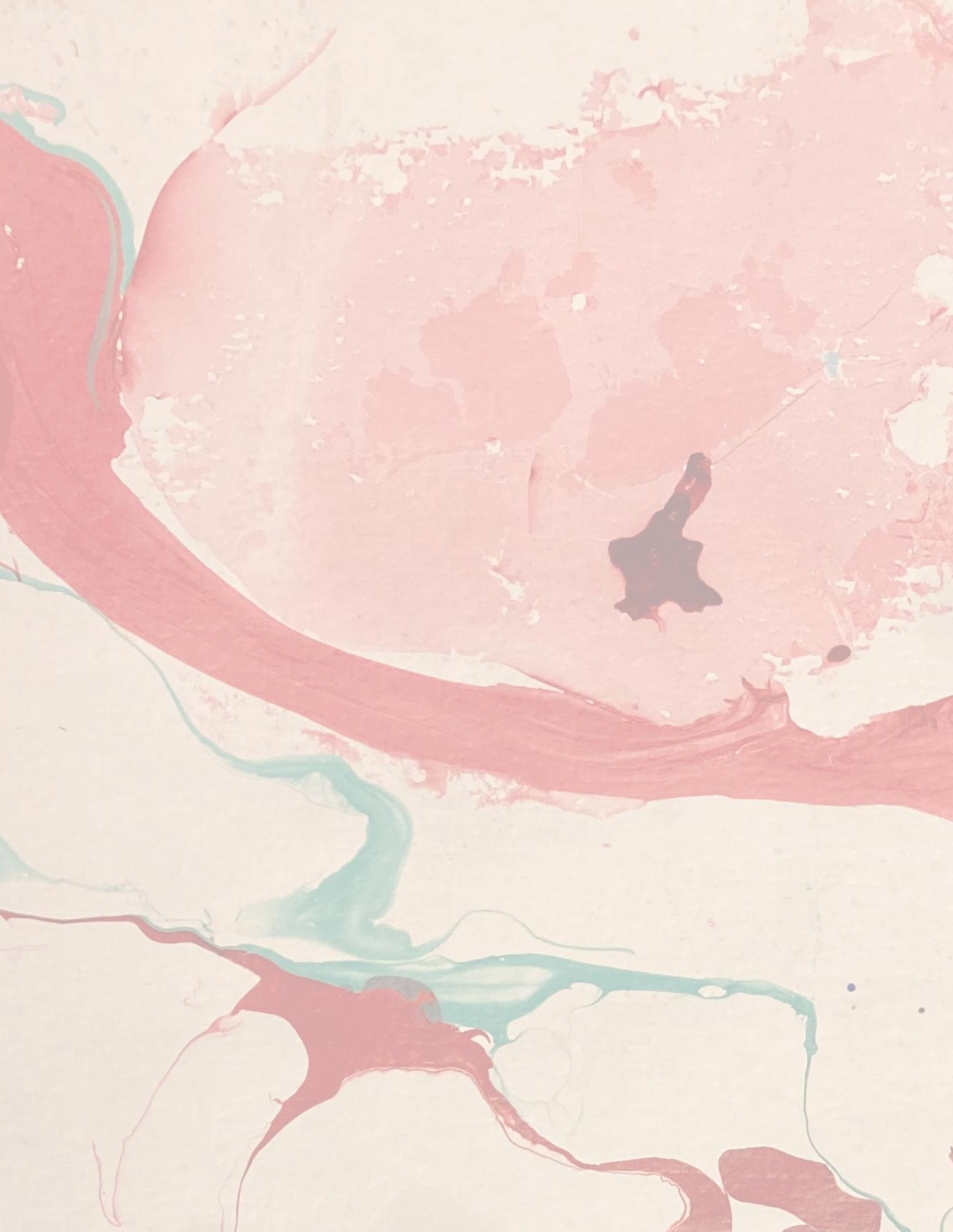


# **The Writers' Block**

**2022**





# THE WRITERS' BLOCK

## THE ADA LONG CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP ANTHOLOGY 2022

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# Basketball

ANGELINA SHUNNARAH

The first true memory I have of my father and his ability to bring us together through basketball was just three short years after my birth. I felt my father's warm hands lift me while the orange ball swished through the net, my three siblings in a semicircle with us at the apex. He worked so much all of the time, this was the only time we were all connected, all bonded.

Four years past, I watched with scrutiny as white flakes flitted down, the snow-custed basket still standing tall in our driveway despite the arctic temperatures. My Dad and I trudged up the ice-slick driveway into the warm house, through the teeth-chattering cold we had finally walked all the way home. And through it all, still the goal stood.

A few months after that, Dad's father passed away from a heart attack and the weight of our sorrow pressed upon us but even then, dressed head to toe in black, he picked up that orange ball, so bright against his clothes, and swished. He even let us win.

Double that age, when I brought my first boyfriend home, he admired the 6 foot long hoop, a mount in our driveway with Dad in front of it, spinning the ball on his finger.

But a lot can change in a year... because at 15, Dad couldn't play anymore. The cancer that ate away at his body made him shuffle his feet as he slowly walked, drain the color from his skin, and glaze his eyes with hunger from not being able to keep food down; even the goal seemed to wilt with him. He promised us as soon as he could he would beat us in PIG, but we all saw the way his face contorted in pain as he tried to put on his clothes or walk down the stairs, and how he would cringe when we helped him with his balance. As he got better we played lightly, keeping in mind his limitations, the air seemed to lighten with optimism, and the goal stood strong.

However, at 16, Dad wasn't around to play basketball anymore. Every game of PIG or Around the World was lifeless without him. When we came home after our final goodbyes, we all stood in a semicircle around the goal, missing our apex, head-to-toe in black, doing the one thing we knew would make us feel his spirit.

## At the Gulf Pier

MAX CORYELL

Sometimes I run into men casting their fishing poles  
Over the ugly concrete barrier  
Into the ugly concrete sea.  
They don't say anything and  
Neither do the fish they catch.  
Both of them just look at me  
With their whiskered faces and gafftopsail fins  
As if they have hooks in their mouths.  
Once I asked, "What's that?"  
And the man showed me a charm on his wrist.  
"Catfish bones," he replied,  
"I just polish 'em."  
And so they were.  
Later, upstairs, I didn't know what to do with myself.

## Railing Girl

ALEENA ROY

The dress flows with every breeze  
as she crosses over the railing  
dangling  
Concrete burns with every touch  
Trees shake their leaves in disapproval  
witnessing something dramatic  
Sunlight beaming rays, sweat dripping  
forming a puddle  
Cars obnoxiously honking  
People glance up only to calmly  
walk away

# The City of Naturis

JULIAN WIESEN

The city of Naturis is completely unrefined. The grasses are thatched together to create abodes. Twigs and mud come together to form a schoolhouse. The hospital glows bright in the sunlight with hues of flowers floating in the air. The entire city is centered around a monument: a concrete cinder block with a single metal thimble fastened to it, the sole remainder of a previously industrial world. Every few weeks, a disaster occurs. Whether it's an exceptionally strong gust of wind, or a thick blanket of rain, something happens, destroying the entire town. The houses are flattened, the school is submerged in mud, and the hospital collapses in a neon explosion. Everything is reduced to its natural form, except for the thimble and the cinder block. The following weeks are a time of rebuilding. When the town is finally reconstructed, there may be a day or two of rest and peace, but a disaster inevitably follows soon afterwards. And thus the cycle repeats. Build. Destroy. Rebuild. But the thimble and cinder block are seemingly constant. Never wavering. And yet they do change. The cinder block erodes, slowly deteriorating. And the thimble rusts, still standing, refusing to accept defeat.



# Death

EVAN SMILEY

For most of my life until I was 14, death was a concept that didn't affect me that I had seen in movies and television.

At the age of 15, when my mom was diagnosed with cancer, death was a looming possibility for one of the closest of my family members.

It wasn't until I was 17 that my mom passed away. Our family thought she made it through her treatment, but her cancer came back and took her life. As much as I wanted to enjoy life, the idea that it could be taken away from anyone at any moment, didn't leave my mind.

At the age of 26, I was married to my girlfriend from college, and she found out she was pregnant. As we were bringing life into this world, I started trying to change my mindset from what it was already, but it was bittersweet because we didn't get to bring life into this world. After my wife's miscarriage, I had thought about how I wanted to have a daughter and name her after my mother, but now I didn't want to try for another.

There weren't many deaths in my life until I reached the age of 64, some of my classmates and people close to me were getting sick and some had passed away. It happened so much that I couldn't run from thought and death itself.

When I turned 74, I was certain that my own would be next after being so tired and feeling powerless. Most of my old classmates and friends had passed away and I was the oldest member of my family. I felt like I was running from it most of my life, but now I just wanted to accept it.



# BFF

JAYLA DOWDELL-MALLORY

At the age of 5, my best friend's name was Alex. Alex had beautiful, brown glowy skin and black, curly crown for hair and she had big hazel eyes. Our favorite activity was singing our hearts out to "Party in the USA" karaoke version. When I moved away at the age of 9 we stopped talking to each other as much and eventually stopped talking altogether.

At the age of 10, I got a new best friend named Sammie. Sammie has long, blonde wavy hair and eyes like an ocean. She wasn't as good as Alex but she was still a great friend. Our favorite activities were sleepovers and going to the park. When we got into high school we had no classes together and so much homework that we had no time to hang out any more .

At age 15, my best friend was Lola. She had pastel pink shoulder length hair and tan skin. Our favorite activity was swimming in my backyard and going on vacation together with my older sister. When Lola got popular she completely turned on me, she started spreading rumors about me across the school, taking my boyfriend and she even started a hate page about me.

At 19, I had a Youtube channel with a girl named Sarah. Sarah and I lived in a two bedroom apartment together but she would always have these terrible parties and there was always a random stranger on the couch so we talked and she said she won't change. That month I left and moved back to my hometown.

At 22, I went to a karaoke bar and when I walked in I saw the original best friend singing "Party in the USA" so I got on stage and we did our old performance for everyone. After our amazing performance we talked and reconnected. 3 years later we moved in next door to each other and had our children one week apart.



"A perverted murderer appeared in this city. He committed three major criminal cases last month. A total of three women were killed. The criminal suspect followed the victim and committed crimes in sparsely populated places such as alleys. Go out, pay attention to precautions, if you have any clues, please contact 205-555-777 immediately"

The news being broadcast in the square and all the places with megaphones made me impatient, and the most important thing right now was to find something to eat and wait until evening.

At 11:30 in the evening, there are hardly any pedestrians on the road. Usually, it is time for girls to get off work. Today, it was a little late, and she waited for half an hour before she came out of the company. I hid in the darkness where the street lights couldn't shine and looked at her. The girl was working overtime again today. At this time, she looked tired and didn't notice me at all.

I followed the girl with light footsteps. I had prepared for this moment for several days in advance. I knew that there would be fewer pedestrians on the road during this time. I didn't want too many people to notice me, so I chose this time.

I did it because I was in love with this girl, but she didn't know me and we only met once, which made me hesitate again. Last week, I was rummaging through the rubbish heap for food, biting a stinky dead fish, and a sudden burst of fragrance entered my nose. It was a girly fragrance, and it was different from the pungent fragrance of cosmetics and perfumes. I followed the fragrance. In the past, it was very late at this time, she held a steaming flat cake in both hands, and ate it carefully while blowing air. I looked at the fragrant food, followed me foolishly, and accidentally bumped into the trash can. The loud noise startled the girl, and she looked back to see me stinking all over. Unexpectedly, instead of running away like the other girls, she leaned over slowly.

I was very full that day. The girl generously gave me the food. Since then, I only have this girl in my heart, and I will follow her quietly every day. The girl who is so gentle will definitely not refuse me, I can only think like this before I have the courage to continue.

I once followed the girl near the house, but I still did not dare to act, this time I have made up my mind.

I continued to follow behind the girl, the dim street light pulled the girl's thin shadow for a long time, and I followed her to a secluded alley. There was no one around but me and her. The excitement, fear and, anticipation were intertwined, and I rushed forward without hesitation.

The girl was a little surprised to see me, then looked around and found that there was no one around, she looked back at my dirty body, then squatted down and picked me up.

"Have you been abandoned? Why don't you go home with me."

I couldn't understand the girl, but looking at her smile, I knew I made it.

"Meow~"

"The latest news, the murderer was arrested in front of the Starliner company at 11:30 last night. According to the police, a major clue was found in his rental house. He seems to be planning the next crime. The crime was committed last night, but fortunately the police caught him in an ambush ahead of time, and the existing evidence is enough to prosecute him. Next news, U.S. oil prices rose...."





**Blue Candle**  
MAX CORYELL

# Red and Blue

MARIELLE VIENTOS

I always looked up to Superman. From the young age of two I was obsessed, obsessed with the outfits, shows, movies. I would run around the house in a large red cape, jumping from the sofa and bed. Every movie night I made sure Superman was flying across the screen, every Halloween I was sporting the blue and red costume.

On my fifth birthday, I insisted on a Superman backpack so I could go into Kindergarten in style. I walked in on the first day ecstatic to make new friends, talk about Superman. I chatted everyone's ear off about him. I heard some girls I hadn't talked to yet snickering, and I went up to them to see what was so funny. "Look everyone, it's Supergirl!" One of them said, and they laughed even harder when I told them I was wearing Superman clothes.

"Superman is for boys, not girls!" They taunted again and again, crushing me more every time they said it. I went home and dumped all of it in the trash, all the pencils, scissors, notebooks, refusing to ever dig it back out. Dig myself out.

By the time I was seven, I followed the rules. Wear pink and purple, blue was for boys by birth. I would have forgotten the existence of Superman if it wasn't for my little brother watching the new show on our tiny TV. My head still turned when the classic theme song started playing, but would turn back quickly when I realized someone could see me.

When I was ten, I was allowed to go to the movies with my friends, and we naturally chose the new Jennifer Aniston movie. I waited in the line for popcorn and looked at all the movie posters when I noticed a Justice League movie that just came out. I was about to ask my friend if we could go see that instead, just a little blast from the past, but my own pink skirt and long blonde hair gave me the answer already.

When I was twelve, I laughed at the super hero cosplayers walking down the street with my friends. We pointed at all the capes and makeup and mocked them, then pretended to fly laughing even harder. They hurried and walked faster, and I wondered if I would have turned out like them. I shivered at the thought of me in the tacky cape and "S" across my chest.

When I was fifteen, all I cared about was boys and clothes. I took a summer job at the pool as a lifeguard to earn some extra cash, but all the cute boys didn't hurt. I was drawn to one in particular, who was wearing a red and blue bathing suit. I was past the point of caring about anything except his six pack, though. I couldn't think straight enough to see the colors I was forbidden to wear, the colors that were my life. The deepest I could think was if he had a girlfriend, and when my shift was over so I could call all my friends about him.

By the time I was eighteen, I had a boyfriend, clothes, everything every girl wanted. I let him pick the movie we went to see and to my dismay he chose the new action movie. Was a little part of me coming back to life, trying to tell me something. Trying to ask me why this couldn't be my thing too, why I couldn't enjoy this as much as the girl next to me. The girl next to me would move to some big city and have an amazing career, while I would stay here and be a housewife at the age of eighteen. The girl would ask me why, why I can't get out of here. I had a car; I should get out before he proposed. But I knew why. I was expected to be the way I was, and nothing could ever change that. Not even Superman.



Photo taken by Julianna Terry

## Cinnamon Ice Cream

DESTINY SCRUGGS

That summer seemed to last forever when Sally had finally put up a picture frame of her and her two favorite cousins. She knew that summer felt like forever when looking at the picture that day; she and her cousins went to an arcade and won a teddy bear that only had one eye, making the bear special. That day they also walked miles for their favorite cinnamon ice cream at this ice cream parlor called The Whole Scoop.

# To My Heart

LYDIA MOORE

you beat on my ribcage  
I pray you don't break through  
you fill with unseen rage  
I hoped it couldn't get to you  
you weep on peaceful nights  
I wish you would falter  
you work to stay alive  
I seek what you're after  
you poison all my insides  
I let you taint me so  
but you're the one called  
my heart  
I can't just let you go

# Running

MARIELLE VIENTOS

We have all run,  
Run to catch the bus,  
Win a race,  
But you never run for nothing,  
You always have to run for a purpose,  
"Keep your eyes on the prize" as they say,  
Like a cheetah running for its prey,  
Not stopping until its hunger is satisfied,  
Or a track star in the final leg of the race,  
The finish line closer than they are to passing out,  
And at the end they are ecstatic to get the trophy,  
Parade it around like a newborn baby,  
Their body still drenched in sweat.  
Sometimes I wonder what I'm running for,  
Sometimes I run to find out,  
Do I want money? Happiness?  
Why do I go through all the pain,  
All the stress,  
To get what?  
I see no finish line,  
All I see is the road ahead of me,  
All I hear is my alarmingly quick breathing,  
All I feel is my heartbeat pounding like a train on the  
tracks,  
All I can smell is my sweat trickling down my cupid's bow,  
All I can taste is the dryness absorbing me,  
My mind tells me to give up,  
After all,  
I am no cheetah or track star,  
I am only running for an answer,  
And the only answer I am getting is to give up.  
Go home.  
My dreams are not here yet,  
They will come with the finish line,  
For clearly there is no prize in sight for me right now,  
Maybe later,  
But not now.

# The Secret

KRISTOPHER PEREZ-MATA

The old man stood next to his wife whilst she was on her final breaths in the Lee County hospital. Even in these tragic moments they didn't stop them from showing their affection for the other, however the old man's wife's eyes didn't share the same glow as his grayish blue eyes. Then the old man's wife started to shed some tears. "Hey, hey what's wrong Samantha?" the old man said, his voice so gentle and caring. Between the crying Samantha managed to peep out a response with her voice full of guilt and sorrow "Harry, I can't die with what I have done and leave you with a false image" she continued to sob. "What do you mean?" Harry replied with his voice changed from gentle and caring to confused and anxious. Samantha cried out another sentence "your children" she paused and let out more sibilings and Harry's eyes widened already fearing what's coming next and he bit his lip secretly praying to god that it wasn't what he feared. Unfortunately, it was. Samantha continued her sentence between sobs "They're not your children." thats all she got out before she just completely broke down and put her hands over her face to hide her guilt. Harry felt like he was stabbed in the back then turned around and stabbed in the front. Harry used whatever energy left he had to pull over a chair. The next few hours were either full of sobs or silence and they felt like decades to Harry. Finally Samantha found it in her to look at Harry again and she was going to say something, but a cat got her tongue and later that night, a confused Harry left into the hot damp night back home. When Sunday morning rolled around, he was home alone with his morning joe on his rustic front porch with a grin staring at the glorious sunshine as church bells rang. Harry told no one of what had happened all those years ago.



# Shoes

JULIAN WIESEN

When I was in 6th grade, my shoes were neon blue and velcroed. They were simple, cheap, and tacky, but they carried me when I ran. Racing against my friends at the park, my hideous blue shoes would blind anyone who looked at them. I ran in them until the soles fell off and the blue had faded to a brown and scuff marks covered them from all the times I had tripped.

When I was in 8th grade, my shoes were an overpriced piece of leather-sewn garbage. Flashy, trendy, and attractive, they looked great, but by the end of my cross country races, my feet would burn against the rigid soles.

When I was a Freshman in highschool, my shoes were unlaced high tops that carried me as I raced away from a house I couldn't call home. When I was a sophomore, my shoes were dark black boots desperately racing into a store and stripping it clean.

When I was a Junior, my black boot's laces fell off and my toes stuck out of the front, but I still raced in them, this time trying to avoid prison.

Now, my shoes are clean and basic. Their bright orange fabric is a beacon, telling everyone I have nowhere left to race.

# Oh My Feet

JULIANNA TERRY

My feet keep me up like a mighty statue  
They move to the beat, they move not knowing where they're going.  
Covering them daily,  
Not seeing the world.  
Crying Id carrying me for too long,  
I would too if I had to carry a full body.  
Soaking my two feet,  
painting my toes,  
hoping no one smelt ten with their nose.  
Kicking the air,  
or even a chair.  
One hits the base as I slide into home plate.  
Helping me swim.  
Helping me jump,  
then landing on my feet so I don't go,  
Thump.  
Even if I do, I hope they catch me next time.  
As I grow old,  
I hope they don't,  
scrape across the floors,  
like a pencil erasing.  
But if they are to,  
I want them to hold me up,  
Like a mighty statue they did once before.  
Thank you for holding me up,  
Mighty and Zighty



# Baby

ROSE O'NEAL

Late at night and into the early morning, Vicky went by a thousand different names—babe, sweetheart, honey, darling. When she stood behind that counter, beneath the piss-yellow flickering lights above the bar, she wasn't Vicky anymore. She wasn't even Victoria.

She was a dozen exes and a faceless scapegoat—a blame for the glasses of amber she slid towards men whose roughened hands all looked the same in the poor lighting of the Hazy Hideout.

The steady thrum of slurred conversation didn't cover up the coarseness of a drunk man's voice when he spoke the name he wanted her to have, but Vicky's hands never shook along with the spike of sour fear in her throat. Instead, when whatever stray had stumbled into the stool across her started racking up too many empty bottles and glasses, she'd tap the counter, pull away the drinks, and tiptoe out an, "Alright, time to go home, big man."

She began cleaning the glasses with the same rag she used to wipe down the counters, just to look busy, and if he didn't stumble out on his own by closing, then it was Johnny who'd toss him out by the scruff, collar loose around his neck.

The man would be gone by the last call, and the next night—if he wasn't back in his usual stool across from her—a different, even mangier one would be in his place. In the light of day, far away from the stench of alcohol-soaked leers, Vicky quietly hated the regulars and the crawling memory of their glassy eyes raking over her skin. Yet, part of her prayed for their return, lest the replacement would be someone Johnny couldn't handle. She'd always thought of Johnny as one of the "good ones."

An hour before opening on one Friday night, when it was still light outside, Johnny switched off the flickering overhead counter lights and dragged up a wobbly stool to the bar. Tucked under one large bicep, his tight t-shirt clinging to the muscle almost obscenely, was a box of department store light bulbs with him, but it was kind of hard to tell with the low lighting.

The room wasn't entirely plunged into darkness, as the overhead seating lamps and the singular small window provided enough light to see by, but it was close to it, and Vicky's eyes strained for a moment to adjust. With little preamble, Johnny began unscrewing the sad light bulbs from above the bar, like he always promised he would.

"What's the occasion?" Vicky asked, voice colored with more than a little amazement, pausing her nightly preparations and rounding the counter to place a steadying hand on the stool beneath Johnny's feet. She watched, lips twitching, as he plucked a bulb from the first socket. Until it slipped from his fingers, nearly directly onto Vicky's head, before his other hand darted out to catch it.

Vicky didn't even flinch, and Johnny didn't answer her question, instead clambering down from the stool in all his ungraceful, six-foot-one glory.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Vicky. Are you okay—did that hit you?" he asked. Vicky didn't know what to do with his apology, and she didn't know what to do with his hands falling onto her head to check for an injury that didn't exist.

She didn't know anything except the bitter, acrid taste of dread building in the back of her throat, the tensing of her shoulders as Johnny's hands moved to her cheeks, and the acute way that Johnny didn't know either of those things. He seemed so blissfully unaware, in

a way that Vicky could never afford. The pads of his fingers were rough on her skin, pressing warm and gentle, and as he craned down to meet her eyes, his own were shining with what looked like sincerity in this low lighting. Some part of herself acknowledged that nobody had ever looked at her this way before, and of course not, because this was Johnny—Johnny, who'd always thrown out the drunks before they could ever try touching her. Johnny, who was touching her now.

Maybe... it was okay to let him.

It was dark enough in the room, and Johnny was gentle enough when he ran his hands slowly to her neck—fingers edging towards her hair, breath loud between them—that she could almost fool herself into believing it.

Her hands came up to Johnny's, for a moment caressing, until she tightened her grip and tore his fingers away, severing the point where they had touched. Her eyes flicked to the counter, the age-worn wood she had wiped down so many times, and in her peripheral, Johnny stepped away. His posture, tight shoulders and stiff arms, was a mirror.

"I'm fine," she finally responded after a moment spent too long staring at the bar. Her voice was steady, but her hands shook where she pulled them back to hold her elbows, and at some point, Johnny's hands had fallen limply to his sides.

She didn't dare to look at him when he stepped further back, nor when he clambered back onto the shaky stool, and she didn't put a steadying hand on the seat again. Vicky rounded the counter, flipped over clean glasses and tumblers, and corked in the liquor spouts for the long night ahead. Above her, Johnny screwed in light bulbs, more carefully than before. Neither of them said a word.

When a familiar man slipped into the stool across from her around midnight, greeting her as baby, she even smiled when she asked: "Hey, big man. You want your usual?"



# Dream Poem

EVAN SMILEY

As I was leaving school one afternoon  
with my mother and sister,  
we were walking to car,  
when two men wearing colorful clothing  
with bandanas covering their face  
Took my mother's purse, then one man shot my mother  
then he shot my sister,  
The second man pushed me to the ground and shot me,  
point blank in the face.

I woke up with a blank look in my face  
I stepped on the cold ground.  
Each second, the clock ticked and time pushed along  
My sister got up, and then my mother.  
I wondered if one day I wouldn't be with my mother  
She reached into her purse and took something out,  
A bandana which she wrapped above her face.  
It was vivid with color but it didn't match what she was wearing  
We had to leave so we began walking to the car  
My mother and sister behind me  
It was a funny morning but school was waiting.



# Thoughts

DESTINY SCRUGGS

My head holds memories  
I wish I saved  
But time moves on  
My head wishes time  
didn't move  
My head replays  
everything you have said  
the memories repeat  
over in my head  
My head rewinds the  
memories  
Thoughts in my head  
makes me think of you  
My head wishes the  
memories in my head  
would come back  
My head just wants  
us back

## Debt of Tears

ANGELINA SHUNNARAH

Stirring and boiling all the things I've been through,  
Is this the end? Have I paid all I'm due?  
The trauma we endure is brutal,  
With scars shown both inside and out,  
Trying to forget is futile.

In the boiling pot of my life  
I start with my instinct to reach for a knife  
To stop feeling pain that feels will never end  
Accepting the truth that I will never see my father again

Should I add the blood he lost when he died?  
Or the tears that poured down my face as I cried?

Should I mix in the memory of starving myself?  
Or of the boy who couldn't keep his hands to himself?

The salt of my tears is to season  
The broth of a loss without reason  
I stir with the spoon of my trauma  
Boil with the hope of achieving nirvana

The ingredient added is tough from stress,  
Why was I given this meat when the others have endured  
far less?

The breeze from an open window ruffles my hair,

As if it's trying to blow away any of my lingering despair.  
As I spoon into a bowl a collection of my heart,  
I realize I'm healing, and it's a start.  
I serve with the prayers of my father's rest,  
Praying that I have properly expressed,  
Everything I've been through.

# Bass Line

MAX CORYELL

Over and over she walked up and down - twelve-bar blues, bossa and samba, sevenths and ninths. During the evenings when men and women in fine clothes mingled and danced like moths under a street lamp, the bassist plucked out the final tune in their set, leaving the last few notes to linger as she lugged her instrument out of the event hall's back door and wedged it in the trunk of her car. She would have showed up earlier, without fail. She would show up again.

Sometimes her arms ached from holding lines or righting capsized sailboats on the lake, but she would show up with a straight face. If she played a bit slower on those nights, no one noticed. Her friends would cover for her - if a chain was only as strong as its weakest link, they were unbreakable.

Sometimes as they ate stale sandwiches between sets, tipsy people in clothes that cost more than a night's pay would wander over, cocktails in hand, and begin to speak. "What excellent music," they might say, or "Thank you for being here tonight."

Sometimes they sought to strike up a conversation, and said, "Do you know Herbie Hancock? Such an interesting artist."

The bassist shrugged, and let the saxophone do the talking. She was a big woman with a big instrument. Something about that, about her dark skin and low voice and the suit and tie she and her friends wore, made her stand out. But she didn't care.

One late night, when cigar smoke and cloak-and-dagger words choked the air, an important man sauntered up and met her eyes. He looked like any of the other partygoers - the kind of talking head who showed up on TV with a printed smile on his face and money in his back pocket - but something seemed different tonight, more predatory. The bassist eyed his suit, and noticed that it was exactly the same as the barman's, only five times as expensive. After a few moments, the politician looked her over again, and extended a hand like a claw wrapped in cloth.

Meeting the man's gaze for only a moment, the bassist turned, taking the saxophonist by the shoulder and leaning in. Several of the dancing couples gasped, suits and dresses ruffling, and began to whisper. So did the man - who backed away, his mouth opening and closing like a carp's, unable to draw his eyes away even as he muttered about decency and tradition.

Only the pianist said nothing, and nodded.

As they kissed, the saxophonist's jaw shifted expertly, as intentional as a suspension. Her breath was strong and tasted faintly of cherry wood, a taste that brought back memories of sawdust and beauty. After a few moments, of course, they broke apart, and the bassist returned to her instrument, fingers hovering over strings.

# The War

KRIS PEREZ

When I was 20, and on the way to my first deployment with my trusty helmet in tow representing what a cause meant to me, a cause was why me and my mates were here, something to fight for and make the world a better place.

When I was 23, on my way back to the region, my helmet bore scars to show its worth and a cause could be a moral reason driving us to do what we do or it could be the officials views as a overall sense of justice.

During my time, the locals bombed our vechiles with make-shift cocktails and then inside our camps some Pows would kill themselves after muttering something in their native language. Maybe a slogan or something.

When I was 25, on my third tour my helmet bore more than just scars, so I left it at camp and cause could be more than the officials view but rather a personal sense of justice worth defending. My comrades' last words were those of confusion as one held my hand and said to me was it worth it?" Things at the camp weren't stable either as one comrade questioned what we were fighting for. I made out the words of fighting for justice but the sound stayed in my throat as I felt wrong wording those words. Day-by-day the locals grew in numbers, their attacks so very powerful, filled with deeper meaning inside.

When I was 29, most of my helmet was in the garbage as merely looking at it would give me flashbacks to the reason I was in a wheelchair or rather an empty home filled with no purpose, no cause. Then was it when I realized a cause is not put into you by anyone as you have to accept it into your morals or heart and that will give determination. The same thing that helped the enemy win and now looking back, we lost because our cause was lost before the war or yet was never truly there in the first place.



# Monopoly

JULIANNA TERRY

When I was five, I learned to play Monopoly. I played with my Paw Paw, he was a kind man. He had hair as white as snow and eyes the color of the sky. The one thing was though he would never let me win, but I never gave up no matter how many times I lost.

I turned seven we played again, I lost still. I was not very skilled.

When I turned nine, I could go to a competition and win, but I could not beat Paw Paw no matter how hard I tried to win.

I turned ten, Paw Paw left, I could never play him again.

I turned twelve, the board with still in the closet, I decided to take it down and lay it out. One last game. After I set it up I rolled the dice. They landed on 3 and 5. But something happened that I never knew was possible. The dice were in the air and were rolled again. They landed on 3 and 6. The dice rolled once more then the old thimble moved to a property of the color light blue.

I turned 15, still playing with the ghost. But I never won. Now I fear if I win the game is over. But I don't know so I bought the property I needed and won the game. I fixed up the board and started again. I waited for a roll, it took longer than normal. I started to put the game away but then the dice rolled and I looked for him but what I saw was my five-year-old cousin wanting to play with me.

## Living

KRISTOPHER PEREZ-MATA

Here I stand  
On the gravel  
Realizing that heaven  
Can be on earth  
As I stand thinking  
And taking in my  
Surrounding realizing  
What a wonderful day  
To be alive it is

# Grade School

ALENNA ROY

I was in Kindergarten. She was a kind young teacher. She was the one who taught me how to read. It took me two weeks to finish that book. She challenged me to read difficult books. She still remembers me.

Then I moved on to First Grade. I had two teachers instead of one. They were both pleasant, but at times I felt like a ghost. They were too busy to remember.

Then came Second Grade. I had two teachers who were complete opposites, like salt and sugar. I unfortunately, got the salty teacher. She was notorious for her upsetting mood. I try not to remember her because of that year.

In Third Grade, I had a friendly and compassionate teacher. She made me feel welcome after I moved here. I remember all the fun memories I had. Fourth grade teacher made me feel not welcomed. She only preferred a select number of students. The following year I would see her and me, and my friends would say hi. I never enjoyed it personally.

Last, but not least, was Fifth Grade. My teacher was okay, but then she did something that made me mad. My teacher thought I looked at her funny twice, but I never did. Thank goodness she quit teaching and never again troubled a child like that. That was the last time I saw her.



## Making Memories

JAYLA DOWDELL-MALLORY

I love being in the moment  
It's actually my favorite things  
Not recording everything  
Enjoying yourself  
Laughing or crying  
Being your true self  
Observing  
Absorbing everything you see  
Being in the moment  
Making memories



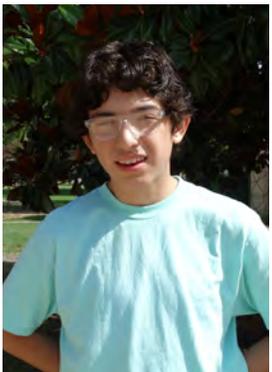
**Maxwell Coryell** is a 2022 graduate of the Alabama School of Fine Arts music department. He has won multiple state-level awards from the Alabama Music Teachers Association for piano performance and composition, as well as several other music-related awards such as the Donna Shugart Sonata-Sonatina Competition, and participated in the 2019 Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop and the 2020 PEN America Free Speech Advocacy Institute. Inevitably curious and outspoken, Max is taking a gap year to teach piano lessons and explore life before entering college on his own terms.

**Jayla Dowdell-Mallory** is a 13-year-old rising freshman at Helena High School. She loves food, making money, watching her phone, and listening. Some would say she is the best big sister. Some would say she has the most unique style, but she would say she is just Jayla.



**Lydia Moore** is a rising freshman at Jefferson County International Baccalaureate High School. She has won competitions in Science Olympiad and participated in an art show. She may or may not be planning to make comics and find voiceover gigs in the future. Some of the most physical activity she gets is when rollerblading while trying not to get another contusion. She believes in personal space as well as equality rights.

A walking PSA on the risks of consuming too much caffeine, **Rose O'Neal** is an incoming freshman at Wallace State Community College, where she plans to pursue her Associate's in Science and eventually get her TEFL certification. She's been writing her whole life with... varying degrees of skill, has won Gold and Silver awards in the National Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, and has been published in *Just Poetry!!! the National Poetry Quarterly*. If not downing her third (or fifth) cup of coffee, reading fanfiction, or exceeding word limits, she can probably be found watching Thai dramas in the wee hours of the morning.



The rare appearance of a **Kris Perez**, a boy with no talents, was a honors student at Homewood Middle School and is a rising freshman at Homewood High School. He is good at math but not so good at science, and when he is not focusing on his studies, he is either building something or on his phone!!! Kris can be a very quiet person in a new place at times, but once he adjusts to the area, he can be a caring social person.



**Aleena Roy** is a freshman at Vestavia Hills High School. Her all-girl robotics team won four prestigious awards. Her team got an invite to participate in a competition in Iowa, but Covid happened, then they couldn't go. Her dream job is to be a pediatrician. She enjoys reading mystery books.

**Destiny Scruggs** is a person of many hobbies, she is a rising junior at Helena High School who plays soccer for her school. Her soccer skills are not always the best, but her ability to finish books within four days is incredible, when she reads books she feels at peace with herself. Destiny is a pescatarian who is a very picky eater, if she doesn't eat what sounds good to her, she will not eat. Although Destiny has all these things, she is accepting of people and encourages people to stick to what they believe in.

(Bottom right) Cyanotype art by Destiny



Her name is **Angelina Shunnarah**,  
When she plays piano people are overcome with awe.  
She's a rising senior at Oak Mountain High School,  
People quake in her presence because she's a Queen who could rule.  
She's won awards from the Alabama Writers Forum,  
She taught herself ASL, which is difficult, for some.  
She's an aquarius who loves to read,  
If you need advice, it's hers you should heed.  
People often judge her because of her purple hair,  
But read above, does it sound like she would care?  
She's Arab so you don't have to worry about guessing her race,  
But if you try to be racist she will put you in your place.  
She loves superheroes and comics and arts and crafts too.  
Sorry to say this is over, she bids you all adieu.  
You're welcome.





The one and only, **Evan Smiley** is a junior at Homewood High School who goes to school by day and watches TV by night. He may be lazy but he gets his work done most of the time. Evan likes to be alone but is fine in groups, he is blind as a bat but doesn't wear glasses, and he is one of the most indecisive people in the world. Even though all that is true, he is a caring and kind person.

**Julianna Terry**, the rising 10th grader of Gardendale High School. At her school she is in the choir and has also signed up for welding. She has also been accepted to the Signature Academics! If not at school you might find her playing video games or doing a puzzle. But when Spring or Fall time comes you will find her leaping into action as she is an Upward Softball Coach! She loves animals, her favorite being a Zebra. While her best subject in school is reading, she hates reading out loud, and loves math, and school. She's an odd kid. Another thing about her is she is very sarcastic, she hates being seen the wrong way and tries to be nice. She is really shy, but does want to make some friends, not many. She can also get lost in thought and daydreams easily.



**Marielle Vientos** is a rising Freshman at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, this will be her second year there. She has won a Scholastic Gold Key award for her short story "Just a Girl," and a cash prize for her poem "Define Home" that she submitted to read in a reception for the Fair Housing Project. She has been taught by award winning writers, such as the current Poet Laureate of Alabama Ashley M. Jones. She enjoys playing bass guitar in her band Bassment (bassment\_band22) along with running their social media which has almost one thousand followers in under six months. Bassment has won music competitions as well as a cash prize in a Battle of the Bands. She wants to be a special-ed teacher and aims to get a novel published.

**Alex Wang**, a simple ordinary boy, is a journey student staying in Vestavia Hills High School now. He is not good at English and chemistry but fell in love with history and math. In his spare time, he is doing track and working in a restaurant to save money. He likes watching anime at night, but that always makes him stay up too late. As time goes by, he is changing.



**Julian Wiesen**

is a rising freshman at Homewood High School. He is an honor roll student who does math team despite absolutely hating math. When he's not being an overachiever, he enjoys spending his free time listening to music and playing video games. His dream school is Columbia because he's hopelessly in love with New York City. Julian believes that traveling and experiencing different cultures is what makes life worth living. He lived in Germany for a year, and has been to a variety of locations such as Norway, Australia, The Canary Islands, Israel, and more. He also believes in humility, authenticity, and self-awareness.

# *In Loving Memory of SGT. Tommie Collins Jr.*

*Ada Long Creative Writing  
Workshop  
Class of 2014*

## **Moxie**

WRITTEN 2014

When I have fears I won't reach life's potential  
Never spanning to the fulfillment of aspirations  
Unable to produce musical vibes that feel essential  
Illustrate to millions a vision they use as direction

Build culture that will brand my heart in humanity  
Gaze on the hills of Tuscany with my true love  
Spend chilly morning fishing, to instill heritage in my family  
Mold foundations of wealth and legacy to embrace and rise above

To never read and learn the eternal chapter of existence  
Not just discovering truth to empower the nation  
But to conceive my true identity after genuine patience  
To view the beauty of Revolution from my windows of exultation

So when understanding life, there should be no hesitation  
So when understanding ambition, there should be determination





**Writing Lives**