

CURIOS

Magazine 2020



CURIOS

Volume 12

Curios fosters the breadth of creative expressions across our northern Arizona community by providing publication opportunities to local writers and artists. The magazine is produced annually by Coconino Community College students with the guidance of CCC faculty and staff.

When we chose Transformations as the theme for this year's edition of *Curios*, we had no idea how relevant it would be. We had no idea that we would be compiling *Curios* from home, soliciting contributions through text messages, swapping materials through the College's learning management system, and sharing design ideas over Zoom and cell phones. The way we had conducted business in the past was no longer possible; we were forced to transform our process and arrive at a design that met our new challenges and old deadlines.

The contributions on the pages inside reflect transformations of their own. They reflect images that shift and change shape in varying light and movement. They reveal transformations in behavior as we encounter marked days of unrest and uncertainty. They explore the devastation of a world attacked by an uncontrollable virus, marred further by a global economic downturn.

This edition pays tribute to all transformations, good and bad, with a message of hope that we can build a stronger community by rejecting our old ways and adopting new ways to save the tender world we live in.

To enter literature or artwork in the next edition, please email curiosccc@gmail.com

Cover Images: Ethereal Motion by Scott Sawyer (with Canyon Movement Company)

For submission guidelines, interviews, and additional audio and video links, please visit us at: curiosmagazine.org

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Anxiety
by
Nina
Dihlmann

LETTER TO AUSTRALIA

.....
Luke Owens

You seemed impossibly
old for a backpacker
slumping down from the Vienna-
Prague night train, though I
am older now than you were then,
a fact my mind pushes against
like a wind-up toy
against baseboard.

Everything we said
is now missing
except the moments spent
trying to pick a name
out of your trenchant Aussie tones: Drivvess
Drevis Trippist Travis.

I just remember drinking
before lunch playing cards
everyone smoking in the monk's
brewhouse with the two Ohio girls,
spiraling rounds of Pilsner
you must have paid for
and the ceiling of Vladislav hall
held up by swirling ribbons
and no one able to straighten their face.

And the day after next, after
you found your expat friends
I remember myself in the snug booth
calling their number
on the LCD screened payphone
with an atavistic riveted metal case
and receiver that must have been backlit
and I remember the Kraftwerk ringtone
the answering Czech unable to help
and my voice, this voice, unable to ask.



THE CHERRY TREE

Chad Sitcler

The woods were dark and the trees posed as dark shadows of creatures in nightmares. But one tree stood taller than the others, darker and creepier, and had many stories made after it. It stood large and in the deepest part of the forest. A boy had wandered his way into the woods having been chased there by a group of pesky bullies. The woods had many stories of ravenous wolves, swarming crows, and bloodthirsty bats, but no story compares the one of the cherry tree. The stories say, "The black cherry tree is the darkest tree in the forest and it is the tree of death itself. The fruit it has holds death. That is why nothing lives in the forest." The child had no care for stories and ran and ran and ran until he had lost them. As he caught his breath, he looked up at the tree with fear tripping over its roots. He had no idea where he was. He was lost, and the sun was setting behind the cover of the forest. His only choice was

to stay. The boy was tired and hungry, and as he was trying to sleep at the trunk of the tree, a cherry had fallen on the boy.

The boy was scared to eat it because of the stories he had heard. He stared at the tree where the cherry had come from and another fell at the boy's feet.

The boy, consumed with hunger and exhaustion, ate the cherries. The boy was scared

that the cherries would make him sick. He laid down again, but still the cherries fell one by one. The boy realized that the tree was giving its fruit to him to eat and was letting him sleep on his trunk. The boy ate the fruit and slept. When the boy awoke, he collected the cherries and left for home. The stories had said that the cherries were black as the heart of death, and the cherries he had picked were a dark black, but when the boy found his way out of the forest, the sun shined

and revealed that the cherries were a deep, red color that looked like a heart. The boy had made it home to his parents who worried about his safety. They asked him where he had been. The boy answered, "The bullies from school chased me into the woods where I was lost." The mother asked, "What do you have in your pockets?" The boy pulled out the red cherries and said, "The tree gave it to me. The tree that kept me safe." The mother took the cherries and made the best pie the town had ever tasted, and as time moved on, the boy grew up, and he walked to the tree and brought his own son. He asked his son, "You see that tree? Doesn't it look scary?" "Yes, Dad," said the boy. "But why are we here? I'm scared of the tree." The dad responded with a smile and said, "My boy, this tree is not like what you see." The father pulled out a light and showed the boy the tree. The tree lit up and was a gorgeous looking tree with hundreds of red cherries. "You see," said the dad. "This tree was my friend, and I want you to realize that your friends are very important." The father picked some cherries off the tree and said, "My friend gives me cherries while I make a beautiful pie for everyone to share." The father and the boy returned home leaving a note on the tree saying, "My Friend" in small and big letters.

Rearview
by
Trevor
Gonzales





Beauty Is In
The Eye
by
Jeff Roth



ART FORMS

Noosab Tsitra

Transformation is an art.
A Human must apply creativity, skill, and imagination.
Only then does the potential for the butterfly to emerge arise.

Transformation is a daunting task,
not for the faint of heart.
It may only take place on blind faith
and, with gratitude.

To Transform is daunting, brutal,
compassionate, and beautiful.
But be careful where and with whom you walk.

To morph into a new or different existence means walking
with mere hope down a long, dark, dank tunnel
hoping for the speck of light.

Be mindful of where and with whom you walk.
Choose well.
There are but a few who can and will take and guide
you through your journey.
Choose well and show gratitude.
The beauty is in the darkness and pain.

Embrace the heaviness, sadness, discomfort, and pain.
Own it as it is a life-raft and serves you well.
It is through Thanksgiving that earthly suffering is
Transformed,
one broken heart at a time.

BALL BEARINGS

Larry Hendricks

Dry season, 1978, hot and sticky. Cicadas droned. It was the weekend, and we were bored. We walked by a dead dog covered in lime to keep the smell down. Joel poked it with a stick. Lance wretched from the stink.

Lance was a dopey-looking kid from Texas. It would be years before he'd become schizophrenic and figure the government was out to get him. Joel was a crazy kid from California. He was that one friend we all have at some point in our lives, the kid who came up with the off-bubble ideas that would land us in hot water. Joel's parents didn't care. Mine did. My parents eventually stated: "Don't hang out with Joel; he's not right in the head."

So, I hung out with Joel every day.

We'd hopped the fence from Campo Tamare into Campo Camco. Both were little gated communities for the families of expats working in Venezuela. The windows in the houses were slatted glass fronted with reinforced rebar to prevent break-ins. The doors had metal bars on the backs that could be locked to keep people from getting in. The camps all had armed guards in Army uniforms carrying shotguns, or M-16s. Some of their weapons had bent barrels, and you knew if they used them, they'd blow their arms off. Venezuelans were not allowed inside the expat camps without good reason. We expat kids could come and go as we pleased, and we never gave too much thought to why the guards were there, or the

fact that our houses were little fortresses.

We strolled through the thick grass. Three Venezuelan workers, dressed in orange oil-rig coveralls, lounged in hammocks under mango trees by an old, decrepit cinder block building. They passed around a bottle of Cacique rum. A man with a big mustache, darker than the rest, nodded to me, and I nodded back.

Joel bent over and picked up something and held it out to us. It was a big, shiny silver ball.

"What's that?" Lance asked.

"It's the biggest ball bearing I've ever seen," Joel said and handed it to me.

The bearing was heavy in my hand.

"They're all over the place," Lance said.

We saw dozens of them, some half-hidden in the grass. We each picked one up. Joel put one to his, pretending he was an Olympic shot-putter. He threw the ball bearing at the cinder block wall.

In an instant, there was a round hole.

We all looked at the three men under the tree. They watched impassively.

"Hey, I've got an idea," Joel said. Lance and I waited for it.

"What say we bust down this wall with the ball bearings?" Joel said. "We could be a wrecking crew."

"Sounds good to me," Lance said.

We formed a plan of throwing low, side by side, in a line that went the length of the wall. We



figured that if we did it that way, it would cause the whole wall to crumble - which it did. The three men under the tree applauded us, and we moved on. We drank cold Polar beer at the bodega near the demarcation point between Campo Tamare and the community of Las Morochas.

Somehow, later that day, I'd told somebody of our feat, and my father had been close enough to hear. To my mind back then, my father had always been a bit pissed off at life. He liked to take it out on my brother and me. At least he didn't drink, like Lance's dad did.

"You did what?" he asked.

I knew I was in for a rash of hell.

"We had permission," I said.

"Who gave you permission?" He gritted his teeth like he always did when he was pissed and I was about to get walloped.

"Some guys at the camp. They watched."

"We'll just see about that," he said, grabbed me by the shirt and hauled me to his Chevy Caprice. As we drove to Campo Camco, I stared out the window at the Venezuelan savanna.

"You still have an out," my dad said. "Tell the truth, and I won't be so hard on you."

I fully knew his line was just as full of bull as my story, so I kept quiet. My heart beat wildly. I sweated ferociously and I worked on a plan. I should run, but where would I go? Maybe I'd mix it up with the old man. But he'd kick me out, and then where would I go? Venezuela is a long way from the United States. I'd have to take the beating. It would hurt, but it wouldn't kill me.

We drove into the camp. I prayed the three guys were gone, but they were still lazing in the heat, passing around the bottle of rum.

"Last chance," Dad said.

"It's like I said."

He glared at me, took a deep sigh and got out of the car. I started to get out too, so I could prompt the guys, but my dad stopped me.

"You stay put."

My dad strutted over to the men. I heard him say something to the really dark guy. They talked, but I couldn't hear what they said. My dad pointed at me, then at the busted-up wall. The dark guy pointed at me and laughed. The cicadas droned hard and loud. My dad's expression relaxed. He and the guy chatted some more, and my dad trudged back to the Caprice.

I steeled myself for a beating.

He got into the car. He sat there for a second. I was ready for the backhand.

"I don't know if those guys are in any kind of position to give you permission," he said and started up the car. "I'm going to talk to Bill in the morning about it. Destruction of property is some serious business."

I snuck a glance at the man. He nodded at me and winked. I nodded back.

We drove home in silence. My dad opened his mouth to say something a couple of times, but didn't.

I never saw that guy again—but ever since that day, doing kind things for strangers became a passion of mine.





CCC Common Read Presents

INKED

The ink tells a story.

Inspired by the Coconino Community College Common Read program selection, *Tribe: On Homecoming and Belonging*, by Sebastian Junger, INKed invites veterans and civilians to share the stories behind their tattoos and body art with the goal of promoting a sense of belonging and connection in our community.

Critics of western culture, throughout the ages, have seen isolation and the breaking down of culture as damaging to the democratic spirit. This criticism, applied by Junger in his book, explores the failure of western culture in being

able to fold men and women of the armed forces back into society.

CCC Common Read invites students, employees and community members to read one book and to engage in common intellectual experiences related to that book. Faculty use the full text or excerpts in their courses as required or recommended reading, and, with the addition of activities outside of the classroom, CCC Common Read seeks to create meaningful opportunities that deepen student engagement and sense of belonging at CCC and in our communities.

Brandon
Whiterock
by
Jeff
Roth





Tasha
by
Larry
Hendricks

The last straw was when the father of her two children hit her and put his hands around her neck.

“As hard as I had fought, I was not able to scream or get him off me,” Tasha said. “That night, I told him to leave, and if he did not, I would call the cops. As soon as he left, I packed only my and my kids’ clothes and took off.”

As she drove away, a sense of calm, of freedom, of safety she had not felt in a long time, came over her.

“I knew I wanted to get a tattoo, but I wanted to wait until I had a need for it,” she said.

She is now a student at Coconino Community College. She wants to study nursing and become a certified registered nurse anesthetist. She had to wait some time to get over the abuse, to stop being skeptical and mistrustful of people, to work on bringing down the barrier she created. It was a three-year process.

“I finally felt I could be myself, and I was no longer angry at my ex,” she said.

She is married now, and her tattoo on her arm is a namaste sign over a lotus flower, which, to her, signifies the peace after a hardship. The lotus flower grows where other flowers are not able to grow.

“I reflected it onto myself – only after having gone through that hardship and getting over it,” Tasha said. “I was able to blossom into ... me.”

-Larry Hendricks, photographer

Brandon Whiterock’s mother, Lori Piestewa, was the first female soldier to die in Operation Iraqi Freedom. She was killed March 23, 2003, when Brandon was a little boy.

“All my life, I’ve chosen to do everything because of her,” he said.

Her name is well known. Piestewa Peak in the metro Phoenix area was named after her. There are the Lori Piestewa Native American Games. The Piestewa family was featured in the television show, “Extreme Home Makeover.”

He realized his mother’s story helps others heal, which uplifts him and shows him how many people his mother’s life impacted.

“It’s really great to come together and heal,” Whiterock said. “To reconnect with other people, to help.”

So, it was important to him to get a tattoo to keep his mother’s memory alive because so many veterans out there don’t get that same honor. He comes from a military family. His grandfather, Terry, who has passed away, was in the

military. His father and mother were in the military.

“I want to give back to the veterans, and my ultimate goal is to work for the VA (Veterans Affairs),” he said, adding that he is a student at Coconino Community College who plans to transfer to Northern Arizona University and get a bachelor’s degree in Physical Therapy.

He got the tattoo on his forearm to immediately see it upon awakening – to give him a focus, with no distractions, on living a successful life. Lori Piestewa left a big legacy and big shoes to fill. While going to school at Tuba City High School, he found out he was good at football. His mother excelled at sports, too. When he gets to NAU, he’s hopeful to try out for the team.

-Jeff Roth, photographer

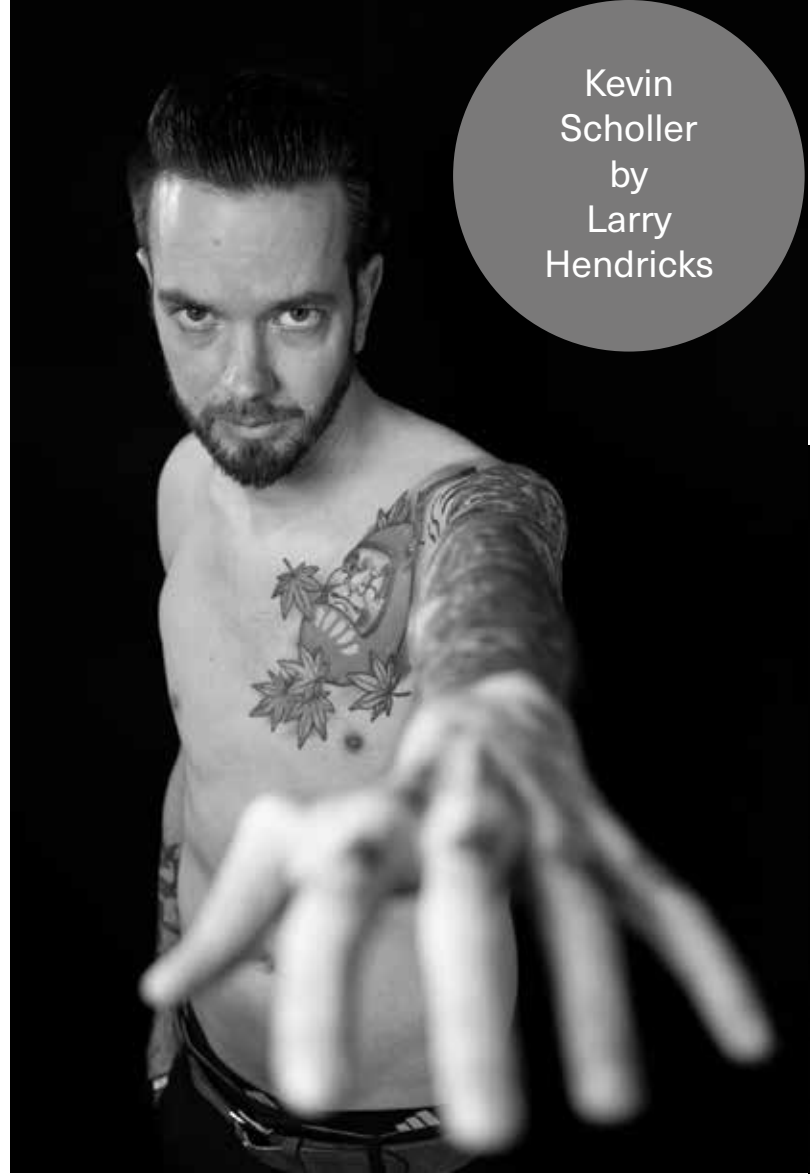
Kevin Scholler, a CCC alum who is at NAU studying for a degree in Social Work, got his knuckle tattoos, “High Seas,” as a U.S. Navy Boatswain’s mate in the Philippines as an homage to his mentor. Bosun’s mates do all the hard work, put in the long hours and get by on very little sleep. It was a brotherhood, and they were all in it together.

The red Japanese Daruma doll on his chest has one pupil filled, which signifies the wearer has set a goal in life. In Kevin’s case, his goal is to get a master’s degree in social work. When he gets the master’s degree, he will have an artist fill in the second pupil.

The lower part of the sleeve is made up of nautical themes, and when Kevin first went into the Navy, he was warned against getting the Navy crest and being branded a “lifer,” so he chose pirates because he liked pirates when he was growing up. The upper part of the sleeve is his “Golden Dragon,” which is an Americanized dragon on a Japanese background, signifying his journey in sobriety. The Chinese have a story of a koi fish that swam up the Yellow River to a waterfall, where there were dozens of other koi fish. They all tried to get up the waterfall, and the one fish was successful and transformed into a golden dragon.

“That was a perfect metaphor for my sobriety,” Scholler said. “Sobriety is not an easy thing. It’s one day at a time, and I wanted something I could look at to remind me of the transformation I’ve made so far.”

-Larry Hendricks, photographer



Kevin
Scholler
by
Larry
Hendricks



Javi
Williams
by
Michael
Luna

Tattoos, for Javier “Javi” Williams, are grounding, connecting him to himself and the earth, and they are art.

“For me, tattoos...are living art galleries fused with a form of time travel,” Williams said. “I can appreciate any piece from afar, regardless of technical level, and, if given the opportunity to hear a story behind a collection, gives me the chance to visualize that brief moment within another’s experience.”

He’s been a collector of tattoos and body modifications his whole life, including when he served four years in the U.S. Marines in various combat roles. In his time in the Marines, he had tattoos of the Grim Reaper placed on his back.

“They reminded me, and still do, just how close death lingers, as well as forming almost wings of sorts to remind that I, too, can be that death that can swoop down upon those whom were deserving of the afterlife. Kind of dark, I know, but that’s who I was in that time of my life.”

In infantry culture in the military, he spent every waking and sleeping moment with his fellow Marines. They quickly became family.

“It’s a different animal making that level of connection in the civilian world as lives are much more separated and rarely have to deal with life and death as a constant,” Williams said.

-Michael Luna, photographer

“It took me 32 years to commit to my first tattoo,” said J.L. “It was 2015, and I was going through some significant and difficult life transitions.”

The lotus flower, she said, has symbolic relevance for many different cultures and religions and has always stood out to her as symbol of hope, beauty and perseverance.

The Ancient Egyptians believed it symbolized rebirth as it closed its petals at night and would bloom again in the morning. In Buddhism, the lotus grows in muddy water, and

it symbolizes the purity of enlightened mind arising out of suffering. It also represents non-attachment, as it is rooted in mud (attachment and desire), but its flowers blossom on long stalks unsullied by the mud below.

According to Hinduism, within each human is a spirit of the sacred lotus. It represents eternity, purity, divinity and is widely used as a symbol of life, fertility and ever-renewing youth. The lotus is also used to describe feminine beauty, especially the eyes.

“For me, this tattoo is marker of this period of my life; a time of transition and change,” she said. “A time of rebirth and acceptance of the unknown. At best, it serves as a reminder of resiliency and positivity in light of the darkness. When I see my tattoo, it gives me pause and allows me to reflect on the balance of both adversity and resilience in my own life.”

-Jeff Roth, photographer



J.L.
by
Jeff
Roth

THE UNEXPECTED

Erika Acuna-Leonet

Seven years ago, two teenagers in love threw their legs over a brick wall and carved their initials surrounded by a heart into a giant pine that loomed over the old library. Their plan was to share a piece of their love with the world. They thought that by carving this symbol in this strong pine tree their love would survive forever. This special spot became their spot. The lovers would meet at the corner every night and sit on the wall talking for hours. The bricks were cold to touch but would soon warm up, enticing them to stay. Cars would pass the teenagers and briefly stop at the stop sign. During the cold months, people would stare, probably wondering why they were outside sitting in a foot of snow. The crickets would sing, the moon would beam, and the stars would shine brightly. There was a lamp post that dimly lit the street, but the girl always felt safe in her suitor's embrace. The vintage library stood a few feet behind the brick-stone wall and pine tree. It held hundreds of books—many of them old and weathered—waiting for someone to read them again. When the pair finally ran out of things to talk about, they would look up and try to find the constellations and passing satellites. Other times, they would try to count all the bricks in the wall. Time was infinite. Until, finally, someone would pass and break that thought. Before leaving, the girl would climb on top of the strong brick wall and walk across holding the boy's hand until the wall came to an abrupt end, and she'd jump off.

I laugh at the memory of the two frivolous teenagers. I look closer at the wall, and the cement looks like it is chipping away. Some of the bricks are missing and cracked. The spot on the pine tree has since faded, and only certain parts of the carving

remain. Had I not been the teenage girl carving the heart, I would have not known what the markings were. There is a cold breeze. My hair blows in my face, and my nose feels like it's going to fall off. It is autumn, and the tree next to the pine is shedding its beautiful yellow-gold leaves. It looks like I could make one enormous mountain of leaves. I know my son would enjoy that. There are mounds of squashed crab apples on the sidewalk below the magnificent tree. It stands even taller than the once mighty pine tree. The pine looks old and worn. I sit on the wall, the exact spot I sat years ago. Cars pass by, briefly stopping at the stop sign before continuing on their way. No one glances at me. As it gets later, it gets colder. I look at the sky, and it is engulfed in clouds. I cannot see the moon or the stars that once shined so brightly. It has since started sprinkling. The bricks are covered in rain; they are cold to touch.

How has life turned out for the boy I loved so much? Has he found the happiness that eludes me? Has he forgiven my betrayal? My thoughts keep flowing, like the Colorado River. They engulf me, they paralyze me, and they seem endless. As soon as one thought ends another begins—on and on.

I am ripped away from my thoughts when I hear a deep sigh followed by a foot tapping on the concrete angrily. I look up and see a little boy with brown doe eyes staring at me. His lips pursed so deeply you could see his adorable dimples. My son has grown impatient. He has walked the wall a total of ONE MILLION times, or so he exclaims. I laugh and get up. He grabs my hand, pulling me toward the doorway of the inauspicious library.

I had only gone in a handful of times and only after having my son. Once inside, we find the library is luminous. Right at the entrance there is a stone brick that they moved over in 1959 from the original Williams Library. The cement that once bound it to the old building still clings to the stone. “Williams Library 1915” is branded deep into the center. It is the oldest piece in the library. My curiosity is sparked. My son heads for the kids’ area, and I head over to Andrea Dunn, the library director. The original library was funded by a group of women who made a cookbook and put the sales toward building the library.

The library was built in 1915 and stood at its original location until 1959. They then built a new library in its current location and moved their tremendous collection of books. She tells me the women decided to get the funding for a library after they discovered that there was a men’s book club that convened regularly at the back of a shop.

I am fortunate.

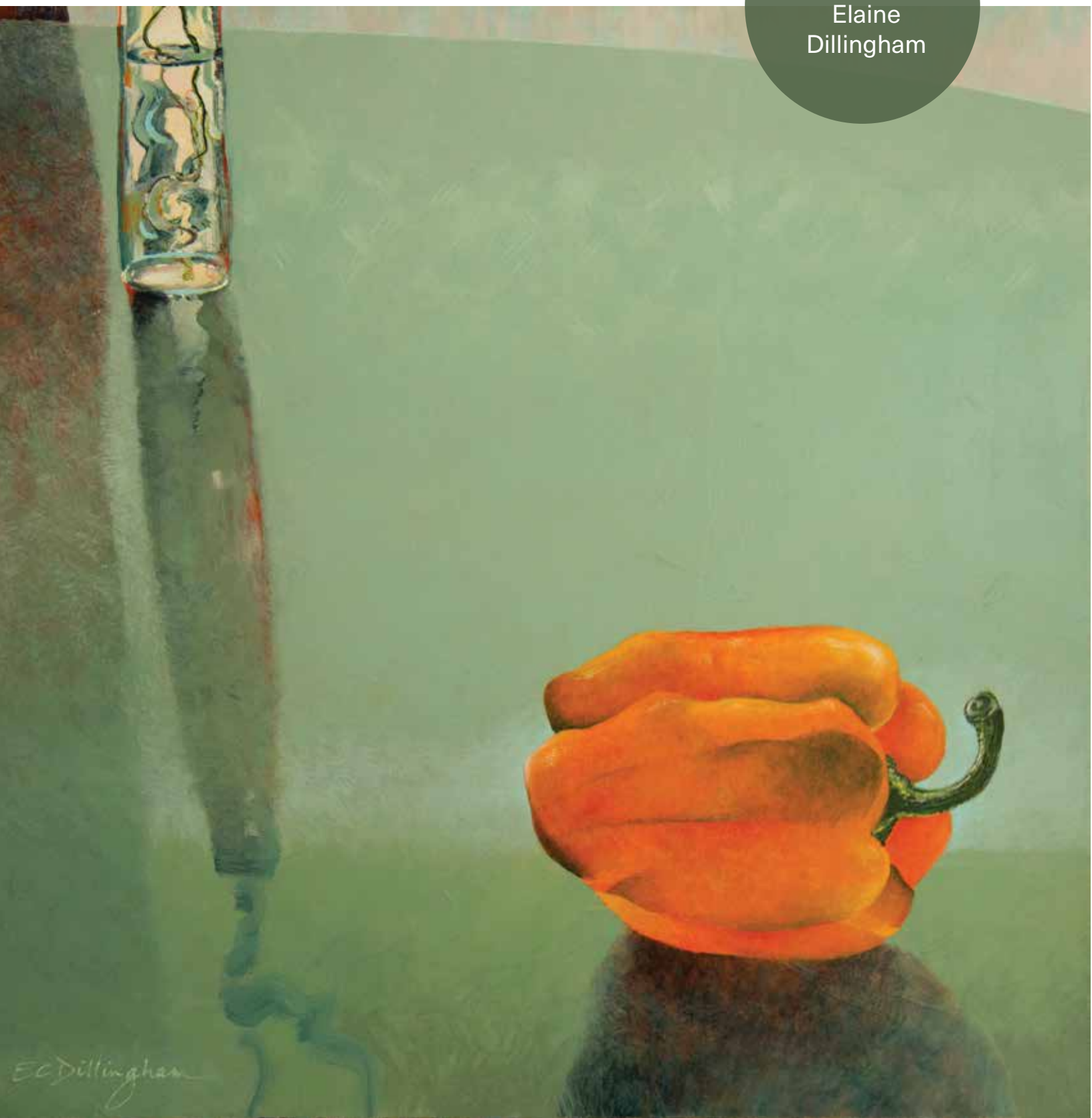
Mrs. Benham, the woman who runs the historical archives office at the visitor’s center, hands me the light-blue cookbook that is over 100 years old. One hundred and seven years to be exact. The book looks better than I will in my 80s. I feel so much pride for the women who put this together. I feel my anxiety start to flood into me. My stomach is doing flips. I want to laugh,

scream and jump all at the same time. I thumb through the pages. They feel silky and fragile. The edges are brown and torn. The book contains recipes ranging from prune pie to removing grease spots. I find a piece of paper that the reader-turned-writer put in the cookbook. The paper feels rough. It has stains, presumably from coffee. It is written in cursive—a recipe for Nougat. My finger traces every loop the writer wrote, and I can feel some indentations from where she pushed her pencil too hard. Some of the words have begun to fade. I find my way back to the first page of the cookbook. I immediately recognize the symbol that is in the middle of the page. I feel dread wash over me. I stare at the swastika, struggling to comprehend the implications. Mrs. Benham sees what I am staring at and tells me that before the Nazis used the symbol, it was used by Native Americans, and it symbolized well-being. A wave of relief rushes over me. I flip through the pages again, astonished by how many hot-chocolate recipes they are. I even see recipes for foods I never even knew existed. Mrs. Benham casually tells me if the book were hers, she would let me take it home. My time has come to an end. I chuckle and close the book and pull it toward my chest for a quick embrace. I feel reluctant to give it back. She smiles as she takes the book. She hands me a picture of a girl smiling wide-eyed in a black-and-white photo. The girl is leaning on a brickstone wall in front of a park that once was behind the original library. I stare at the picture—frozen.

The irony.



Pepper
by
Elaine
Dillingham



REFUGEES OF RAIN

Doug McGlothlin

Due to flash flooding, I find myself stuck
in the east-side library—not the one with
historic appeal and panoramic
pictures of the frontier days—

the one in the strip mall housing one-horse
shops and shops on the brink of abandonment,
a liquor store with iron bars a couple
of doors down from the Pistol Parlor.

This one is crowded with refugees of rain,
city bus riders and carriers of most of
what they own, those who have a computer
only during the allotted log-in time;

all are equal here, all have a right to
owning as much knowledge as can be found on
these shelves, as much “Escape to Scenic Highlands
of Scotland” and “Glamour Secrets of the Stars”

as can be found on the magazine rack
or classic stacks at a given time. A few feet away
Hamlet is having a nervous breakdown.
A few feet away Flannery O’Conner

spins a yarn hypnotic and ironic,
hilarious, tragic, truer than not.
A few feet away is a nodding napping
mouth breather in need of anointment, but rain

water will have to due for now. A few feet
away a Navajo kid is sketching something
on butcher paper that Van Gough would give
his other ear for: horses lunge from storm

clouds framed in feathers amid shapes ancient
and profound—his Led Zeppelin shirt still soaked.
A few feet away an unemployed bartender
works on his resume and a teen-aged mother

balances her son on one knee, proofreading
her research paper about renewable resources.
The librarian’s nearly inaudible voice helps an
elderly man find an audio book by Zane Grey.

Outside the rain has ceased, the bus approaches
its stop on the flooded corner like a hybrid ferry.
A rustling of Spanish, English, Navajo—
a few gather up and leave, but most stay put.



SINGLE SNOWSTORM

Maxie Inigo

I

It's been snowing three days in a row.
It gets redundant shoveling snow.
I do the best that I can,
But I dream of a man,
Who will give me a plowing, then go.

II

It dropped another foot on the house,
Again, I'm in need of a spouse,
Or a companion at best,
To help shovel the rest,
Then ask me to take off my blouse.

III

The sweat on my brow is now dripping.
My hands are all blisters from gripping.
So where is the man,
With snow plow in hand,
To clear all this snow while he's stripping?

IV

Too much shoveling and too much seclusion,
May be causing my steamy delusion.
Oh, where is my dude,
Who arrives in the nude,
To give me my hoped-for conclusion?

V

The storm is now over, Thank Heaven!
It dumped about three foot eleven.
A man did not show,
When I was shoveling snow.
Still dreaming of Tom, Dick, or Kevin.





Canyon
by
Jim
Schroeder





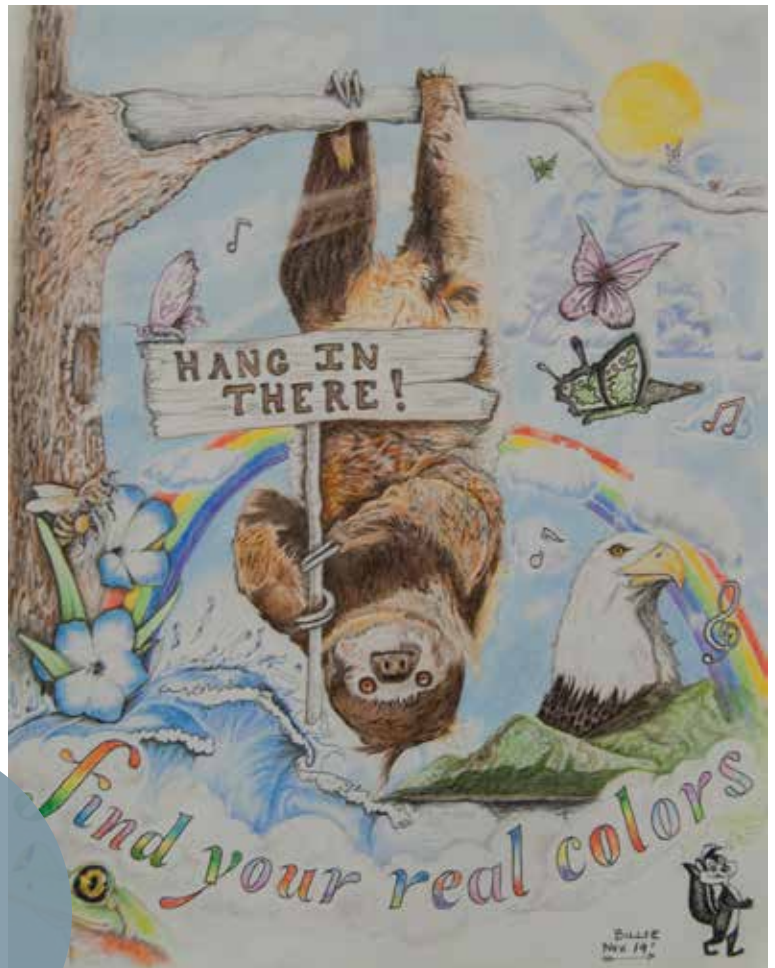
Coconino County Detention Facility
Exodus Inmate Substance Abuse Treatment Program

In the Exodus Program, we are recovering addicts and alcoholics. We are parents and partners. Sometimes, we are homeless. Sometimes, we are jobless. We are thinkers, inventors, criminals, and wonderers. We are artists and writers.

We write about our scars—internal and external. We draw pictures of what we looked like before we were incarcerated. We create banners that share the message of hope and inspiration.

We strive to be unique.

We strive to show the world and our community that we want what everyone else wants: family, love, and a good life.



Artwork
by
Exodus
Inmates



Artwork
by
Exodus
Inmates

POEM: MY SELF PORTRAIT

.....◆.....

Brandon

For this work I have chosen the colors of yellow, white, and green
The yellow stands for my positive attitude
The white for my willingness to start from a clean slate
And the green stands for my successes I want in my life
The background of my self-portrait will have armies fighting
Because my life has been a battle within my self
In my self-portrait I will be holding nothing
Because I want to be free of the burdens I have been carrying
In my self-portrait, my eyes will say, "He looks Determined."
I would like to give my self-portrait to my parents
Because they have watched me grow
The title of my self-portrait will be "the strength within."

Artwork
by
Exodus
Inmate

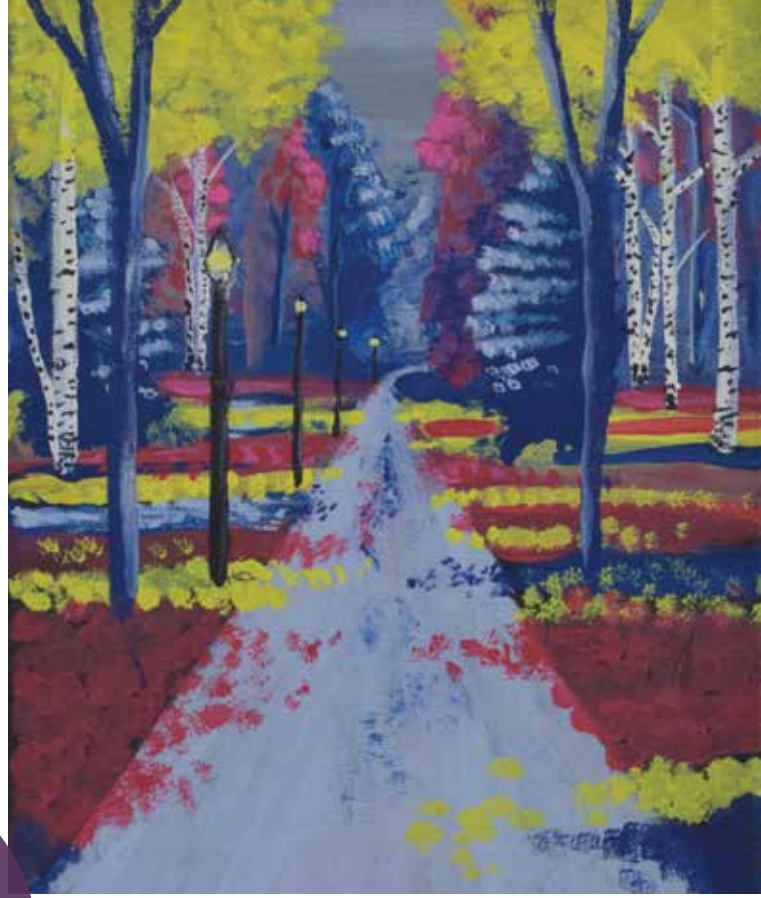


THE NEXT RIGHT THING

.....◆.....
Shaun

Once I'm awake and on my way
those thoughts begin to flow,
I ask the lord to walk with me
before the "self" creeps in, you know,
where I get overwhelmed.
So I allow myself to take advice
and admit when I don't know,
be still, relax and trust in him,
turn it over, take it slow.
Because before I can even arrive
I've already made a mess,
or I let my ego get too large
and indulge in expectations.
Forgetting who is really in charge
gives me grief and aggravation.
When suddenly I get cynical
then hostage to the fear
and far from being spiritual -
now what's my part in this whole affair?
I must question my intentions
and when I get to the bottom of me,
It's all the same disease,
and unless I reach that understanding
I'll be blowing in the breeze.
So I return to my decision,
to accept and surrender
the faith to humbly face it all
and not go on that bender
by giving in to alcohol.
Now I get ready for the unknowable
and primed for the unsure,
the next right thing in front of me
Is the right amount for sure!

Artwork
by
Exodus
Inmates



EUPHORIA

Alessandro R. Uentillie (L)

You been

my euphoria

in a time we tryna be dormant,

and all this time

(I still will find)

You been

enlightening my morals

and being

constantly supportive,

even when I had remorse for the guy I was known for

(No, no)

No one wants to see how deep or low you can go in

Suffocating by all these emotions

Bubbling up

til it's imploding,

but I'll never be broken (Why!?)

'Cause you're way too

important

and I hope you and Kai both know it

Ever since,

Mr. Stinker, opened his eyes to expose them

That's been a moment

that'll forever be frozen

and we hold it... so close to us

that I slowly begin to remember what it was

and all that

when we were together

and it finna be better

even if it's just a little bit,

an inch of measure

of all that we done...

Our hope, trust, and now our son

with laughs to come

to an endless love

memories now, yet can never touch

but moments like this

You will see

all that you is

from all the times,

you ain't never had sh**

How could I forget

Times I remember this

and times I reminisce

with a little bit of a NEU drug

'Cause there sits

in a crib

My cute son

and those don't

or won't ever know

The thought of leaving your son alone...

and these are regrets I hope won't be set in stone

'Cause all I really wanted was to be put up on a pedestal

Like that of my folks

so I gotta let em' know

I commend every second I been blessed with your essence

(Family) I'll never forget

A love that never ends

and there lays
my high hopes
that Kai will grow
to mirror your side and soul
'Cause I've been reflecting on mine
and that side will go
remind me all
I've been fighting for
Your euphoria

and I know it's been a sacrifice
'Cause I too have been spending half the nights
to have to fight
to keep myself from the afterlife
(That's what drinking did)
something I had to quit
A time I been hearing you in
"Are you gonna fight for this?"
A light every time I see Kai again

Minutes of bliss every second I'm with him,
and there begins my dad position,
a promise I hope to uphold
and add with a vision
That through the friction,
our loves an addition
Something I hope I'll always have with him
(A euphoria)
I see growing more and more in ya
An aura of smiles and laughs
that take me way back
A past that I'm amazed that brought me to today
and I would never change that
Never
and I promise
I wouldn't have been able to do this without you.
Me or Kai couldn't do this without you. Happy
Valentine's Day to you, Mr. Stinker and Ms. Sheen.

Sincerely,

Alessandro R. Uentillie (L)



New York
Lights
by
Ben
Lee





Kevin's Bike
by
R. M.
Lunday, Jr.



Levitation
by
Emma
Stephens



RETRACTED AND REVISED

Kama O'Connor

SWORN STATEMENT

For use of this form, see AR 190-45; the proponent agency is PMG.

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

AUTHORITY: Title 10, USC Section 301; Title 5, USC Section 2951; E.O. 9397 Social Security Number (SSN).

PRINCIPAL PURPOSE: To determine the eligibility of Sergeant Adam Miller, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines Regiment, in receiving the Purple Heart for his military actions on April 12, 2008, that resulted in his left knee suffering a shrapnel injury.

ROUTINE USES: Information provided may be further disclosed to federal, state, and local governments in order to ascertain the validity of the statement below. Information provided should detail Sergeant Miller's account of the day in which he sustained his injury and should list any potential witnesses to this incident that may be asked to further corroborate his statement.

DISCLOSURE: Disclosure of your SSN and other information is voluntary.

1. LOCATION	2. DATE (YYYYMMDD)	3. TIME	4. FILE NUMBER
Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan	2008/04/12	1520	012-13
5. LAST NAME, FIRST NAME, MIDDLE NAME	6. SSN	7. GRADE/STATUS	
Miller, Adam M	[REDACTED]	E-5 Active Duty	
8. ORGANIZATION OR ADDRESS			
FPO AP 09868, Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan			

9. I, SGT Adam M Miller, WANT TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT UNDER OATH:

On April 12, 2008, while patrolling the Haqliniah Bridge, a major [REDACTED], my squad was met with a silent (off the normal baseline of activity) marketplace on the north side of the bridge at around 0700, when we normally sustain fire from the bushes to the right of the bridge. We were all nervous, especially Pvt. Charles Benson, who had never seen combat. He was shaking, talking too much. I worried that [REDACTED] if needed. We spread out in formation, me on point with Pvt. Benson, Ssgt. Hank Conner calling out commands for us to follow, mostly detailing places for everyone to take cover if an explosion were to occur. Lcpls. Miguel Lopez and Brian Langford were behind me, I am not sure with any certainty where, except to say that Pvt. Langford must have been next to Ssgt. Conner because he [REDACTED] after the initial explosion. With regards to the initial event that led to my injury, we were facing the north side of the market when we saw a child, around ten years of age, leading [REDACTED] through the newly abandoned marketplace. Ssgt. Conner told us all to stay alert because [REDACTED], Ssgt. Conner was suspicious because of [REDACTED] called out to him in Pashto to halt. He tried again to warn the child in English, but still, he led [REDACTED] closer to our team. Ssgt. Conner tried twice more in each language to get [REDACTED] to stop moving forward, but he did not listen. It was clear he heard us, however, because he smiled at us as he continued down the center of the marketplace. When he got to the bridge, Pvt. Lopez [REDACTED], but Ssgt. Conner [REDACTED]. He cited the rules of engagement, to which Pvt. Lopez replied that "[REDACTED]" Ssgt. Conner agreed and for one moment told us to [REDACTED]. The child [REDACTED] ran the other direction. With the [REDACTED] headed towards us, it was impossible to get [REDACTED] in our sights, but Ssgt. Conner told us in the confusion [REDACTED]. Less than three seconds later, the [REDACTED] detonated and I was thrown to the left of the bridge into the tall grass we usually used for cover, for reconnaissance, or for bathroom needs. I was screaming, looking down at my knee, which was mangled and twisted sideways so that I could see the ligaments that were holding it to

the bottom part of my leg. My kneecap was gone and the tissue surrounding it was singed and smelled like burnt flesh. Doc (Corpsman Francis Wright) came to my left side and began to establish care, first laying me down so I could remain calm, then taking care of my knee. Cpl. Peter Sepulveda was unconscious, as was Pvt. Benson. A second explosion caused me to flinch, which led to a tear in one of the remaining functional ligaments. I screamed again and Doc yelled [REDACTED] I asked who, but Doc told me to forget about it, to concentrate on what he was doing, which he was saying out loud for me. I don't remember much of what he did, only that I still have my leg because of him. After wrapping my knee and calling for a medical transport, he informed me that I would be OK, but that we'd sustained some other casualties. I looked around and didn't see [REDACTED] so assumed that they were killed.

I discovered during my convalescence that [REDACTED] threw [REDACTED] out of the way, therefore [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. This secondary explosion also caused Pvt. Benson [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the only real risk to Lcpl. Langford was some shrapnel to the back or side, maybe even a slice on the cheek like Ssgt. Conner had. [REDACTED] We discovered that [REDACTED] was daisy-chained to three others that thankfully had a short between the first and others, making them ineffective. If they were not, who knows the casualties we might have sustained that day. I also [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

I do not blame [REDACTED] however, [REDACTED] Ssgt. Greg Hill, however, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] two KIA and three WIA). I hold [REDACTED] events surrounding this mission. I will be dictating the same in my witness report for Ssgt. Conner's request for the Purple Heart.

10. SIGNATURE OF MARINE

11. DATE (YYYYMMDD)
2008/07/03

SECTION II – CERTIFICATION/APPROVAL/DISAPPROVAL

12. I certify that the personnel action that has been reviewed above (Section I) and is contained herein:

HAS BEEN VERIFIED RECOMMEND APPROVAL RECOMMEND DISAPPROVAL
[REDACTED] **IS APPROVED** IS DISAPPROVED

13. COMMAND/AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE

14. SIGNATURE

15. DATE (YYYYMMDD)

Col. Benjamin Serty



20080815



Statement of Intent: Revision

My name is Francis Wright ~~and I am a field trained combat veteran, but the guys just call me “Doc.”~~ Khushala shum pa li do di, or “pleased to meet you” in Pashto. No, I am not Afghani, ~~but more on that later~~ but I will elaborate on this later in my essay. In fact, I am ~~as backcountry and white trash~~ from as modest a background as it gets is possible. I was raised in Texas, just south of Houston, born to a father who ~~was a grunt~~ worked hard manual labor on oil rigs and a mother who waited tables at the local coffee joint, “~~The Greasy Spoon~~,” for twenty years until she saved enough money to ~~buy the place~~ purchase the restaurant. I tell you all of this to show you that I come from good, hardworking stock, but with the knowledge that my parents, despite their good influence, have no effect on my ability to work hard or otherwise. It is entirely up to me. ~~And I am a fucking hard worker.~~

So why did I greet you in Pashto? Because that is what I have been trained to do for the last eight ~~long~~ years of my life. I am a combat veteran of the United States Navy, with whom I travelled to ~~shitty~~ exotic places like Afghanistan and Iraq, saving the lives of Marines. I ~~don’t~~ do not say this to ~~be an ass~~ make light of my experiences overseas, but rather to tell you that to a boy from Texas, leaving home to go to a place where everyone is trying to kill you, is ~~pretty damn exotic~~ a fascinating world I had only heard about. I know you are wondering why I am telling you this, and how it could possibly make me a good candidate for ~~Johns Hopkins Medical School the University of Washington the University of Arizona School of Medicine.~~

Allow me to explain. You see, I am applying to medical school in order to become a trauma

surgeon. I know that sounds ~~impossible and snobby~~ lofty and that the candidates’ essays you read prior to mine probably asserted the same thing, ~~and had much better grades~~ with stronger applications to back up their claims and goals, but ~~I am pretty damn certain~~ it is more than likely that these candidates have done no more medically than putting superglue on a superficial wound after cleaning it out with soap and water. ~~Maybe a few have trained as EMTs and have had to do some lame field work, but I am not betting that is common.~~ These candidates are perfect on paper, I am sure, whereas I am not. I attended college eight years ago and received my degree in Marine Biology, with the intent to ~~SCUBA dive and smoke pot the rest of my life~~, perform ocean research and pursue higher education far from the desert of Texas. Even so, I was a “B” student who ~~didn’t~~ did not put the time or energy into school. ~~But, at least I graduated.~~ My father was wounded on an oilrig in my senior year and due to ~~shitty doctors~~ complications in the Emergency Room, he did not survive. Still, I graduated. It was too late to change my major, but I knew in that moment, I wanted to be trained as a trauma surgeon so ~~less men like my father had to die.~~ fewer families had to suffer like mine. I knew I could do better ~~than the doctors who killed my old man.~~ I would do better.

However, I was mature enough to know I had ~~blown my chance~~ lost the opportunity to apply to medical school directly after college receiving my undergraduate degree. ~~I hadn’t done anything of value to put on my application to set me apart from the thousands of guys who’d been on this track their whole damn lives.~~ I lacked the grades, the discipline, and the experience necessary to apply to a prestigious school such as this. ~~It was kind of like fate when I saw the Navy commercial~~



~~come on the television, because~~ Upon seeing an advertisement for the United States Navy, I knew this is where I would become a man, a man worthy of training to save lives. I worked hard at learning everything I could about being a Navy Corpsman and earned the distinction of being able to wear the Marine uniform by passing their strict PT physical training regulations. I graduated at the top of my boot camp class and was meritoriously promoted to an E-2 Seaman Apprentice, where I was sent to Twentynine Palms to train to deploy with ~~the 3/4 Thundering Third~~ 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment to Afghanistan. ~~And it wasn't too long after that I did, save my first life that is.~~ It was here that my training was put to the test in the field, where I battled artillery, snipers, roadside bombs and more while assessing and dressing injuries to Marines. It was also here that I saved my first life, and that is a moment ~~you~~ I will never forget.

In combat, there are ~~what's called the~~ ROEs, or rules of engagement. These rules ~~are made by higher ups to keep the guys safe~~ are in place to keep everyone safe and to establish a line of critical thinking when potential action is possible. I was stationed with a squad of Marines—~~Benson, Sepulveda, Miller, Hill, Lopez, Langford and Conner~~—at a remote outpost where we were tasked with guarding a bridge. After ~~being shot at by~~ taking contact from enemy fire daily, we established what was normal in the area and what was out of the ordinary. One day, about two months into the deployment, we realized ~~no one was out like they should be, no one shot at us, and we were happy until we realized that we were pretty screwed.~~ our baseline was off, that no one

was shopping in the market and we were most likely going to see some heavy contact of some sort. We set our positions, ~~Miller at the front, with Conner and Benson, Lopez and Langford behind them and me and the other guys flanking them on the sides,~~ and watched as a ~~kid and~~ child led his donkey toward us. As they crossed the bridge, the ~~kid whipped the donkey on the ass and sent him barreling toward us full speed~~ child whipped the donkey, sending him careening toward us, at which point the child ran and dialed a remote-detonated bomb, which was rigged up in the donkey's saddle bags. The donkey exploded ~~taking out Lopez, tearing into Miller, and when Conner tried to save Langford, he threw him onto a daisy-~~

~~chained IED that split Langford in two.~~ , killing one Marine instantly, critically wounding another, and led to a third landing on an IED hidden in the grass, where he was killed instantly as well. My ears were ringing, I was at ~~red~~, the place where adrenaline ~~kicks in~~ surges and tells you exactly what to do, and I ~~was so damn scared.~~ remember feeling frightened.

Still, I established triage, set up priority cases, which are different in times of war than in a



standard emergency room, and worked through the morning into the afternoon helping Miller's knee, bagging up Lopez and Langford's bodies, separating the parts of them from animal carcass, helping Benson, who'd passed out and was diagnosed later with a TBI, and cleaning small shrapnel wounds to Conner and Sepulveda. a critical injury to a Marine's knee, cleaning and dressing smaller shrapnel wounds, diagnosing and treating a head injury, and helping to identify and tag the bodies of the deceased. I was suturing wounds in the field, using simple, crude instruments in my med pack trauma kit, all while making sure I was alert enough to keep alive and not get anybody else blown up or shot myself and the Marines under my care safe from further fire. I was also helping to identify friends of mine who were in pieces in the Afghan dirt. the bodies of fellow Marines, which was traumatic after the fact, but too important to not think about during the mission.

After that explosion, my first time treating severe injuries and seeing friends die witnessing Marines lose their lives, I became even more gung-ho about being a doctor dedicated to the life of a trauma medic, learning everything I could about field dressings, triaging injuries, new advancements in field medicine, and treatments for post-operations to help Marines get back in the field. I made myself a student when the risks were life and limb, not As and Bs inside the safety of a classroom.

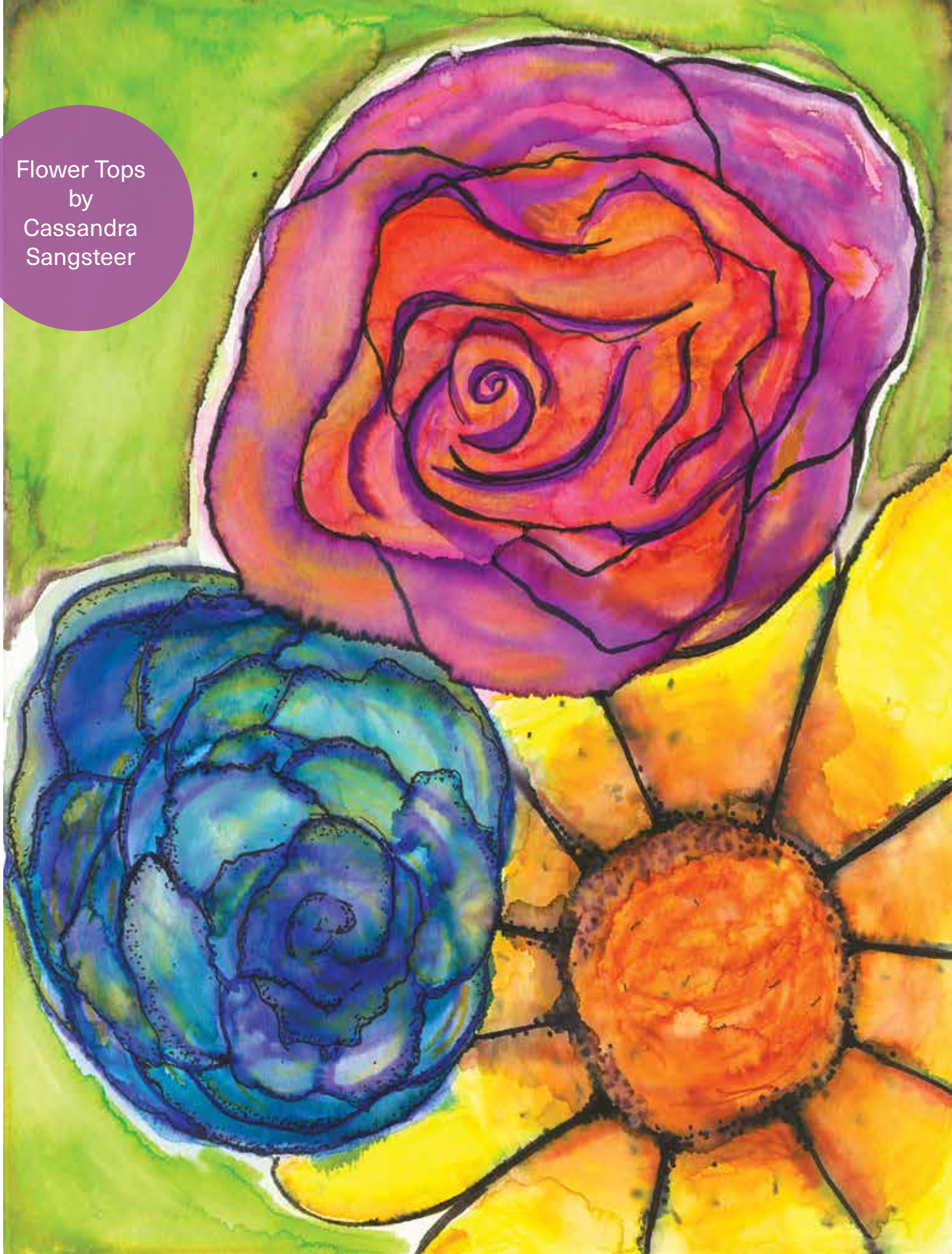
All of this is why I'd be a much better doctor than the guy who killed my dad exemplifies why I am not only a good candidate for the program, but why my passion is fueled by the right combination of interest and experience.

Thanks for taking time to read about me and my

~~past, and I hope I get to see you soon.~~ I hope you find as much value in me as a medical school candidate as I do in you as my top choice of schools, and I want to thank you for your time in reviewing this application. Semper Fi.



Flower Tops
by
Cassandra
Sangsteer

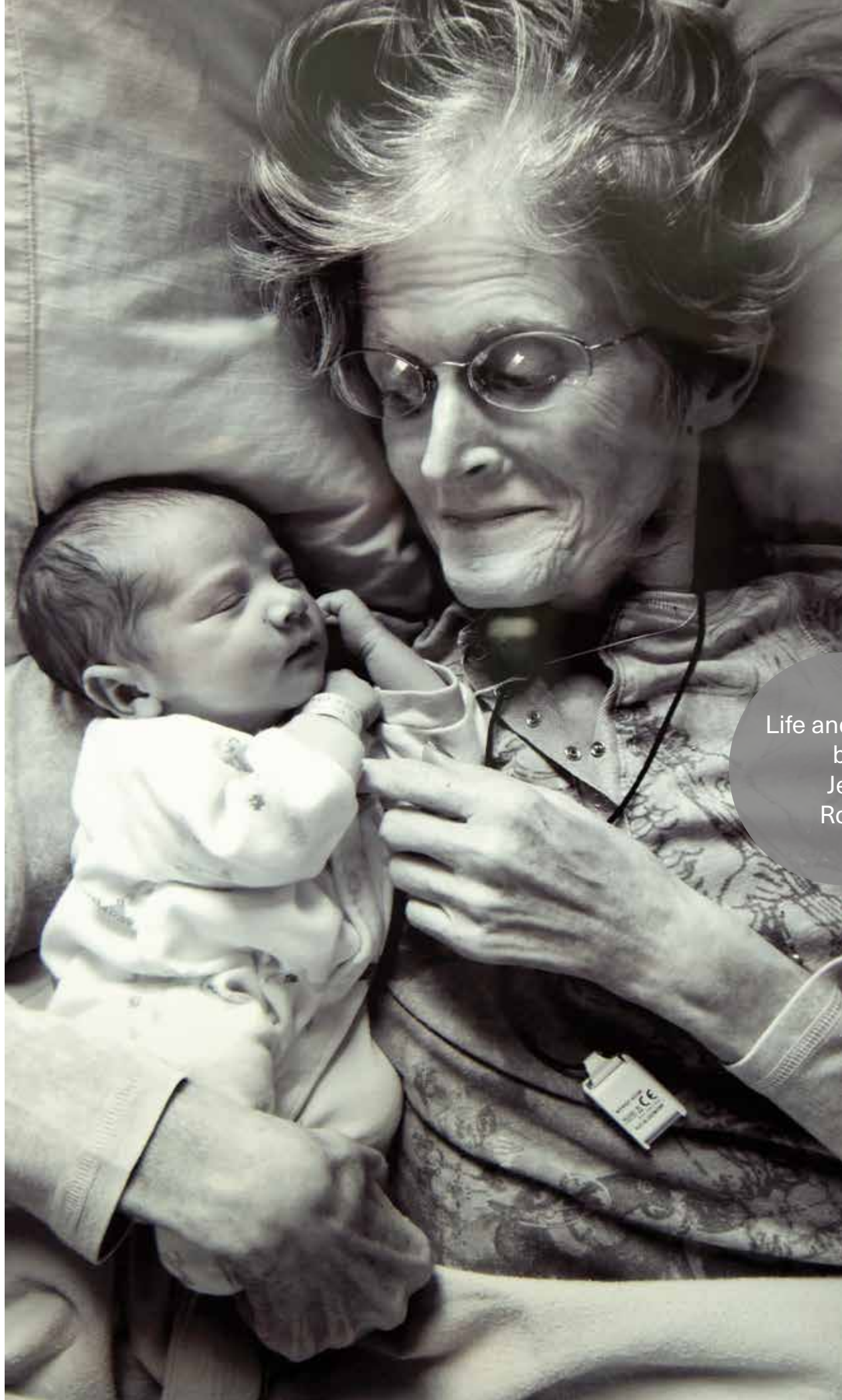


ODE TO HAIL, ODE TO SACRIFICE



Jill Divine

My son is leaving in four days. Driving
across the country to start college. Driving
on highways rife with drunk drivers,
truckers fueled by meth, rest stops full
of RV's driven by predators. His own driving,
which is heavy on the pedal, combined with
too much wind, occasional thunderstorms
and blinded by rain, will be challenged
by the bloom of adulthood. I am scared,
and I weep daily in the car or
in the mop room at work. Without him
I will die. At lunch today I walk
through my yard, look at the corn stalks
and Armenian beans, the six magnificent
tomato plants filled with orbs of barely pink.
I touch the small zucchini and the tri-color beet
and carrot greens busting out from my dark earth.
I know there is a storm coming and as much
as I love the roiling sky, I say out loud, please,
no hail today, no hail. But there is something
in the sky, listing there between the turning
clouds, black and green like old bruises.
There is something there looking back at me.
Please I say, take my garden. Shred the corn,
decimate the early girls and the beefsteaks.
Take the beet and carrot tops and ground them
into my beloved dirt. If you must take something
from me, if I have not suffered enough,
balance me by crushing the soft green leaves
I have babied since April. Let the sky fall
hard and unforgiving, but take that from me
and nothing else. In the afternoon, in my cubical
with no windows,
I hear the raging storm beat hard
against the walls. When I pull into the driveway
after work I see the blessed destruction
of my yard. Thank you, thank you, I cry over
and over, my beautiful tomatoes ripped apart
like strange animals. My sacred Glass gem corn
ribboned into nothing. My account for living
balanced, as the scattered, torn leaves
from the maple tree surround me like ticker tape.



Life and Death
by
Jeff
Roth

POEMS



Coleman Whealy

Poem 1

A feeling of many, coming together
as in one thought and feeling
in hopes and dreams
feeling strong in belief
in the common cause.

Poem 2

Great Love
Come together
Walk with me
Talk with me
Be a part of me
Be my partner
Be my friend
Be my greatest love
That will last forever
Grow old with me.



ASCENDING THE MOUNTAIN



Noosab Tsitra

The goat ever climbs
Climbing to transcend
Climbing in order to find
Find the divine inspiration


The mountain symbolizes
constancy
performance
motionlessness
eternity and stillness

The goat ever climbs higher
Toward a higher state of mind
The mountain represents
achievement
obstacles
responsibilities
A path to success, success and even
loss

The mountains provide water and
food
and like the Oceans have been
around
for millennia
Mountains symbolize overcoming
obstacles or making progress

The goat ever climbs
the rising indicating improvement
Climbing the mountain toward
Absolute Consciousness.





Earned Mastery
by
Scott
Sawyer

FEARS INTO THE OCEAN



Noosab Tsitra

Articulate the fears
Walk into the fears
Let the fears consume your being and be
supported by the ocean

The ocean in its vast depth can create
both safety and death-
But isn't it the same?

It is the beginning of life
It symbolizes formlessness
 Unfathomable
 Chaos

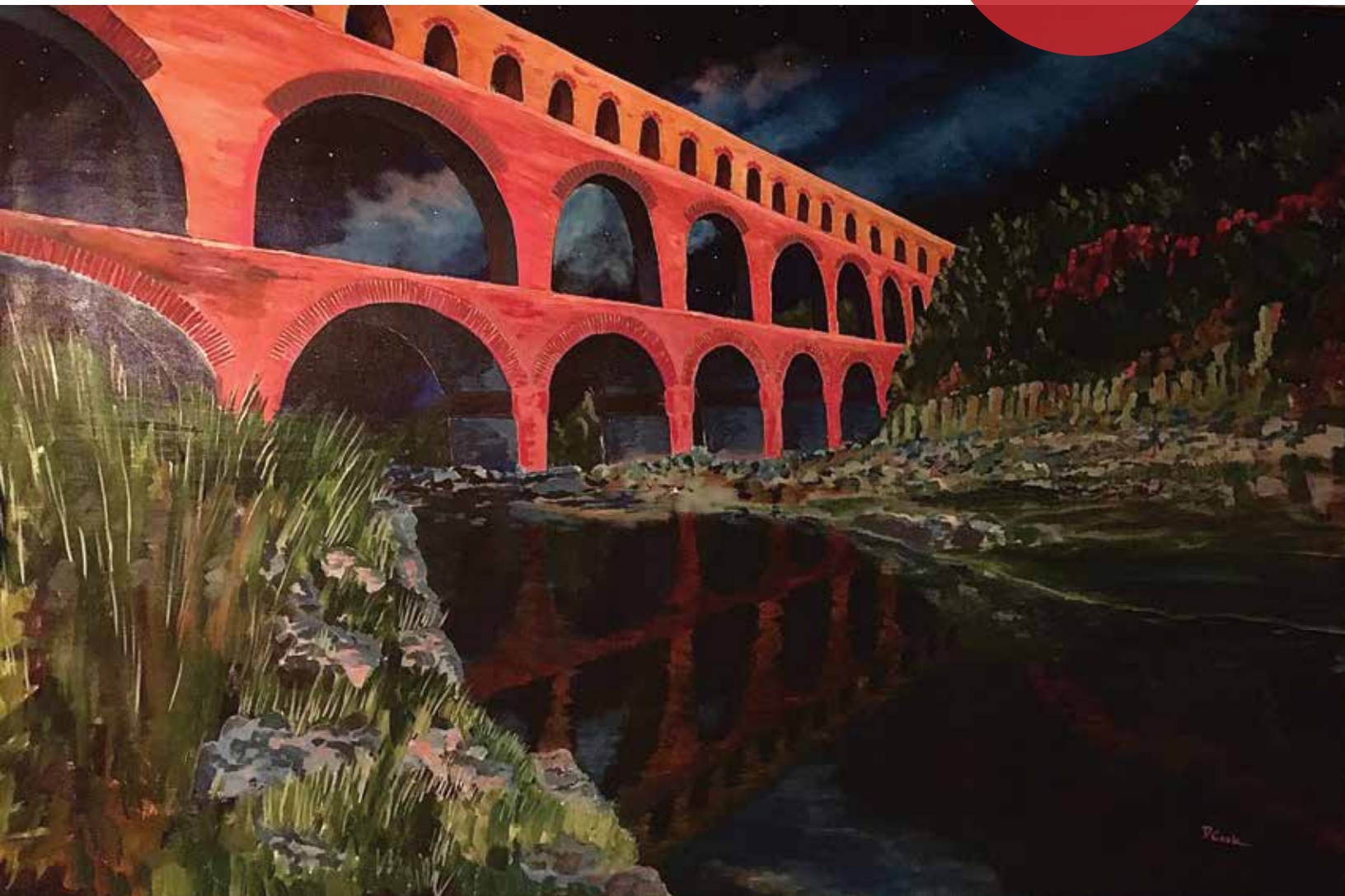
It is, too, a symbol of stability
It has existed largely unchanged for centuries
It is where the fears go and they are
cradled and tended to both violently and
 tenderly

The soul, the tranquil inner part of oneself that lies at the
 core
It represents the untouched part, the part not of
 civilization
or, subjugated by
 external forces.

It represents the original condition- the place where all things
 arise.



Pont du Gard
by
Daniel
Cook



COVID-19

TIMELINE

January 2020: Whisperings of a disease far away. Arizona's first reported case of COVID-19.

February 2020: Word is spreading, low risk for non-travelers, advice: wash hands.

March 2020: 1st Week: Things changed. Some supplies in stores running low, fear is spreading, so is the disease.
2nd Week: Arizona declares a public health emergency.
3rd Week: Statewide school closures, Flagstaff city closures. All restaurants can only serve to-go food.
Entertainment closed. First report of positive case in Coconino County. Coconino County business closures.
4th Week: Evidence of community transmission of COVID-19. First death in county due to COVID-19.

April 2020: Grand Canyon closes. Neighborhood parks close. Social distancing goes on. Stay home, stay safe. 6 feet apart.
Isolation. Fear. Death. Life. And even some joy and humor.
We speak, we make art, we try to understand the world around us.

The Future: Unknown.



My
Addiction19
by
Delmy Payne



Posted: Most Wanted

Sandra Dihlmann



Playgrounded
by
Victoria
Patton

The scene of a crime. Two picnic tables. One slide. Both wrapped carelessly in plastic caution tape. The remains of a swing set. One zipline carcass. A grassy field with no kids. An empty basketball court.

No one is witness.

Everyone is suspect.

Nimbus clouds form over tilted metal roofs where barbecue pits serve up month's-old ash. It's April, but a mixture of snow and rain threatens the five-day forecast. The Peaks—a postcard backdrop—complement the still mountain air until the distant sound of BNSF Railway cracks silence. Train crews fast-track life support to ravaged cities.

I gallop to the safety of my family dwelling, eyes strained for the swift criminals who have shut down the neighborhood park. Sidewalks, unaware of the current situation, grin with cheery chalk faces. We're on lock-down until the criminals are found, been handed our marching orders: check temperature, wash hands, wear gloves, wear masks, hide toilet paper.

No one is immune.

No one is safe.

Until we are.

WATCHING THE WORLD FALL APART

Alana Galloway

Sometimes I feel as though I am watching the world fall apart from afar
As if I am seeing it be destroyed in a fishbowl and I am on the outside
No amount of apocalypse movies could have prepared us for the daily death tolls
the instant fear we have of one another
the hateful biases that would come out of some

Sometimes I think I will go crazy if I have to stay in one more day
As if I am on house arrest for the crime of being human
No amount of Facetime and Zoom calls will replace the thing we crave most
The interactions and affections that make us who we are

New Normal
by
Marguerite
Jensen



Some days I feel hopeless and lonely
As if the whole world is not going through this at the same time as me
No amount of quarantine jokes or baking can heal the scar
The mark that has been cut across our world

Some days I feel grateful that I have enough resources and space
As I am lucky to be hunkered down surrounded by love and family
No amount of time at home could make me understand their quirks
The funny but frustrating things they do all day in this house

Somehow, miraculously, slowly, bit by bit, time passes
As we learn that we do not need as much as we thought
No amount of forced minimalism is enough to repair the environment
But it is a good place to start

Some days I wonder if, when we emerge from our homes, we will be a better humanity
As if the time at home made us think about how we treat our planet and each other
No amount of past mistakes could stop us from improving tomorrow
And rebuilding our world, if nothing else, is something to hold on to

Boarded Up
by
Nina
Dihlmann



UP NORTH

Nate Lemin

Up north we've got bed bugs and three of the deer have mange and there's water damage on the north wall and bats in the roof.

But snow still covers the ground in crunchy sheets, the sun is striking the pines green, no cars are out to hit the dogs, no trees fell across the drive, fragments of ice still caught at water's edge ripple in the wind and sound like spring rain, mergansers and goldeneyes and Canadian geese sleep on the docks, the connection is good enough, and I don't need to run; I don't have anywhere to go.



Free
by
Delmy
Payne



Enough Said
by
Marguerite
Jensen





Roadblock
by
Delmy
Payne

GRANDMA

Cymelle Edwards

Grandma calls and says to purchase a string of red Christmas lights to hang around my front door, or red ribbon, or something red to evoke what-like the Israelites did with lamb's blood during the final plague. She says this is how the angel of death will know not to bring Covid-19 to our home. She says my faith is good. She says her stomach hurts more today. I want to lacerate something holy and spread its blood all over her, to knead the stitches and paint her skin sticky. I want to immortalize her in my hand's little dipper and let the words *pass over* remain about lambs and sky.





Stop Covid
by
Nichole
Sanchez

WHEN THE WORLD STOPPED

Marianna Gracheva

When the world stopped, we all talked about the world being one now, about spreading love and doing our part to help. There were incredible people out there who did that, and that was beautiful.

There were also things, however, that we didn't talk about. Nobody said a word about a major well-reputed company laying off a large number of its foreign employees who found themselves unemployed and uninsured, forced to fly home amidst a global pandemic, and as they did, many of them could not avoid the hotspots of the outbreak when they laid over in Europe. I'd once been part of that company; I wasn't anymore, but that didn't help with the secondhand anger and embarrassment.

I learned that a large meal delivery service suspended their freebie services, to put it in their words, "in hard times like these." I understood what was happening was hard on businesses, but these were also exactly the "hard times" when most people needed to use their credit more than ever.

I heard of people having parties and getting drunk when across the ocean, in Italy, over 900 people died in 24 hours; in a matter of weeks, that gorgeous country ran out of space to bury their dead. I heard that where I am from some people blamed Italy and Europe in general for what they were going through and called it negligence and untimely measures. I heard of people in this part of the world who described what was happening as natural selection.

I didn't want these thoughts of mine to come from a place of judgment, but I couldn't unsee people's tears rolling out of eyes filled with desperation and into their face masks, and 2020 became the year when I learned to pray for people I had never met. I didn't want to judge, but I was so profoundly disturbed by what I saw that if noticing it meant being judgmental...I guess I was.

I hoped I would always, always see good in all things over the bad bits. But I think Bukowski was right, "what matters most is how well [we] walk through the fire." When the world stopped, I couldn't help seeing humanity win some battles, but lose others, and my own world shattered a little more.



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