked her what I should do. She gave me two options, “Get back together or don’t.”

That seemed easy but my mind and heart were racing. I got off my bed and grabbed my keys. I drove to his house with “Stand” By Rascal Flatts playing on a CD on the radio. I tried not to speed but sometimes it got away from me.

~11:30 pm on August 28, 2017

I drove into his driveway and he was standing on his porch. I parked and we walked halfway.

“I really missed you,” we said together and hugged with passion.

“Welcome back.” his mom jumped in.

“I am glad to be back.” He guided me inside and gave me the giant stuffed teddy bear back.

I went to college two days later. We called and voice chatted often and I came home every weekend. We sat down and talked about our future. We felt like us again.

I go back to see that man at the end of the aisle dressed in a black suit and a purple vest and bowtie.

I am able to dream again.

Jerry Williams

I have enjoyed the process of getting to know Jerry on a personal level as well as a writer throughout the duration of our English 157 sessions. Jerry was hesitant at first to introduce his writings, but as time progressed he became more confident in the work he was producing, which was such a positive growth to see in him. I thought the raw and real theme his poems offered was intriguing and made the work all the more interesting to read. It takes courage to write personal pieces for all to see, but I am so glad Jerry did. I think the three pieces of work he has submitted to Wordplay are excellent and make the readers feel something, I know I did. I know that with Jerry's way of adding personalization to his writing, he will continue to influence others through his work. —Paige Zeratsky

I Can't Lose

I can't lose because confidence and determination fuels my hunger to be great.
I can lose because mistakes and failures keep me grounded.
I can't lose because hope keeps the dream alive.
I can lose because every loss is a lesson.
If I stop wanting to better myself every day, I lost
If I am content with giving up, I lost.
I won't lose because I know that if I'm doing what I love, I won.

Above it All

Mom always told me to shoot for the sky.
Usually left me wondering...wondering why?
So now I'm in the sky, so high up with the stars,
failure, underachievement, and disappoint left me with scars.
In my mind I can't escape.
Not pain and sorrow, but the feeling to be great.
I love dreaming, but these night terrors are not meant for me.
Optimism and positive energy will guide me to see,
see what I once was.
I was a mess.
Overly stressed.
Openly depressed.
But I didn't let it get me down, I was too close to the top.
I saw my dreams, I watched from afar.
Remembering that all I needed to do was shoot for the stars.
Some may ask why?
Mom always told me to shoot for the sky.

Elma Janet

You will know when she enters a room, she's loud.
She's a girl that everyone wants but can't have, she's expensive.
She's the type of girl that will pick you up when you're down, a special kind of high.
One night with her and she will leave you disoriented and happy, sort of a haze.
Once you get a taste of her, you never want to let her go, almost as if she's addicting.
Don't spend too much time with her or people may think that it's a problem, like she's a drug.
But she's not, she's different, she's my best bud.
She's like a flower in a field of weeds, a tulip.
She's a mixture of beauty and danger, a hybrid.
She's the reason I can deal with anxiety, a cure.
She's my drug.

Myke Williams

It has been a joy getting to know Myke and his poetry over the course of the semester. From the beginning he was eager to share his work and knowledge with me and always looking for opportunities to grow. This semester we worked a lot on figurative language, which is showcased beautifully in his poem "To Read Me". I was impressed with Myke's dedication to making his poetry an enjoyable experience for himself and his reader. I know Myke's poetry and his love for it will continue to flourish. – Taryn Wield

The Flower

A cloudy sky, A cold breeze.

Winter.

My petals are chilled by the snowflakes I catch,

My stem is shaken by each frosty gust of wind.

I sleep in this winter, dreaming of warmer days.

Days full of the crisp taste of sunlight, the buzzing life of bumblebees and the droplets of cool water that I would catch on my petals.

My petals, each crafted by mother nature herself, with rich hues of red & yellow and a slight shine that made them almost glow....My sleeping nostalgia shatters like glass as another chilling breeze rakes across me.

Alas, summers don't last long enough, but only because we want them to last forever.

To Read Me

If I was a book, I'd be written in invisible ink. So in short I'm kinda hard to read, doing so is seemingly pointless. I mean, who wants to hover a heat source over each of my pages, just to enjoy a good read. I understand if my covers remain closed, and my pages collect dust.

Perhaps I'm over selling the value between the pages because I'm the author, Illustrator, and publisher all rolled into one.

Maybe It's isn't even that good of a book.

Meara Wolfington

It was a pleasure working with Meara this semester. Her enthusiasm and willingness to share intriguing storylines and intricate characters made every session fly by. Meara's ability to tell a story filled with excitement, convoluted and elaborate detail makes her a truly unique and talented writer. The following poem was inspired by a portion of the novel she is currently writing and demonstrates the creativity in her writing. It is clear that Meara holds a passion for writing which will last much longer than this semester. I am excited for her future storytelling ventures. –Dan Maatta

Here we are again
To bury another friend
I **thought** last time
Would be the last
Guess I was wrong

How could I forget?
The kindest of us all
Mother of one
He wasn't **even** a year

And then we lost two more

Two little girls
Who followed
In their footsteps

Blue got lucky

Lost his life
To save two more
And now here we are once more
Six years later
To bury another

Poisoned by **the** woman
Who is rotten to the core

And here we are again
No proof

Conviction

Another walked free
And here we are
Again
To bury another **friend**

Here we are again
To bury another friend
I **hoped** last time
Would be the last
Guess I was wrong
Do you remember the first?

Mother of one
He was **only** a year
It was only a year

They left behind
Two little girls

In their footsteps
Red completely

And even before Red
Our serious little man
Gave his life
To save two more

To bury another
Taken from us
All too soon
Poisoned by **a** woman

Who orphaned another child

No proof
Of foul play for a
Conviction
Now here we sit knowing
Another was taken

Again
To bury another **parent**
Once

Again



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