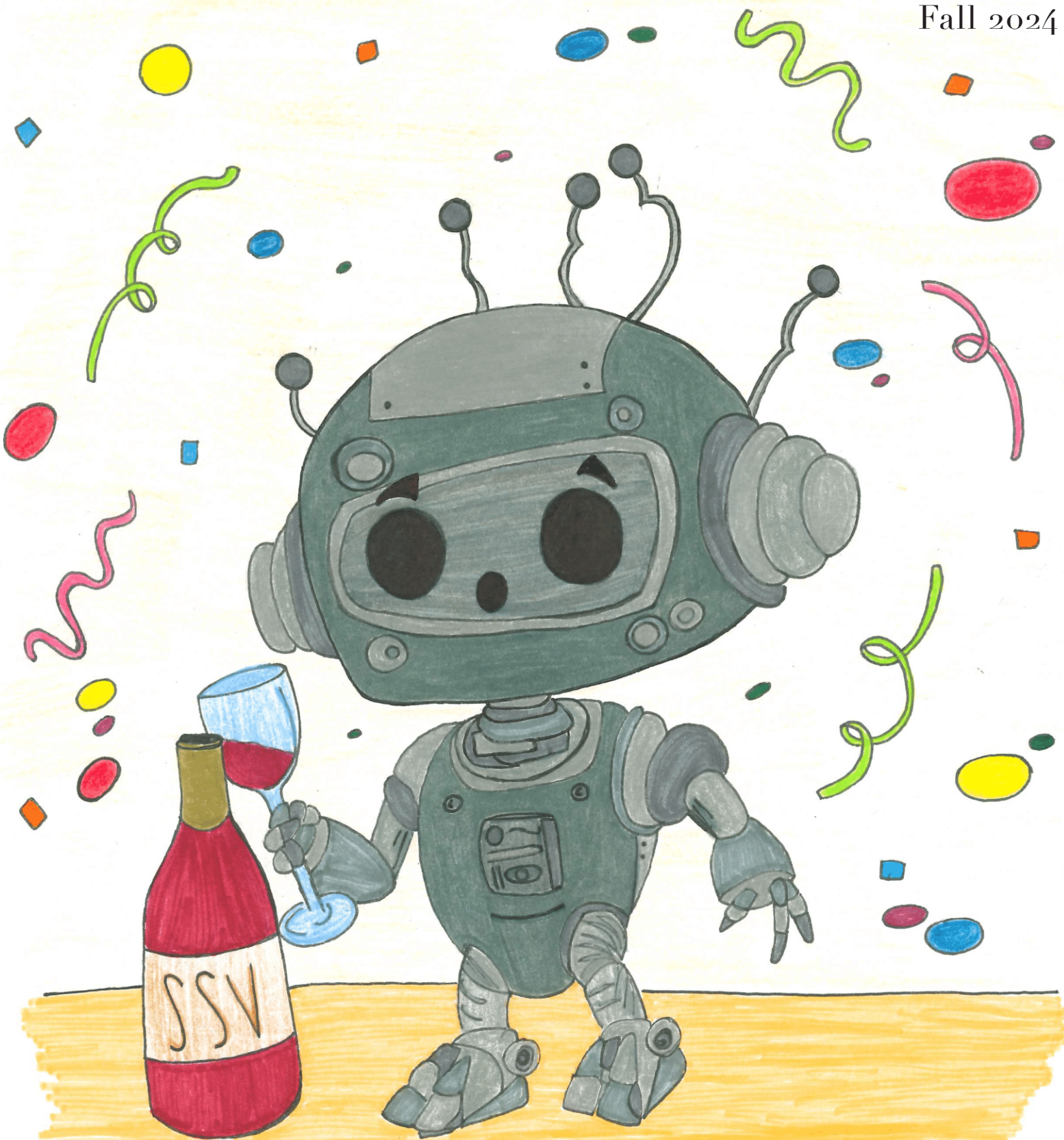


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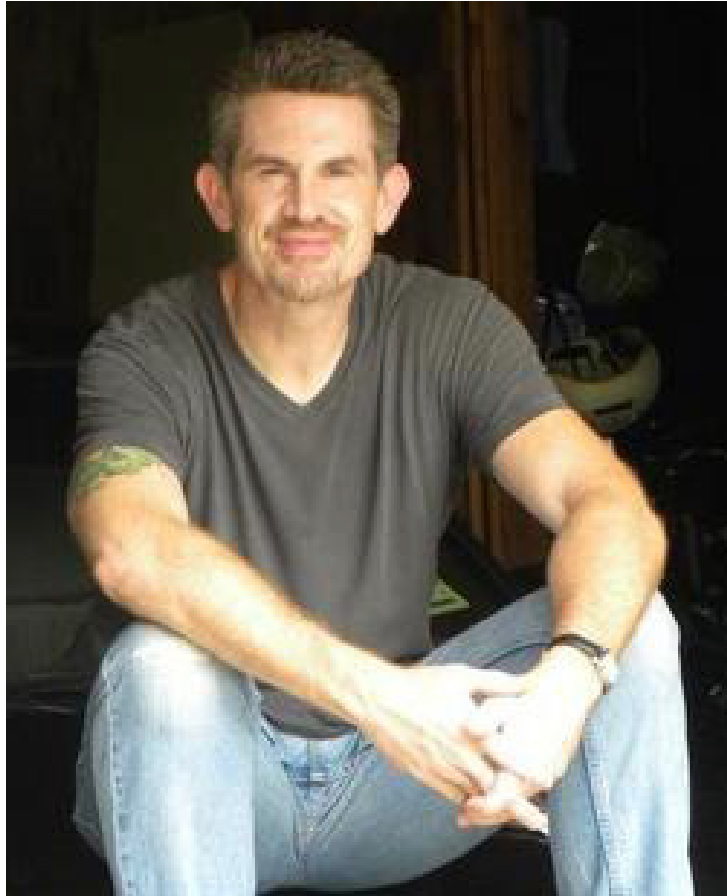
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IN MEMORIAM – JASON COURTMANCHE

APRIL 15, 1969 - NOVEMBER 27, 2024



Jason Courtmanche showed up for his first day of student teaching at an alternative high school for at-risk students and found a note on his desk telling him that his cooperating teacher was in Peoria, Illinois attending to her mother’s funeral and would be out indefinitely. It was a baptism by fire and one of the best things that ever happened to him, professionally speaking. Jason spent most of his career in Connecticut. He was at the University of Connecticut for 29 of the past 37 years, where he has been an undergraduate English major, a non-degree education student, a doctoral student, an adjunct professor, and now for the past 17 years the Director of the Connecticut Writing Project and in-residence faculty in English, as well as Early College Experience Assistant Coordinator and affiliate faculty in Teacher Education.

– Jason Courtmanche Bio from a book project

Jason Courtmanche was a man of many talents and a master of most – master teacher, master writer; master dreamer; master innovator; master gardener; master husband, father, friend and colleague. The list goes on. Jason had a brilliant mind and a sharp wit. He was an avid reader, as evidenced by the thousands of books lining the walls of his home and office. He had an eidetic memory – he could tell you the plot and characters from novels he’d read decades earlier and cite exhaustive details of nonfiction works. His goal while on medical leave was to read a book a day and, even as sick as he was, he came close to accomplishing that, posting titles, details, and reviews about his latest reads.

Jason was a remarkable and unforgettable man. He wasn’t perfect, but then none of us are, but Jason was a survivor. We nearly lost him in 2020 when the Powassan Virus, a rare tick-borne illness, landed him in the Intensive Care Unit packed in ice with a fever of 107. The Powassan Virus caused encephalitis, a serious inflammation of the brain, which left Jason with some long term effects. Maybe his brain didn’t work quite as well as it had, his eidetic memory slipped sometimes, and he had to write things down in order to remember to do them, but we all joked that he was now closer to being like the rest of us normal humans.

But last spring, Jason became very ill and was eventually diagnosed with a very rare form of cancer that had no known cure and a dire prognosis. But we all knew what a survivor Jason was, so we believed that he would beat this cancer, just like he had beaten the Powassan Virus and encephalitis. We knew how brave, strong, and resilient he was.

For months he was in and out of the hospital, courageously fighting the deadly disease. His strong, handsome frame weakened as he received a variety of treatments. His wife, Amy Nocton, started a Caring Bridge for him, where she or Jason posted his health journey nearly every day. To get an idea of how wide a circle of family and friends Jason had, that Caring Bridge site has had 32,389 visits.

If courage and strength were all it took to survive cancer, he would still be with us. Jason had an abundance of both. But cancer is wily and deadly. Jason entered the Connecticut Hospice facility in Branford, Connecticut, looking out on a beautiful view of Long Island Sound, on Friday, November 22, 2024, surrounded by family who kept music playlists playing in the background. Sadly,

Jason passed away during a beautiful sunrise on Wednesday, November 27, 2024, to the sounds of Nora Jones’ Sunrise and Diana Krall’s version of It Had to Be You.

We do not know what lies beyond this mortal life, but I believe in a hereafter. I like to believe that when a loved one dies, especially when, like Jason, it’s far too early for them to go, it’s because their good energy is needed elsewhere - we just don’t know where. I like to think that Jason is still hiking in majestic forests, writing beautiful poems and other powerful pieces, and having a lively discussion with his favorite authors. Maybe he has finally met Nathaniel Hawthorne, a writer who helped shape his career and his life.

Hawthorne is quoted as saying, “I have not lived, but only dreamed about living.” That can never be said about Jason. He lived his life to the fullest, savoring every moment, every person, and every word. Life is not fair. Jason had so many more students left to inspire and far too many more books to read and words to write. No matter how long Jason had lived, it would never have been long enough, but he did live, and he lived well. We, all the people upon whom he had an impact, will remember him—with deep love and respect—always.

Happy trails, dear friend...

- Jane Cook, colleague and friend for 17 years



TEACHER
CONSULTANT
CONTEST WINNERS
&
HONORABLE
MENTIONS

Prose Fiction Winner

DARLIN DARLENE

Anna Muharem (SI '24)

Ashley and Justin had been married for three months, 2 weeks, and four days when their friend, John, called them with the best news.

"I just got a brand new listing and it's an absolute steal. Three bedrooms, 2.5 baths, center-hall colonial. And it's got water views," he said. "It's listed at \$350,000. The comps for that neighborhood are well over that. Someone in my office just sold a house three blocks away for 1.3 mil."

"What's wrong with it? Why is it so cheap?" Ashley asked.

"Honestly, I have no idea. It's a new house- they tore down the one that had been on the property and did a complete rebuild about 10 years ago. Do you want to go see it? At this price, it'll be gone by midnight!"

"Let's do it."

Justin came home from work at 2:00 pm and their appointment was at 2:30. By 2:28 they pulled into the driveway and looked up at the two-story colonial before them. It was bright yellow with white shutters and a flagstone walkway that led to a wide front porch.

The house did, in fact, have direct water views, as they could easily see the Pawcatuck River that eventually joins Little Narragansett Bay and flows into the Atlantic Ocean. The view was completely unobstructed, except for the few taller monuments that erected from the grounds of the cemetery across the street.

Maybe the cemetery was the reason that the house was priced so low?

Ashley and Justin didn't even go inside- they didn't need to. They looked at each other and then, in unison, announced to John, "We'll take it!".

It was on a Saturday, two weeks later, that Ashley and Justin decided to wrap up the painting and the cleaning for the day and enjoy their new porch. Ashley brought out a bottle of chilled rose and one of the new wine glasses that they had gotten from their wedding registry. Justin popped open an IPA. They sat on the top step, cheered each other, and took their first sips.

Ashley looked across at the cemetery. She had a moment of panic last night- what would it be like to live across the street from a cemetery? Would funerals cause much traffic? Would she be scared to go outside at night? But now, as the sun was setting, and she watched the few clouds in the sky soak in the pinks, purples, and oranges of the sunset, she felt at peace. The cemetery would remind her to not take this life for granted. She might even take walks in it, get to know the people who were there, learn their names.

She accepted Justin's extended hand and settled her head on his shoulder.

The cooler temperature of the evening brought the neighbors out. Older couples walked by, mothers and fathers pushed strollers, a child drove his bike as his sister followed next to him on her scooter. Each of them looked at Ashley and Justin, curious about the new young couple. One woman in particular walked alone and turned her head deliberately to stare at them.

Or, moreso, Justin,

Ashley was used to catching women stare at Justin. He was, in her opinion and apparently in the opinion of others, very good looking. He, of course, was oblivious.

Her husband. Her husband, Justin.

When they finished their drinks, they walked to

“Darlin Darlene”

the front door. She stepped inside, Justin locked the door, Ashley turned off the light.

“This is a ritual,” Ashley thought. “We are married and we will have rituals. This is one of them.” That night Ashley fell asleep next to her new husband in her new house, and it was the happiest that she had ever been.

Ashley got her morning run in early the next day before the warm weather turned muggy. She skipped up the steps and into the house. Thankfully, Justin was already awake and had turned on the air conditioning.

“Babe!”, he called to her from the kitchen. “You’ll never guess what just happened. While you were out, some woman came over and asked to borrow a cup of sugar. Can you believe that? Like how cliché is that? We’re literally living in a movie.”

Ashley stopped. “Babe! Are you serious? We don’t have any sugar! I haven’t bought any yet. Oh my God, we’re already making a terrible impression. What’s her name? Which one is her house? I’ll go out right now and buy some and bring it over to her.”

Justin walked over to her, wrapped his cool arms around her, and kissed her nose.

“I didn’t get her name. I don’t know which house is hers. And I think we’re fine.”

“I’m going to the store to get sugar.”

“Right” kiss “now?”

“Right” kiss “now.”

“Okay.”

There was no super store in town. There was a brick market where the entrance and the exit were right next to each other. When Ashley walked in she was greeted by a poster that told her who her friendly butcher was that day (Jimmy), who was in the bakery (Phillip), and who she might find behind the deli counter (Donna).

Ashley grabbed a basket and headed for the baking aisle. She grabbed three different types of sugar (straight up white, coconut, and light brown.. Justin had not specified what kind of sugar the neighbor had been looking for, and Ashley felt compelled to be the woman who had it all). She took all three to the register.

The girl checking her out was named Molly, as indicated by the nametag pinned to her maroon store vest. Ashley also decided that she wanted to be the person who could chit-chat with the 16-year-old cashier.

“Yea,” she began, as if they were already in a conversation. Molly’s eyes grew wide. “My husband and I just moved to town and my neighbor stopped over to

borrow some sugar. Well, I guess you don’t really borrow sugar since you can’t give it back!”. Oh God, she thought to herself, I’m flailing. Molly thinks I’m a total airhead.

But Molly stopped scanning and looked directly at Ashley.

“So you met Darlene,” she said.

“Darlene? Is that her name? My husband didn’t catch it,” Ashley answered.

“Your husband was the one she talked to?”

“Yes.”

Molly looked down, then away. Then back at Ashley.

“Um, Ma’am? I think that maybe you shouldn’t really talk to Darlene. At all. She can be...a lot.”

Ma’am? Yikes! That struck. Ashley was just getting used to being called Mrs., but now she was a ma’am? Embarrassed and flustered and suddenly feeling really old, Ashley shoved the sugar into her shopping bag and moved along.

“Thank you...Molly,” she mumbled.

When Ashley got home, Justin was in the backyard, assembling their new grill. He had opened a bottle of red wine and marinated a couple of steaks. Ashley put the sugar away in the cabinet, forgetting all about her interaction with Molly. She walked to the refrigerator to start putting together a salad.

Ashley ran farther than usual the next morning. She passed a coffee shop and decided to stop on the way back to grab some coffee and muffins for her and Justin. The door chimed as she opened it and the woman behind the counter looked up at her. She wore a yellow dress, white apron and her pad of guest checks was shoved into the front pocket. She stared at something on a clipboard.

“James,” she yelled to someone in the back. “She’s here.”

She’s here? Ashley was confused. Who’s here? Her?

A man came to the front through a swinging door that led to the kitchen. He looked Ashley up and down and sucked in his lips. He was portly, his white t-shirt stained from years of time spent behind a greasy grill. His white hair was barely there, his face was scrunched and red. But his eyes were soft and brown.

“There you are,” he began. “Me & Wanda’s been waitin’ for ‘ya.”

“I’m sorry?” Ashley answered.

“Yup. That’s my wife, Wanda.” He gestured over to Wanda.

“Hey,” said Wanda.

“Hi?” said Ashley.

“Seems you bought 405 South Main Street, ‘eh? Yellow house? White shutters? Kinda pretty in one of those old Disney movies way?”

Oh, okay, thought Ashley. It was weird that they knew this, but it looked like James and Wanda had probably been serving the people of this town for about 50 years, so of course a new face would be noticed.

“Yes!” she squealed, too chipper for her own ears, but excited that she was part of a community now where people wanted to know you.

“Heard your husband met Darlene,” James said. Wanda stopped staring and looked right at Ashley.

Darlene. Did Molly mention something about a Darlene?

“Darlin’ Darlene,” Wanda mumbled.

Ashley, annoyed, forgot her newlywed, new neighbor manners.

“Who the hell is Darlene?” she demanded.

James began.

“It was about 40, 45 years ago.”

“43 next month,” Wanda interrupted.

“Forty-three years ago. Wanda and me had just taken a trip down the aisle ourselves.”

He looked over at his wife and when their eyes met she winked at him. It baffled Ashley. “Darlene and Adam were the talk of Westerly. They were what you ‘all now call the ‘It Couple.’”

“I wasn’t impressed,” Wanda mumbled.

“I know, my mutton-chop. But you remember how the rest of the town was. You see, Adam was one of those trust-fund kids. His family bought up the coastline years ago- it’s gone into estate now. But anyone who wanted to build anything at all had to go through them. Even that fancy Lily Pewlitzer, Puhlitzers”

“Pulitzer, James,” helped Wanda.

“Pulitzer. Anyway, I thought Adam was an idiot. But they had everyone in town thinking they shit glitter. Built themselves a huge house over in Watch Hill, put a gate at the bottom of the driveway like they was too fancy to be bothered with people driving up their driveway. Didn’t matter though- every weekend that gate was open and that house was lit up like a Christmas Tree in July! Parties, music, drinking...”

Wanda had fallen into reverie over the memory. Ashley wondered for a moment what a young Wanda

looked like, young and all dressed up for a party on the beaches of Watch Hill.

“Then one day he goes ahead and buys Darlene a boat.”

“Darlin’ Darlene,” said Wanda.

“Yep. Named her Darlin’ Darlene. The whole town was jealous. Every husband heard it from their wives about why they didn’t buy them a boat and name it after them?”

“But that didn’t last too long,” said Wanda.

“Nope. Not too long at all, thank goodness. Turns out that Darlene wasn’t his only darlin. She came home from shopping one day and found him in bed with Marcy.”

“Whore.”

“Now Wanda...” he coaxed.

Wanda scowled at him.

“The next day,” James continued, “Adam and Marcy were gone. Took off. Never came back. Darlene was mortified. Didn’t show her face in town for weeks. Then one night she takes herself a bottle of that Vuvay Clink-Clink...”

“Veuve Clicquot, James...” corrected Wanda.

“Sure was,” he said. “Takes it right out on that boat and goes out on the ocean all by her lonesome. Storm came in. They found her and her empty bottle the next day.”

“Oh my God!” Ashley covered her mouth. “They revived her?”

“Nope.”

“Wait...then how...how is she coming to my house every day?”

James and Wanda looked at each other for a dramatic pause.

“She’s a ghost,” they said together.

Ashley waited for them to smile, crack up, laugh it up at her expense. It made sense- draw the new girl in and make a fool of her. Ashley didn’t know whether to laugh or leave.

But they didn’t laugh. They waited.

“You’re pulling my leg,” Ashley went along. “Very funny. I’ll let Justin know we’ve got some comedians in the neighborhood.”

Still, they waited.

“She can’t be a ghost. Justin would’ve known if she was transparent! She was a full human woman.”

““You ever seen a ghost to compare?” Wanda asked.

“She looks real. When Adam ran out on her, he took half her heart with him. That means that half her heart is still here, in the living world. Until she gets that back, she can’t move on,” explained James.

Why was this suddenly sounding feasible to Ashley?

“So how does she get the other half of her heart back?” she asked.

“She takes it from someone else- some other man. That’s why she’s coming after your Justin. If she can get him to cross over with her, she’ll be free.”

Ashley processed this for a second. She doubled over as the next thought popped into her mind and punched her in the gut.

“She’s going to try to kill Justin?”

For the first time, Wanda came out from behind the counter, walked over to Ashley, and put her hand on her back.

“Go home and protect your husband,” she said. “He’s going to need it.”

Ashley ran home faster than she ever had before. She took the stairs in one leap and threw herself at the door. There, face down in the foyer, lying in a small pool of blood, was Justin.

“Justin! Oh my God! My baby! Are you okay?” She ran to him and tried to slowly turn him. She breathed a sigh of relief when she heard him moan.

“Owww” he murmured softly. She got him on his back and noticed that the blood was coming from his nose. It didn’t look broken, but it was still bleeding. She grabbed an ice pack and gently placed it over the bridge.

“I don’t know what happened, Ash,” he started. “I was just walking down the stairs, or I guess kinda jogging down the stairs? Anyway, something just tripped me and I went crashing. It was like someone had tied a fishing line across the steps. Is something there?”

Ashley walked over to the stairs and inspected each one. No wire.

Darlene. It was starting.

But what now? Tell her husband that a ghost lady was trying to kill him? He’d think she was insane. He’d definitely divorce her. People divorced for much lesser reasons than crazy spouses. She’d keep this to herself and find a way to stop her. No way was she letting that ghost bitch take her husband.

Ashley got a washcloth and cleaned up her husband’s face. They walked over to the couch and she

settled him in with his head on the armrest and a pillow beneath his feet. Then she climbed in next to him and wrapped her arm around his chest.

Nope. No one was going to hurt Justin.

But Darlene sure did try.

Over the next few weeks, Ashley saw Darlene wherever she and Justin went. She’d never speak- she’d just be there, somewhere in the background, blending in with the living. And the following happened:

The brakes on his car temporarily stopped working while he was descending the hill that led into town. Luckily they kicked in right before he was about to hit a troop of campers. Ashley guessed that Darlene was selective about whom she murdered.

One night, to celebrate their one month anniversary in the house, Justin took Ashley out to a fancy restaurant. He ordered a steak and started to choke on the first bite. But the town physician was seated next to them and she initiated the heimlich maneuver. The steak popped out and hit Ashley in the eye. The rest of the restaurant cheered.

Finally, Darlene put a love letter addressed to Justin from a Secret Admirer in their mailbox. The police concluded that the letter itself contained traces of cyanide, which might have worked if Darlene herself had not written the word “POISON” on the envelope. Ashley surmised that while Darlene wanted to kill Justin, she didn’t want to hurt him.

Having had enough, Ashley returned to the diner to see James and Wanda. Wanda was standing in the same spot, holding the same clipboard.

“You were right!” Ashley said.

“James,” Wanda called. “She’s back.”

James pushed through the kitchen door with self-satisfaction. Ashley chose to ignore it. She needed his advice; he could keep his victory.

“I need to know. Did she ever actually kill anyone?” She pleaded.

This time, both James and Wanda came out from behind the counter. Wanda took Ashley’s hand and sat her down in a booth. They all scooted in.

“Came pretty close with Michael,” James began. “You know how that house of yours is practically brand new? Ten years ago, Darlene got a hold of some gasoline. Poured it all around the foundation and lit a match. Michael had been napping in the bedroom upstairs. By the time he woke up he had inhaled too much smoke. Put him in a coma. The firefighters got him out, but the

house was gone. He's still there up at Westerly Hospital."

Ashley noticed that Wanda squeezed her hand a little tighter. When she looked at her, there were tears in Wanda's hazel eyes.

"His wife, Judy, moved on. Got remarried and had two kids: boys. But she still comes to visit once in a while. No one blames her for moving on."

Wanda suddenly gasped as if she had been holding her breath.

"No one blames her," he said, but this time to Wanda. "He ain't never coming outta that." Wanda looked towards the window. James frowned.

"James!" Ashley drew their attention back to her. "What do I do?"

"We just got some news that might help," she said.

Wanda took a breath, looked at James, and began.

"Jimmy and I were just at the hospital. We visit Michael about once a week."

"Or twice, or sometimes three times for you," he winked at her knowing that she needed the gesture of affection. It worked. She smiled.

"And sometimes when we're there, we run into Nancy."

"We've known Nancy since forever. Now she's a nurse at Westerly," James added.

"Now?" Wanda laughed. "James, she's been a nurse there for about 30 years!"

"That long? Yeesh!". Ashley was getting impatient and Wanda sensed it.

"I was talking to Nancy and she told me that Adam's back. Turns out that he has that Lou Gehrig's disease," she said.

"Great ball player," James interrupted. "Sad that they had to go and name such an awful illness after him."

"Jimmy! They named it after him because he had it. It was his disease!" Wanda swatted his arm. Ashley pursed her lips.

"Anyways, Adam's been battling it a while, and he's almost ready to go. He's in hospice care now."

"So we were thinking that you could get them back together- him and Darlene. Get her to go to Adam's room. Heck, he's on his way out anyway!"

"James," Wanda scolded. "That's a terrible way to put it."

"But he might be right," Ashley said, suddenly wanting to grab Justin and run to visit an old man named Adam who was dying from Lou Gehrig's disease.

"Can I ask something? Why do you guys go to visit Michael so often?"

Wanda let go of Ashley's hand and Ashley thought she might have offended her. But then she saw Wanda take both of James's hands in hers and look into his eyes. Now they were both tearing up.

"He's our only son," she said.

Ashley sat at the kitchen table, scrolling through her phone, impatiently waiting for Justin to come home. She finally heard his key slide in and the jiggle of the door as it opened.

"Baby!" he called out to her.

"Hi babe," she said, taking his work bag out of his hands, and turning him back towards the door.

"I'm taking you someplace," she told him. "Someplace very very special. You can't ask any questions or you'll ruin it."

"Can I go to the bathroom first?" he asked.

"Nope. Hold it."

They got into the car and she drove the short distance to Westerly Hospital.

Nancy was on duty that night and Wanda and James had already told her the plan. She knew Ashley right away.

"He's a handsome one," she said, winking at Justin.

What is with the cougars in this town? Ashley thought.

Justin smiled and let out an appreciative laugh. He was confused about why Ashley had chosen a hospital as a "special place", but he didn't give her a hard time about it.

"He's in room 908. You can go in. He's nonverbal now, so don't be offended if he doesn't say hello to you."

Ashley walked into the darkened room. There lay a frail old man, hair full of white hair. He was hooked up to all the machines that chime and beep and glow with numbers that go up and down. She walked to the bottom of the bed and looked him over.

"Justin, this is Adam," she said.

"Hi Adam. Ash, who is this? Do you know him?"

In that moment, Ashley felt like she did, as if Adam and she had a connection that transcended time and familiarity. She wondered what he looked like when he was younger, what his voice sounded like, how a man so seemingly in love with his wife could leave her for someone else and disappear?

“Darlin Darlene”

He startled her when he woke up. For a split second she thought she'd have to introduce herself. What would she say? But then he simply sat up and straightened himself out.

Any hospice nurse can tell stories about how, often in the final hours of a patient's life, as they slowly transition (as death rarely happens in a single instant) from one world to the next, the patient will reach out their arms, sometimes to the ceiling (as if reaching to heaven), or forward, as if they are trying to touch a beloved family member who is there to welcome them to the other side. Doctors sometimes dismiss this behavior as confusion caused by hospital delirium.

But when Adam sat up, turned his head towards the door, and reached out his arms, Ashley knew who he was reaching for.

Darlene. She was standing just a few feet away from the bed, her eyes locked on her husband.

“My girl,” Adam said with perfect clarity.

“Adam? What are you...where have you... Adam?” It was the first time that Ashley heard Darlene's voice and she was startled by how young she sounded, how vulnerable, how broken-hearted.

Ashley stepped away, mesmerized by the scene. She watched as Darlene slowly walked over to Adam and took his hand in hers. They smiled at each other and he reached out to caress her face. Darlene leaned in to adjust her husband and she started to arrange his pillows, to make him more comfortable.

She took one out from behind him, fluffed it up, and then, with all of her might, covered his face with it and smothered him to death. His body resisted and jerked, but not much. And then it was still. Adam was dead. And now, finally and completely, so was Darlene.

She had reclaimed the other half of her heart.

“Holy crap!” cried Justin. “Babe! What the hell did we just see?”

Ashley turned to him, wrapped her arms around his neck, and gave him a kiss.

“We need to, like, call the cops! That lady just killed him.”

“No we don't.”

“We don't?”

“Nope.”

“What do we do?”

“Call Nancy,” she said.

Ashley took Justin's hand and they walked out of the room together. Nancy was at the nurse's station, and when she looked up, Ashley simply walked by and nodded at her. Nancy's face softened, knowing that something very tragic had ended and something wonderful had happened.

Justin tried asking questions on the way home, and Ashley promised him that she'd tell him everything- but not tonight.

That night Ashley fell asleep next to her new husband in her new house, and it was, for the second time in her life, the happiest that she had ever been.

Prose Fiction Honorable Mention

STOKED

Amanda Peterson (SI '23)

Chapter 1

Only two kinds of people stay behind when a hurricane is off-shore, surfers with a death wish and looters. I am one of the former. I'm also known as Bree Rixey the pro-teen surfer representing Myrtle Beach, SC. One week ago, before Hurricane Aurora hit, I had no idea I would add endangered species protector and crime buster to my resume.

The surf pushed extra hard against me in the frothy breakers on Monday of last week. My board slipped me under like the dolphins that sometimes glide below the waves. Who would even think of missing a sunrise ride like this- hurricane or not? Like always, I surfaced before the others and waited to see if Lillia and Marley made it through. The ocean was a little choppier than usual due to the incoming weather, so Marley and I, being three years older than Lillia, kept a constant watch on her.

Lillia is 14 and is a Myrtle Beach local, too. She's a former foster care kid, so she didn't have all the same advantages like swimming lessons and surf camp. She can swim, and her surfing is coming along, but undertows get a few people every year, so we watch her. By the state's definition, we are her kidnappers, but she refuses to return to the foster family- if you could call them that. Marley and I are not technically adults either, but social services has not noticed that we are missing because no one has bothered to report it. At least we look out for each other, especially in the water. Lillia loves the water, maybe a little too much.

Lillia surfaced sputtering but stoked and gleaming from the water reflecting dawn's light. She wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her Coastal Currents Surf Supply

rash guard and pointed out the sunrise to us. A sliver of blaze-orange spilled fuschia across the horizon line and reflected purple and pink on the frothy crests, all the colors were brighter than usual.

My best friend Marley grew up on an army base in Hawaii and prefers the ocean to land. She grinned at Lillia, her little surfing prodigy.

"Red sky in the morning, sailor's warning. Weather is coming," Marley called. We have been amped about the hurricane. Bad weather makes great waves.

We all waited to begin our daily dawn patrol imagining the huge barrels that could come with the weather change later today.

Lillia's yelp broke the meditation moment. "Shark." She exhaled the word like she had never used it before. "Eight feet! Pull up your legs."

"No way." Marley hated it when we fussed about sharks, but the undeniable shadow passed her close enough to touch. At that moment, I felt a gentle swirl of water hit my calf, and it was not from the undertow. Sharks are not a problem for surfers. They are there if the water is wet, and they are not an issue, but it is not wise to dangle your barbeque chicken-looking legs in front of them either. So we pulled up our dangling particples and tried to see through the agitated, murky water.

"No worries, girls, but we are in traffic. Just sit for a minute."

"What the hell is drawing them? This is not normal." Usually, the sharks don't loiter in "No fishing" zones by Springmaid Pier where there is no bloody chum. Sharks won't ignore the dinner bell of hooked fish and the waste from where the fishermen clean and fillet the fish. And

that is the only time they are dangerous because they might just mistake a surfer foot for an all-you-can-eat buffet nugget.

My board levitated and nearly flipped by a powerful bump from below. I could only assume was from another large shark. “Probably a nurse shark,” I called trying to calm myself. The cause of the congregation of predators was soon obvious; dozens of dead silver-bellied fish floated toward us from the pier. And worse yet, a giant green sea turtle, who must have just left the beach from laying her eggs, was floundering to stay afloat. I tried unsuccessfully to pull the 50-pounder onto my board while not becoming an unintended part of the shark’s feeding frenzy. “Marley, I have to get her to shore. Something is wrong with her.”

Chapter 2

Myrtle Beach is a well-known stop-off for criminals looking for a quick score, followed by sunshine and beer. There are so many delinquents that there is no reason to leave town immediately after a theft spree. The police are notoriously understaffed and uninterested in helping the tourists track down their stolen watches, cash, designer sunglasses, and purses. The criminal element all over the East Coast knows this and evil descends silently in April after spring break. The influx of visitors signals locals to batten down the hatches for the yearly purge.

Designer purses and petty theft were not what Crush and Squirrel had in mind. Little payouts were no longer sufficient for this enterprising pair. They had a new venture in mind. Kidnapping shih-tzus from wealthy neighborhoods in Miami and then “Finding” the “Missing” pups for a reward had been a fairly successful start to their animal trafficking business. That is until a retired octogenarian with a flamethrower decided to enact her Stand Your Ground rights when Squirrel posed as a local politician. The homeowner did not even know about his malintent for her beloved dachshund, Poquita Fuega. She just really hated Republicans.

So now they had a revised plan. Fewer teeth, less fire, and hopefully less interaction with the public.

“Explain to me again, why we had to go during a hurricane, Crush,” Squirrel inquired. “I mean, everybody knows the cops in Myrtle are too busy hitting on the cute Lithuanian lifeguards to notice us stealing turtle eggs.”

“It’s not the cops- it’s the tree huggers.” Crush angrily flexed his jail-quality tattooed triceps and smacked the steering wheel. “They are watching those nests 24/7.

They are called something like the Turtle Patrol- but not like Paw Patrol. They are hippies we don’t want on our butts. The only time those weirdos are not pulling a Horton Hatches the Egg is when the law evacuates them for a hurricane. That’s our only shot.”

“1,000 per egg on the black market and Google says there are 120 eggs in each nest.” Squirrel started to do some greedy math on a Popeyes napkin from the floorboard of their stolen 1985 Ford F-150. “That is a huge payout for getting a little wet and having to camp out on the beach for a few days.”

“God dang, we could do this once a year and live like kings in the Keys the rest of the year! And no teeth or flame throwers!” Crush imagined himself on a hammock with a pineapple drink in hand.

“Speaking of fire, can you pull off at the fireworks store? I have an idea for catching a seafood dinner when we get there.”

Chapter 3

One thing is agreed upon in Myrtle Beach- the careful protection of the green sea turtles who come to the area only once per year between May and June to lay up to 120 fragile and endangered eggs deep in the dunes. A fierce group of turtle enthusiasts called the North Myrtle Beach Sea Turtle Patrol mark off the nesting sites and give citations to any business owners with bright lights or obstructions for the hatchlings that would need to use the moonlight to guide them to the ocean after hatching. They knock over sandcastles faster than a toddler can say “Mommy, what is the mean lady doing?” as these constructions are death traps for the little hatchlings. They also raise funds to pay for a turtle rehabilitation program at the state park.

“The nature rehab center might not be open.” Marley sounded dejected as we washed ashore with the giant turtle writhing in pain. The rehab center was the turtle’s only chance. “And the turtle patrol are all civilians, so they have already evacuated and can’t help us find another center.”

Evacuation of the beachfront areas is a common occurrence. Because of the somewhat protruding coastal location, every storm that thinks about being called a hurricane makes landfall in the area. Locals haven’t seen anything catastrophic since the 90s when Hugo came ashore with 170 mph winds and a category 4 rating. City officials have learned to evacuate the coastline as a precaution and reduce liability. Even the Turtle Patrol had to leave.

Technically only emergency rescue workers are supposed to remain behind. Others always do, die-hards mostly, and crazy surfers. But no one would come if they called now. The hour for outside help had passed even though the storm was about five hours from landfall.

While I dragged the turtle that was only partly on my board on shore, I saw something out of place on the pier. Two men were stooped over. One of the hunched men was beet-red with sunburn under dirty ginger dreadlocks, and the other looked like Tarzan who had done some hard time. They were attempting to light a fuse.

Before they could drop it in the water, Bree shrieked, "Stop, no! What are you doing?" If the explosive went off underwater, it would cause a shock wave with a 100-meter kill radius for all marine life.

"Oh, God! Those lolos are fishing with explosives. That's illegal you dip-sticks!" Marley was halfway to shore in pursuit of the numbskulls when they realized they'd been caught and that other surfers had also arrived at the noisy scene.

The muscle-bound criminal threw the incriminating evidence into the waves below, dropped his still-lit Zippo lighter into his open backpack, and sprinted to escape before Marley and the other surfers could get to the pier. Five steps into his attempted getaway, the fireworks that remained in his backpack began a smokey, booming, crackling light. The excessively tatted and muscled miscreant, who was not in possession of the one brain cell the two men shared, did not immediately realize why he was under heavy fire and flailed in a confused circle spraying himself and his partner-in-crime with dazzling bursts of 2,000-degree pyrotechnics. He finally dropped the bag, only to have a half-dozen Roman candles escape- like spinning tops of hot vengeance in every direction. The twirling death stars seemed to be pursuing the men no matter how they tried to avoid the scorching assailants.

Marley stopped running and, like the rest of the bystanders, stared in awe at the beauty and horror of the scene.

The men jumped overboard and remained bobbing and bellowing a hundred feet offshore. Their shouts conveyed panic, pain, and confusion even if we could not hear their exact cries.

Marley's attention returned to me, Lillia, and the turtle.

"Do you think the nature center could still be open to help her?" Lillia's throat squeezed off the words.

"Diana's too much of an animal lover to leave, even with the hurricane coming. Won't leave for anything below a six, and the forecast says it is a three." I reminded her.

Dianna Laing is one of the only regular adults we know. She works for the nature center in the state park. The park has free air-conditioned bathrooms and local habitat classes for tourists taught by Dianna, a sweet soulful lady with gentle middle-aged features. She is a true zoologist. The center also houses all the endangered animals in rehab by the state park.

"Speaking of the hurricane, why are those idiots even in town? All the tourists were supposed to evacuate, and they are not local!" Lillia asked, clearly frustrated.

"Who knows, this place attracts messed-up weirdos." Marley reminded her. We all nodded at the unfortunate truth of Myrtle Beach.

"Yup, Murder Beach, right?" Lillia chimed in. Foster care had given her too much experience with how messed up people around here could be. Rampant fentanyl addiction, gangs, homelessness, and gentleman's clubs on every corner. It is not the family-friendly beach town the tourism commission would have anyone believe.

"We will tell Daniil, later. He will handle it. I don't even care how," Bree continued. Local mob justice is not nice to think about, but that is the only way to get things done.

Daniil is the boss at the surf shop where we all work and live. We give surf lessons to beginners on vacation, or banana boat rides to parties, and he keeps us fed, clothed, and protected from other riff-raff in the area. He doesn't mind employing underaged runaways because, for the Russian mob, illegal was and is business as usual. Technically, having teens work for shelter, food, and clothing is labor trafficking of minors and very illegal, but it works for us. Daniil is very territorial over his business and would chase those losers off for sure.

We hoisted the mother turtle into the brightly wrapped surf shop van and crossed our fingers we would not get pulled over. We would be committing more than one crime by driving on King's Highway now. First, we were supposed to be evacuated, being in Zone 1. Second, we had an endangered species in our possession, and you are never supposed to mess with the turtles or their eggs in the dunes. It is a federally protected species.

Unfortunately, the neon "Coastal Currents Surf Supply" advertisement and the nearly life-sized plastic

surfer riding on the van are not discrete. Miraculously, we arrived at the nature center as the first warm swashes of storm sprayed the shoreline.

We used a beach towel to drag our patient to the state park nature center where we came upon Diana building a sandbag barricade to protect from the advancing storm surge. She was mad-sad when she saw the injured patient painfully opening its beak and gasping for breath. She measured its vitals with graceful, sun-leathered hands. She is experienced with sea life. Her face grew serious when we relayed the events, and she reassured us.

“You did the right thing. With this weather, she couldn’t have survived being stuck on the surface. The explosion damaged all the internal organs that contained gasses and her eardrums were ruptured. She can’t submerge to get out of the worst of the waves. She would have drowned from exhaustion.” Diana glanced us over for the first time this visit. “Girls, I think you should hang out here for the storm. You shouldn’t be out in this either, and I suspect by your wetsuits that you are planning recklessness.”

“Mai hopohopo, Aunty.” Marley pleaded, “It’s a three-max. Besides, I surfed a lot bigger on Kona. This is the closest thing to surfing ever in Myrtle. We might even get to drop in.” Diana shook her head in concern.

“At least keep Lillia on shore.”

“Lillia stays on shore. We promise. We will come check on this poor girl after the weather. Hopefully, her eggs are safe, too.”

Chapter 4

Crush and Squirrel were fished out of the water by the same irate surfers who had earlier been chasing them. They would have received a brutal beating had they not already been a sobbing thrashing mess of misery. The surfer dudes did not know what to think of the display of wimpiness and moved on about their day.

Squirrel, the less burned of the two, made his way to a hotel lifeguard stand and broke into a medical kit. The two men then broke into an unlocked janitor’s closet to escape the rain and attempted to dress their soggy third-degree wounds in gauze and Doc McStuffins bandages too small to cover the huge raised blisters that were already oozing where the firework had seared through their clothes and then their skin. They swallowed all of the Aspirin in the case and took stock of the current situation.

“I don’t know if this is worth it. Maybe we should go back to stealing puppies,” Squirrel whined.

Crush, let out a slow cry, gathered himself, and replied with forced conviction. “When the painkillers kick in, we dig up the stupid eggs, deliver them to our guy, and get out of this hippy village of the damned and go back to the Keys.”

Squirrel rummaged through the lost and found bin attached to the hotel lifeguard stand and pulled out two children’s shovels, a bucket, and a sifting toy. “Turtle Time,” Squirrel said trying to sound tough and resolved.

Crush rolled his eyes, snatched the little shovel, and pushed past Squirrel with an unintended whimper. How were turtle eggs shaping up to be harder than puppies?

Chapter 5

With the turtle in safe hands, we rallied back at the surf shop for a pre-storm hype-up while the intensity of the storm outside gathered and sucked in a surge like I’ve never seen- even during a king tide. The backup generator kicked on in the shop, and Marley zoned in, describing how to take on a big wave.

“Timing is everything. Find a good set, drop in, and stay in the pocket. And Lillia, bail out if you have to. I want to get a barrel so bad. God, I miss that,” she panted as she squeezed into her wetsuit over her rash guard. We huddled at the door looking at the sea spray hiding the beach from view, and then at floating cars in the parking lot next door. I started a countdown from three. At two, Marley pushed open the glass doors that held back the pelting rain, and at one we were off shrieking like banshees racing to the shore.

Chapter 6

[Anchorman: Dion]

Good morning, Myrtle Beach! I am Dion McGill, with your latest hurricane updates. As you know Hurricane Aurora is bearing down on the South Carolina Coast. All of Zone 1 on the coast has been evacuated inland. But not everyone followed directives. We’ve got some daring, die-hard individuals here for the adrenaline rush—surfing during a Category 3 storm! Yes, unfortunately, some people need to learn the hard way. Let’s see what field reporter Laura McDermott can tell us about these daredevils.

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

Thanks, Dion. I’m standing here on the shore of what a few days ago was a sleepy beach town and tourist

attraction. The wind is beginning to pick up and has pushed the water levels 6 ft above normal as you can see by the official depth marker—right now we are only a few feet below where the devastating storm Hugo was 35 years ago. But that has not swayed some young surfers from taking advantage of the extra large waves, some as large as 10 ft. Common sense is not so common after all.

The camera cuts to two surfers one lanky teenage boy with black curly hair covering his face while attempting bodybuilder poses while riding a 10-foot wave. Another teen, wearing a “Make America Great Again” trucker hat, just down the shore is riding the same wave and flashing the hang ten sign to the camera. They are not just here for the waves, but also for their 15 minutes.

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

Dion, a Category 3 hurricane, is no tropical storm. Wind speeds could be from 111 to 129 miles per hour. That wind and the large waves it brings can create deadly projectiles out of ordinary objects and spin-off tornados and waterspouts, while the waves the young men are surfing on may contain hidden dangers that have washed off the shore. These boys are having fun, but what do you think, Dion, are you coming surfing later? Oh, hold on. Here come our surfer dudes now.

[Surfer: Ashton]

Yo, hey everybody, I'm Ashton! This is my pier. Nobody can ride these waves! These waves are gnarly! Me and Fierce are the best in Myrtle- Don't forget it!

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

Ashton, aren't you worried about your safety? There are no ambulances if you get hurt. The coast guard is nowhere near the shore if you get pulled out to sea.

[Ashton]

Totally, Ma'am Mrs. Reporter. But we are professionals. The danger is not the same for us.

Ashton squeezes Fierce around the shoulders and pulls him into the shot.

[Field Reporter: LauraMcDermott]

Momentarily stricken silent-then snaps back into her reporter tone

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott] Well, Ashton and Fierce, there is no arguing; you are something else!

Dion smirks and turns toward the front camera

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

Thank you, Laura, for risking your safety to bring us news from the coast. We, here at WMBF News, would like to remind you that we do not encourage our viewers to

leave their homes during the storm and stay far away from Zone 1. That's all for now, we will be back on the hour with more news.

Chapter 7

The peaks were extra unforgiving, but not bad compared to what Marley and I saw at Puerto Escondido, Santa Cruz, or Hawaii. We were both pro before losing funding. Marley's locally influential and well-off father still won't accept her “loser” surfer friends (me and Lillia), so he is going no-contact and no financial support. And without a wealthy benefactor, teaching lessons is the only way to get by and still do the thing we love most- riding radical swells.

The undertow was now hoovering all the beach sand to Atlantis, so we had Lillia recording our ride safely from the enclosed pier shelter. Marley was playing surfer Pac-man in the parking lot. The storm surge had breached the dunes, so she rode swells past the “Beware of Tsunami” warning that marked the beach area and into the parking area, narrowly missing benches, tipsy porta-potties, and trash cans. I briefly caught a mountain of a barrel only to bail out before hitting a portapotty fuselage. I spent the rest of the time being rag-dolled on the shore.

I could see Lillia through the strips of rain, taking wide pans up and down the shore recoding our wipeouts. The deluge finally made breathing possible only by pulling my rash guard over my mouth. At about that point, a water spout came ashore in the distance by 6th Avenue Pier, sucking up umbrellas and tourist trash and dropping it in the hotel pools. Marley and I tired quickly from the extreme wind and rain and had no desire to ride a water spout today. We sloshed through the breaking waves, laughing and grabbing each other to fight the tow. We stashed our boards and returned to the shop to wait out the worst of the storm.

When we arrived, the glass surf shop door whipped open and clanged but did not break. Everything here was built with even bigger hurricanes in mind. Also, the shop is a ways back from the water, 400 meters usually only 10 that day because of the storm surge. Some parking lots were flooded and car alarms sounded from all directions. Luckily, the shop is on steel-reinforced stilts. We dried off and settled in to watch the replay of the surfing.

Lillia laughed and gently nudged me when my big toilet wipeout came on. I was secretly proud that I had caught that swell at all, so the teasing was funny.

Marley stopped laughing and leaned into the screen, looking very closely at the footage of her ride. Then she paused it.

“Are they the same jerks from earlier?” Marley inquired, pointing to two figures on a dune in the background of Lillia’s panoramic footage shot from the pier.

“Oh, for crap’s sake. Are they doing what I think?” Lillia backed away with her hand over her mouth.

They were, it appeared, using an orange child’s sandcastle shovel and bucket to dig in the dunes. Marley played the image frame-by-frame. Blurred by the rain, the two hazy silhouettes dug into the damp sandy dunes and placed small delicate spheres into the bucket. Every time the ocean waves receded they would run back to the dune and dig vigorously, like a couple of overgrown sand fleas. The final waves pulled them under the pier where they clung like koalas to the splintered trying to climb to safety.

I felt my chest tighten. “Were they looting exotic turtle eggs while the sea turtle patrol is evacuated? Those scumbags!”

“That explains why those dinguses were on the pier earlier,” Marley concluded.

“American girls have the worst language.” We jumped off of the makeshift beach chair couch, surprised to hear a loud Russian man’s voice in the room. Albeit, a familiar one. Daniil has the habit of scaring the crap out of everyone by suddenly announcing his presence by speaking rather than by entering through a door like a normal person. He likes to move through evaporation and condensation.

“What are my favorite employees so worked up about?” Daniil asked, sipping his expensive bourbon and biting the end off of a Cuban cigar. “What? There is nothing better to do today. He shrugged and answered the un verbalized question of why he would smoke inside the shop. “So what are we so mad about today?” He asked again, putting his feet up on the glass display counter filled with knives and bongos, and tipping his chair backwards.

I relayed the story of the idiots with the fireworks who are stealing eggs. Daniil was poker-faced and listened attentively to the story. He cracked a smile when I described their fireworks exhibit, but then his eyes narrowed slightly when I got to the part about the egg heist.

Daniil for sure gives off a whole crime boss vibe. He worked his way up in the area by acquiring businesses for the mob through dirty dealings and blackmail. The most recent were some nice Canadians who spent their life

savings to open an ice cream shop. Daniil pretended to want to go into business with them and offered to pay for their expensive refrigerators if they would sign a contract with him that he could sell some of his products there. Unfortunately for them, that contract also indicated that he could pull out and demand immediate repayment for his investment at any time. Which he did at the exact moment he knew they would not have the money. They would either have to give him their portion of the business or lose their visas if he took them to court. It was a simple scheme that worked again and again, and now he owned most of the businesses in this area. We are grateful we are not on his bad side. In this town, you either have the protection of the Good-Old Boys Club or the Russian mob. And seeing as Marley’s dad was originally from an influential family in this area, and the two are not on good terms, we can only get employment from Daniil.

Marley and Lillia advocated for him to go full mob boss on the unwelcome turtle terrorists while Lillia was still examining the screen. “Here, look,” Lillia said, pointing to the end of the video. “I panned out at the end, but it looked like they went down 3rd Avenue after they climbed onto the pier. There can’t be many places open where they could have gone.”

We all looked at Daniil. He rolled his eyes at the implication that he would have to go out in this weather. Everyone looked at the shop window where the sopping wet fireworks flag slapped violently against the glass.

After a few moments of admiring the impressive wind, I turned to tell Daniil that I’d go looking for them after the storm, but when I turned back to where he was sitting, there was only the smoke of his cigar wafting up from a mermaid ashtray.

Chapter 8

Marley loved drama almost as much as hanging -ten. “Looks like it’s gonna go down between Daniil and those two dudes.” Marley was trying to look through the shop windows for where Daniil went. Lilia, couldn’t restrain her excitement. “We have to see this!”

“Right,” Marley agreed. “Daniil in action! The shop van’s gone; I guess he did not want to take Bently out in the storm.”

Just then, two drowned-looking surfers slammed their whole bodies on the shop door and began crying to come into the shop. Hurricane downpours come in waves, and these two were caught in a particularly bad swath. Fierce

and Ashton (now holding his “Make America Great Again” hat), pushed the limits way too far for extreme surfing and trying to make the news, and now looked shaken at their brush with Mother Nature.

Marley unlocked the door and the two grateful, half-drown, overgrown boys squished into the dry surf shop. They both avoided eye contact knowing that we were the last people they wanted to ask for help- having made a life’s work of picking on us whenever possible.

“You owe us big, Ashton,” Marley chided. “You are not even welcome here.”

“Thanks, Marley.” Fierce offered sheepishly while slyly slipping a Snickers off the display.

“Seriously, we would not have come if it had not been coming down so hard. We couldn’t even breathe, the rain was insane, and I’m not sure the van is even safe right now. Anything you need, just ask, We owe you.” Ashton promised while shaking his hat over the entry rug and slapping it unceremoniously on his bald head. Ashton it seems would wear that hat no matter what the circumstances.

“Kharma came for pay up, did she?” Marley had been waiting to confront the boys. “You almost drowned Lillia when you knocked her down in the shallows. You could have broken her neck.”

Lilia assessed the scars on her arms and legs where she had been dragged through what surfers call the washing machine, tumbled mercilessly over jagged rocks. Fierce, quietly sang to himself, “When your legs don’t work like they used to before

And I can’t sweep you off of your feet.”

“Not funny, Fierce. Lillia is only 14 and a beginner,” Bree hissed, pelting him with the contents of a bowl of mood rings. Fierce responded with a spasm of shadow-boxing in Bree’s direction.

“Look, surfing is not for little kids. You all brought her out there.” Ashton deflected.

“Aww, come on, you can’t take a little friendly competition,” Ashton continued. “You are always takin’ dibs on the best waves. You don’t think nobody should challenge you? Who died and made you Ms. Myrtle Beach?” Ashton’s reply revealed his real reason for being the nastiest wave burner in town. He is jealous of my and Marley’s world-traveling and competing on the teen pro-surfing circuit.

“Look, a surfer’s code is the same everywhere. First come, first serve. It’s not that we think we are better than

anybody else, and it is not rocket science.” I hate conflict, but wave burning is disrespectful and dangerous.

Fierce’s head buoys up over the tee shirt display to see how Ashton would react. It could be anything. A full body rage seizure or a silent cold shoulder. All attention turned to Ashton, and attention was what Ashton liked best. “Well,” he spits, “Once everyone sees how we saved those drowning lepers, we will see who are the best-known surfers in Myrtle. We are gonna be famous.”

“Leopards?” Fierce speaks his first word in the conversation quizzically.

“No those, weirdos that were caught on the pylons. These two homeless dudes were stuck and couldn’t get to shore. They looked pretty messed up and had sand buckets with rocks. I think they must have escaped from Little River Behavioral Center. Anyway, the news lady was filming it when we saved them.”

I felt my arm stiffen for a punch although I had never even thrown one in my life. “Those were not poorly vagrants, those were animal traffickers stealing turtle eggs. You assisted in exotic animal theft. You are not a hero.”

With Ashton and Fierce now essentially being felons in my opinion, I was ready to exit the shop at whatever cost. There was a lull in the storm, and I wanted to help Daniil hunt down those miscreants. “Ashton, you owe us. We want your van for an hour?”

The van fits the description of 50% of Amber Alerts. It was formerly used for selling ice cream, then fresh shrimp off of exit 12, and now is the boys’ home and only possession, so this was a huge ask.

Ashton shifted uneasily, he’d meant “anything” ... other than using the van when he offered a favor. “Do not take it through deep water. Or you will pay for it, Bree.” Fierce’s jaw dropped that Ashton had said yes. “And take Fierce with you.” Fierce’s whole body melted with dismay.

“Of course, come on, Fierce,” I said heading for the door. Fierce dragged his feet toward the door and slipped two more candy bars into his pocket on the way out glaring at Ashton from under curly jet-black hair. Fierce doesn’t say much, but you can always tell what he is thinking.

“There is no way I’m missing this,” Marley laughed, following them out the door. “Besides, I don’t think Daniil is interested in getting those eggs back to Dianna to be rehabbed- he just wants those goofballs out of his territory.” Lillia and Ashton looked at each other, shrugged, and followed us into the storm.

Chapter 9

Squirrel and Crush managed to pilfer five eggs from the nest before Nature nearly took them to their final resting place under the sea. They shimmied up the pier pilings while being pummeled by waves. Shimming up any pole is a challenge, but sun-splintered and barnacled pylons are cacti to the touch in the middle of a hurricane. They clung on as the waves ripped at them, trying to reclaim the precious turtle eggs in the child’s plastic bucket.

They had been reduced to needing rescue from two local surfers to get off the pier. After spending the better part of an hour being waterboarded by waves they were thoroughly trembling with exhaustion when the two teenaged surfers helped them to shore. They crawled painfully down Third Avenue in the direction of the exotic animal egg buyer rendezvous spot. Bloody oozing blisters were pinged by the needle raindrops, their clothing (soaked and full of burn holes) chafed at every sore spot, and the men moaned audibly with every movement.

Daniil might not have opened the door for the two men when they arrived as he easily could have mistaken them for the first two zombies in a fresh apocalypse had he not seen the telltale oval eggs in the orange sand buckets.

“Your lack of discretion was not appreciated.” Daniil hissed. “Ugh, come in. You will never come here again. Do you hear me? Stinking Americans. Fireworks? Disturbing the turtles? PETA is everywhere- you fools- never stir up the hippies! What am I going to do with only five eggs and a full shipment promised for tomorrow?”

Crush did not know what he had expected from their buyer, but this was not it. He could feel his anger rising. Squirrel was beyond feeling anything at that point and rocked back and forth in a dissociative state murmuring “It’s turtle time,” on repeat.

“Just give us what you owe,” said Crush, rising to meet the gaze of Daniil- who smirked back at him knowing Crush was trembling just to stand and that his bulky muscles meant nothing at this point.

“I’ll pay when you fill the order, now go.” Daniil kicked Squirrel, who was stooped in the fetal position, out the door and shoved Crush backward. The deadbolt clanged. The dejected men crossed three parking lots until they found an unlocked Kia to escape the barrage of water and wind. Safe for now, Crush pondered their bad luck and considered their next move.

Chapter 10

The smell of the van had not improved since graduating from housing discount shrimp off Socastee Blvd. The humidity of the storm revealed the full history of odors. Marley took the wheel, and Ashton stood behind her, holding onto her seat, critiquing every turn and gear change. Bree, Lilia, and Fierce pushed themselves onto the front seat to look out the wind.

I peered through the brief clearing of the windshield wipers. “Is that them? It has to be. No one else would be out here.” The two limping figures resembling Golumb moved from car to car trying doors. “But where are the buckets? We need to get the eggs back to Diana.”

It was Fierce who first noticed the ultraviolet grow lights. He had plenty of experience in indoor horticulture as Myrtle Beach still considered growing personal marijuana a crime. The bright lights were distinct through the cracks of the basement door of the ice cream shop. If the men had stashed the eggs, they were likely being stored under some UV incubators to keep them fertile. Lilia, Marley, and I hopped out to investigate while the guys “parked the car.” They peeled out and hydroplaned on bald tires down Kings Highway.

Chapter 11

[Anchorman: Dion]

Good afternoon, Myrtle Beach. I’m Dion McGill with your most up-to-date storm information. Things have taken a concerning turn as this hurricane has parked itself offshore directly southeast of us with the cooler currents pushing from the west, trapping the storm in a position to drop unprecedented levels of rain. How does it look from the street view, Laura?

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

As you can see, Dion, we have taken shelter on the third floor of the Springmade Hotel. The lobby is completely flooded.

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

What about our heroic surfers? Are they still enjoying the waves?

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

No, Dion. I’m afraid the party is over. Not only has everyone left the beach, but the beach is no longer even

visible. The storm surge has pushed water levels a full foot above the previous record. I only pray for the local community that the levy holds. No one anticipates storm surges like this to linger.

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

What would happen if the levees gave way?

[Field reporter: Laura McDermott]

The camera pans across the cityscape. Dion, all of these local businesses will be flooded.

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

We advise everyone to find higher ground if you are in Zone 1. Flash Floods are imminent. Stay safe Myrtle Beach. And stay safe, Laura.

Chapter 12

“What do we do? Knock?” Lillia asked shrugging. The girls sheltered from the rain in a bus stop waiting station.

“No, Lillia. Whoever buys stolen eggs is not going to hand them to us because we ask nicely. We have to sneak in.” Marley made a break for it and began testing all the windows and doors on the perimeter, finding the basement door ajar at the loading area where a U-Haul was parked and partially loaded with aquariums.

The room was damp and dingy. It had flooded with every king tide and had the stink to prove it. The ice cream machines had all been replaced by aquariums with exotic fish and reptiles.

Daniil’s cigar dropped from his mouth when we entered the basement. His surprise switched from shock to rage. “What now, the water is rising. We have to go now. Girls, grab those aquariums and load them. The roads are washing out and we need to get this shipment out. You should never have left the shop.”

“You are selling exotics?” I could not believe my eyes. Daniil scooped up handfuls of baby pythons and dropped them into a bucket. The first waves entered the basement, and the water climbed up our legs.

“I sell whatever pays. You get paid. What do you care? Get in the truck!”

“No, we have to get the eggs back to the rehab center, and all these animals will die if we leave them.

“You want to stay, stay!” he said and the door slammed and the lock clanged.

Marley banged the door and screamed after him, but soon the sound of a truck started up and pulled away from the building. “He is not serious, is he? The water. Oh my, God. What do we do?”

We huddled on the stairs and pounded on the locked basement door as the ocean seeped in from every bared-up egress window.

Chapter 13

A viral Kia hack was the only reason Crush was about to get their current vehicle in working order. Car theft was no part of his usual repertoire of crime skills. The toasty car heater was beginning to revive the soaked and miserable pair.

The water levels were rising, so it felt like it was time to leave Myrtle Beach for good. This had not panned out for them. Then, he saw Daniil pulling away in a moving truck, and something that he had never felt before welled up inside. He did not know exactly what he was going to do, but something was coming from deep inside and it caused him to grip the steering wheel and rev the engine. Someone would pay for what he went through- one way or another.

Chapter 14

We all huddled together at the top of the basement stairs. I calmed Lillia while Marley dived frantically to find a way out below the water line- now only a few feet from the first floor. Something was causing the water to rise. I yelled and banged for help, praying that Ashton and Fierce would return to pick us up and that they had even the slightest care for us. But based on past behavior, it was not likely.

Marley was dizzy after three separate attempts at finding an exit. She laid her head on my shoulder and sobbed. It was so unfair- all of it. The guys abandoning us after we helped them, Daniil locking us in here for trying to do the right thing, even Marley’s dad leaving us high and dry and kicking her out. Everyone let us down in the end. And now we were going to drown together betrayed and disappointed. But at least together. We huddled together and held on crying and waiting to run out of air space as the water climbed up to the ceiling.

Then I felt the basement door to the first-floor push against me, and Diana’s head poked through the opening. Lillia let out a scream of joy. Diana grabbed me by the arm and with almost no discussion, she pulled me

by the hand- Lillia and Marley followed, into the flooded ice cream store and out the front door. From there we swam to a nearby hotel and were pulled from the water by a news team who had been watching Diana’s rescue happen from above.

Later inside the hotel, my body convulsed with shock, and it occurred to me, “How did you know we needed you? How did you find us, Diana?”

“You didn’t respond to my texts about the turtle, so I thought you had gone to surf again. The news showed that we were going to have a deadly flash flood. I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t come looking for you. I saw the surf shop van outside the ice cream shop when the flooding started, and I broke in to search for you. I couldn’t see you anywhere, but I heard screams for help.

“You didn’t leave us?” Lillia had never looked so young like something had healed inside her at that moment. Diana wrapped Lillia in another towel to warm her and hugged her. “That’s not what friends do.” Not everyone had left us, and we still had each other. Lillia, Marley, and I still had each other, and Diana had been watching over us the whole time. Another batch of orphans she would never abandon.

Chapter 15

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

Welcome home, Myrtle Beach. I’m Dion McGill reporting on the aftermath of Hurricane Aurora. The flooding has receded in the last few days leaving destruction of property, but thankfully our citizens are pulling together to rebuild. Our field reporter Laura McDermott is on the ground to tell us more.

[Field Reporter: Laura McDermott]

Yes, Dion, the rebuilding effort is underway. FEMA is setting up at Socastee High School and Myrtle Beach Middle with supplies and assistance. Also, Ignite Myrtle Beach church, on Kings Highway, and Beach Church on Socastee Blvd., are providing warm clothing, food, and toiletries to whoever is in need. To donate please visit WMBF.com. Back to you, Dion.

[Anchorman: Dion McGill]

In stranger news, a high-speed chase between a stolen Kia Sorento and a rented U-Haul truck ended when the Army Core of Engineers rescued both overturned vehicles on the temporary floating bridge installed in advance of the hurricane. Two known petty criminals, who go by the

alias “Crush” and “Squirrel,” were arrested for reckless driving and assault with a motor vehicle for causing the crash.

But that is not where this story ends. The other vehicle was filled with exotic snakes, fish, and other endangered species heading for sale on the black market. The crash released the animals into the vehicle which complicated and delayed the rescue of animal trafficker Daniil Sokolov who was bitten, scratched, and squeezed by his trafficking victims for hours until animal control could arrive on the scene. Daniil and the animals were eventually rescued. The animals were transported to Myrtle Beach State Park Animal Rehab Center, and Daniil was transported to a local detention center. It seems some people have to learn the hard way.

Prose Nonfiction Winner

LOST FOREVER

Bini John (SI '24)

“Amma, can you make Neychor?” My younger one has had this butter smothered rice as her favourite food ever since her childhood. We often joke, even if she is asleep, a whiff of Neychor will wake her up and sit her on the dining table.

Wandering thoughts:

If you want to reach a goal, all you have to do is to follow the process. Do accurate measurements and proportions, you will succeed. But, this story is true only if you know where to go and what the steps are.

Step 1:

Take a deep pot which can contain 8 cups of water. You need two cups of raw basmati rice (well if you are like me, very specific, then 2 cups of Jeerakasala rice). The measurements of rice used in this recipe can yield 4 servings. Other ingredients are 4 cups of boiling water, 4 cloves, 1 inch cinnamon, 1 bay leaf, 2 tablespoons of butter or ghee, and 1 Tbsp of salt and fennel seeds.

Step 2:

Place the pot over low medium heat and add butter or ghee. Add cloves, cinnamon, and bay leaf. Lower the heat and add washed (wash rice thrice and drain) rice to the pot. Stir for another 2 minutes.

As the liquids evaporate, just like my dreams evaporate to the touch of reality, I add 4 cups of hot water to the pot and stir for one more time. While my dead dreams roll out of my eyes, I add 1 Tbsp of salt. I put a lid on my burning heart and the boiling pot.

This ghee rice is not for my daughters. It's for a friend's

family. My friend is not here in the US. She went to her tropical home last week. I do not envy her this time. I do not want to be there anytime soon. Her home is no longer home. How does one ever walk to a house where one's mother is in a freezing box?

Wandering thoughts:

I am employed. Not like that. I am well off. I came here out of choice. I knew I was going away. But years have passed and hearts have weakened. I want to go home. I want to be by my mom's side. I want to be just there. I am tired of holding the weight. The weight of the thought that I might one day walk into that house with a freezer coffin waiting for me. I need to be by my mom's side. I can go. Nobody is stopping me. Nothing around me is yearning for my attention. I am here, just like a log in the water. Yet, I cannot. If I go, where would my daughters go to sit in the light of nonjudgement? How would they sleep till noon and do nothing and yet be the most precious? Where would they have a day off from all the worries?

Step 3:

The rice will be ready to be served in 10 minutes. Don't worry, I will be smiling before even that. Remember, I have lids. The lids that are hardened heavy in years of effort of processing the thought, the thought that my life is no longer just being a daughter. I am an immigrant daughter. I am an immigrant daughter and a mother.

Wandering thoughts:

I am torn and trapped. I am a mother and daughter.

“Lost Forever”

They say, “when you become a mother you understand your mother”: I disagree, I am not thinking about how my mother mothered me. I am missing her. I send all my positive thoughts to her to keep her safe when I am not there. I feel the emptiness in her heart which I never filled. I can go fill it with my presence. I know that emptiness will then be mine. I will long for my daughters and their touch and their giggles and their presence. Between these worlds, I am lost, forever.

Notes:

Neychor: The buttery rice dish. Language malayalam.

2. Jeerakasala rice is native to the Wayanad district of Kerala, India.

Prose Nonfiction Honorable Mention

A CAVE IN KENTUCKY AND ITS EXPLOSIVE BAT POOP HELP "WIN" A DISTANT WAR

INSPIRED BY THE WRITING STYLE OF JOHN GREEN IN THE ANTHROPOCENE REVIEWED

Elizabeth Sangree (SI '24)

America has only officially been at peace for 17 of its 246 years. This means that, besides the “big boys” of the Civil War, World War II, etc, there have been a multitude of petty smaller wars featuring America trying to snatch land from other colonizers; America trying to increase its political or economic presence on the world stage; America trying to defend the honor of this or that dead guy.

One little-known and not very interesting war was the War of 1812, which was sort of an echo of the Revolutionary War paired with the idea of westward expansion and Manifest Destiny, and which featured us fighting against Great Britain (again) to be expansionist and get rid of Native Americans (again) to defend the idea of America as a country (again). And a cave in the deep backwoods of Kentucky has a story to tell about this war, which took place nowhere near this hilly and haunted wilderness area.

My husband and I stumbled across this cave by accident on our giant Honeymoon road trip of 2023. We quite literally happened upon Carter Caves State Park as we drove through a no-service, rough-rocked, heavily-wooded stretch of middle-of-nowhere-Upper-Kentucky. We were basically trusting our hearts in terms of trying to navigate south with no GPS and no map. Suddenly, I flailed my arms as we drove alongside a muddy roadside brook, seeing a telltale brown wooden sign with white writing pointing us uphill, and declared that I wanted to go see what it was like up there. We discovered at the visitor center that there were spots available to tour a subterranean cave for \$10 apiece, and thus we literally went down into history.

Our small band of tourists descended into the abyss via a strange above-ground portal: in a stone structure about the size of a car, lined with bars and resembling a jail, there was a metal staircase that sunk into the ground, the cool air of the subterranean cave blowing up at us. Once underground, the industrial-style lights on strings overhead and the kitschy antique mining tools placed around distract you from the fact that you’re in pure limestone that you know has a tendency to crumble. Our guide, an enthusiastic high schooler with a Kentucky accent, leads us through the low-roofed cave system and explains the history, geology, and ecology of the cave. She occasionally pauses to point out a mining cart that was left behind or a spot where a whole family lived for months underground, cookfire smoke streaks forever there to memorialize their habitation. There are wooden water pipes running at haphazard angles across the various low-roofed caverns you traverse and bits of rusty metal at the edges of each wall. Everything is scraped-chalk-looking, light brown and tan and white, shadows play in and out of our vision, and there is graffiti written in charcoal from the 1800s on the walls and tracks etched into the floor by mine carts and mysterious holes with fragments of rock partially concealing them. This cave is a monument...or a tomb?...to saltpeter.

Saltpeter, the weird old-timey word for potassium nitrate, is extremely valuable and still in wide use today. Apparently, according to a quick Google search, potassium nitrate’s modern uses include being a food preservative and additive, a fertilizer, and an oxidizer for fireworks and

“A Cave in Kentucky And Its Explosive Bat Poop Help “Win” A Distant War”

rockets. Fun fact: nitrates, both historical and synthetic modern ones, keep your meat products red! But, for the majority of human history, the appeal of saltpeter was not as a food preservative but as a key explosive ingredient in gunpowder. This Kentucky cave was an incredible source for saltpeter, with layers upon layers of it coating the floors, obscuring the cave floor and filling the whole expanse higher and higher like icing piped from a bag onto a cake. At some points, the clearance between the roof of the cave and the saltpeter deposits was unnavigable by humans. But, where did this saltpeter come from? Is it a mineral, or perhaps a surprising bit of waste from the formation of stalagmites and stalactites, or some sort of metal ore? No. It is an important component of bat shit.

Bat shit, or, if you want to be fancy and academic about it, bat guano, has its own storied history of being surprisingly interesting to humans. Today, scientists take cores of bat guano to learn more about paleoenvironmental factors (what pollen did bats pick up four thousand three hundred years ago?), but we were guano crazy long before this scientific process. Bat and bird shit were major motivations for European exploiters to head to the hinterland islands off the coast of South America, conquering not people, because nobody lives on these shitty rocks out in the ocean, but seabirds, because they stood on layers upon layers of their own guano. And in the 1930s, Bat Cave Mine in Arizona became U.S. Guano Corporation's cash crop, with bat guano being shipped worldwide and giant equipment getting trucked out to the remote desert.

Why so much passion for guano? The key reason why is that guano, both bird and bat, was once the only scaleable source of nitrogen, which is a key nutrient that all plants need to grow, and which must be added because it is not easy to find. Nitrogen cannot be easily generated from any plant source, and down-home efforts at fertilizer like adding cow shit or compost were not feasible on a larger scale, so, to feed the masses, humans had to look elsewhere. The early 20th century rush to discover artificial nitrogen to thus feed billions of people is its own insane rabbit hole to go down involving men choking to death on chlorine gas in holes in France, China meticulously collecting and saving the piss and shit of all of its people, factories exploding, Nazis, egomaniacs, and eutrophication...but let's not get into that now.

Incidentally, the name saltpeter comes from the old Latin “salpetra”, which means “salt of rock”, referring to salt deposits encrusting rocks. Looking around Saltpeter

Cave today, even after the extensive mining operation that went on throughout the 1800s and into the 1900s, encrustations of ancient bat shit can still be found in a thin yellow-white dust coating everything in the cave. Our enthusiastic high school guide explained that the cave is still a bat habitat today, with a great deal of protections in place to keep the bats stable despite humans' longstanding abuse of the cave. She also alluded to the Kentucky Cave Wars, which is yet another historical aside that I can't delve into, but which resulted in deaths due to backwoods battles over tourism!

So, this redneck cave in Kentucky was a goldmine, or a guanomine, I guess. And the people who lived in this cave, nameless to history, were collecting giant shitty blocks of it and mine-carting it up to the surface, not because they were interested in its fertilizer properties, or in paleoenvironmental cores, or in preserving food, or having vividly read hams, but instead in its explosive gunpowder-related properties. Bat guano on its own is not saltpeter— only about 12% of it is— so extracting the saltpeter from the shit was a whole other grotesque procedure after all the other hard work of mining it.

The basic process for extracting the saltpeter, the good shit, if you will, was basic in concept but hard to do: immerse the blocks of bat guano in water until it formed a combined slurry, then pump that cloudy calcium-nitrate water slurry to the surface, where you filter all the solid materials out with screens. Then, it is combined with wood ash and occasionally ox blood, gets filtered once more to eliminate the calcium and magnesium byproduct, and the remaining solution is then dried into crystals and crushed. Creating saltpeter was definitely a laborious process and a crude chain reaction of early chemical tinkering that makes one wonder who thought of this (the Arabs). And saltpeter is only an ingredient in gunpowder, not gunpowder itself! To achieve gunpowder to fend off the British in the War of 1812, America had to find sulfur and charcoal, too, so these compounds were extracted and added from other backwoods frontiers as this Kentucky saltpeter made its way down toward the Mississippi River and the fateful battle at New Orleans.

And about that battle, aptly named the Battle of New Orleans. In the war of 1812, America had to get creative as it mobilized its attacks on the British. One major challenge was the British Navy, which effectively blocked importation of almost everything into America, which meant that gunpowder for cannons and guns

was not available to the American military, which meant that crude homemade black powder was made from a multitude of backwoods citizens in the American frontier lands. Imagine being the guy who bought the cliffy, roadless, giant-treed land in the North of Kentucky, not expecting much in the way of farming, not sure if your northern territory counted as a slave state or if you felt morally obligated to holding slaves at all, not sure what to do with it after you axed all the massive trees, not sure how you could further exploit this land you stole from the native people there. Suddenly, America needs bat shit, and you've got these massive caverns below your feet.

The saltpeter starts flowing from Saltpeter Caves, not springing up with ease but instead through intense labor, as we've covered, and it rolls down the creeks and rivers in barrels and then bounces along in wagons on the dirt roads and then boats down the Mississippi, getting combined with the other two gunpowder ingredients in the process. And, on January 8th, 1815, the saltpeter from these caves exploded out of American cannons and muskets as Andrew Jackson, future president of the United States, led his troops in a sound ass-kicking of the British forces who outnumbered the Americans, were more highly trained than the Americans, and had way more experience, too. The battle lasted half an hour, the British screwed up their assault bigtime, and the American saltpeter propelled a swift victory with only 71 American casualties versus Britain's 2,000.

Don't dwell on the fact that the Battle of New Orleans was technically pointless because two weeks earlier Britain had signed a treaty to end the war, but the message hadn't traveled all the way to D.C. and been ratified yet. Never mind that the mechanisms of war and conquest and colonialism and sea battles set in place by the War of 1812 propelled America forward in slavery and stealing Native American land. Never mind all the masculine glory and dick measuring contests that permeate many concepts related to the War of 1812, or any war at all. Don't dwell on the fact that this battle made Andrew Jackson famous and propelled him into the presidency, with his racism and aggression becoming legendary. Don't worry about all that. Just think about the backwoods cave in Kentucky and the bats making their valuable shit, and the sheer effort elicited to help a fledgling nation, and the tourists like my husband and I who wander the caves to this day, stopping to think about shit and its spiderwebs of meaning exploding out across time and space. Think about all the

enthusiastic high school tour guides who tell a story the best they can and gloss over the scarier details like slavery or the finer details like chemistry in order to impart a small-town Kentucky pride. Listen for the protected bats of the modern day fluttering in and clicking gently and peacefully roosting. Look for their little brown bodies and their lacy wings, their shining eyes and their alert ears. This is what America is all about.

I give Carter Caves State Park 4.5/5 stars.

“To a growing two-year old, the boy who will become a man.”

P o e t r y W i n n e r

TO A GROWING TWO-YEAR OLD, THE BOY WHO WILL BECOME A MAN.

Margaret Bugingo (SI '24)

Chapati n'avoca.
Amashasa n' ibitochi.
Imineche n'umutobe.
I come from the land of 1000 hills.
Also, baseball and apple pie.
Yego and yes.

I am neither here nor there.
I am neither there nor here.
In many spaces I don't exist.

In the US my identity is black. Or white.
Am I white presenting?
Then white.
Black presenting?
Then black.
I am neither.
I am mixed.
Check the box.
No box for that.

Native language?
Guess it's other.
What is "other" anyways?
And why do they care?
They won't take time to learn.
Oh yeah vs. oya.
What a trip.

Beans and potatoes for lunch.
Who am I?
American Rwandan.
Afraid for my life.

My mama worries daily.
Of what I could become.
Not because of me.

No, she loves me so.
Because of them.
Statistics.

They talk about me in class.
Me.
The one at risk.
My mama visibly shudders.
She knows.
She worries.

I will grow in this culture.
I will know the language, the cadence, the style.
I will joke. I will dance. I will play.
Too loud. She worries.
Too tall.
She worries.
My skin color a weapon to them all.

The white ones at least.
They'll be afraid.

Watching my little body run down the road...
She worries.
I am only two years old.
She worries.

Don't go on their lawn.
Don't touch their kids.
Don't speak, don't breathe, don't jump, don't play.
For fear.

Freedom.
She whispers every night,
"You are safe, you are loved, you are free."
But she knows.
My freedom lives in these walls.
No home beyond.

Everyone loves me now.
My sweet little curls.
My deep brown eyes.
They tell me I'm handsome. I am.
Adorable. I am.
Love the curls. Of course, they do.

But all too soon they'll be afraid.
And fear drives anger. Resentment. Violence.
All too soon, the biracial boy will be a man.

P o e t r y H o n o r a b l e M e n t i o n

OPTICS

A *PRE-CAMBRIAN ORIGIN STORY OF SIGHT*

Joan Muller (SI '10)

What happens then?

First, they were dimples,
suggestion of a touch,
like tiny craters God left behind
after she felt in the dark for a pulse
in her first blind
single cell beings
for whom over time
---because she has nothing but---
she cleared the sooted air,
and behold,
the sensate dimples
feeling light from the sun
became lenses, eyes,
blinked,
sent themselves like palpations
reaching toward
wherever brightness
touched others of the world,
as if in wiping them with sight
they all became
a common surface,
as if this was the most reverent form
of gratitude returning her favor,
as if everything in the world
might
look out
for each other.

P o e t r y H o n o r a b l e M e n t i o n

THE LITTLE ARMY OF CHILDREN

Lorie DelGrosso (SI' 24)

Oh how the hot summer air scorched their faces! Pale skins cooked into a fine bronze, then turned red. Blisters formed on their foreheads, necks, and shoulders as they continued to drift towards the capital building. The discreet breeze did little to compensate for the suns abusive rays. However, despite their shared and searing pain, a slow song spawned within the bowels of the marching army. Their lyrics diluted the sounds of sirens that surrounded them. A million voices declined to be silent, instead choosing to bestow a volume of musical fury upon their oppressors. Onward past the dogmatic ranks of plexi-glass shields and clouds of tear gas, they chanted, "Impeach the crown! Reclaim the throne!"

Even the loud thundering of concussion grenades failed to postpone the army's advancement. In the eyes of the kingdom, they were fanatics. In the eyes of the fanatics, they were heroic.

Behold the little army of children, afloat on a sea of rebellion, adrift in the currents of change, lost in a world of revolution.

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ODE TO TUESDAY

Anna Muharem (SI' 24)

I didn't see it coming
and there's no way I could have stopped it.
But when I finally figured it out,
it was more real than anything I had ever felt.

It came on slowly-
the flame didn't begin as a spark.
It was always there, gentle
a lovely tapered candle
a soft flicker.

And once I saw it,
I felt it,
and once I felt it,
I knew it.

I was so in love.
Love that was pure, kind, easy

I was in love.
Love that gave me grace, time, sometimes joy.

I was in love
with Tuesdays.

Oh I hear you in the back!

“Ode to Tuesday”

Tuesdays?

Not the raven haired beauty of Friday?
Wit, humor, charisma- everyone wanted Friday.
Elusive, enigmatic
work through her and then sit back and enjoy her.
She was potent and powerful and you lusted after her
minutes
because she took herself away at midnight and dan-
gled the distant promise of herself on your marked up
calendar.
Yea...you sigh...Friday.

Or what about Saturday?
Doesn't his rugged handsomeness,
His calloused hands,
His scruffy “I'm not shaving today” beard do it for you?
He can do anything!
Digging a garden? Saturday!
Renovating your bathroom? Saturday!
Man oh man...Saturday.

Or even Thursday?
Sexy, sultry Thursday?
With his goatee and hipster glasses,
thoughtful, provocative
reflective, always wondering how it will all end.
Looking deep into your psyche and forcing you to
question
Did you do enough? Are you enough?
Phew! Give me a minute here...Thursday!

No.
Tuesday.

For Monday is the liminal space that pulls me from all
that I love:
bed, family, home.
Monday sets me in motion, pushes me forward, spins
me around
nauseates me.
I begin Monday planning for its end.

Wednesday is the thorax of the butterfly-

the moody middle child.
Wednesday is a hill upwards and a slide downwards
unpredictable, erratic.
I can't play a wild card in the middle of the week.

Thursday.
Thuuuurrrrrsssday.
Lettttthhurrsssday.
Lethhaaarrrrggggicc.
Thursday.

Friday! WOO! FRIDAY! WOO!
I have so much planned for you Friday!
I will go to happy hour with friends!
I will go out to a lovely dinner and eat steak!
I will find a KARAOKE BAR!

No I won't.
I'll go home, change into pajamas.
Open a bottle of red wine, climb on the couch.
Order a pizza.
Pass me the pepperoni.

Saturday is here and I can do everything!
Wake-up-makemybed-gatherthelaundrybasket-remind-
myselftocleanthebathroom-godownstairs-throwthelaun-
dryinthewash-putoutpaperplatesforthe pancakes-ma-
kethepancakes-callthekidstoeatthe pancakes-cleanup-
thepancakes-writethegrocerylist-getthesoccerbag-drive-
tosoccer-watchthesoccer-forgetthegrocerylist-buyran-
domstuff-gohome-cleanthebathroomwithlavendar-
scents-makethemacaronisaladforthepicnicIhavetobeat-
at3-realizeIdon'thavealltheingredientsbecauseIforgot-
thegrocerylist-gotothepicnicat3withalacklustermacaro-
nisalad.

Sunday is relaxing...relaxing!
But I forgot how to relax
in the late 1990s.
So I drink a glass of wine (or three!).
Nap.
Wake up angry with so much to do to get ready for the
week.

“Ode to Tuesday”

Tuesday.
Sweet girl Tuesday.
Glorious Tuesday.

I say your name and I exhale.
You whisper me awake:
“No one expects much from you today!”
You have no plans with friends that you wish you never
made,
There are no deadlines today.

No one cleans their house on a Tuesday.

Go get cheap tacos somewhere.
Wash them down with a \$5 margarita
(just one because it's Tuesday).

Put on your Katy Perry, Gaga, and Shakira
Dance around the house as you cook dinner with all of
the ingredients.

Or maybe meditate?
A little yoga?
Read some of your book?
Breathe.
Relax.

Do whatever you want.
It's Tuesday.

2024 Summer Fellows

MIRROR**Bini John (SI' 24)**

The blue hue of the saree on the ironing board reminded me of the Spring sky. I held the iron box gently as I smoothed the soft folds and enjoyed the feel of fine silk at my fingertips. It is a rare thing these days for me to wear a saree. For years, it has been my only daytime outfit but now, draping a saree is just as rare as the sighting of a fox in a town square. I lifted the light fabric and pressed it to my chest as I absorbed the warmth and then felt for the end to fold it. My fingers drifted along the borders and before it could reach the tip, my phone buzzed.

My youngest daughter's smile appeared on the flashing screen as a smile broadened my lips. I knew what the request be. "Can we stay for another 30 minutes", as usual, will be the request. The two of them, my girls, ever since the older one has been a college student, act like they don't get enough of each other. All night, when both are home, giggles and whispers float in the air. Loud music and impromptu dance recitals fill the living room during the day. They go outside, they bake, and they fill our lives. Ready with an answer wrapped in an upbeat tone that they cannot delay returning as they have to get ready for the evening, I accepted the call.

"I got picked up" her voice trembled. The confusion withered my smile and my mouth froze with the words that my brain did not supply. Instead of giving me a quick response, it tried to make sense of the words and the context. So, helplessly, my mouth formed the most obvious response of confusion, "What?". But this time a masculine voice greeted me. That was a greeting with no pleasing message. My brain refused what it had to comprehend. My precious, well-raised, daughters got picked up for shoplifting. An act of theft. The store manager explained how this was a minor one in their usual experience and they would not report it to the police. The consequence is that she will be detained from the store for a few months. My daughters stole some make-up! As my apologies were raised to the manager my thoughts ran adrift. I get

them what they want, they work and have money in their accounts, they go to the mall to buy a dress, and they tell me that they are done shopping. The manager listed the things they stole and I wish I could recollect them for you to know. My ears were closed with wax of disbelief and my senses were all trying to hold the unfamiliar experience in their way. My skin felt the flash of winter air piercing through to freeze my blood and my eyes burned my shock down to my cheeks. "I will call you in few minutes" the familiar voice returned to my ears. Words did not find a place in my mouth and gave none as a reply. I ended the call.

The mall is twenty minutes away. I thought some math would help as I calculated their ETA. In half an hour I have to have a response, a plan, and a consequence suitable for the action. I dredged through every piece of knowledge that I had about parenting. The past nineteen years seem to have evaporated with nothing left to walk me through. I stood there in complete ignorance of how to deal with this. The hands of the wall clock forced me to move, and my body decided to do otherwise. Familiar experiences, of mine or others, books and literary characters, ancestral knowledge, I searched and found nothing that guides me forward.

Is this my fault, the mirror asked as I tried to devise my plan. As the garage door rolled up, I stepped to the corner of my bedroom hiding under my helplessness. I hoped that they are not coming straight away to apologize, even though I yearned that they would be apologetic. I did not want to face them as the mother who failed to raise them with the moral values that they should possess. I felt like a betrayer of my own ancestors and my own existence. I am the Judas of my family.

A conversation from decades ago filled my thoughts. As I peered through, I saw my uncle opening my grandpa's wallet. My grandpa's stern voice filled the room. "Your values are what define your existence. Honesty should be the foremost. Always hold them dear to you." He then turned to the 4-year-old me and said, "This is our value. We are honest. Remember that". Did I not repeat that to my children? Did I not live it for them to see? I sighed.

I slowly lifted my saree and wound it around me. In another hour we need to leave. I sighed in relief. For another four or five hours we will not be alone with ourselves. I might come up with a response and a plan by then. I hoped.

2024 Summer Fellows

WHEN THE MORNING COMES

Emma Kraner (SI’ 24)

When the morning comes,
I’ll be looking for a way home
where pine cones scatter instead of plastic bags.

I’ll be looking for a way. Home,
where pine cones scatter. Instead of plastic bags,
we will lay our heads in beech leaves.

Where pine cones scatter instead of plastic bags,
we will lay our heads. In beech leaves,
we will make medicine for loneliness.

We will lay our heads in beech leaves;
we will make medicine. For loneliness,
we are building a green terrace.

We will make medicine for loneliness:
we are building a green terrace,
like our mothers always asked.

We are building a green terrace.
Like our mothers always asked,
Promise you’ll find luck in golden fields?

Like our mothers always asked,
Promise you’ll find luck in golden fields?
Will you borrow our recipes in the future?

Promise you’ll find luck in golden fields?
Will you borrow our recipes? In the future,
under an overpass of cumulus, we swallow our doubt.

Will you borrow our recipes, in the future,
under an overpass of cumulus? We swallow our doubt
with tabs of acid rain. We style our hair like duchesses.

Under an overpass of cumulus, we swallow our doubt;
with tabs of acid rain, we style our hair like duchesses;
holding sisters’ hands, we look for the way home.

2024 Summer Fellows

APPALACHIAN JUXTAPOSITION

Elizabeth Sangree (SI' 24)

The smell of shit with a certain industrial quality to it hit us like a realization. We had been meandering through miniscule dirt roads in the Appalachian Mountains, intentionally avoiding not only highways but also actively seeking a lack of pavement whatsoever, and now we were descending into a town and a promise of the shittiness of mankind.

In the early years of our dating we took these road trips through Appalachia on our way to his parents' Disney timeshare, basking in a week of getting to know each other and seeing a haunted and fascinating side of America. The sleeping, shaggy, verdant brilliance of the mountains of West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky still permeate through my dreams. These trips really connected us, cementing us as a couple, and they were the genesis of our larger, wilder, Western-themed road trips that we pursued in our later 20s. Now, at 30, I've driven to every state besides the one you can't drive to.

These Appalachian trips are so burned into my mind because of the stark juxtaposition of the American Dream and the shattering of it; of real nature and fake Disney; of forgotten history and placeless McMansion architecture. Once we made it to the Disney timeshare, I dwelled on the final contrast: his family's pursuit of appearances and consumerism versus the unvarnished genuine simplicity between Alex and I, the symbolism of what we sought out in the world versus what they sought out. On the way, in seeing the backwoods, redneck side of East-coast America, we saw true America under the makeup. Once there, on seeing Disney and Orlando and Florida generally, we saw true America all dressed up for a night out.

This smell, this place, this descent was only one of many contrasts, and we only brief witnesses to a little town tucked away in the middle of nowhere. We descended from the mountains, probably in Virginia, maybe in Tennessee, and then it was like we went beneath a blanket that hung death-like in the valley below. It smelled like shit mixed with decay mixed with that cloying chlorine smell, but mostly it was reminiscent of sewage.

"What IS that?" we asked, as we hit the bottom of the valley and drove through a proud little town with cracked pavement and sons sent off to war in banners on the lamp-posts and little baby boomer houses squatting in the sunlight. We made a final turn and there it was, splayed out before us in the final dip of the valley—a sprawling brick monolith of a factory with all the accouterments—gargantuan smokestacks, cars in a defeated parking lot, no windows and rusty metal outbuildings slapped on throughout and pipework like arteries pixelating across the air. We found the huge sign out front, which announced that this was a cardboard factory. The smell of cardboard being made is the smell that seeped into every atom of that town.

I'll never forget the purity of the mountain area juxtaposed with the sudden industrial wasteland like a cancerous blip in the valley below, and the smell of that town. I'll never forget the conflicting feelings swirling in me, the questions—were the people in this town proud and happy, because they had jobs? When Amazon boasts how it switched from styrofoam to cardboard, does anyone pause and think about where cardboard comes from? Did these mountains lose some of their verve when the pollutants came to town? Did the nature we just emerged from, the green tunnels and the roadside springs and the birds singing up high, know that this was here? Does mountaintop removal parallel this, or is it worse than this? Do the townspeople know that everything is shitty, or do they think otherwise because they can't smell what's in the air?

And the bigger questions, of course, streamed in, too, and we lazily batted these questions back and forth with no answers as we drove through. We were just passing through, we were just witnesses and "huh, how about that?," we were just the question askers and the ponderers here, not the participants. We asked, what is up with humanity, what is up with the environment, and is it possible for man to exist without shittifying the air and shitting up the streams and shitting up the entire landscape until the earth is just one big wasteland dedicated to us and our multiplying of ourselves?

The simplistic feelings, besides the questions, the thing you would tell to a child as a lesson about environmentalism, as the Lorax, was that simple, initial contrast, as we descended the mountain, as the smell hit us, as we started to realize that industrialization was here. The story of how humans treat the environment, now and always, and what is our role here, exactly, on this, our only planet? Us versus nature. Contrast.

TWO RIGHTS AND A PONY

Lorie DelGrosso (SI' 24)

I was on the long, yellow, school bus with a bus driver named Charlie. He always had black shirts on with lightning and heavy rock band's names sprawled across the front. His arms were frail and tanned and he very well may be the first elderly man I can remember with tattoos on his arms. I got on the bus, like I did everyday to go home and we drove the few miles from school to my house. Two right turns. My face was pressed against the window when I heard shrieks and noise coming from all around me. There, at my bus stop, was my father and a pony. He held the red reins to a white horse patched in black and brown. My stomach dropped and then butterflies filled my belly in its place. What is happening? I remember asking, What is this? I didn't understand what this creature was doing there and I remember my father's smile underneath his mustache.

The only explanation for the smile plastered across his face is that daddy's girls are a real thing; I am a daddy's girl. I am the reason that gave my father a second life he didn't expect. I was a happy accident and not at all planned but I know that I changed my parent's world, especially my father's. He was just a small-town, rural guy working in his father's restaurant when he met my mother. He drove fast cars and crashed them pretty frequently. His charm and devilish good looks marked him as trouble, which he enjoyed causing. He may not have realized that his reign of terror and smoking Kool cigarettes would be coming to an abrupt end after meeting her because she would become pregnant with me. From what I have heard, this bad boy turned into a hard working man in anticipation for his daughter. When I arrived into this world, I was greeted by loving parents. "Look at her lips, John," were the first words my mother said to him as I was enfolded in his arms. And from that moment on, I was a

daddy's girl. My father dedicated himself to being a father. I continue to say father because anyone can be a dad, but a father is something more important- the word means more. He got himself a job as a Connecticut Correctional Officer at the age of 40 to better provide for us. He would wake up at 2:30 in the morning to go to work to a job with substantial benefits and a high suicide rate. He would still come home, indubitably tired, and drive me to skating lessons every week or take me on lunch dates to Paul's Pasta where I would always order lobster ravioli with alfredo sauce. He taught me how to drive an ATV when I was far too young to be driving. He would crawl around on the floor with me as I tumbled and wriggled over him, no doubt uncomfortably. He brought me home a turtle the size of a quarter, which we named Fred. He also got me a little, black lab puppy, tiny enough to hold in my arms but too heavy to cradle at seven years old. I suppose it wasn't odd for my father to frequently gift me animals since we lived on forty-six sprawling acres, but I never expected to get off the bus to a small horse, the biggest of animals I'd received yet.

Grinning ear to ear, I walked through the center aisle of the bus, stepping over sneakers and backpacks in my way. The aisle never felt more narrow or longer than it did then. The anticipation was buzzing through my body as I waited for Charlie to nod for me to cross the street as I was held back by the bus's long yellow arm, blocking my way into the road. I crossed the asphalt in a hurry, excitement suffocating my tiny little body. Giddy, exhilarated, thrilled. Standing on the pavement in front of my father- that is when I learned that this was my pony now, and her name was Patches. What kind of little girl actually gets a pony? A daddy's girl, I guess.

HONOR THE UNIVERSE

Margaret Bugingo (SI' 24)

The world is on fire.
And yet, all I see, is beauty,
Blue, blue, blue beauty

The hydrangas call upon me
The gardens tantalize me,
The waves welcome me,
The world is waiting, waiting for us to live.

To live alongside it.
To live at peace with nature and love and joy and earth.
But instead, we fight it.

Poisons in our food,
Plastics in our water,
Trash killing animals,
Tourists killing reefs,
When will it end?

The destruction we rain upon the earth circles back.

Newton said,
Energy is forever,
We cannot destroy.

We destroy one another.
We destroy the earth.
And in that, the earth destroys us.

It's only a matter of time...
For when something has been created,
Only the creator can destroy.

INTERVIEWS WITH
SUMMER INSTITUTE
MINI-GRANT
RECIPIENTS

2024 Mini-Grant Recipients

ANNA MUHAREM

(SI' 24)

The most impactful lessons that I learned during the CWP were the discussion strategies and the creative writing exercises. I've always struggled with the idea that I have content that needs to be "covered" and things my students "need to read", but then what do I "do" with these readings that engage my students in meaningful ways and give them opportunities to practice reading and writing skills? It's great to have a cache of activities that I can pull from.

Aside from the discussion protocols, I've experimented with assigning more creative pieces this year, and my students are very receptive to these experiences. For example, I modeled the *zuihitsu* poem model for them that we learned from Danielle Pieratti and I had them write their own. Some of them did exceptionally well and were really surprised at how good their poems came out. I'm also better at making sure that my students turn in reflections with their writing so that they can think about where their ideas come from and how they revised their work from beginning to end. Our school publishes a literary magazine every year and, as part of the reflection, I ask my students if they'd like to publish their work. Many students who have never seen themselves as writers before are now willing to publish! I think that's really cool.

I used some of the mini-grant to attend the CWP Writer's Retreat at the Trinity Retreat Center and it was great to meet up with one of the other women who attended the Summer Institute (Bini John). I have not spent all of my mini-grant, as I'd like to purchase poetry books, essay collections, and children's books for independent reading, but I want to take my time in choosing which ones I want to invest in.

It seems outside of how the grant is typically used, but I invested in plastic cereal containers and mini snack bags to have on-hand in my classroom. I keep the containers full of cereal, and the kids can use the snack bags to help themselves when they come to class. I teach teenagers, and sometimes they come to class hungry. They are very appreciative of any food I provide. Since I have many students with 504 or IEP plans specifically for ADHD,

snacking on something really does help them focus.

This past Election Day, I delivered professional development to my English Department based on some of the things that I learned from the CWP. My colleagues really enjoyed it and I had a great time sharing with them. This summer I plan to look into programs to earn a degree in Educational Leadership. I would likely put some of my mini-grant towards that endeavor. I am on the Leadership Counsel with Jane Cook, AB, Bini John, and a few other educators, and I have volunteered to judge the Student Writing Contests.

EMMA KRAMER

(SI '24)

The theme that keeps coming up for me is learning how to better use writing to help students understand their own identities. Through the demonstration workshops we took part in, I got a lot of lesson plan ideas. One of my favorite lessons on identity included sentence starters for students to write autobiographical poems. I was able to use inspiration from that workshop with my 11th graders when they wrote creative nonfiction this fall.

I used my grant to fund my attendance to the NCTE Conference in Boston. It was meaningful to hear from other teachers and authors on how they plan address important issues for today's students. Attending the conference reinforced how important teaching writing is. I'm still working my way through materials and texts I discovered there, and I feel especially excited about new YA books I might introduce my students too.

I feel like I received a heavy dose of professional wisdom from being around the other teachers, which speaks to the community that Jason, Jane, Kelly and Pat creates. The many talented teachers of writing at the Institute opened up possibilities for who I can be as a teacher. Looking ahead, for future writing workshops, would love to use an inclusive model inspired by what I've learned at the Summer Institute.

2024 Mini-Grant Recipients

ELIZABETH SANGREE (SI' 24)

The 2024 CWP Summer Institute taught me the power of daily writing practice combined with peer response groups. Writing every day, revising, and receiving constructive feedback from other educators allowed me to see my own work through fresh perspectives. I had a great time writing unhinged nonfiction explorations, and the peer response groups made me feel worthy of pursuing my long-dormant writing skills. This fall, I incorporated the peer response group strategy intensively with my medium-level 12th graders, flipping our boring college admissions essay writing unit into a peer-driven, Ann Lamott-inspired, brave circle of writing and editing.

Receiving a mini-grant was instrumental in helping me implement innovative strategies in my teaching, and the versatility of the grant has been splendid. So far, I have used the mini-grant to help my Debate Club students prepare for and go to an otherwise off-limits tournament; I have purchased notebooks and decorating materials for my 10th grade students to create and take pride in their own personalized daily journals; and I have bought a mentor text -- Station 11 by Emily St. John Mandel -- to try out with my 12th graders this spring. I look forward to applying the grant further this year!

The CWP Summer Institute has certainly inspired me to continue to evolve as an educator. Hearing other teachers' ideas for keeping the writing process relevant and relatable has helped me to not feel defeated by the rise of AI in "student writing". I know that each generation of student I get will be increasingly like a lost person feeling blindly about in a dark room, unable to read or write for themselves because they have had AI writing for them and generic AI lesson plans taught to them. They will be in the dark on the possibilities of reading and writing beyond the mundane and oversimplified. The CWPSI helped me embrace the messiness, zaniness, and unwieldiness of the writing process for myself, and I want to instill a love for this type of synthesis with my students.

LORIE SCOVICH (SI '24)

One of the most impactful lessons I took away from the 2024 CWP Summer Institute was the importance of using personal narratives to help students find their voice. This fall, I introduced identity texts, where students wrote about their experiences, backgrounds, or what matters most to them. To set the tone, I shared a story from my life—it wasn't perfect, but it showed them that writing is about being honest, not perfect. The result? My students started writing with more confidence and depth, and our classroom conversations became so much richer. It's been a really rewarding shift.

Receiving the mini-grant allowed me to take a course at CCSU designed specifically for English teachers, and it's had a direct impact on my teaching. One strategy I brought back was using mentor texts to help students develop their writing. This fall, I introduced mentor texts in our narrative writing unit, showing students how published writers craft their stories and encouraging them to try similar techniques in their own work. The shift was immediate—students stopped staring at blank pages and started experimenting with structure, dialogue, and detail. One student even told me, "I didn't think I could write like this before." That moment alone made the program worth it.

The CWP Summer Institute inspired me to keep evolving by reminding me that I'm not just teaching writing but I am helping students see themselves as writers. Looking ahead, one of my goals is to build a classroom culture where students feel comfortable taking risks with their writing. I want to incorporate more student-led workshops and peer feedback, so they see writing as something we work on together, not just for a grade. I'm also planning a project where students create identity texts that connect their personal experiences to larger themes we study. My hope is that they leave my class knowing their stories matter and their words have power.

MARGARET BUGINGO

(SI '24)

Modeling was the most impactful strategy I learned. I value the way it was shared, not just as sharing a final assignment, but through modeling each individual piece of the work. I will also always remember “re-vision” as Jane said: to “re-see” something.

I am planning to attend the Symposium for Second Language Writing, so it will inform my teaching practices through increased knowledge of how best to support multilingual learners.

BINI JOHN

(SI '24)

Specifying one strategy or lesson from the CWP 2024 that impacted me the most will be a challenging task. CWP offered an immersive learning experience on various discussion strategies. I have incorporated them into my everyday teaching and have found them engaging students in the most productive way. As I reflect more on the 2024 CWP, I believe that I have gained more confidence in implementing the writing process and walking students through each stage of writing by providing essential support. Oftentimes, students struggled in the previous years in my class partially because of how I hesitated to focus on direct instruction on all strands of writing and the writing process. After attending the CWP in summer, I have incorporated more writing lessons and workshops which most of my students have benefited from and has got more clarity on their voice.

Focusing on writing and building students confidence in applying their voice in their writing was my focus as I attended the CWP Summer Institute. Receiving the grant, helped me to attend the Writing Center Conference and invest in establishing a Writing Center at my school. The grant is utilised to take students to other Writing Centers and observe and learn from them. Students are provided with opportunities to participate in writing competitions and I am using my grant money to support with any entry fee if included. With the grant money, I did purchase books, journal subscriptions, and technology required for the Writing Center as I believe in collaborative learning.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anna Muharem is a wife, mother of three girls, and a teacher. She has a bachelor's in English from the University of Connecticut and a master's in education from Fairfield University. She loves teaching at Woodland Regional High School and she lives in Prospect, CT with her family and their one-eyed shih tzu, Cooper.

Bini John is a dedicated high school language arts teacher specializing in writing instruction. With a passion for nurturing students' writing skills, Bini creates engaging and interactive lessons that inspire creativity and critical thinking. With years of experience, Bini is committed to helping students develop their writing abilities and achieve academic success while working on her creative writing.

Emma Kraner is a high school English Teacher going into her third year of teaching. She has previously studied at University of Connecticut and Providence College.

Elizabeth Sangree is an English teacher at EO Smith High School. She lives in Pomfret, Connecticut, with her husband Alex, her cat Big Pleasant, and her flock of chickens. In her classes, she emphasizes research writing, creativity, and finding one's passion. Some methods to encourage this include a unit where the 12th graders teach their own class about a short story, a unit for *The Crucible* with a culminating project that has students pick an extreme society of their choice and analyze human psychology in both texts, and a unit that involves an egg drop out of a classroom window as a metaphor for global inequity (mostly she just likes doing egg drop projects)! When not teaching, she enjoys spending time at a pottery studio making mugs and bowls, going hiking in all conditions, baking somewhat presentable sourdough bread loaves, gardening erratically, and—obviously—reading and writing.

Lorie K. DelGrosso is a middle school teacher at Tyl Middle School in Montville, CT. She obtained an Elementary Education degree and English degree from Eastern CT State University as well as a Masters of Teaching from Sacred Heart. She holds a K-6 certification and 7-12 English certification. She will be entering her tenth year of teaching.

Margaret Bugingo is a PhD student in writing studies, a current staff member at the University of Connecticut, and an instructor of First Year Writing. Her work is mainly centered on DEI efforts, particularly those involving multilingualism. Her latest co-authored piece titled, "Aquí Se Habla Deutsch, Française, Kinyarwanda: Making Multilingualism Audible In Writing Centers," was published in the spring 2024 issue of *The Peer Review Journal*. is a wife, mother of three girls, and a teacher. She has a bachelor's in English from the University of Connecticut and a master's in education from Fairfield University. She loves teaching at Woodland Regional High School and she lives in Prospect, CT with her family and their one-eyed shih tzu, Cooper.

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