

I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE

VOLUME 5 – FALL 2011



“Morning Light” photo by Michael Knapik

“I DIDN'T SEE YOU THERE”

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Volume 5 – FALL 2011

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WHAT WE ARE:

The Catalyst is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse English Club publishing prose, poetry, photography, art, music, and all other creative works by the students and faculty of UW-L. Each semester, the student editors pick a new theme and accept submissions about and outside the chosen theme.

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

For this year's theme we went with the topic of "I didn't see you there." We asked for submissions that showed what students see now, with eyes wide open, staring into the static of everyday life that they may not have noticed before. The result was a lot of great creativity being sent for our winter issue. We would like to take this time to thank everyone that did send to The Catalyst, and we hope that you appreciate seeing YOUR work on display here. If you did not make it into this issue, we encourage you to continue sending pieces for us later on.

~ The Editors

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Heliotropic Persuasion

Avery Velo

We were staying over at my grandmother's home which was protected by two lines of guarded trees but bordered by golden chapped fields of corn on three sides. I had been abandoned at the house as punishment for a deed of mischief while my visiting cousins (the narcs) and the rest of my family had fun downtown at Turkey Days. My parents had set the T.V into a state of disrepair (another tortuous plot) so I distracted myself with games of solitaire (using actual cards) and spent my half times absorbing the sunlight that streamed through the wide front porch window.

At eleven years of age one can only play so many matches of solitaire before the hooded reaper of boredom starts tickling you. So I leaped outside trying to find the trail of a far away adventure. Hopping around the cracks of the h-shaped driveway, freeing weeds from the baked clutches of slabbed pavement, but then my eyes developed into saucers. I was playing around on a driveway stage separated by a drifter's road to an audience of petal thick maned sunflowers. Fields of them! Row upon row as far as I could see. It was like walking through the wardrobe and discovering the Narnia realm my dad had read to me. Leaves clapping, seed filled heads bowed or rubbing together whispering to each other, all puppeted by the wind. I swore I'd never seen this place before. It was magic, a trick of light. Some lost hope that had found pasture here.

Looking both ways, my steps ventured to touch this mirage. Approaching the painted mailbox like a stony guard who could deny me entrance with a flip of his red worn flag. Rejection an indifferent procedure. I trespassed anyways, the peak of my head barely level with the chin of their petals. Before any introductions, explorations or diplomatic action could occur though, the flash of a sun paned windshield struck the road. So with a rude streak of instinct I hid crouching in the land of sunflowers waiting. But the dust striking pick-up didn't streak by weighed with a journey, it slowed down with the intent of a destination. A destination that parked it right before the red flagged mailbox guardian. It was a car I didn't know. Dust painted and a perfume of burning of rubber and farm fed gasoline. They'd seen me! I was gonna get kidnapped, I was going to die. My heart drummed its marching way up a constricted throat, clammy hands found themselves slivered to a mask, hiding my eyes. I was too young

and too scared to face my fate yet. Much less kidnapped and killed, or whatever the grimaces of front page news plead.

The swing of a door and the cuss of a slam inspired an urgent need to pee though and the ever closing crunch of gravel only ticked nearer. It was forever, it was unbearable, and I refused to wet my pants. A Jedi would never do such a shameful thing (I dearly loved star wars). So to save myself from an urgent dishonor, eyes still stubbornly shut. I shook my hands into tiny knots of fists, jumping from a flowered world, crying like a banshee. Yelling myself hoarse like a little savage, readying for the counter attack. The shock of not getting slapped straight away dared me to slip open an eye though. There my bearded grandfather stood white knuckled hands choking the stem of a sunflower raised before him like a sword, dirt dripping from its roots, jaw slightly dropped. We were two statues caught completely in surprise and then a dusty wind swirled by, breaking the stalemate. He smited me with the sunflower rather roughly, exploding seeds upon impact. "Arde Garin! I practically had heart failure you little runt." Chuckling a little as he felt his chest reassuringly, before swatting my backside with a crack of his sunflower weapon again.

Now the shock of the first blow had dulled the pain but the second one sparked a bit of embarrassed anger. So I snatched up my own sunflower sword (a slightly dead sunflower of course, I hadn't the heart nor the strength to uproot one). With this I struck him back and then a duel of epic-ness took place. We traveled all over the yard, driveway, front porch spraying cackling seeds from the blows exchanged. There were ducks, dervishes, daring charges, a flourish of grinning spins, mostly whatever I'd seen in movies (mostly fight scenes from Star Wars). It lasted through the endurance of my imagination (Grandpapa later said I was making sound effects), till we were swinging the barest nubs of stems, our hands hilted in dirty roots. Nothing but the sound of heavy breathing between us.

Then with a sky breaking grin Grandpapa tossed his victimized sword to the side, "You win little rascal." Cocky on the purchase of victory still I called, "What do I win?!" Before I could run much less react he shouted, "A Grandpa hug!" Snatching me to his chest, scratching his beard across my forehead as we spun in kamikaze circles. My giggles the sputtering fuel of our journey, which (luckily)

crash landed on the grass where spits of dandelion seeds shot up.

Swatting pollen and sunflower seeds from my hair as I stood defeatedly surveying the damage. There was a scattered army of sunflower seed carcasses covering the yard especially the driveway. Grandpapa just bowed his head in laughter, as I crossed my arms, refusing to be labored with more punishments. "You better tell grandma this is half your fault. I'm in enough trouble already!"

As the echoes of his joy fell away, subtly swiping tears off, Grandpapa caught two brooms from the garage. Together we made quick work of the mess. With my chin perched on the broom I questioned rather shyly Grandpapa curious to see if he could see them too, "Where'd the sunflowers come from?" "They've always been there turkey!" Now I was embarrassed. "It's okay. Sometimes you don't see things right away, especially the ones in front of your face. You know I'd known your grandmother for most of my life growing up. Then one day we were sharing a bag of sunflower seeds at a baseball game and I grew." My eyebrows had crawled into a state of confusion, but grandpa just laughed, "What I've learned in my many years is that people don't fall in love, you can but it usually hurts when you land. The best kind of love is grown. That day I grew sitting next to your grandmother. And I could tell you every detail of it, names of the players, the smell of barbecue across the street, how her winning smile got us discount hotdogs after, anything and everything. We got married, had nine kids, worked and lead a farm together and it's tough because change is never unaccompanied without some growing pains. Sometimes, well often times people forget why they wanted to grow together. So, when we built this house I carved out a wall of windows on the front side. Every summer season when the farming was the busiest and we'd come home bone tired barely seeing each other all day. She could look out that window and see an acre of all the reminders why I loved her." He held me close enough to hear his heart.

Then the family drove up laughing with fair stories and fat bags of kettle corn, running inside to escape the heat. Grandpapa talked to mom and dad which abolished all of my sentence. Happily I hijacked a hay barn with my cousins scaring up a family of raccoons and climbing Everests of crumbling bales. That night before supper though I snuck across the road, loping off the head of a sunflower

and sneaking it into a vase, to centerpiece the table. When my grandmother saw it her eyes found my Grandpapa's and they glowed together like a twin some star. That is how I learned to truly see and appreciate the things around me.

An Untitled Piece

Matthew Baumann

“Why do you want this job?”

Well Chuck, do you mind if I speak candidly, about exactly why I am sitting here before you? By now, you probably have a good sense of my ostensible persona. Up until this point I have pandered my answers to your liken, but I feel I need to be completely honest when answering this question. If you really want to understand me as a person, and the pain that is associated with the dichotomy of thought I am feeling then I hope you embrace what I am about to describe to you. Know that that this is my last attempt at abstraction. This is merely an effort to describe who I was, what I want to be, and how that will benefit your company. When I was in grade school there was this awesome substitute teacher named Mr. Quill. He was a wide-eyed, jubilant man with an insatiable desire to have fun and make kids laugh. He was as much a novelty as his quirky last name suggested. Out of the entire, substitute-teacher-pool the students prayed to get Mr. Q. Like all substitutes, he never required us to do any real work but he always leveled with us in a way that we respected him for. He usually led off class with a goofy joke, followed by a brief attempt at doing the “assigned” busy work before he would just say ‘screw it, push your desks aside, we’re playing a game”.

Mr. Q was somewhat of a celebrity in the local performing arts scene. He was a staple member on the prominent improve team in town called Comedy Sports. He always incorporated a level of goofiness from the stage into his teaching persona. As an 8-year old I hoped to one day have the same type of energy and enthusiasm for living that Mr. Q had as a middle-aged man. As I aged, Mr. Quill continued to substitute teach in my classes a couple times per year. Around my Junior year of high school I noticed a sharp change in his demeanor. His tone became more desperate, his pitch more monotone; it was like he had lost his will to entertain, to create, and essentially to live. Soon he became a shadow of himself, exhibiting little enthusiasm while he hid behind his computer for most of the period and forced us to do the type of busy work he once despised. Students resisted this change. Every class had a few who couldn’t help but point out to Quill that he was no longer who we thought he

was. “Hey aren’t you a comedian, tell us a joke funny guy” is what they would say to him in a condescending voice. Quill would just shake his head, sink his shoulders, and disappear deeper into the abyss of his once vibrant mind. He would sit behind his computer while he sporadically typed in a manic fashion. I assume he was working on a novel that he had ambitions of finishing before waking up on the wrong side of 25. The weight between his waist and sternum constantly reminding him of an adulthood filled with overconsumption. His aging face and smokers cough were evidence of a lifetime riddled with unchecked impulses for “living in the moment”. It was not until I started searching for jobs in the business world and thus having to deal with the reality of adulthood, that I understood what happened to Mr. Q. He was dealing with the realization of being creatively exhausted and irrelevant. I can take one of two paths as I transition into adulthood. I can either be a speculator/distributor of someone else’s value or I can be a creator of my own value. However, there is a third option, which is a combination of both roles. This is the most dangerous path because the two ideas are so conflicting in and of themselves. This is exactly what Mr. Q attempted to do. He was using the guaranteed income of a substitute-teaching gig to supplement his creative aspirations. He probably figured he would do the teaching thing while he tried to launch his writing/acting/comedy career. Slowly he realized that he was never going to make it. He was never going to make a living in a creative capacity. Yet, everyone at his rational career (students and peers) already had this expectation of him to constantly be creative and funny. In a way, we were all rooting for him to reach his creative potential but it never happened. Can you imagine what it must be like to be expected to play that role all the time? Can you imagine trying to earn a paycheck based on your personality and ability to make someone laugh? This must be the loneliest place a human being can be. A human life trapped inside a character– typecast for eternity. So, what does any of this have to do with me being here? If life operated in a vacuum, there would be no reason to be afraid of anything. No risk too dodgy. No desire too selfish. No deprecating thoughts that could inhibit and destroy the mind. In this vacuum accomplishment is limitless and creative thought is infinite. However, I do not operate in a vacuum. I live in the real world. A world that is dictated by dollars

and cents, haves and have-nots, successes and failures. And the barometer for success is always money. When I went to college 5 years ago, I thought a business degree was the next logical step. A proverbial security blanket in case I didn't achieve wild creative success or start a retail phenomenon equivalent to silly-bands. But that turned out to be an ideal fantasy. A myth buried inside my head. For 23 years I have lived my life with a complete sense of wonderment, and curiosity. I have woken up in foreign places, said things I shouldn't have, used and abused substances/friendships/relationships all in the name of "finding myself". I have taken a lot of risks in effort to find my creative self but it's easy to be idealistic and socially rogue when I don't have any adult responsibilities like paying bills. I need to let go of my childish ways and start living with some foresight because the future scares the shit out of me. My youth and my careless approach to life have been catalysts for creative output and I feel that as soon as I commit to an "adult" life, the rigid domains of reality will limit my ability to find joy the way I once did....but its something I have to do.

Have you ever loved something and then slowly watched it slip away because of factors you felt you had no control over? I'm talking about a pain where the lingering sense of loss presents itself in subtle, yet myriad ways. It's the feeling you get when you brush your teeth in the morning and see your youth fading away in the mirror day after day. It's the look of terror in my parents eyes as they watch the news and begin to realize that the "American Standard of Living" that they once thought was infinite, is actually eroding. The best parallel I can think of is the thought of treading water in the middle of the Atlantic ocean—delaying the inevitable.

I know that I cannot commit my life to working in a creative capacity while the jaws of reality nip at my heels and because of this, I am here to take the brunt of the pain now, rather than deal with a lifetime of depression due to a lack in myself. I want to avoid what Mr. Q went through at all cost.

As I see it this job provides structure, vertical promotion opportunities, and most importantly a consistent paycheck. I need to be "Jared the Insurance Salesman" from 9-5 and Jared the human being after hours. This separation is key for my peace of mind. Someone with creative aspirations is never off the clock. Their

workday is not finite because as an “artist” their job becomes all encompassing. It must be impossible to approach ANY situation--social or even in solitude, without thinking about how they must produce something. Eventually their minds eat them alive. I am here to plug-in and bury my idealistic vision of myself for my own safety and well-being. I am leaving that part of me in the past and opting into a life of certainty. However, this does not mean I am completely done making irrational decisions. Someday I may use my savings that is earning minimal interest in a CD to buy a boat. I may assume the role of a boat owner. I will wear retro fitted caps and measure my relative bravado against other men in terms of horsepower and hyperbolic fish stories. I might even play the lottery on a weekly basis and internally romanticize about the things I might do if money were no longer a problem. But this is a different type of irrational behavior in terms of my worth to you as an asset to this company. My temporary lapses in frugality will only further insure my dependency on the paycheck that this job will provide me. The dark truth is that I am a coward. I do not have the balls to commit to a life of uncertainty and make an attempt at creating value. But I know that my commitment to working here is not selfish--it is actually the most selfless thing I can do. People say that “surviving” is just a euphemism for slowly dying, but people who are “living” are simply selfishly desiring. This type of creed works for some people and I have the utmost respect for them, but I am too cowardly to make that commitment. My dream is to give my son a chance to pickup where I am going to leave off. I hope that I can provide him with a life of consistency and stability that will allow him to grow into what I could not be. To give him the bravery and encouragement necessary to find success in making the “unknown” work for him.

By the time I was 12 I realized my athletic limitations were going to prevent me from ever playing in the NFL and some 12 years later I am realizing that I will never be a creator of my own value. I don't think there is a better counter weight to that realization than being a salesman who insures someone else's value. I am here not because I want to be, but because I have to be; and in that desperation, you will find an employee that is so unequivocally dedicated and addicted to the idea of stability and the importance of success that I will make the best “Yes”-man-employee this side of the Mississippi.

....Soo what do you think Chuck....am I fit to sell insurance?

Dear Man

Andrea Gleason

Dear Man,

No offense intended kind sir, but I do not desire to be you. On the contrary, I am proud to be quite different. This current movement of modeling your clothing and your mannerisms has been pushed upon me by society for far too long. 'Tis a pity that your foul mouth has infested mine, and that it has become acceptable for me to utter such filth in the presence of others. We have strayed from our feminine ways of modesty, reserved nature, and politeness, exchanging these for provocative attire, brashness, and ill manners. Often such motives are to appeal to your unbridled masculine desires, and in doing so I am losing my identity as a unique and respectable sex. I have been fooled into believing your wants should be mine as well. I have rejected such beautiful and intricate attire for fear of appearing weak or unattractive beside you. My fight for equality has become a fight for the right to imitate and please. In my struggle for equal dignity, confusion has occurred, making it a struggle for your ambitions and manly qualities, or often to appease them, and even you have forgotten who I am.

I have received what the so-called "feminists" of my sex have asked for: I open my own door, walk in behind you, pull up my own chair, and pay for my own meal. In our blindness for more power rather than equality, my innate qualities have been underappreciated. Delicacy does not imply a lack of strength, and displaying my emotions does not mean I lack the ability to be logical. In envying your qualities, I have forgotten to value my own such as my nurturing nature, sensitivity, and compassion. In lowering my standards, I have equally lowered yours. For this I apologize and promise to work to regain the respect and dignity those in the past have worked so hard for. I only ask that you help me in this fight by supporting my right to be equal in dignity and rights with a role distinct from your own. I now realize that just because I now have the right to act like you, does not mean I should. I desire, not to be treated like your fellowmen, but rather as

your compliment and counterpart, whose qualities although quite different, are just as valued.

Sincerely,

Woman

Untitled (monoprint)
Brittany Vogt



Cigarette Butts

Lauren Ihrke

I can't believe I didn't see it before; it seems so obvious to me now. In front of me on the table the ashtray overflows with the butts of my habit. In the pack there were four measly cigarettes left, and the one shaking between my first two fingers was nearly used up completely. I take another pained drag from the stick, trying my hardest to ignore the voice chiding me. How did I never notice it before? Now it screamed at me, refusing to be ignored.

"Those will give you cancer," it tells me, but I don't respond. The next drag is extra hard, just to spite the voice, but the fire burns its way through my lungs and is released in a hacking cough. "I don't know why you're persisting in acting so childishly."

I glare at it in offense. How dare it act that way! It should know exactly what's going on here. Of course I'm offended! All of these years, it's been lying to me, and now it's upset because I don't take it in a stride? I go to take another drag, but the cigarette has been used up. Instead, I scowl again and stub it out in the tray. I go to grab my next stick, but it grabs out first and swipes up the package.

"I think that's quite enough," it tells me with scorn as it turns away, rising from the table crossing the room. The package is dropped into a drawer, and the drawer is closed. It thinks it's winning by doing this, but it's only angering me. Those cigarettes were the only thing that was helping me to stay calm. I was already shaking for another.

"You can't do that if I don't want to you," I say, almost to myself. I don't move from the table. I'm still trying to figure out if it's happened at all, or if I'm imagining things again. I've been imagining things a lot lately; it's getting difficult to tell which is which. "Why are you still here anyway?"

It looks hurt, and then it sighs. "Something is wrong," it says, looking at me in pity. "I can see that. But, please, stop taking it out on me. Haven't I always been here for you?"

“That’s what I thought,” I murmur, staring at the table in front of me, rather than looking at it. “But you lied. Since day one, you lied. Still you won’t admit it though. You keep giving me that look, like I’m making things up.” I pause and lift my gaze, glaring at it. “I know you disappear!” I shout at it. “When I’m not around, you don’t exist!”

It’s eyes widen in terror. Now it’s sure that I know it’s lie, and it’s scared. It thought that I was still blissfully unaware. But, I know — oh, I know. I know everything, and I’m ready to tell the world. It isn’t real.

“What are you talking about?” it finally asks, taking a half-step toward me. It held it’s hand out, as if to sooth me, but stopped before it was within reach. It looked scared now, like I was the one here who was dangerous. As if it hadn’t brainwashed me all this time. “Are you okay?”

I scoff. It really was trying hard to keep the lie up. It was pathetic. The game is lost, honey; give it up. “I’m not falling for your tricks anymore,” I tell it, venom dripping from my words. I could see how they cut it; broke it down. Slowly, I stand from my chair, practically seething. “You have no power here anymore.”

I step out from behind the table, and it falls back a step. It’s eyes are wide now, full of terror. “Finally scare of me?” I asked, taking another step forward. It’s stuck at the counter now, and can’t run away.

“That’s right. I’m the one in control here. I don’t want you here anymore.” My breath is coming in fast, like I’ve just run up a flight of stairs. I’m excited. I thought this day would never come. “You have to go away.”

It starts crying, staring at me like a hurt child. It plays these games — yes, it does. It wants me to believe that it loves me; that there’s something real there. For a long time, I believed it too, but not anymore. This is going to be finished now.

Wiping at its eyes, it nods slowly. "If that's what you want," it says softly. "I won't stay if you don't want me."

"I've never wanted you," I bark, glaring. "I didn't think I had any control over it before, but now I know, and I want you gone!" I don't care that it's beginning to cry with more vigor. It will put on its waterworks, but I won't be affected. Instead, I move a few feet over, opening a drawer.

Inside there are all sorts of gleaming knives. They were a set that it bought me. I suppose though, I actually bought them for myself, now that I think about it. They really were a very nice set. I fingered the edges of them a moment, relishing how sharp they were. I had finally discovered that I would need to visualize what I wanted to happen for it to happen. This thing wouldn't just go away because I wanted it to; I would have to make it happen.

I hear a shifting behind me, and half turn my head. It's trying to leave the room, and I know it's because it knows what's going to happen.

It's protecting itself, trying to get away for a few hours until I calm down. I'm faster though, and in seconds I grab it's shoulder, pushing it up against a wall.

"Three years, you've lied to me," I growl. It shakes it's head fervently.

"I don't know what you're talking about! I've never lied!" My growl comes out more harshly this time. "Don't lie to me!" I bash it against the wall harder, and it winces, letting out a squeak that ignore. "You let me make a fool of myself!"

Again it whimpers, shaking its head with as much emotion as it can.

"I would never lie to you; I love you!"

"You're not real!" I shout back, growing impatient. My free hand is gripping the knife at my side. I tell myself to just plunge it in; then this will all be done.

"What about me isn't real?" it shouts. "I've lived with you; I've slept with you; I met your parents! We were a real couple! We are real!"

It's desperate now, sobbing while it spouts its lies at me. It thinks I'll take pity on it for all of the fake realities it fed into my brain.

"I want to be healthy," I tell it softly with a dangerous edge. I do pity it; it can only survive through me. I just can't live in that world anymore. "You need to go so that I can be healthy. All of this is just a fantasy, and I can't live it anymore."

It puts its hands on my shoulders, looking at me desperately. "Just let me go," it says, sewing its web of lies tighter. "You'll never see me again. I promise. I'll do as you want; I'll leave and never come back." It's shaking now uncontrollably, because it knows what's coming next.

I let out a scream of rage, thrusting forward the knife until I can't push it forward anymore. My eyes are squeezed shut and all of my muscles are taunt. Then, the grip on my shoulders loosens suddenly; and then it comes back. I open my eyes and look into hers. She's staring at me wide eyed, in shock. Tears are streaming down her face, but her eyes are quickly glazing over. Her mouth opens and closes in silent terror, but no sounds form. Like a fish out of water, she opens it with a clicking sound in the back of her throat, then it closes again.

Horrified, I jump back, and stare at what's happened. It's tricked me again. I didn't even see her there. I wanted to stab it, not her! "Oh, no! Oh, God, no! I didn't see you!" I repeat over and over to myself in little more than a breath. I lift my hand to cover my mouth, and it's gleaming red with her life. "Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no!" I go forward and push against her stomach, but the blood doesn't stop. Quickly, I retreat, looking at her in horror.

I rush forward again, picking her up from her slump against the wall, and cradle her against my body. "I'm so sorry," I sob into her shoulder. "It did this. It didn't like us being together. I'm so sorry. If I had done this sooner, this wouldn't have happened. It would be dead, and we could be together; just like old times."

As her last breaths come in, I pull back and look at her face, cradling it with my blood covered hand. She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen, even with a knife in her gut and blood creeping from her lips. She looks at me with hurt and betrayal, but still can't form words. I know that she would tell me she loves me if she could, but death is coming on too fast. In moments, she's gone.

"Damn you!" I shout at it. It's ruined things again. Even at my best attempt, I couldn't kill it! "I'll get you yet. You aren't real; I have to do away with you. I have to be healthy."

Hours later, I still sat on the floor, cradling my love in my arms. Her body grew cold, the phone rang, someone banged on the door wondering about all of the noise, but I never moved. I waited for it to come back, but it didn't. It finally had me where it wanted me. I didn't see her there, and now she's dead.

A manic laugh forms after some time in my stomach, and works its way up through my throat. Soon, my own laugh bounces around the walls, echoing in the empty space. For the first time in months, it isn't here. I've lost her, but it's gone too! It's this thought that's on my mind when the police break in the door, and I laugh at them too.

Where Life Meets Fantasy

Brook Sullivan

Imagine a place so full of life where time seems to stand still; a place where the morning sun rains down on a sunlit meadow, a life-bearing river, autumn-like trees, all beneath a marble sky. The grass, like a soft pasture, remains untouched by humanity. Overgrown and billowing tufts flourish from the spongy earth. One would think the ground underfoot is solid, when in reality it may be a mere illusion. The Utopian appearance of the meadow awakens the recesses of one's heart, and the wilderness makes an individual feel a sense of wholeness and peace. The bank where the meadow meets the river, beryl in color and non-tumultuous in nature, is undefined. The direction of waterway is also vague; it weaves and bends like a path of life. With the clarity and purity of a glacier and as smooth as glass, the water reflects the contours of an enchanting forest back to the beholder. The dense array of colors of towering trees catches the eye. The frontal trees, whose leaves have a rustic-auburn blush, are exceptionally distinct. Some of the leading trees are notably tall and slender while others are pithy and have plump trunks. Soaring over the obverse trees are the vermilion and apricot stocks, average in appearance. The dark moss and callow timber extend over the amber pulp creating a thick, voluptuous supply. The trees are so magnificent because of the extreme diversity of colors and sizes. The trees add to the timeless area making everything seem perfect. When glancing at the sky, the light-blue color mixed with the soft cotton-like clouds seems dreamlike. The delicate billows arranged sporadically make the firmament a breathtaking beauty. The calm warm sun radiates through the buttermilk sky; it composes a fantasy place only experienced in sagas of fairy tale. The cool, crisp air begins to set in as the sun creeps closer and closer to the horizon. To think that nothing lasts forever is a doleful thought; this once upon-a-time place is reaching its last moment, drawing its last breath. The grand finale proves that there is hope of a promised second life.

Clouds Reflect
Rebecca Otto



Destruction in the Middle of the City

Kacy Harasimowicz



Freedom
Brock Mueller



Out and About
Lucas Graff

Every time I go home
My grandmother asks me
If I have a girlfriend
It never fails
She wants a wedding
Like I want a boyfriend
But I'd never tell her
That I love a guy
Who has broken my heart
So many times
His name is still bleeding inside me
Because quite honestly
I'm afraid the news that I'm gay
Would kill her
My grandmother only knows
The parts of me I'm willing to share
And I love her too much
To sit there and watch her die
Just so I don't have to live a lie

I told my mother I was gay
Over the phone
Because I couldn't
Watch rain fall from her eyes
Her lightening words splitting
My body in half
I told the first brother
Over an instant message
Because he was stationed
In Iraq and I didn't know
If he would be coming home alive
I told the fourth brother
When we were driving to the grocery store
I told him I'm gay
He said I know you're happy

When I said it again
He looked at me like I was dirt
I grabbed his arm
And yelled that I am still the same person

But I was never able to tell the third brother
Like all small towns news spreads faster
Than the wind can blow
The tornado rumors of who I love
Ripped his trailer park popularity
And threw it three counties over
He has never told me
What people said or did to him
But the amazing thing
Is that he doesn't resent me

And now eight years later
I can honestly say
Coming out was the best thing
To happen to my family
Since the four of us took our first breath
Because we were all born again that day
Our cords were cut
The curtain rose on act 2 of the Graff family play

I never thought coming out
Would create a relationship with my father
For a man who barely spoke to me
In high school
The words I'm proud of you
Fell from his tobacco covered lips
Like they did not mean everything to me

And I never thought
I would be able to sit in dive bars
With the first and third brother
Ordering another round of beers
And my dad buying us all shots of tequila
Forcing me to walk the two blocks home
At three in the morning

I never thought
I could tell my mom about
Being sixteen; laying in my bed
Praying to a God, I'm not sure exist
To just make me normal
I was begging and pleading
This gay thing would just be a phase

And I never thought
The fourth brother
Would greet me with open arms
When I came home from Christmas
Then proceed to wrestle me to the ground
Knowing he's bigger and stronger
Than I will ever become

But the fact that if somebody scratched
The word fag across my back
Or threatened to drag me behind
A pickup; feet tied to the bumper
Until my lungs fill with gravel
All three would drive nine hours
Just to kick their ass
And that is the best gift
I could ever get

Untitled

Joey Curtin

Dear Friend,

Little do you know, you continue to provide a positive vibration throughout your life. Day by day you proceed to surpass the media bullshit thrown at you from all sides. You're a circle, completely unaware that sides exist and therefore, refuse to be influenced by anything; unless there is a serene, completely positive essence surrounding it. You'll go on to give off this idea to those around you and inspire them without you knowing. But, that's the beauty of it. Inception. Not knowing that you're invigorating a sense of originality within another being. I look around this room, at 2:26 in the morning, and see four other men. Four other men that have wandered into this apartment. Pause, and think about how wandered is such a biased word. I feel that when people nowadays use the word wander, it broils with negativity. Straying from the beaten path is what gives us courage, what gives us character. Those who don't wander, are lost. To not wander is to undergo a life of knowing. Yes, knowing might sound like an inviting accent on a sentence, but what's a life without the unknown engulfing you. So to say I'm surrounded by four other men that wandered into the same room as me makes me comfortable. Comfortable in a sense that even silence is bliss, and to achieve blissful silence is to make a connection that speeds past doubt. That my friend, is love.

- Joey Curtin

Pdiddles
Ashley Nicholas



20/20 Vision

Greg Nickel

There are many contrasting experiences in life. Furthermore, every one of those experiences has the potential to teach us new ideas and fresh ways to look at things. College is more than just one of those experiences. College is something else completely. But what does it show us?

Think back to your first semester as a college student. When you ponder some of the things that may have been going through your mind the conclusion can be drawn that they were... juvenile. Maybe you wondered how close this would be to your high school classes. Maybe you wondered if that girl/boy sitting next to you was also silently thanking themselves for choosing that seat. Or maybe you just silently prayed that the professor would not pick you out to answer the first question. All of these were legitimate thoughts to have as a freshman or sophomore. But what has progression taught you?

As you trek further along the pathway that is college, your blurred vision begins to clear. You begin to see who you are, what you like, and where you want to go in life. Dreams are born and at the same time they are crushed. Reality is... realized, and adulthood must be embraced. Friends are made and lost, but one thing remains: we learn.

So, what have you learned... not in the confinement of the classroom, but in the infinitely opportunistic environment of the college campus. Have you found that dream? Have you met those lifelong friends? Have you realized reality? If the answer is no, time is not up. Go out and solve the code. There's a good chance that when you do, your vision will be perfect.

Untitled

Macakenzie Hautala



(This picture was taken on the evening of Julia Sumnicht's funeral. Julia was a student here at UW-L. In the clouds, you can see the outline of an eye with an eye brow as Julia looks down at her family and friends.)

The Masterpiece

Rob Schrader

The master Sculptor reached out a hand
To mold the clay that shapes this land
Using His hands and sculpting spade
A masterpiece is what He made
With flawless form and technique
He shaped valleys and mountain peaks
Lakes and rivers He did connect
His whole work being perfect

The master Painter picked up His brush
His palette full of colors lush
Ranging from lavender to jade
A masterpiece is what He made
With flawless form and perfect strokes
He painted the leaves of the autumn oak
Hills and oceans and everywhere
The Artists' work beyond compare

The master Creator reached out His hand
And molded the body of the first man
In His image and His like
Mankind's match He did strike
And breathed into him the breath of life
Then created for him a wife
He looked around and said it is great
A masterpiece He did create

Untitled
Andre Bailey



Sidewalks with Cracks

Sasha Michigan

It was a town filled with churches, but also as many bars as there were churches. Each an institution for meeting with others, one more accepting of all kinds over the other, despite one of them saying that it was more accepting than the other.

The youth gives up on church. They go to church with an exasperated look on their face, and leave the same way. The old people enter the chapels with a feeling of accomplishment, a shallow revival of where they were during the last week. They all sin, we all do it, and make the same mistakes that we promised to stop. The old man's last drink has lasted twenty some odd years.

The further a person travels down the numbers from thirteen to three, the street's buildings change. The churches become the taverns, and the congregation leaves at 2:30 A.M. stumbling in the street filled with the intentions/hopes of committing the same sins they will atone for later. They are so filled with gospel that they run and scream, act upon their wildest indiscretions, it's called drunken faith and they commit to talk to the people they desire most, a trick that no book could instill on even the strongest believer.

The youth walk into bars with their chin held high, and as the doors are pushed open and the years change their chins lower, until as an old man they walk into bars through loneliness and hopelessness knowing nothing will change and the last drink will wait. Carpe diem, ends up a request to die on a carpet, as comfortable as alcohol poisoning can get when gurgling vomit surrounding a last breath. Survivors wait till the weekend to pick up from their mistakes make corrections where needed.

The church that towers high above, reaching towards the heavens always seems to be asking for money, when you give money to taverns you see results sooner, if even at all from churches. They ask with the image of Christ bleeding in pain, as you are sitting on a wooden corrective stature bench, in a mansion that imprisons God,

and tells you about what hell will be like. Souls are condemned- blindness, gnashing, sinews, genitals, more gnashing, four horsemen. The talk of misery stacked upon guilt stacked upon the request for generous donations to a building of medieval hierarchy.

Bars encourage you with hope, false as it is, a woman in a tight top winking at you as you toss the extra bill. Gnashing, gnashing, genitals- please here. Your chin rises a little to a false hope, salvation through a sixteen ounce glass, more and more. This temple stays warm till around two, when people become people, they remove their false fronts like the well dressed church goes on Sunday. Leave, go home, we all have places to be.

The streets are colder damp from the rain that falls light and slow. Street lights light up a path up through third and on the way back up to real society. The march of stumbling proceeds out every dimming door, the open signs slowly go away. Distant laughs, and voices that anticipated what comes next the bad intentions to pray about, and forget later. Their chins stay up, while others stay down, but to drunk to completely lose all hope. The houses next to church are pale with chipped away paint. Please give money to the tower next door, remember how the preacher focuses on the guilt instead of hope, he prostitutes the Bible to you so that you will buy your salvation in them. Messages corrupted by people, people corrupted by power granted through hope. It spins your head around until you land on a lap crying "please save me, please don't go, take me with you." Preachers, prostitutes, bartenders, friends, and even pews and stools. We cling and break glass and bone, we can't be wrong, we can't be left behind. "Take me with you, even though I don't deserve you." Preachers, bartenders, hopefuls alike, friends that want to leave early and have just had enough. They all leave they all go away, in pew or sidewalk everything closes, and eventually fades away.

Da Lucia
Brittany Vogt



Mississippi River Ice Close

Laurie Maloney



seeds

Cassidy Flannery

what would we do
when all the seeds go missing?
with so much in this world we take for granted.
how could we say goodbye to the flowers?
colors which once swayed life through the breeze now gone
tell me...
who would still sing the songs?
rightening all of our wrongs, brightening our day when we've got
nothing else
so much we take for granted
as we sit in our confinements, always viewing static.
what would we do, when the seeds go missing?
no birds a chirping in the distance
no peace, and love, just a black and white existence.
who could still love? when there's no family trees staring from above?
so lets lay outside tonight
you and your hair in the breeze, just put my mind at ease.
that we wont let this beauty go missing.

Bluff Land Drift
Laurie Maloney



Andean Anthropology

Rachel Lee

Once upon a time I had a dream I'd be the next Jane Goodall
Instead of loving the primates I would travel the world "helping"

people

I wanted to spread the "American Dream"

Focusing in on Latin America like a beam

But...are we helping or hurting?

Loving or punishing?

Diversifying or conforming?

Once upon a time I closed my eyes and saw an old beautiful bruja

She told me that spirituality comes from within, from nature, and
camaraderie

She told me to look towards the mountains, precious water, and sun

Then she asked me:

Why do you find me so interesting?

People are people and although we are different, we are all the same

Love is love

Pain is pain

We all show our emotion many different but universal ways

Once upon a time I looked at the sun and realized that we are all one

Living under the same big star we worship different deities

One may praise Allah

One may praise "God"

One may praise Shiva

One may praise none

Some can grasp the message of the gods and nature combined

They are the lucky ones

Once upon a time I wanted to help the Andean people

I now realize that although I have money I am no richer
than those who see the multidimensionality of this universe

Who am I to deem a lifestyle unfit?

Who am I to change a culture?

Who is this American who wants to intrude?

Am I the one who is just being rude...
To think of my life as better than yours,
To take on your burdens instead of letting them be sores

But this dilemma is bigger than me
My country wants to help and that's our creed
The United States is meddling with politics
Calling a president an Indian because of genetics
You are who you are by defining yourself
Stop taking advice from the white man's shelf
Get out there and learn about all different cultures
Before the world goes to shit and we are all acting as vultures.

Ignorance
Carly Frerichs

They say ignorance is bliss.

That is a lie.

No, ignorance is a fox.

It is cunning and crafty.

It will steal what is dearest to you,

Then silently disappear.

Wise
Brock Mueller



Breaking Point

Matthew T. Bauman

Mike Miller got what he deserved. Some time ago, at the KFC downtown, Mike Miller was standing in line with about a dozen people or so. He was inattentive, as he usually was, looking at the hole in his slacks and wondering where he had lost the phone number of the IRS representative he had talked to about filing bankruptcy. Also, much of his money had disappeared through the hole and he only had enough for the chicken sandwich. What part of town did his money drift to? Who now was it serving? He wondered.

At the front of the line stood a customer flailing his arms as he screamed and spat at the cashier, apparently for some dereliction of duty. The exact details are not important. Most of the customers in line had a good view of the cashier's muscles tightening in response to the argument, and when they saw this surely some custodians in the brains of the dozen patrons lit matches behind their eyes as if to say, GET DOWN, but Mike Miller was not paying attention. When the cashier fired two bullets into the chest of the angry patron from a fisted pistol, and the crowd ducked and screamed and shit their pants, Mike Miller was too preoccupied to notice what was going on. Once he grasped the situation he lunged forward, stepped between the hands and noses and hairs of the panicked customers, leapt over the counter and grappled with the cashier, his decrepit, conflicted chest against the cashier's strong, poloed chest.

Had it not been for Mike Miller's grandstanding, the child would not have died. Mike bit the cashier's wrist and took his gun away from him and by some strike of good fortune, the cashier tumbled into the cup dispenser and Mike stood with the gun. He found the safety switch and fumbled at it. The gun fired and a boy never rose from his prone position on the restaurant floor. The cashier yelled out MURDERER and no one was willing to argue. Mike Miller killed a boy with the gun he should have just put away, or better yet, used to hold the cashier in place as he called the police. It was an unacceptable error, Mike.

Mike Miller should not have even been there. It was his own fault he was hungry. Perhaps he shouldn't have driven his superiors to can his ass. Perhaps he shouldn't have been so willing to rat out his boss for sleeping with another man's wife. All that did was expose her affair, and all and all Mike ruined about fifty lives counting all the children and extended relatives, some of whom surely lived out of state, but probably felt heartache nonetheless. Perhaps he shouldn't have used his status as Assistant to the Executive Human Resources Manager at Costco to get his 16-year-old nephew a shelving job, \$6.50 an hour, part time, after school, Saturdays, every other Sunday. There were four applicants, Mike Miller played favorites, and there are few who wish to employ a hypocrite, that is to say a man who would attempt to preserve the justice of monogamy and root out those who break it, and then turn around and delve into nepotism, no matter if it was on a small scale.

If Mike Miller would've kept quiet he would not have been pushed to take on the role of a ragged, malnourished man and would not have to touch food as unsavory as KFC just to eat something, anything. It's Mike Miller's fault for not settling on eating rats and wanting to eat "real" food, wanting to "pay" for food.

Maybe if Mike Miller hadn't lingered, he would've been able to reach his car. Mike, if only you had parked in the handicap spot your damn car would not have been so far away from the restaurant door. Then they wouldn't have caught you. You just couldn't fucking learn, could you, Mike?

They, that is to say, the customers, tied Mike to the back of one of their cars, left wrist around bumper, monkey fist knot, right wrist around bumper, monkey fist knot, face-down on the gravel. The parents of the boy Mike Miller savagely killed grieved in the background, and the cashier held a young, attractive girl who might have been the sister. They took turns driving around the block, gunning it hard, letting Mike Miller's face gradually peel off on the concrete, letting his shoulders separate, letting his balls bounce on the rumble strips (they eventually took him to the highway), letting the rope enter the skin of his wrists, while the cashier fucked the sister or

whoever in the backseat of another car. When the gang, Kentucky Fried Cunts they named themselves while laughing heartily over some booze they opened with Mike Miller's teeth, finished their fun, they left the broken criminal in the parking lot.

When the cops came by after midnight, Mike Miller should have let them know the situation. Massive trauma? Please. Serrated fingers? Yawn. If he would have told his side of the story, albeit incorrect, perhaps the two police officers would not have kicked his head until he passed out. If Mike Miller had any decency, he would not have had the curiosity to spend six years in a coma, while all those poor doctors wasted their time fixing him up. Think of what those doctors could have accomplished if they didn't have to work on Mike. Think about it.

When the cops arrested him for two murders thirty-three seconds after he woke, Mike Miller was the only one to blame for not having saved up his money to hire a good lawyer. Maybe if Mike didn't infuriate the atheist judge by answering his sneeze with "God bless you," he wouldn't have been denied his constitutional rights that allowed him a lawyer. Maybe he shouldn't have looked into the eyes and apologized to that one girl, the possibly-sister, very pregnant, who stood with the cashier, who held a kid's hand, about five-years-old, because when the girl started to cry, the jury started to shout out GUILTY and decided not to deliberate.

Mike walked home, because, despite filling the meter up, his car was towed away, probably for detracting from the beauty of the infrastructure surrounding the courthouse. While walking home through the thunder and foot traffic, Mike should not have made eye contact with the little boy crying over his skateboard, which lay stranded in the middle of the busy street. Without hesitation, Mike Miller risked his neck to retrieve the board, dodged Buicks and peddled bikes, Chevys and horse-riding coppers, there and back. A perspiring Mike returned the skateboard to the boy who beamed and jumped and smiled and cheered and said thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. Mike felt a change. A feeling of salvation, beauty and innocence, all the glory a child's happiness can bring,

filtered like foggy light through the metal bars of a sewer lid, entered Mike Miller's body and crept through his veins toward his heart.

As Mike stood up and tears entered his eyes, a burly man wearing a fur, real fur, shoved Mike in the chest as he passed and those good feelings that were described earlier veered off and never found the heart. The boy might have sensed a profound death enter this stranger's heart, but still gave a cautious final thank you once more with a meek wave of his hand. He then positioned himself on his board and looked around to be sure it was safe to ride. Mike Miller placed his hand on the gap between the kid's shoulder blades, shoved him off his ride, scooped up the skateboard and snapped it in half with a thrust of his knee. He pulled out a Swiss Army Knife. Mike pointed at his wrist and told the kid to cut himself there until it hurt, and cut himself again until it stopped. He then tossed his small weapon to the child. As Mike Miller walked away from the scene the boy put the knife in his pocket, whispered a silent fuck you, and went forth, changed, one way or the other.

Brazen Silver Memories

David M. Briggs

Did I ever tell you I used to play the trumpet?

I did, it's true.

Now you might not think the trumpet is

a very cool instrument,

but I assure you, back in the day,

I was quite good.

I played for years, you know.

I played all sorts of music

for all sorts of people.

I screamed on high B's
when the music would burn.

I tore through the scales

and I shouted for more.

I pondered the blues
when my heart was in tune.

I brooded and crafted
and sang through the brass
like a lovelorn vagrant.

I wrote in the air
with invisible ink
that could be seen for miles
if you cared to listen for it.

I played galas and galleries,

dances and dinners,
basements and theaters,
ballparks and bars.

Life was my music
and music was life

and one could not exist on its own.

To me,
those times are the fondest of memories,
though I frequently wish they were not.

For who can give up their life and soul
and not feel a little wistful at its passing?

Eleven O'Clock Penalty Flags

David M. Briggs

It is eleven o'clock
And I sit in my room
In front of a computer
And wait for a video to load

While in the football field
Across from my room
(and five stories down)
Groups of people
Throw penalty flags
At no one

Three large groups of people
At eleven o'clock in the evening
Decided that they should go to the football field
Turn on the lights
And throw penalty flags

There are no footballs
There are no frisbees
There are no soccer balls
No lacrosse sticks
No baseball bats

Just three groups of people
Throwing an oddly large number
Of penalty flags

Sometimes they throw them to each other
Sometimes they throw them in the air
Sometimes they run as they throw them

But none of this changes the fact
That all they are doing
Is throwing penalty flags

Without any football players
To make penalties

And I sit in my room
And wait for a video to load

And I call them weird.

I think maybe my priorities are out of order.

Lakeside Light
Michael Knapik



Untitled

Ryan Kacvinsky

As driftwood comes and goes with the rise and lowering of the tide,
much of what we say in a day is forgotten. But in a storm, some
driftwood is impaled upon the earth in such a way that the tide will
never have the power to wash it away again, just as some things that
are verbalized will always be embedded in you - and will forever affect
you.

Puzzled
Rebecca Otto



The View
Theresa Wheeler

The view from my window,
 So picturesque.
The colored leaves falling
 Telling me
 Seasons are changing.
 Times,
 Are changing.
The frantic rush
 Of all,
 To prepare for
 Yet another
Season. Another change.
The view from my window,
 Is people.
 People swarming,
Each one different.
 Though all one
 In the same.
 But I never see
 You.
The view from my window,
 So picturesque.

Untitled
Joseph Van Oss



Thing

Brian Miller

Hello there thing that I never have known
Where have you come from
What are you
Why me why now
These questions keep stirring, then
Like light from a cloud or melodies in a song
Listen, listen, the revolution is coming
Like a hurricane engulfing my brain
I wonder, I wait for this overflow to stop
Then suddenly nothing, nothing but calm
A feeling of comfort that you've been unknowingly waiting for
It's here you're mind numb from the possibilities
You wait you wonder, this thing it's not just a thing
You ponder
Have you come home, have you been gone
Still more questions, more lessons
Lyrically woven like a tapestry you begin to get more answers
More and more
Until you realize this thing
It's not a thing
It's you.

Untitled
Andre Bailey



No Ordinary Day
Aarynn Deutsch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7E2S0uKM4o>

Adorable
Aarynn Deutsch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F51bJLnsW7Q>

Take a Loss

produced by Tyler Keyes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leUbXh4kZyM>

After I'm Gone

produced by Tyler Keyes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vo7BHiTrEKY>

