



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA CROOKSTON

INSPIRED

Art Journal



Issue 9

Inspired

Art Journal

*Creative works by UMN
Crookston students, staff,
faculty, and alumni.*

Issue 9

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The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

Preface

What inspires you? Is it a beautiful scene in nature, an intriguing piece of art, or a well-crafted speech? Do you find inspiration in the diversity of people and culture, history unfolding on the world stage, or the ordinary events of life? Each of us finds inspiration at surprising and different moments on our journey through life.

The writers and artists from UMC who contributed to this year's issue of *Inspired* share thoughts and images that flow from experiences that have impacted them. They were inspired to create out of joy and pain, self-reflection and observation. They do so with a willingness to be vulnerable; they share things that are deeply personal.

As you read through the *Inspired Art Journal – Issue 9*, you will discover that we are infinitely different yet linked by our common **humanity. People's experiences, culture, and perspectives are as varied** as the colors in the morning sky. My hope is that as we encounter thoughts and experiences different from our own, we will celebrate our diversity and find opportunity to appreciate the road that another person has traveled. ~

Lynne Mickelson

Table of Contents

NONFICTION

Gretta Nordgren	05	The Rough Draft of Life
Karen T. Miller	12	Dumped for the Doobie Brothers
Kari Sundberg	15	Play: The Old Red Barn
Gretta Nordgren	25	Being an “Others”
Laurie Everitt	27	Reversing the Ostrich
Erin Bone	46	Our Cabin
Kari Sundberg	55	I Go Back to Vagabond Village
Gretta Nordgren	58	Imperfect Perfection

FICTION

Jayla Williams	08	Aunt Josephine
Kate Bunner	21	The Scroll of Athena
Jayla Williams	48	Director
Lynne Mickelson	52	The Survivor
Kate Bunner	61	The Eternity of Hades

POETRY

Edna Chiclana	07	Phantom Limb
Jayla Williams	24	I Was Locked Up until Love Set Me Free
Edna Chiclana	51	According to John
Edna Chiclana	60	Silent Cry

VISUAL ARTS

Laurie Everitt	29	Buck Buck
Vanessa Robbins	30	Midnight Moose
Eric Castle	32	The Wall
Vanessa Robbins	34	Dreams Await
Vanessa Robbins	34	Maroon and Gold
Paige Sannes	36	Platform 9 3/4
Eric Castle	38	Cattail on Cattail

VISUAL ARTS (continued)

Paige Sannes	40	Elephants
Vanessa Robbins	42	Pansgiraffe
Vanessa Robbins	43	Transgiraffe
Hee In Moon	45	A Hope Tree

PHOTOGRAPHS

Jennifer Marcus	31	Colors of Spring
Tatianna Enget	33	A New Day (cover photo)
Hee In Moon	35	Look at the Sky
Hee In Moon	35	A City in a Lake
Hee In Moon	37	Ansan, South Korea
Alana Ortiz	39	The Curious Cat
Alana Ortiz	41	The Dialed in Dog
Hee In Moon	44	Danger

The Rough Draft of Life

Writing an essay involves a display of clear and effective communication. This is best done by writing authentically and by being aware of our mistakes so we can improve. Writing is like Life. Living a happy, effective life is best done by being ourselves and being aware of our mistakes so we can improve. In life, we might experience a “dead end” just as a writer might experience writer’s block. No essay will turn out the same if we use our own unique style of writing. In the same way, each life is different if we utilize our unique personality and original way of living. Both writing and life require concentration and commitment, and we have to be willing to put in the work to make them gratifying endeavors.

While writing, it is essential to think about ourselves. “What do I think?” “What have I experienced?” We shouldn’t write what our friend wrote, we should write in our own authentic way. If we were to copy someone else’s paper and claim to have written it ourselves, that would be classified as cheating. In the same way, if we copy another person’s life or try to “be” a different person, we are cheating ourselves. We shouldn’t live our friend’s life, we should live our own.

Wordy sentences are the anxieties in our lives that will not leave us alone. “You are worthless, and you are so stupid, and no one likes you, and if I were you I would hate myself, and you really are a screw-up.” Inarticulate phrases and remarks: wordiness is an anxiety that our writing and lives could live without.

There are times in life when we don’t know what to do. These tumultuous seasons often leave us frustrated and uncertain of what will come next. We might say, “Why is nothing going the way I want it to? What do I do now? I am stuck.” Writing is the same way. Writer’s block can consume and enable us from continuing with our writing. A writer would say, “Why can I not think of anything to write? Nothing is going the way I want it to! I am stuck.” Learning to get through these rough patches is a necessity in writing. What if every person gave up when they didn’t know what to do in life? What if every writer with writers’ block

set down their pen and abandoned their project? We cannot give up; we have to learn to keep striving to get through the ups and downs of life and writing.

Being open to change is a big part of writing. We have to be ready for something unexpected to happen. If we start writing an essay about horses, we should keep an open mind of what else the essay could include and not strictly focus on horses. Life throws curve balls at us and being open to change is one of the best ways to overcome our obstacles. **We shouldn't just stick with one thing and ignore all other options.** A certain situation could reroute our lives, just like an idea could pop into our head and cause us to change course in our writing. We need to be ready for a change in order to live fully. When writing gives you lemons, write about lemonade.

No piece of writing is the same. If we all wrote an essay about cake, they would all end up different and have our own personal flair to them. One might be about my favorite kind of cake, another might be about a cake recipe my Grandma learned when she was a teenager, and one might be about desserts in general. There are lots of different ways a paper could turn out, and there are lots of different ways a person could **turn out. We become doctors, teachers, and writers. No one's life is** completely the same, and that is what makes life special.

Unlike writing, there is no final draft in life. We are constantly revising our lives and improving so we can become the best version of ourselves. We have to edit the rough draft of our life over and over again, but we can never be completely finished. There will always be room for improvement. Writing and life take work, but they are worthwhile if we are **willing to commit to them. So let's be ourselves, keep an open mind,** and be aware of our downfalls so we can live life to its fullest.

By Gretta Nordgren

Phantom Limb

On mom's birthday did I tell you

He wore a polo and beige Bermuda?
His gleaming eyes, a soft touch on her face,
In bright candlelight, the two souls melt,
Like it was yesterday—

Though clocks were ticking faster than
His walk, though the birthday cake
Went sooner than we thought,
Dad laughed so hard that night.
Joyous heart celebrates him who fought.

But phantom limb never makes sense.
A diabolic tsunami, no brace for impact.
It just shows up, forget about *Anticipate*.

I wish he's warned, like

**"Hold on tight, here comes another 5 to 10
second- hell- of- vexation"** — before those million
Needle-poking-sensations attack.

Now the soup gets cold, jokes are cancelled.
His guitar cornered; lyrics erased.
Tossing and turning, my father must
Now wrestle with pain. My mother sits by
Him and I'm **too in pain**.
It kills me to see him hurting,
It kills me to remember how much
I've hurt him in the past.



Edna Chiclana

Aunt Josephine

I paced the floor in front of three of my five siblings - two year old Sunshine, ten year old Rainy, and sixteen year old Stormy. Our parents hadn't come home yet, and it was well past eleven o'clock at night.

"Cloudy? Are you okay?" Rain said, twirling one of her thick golden braids nervously. I stop pacing long enough to look into the sweet, innocent, blue eyes of my newly adopted sister.

"No. I wish I could tell you I am, but I'm not. I'm scared." I say, pacing again.

"When Snowy and Dewey get home, will you stop pacing and rest?" Storm asked. I stop pacing and look into her pale gray eyes.

"No," I say, and start pacing again. Sunshine began to cry.

"Cloud, please. You're scaring Sunny. Look, I know you're stressed, but is there any way to sugar coat this?" Storm says, picking Sunny up.

"I'm sorry, but I don't think I can -." I was interrupted by the front door opening. I looked over to the door, and in walked my two eldest brothers.

"Snow! Dew!" We all shout, running over to the door, almost knocking over the seventeen year old twins.

"Hey, Weather Squad. Where's Mom and Dad?" Snow asked.

"We don't know." I say, starting to pace again.

"Cloud, my man. Sit down and relax a bit. You are taking on too much stress for a thirteen year old." Dew said.

"Relax? That's impossible -." I was once again interrupted by the front door, this time by loud knocking.

Dew went and opened the door. A police officer was there, and, to make matters worse, he had bad news.

“Is this the house of Joseph and Clara Weathers?” he asked.

“It is,” Snow answered. “Is there a problem, officer?”

“I’m afraid I have some bad news. There’s been a terrible accident. We’ll need you to come down by the mortuary to identify their bodies.”

“Okay. But is it okay if only Dew and I go? I don’t want Sunny or Rain seeing that sort of thing.”

“That’s just fine. It should only take a few minutes. If they are indeed your parents, we’ll contact any remaining family members.”

Dew and Snow followed the officer out of the house. I begin to pace again, and Storm groans loudly.

“Cloud, please. Enough with the pacing. It’s bad enough Mom and Dad aren’t here to calm you down. So please. Help us out, and calm down.”

I tried to calm down and relax like everyone was telling me to, but then I began to think about what we would do without Mom and Dad, and before I knew it I was up and pacing again.

“What are we going to do without Mom and Dad?”

“I don’t know.” Storm said honestly. “But we’ll make it through. I just know we will. We have to.” Just then Dew and Snow walked back through the front door.

“It was Mom and Dad. The officer told us the story on the way to the station. Their car went off the road and into the river sometime this morning. A fisherman saw the car go in the water, and tried to get to shore quickly. He called the police.” Dew said, looking solemn. “At the station the officer contacted our aunt, who is first on Mom’s contact list. She’s coming to stay with us. Aunt Josie is going to be our new guardian, guys.”

“Aunt Josephine? Please tell me it’s a joke.” Storm said, her eyes pleading with Dew.

“No. Sorry, Stormy.”

“But... Aunt Josephine is crazy! *Hiel gek! Muy loca!*”

Storm was right. Aunt Josephine was the kind of person you’d find in an insane asylum.

When Aunt Josephine got to our house, my siblings and I put on fake smiles to help her feel welcome. However, the crazed look in her eyes made all of our smiles disappear. We knew we were done for when she began to laugh hysterically, for no reason at all. She walked around the house, gently touching everything, and giggling like a little child in a candy store. Every now and then she would glance at us and say, **“We are going to have so much fun!”**

Although, not once did she approach us, hug us, or say anything else but, **“We are going to have so much fun”**. All was going almost fine, until after dinner. After we had finished washing the dishes and cleaning up the usual dinner mess, my siblings and I went into the living room to play a game of monopoly. Aunt Josephine followed us, whispering the whole way.

“So much fun. We are going to have so much fun. So much!”

My siblings and I ignored her whispers. She’s always whispering to herself. Every time we see her, it’s a new phrase. The first time we ever met her, she whispered, **“Kids. So many kids. So many,”** and the next time, all she would say was, **“I like kids. Kids are so much easier. So much. So much!”**, and once, all she said was, **“Soon. Real soon.”** So we were used to her strange ways. Though, that doesn’t mean they didn’t make us uneasy, and a little scared. This visit, though, was different.

“When is your bedtime?” she asked, surprising us all.

“Well, it’s whenever you want. But I’m sure we were all planning to retire after this game, anyway. We’re all a little tired.” Snow said, glancing at the rest of us. We all nodded in agreement. To our surprise, Aunt Josephine smiled at this, a strange, almost pleasurable,

gleam in her eyes. I shrug off the uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach, and turn my attention back to the game of monopoly. I should have listened to my gut feelings.

Later, as I was lying in my bed, unable to sleep, I heard scratching noises and heavy breathing coming from down the hall, **near the twins' room. Naturally, I assume it's my brothers, and I pay no mind to the strange noises.** Sometimes my brothers could be weird like that. But then the noises began to get louder, and kept getting closer to **my room. As the noises got closer, I realized that it wasn't heavy breathing that I was hearing, but instead it was a whispering voice.** And as it approached my door, my blood went cold.

"It's time. It's time, now. Time!" came the whisper, followed by an eerie giggle. Then, suddenly there was a tall shadowy figure standing in the doorway of my room. I was frozen in fear and confusion. The figure resembled my aunt, but looked like a stretched out version of her, like Slender Man, almost. The figure did not move, but just stood there, staring at me, whispering loudly with a raspy growl.

"It's time. Time!"

Then, downstairs, I heard the front door open, then close a few seconds later. Then, a female voice, that reminded me of Mom, floated up to my room.

"Hello? Anyone home? I'm sorry I'm late. Traffic was bad. You've never met me, but I'm your aunt Josephine. Is anyone here?"

The figure in my doorway began to move closer to me, still whispering, **"It's time", and the stench of blood drifted towards me...**

The End

By Jayla Williams

Dumped for the Doobie Brothers

It was during my freshman year of college that I was dumped for the Doobie Brothers—the year I shared a closet-sized room with a girl named Julie in the 4-H House at the University of Arkansas. Julie **and I didn't have much in common. She was a music major who got her kicks by strategically placing Whoopie Cushions around the house, but I envied Julie in a way. I didn't know what I wanted to do** with my life, although I did know I wanted to do something for Jesus. I was an avid participant in a campus ministry and spent hours in the 4-H House music room, playing songs about Jesus on the grand piano while my grades plummeted.

Despite our differences Julie and I got along okay, probably for that very reason. And we did share one thing, a love of music. I was proud to be voted song leader of the 4-H House, which meant at supper **time I would tap on my glass with a spoon to get everyone's attention**, and then we would sing songs and hope the cute house boy we had our eye on would serve our table that night. As song leader, it was also my responsibility to find someone to prepare the residents for a singing competition that was held each Christmas between the resident halls and sororities. Julie, being a music major, was, of course, the unquestioned choice.

During one of those practices, Julie introduced me to a friend of hers who dropped by—a DJ at the university radio station. Anyway, Sam or Joe or whatever **his name was, I can't remember, called me a few days later. He was very excited. He said, "How would you like to meet the Doobie Brothers?"** then waited smugly for me to respond. Well, I must admit, I knew very little about the Doobie Brothers. My aspirations **to follow Jesus meant I didn't pay much attention to rock groups.** I did know the Doobie Brothers was a big group, though, and that one of their **songs was "Jesus Is Just Alright,"** so I thought they couldn't be all bad. Sam then informed me that there was a Doobie Brothers concert on campus that weekend, and as an employee of the university radio

station he was going to interview them in their dressing room after the concert.

The word of my good fortune spread fast at the 4-H House. I was going to meet the Doobie Brothers. The excitement this generated **couldn't help but make me excited, too.**

The concert was a blur. It was loud and smokey. The Doobie Brothers performed on a stage set up on the basketball court of the fieldhouse, while we concert goers sat on the bleachers at one side of the room. I do remember clearly, though, that the Doobie Brothers sang **"Jesus Is Just Alright," and one guy, who must have been on drugs, that spun like a top next to the stage throughout the entire concert.**

When the concert finally ended, Sam talked our way into the dressing room. It was one of those rooms where the basketball team suits up. The Doobie Brothers, their crew members, and two girls, who appeared to be groupies, were standing in a circle around the room. On a wooden table in the middle of the room was an assortment of fried chicken, corn on the cob, and such that a couple of the band members nibbled on half-heartedly. I found a wall and stood against it. Sam moved to a spot across the room from me. He was still holding his tape recorder, but it was apparent now that he had gained entrance it had lost its purpose.

"My darn heel broke, and I fell right off the stage on my butt!"* (**edited version*) the tall, thin Doobie Brother with long hair said, and he threw the offending four-inch heel across the room. One of the crew members picked up the heel and gave it a toss, then everyone started throwing it around, laughing, being cool, loose. I was just trying to stay out of the way when suddenly I realized a joint was being passed around the room and was headed my way. I hate to think what I looked like to the Doobie Brothers, that shy young girl, dressed up in a brown suit as **if I had just been to church, and I'm sure they weren't surprised when I declined the joint, and it went on to the next person.**

In retrospect, I'm sure the Doobie Brothers were wondering what one does in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Then the Doobie Brother who had lost his heel said something about finding a card game, and Sam jumped on that like any overeager fan would. He rushed out of the room to make some phone calls to the guys in his dorm, then off he went with that Doobie Brother and his groupie, who was hanging on his arm.

I don't remember if Sam said goodbye or can you get someone to take you home. I just remember that he left, and I wasn't sure what to do. I found a phone booth and called Mom Brown, the house mother at the 4-H House, who came and picked me up.

Back at the 4-H House I was greeted by the other girls and their dates, asking how it went, and then the hard question, "Where is Sam?" **I didn't lie. I knew I had been dumped. But really, I was kind of glad when Sam disappeared. It was clear from the start that we weren't meant to be.** And if a person has to be dumped once or twice in a lifetime, at least that one time I had a worthy opponent. That night I was dumped for the Doobie Brothers.

Karen T. Miller

Play: The old red barn

Scene: An elderly man sits in his hospital room, surrounded by his family.

Edgar: *(About to get discharged from a brief hospital stay.)* I know getting admitted to the hospital for this ulcer was the best way of getting Dorothy into the Alzheimer's Unit. I know that. I've been putting it off for a year now, knowing it wouldn't get better, but wishing it could. I know it was supposed to happen this way; there's no way I could have drove her there, walked her in, and just left her there alone. *(Starts crying.)*

Adult son: *(Puts his arm around his dad, choked up, unable to get any words out.)*

Edgar: I didn't even get to say goodbye to her, though. I didn't know last Friday would be our last night sleeping together in the bed we've shared for 63 years. I just wasn't ready...

Scene: Nurse talks to family members outside of Dorothy's room at the Alzheimer's Unit.

Nurse: I know it's hard to deal with this and as Dorothy's family, you want to explain this situation to her. But remember when someone has Alzheimer's this extensively, there's no reasoning with them. I know it's hard to hear, but no matter what you say, nothing is going to make sense to her, ok? *(Said with the upmost of compassion and respect. Pauses for a moment.)* May I suggest you just try to sit with her and listen. Don't reason or explain, just listen, and agree with her so she feels understood.

Scene: Dorothy's two adult daughters are with her in her room.

Dorothy: I just don't understand why my mom and dad would leave me here!? Where did they go? When are they coming back to get me? *(Said with much anguish.)*

Adult daughter # 1: Mom, your parents are gone, remember?! They died 30 years ago!? You haven't seen them in over 30 years. You're in a nursing home, Mom. We had to bring you here because it wasn't safe to have you at home anymore.

Dorothy: WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY PARENTS ARE GONE!?
(*Frantically looks around the room, wondering where the exit is and how she can leave.*) **My parents are NOT gone and you're not going to lie to me! Who are you and who sent you here? I'm not your mom!? I don't have any kids! Get out of my room right now!**

Adult daughter #2: (*Quickly looks at her sister, realizing she hasn't fully accepted her mother's diagnosis.*) **It's ok, Dorothy. It's all going to be ok. I think your parents are going to be here shortly. Would you like to sit with me and do a puzzle while we wait for them?**

Dorothy: (*Appears nervous and unsure, but a lot calmer and trusting of this plan.*) **Well, I know they'll be here soon, they told me so. I suppose I'll sit down and wait with you. What did you say your name was? I'm Dorothy. It's nice to meet you. Thank you for waiting with me.**

Scene closes: Adult daughter #1 leaves the room crying. She's emotional and having a hard time understanding this new way of communicating with her mother.

Scene: At Edgar's house, a couple of weeks later. Edgar and his adult granddaughter Natalie are having a conversation around the table.

Edgar: (*Sitting in a chair, looking down at the floor.*) **It's just not the same without her here, but I just couldn't do it anymore; it was getting too hard. So many days she didn't even know who I was, Natalie....**

Natalie: I know, Grandpa. But you know that this was the right thing. And this **decision was all of ours together. The weight isn't on you; we're all carrying it together and will share the heaviness. You're not alone in this, but I know it's hard; I do. I'm so sorry for your pain.**

Edgar: **It just feels like I've given up on her. We've been married 63 years; 63 YEARS!?** We took a vow that said, 'for better or worse – through sickness and health.' (*Starts crying.*)

Natalie: **You didn't give up on her, Grandpa. If anything, you've honored that vow to the fullest. You've been the absolute best husband to Grandma for over 6 decades. We all know it...and she knows it. Even if she doesn't remember it, she knows it and lived it.**

Edgar: It hurt when she thought I was her dad or when I'd come in from the shop, and she didn't know who I was and would call your dad scared.

Natalie: **Grandma didn't even know she was calling Dad, though. She just had that emergency number written down and knew it would be someone on the other line who could help her. She doesn't know any of us, Grandpa. Alzheimer's is wiping her slate clean, little pieces at a time. It's been slowly happening for five years, but I know this rapid decline is hard to handle.**

Edgar: I know it, I just don't want to admit it. It's hard to explain, but we're coming to the end.....I can feel it.

Natalie: What do you mean by that? *(Natalie loves her grandpa so much and speaks with the softest of tones and the most respect.)*

Edgar: I'm 87 years old. Most of my friends are gone or are in a nursing home. Some of my siblings have passed. There's just no one left. And now Grandma's gone too. I know she's still physically here, but it feels like she's gone. I'm just not ready.

Natalie: I don't believe anyone's ever truly ready, Grandpa. But I do have to tell myself this: I'm 39 years old. I thank God that he's given me 39 years and the gift of seeing my kids grow up. All I've ever hoped for is to at least live long enough to raise my kids. So far, I've been given that. And I feel so blessed that you and Grandma were around for it. She knew my kids before Alzheimer's, and my kids knew the true Grandma. I feel blessed beyond measure that I got to grow up with you guys, and that my kids got to grow up with you too.

(Both are crying, knowing old age is such a bittersweet feeling.)

Natalie: I know it feels scary nearing the end. But Grandpa, I can only **hope God gives me 87 years like he's given you. I can only hope God gives me 80 good years like he gave Grandma. Grandma has had 80 wonderful, amazing, great years with our family. And she has you to thank for that. You guys have built and lived such a wonderful life together. A life most would love to have.**

(Edgar look outside, at the 100-year farm he lives on, that belonged to his grandpa before him.)

Edgar: Did I ever tell you the real reason why I fixed up the old, red barn?

Natalie: **Well, I remember you saying there weren't a lot of big, traditional barns left these days. And that you wanted to have new siding and tin put on it so there wasn't any upkeep...**

Edgar: **...and spending \$30,000 to get the new foundation put underneath it, which Grandma didn't like.**

Natalie: Yes! That! *(Laughs.)* Grandma sure was upset about that much money being spent on a barn that no one even goes in! She didn't talk to you for two weeks!

Edgar: *(The smile slowly fades.)* **Yes. She always said it wasn't necessary. But it was. I did it so there'd be something left when I'm gone, Natalie. I want that barn in our family for another 100 years. I need to be remembered after I'm gone. Promise me you'll think of me every time you see it.**

Natalie: *(Goes to hug her grandpa, speaking through tears.)* Oh Grandpa, I promise! Yes! Your legacy will live on through your family, through that **barn, through all the memories you've given us. You are the strong roots of this big tree; don't ever forget that, please. You have given us all such a great example and such a great life. I can't thank you enough for the example you've set. I'd move into that barn today if I could.**

Scene: Flashback to 55 years earlier, in Edgar & Dorothy's new farmhouse.

Edgar: *(As a strong, 32-year-old man, young kids playing at his feet.)* Come and sit down for a minute, Dorothy.

Dorothy: **No! Are you crazy? Everyone's going to be here soon?! I've still got the stuffing on the stove and the table to set?! Keep the kids out of the kitchen.**

Edgar: Dorothy. Come. Please.

(Dorothy wipes her hands and throws the white dish towel on the kitchen table, walking towards the living room.)

Edgar: Sit down on the couch with me. Please. For one minute before everyone gets here.

(Dorothy sits down, lets out a sigh, as she expects Christmas company to walk through the door at any minute.)

Edgar: **I know I don't say it much but thank you.**

(Dorothy looks over at her husband, slightly confused with a smile forming on her face.)

Edgar: **I'm serious. Thank you. For all of this. For these loud, busy kids....**

Dorothy: **Lord, they're loud....** *(Laughs.)*

Edgar: **For decorating that little tree over there...**

Dorothy: **Lord, it's little....** *(Laughs.)*

Edgar: For making our new house a home. Look at it; everything we ever wanted is right here.

(Dorothy stays quiet as she knows Edgar doesn't share his feelings often.)

Edgar: **When my grandpa told me that one day I'd be living on this farm, I couldn't even imagine it. I never imagined that one day I'd have four little kids at my feet, waiting to open their Christmas gifts in our newly built house. I never thought I'd have a beautiful, witty, and sharp, wife who hates cooking so much.** *(Chuckles at the joke that would follow for years to come.)* **I never thought I'd own this farm, with land of my own, raising animals in that old red barn. It just hit me suddenly; this feeling of gratitude, realizing how blessed I am.**

Dorothy: Even with that God-forsaken tiny little Christmas tree?

Edgar: Even with that God-forsaken tiny little Christmas tree.

Scene: Present day, Edgar is walking into the nursing home carrying a tiny little Christmas tree to put in Dorothy's room.

Nurse: **Dorothy's sleeping right now, Edgar, but go on in. That's a cute little Christmas tree you've got there!**

Edgar: **Thank you. I'm sure she'll like it.** (Smiles, reflecting on all the memories.)

(Edgar goes into Dorothy's room. While she sleeps, he quietly decorates the little Christmas tree with a few gold bulbs taken from the Christmas box at home.)

Dorothy: *(Wakes up, remembering her husband for a brief moment.)* Oh, you and that damn, little Christmas tree. *(She laughs.)* Come here. Sit down for a moment so I can say thank you.

(Edgar sits down, knowing the moment will soon be gone, but overwhelmed with love for his wife and another moment in front of a tiny little Christmas tree.)

Scene: 30 years later. Natalie's adult son is now 46 years old. He's driving into his great-grandparent's old farmstead where a beautiful, old red barn still stands strong. He has his own young grandchildren with him for the day, along with his mom Natalie, who is now almost 70. They pull up to the barn and park the car. Natalie's heart remembers a conversation fondly,

"Promise me you'll think of me every time you see it."

A tear falls down her cheek as she still remembers her grandparents so vividly and, oh, how she misses them. She gets out of the car and walks with her own grandchildren towards the barn. Her son grabs her hand and gives it a squeeze.

The curtain falls, bringing the show to an end.

By Kari Sundberg

The Scroll of Athena

Two siblings, a sister, and a brother were raised together by their mother in their small one room hut on the border of the woods. One dark and windy night a large figure appeared at the door, shrouded in a grey cloak. Lightening flashed behind him illuminating an old man carrying a carved wooden staff.

He stood in the doorway then intoned, “**A** journey awaits **you**,” he points to the boy in the room, “**A** journey that must be taken, for the **SCROLL OF ATHENA**.”

The brother who was just waiting for someone else to notice how much of a hero he always has been, loudly answers “**I will go!**” He jumps from his chair and rushes towards the door.

“**Wait**,” His mother desperately called, “**Take** this for your **trip**.” She quickly holds out a bag of supplies.

The boy shook his head, and strode toward the door saying, “I do not need that, I know about the world, and I shall find the Scroll of **Athena**.”

“**Wait**,” His sister desperately called, “**Take** this for your **trip**.” She quickly gathers last of the apples from the larder.

The boy shook his head, and strode toward the door saying, “I do not need that, I know about the world, and I shall find the Scroll of **Athena**.”

“**Stay** yourself young **man**,” The figure at the door said, as he held out a slip of paper, “**Take** what is offered you by those who have your best interest at **heart**.”

The boy shook his head, and strode out the door, “I do not need that; I know about the world, and I shall find the scroll of **Athena**.”

“**So be it**,” The figure said.

His mother and sister watched from the doorway, as the young boy strode out into the night, armed with nothing, except what was in his pockets.

“**And you?**” the figure asked, turning towards the girl, “**You** are needed as well.” He again held out the paper.

The girl startled and paused before, she took the bag from her mother, picked up the apples and took the paper from the figure. She glanced at the house, hugged her mother, saying “I will be back as soon as I can,” then headed off towards the forest behind the house.

The girl began to travel through the woods, with its dark long shadows that reached out like the claws. She glanced at the paper in her hand; it began to glow revealing a map creating a ring of light to see by. She trudged on through the forest, a small light moving into the gloom.

As dawn broke over the trees, the girl trudged onward. She was covered in mud and her skirt was torn. She smiled when she saw a lake in the distance, it would be the perfect place to rest.

The girl sat down on the banks and began eating a few of the apples, "**Where** are you **going**?" The girl looked up and saw a beautiful swan swimming in the lake, "**I** am on a quest, for the Scroll of **Athena**."

The Swan fluffed her wings, "**Honestly!** You should not worry yourself with that, I have a scroll here. The scroll of **Eris**,"

The girl paused, "**I-I don't know.**"

"**Well**, there is no certainty that you will ever receive the Scroll of Athena, and all you have to do to is walk into the **water**," The swan said, as she pointed to a jagged rock on which the scroll sat.

The girl hesitated before she rose, "**Thank** you, but **no**." She was about to put the map in her belt when the swan rose ominously and hissed loudly then ripped the map from her hands and threw it into the water.

The girl watched as the water drifted the pieces along, she looked at the swan with dismay.

"**The** scroll is over there if you **like**," the swan spread her feathered wing over towards the scroll.

The girl shouldered her bag, turned away from the swan, and proceeded into the dark woods. The shadows were back; as she began walking deeper, her dress and hair were being grabbed and torn by low hanging branches.

The girl looked up, as a bird flew overhead and stumbled over a tree root falling onto her face in the dirt. She looked up just as a moose emerged from the trees.

"**Climb** on and I will take you to the scroll that you seek. The Scroll of **Athena**." The moose said, "**You** were wise not to trust that swan; she seeks to keep those from the Scroll of Athena, something she was never able to **obtain**."

The girl climbed onto the kindhearted moose, and they road through the forest until they reached the foot of a temple. A large flight of stairs ascended before them, atop which stood a golden pedestal in the form of an eagle, where a single scroll was kept.

“You must take the climb on your **own,**” The moose said.

The girl looked around, **“And** what of my **brother?”**

“He has abandoned the quest; he was tempted by the ease of the scroll of Eris. It blinds people and causes them to make mistakes they cannot **face.**”

The girl looked up at the steep steps, and yet as she began to climb with each step, they became easier. The higher she climbed, the hotter the sun beat down on her. The hem of her dress was singed as the sun burnt hot on the golden steps. Her hands became scorched with burns.

As the girl neared the top, she reached into her bag and pulled out a pair of thick gloves then proceeded to climb the steps. She beheld the scroll on the top of the pedestal; she took it and found herself on the ground below. Her torn and tattered things were replaced with a leather bag of coins and a new dress of maroon and gold, while her wounds were healed.

“It is time,” the grey figure said, as he appeared.

The girl paused, **“What** about-” She paused when she noticed that there was another scroll on the pedestal.

“Athena’s Scroll is for all who can find the will to take **it.**” The grey figure said, **“Perhaps** in time your brother will be able to admit his own mistakes and claim it as you have **done.**”

The girl smiled, as she climbed onto the **moose’s** neck, and it carried her back to her house that stood on the border of the woods.

It was calm and still; it seemed to glow with a golden light from within as her mother stood in the doorway waiting her return.

The girl smiled, as she dismounted and headed in the house; she was home. Though the world around her appeared unaltered, it felt different and as the contrast from the unknown and the familiar seemed less wide and daunting.

By Kate Bunner

I was Locked Up until LOVE set me Free

A Valentine's Day Tribute

The majestic bird flew to me
Carrying a message so sweet
A dove who sang a melody
Delivered your heart at my feet.

From my cage, I gazed at it
Its beauty did the whole world lit.
And then I saw the glorious flock
With the key that fit my lock

They flew to where your heart lay
With a song brighter than day,
And unlocked the door of my heart,
So that now we may never part.

~ Jayla Williams

Being an “Other”

I was home-schooled up until my sophomore year, when I started going to public high school part-time. In our small town where almost everyone had known each other since they were kids, I stuck out like a sore thumb. From the moment I walked into school, I realized that the movie *High School Musical* was actually pretty realistic. No, the kids **weren't singing on tables in the cafeteria, but there were a lot of cliques** and definitely some bullies. I was *not* expecting that. I was mocked and **teased for who I was, and where I came from.** “**Did you take your covered wagon to school today?**” my classmates would ask. “**Do you know what electricity is?**” Looking back, I can laugh at these little questions and comments. But as they were being said to me, I did not think they were funny. Being homeschooled, I had been raised in an environment where it was safe to be myself, where I knew I was loved and supported. I had no idea that the kids in public school were not very nice. I suppose, they had been taught from a very young age to act a certain way in order to protect themselves. And here I was, raw and exposed, unaware that this was what was considered normal to them. My classmates never seemed to accept me. When I would try to talk to someone, I would often be given an eye-roll in return. I was known as **“the home-schooled girl,” and I hated that.**

Now, I am not here to criticize my former classmates. After all, we all have our own story, and I would not be who I am today without them. But all of those comments made me feel a tremendous amount of shame. I was ashamed of who I was. Ashamed of where I came from. I hated everything about myself.

One day in class, during my junior year, I was asked a question. Knowing the answer, I responded with confidence. But one of my **classmates disagreed and said to the class, “I don't know if you know this, but she is *home-schooled*.” The girl beside me gave a sarcastic laugh and said, “Yeah, she's an... other.” It was meant to be a joke, and I tried to laugh along. Knowing that if I didn't, they would make even more fun of me. But the words affected me more than I realized. On my way home from school that day, tears streamed down my face onto my steering wheel. I was so angry. Angry that I had been home-schooled.**

Angry that I would never be able to “fit in.” Angry that no one was accepting me. I felt so lost and alone.

So, I decided the best thing I could do was disappear. I stopped. I **stopped trying. Stopped caring. I stopped being myself. I didn't talk**, knowing that if I did, they would probably make fun of me. After months of pain and hiding, I walked into Ms. Mooney's classroom. Ms. Mooney was my soccer coach, director, and above all, my friend. And I didn't have very many of those. After I explained how my life was going, this is what she said to me, “Don't ever let other people blow out your light. There are always going to be people who try, but don't let them. Be yourself and shine brightly!”

Unfortunately, I did not get it right away, and I still struggled through the rest of my junior year. But eventually, I came to the realization that the most important thing I could ever do **was be myself. While it didn't feel safe**, I chose to be vulnerable, and that is what helped me get through this time in my life.

Being homeschooled taught me to value my family and be kind to all people. I am so glad I was home-schooled, and it brings me no shame anymore. I am also glad that I went to public school. Though it was not exactly fun for me, it taught me valuable lessons and created relationships that I would not have wanted to miss.

In my high school, there was a quote painted on a wall in the library...**Ope! Sorry, my classmates would correct me, “It's the *media center!*” Either way, the quote was attributed to Dr. Seuss. It said, “Be who you are, and say what you feel. Because those who mind, don't matter. And those who matter, don't mind.”**

So to those of us who are different, to those of us who are hurting, and feel like outcasts; the truth is that we are enough. We are worthy. **And it doesn't matter what the world thinks of us, because** being ourselves, is exactly who we are supposed to be.

By Gretta Nordgren

Reversing the Ostrich

I blame *Old Yeller*. When I was a middle schooler, this was one of the stories we studied for language arts. I still remember sitting in that darkened classroom while the teacher showed us the Disney movie version of the story. I was shocked and horrified that Travis had to shoot his dog, who clearly had been the best dog ever. To this day, decades later, I rarely tackle any media that involves painful or difficult subjects, whether fiction or nonfiction.

...All right. I actually can't say that I was fine and well-adjusted, and that this one book made me stick my head in the sand for the last thirty-seven years. If I heard it once as a child, "Why do you have to be so sensitive?!" I have heard it hundreds of times. Sad or painful events in literature or real-life stick with me for a very long time. Years later, I now understand that I fit into the category of 'highly sensitive person.' This explains why it felt so traumatic reading about Old Dan and Little Ann dying in *Where the Red Fern Grows*, watching a horror movie with friends during sleepovers, or reading Leonard Peltier's autobiography in college. (You can believe that after the peer pressure eased, horror movies were off my list.)

In stark contrast, this is one of the reasons I'm very drawn to family-friendly comedy. I was the tagalong little sister of two older brothers, and they often didn't want me around. We did connect through watching things together like Harold Lloyd, SCTV, or *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. The memories of everyone gathered and laughing at a shared moment of *Fibber McGee and Molly* or *The Apple Dumpling Gang* were moments of joy and connection. While trying to fall asleep at night, thinking about the things that were funny sure beat wondering why the Marches didn't get Beth to a doctor sooner.

I have chosen the ostrich lifestyle ever since leaving college as a young person. Comedy is in, heart-wrenching is out. If I didn't have to watch the daily news or read painful things anymore, I wasn't going to. This is why I could never join a book club. I remember when *The Deep End of the Ocean* was hitting all the best-seller lists, and I was sort of intrigued...until I heard it was about the disappearance of a child. As a young mother myself at the time, I 'noped' right out of there and haven't read it yet.

It wasn't until the protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd that I realized the roots of my willful ignorance are based upon privilege. I grew up white and middle-class in rural Minnesota in the **1970s and 80s. Topics of racial justice weren't discussed at home or in school**, so sadly they did not enter my consciousness. After marrying and moving to Wisconsin to raise a family in a progressive area, I remained mostly hidden from the realities of oppression. I did not educate myself on how to become an ally because I did not realize there was work to be done. Hateful events were continually occurring, but my head was still in the sand.

Of course, I was somewhat aware of growing unrest. Being a liberal in America during the Trump administration meant watching the hypocrisy of the ruling government officials, who turned back hard-fought rights and actions. This was hard to bear. Many people may not realize this, but in Wisconsin, we had been experiencing the same authoritarian takeover for eight years prior to the presidential election of 2016. Scott Walker and his fellow Republicans controlled all aspects of our legislature; I saw firsthand that protests, letter-writing campaigns, etc. seemed to make no difference in the removal of rights and fairness to us as constituents. This further cemented the idea that **bad things happen, there's nothing you can do about it, and it will keep you awake at night.**

So ever since the Black Lives Matter movement began to bring attention to long-standing injustices, I have been trying to be more mindful of my ingrained prejudices. Just like reading the sad stories in my youth, however, starting this work leaves me feeling disheartened and incapacitated. For example, I bought *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, and two years later, it is still unread on my shelf. So the question I must ask is, how do I educate myself on the hard things, look for ways that I can make valuable contributions, and *not* let it eat me up inside? How do I **keep up hope and optimism when I can't see that my efforts make any difference at all? I haven't figured it out yet**, and thus I keep my head in the sand. I am realizing that as a person of privilege, it is my duty to understand and dismantle the systems of oppression that hurt so many people. If not me, then who? Right now I am a strut keeping this oppression in place, when I should arrive with a crowbar and a leveler, to help create something better.

I'd like to say that I have worked to become a better person in this regard already, or that I have solid plans for doing so in the future. But I know myself. Ibram X. Kendi's book on my nightstand next to Agatha Christie has usually meant that I'm rereading a whodunit. There must be a way to learn distress tolerance, even for highly sensitive people. If this is a skill that can be developed, then maybe I can finally read sad fictional stories, like a boy euthanizing his sick pet, or keep up with the world news on a semi-regular basis—and still be able to fall asleep at night. Reversing the ostrich by pulling my head out of the sand and taking a clear look around might be the first step that will help me become a more thoughtful, kind, and productive member of the human race.

By Laurie Everitt



BUCK, BUCK created by Laurie Everitt

Puppetry has become a recent passion, and I can see all manner of uses to educate and entertain various groups in my community.



MIDNIGHT MOOSE by Vanessa Robbins

Acrylic on canvas

I am a surrealistic animal artist.



COLORS OF SPRING - photo by Jennifer Marcus

Being creative through storytelling is something I've always been passionate about, so I am glad that I have the opportunity to tell my stories through photographs and creative writing.



THE WALL by Eric Castle

Watercolor and Sketchbook

When I travel I enjoy spending time sitting and sketching interesting places or recording impressions.



A NEW DAY -photo by Tatianna Enget

Photo taken by her home

I love spending time with family, with kids, and capturing moments with a camera!

(Cover photo – reverse image)



DREAMS AWAIT by Vanessa Robbins
Copic marker, ink, and colored pencil on Strathmore Bristol paper



MAROON AND GOLD by Vanessa Robbins



LOOK AT THE SKY – photo by Hee In Moon (South Korea)



A CITY IN A LAKE –photo by Hee In Moon (South Korea)



PhotoScan by Google Photos

PLATFORM 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ by Paige Sannes

Acrylic paint on canvas

This art piece demonstrates Platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$, the train station where Harry Potter and friends embark on their journeys to Hogwarts.



ANSAN, SOUTH KOREA – photo by Hee In Moon
I am so grateful for my precious memories and good friends.



CATTAIL ON CATTAIL by Eric Castle

Linocut block print, oil based ink, handmade cattail paper

I very much enjoy making beautiful, functional objects.



THE CURIOUS CAT – photo by Alana Ortiz

Photo of Charlotte take in Las Vegas

Photography and videography are a huge passion of mine, particularly sports photography and videography. I really love encapsulating the energy and intensity of sports into photos and videos.



PhotoScan by Google Photos



ELEPHANTS by Paige Sannes

Acrylic paint on canvas

Elephants are my favorite animal and are depicted here as empathetic companions.



THE DIALED IN DOG – photo by Alana Ortiz
Photo of Loki taken in Mount Charleston.



PANSGIRAFFE by Vanessa Robbins

Acrylic on canvas

I am a surrealistic animal artist.



TRANSGIRAFFE by Vanessa Robbins
Acrylic on canvas.



DANGER – photo by Hee In Moon

Photo taken in South Korea.

나무 한그루 MOON



A HOPE TREE by Hee In Moon

Painting

Our Cabin

In a small town, where he grew up, where she grew up, where we grew up, it all started. 1945 returning from World War II, he chose a **moonshiner's cabin to create his masterpiece that still reflects a million memories** like the treads on each carpet square that decorates the main room. Blues and browns and yellows and greens, we hopped onto each square as mom called out the color for me, for my brother, for my boys – more treads, more memories. Each stein that hangs from a hook holds laughter from stories shared about family and friends – with family and friends.

To fit everyone in, George built more for them – more space for **his kids and their kids and my kids. The “big” cabin protected by white birch and pine** that allow glimpses through the windows down to the diamonds on the lake where the loon calls and the eagles search for prey. In the trees, we see flying squirrels and know the whippoorwill hides so only his voice is heard at dusk to wish us sweet dreams. In the morning, we are greeted by the buzz of a nearby humming bird who flies much to close for comfort but is a welcome sound. I step out from the **“little” cabin** - the smell of the trees and the cool air greet me until the scent of the fire from the stove in the big cabin creeps into my nostrils and lets me know that I can greet my loved ones, and secretly hoping the next thing I smell is pancakes and bacon. Nobody makes them like a grandpa can make them, my grandpa – **or my boys' grandpa.**

After breakfast we can journey into a space somewhere in the woods nearby and search for flowers for her, my grandma – **my boys' grandma: daisies, water lilies, tiger lilies – my mom's favorite, and anything else in bright colors of yellow, orange and purple. Just don't touch the ones that make us itch. Look for signs of wildlife; fox dens on the hill, a doe and fawn drinking water from the swampy marsh where a turtle is sunning himself on a log. Watch out for snakes; no, they aren't poisonous, I just don't like them. Watch out for bear; they are probably more scared of you than you are of them, but if you sight one, jumping on the roof of your car will do very little to hinder her mission.**

Pick up rocks along the road, make your way up the driveway to see him tinkering in the shed; **sometimes you'd swear the smell of**

pipe tobacco still lingers lost among the tools. You didn't love it while it was there, now you miss it and see him when you catch a whiff, real or imagined. There is always something to do, cutting down a tree or a project from the honey do list.

But first, what about a quick trip to the inlet. Cast a line off the dock, **and see how many bluegills you can snag, or if you're real lucky** you will catch the eye of a bass; you can tell, they are heavier and fight different. You yell for someone to hear you because you want to show off your prize, but want to do it quickly so your trophy can dive safely back into the weeds. While you wait for the stomping of shoes on the sandy path you hear the chorus of frogs chirping as dragon flies land on the reeds and their iridescent wings flutter in the sun. Mom is there to **take your picture; she doesn't even have to remind you to smile because** you are already grinning ear to ear from pride. As she steps off the dock, back onto the sandy shore, you hear, **"An agate!"**, and she slips the red rock into her pocket for the collection near the patio where we all add treasures we find on the shores or in the water. The place where we have waited for the monarchs to hatch, spreading its wings repeatedly as they dry and prepare for flight. We wait with baited breath for her to see her new world, our world. She takes off, slow at first, wavering in her path then gaining speed and height until she is nothing but a speck to us and to her we look the same, **standing next to a tiny moonshiner's** cabin.

Erin Bone

Director

The opening act of our play, “A Christmas Carol”, went excellently. But before the second act, the director disappeared, with no warning or trace of her left, except for one gold earring. Jonas and I stood apart from everyone else, hugging our chests.

“What do you think happened to her, Clarise?” Jonas asked, shivering.

“Dunno. I hope nothing bad.”

“You think they’ll call off the play or get a new director?”

“Probably call off the play. Wouldn’t this be a crime scene now?”

“I guess.” he sounded uncertain. At least that made two of us.

“Uh-oh. Here comes Neil.” I groan.

“Either of you know what happened to Mrs. Bell?” Neil says, walking up to us.

“No. You?” Jonas uncrossed his arms.

“I think she was abducted by aliens from Mars.”

“Like... as in ‘Martians’? Are you being serious? I think that’s stupid, and unreasonable, Neil.” I say, uncrossing my arms and balling my hands into fists.

“Jeez! Calm down, Clarise. It was just a wild guess.” Neil backs down and walks away. Jonas and I watch him go.

“You know, you could at least try to be nice to him, Clarise.” Jonas turns to look at me.

“I know, but every time I’m around him, I get all antsy, and my adrenaline levels shoot through the roof. I just want to... to punch him or something.”

“Uh... well... you really only have yourself to blame.”

“I know. But... let’s talk about something else.”

“Alright... So what do you supposed happened to Mrs. Bell?”

“Dunno. You already asked me that.”

“Oh. Right. Well... I hope she’s okay, wherever she is.”

“She probably isn’t. She was probably kidnapped.”

“By who, though?”

“Probably an ex-lover.”

“Or the principal.”

“Why the... oh never mind. It's better not to question you, Jonas.”

Jonas didn't reply. We stood there not talking for a while.

“Okay. Guys. Quiet down, please. I have an announcement to make.” one of the police officers says, shouting over the noise. Jonas and I exchange a look.

“We've come to a conclusion. It appears that your director - what's her name?” the officer turns to me.

“Uh... Mrs. Bell.” I say, shoving my hands into my pockets.

“Mrs. Bell. Thank you. It appears that Mrs. Bell has been kidnapped. We found some threatening letters in her dressing room. We will be keeping you up to date as we look for her. If any of you see or hear anything, or remember anything we might have missed, tell us right away, capisce? Capisce. And please. Remain calm?”

Ignoring the officer, everyone went into an uproar, crying and wailing like injured wolves.

“Hey, hey, hey! Everyone please calm down!” the officer yelled, trying to control the crowd.

“Oh my gosh!” I whisper, falling into Jonas.

“It's okay, Clarise.” He stroked my head.

“I need air. Can we go outside for a minute? Please Jonas.”

“Sure. Come on.” He led me out the back way. When we got outside, I immediately felt better.

“Thanks for coming out here with me, Jonas. You didn't have to.”

“I know, but I wanted to. Besides, you needed me - wait. What's that?” Jonas pointed to the ground behind the dumpster.

“I don't know. Let's go check it out. It looks like someone's foot.”

“That's scary. Don't say that?”

“Help me move the dumpster, Jonas.”

“Okay, but promise me we'll go get the police after this.”

“Promise. Now help.”

Jonas came over and helped me push the dumpster away from... whatever it was.

“Oh my gosh!” I screamed. “It’s Mrs. Bell! Jonas, what do we do?”

“Go get the police. I’ll stay here.”

“But what if something happens to you? I’ll never forgive myself.”

“And if we both stay, and something happens to both of us, I’ll never forgive myself for not making you leave me. Now go. Please, Clarise. For Mrs. Bell.”

“Fine. But don’t you disappear on me, Jonas Fletcher!” I ran inside. “Police! Police, we found a body! We found Mrs. Bell’s body!”

“Where?” the officer said, following me outside to Jonas.

“There.” I point. The police call the paramedics. Jonas and I watched as they drove her body away for the autopsy.

“You okay, Clarise?” The voice seemed far away.

“Yes. I’m fine. Perfectly fine.” But I wasn’t.

THREE MONTHS LATER

I sat looking out across the lake, tears threatening my eyes.

“Hey Clarise. You okay?” Jonas touched my shoulder.

“Yes. I’m just sad she’s gone.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

“You know, I always hated Neil, but I never thought he had it in him. He’s a madman, to say the least.”

“What do you mean?” Jonas looked inquisitively at me.

“Didn’t you hear? Neil was the killer. He didn’t even have a motive.”

The End

By Jayla Williams

According to John

Jane my wife softly squealed, so in love with
The mansion. *The most beautiful one*, she said.
A patrimonial estate that made those eyes,
Glimmer so bright, seeing the Garden, *Delicious*,
She exclaimed, with a charm – conceived in lunacy.

That ghostly talk again, as we entered the place.

I chuckled, what's it with women

And celestial beings? It's not a haunted house.

And it's not queer, darling.

I love her still in sickness and in health

But now she wanted the room downstairs,
That rose talking, decoration. A mind deranged.
Upstairs, I promised it would be perfect
A bedroom with fancy bars, the most
Secure. I long for my wife to finally be cured.

But how dare she – burning me with betrayal!
Discovering her, with pen and paper
Craftily carve fantasies, cheap imaginative escapades
And now contentious over some stupid yellow wallpaper!
This place should do her good, Jane my little silly goose.



Edna Chiclana

~Inspired by *The Yellow Wallpaper* – A short story, a feminist fiction by
Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892)

The Survivor

The Wounding Blow

It happened so quickly and unexpectedly. She didn't see it coming. He punched her forcefully in the gut, and she dropped to her knees; then he plunged the dagger into her chest, ripped her heart in two with his bare hands and fled with half her heart. She looked him straight in the face, then he vanished. She closed her eyes momentarily— she must pursue him, stop him, get her heart back. Her eyes flew open, and she **jumped to her feet. Looking down at her chest, she couldn't believe her eyes:** there was no blood, no wound, though she knew she had not imagined the attack. She still felt the intense pain in her abdomen and heart. He was but a shadow now eluding her. She ran with all her strength after him, but he slipped through the heavy Doors, and they slammed shut in her face. Though she pulled at the Doors with all her weight until she was utterly exhausted, she could not open them. She knew instinctively that they led to another realm. One she could not enter. Once someone passes through those Doors, they cannot return to this realm. He was gone! A loud guttural cry escaped her lips. It was the worst she could imagine! Oh, that she could awaken and it all be just a bad dream.

The Aftermath

But it was not a dream, though she desperately wanted to deny reality. She just wanted to be left alone with her pain. They did not **understand.... She was wounded** – with an incurable wound. They expected her to take care of things.

The authorities called. She was to come and identify the body. She saw him lying there - a stiff sober expression on his face. Though it had the shape and likeness of his body – it was not him. There was no sparkle or light in his eyes, no sly smile on his face. Just a pasty, cold, lifeless corpse. Again, she fell to her knees, and she wept uncontrollably. If only she had turned to really see him and hear him before the **Wounding Blow, maybe they both would be here ...whole...at peace with one**

another.... **sharing laughter, playing a game together.** Her mind does not want to accept that there is no reset, no second chance to start the game over again and hope for a better outcome.

The Arrangements

Decisions. So many decisions. They want her to give answers. What to do with his body? How to celebrate his life? How to mourn his death? She wants to slip away into another place. Her brain is stuck on the **“whys”... the “what ifs”.** **Why did he do it? What if she had been there** when he needed her most? What if she had seen the warning signs? What if???

Will she every feel normal again? Will she every know joy or peace or love again? It is overwhelming. People come round her and offer words **and gestures of comfort, but they don't ease the pain.** Her incurable wound remains raw and sensitive.

The Search for Healing

The doctors can't see her shredded heart on their X-rays or EKGs. They are sympathetic to her pain, but they can do so little. They offer her medication to sleep, but nothing to ease the real pain.

She wonders if she could run until the pain in her feet would overtake the pain in her heart. She knows others turn to alcohol or drugs to dull the pain; she wants to avoid those for she know they are dangerous, even deadly. Yet, in desperation, she finds she turns to a bottle for comfort more than she would like to admit. The ache is always there – no one can soothe it. Barely surviving – one breath, one step at a time.

The Peace

She is at the end of herself. No comfort. No answers. No peace. She is bruised, broken. Her hope is a faintly flickering light. She cries out in the darkness of night. How can she make it through one more day? She heard once, somewhere long ago that He is close to the brokenhearted. That He saves those who are crushed. He is the One who walks

between the two realms: this realm and the one beyond the Doors. He goes by many names. Her mind rests on Prince of Peace.

Suddenly, she finds herself in a conversation with Him.

“It hurts so much”, she cries out.

He draws her close, “I know,” He whispers tenderly.

“I just want the pain to go away! I want my son back!” she sobs into His chest. **“I want life to go back to...before IT happened. I want him to be alive!”** She is overcome; shaking with grief, wailing uncontrollably.

In the midst of the sobbing, she becomes aware of His presence. “I love you, Daughter. There is no going back. But I will be with you tonight and each day to come. I will give you a peace that will feel inexplicable. Come to Me when you are weary and broken. I will listen. I will carry your pain for you.”

She falls asleep in His arms, the One who walks between the two realms. When she awakens, she remembers. Her mind and heart are strangely different today: there is an inner calm and unexplainable peace in the midst of the pain. She can get through this day; He walks with her.

“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18 NIV

*Dedicated to suicide **survivors...***

By Lynne Mickelson

I Go Back to Vagabond Village

I'm walking with my sister to the bathhouse in the center of the campground because if we shower there instead of the camper, we can take as long of a shower as we want to without our parents telling us to **hurry up because we'll run out of hot water.** Our two best friends, who are also sisters, walk from the other side of the campground and meet us at the bathhouse; all of us ready to wash the sun, sand and sweat off us after another long day down at the lake.

I can smell the coconut and feel the oil still on my skin, being we apply it multiple times a day, even though all our parents constantly remind us to use sunscreen, which we choose to ignore, except for the quick smear across our already red cheeks. There are grains of sand stuck to my oiled skin, but the current issue of Glamour has informed me that this is essential, and the sand is exfoliating my skin; **but we'll see what next month's issue says.**

We've been coming here summer after summer, all of us going back to our own hometowns spread hours apart from each other; yet for 3 months, our families reunite at Vagabond Village where we all have summer homes in the form of campers, some of them big 5th wheels with fancy slide-outs, some of them smaller trailer-style, but all of them filled with BBQ supplies, bug spray, beach towels and wet swimsuits slung up to dry, amongst all the other summer essentials that seem to come in too bright of colors.

The familiarity of each summer day arrives with comfort and anticipation, and looking back on it as an adult, it brings a feeling of yearning, making you feel home sick for a place that felt so happy and care-free.

It was a ritual, our evening walk to the bathhouse. All of us girls repeating the same day, only varying slightly, for many summers now. We get up from the hard, uncomfortable camper mattress to the smell of our parents cooking us breakfast, the sound of the bacon sizzling in the kitchen. We eat and have mindless conversation because **there's no**

need to set up a plan for the day as we know what'll happen. Our mom makes us help cleanup; **we brush our teeth, put on those bikinis we've** never stopped thinking about, and head down to the water, which is slapping against the side of the ivory and teal Glastron boat, that is already sitting amongst the others, ropes and tubes intertwined atop the sundeck, awaiting us to take our place and ride the waves created by **our dads, who laugh and joke that it's the only form of child abuse they** can get away with. We spend the day flying over the wake, feeling the cool splash of the droplets coming off the surface, until we are launched into the sky and slap against the hard water, making you lose your breath for a minute, but you pop right back up full of laughter, waiting for the boat to circle around, pick you up and give you another thrill, while your mom takes pictures from underneath her sun visor in the boat, smiling not worrying about work or cleaning the house.

The sun bronzes your skin even darker; your mom constantly **reminds you to drink your water, which you've left in the cupholder, so it's piss warm from the same sun rays you feel so thankful for because the cloudy, rainy days at the lake aren't nearly as fun.** A quick break in the day brings lunch where we all go back, make a quick sandwich, and grab a bag of mini chips that sit perched above the fridge in their multi-colored bag, **always hoping there's a Cool Ranch Doritos left.** Whether we decide to be in the water or lay on the beach with the Top 100 Billboard Hits serenading us, along with the sounds of laughter from other kids our age, or the endless hounding of parents to toddlers, or fishermen climbing into their own boats, hollering at their sons to grab the bait, we soak it in - the time, the sun, the friendships, the moments, the water, the memories being made. We soak it all up, **and then it's** time for that evening walk to the bathhouse once again.

After the long shower comes the tank tops, shorts, and mascara while our parents are back at the camper grilling meat, with a side of cut-up potatoes wrapped in tinfoil, no doubt. We laugh; we look forward to the night, and we meet up again after supper, walking around the

campground to see the familiar faces of the boys we play spin-the-bottle with after our parents have long-since left the bonfire we all sit around.

We continue this throughout the days of the summer, until that cool, crisp, fall air hangs over us like a fog, forcing us to close the campers up and start thinking about that first day of school, walking the halls with our school friends, still thinking about our summer friends, a lot at first, but then not so much because - well - time. But come spring, **even amongst the wet, dirty, melting snow, you know what's coming; you can almost feel the summer heat, and you think of your summer friends again, counting down the days until you're back together.** The simple pleasure of the lake, the bonfire, and that bathhouse; the warm days that seem to play on repeat, yet each story and laugh, and kiss from the boy you sat next to at the fire all feel so different, shaping you into someone who will one day look back and appreciate everything those summers gave to you, wishing you could go back and experience it all over again, even if just for one day, sunrise to sunset.

By Kari Sundberg

Imperfect Perfection

Why Being Perfect is Not the Answer

For as long as I can remember, I have observed the people around me. Righteous and unrighteous, just and unjust. Never with contempt or disdain, but with curiosity. The differences between each individual **human being have always been fascinating to me.** “**Why has this person experienced life in a different way than this person has?**” I would ask. By watching these people, I have picked up on all the things that worked out well for them. And, being a perfectionist, I took the good things in **each life that I have seen, and tried to piece together a “perfect life.”** I have always wanted to be perfect. I worked hard so I could be the best at everything, and when I failed, a wave of shame and self-hatred always passed over me. But why did I want to be perfect? Why did I feel the pressure of attaining this flawless life?

As a Christian, I thought that this was the way I needed to live in **order to be loved by God. I prided myself in being the “good Christian girl” who was somehow better than my peers. Obviously, I was not (and am not) perfect.** Just like anyone, I had lots of issues, but I would never allow myself to show them. It was all about how I appeared to the world.

But lately, I have been thinking about what my seemingly perfect life has accomplished. From what I can see, it has only made people feel jealous and judged by me, made me unable to be myself, and made me bitter towards the people who do not appear perfect but are still happy.

We strive to be “good Christians” and ideal people, when being those things is not doing anything for us besides making us less like the person that we should be imitating. Jesus.

Jesus. When we hear his name we think, mighty counselor, everlasting father, prince of peace. All the big names that only begin to describe His greatness. But we must remember, this lion, knelt down and became a lamb.

When I think about the story of Jesus, I can't help but feel that my attempt at attaining the perfect life, is the exact opposite of what Jesus did!

Jesus was born to an unmarried teenage girl. Think of the scandal! His father was a carpenter, the lowest of the low. Jesus Christ was born in a stable and laid in a manger!

If the ruler of the world lived the most modest life possible, why then would I not do the same?

Growing up, **Jesus was probably known as “the kid who was born out of wedlock.” And here I am, trying to be known as “the perfect girl.”**

In the song *Failure to Excommunicate* by Relient K, it says, **“Jesus loves the outcast, he loves the ones the world just loves to hate.”** The people who live the lowest lives, the people who are hurting the most, those are the ones that God wants to help. God loves us all at our worst. If we are broken, if we are discouraged, if we are imperfect; he will meet us there.

All this time I thought I could only meet God in my perfection, when I had cleaned up all the messiness of my life. But according to Gravity Leadership, **“God meets us in reality”**, in our broken state. He can only meet us where we are really at. None of us are really in a place of perfection, so it is impossible for us to meet him if we are determined to be perfect.

Be real, and know that being yourself is the best you can be. Don't try to be perfect, when no one is. Instead, try to be like Jesus, and live a perfectly imperfect life. There is no shame in not being the best, only in not being ourselves.

By Gretta Nordgren

Silent Cry

Stop that cry, a million silent cries that
Shattered my head, so many days,
Mornings and nights.

Take them away, a sight of translucent arms
Tiny legs — stretched out. Trying to
Touch my hair, reaching me out.

I woke up trembling. But that
Voice, still I could hear. Incomplete
Vocal cords —eerily vibrate.

Angels' faces with mouths open

So wide, so anguish. Tears dripping down
Tiny faces, made with flesh and blood.

Little heartbeats, your claim I hear!
Stronger each time I wake up, for
I, too, used to be silenced. I, too, used to be stopped.

Let all craftiness behind curtains,
And the stiff-necked masks crack open,
What is Choice when innocence — sacrificed?

Life is so divine. downcast like trash.
But God collects each drop of tears when our spirit – crushed.
So here I stand for the still small voices.

In sackcloth and ashes, a rose with thorns
Caressed on a mother's chest, for she mourns
Her angel who was alive, yet never had the right

To Life



Edna Chiclana

The Eternity of Hades

THE CHARACTERS

The Delivery Man	Hades
Cerberus	Zeus
Thanatos	Aphrodite
Alexander	Oracle of Delphi
Hermes	Persephone
Adonis	

Scene One

In a dark cavern-like location, a man stands nervously in front of a black archway surrounded by jagged rocks. The man is carrying a large bag and peers around the edges of the archway.

Hades jumps out from around the corner of the archway, dressed in ancient Greek robes.

Hades: Ah! There you are! A bit late, I must say. Did you lose your way? I told Hermes that we needed signs along the river.

The Deliverer: No, it's literally too hell to gone. Here's your pizza.

Hades smiled: Much obliged, do you take cash? Or would drachmas be preferred?

The Deliverer: Cash is fine.

Hades pulled money out of a pocket and handed it to the Deliverer.

Hades: Thank you!

The Deliverer holds the cash in hand, as he walks back towards the rocky pathway.

Hades enters an area that resembles a form of Grecian temple, with a large dark red velvet sofa in the corner where a dog is sleeping.

Hades: Cerberus, down! Just because mommy is not home does not mean you get to ruin her sofa.

A long deep tolling bell sounds through the room. Hades retrieves his mobile device while balancing the pizza with one hand.

Zeus (Through text): Bit of an update, Miranda is heading your way.
Hera found out about “certain” activities LOL. Anyway, could U send
Thanatos after Ares? He has been a constant irritation lately, as usual.
U coming to the party Tues?

Hades places the cell phone down with a long stare of suffering only known by those who are kin to Zeus.

Hades: Why did I not block his number?

Hades sits beside Cerberus taking a slice of olive pizza. A dark figure with black wings floats into the room and grabs a slice of the pizza.

Hades: *(With a scoff)* Thanatos, you could have asked.

Thanatos: When is Persephone returning?

Hades: Two weeks. *(He sighed)*

Thanatos nods before he heads out of the room and back through the black archway.

Aphrodite: Hades! Hades!

Hades chokes on his pizza, as he stares off at the archway. Reluctantly he places the pizza down.

Aphrodite stood before the arch; she was wearing a new tight pink sports outfit.

Hades: Aphrodite, what can I-

Aphrodite holds up one hand with a sour expression.

Aphrodite: I want you to return what you stole from me.

Hades: *(Frowning slightly)* **I don't have anything that belongs to you, I** rarely go up to Olympus, for a reason.

Aphrodite: Oh, please! I want Alexander back.

Hades hesitates before he retrieves his phone from the table.

Aphrodite: What are you doing?

Hades: Talking to Thanatos, he is the person you should be speaking with as well. I do not take in the dead.

Aphrodite: *(Waved her hand in dismissal, her bracelet jingling in the process)* Alexander died, and I want him back.

Hades: No, I'm sorry.

Aphrodite: What do you mean no?!

Hades: Ever since Orpheus and Eurydice, I swore off returning the dead.

Aphrodite: *(Crossing her arms, with pursed lips)* **“What if it was against his destiny to die?”**

Hades: Well, destiny is shapeable Aphrodite. It can be changed by a single act. I will release him if you can find evidence he was taken too soon.

Aphrodite: *(Smiling with a smug look)* I will. I get what I want.

Hades: What did I get myself into?

Scene Two

Hades is seen walking around a room, in a robe with a bowl of ice cream in his hand. Cerberus is laying on the sofa, while a mirror is displaying the image of talking people, who appear to be in distress.

Aphrodite: “Hades!”

Hades turns the mirror off, then walks towards the door, he stops as Aphrodite comes inside, dragging a woman wearing a white dress behind her.

Aphrodite: This is the Oracle of Delphi; she will tell you Alexander's fate.

Hades: Yes, I am aware who this is... How did you convince Apollo to let you-

Aphrodite releases the Oracle, shoving her forward a few steps.

Aphrodite: Tell him!

Oracle: Alexander's fate, was to become the favored of Aphrodite before he gained eternal comfort and peace by her hand.

Aphrodite: See? He is supposed to be with me and in the comfort of Olympus.

The Oracle furtively slinks out through the archway.

Hades: No, I do not exactly see your point. He was destined to die. What did you do anyway? Please tell me it was not another Troy situation.

Aphrodite: What do you mean? Comfort? Peace? That is your idea of death.

Hades: **Yes. I don't exactly rip out peoples' livers you know! I make** sure that everyone who comes to my kingdom is as welcome as I can. Except for Pirithous.

Aphrodite: Life is so desolate then?

Hades: No, it's not Aphrodite.

Aphrodite flounces off stage, while Hades sits down with his phone. A cell phone buzzes as a text message from Hermes is displayed.

Hermes (*Through text*): Update, we just got a new plant for the natural world courtesy of Apollo!

Hades paused as the phone buzzed again,

Persephone (*Through text*): See you in a few days <3.

Hades: (*Smiling as he reads his texts*) Life is not desolate at all.

End.

By Kate Bunner