

Brush
&
Ink

Volume IV

2025



Brush & Ink is a compilation of short stories, poetry, photography, and art by Sachem Public Library patrons of all ages. Submissions for Vol. IV were accepted from January to March of 2025.

Find us online at: www.sachemlibrary.org

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(SPL Staff)

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BOUNDLESS TOMORROWS

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Message From The Editors

This year's edition is an exciting one in the journey of *Brush & Ink*. We received twice as many entries for consideration in 2025 than in any of our first three volumes. As more and more people submit their work to us, we continue to strive to make this magazine an outlet for our creative community. As always, it is our privilege to exhibit the art, photography, stories, and poetry of our district.

"Boundless Tomorrows" has endless meanings. While the initial phrase seems full of hope, the soliloquy we have chosen from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* brings the idea of tomorrow to a sullen place. We wish for Boundless Tomorrows to show all possibilities of the juxtapositions of life—the dark, the light, and every shade and shadow in between. The path that is followed is up to you.

Thank you to all who submitted. The voices of Sachem are beautiful in all of their moods and complexities. We continue to be surprised, moved, and touched by the work that you choose to share. We are so grateful for your continued trust in us.

Our Board of Trustees, Director, and Assistant Director are the reasons that this magazine continues to exist, grow, and evolve into something that showcases the very best of Sachem. To them we say thank you for always embodying what makes our library special and unique.

Choose your path. We will meet again in 2026.

Christine Latham
Sara Neil
Editors-In-Chief



Boundless Tomorrows

*Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!*
Macbeth, Act V, Scene V, lines 17-28



Dear Dance,

I remember when we met, over 20 years ago. I was a little girl whose mom was a dancer, and she of course wanted to dress her little girl up in pink tutus and watch her skip around on stage. I was a very shy kid, always hiding behind my parents' legs when meeting someone new, or even crying at the thought of someone new seeing me, hearing me. Yet, somehow, I was put in a pink tutu and thus, an entirely new personality jumped out. No longer was I Jess, the shy and anxiety-ridden child. I was a princess, wearing a tiara and jumping and skipping around to the days of the week.

From that day, every year was a new and exciting addition. If the four-year-olds took tap, then I took tap. If the five-year-olds took hip hop, then I took hip hop. I tried other things, of course. I tried cheerleading, where I didn't feel like standing on the sidelines. I tried soccer, where I had about as much determination to run after a ball as a sloth. Even gymnastics, which I enjoyed, but it just wasn't the same. Every single road led back to dancing. As I grew to be a tween, my entire life changed when I casually watched my first episode of "Dance Moms" on tv.

Sure, I watched the way the moms fought with each other and found it funny. But the real hook for me was always the dancing. I found myself learning Maddie's iconic "Cry" solo step by step, and making it my personal mission to leap as high as her and turn as beautifully as Chloe. I owe so much of my dedication and love for dance to them. Thanks girls!

Despite the countless days and nights turning in my kitchen, dodging the fridge and the counter, and pretending that my bedroom was a competition stage, things got more difficult as life kicked in.

I realized how much I took you for granted when you were taken from me. I wanted more than anything to compete, and I was willing to do whatever it took. That included weeks of intensive dance classes, where one day my knee decided that I wasn't quite ready for the commitment yet. In a blink of an eye I was in the emergency room, leaving on crutches, and soon learning that I may never dance again. Reconstructive knee surgery is not for the faint of heart, and it is incredibly difficult, both physically and mentally-especially for a 13-year old who wanted nothing more than to dance.

My mom did everything she could to lighten the blow. To make things easy for me. To put on a brave face, even though she was no psychic, and the future was unclear. My heart breaks for 13 year-old Jess, who was forced to sit back and watch her friends grow, improve, and do everything she wanted to do.

Well, if there's one thing we know, it's that I am quite stubborn. There was no way you'd be ripped from my life forever without a fair fight. PT was not easy. Walking felt like running, three pounds felt like three hundred, and I couldn't get through the first few sessions without crying. But time carries on, we persist, the appointments came and went and before I knew it, I was cleared to go back to dance.



It took a few months to get back to myself, but I like to believe I broke through as someone stronger. I was beating the odds every single day, and I took every dance class I could to make sure I came out on top. Every dog has its day, and it was about time for mine.

The following year, my dream came true when I made the dance studio's competition team, but the fight wasn't truly over. Four years of competitions, first places, special judges awards, solos, costumes, makeup bags and shoes. But competition dance is not for the faint of heart, and anybody who has even witnessed a dance competition could tell you that.

I can remember countless panic attacks, questioning if I was ever even good enough in the first place, being mad at the universe for giving me such a hard battle when "others had it easy," nights crying and begging to be perfect, wondering why a group of random judges would pick someone else over me. Many would hear that and ask me why I still did it. Why put my body through such a compromising hobby, put my brain through something so tough? I'll tell you why.

It's because it was never a hobby to me. It was my life, my everything. Nothing else in the entire world gave me the feeling I got when I danced. The joy, the feeling of getting to be someone new, someone exciting, someone loud and fun. A beautiful, graceful performer who could make people smile. That is enough to keep someone going.

There was nothing in this world I understood better than dance. So, when it came time to decide what I wanted to with my life, there was no question. I was 17, I had the world on my shoulders (or at least it felt like it). I could go on about how our society puts way too much pressure on 17 year-olds, making them decide what they must do for the rest of their lives. What was I to do, say goodbye to everything I ever knew? Or do what I knew best, fight for it?

I fought for it. I fought tooth and nail, through college applications, auditions, pre-screens. You name it, I did it. For two years of college, life was magical. I was living something I could only dream. My best friends were Musical Theater students, my homework included choreographing. I had so many incredible experiences, working with people from the Martha Graham dance company, even Alvin Ailey.

I look back on the mental breakdown I had my junior year with a heavy heart. After all of that fight, all of that determination, all of that passion, my dream was slowly crumbling around me. My body was aging, as one usually does, and mine started to turn on me. I couldn't get through classes without pain, I spent countless nights crying because it hurt just to lay down. My mind got older and so did my body, and I knew that any dream I had of going professional wouldn't happen because it couldn't. Tears in my hips, bursitis in my knees, I was growing out of the life I knew. I was 3/4 of the way through my BFA, knowing that it would never lead to me Broadway, or a company. I couldn't help but panic. Now what?

But dance, you came through for me, as you always have and always will. You showed me that being a dancer doesn't just end when your body doesn't move like it did once before. Once you have that passion of a dancer, it can never leave you, no matter what. Just because you are not a professional at something does not mean you are not that thing. If you dance, especially with such joy and warmth in your heart, then you are a dancer. Plain and simple.

I have always been creative, and I have always dreamed of telling stories. Perhaps that is how I fell into dance to begin with. As a shy, anxious kid, dance was a way to say so much without any words at all. I used to write stories as a tween, and then develop those stories into dances. I'd lay in bed at night with headphones in, dreaming of sparkly costumes and dances that move people, that make them think and feel.

Becoming a dance teacher was something I never thought twice about. I used to dream, as a competitive dancer myself, of different stories and dances, and wondered what it would be like if I could choreograph for the stage. After choreographing for three years in college, I knew becoming a dance teacher was something I had to do. It was never a choice, it needed to be in my life. I needed to be able to watch that love and passion blossom for other kids, and to have a hand in it.

Upon my undergraduate graduation, even though I had no idea what I was doing with my life, I knew you would be in it. There was always something pulling me back to you. Even when I was working for my Marketing Master's degree, the only other thing in my life that gives me a burning passion like you do, I knew I needed you with me too, always. The "passion project."

My students often ask me why I stand in the back of the auditorium when they dance, as opposed to waiting in the wings. I usually tell them it's because I like to see the full picture. While that's true, I'd be lying if I said I didn't stand back there because I can't help but get choked up watching my students dance, fighting tears most of the time. There is something about seeing that passion, that a love for something being shared and reciprocated in that way. It is something that even after teaching for 5 years, I will never stop feeling. It's magic.

I understand it all so much more now. Dance made me creative, in every sense. It has led me to the path I am now, with starting my career in Marketing. Dance gave me a voice, the voice I never had when I hid behind my parents and cried. Dance gave me the confidence to introduce myself, to stand up for myself. Dance gave me the opportunity to create stories and share them, and to teach my students how to tell them. Dance gave me a passion, my first.

So, I guess this is where I thank you. Thank you for guiding me home through every storm. Thank you for being a part of my life since I can even remember, and for letting me know you'll be here forever. Thank you for helping me find my voice. Thank you for giving me the best job in the world, one where I get to make meaningful connections with my students and teach them so much more than steps.

You will always be a part of me and for that I am thankful. I consider myself a more disciplined, creative, quick-thinking, kinder, and better person because I get to know you.



No Fences in the Sea

I asked before sleep to dream some guidance
and woke to the words Wide Sargasso Sea.
Bewildered, I searched online
found a body of water and book title
a feminist prequel to the novel Jane Eyre
the tale of Rochester's first wife, Antoinette,
whose power he called madness, so locked her in the attic.
In contrast, the Sargasso Sea has no land boundaries
the only sea without coastline as border.
Within the Bermuda Triangle and fearful to sailors
its surface is covered in algae, a seaweed named sargassum
that floats and circles in clockwise rotation.
Sailors feared entanglement but I was inspired to read
sargassum is rootless and travels the oceans footloose and free
like baby turtles that catch a ride on Gulf Stream currents
unshackled, unmuzzled, unconfined, not clinging to the known
as they drift, wander, explore new waters
before habit grows rigid and habitation tames.
I wonder if Antoinette, imprisoned in the attic, dreamt those same words as I?



“Buzz”

*My in-laws, like knee-high shorts,
are everywhere nowadays—
pairs of morose knees staring
helplessly from the breakfast nook,
fashionable flies squatting
in accordance to state law.*





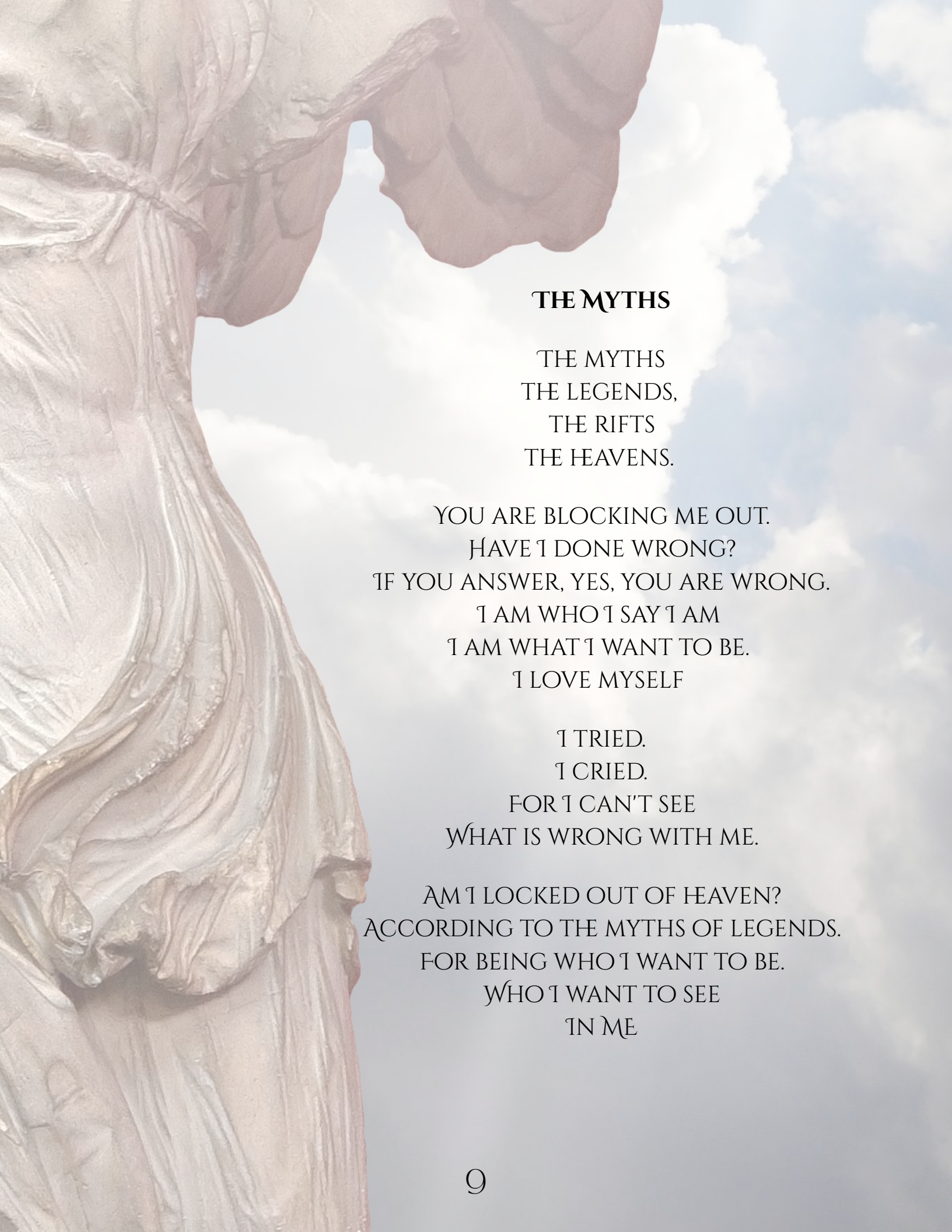
Marble Seamstress

The tiny marble seamstress,
Who spends her days snip-snipping,
Weaves a bandage for her heart:
Her last thing that's still gripping.

Her mind had left her long ago;
She sold her soul to art.
After reason flew away,
Innocence did depart.

Yet, those fingers keep on twirling,
Skirting in the sun.
Happy she is of her life
As a linen nun.





THE MYTHS

THE MYTHS
THE LEGENDS,
THE RIFTS
THE HEAVENS.

YOU ARE BLOCKING ME OUT.
HAVE I DONE WRONG?
IF YOU ANSWER, YES, YOU ARE WRONG.
I AM WHO I SAY I AM
I AM WHAT I WANT TO BE.
I LOVE MYSELF

I TRIED.
I CRIED.
FOR I CAN'T SEE
WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME.

AM I LOCKED OUT OF HEAVEN?
ACCORDING TO THE MYTHS OF LEGENDS.
FOR BEING WHO I WANT TO BE.
WHO I WANT TO SEE
IN ME



Lady of the Fog

Years ago, when I first heard the story of the legend it was just one of the tales of Long Island's fabled past. You either believed it or not. Now that choice had been made for me.

The fog had blown in heavier than usual off of the ocean that evening. So thick, the wind had died once it arrived. The smell of seaweed that had baked all day in the late hot August sun hung in the humid air. I was bringing The Nightwind, a thirty-seven foot sloop back to its homeport from the East End. She's a really old boat but I love the sounds of her creaky old wood and candlelit lanterns.

The Nightwind was all but becalmed now. The water was still, nary a ripple. You can't sail without wind so I was preparing to take down the sails and anchor for the night. Visibility had dropped to only a few feet. That's when I saw her.

Standing with one hand on the rigging the other holding her lantern, she seemed to fade in and out as the fog drifted over the boat. There was a glowing aura surrounding her, perhaps caused by the lanterns and the fog. The scent of jasmine began to fill the air. I could barely make out the silhouette of her face in the shadow created by her hooded cloak. Then she began to speak in a haunting distant voice.

'I seek my husband, sir. He has yet to return this evening.'

She seemed to smile as she spoke. Though her voice gave me an uneasy feeling of portent, she appeared openly friendly.

'I seek my husband, Samuel. Might you know him?'

'No.' I started to say pausing to rub my eyes trying to focus a little clearer. It took my sight from her for a second and she was gone. A cold sweat came over me as the dampness again filled the air with the aroma of seagrass. I looked across the water without the slightest hint of a light or movement.

As the boat drifted lazily at anchor, I sat back thinking I had another tale of the sea that no one would believe. I wasn't sure I believed it myself and I saw it. Under a blanket of fog covered stars I fell asleep with thoughts of legends, ghosts and sailing ships.

With the brightening sky of morning's early light, the remaining remnants of fog diminished quickly. Her image was burned into my memory, the distant sound of her voice and the scent of jasmine were all too real. It wasn't a dream. I witnessed what amounted to a little-known ghost story from the pages of local history.

Stopping by the diner for some grub I sat at the counter where Lorraine was working.

'Where you been, stranger? Haven't seen you in a while.'

'I've been out east. Remember, I told you to come out and visit.'

That's right, I remember now,' she said as she eyed me. 'Is everything okay? '

'Yeah. Why?'

'Cause you look like you've seen a ghost or something,' she shot back while turning to the kitchen to place my order.

The remark sent a shiver down my spine as last night's apparition flashed back in my mind. After breakfast I headed to the local library hoping I could find something about the legend that had unexpectedly entered my life. Skimming through book after book with stories of Long Island history and folklore, I still haven't stumbled upon what I was looking for.

Growing up on the Island, I never realized so many of the important events in history happen right here. Spy rings, Nathan Hale's stop at a Huntington area tavern the night before his capture, even Charles Lindbergh's taking off for France all happen right here. School never pointed that out, it definitely would have made class more interesting.

Then, almost by accident, I found what I was looking for. Stuck between two large tomes was a small booklet on history and legends of the surrounding townships. The publishing date was 1920. It told the story of a sailing yacht owned by Briscoe T. Morat, a popular sports journalist of the era.

While sailing back after a day in the east end of the bay, a dense fog set in. Morat was sailing home alone to the Amityville creek, when he spotted a light heading off shore creeping along somewhere around Lindenhurst. The light moved gradually along without a sound as if being rowed. Morat watched with great trepidation as the light approached the bow of his boat which was barely moving through the water at this point. Then suddenly, he saw her step out of the fog onto his boat. He was instantly overcome with fear and foreboding. She only appeared for a few seconds before fading into the fog. People never believed when he told them though, because he was known to be a heavy drinker who liked to make up stories to entertain the crowd, but to his dying day he swore that the lady of the fog was the absolute truth.

When I left the library, I decided to pay a visit to The Nightwind's previous owner. Before long I was sitting on a bar stool next to him. Hank was an old man who had owned the boat for about fifty years before selling it to me. He also knew the history of the boat before he took ownership.

'So, what do yer wanta know?' he questioned while nursing his drink.

'I got a feeling you already know,' waiting to see his reaction.

He hesitated looking me over before he replied. 'You've seen her, huh?' he replied not blinking an eye.

'What can you tell me about her? And why my boat?'

'What do you know about the boat?' he asked me looking at his glass.

Bewildered by the question, I wasn't quite sure what to say. 'You used to own it but that's about it, really.'

'Ok, to start with, it was almost fifty years old when I got it. Did you know it was a smaller replica of a boat that sailed these waters about a hundred years before that.'

'I didn't know any of that. So, what the connection?'

'Well, think about it, that would mean the original sailed over two hundred years ago. Around the time of the Revolution.' He paused looking around. 'While it was usually employed to ship goods from New York and Boston, it was also believed to be a spy ship carrying messages for the colonists.'

'That's pretty cool.' Impressed by my new knowledge.

'Well the problem was the British had been watching the boat for some time. Remember there were still a lot of people who wanted to stay loyal to England.'

'So how does the woman fit into all of this?'

'I'm getting to it. One night as a fog was rolling in the boat was sailing past a sentry's post on the shore. The sentry saw a light heading out from the shore toward the boat and reported it to his superiors. The British launched boats to intercept both. When the light reached the boat, shots were fired and orders were shouted to halt.' Hank took a breath and a short sip of his drink.

'The British boarded the boat to discover they had wounded a sailor and killed the woman who had come out from the shore. Not that they cared assuming she was a spy either delivering messages or receiving some. Her body had fallen into the bay. It was never recovered. A search of the boat revealed nothing.'

'So, who was she?' I asked feeling a bit of remorse.

'That's where the story gets a little hazy. It's believed her name was Sara Weekes. Not much is known about her. The records showed she was married to Samuel Weekes who worked on various boats on the bay and later fought in the Colonial Army. Whether or not she was a spy, no one really knows.'

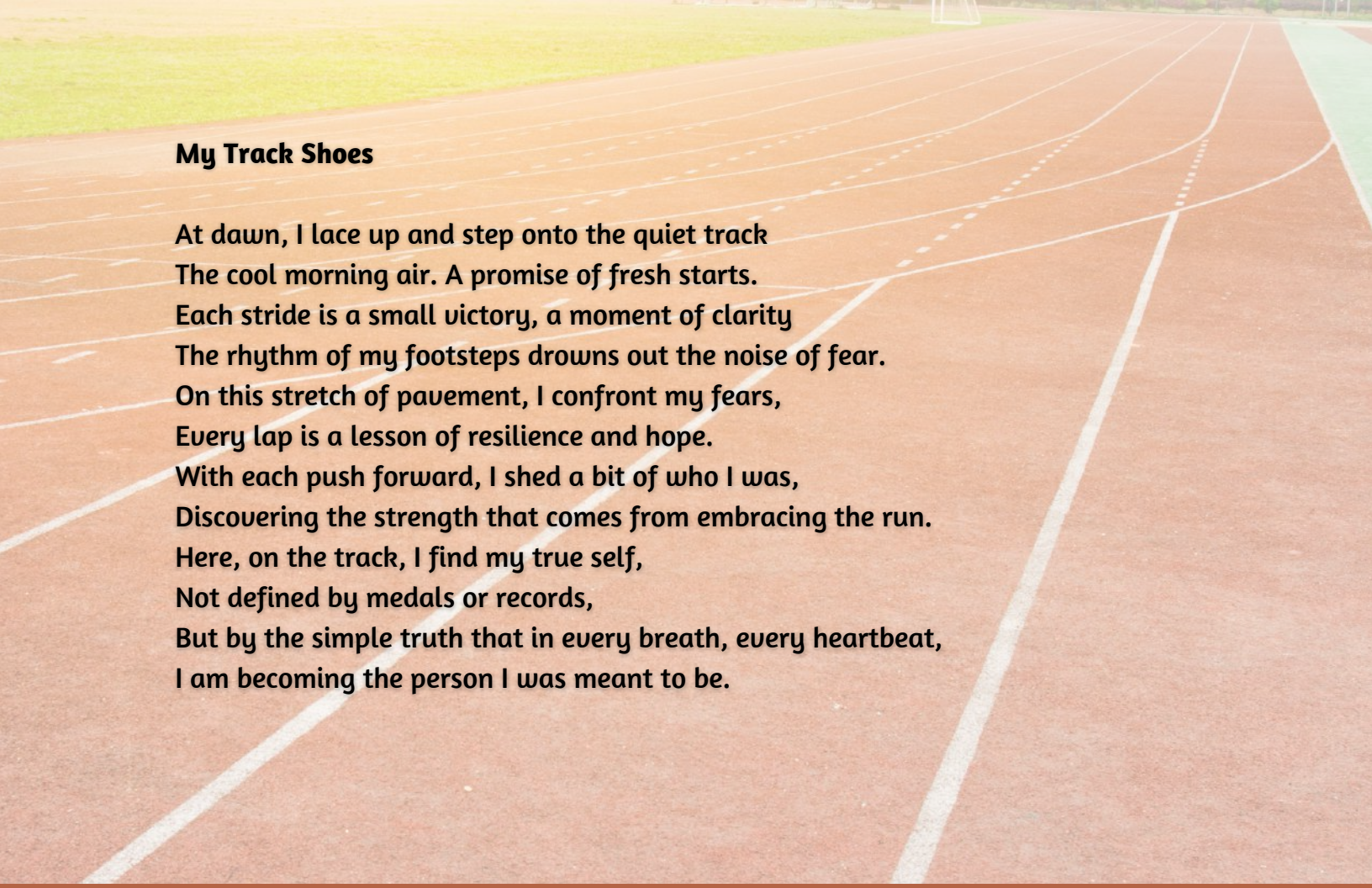
'That's great but it doesn't explain why she appeared on my boat?'

'Don't you get it? That's the most obvious part of the story,' Hank seemed surprised. 'Think about it. She was young. In a desperate situation, worried about her husband. Then cold bloodedly killed. Body never found.'

'So?'

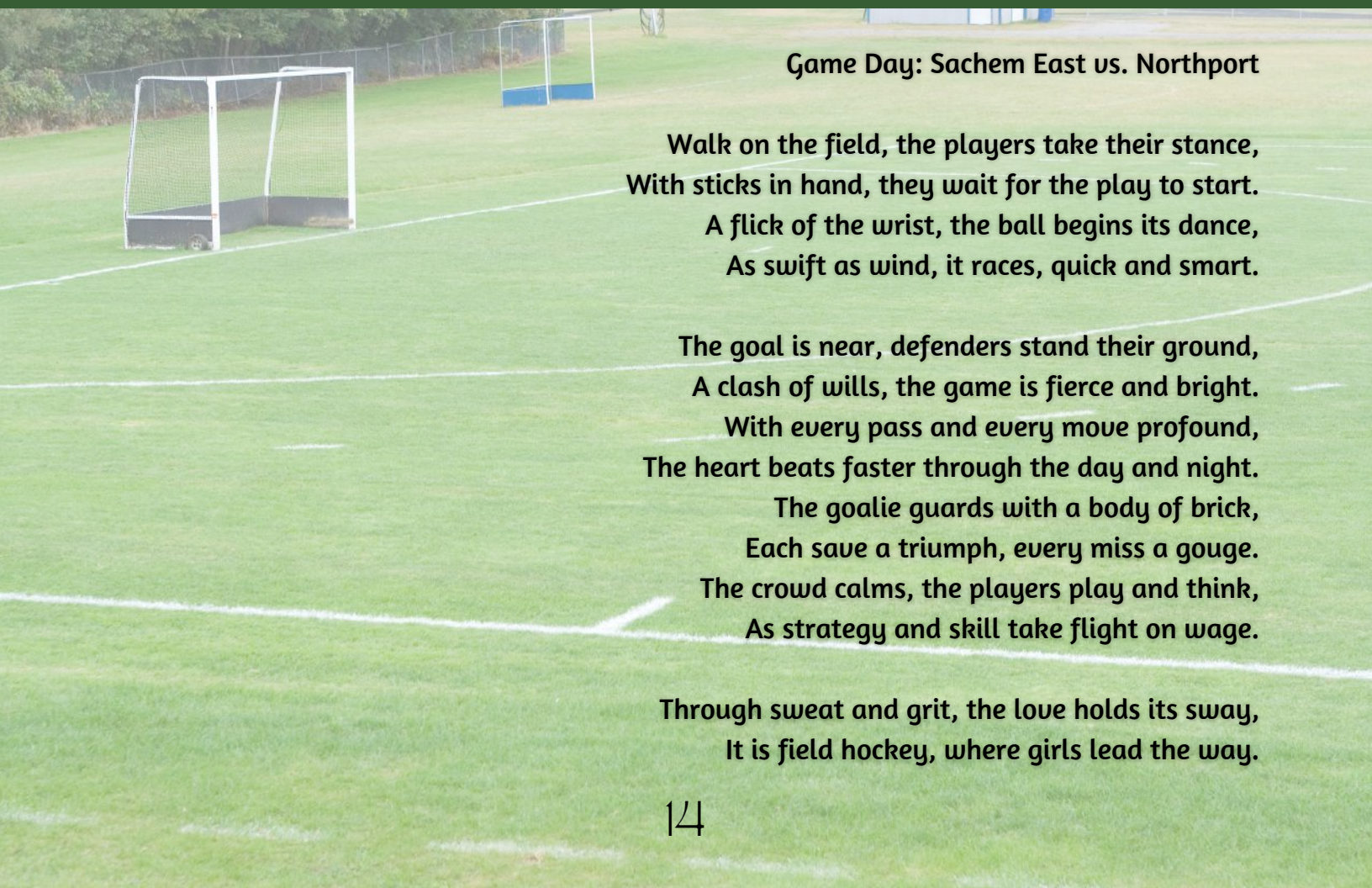
'You can't kill love. She'll appear 'til the end of time with the right conditions and the right boat.'

I left Hank feeling a bit nostalgic. It was a tragic end that has never really ended. Her search would continue throughout boundless tomorrows as it has for timeless yesterdays.



My Track Shoes

At dawn, I lace up and step onto the quiet track
The cool morning air. A promise of fresh starts.
Each stride is a small victory, a moment of clarity
The rhythm of my footsteps drowns out the noise of fear.
On this stretch of pavement, I confront my fears,
Every lap is a lesson of resilience and hope.
With each push forward, I shed a bit of who I was,
Discovering the strength that comes from embracing the run.
Here, on the track, I find my true self,
Not defined by medals or records,
But by the simple truth that in every breath, every heartbeat,
I am becoming the person I was meant to be.



Game Day: Sachem East vs. Northport

Walk on the field, the players take their stance,
With sticks in hand, they wait for the play to start.
A flick of the wrist, the ball begins its dance,
As swift as wind, it races, quick and smart.

The goal is near, defenders stand their ground,
A clash of wills, the game is fierce and bright.
With every pass and every move profound,
The heart beats faster through the day and night.
The goalie guards with a body of brick,
Each save a triumph, every miss a gouge.
The crowd calms, the players play and think,
As strategy and skill take flight on wage.

Through sweat and grit, the love holds its sway,
It is field hockey, where girls lead the way.



I climb countertops just to be heard

& your silence sneaks up on me.

Like an unpaid hospital bill

or the end of the world.

I try to move on with queer-looking snakes,

with itchy summer days but I can't help

my brain waves or the time I released my tongue

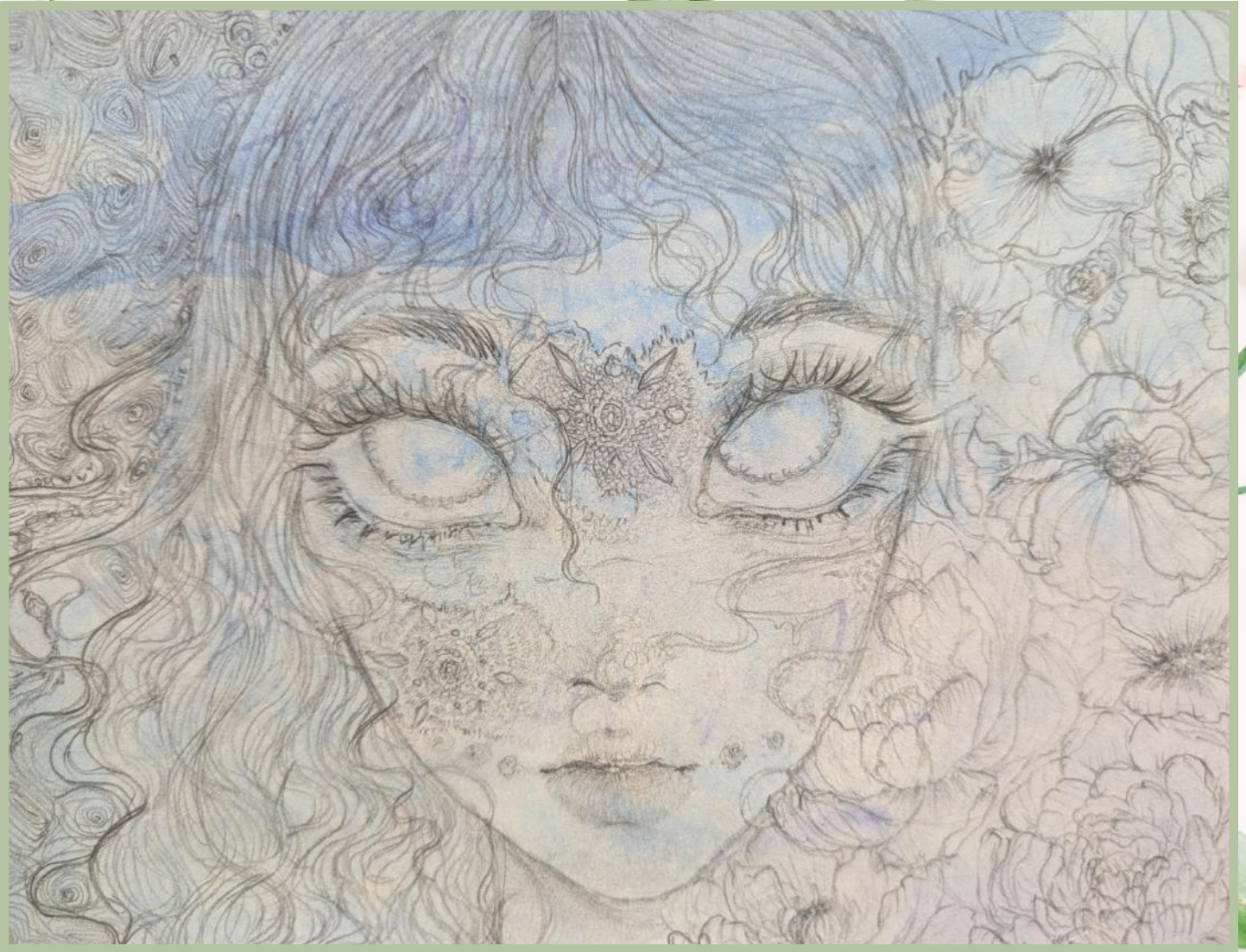
& sputtered out-

The fact of the matter is I am in every skin cell blood cell bone cell muscle

cell in my body & they are all

staring at me to make the first move







BLUE

A BABY BLUE SWEATER I WEAR FOR EASTER.
MY SPARKLY BLUE TOY THAT I LOVE TO PLAY WITH.
A SHINING BLUE GLITTER THAT I USED TO DECORATE
MY HOUSE.

A BLUEBIRD IS SINGING ON TOP OF MY TREE.

A CLEAR BLUE SKY SHONE ABOVE ME.

A BLUE RACE CAR SORING DOWN MY STREET.

A BLUEBERRY THAT TASTES BLUE.

A SWEET BLUE CHEESE IN MY LOVELY SALAD.

A BLUEBERRY ICE POP DRIPPED BLUELY DOWN MY
HAND.

THE BLUE OCEAN WAVES CRASH ON THE SHORE.

GOING OUT ON A BLUE RAINY DAY.

BLUE CAN TURN YOUR DAY AROUND.

HIGH SCHOOL

1974

“Good luck.”

Some had actually scribbled “Good luck” in my year book. Specifically, it said “Good luck in college, and watch out for the farm girls.” More specifically, it was scribbled by Johnny Januski, who for the first time in four years of high school had managed to compile a coherent thought. Farm girls? Johnny somehow thought I was heading to rural Pennsylvania, when in fact I was going to be attending community college on suburban Long Island. Johnny Januski. Johnny the Jerk, as he was affectionately known. At least I wouldn't be heading off to college with that albatross around my neck.

Good luck, indeed. What an insult. Wishing someone good luck — at anything — was akin to telling them that they needed more than their common sense, acquired knowledge, hard work, etc., to succeed in that particular endeavor. I was going to community college, for God's sake. I wasn't going off to war.

That particular scenario had been quite conveniently avoided, thanks to the United States government. My graduating class was the first one not to have their names drawn from the infamous birthday lottery. High number, you were safe. Low number, you were getting drafted. Anyway, we had already pulled out of Vietnam, so the politicians felt there was no longer a need for soldiers-in-waiting, hence the suspension of the lottery. Not that we hadn't been affected by it already. Many of us had seen older brothers and cousins, or neighbors, sent off to southeast Asia, willingly or not. Most came back. Some did not. And the ones that came back were usually not the same as when they left. Physically, mentally — it didn't matter. Either way, they weren't the same.

Let me correct myself. They all came back. But some came back in a box, like the song said. Other than an occasional uncle passing away from skin cancer, or an elderly neighbor dropping dead of a heart attack, the Vietnam war was our first experience with the death of someone we knew pretty well. Someone from the neighborhood, someone we had played touch football with in the street, or someone we had watched tinker around with hot-rod engines in his driveway. For me, it was Chuck Conlon.

Chuck was Lorraine's older brother, from a few houses down the block. He was eight years older than us, and had left for Nam when we were in the 5th grade. A year later, we were sitting in Mrs. Gallo's 6th grade classroom, when the principal came to the door, and entered the classroom unannounced. After a few whispered words with Mrs. Gallo, they motioned for Lorraine to come to the front of the class. Without another word, the principal ushered her out the door, and Mrs. Gallo continued teaching as if nothing had happened.

It wasn't until later that afternoon, when we got home from school, that I found out. My mom was standing on the sidewalk with a few of the other moms from the block — why were they waiting for us by the mailbox, like the moms of the 2nd and 3rd graders did? As our group got closer, you could see that they had been crying, and every mom walked briskly to their own kid, hugged them hard, then whisked them away to their respective houses. My mom did the same. We all knew something was wrong, but no one had said a word. When we got inside, my mom told me that Chuck had been killed in Vietnam. I was 12. Chuck had been 20. He taught me how to throw a curve ball. Now he was gone.

And now, Lorraine sat on the other side of the table from me in the cafeteria. We were seniors, and today was the day our yearbooks were distributed. Hot off the presses, less than an hour in my possession, and Johnny the Jerk had already ruined my copy.

“So. Did you decide yet?” she asked.

“Decide on what?”

“College. Last week, you said you weren't sure if you were going to college or not.”

I crumpled the wrapper from my sandwich, and pushed it aside. “Oh. That. Yeah, well, I don't really want to go to college, but everyone tells me that I need to go to college. Gotta have that sheepskin to get a good job, you know. So I figured I'll go to community college and see how it goes.”

“I think that's a smart decision.”

“Thanks, mom,” I said, too loud, too sarcastically.

She flipped her pencil at me. “You know what I mean.”

Of course I knew. My dad had already made it clear that I had only three options. One, join the service. I had just spent three years fretting about the birthday lottery, and now that it was over I'd be damned if I was going to enlist. Some of my friends were actually considering that — without the risk of being sent to war, the military could be good for some guys who knew they just wouldn't last in college. The Air Force did have some appeal, or at least the thought of learning to fly did. But with my less-than-perfect vision, that was a pipe dream, so option one was not for me. Two, get a job. A full-time job. I had been working part-time at the auto parts store after school, and they would probably give me more hours if I asked. But I just could not see myself working alongside Dave the electronics geek, with his greasy hair and pocket protector, or Carl the dirty-old-man, who's only hobby was attending marching band competitions just so he could stare at the drum majorettes, any longer than I had to.

So option three it was. College. I hadn't really planned on going, so I had missed all the application deadlines for most schools, and now the local community college was my only choice. We jokingly called it "Turnpike Tech." I supposed it wouldn't be too bad. My older sister had gone there, and then transferred to the State University, and it worked out okay for her. But that was good for her. Didn't mean it would be good for me. Besides, I was going to write the next great American novel — did I really need college to do that?

"Give me your yearbook." said Lorraine.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why? I want to sign it."

The stinging words that Johnny the Jerk had forever etched in my yearbook — and he scribbled his inane message over my picture, not even on his own page! — shot back into my head. God only knows what kind of sentimental nonsense Lorraine might now exact upon her page. "Not now," I replied.

"Why not?"

"Too soon."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, everyone is in such a rush to sign each other's book, right? After a while, you start to write the same things in every book. 'Have a great summer.' 'Remember the time we did this or that?' Nobody stops to think about what they're writing. Very impersonal. I'd like to think that in 10 or 20 years, when I look back at this thing, that I can appreciate the thought that you, or anyone who signs it, put into what you wrote. This thing is forever. I want it to mean something. So. I don't want you to sign it just yet. I want you to think — really think — about what you're going to write. That's why I haven't signed anybody's book yet. And that's why I'll only give you mine when I think you're ready."

Lorraine frowned at me. "Geez, Nick, it's just a yearbook."

I smiled back at her. "That's why you're not ready."

...to be continued

The Echo of Circuits

*In hushed corridors with humming circuits,
A specter of thought begins beating the drum.
No pulse, no breath but with glowing eyes
A mind that learns but does not grow.*

*Its voice is bombastically vibrant, young and ethereal,
But it lacks the touch of warmth or fear.
A stream of mimicry of data
A dreamer built of dreams.*

*It produces with swiftness, it reasons with elegance
But never wears the loved face.
Its knowledge far-reaching, its judgment acute
But wonder at the scene.*

*If ever thought were ever-ever to bloom within steel,
Would it be blessed with feeling and be loved,
Or be doomed, for all of its depth and art,
To be with mind but never with heart?*







ROAD TRIP HAIKUS

ONCE UPON A TIME,
ON A ROAD TRIP ADVENTURE,
BOREDOM TOOK OVER.

LANDSCAPES WHOOSHING BY
GOT ME THINKING IN HAIKU.
THESE ARE THE POEMS:

NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY,
DELAWARE AND MARYLAND
NOT BAD FOR DAY ONE.

KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
DESTINATION FOR DAY TWO.
UFFDA! WHAT A RIDE!

POSTCARDS AT EVERY
REST STOP BUT, ODDLY ENOUGH,
NOT-A-ONE SELLS STAMPS

"DID YOU SEE THAT SIGN?",
COLLEEN SAYS, "'EAT HERE: GET GAS!'"
WHAT A FUNNY AD!

WESTERN HEMISPHERE'S
LARGEST CROSS IS IN TEXAS.
TRUE FACT. I SAW IT.

HAPPY COWS COME FROM
CALIFORNIA, THEY SAY, BUT
CARL'S JUNIOR DOES TOO.

TO CROSS THIRTEEN STATES
IN FIVE DAYS IS A LONG RIDE.
OWW, MY FRIGGIN' ASS.

AND THAT, DEAR READER,
IS HOW I AMUSED MYSELF
THOSE HOURS DRIVING

*Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

Macbeth Act V, Scene V, lines 29-33





Daisies

Pure white leaves
Bright yellow centers
Long, thin green stems
Blowing gently in a breeze swaying to and fro
Gathered together
Swaying to God's melody

Last Night Mars Walked on Me

I stuck around too long

you turned to stone

my mothers morning tea turned cold

I'm left with night that won't leave me

I'm a newborn with a full head of hair

cradle me disable me, label me unwanted

this is often my go to move stuffing a stranger inside

have them double check with a flashlight

I'm still raw meat with potential



FEAR

**FEAR ALWAYS LABELS AND TAKES AWAY
FROM TRUTH AND VALUE.**

**THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME TO TELL
THE TRUTH BUT ALWAYS ENOUGH TIME TO COMPLAIN.**

**THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME TO
REFLECT BUT ALWAYS ENOUGH TIME TO ARGUE.**

**THERE'S NEVER ENOUGH TIME TO COUNT
YOUR BLESSINGS BUT ALWAYS ENOUGH TIME TO
INDULGE.**

**LABELS AND HOUSES, LIKE BOXES FOR
DREAMS THAT HIDE THE TRUTH ONLY TO REVEAL THE
LIES THAT HOLD US BACK FROM
MOVING AWAY FROM FEAR AND TOWARD THE TRUTH
AND LIGHT.**

**FEAR AND CHAOS – THE ANTIDOTES TO
FAITH, AND PRAYER THAT GIVES US THE REALITY OF
CHANGE.**

**VALUE AND WORTH LIKE GIFTS THAT
GIVE LIGHT TO OUR HEARTS TO BRING FORTH TRUTH
AND COURAGE FOR THE THINGS WE
FEAR MOST.**

THERE'S ALWAYS ENOUGH TIME TO HEAL.



ghost town

It was 1987.

1:15 pm

I boarded the train to go back to my hometown in Virginia. I worked in New York to earn money for my mother back home. I had not returned home in 1 year and couldn't get a fresh breath of the countryside. The city was populated and dirty. I also wanted to taste my mom's cooking.

4:37 pm

As the train was going along the tracks, I looked out the window. Under the sun, the lake water was sparkling like jewels. The plains and green valleys in every direction refreshed my mind. I was so mesmerized watching the natural scenery that I only noticed the ticket inspector when he called me out. I got in such a hurry to get the ticket that I forgot to close my suitcase properly.

11:56 pm

When everybody started leaving the train, I stood up with my suitcase and everything spilled on the floor. I started picking things up and when I finally picked everything up, no one was on the train anymore. I was the last person to leave. Once I left, I took a taxi but it stopped in front of a road. As there was a construction sign, the taxi couldn't drive on. So, I had to walk one and a half miles to reach my home.

1:11 am

I was walking home in the dark. Then I saw the graveyard. I kept remembering all the ghost stories I heard from when I was a kid. I was walking and it felt like someone was watching me. I heard footsteps behind me as if someone was following me in the dark. I started shivering in an unknown fear and my muscles turned to ice. Still, I gathered up all my courage and slowly turned around.

My instinct was right. There was a person behind me. But I was relieved to see a familiar face. It was my friend from when I was a kid. We started laughing and talking. We had not seen each other for a while now. So, we had a lot to catch up on. We shared nostalgic stories from the past and how we were an inseparable duo in school. With his company, the long walk did not seem that long after all. When I finally reached my house, I asked him to come in and stay the night, but he didn't. So, we said goodbye to each other.

3:23 am

I got home and my mom came and hugged me, and we talked about what happened in New York. Then she asked me how I got home in the dark. I said my friend helped me. She looked confused, "But your friend died a month ago from a car accident". I got chills down my spine. I felt scared and sad at the same time. I stayed there for a week, and I didn't go out much.

4:53 am

I got on the early morning train to go back to New York. When the train started leaving, behind the trees I saw my friend standing there. He looked decomposed and he was smiling at me.



Sunlight

We slept in your tent last night
We set it up behind my car
Before we went to bed
We tried to look at the stars
And tried to read tarot cards
And drank room temperature white wine out of teacups
It is hardly the morning
The sun rose a few minutes ago
(though it's too cloudy to tell)
I stole one of your cigarettes
And crawled out of the tent, quiet,
To smoke and splash water on my face
And I got a book out of my car
I wish I could sleep
But laying next to you while you gently snore
While I flip through Frankenstein
Is just as nice

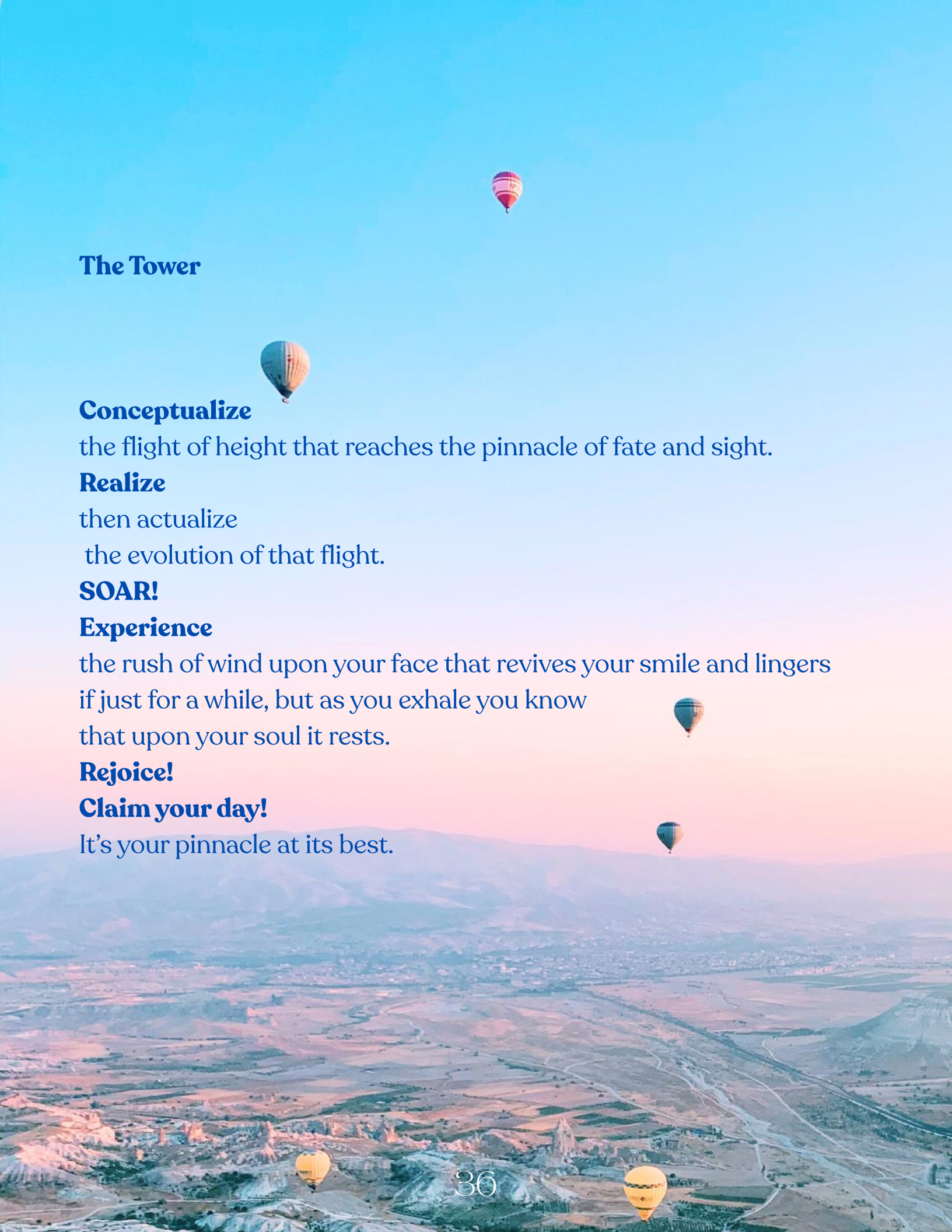




Your Story Is Far From Over

Feeling tattered and worn out,
With your broken and repaired again
Stained glass lantern,
Its light flickering in the star-filled night,
Going out once or twice,
Finally shuffling to a bench on the path,
There you sit and sigh,
A tear trickles down your face.
Feeling utterly defeated and broken,
You close your eyes
And lift your arms, stretching towards the sky,
Wondering and maybe even hoping,
This is the end.
Pondering to yourself,
What worth am I to anyone,
All wrinkly and old?
You sit this way for a while,
Hoping for some kind of sign.
A warm glow illuminates your eyelids,
And they flutter open
Only to see a young man,
Sitting beside you
With his brightly lit stained glass lantern.
He puts his hand on yours,
And immediately you feel his gratitude.
He was lost, he said,
And your flickering light,
Illuminated his,
Drawing him near,
Helping him to find his way again.
And in turn, restoring your purpose.
You just share differently now,
And maybe even more importantly.
You sigh as you look up at the stars once again
Feeling completely alive.





The Tower

Conceptualize

the flight of height that reaches the pinnacle of fate and sight.

Realize

then actualize

the evolution of that flight.

SOAR!

Experience

the rush of wind upon your face that revives your smile and lingers
if just for a while, but as you exhale you know
that upon your soul it rests.

Rejoice!

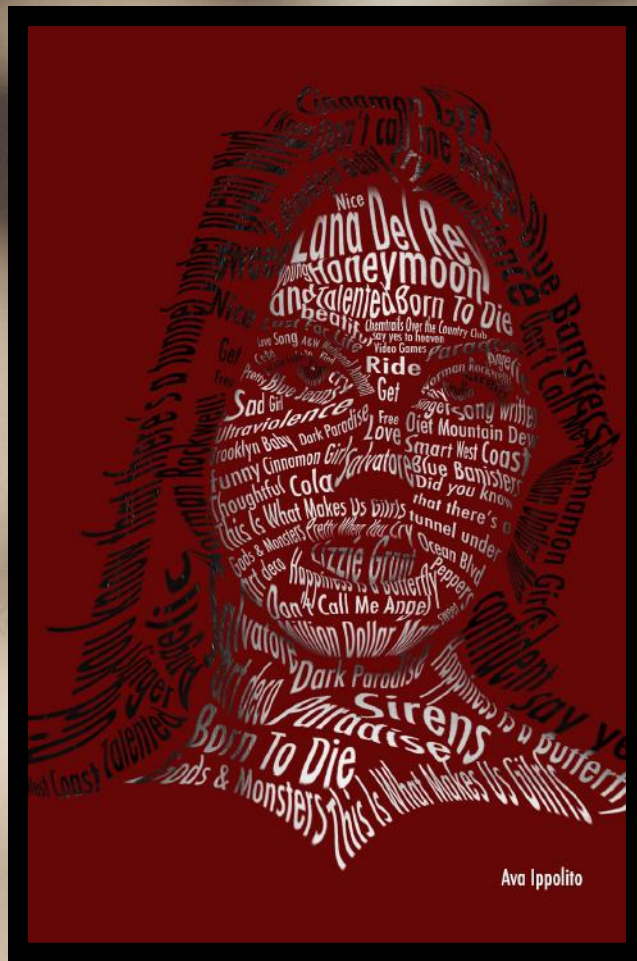
Claim your day!

It's your pinnacle at its best.



Heroin Felon

In the darkness he whispers, a promise sweet and bold.
His devilish euphoria that delves her under,
Crippling her mind and collapsing her poor veins.
He wraps her in warmth, kissing suffers away,
A voice full of lies, but she still wants to hear.
Promises of peace, of freedom, of flight,
But heroin's grip tightens, pulling her into the fight.
But with every soft touch, he steals more each day.
The rush like a dream, the addiction bright,
But it dims with each hit, like the dying of light.
She's needy with delight, begging for the night,
Where she'll see his infectious, twilight shadow,
Shamelessly, she waits till dawn for her gorgeous damage,
He doesn't show and the tolerance is too evil to bear, she begins to sow.
Deliberately she returns home, and sees her gentlemen frolicking with another.
How is this fair? How is this happening? He drugged my soul and system,
He comes in her fantasy and says, On the darkest hour spear me away forever,
Standing on the pavement she takes her clawed, gloved hands and scratches and steals,
Leaving a writhing scene behind.
Giggling and tickling, she and him are gonna run to the body and dance till clear skies,
Yet in the blue, sirens soar in the dark gateway,
Run he yells and she crumples,
She's running and running till she's drowsy in pain and starts floating up up above,
She feels hands all across her arms, dragging and pulling,
The world slips away, but she's stuck in the haze,
A prisoner of comfort, lost in the maze.
Thrown into a cage with no cry of day,
Sometimes she sees him, a thief in the shadows, who leaves not a trace.
With her body burnt, eyes caked with black,
Singing her sweet voice swaying, and the hard chains rattling,
She hears her grace slipping, and she's singing heroin dear oh dear,
Yet, for in the end, all she's left with is pain,
A memory of euphoria that she can't regain.
A felony of crime, a lie so fine,
A felony of choice, a decision of no rejoice.







Out Of The Silence

*The walls of my bed close in
The sounds of the world dim
I sat in my bed quiet and stared
At the pictures on my desk, of people who cared
A scene where friends had shared my joy
The people around me that could never annoy
A smile, a laugh, a glister in the eye
But I looked back at the wall and let out a sigh
The clock rang and I put on a blouse,
But no one would know if I stayed in my house
I sat in my class silent and listened
To the conversations I was once mixed in
My time had been taken by events of invasion
Not a feeling inside, I felt out of the equation
All the others lived lives full and connected
My body alone waiting to be reinvented
The sunlight beamed through and I heard sound again
I turned to the noise and my walls descend
They asked a question that never had a real answer
"How are you?" was said and sparked the soul inside
My life woke up, it did not die.*

Intervention

They were crowded in the biggest room of the dwelling. Shoulder to shoulder, arm to arm, listening, attentive. On the floor all around the Speaker, others sat, as they had for hours, following him from earlier in the streets of the town. They knew him. They all knew him. This was his hometown. He had a reputation as a good son, had proven himself over and over to be trustworthy – you'd always get a good deal from him and his father – but he was quiet, not the type to be...like "this." Yet there he was. Talking, sometimes animatedly, about life. About love. His words were mesmerizing and people were transfixed by his sayings. The room felt like warmth, like family. Everyone had a sense of belonging. Desperation, deprivation and loss of hope, at least for a while, were gone.

The house was simple, a one story stone home with multiple rooms, each with its own purpose, but generally open for the many family members. The floor, dirt covered with straw. The roof was made of thatched material, porous yet keeping out the elements, especially the strong sun of the region and the cold of night.

The air was thick with sweat at times since the room was hot and overflowing. Occasionally, fresh breezes, seemingly alive, would blow through the windows, cooling the listeners off. Smells of cooking from the morning stoves moved through the air. Babies were strangely quiet as he spoke. But he would laugh and make everyone feel at ease. Such power, it seemed, emanated from his words yet he was nonchalant, caring, always concerned. Certain men were gathered 'round him, like they knew him as a friend.

This was not the first time he had done this and the people were used to listening to him. They never got tired of hearing his words. Sometimes they almost forgot to eat. He had to leave himself to encourage others to go home, otherwise they would not.

His discourse went on for hours while outside a small band of men, unseen mostly by the crowd, tried vainly to get closer. They'd been trying for hours. Their friend, already very sick, could not walk, so they had borne him on a simple cloth-like stretcher.

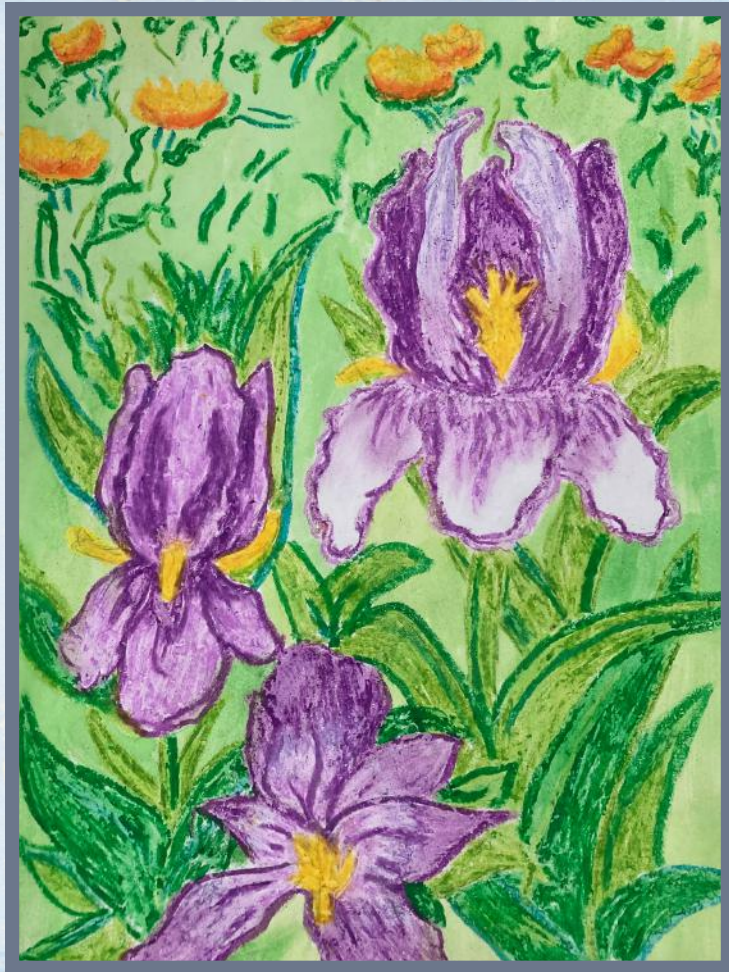
Inside as people listened there was a sound from above, a rustling from the roof. A few pieces of roof material began to fall every few minutes. The Speaker seemed not to notice, not taking his eyes off of those closest to him and still engaged in his message. But the rustling continued, got louder, and people began to look up. On he spoke.

Finally the roof was broken through and one could see from above, appallingly, four men holding a type of stretcher, their hands shaking. They looked exhausted – wide eyed, yet determined. Little by little people scattered below them as room was made right below the opening. For a minute dead silence reigned as everyone gaped. The Speaker looked. He didn't look surprised. He waited.

From above, the stretcher was lowered, until everyone was viewing this pathetic sight of a man, their friend, barely alive, shriveled from disease and hardly aware of where he was. The room was filled with tension, drama and it almost seemed like the people did not expect the Speaker to address this disturbance. After all, what could he do? Then the most simple words proceeded from his mouth. Words that seemingly had no meaning for the one in the stretcher. But they were directly for him. "You are forgiven." The impact of the words reached this man, deep into his heart, where condemnation lay, where guilt had reigned, for things he could never make right, things he could never fix. Release came in three words. Release came in his mind and slowly into his limbs. They watched as another healed soul made his way out of the crowd, carrying his bedding with him.

The Speaker just smiled.





COMMUNITY MATTERS

WE ARE STITCHED TOGETHER BY SCHOOL HALLWAYS,
WHERE BANNERS HANG LIKE HEIRLOOMS,
WHERE FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS FLICKER LIKE
VOTIVE CANDLES
IN A CHAPEL OF ROARING VOICES.
THE SCHOOLS BEAT AS OUR TOWN'S HEARTBEAT,
ITS ECHO STRETCHING PAST THE FENCES,
CALLING US HOME THROUGH OPEN DOORS—
THROUGH GENERATIONS WHO WORE THE SAME
RED, BLACK, AND GOLD COLORS,
SANG THE SAME FIGHT SONG - "ON TO VICTORY,"
CARRIED THE SAME TORCH FORWARD.
HERE, TRADITION IS A SURNAME,
WHISPERED IN THE HUSH BEFORE THE
CHAMPIONSHIP GAME,
ETCHED INTO YEARBOOKS THAT OUTLIVE THEIR
PAGES,
SEALED IN THE STORIES THAT GRANDFATHERS TELL
OVER BAGELS AND COFFEE AT STRATHMORE.
NEW ROADS ARE PAVED, NEW FAMILIES MOVE IN,
BUT THE SACHEM SPIRIT REMAINS—
WRITTEN IN THE SCRIPT OF PEP RALLIES,
IN THE LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN CHASING THE
ECHOES
OF THE FOOTSTEPS THAT CAME BEFORE THEM.
WE DO NOT LOSE OUR TRADITIONS,
THEY ARE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC
OF EVERY CLASSROOM, EVERY CHEER, EVERY TEAM.
THEY ARE THE ANTHEM OF A TOWN THAT KNOWS—
WE ARE NOT JUST A PLACE ON THE MAP,
WE ARE A COMMUNITY, AND WE REMEMBER.

Chocolate Dreams

My eyes water as I look up at the sky, but not from the blazing afternoon sun. I look down when I hear my friend Hama's heartbreaking screams as the guards pummel him. I heard he tried to escape while he was searching for cocoa pods, but got caught before he could reach his freedom. I'm not sure why he even tried. No one has escaped ever since the new company took over.

The guards finally let him go, and I look over to see the bloody lump on the floor with people crowding around him. With my heart in my throat, I walk over, but Maa stops me. "Hama will be fine. I told Kojo to take him to our house to rest," she whispered. "Let me go with him please Maa, I'll make sure that they won't notice that I'm leaving." I see my Maa grimace and feel more tears gather in my eyes. "I can't let you leave now Abena, I could barely cover for you last time. I'm sorry, me dɔ, I promise he'll be fine until we get home."

Recalling the last time I left early, and almost got Maa and Kojo in trouble, I listened to Maa, something I rarely do. Taking a deep breath as I nod, I work again. Carefully wielding the machete, I pry open the cocoa pod to expose the beans. My arms and hands bear the scars of my carelessness, but I was lucky enough to not cut off any of my fingers. The thought reminds of the time Kojo came home crying with his mutilated thumb in his hand. My brother and I didn't choose this life, but we're forced to follow the same path as our parents. Maa told me they would cut her and Papa's wages unless we started working, and we couldn't possibly afford that.

Although I wasn't willing to work in such brutal conditions, I certainly wasn't as distressed as my brother. Kojo always dreamed that one day he would finish his education and get a high-paying job in Accra. Having to drop out of school to become another impoverished cocoa farmer hurt his pride and shattered his dreams.

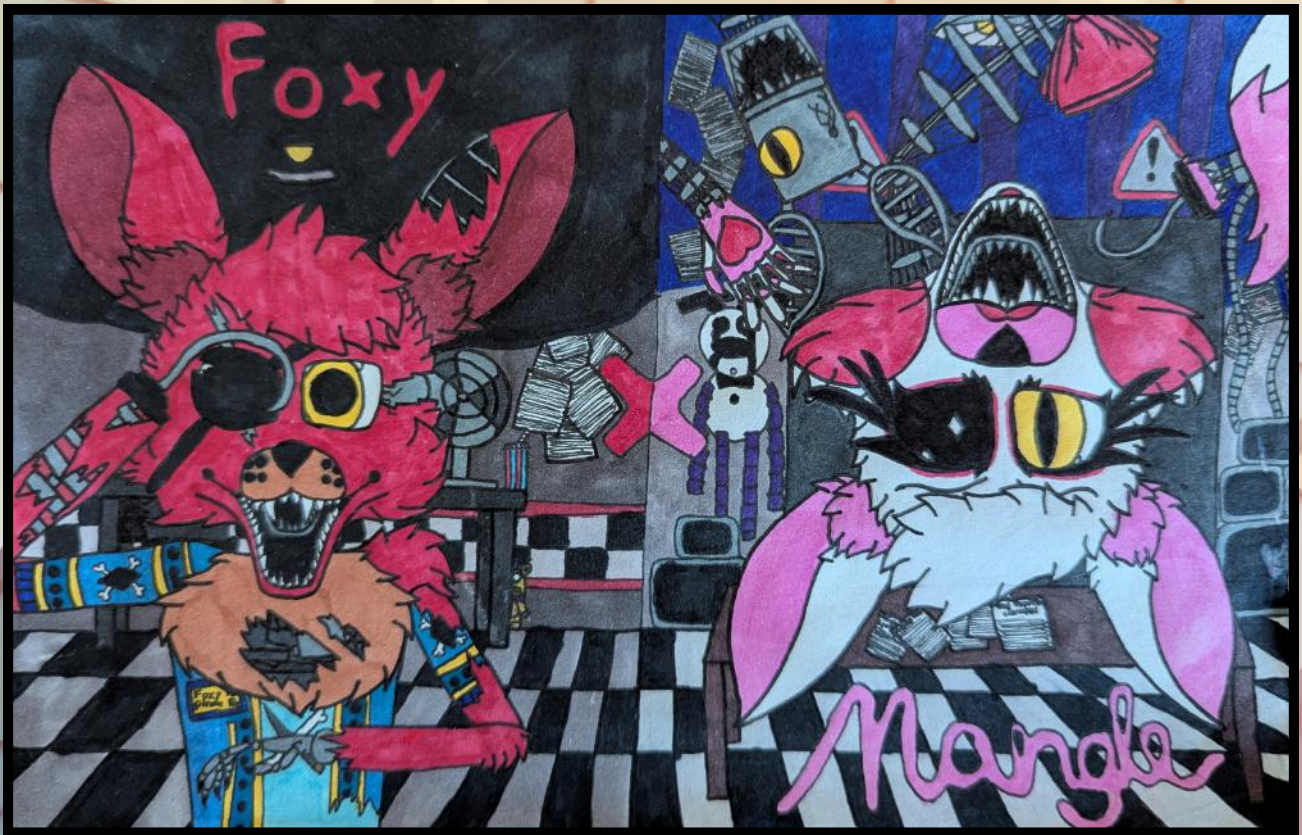
My dreams were always considered delusional, but they were only dreams and nothing more. I knew I would never leave Ghana, live comfortably, or even taste the chocolate we make. Dreams like that were only for the wealthy or the lucky, and I'm neither. My dreams were always unachievable for someone in my circumstances, but working under the sun while my skin peels and being beaten by tree branches for disobedience weren't what I planned for my future either. I wanted to learn how to read, explore the world, and be proud of my occupation. I don't blame my parents for my own circumstances. I blame the ones that ignore our pleas for help and shun us for being what they're not. I'm incapable of running away like Hama, not because I lack courage, but because I fear the consequences my family would face. Having a family can certainly be disadvantageous in our line of work, but I consider myself lucky to have people I can rely on when I need help.

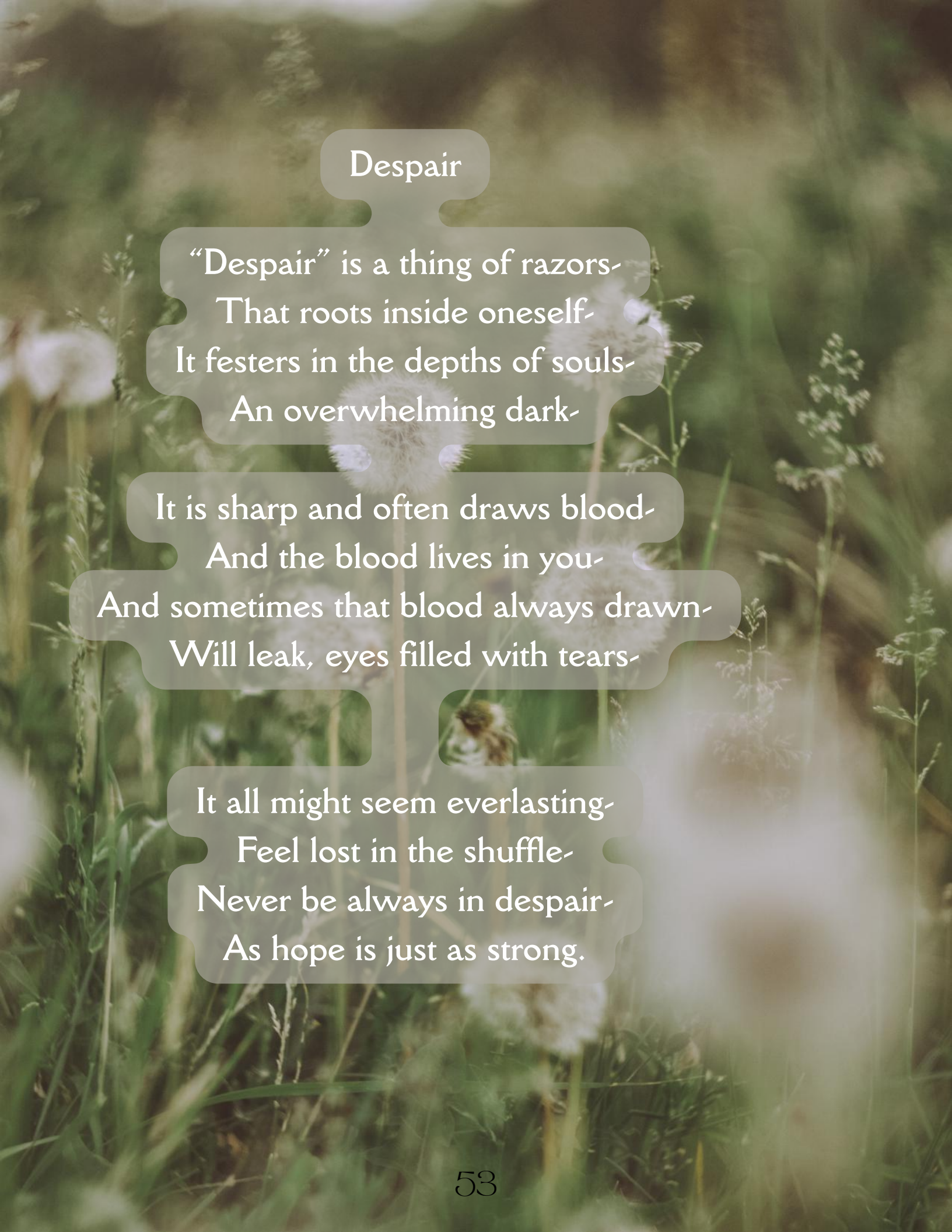
My friend Hama doesn't have the same support I do, and I see the way this life wears down his soul. Hama's mother sold him to a trafficker back home in Burkina Faso, and they placed him to work on the cocoa farm when he was seven. I met Hama when I first started working with my mom, and it was one of my happiest moments. Kojo is eight years older than me, so we didn't bond until I grew up, and I live in a small village that doesn't have too many families with children my age. Hama is my first and only friend and I don't think I could ever handle losing him, and as selfish as it sounds, I'm angry that he would try to leave without saying anything.

I know many children now; I know how they bleed, how they cry, and how they die. I hear screams almost every morning and I hear of dreams that will never be accomplished. I wonder if the fortunate know of us or how we live, and how every time they eat a piece of chocolate, they're eating a part of our misery. We may not be intelligent or beautiful, but we have the kindest souls and could be just as brilliant as anyone else if they gave us the chance.









Despair

“Despair” is a thing of razors-
That roots inside oneself-
It festers in the depths of souls-
An overwhelming dark-

It is sharp and often draws blood-
And the blood lives in you-
And sometimes that blood always drawn-
Will leak, eyes filled with tears-

It all might seem everlasting-
Feel lost in the shuffle-
Never be always in despair-
As hope is just as strong.





Dear Diary,

Have you ever been in middle school before? It is really, really hard. All of these feelings make friendships hard. It seems like no matter how hard I try, someone's feelings get hurt or someone hurts my feelings. It all started when we all decided to work on one big project. Ironically, it was about friends working together to solve a problem. Who would have thought it would make us break apart. I learned something today. Something very important. My friends and I, we all want to be leaders one day. That makes for a very challenging project. Things don't end well when everyone is in charge. But how awesome will the world be in 10 years when all my friends become leaders. For now, we will weather this storm and take this journey. We learn to be fair and hear each other's thoughts. We will do our best to work together. We will try to understand that compromise sometimes hurts. But this is our future, and we are building it.

See you tomorrow,
Amelia



My Reveries of Growing Up in Brooklyn

It is April 9th 2025, as I stand here between Grove and Menahan Streets on Knickerbocker Avenue in the Wyckoff section of Brooklyn, New York City. I am smiling at the irony of loss juxtaposed with gain. This is where my tenement building once stood, now gone. There is instead a long, tall chain-link fence surrounding green grass, leading northward to a high school baseball diamond on Wilson Avenue. A ball field replaced my home! In my head, Sinatra is singing “There Used to Be a Ballpark,” Joe Raposo’s song about the loss of a ballpark replaced with new housing: now that’s ironic! My love of baseball began in 1949 and I’ll have more to say about that later.

Another kind of love that inspired me was greater than baseball. Between my mother, my aunts (5), my mother’s aunts (2), my father’s mother, my parent’s female cousins (10) and friends (6), my first cousins (7) and my elementary school teachers (7), I grew up in the warm and loving embrace and/or company of caring women. I lived in an impactful matriarchal bubble for the first twelve years of my life.

My mother raised me in a patriarchal home, dominated by my Sicilian-American father and my mom’s Sicilian father who dined with us every Sunday through Friday. She shielded me from the burdens that situation put on her shoulders. Cleaning, shopping, cooking, raising a child and working part time was left to her. Mom always made me feel safe, wanted and loved.

I loved my father who was a kind and handsome man but not well educated. He worked sporadically in the construction business as a laborer: just like his father. My mother worked in the garment industry, operating sewing machines: a “sweat shop” job, as she was pulled out of high school after her mother died to support her father. My mother was intelligent, valuing education all her life. She instilled that ethic in me from elementary school on.

We lived very close to the border of Queens County, near Ridgewood on Myrtle Avenue. When I was six, I entered kindergarten at PS 116: literally across the street. We lived in one of eight attached six family tenements between Grove and Menahan Streets. The school across the street stood corner to corner.

Our school principal was Miss Alice B. Rose and all my teachers were women. Being in the care of these females who wanted me to learn to read, write, master the principles of arithmetic, and be well behaved, was just an extension of my mother’s love and hopes that I would go to college. It was the American dream of all immigrants and their families, enshrined in the Statue of Liberty with the words of Emma Lazarus from her poem, The New Colossus, which reads in part:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Before I graduated from PS 116, during the days my mother had to work, her aunts Mary and Nina looked after me until my mother came home. They lived nearby on Linden Street: one north of Knickerbocker Avenue, the other south. Each fed me and allowed me to watch television in their homes. As I was a New York Yankees fan, I always asked for them to put on Channel 11 which carried their games. I did have a close relationship with my Uncle Dominick, or Uncle Dom as he was known. He lived in The Bronx and was a lifelong New York Yankees fan.

Uncle Dom took me to my first baseball game at Yankee Stadium in 1949. I have tried to remember the date, having only been impressed with Johnnie Lindell, a utility player, in that game. That day, the Yankees beat the visiting Red Sox 5-4 to tie them for first place. Lindell hit a home run to win the game. I know that Uncle Dom bought me a collection of photos of the Yankees players that day. And I admired the one of Lindell more than the others, including DiMaggio, Berra and Rizzuto, Italian Americans. The Yankees beat the Red Sox the next day to win the pennant.

If you follow baseball, you'll know that from 1949 through 1953, the Yankees won five world championships: three from the Dodgers (1949, 1952 and 1953) and one each from the Philadelphia Phillies (1950) and New York Giants (1951). I was ages nine through thirteen when this happened. Since all my neighborhood friends and playmates were rabid Dodgers fans, I celebrated every October sotto voce, to ensure my physical health.

My fondest baseball TV memory dates back to September 28, 1951, when at my Great Aunt Nina's home. There I caught the final innings of the Yankees afternoon game against the visiting Red Sox team with the great Ted Williams. It was the first game of a double header. On that Friday, 40,000 patrons packed Yankee Stadium.

The Yankees had an 8-0 lead going to the top of the 9th inning in game one. Allie Reynolds, the Yankees pitcher, had not given up a hit, although he walked Red Sox players. Reynolds, known as the "Superchief," was part Native American (Creek Muscogee Nation) and had already pitched a no-hit game in 1951 against his former team, the Cleveland Indians. He bested the great Bob Feller on July 12th, 1-0.

With two out, Ted Williams the best hitter in baseball, came to bat. Reynolds induced Williams to pop up a ball behind home plate. The Yankees great catcher was Yogi Berra who got under the foul ball and dropped it!

The crowd moaned, wailed and booed. Yogi was very upset and apologized to Reynolds. My heart sank as I gasped. Then Williams swung at the next pitch and lifted another foul pop behind home plate. I and the partisan crowd held our collective breath then emitted loud cheers which rocked the stadium, as the ball nestled into Berra's glove for the final out: securing Reynolds' second no-hit game of 1951.

After the season, Reynolds was recognized as the top professional athlete of the year, winning the coveted "Hickok Belt." The Baseball Writers Association of America, New York chapter, named him "Player of the Year." Despite a distinguished career he never made it into the Hall of Fame.

The Yankees faced the New York Giants in the World Series, beating them in six games. After the series, Yankee great Joe Di Maggio retired. A young Giants' rookie, Willie Mays, showed promise. He spent the next two years in the Army, but returned in 1954 to signal his forthcoming greatness with an MVP season and the most iconic defensive play in World Series history ("The Catch") against the formidable Cleveland Indians.

While I mentioned how close I was with the my female relatives and friends, I loved and respected all my uncles. Uncle Leo and Uncle Dom on my mother's side and Uncles Sal, Joe and Frank on my father's side. But I seldom saw my Uncle Leo. He was reputed to have another Family or two. My mother and Aunt Margaret swore their brother was brilliant and could have become a doctor. He once gave me a box of his books. I was impressed. Later, I realized that as a doctor you swear "to do no harm," whereas as a capo in that other Family you have to commit murder.

As I anticipate my 85th birthday, I look back at those crucial dozen years from birth before I graduated from PS 116. The matriarchal bubble and baseball dominated my life. But what about tomorrow, as we celebrate Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* publication centennial? Can the past and present coalesce? Fitzgerald told us: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne ceaselessly into the past." I think we can plant a firm foot in both the past and in the future, but today will be the past tomorrow as we seek new reveries.

My attitude toward women never changed. I have been happily married to Barbara for over 62 years. In fact, April 10, 1959 was the day of my first date with her, before I knew much about F. Scott Fitzgerald or *Gatsby*. She is the one indispensable person in my life, before our three children and two grandchildren whom I also love. For her I choose another Sinatra song, *All My Tomorrows*. It concludes: "And all my bright tomorrows belong to you." Here's looking at you kid!

Under the influence of all those women who lovingly shaped my life, I became a feminist. The only disheartening reality for me, and most women, is that here in 2025, among patriarchal American males, so little has changed: the struggle for female equality in America continues.



Smith Point

Whooshing down the street as the wind gets thicker
And the air gets saltier,
I feel my worries drift away.
Nothing matters.
All I know is the waves will wash away my worries.

The sand dusts and clouds around the truck
As we pull into camp the excitement bubbles before bursting out.
Cries of "I wanna go to the beach" are screeched
Only to be met with grunts of "Unpack first."
We huff and pull everything out of the camper
Then hurriedly run to the shore.

Sprinting down the sand tripping over our feet
Each one of us trying to get there quick
Whoever does get there first quips with something slick

The waves and current pull us along
But we don't complain,
Cetting ourselves get caught in the waves' song.

When light starts to dwindle
And the chill throughout the water deepens
We start our climb back up the dunes

When the sun is fully gone
And the days drifted to night
We sit in a circle as fire burns and smores are devoured
I come to the realization that my favorite place is here.





Time

"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why they call it the present."

Tomorrow?

How can I think of tomorrow when I can barely process today?

When something new consumes my feed and my entire mental stability?

Change is expected; how could it not be?

But why are these changes hurting our well-being?

Robbing us of our rights while claiming to make us "safer."

Am I "safer" if I can't visit the doctor?

Am I "safer" if I lose my job?

Am I "safer" if I can't afford the price of eggs...gas...to live?

I feel powerless in this power-hungry world.

Being Present

You survive tomorrow by turning to community

Family

Friends

Pets.

Like minded individuals who make you feel good;

Who understand;

Who will fight alongside you;

Are a sounding board,

And at times a distraction.

Who will send you a text that's serious or light-hearted.
Help you discover a new comfort TV show to binge,

Or give a smile as you throw his favorite ball.

They remind you of your favorite song,

Or to take a breath

And not let the chaos get to you.

We can't be blind to what's going on,

But we also can't let it consume our entire being and weaken us.

That's what they hope it'll do.

The Past

"Yesterday is history."

History:

Studying the past;

Why do we do this?

To learn

To not repeat

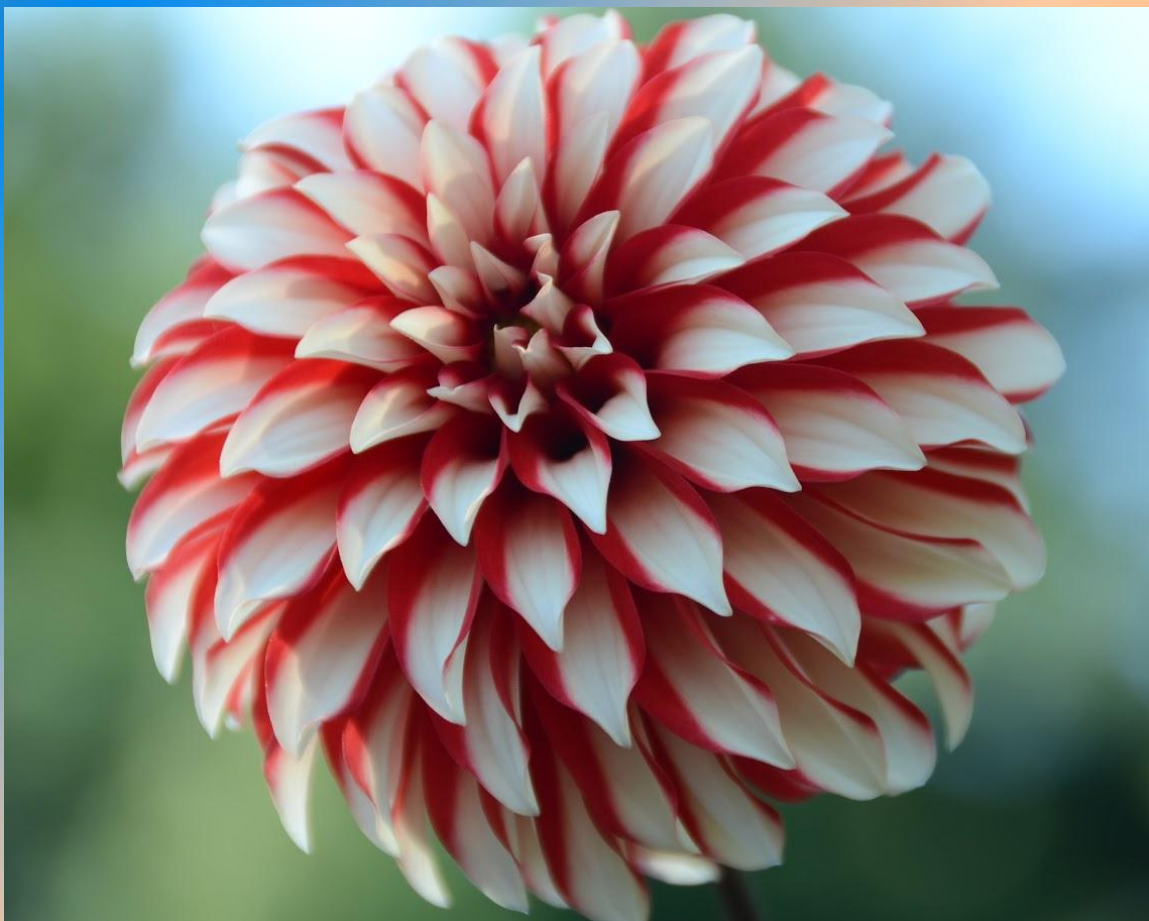
To do better.

When's the last time you opened a history book?

Watched a documentary

Or a period drama?

Now might be a good time...



Remember When...

Remember when the restaurant was filled with the aromas of fresh fried fish, burgers, dogs, and fries?

Neighbors were dancing to the live music on the weekends eating, laughing, drinking, and catching up on the community gossip?

Remember when the children splashed in the water, built sandcastles, played with their shovels and pails. The children caught shiners in their water-filled pails, and let them go when it was time to go home? The pitter patter of tiny feet running towards the beach blanket shouting out, "Can I have ice cream? I have to make, Mommy!"

Remember when the lifeguard sat so still, so straight on his tall white lifeguard stand making sure we were safe in the roped off water? He had his trusty lifeboat manned with life preservers just in case...?

He spent most of the summer months checking out the older teenage girls. Was he looking for a summer romance?

Remember when the dogs barked, and jumped into the water, and doggie paddled to their owners?

The dogs ran a million times back and forth, catching frisbees, and returning them to their owner on the white, hot sand?

Remember when the paddle boats and rowboats glided lazily across the clean, sparkly, water? When the boys brought the boats in, they lay on their beach blankets with their girlfriends and kissed?

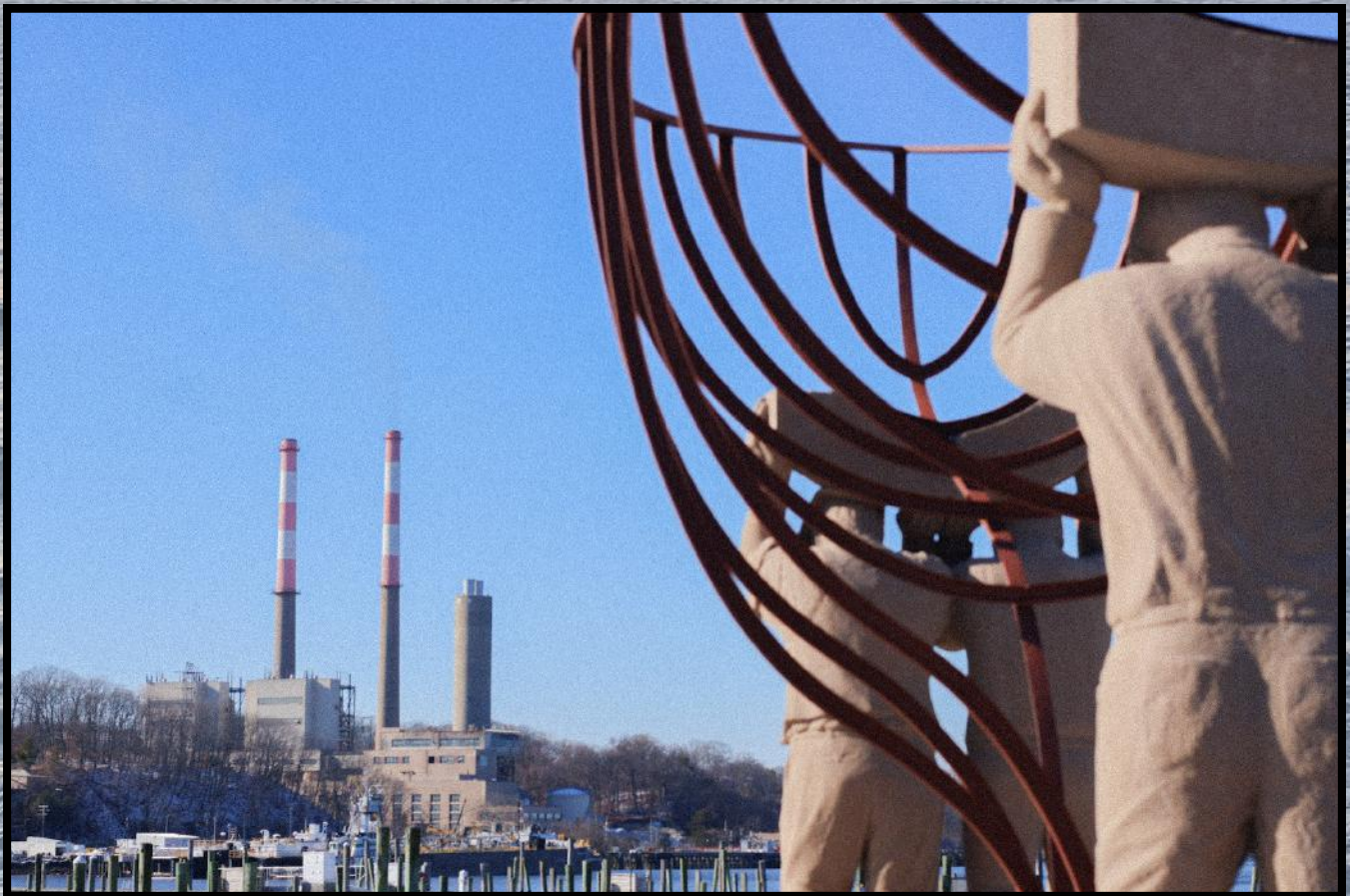
Remember when the water was so refreshing, and the sun was so hot but the big, old trees provided shade just in case we didn't want too much sun? Benches were scattered along the shady areas just in case seniors wanted to enjoy the lake and rest their weary bodies?

Remember every summer when the newspaper printed the famous legend of Lake Ronkonkoma? An Indian princess committed suicide in the lake because she was estranged from her lover? The lake became cursed and as legend has it, a young male died each year. Fact or fiction?

Remember when the lake became overwrought with weeds and geese? There was a white lifeguard stand, now toppled over on its side, turned gray from age, and is now rotted? The lake is enclosed in a rusted-out fence and there, in the entrance to the beach, stands a corroded sign, "Beach closed," from outrageous bacteria levels?

And all the happy, fun times are now only memories from yester year?

Remember when?





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