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Windsor High School

**Student Programs** 

Grants and Technology Jane Cook (SI 07)

Social Media Erika Karwowski (SI 16), South

**Elementary School** 

Writing Contest Judges Julia Brush (Poetry)

Aaron Proudfoot (Prose Fiction)

Kyle Barron (Prose Nonfiction)

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Teacher Consultant
Whiting Contest
2019 Winners

## **Poetry Winner**

This Quiet Air So Sharp
For Uncle Bob
by Amy Nocton (SI 14)

"I shall have written him one
Poem maybe as cold
And passionate as the dawn."

—W.B. Yeats "The Fisherman"

And my almond eyes have no place in the glint of winter as they seek to photograph the boughs weighed down by frost and chill, a thousand hoary stars that cling, earthbound, to grey branches. And as I wander, I think of him, an artist, and how he would paint this quiet air so sharp as it is swept along the snow. His art, a brush or pencil stroke. His muse, caffeine and nicotine. My tool, a lens to record a thousand fallen constellations—heaven cast—in the mourning sky tonight.

Tweed on tweed on corduroy, philosopher and artist, this gentle uncle I carry fondly anchored to my song.
He is an amber-hued image caught under an autumnal sun beside a nephew and amongst the grasses gold. Beloved uncle who brushed the Hudson cloaked in blues

and colored windswept trees.
He painted picnic reveries,
curmudgeons and angels, too.
And there his pencil strokes show
our laughter wrapped in light.

When wind rises wistful off
the river, and frost feathers
windows with icy blooms, we will
listen. When our names are no longer
spoken, we will feel:
the weathered skin
of an elder, the canvas
of a woman's back, the scowl
of a patriarch's glance, the sparkle
of his wife's gaze, the record
of our forgotten past
sketched for an unforgivable
future.

Now we hear not the buzz of bees, but the hiss of the wind as it chafes the branches.

Overhead, the barred owl perches, her wings death's herald.

Downstream the water gurgles and surges, against its cold, cold sepulcher. And soon I will press this poem to his palm, one day, one merciless dawn.

## **Fiction Winner**

Just Pretend by Jane Cook (SI 07)

Maria was a devout Catholic who never spoke of sex and hated the act. She had allowed herself to be impregnated five times and gave birth to five daughters before she became a lonely widow with five daughters under the age of 10. Maria often let the older girls visit Mr. and Mrs. Ahriman, her next-door neighbors, an elderly couple who had befriended her when she and the girls moved into the neighborhood.

Her eight-year-old, Faith, was a sweet child who rarely spoke. Her chestnut brown hair framed a face so fair that she looked like a China doll. Faith and her two older sisters loved to visit next door. Mrs. Ahriman would greet them with a friendly smile, cold milk, and warm cookies, right out of the oven. Mr. Ahriman often joined them to talk to the girls. He befriended all the neighborhood children and groomed them to trust him. Then he'd hand-pick one young girl and shower her with special attention.

Faith wondered what it would be like to be his chosen one. She imagined that he would be like her Uncle John, the kindest man Faith had ever known. When she'd visit with Uncle John, they would work on projects in his basement workshop. He let her practice nailing with a child-sized hammer he'd picked out just for her. She would hide his tools and feign innocence, so they could spend more time together. He called her Foxy Faith and loved her hijinks. When he died of a sudden heart attack, Faith's heart had broken.

One chilly winter Saturday, the girls went to visit at the Ahrimans'. The ice on the nearby pond was perfect and Mr. Ahriman had promised to take them skating. When they arrived, the smell of freshly baked cookies wafted through the air. They gathered around the kitchen table guzzling milk and chowing down cookies. Mr. Ahriman announced that he had to sharpen the ice skates down in the basement. He made a big show of needing help and after some discussion settled on Faith. She scurried down the cellar stairs, excited to be his helper.

The cellar was dark except for a single bare light bulb at the bottom of the stairs. Cold grey walls watched as the old man started kissing Faith and pulling her close to him. He smelled of stale coffee and cigars. As he began feeling her body, placing his hands where no one had ever placed them before, he whispered in her ear, "Don't worry, I won't hurt you. I love you. You're a beautiful little girl. Don't be scared." She closed her eyes and held her breath, praying that someone would come down to the basement. Her heart pounded as she felt his full body against her. She tried to scream but could only muster a whimper. "Don't be afraid. This will feel good." When he finished his perverted acts, he whispered to Faith, "Don't ever tell anyone about this. It will be our secret."

And so she didn't. Later that spring, Maria learned from another neighbor that Mr. Ahriman was a pedophile. He had sexually assaulted a large number of young girls over the years and Faith was his latest victim. It was the late 1950's. Mrs. Ahriman had stayed with him because divorce was not an option for her. She had unknowingly lured young girls into their house with her delicious

cookies. They never spoke about what he did in the basement. This sort of thing was never supposed to happen, but if it did, it was never, ever talked about.

Maria approached Faith after hearing this news. She feared the world might learn that Faith was damaged goods.

She cautioned Faith, "Don't ever tell anyone about this," and added without emotion, "Just pretend it didn't happen."

Faith did pretend, and she never told anyone—not her sisters nor her best friend, not even her husband. Each time he talked with her about having children, she evaded the subject. Finally, he gave up and died broken-hearted. She died lonely and childless, but how could she have brought a child into a world filled with monsters?

## **Nonfiction Winner**

#### In Response to Bacon

by Amanda Flachsbart (SI 19)

I recently participated in the icebreaker "Two Truths and a Lie," which is always an uncomfortable reminder of my lack of interesting qualities--I have not scuba dived off the coast of Australia; I am not trilingual; hell, I've never even lived in another state! As usual, I squandered so much of the allotted time searching for two semi-interesting truths that I was rushed to fabricate a lie about myself, therefore settling on one that I knew I'd regret even as I was saying it aloud to my partners: "My favorite food is bacon." I obviously would have had to come clean anyway, but it was especially humiliating when one of my partners immediately saw right through my scheme, guessing that I must be a vegetarian. When they asked if I was a vegan, I launched into my long-winded "sort-of-but-not-really" explanation about the exact ratio of vegan to non-vegan food I consume. I also revealed that I actually was never a bacon lover to begin with.

The mere presence or even mention of bacon instantly brings joy to people. Its smell permeates a room and lingers. It is versatile: you can cook it so that it's crispy and melts in your mouth or underdone so that it is chewy and juicy. It's good alone but also added to just about anything--sandwiches, Bloody Marys, even ice cream. I once attended a wedding with an entire bacon station, which included various types of bacon, bacon tomato soup shooters, chocolate drizzled bacon, and maple bacon donuts. Throughout cocktail hour, my wife would disappear, and I'd find her at the bacon station mingling with other bacon lovers whom she did not know but had bonded with solely on the premise of their love for bacon. On top of everything else are the opportunities for presentation. I just heard about a restaurant with an appetizer of maple glazed double cut pepper bacon dangling on a clothesline between wooden dowels.

Meat enthusiasm extends far beyond bacon. The Super Bowl isn't the Super Bowl without the meat-based appetizers, especially chicken wings. The National Chicken Council (which is a real thing) estimated that Americans eat about 1.3 billion chicken wings on Super Bowl Sunday. Restaurants that specialize in burgers are ubiquitous. Holidays all have a meat associated with them, from turkey on Thanksgiving to hot dogs and hamburgers on the 4th of July. Less than a year ago, a Brazilian-style steakhouse opened in the Westfarms mall. An article promoting this restaurant in the *Hartford Courant* boasted that the "uninterrupted parade of grilled meats might even bring tears to Ron Swanson's eyes. You, too, can now dine like the notoriously stoic and infamously carnivorous 'Parks and Recreation' character at greater Hartford's new Brazilian-style steakhouse." In all of these meatcentered situations and places, it's not the quantity, presentation, or variety of meat that gets to me; it's the glamorization of the meat that I contend is unparalleled in the veggie world.

Plant-based eating isn't exactly uncool. But it's definitely soft. Ron Swanson wouldn't approve. There are tons of vegan blogs, and they have titles like "Oh She Glows," "Fork and Beans," "The Fig Tree," and "Keepin' It Kind." Of course, there are a couple that try to bring a badass vibe to the table, my favorites being "Post Punk Kitchen" and "Thug Kitchen." And while I acknowledge that there are a lot of bloggers and chefs who can truly make plant-based eating look cool, they are not glorified in

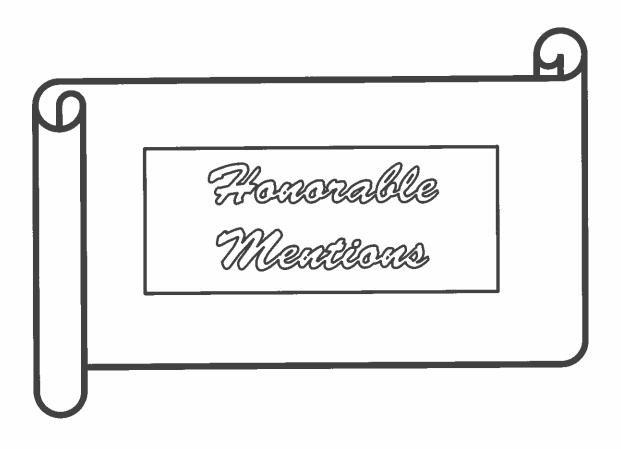


mainstream culture. Non-vegans aren't buying these recipe books or checking these blogs very oftenin fact, many probably haven't heard of them. Some might even find them offensive.

It might be the social acceptability that makes me worry about my food proclivities. I am painstakingly self-conscious. I'm also more of a people-pleaser than I want to admit. Sometimes, my diet gets in the way of my desire to fit in, or even to simply not stick *out*. People are usually supportive, showing polite but also genuine interest. Yet there's still the fact that it's a *thing*, one that is vulnerable to judgment and commentary. Such as: "I tried that but I could never give up chicken," or "I heard that the healthiest diet is actually the Mediterranean Diet," or "Do you actually *like* tofu? It's disgusting." Then I get the personal justifications: "Our planet's going to hell anyway," or "I would be devastated if I couldn't eat burgers anymore." I've had people tell me that they tried it, but they were hungry all the time. The most unexpected reaction was when a friend informed me that humans were born with canines, proof that we were *meant* to eat meat. But I'm most disturbed by the people who actually seem suspicious of me, and a bit indignant, like I'm trying to suggest that I'm morally superior. At my weakest moments, I worry that I'm doing it out of hubris.

I truthfully mean no disrespect to the meat loving community. I do not want to propose that I am better, only that the camaraderie amongst meat lovers is no less annoying or intense than that of the vegetarian community. It is simply that the meat loving community is a lot bigger. And besides my friends on Twitter, I spend a lot more time with the meat-lovers. These meat lovers whom I interact with the most are my close friends and family members. I often sit amongst groups of people cracking open lobsters, enjoying burgers and hot dogs, and slicing juicy filet mignons. It doesn't bother me; I once partook in these activities. There's occasional teasing. My most extreme commentary comes from my own family, particularly my mom, who frequently *implores* me, "You're not going fully *vegan* are you?" She's come a long way, but she undoubtedly adjusted more smoothly when I came out than she did to my choice to give up meat.

While we perhaps aren't living in a society that celebrates to fu the same way we do bacon, plant-based eating is gaining traction, backed by cool celebrities like Beyoncé, Portia DeRossi, Natalie Portman, Tom Brady, and Venus and Serena Williams. Strictly vegan restaurants are popping up more and more, as are vegan and vegetarian options at grocery stores. I've heard a lot of buzz on Twitter about burgers that taste like meat, most famously the Impossible Burger. Some people object to vegetarians who would want a meat substitute that too closely resembles meat, suggesting that a true vegetarian should not desire something that tastes like beef. What I'd like to propose is that those who feel that way need to be supportive our secret beef-loving vegetarian counterparts. If they need the non-alcoholic beer of the meat world, then so be it. We all need to stick together. Because I'm holding out hope that someday I will attend a wedding with a full-blown plant-based station, stacked with cauliflower and quinoa and beans. And I am totally fine if it's placed right next to the bacon station.



## **Poetry Honorable Mentions**

#### **Anthem**

by Sallyanne Ferrero (SI 89)

Irma, you are gone While here, you shook and almost Broke me With wind and rain Attacked and battered me. You barreled through, leaving us Mauled and mangled; others Split and uprooted--now gone. Our roots Clenched the soil: Frantically bending and swaying We held on. When our branches were Whipped and stripped from us Your howl Muffled our cries. In the aftermath, We see your damage, but also What remains. Each new palm frond is A victory flag. Each fresh shoot of green is A harbinger of further growth. Once again, birds will find Shelter in our arms. Once again, our canopies will flourish, Offering shade to all. Irma, you are gone, but We are still here. We still stand. We are the survivors, the

Trees of Florida.

#### **EISENHOWER**

by Kyle Barron (SI 19)

From the tiny window of an aircraft, innumerable concrete and asphalt strands appear to cover the planet in gray webbing celestial carrion caught in an insouciant spider's silk. Each city, town, and burg sustained by its own tightly latticed labyrinth of crushed stone; each conurbation interconnected by travel corridors the pulsing earthen vascular system of modern civilization. Impossible to believe the magnitude of such an undertaking: Each individual piece of aggregate, tiny flecks of rock, gravel, and sand, all dug up, loaded, shipped, trucked, mixed around, laid down, leveled, graded, rolled out, and painted brightly each tiny chunk artificially fused to another and another, and yet another, creating a continuous, unbroken blemish that extends from coast to coast. village to village, front door to front door. across the face of an entire continent.

A rose-lined driveway in a rain-soaked Portland suburb linked to a bamboo and palm adorned cat sanctuary in sunbaked Key West:

sloped aprons,
residential avenues,
arteries and throughways,
main streets and side streets,
on-ramps, off-ramps, interchanges,
bridges, overpasses, tunnels, rest stops,
highways, byways, freeways and skyways,
toll roads, toll bridges, turnpikes and frontages,

traveling thousands of miles en route,

past towering green road signs, arrows, and numbers; halogen lights, billboards, dividers, dotted and solid lines, over scenic river gorges, high painted deserts, moon-like craters, buoyant great salt lakes, narrow slot, and mile-wide grand canyons, petrified forests and Navajo pueblos—cities of crosses near white sands, from one beige panhandle—across a gulf shore—out into a lush green one, down a peninsula, straight out, one hundred thirty humid miles over warm water.

A manufactured, multi-million-mile monument to American pomposity—



a symptom of aggressive capitalistic cancer that masquerades as benign connective tissue, ever-rapidly metastasizing as its convenience is embraced; untold acres of the irreplaceable crushed underfoot.

## My Sanctuary of Three

by Amy Nocton (SI 14)

I draw a breath, it is a charcoal pencil brushed over stone. The intake of air feels like sand filtered through someone else's hands. I sketch three lives just so. My son's paper swells awash with color. His breathing is a quiet blue. He is lost in the sounds of his artistry, a silent orchestra in one dimension, quiet images of fancy. My daughter's voice instills wonder in others. Slight spirit, she sips air in tiny puffs and unravels it willfully, commands notice. Her tangerine melodies, lively citrus, envelope all. And their father, awash in words and stones and pinecones, my husband, among the green and the water and books, plants the flowers that root us to home. Tattooed with the sun and the moon, he moves through time uniting us in place. And I. mother, wife, observer. I record our world with words and photos, my vain attempts to make sense of my devotion.

## **Fiction Honorable Mention**

### **Red Enough to Stay**

by Victoria Clarizio (SI 19)

Ally jumped at a sudden pounding on the bathroom door.

"What are you doing in there?"

"Just a sec."

Ally ran a brush through her wavy brown hair. The light caught the auburn highlights. She still didn't know if they were natural. The last time she had died her hair was over a year ago. Yet, the red seemed to linger. Or maybe it was the summer sun that always seemed to give her hair a red tint. She had longed for red hair all her life and now had just enough to satisfy her.

Ally put her hairbrush back in the cabinet under the sink. She took a deep breath and opened the door.

John raised an eyebrow.

"Where you going?"

"Just to work."

"Uh huh."

John put his hands on Ally's hips and pulled her close as if to say that she belonged to him alone. She jerked her head back. "You need to brush your teeth." John pushed himself away, and she almost lost her balance, bumping into the edge of the bathroom door. So much for wearing short sleeves. "God Al."

She remembered how he had first looked at her, like he had met her before. She should have walked away then.

She had tried to. They both had. Ally didn't remember the first time they had met, but she did remember the second. Ally looked up one day on the metro ride into DC for her summer internship. A man was looking at her. A man who would have been one of the jocks in high school and never would have looked at her. "Hi," he said, "I like your skirt." She was wearing a long, flowing patchwork skirt. He told her later that she seemed different and her quietness intrigued him—He knew he needed to get to know her. He introduced himself as John and reminded her that they had in fact met before.



Towards the beginning of the summer, someone else in the internship program had organized a trip to one of the Smithsonian museums. She remembered the thrill of squeezing into a pickup full of guys and thinking that maybe she would finally find love that summer, but hadn't noticed John. He had noticed which metro she usually took from their apartment building and starting taking the same one. At the time, this seemed sweet, but in hindsight it was really just creepy. John had struck up a conversation about going to the Holocaust Museum, exchanged numbers, and she soon found herself in his apartment holding his hand as they sat on the couch together.

And then she told him just how innocent she was, that she had never been kissed before. He tried to walk away saying that she didn't know what he had done, didn't want to be the one to shatter her innocence. He didn't know yet that she had seen darkness too. And maybe that's what kept her going back, insisting that she wanted to do this even when he pushed her too far. Or maybe she didn't want to be alone. Who else would love her? Even when he started shoving her against walls and going out without her, she couldn't let go. Maybe they could make each other better.

John shoved his way into the bathroom, grabbed his blue toothbrush and began to brush his teeth while muttering things like, God I can't do anything right.

Ally tentatively reached a hand towards him. "John?"

He rinsed his toothbrush and put it back besides her red one. He took a deep breath and apologized. "I'm sorry babe, just woke up on the wrong side of the bed. Now can I kiss you?"

She nodded. She gave him a quick peck but pulled away far too soon.

"That's it?"

She wanted to yell and scream that he had just shoved her into a door. And she wanted to leave. More than anything she wanted to leave.

As if reading her mind, he said, "If you leave, I'll tell everyone what you did."

"I won't ever leave. I promise."

They walked out of the bathroom and Ally picked up her work bag sitting by the front door of their tiny apartment. John opened the door for her and then followed her out to her car.

"Come right home, okay?"

Ally nodded while keeping her eyes fixed on the rushing water pouring out of the reservoir across the street. Then she opened the trunk and they both looked, as if compulsively, at the faint red stain. She looked him in the eye and knew that she would come home that day.



Their relationship might have ended when that summer in DC was over and they went their separate ways—him to Ohio and her back to school in Florida, except for what happened right before they left.

Ally was relieved that she had an excuse to get away from him. John helped her bring her suitcases out to her red bug. He looked at her with begging eyes. "What now?"

She shrugged, avoiding eye contact.

"Am I ever gonna see you again?"

Then he saw it—the red stain. "What's that?"

Ally shuffled her feet nervously. "Just some paint that leaked or something. John, I don't think we should see each other anymore."

She expected him to smash his fist on the car, hit her, something.

Instead, he gently took her hand, pulled her over to his car, and opened the trunk.

She knew then what he had recognized in her, why they couldn't leave each other, and why they would always come home.

## **Nonfiction Honorable Mention**

December 23 ... by Ellen Devine (SI 12)

If the story is to be believed, then tonight, Joseph and Mary are traveling along the road to Bethlehem to be counted. Mary is "heavy with child" which is an ancient and preferable phrasing to the more contemporary and distasteful, "about to pop." Phrasing aside, the point is, she was relatively close to delivery. In this vulnerable time, she found herself sitting atop an ass being schlepped around the desert to return to her husband's home in order to be counted.

If the story is to be believed, Joseph sought various places for the two of them to rest and for Mary to eventually give birth. But as we know, "there was no room at the inn" and so on December 24<sup>th</sup> they hunkered down in a manger and the rest was history, mythology, politics, violence, new human vindication for a host of ancient inhumane acts, etc.

But before that, before it was all said and done with Mary laboring in a pile of hay with a group of unusually observant farm animals looking on, she was sitting atop an ass, walking for hours, thinking that it couldn't get much worse than this. The dust, the thirst, the miles, and the exhaustion of the journey alone would be enough to undo the strongest of people, but on top of it all, it's likely that Mary would have been in the throes of early labor as she sat "heavy with child" that evening, December 23—if the story is to be believed.

With the strong back bone of that ass digging into her already sensitive crotch, and with the burning cramps that initiated at her core and radiated up her back, she must have thought this extended torture must simply be endured. She must have convinced herself to go on with the faithful assertions that carry other women through such moments: that this would soon be over, that she would soon rest, that she would soon be surrounded by women who would help her deliver this child—this child who was promised to be so much to so many. This child who was conceived in a way that is hard to describe as consensual but could certainly be described as magical. How often, she might have wondered, is magic consensual after all?

If the story is to be believed, then on December 23 she would have shown grit, focus and determination all in the name of reaching the place where they were destined to land. A place of promise, a place of relief, where she could fall into the hands of capable women who would receive her and help her through the labor, the fear, the pain, the uncertainty. Of course, what we know now, is that on December 23, Mary still had many more tribulations to face. She would reach Bethlehem, but Joseph would be unsuccessful in finding that group of women to receive and guide her; he would be unsuccessful in even finding a place that was little more than a lean-to. The gospels will tell you it was a humble beginning, the carols will tell you it was meek and mild, but really, it was bullshit.

If the story is to be believed, then after traveling for days so that she could be counted due to the paranoid fancies of an insecure emperor, and after being impregnated and ultimately abandoned by an ethereal lover who promised eternity but was never seen again, all that Mary was left with was Joseph—a kind man

who wanted her as wife despite the fact she carried someone else's child (a rare quality in men at any moment in human history)—a tired loyal ass, and an unborn child who demanded to come into this world while his mother was a refugee fleeing a tyrant. Those were her circumstances and she barely even knew. Or perhaps she knew it all. If the story is to be believed.

Why does the Gospel not speak of the dust and the sweat that surely covered Mary, Joseph and that loyal ass? Why does the Gospel not speak of Mary's early labor—of her contractions that would have leveled her and made her cling to the donkey's neck as though there were no tomorrow? Why does the Gospel not describe Mary's heroism as she birthed her son with only Joseph--sweet, helpless Joseph--as midwife, and a bunch of empathetic mammals as witnesses?

Perhaps the farm animals had the instinct to help Mary. Maybe they were eager to lend helping hooves to fetch water, provide gentle massage and point out the mucus plug whenever it finally passed. The more likely scenario, however, is that the animals would have struck some balance between bemusement and pity. After all, they, in their evolutionary wisdom, had the good sense to give birth to offspring with reasonably-sized heads and the ability to walk upon their earthly arrival. What must they have thought of the scene unfolding in the hay in front of them? What would they say have said to one another when they realized Mary didn't even know well enough to eat her own placenta? Presumably, the loyal ass would have offered to assist on that front, and if not him, certainly the goat, but still ...what a bizarre scene it must have seemed to all present in that sweet little manger that so many churches reverently recreate every year.

What the churches don't recreate is the blood, or the urine, or the shit, or the sweat and dust that were surely a part of it all as well. Jesus came into this world through the resolve of his mother as she persisted to stay alive so that he too could live. There is nothing tidy about such persistence. Birth is dirty work and the life that follows only makes us dirtier; there is no sin in that.

If the story is to be believed, Mary endured her labor and then delivered the salvation of mankind—or some of mankind depending on who you ask—without incident, complication or pain worthy of mention. Maybe God helped her out and had the Holy Spirit slip her an epidural, but those details have not found their way into the Gospel either. God has only ever gone on record once regarding human childbirth when he said to the woman who would later be named Eve, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). But maybe God made an exception for Mary. Maybe he divided her sorrow until it was almost nonexistent. Maybe she felt as though she was essentially having a pleasant, late-night visit to a petting zoo and then, a baby appeared. Maybe all of that is the case, but none of that ever made it into the Gospel, so we are left to imagine that she labored like other women, suffered like other women, battled like other women, triumphed like other women, and was left generally unacknowledged for the real and brutal work that she had done.

So, on December 23, when she still has much work to do, more trauma to endure, more indignity to face, we think of Mary—not The Holy Mother of God, not the Blessed Virgin, but the woman who fought for herself and for her child, long before she understood any of what she did.

2019 Sammer Nastitute Fellows Contributions

#### How I Loved You, Flooded

by Sarah Aceto (SI 19)

As a child you didn't know why watching TV made you sick. You'd sit tangled with your brothers, agree to get up and turn the channel. Your stomach would slip, a heaving, a wave, and you'd run to the bathroom to make it on time.

Don't misconstrue: repressed memories are not waiting for anyone's permission. They're out every day in full weather gear, measuring the glacier melt, calculating depth and speed of the one icy stream weaving to your consciousness on which will travel an entire mountain range to be dropped on your back.

Until then, sleep well.

Wake, dress, eat. The rocking deck of nausea might return,
but mostly, be happy
with your records and your violin. The curled fingers,
long neck, dropped elbow—these are buoys in the storm of your music. Still—

You drowned last night. Too old to wake your father, too proud to wake your brothers, you carried wet sheets to the washer without turning on the light.

The breaching whales in your sleep leapt to flying fish, spun to spawning salmon, landed as dying puffins. On the mist-slipped deck, you lost balance, sinking under an ocean of fingers and legs.

I wiped green foam from your nose as your breathing slowed.

You turned the bath water pink in the dark. The Loch Ness night surged in the silence.

#### **TOO BIG TO FAIL**

by Kyle Barron (SI 19)

In a comfortably lit, tapestry-trimmed corner boardroom on the seventy-fourth floor of a nondescript billion-dollar heaven-affronting monolith, twenty-three white males with four-hundred-dollar haircuts sit around a fifty-four-thousand-dollar custom-crafted solid oak table with ebony inlays, occasionally inching back the sleeves of their five-thousand-dollar monogrammed bespoke suits to glance at the faces of their twelve-thousand-dollar gold and titanium timepieces—keeping a keen eye on the hour, so as to not miss their 7:15 dinner reservation.

From the floor-to-ceiling windows a massive megalopolis can be seen.
Thousands of buildings sprawl out for dozens of miles in all directions— an astonishing slate sea of saw-toothed shapes— but none of the men are looking:
They have contracted indifference to this view after decades of exposure to opulent penthouse condos, extravagant skyline steakhouses and luxurious private jets— eternally elevated to such great heights that anything less is more noticeable.

They sit here now, as bankers, politicians, industrialists, and representatives of corporate free speech, plotting the projected path of an entire planet; centuries of cunning wealth consolidation and opportunistic investment strategies place these men—and others like them—into positions of immense influence and power. Embedding themselves in media conglomerates, infiltrating statehouses and senate chambers, they god-hand a chess match of unfathomable proportions, writing the rules to the game as the game unfolds, gambling it all on the assumption that



by the time *the people* have caught on, the parasitic corruption will be so wholly systemic that any attempt to root it out will kill the host.

When these men speak, gold and green gush from their mouths—diamond-encrusted dollar signs spurt out wildly between disingenuous words, like arterial blood jetting from the gashed neck of a fatally wounded working class.

Eleven hundred feet down, below the surface of the Earth, a transit platform swarms with snow-dusted citizens.

A woman carefully cradles her swaddled child

as she shoves into a subway car—
mind moving a million miles an hour,
hoping there's enough time to catch two more buses
and make the mile-and-a-quarter dash
to drop her baby girl off with Mom,
before bolting down the street
to minimum-wage job number three, waiting tables.

Shift starts in less than an hour; supposed to be a twenty-top in the Starlight Room—bigwigs from some bank.

Here's hoping they tip well.

### Fishing with Dad

by Réme Bohlin (SI 19)

"Are you going to tattle on me?" He drinks deeply.

My face is hot. I wish I hadn't said anything.

That morning he suggested we go fishing.

Our house overlooks a public pond. This is not really a swimming pond. Grass grows thickly around the edges and the water is an impenetrable brown. We read *The Hatchet* in school, and I am convinced there is a plane at the bottom of our pond, the pilot's corpse still strapped into the cockpit. If we get brave, we take our shoes and socks off and wade into the murky water. Every mysterious slither across my toes reminds me of that pilot, drifting gently below us.

We play a lot at the pond. There are interesting things to be found: old fish hooks, rocks that sparkle when they're turned this way or that, tangled fishing wire, someone's spare change, gummy and green from being forgotten outside for a long time. There are interesting things to do: pretend to be wolves, climb into high, small caves that are wet and sharp. We like to secretly observe other visitors to the pond: older kids who shove each other playfully towards the water's edge; men who snooze in ratty beach chairs, hats tipped over their eyes.

And sometimes we go fishing with Dad.

I like fish bait, especially the man-made stuff. It comes in bright colors and weird shapes. We each pick our preferred bait. I pick mine for the color. I have no strategy when it comes to fishing. I don't care if I'm good at it. I don't even like the taste of fish. When we get home, we'll take what we've caught to the kitchen sink. My dad will gut and clean the fish. I'll stand at his elbow but look away when he draws the knife through their bellies. He'll explain what he's doing, where he starts with the knife, what he does with the stuff that drops into the sink. Then he'll put the fillets in a zip lock bag and the bag in the freezer. My mom doesn't know how to cook what we've caught. When we move out of this house, we'll find ten or so zip lock bags of fish in the freezer and have to toss them.

My dad has to engineer these moments together. We live in different corners of the house. Our toys are in the family room. In one corner we've arranged our Bryer horses, Barbies, and doll furniture into a little drama. My dad spends a lot of time in the garage. All of his tools are in the garage: the table saw, the jigsaw, the wood burner. Nails, grommets, sandpaper, stencils, rulers, levels. Also, he's not allowed to smoke in the house.

When Dad goes out to get cigarettes (the Winston brand), he'll ask if we want to go with him. He'll buy us a candy bar, he says. I don't really care about the candy. I worry he's lonely, sometimes. I worry that if one of us doesn't go with him, his feelings will be hurt. I worry that if one of us doesn't go with



him, he'll get in a car accident. When I climb into the cab of his truck and scoot into the middle seat, I feel like a talisman. Nothing bad can happen to him if I'm there.

We choose the left side of the pond and settle in. Water skippers dimple the surface of the pond. A cloud of gnats hums dizzily near my ear. Fishing is kind of boring. But I like that you don't really have to pay attention. Or maybe you do, and that's why I never catch anything. I squint at the red and white bobber at the end of my line. My sister and I are quiet, waiting for the fish to take our bait.

Dad opens his tackle box and pulls out a Budweiser. The can hisses wetly when he pops the tab.

I look at my sister. Who's going to say something?

## Title: Scientific Inquiry and Religious Belief: Can they coexist?

by Victoria Clarizio (SI 19)

#### Statement of the Problem:

What question(s) are you trying to answer?
Include any preliminary observations or background information about the subject.

Question: Is it possible to pursue scientific inquiry while maintaining a belief in a creator?

Many people assume that science and religion are mortal enemies. This might be true for fundamentalist Christian sects but has never been and hopefully never will be the case for the Catholic Church. The few negative reactions to scientific discoveries has tarnished the Church's reputation when it comes to science.

No greater lesson have I had in this, than the day I took my students to a planetarium; my Catholic, homeschooled, somewhat sheltered students. I took them to a presentation at the local public university, which I knew would not be from a Catholic perspective, but I trusted my discerning, well-formed ninth graders. And honestly, that presentation was a better sermon than I had heard in a while.

#### Hypothesis:

Write a possible solution for the problem.

Make sure this possible solution is a complete sentence.

Make sure the statement is testable.

The statement should reference the independent and dependent variables: such as "The plant group receiving (independent variable i.e. fertilizer) will (dependent variable i.e. produce more fruit) than the plants that did not receive (independent variable i.e. fertilizer).

My faith will be made stronger by exposure to scientific discoveries than if I avoided them.

#### Materials:

Make a list of all items used in the lab.

History of the Catholic Church
Craig Robinson
Ninth Grade Class
Planetarium Projector
Chalk
Chalkboard
Catholic faith
Imagination
Drake Equation

#### Procedure:

Write a paragraph or a list which explains what you did in the lab. Your procedure should be written so than anyone else could repeat the experiment.

1. Examine the history of the Catholic Church and its relationship to scientific inquiry.

Until recent years, this hasn't even been an issue. In fact, the Catholic Church has been a forerunner in scientific discovery since it was founded. Rene Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Gregor Mendel, Louis Pasteur, and Nicolaus Copernicus were all Catholic. Most telling of all is the history of The Big Bang theory, which is often used as evidence against the existence of God. Who proposed this theory in the 1930's? Georges Lemaitre—not just a Catholic, but a priest.

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

159 Faith and science: "Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth." "Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are." "38"

http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html#61/z

2. Take a group of Catholic students to a secular planetarium presentation.

Craig Robinson, our guide and teacher for the day, begins breaking apart everything I believe, so I can really see before I look. He first addresses the question: are we alone? As he talks about the creation of the universe, at first I sit with arms folded and eyes rolled high. I know where we came from and it's not stardust, which apparently contains the foundation for life: carbon. I forget what I have proselytized: we are not creationists and science is not in opposition to religion. Right now it feels like either or.

Craig tells us about the research of Frank Drake. In 1961, he came up with an equation to estimate the odds of finding intelligent life in the universe.

The Drake equation is:  $N = R_* \cdot f_{
m p} \cdot n_{
m e} \cdot f_{
m l} \cdot f_{
m i} \cdot f_{
m c} \cdot L$ 



#### where:

*N* = the number of <u>civilizations</u> in our galaxy with which communication might be possible (i.e. which are on our current past <u>light cone</u>);

#### and

R. = the average rate of star formation in our galaxy

 $f_{ij}$  = the fraction of those stars that have <u>planets</u>

 $n_{\bullet}$  = the average number of planets that can potentially support <u>life</u> per star that has planets

 $f_i$  = the fraction of planets that could support life that actually develop life at some point

 $f_i$  = the fraction of planets with life that actually go on to develop <u>intelligent</u> life (civilizations)

 $f_{\rm e}$  = the fraction of civilizations that develop a technology that releases detectable signs of their existence into space

L = the length of time for which such civilizations release detectable signals into space signals space signals into space signals space signals into space signals into space signals space signals space signals space signals space signals space signals space s

At the time, Drake thought there could be a good chance of other planets with intelligent life. But, we were just starting to explore space during his lifetime and now that we are discovering more, the odds keep going down and down. Three elements are needed for life to exist: water, carbon and energy. For a planet to sustain life it can't be too far or too close to the sun. The chances of a planet having everything necessary for life are slim to none. We are probably alone—our tiny blue green miracle in the vastness, wanderer among the stars. The chances for life to begin and thrive are so miraculous that my inner refrain becomes: this can't be an accident.

Craig shakes what I think I know even further by talking about relativity. He tells us (I don't know whether this is true) that when we're babies the sun burns holes in the back of our eyes before we learn not to look at it. Our brains fill in the holes in our vision, so sometimes what we think we see is not actually what we see.

Everything in the universe is relative except for light. Craig explains that if you throw a baseball out of a moving car the ball is moving at the speed I threw it plus the speed of the car. You would see its movement differently than someone outside of the car. Light is the only absolute. Perspective is everything.

Craig says that he wanted to lead us to the "eureka moment" that scientists experience when they make a new discovery. He begins to draw series of shapes on the chalkboard and challenged us to crack the code. A circle, a square and a triangle equal four so what does a triangle and two circles equal? He tells us to keep our "eureka moment" to ourselves so everyone can experience their own. He points to each set of shapes and asks what it equals. When we can't figure it out, he tells us the answer. After about twenty sets I still can't figure it out and none of my students can either.

And then my eyes glaze over, tired from the intensity of focus. My gaze wanders and only then do I realize I have been paying attention to the wrong thing. I start looking at Craig's hands as



he points to each equation and find the answer there. He is quickly tapping the board, holding up the number of fingers that will give us the answer.

#### Results:

This section should include any data tables, observations, or additional notes you make during the lab.

Although some students may wish to recopy original data: it is important to always preserve the original.

You may attach a separate sheet(s) if necessary.

All tables, graphs and charts should be labeled appropriately.

It seems that the fact that science can explain where we come from debunks the idea of a creator. However, studying *how* the universe was created does not automatically discount that its primary origin was a divine being. During our discussion the next day I brought up the different theories we had heard about the origins of the universe. Commenting on the idea that we came from stardust, Matthew, not usually the sharpest tool in the shed, astutely realized that the scriptures do say "for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). These ideas are not mutually exclusive.

The improbability of the perfect conditions existing for life to begin and thrive served to strengthen my faith in an intelligent creator.

The Eureka moment activity was also very telling. The shapes and their order meant nothing. There was no pattern. Or so it seemed. This would also seem to disprove my hypothesis that there is order and purpose behind creation. Except that the shapes had been drawn by an intelligent being and he was the one giving them meaning. They were not meaningful in themselves, they were just a random set of shapes, until he told us what they mean. Looking at creation separately from a creator has the same effect. It is only when we step back and see the hand that created and holds everything in place that we understand the why, the patterns connecting everything.

#### Conclusions:

Accept or reject your hypothesis.

EXPLAIN why you accepted or rejected your hypothesis using data from the lab.

Include a summary of the data – averages, highest, lowest, etc. to help the reader understand your results.

List one thing you learned and describe how it applies to a real-life situation.

Discuss possible errors that could have occurred in the collection of data (experimental errors).

An unlikely chapel, The dark dome Of the planetarium Becomes a holy place.



In Science, opposites attract.
Positive and negative,
Protons and electrons.
Faith and reason.
They need each other.

All of creation tells The glory of God. The more I learn, The more I know him.

Could I be a cosmic accident?
Carbon from stardust
Explodes into DNA.
You are dust,
And to dust
You shall return.

Craig Robinson, my unlikely mentor, Teaches me to crack the code Of my preconceived notions.

My vision opens wide Eureka! Joy of discovery Discovered again. Joy bubbles up At the simplicity of it all—

I am so focused on figuring it all out That I miss the obvious, the big picture, The Hand that holds all of me.

#### **Rising Tides**

by Amanda Flachsbart (SI 19)

Along our section of the Connecticut shoreline, the houses stand on stilts. The ocean is uncontrollable. During especially high tides, water seeps through the rocks and the beach grass and into the sand in front of our house so that you can soak your feet in the water as you sunbathe. At night when it storms, waves crash violently over the rocks. Water pours underneath the house and floods the road. In the morning, we search for lost belongings from under the house. An oar is discovered down the road, a pail in someone's driveway. A small house with dull blue siding and a porch overlooking the water is a luxury summer home to my entire family.

Part of the beauty of this area is in the unique quality of the tides. During low tide, sandbars stretch across the shoreline. This is when much of the sea life reveals itself-- tiny fish, clams, snails. Also abundant are horseshoe crabs, prehistoric creatures with large, helmet-like shells and pointed tails that seem threatening but are actually harmless. Every so often, something sinister appears. Last summer it was a skate, a rubbery creature that looks like a stingray but without the tail spike. One year we found something that resembled an eyeball. When the tide is high, the water rarely rises to more than about five feet, and you can walk out for a long time before the water is over your head. But you never forget those creatures from low tide, now lurking in the deeper water.

August brings a smattering of jellyfish atop the sandbars, some purple and some almost transparent. They glisten in the hot sun and are eventually swallowed by the rising tide. I recently read that it does no good to pee on a jellyfish sting. We never actually tried it, but it's one of those suggestions you make every time it happens. Inside the house, a note from my grandmother is tacked to the bulletin board, her handwriting in black Sharpie: *vinegar for jellyfish stings*. Everyone in my family is familiar with the prickly sting of a jellyfish. At some point, you realize it's not that bad, but it always lingers a bit too long.

There's also a lot of talk about which jellyfish actually sting--it's mostly agreed upon that the transparent ones do not; indeed, I've been known to flip them upside-down with my toe. The purple ones are more interesting, the top part bulbous with a substance resembling a brain. Tentacles spill out from underneath, a dangerous looking cluster of material. I've watched my girls shriek at the sight of a jellyfish, daring one another and their friends to touch the top of them.

Each summer the kids go crabbing. I've wondered if some of the unlucky ones get caught more than once. Many years ago, my brothers and cousins and I would each grab a spot on one of the steps of the dock, equipped with our bait: a hot dog slice or a piece of turkey pinched by a clothespin at the end of a string with some type of weight, a washer or a rusty nail. Eventually, an entire community of crabs is imprisoned in a kiddie pool, stepping on one another, fighting over a tiny fragment of hot dog, pinching their claws in the air. Their menacing qualities are reduced to a pitiful helplessness in the footbath, small specimens of defeat. I still relive this every summer as the younger generation engages in the same process, releasing the crabs back into the water once they're finished. I imagine the crabs' relief at realizing that this was not the end for them.

For over thirty years I've returned to this land of crabs and jellyfish, seagulls and egrets. The Fourth of July brings fireworks over the water at every vantage point, neon colors lighting up the sky, pops and whistles and thunder-like rumblings. Every summer, each member of my family takes a photograph of the sunset above the water with a view of the dock in the foreground. Simple beauty

that we all want to take home with us, to keep with us all of the time. Sometimes I think about what the house knows—the camaraderie and games, but also losses and tension. People stumbling and slurring their words. People who never came back. Fractured relationships and fractured body parts. Deep cuts and blood and bandages. But every year in April, life returns to this tiny house that stands upon a tiny plot of land. New sand gets delivered. New flowers growing in the planters on the porch. The process repeats itself.

Just about every time low tide hits, we walk, about a half mile, to where the sandbars end. It's always the same walk—take a left out of the dock and head east, and eventually there's a short rock wall, beyond which is private property. We always touch the rock wall. Most of my thinking happens during these walks, and in these moments, separate worlds always seem to collide. Real life versus beach fantasy. At the beach, my worries and fears take different shapes, and whatever is going on at present seems to be suspended or distorted. Where was I last year at this time? Last summer, I took this walk after a challenging year. A mistake I wanted to take back, one that hurt my family. My wife and two girls accompanied me, our shadows beside us, mine somehow the shortest. The four of us—a family I never thought I'd have. And on this walk, the salt air and my company restored my resolve, reminded me of the impenetrable bonds I've created. The girls keep growing, smiles return on their faces. The truth is, I can't help but think of my grandfather's spirit approving of all of this from somewhere distant. Because in this repetition, subtle changes and growth take place. And meanwhile, laughter still replaces tears, we take the same picture of the sunset, the sting eventually subsides.

I increasingly consider the effects of the changing climate on the sound. Air and water temperatures are rising, the sea life is changing, and flooding is more frequent. Worst of all, the storms are intensifying—Irene and Sandy ravaged the shoreline. To me this is a reminder that this moment in time, like all other moments, is fleeting. Someday our little plot of sand will only exist in memory, in spirit. But I know to grab hold of these moments, to cradle them in my hands, for they are as restorative as they are impermanent.

## To the Friends I Made In College

by Katie Grant (SI 19)

Realistically, there is no reason why the eight of us should have met. We have different backgrounds, different interests, different on-campus involvements, different ... just about everything.

But it is the Honors Program and Dr. Paula Wilmot that brought us together.

See, we—the Ubes—were all a part of the Honors Program for at least our first few years of college. As part of the Honors Program, you take a one-credit UNIV course your first semester. One day is How-To-UConn-101 led by two Honors sophomores, known as peer facilitators; the other day is run by a faculty member on a topic of interest to them (anything from "Why Read?" to "Creativity in STEM" and "Have iPhone, Will Photo"). These courses are geared towards getting students interested in the collegiate spirit of academics while also providing them with a first-day community and peers who know what they're feeling during that first semester and can provide some guidance.

We take this UNIV course, we end up becoming facilitators ourselves (many of us being paired together prior to the beginning of this friendship), and then we have the opportunity to apply to teach the next round of facilitators—as Uber facilitators. Me, being who I am, flung myself into college extracurriculars with a gleeful zeal that matched my enthusiasm for preparing my application to the Neag School of Education. I was committed to becoming the best teacher possible, and this was my next resume line.

There's 10 of us Ubes: Clarey, Kayla, Lucia, Lahari, Maddy, Muhammad, Matt, Tommy, Taryn, and myself.

We go through the semester leading our groups in class, and those Friday afternoon work meetings are the best parts of my week. Half the time we run late or don't get through everything on the agenda because we have so. much. fun. We crack jokes, we make fun of one another, we celebrate with one another, we commiserate our bad days. Those meetings in Bulkeley Classroom were joyful in a way that isn't common.

During the summer following our Junior year, eight of keep in touch, and as we return to campus in the fall, we decide we want to catch up. Maddy and I moved off campus, and so we host dinner; we all coordinate a date, set a menu, and come together. The first person leaves around midnight. We started before 6pm.

That first Ube Dinner, the eight of us sat around our too-small dining room table and talked and laughed and laughed and told stories and laughed even more until some of us had to leave the room to calm down. Clarey and Kayla are two of the funniest people I know, and then you put them in a room together, and all hope is lost. There was this amazing social chemistry in the room that only comes from such a diverse group of people—ones that have those different backgrounds, involvements, and interests that would have typically kept us apart.



Over the course of our Junior year, we host these Ube dinners every month or so, and we become more and more eager for (and then lovingly obsessed over) these evenings we spend together. We picked different themes (breakfast for dinner and so many leftover waffles; appetizer night, a personal and forever favorite; build your own pizza, which left our kitchen a disaster but was so worth it) but we don't change location. Some people (Kayla, and whoever she's driving) are late, some (Matt) will sometimes not stay long—but we always come together.

Over the course of these two years, our friendship grows and deepens. We take classes together (be that in Neag or in PNB), study together, and get breakfast, coffee, or dinner together. This continues on into our senior year, and we start to feel the presence of graduation, and the changes that comes with it, looming in the distance. There's a change in our friendship, in the way we talk about this group—we know this is it, the last two semesters that we'll have on this campus together. These are the friends we made in college, the friends that we will tell stories about in the coming decades, the people that will be a part of the rest of our lives.

So, during our senior year, without really speaking about it, we focus more and more on spending time together. Even with everything that we were balancing (school, work, relationships, the constant "what's after graduation?" questions, grad school applications, engagements—and wedding planning!), we still make time for these Ube Dinners and spend as much time as we can together.

Then we traveled together. What originated as a joke about how we would vacation together in 20 years quickly became the most "I can't believe the logistics of this all worked out" trip of my entire life. Spending a week together in Flagstaff, AZ was perhaps the single best part of my college experience (and it skyrocketed the level of what we knowingly call our codependency for one another). During that week, the relationships have deepened even more; there's something special about being able to explore a new place and spend that extent of quality time with people you care so dearly about.

I had always known how special this group of friends is to me, but it really came to the last few weeks of school where I truly realized how unique, how amazing, and how lasting this friendship is. I realized how there was no other group that I could convince that yes, Wednesday at 7:30 AM during finals week was actually the only time we all had free to take graduation photos; how fortuitous it was that Dr. Wilmot walked by at just that moment and was able to take photos with us; how one of my favorite memories is us all taking naps together that day in our living room. As I started with, there is really no reason why we would have ever met had it not been for the fact that we all had the same job our sophomore year. What are the chances that the eight of us would go into that as (mostly) strangers and leave as we are now?

These are the people that have celebrated with me at my best and have consoled me at my worst, the people that have helped me to become a better person, teacher, and leader, and the people that have taught more than they know. It is really difficult to imagine what my time at UConn would have been

without them. Each of these humans brings something so unique to this group that it is truly something beautiful.

I believe in telling people how much they mean to us, and so I'm taking this as my chance.

To my favorite people:

Clarey, your encyclopedic knowledge of all things pop-culture makes me want to go back and be a student in your classroom. I have always deeply appreciated the love that is evident when you talk about your students and your role in the classroom. Your ability to know exactly what someone needs to hear is a gift to those around you.

Kayla, your humor is unmatched, but also the way in which you care for people is as well. It's been an honor to be a part of your journey and to see you grow over these years, and I cannot wait to see the ways you change lives for the better now and in the future. You make me live life more joyfully and, through that, more fully.

Matt, your easy-going nature always reminds me to take a breath and appreciate what I have now. You are a skilled leader, a caring educator, and a wise friend. I have always appreciated your unapologetic dedication to the things that you love—even if it's a 32-minute Dave Mathews recording.

Muhammad, you are kind and compassionate in a way that always reminds me of the good in the world. You have an innate ability to know someone for who they are and to so accurately perceive this. I will always admire your presentness and your unwavering compassion for those around you, and we are all the better for having you in our lives.

Maddy, your kindness for all of those around you inspires me to move outside of myself to instead focus on others on a daily basis and to stand squarely in this. I've been so lucky to know you so well for these four years and to see you grow. You have shown me the power of grace, humility, and love, and for that I am ever thankful.

Tommy, you have brought so much joy and laughter to my life over these four years. I admire you as a leader and as the person you are—one that takes each day as new and as an opportunity to do good in the world. Thank you for the vulnerability, friendship, and growth that you have so wonderfully modeled.

Taryn, you have a tenacity to you that makes me want to be a better teacher, woman, and human on a daily basis. You care for others deeply and unwaveringly. Your love for life and experiencing all that it has to offer that makes me want to travel the world (and especially to Italy) but to also live each day to its fullest potential.

## Sink by Shelbie Greene (SI 19)

Sink in. That's exactly what I want to do—sink. Not drown, but sink. Not hit the ground, but to fall into it. To breathe slowly, but not to lose air. To let oxygen in with the intent to release. Release when I finally fall into this. I want to be caught gently by whatever lives underneath me, underneath the cage that regulates and restricts all that air.

The breeze blows the long wrinkled white curtains both to one side. I watch as they caress and flirt with one another- as they move away from the colorless wall that holds them tight, beckons them to fall back. Forward, away, against, together. Movement. Morning sunlight peeks through the slim space that lies between them. Together they feel it all- they feel everything.

I run my fingers along my bare thighs and as I move slowly down my body, I use the breeze as a reminder to breathe. To sink. To let the cage expand. To release. I travel lightly up my navel—I exhale and stop. Stop to feel. To feel whatever lies within there—whatever holds in all that air.

Have you ever wanted to meet yourself? Even if it is just for a moment? For one single breath? To say "Hey, there you are." So, you feel, you fall, you breathe until finally you begin to sink.

Remove everything. Buy white curtains. Leave your windows open. Add air—add oxygen. Find brown eyes that reflect blue and never stop asking where are you. Get angry at those brown eyes for absorbing more of you than you ever have. Fight them. Run from them. Fear them. Always fear them. Until you are ready to sink. Until you lie stripped on a bed begging the breeze to enter your lungs and melt into your skin, slowly slipping into and leaking out of you.

He asks you to take away color—just like his eyes do. To de-color the world around you—to remove life and to find it. To start over with colors you've never seen before or more truthfully the colors you can no longer see. Yet, you can't—you can't re-paint the world because you have nothing to use and you know the dangers of finding the colors. But, then you remember how your eyes color his and you begin to sink.

On the way down, what if all you find is grey? Shades of grey that attach to one another. You want to tear them apart and find what lives beneath them—behind them. But, you're just not strong enough. Your arms are pinned against the walls, your head turned to the side. Grey floods you. So, you go back to the brown. The brown that says to you—what made you stop? What destroyed you? What took away all that air—all that color?

You start to sink again. As you sink, those grey walls enclose you. The cage tightens and the breeze blows the other way. Nothing to let in. Not now.

Again he asks. What destroyed you? What took your palette of life away? What replaced it with shades of grey? Your fingers go numb as they reach your lips. The breeze is sucked back into the world



outside and the grey walls grab the white curtains, forcing them back. Backwards. Against. Away. Movement. Away from sunlight, away from air.

I remember red. But, God, I don't want to.

All I want is the grey, but here I am sinking into the brown. The brown that says to go find the red and breathe it in.

There are no curtains here. Windows are always shut tight. The walls are white, but you can barely see them beneath the darkness of nightfall. Your naked body lies against the rough, faded multicolored quilt. Orange, brown, yellow, and blue all wrapped in seams of red. The last color you see before you close your eyes is that stitched, worn red border before the room fades into grey.

Your skin sinks into the bed as skin that belongs to another sinks into your arms. Against. Away. Toward. Movement. Movement that is not your own and all you feel is the air trapped within you as you are beneath the world above you. Your tiny fingers wrapped tightly around a strand of freshly washed hair until another's fingers wrap around your wrists and pull you down. Open your eyes. Red seams etch themselves into your compressed cheek. Move. But, you can't. You're just not strong enough. Not yet.

Remember the brown. Air follows him. He reflects the colors in the world around him. He moves toward you, with you, never against.

"What destroyed you?" He asks. "Not being able to move" I answer.

So, now here I am drowning in the red and there is no oxygen. But, my goodness, there is color and I am moving toward it. And it is going to kill me. And I am going to let it. Then I'll sink further into the earth where the oxygen lives and where the colors I lost—breathe.

First, you must allow yourself to die. Then you can sink and, once you reach the ground, you can paint yourself into the world again.

I run my fingers around my wrist as it warms under the sunlight that travels in with the exhaling breeze. The white curtains find each other once again. Movement. He pokes his head through the bedroom door. His eyes catch mine just as they open. He feels it all. The red dripping down my body and onto the white bedsheets. He sees it in the blue within my eyes.

He moves toward the edge of the bed. Places his hand on the cage. Breathe.

"Even if I didn't love you, I'd do this with you." He says. So, I press my lips against his and feel his body vibrate as he inhales all that red.



## Forsaken

by Kim Niemiec (SI 19)

Who is that guy?

It didn't take long to discover he was The Golden Boy, as in All-American quarterback of the football team, captain of the hockey and baseball teams, Prom King. But in that first glimpse, to me, he just looked Golden. Nick was tall with blonde hair and green eyes, his t-shirt stretched tightly across bulging, tanned biceps. It turned out he noticed me too, despite my sauce covered pizza apron and straight from my other job at the beach slicked back ponytail. He came back into the restaurant the next day and paid a dollar for a soda he could've bought next door for 50 cents. A conversation, a phone call, and a date followed. At the end of the date, our waitress pulled me aside and confided, "I hope I meet someone someday that looks at me the way he was looking at you." I couldn't believe this was happening to me.

We started out in the harbor. Close to the shore. The first trips we took were just me and you. Sometimes with family, sometimes with friends. But the best ones, the most comfortable ones, were just me and you. The weather was always beautiful for sailing.

That summer was magical. Before the Crosby, Stills, and Nash concert, Nick demonstrated how holding the ketchup bottle upright and banging on the bottom was the right way to hurry the ketchup along; the glistening red glob arced in slow motion. Our eyes followed it to its crest, and then to its trough where it landed squarely on the right upper thigh of my once gleaming white pants. When Graham Nash leaned down and handed me his guitar pick, Nick told him to "back off pal" and we laughed. Even though that was a joke, we knew we would never choose anyone other than each other. On our next date, while waiting in line to get bracelets for the booze cruise, a buddy of his asked, "How'd you guys meet?" I was expecting the story he liked to tell: that I put my phone number on a piece of pepperoni. But instead, Nick smiled, grabbed my hand, and with simple earnestness replied, "Fate." He apparently wasn't concerned about having his chops busted for responding with something that sounded far too tender for typical jock-speak. And his friend didn't dare to, because it was clear from Nick's tone and the look on his face that he believed it.

We took to the water in every spare moment. Our slip was on the fixed dock, the mooring certain and secure, the boat unquestionably seaworthy. Everyone could see that, and others envied what we had. The weather was usually beautiful for sailing.

I wanted a justice of the peace at town hall, but he wanted to celebrate with hundreds of friends and family. His mother picked the flowers, my sister picked the bridesmaids' dresses, my mother made a seating chart. He picked a wedding date shared by his recently deceased uncle, to honor his family. I swear his mother literally swooned. The Golden Boy was so shiny. And what a great father he became! He was a gentle giant. His girl loved to bury her serious little face into his broad chest, and his boy loved being thrown sky high, yelling, "As high as the birds!" Although parenthood was exhausting, we believed in happiness.

The boat acquired a few dings here and there. A lost fender let her bump against the dock for a few days before it was noticed. A youngster at the helm ran her aground for a few tense minutes but there was no keel damage, just a few scrapes on the hull, but most of these remained hidden underwater. Only we knew they were there.

For the first time, there were noticeable chinks in Nick's armor. Nick struggled with the fact that there were things beyond his control, things a sports star couldn't fix with extra practice, things he couldn't smooth over with his charming smile and quick wit. We were all getting older. Things were changing. Our kids no longer needed us the way they used to. Feelings of alienation settled deep within Nick. Where he was once loved and admired not only by Kirsten and Jack, but also their friends and teammates, other parents and coaches, Nick was starting to feel irrelevant. His days of being the beloved, even-keeled, multi-sport coach had come to an end. Our lives no longer revolved around each other. In fact, they barely involved each other. Nick's roles were now undefined, he was no longer the center of our world. He began to lose belief in himself. He began to drift away.

Now the hull above the water line was noticeably starting to weather, but in a way, that was a badge of honor, indicating we'd clocked many days at sea. We got lost for the first time, and spent a couple of tense hours floundering, trying to find our way back. Luckily, the wind was kind and we kept moving forward, and eventually made it back to shore. We were a little worse for wear, but the weather was ultimately on our side.

When I said, "Nick could have an entire life that I know nothing about!" I was joking. But then, *stuff* started happening. He started getting home later and later. His moods and behavior became troubling and erratic. Nick lost job #1. "Downsizing," he reasoned. Then, he lost job #2. "The new boss wanted to bring in his own people," he explained. Money was tight, bills were unpaid, and Nick's moods were dark. Then, the house literally went dark.

A "mellow following sea" is when you are sailing in the direction of the waves, when they push you gently onward, and you go with this flow. Every sailor hopes for following seas. More and more though we found ourselves stuck in "head seas." Head seas are when you sail straight into waves that are coming right at you. Sometimes the switch happens gradually, and you don't notice it until forward progress becomes difficult.

Turns out, the "entire other life" that I so casually joked about, was true. But it wasn't with another woman. I wish it was. It would've been much simpler. It was something much more insidious and much more seductive. It was something that promised nothing but numbness, and cost nothing but money. Nick was an alcoholic. Was there a particular moment when I knew for sure, or was it a body of work formed from many vignettes? It's ironic how alcohol consumes the consumer. There's a theory in psychology that says you can't feel opposing emotions at the same time, but anyone with an alcoholic in the family knows that the sound of car tires crunching on a gravel driveway brings both the warmth of relief and the torment of dread.

I am leaving the safety of the port, outward bound. On this trip I am alone. The storm clouds were there since daybreak, but the intensity of the sudden darkness takes me by surprise.

He said, "If you didn't hate me, if you loved me still, I could get better." But I couldn't hate him more than he hated himself. He said, "I'm not going to drink anymore. I'm done with all of that." But when he could not stay sober and I wanted him to go, he stated matter-of-factly: "If you make me leave here again, I will die." I could not believe this was happening to me.

I am out on the open sea but the sheets of rain reduce my world to a small white room in which I am trapped, and finding it difficult to breathe. An invisible wall of frigid air blasts across the frictionless surface of the water; it slams into me and swallows me. I am in danger.

That scorching morning in the garage. Hazel eyes as hard and as cold as ice.

I should've let him go.

I cannot hide from unrelenting needle stabs of rain. They say lightning never strikes the same place twice but that is a myth. It's striking my boat again and again.

I should have let go.

I use every bit of strength I have to grip the wheel to keep from falling as the boat heels hard to starboard. A sudden, strident roar drowns out every thought except for one.

I think of my kids: I hope no one ever looks at them the way he looked at me.

The next waves I do not see coming.

I am tearing through space and time, but the space is fraught with sharpness that gleams hard and silver. Time moves in heartbeats.

The boat is on her tail. The keel drives skyward, up and over. She is lost. She has been forsaken.

I am underwater.

I cannot see. I cannot breathe. I do not move.

But then I remember.

I can swim.



# Bring Me Closer to Thee: Excerpts from a Pilgrimage by Katie Pitts (SI 19)

I have a tale to tell.

1993 brought a year of insecurities and fears to this country.

The World Trade Center is bombed- six people dead and thousands injured.

The Koresh compound is raided by the ATF and by the end of the conflagration close to one hundred people are dead.

The first murder of an abortion doctor occurs in Pensocola, Florida.

Rodney King testifies against four Los Angeles Police in a federal civil-rights trial.

A passenger on the Long Island Railroad opens fire killing six.

Mother nature begins showing signs of vulnerability with record-breaking floods, snowfall and wildfires.

Bill Clinton is changing the military in ways that are unheard of; the Don't Ask Don't Tell law is introduced, women are allowed to not only see the frontlines of battle but they can fly warplanes. Prospective gun owners must pass background checks in order to purchase guns.

When I look back on 1993 I cannot believe the rumblings of what sadly became norms in society; unrest, environmental upheaval, gun law controversies, civil-rights controversies, police use of force controversies, women's rights controversies, but none of them seemed to matter to me back then because there was only one thing that mattered to me in 1993: seeing Madonna for the very first time.

In 1990, after Madonna's Blond Ambition Tour ended she proclaimed she would never tour again; the tour simply took too much out of her. This news crushed me in and day out. My twelve-year-old self wasn't allowed to attend the Virgin Tour in 1984 because my parents feared the devil himself would be at the concert, my seventeen-year-old self wasn't allowed to see the Blond Ambition Tour because, again, my parents refused to let me douse myself with spurts of Satan. Were they not impressed when they watched Madonna at the 1984 MTV Music Awards and I mimicked her performance so well?

In the spring of 1993, Madonna released news of a tour that would bring her to five US cities. My entire life changed in that one moment. Suddenly, my life had meaning. My twenty-one-year-old self would not and could not be shut down by meddling parents. I would see Madonna, we would breathe the same air, I would be in her presence and nothing would get in my way. Plans were to be made, money was to be saved.

I was going to see Madonna.

Friday October 15, 1993 New York City



Our tickets are checked and make our way to our seats. We know that every single person is watching us with jealousy. We are going to the front, where real fans sit. We are shocked when we get to our seats and we are immediately met with scornful looks from men in business suits and women with outfits that would be better suited for Tavern on the Green. These people surely weren't expecting to be seated near rabid fans.

We will be told by the suits to sit down (the concert hadn't even started yet!), be quiet (did they not expect shrills of beckoning Madonna to the stage?), get dressed (had they really never seen a black bra before?). The suits get so frustrated with the us that they will pout their way to security, earning us our very own security guard standing by us for the entirety of the show.

The moment I will never forget, the one moment in my life that I will forever be able to go right back to. The moment Madonna appears on stage. Tears quickly well in my eyes. The shrill of my screams, the lungs closing- trying to grasp breath. I laugh, I cry, I watch. I feel wet—wet because I have been drenched in beer. Angry stiffs and snooze fests have revolted and have joined forces to cover us in beer. Surely they do not know that faith in Madonna runs deep to the core, every cell in my body is flowing for Madonna, and if they think a simple beer will slow me down, they are mistaken. The concert goes on for two hours, hearing her voice, it's like an angel calling. Two hours of watching Madonna, staring too intently on every inch of her body, screaming for more, screaming out of pure ecstasy. This is the absolute pinnacle of my life. For two hours I am breathing in sequence with Madonna. She is so close to us that she can see us dancing, she can see how much fun we are having. We know from *Truth or Dare* that she hates when people in the front just sit there, so she is seeing us. She is enjoying us. We are waiting for each next word, we know the next song just by the very first note. We know that Madonna is grateful for us, we are the reason she tours, we are what she will remember when she thinks of this night. The rest of the world has disappeared, it is the two of us and Madonna.

The concert ends and I am half heartbroken and half wondering if my life will ever be the same. How can I go back to normal "living" when I have seen what in my twenty-one-year-old mind is the true one God? The suits mutter as they walk by. "Sluts, obnoxious, pathetic." Bring it on, I think to myself, I have seen Madonna. Fans pour out of the Garden. We stay, dancing, crying, collecting confetti that has spewed from above. Suddenly, a blue clown that was a part of the show comes out on stage. Hardly anyone is watching. We go on high alert, jump on our chairs and in unison scream "Madonna!" over and over. The clown puts its hand to its mask, slowly removes the mask and it is MADONNA. We jump, we gyrate, we cry, we stare. Madonna rests her gaze on us and waves. She waves to us. For what will forever feel like an eternity, an alignment of the universe, Madonna and I look deep into one another's soul, and eye to eye we need no words at all. Our security guard saunters up to us, smiles, and says, "Damn you two deserved that wave. Watching you was the most fun I've had a concert. But you really do need to put your shirt back on."

Saturday October 16, 1993 Central Park West and West 64th Street

We decide that we must make this pilgrimage complete and pay homage to Madonna's apartment. Fate brings us to the outdoor foyer of the Harperley Building and we notice a very large body guard mount a bike and another man who is preparing for a run. Another person emerges wearing an Adidas outfit and a white baseball hat. I instantly know...this is Madonna. Twelve hours since the concert ended and now here is this woman fifteen feet in front of me. The two men fall into place on each side of Madonna and they go right past me and I stand frozen with shock. Madonna and her men pick up speed and are jogging/biking toward the sidewalk. I quickly come to and break into full run behind the trio. I am convinced that Madonna will recognize us from the night before: we danced the night away together, we made eye contact with the "clown." This day will be the day that Madonna realizes that I am on this earth to be her best friend. All of this rushes through my head and I fall into step behind Madonna, each stride becoming longer and faster. I just ... cannot ... keep ... up. With the urgency of a soldier, I cross Central Park West in a death-defying, jay-walking move crossing the street and breaking into full sprint, zooming in and out of unsuspecting pedestrians. I do not slow down, zip zoop, all around people never once taking my eyes off Madonna. My plan is to run up a block, cross and catch run into Madonna. The light turns red and I am stuck- need to wait. But wait, Madonna is going to cross. Madonna is going to cross! I stand at the entrance to Central Park West and when the walk light goes on I see Madonna break into a jog across the street. I stand and wait, arms wide open ready to grab Madonna into my arms so that we can meet and begin our friendship, our connection, our life. Madonna is getting closer, two men still at her side. Madonna is within ten feet of me. I plant my feet to the ground.

#### THWAP!!!

The bodyguard interjects the caress between me and Madonna by ramming into my body, throwing me to the ground, leaving me beat, incomplete. I teeter, totter but clearly and carefully tell myself, "You are going down. Reach, grab her. Make this count." I stretch my already long body and lunge for Madonna, grabbing onto her arm, holding on for dear life. *THWAP!!* The bodyguard hits me again sending me face first into the pavement. I force my body to roll over in hopes of pulling Madonna down but I can't quite reach. Madonna scoffs, steps over me, looks down and gives me a look that says I HATE YOU. With my body contorted on the ground and my arms in a full stretch I scream with all that I have left: "I LOVE YOU, MADONNA!"

## The Cell

## a commentary on breast cancer

by Rachel Ruiz (SI 19)

Rust makes its home on my arms as
my skin peels away in thin sharp specks.

Shards of apricot—red pomegranate peeking through the cracks.

Blood lingers in the cuts of my lips — cold and salty
streams to dissolve
my dreams.

Her skin appears to be peeling ... how strange looking indeed ... and where are her fingernails? The warden wonders "Ma'am, just take a seat" he comes to scoff.

But I

Forgot

what it's like to be free. "Mhm," I swallow as I sit, but orange petals fill my throat.

A strand of my hair starts to fall
—like leaves on trees cascade down—

There's cyanide in the air. I come to think isn't there?

Another way?
I clasp my spinning head and come to realize

My hair is on fire!

Sulfur fills the air and clogs my gaping pores.

The sound of her retching is waking up the inmates. Observes the guard. "Should we put her somewhere else?"

He questions and the Warden ridicules "Um ... let me see ... no ... where?"

I heave—
a mess of red marigolds splash onto the floor.

The rest of my hair falls into step sticky globs of black rain down—and the smell.



The smell starts to get inside my brain. It inches its way into the tissues and finds a wrinkle to hide in. It nips and nibbles at the walls until

even it no longer has a home.

Smells of sulfur fill the emptiness.

Skinless, hairless ...

"She can't even remember how to spell her last name."

The warden jeers.

I wince. The petals lose their color—red to brown—and start to crumble.

Maybe we can have some fun with her ..." he sneers.

Brainless.

"Ma'am, if you want to stay here, you're going to need to pay us...
with those." He warns.

His pointed finger lands like a knife on ...

the delicate pom poms on my chest.
They ache—two imperfect globes of gold.
I squeeze them one last time and my

Isn't there another way?

heart.

The smell contorts that pulsing pulp and squeezes it in its hands until it takes the shape of a thin iron bar.

But isn't there another way?

1

forgot what it's like to be free.
two sick marigolds discarded,

lie down at their feet.



## An Ode to Uniball is an Ode to CWP 2019

by Kimberly Shaker (SI 19)

\*Even though this is an ode to the CWP '19 crew, I have changed the characters' names.

Despite the unrisen dawn, wide-eyed Barb, ever alert, strode into her classroom with her books neatly stacked in her arms. She tossed her denim jacket over the rolling chair behind her desk, knowing she'd be sitting amongst her students at the stiff, high-chair-like pupil desks, anyway. She noticed a set of footsteps like a heavy metronome coming down her hallway. She'd know Uniball's heavy footsteps anywhere; their weight and their rhythm were unique only to someone who had suffered a past leg trauma. She didn't truly know anything about the custodian's past, but it felt safe to assume that his rhythmic limping must be the limping of a veteran soldier. If he had been a soldier, maybe that explained his ability to utilize what he had around him so well, his ability to use what he literally had at his disposal; she was most certain that the kitten mug she'd seen him collecting pens in was something he'd saved from a classroom's trash he'd been emptying. Barb appreciated that about him, his ability to recycle and not to waste.

It was unusual that Uniball was here during the day shift.

Wendy was out for the day; she was moving into a new apartment. Cara was just about to swing into Wendy's classroom to make sure her colleague's substitute for the day was all set when she noticed Barb had arrived. She swept into Barb's room and mentioned that she had received another cryptic message from her potential beau and she just wasn't sure if or how to respond. Barb gave her a pointed piece of advice, and as Cara walked back out into the hallway, she noticed the kitten mug full of pens on Uniball's unattended cart. She felt that mug must signify the mug of a divorced man, and she silently entered her own classroom, thinking about marriage and divorce and the trials of love Uniball must have endured.

Uniball came back to his cart.

Gretchen arrived later than she'd have liked that day. She had noticed a motorcycle in the parking lot and assumed it must be the custodian's because she didn't know anyone else who was here at the time that would own one. Plus, with that mustache of his, he had to be a Harley man. She had always liked Uniball; underneath that mustache was a man always ready with a smile and a joke. She loved how he could bring so much joy to others, and she thought of her son, and the funny thing he'd said on the playground yesterday. She wondered if Uniball's mother ever feared him getting a motorcycle; no mother wants to see her son get hurt by a hog, and Gretchen's sweet boy had just had a bit of a run-in with a dog. But all was well, and he was making people laugh again; Gretchen hoped her son would always keep his sense of humor.

Uniball was fixing the flickering light in room 100.

Nina entered room 100 and was so glad to see her light finally getting fixed. The frustrating flicker was like having a sizzling-brain-on-drugs campaign constantly running above the desks in the back of the room. She knew too well that students already have enough distractions; the lightning show was an added one she didn't need. As Uniball worked to fix the light, she noticed how fastidiously clean Uniball's coveralls were, despite what must often be dirty work. She admired his ability to clean up all the messes and remain so

clean. She thought about how hard that can sometimes be to do in life, but remembered, while looking at the man on a ladder before her, how very possible it is.

Uniball climbed down to get something out of his toolbox.

Bree stopped in quickly to visit Nina before the students arrived. She saw the animal posters on Nina's walls and then noticed the kitten mug on Uniball's cart. She thought it strange that this man had this mug because he was clearly a dog person. Bree knew how important it is to be straightforward and honest, and she liked Uniball, so she didn't think he was living a lie through that mug. Someone must have given it to him. Maybe it was his ex-wife, judging by the pale skin on his ring finger where a band must have been. Family life can be hard. She felt for this man and wondered how far the memory of the marriage went.

The light was fixed, and Uniball left to go unlock the auditorium for a morning assembly later on.

Brian saw Bree leave Nina's room and he caught up with her as Uniball's cart turned the corner. He was relieved to see the psycho going the opposite direction. In a way, he loved this guy's propensity to say "f you" to "the man." He was intrigued by the faded Susan G. Komen sticker on his cart. If Uniball had known illness and loss, he certainly hadn't coped with it the way Brian knew someone could and should. Uniball had probably turned to drink, but Brian knew the elixir of cynicism was even sweeter.

Uniball rolled toward the auditorium.

Gemma had been waiting for Uniball to open the auditorium door for her. As she saw the kitten—mugged cart wheel towards the door where she was waiting, she thought that a man with Santa Claus eyes like that must be a wonderful grandfather. His granddaughter probably gave him that mug. She wondered if they had a close bond as she mused that she might know him better than his own family even does.

Uniball searched for the auditorium key on his key ring.

Cate, who had somehow already finagled her way into the auditorium, like an audio-visual tech fairy, saw the kitten mug as the main auditorium door jiggled and then swung open. She always loved that mug and loved that the kitten delivered a message. All animals had messages to give; she knew that, and she felt the custodian knew this, too. The hand that held the door for Gemma was missing a finger. Cate knew it was better to be missing a finger than missing a heart and she loved Uniball's kindness.

Uniball closed the auditorium behind him before making his way down the hallway again.

Annie was on her way to bring Cate a mug of tea because she knew Cate had been working on the a/v equipment all morning. As she passed Uniball on her way to the auditorium, she noticed that he did not look up to meet her eyes. He never did. She actually appreciated his shyness. She knew a lot of people who thought shyness was a weakness, but Annie revered this in Uniball because he was gentle. He quietly let her pass unobtrusively. She appreciated his shyness and wished more men realized how important a modest nature can be.

Uniball stopped to pick up a pen from the hallway floor.

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Uniball stopped to pick up a pen from the hallway floor.

Pam was doing her morning run throughout the halls of the school to get some exercise in before the students arrived. She normally ran with Franny, but Franny had fractured her foot and was unable to go for their morning jog. That didn't stop Pam, though; she just told Franny to hurry up and heal because, in the meantime, Pam would just be getting faster. She noticed some running shoes on the lower shelf of Uniball's cart. Granted, they could have been anyone's; he might have found them in the hallways, like his pens. He might have just been bringing them to the lost and found. But Pam looked at him and knew that a veteran, like she was, appreciated what it took to keep a body running, literally and figuratively. She, too, noticed the kitten mug as she rounded the corner where he was wheeling his cart and thought that it was nice of him to keep a mug a student had given him. She knew how important it was for students to forge relationships that mattered, and that mug was evidence that Uniball knew it, too.

Uniball placed his newfound pen into his mug.

As Pam ran by Franny's room and yelled, "Lame," Franny, with her wounded foot elevated on her desk, just laughed to herself and got back to grading. Uniball was a few paces behind, but she could hear his cart coming towards her room. As he passed, she noticed his shirt sleeve rolled up amidst the stifling heat of the building, and the tattoo of a woman's name was exposed. Franny knew how important it was to balance the elements of life, and she could see this man had a wild side to him, even though he was such a fervent worker at school. She loved that balance, but also mourned for him when she saw the tattoo, wishing he'd been able to keep the love he'd had, knowing that some wounds are tough to heal. Thank goodness that wasn't true for her foot.

Uniball stopped for a drink of water.

Rose, always thinking of others, came in to see if Franny needed any ice for her foot. As she was walking into Franny's room, she saw Uniball stop for a drink from the water fountain. He drank the water so calmly. No slurping. No awkward bending for the angle of the awkward faucet. She looked at the way this man drank the water and got the sense that he was someone who could go through a difficult time with grace. She thought about the burdens people bear and the hardships people harbor, and she knew he must be going through something difficult. But, regardless, he carried on. He endured. And he did so with grace and beauty.

Uniball lifted his head from the water fountain and turned down the hall leading to the custodial supply closet.

Chris ran after him. He needed a pen and knew Uniball's stash was plentiful. Chris called the kitten mug of pens Uniball's "plentiful pentiful" and that always made him laugh. He noticed the same tattoo Franny had noticed just a few minutes ago. There was no way this guy didn't have an interesting past. Tattoos always indicate interesting pasts. Chris bore his tattoo as a proud reminder of that, a past flowing with long locks and memories. He walked away, forgetting to ask for the pen, immersed in his memories of a California beach back in 1989.

Uniball placed the cart back in the custodial closet and left; he would return for his regular afternoon shift later that day. No one noticed him leave; they were all getting ready for their days to begin.



## After Manohla Dargis: Two Things Soap Operas Taught Me by Arri Weeks (SI 19)

Every summer day as I lay on the tan carpeted floor on my stomach, I watched as Lily would struggle with her decision between the beautifully blue-eyed, dark-haired Dusty and the equally gorgeous, but more rough around the edges (or at least he was supposed to be) Holden. Holden was from the poor farming family, the Snyders, and for Lily's mother, the penultimate business woman, Lucinda Walsh, this was all too much. While she wasn't thrilled about the idea of her daughter being with anyone at this young age, she preferred Dusty over Holden. Holden was a sexual threat, whereas Dusty was less so, even despite those piercing blue eyes. I understood this at eight years old.

As the World Turns was a family heirloom, passed on by my grandmother. She had watched it since the fifties when my mother and aunts were young, and she was stuck at home. In fact, my mother always says that a wave of sleepiness washes over her whenever a spinning globe appears, a lasting symbol of nap time from when she was a child.

When I was seven, my parents separated and eventually divorced, I often showed up at my grandparents' door. Sometimes I had a snow day; sometimes I was sick; sometimes I pretended to be sick in order to stay with my grandmother and just escape.

I knew what the day had in store for me. It went something like this (or at least this was what I had planned):

7:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Continue sleeping, playing, and/or cartoons or movies on HBO

11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. The Price Is Right

12:00 p.m. - 12:30 p.m. Lunch and most often a rerun of a television episode. *The Brady Bunch, I Dream of Jeanie*, and *Bewitched* stand out in my memory.

12:30 p.m. - 1:30 p.m. The Young and the Restless

1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Capitol or The Bold and the Beautiful, depending upon the year.

2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. As the World Turns

3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Guiding Light

4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. talk shows and/or movies on HBO

My childhood wasn't mapped out by the books I read or play dates with friends, though those activities were present; it's just not what stands out. Instead, I remember Pam Ewing (Victoria Principal) opening up the bathroom door when she heard the shower running. Perhaps it was my first form of criticism, understanding that *Dallas*'s writers had gone completely off the rails in killing off Bobby Ewing (Patrick Duffy) for a year.



There is something magical about soap operas, even when I'm frustrated by the writing or the production. After not having watched *The Young and the Restless* for over twenty years, I was able to jump right back into the interwoven storylines of Genoa City's complicated residents. They are the familiar and constant while life may not be, and yet they also continue to break new bounds. *General Hospital* has a storyline about overbearing parents in the school system, an out-of-the-headlines enigmatic cult leader, and a trans actor. With their ever-minimizing budgets and production values, soap operas still manage to get at the basis of human relationships, and they "shape our expectations, our hopes, our dreams" (Staniszewski) about those relationships and the ways in which they are represented.

Having watched them since birth, that constancy and boundary pushing has taught me some things along the way, and just as Manhola Dargis says about films, so too do soap operas, "get into our bodies, making us howl and weep, while their narrative and visual patterns, their ideas and ideologies leave their imprint." Soap operas have left and continue to leave their imprint on me.

## Lesson 1: Women will fight over men, and it is never the man's fault

Lauren and Tracy first fought over Danny Romalotti and then, later, Brad on the *Young and the Restless*; Lily and Emily fought over Holden on *As the World Turns*; Sue Ellen and her sister, Kristin, fought over J.R on *Dallas*. If there's a leading man, he is to be fought over by two women, regardless if the women are friends or—sisters.

These women see themselves in competition with each other for the man and never seem to find any fault with the Dannys, Brads, and J.R.s. These women might exclaim "how could you!" (it's not really ever a question) to that man, but he remains the prize. Instead, the women usually come head to head in a campy fight scene where one or both hurl the tramp accusation and one lets out an angry "bitch!"

This trope, though, serves to support the pattern we see in films and media elsewhere. Men are the prize; female friendship, or even civility, is not.

There is pleasure to be had in these scenes for their high camp, but it wasn't until I was older that I started to ask questions about the fights themselves and my delight in them. Why don't they ever get mad at the man? Why doesn't one of them say he's an asshole and not worth having?

There have been moves away from this. Abby Newman fighting with Mia Rosales over Arturo. If we're being honest, Arturo wasn't really the object of desire for either woman, he was a distraction--Abby from her business and family drama and for Mia from her philandering husband. In this way, it wasn't so much about the prize of the man, but instead was really about the women and getting the good old barbs for high camp effect in.

But I still find myself responding—laughing and enjoying—the fights the female characters have over the men in the soap opera genre, which I wouldn't in other genres. I'm critical of films and other television shows that rely on this trope where I am not with soap operas. If I'm examining this, perhaps is because the soap sphere operates from a female gaze (Lesson 6) where the other shows normally do not.



Lesson 2: Unstable out of control women make for the best characters



My Aunt Donna and I love a drunk Nikki and an offher-meds Sharon; these uninhibited women are fun to watch. They stir things up and fuck shit up. They don't follow protocols and the very strict expectations of who they should be.

Nikki Newman is married to mega billionaire and CEO, founder of Newman Enterprises, Victor Newman. We tend to forget the fact that she's a former stripper based on all the lady luncheons and charity events she plans and attends now, so it comes as a great relief when she's unhinged and lets loose after a few vodka martinis (or swigs from the bottle).

Nikki often clashes with Sharon, who has her own trouble with stability. She was finally diagnosed as bipolar, if memory serves, after burning a house to the ground. When she was in the mental health facility, her meds were adjusted by another patient who was then able to convince her she was pregnant and subsequently to kidnap another woman's child after she gave birth.

## It was a delightful storyline!

And while alcoholism and mental health are very serious topics, in the land of soap operas, they can offer moments of comic hilarity. As the audience, we know this world is fiction. Genoa City isn't real, even if they have recently experimented with location shooting. These fictional women follow in the footsteps of a long line of bawdy women who love a good stiff drink, sex, and say and do the wrong thing. They are also perhaps relatable to having had one drink too many and saying the wrong thing, though I've never thrown a glass at someone. Dropped a glass or two, yes, but not thrown.

The best scenes are when Nikki enters into fights with other characters and her truth comes out (usually revealing the stripper is still inside her). She may be prim and proper, playing the self-appointed moral arbiter of Genoa City, but at her core, she is just as messed up as the other residents (and us).

In real life, I would like to stay as far away as possible from these women; in no way do they resemble any of my female friends. I am not one of those people who feed off of real-life drama. In fact, my go-to line is "never make eye contact with crazy." So choosing to make forty—five-minute daily contact with crazy may seem counterintuitive, but it's the kind of crazy where there are no real consequences.

It also gives these women momentary power to let loose. They don't have to watch everything they say—in fact, they are physically and/or emotionally incapable in that moment. Perhaps we all long for that kind of power, where our own letting loose has no ramifications in our daily lives. When watching, we get to live vicariously through these women. I know I do.



There are more lessons, of course. There is something to be explored about tradition — both traditions the genre and the storylines uphold. There is also more to be said about the female and queer gaze that is scheduled every week day from noon to four p.m. in most time zones. Soaps have had a tremendous impact on our viewing and can be seen in popular current shows including *Grey's Anatomy* and cult favorite, *Twin Peaks*. It's a genre that endures because of the ways in which it allows for the messiness of real life and a life imagined. There's more pleasure to be had watching women behave badly.

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Kyle Barron (SI 19) is a graduate student at the University of Connecticut where he studies English, specializing in rhetoric and composition. He's particularly interested in the rhetoric of science, ecocriticism, urban ecology, and science writing. His other interests include writing center studies, literacy studies, writing across the curriculum (WAC), translingualism, and technical writing. Kyle also works as a writing instructor, teaching various composition courses at UConn. Prior to that, he worked as a technical writer and illustrator. Sometimes, against his better judgment, he writes bad poetry. He doesn't do anything in his free time, because graduate students don't have free time.

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Victoria Clarizio (SI 19) knew she wanted to be a writer since she was in first grade. She recently received her MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University. Victoria has worked with homeschool students on academic writing and creative writing for the past two years. She is currently working at Saint Bridget of Sweden Parish and School in Cheshire. Victoria is passionate about introducing students to the love of words and story. She loves to use techniques of creative writing to help students overcome their resistance to academic writing.

Jane Cook (SI 07) has been working as an educator for over 40 years and as a Literacy and Technology Coach for over 30 years. Since 2007, Jane has been involved with CWP as a Teacher-Consultant, serving in various capacities including co-facilitator of the CWP Summer Institute, CWP Technology Program Leader, and CWP Grants and Outreach Program Leader. Currently, she works as an Educational Consultant providing professional development and coaching support in curriculum development, literacy, and technology. Jane began her writing career on her high school newspaper and has never stopped writing.

Ellen Devine (SI 12) teaches, writes, and lives at Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, CT.

Sallyanne Ferrero (SI 89) When Sallyanne Fererro was a child, Wee Wisdom magazine published her poem "Tippy and I." She was hooked. Years later, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Salve Regina College; then taught for twenty-seven years. During that time, she was fortunate to participate in the Connecticut Writing Project. That experience inspired her to continue studying and writing. In 1998 she obtained a Master of Arts degree from Northeastern University. Moving to Florida after retirement, she explored new interests, including volunteer work at Humane Society, Naples. A perfect match followed: she worked as a free-lance writer for Naples Dog magazine! "Anthem" is her reaction to Hurricane Irma's damage in Naples, Florida. Many trees were compromised or destroyed, including her favorite palm. In "Anthem," she applauds the resilience of trees, but later realized she was celebrating human survivors, too.

Amanda Flachsbart (SI 19) teaches English at South Windsor High School, where she also advises the school's literary magazine, co-advises the Sexuality and Gender Alliance, and coaches girls track. Besides reading and writing, she also enjoys running and hiking. She lives in Willington with her wife and daughters, who are often the subjects of her writing.

Katie Grant (SI 19) is a 5<sup>th</sup> year student in Neag's Integrated Bachelor's/Master's Program for Secondary English Education. She finished her undergraduate degrees in English and Secondary English Education, with a minor in Public Policy, last May and will graduate this May with a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. She is currently serving in her second term as State Chair of the Connecticut Education Association Aspiring Educators Program, where she supports the development of pre-service educators statewide across six different universities. Katie also currently works at the University Writing Center as the Coordinator for Secondary School Outreach; in this role, she works directly with a local secondary school to develop their own writing center over the course of the 2019-2020 school year. She is looking forward to being in the classroom next year as a high school English teacher where she can blend her interests in literature, civic engagement, and critical thinking.

Shelbie Greene (SI 19) currently teaches Enrichment and Monsters in Literature at Illing Middle School. She has the wonderful opportunity to engage students in the creative, exploratory process of self-discovery through their own research and writing within these courses. Prior to teaching at Illing Middle School, she taught Language Arts at Killingly High School for four years. She began teaching because she loved her content, but now she continues to teach because she loves guiding kids to places of personal growth and understanding through the use of writing, reading, and research. When she's not in the classroom, Shelbie spends time with her beautiful, evermoving toddler, Loxley. He has reinspired her love for writing in the past few years—that need to stop, look, and reflect.

Kim Niemiec (SI 19) is a Social Studies teacher and National Honor Society advisor at Wethersfield High School and girls and boys swimming and diving coach for South Windsor High School. Putting daughter Kate and son Jake through college keeps her busy! Who knew writing could be such fun?

Amy Nocton (SI 14) lives in Storrs, Connecticut with her family. She teaches Spanish at E.O. Smith High School (where she also runs the Democratic Discourse and Deliberation Project) and English composition for non-native speakers at the University of Connecticut. She has also taught high school Italian. When not working, Amy enjoys reading, cooking, traveling, sharing writing with her amazing writing group friends, and visiting with family and friends both in the States and abroad. She has been previously published in *Poetry Ireland Review, Down in the Dirt Magazine, Inti,: Revista de literatura hispánica, The Bookends Review, The Pangolin Press, Moonchild Magazine,* the *Peacock Journal, Dodging the Rain*, and the Connecticut Writing Project's *Teacher-Writer Magazine* at the University of Connecticut.

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Kimberly Shaker (SI 19) teaches 12th grade English at East Hartford High School. She has been teaching in East Hartford since 2002, having taught English in Chelsea, Massachusetts prior to coming to East Hartford.

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