

Penn In Hand



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Poetry, Prose, Photography, and Art

PENN STATE BRANDYWINE'S LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL

Penn in Hand Literary Arts Magazine
Penn State Brandywine
Founded in 1995
Issue 30

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Special Thanks to:

Dr. James Berkey, Michel Hoi, Dr. Beth Womack, Dr. Paul Greene

Funding provided by the **Student Initiated Fee**

Prizes provided by

Development and Alumni Relations
and The Center for Social Impact

A Note from the Penn in Hand Staff:

The entire staff of Penn in Hand would like to thank everyone who submitted poems, prose, photography, and artwork. We may not be able to publish them all, but every piece contributes to an enriching publication for our campus.

Happy Reading!

Cover Art Hidden *Beneath my Breath* by Nicole Yun
Second Prize Winner of the Art Contest

Table of Contents -- * Contest Winners

The Great Enterprise by Aaron Poon*	4
Beyond the Quest by Meera Ramasamy	5
2001: A Space Odyssey by Neil Arevalo	5
The River Bend by Lucas Ballenger	6
Sunkissed Riverbank by Alicia Jackson	7
Being Watched by Phoenix Hawkins	7
We Are Stardust by Seth Amos	8
Spaceship Earth by Evan Shade	8
Whispers of the Moon by Hana Zekri	9
A Truant Student by Naveen Dhillon	10
Untitled by Delaney Harris	11
Untitled by Brady Pomales	11
Shy Girl by Hannah Gilbert	12
Reflections Between Stops by Shawn Butler	12
Indigenous Woman by Laila Bayron	13
Feeling of Autumn by Morgan Rizer	13
Forested Wonder by Alicia Jackson	14
Calls of Sleep by Hannah Chu	15
Mutatio by Sierra Coleman	15
Waves by Sierra Coleman	17
Transgender Policies by Phoenix Hawkins	17
Art 20 Master Drawing by Ethan Mcleer	18
Origin of Cruxes by Hannah Chu	19
Depth by Tyrik Lofton	21
The Girl in the Watermelon Dress by Brady Pomales	21

Serenity by Sonya Brown	22
Rapids by Sonya Brown	23
Free at Last by Shianne Vanover*	23
Portrait by Shanice Gayle	24
Portrait by Shanice Gayle*	25
Done. by Krista Crespo.....	25
Untitled by Yanira Rodriguez	26
Untitled by Yanira Rodriguez	27
A Goodbye, A Hello by Ciarra Ferrell.....	27
The Hidden Creativity of the Mind by Alicia Jackson	28
Evocation by Hannah Chu	29
Wonderland Bridge by Hannah Chu	30
Flightless in Afghan Sand by Matt Talley	30
A Hand in It by Ash Trentacoste	32
Pretty Koi by Mikesha Wells	32
The Solitude of a Silent Heart by Zara Bussenius	33
Untitled by Delaney Harris	33
Untitled by Seanna Reid	34
A Different Night at the Same Time by Brennan Kramp	34
An Evening at the Lighthouse by Anna Caporale	35
Remedy of Resilience by Hannah Gilbert	36
after the storm by Slat.....	38
sunset overdrive by Slat	38
The Grocery Cart by Marianna Pham*	39
Fragments of Perception by Matolyn Roland.....	40
The Mental Side of an Athlete by Anna Caporale*	40

Victory in Happy Valley by Evan Shade42

Losing A Person Without Death by Ash Trentacoste42

Corrosion by Daniel Miller44

Expectations for Reality by Diaka Iman Kaba45

Good News by Mikesha Wells.....46

Polaris by Brady Pomales47

The Crucifixion by Abel Hillberg47

American People by Phoenix Hawkins.....48

The Great Enterprise by Aaron Poon*

First Prize Winner Art Open Category



Beyond the Quest by Meera Ramasamy

The characters I see online are all always on a quest.
The musicians I hear always dreamed of being the best.
It always starts when they are kids, as they join sports and clubs.
But what about the kids who did nothing and squashed bugs?

Everyone expects young adults to have it fully figured out.
To follow the dreams, they had since they were a child.
But what about the kid who just wanted to exist?
To enjoy the simpler things, to live life in bliss.

We were always supposed to choose our little box.
To have our ambitions that will go into our jobs.
To keep doing it for our employers until we are drained.
With the love for our ambition dissolving like chalk in the rain.

Why can't we exist and do what we want?
To change our goals without a thought.
To not 'do what we want' for other people's dime.
To just live life one day at a time.

2001: A Space Odyssey by Neil Arevalo



The River Bend by Lucas Ballenger

“Goodbye, I love you all!!” she calls,
As soft waves lap the boat.
Her eyes glint like waterfalls,
As parrots warble notes.

The engine chops the muddy spray,
And her hands clutch the ropes.
She trembles, “Can I go away
To the heart of their hopes?”

“To tall towers and teeming streets,
“To that labyrinthine place?”
Can she go where millions meet,
To grounds stranger than space?

For brick giants tangled in lights
Are like Mars to her mind,
Strangers to her rainforest nights,
Of concrete clay designed.

“It was Mama’s wish, she knew best.
“The city,’ she had said.
“Go, work! Fortune will weave the rest.
“Jungles now serve the dead.”

The craft travels the river’s bend.
She gazes upon the dock,
Receding faces, ghostly friends,
As the mists interlock.

Stout forest pillars hold her eyes.
Her home is with those trees.
Her mother, father, aged allies,
Souls floating in the breeze.

The old perish and the young leave.
She is the last to go.
River to mountain, now she grieves.
Her fate, she does not know. . .

Sunkissed Riverbank by Alicia Jackson

Honorable Mention



Being Watched by Phoenix Hawkins



We Are Stardust by Seth Amos

You asked me once,
“Do you think
we’ll meet
in every universe?”

And I looked into the distance
to see calm waters
enveloping a setting sun.

I see a watering can
tilting over,
and giving a part of itself
to the flower wilting below it.

I see two leaves hanging
from a weak branch.
When the wind blows,
They fall together.

I see it all, and I think
that every version of me,
was born to follow you
into our next life.

Later, I look upwards
to the sky that we lay under-
into the stars that admire us,
as we admire them.

I see the stardust
that we were made from,
that painted my eyes,
and dotted your freckles.

I see Saturn,
in all her beauty,
and I see the rings that
devotedly surround her.

Spaceship Earth by Evan Shade



I see a galaxy
enamored with another,
defying its own path,
to become one with its lover.

I see it all, and I think
the very atoms of my being
will always find themselves
crossing paths with
Yours.

Whispers of the Moon by Hana Zekri



A Truant Student by Naveen Dhillon

Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt**

Groping around the bedside table for his phone, with eyes half-open, Anthony fussed about as his alarm rang him awake. It was not the first or second alarm but his final one—a last resort, in case all else failed to get him out of bed on time for his 9 a.m.

Anthony suffered from chronic lateness—a by-product of the self-appointed always-sleepy-when-I-should-be-awake disorder, you see?

Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt**

“Where ARE YOU?” he exclaimed, almost shouting. The abrupt burst of frustration seemed to snap him out of that sleepy state. His eyes focused on the shelf beside his bed: the phone was nowhere to be found.

Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt Bzzrt**

“Show yourself, damnit!” Anthony muttered, tossing his sheets to the floor and turning each pillow over individually. Finally, he felt the hard-shell of his phone case: it was hidden within his pillowcase!

“Thank fucking Christ,” he let out with a sigh as he silenced his alarm.

8:46 AM

I Notification – Canvas – Message from Professor Fieldsy (16 minutes ago)

His eyes poured over the screen as he repeatedly refreshed the page, hoping it would speed up the process.

“You’re fucking kidding me,” Anthony muttered, realizing there was no way he could make the drive to campus during the morning rush.

“Maybe I’ll just email saying I shit myself.”

Finally, his inbox loaded:

Class will be held via Zoom today.

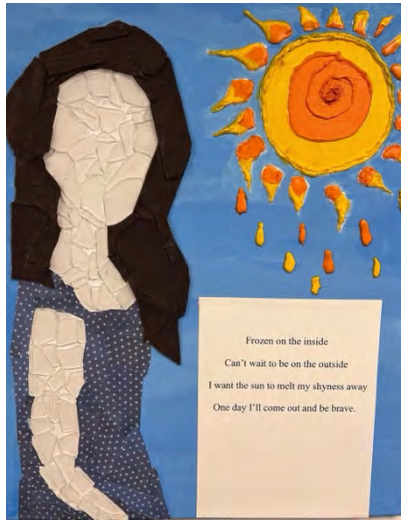
Untitled by Delaney Harris



Untitled by Brady Pomaes



Shy Girl by Hannah Gilbert



Reflections Between Stops by Shawn Butler

She was always on that 7:15 train, reading. Her face tilted toward the window as if she were trying to memorize every blur of green trees, every passing house she'd never visit. He was always there too, across the aisle, a coffee in hand, a newspaper folded neatly on his lap. Their eyes had met once—by accident, as the train jolted to a stop—and she had smiled, faint and polite, just enough for him to feel the air knock out of his lungs. But the next day, her gaze was back on the world outside, beyond reach.

Months went by like that, brief seconds and glances that felt like lifetimes in his head. He'd convinced himself that, eventually, he'd speak to her. He'd make a simple, casual comment about the delay, or maybe the rain, something to break the silence that bound them to the routine. Yet, every time, words died on his tongue, and he sat, watching her drift in and out of his life with the punctuality of the train's stops.

One morning, she wasn't there. He waited, peering up each time the doors opened, hoping her familiar coat would step through. But days turned into weeks, and she never returned. He scolded himself for feeling

anything at all—she was, after all, just a stranger. He didn't even know her name. But his mind wandered to her often, painting stories of where she might be or why she'd stopped coming. He pictured her laughing in some other city, or perhaps sitting on another train, a different stranger's glance lingering across the aisle.

A year passed, and he still took that 7:15 train, his eyes drifting to the empty seat she'd once claimed. He had almost forgotten the exact shade of her coat, the way her fingers danced over the pages of her book. But sometimes, when the train slowed and the early light caught his reflection in the window, he swore he could still see her faint smile, staring back at him from the glass—a ghost of what could have been.

Indigenous Woman by Laila Bayron



Feeling of Autumn by Morgan Rizer

The calming breeze with the falling golden leaves,
Gatherings occur on this crisp autumn day.
The air is filled with pumpkin spice,

Kids are playing, adults are laughing.

Gazing in the distance there's a wooden hut;
Fresh bakery is printed on the side.
Hay bales and pumpkins fill along the path;
The cozy warm air hits when entering.

A fireplace seen in the distance with couches surrounding.
As I sink into the cushions, the weight lifts off my shoulders.
The feeling of being back home on a cozy chilly day.
Tucked in the corner the fresh bakery awaits;

Glancing up I see all the autumn cravings.
The strong smell of pumpkin spice remains;
As you see the seasonal donuts being glazed;
And the pumpkin lattes being made.

Gazing through the window all the leaves have fallen;
As a dust of snow begins to fill the ground;
Autumn has come to an end;
As the cold chilly air starts to set in,
Now we await for autumn to come back again

Forested Wonder by Alicia Jackson



Calls of Sleep by Hannah Chu



Mutatio by Sierra Coleman

She is difficult, she is the never-ending cycle I find myself enveloped in. She is my beginning, my middle, my end, and my rebirth.

The way we met was intoxicating. I was already trapped by her alluring achievements, how she already had many more lovers before me, that she had taken and rearranged.

And at first, I didn't want to be one, but when her eyes met mine, I was instantly transfixed, she flipped a switch, and I knew in that moment that this was it.

I was caught in her trap.

In her dance of lusting for me, and my endless escape to evade her innovations, I was snared by what I believed to be a beautiful, seemingly, sweet rose only to find that she was a Venus flytrap in disguise, and in my entrapment, she made me question escape.

All while being with her was like dancing with an angel but sleeping with the devil.

Her appearance was innocent. She was coated in an aura of light and pureness. But her light blinded me from her true intentions.

Those were her devilish tricks and fallen wings. They represented her own struggle and her journey. One of savior and one of sin.

That left me infected,
Her prowess impaired my judgement.
Her power tempted my own temptation.
And from that moment I was ensnared in the trap that was her.
She kept me caught in her grasp as I tried to run away, but every time I'm
almost out that door, she pulls me back. Give me sweet nothings,
begging me to stay.
And I hate to admit that I do.
I stay because she says she will change. That she'll fix me and in that, be
able to fix herself.
But every time she says she will change, I know those are fruitless words
backed by useless actions.
But I always believe her.
As a result of this, I hate how she moves me with her constant
advancements,
Sometimes forceful, other times soft and gentle, when I'm cradled in her
arms, and she soothes me in her embrace.
She is the epitome of my universe, I know I revolve around her, and
every time I try to switch, I see every part of her shift, and I know I can't
As she moves, she makes all of her contractions completely compressing.
And her transformation transitions lovely, true, new beginnings in me.
New beginnings that leave me new and vulnerable.
And her transformations in me are constant and even when she knows
I'm not ready, she makes me dive headfirst into a new pool of
uncertainty.
I know she can smell my fear, my anxiousness to move forward with her.
She hikes up all my worries and pushes without confident hesitation.
Then I realize the fear turns into adrenaline,
and that all this time she pushed me headfirst not into fear, but uncertain
excitement.
With that, I don't want to admit, I yearn for her melodic modification,
her every correction is my conniption, and she knows it,
and uses this to make me stay.
I am drowning and she is the ocean that I am consumed by.
I am reborn in the waves that are her. Her metamorphosis makes a new
me. I can't help but want more of her, out of her, more from her.
She is my irresistible affliction,
my everlasting infatuation,
Her every touch fester and infests my very being. People say I am
enamored with her, I cannot deny it and she know it is true.

How she has changed, and rearranged and put through anguish in our lives.

She is the calm before the storm. The masterpiece that is painted, forever to be frozen in time. For everyone to see and gawk at and get a longing piece of utopia. The angelic heaven, where I've been given wings to soar. She is the red, deep fury that consumes everyone. The chaotic monster that ravages people in the dead of night. She leaves people sometimes with nightmares or with bad waking dreams.

Finally, she is nothing. The stillness. The quiet of nights that leave us as we are. She is calm and steadfast like the earth and stays resolute. She has changed.

Waves by Sierra Coleman



Transgender Policies by Phoenix Hawkins

Children's bodies are not policies you can use to toy around,
you'd rather turn from gun violence and lay trans kids in the ground
because our country's real problems are not White supremacists,
they're kids born in the wrong bodies,
they're causing the distress.

In fact, maybe it is the trannies behind the trigger of the gun,
aiming for dysphoria, lodge a bullet in their cranium
because you did not give them access to life-saving care,
you'd rather we off ourselves than give us an equal share.

What is this pedophilic obsession with children's genitals?

In the past week alone, you've passed several new orders, and executive actions -
to shield the public from *real* issues, using trans people as a distraction -
allowing adults working in our elementary schools
to investigate a *child's genitalia* because "those are the rules."

Thanks to you our situation is dire.

To be frank, I am livid, these words taste like fire;
the fire that ran through the veins of the trans people before me,
and though you may burn history, you cannot burn their memory.

The blood of these children will be on your hands,
(But you will not care, because they were trans.)

Art 20 Master Drawing by Ethan Mcleer



Origin of Cruxes by Hannah Chu

To think that living in a life of luxuries is the easier way of life, that is the overstatement of the century. Living life in a noble status or even a royal status the easiest way of life? Ah, the previous statement was a lie. Yes. Living the life in a noble status, or even a royal status is the most overstatement of the century. What do the lives of a noble or even a royal typically consist of? Residing in a grand castle or manor, enjoying an extravagant lifestyle with fine dining and clothing, engaging in activities such as hunting and falconry. Which is not entertaining to say the least.

Now, what would happen if someone told you that living in your life of privilege was the exact reason you were a target for many? That is what happened to me. Being the youngest amongst 16 half siblings, and many more stepsiblings, had nothing to do with why there were many targets out for me. Could you guess correctly? If you guessed, I was part of the royals then you are a great predictor. All my siblings had something special about them. For example: The eldest male sibling, Jacques was known for being able to be the modern Superman. Enhanced Strength, enhanced Durability, enhanced speed and flight. Check. Once he felt very compulsive to clean every nook and cranny of our home, so he lifted the entire castle and cleaned even the bottoms of that. With everyone still inside? Yes, even the furniture. He was running late to a council meeting, but in the blink of an eye he was sitting poised and proper not missing a beat. Heat Vision and X-Ray Vision? He noticed that in my room the fireplace was not on during the peak of winter, and thus knocked like a gentleman he is, and proceeded to light the fireplace with just a glance. He is a modern Superman. As the eldest male, he is also one of the people in line for the throne.

The eldest sister, Helena, had the power to conjure any weapon she wanted. She prefers the outdoor training ground. When she is in front of the practice targets on the outdoor training grounds, she summons a bow and arrow instantly and practices her already precise aim. Helena can create weapons from nothing or by shaping the existing matters or energies. She can however many she wishes, depending on the weapon she made the abilities will vary. She does have unlimited ammunition at her disposal. Every one of my siblings is very protective of my safety. I was never told the reasoning for why I was never allowed to be out in society at certain hours of the day or even night, but with the upcoming celebration of my birthday I am going to find answers.



“Today is the day!” a housekeeper excitedly whispered to her other fellow compatriots.

“What’s today?” a butler, blinked.

“Today is the day of Her Highness’s birthday!” the housekeeper said.

“Oh.... right....”

“What is it? You think something is going to happen?”

“It is not that...”

“Then what is it?”

“Don’t you remember? The promise?”

“Oh....right.... *that* promise....”

Loud clicks from heels were heard, as all eyes turned to that general direction. It was as if on cue that all the owners' eyes busied themselves as the sounds of heels came closer and closer.

“You should not run! Princess Lorelei!” yelled an exhausted knight.

The pale skin with long and mahogany brown straight hair young lady ran past all the helpers of the palace, the sounds of her heels echoing behind her. The wearied knight running after her replied back to the sounds of her heels by the clambering of steel and metal of armor and his trustee weapon, a standard issue of a sword.

“Alas... the maiden halts her-...” the fatigued knight began to say but realized the female in front of him was frozen solid with her hands slightly shaking. “...Lorelei?”

Lorelei began to laugh, “...I am pathetic right Seiya? If you were in my position, you would have no hesitation and just knock.”

He sighed, “...this is a big step you know? You are finally going to get answers to questions that you have been asking since for a long time.” He stepped forward cautiously and then gave her a smile. “Want me to do it?”

Lorelei nodded.

Seiya smiled as he knocked loudly and announced, “Her Highness, Princess Solaria Lorelei.”

The looming regal double doors opened, as two guards opened it from the inside and now stepped aside for the princess and her knight to walk through.

“I’ll be right behind you, go on ahead.” Seiya motioned.

Lorelei took one big breath and walked forward. Every step forward was more daunting. As she looked ahead, there was one man sitting on an ornate golden throne with several of her eldest siblings surrounding him.

Every step forward was harrowing because it seemed as though she wasn't getting any closer.

“Hello little one.” said, the man on the throne.

“...hello father...” Loralei said as she curtsied. “Elder brothers and elder sisters... a greeting to you too.”

“To think that today will come.” whispered Jacques.

To read the conclusion of “Origin of Cruxes” visit *Penn in Hand* and *The Roaring Penn* at <https://sites.psu.edu/roaringpenn/2025/03/19/origin-of-cruxes-by-hannah-chu/>

Depth by Tyrik Lofton

Honorable Mention



The Girl in the Watermelon Dress by Brady Pomales

The girl in the watermelon dress
I saw you peddling past
Into the night
I hissed
My breath reeked of envy

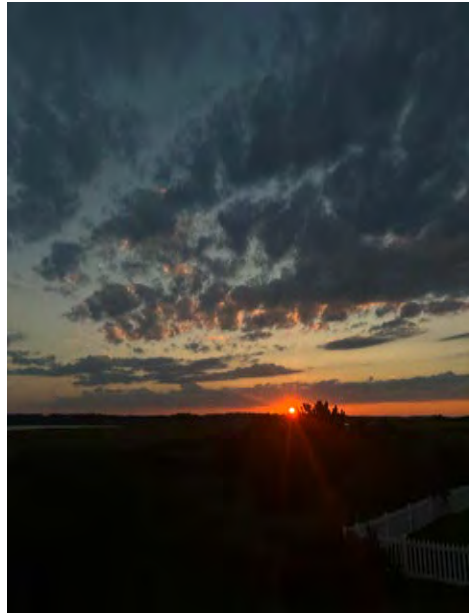
To feel so careless
so free
Ignoring life's worries just for a moment
The only thing that mattered was the gentle breeze
and the starry sky
A destination unknown
but it didn't matter

She yearned for excitement
The subtle touch of the wind
playing with her curls
Tomorrow feels so far away
Maybe she could ride her bike
until the sun came up
Or perhaps she could pedal fast enough
that tonight would last forever

The passing roads became blurs
Streetlights turned into beckoning rainbows
Raindrops drizzled on her face
Slowly drenching her hair
Small drops became a downpour

The girl in the watermelon dress
hurried for shelter
She stared at the rain
and could not help but smile
"What a beautiful life"
She uttered to herself

Serenity by Sonya Brown



Rapids by Sonya Brown



Free at Last by Shianne Vanover*

First Prize Writing Open Category

She stands before the mirrored glass,
tracing curves with her eyes downcast.
A war of whispers, sharp and cold,

telling tales, she's long been told.

Too much, too little, not enough,
the world around had made her love feel tough.
Each flaw a shadow, deep and wide,
a ghost that would not leave her side.

But somewhere in the quiet space,
she finds a glimpse—a softer face.
Not numbers, lines, or parts to mend,
but a body strong, a lifelong friend.

She lifts her head, she meets her gaze,
and lets the light dissolve the haze.
No chains remain, no voice but hers—
She's free, she's whole, she knows her worth.

Portrait by Shanice Gayle



Portrait by Shanice Gayle*

First Prize Winner Art Social Impact Category



Done. by Krista Crespo

You started to drift away
You told me you would be different
Now I'm stuck with this feeling
Tell me why. What was the reason?

I hate the player and the game
Thousands of miles, escaping the blame
Now I'm quiet and you're gone.
God. I was so stupid.

Dark hair and insecurities
Bad days and cuts on your sleeves

When did your thoughts become heavy?
You shut me out. I never stood a chance
I was just a pawn, but you were everything.

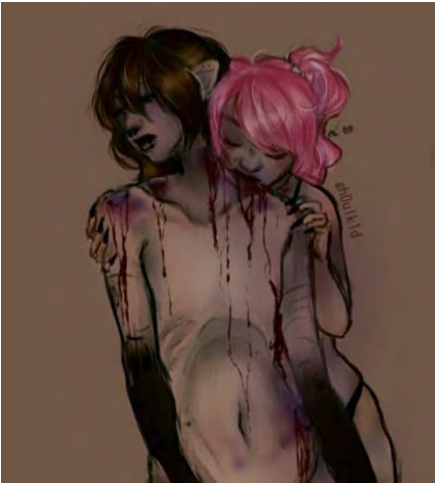
I hate the player and the game
Your stupid accent and your brain
I'm stuck with you in my head.
Why? What was the reason?

There are no sides and yet you found one
Gun ready; words loaded.
Paragraphs falling to the floor.
It sucks that it was you in the end

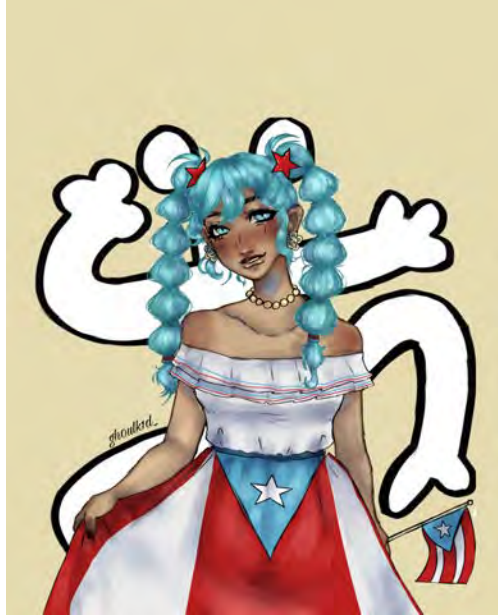
Insults outweigh the memories
The glass shattered in your footsteps
God, I was so stupid.
I'm sorry I didn't elaborate.

You dangled insults as if it was bait
Words hurt, but I guess you already knew
I'm sorry you just didn't understand
Times out. There's no second chance.

Untitled by Yanira Rodriguez



Untitled by Yanira Rodriguez



A Goodbye, A Hello by Ciarra Ferrell

I let you go, hands trembling,
watching you fade like a shadow swallowed by sand.
you were the pulse i clung to,
The dream that blurred my nights.

in the quiet left behind, I found something small—
a spark, hidden, almost lost.
I learned to stand where I once fell,
to speak, and to listen to the voice inside.

losing you carved space in me,
a hollow that somehow filled with something new—
a love for myself, raw and uncertain,
a strength I never knew was there.

the ache remains, softened by time,
a reminder of what i can endure.

i am whole now, shaped by loss,
born again from the ashes of goodbye.

and so, I thank the silence you left,
for teaching me the warmth of my own company.
I walk forward, alone, but complete,
finally at home within myself.

The Hidden Creativity of the Mind by Alicia Jackson



Evocation by Hannah Chu

Honorable Mention



Wonderland Bridge by Hannah Chu



Flightless in Afghan Sand by Matt Talley

Honorable Mention

I wake up, jolting upward after hearing the alarm. It's the first day of school and I'm fully ready to get back into my routine. Summer always ruined my schedule of waking up at 7:45, getting dressed, eating breakfast and making sure my bag was packed and ready to go. I move quickly completing everything I need to do; I grab my backpack, pen and pencils – check, binders and notebooks – check, calculator – check, now I just sit by the door and wait until I can see the bus. I hear my mom calling my name from upstairs; she probably just wants to know if I got myself ready.

“Corporal! Corporal! We ready to rock n’ roll out there?? Heard them Taliban boys prayed for a sandstorm and got one” Sarge said, walking toward me.

I just got done cleaning my rifle and packing my rucksack for our next air run. I've been running supplies and vehicles for about 4

months in a trusty CH-47 Chinook helicopter that I like to call ‘the bird’ around the entire paradise of war-torn Afghanistan.

“Ah nothing the boys haven’t flown through, right? I’m about as ready as I’ll ever be sir. Let’s get moving.”

I was never bothered to run a mission with the sarge; and I usually found myself happier with him around. He was a funny guy who always had your back no matter the situation. Truly a great soldier; he was even awarded the silver star for this mission out in Jalalabad – saved the lives of his team and after that close encounter was put on these lower-risk flight missions until he’s sent home in about 2 weeks. We carried ourselves over to the airfield and got in the chinook, today’s mission is to fly supplies over to the ground units in Kandahar. Our lovely air team today includes our pilot and co-pilot, a few lovely flight attendants being 3 other first-class privates -though much to all our chagrin they don’t have drinks and snacks to pass out. Then sarge and I to top off our well-rounded team of handsome gentlemen. Just as soon as we climb aboard and sit down, the pilots take off; no time to waste.

“Hey whatcha doin’ champ? Why don’t you come inside, and I can make you something to eat?” Mom asked me in her sweet and caring way.

“I’m going to stay out here for a little while longer; the birds are nice to look at”

“Okay honey, I’ll just be inside if you need anything”

“Thanks mom, I love you”

“Love you too”

She walked back inside the house, and I sat for a good 30 more minutes admiring all the birds that flew around in the sky. At this point it started to rain, so I got up to go back inside; right when I stood an entire flock of birds began flying overhead. I noticed one that flew differently than the others, it appeared to be hurt; but it did everything it could to stay up in the sky despite the rain that continued to get heavier at the moment.

“Shit I can’t see anything out there!! Radar is down and we’re taking fire!” The pilot screamed from the front of the chinook. After just another second, we began to move in a terrible spinning motion in the air.

To read the conclusion of “Flightless in Afghan Sand” visit *The Roaring Penn* at <https://sites.psu.edu/roaringpenn/2025/03/20/flightless-in-afghan-sand-by-matt-talley/>

A Hand in It by Ash Trentacoste



Pretty Koi by Mikesha Wells



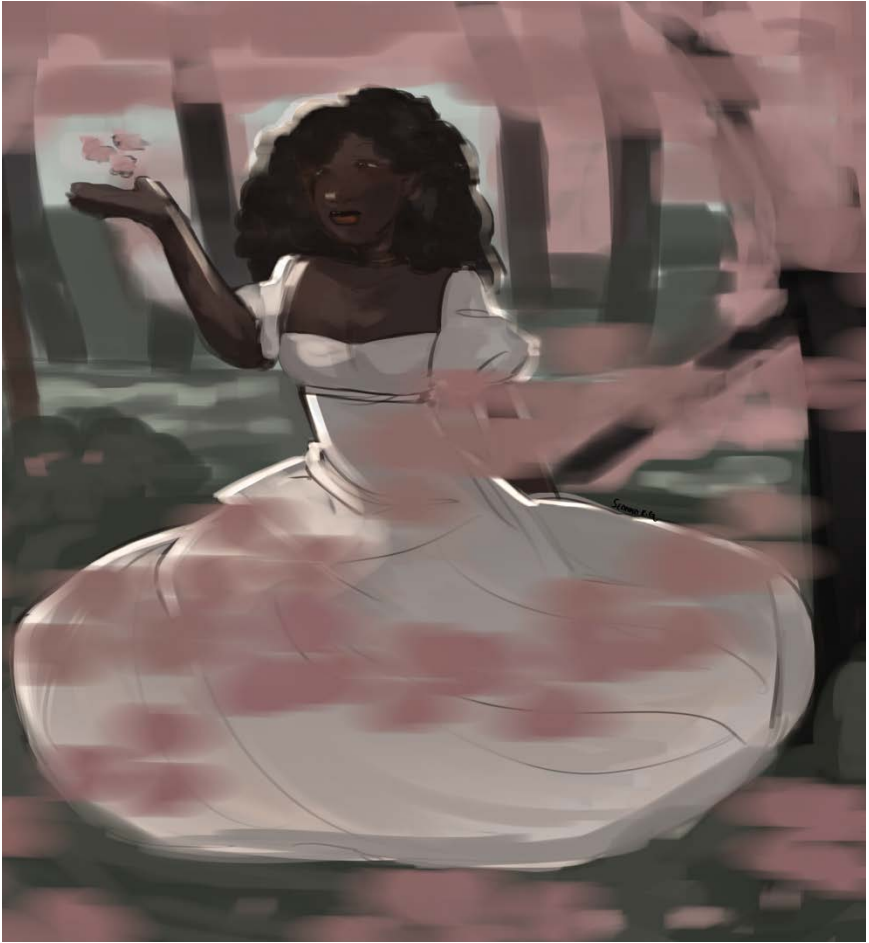
The Solitude of a Silent Heart by Zara Bussenius

In the light of laughter, she fades,
The happiness of others, but for her, the trace
Of a solitude, like a cloak of mist,
She is lost, invisible, under the weight of feathers.
All admire, but none approach her,
Her heart is a book, love, a bell
That rings in vain, a desperate echo,
Why this emptiness in me? Why so much denial?
Every gesture, an offering, every word, a hope,
But glances pass, don't see her, tonight.
Why so much warmth for others, for them?
And I stand here, my heart on fire.
In her eyes, tears that no one sees,
A frozen smile, a dance without choice.
Why be the confidante, the support of souls,
When, deep inside myself, I feel this drama?
When night falls, she seeks a star,
A breath of love, a light that reveals
The secrets of her heart, an answer, a voice:
Why am I alone here? Where are you, my choice?
Her existence, a gift, but at what price?
To be loved by others, but never alive.
Why this imbalance, this cruel pain?
In this sea of hearts, why am I the only one making salt?

Untitled by Delaney Harris



Untitled by Seanna Reid



A Different Night at the Same Time by Brennan Kramp

I sink my head into two pillows
A pile of blanket at the edge of my bed
The lightbulbs on my fan illuminated without a flicker
My oversized hoodie getting in the way as I try and turn to my side
I have three more cigarettes to get through my week
I lay awake at two in the morning
Watching videos of football highlights

Stomach full of cookies, turkey, soup, grease, fat
A simple night
Meanwhile
A man puts his head on a park bench armrest
Pulling the tarp over his tattered jacket
Duct taped holes from rats stopping for a visit
Stomach growling for that stranger's leftover chicken wings
They won't get eaten, he knows
An empty wallet
Except for a picture of his ex-wife
It's been about eight years since she left
He breathes into his hands so that they don't freeze overnight
Lying awake, he listens
Listening to the trains, busses, taxis
Delinquents, bar hoppers, muggers, lawyers
Construction sites, honking of cars, shattering glass
The laughter of a father being taken for his birthday dinner
And I lay here
In the silence of my bed

An Evening at the Lighthouse by Anna Caporale



Remedy of Resilience by Hannah Gilbert

“Fall seven times, stand up eight” is my favorite quote. I have used it before in speeches and papers, and I know I will use it again because it captures my most important belief. I believe that no one is perfect and the best remedy for imperfection is resilience.

The biggest struggle I have faced is having low confidence. Making mistakes and being criticized breaks my confidence into tiny broken glass shards that take time to be put back together again. In the past, teachers have shaken my confidence by calling on me without warning and then not having the right answer. When teachers yelled and lectured at the whole class, I had a hard time knowing if it was directed at me or not. This made me embarrassed, so I stopped participating in my classes. I have a tough time trusting people, and this behavior makes me feel like I cannot trust my teachers. When this happened, I would doubt myself and negative thoughts would take over my mind.

I would start tearing up and struggle to breathe as if the room sucked out all the oxygen from me, and I would often have to leave class to cry in the girl’s bathroom, tears dripping down my face hiding in an empty stall alone with my emotions as company, along with a roll of thin toilet paper as a bandage for my bruised heart. But every time I had to face my fear and go back to class. I did not know this was resilience until my academic advisor Mrs. Wilson told me that was the word's meaning.

For my senior speech in high school, I had to stand up in front of the whole school during assembly, students from grades K-12 were all huddled together sitting on the APR rugged carpeted floor while staff and teachers stood up and leaned against the side and back walls. The whole space was crowded with people. Their eyes glared with heat back at me, my heart was pounding like the rhythm of fingers tapping a desk, and my chest was filled with tangled nerves fighting to break free. I knew at that moment the day had arrived. The day when I had to speak aloud in front of everyone and make eye contact frightened me because I knew if I messed up it was game over. But I did it anyway; When it became my turn, I walked to the center of the APR with quite strength once my English teacher called my name.

As I stepped behind the podium, with my printed paper stapled speech gripped tightly in my left sweaty nervous hand along with a highlight book ruler like I was holding on to it like a life source. I told myself it was not real. I pretended it was all a dream and somehow my brain believed the lie. I made eye contact, concentrating on one face at a

time without losing focus. I did not miss one word; I spoke loud, clear and showed emotion. I even walked in front of the podium and read the original poem I had written for myself. After, I shared the story behind the poem of learning to embrace my tears, I said:

“They are not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength.”

I stopped caring what other people thought, and I just was myself. Taking this step was one of my first public displays of resilience.

As I started being more resilient, I took more steps to fight things that scared me. I started writing poetry. I read the poems either to myself or aloud to my friends and family. Somehow, I started to believe in the meaning and encouraging messages behind the words I wrote, it unlocked something hidden deep within myself. I gained more confidence and the power to accept my flaws and not be too hard on myself and knew I did not have to be perfect all the time.

To challenge myself even further, I was determined to self-publish each book, not only to help myself but to help others who could be going through the same feelings of self-doubt and anxiety. I wanted to use my poems to help people on their journey, letting them know they were not alone. And, if I could get back up, they can too.

I think the two books that touched me the most of all that I self-published were: *A Blossom That Bends* and *Imperfectly You Embracing Imperfections*.

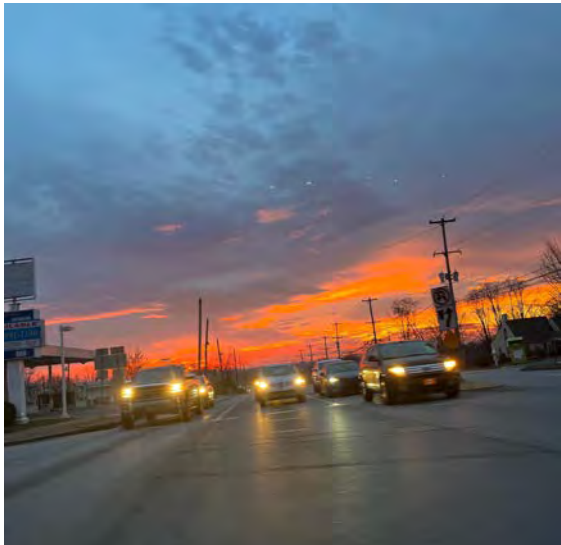
Being resilient is an ongoing cycle. Every time I am embarrassed or anxious or feel like a failure, I must remind myself to get back up. Every time I do it, I get stronger, and my resilience grows. Funny how simple words can affect my life they could either haunt me like a relentless ghost or heal my closed-off wounded soul through poetry.

after the storm by Slat

Honorable Mention



sunset overdrive by Slat



The Grocery Cart by Marianna Pham*

First Price Writing Social Impact Category

TW: Eating Disorder (ED)

“Push!” someone yells.

After labor comes release.

*A group of workers are delivering a grocer shipment of shopping carts;
the body of steel and virgin wheels.*

“A teenage couple...a mother of four...an elderly gentleman...” I chant to myself, observing as the connecting carts depart, coming closer to my turn.

A young lady then approaches me. She steps back for a moment, reluctant, contemplating whether she’d prefer a basket, but proceeds to choose me.

She takes a deep breath before forcing herself onto my handles, maneuvering my wheels. From her touch, I conclude that her body resembles glass, a seemingly translucent sheet covers her body, accentuating her bones.

Seventh? No, I lost count after our fourth loop. Yet I am empty, lacking fuel; purpose. I was meant for more than merely containing a box of wheat crackers, low-fat yogurt, and a pack of *Monster Energy*.

She’s restless. The heat from her shopping scuffs my wheels, burning them. I can no longer move adequately, nor can she.

My handles begin soaking, sweat I presume? But I was wrong. It was the young lady, expressing her defeat through tears. *Had her personal struggle won?*

She leans on my body as the tears came rushing, forming puddles around my wheels, lubricating them and slipping me away from her.

She looks over at my bare contents and collects herself, not taking her eyes off me.

Gripping onto my handles, we loop around the store once more.
Conquering foods one by one.

The young lady left the grocery store carrying a few more bags than usual, but for once, she was content.

The grocery cart remains, patiently waiting. Awaiting to see what repairs and dents human contact can further bring.

Fragments of Perception by Matolyn Roland



The Mental Side of an Athlete by Anna Caporale*

Second Prize Writing

Upon the track where runners race,
Upon the court in fierce embrace,
Upon the field where champions play,
The mind must shine as much as they.
For muscles strong and feet so fleet,
Mean little when the mind concedes.
A weary heart, a restless soul,
Can break the body, steal its goal.
We train our bodies, we push with might,
We rise at dawn, we run till night.
We lift, we sweat, we fight, we grind,
Yet often leave behind our mind.
The outside voices cheer, the banners rise,
The glory gleams in watchful eyes.

But in the quiet, when lights are low,
The unseen mental battles start to grow.
Anxiety, a phantom fast,
That whispers doubt, recalls the past.
Self-doubt like a heavy chain,
That turns each triumph into pain.
The weight of hope, the fear to fail,
The pressure's hand, so harsh and pale.
To win is joy, but loss can sting,
And silence wraps up the suffering.
An athlete so strong, with heart so bold,
The mind is valuable, more prized than gold.
Not every wound is seen or bled,
Some battles rage inside the head.
So, pause and breathe, release the strain,
Let rest restore, let ease remain.
A break, a breath, a whispered peace,
Can be the key to strength's release.
For therapy is not defeat,
A helping hand is no retreat.
To seek support, to voice the pain,
Is how the strongest athletes remain.
A coach can teach, a doctor mend,
But mind's own care is still your best friend.
To speak, to heal, to give your best,
Is not to quit—it is to rest.
Resilience is not just to stay on your grind,
But knowing when to free the mind.
Not only speed or power bright,
But balance in both the dark and light.
A champion's heart is not just steel,
But one that learns, and dares to feel.
For in the game of time and test,
The strongest mind endures the rest.
So, play, compete, push past the line,
But guard your thoughts as much as time.
For medals fade, and trophies rust,
But mental strength is built on trust.
A trust in self, a trust in teammates, and a trust in care,
A trust that healing's always fair.

The bravest choice, the grandest fight,
Is choosing self-love, not just the light.
So, raise your hand, let voices swell,
And tell the world you wish to tell:
That mental health is strength untold,
And caring for it makes one bold.
For champions rise where care is found,
And true success is safe and sound.

Victory in Happy Valley by Evan Shade



Losing A Person Without Death by Ash Trentacoste

I was supposed to go to a football game, but I ended up without a mother. As a child one of the worst feelings is being rejected. I had a roof over my head, food in my stomach, and clean water to drink, but I didn't have the love and attention that a child needs growing up. At least this was true every other week of my life until I was 15 and left.

Year Four: Right before I turned 4 my parents got divorced and a destructive custody battle ensued. My mom and dad fought ruthlessly in front of a judge to figure out which parent got which sister and when. They finally decided on 50/50 custody in periods of a week at a time with all three of us. Even though this was a court-mandated order, my mom couldn't handle having all of us at the same time and in turn gave me off to my dad most of the time. This worked well in my favor as I heavily preferred to be with my dad. At the same time, she put me into my dad's care, she happily kept my two older sisters. I felt both relieved

and dismissed. I constantly thought to myself “What is so different about me compared to my sisters? Why doesn’t she want me?” These questions have long been left unanswered, and they still occupy my mind on a daily basis. I wondered if I had done something wrong at such a young age, or if she just didn’t want me.

Year Fifteen: When I was 15 years old and freshly out of a hospital, I was solely in my mom’s custody. This was August of 2021 in the midst of a global pandemic, Covid-19. I had made plans to go to one of my friend’s first public football games, and my mom was going to go with me (since I wasn’t trusted to be alone). We sat down at her bare wooden table and began to eat our dinner. It started off eerily silent except for the occasional sounds of chewing and soon turned excessively loud in the form of screaming. On the turn of a dime my mom shot out of her seat, knocking it over in the process, and got in my face to scream “I never wanted you, I never wanted this! I don’t love you; you aren’t welcome here anymore!” Aside from these unnecessarily harsh words, others were said that are too heartbreaking to repeat. I sat, dumbfounded and still, until an ice-cold metal Hydro Flask was thrown in my direction. As soon as I realized what had happened, I was left alone with the sound of a door slamming shut. During this time my father and stepmother were in London with my older sister where she attended university. With no dad to escape to, I bought myself an uber to my friend’s house 35 minutes away. This was the longest yet shortest, eerily quiet car ride of my life. I arrived in a flood of tears and minutes later my phone started blowing up with the incessant calls and texts from my mom asking where I was and that I needed to come home now or else she would call the police. After this whole debacle, it was decided that I would stay with my aunt for a few days while my mom calmed down.

After around 3 days had passed, my dad landed back in America and soon took me back under his care. I was heartbroken and exhausted and left with no person to call my mother. Since then, I have lived solely with my dad. I was an immature 15-year-old with a broken parental relationship, and two sisters who refused to believe me. The mistrust they felt towards me ran deep through their veins as they idolized their mother.

Year Seventeen: Instead of living the teenage dream of going to a football game with friends, I was living a teenage motherless hell. I went the next two years without seeing her, and then my oldest sister graduated college in May of 2023. I was left with no decision but to see her again. If there is one thing that will for sure bring back the traumatizing memories, it is seeing the person who traumatized you.

With as big of a family as I have, it was relatively easy to avoid seeing her, so it worked out well. Although it provided a reason for my brain to kickstart the diminishing memories, it was a brief weekend of seeing her in the distance every once in a while.

Year Eighteen: These experiences left me with agonizing nightmares, the ones where you wake up in the middle of the night in a pool of sweat and tears in your eyes. Over the past three years, with lots of therapy, I have learned how to cope with the loss, and how to regain a good relationship with my sisters. I am closer than ever to my oldest sister as she has recently gone through a similar experience. Both of us, however, are even farther away from our middle sister as she can't fathom her precious mommy doing anything more than hurting a fly. When I was a child, I had no clue if it was possible for my life to turn out this way, but maybe it is for the better. Is it better to live with an abusive mom or to not have her in your life altogether? I guess that is something only time will tell. Who knew one big fight could cause this much of a shift in my life! According to Menander, a Greek dramatist circa 290 B.C, time heals all wounds (albeit in different wording). I don't agree with this. How can time heal a wound when the dagger was still left inside?

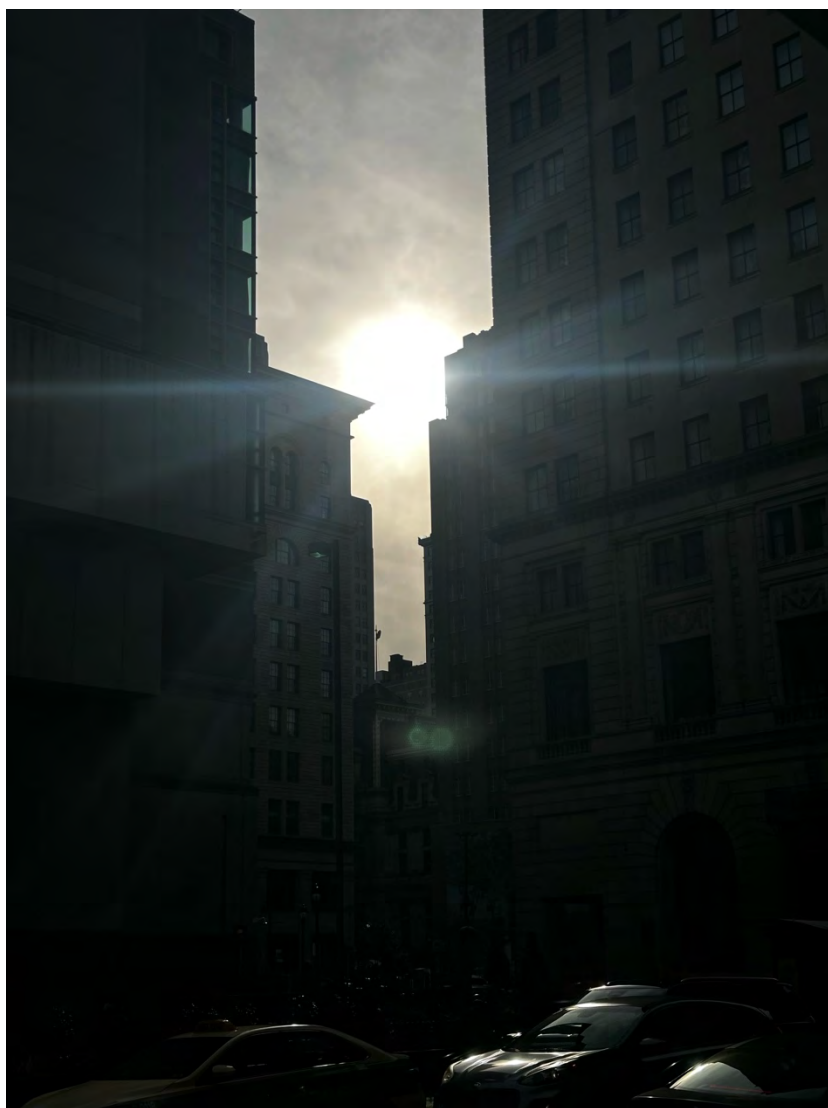
Corrosion by Daniel Miller



Expectations for Reality by Diaka Iman Kaba

Wake up early and make the bed properly, don't allow the sheets to get messy, lest it reflects lack of discipline; greet your parents at the earliest moment in the morning, whether you feel sleepy or not; obey your seniors at all times, even if they are in the wrong; don't argue, as reacting reflects lack of respect; learn to make at least three of your mother's best recipes, so you will have the skills needed to manage a house; observe her cooking the rice, ensure that it is fluffy, never soggy, and never throw anything away; don't ask why, but listen and do; study well and earn good marks; education is the only key to a better future; do not waste time on useless subjects such as music and art if you do not want to be poor forever; be superior to others, but do not boast about it; learn perfect English so that you will not have an accent, but do not lose your mother tongue or you will lose yourself; do not shame the family with poor grades, poor manners, or poor behavior; remember, whatever you do reflects us; don't be out too much; only bad girls spend too much time out; come straight home from school, and stay with us at all times; don't talk to strangers, especially boys; don't be on the phone too long, people will think you're wasting time; don't sleep in too late, lazy people only sleep in; don't have your door shut for so long, what is it that you have to hide? always provide your services first before you are requested to, a good daughter anticipates family needs; dress sensibly; you don't have time for short skirts; you are not a fast girl, and short skirts are for fast girls; do not put too much makeup on, you do not have to look as though you're making an effort; smile, but not too widely, because people will believe that you are too friendly; talk softly, but not softly enough that people will believe you are weak; don't make a scene, don't attract attention, don't shame the family; Be hard, but not hard; be smart, but not smart; be on your own, but not on your own; don't ever forget where you came from; don't ever forget the sacrifices we made for you; don't ever forget family comes first, always; don't ever forget who you are.

Good News by Mikesha Wells



Polaris by Brady Pomales

A boat on a lonely river,
A fisherman with nowhere to go
but north
Small jolts, tugging at the line
Reeling in a tiny trout
Contemplating a name
for this little guy

Polaris
His shining star
guiding him forward
Forming a quick attachment
Maybe he'd let him
stay a while

The fisherman told stories
of a fair maiden who
once loved him
And his children, who's faces
he'd forgotten
Polaris could only stare

But it was enough
for the fisherman
It made all the difference
just to have
someone

The Crucifixion by Abel Hillberg



American People by Phoenix Hawkins



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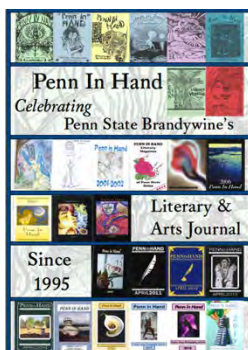


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