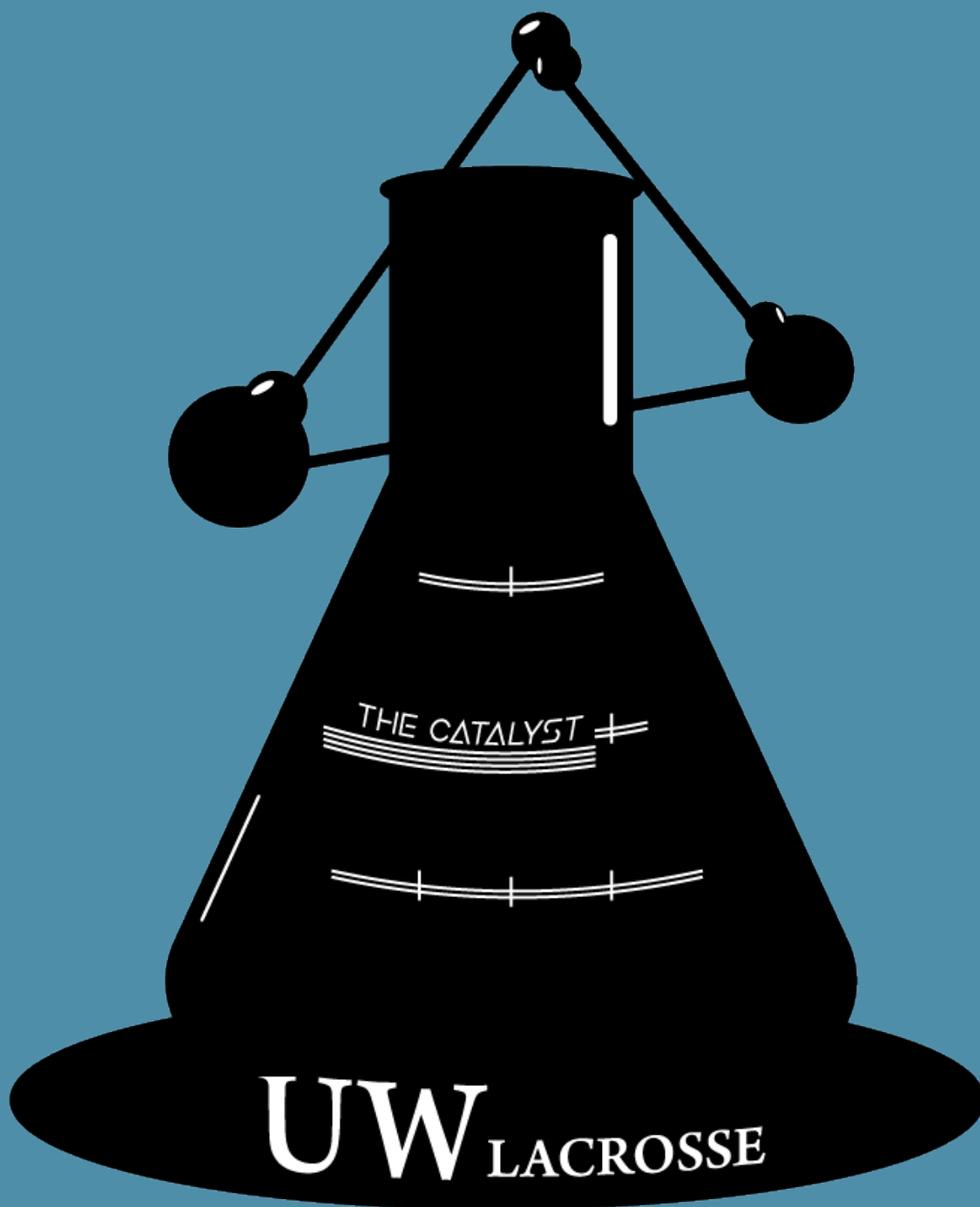


THE
CATALYST

21st
EDITION





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Who We are:

The Catalyst is an undergraduate creative journal from the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse, focused on showcasing the talents residing between the Mississippi River and Grandad’s bluff. This magazine publishes original prose, poetry, photography, and visual art from UWL students and faculty.

Special thanks to:

...William Stobb for guiding and supporting us through this edition of *The Catalyst*.

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...The students who continue to contribute to *The Catalyst*. Thank you for sharing your talents.

...And to you, the reader! Thank you for keeping the arts alive at UWL.



Untitled
Holden Shafer

Table of Contents

Poetry

Sanitize your hands	1
Allison Bentley	
Representation	3
Katie Pierre	
Modern Escapism	5
Cedric Neve	
<i>Frankie</i>	6
Melissa Deisting	
Catholicism	7
Lizzy Miller	
From the Pantry	15
William Albea	
Fear	17
Lizzy Miller	
The Lost Position	21
Issac Tahiri	
Peter Peter Peter	23
Cedric Neve	

Art and Photography

Achoo	2
Alex Keller	
Untitled	4
Rachel Meihack	
<i>A Lashing</i>	5
Victor Zheng	
Lily Pad	6
Linnea Cochran	
Untitled	8
Rachel Meihack	
Untitled	14
Rachel Meihack	
PUNCHTHEPIES	16
Sophie Fox	

Untitled. 18
Holden Shafer

Fruit in Light 20
Savannah Farrell

Untitled 22
Seth Polfus

Peeping 23
Austin VanBuren

Collage No.4 24
Sophie Fox

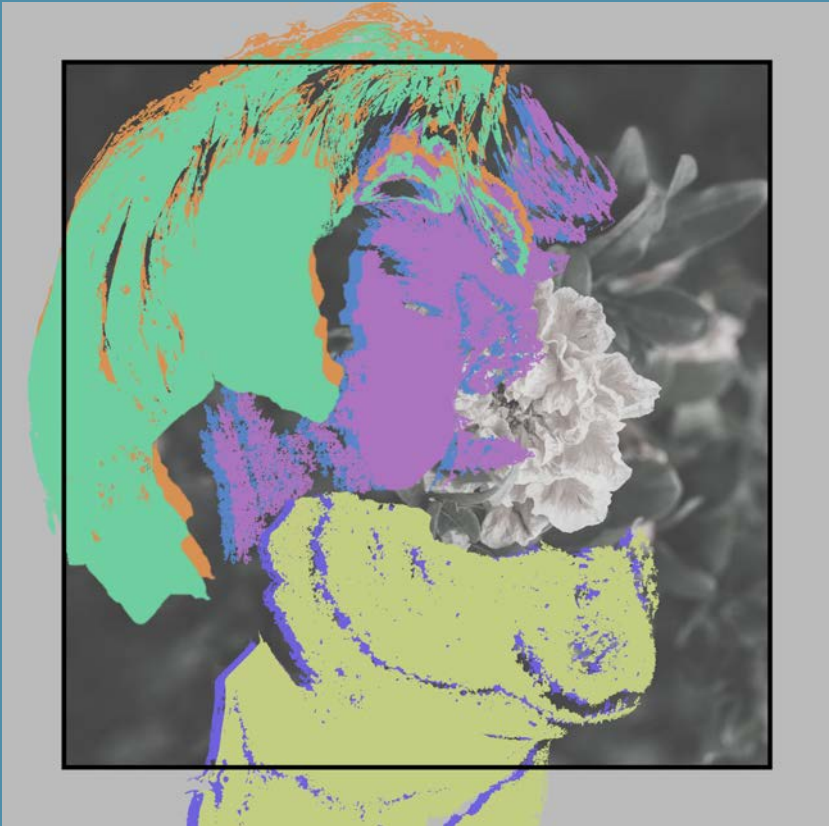
Prose

A Gang of Boys 9
Beau Haugen

How to become a writer at UWL 19
Marissa Widdifield

Contributors

Author Biographies 32



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Sanitize Your Hands

Allison Bentley

Two-three times.

My mother tells me to stop.
Saying that petting the dog
won't make me ill or that
touching the ground
is not enough to kill
but I don't listen

I put on my headphones
to drown out the noise
as I pour more soap
into my hands and scrub them clean.
Until they are dry like sandpaper

the bubbles pouring down the drain
swirling and coating each other.
Wafting the scent of green apple
throughout the air
like a warm blanket

my skin begins to crack
around my knuckles and
down the creases of my palm.
The blood bubbling up
but I remain calm.

Torn apart in a continental drift
streaming down both sides.
Not even Moses was called upon
to part this red sea.

I dab them dry
our white kitchen towel now stained.

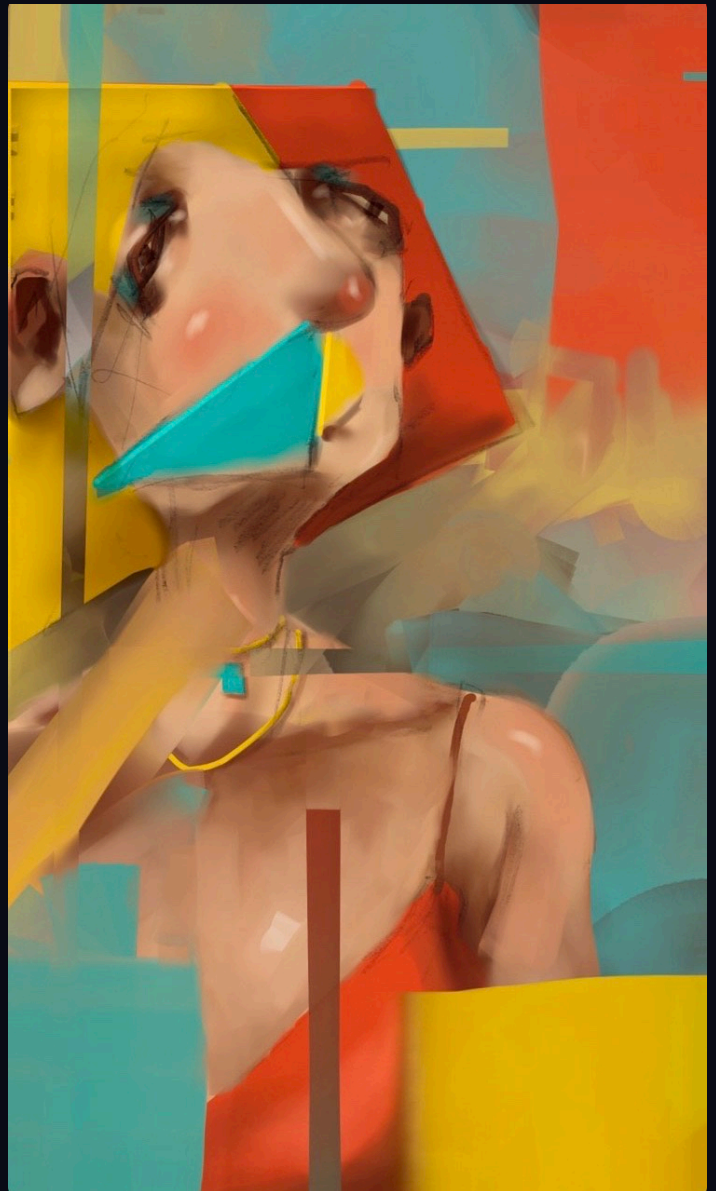
I never understood why my mother loved white.
It showed every molecule
that was out of place

Especially those that smother my hands.

I think she just likes to know
whenever I get like this.
To see when the towel grows crimson.
As if she could help
save me from my thoughts.

Tossing the towel aside It lay upon the counter
in a shameful heap of red waves.

I reach for the soap
dousing my hands in peace.
Continuing my music
and scrubbing away



Representation

Katie Pierre

The moon was rising in the sky
as we rocked in that old chair
reading as we always do
our favorite thing to share.

As she gently turned the final page
and the story came to an end
I looked down at the sorrowful face
of my daughter and my friend.

"But where am I?" She said concerned.
"my face I do not see.
I want to read and learn and grow,
but these books weren't meant for me."

I took her face between my hands
and kissed her on her head.
"I know you're feeling lost right now,
but it's time to go to bed.

In the morning when you wake
we'll start searching far and wide
to find the books that speak to you
and fill your heart with pride."

With a heavy sigh she laid her head
upon my chest with care
and slowly drifted off to sleep
knowing I was there.



Modern Escapism

Cedric Neve

Stand in an open field where the deer made a mat
Feel the sun on your eyelids
The green is so green
Ignore the way the grass – it's taller
than it should be – lashes your face

Lay in a shallow river
hear the water slosh into your ears
Breathe calmly through your nose
the current isn't strong enough to carry you away

The clouds look like a painting
Starlings swarm and weave, tying knots from loose strands like
the pink strings coming out of the bird on
asphalt

Wander back into the city, where
the breeze still blows the same smoky air

Hold a leaf tightly in your hand and let the pieces' go



Frankie

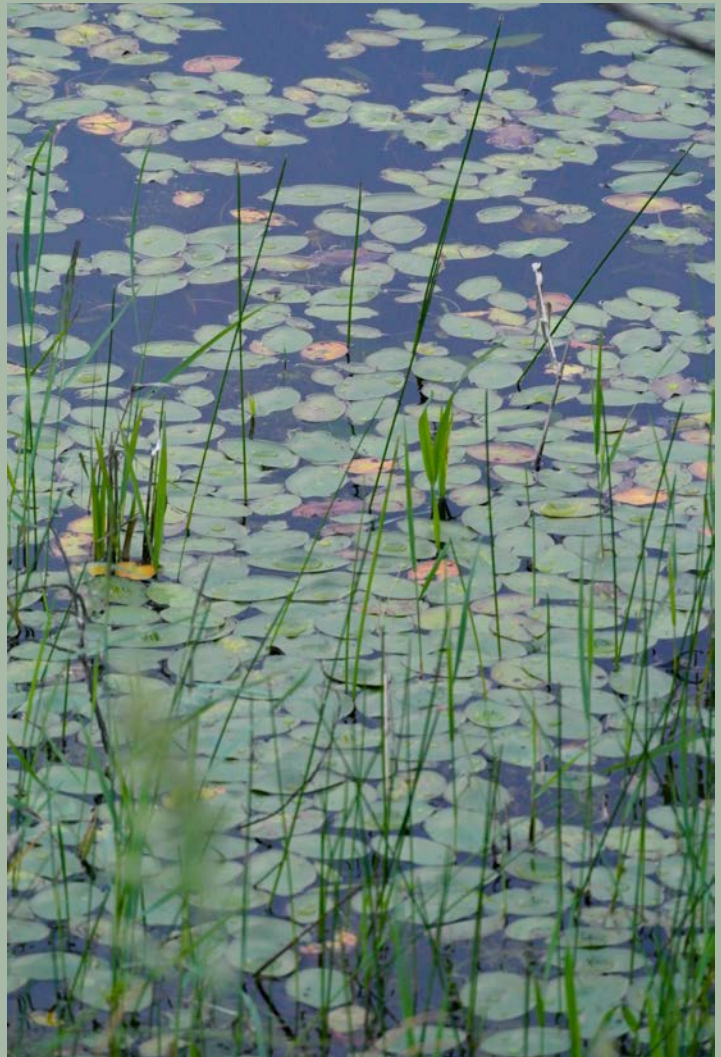
Melissa Deisting

Did you look for cars?
Your eyes say yes
so we cross the street
to where the lilac bushes are.

We sniff the air and
the scent is
sweet.

The sun bathes our path
in a burnt orange glow—
you don't notice.

A dandelion has caught
your attention and you
sneeze when your soft nose
gets too close to its
transparent
fluff.



Catholicism

Lizzy Miller

A priest with ash on his forehead gives
a sermon. That's how I was taught about love
and about martyrs. We learned their names
because they had been canonized,
after.

"You will become closer to Him by
giving yourself up," and I don't know how,
years later, to build a relationship without
the sacrifice of something crucial.

I've been thinking, lately, about
what we inherit. If my parents carry their thoughts
around like bricks, their shoulders curving in,
Or if they gave them to me
Or if they gave them to God.

-

A child with a thorny crown drags
a wooden cross past the congregation. He is solemn because
today, he is Jesus. Two other children, soldiers,
pretend to nail his hands and feet.

If I bring a lover
home,
they will call her my friend while
my sister and brother-in-law hold hands across
the table.

I feel like I have to mention
a stained glass window.



A Gang of Boys

Beau Haugen

"I don't think Beau could lift a quarter by the looks of his arms," said Martin, as Will snickered behind him.

"He still has change from Kwik trip, so obviously he can," said Jeffery

"Shut up Jeffery, you sound like a girl," replied Martin. Jeffery fell silent.

It was the summer of 2009, in the suburbs of Minnesota; Jeffery, Will, Martin and I sat on our BMX bikes on top of the hill at 15th St. Jeffery had to defend any joke launched my way because I was too skinny to fight back, and too shy to say anything. We became best friends because a lot of the groups jokes were directed towards us.

Will was the fat, funny kid that would eat anything for attention. Once, I saw him drink a whole bottle of "Bacon Ranch" only because someone told him to.

Martin was two years younger, and always accepted a challenge to prove to himself he was just as old as us.

We started our days playing Marco Polo in my pool, where Jeffery would eventually cry because Will had his eyes open, signaling for the end of our swim time. We would then dry off in my mom's lawn chairs.

"Hey Jeffery, how does it feel knowing your sister's balls hang lower than yours?" Will asked.

"At least I don't have man tits," squeaked Jeffery.

This bickering went on until someone asked to go to Will's house. Then we would hop on our bikes and ride over there.

"Last one there has to lick my toe!" yelled Martin. (On days with crappy weather we would play poker, where the loser would have to lick the second losers toe.)

After jumping on Will's trampoline, we would then sweat in lawn chairs facing the sun. More jokes ensued, and we would race back to my house.

Swim, bike, trampoline, repeat. All summer long. Sometimes my older brother Trent would come hang out with us. A year older - the unspoken leader of the neighborhood rats - he always convinced us to do other less kid-friendly activities like ding-dong ditching and teepeeing.

One mid-summer day, he met us on top of the hill.

"Whadup munchkins," he said with a slight grin. He walked over to us with his cargo shorts revealing his American Eagle underwear, a too-black-Tapout shirt for such a sunny day, and a flat brimmed Phillies hat.

"Just about to go swim at your house," said Will.

"With this prick?" he said, pointing at me, "I'm surprised you guys hang out with him."

"Yeah, he's a tool," said Martin, with his chin held high.

"I think he's cool," said Jeffery. My brother shot him a glance, to which Jeffery replied with his eyes shamefully dropping towards the ground. I offered silence.

Trent was with Parker, the other flat-brimmed, Monster drinking kid from our neighborhood.

"Me and Parker want to steal chromies. You guys coming?"

"Of course!" replied Martin, which meant we were all going.

Chromies were what we called the air caps on tires. It's that little cap you have to screw off before you can fill it up with air. We stole them on occasion in Walmart or Sear's parking lots so we could replace them with the chromies on our bikes. We thought they made our bikes look cool. In reality, no one but us gave a shit.

We started peddling towards my house, I looked around to see if anyone else showed signs of gut-wrenching nervousness. I looked at Jeffery, who revealed a desperate plea before vanishing as he looked away. A calm sense of security rushed over me.

We started in the Walmart parking lot. Cars spread out like a paved wasteland clustered with metallic bugs, we began our playbook formation - dropping quarters, pennies, or nickels next to the car's tires as an excuse to bend near them to screw off some chromies.

"Hey Beau, spot me," said Parker.

I turned and watched Parker as he dove on the tires like an owl on a mouse, unscrewing the caps with swift motions. I looked around for bogies, thinking that I was in a game of Call of Duty. My heart was beating as if actual bullets we're whizzing by me. I scanned for my other comrades, and saw their heads popping up and down between the cars. Parker gave me a thumbs up. We then slowly crept along to other cars. I would always drop a quarter, stare at the tire for a while, pick up the quarter, then tell myself "next one, for sure. This would be

repeated until it was time to move to the next lot. Trent rounded us up as we stood in a nearby park, examining the caps as if they were riches we found buried away.

"Look at these BMW chromies I found!" exclaimed Parker, as he pulled them out of his cargo shorts.

"Damn dude, I found a couple plastic chromies, but nothing else," said Will.

As we sat on our bikes, exchanging and admiring the chromies, I managed to hover like a ghost during the conversations, when Parker noticed me.

"Beau, what'd you get?" He asked me.

A curious shadow fell over the group.

"I got nothin', couldn't find anything cool," I said.

Their faces read bullshit and I knew this wasn't sufficient enough to not be labeled a "pussy."

"I tried to get some Mercedes one's, but I swear an old man was looking, so I backed off," I said trembling.

"Yeah, me too. Just too many people," piped Jeffery.

"Who gives a shit, we're wasting daylight. Let's try Anderson Windows next," said Trent.

Bullet dodged.

We peddled on to Anderson Windows. It was still the middle of the day, so plenty of light was left. When we arrived, the cars were packed together like Miami beach during spring break.

We began the same routine. Quarter, drop. Nickel, drop. Our feet were meticulously pushing our bikes. I looked down and noticed BMW chromies. The white and blue logo plastered on the top, covered by a hard plastic bubble.

"Will, cover me," I said.

He nodded his head in my direction. I slowly reached down, trying to ignore my screaming heart. I touched the rigid black edges with my fingers, and panned over the glazed logo. I then began frantically unscrewing the cap, my hands jittering. I pulled the chrome cap from its home, and a wave of confidence smoothed my nervous trembling. I gently nestled the cap in my pocket, as I wiped the sweat fumigating on my forehead, I bent down for its sibling.

The second cap was much easier. I stood up like I won some prestigious award. I panned around to see if anyone was congratulating me. But all I noticed was an Anderson Windows worker furiously striding towards our group. My confidence receded into its familiar nervous shell.

"Hey you kids, come here!" he shouted. I didn't move. The pavement solidified around my feet. The rest of the group also seemed to be trapped by the same concrete.

"I've been watching you guys stealing the tire caps from the cameras. The police are coming, you better stay put," We looked around at the cameras jutting out awkwardly on the lamp posts. Their watchful gaze hovering above us.

The cop showed up, just as the Anderson worker promised. His bulky blue suit towered over us as he commanded we give him all the tire caps. I panned around towards my friends to see regretful faces and disappointment, their hands shoved down into their pockets to pull out the once-meaningful chromies. We piled a fountain of gray, green and black plastic caps that spilled out the side of his cupped hands.

He began taking notes. The weight of the situation plopped uncomfortably into my stomach.

"Name, address, and home phone number." He said, acting like this were a murder case.

As he was taking notes, we noticed some girls walking by; a closet look revealed them to be my cousin Jenny and Jeffery's older sister Natalie.

"You're going to be in biiiig trouble Jeffery," shouted Natalie.

"Shut up Natalie!" yelled Jeffery.

I looked at Jeffery and noticed he yelled through tears, wiping them as they dripped down his pudgy face.

My own tears began to creep up.

Quickly wiping them away, Jeffery and I made eye contact before I looked down at the pavement.

The cop decided to let us go with a promise that we had to answer the phone (which Trent and I never did) when the police station called so our parents knew. Okay, sure, we agreed. On the bike home, the group continued.

"Dude, you were weeping like a baby. Baaabbbyyy Jeffery. Wahh, wahh," said Trent.

"You should have heard your squeak. Jesus, my ears almost bled," said Will.

"Yeah, well Beau was crying too," stammered Jeffery.

The energy of the group shifted towards me. I looked around, their eyes hungry for an answer. There were two options: either Jeffery and I would band together and fight, or I'd drop him into this abyss of emasculating insults.

"No I wasn't," I replied.

"Yeah you were, I saw your tears," pleaded Jeffery.

"No. You were the one crying like a sissy when your sister came," I said.

"Shut up, you liar," He quivered.

This allowed them to rip into his vulnerability.

"You're a baby *and* a liar Jeffery? Wow, how low of you," said Martin.

"He's just mad cause' his balls haven't dropped yet."

"I don't think he even stole any chromies, freakin' pussy."

Jeffery started crying again, which later turned into wailing. Crying in front of us was too much for him. He molded himself into a weeping baby as the group blasted his downed character. His voice screeched through the air. I hovered behind the death circle as they slowly advanced inward on him, a comment thrown with each step.

"Homo."

"Cry baby."

I remained silent through the attack, my fear cementing my movement. I just listened to his sobbing as everyone else laughed at him, not uttering a single word.

No signal called for the assault to end, they just didn't think it was fun anymore.

We biked towards our houses. I turned to see Jeffery trialing behind the group, his head hung by his knees. Trent and I said our good-byes, everyone but Jeffery saying something.

Our routine continued, but Jeffery and I never consoled each other again that summer. He had sunk too far into his personal shame, and I was too struck by own guilt to try. For the rest of that summer, anytime Jeffery got criticized, he took it like a victim who thought they deserved it, and I insecurely glanced at him with silent responses.

When Autumn came, Jeffery and I met up on top of the hill on 15th street, with bikes under our feet and a barrier between us. I admitted to him what he already knew: that I too had cried. He almost cried again, saying how alone he had felt, and how he would have done the same if we were in opposite positions. I told him I felt ashamed, and admitted it was wrong for me to have acted that way. We stood in awkward silence as we realized we were expressing our feelings for the first time.

"Wanna shoot around at my house?" I asked.

"Sure," he said, through a smile.

We hopped on our bikes, and raced each other to my house.



From the Pantry

William Albea

An inky evening and its empty frigidness permeated through the old walls painted white and the darker roof tacked grey, with the clear windows reflecting out images from inside the house

A greying woman stood before the dampened sink, sponging the Lenox plates and bowls,

She remained focused, not meeting her dimmed reflection in the cold window or focusing on the pale-yellow lamplight that brightened slightly that small kitchen,

Her veiny and spotted hands rested the last of the fine cutlery on the wrack to drip and dry as she turned toward the pantry, while wiping the last dampness from her hands to her apron,

Through her cataract eyes she spotted what she made out to be a small, round, black head sticking out of the pantry door, with shiny black eyes that reflected the lamplight, and a small, malformed nose and mouth that looked pressed and stretched across its ball of a head,

The thing hopped out from behind the pantry door and skipped over to the wrinkled woman, it said hello and asked if it could help with any chores,

The woman was perplexed at this first sight of the blurred figure standing before her - its height at her hip - that spoke in a child's voice, a young boy's voice, content and happy to be talking to her,

That voice reminded her of another's, one she once knew; one she once delighted in; her grandson's voice; she could smell ash as it smiled up to her and standing there almost impatient for her to say yes, to spend time with her,

She remembered the fire and the smoke and the black clouds from before and what it had taken,

She reached out her bony hand to the thing's and took it, she smiled and said let's go put away grandma's books



Fear

Lizzy Miller

The edge is sharp,
here, and we both look down.
I take three steps back
because I am afraid and I don't want you
to see my hands tremble.
You're smiling
and it amazes me.
We must be wired differently
in the maze of the head,
the gray and white matter
that makes us.

I have scars on my knees from
before I can remember, but I imagine that
in the green expanse of the yard,
I tried to run
on small, uncoordinated legs.

I wonder
if the pain surprised me,
if I could stand on my own.
I like to think maybe
I wasn't always waiting
for something bad to happen.

I move to join you, now,
because I am scared that my limbs
will grow roots and that I will grow content to live
dreaming of the sun at the cliff's edge.

I lift
my face to it.
I do not fall.



How to Become a Writer at UWL

Marissa Widdifield

First, write tales about wiener dogs in a purple foldable lawn chair on the sidelines of your older brother's soccer game. Don't look up from the fabric binder of loose-leaf paper unless to ask your mother for the time or to accept candy from Jean, the grandma watching her grandson play. Be relieved when your brother's team loses. The tournament is over. You get to go home. You don't like to leave the house. Your mother tells you that you are a homebody. Don't say anything. Don't say anything when Jean says to your mother, "Is that all she does? Write?" You don't like when people talk like you're not there. You're six and you're shy. You're scared of the world. That's good. It makes you a keen observer. Jean is petite and wrinkly.

Don't show your mother. She's nostalgic and means well. She liked the story you wrote and sang on the ride home from school when you were seven about a mouse who lived in a house and ate Cheetos all day long. Read Romeo and Juliet for your eighth-grade lit class. Write short, lyrical, and mediocre prose about your older brother's friend named Ben. You don't want your family finding out. Create a nickname for Ben so you and your friends can talk about him in public. Nickname him Artichoke. Hide the prose in an old notebook in your bedroom's desk drawers. Your mother saves the papers you write for school. She says: "You have always had such a great voice!" She stores the essay you wrote about dying polar bears with the finger-painted artwork you created in kindergarten in a plastic bin in the cellar next to the wash.

Develop a new crush on your high school American Literature teacher Mr. Devinney. Decide you develop crushes too easily. Keep doing this. Feel the intensity of hope and desire. Write it down. Feel reality like a dry, dead leaf when feelings aren't reciprocated or never told. Write it down. Write an essay in American Literature on "Into the Wild" that you refused to read because you fell in love with a boy named Tyler and didn't care about anyone else, much less Christopher McCandless. Receive a 98%. Brag to your friends that you got an A on a paper written about a book you never opened. Quietly admire the smiley faces Mr. Devinney drew in the margins of your essay next to the sentences and ideas he enjoyed. Convince yourself that if you were ten or maybe even just five or maybe even just three years older, he'd have a crush on you too. Write it down. Buy his favorite book, "Death of a Salesman." Read half of it and then put it on your nightstand to use as the drink coaster your water bottle rests on for a year.

Stand in the shower during your senior year. Decide to major in English. Or Communications? Apply to half of your schools as English and half as Communications. Click the drop-down menu on the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse's college application. Choose between a Rhetoric and Writing emphasis or a Literature emphasis. You don't know what rhetoric means. Choose Rhetoric and Writing, since it has "writing" in the title. During your freshman year, tell your friends and family that you're "undecided." Take the statistics math course because it's versatile. "What about graphic design? Or computer science?" Your father asks you. "I remember you always liked creating websites." He isn't wrong. But neither is your English major. Declare a minor in Professional and Technical writing. Add a major in German Studies. Both are armored defenses against anti-art pests who wonder why science or history weren't in your periphery when choosing a

major. In fact, they were. Continue spotting constellations in starry nights and reading recounts of the Stonewall Riots and watching nature documentaries.

You're still dating Tyler. He attends a different college. Long distance is hard. Attempt to grab his attention again by sending him a picture of yourself with a hickey on your neck. He breaks up with you. He blocks your number. Grab your computer and start writing. Feel your esophagus swell to the size of soccer ball and type rapidly on the keyboard, "I want to write about something else. But I don't know anything else besides the ugliness of vulnerability." Laugh fondly at these bouts of impulsive, emotive writing a few years later. Keep writing about love.

Drop the Professional and Technical Writing minor. You don't know what Technical Writing is anyways. And love is anything but technical. Take ENG305: Creative Writing. Sit in a seat in the Marketing wing of Wimberly Hall and write your first story that's due for your first workshop on Thursday. Write about a woman getting an abortion on Valentine's Day. Eavesdrop on a group of marketing students sitting a few couches down. "I got a 68 on that test." "Dude, I got a 55." Continue writing about the decor of the abortion clinic. End your story with the vibration of the character's phone in her back pocket. Shut your computer and walk past them with attention on correcting your bad posture.

Continue taking creative writing classes...Forms of Fiction. Fiction Seminar. Join Ski & Snowboard Club. You originally wanted to be a poet. But the timing of fiction courses being offered forced itself into your collegiate path and you don't mind. In fact, you secretly like it more. Especially since the poem you wrote about M&M's and your best friend you thought was genius and beautiful never got accepted by the literary journals you sent it too. Accept that none of your non-English/creative friends will ever understand exactly what you do. "Are you going to write a German children's book?" a boy asks you at the gym. Respond: "Yeah, and you'll die in it."

Write about a woman who finds a tiny butterfly in her orange. Declare a minor in creative writing during your senior year of college. Don't explain yourself to anyone. Blush and smile when Artichoke presses the heart button under your picture on Instagram. You're still confused what rhetoric is. Never walk across the stage and accept your diploma because a different strain of the cold has taken over the planet and you're forced to confine yourself in a small room, alone, where you watch it snow on Easter.



The Lost Position

Issac Tahiri

What yet do you reap from your fields?
The sickle and hoe
where have they fled?
Oh, how your skies are empty.
For whom then do you weep?
The steeples have no bells.
Why have they gone mute?
Oh, West
your face is sullen,
your eyes are so depressed.
Observe the hour,
the Sun begins to set.
Why do you tarry?
Why are you at rest?

What yet do you recall?
The columns and libraries,
what weakens their foundations?
Oh, how your memory fades.
For whom then do you live?
The novels have no heroes.
Why have they gone gray?
Oh, West
your face is sullen,
your eyes are so depressed.
Observe the hour,
the Sun begins to set.
Why do you tarry?
Why are you at rest?



Peter Peter Peter

Cedric Neve

In the morning a bird
sings outside our window
you try to mimic the song
but the bird is too fast
you end sounding like a different bird entirely

the holes of my shirt curl where I cut off the sleeves
like your lips
after you got your braces off

you keep doing it to make me smile
we eat fresh fruit for breakfast
and later you point at the smallest green
lizard you've ever seen, there's smaller brown ones
but I don't say anything
I don't want to spoil the fun we're having together
we kiss in the sunlight
The pineapple is the sweetest I've ever tasted





Contributors

Marissa Widdifield is a graduated senior with degrees in Writing & Rhetoric and German Studies, and a minor in Linguistics and Literature. As for the future, she plans to make herself some dinner and meet up with an old friend.... OH...you meant life after college? Who knows! But if I had to guess, you'd probably find her someplace advocating for green bean casserole and making her mother angry.

Allison Bentley is currently a sophomore majoring in English with a minor in anthropology. "Sanitize Your Hands" was written for her ENG 305 class. She hopes that people will be able to find meaning and relatability within her work.

Katie Pierre is a mother of two biracial girls, and a teacher at North Woods Elementary School in La Crosse, WI. A UWL graduate, Pierre decided to reenroll herself into the School of Education to pursue a master's degree in specialized reading.

Cedric Neve is a biology major at UWL who enjoys learning about anything and everything.

Melissa Deisting is a third-year student at UWL studying English Education who enjoys crocheting, watering her plants, and wandering around her apartment.

Lizzy Miller is a graduated senior who, before her last semester, had not creatively written in years. The work you see in this edition are from thoughts she's had living rent free in her head up until their recent submission/eviction.

William Albea is a graduated senior who was last appeared in *The Catalyst* in 2017. His poetry and short stories have since been featured in numerous literary websites and magazines. "Writing is something I enjoy and I'm glad to be able to send in my original work to be read and enjoyed."

Seth Polfus is a proud "Yooper" and a familiar face to *The Catalyst*. His photo "Kentucky" graced the cover of Vol. 20. "I want to further my expertise in photography in order to properly harness the skills necessary to guide the viewer towards the significance of an image's story." Polfus hopes to evoke emotion through his work by "providing the viewer images that allow them to see the world around them under a new light."

Rachel Meihack fashions art out of need and identity. She'll love photography today, tomorrow, and the day after.

Victor Zheng (a.k.a "Vic") is a senior, who plans on graduating sometime soon. He studies philosophy and economics, having only practiced photography for a year. During that time, he's found a love for learning new techniques and styles.

Alex Keller is a hash brown enthusiast.

Linnea Cochran is a senior majoring in psychology with a minor in at risk youth. She enjoys running and 30-minute walks that turn into two-hour photoshoots.

Sophie Fox is an art major, photography minor, who enjoys playing around with food and collages -- sometimes at the same time.

Savannah Farrell is a graduated senior who majored in marketing and photography. Her interest in photography began at an early age growing up in her native White Bear Lake, Minnesota. She's inspired by the people and places she keeps close to her, and is interested in the way a captured moment makes her feel rather than its technicalities.

Issac Tahiri is a senior studying public administration and legal studies. Poetry is his creative tool of choice to explore and comprehend the human condition. His aim with his art: "to ignite meaningful introspection and curiosity." His favorite subjects to write about include: philosophy, history, and theology.

Austin VanBuren grew up in rural Wisconsin where he developed an eye for overlooked areas. "I find my work to focus on the relationship between figure and environment, as well as the integration between humanity and the 'natural' world." In his free time, he enjoys petting and overfeeding his devious cat Finnegan, playing the bass guitar, and long destination-less bike rides.

Beau Haugen studies philosophy and English. He will be graduating in December 2020 and enjoys reading, writing, running and meditating. Whenever he is away from these activities, he can be found hanging out with friends, or watching anime. He thinks Buddhism is cool: "everyone should check it out."

