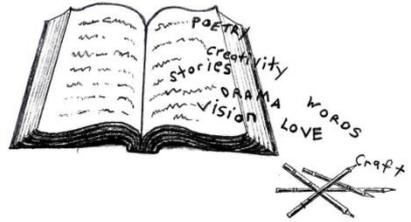




Pens & Keystrokes

Pens and Keystrokes

Writings from the
YCCC
Community



Spring 2017 Volume 12
York County Community College
Wells, Maine

Pens and Keystrokes

~ Acknowledgements ~

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Digital Media faculty extraordinaire Mike Lee designed the cover using a wonderful photograph from student Kendall Coburn

Finally, thank you to all of the artists and writers who contributed writing, art, and photography to this 12th volume of Pens & Keystrokes. You produced wonderful work which will inspire others.

*~ Dianne Fallon, Editor
English Department Chair*

Cover art, **“DARK WATERS”**

Original photograph by Kendall Coburn

Title page art, **“BOOKS AND WORDS WITH PENCILS,”**

By YCCC alumnus Donald Martin

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NATURE SESTINA

Surrounded by trees,
lost in the mountains
where souls become feral
and minds become exhilarated
where hearts are set on fire~
a new sense of tranquility.

The silence around me gives tranquility
inside my bones – they are strong, like the trees.
Cracking and burning, my soul is on fire.
Running down the side of the mountain,
I feel alive from simple exhilaration,
as if I am alive like the animals around me, feral.

I am a wild thing. In my heart, I am feral~
I hunt in silence, then disturb the tranquil
wood with claws and fangs, exhilarated.
Then I disappear, another shadow beneath the trees,
a spirit as ancient as the mountains,
and fiercer than fire.

The night glowed bright with the heat of the fire.
In this feral
land of shadowy mountains,
the tranquility
of life is caught in the trees.
Oh, this world is so exhilarating!

Is anything more exhilarating
than hiking through country forged by fire
amidst stalks of blackened dead trees,
feeling like a feral

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creature that never knows tranquility
as it wanders in the mountains?

In Japan, the people worshipped the mountain
exalting the summit as an in-between space, exhilarating
pilgrims who practiced austerities in search of tranquility
as their feet crunched on paths forged by volcanic fire,
a barren landscape that bends the hiker into a feral
posture when she stops to catch her breath under the
beating sun, longing for a shady tree.

We fear and love the spectacle of fire.
Its bright hotness brings out something wild, almost feral
as it releases seeds from pine cones and gives birth to a new
generation of trees.

*~ Creative Writing class
Spring 2017*

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KIRÉ NA

~ Adia Montagna

61-YEAR LOVE AFFAIR

For 61 years Andrew Smith woke to the sounds of his wife humming in the kitchen. He remembers the smell of coffee and the feelings of comfort knowing the love of his life was just a few rooms away. These days he wakes up to silence. There is no humming, no smell of coffee. He is instead greeted with a picture of his late wife. Where the smell of coffee and the noise of his wife making breakfast once lingered is now just the memories of a 61-year love affair.

He walks out of his bedroom of the house that long ago belonged to his mother. He is reminded of the years he spent growing up in this house. During the Depression the house he calls home was nothing more than a shack. There was no running water or electricity. He remembers the extreme poverty that came with growing up during this time. He remembers watching his mother scrape together enough food to feed him for the day. He remembers being a child and saying to himself, "I'm not going to live like this forever. My life is going to be better than my parents ever was."

As he enters the empty kitchen, he is overtaken with memories of the mother of his children packing a lunch for him to take to his job at the shipyard. It was his hard work as a youth that gave him the skills necessary to land that job. It was the job at the shipyard that helped him create the life he only dreamt of as a child. It was his success there that allowed him to gain the courage to ask the most beautiful woman in Biddeford to be his wife.

When he first met her is still clear as day. He remembers being introduced to his future wife by a friend. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her smile lit up his life. In those days there was very little for him to be excited

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about, but seeing this beauty was the most exciting experience he had ever known. After weeks of friendship, he remembers the night when they were confronted by her drunk father when he dropped her off. He remembers stepping in between her and her father as he was about to become abusive. "I was lucky that she stopped me that night. Had I hit her father, we might not have ever been together." That was the night he knew he had met his wife.

As he walks into the living room, he catches a glimpse of the photos of his two sons who left this earth long before their time was up. The pain of losing his children still tears at him 30 years later. "A parent should not have to bury their children," he says as he sits in his favorite chair just as he has done for decades. The overwhelming silence that fills his home is deafening. He remembers how full of life this house once was. It is difficult to see that same home soaking in such stillness. Visions and memories of his life partner sitting in her chair next to him provide a beautifully painful feeling. On the one hand, he has a lifetime of memories with a love that most will never experience. On the other, a gaping hole in his heart that can never again be filled. His years of life have taught him that this is just the way things go. "We live and we die, some sooner than others," he says. "I wonder what is keeping me going these days."

He goes back into his bedroom to get dressed for the day. It was in this very room where his oldest son lost his battle. Andrew didn't even know what AIDS was at the time. It still rocks him to his core to know that an unknown disease could take his son and change him from a successful, healthy young man to a frail and helpless body. This is the room where his first child took his last breath. The pain is the same as the day it happened, and it is a pain that he

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never gets used to. Once dressed, he wanders out into the yard to find some chores to do. He knows that there is nothing that has to be done, but that doesn't stop him from looking. "If I stop, I'll die," Andrew says.

His days don't differ a whole lot anymore. On occasion, one of his grandsons will visit. Those four boys are the only pieces of his sons that he has left. He remembers the joy these boys brought to his wife. The smiles she would get when they came running into the arms of the greatest grandmother the world had ever known. He wishes he could see them more, but he knows they are busy with their lives and it is difficult for them to find time for a visit. From time to time he receives a phone call from old friends but the older he gets, the shorter the list of friends becomes. The majority of the time his life consists of living alone in a silent house, the house that once was home to the beautiful life he and his wife created together. The older he gets, the more he sees how life works. "Things go from order to disorder," he says. "I'm just at the tail end of an incredible journey."

After a day like every other day, he retires to his chair just as he has done for decades. He turns on the news and watches as the world continues to move on. He knows his current days are lonely and dull, but he doesn't regret a thing. Even though his life consisted of more pain and loss than the average man, he knows it was also full of more love and happiness than average. "Life has a way of balancing out," he says. He then gets up, walks past the pictures of his sons and goes to bed. The picture of his late wife is the last thing he sees before going to sleep. "Soon enough we will be together again my love," he thinks to himself before drifting off into a slumber filled with dreams and memories of the beautiful life he was given.

~Jason Smith

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PEARLS

The air was ripe with summer.
The sky illuminated,
by flashes of Heaven's light.
We let the drops wash over us,
like millions of translucent pearls.
We whirled and splashed.
With naked feet and outstretched arms,
our bodies baptized by the pearls.
Two lovers dancing for all to see.
Our clothing clung like second skin,
bearing more than just our souls.
With strong, yet tender hands,
you reached out and took my face.
You pressed your mouth against my mouth.
I tasted pearls upon your lips.
It was this day you stole my heart.
The day we danced for all to see.
The day we danced among the pearls.

~ A. Rankin

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PAINT, GLITTER, GLUE AND AN “I LOVE YOU”

I come home from work all tired and a mess.
Being a working mother is tough, I confess.
There to meet me is my 7-year-old son Trey.
He asks me for the month; I say, “It’s the beginning of May.”
Then Trey says, “Okay, then I need popsicle sticks ASAP.”
So after an hour of begging, we go to the store, Trey and me.
The next day I come home from work with a sore back and
 achy knees.
Trey gives me a hug, and says, “More glue, pretty please.”
So we go to the store again in my old rundown jeep
and when we get home, I go right to sleep.
The next day is worse; when I get home, dog-tired,
Trey says, “Blue paint, please and the milk, it’s expired.”
I say to Trey, “Just like this milk, you’re getting spoiled,
 young man.
But let’s go, since I love you, and I’ll do all I can.”
The following day I come home and on the couch I collapse.
Trey comes over and says, “Need glitter, no time for naps.”
Times are tough, but I’m no quitter
so Trey and I go to the store to get some glitter.
The next day: “I need ribbon, buttons, yarn at the store,
googly eyes, more Popsicle sticks.” I can’t take much more.
On the 14th of May, I come home very exhausted indeed.
I say to Trey, “Okay, now what do you need?”
Trey says, “Don’t you know what today is? I got something
 for you.
Thanks for all the popsicles sticks, paint, glitter, and glue
I made you a birdhouse because you love birds a lot.
Happy Mother’s Day, you’re the best mother I could have
 ever got.”

~ Alana Saunders

AN INVASION OF THE HEART

A beautiful city had turned into ashy ruins. The home she held so dear, torn from her very grasp. To be reunited is the only way to cure this homesickness. A reunion that will never be. Home is where the heart is, and it is left in that beautiful country. Something a young girl like Mina herself should never have to lose so early.

An innocent child, the age of 5, trapped in the middle of a war. Our history books call this war~ the 2003 invasion of Iraq, but to Mina this war was far more real than anything a book could ever describe. This war was her childhood, a living nightmare tearing at her pure soul.

This was a war that she was able to leave, but at a price. Her family, her friends, and everything she loved, was forced to be left behind. She couldn't look back, nor did she dare. For the last dare she took made a goodbye far worse than what it had to be.

"I used to have family, friends that I loved there. Now I don't even know if they are alive." The sparkles in her wide brown eyes diminish as she speaks this truth. She hides her broken smile with her brown curly hair. This sadness, caused by unnecessary deaths and madness, is due to humanity's hunger for power.

Could you imagine, waking up every morning wondering if today would be the day you die? The day where a bomb could be dropped on your very location. Your body will

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explode like a piñata, your flesh melting from the extreme heat of the dynamite and its impact. Can you even imagine? Or maybe it was the day you walked down a street at the wrong time, coming face to face to your enemy? In this war, a gunshot was the kindest death.

This was the fate every Iraqi had to face.

Mina was lucky to have such a loving family. Her father left his high status in the military to protect them, to guide them through this hellish war. Her mother hugged all her tears away, reassuring her that she is indeed loved and that life had meaning. To avoid bloodshed, her family retreated from their city home in Baghdad, and journeyed to a family farm in Samarra.

Little Mina, tired and scared, traveled alongside her father, mother, and two older brothers to this family farm in Samarra. The farm was filled with many animals that distracted Mina and helped her cope. The big, colorful cows were milked by her tiny hands while her little legs dangled under a wooden stool. She enjoyed this chore, not only because it was it fun, but it made her feel safe. Here in Samarra, Mina was safe. The news said so.

No matter where she was, Mina could not sleep. Her father and mother took turns, gun in hand, guarding their door. They always told her that she was safe and that they would protect her. Mina didn't doubt any of this, but no matter how hard she tried, she just could not drift into sleep.

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Insomnia is what this 5-year-old developed, but it was this insomnia that protected her.

The second night on the farm, Mina laid in her bed, eyes closed, in all hopes that tonight was the night she would finally sleep. Hours flew by, still no sleep. Suddenly, a loud bang outside the room startled her. Curious, she lifted her body out of the comfort of her bed to peek through the dusty curtains of a tiny window.

The dirt road that lead to her safe haven was intruded with the Militias. They marched with their weapons held high. Ready to attack the defenseless. Their loud threats scared Mina motionless. The beautiful night landscape, the one we all share, was stained with the dancing shades of red, orange, and yellow of their flaming torches.

"I knew at that moment, Iraq was done. I was devastated because I wanted my friends, my family, and most importantly, my country safe from them."

Crying was a daily activity, and despite her mother's lovingly hugs, the tears just kept coming. It was these tears, the muffled sounds in her scared voice, and her love for her family that convinced her parents to move back home. Mina's journey began once again, back in the nostalgia of her loving home in Baghdad.

One night, when dinner sat proudly in the middle of the family crowded table, a loud gunshot pierced through the

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air. The unforgettable noise froze everyone in their tracks. The fear to look around, to see a family member dead or injured, unthinkable, but necessary. Fate was on their side this time, and everyone was left unharmed. Immediately, they found out that the gunshot belonged to their neighbors. According to the neighbors, while everyone was seated at the table, a group of militias had trespassed onto Mina's yard, weapons ready, to murder her innocent family.

"They were going to kill you, so we pulled the trigger to scare them away." This was reassuring news at that moment, but a warning for future notice.

"I was afraid of death. I was young. I did not reach my dream of becoming a doctor or marrying a handsome man or even starting a family. I didn't want to die." The memories and feelings she has repressed now rewind in her mind. Her eyes swell with tears.

Because of this warning, Mina and her family decided to stay at her mother's uncle in Ghazalia, a small city within Baghdad. Despite how much everyone pleaded, her grandmother refused to leave the family house in Baghdad. She wanted to guard and protect the home from another invasion. There was no convincing their stubborn grandmother, a trait that Mina has proudly kept to this day.

The stay turned into a quick visit, because all contact was lost from her grandmother. Mina's mother gripped the phone anxiously, redialing and calling repeatedly. She tried not to panic in front of her children, but there was no

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hiding the fear in her voice. This was very unlike Mina's grandmother, for she always answered the phone, especially for a family member. The trip ended that night, and they all returned home to subdue their panic.

Back at their house, screams were heard from a mile away. Mina's mother, now inside the house, screeched for her husband. Mina's eldest brother was ordered to keep his siblings outside, but something bad was going on inside! Her mother's furious cries, a mix of misery and anger, attacked Mina's heart with panic. Curiosity killed the cat, and that cat was Mina herself. With a fast cat-like movement, Mina slipped through the grasp of her elder brother, and froze, right in the doorway, horrified beyond belief.

"I looked at my mother; her hands were filled with the same dark red coloring of the warning. She was sitting in a pool of red blood that was pouring out of my grandmother. I could see multiple stabbings. My grandmother, she was...."

Dark red slime, soon to be distinguished as blood, splattered the once white walls. Her mother sat in a pool of blood, bathed in the same dark color. Multiple stabbings penetrated her grandmother's frail skin. Blood poured out of her Grandmother like a broken dam, leaving the floor tile cracks to stain with this sin.

"Leave this country or you will die." Painted in the very same blood, sat boldly above the deceased body. Mina's curiosity left her dead. She was no longer capable of holding

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in her screams. She broke. Her throat screeched a disturbing scream, mumbled with the sounds of tears, as she stared into the soulless eyes of her beloved grandmother. Dead.

There were no goodbyes, no last words, not even a single kiss. All they are left with is the brutal image of her limp, bloody body.

“I cry when I remember her beautiful smile.” Mina’s skinny hands start to tremble, but she tries to shove the pain off with a smile. “I try so hard to run away from this past but there is no exit in sight.”

Mina knows what hatred can do and that’s exactly why, even though treated the way she was, she still holds on to hope. Even when she moved to America right after this incident, and was severely bullied, she held onto that stubborn attitude she inherited from her grandmother.

“At times I feel angry and sad because I lost my home country. I got hurt emotionally, and at times thought that my life didn’t matter, but I never lost hope in finding a light.” Mina sits, her beautiful smile beaming the light of hope. Such a young girl, 18 years old to be exact, but far more mature than most, if not all her age.

A tragic story, shared by so many others. A fight not everyone has the courage to battle. Mina has now found the light. No. She always had it. Though this time, she will not stop at anything that brings her down. She will fight for the happy life she so deserves. For herself, and for her country.

~Stephanie Michaud

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SUNSHINE GIRL

~ Kendall Coburn

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WHERE I AM FROM

I am from knotted trees adorned with fruits.
I am from Red Sox caps and L.L. Bean boots.
I am from a house with siding as white as snow,
shutters and roof red like the autumn leaves that blow.

I am from music of the chatty chickadees.
I am from dangling upside down amongst the trees.
I am from staying up late to catch fireflies,
and freshly picked blueberries to make homemade pies.

I am from lavish lobster with butter on the side.
I am from watching sailboats bob along with the tide.
I am from getting mint green ice cream on my nose,
feeling the cool and sinking sand tickle my toes.

I am from watching the squirrels scurry and chase.
I am from seeing a moose two feet from my face.
I am from pelting snowballs at my brother's fort,
enjoying pizza and fries down at the Old Port.

I am from picnic lunches at Portland Head Light.
I am from seeing geese head south - "V" shaped in flight.
I am from collecting maple syrup in old glass jars,
good night prayers, and wishing on all the shooting stars.

I am from somewhere ordinary - somewhere plain.
I am from nowhere else - just the good old state of Maine.

~ Alana Saunders

MR. KING

Callow eyes
staring back at me.
A smile forms,
mutual laughter
fills the room.
You're already taken,
so I'll settle for
a chat once in a while.

Say hello to
a newly single boy.
Whose smile says
he wants me,
he likes me.
Young love is budding
only with a couple of
secrets.

Callow eyes
have become cold,
one sided-jokes, and small answers.
He wasn't the same boy
that I liked.
Putting a stop to it,
maybe he'll come back
to normal?
Then,
first spill of rumors heard.

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I kept my word—
I denied it.

Say hello to
a newly born slut,
smug friendly smiles
from boys
and
dagger whispers
from girls.
I wasn't
the girl who was
tricked,
I was a
trick,
in the callow eyes
of the public.

~ *Gisela M.*

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SNOW TREE

~ Paula Gagnon

CHEMO IN A SNOW STORM

“There is no way I’m taking 93 in the snow,” I said to Eric as he moved the curtain to get a look at the weather even though it was still dark outside. We were both quiet for a minute. Silence seemed to be the new norm.

“Maybe the Downeaster has a train out of Exeter that can get us there by 8:00,” I said, breaking the silence.

Eric nodded, but I could tell he wasn’t thrilled. He hates being on someone else’s time. The earliest train would get us to Boston in time to take the T over to Jamaica Plain. I went over to my parents’ side of the house to let them know we were leaving. They were still in bed but groggily wished me good luck.

My parents had opened their home up to us after Eric was laid off from his machining job and we had to short sale our house. We were able to make my parent’s house into a make shift duplex, turning about 600 square feet into two bedrooms, a living room, a full bathroom, and a dry kitchen with a countertop, refrigerator, and microwave. We had to share my parent’s kitchen and laundry. We did have our own entrance to our side of the house though, which gave us a small feeling of privacy.

I left the door between our two spaces open so they would hear when the kids woke up. I went in and gave the kids a kiss. I stayed there a moment, wishing I didn’t have to leave them. My youngest son, Sean, had just turned three the day before. We had hastily thrown him a birthday party last weekend. I felt bad, but luckily three-year-olds don’t seem to notice things like that.

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It was still dark by the time we left, the snow was preventing the sun rise from making a difference as it came down in small, fast flakes. Our mini-van slipped a little on take offs, but we still got to the train station quicker than I wanted to.

Waiting on the platform, I noticed my winter coat was not doing a good job at keeping me warm. I had gotten it for Christmas 14 years ago when I was in the seventh grade. We hadn't had the money to replace it this year. I pulled my hands into my sleeves. Eric didn't seem to notice the cold.

We could hear the train before we could see it. I used to take the boys here just to watch the train. They always got excited when the engineer blew the whistle. The sound of the train made me miss them more. We boarded the train and took our seats and the train sped toward Boston.

"I'm really glad we decided not to drive in this," I said to Eric as I watched the snow from the window. It had picked up considerably.

The train platform in at North Station was cold and dimly lit. There were people everywhere. Nobody smiled. We all just kept our heads down and walked fast.

"Now what?" Eric asked.

"I'm not sure. I'll try to Google what line to take to get to Faulkner." I tried to conduct an internet search while at the same time not walk into anybody. I couldn't find any information on the T. I looked at the time. "I have to call them to let them know we're in Boston trying to make our way over," I told Eric.

I made a frantic call to Dr. Morganstern's office. "Hi, I have an appointment scheduled for 9:00, but we're currently

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stranded at North Station,” I said, wincing at how incompetent I sounded.

Cheryl, the receptionist, told me not to worry, she would tell the doctor I might be delayed. After I hung up I felt a little better. We still needed to figure out how to get over to the hospital. I asked someone working behind a window what line to take to get over to Jamaica Plain.

“I don’t know that,” the man said.

“Ok, thank you,” I said, not trying very hard to conceal my frustration. I turned back to rejoin Eric. He was noticeably irritated with the situation. I wanted to get mad at him for leaving me on my own trying to figure everything out, but he had actually taken the news of my diagnosis harder than I did. When the doctor had shaken his head at me and said he didn’t have good news, Eric audibly made a sound of distress and doubled over like he had been punched in the stomach. I thought it would be unfair of me to have any expectations of him while he was still reeling.

“I’ll look up a taxi, maybe I can call one to come pick us up,” I said to Eric, my eyes focused on my phone. I found a company that served Boston and took reservations online. Once that was done, we walked up to the street. It was still snowing, but in Boston it just turns to slush once it hits the ground. The sidewalks were covered in brown slush. It made everything look gross.

“What street is this?” I asked Eric.

“I don’t know,” he replied. I guess I would just have to get used to no one knowing anything.

The cold was biting and the snow was good at finding openings in my coat. We decided to duck into the covered

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portion of the street-level station entrance while we waited. A homeless man and a police officer were in the corner.

“I paid cash money to sleep here!” the homeless man said in a wavering voice.

The officer didn’t respond, but just stood there with his arms crossed. Multiple empty liquor bottles were scattered around where the man had been sleeping. I tried not to stare at him. I felt bad for him, especially with it being so cold.

Our taxi finally arrived. “Where you guys headed?” asked the driver.

“Faulkner Hospital, over on Centre Street,” I told him, trying not to touch any part of the inside of the cab with my hands. The driver plugged the address into his GPS and cocked his head to one side. He covered his mouth with his hand and thought for a second. The roads were bad and the snow wasn’t letting up.

“Yeah, ok, I can do that,” he said after thinking it through.

The silence I was getting used to joined us for the whole taxi ride. Eric had his hand on my knee. His grip tightened every time the driver changed lanes, cut someone off, or when the car slid in the slush. By the time we got off of Arborway, he had my knee in a death grip. The driver dropped us off at the entrance. We tipped him and wished him good luck.

I had only been to this hospital twice since I had received the diagnosis. I had been working with a local hospital in New Hampshire and decided to get a second opinion from Dana Farber at a friend’s suggestion. The first time was Tuesday, to meet Dr. Carter, who was going to be my surgeon, and Dr. Morganstern, who was going to be my oncologist. Dr. Carter had found another lump under my

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armpit during an exam which led to me having to come back Thursday to do a round of tests so that they could stage the cancer. It felt like I was put through every machine in the hospital and every vein in my arms had been stabbed.

Dr. Carter called me while we were on our ride home from the hospital that night to tell me I had a 3cm tumor in my left breast and a 4cm tumor in an axillary lymph node, but the cancer had not spread beyond that. It was actually amazing news. So here we were, back again for a third time in a week to talk to my oncologist about my treatment plan.

“The type of cancer you have is rare,” Dr. Morganstern said to me as he was flipping through the pages in my chart. “It only accounts for about 10-15% of the cases of breast cancer. The treatment is going to be intensive, you’re probably looking at over a year of chemotherapy, plus radiation and the mastectomy with node dissection.”

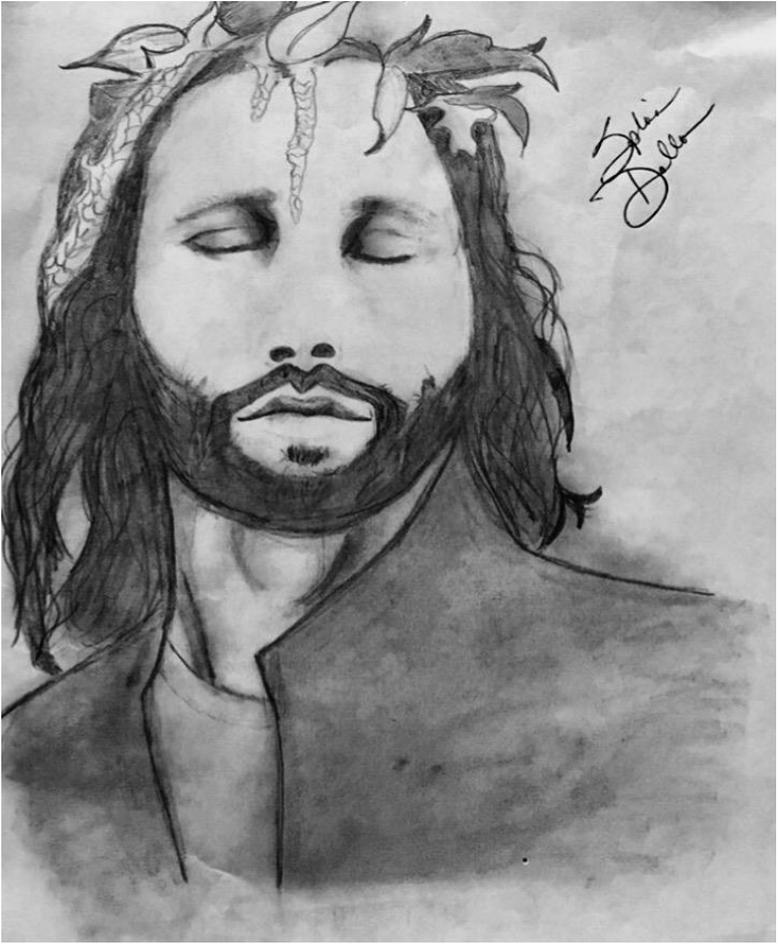
The words he was saying to me, “*chemotherapy, radiation, mastectomy,*” felt so heavy and strange. I was only 28 years old. I can’t say that I had never thought that one day we’d maybe have to deal with a cancer diagnosis, but I never thought we’d be dealing with one in our twenties. My mind raced with questions about my future.

“But the good news is that this type of cancer can be treated with a drug called ‘Herceptin,’ he said, disrupting my thoughts, “which means your cancer is curable.”

At those words, “your cancer is curable,” all of the hopelessness in me went silent. Eric put his hand on my knee. I sat there for a few moments, letting the doctor’s words set in, no longer minding the silence.

~ Kate Moulton

Pens and Keystrokes



JIM MORRISON

~Sophia Dalleo

LOVE IS

In our hearts and souls
Sharing our lives
Helping without being asked
Growing old together
Missing each other when separated
Enjoying each other's company
Having a family together
Caring for one another in sickness
Holding each other in sadness
Supporting each other when needed
Hurting when the other is in pain
Forgiving each other immediately
Looking forward to the next time we see each other.

But most of all, Love just is.

~ Stephen Allain

DOGS

A dog is
Happiness that a
Man can buy.

In a dog
Man will find
A friend.

In this world there is
no greater
Love
than that which resides
in the heart of a dog.

Manners must be
learned early,
lest you enjoy dining with a dog.

The country was
tattered, ravaged by war
beaten like a
dog in the street.

The dog is
there smelling.
He sniffs out your sins,
that hound from hell.

To win
a lottery alone

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is to be as lucky
as a dog unchained.

The pages of a well-written
book are worn
like the ears
of a dog.

Relax
as a dog
in the days of
warmth and summer sun.

Beware the love
of a dog~
He will tear up
your home in
more ways than one.

No matter the
color outside,
the blood of a dog
always runs blue.

Modesty and wisdom
walk hand in
hand in the eyes
of an old dog.

Every dog deserves
a home, but not every home
deserves a dog.

~ Sommer Thompson

MOM'S LAST NIGHT

When I was 6 years old, my Mother left all her kids and never came back. Dad said he kicked her out because she was not willing to take her meds, and had been behaving erratically for a long time. Mom said she didn't want to leave, but he made her.

I can remember hearing my parents argue in the living room late that night. I didn't bother listening to what was being said. I tried to muffle their dispute by sleeping with my pillow on top of my head. The non-stop altercations were the white noise of our home. My siblings and I didn't blame Dad for arguing with Mom all the time. Her denial of her mental illness made any logical conversation impossible.

"Michael! Take your socks off so your skin can breathe!" she would yell at my older brother.

"Why did you take your socks off? It's freezing! Put them back on. Why do you always have to be so difficult?" she would say a few minutes later.

When she made dinner, she would often forget to feed one of us. If we felt brave enough to point it out, we would get punishment in place of food. She'd bark, "That is completely ridiculous! Stop lying! Go to your room!"

That night I couldn't dampen their altercation sufficiently to fall asleep. After listening to her screech at top volume for several minutes, I got out of bed and walked into the dark

Pens and Keystrokes

narrow hallway. From there I could see my Mother standing next to the front door. She seemed startled when she noticed me. Her face was shiny with tears.

“Honey, I’m gonna go away for a while. But I will be back! And I will always love you!” It seemed like such an odd thing to say, a hollow statement. She was trying to convince me.

“If you walk out that door, I will never let you walk back through it. This is the last time,” Dad asserted.

My eldest brother stood in the hallway behind me. She tried to say goodbye to him, but he pulled away. “Don’t you want to give me a hug?” she whimpered, trying to guilt him into it. No,” he said, shaking his head. He was too mature for a 13-year-old boy. He understood exactly what was happening. He seemed to be waiting for her to leave.

She turned away from her children and headed out the door for the last time. It dramatically slammed behind her shaking in its frame. I looked out the hallway window. A car with its headlights on was parked in our driveway. She opened the passenger side door, and I heard it bang shut as it closed. The car sped away. Dust kicking up behind it.

I wasn’t in any emotional turmoil. I just wanted them to stop hollering so I could go back to sleep. I could see our Dad standing alone in the living room. His large calloused hands were balled up into fists at his sides.

“Back to bed Suzanne,” Dad said, gently. I didn’t ask any questions about what had just happened. This wasn’t

Pens and Keystrokes

abnormal behavior for our Mom. Her departure in the middle of the night didn't seem like it would be worth losing sleep over.

I went back to my bedroom. I shared my room with one of my brothers. He had snored his way through the whole scene. It was time to join him.

When I woke up the next morning the household was quiet. My older siblings were still in bed. The world seemed unaffected by our Mother's departure. Birds were singing outside the window, and sunshine was streaming in. It was a beautiful day, and I remember feeling happy.

Dad was an HVAC mechanic for a fish processing company. He spent long hours doing manual labor to support four kids and a housewife. It seemed like he was only ever home so he could rest.

I was standing in the kitchen when Dad walked out of his room. He had called out of work, which was unheard of. It was a rare treat to have him home. This would be the first time he got up with me in the morning.

Dad was not an emotional man, but his chin quivered. "I'm sorry Suzanne, I don't even know what you eat for breakfast."

"Don't worry Dad," I exclaimed full of pride. "I know what to do!" I climbed up on the counter casually grabbing a bowl, and a box of cereal, and some milk from the fridge.

Pens and Keystrokes

Agog, Dad watched. I sat down next to him and began to eat my breakfast.

“You know, I think everything is going to be ok.” He placed his warm hand on top of mine. “We can figure this thing out together.”

~ *Suzanne Zimmer*



PAW PRINT

~ *Casey Buck*

Pens and Keystrokes

ALTERNATIVE ENDING

His are eyes sad and lonely; his face is unshaven. The bags under his eyes are very dark tonight. They look darker in the light of the neon signs coming from the walls.

Sometimes she doesn't think she knows anything about him. It's hard to tell if he's hiding something or if he has no feelings at all.

His eyes roll back a little as he talks to her. He's rambling again, that drunken ramble she has been listening to most nights for nearly ten years now.

"Could we get two more?" she practically yells. She takes a drag from her cigarette and fakes a smile to the waitress who is smiling for real. It seems like a joke that this is a marriage.

She's crying in the bathroom. The mascara is burning her eyes. She is tired of their mocking smiles and needs an escape.

She tries to push past the other people at the bar. They all seem to be staring. The twenty-somethings whom she envies and pities equally look at her as though she is an outsider. She wants to say, "Laugh now, this is you in twenty years!" Then she remembers, no one is laughing.

She rushes out to her car, still crying, breathing heavily. She fumbles for her keys as she sees him coming across the parking lot. She sticks the keys in the ignition and puts the car in drive. She presses her foot to the floor and the car

Pens and Keystrokes

whips around and out of the parking lot. This time she isn't just leaving him at a bar. This time will be different.

She gets to the house in less than 10 minutes. She knows she doesn't have long. He knows everyone at the bar and she's certain any one of them would be happy to bring him home and participate in the drama that is their daily life.

She runs up to their bedroom, skipping a few steps. She grabs her client book, her photo albums, a few sets of pants and shirts, underwear, make up and her cell phone charger, making note that her new phone should use the same one.

It was funny to her that all the things she needed to start over fit into her smallest piece of luggage. After all of the moving they did years ago, this seemed instantly hilarious. She laughs out loud, remembering packing all of her clothes and the kid's clothes into trash bags in less than an hour. This routine happened more often than she would ever admit. She stops laughing.

She grabs her bag and a Pepsi from the fridge and heads to the car. She uses what's left of her tips to fill up the gas tank. She realizes that she would have a lot of awkward phone calls to make, but she is more than ready for whatever is next.

~ Renee Lipford

Pens and Keystrokes



HIDDEN

~ Bryanna Smith

WAYS OF THE 4K

The first, the great
rock-strewn summit of
Mount Washington, bright
on a barren Halloween.

On July 4th, how fitting
to scramble up the Caps
to Jefferson's piled-stone peak.
But on the descent, the Castles are not democratic.
Why did we take this tortured trail?

As in history, Lafayette
is always a favorite, wind-swept, open
and preaching freedom.
Like its Revolutionary namesake,
the mountain offers a path to Liberty,
and to the humble Haystack
of yeoman farmers.

After a week of rain,
a bluebird sky above
Mount Adams means
no regret for
the labor of climbing over
many granite boulders.

At sunset on Madison,
the mountains glow in a
pink light. We feel like we
discovered this place.

Pens and Keystrokes

I don't know much about
the Monroe Doctrine. I know
that being alone on the mountain
makes me feel more like a queen
than a president.

Eisenhower is bald, like Ike,
and crowded with people on a
September Saturday. We are still glad
to be here.

Field, Willey, Tom:
Conquering three mountains
in one day feels like an accomplishment,
even with skimpy views.

Scratching up the rock wall
of Mount Flume might have
killed me. It's a good thing I didn't know
what I was getting into.

On Mount Gale, an angry
pine marten hisses at me
from a spruce branch, threatening
death by bluster.
I retreat.

Thunder threatens as I scamper from South Twin
to North, then over to West Bond, which
I missed the year I hiked Bondcliff.
The storm breaks in sheets of rain
when I reach the hut.

Who knew that the 15-mile slog
on old railroad beds to Owl's Head

Pens and Keystrokes

is a magical solitary walk
through the forest?

Coming attractions:
The trails of Tripyramid,
a journey
to the heights
of Isolation.

Thirty-five years of mapping
this landscape with my feet, and
still discovering wonder.

~ Dianne Fallon



MOUNTAIN RIVER

~ Kendall Coburn

Pens and Keystrokes

RICHES OF SOUL

Contentment indeed entails wealth,
As it bespeaks comfort and health.

Yet it's not easily come by.
Like material riches some buy.

For it is no natural thing
But a supernatural wing

That lifts and carries one away
From the frets and cares of a day,

Then returns one with new eyes to see
This or that possibility

For engaging life as it's found,
With a vision that's sure and sound.

By this contentment does hail,
As riches of soul prevail.

~ Wesley Joseph Mills

SEASONS OF THE TALL GRASS

The winds are stirring again this morning.

I heard them coming before I opened my eyes. I lay waiting. The sun washed across my eyelids illuminating the transparent maze of roads I knew the winds had taken to get to me. They'd broken loose as the sun rose over Phalombe and raced across the plain, winding playfully around maize stalks as though waltzing with golden voluptuous women; then, pulling them to the ground in a fervor, they released their captives, sending showers of pollen into the air, the aftermath of a brief love. I saw them pour on, sparing nothing in their path, leaving footprints of red-clay dust clouds obscuring the land, the huts, still asleep before dawn. Only the women returning from the hills with their head-loads of wood could feel the insistence of these hot-season winds wrapping around their hips.

And now the winds are here, calling me from the acacia rustling outside the window. They don't wait for my reply, just slide through the slats, brushing aside the curtain. Naked winds dancing around in this tiny room pressing up against me, stroking my body through the sheets then fleeing as I turn to respond. I shudder from this fever withdrawing from me, my eyes are growing hotter and the roads are burning, leaving me alone with these winds pursuing me; every day now I'm waiting for the rains to release me.

But when will they come, I ask the boy, Kunjerika. And Kunjerika tells me, "Tomorrow, Ma-dam, tomorrow, I know they will come - don't worry Ma-dam, and when they come

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you will remember what this world looked like the very first day it was born; the grass will grow as quickly as children, the papayas will drop off the trees just as many as the raindrops, and when you walk the path to Mulunguzi, the jacarandas will spill their red, purple, white blossoms on your head.”

And I thought, yes, Kunjerika, I will remember. I will remember.

It was a brilliant day, a blinding day, when we arrived. The plane circled Lilongwe airport several times before landing, an oversized African vulture waiting to swoop in for its prey. I looked out the window at the National Geographic Special we were about to enter and saw lots of tiny black faces following our movements from the lookout deck on the building below. I found out later that this pilgrimage happened almost every day; adults and children alike came to find out what the metal bird had to bring them that day - a promise or a burden. We approached each other that day in mutual awe, and disbelief.

As I stepped off onto the runway, the air closed in on me, heavy, sweet; the heat filtering in my nostrils brought with it the smell of many flowers, overripe fruit, sweat - dark, moist, perpetual sweat. I drank of the heavy sweetness, the heat, as I swallowed and walked on towards the cool refuge of the concrete building ahead.

Lucy and Mr. Nkwela met us after customs. She was a big woman, from the Home Economics Department at Chancellor College, and he was a “driver.” They had a

Pens and Keystrokes

white Peugeot station wagon stuffed with cabbages in the back. Lucy apologized - the cabbages were cheaper in Lilongwe. She couldn't come this far north very often, so she was taking back as many as she could. We didn't care, we'd finally made it. Our bags were thrown in with the cabbages as we settled into the burning leather seats for the last leg of our journey.

I remember that ride so vividly still - my mother, sister, and I stretched out in our exhaustion, no longer shackled to our ten-ton bags. We'd walked like inmates for days, dragging our "worldly" possessions along the ground, tripping as they wound around our legs. I'd begun to dread every move we made. The distance from the hotel to the taxi stand to the check-in line at the airport seemed interminable, unbearable. In my delirium I couldn't even imagine why we thought we needed all of it - the clothes, the shoes, sheets, and towels, and pots, and hair dryer, and coffee pot. It was staggering. I just wanted to get there.

And now we were here, our escape accomplished. We were floating along, in a car, with a breeze washing over our aches and everything new streaming in the windows - no fear, no resistance, just silvery hills and dust, and red earth churning along with huts and women and children with no clothes on and colors of wraps around every woman and the one road in the whole country that was leading us to our home. For hours we rode in this mesmerizing movie scene of childish wonder, letting our senses absorb anything this new land had to offer.

Pens and Keystrokes

In the evening I saw the first signs of “civilization:” A row of street lights cutting through the blackness at the outskirts of the town of Zomba. They were such perfect, uniform spheres of light compared to the tiny fires we’d seen flashing up along the roadside on our way. As we glided into this runway of fluorescent beacons, in our white chariot, I thought it somehow strange that this was the beginning of our life in Africa.

The marketplace was crowded. It had been this way since we arrived two weeks ago, perhaps because Zomba market was renowned as the best in the country, but no, today was different, the air was agitated, pulsing, almost suffocating. Becce and I crossed through the gate and at once were overwhelmed by the cloying stench of long dead fish drying in the sun. Someone had just brought in a new load from the lake and the men were busy throwing them into piles: chambo, kampango, tiny bite size ones and split flat fish we didn’t know the names of yet.

One of the fish sellers called out to us, “Ma-dam, please come buy my beautiful fish, a bargain, beautiful fish ma-dam.” He picked them up, turning them over and over, slapping them on their creamy bellies so the scales flew off in silvery showers; as they sifted down along the spindly brown legs of the seller, the sun caught their somersaulting in flashes of tiny light before they settled with the rest of the dirt swirling around countless bare feet.

We retreated, to try to find what we had come here for, but as we squeezed through the crowd, other sellers slipped

Pens and Keystrokes

their wares in front of our faces - mangoes nearly dripping sticky juice as they dropped into our hands, fat shiny cucumbers, tear-drop ripe papayas, avocados the size of hand grenades, and pineapples that we smelled from yards away. Women were laughing, their pink tongues flying between cracked lips, while the babies wrapped tightly to their backs were sleeping peacefully, oblivious to the wild gesticulations of their mothers, and the din of the market around them.

A surge of people pushed in on us and I got separated from Becce. I stood still, trying to relax until the crush subsided. I realized then too that the banging of the tinsmith was ringing in my ears. He was smashing his hammer onto the side of a half-finished bucket trying to smooth out the kinks; beads of sweat gathered on his forehead until a few dropped onto the bucket, dulling for a moment the screech of the two metals grinding together. I was getting claustrophobic. I thought I saw Becce across the market, by the bottle seller, so I moved to make my way to her, but something caught my eye.

I turned to see a woman walking towards me. She was unruffled by the commotion, walking resolutely, in a straight line towards me. Her eyes were so clear, but empty. No, not empty, just far away, very far away. I stared at her, at the landscape approaching me in her eyes, but she brushed right by me without stopping. I followed her, but stopped by the edge of the maize stand as she approached the other "tomato ladies."

She moved a little beyond the group and laid her basket down slowly, almost reluctantly, as if setting down this

Pens and Keystrokes

burden was like relinquishing a part of herself. This basket of tomatoes was a part of herself, the many hours and days spent tending and weeding and waiting for the rain to come. Now, the red blush of these fruits must certainly attract buyers to her, like lovers drawn to the freshly painted full lips of the one they desire.

She stayed bent over her treasures for a long time, just staring at them, gripping tightly to the sides of the basket. Then suddenly she snatched one from the bunch, turning it over and over again - then another one, and another one until satisfied that they were still ripe and plump, she let go of her panic. Her blouse clung to her back, the tiny flowers of the pattern drowned in the salty sweat.

As she stood up she pulled the cotton from her skin to let the cool air pass through. She paused, leaning back over the hand resting on her waist; her head slipped back so I could see her eyes flutter then close for a moment, her lips moved imperceptibly forming words unrecognizable, unheard. But then as if this reverie would trap her somehow, she shuddered and straightened. She gave a furtive glance around to see if any of the other women had seen her, lost in this indulgence, but they hadn't. She tugged the folds of her chitenje loose to tighten them again around her waist. She wrapped it once, but it wasn't tight enough. She kept wrestling with it, not quite getting it the way she wanted it; each time the birds on the material quivered on their branches as she swirled it around, waiting for their chance to finally alight in peace.

Pens and Keystrokes

I left her there. I left my sister there, and walked up toward Zomba Mountain. I walked past the Indian stores where tailors sat on the khondes pumping rivers of lush material through their machines, past the Gymkhana Club and the perfect white stripes on the tennis court, past the women laying out a colored puzzle of dripping clothes on the rocks, past the sprawling colonial mansions that were once Britain's glory, until I came to the tall grass; the tall green grass, that had finally come with the rain. I didn't look for the path, I had no patience left. I walked into it, into the smell of it, into the length of it, into the silence of the swishing blades.

~ Catherine S. Duclos



JUST PRETEND

My neighbor is an alien.
He has a UFO.
I saw him fly it yesterday
Right down that hill of snow.

My teacher is a vampire.
She stays awake at night.
I saw her fangs on Halloween.
She swears she doesn't bite.

And I'm a little monster.
I frighten my best friend.
Until I take the mask off.
It's only just pretend.

~Bryanna Smith

BOX, p. 51, also by *Bryanna Smith*

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FIRE WATER

So remember this,
fire cannot survive water
& water in fire turns to mist.
So tell me why, dear Father,
why his river & my flames are
always on the verge to kiss

~ *Sophia Dalleo*



ICE ON BRANCH

~ *Casey Buck*

THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

“Depression is where you are both the suffering prisoner and the cruel jailer.” ~ Dorothy Rowe

The long metal bars barricade what’s left of my broken soul. My tortured body sulks silently, huddled in the chilly corner of the dark cell. My soul, it begs, thirsts for the touch of warm light. My emotionless eyes daze up at the tiny barred window above me. It drizzles the cold cement floor with the very light of hope.

“You know that’s not a good idea.” My hand freezes just inches before the sunlight rays, startled by this random voice.

I peak through the rusty bars to meet the beautiful green eyes I know too well. The eyes that splash with many brilliant shades of green. Blending and bleeding as if they are a watercolor painting itself.

These are the eyes that shower others with kindness, but hidden deep inside them, there is someone crying, screaming for help. Pleading for someone to break through the lonely spell she has cursed upon herself, but all is camouflaged by a fake smile. These are the eyes that belong to my jailer. That belong to me.

An unescapable dimension, where I am both the jailer and prisoner. Both of us lack the key to recovery. We lack the will to even try. In the end, we both are free yet chained. A weight that cannot be lifted, only dragged. A fate worse than death.

Pens and Keystrokes

I entered this cell at a young age. It was the year 2002, where the innocence of my seven-year-old self was snatched away from me. It was the day where I traded my little blue skirt for the invisible orange jumpsuit that symbolizes my jail sentence. A suit that nobody could see, but it somehow attracted society's attention towards me. Leaving me as the target for their nasty labels and stigma.

It was the first Wednesday of the month, during the week I always dreaded. The divorce agreement my parents signed stated that my father got us early that week. An extra day to the 4 days we already had with him. This week in particular was the one in which the dreadedness turned into a personality.

School is where it had awakened, in the chaotic classroom that holds the district's second graders. The traditional black and white clock hangs over the tall doorway. The thick clock hands indicate that English period has just begun.

The wooden table above my tiny knees is glossed with a pigment of tan. My blue journal is opened before me, my name sitting proudly atop of the lined paper. My teacher gives us a prompt to write about, a prompt long gone from my memory. But the aftermath is too much to forget.

Between the red lines I have neatly written 2 sentences, well almost. My mind isn't loading spell check, so I can't continue. The word school is needed to finish the sentence, but for the life of me, I can't remember how to spell it. Is it Skool? Maybe Scool? No. They don't look right. How about Skcool? Scole?

My eyes frantically scan the many colorful posters and artwork that decorate the white classroom walls. None. Ironically none of

Pens and Keystrokes

them has the word on them. Just my luck. Maybe if I trigger a memory, the spelling may become clear?

I try to calm my tense body and breathe out slowly. My eyes close as my mind travels to the big double doors of my school. The name of the school sits proudly on the old brick exterior. Big, bold, black letters. I remember the font, even the spelling of the first two words, but the word school. Nope. My anxiety blurs it out of my mind.

The ticks and clicks of the clock appear louder than normal. The annoying sound drills into my tiny ears. Each second that passes by takes my patience along with it. My eyes study every movement of the clock, waiting and hoping for class to be over. But, as every student knows, this only makes the time feel longer.

I give up.

I examine my surroundings once again. All of my classmates are writing in their journals, not one of them confused or desperately looking around for answers. None of them are upset with themselves. I am the only one. The only stupid one. I glare at the wide lined paper in front of me. The eraser marks leave a big black smudge to symbolize my mistake, my stupidity.

The sound of multiple lead against paper triggers the anger I bury inside. Why? Why do they deserve to know how to spell, but I can't? What do they have that I don't? Smarts apparently. I grab my wooden pencil out of frustration and pretend to write in my notebook. I don't want others to see my confusion and frustration.

I am pathetic.

Unexpectedly, a sharp pain drops from my chest. An overwhelming wave of sadness washes over me. I drown, deeper and deeper into this strong emotional current.

Pens and Keystrokes

"Keep writing. You can always skip the word and come back to it," my conscience persuades.

"Why should I? If I was smart in the first place, I wouldn't have to!" I internally scream to myself. I sigh and put the pencil down. Drowning in my self-pity is the only thing I have energy enough to do.

What if my father finds out that I can't spell? He's going to hate me. I am a terrible excuse for a daughter. Sadness overwhelms me, the tears I push away hide it all. I have to be strong. I can't let anyone see how pathetic I am.

I deserve this pain.

Suddenly, the pain stops. I no longer feel this deep sadness, what is it that I'm feeling? That's the kicker, I'm not feeling anything. I'm an empty vessel. The sharp pain in my chest is gone, my anxiety and panic evaporates into thin air. I don't care about anything anymore. Not my classmates, teacher, the assignment. I'm not hurting any more, it is better this way. Not feeling anything.

It is better this way.

Even though I don't care anymore, the negative thoughts keep racing. My fragile skull intensely throbs. All the insults my father will yell reverberate in my mind. His voice is the thunder. "You're no daughter of mine!"

His strong angry hand ~ "Pull your pants down, this is what you get"- is the lightning.

I'm so sorry daddy.

I wish I was never born.

I wish to be dead.

Pens and Keystrokes

I wish to be dead. Something a 7 year-old should never wish for. Something they shouldn't be able to comprehend. But I did. I craved it. To me, death was the easy way out.

Now the year is 2016. That second grader is all grown up now. She is 20, going to college in hopes to better herself. She sees herself as a writer, a story teller to be exact. But really, what has changed since then? I look up at the ceiling, trying to recap the many events of my life.

The original white paint of the ceiling has been stained by age. Although still white, it's as the atmosphere drained its pigment, causing it to tint yellow. A new egg-white color coated over the original, but it only made it $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way. Giant brush strokes furiously scatter in hopes it would spread the paint, and cover the whole ceiling, but the strokes fail, and fade into the tinted white paint. Failure huh? I know a thing about that.

Truth is, nothing has changed since then. I am still that weak girl, crying in the corner of her prison cell. The one who needs the light, but doesn't think she deserves it. All that has changed is that I have visitation rights. I can leave that stinky cold cell whenever I please, but for some odd reason, I always return.

~Stephanie Michaud

EYES ON STALKS

Some eyes are blue,
some are brown.
But eyes on stalks
are world renowned.

Made of stalks
attached to eyes,
eyes on stalks,
what a prize.

They bend around
to see the world.
They look the best
when unfurled.

They twist three-hundred
and sixty degrees.
They bend and sway
in the summer breeze.

It pains me to see
stalkless eyes.
When I see them,
my soul cries.

The horror of seeing
eyes *not* on stalks
brings sorrow of which
I'd rather not talk.

But eyes on stalks,
silky and clean,
see them for yourself,
and see what I mean.

Pens and Keystrokes

The beauty they hold,
the joy that they give,
without eyes on stalks,
I'd rather not live.

~NWC



BLACK AUSTRALORP

~Casey Buck

Pens and Keystrokes

OPIATE SESTINA

How I wish that there was something other than the pain.
The sweat and shaking are the easiest part of the withdrawal.
I see the torture and the anguish in the eyes of my family.
I remember telling them that I was more than just an addict
while I lied, deceived, and stole.
But now they know that I betrayed them, no more hiding of
the highly guarded secret.

My friend had a secret.
His eyes said he knew pain.
He said he started stealing.
Today he came to me because of withdrawal.
I never thought he would an addict.
In this crisis, I knew he needed family.

Many dream about having a picture-perfect family.
But behind closed doors, even the perfect hold a secret.
Someone may crave a drug that is so addictive~
if anyone knew of pain,
it was the ones suffering from withdrawal
having control of their lives stolen.

You are always stealing.
You don't think about your family.
You are going to die, not just have withdrawal.
This is not a secret~
you are causing so much pain!
Heroin is very addictive.

Pens and Keystrokes

The thrill is so addictive,
but comes at a cost of stealing
time from others and causes pain.
The time lost with family
is something to never be replaced but by a secret
and this time, my final breath has been withdrawn.

She shakes and leans, weak with withdrawal.
How had the comedown, too, become so addictive?
She treasured it all, like a well-kept secret.
Asking, pleading, borrowing. Stealing.
I'm just busy, she says, hiding from her family.
She is the keeper of her own pain.

This crisis unfolds, stealing
a generation from family
who knows no drug will stop the pain.

*~ Creative Writing class
Spring 2016*

THE WASHERWOMAN

You've seen me in the ford,
heard my call in the eve,
though I foretell misfortune
you need not fear me.

I tend the frocks of your kinsmen
year after year
though you know me not now, child
you soon will, my dear.

I'm the crone by the creek
with a shriek that breaks glass
I launder the garments
of those soon to pass.

Whether matron or maiden,
with hair of wildfire
I sing for the souls
who are next for the pyre.

I have many faces
and a lamentable lot
I serve my sentence
for it's all that I've got.

In time I'll see your future
I'll know my family's fate
though I can visit them only
when their hour grows late.

And when the sun sets
a 'keening, I'll come
and I'll visit the homes
I was torn away from.

Pens and Keystrokes

An omen of death
an unwelcome sound
I'll wash them in tears
before they're lain in the ground.

I'll clean your grave clothes
till the rivers run red
I'll wash the shrouds of your children
long after you're dead.

~ JH Morgan



CONFRONTATION

~ Adia Montagna

Pens and Keystrokes

GLASS

at its melting point, it
bends to the
whim of gravity.

through the looking glass
I see my life in ways it
could have been.

so fragile, the
glass shatters in
the woman's petite hands.

sun shines through the
glass window heating the house.

glass-stained church windows leaves
rays of color throughout the
entire church.

glass marbles in
the gardens.

fragile glass horse that
I gave to
My meme, only
to be given back to
me when she passed two
weeks later.

Pens and Keystrokes

not all of us have
twenty-twenty vision so
glasses save us from the blur.

how beautiful is it
that when people throw broken
glass bottles into the ocean

yet, the ocean forgives over
time and
gives the broken pieces a
new beauty as
sea glass.

~ *Amanda Packard*



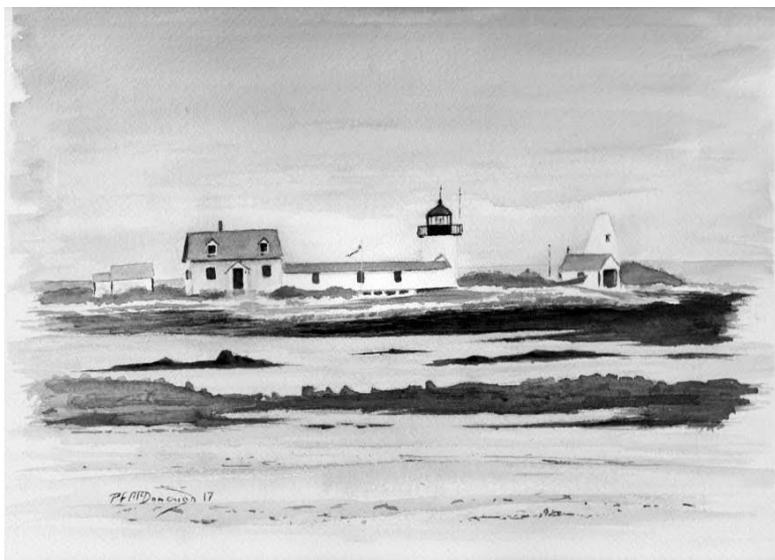
WOOD ISLAND

~ *Paul McDonough*

HER HORIZON

I was divided
like the sea
from the sky.
I smiled at him
Do you want to drown,
or fly?

~SD



GOAT ISLAND

~ Paul McDonough

Pens and Keystrokes

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND

My dad lent me forty dollars to come to visit him and the family.

I paid him back the forty dollars.

My dad needed his air conditioner serviced.

He paid my brother forty dollars to service it.

My brother needed his lawn taken care of.

He paid forty dollars to a friend to take care of his lawn.

His friend needed a hat and two tote-bags.

He paid me forty dollars for the hat and tote-bags.

My dad had his seventy-fifth birthday party at Olive Garden.

I paid for his meal: forty dollars.

What goes around comes around:

Good Karma.

~ Robin Kalde

Pens and Keystrokes

KNOWING

Knowing you keeps my day always sunny
regardless of the weather outside.

Knowing that you love me
keeps me warm when the snow flies.

Knowing that your smile will
always keep me focused on what is important.

Knowing your loving embrace
is all I will ever need in this life.

Knowing I will drown in the depths of your gaze
keeps me returning for more.

Knowing you will soon be
by my side keeps me going.

Knowing we will soon have a family
is what makes us immortal.

Knowing is not only just for the brain,
but for the heart as well.

~ Stephen Allain

Pens and Keystrokes

PERSPECTIVE

My alarm goes off at 6:13 AM sharp. Disgruntled, I get up from under my warm sheets and my skin is instantly covered by the cold air swirling in my room. I shut off my alarm, and clap my hands two times. *Clap. Clap.* The white Christmas lights that border my window click on, filling my room with soft white light.

I check my phone as I quickly get dressed in a series of clothing layers. “What is the temperature right now?” I ask with a low whisper.

“It is a shivering 17° outside,” Siri responds loudly

Startled by her loud response, my phone clumsily flies out of my hands and it bumps into my window sill. It hits the sill two times, and my lights shut off.

Good job, I think to myself as I stand half dressed in my now dark room. I know I ought to be more quiet. My roommate and her boyfriend are in the room next to mine and I don’t want to wake them. I put on my last layer, and I’m ready to go. Wearing three socks, two leggings, two shirts, two jackets, and one hat, I plug my headphones in, put on my shoes, and leave my apartment.

The brisk ocean air hits my face, and I smile at the early morning sky. The clouds are purple and grey spread across the horizon at the very edge, and the sky a bright blood orange fading off into a light baby blue. It’s as if the sun is trying to peek through the clouds to say hello. Grabbing my

Pens and Keystrokes

bike, I pass through the gate behind my house, carrying the bike on my left shoulder as I walk carefully down the ice-covered stairs. Once I get to the sand, I take a moment to look at the scenery. The rocks are almost black, and the low tide reflects the orange and blue from the sky. I couldn't ask for a more perfect place to live. I set off on my bike following the water.

I have come to the conclusion that my bike is a little broken, as it makes a sliding noise that it didn't before. I'm sure it's from riding it on the beach. With the crisp air hitting my face, and no one else on the beach, I have the ocean to help me clear my mind. Thoughts of my mother fill my head.

The time is my senior year in high school, about one a.m. Frustrated, I sit up in my bed and stand in my room. I have been listening to my mother screeching to herself and banging on the kitchen table. I know from many times before, that the only way I will get to sleep tonight is if I go and help her. Hesitant, I walk over to my door, laying my head against its wooden frame, and my hand on the door knob. I can hear my mother in the kitchen, the room outside my door, having her hysterical breakdown. For a moment I don't hear anything, and I think that maybe I can go back to bed, but I listen closely, and I can hear her awful loud whispers of how she hates this life. I take a deep breath in, and open the door.

The light from the kitchen is blinding. I squint my eyes for a moment. While my eyes adjust, I can hear my mother sort of

Pens and Keystrokes

grunting as she swears under her breath. And there she is. At the kitchen table, with her laptop and an assortment of binders and sheets of paperwork spread on the small table. Walking towards her and the piles of paper, I feel the cold from the kitchen tiles against my bare feet. She bangs her fists onto the table, and quickly turns her head at me.

With her jaw clenched, and her eyes staring at me like daggers, she utters, “What are you doing up? Go, to bed.”

“I can’t really do that. I can hear you clear as day in my room. I might be able to help,” I say softly as I walk towards her, trying my best to avoid the papers on the ground.

My mother rolls her eyes at me, and says with disgust, “Oh. Like I’m *SO BAD*.”

“I’m not saying that you’re ‘so bad.’ I just want to see if I can help. What can I do?”

My mother looks to me and I see her let her guard down. “I’m trying to do this assignment but the computer isn’t working.”

The thing with my mother is that when she would get into these fits, she never talked, she screeched. She would strain her voice out every time that she would talk. It is the most annoying thing I have ever had to withstand.

“I’m sure there is a way to fix it. Did you try reloading the page?” I ask while looking at her computer, stepping closer.

She slams her fist down onto the table. “NO!”

Pens and Keystrokes

I tense up, and hold my breath. Trying not to show how much she scares me, I don't move at all, and I don't think.

"That. Won't. Help," she persists, as she hits her computer.

I quickly stop her hand. "Don't do that. You're going to break your computer and will have to get a new one."

Dealing with her sometimes was like dealing with a toddler who only knew how to communicate through temper tantrums. My resentment of her grows each time I had to deal with her outbursts. Now, I take a deep breath to try to remain calm, before asking her more questions. When suddenly, I do something very wrong.

She snaps her head towards me, with a look of pure rejection and hurt. "OH GREAT!" she exclaims, throwing her arms up, and tossing her head to the side. "I'm just a f---ing problem to you, AREN'T I?"

Completely confused, I don't know what I did that could make her feel this way. Was it because I stopped her hand from hitting her computer? Did I overstep my boundaries by talking back? Should I have stayed in my room and listened to her random screeching all night? I'm silent for a moment, looking to her in a daze as to what I did to make her question what she is to me. "Why are you saying that?" I ask.

She scoffs at my question, and gives me a dissatisfied look. "You gotta take a Deep. Breath. And act like I'm the worst mom! If I'm that *exhausting*, then why don't you go

Pens and Keystrokes

somewhere else? I'm not awful! I don't hit you. You wouldn't last a day with my father!"

That is when I realize that the air around me is cold. I'm cold. The tile on the kitchen floor is gone, and I'm not in that small apartment alone with my mother.

I'm back on the beach. The sun has risen, and tears are streaming down my face. It's as if I opened my eyes, and three years have gone by in an instant. I look around me, and see the ocean, and am astonished. Dealing with my mother sometimes felt like one big panic attack. The unpredictable behavior, the anxiety, and intense tension made me feel at times that I would live like that forever, and that I would never get my chance to leave. I felt as though I would always be in that apartment taking care of her, and never get my chance to live the way that I wanted. Growing up with her made me scared shitless.

Even though I'm not the girl I used to be, I'm still scared when I think back on those memories. Now I know that I don't have to live the same day over and over again. I can leave and change how I want to live. This new life can help me motivate myself into a new kind of person. I don't have to be the same frustrated and scared girl I once was.

I set off on my bike again, continuing my ride on the beach.

~ *Gisela M.*

Pens and Keystrokes

BOOKS

Books and stories~
an escape can be found
inside pages and language.

Some are more
Special~
They are who
People Are.

Are people stories
books placed on shelves
up high?

Books gather dust
like people
who wait for stories to take them.

Dust that fills pages
creeps into the spine and stays there
dust that sits in eyes and on tongues.

I cannot tell
which is preferred in compare~
books or people?
Stories or people?

I cannot tell
how long can a book last
if it does nothing
if it says nothing
no words: Is it a book?

Pens and Keystrokes

Empty stories
fill time
placeholder until a new pen is found
used to scratch and fill space in the margin.

Some stories are short
books are thin
how quickly some end.

What genre is the right?
What moral can be found?
Who writes the story?
Who interprets it all?

Do men and women read in different minds?
The voice that lists the word from the page
is what the author wrote~
what is being
saying to sounds?

Is it sound that makes the story
into a story,
the voice within our minds?

Some stories are told out loud.
Some books are read in silence.
Some people move in space
off from high shelves

~ Sarah Berger

FATHER TIME

I was given a name,
eyelashes, a zodiac
a million cells dividing like a firework
& the stars are jealous of me.
I am the daughter whose
feet have touched
the Earth.
Father, father,
Can I stay here forever?
I am drunk with the night air
& its melancholy brilliance.
I've chased fireflies with my friends
& we laughed like children caught
in the wooly cotton dream of infinity
I want to know everything.
Father, father
let me create a god.
I'll steal a piece of the moon
while you give me the sun.
My punishments include losing,
longing, and weak knees
Father, father,
why do you hurt me?
Let me be new, beautiful, &
untouched
He looks past my request &
I see my reflection in the mirror.

Father Time,
I no longer wish to be your daughter anymore

~ *Sophia Dalleo*

Pens and Keystrokes



DOUBLE GOOD LUCK

~ Paula Gagnon