



York County Community College

# Pens & Keystrokes 2022

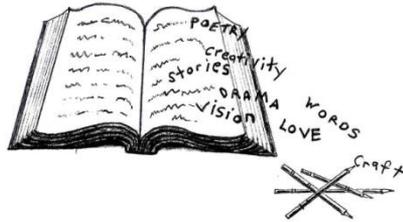


**YORK COUNTY  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

FIND THE FEARLESS YOU.

# Pens and Keystrokes

Writings from the  
YCCC  
Community



Spring 2022  
Volume 15

## Pens and Keystrokes

### ~ Acknowledgements ~

*It takes a community to publish a literary magazine. Many thanks to all who made this publication possible. The English Department sponsored the magazine financially. Special thanks to the creative writing students from Spring 2022; I'm always amazed by the writing – especially poetry – that this class generates.*

*Digital Media Department Chair extraordinaire Mike Lee designed the cover using two wonderful photos: “Open Road,” by Casey Cyr, and “Butterfly,” by Jessica Lehoux.*

*Finally, thank you to all of the artists and writers who contributed writing, art, and photography to this 15<sup>th</sup> volume of Pens & Keystrokes. You produced wonderful work which will inspire others.*

~ Dianne Fallon, Editor  
English Department Chair

Cover art, **“OPEN ROAD” & “BUTTERFLY”**

A collage, created by Mike Lee, with original photographs by Casey Cyr and Jessica Lehoux.

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

By YCCC alumnus Donald Martin

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**THE TURTLE**

When born, I ran terrified.

Unable to hide

I see the water and the tide.

I make it to the other side.

I am there and yet, I decide

to wait on the ides

to bide my time.

And as I waited, to grow old,

In the cold, I ate and grew,

Yet even still fear the news.

The sky does fill with birds this night.

Be still, my heart. Do not take flight.

~Coley Hatt

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### **BLACK LIVES MATTER**

Bound, and taken against their will  
Led to labor in the fields  
Allowed nothing to own  
Chained up like a beast  
Killed for speaking.

Lives are lost  
In the  
Void  
End.  
Someone

Make it stop.  
A nation weeps ~  
Time to make a change.  
The fears can't continue ~  
Every life deserves to live.  
Release the hate and learn to love.

~ *Anonymous*

**BANNED FROM INSTAGRAM**



~ Ashley Blake

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### WONDERLAND

Looking around, seeing not believing,  
Grandiloquent light chained to a rhythm,  
Tempo changes, heart starts drumming, feet swaying ~  
Veils yawning to shatter light through a prism.

An array of color whirls through the air,  
Humming swaying to a beat stuck in my bones,  
Whispered words of a mystery to snare,  
Lost in a storm, gazing at vast unknowns.

My vast oceans of dreams are drowning me,  
Those dreams jolt my mind; stumbling endlessly,  
Oh! Waves crash down in the fathomless sea,  
Surrounding and muffling reality.

Finally, my life is at its fullest,  
I turn to explore the vibrant forest.

~ *Willa Ferris*

**WINTER BEACH DAY**



*~ Jessica Lehoux*

## THANKSGIVING CHICKEN POT PIE

I sat there, alone, in an empty motel room. It was the first time I had ever been alone on Thanksgiving. I pushed around the contents of a microwaved chicken pot pie, as generic Christmas movies played in the background. This was foreign to me. I tried to convince myself it was an ordinary Thursday, but there was the inescapable and nagging fact that it wasn't just any Thursday.

Thanksgiving was always very big in my family. My grandmother and my mother would spend all day Wednesday prepping for the big meal the following day. We peeled vegetables, made pies, sipped eggnog, and chatted the day away.

“Make sure you don't burn the dinner rolls and carrots this year,” my grandfather would joke to my grandmother. Inevitably, the rolls and carrots would both be burnt.

I reflected on those memories as I mindlessly flipped through channels. I decided to forgo watching the parade this year. I doubted that watching it would make me feel anything other than sad. Unlike this year, the parade was always on. As the turkey roasted and the vegetables simmered on the stovetop, my family would be in the living room, watching the parade. The coffee table was always filled with stuffed dates, a bowl of unshelled nuts and nutcrackers, and chocolates. We would snack while passing snide comments about some of the silly and corny acts performing.

But, this time, I didn't even bother to see who performed. I didn't wait for Santa to arrive at the end the parade. I just bounced back and forth from one channel to another, trying to decide which mindless movie to watch.

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I looked at the empty dark corner of the hotel room where the window was. There was no tree there to fill in the space. There was nothing. We always put our tree up and decorated the house in November. Everything was fully decorated before Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving night, after the food was put away and the kitchen was cleaned, we would relax and watch Christmas movies. The warm glow from little white twinkle lights lit the entire room.

Everyone would be stuffed from eating so much, but there was always room for pie. It was my favorite part of the whole day. This year there was no tree. No ornaments hanging with the pictures of my children. No school-made decorations that my children hung up every year. And no pie. Nothing but that dark corner.

I tried not to let myself get overwhelmed with emotion, but I was having very little luck. My mom and my brother couldn't travel up here, from Connecticut, because of COVID. And my grandparents have since passed. All I could think about was everyone gathering around their tables enjoying their dinners. I thought about my kids, who were with their father and his family. I choked back tears when I thought about my family laughing and cooking in the kitchen that my ex and I had just remodeled. I wondered if my children missed me. How did it feel for them to not have me there? Since having a family and a house, I always cooked the Thanksgiving meal. I brined the turkey for 48 hours in a homemade brine. I baked all the pies and peeled and cooked all the vegetables. My daughters and I loved to dance to holiday music while the food cooked.

"Spin me around and around," my daughter, Hazel, would always ask of me when "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" came on.

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“Can I have the wishbone this year? Seamus and Gretchen always get it,” my daughter, Molly, begged.

“You had it last year,” I reassured her. She had it several years in a row, but always conveniently forgot.

I thought back to the event that brought me to that motel room that November night. The end of my marriage meant that one of us had to move out. The house had belonged to his parents, so I was the one who had to leave. But I was supposed to have time. I was supposed to pack carefully, scout out property, and slowly transition. But I didn't. A very heated shouting match, politically infused, caught the attention of my neighbor down the road. She was not only my neighbor, but my friend. She thought it turned physical and the police were called. I left that night and never went home again. I ended up at a reasonably priced motel.

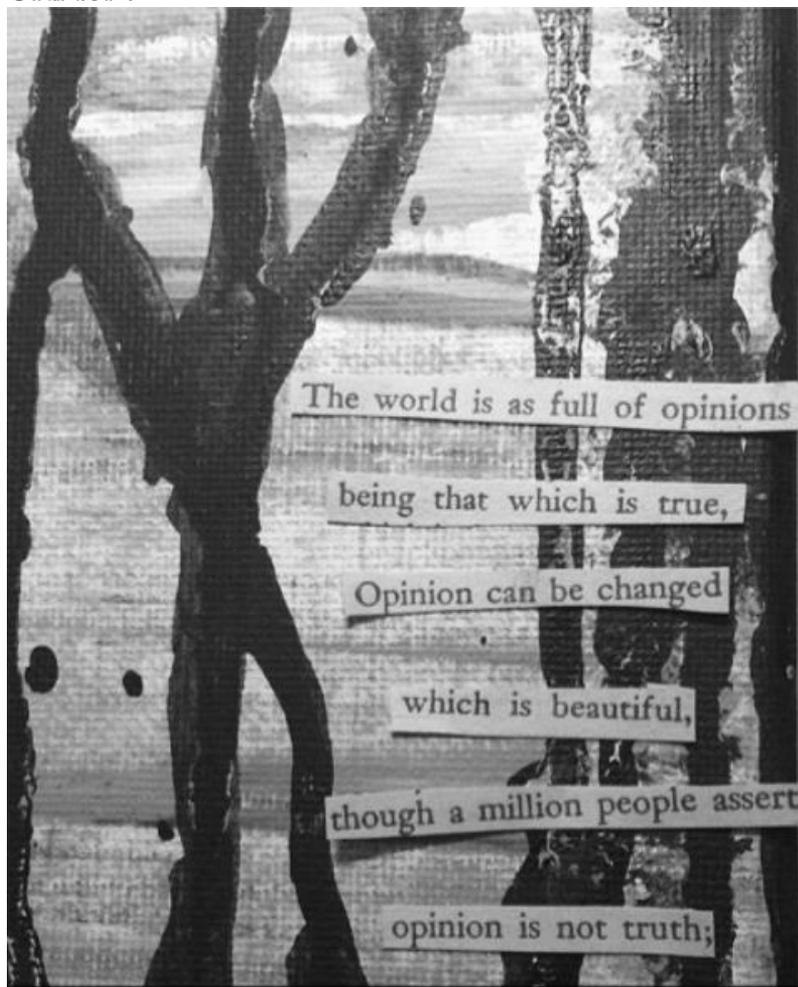
Thankfully, with the tourists gone home for the winter, I had many options. It had two double beds, low thread-count sheets, a fridge that could barely hold a pint of milk and some fruit, an even smaller freezer, and a microwave. Positioned across from the beds was a flat screen TV. It contained 200 plus channels, none of which played anything worthwhile.

That motel room became my home for over a month. It brought me warmth and shelter, and I was thankful for that. It gave me a place to spend my Thanksgiving. It wasn't a home filled with Christmas decorations or a well-placed dinner table filled with turkey and pies. It didn't have any laughter and love mutually shared by my children and me. But it did have a TV and a microwave that allowed me to have my Thanksgiving chicken pot pie. It wasn't pumpkin or apple, but it was pie and that was good enough for me.

~ Carey Graffam

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OPINIONS



~ Kai Gehring

**GONE GIRL, NEW MEXICO, 1997**

A flash of lightning lit up the New Mexico sky, and I knew I had to hurry. If it rained, the roads to Santa Fe would become slick with mud and impassable to my low-riding sedan. I had to leave before that happened. I couldn't spend one more night in the same space as that awful little man.

Living in New Mexico had seemed like a good idea when I had never been there. People talk about the beauty of the desert, the light, the stone. They say it's magical. To me, everything about it felt hostile. New Mexico in the mountains in March was cold. I lived on a farm as an intern in an unheated geodesic dome that gave me a beautiful view of the hills but also allowed my boots to freeze to the floor and my work pants to stiffen up like cardboard. When I put them on my already chilled legs, the rough fabric felt like a dull razor. The outhouse's doorway curtain didn't keep the snow out. I had to brush a dusting of it off the toilet seat before I could sit down on the frigid plastic. Little seeds, called goat's head because of the two horn-like spikes on them, laid in wait on the ground for a soft bicycle tire or unshod foot. Water was rationed and there was very little that was green. I was supposed to stay for eight months.

The physical discomforts, however, were more of a challenge than a deterrent to my remaining in New Mexico. The reason I left, fled really, was my boss, the man who owned the farm. My father and I drove there from Maine together because, at 23, I was too afraid to make the trip alone. The day we arrived, I remember standing next to my car which had just managed the final 10 miles of back roads to this isolated homestead, an adobe house in a small valley

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surrounded by empty vegetable beds and a lot of metal crap. I wasn't even sure I was in the right place. Then I noticed a very small man, almost elfin in his petiteness, with an abundance of curly dark hair.

He walked across the yard, maybe 40-50 feet away from my father and me. His body was perpendicular to us, and I could see him looking at me out of the corner of his eye. He never said a word. Did he work there? Was he another farmhand? A random desert dweller just passing by?

Turns out, he was my new boss, the owner of this junkyard. His name was Steve. He ran ultra- marathons, ate a lot of vegetables, and had a passive-aggressive relationship with his live-in girlfriend, Barb. He was very bright and had little patience for those he thought less intelligent than him which was everybody on that farm. Right. This is where and with whom I would be spending the next 8 months. Steve was short-tempered and abrasive. He was like the desert in which he lived ~ prickly, inhospitable, all muscle and sinew without an ounce of lushness anywhere.

I honestly can't remember all his little micro-aggressions or evidence of his hostility. I just remember forgetting to turn off an irrigation valve which lead to a waste of water, a big no-no in such a dry environment, and being scared to death of Steve's response when he found out.

At this point, I had been at the farm for two months. I shared my living quarters with a wonderful woman from Ohio who, 25 years later, is still my friend. We had turned over a lot of soil, fended off a lot of attacks from the

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rooster, and planted a lot of seeds. There were other interns at the farm during that time. Pip from Tasmania, Shane from ....?, Sarah from Worcester. They were all good people who had signed on for shorter stints at the farm than I had. They were also better able to take Steve's personality with a grain of salt.

The best part of life at the farm, though, were the dogs. Jasper was an aging mid-size dog. I can remember the day he realized he could no longer join Steve on his marathon runs. Steve, who had no people-skills, was very gentle with Jasper. They'd been running together for a long time. The other dog, Bitsie, was the very best kind of little dog. She was full of personality and sass. I loved her, but I had had enough of Steve.

I had spent those last two months with a knot in my stomach stemming from Steve's unpleasant personality and my own obsessive need to please people. I lived in tense anticipation of his next cutting remark, his next snarky mood. Watching the dynamic between himself and Barb depressed and angered me. Again, I don't remember the details of their relationship, just the bleakness of it. There seemed to be no tenderness and no joy. I wondered why she stayed.

The day I realized I had left the irrigation on, Steve was off the farm. I spent the day full of dread. How would he respond when he saw what I had done?

I worked myself up into such a state of gut-churning skin-prickling anxiety I finally cracked. I couldn't take feeling that way anymore. I decided to leave. This meant bailing

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six months early on my commitment to work on the farm. Quitting was not something I did lightly. Deciding to leave caused me almost as much anguish as the idea of staying.

But I had had enough. When Steve came home, I embodied the phrase “girding one’s loins” and told Steve I needed to leave. The man was not much taller than I am, but I was still terrified. His response to the irrigation issue had been mild, but his reaction to my leaving was not. After telling him my decision, I went back to the dome to pack. Shortly thereafter, he appeared in the door, and my stomach dropped. After some stinging remarks about the unlikelihood of my future success in life, he said, as I recall, “This ball and chain is going to follow you around for the rest of your life unless you deal with it. I don’t want to see you back in the house. You need to leave first thing in the morning.”

I said nothing. At that point, I knew I could not bring myself to spend even one more night there, but where on earth could I go? Should I just drive around Santa Fe until I could find a hotel?

This, remember, was before cell phones and GPS. It didn’t matter, though. I just had to go, to get out of the weird bubble that was this farm in Ojo de la Vaca, New Mexico. However, after a quick conference with my fellow interns, I ended up finding a place to stay with a friend of one of them who agreed to let me sleep on a couch in his garage. I

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gathered up my muddy boots and dirty clothes and loaded it all into my car. The two remaining interns and I stood in a huddle in the road, surrounded by the night sky and a sharp wind. We knew the storm meant I needed to leave soon, and so we said our goodbyes. I climbed into my car, my little home on wheels, and headed into the night.

~ Tracy Weber

## MOUNTAIN MIST



~ Casey Cyr

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### SESTINA: VACCINE MULTIPLICITY, 2021

What is freedom?  
Is it possible that science  
is the key to the injection  
of hope, to the pinch  
of happiness I feel when I gather  
with my old lady mother, still healthy?

The beginning of health  
Often is the beginning of freedom.  
From a year of separation, now we will gather.  
Who could imagine the gift of science  
Delivering safety with just a pinch  
Millions of people immunized with an injection.

There are many people who hate these injections.  
They'll claim they don't need medicine to be healthy.  
They wince while getting shots because they can't handle  
the pinch.  
But to be vaccinated will bring back our freedom.  
There are those who claim they don't believe science.  
Instead they try to cure with herbs they have gathered.

Are we truly reaching freedom?  
Or are we being pinched  
by the government? The health  
of the people is what matters. However, an injection  
is now the question. We gathered  
the information we have, but will science have our back?

So many line up to receive the same pinch,  
that same pain we've all experienced that we gather

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like sheep for. Some say we sacrifice freedom  
by doing this and are injecting  
poison into our bodies. "But our health  
depends on it!" We cry back, knowing they would pander  
to oranges over science.

I've gathered all this scientific research,  
but will it convince me to submit to the pinch of health?  
Instead, can I inject the freedom to choose?

*~ Spring 2021 Creative Writing*

### **MASKQUERADA'S POWER**



*~ Pari Kim*

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### CHILDHOOD

I saw the fireflies in the night,  
recall sleeping on the ground near elders and cousins, knew  
the fullness of our supper washed in water near the shelter,  
gathered with them at the fire to hear the stories of the  
elders, heard their laughter.

There were presents for the stranger when we gathered,  
all together. Needles spilled from pines between the houses  
that she built us.

Daughters cowed to mothers who cowed to elders, never  
others.

Knolls stood out in glory in amber autumn bluster.  
Spirits shaped in hollows in the heaviness of twilight.  
Deer and rabbit slept outside the ring of firelight.

There was god out on the landscape poised and full with  
knowing.

God was there at night in the secret rites of elders.  
I flew with breezes stirred in trees that towered,  
was intent on signs of lodgers in the fallen pines rotting.  
Believed that I was whole with every change approaching.

But I don't know. I don't see them anymore.  
Now I'm not certain, I'm not so sure.  
I'm not well, and in death they've gone.  
Time and death have left me confounded  
and surrounded by these ghosts.

~ *Pine Beers*

**POOR LISTENING**

James.

The name sounded innocent, charming. A name that belonged to a prince or a diplomat. Of course, my favorite stories were always the happily-ever-after romances. The Hallmark channel seems to have had a movie for each one of my fantasies growing up. They provided an escape from reality, and I would let myself be pulled into each and every cheesy plot line, knowing the resolution from the moment it started. He wasn't like the princes in those movies. He enjoyed laughter and friendship, and constantly sought after the company of others.

He wasn't the fittest. His height was like mine, but his weight was almost double. Very often seen as cuddly, or warm. I wasn't scared of him, I didn't have to be. It's rare that someone like that is threatening. He wasn't my "type" at all, but he gave me attention. I fell for it. Zero self-confidence. Zero self-esteem. He wanted connection, I wanted worth. My self image was constructed of what other people said they thought about me. I didn't understand the importance of seeing my own value and self-worth before I realized I had none. I was smart, could hold an intelligent conversation, but had no social IQ. I had no idea how to say no, to tell myself I deserved better, to even think that I deserved better.

He had been so adamant about being respectful of my decision to say no. He had been very clear in saying, "It's

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okay.” I believed his words. At first. But then it became just words. His words had lost all meaning. The more he asked, the less it felt okay, and the more it felt like if I said no, I would lose the value I “gained” when he gave me attention. It only took a couple weeks before he asked me to be his girlfriend, and only a couple more after that before he slipped through the side door and turned the corner into my room. He locked the door behind him, his mind was only focused on one thing. His red sweatshirt soon found a place on the floor. It didn’t start slowly. It was fast, incomprehensible, a blur. Maybe that’s just because I didn’t want to remember.

I found myself laying on my back, on the bottom bunk, fitted with my soft, aqua-colored sheets. My neck was bent awkwardly on my matching pillows as his entire weight was holding me in place. I couldn’t move. I had no place to go, no ability to run. It wasn’t intentional, I know that, but I was stuck beneath someone twice my size. We had paused for a moment and he asked me if I was sure. Time froze. The pressure of all the asking had finally built up to this painful moment and I panicked. I looked around the empty room, the bare walls silently watched me squirm. I never felt the desire to decorate a place I would just as soon move on from, I never got attached. I never felt at home. I was left alone. Alone. My mind spun, floating in space. I tried to find a way out. My eyes darted back and forth, picking up glimpses of the brown hair that flipped around his face and his brown eyes that waited with anticipation.

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He didn't ask for my sake, he asked for his own. He knew what he wanted. He knew what he came for, but thought it good to give me one more chance.

I don't know how many seconds passed before I broke the silence. Defeated. No one knocked on the door. My roommate didn't come back unexpectedly. No one called my phone. I didn't have anyone who would. I never had a best friend. The only connection I had was with James.

I couldn't find a way out.

He didn't save me.

"Yeah."

~ *Cyann Karnes*

## RIPPLES



~ *Kai Gehring*

## THE WAVES

I was so close. I kept kicking the ball, while the ball went with my speed. The other team kept getting closer, so I kicked it to the goal. The goalie caught the ball and kicked it back into the game. I jogged back slowly, panting from sprinting back and forth most of the game. Everything was perfectly fine.

“KJ! KJ! Come in!” My teammate yelled out.

That was the first time it happened to me. My sophomore year of high school and I didn’t fully understand why or how. All I know is that my mind was somewhere else or at least that’s what it seemed like. I was shaking everywhere and I wouldn’t let myself calm down. It seemed like it would never stop. I hid from the group, hiding the fact that something was wrong with me. I walked to the sidelines and kept walking. My heart beat a hundred times a minute and my eyes saw a blur. Everything was put together.

The worst part was that everyone around me saw it happen. I never liked the spotlight that hung around some people. I always tried staying out of it. As hard as I try, I always step into it. My two friends came over and tried to calm me down. The words that I remember the most were, “I have them too.”

The coach then came over and dismissed everyone else from my area. The game had ended, so they all grouped together. I could hear their conversation as I was overwhelmed with my breathing. She kept saying, “It’s going

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to be okay, it will be over.” Over and over again, until she wanted me to count my fingers. At first it didn’t work. The only thing that helped me was my mind taking over the situation. I had to believe I was okay and, of course, it would end. It might sound easy if you’ve never had one before, but it’s hard. All I could think about is that my lungs were going to give up on me and that was the end. I couldn’t bear the thought of giving up in front of everyone.

When it finally ended, my whole body felt weak. I remember trying to walk, but my legs had given up. So, I decided to sit down to charge my energy. The team discussion had finished and everyone had gone in different directions. I didn’t know how to feel. Should I be embarrassed, angry, sad? I had no idea. All I knew was that the world was against me.

I always thought that they were caused by something wrong with someone. I never thought people at my school had them. For the first few weeks after, I started realizing that other people had them too. I would walk around the halls, scared that everyone would see how weak I felt. The way I would clumsy fall out of nowhere. Or when I was in class and I could no longer concentrate on what was being taught. My mind had been stolen, and it seemed like I would never get it back.

Once I heard that everyone had them on their own, I came to a realization that I was okay. School was getting harder and I was taking on more responsibility. I also just started high school with COVID and all. I usually don’t

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keep things to myself. I don't know how. I do know, however, that everyone has their thing going on.

Then it happened again in science class two months later. My thought process was back to the beginning. The simple questions always came back. Would I be alright? Why was this happening to me? What was making this happen? Everything to the last detail made me question what was wrong with me and why I never saw it happen to anyone else. I guess you never get the thought until it happens again.

I had a project where I had to talk in front of people I barely knew. I guess the real problem was that they all knew each other and I was the new kid. They were all a grade above me and I didn't know how to act in front of them. The truth: I was terrified. They were all so smart and knew what they were talking about. They were very opinionated and always yelled when they wanted to talk. I was always the opposite, I shut up and let everyone else have a voice.

My friend had walked to the bathroom with me and tried to calm me down. The same words sprung from her mouth, "I get them too." The thing I would never fully understand is why everyone has them, but not in school. Why did mine always have to be at school? Maybe it was the attention that people started giving me. I always knew I was funny and enjoyable to talk to, but I've never tried to get friends. I always try to stay away from everyone.

My mind was racing and I couldn't stay up straight. So, what did I do? I stood up against the bathroom wall and listened to my friend talk. She thought I was listening, but

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hey, did you expect me to? You try having them in the bathroom as every girl in school walks in.

It took her a while to get me to calm down. There were some girls who came into the bathroom and looked my way. Some even asked to see if I was okay. I knew everyone at my school, so I was okay with them seeing me like that. It was hard for me to think straight and I couldn't grasp the idea of not breathing properly.

I was taking on more responsibility in school and had to get used to it. It never happened to me again. I got used to my classes and I learned to talk to everyone, even if they were older than me and were very opinionated. I had to learn my ways and had to find my thought process. Now look at me, I am doing college classes, junior classes, my regular sophomore classes, and I am better than ever. Every time I start to get a wave, I take a deep breath and take over my thoughts. It always works for me.

I would even say getting anxiety attacks was a learning experience for me. I felt like a wave. My breathing can go up and down, it can come and go. However, at the end of it all, I always go back to normal. I just have to remember that I have my own thoughts, and I either ride with the gentle waves or the hurricane waves. Either way I will be in control.

~KJ Combs

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### YET TO SEE

Sometimes I wanna take a train  
    Right out of this place.  
And sometimes I wish I had my own  
    Little piece of space.  
And I just want to set myself free  
There is so much in this world yet to see.

I wish I could scrub this dirt  
    Right off my body.  
Sometimes living on the streets  
    Takes its toll on me.  
And I just want a place to sleep  
And I just want some food to eat.

Life holds so many adventures  
    For us to share together,  
But so many people stay in their  
    Same little place forever.  
They never get the brave to leave.  
There's so much in this world yet to see.

Sometimes we struggle  
    And sometimes we cry,  
And sometimes we suffer  
    And sometimes we die,  
And if we never set ourselves free  
    Then we never truly lived our lives  
    Then we never truly lived our lives.

~ *Samantha R. McIntire*

**HERON CAVE**



~ Pine Beers

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### LOST SMILE

Where did you say you left your last smile?  
Likely under summer's sun long ago.  
I saw it once or twice ~ it's been a while  
Too long it seems, how did I ever know?

The days have passed and the nights are too long  
An eternity as so it might seem.  
I still cannot believe that it is gone;  
I could only wish it was just a dream.

My heart thunders at the moments with you.  
You hear it beating many miles away.  
Spring has blossomed as it always will do;  
Maybe we might see it again one day.

But for now, it is wise to let it be.  
For now, I smile for that I am free.

*~April Williams*

## THE “BIGGER” GIRL

Growing up, I had always been the bigger girl. I wasn't anywhere near huge, but I was always the bigger one in all of my friend groups. Bigger than average, as one might say.

When I was very little, I didn't care what my body looked like. My family loved me, and I was always their little "princess," even though I might have been a bit chubbier than the average kid. They would always tell me how beautiful I was, and I enjoyed my life, eating whatever food I was given because it was good. I didn't have any standards to live up to, and life was great. It wasn't until upper elementary school that I started to wonder why all of my friends had slimmer thighs than I did. All of a sudden, I became consciously aware of the size of my body in relation to other kids' bodies.

The first time I ever had a negative thought about my body was in the third grade. I had gotten home from school and sat down in a chair at the kitchen table. I was wearing shorts and a T-shirt, and I looked down at my thighs as they flattened out against the solid wood. I sat there for a moment, observing them.

“Why do my thighs look so big?” I wondered out loud. “They look like chubby pears.”

My mom was standing right there in the kitchen cooking dinner when she paused cutting up vegetables and looked over at me. She gave me a funny look and said, “No, they don't, you look fine.”

But I didn't believe her. This is when the hatred I had for my body all started.

Throughout the rest of elementary and middle school, every time I looked in the mirror, I wondered why I was as big as I was and why I couldn't just get smaller. I wasn't really

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a super athletic kid, since my parents didn't have extra money to put me and my siblings in sports and activities, but I was always playing outside and doing things like biking and swimming, so it's not like I did nothing. There were always a few kids that were bigger than me in my classes at school, and I never really got picked on for my weight, but I still had this constant internal battle with myself and went years thinking I needed to be smaller, or more "normal."

My mother didn't like it whenever I talked about my weight. "If you want to blame someone, blame me," she would always say. "I've always had a problem with my weight, and same with your grandmother and all of her brothers and sisters. It runs in the family."

But that didn't make me feel much better. Sometimes I did feel like blaming her for my slow metabolism, as I always wondered why I couldn't eat like my friends and stay skinny. In elementary and middle school, I had a best friend, Moira, who was pretty much the opposite of me, super tall for her age and slim with a fast metabolism. I always used to wish I looked more like her. She was built like a model, always the tallest girl in the class, with long, slender legs. She never made fun of me for being chubby, and she liked me for who I was, which I will always be grateful for, but there was always that sliver in the back of my mind that wondered why I couldn't be skinnier like her and many other people in my class.

When I was in the fifth grade, I started taking dance classes. I loved to dance and it helped keep me active, but the fact that I was a bit bigger than most of the girls there always crept its way into my mind. I thought I wasn't as good just because I was bigger, even though my size had little to do with how good of a dancer I was. One thing I always

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hated was getting measured for costumes. I knew my measurements would be bigger than most of the others, and that I would probably need a larger size than everyone else. It made me feel uneasy having other people know my measurements, even though I was a preteen who was undoubtedly still growing and changing.

Costume nights were always the worst nights. I felt like the costumes always looked terrible on me and great on the rest of my teammates. I hated everything about it: the bladelike sequins that were ready to slice your arm with one wrong movement, smiling through countless group pictures where I felt like the odd one out, and the tight spandex squeezing my body and making every little bulge on my body visible, like a muffin tin that was filled just a little too full and overflowed inside the oven. I would stand there listening to the excited chatter around me while the other girls were putting on their costumes and having a blast. Usually, I would try to go along with them, but whenever I looked back at myself in the mirror, I had this feeling I can't really explain. A feeling that I couldn't relate to them. Maybe there was a hint of jealousy since my friends could look good in their costumes and I didn't. I loved dance and my teammates so much, and I knew my teachers and teammates wanted me there, but being the bigger girl never failed to make me feel a tad bit out of place.

Being on the bigger side always bothered me and knew how to make me feel bad about myself, but it wasn't until my sophomore year of high school that it started to take over my thoughts on a daily basis. It became the only thing I could think about and it started to influence everything I did. Everywhere I went, I felt like people were judging me for the way I looked, and I even changed my eating habits when I

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was around other people. I would be embarrassed to eat in public or around others because I was afraid people would think "Why is she eating so much? A girl her size shouldn't eat that much." I would take the daintiest little bites of food and chew for a minute in between each bite to avoid people thinking I was eating too fast or that I was too fixated on my food. It was all I could think about every day, and I was simply unhappy. And it was at this point in my life that I had made a huge mistake. I was extremely unhappy with my body, and that mistake was thinking that I would be happy again if I lost weight and got smaller.

It started with skipping breakfast in the mornings. I barely had time in the mornings anyway, so it wasn't a huge deal to just wait until lunch at school. One day I thought, "If I can skip breakfast, why can't I just skip lunch and wait until I get home from school to eat?" Soon, I was eating only one meal a day on some days. It was easy to hide because my family would never know that I skipped lunch and didn't eat any snacks throughout the day. I didn't realize how bad this was for my body. I just wanted to lose weight.

In the summer months, I would stay up super late and sleep half the day, and I usually wouldn't eat until the evening. I was eating way fewer calories a day than a fifteen-year-old girl should be eating, and I even forced myself to do workout routines every day because they would help me "lose belly fat," or get "slim thighs." I was weighing myself pretty much every morning, and if my weight was even a tiny bit higher than it was the previous day, I would feel like a failure. I didn't know that many things can cause your weight to fluctuate, and seeing that I gained made me so angry with myself every time.

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One day, I was out with my family in Old Orchard Beach, and it was hot so I got a frozen coffee from Dunkin Donuts. I remember feeling so guilty afterward, and I had myself thinking that if I drank one frozen coffee, all those calories would make me fat. I didn't want to eat anything that didn't have a label, because I wanted to know exactly how many calories I was eating, and I took a significant chunk of time out of every day trying to figure out how many calories I had already consumed and how many I had left so I would stay under a certain limit. The amount of time I spent tracking every single bite I ate and feeling guilty for eating was insane, far too much time for a teenager to spend worrying about her body.

That summer, I had lost quite a bit of weight. Even though I had gotten much smaller, I was as unhappy with my body as I had ever been. Every time I looked in the mirror, all I could focus on was every tiny little flaw, and even though I looked fairly thin, I still thought I was fat. Instead of focusing on how much weight I had lost, my brain would only allow me to focus on how much more weight I could lose. I had friends who were naturally thin and were still smaller than me, so even though I was thin for my body type, I still saw myself as giant compared to them, and thought that there was so much more I had to lose before I could finally be happy with my body.

One morning, I had an early practice in preparation for a dance competition. After my solo practice, my dance teacher told me, "I was worried how the leggings would fit on everybody. You're pretty thin, so they shouldn't be a problem for you."

"I am not thin," I immediately replied.

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She and my mother looked at each other and gave a slight eye roll. "You are thin," she reassured.

But I didn't believe her. Despite all of the people who had told me I looked thin, I still wouldn't believe it for a split second. The voice in my head always took over. "No, Riley, do not listen to them. You look fat," is what the voice would say. I was at the point where I thought that no matter what people said, they all secretly thought I looked fat but wouldn't tell me.

It wasn't just me who felt bad about my body. Even Moira had insecurities. I didn't understand why. She was thin! One day it came up in a conversation when we were a bit older.

"I used to be so chubby in elementary school," I said.

"At least you were short," she replied. "I always used to get special attention for being tall, but I hated it. I hated being the center of attention, and I wanted to be shorter so I wouldn't stand out." This completely surprised me, and I still think about it today.

I used to be an assistant dance teacher, and still am, but back then I helped out with a class of very young dancers. I had gotten so used to calling myself fat that I would sometimes even say it in public settings, until one day, my mother told me, "You have to be careful what you say around other dancers. If a young girl overhears you calling yourself fat, don't you think she's going to think that about herself, too?"

I didn't know what to say to that. Those little girls for whom I was supposed to be a role model to looked up to me. Not one of them cared about my size, or even really knew what the word "fat" meant yet. The girls I taught and many other younger dancers looked up to me for my

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dancing abilities. When my mother said this, it made me feel incredibly guilty for talking bad about my body. If I taught those girls to think someone my size is fat, they were going to grow up thinking that they needed to be a certain size too. I couldn't let those girls grow up hating their bodies. Just because I felt bad about my body, I couldn't put them through what I went through and allow them to view their bodies negatively. I could not live with myself if I were to instill thoughts like that into their minds at such a young age.

I soon found that changing my behavior for them slowly started to change how I felt about myself. I began to see myself the way others saw me, and I found that some of the things I was so worried about, such as my eating habits out in public, nobody even noticed or thought twice about. I was finally able to see myself with a fresh set of eyes, after years of looking in the mirror and feeling nothing but a true hatred for my body.

Now, I led the dance class, showing the little girls how to leap and twirl, and move their bodies in ways that let their true beauty shine through.

*~ Riley Greenleaf*

## Pens and Keystrokes

### **PLEASE STAY**

Please stay just a little longer.  
There is so much I want to say ~  
Please don't leave so soon.

There were others before you who left.  
However, there was so much more time to say goodbye.  
Do you have any idea how much you mean to me?

The sun is beginning to set, the onset of twilight  
Your life is fading  
Please stay just a little longer.

~ *Eric Miller*

### **FLOATING LEAF**



~ *Isaiah Slater*

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**PAWPRINTS**



~ Amy Regan

## Pens and Keystrokes

### LAMENT

In the dew that washes summer morning freshly new  
I thought I, in tiny bit of meadow, could see you:  
The Ones who've passed, having crested the hill that leads to  
    longest night.  
This morning's damp brings back to me tears cried with all  
    my might.  
Love has a dark side, the fear that love will end.  
It's true and there's no shoring up the boat to dodge the bend.  
I take you in my arms and ask that we love and always will  
Along this misty morning, cross the meadow to the hill.

~ *Pine Beers*

### OPEN FIELD



~ *Kai Gehring*

## Pens and Keystrokes

### WRAITH

At first I thought this grief would break me open.  
Crack the birdcage of my chest just to see what lies inside.  
Crisp the edge of my soul to charred remains.  
Drag me to sleep at the bottom of a well,  
where cold mud and roots could hold me hostage by curling  
    into my skin.  
At first, I thought this grief would break me open.  
Instead, all I can feel is cold.  
My heart encased in ice cannot beat to the pace of this  
    mournful tune.  
Instead, poison is what sits heavy on my tongue.  
Words build mountains against my teeth,  
tripped only by a foolish and cautious hope.  
At first I thought this grief would break me open.  
That hope would not curl into the marrow of my bones just  
    to keep me standing.  
And if not hope, I thought my knees could still hold the  
    weight of this kind of forgiveness.  
Yet, I am no Atlas.  
I fear now for the woman you knew as she is nowhere to be  
    found.  
In her place is this woefully lacking thing.  
A shapeshifter creature with her eyes and features but none  
    of the qualities I once knew.  
Where has this woman come from?

~K. LaPoint

**PORCUPINE**



~ Casey Cyr

**ONWARD**

A million miles away  
we listen  
to what the eyes can't see  
from distance  
the sky scatters across the  
depth we share  
and will remind us what is  
always there.  
The ground is changing beneath  
our feet  
onward to the path ahead.  
It's brief.  
The night will swallow us whole  
one last time  
in the darkness forever  
we shall shine.

*~April Williams*

## Pens and Keystrokes

### WISHING

I wish there was a god I could pray to  
On these cold lonely nights all alone.  
I wish there was a friend I could call  
As I scroll through the contacts on my phone.  
I wish someone could come and love me  
At least as much as I love them.  
I wish, I wish, I wish, but what's the point  
They say things get better but when?

I know I am not alone, we all feel this way  
But it gives me no comfort that you share this pain.  
"Misery loves company" or so they say  
But it hurts me to know that others hurt the same.

It's 4 a.m. again; I wanted to sleep at ten.  
The sun lights the sky, I wish I could die again.  
Look at the scars and think about the time:  
Could I, should I, make the choice is it mine?  
It's six and I need to be up by nine  
I go to work again and pretend I'm fine, I'm fine!

You see me smiling, laughing, think I'm okay  
You have no clue as to how close I was to not being here  
today.  
But I just smile for a while and tell you everything is great.  
Maybe being alone staring at this silent phone was my fate?  
Maybe it's all in my head that I'd be better dead.  
But if there's a better option, then that option hasn't been  
presented instead.

I wish there was a god that I could pray to  
On these cold lonely nights all alone!

## Pens and Keystrokes

I wish there was a friend I could call  
As I scroll through the contacts on my phone.  
I wish someone could come and love me  
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I wish, I wish, I wish...but what's the point  
They say things get better...but when?

~Samantha R. McIntire

*Author's note: This poem is a description of an anxiety attack that I was having one night. Please know that if you are having these feelings yourself, you can reach out for help, call a crisis line, practice calming skills, call a friend or loved one who will answer your call anytime. Just please never give up, and never give in, no matter how hopeless things may seem.*

## MAGNIFIED



~Isaiah Slater

**MIRABEL'S GIFT**



~ Pari Kim

## **ORE NELL'S BARBECUE**

Situated on tiny Badger Island between Kittery, ME and Portsmouth, NH, Ore Nell's Barbeque is serving up amazing authentic Texas style Barbeque: ribs, briskets, and even brunch. The entire made-from-scratch menu is the brainchild of Will Myska. Will is from Houston originally where he learned his grandmother's, Ore Nell, recipes. "Everything she cooked was full of love and flavor ~ that's what I am trying to do here at Ore Nell's," says Will.

Upon entering the small establishment that you just might drive by, you are immediately met with the sights, sounds, and smells of a kitchen. On our last visit, we tried some new items from the a la carte menu. My husband and I ordered a half a rack of ribs, half a smoked chicken, the Frito pie, and jalapeño corn bread. The kids split a couple kid's meals: chicken tenders, mac and cheese, waffle fries, and apple sauce.

The meals arrive quickly, served on ¼ sheet pans with red paper baskets. There's no fuss or frills to the presentation, but there is no need because the food speaks for itself. The kids love the macaroni and cheese and devour the ooey gooey pasta. It is their favorite mac and cheese to date. It is a delicious creamy bechamel loaded with Vermont white cheddar. The chicken tenders look like and are real chicken which is tough for kid's meals these days. Those and the fries are fried to perfection- served crispy and hot. You can smell the salt on the oil. The apple sauce's sweetness

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cuts through the richness of the cheese and the texture is a nice contrast. As it contrasts the pasta, it complements the chicken perfectly.

The ribs are smoked with a delicious rub. It has notes of sweetness, heat, and smoke. The crust is everything you want in a rib. Great reddish-brown color and pockets of flavor from the rub. When you go to pick it up, the meat is so tender that it falls clean off the bone. The half chicken arrived with the most perfectly golden roasted skin. The meat is juicy, and the skin is crunchy and full of flavor. All the while that you are enjoying the feast, you can't help but get whiffs of the variety of spices used on the meats. And you can't have BBQ without some killer sauces. Ore Nell's offers two: a sweet and a spicy. Both are thick and deep reddish color, and both are amazing.

The Frito Pie has been described as comfort food. And that it is ~ a little cast iron pan arrives sizzling and looking all beautiful. It starts with a mix of ground brisket, pinto beans, and Fritos all topped with crema, pickled red onion, cotija and cilantro. The variety of textures hidden in the dish makes every bite an adventure: the soft meat and beans, the crispy Fritos, the smooth cool crema, the acid of the onion, the freshness of the cilantro and the saltiness of the cotija ~ you never know what you are going to get.

As a treat for the table, the jalapeño cornbread is the perfect mix of sweet and heat. Two jalapeño corn muffins are split and grilled until golden and glazed with a De Arbol Honey. The edges get all crusty, crunchy, and sweet ~ the

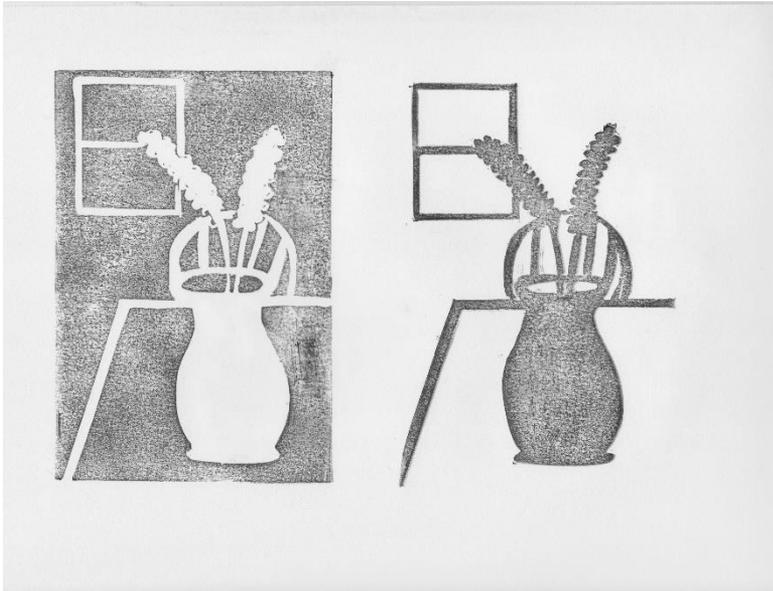
## Pens and Keystrokes

opposite of the soft corn muffin. The little pops of jalapeño add a nice burst of flavor and just a little bit of heat which is met perfectly with the sweet honey.

Ore Nell's might not seem like much from the outside, but they are serving up some of the tastiest authentic Texas BBQ in New England. They have received all sorts of honors since their opening. It's no question why when you experience it yourself. Good homestyle Texas barbeque served up simple but beautifully prepared ~ truly a feast for the senses.

*~Megan Milburn*

## WHERE I WAS FROM



*~Jamie Williams*

## Pens and Keystrokes

### EXCAVATION

Combin' through the earth searching for treasure,  
Diggin' in the dirt, trying to find worth,  
Findin' bits an' pieces is a pleasure.

Plantin' life to harvest an' enjoy is a leisure,  
Searchin' the garden, findin' gems in the earth,  
Combin' through the earth searching for treasure.

Sortin' rocks an' shells to find somethin' better,  
Gettin' dirty uncoverin' mysteries bring me mirth,  
Findin' bits an' pieces is a pleasure.

Spandin' time with family, a memory to last forever,  
Havin' sea glass, shells, stones, an' secrets to unearth,  
Combin' through the earth searching for treasure.

Collectin' artifacts causes me no displeasure,  
Brushin' of the dirt to give an item a rebirth,  
Findin' bits an' pieces is a pleasure.

Creatin' art from my gathered treasures,  
Paintin' my treasure to later share at the hearth,  
Combin' through the earth searching for treasure,  
Findin' bits an' pieces is a pleasure.

~ *Willa Ferris*

Pens and Keystrokes

LITTLEWORKSPACE



~Jamie Williams

**A RAGING TORRENT**

Peace of mind cannot be a concern.

Peace of mind can only be consequence.

Peace of mind is a fluid state of tranquility for oneself.

Yet concern is a raging torrent of movement toward another.

A movement of thought and act.

Concern beckons passion not passivity.

It bespeaks justice and compassion.

And may not be judicious nor comforting.

Concern is a commitment,

while peace of mind is a contentment.

Concern looks to the welfare of another,

and not oneself only.

If such concern brings peace of mind to another,

it is a comfort.

If such concern bears with it peace of mind for oneself,

it is a consequence.

The act of concern and peace of mind are not dualities, at odds.

Yet there is a truth about their reality and relationship:

Genuine concern considers not the consequence.

And true peace of mind if only possible as the consequence of the concern.

Reach not, then, for peace of mind.

Reach out with concern.

For in such a reach are possibilities

For peace and justice together.

~ Wesley Joseph Mills

**NUBBLE LIGHT**



*~ Jessica Lehoux*