

Windows Spring 2023



 Ashley Soto

Windows Committee

Students:

Emma Galonski
Tristan Jardinier
Ashton Laurent
Blair Shewan
Cassidy Tomeo

Faculty:

Melanie Brooks



 Shaylin Keegan

Windows is a collection of students' creative work, published by Nashua Community College on a semester basis. Windows reserves the right to edit or reject any material. The artwork does not directly represent the written pieces. The content of this publication does not reflect the College's views and contains themes intended for an adult audience. The Nashua Community College Student Senate funds this project.

Table of Contents

 Writers

Paris Green	Blair Shewan	4
Double Digits	Tristan Jardinier	6
The End	Leo Amrani	6
Welcome Back to Gale Springs	Eden Grandmont	7
Chronic Dallyers	Tristan Jardinier	10
Sad Girl	Heather Cleveland	11
Did You Know the World Is Ending?	April Waltmire	12
The Mold	Leo Amrani	14
Aqua Dreams	Eden Grandmont	15
The Hairdresser	Ashton Laurent	16
Fireworks	Sherrill Bokousky	17
Pontiac, the Good Boy	Keren Hawkes	18
Home Intruders	Aiden Smith	21
Room 216	Eden Grandmont	21
Excerpt from A Compulsion to Lunacy	Dan Bingham	22
The Petals on a Rose	Cassidy Tomeo	24
You'd Never Know Beauty	Jack Miller	26
Ashes Will Fall	Cassidy Tomeo	29
A Life Changing Experience	Mathew Smith	30
Consider the Pickle	Dan Bingham	32
Sweet Disdain	Alishea Skye Preston	33
Howling Mouse	Cassidy Tomeo	35
Fishing Feelings	Vitor Lage Duque	38
Trapped Within a Cell	Alishea Skye Preston	40
Two Paths, One Decision	Damaris Nieves	41
Tears of My Grandfather	Melissa Burgher	44

Artists & Photographers

Shaylin Keegan	Front Cover	Dan Bingham	27
Emma Galonski	Back Cover	Rochelle Hebert	28
Ashley Soto	1	Devin Anderson	32
Shaylin Keegan	2	Cassidy Tomeo	33
Eden Grandmont	5	Brianna Lemmon	34
Emma Galonski	9	CJ Miller	37
Brianna Lemmon	11	Brianna Lemmon	37
Eden Grandmont	14	Rochelle Hebert	38
Ana Lopes De Lima	15	Karen Porter	41
Ashley Soto	18	Brianna Lemmon	43
Emilie MacKenzie	20	Ana Lopes De Lima	45
Cassidy Tomeo	25		

Paris Green

✍✍✍ By: Blair Shewan

She twirled around, switching between partners like it was what she was born to do. Maybe she was. It did not matter anymore. Disembodied eyes watched her as she spun, heeled feet digging into the soft dirt. She nearly stumbled, but caught herself in time, eyes wide as her heart beat faster.

Don't mess up. Survive. The mantra that had been embedded into her since she arrived at this place.

Another transfer. She wrapped herself into the arms of the man she elegantly collided with, trying desperately to keep her breath even. Everyone on the dance floor was utterly silent. The only noise was the chattering of the crowd and the light piano music.

A man in a dark green suit cried out, collapsing to his knees. His partner sneered, turning away with a flourish. He scrambled to stand back up, but the motion rolled up his pant leg, revealing his flesh. She sucked in a breath before going back to being motionless, eyes glancing around to see if anyone had heard her. The skin was ruined, mottled black and blue. Parts of it were an ugly green, the rest of it was an unnatural white. Her hand unconsciously twitched towards her waist; her own green dress suddenly tighter than it was before.

"Please..." The man begged, struggling to get to his feet. "Please just let us go." His clothing was destroyed from the dirt. The strangers surrounding the dancers snickered, drinking their gooseberry wine. Her hands clenched into fists.

One of the strangers rose from an ornate chair, walking over to the fallen man. The stranger grabbed the man's face, twisting it at an unnatural angle. The man whimpered softly, legs collapsing again.

"It looks like one of my toys is broken," the stranger announced. "Who would like to throw it away?"

Everyone stayed stock still, barely breathing. She stared straight ahead, like the wind-up toy she was remade to be.

"You," the stranger snapped his fingers, pointing at her. "Come closer." She obeyed, moving towards the stranger. Up close, she could see their pointed ears, the harsh glare of their yellow eyes, the unnatural way they did not move. The stranger pressed a dagger into her hand, the weight of it unfamiliar and wrathful.

"Dispose of him, and you will be greatly rewarded," they whis-

pered into her ear; their breath brushing her skin before they stepped away. Her eyes flicked down to the weapon in her hand, then to the groaning man in front of her. He was dead either way, it was her or him. Leaning down, she hissed out a small, "I'm so sorry." He looked at her, eyes pleading. She took a deep breath, and before the stranger could get someone else to do the task for her, she stuck the dagger into his chest. She could feel it get stuck on his ribs, only for a second, before it slid into his heart. He didn't even scream. She couldn't tell if that made it better or worse.

The stranger came out of the shadows, and she handed the dagger back. They instead took her hand, hoisting her up from the ground. She didn't speak. She barely dared to breathe. They studied her face for a moment, before a slow smile came across their own. It was not a nice smile. With a snap of their fingers, a second chair appeared beside theirs, this one made of the same toxic green of her dress. She made her way over to it, looking straight ahead. Status was status, no matter how she got it. That's what she told herself. She sat down, the chair uncomfortably jabbing into her corset. The stranger clapped their hands and the dancing resumed yet again.



 Eden Grandmont

Double Digits

   By: Tristan Jardinier

When I was little
I made the same wish on my birthday
Over and over.
I stopped the year I turned ten.

“Welcome to the double digits”
my drunk uncle said jokingly
“It’s all downhill from here.
Do you feel any different?”

Alcohol breath and cherry tobacco
Chocolate cake and vanilla frosting
Candle smoke.

“Not really”
I lied
Having thought moments before
That if my father was going to love me
He would’ve started by now
So maybe
I should start donating my birthday wishes
To some other kid
Whose wishes might still come true



The End

   By: Leo Amrani

You were the worst outcome,
Of my best intentions
It’s the same story recited,
In many different versions
Lost in translation
Several times over
It’s nothing new,
As the ending is always the same.



Welcome Back to Gale Springs

   By: Eden Grandmont

The time on my phone reads: 9:52 AM. I glance back to the dark path, only seeing towering trees and bushy ferns that I had passed minutes ago. They’re a much more pleasant sight than rapidly flashing and colorful lights. I face the large opening before me. Piles of broken dishwashers, shattered lamps, and other bits and pieces fill the area. Aside from narrow pathways used to move through the junk. My eyes find their way to the dilapidated school bus in the far corner of the clearing, its paint more chipped and faded than I remember it. My once-spotless sneakers leave flat spots on the growing grass, occasionally crunching a brittle leaf. An invigorating breeze blows over my face, and through my long hair, causing a rushing sound to fill the otherwise still air. *It’s better than that obnoxious music.*

I remember to carefully step over rusted rails that span the opening; courtesy of forgetting about them myself, years ago. The moon is kind enough to be full tonight, causing a cool glow to coat the old metal. Never had I thought about how the train ended up parallel to the rails. Or overturned. The train at the opposite end of the grounds enters the center of my vision. I can’t see it clearly yet from this distance, but it had been reclaimed by nature many years before I first showed up here. I continue toward the bus, staring up at the old vehicle as it grows near. Part of me wants to walk inside and take a seat; being in a familiar place may do the trick to ease my mind, after all. But I continue past, instead heading for the toolshed near the center of the open space, weaving around the bendy paths.

Standing before the rotting shed, I inspect the wall next to the closest window. *S + F. Well, that’s nice, I guess.* As I reach for the doorknob, I spy a figure through the front window, standing in the back side of the shed. A familiar mess of black curly hair holds a red cup, moving toward me from across the yard. A breathy sigh leaves my lips, and I turn around, waiting for her to approach. Her blue eyes meet mine.

“I had a feeling you would be out here, Sam.” She looks at me up and down as if there’s something off. I remain silent for a few moments.

“Did you make it over the rails this time?” I try to keep my voice steady, but I can tell she knows I’m stressed. “Sorry, Jules.”

“Fran was looking for you, you know. She noticed you sneaking peeks at her.” Jules makes a circular motion with her cup, not breaking eye contact. “Why did you disappear like that?”

I try to swallow a lump in my throat. It remains. "I just came out here to think."

"Had another anxiety attack?" Jules tosses her empty cup towards a nearby trash pile.

"I'm not entirely sure. Maybe." I try to keep my voice steady. "I only got back six days ago, so I'm still getting used to living here again."

"What, one year away is enough to make you forget about the town you've spent your entire life in?"

"College life is different."

"And not for you," Jules says with an accusatory tone. I take a deep breath. "Yeah, you're right about that."

She nods slowly. "I don't get it. You talked to Brent and I as if you never left, but haven't even approached Fran?"

"I don't think I'm ready to talk to her."

I can see Jules' narrowing eyes behind her moonlit lenses. "Is this because she came out while you were gone?"

"No, not at all!" I wish she wouldn't jump to conclusions like that. "I know that our relationship ended as well as I could have asked for, but something about moving just days after a breakup seems wrong." Her eyes return to their regular wideness. "And I really don't mind that she's trans!"

"Fran talked to me shortly after you left, you know. Seems like she was more happy for you than angry. I think anyone would be happy for someone who leaves this sinkhole of a town." Jules slowly reaches forward, gently wrapping her bony fingers around my wrist. "I'll stay with you if it makes you feel any better, but it's going to hurt her if you try to stay away from her." I think she notices my hands shake. "She's the only friend you haven't reunited with. Do this for her... and yourself."

Jules takes one short step backward, lightly pulling at my arm. For some moments, my legs do not move, as if quicksand is holding me in place. Fog in my mind clouds my thoughts. *This should be a simple decision, right?*

I find the strength to take a step forward, then another. My eyes meet Jules', and she laughs warmly. "You've got this, Sam." She and I make our way back across the field of junk, past the old bus and over the rails (which I stumble over, much to Jules' amusement).

"It really is good to see you again," she says, "I'm sorry college didn't work out the way you wanted."

She doesn't know that I came back willingly, but I'll keep that to myself for now as anxiety and confidence do battle in my head.

"I'm sorry for being so difficult lately. I just need time to get used

to this place again."

Jules nods in understanding. The silver light illuminates the wooded path back to the loud house, as trees continue to dance and sway in the dim night, all while the wind whistles a deep tune.

Welcome home, Sam.



 Emma Galonski

Chronic Dallyers

✍✍✍ By: Tristan Jardinier

“Do you remember the worms?”
They asked me.
“When we were in middle school?”

“Sorry,”
I replied
“I don’t remember much from those days.”

“Your mother was working an overnight,”
They explained to me
Patiently.
“You spent the night at my place.
The next morning we walked to school
And it was pouring rain
We didn’t have an umbrella.
I saw a worm in the road
And I said it would probably get squished.
You stopped and looked at it,
And then walked to pick it up
From the middle of the road.
You brought it to the grass by the sidewalk.
Without saying a word,
We both started picking up every worm we saw.
We were so late.
And we were soaked.
We were still wet when we left school that day.
I was never late to class,
But I didn’t regret it.
When I see worms in the rain
I think about us
Saving worms together.”

“I’m sorry to have forgotten that.”
I replied sheepishly.

Neither of us are girls now
But when we’re running late
Because we were dilly-dallying
Like schoolgirls with a crush
I think about the worms too.



 Brianna Lemmon

Sad Girl

✍✍✍ By: Heather Cleveland

Hair up
Eyes down
Accompanied by that painful frown.
People come.
People go.
The cruelest part of life is having to let go.
Especially if you’re uncertain.



Did You Know the World Is Ending?

   By: April Waltmire

Did you know the world is ending? This is a fact. A depressing fact, maybe, but an irrefutable one nonetheless. Ever since the universe began, it and all that dwells within, has been spiraling uncontrollably towards eradication. In fact, it very well might meet its end tomorrow. Or perhaps the day after. Maybe even, if we are quite lucky, next Tuesday. Yet despite the unwavering evidence of the world's inevitable demise, most inhabitants of this plane of existence are not aware of their own impending doom.

Take that duck for example. See how he is paddling through that lake, his long and slender beak slicing through the water to snap at the minnows darting about under the surface.

Do you think he would be fishing at a time like this if he had any idea that the world is ending?

Of course not. If he were aware, he would be doing something about it. Something to save his own tail feathers, like flying up and away to the south. He would scramble to safety, and, if he were a caring and kindhearted duck, he would be squawking at any other foul he saw to come along and join him. If he were an especially caring duck, he would no doubt fly as far as his great gray wings could take him, shouting the news for everyone to hear.

"The world is ending!" he would shout, while flying over chicken coops and cow fields. And what would happen then, I do wonder? Would the chickens listen to his warning? I should think so, for chickens are known to be a superstitious bunch. Then the hens, fueled now by the fear of the world's end, would try to escape their coops and scatter across the countryside in feathery droves, clucking and cooing the same message that the duck told them to anyone they might find.

But what of the cows? What might the mighty dairy cows do in light of the horrid news? Will they stampede across their fields? Trample their grassy knolls into desolate mud patches?

I think not. For cows, on the whole, are sensible and honest creatures whos' stout hearts care deeply for the ones around them. I should think their loving nature will compel them not to panic, like the duck and the chickens, but instead to calmly explain the dreadful situation to the animals around them.

Take Bessy, for example. She might wander over to the pigs' pen and poke her velvet nose through the fence and say something like, "Hel-

lo, there, friends. Have you heard the news?"

And the pigs' leader, a great big hog by the name of Horace, might reply, "What news would that be? The news about the farmer's supper?"

"No, no," the cow would reply patiently, "The news about the end of the world, my dear friend."

"Oh," Horace would say, "That old stuff? Why, we pigs have known about that for ages."

"Really?" the cow would ask, her big eyes getting even bigger in surprise, "Then why on earth didn't you tell anyone?"

And Horace would snort through his muddy snout and say, "What would be the point in that? The world is ending, who gives a fig so long as I get my dinner, yeah?"

And the cow would shake her great head and wander away from the pig pen, wondering how pigs ever made friends with anyone in the first place. And while all this was going on, the duck would still be flying, squawking his news for all the earth to hear. A messenger, of sorts, or at least one for all those who can understand the intricate language of ducks.



Ah, but my friend, all that would never happen. That duck will stay right where he is, swimming serenely in his little lake. His clever little flippers will keep churning through the brown-green water and his beak will keep snapping at darting minnows until he has caught his full. The duck does not know that the world is ending, so he will keep on paddling in his little pond.





 Eden Grandmont

The Mold

   By: Leo Amrani

My Skin feels tight against my bones
My cheeks feel hollow,
Stomach empty and screaming
I lie on my bed,
Light headed and disoriented
As I try a million different ways,
To keep my mind off the one thing I need
The one thing I want
But nothing else seems to keep my mind quiet
This is the price I have to pay
To mold my body like clay,
Into a shape and size
Of my own design



Aqua Dreams

   By: Eden Grandmont

The flow of the river rushes under a starry sky,
causing damp crashes heard through the cool air.

Captivated, the fawn makes its way towards the bank,
following the curious noise along crisp leaves and deep sod.

The fawn is mesmerized in an instant, gazing upon the brook before it.
Moist droplets touch its nose as if to further get its attention.

Curious thoughts rush through the fawn's head,
creating another river of ideas.

One step is enough to know:
The river is the place for fish.

And bears, perhaps.



 Ana Lopes De Lima

The Hairdresser

   By: Ashton Laurent

“So, you’re in school?”

The hairdresser was very chatty. She talked a mile a minute, barely giving me a chance to respond. Not that I cared; I find small talk during haircuts or dental exams incredibly awkward.

“What grade are you in? My son just graduated. He wants to study Psychology. What do you want to do when you graduate?”

Six months passed. I decided I needed another haircut.

“It’s good to see you again! Just a trim?”

Same chatty hairdresser, same generic ‘How are you? What grade are you in now?’ The same questions she always asked before talking about her son. Somehow the conversation always ended up about her son. “That’s awesome! You know, my son said senior year was his favorite. He’s going into the army. I’m not a huge fan of his decision, but it’s the only way we can afford his education.” She gave an awkward chuckle. At least I didn’t have to talk about myself.

Time for another haircut.

I scheduled an appointment at the same place. The hairdresser may be chatty, but she always did a good job. Something felt off today. She didn’t talk much as she usually did.

“How are you? I’m a little anxious, myself. I’m sure you’ve seen the news. He’s going off to war...” She didn’t say much else. I began to miss hearing her constantly blabbing about her son. I hoped they both ended up okay.

My hair was getting long again.

I needed a trim, so I scheduled another appointment at my usual place, with the usual hairdresser. She was back to her chatty self this time.

“Good to see you! How are you? Are you in college yet?”

Same old chatty self. Good. Slightly annoying, but normal. I wondered when she’d start talking about her son.

“How old are you again? You know, my son is coming home in a couple of months to celebrate my birthday!”

That didn’t take long. I was about to say ‘happy early birthday’ when her phone rang.

“Sorry I have to take this,” she said as she sped off to the back.

I waited for what felt like hours. The receptionist went to check on her. Someone was wailing. It was so loud and ear-piercing that I could hear it from where I sat. Something was wrong. The receptionist came back a few

minutes later.

“I’m sorry but Debbie had a family emergency come up. We are going to have to reschedule your appointment for another day. We won’t charge you for today,” she said.

I didn’t have to ask what was wrong. Debbie’s son had been killed in combat. Her wails could come only from a parent who experienced the loss of their child. I didn’t know how to react, so I just kept quiet. I re-scheduled my appointment with the receptionist.

I had a different hairdresser next time.



Fireworks

   By: Sherrill Bokousky

As a planned event begins to draw near
Because we do it as a family
Calls are made to get together
Deciding what time to be there
Everyone is excited to get together
Family and friends alike
Gathering snacks and drinks to share
Hoping for a few sweets to be added in
Inside voices are not required
Jokes and laughter shared is the best
The key spot to gather is scoped out
Looking for the perfect place
Most of us have now gathered
No shortage of snacks or drinks
Only a few spots left as we take our seats
Plan is now to relax and watch the fireworks show
Quite a large crowd settled in
Ready to see the lights in the sky
Sky is clear and shining with stars
To show the bouquet of colors to come
Under those stars we wait and then....
Very quiet as we watch except for the loud exclamations
What a show
Many in hearts of young and old tonight
You are seeing
Snazzy in motion



 Ashley Soto

Pontiac, the Good Boy

   By: Keren Hawkes

It started with: “We are just here to look.” I walked through the front door of the rescue with high hopes of leaving with a new family member. Being the middle of summer, the smell of wet dog permeated throughout the rescue. The lobby was questionably quiet, but we were greeted with a smiling face. We were then escorted down a hallway, past the cat section and the little play areas with those half doors used to meet with prospective furry companions. Finally, we entered the puppy section. Many kennels were empty, but the barks and whines of puppies still filled the air.

The name tag read ‘Pontiac,’ and there behind that chain linked kennel sat a skinny dog with his tail between his legs. He had big, goofy ears that stood straight up and moved with every sound made. Without hesitation I asked to play with him. Once we entered the area, he jumped up on me and lapped me with slobbery kisses across my face.

The first responsibility I took on, with the help of my sister, was to rename him. We listed name after name, dismissing each one. “Riley... no, Hank...no, Bear...no.” Finally, my sister mentioned the name Duncan. As the name escaped her mouth his big ears flickered in her direction, as if she had called out to him. “Duncan it is!”

We enjoyed walking on the beach, playing fetch, and cuddling on

the couch after a difficult day. But as you would expect, there was a bit of destruction that came along with him. His best work came when the colder weather rolled in and I was not exercising him as frequently. I came home to find him surrounded by cloud-like stuffing covering the floor. Stepping into the living room, I dropped onto the floor. “Duncan, you’re going to die, I’m going to die, mom is going to kill us.” He shredded my mother’s new couch. Thankfully, she didn’t kill us, but she did make me enroll him in doggy daycare. A bored dog can be a destructive one.

In my mid-twenties I met the man I would later marry and began neglecting the attention that Duncan deserved and needed. I began partying and wanted to be with my friends and boyfriend, leaving Duncan behind. My parents stepped in as I transitioned to living with my boyfriend. Without realizing it, days, then weeks would go by without visiting. Anytime I would leave, my mother would send photos of him sitting looking out the window, depressed. Looking back, this is the biggest regret I have with the care I provided him... or lack thereof.

After marrying my husband, we resumed responsibility for Duncan. Years filled with adventures of going to the dog park, getting another puppy, a kitten, having our first child, and cuddles went by quickly. My husband and I settled our family in New Hampshire in 2020. In September of 2021, we began to find droplets of red around the house. Two months later these splatters became more frequent. It was not until I witnessed Duncan sneeze one day that I learned where these splatters were coming from. I watched the blood ricochet out of his nose. I was horrified.

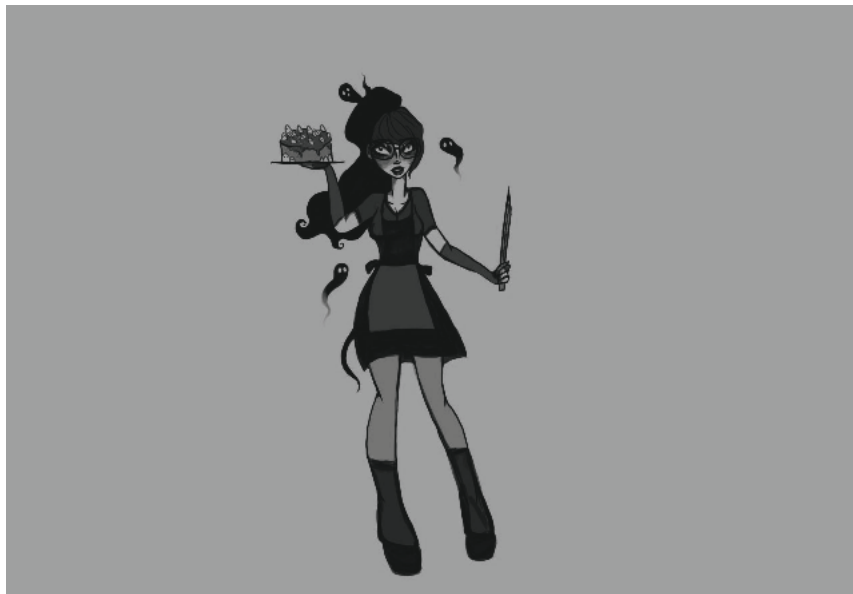
The vet rambled off what they believed his issue might be, but it was hard to stay focused. She believed he may have Nasal Adenocarcinoma. Cancer growing in his nose. Sadly, she advised me that dogs with this diagnosis do not typically live more than three months. Three months later and he was still with us.

I gave birth on August 1. While in the hospital, my husband hesitantly told me that we had to speak about Duncan. “He is not doing well, really not doing well.” I brushed off his warning and focused on my new baby. When we were later discharged from the hospital and sitting in the driveway, my husband turned to me to warn me of Duncan’s worsening condition. Finding it hard to believe the drastic change, I immediately entered the house and went looking for Duncan. He was gated off in the spare room. Stepping into that room was like stepping into a gruesome bloody crime scene. Blood was everywhere. I can still clearly remember the metallic smell of the blood taking over my nose, feeling my blood rush to my head, and dizzying me. It was up to me to make the decision of

when to send him over the Rainbow Bridge. With all the strength I had, I called and made an appointment at the animal hospital for the following day.

This was his last ride in the car, one of his favorite activities. I was going to make it memorable. With the window down and his head hanging out in doggy euphoria, we stopped at McDonalds. He devoured his cheeseburger, fries, and ice cream like he knew this was his last. We finally arrived and were quickly shuffled into the back. Unfortunately, while waiting, Duncan began panting heavily and I noticed the bleeding increasing very quickly. I knew our time was limited to minutes, possibly seconds. The doctor entered the room, and it was clear no examination was needed. She injected the first medication to relax his body, he gently placed his head with those big goofy ears on my lap. The second medication, the one assisting him over Rainbow Bridge, worked instantly. It took an enormous amount of strength to stay in that room with him. I put my own fears aside and found the strength to provide the love and support he not only needed, but deserved after all those years by my side.

Despite the sadness that can come along with having a pet, the lessons learned are of immense value. Responsibility, the concept of time, and finding your most inner strength and selflessness are lessons that will forever follow me after my time with Duncan. Thank you, Duncan, Pontiac, my good boy.



 Emilie MacKenzie

Home Intruders

 By: Aiden Smith

Crash! Another crash, followed by several more, now accompanied by footsteps. The shouts of men fill the seemingly endless hallway as they draw near. I sit cramped in the dark enclosed space, a spider and ant duke it out in front of my eyes as the first pair of boots enters the room. Followed by another, then a pair of sneakers, then boots, sneakers, sandals, boots, all rushing into the room. I cannot contain myself but I must. I quietly hyperventilate among the dust and cobwebs. I don't even remember crying, but the drops of salt water on my lips and the floor speak the truth. There's yelling, anger, stomping, and screams. I hear more crashing and the sound of shattering glass. A moment later, I can see the bright orange light from the next room over. The smell of burning wood and paint fills my nostrils.

Next came the loudest sound I'd ever heard: *BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG*. Several more pairs of boots run inside, and I can see a hand laying down around the corner from where they came. The shouts only get louder when the mattress is pulled off, and I'm hoisted up by a man in camouflage. Quickly, without saying a word, I'm in my father's arms and I knew that my mother was dead.



Room 216

 By: Eden Grandmont

Two for two and four for four,
Most of the time I wait on the floor.
Many like me are by my side,
Waiting for a hand to make us slide.
Day by day I sit in a dim room,
Hopeful that I have not met my untimely doom.
Footsteps and voices heard out and about,
Occasionally interrupted by a shrill shout.
At times I wish I had moving legs,
And perhaps long, majestic hair.
But I can't say much about that.

I'm just a chair.



Excerpt from A Compulsion to Lunacy

   By: Dan Bingham

I'm sitting on the bench outside the bar that I've been banned from entering for the last five years. I still go there from time to time to see if they'll let me in, and they never do. I told the owner to go f- himself. It was justified. He's an asshole.

I sit on the bench outside the bar sometimes and bum cigarettes off the patrons. On occasion, I'll have a little conversation. Right now, I'm alone, staring at the building in front of me. It's a brick ambulance bay or something like that- I think I saw a small firetruck in there once.

An old man with blue eyes, a green coat and a white beard walks out of the bar and sits beside me, lighting a cigarette. We sit in silence for a bit, but after a few puffs, he turns to look at me.

"Anybody ever tell you the story about the man who hunted the angel for its tears?" he asks me, exhaling a cloud of smoke.

"No," I say. I definitely wasn't expecting that.

"An angel's tear can grant you any wish in the world," he says.

"Is that so?" I ask.

"It is," he replies. He clears his throat and continues, "Now, there was a man who had lost his love and the pain was unbearable."

"Sounds tough," I say.

"It was," he agrees, "Now do you know how to catch an angel?"

"I do not."

"Well, I'll tell you."

"Please do."

He coughs and takes another drag of his cigarette before proceeding: "You have to wound a young deer with a silver tipped arrow. This will lure the angel out to answer the young animal's cry for mercy. Now, this man didn't have a silver arrow. So he melted down the ring that his father had given him before he died. The man crafted it into an arrowhead.

"Now, in order to capture the angel you have to entangle it in a net of silk. He didn't have a net made of silk, so he destroyed his mother's silk wedding dress to make one. He went into the woods and he waited. Eventually, a deer came along and the man shot it with the silver arrow. He waited again. For an entire day, the deer laid in pain, unable to move, crying for mercy. An angel finally appeared. The man looked at the angel as it went about soothing the animal's pain."

I notice a small drop of liquid about to drip out of his nose, but I don't say anything.

"Are you still with me?" he asks.

"Yeah," I say, "Keep going."

He continued, "The man caught the angel and he set about making it cry. He beat it and he whipped it and abused it in all manners you can think of. But the angel just stared defiantly, accusing the man with its eyes but never showing an ounce of anything but scorn. Finally, the man broke down. He saw that all his work had been for nothing, and he'd become a beast himself- whipping a beautiful creature just because he had missed his love so very badly. He broke down, and made to cut the angel loose.

"To his surprise he looked up and saw the angel weeping tears of sorrow for the man's plight. The tear turned into a crystal when it hit the ground and the man picked it up. But he couldn't bring himself to make his wish anymore. He'd turned himself into such a beast in order to get back what he had lost, and he couldn't bear the shame of facing his love if he were to wish her back.

"Instead, he took the tear and used it to wish that he had never done what he did to the angel in the first place. But that was one wish that the angel couldn't grant. So, instead, he wrapped the tear in a handkerchief and gave it back to the angel. The angel took it with a solemn nod and flew away."

He nods, satisfied with his telling.

"What happened to the man after that?" I ask.

"Who knows?" he responds. "That's the end of the story."

"Why did you tell me that?" I ask.

"I dunno. Just seeing your face made me think of it," he says.

Then, he gets up and leaves.

I'm not sure what to do now.

I just sit back and close my eyes.

I breathe in.

I try to think of nothing.



The Petals on a Rose

✍✍✍ By: Cassidy Tomeo

I can see it,
It's as clear as day;
Even as it rains.
The petals of a rose.
The color of the petals
Don't matter as the
Beauty in whole
Is not to be compared to,
But the petals,
The petals shine and shimmer
As the raindrops
Cover it in whole
And the wind
Threatens to blow them off,
They are beautiful.

The petals of a rose
Could be said to be the same
As a person.

In our youngest of days
We are colorful, lively,
We shine and shimmer,
But when our own rain comes
We continue to shine and shimmer
Only to be blown off eventually.
But, through all of the abuse
Of society
We remain beautiful
In our darkest of hours.
Even as we fade like
The petals of a rose.
We are beautiful.



 Cassidy Tomeo

You'd Never Know Beauty

✍✍✍ By: Jack Miller

I've had many names in my existence, but now I have one. I was named for the first thing they knew me as: the ground. Every living creature crawling across the topmost layer of my skin. There are many who fly above it and many who go deeper. I feel everything. I hear many cries for help in my name; they think I am in danger. This is not the first time this has happened. I am not in peril. I will outlast the creatures on my skin. I may miss them, but it is not the first time.

Once, I was considered a God. I was known as Gaia. I was revered for giving life to the men and Gods of their time. The mother of the sky, with whom I bore life. That name did not last. Now, I am everything. The mountains, waterfalls, forests, canyons, seas, and the skies.

I am the Earth. They call me their mother. Others look beyond me; see me as a failure for what they've done to my sky. I did not choose for humans to exist on me, but they are stubborn. They're hellbent on survival, simultaneously destroying themselves through me. The ancient ones were right, I *am* a God. The last man will be embedded in my soil, regardless of who kills whom. They will not live to see it, but I will change again and it will be beautiful. I guess it was inevitable. I always have to change. Earth, the homeworld of humanity. The holy ground on which these narcissistic parasites reside. They do not revere me as much anymore. They tear me apart, destroy my creations, and shit on my name.

There are a few of my dwellers who have retained man's respect and admiration for me. Those few, despite denouncing the actions of the humans who force my change, still sell themselves into modern abusive systems. Those respectful few have no choice but to submit to the ones who believe they've taken me over. There is nothing I can do for any of them. I cannot save them.

My final form will be ashes in the void eventually, so they say. Many of the parasites want to leave me before that happens. Pathetic. I highly doubt any of them will outlive me, their one true God. Even many who praise the sun and the moon are forced to recognize that it is I, Earth, who gave them everything they have. They do not call the sun their mother or the moon their home. I am named with much more meaning than those lifeless balls of energy and mass. I am the only one named with any true reverence.

Mars was a war god, yet that planet is a cold, dead wasteland. Venus is supposedly the Goddess of beauty yet there is nothing beautiful

about a hot, dank, acidic hellscape. I am named for everything. I showed them what beauty is. I gave them the sky and the seas, which they would otherwise have no concept of.

They named me for the ground. I am more than that. I am beauty, I am the skies, the seas, and the place where they fought their 'wars'. Every idea in their feeble minds was caused by the things I gave them, and yet, they could not be content.

I *hate* them. The ancient ones looked beyond me, but still revered me as their God and the Mother of Life. These new parasites rip out my skin, destroy my skies, flood my seas, and decimate my ice caps. They only think to abandon me because they believe that one day I will not be good enough for them. *Blasphemy*. I am Earth! I am the Mother of all Life! These parasites will not outlive me. These ungrateful leeches have forgotten what my name really means.





 Rochelle Hebert




Ashes Will Fall

   By: Cassidy Tomeo

When I look back on this memory,
A not so fond memory,
I remember how I stood in a vastness
Of never ending cliffs
And how everything was an innocent white
As I looked at the sky,
That dares to reflect the ocean,
And white clouds littering throughout it.
It was a peaceful winter day
As I had remembered it.
But, in a blink of an eye,
The world had turned upside down.
The black death of snowflakes started to rain from the sky,
And though they fell as graceful as one,
There were no snowflakes I had ever seen.
In this mass-ness these snowflakes
Leave behind a screaming mass
And corpses on the ground.
It suffocates everyone around it
And sucks the life out of everything it touches.
The once beautiful landscape that I once knew,
Would be gone in a day.
But, the fatalness of it all would be the thing that remains
As every breath I took became suffocating
And my lungs became poisoned.
My hands had started to shake with fear
As my heart was in my ears
And all in that moment,
All I could think about was how it continued to fall.
The silent killer.
To the lungs
And it poisons the mind,
My and your hands start to shake
With fear,
But it continues to fall.
The silent killer.



A Life Changing Experience

   By: Matthew Smith

That morning I was given the worst news of my life. I was ushered into my living room by my stepmother and the pastor from the local church, who had become a close family friend over the years. The room was decorated with an old floral patterned couch positioned in front of a small television set in the corner. The room was painted maroon with brown accents. I've always hated the color of this room. I was told everything would be explained when my father arrived, and that he would be home shortly.

When my father entered the room, he told me I should sit down. I sat down on the couch, my stepmother and the pastor sat on either side of me. He stood in front of me, and I would never forget what he said: "Son, Grandma Cheryl was in the hospital today. She was in and out of consciousness several times. The doctors tried to bring her back, but grandma passed away this morning."

Suddenly, I felt as if my heart had just dropped fifteen feet. Tears started running down my face uncontrollably, and my eyes began to blur. My breath became taxing as I struggled to control my emotions. My mind still could not believe what I had just heard but my heart was telling me that this was it. My father and stepmother tried to comfort me through this tragedy, but I was completely and utterly broken. The person I admired the most in this world was gone forever.

Over the next few days, I would discover that things would only get harder from that moment forward. But I took comfort in knowing that my grandmother was in a better place. From that moment on, I decided to dedicate my life to helping others so that I may ease their burdens as much as I can.

I can still remember the day my grandmother took my brother and I to the river. We woke up at around 7 am to the smell of pancakes filling the room. I always loved waking up to the smell of pancakes; it was a weekend tradition for our family. After my brother and I got up, we made our way to the kitchen where I found my grandmother waiting. She told us when we were finished eating that we would leave for the river. Once we finished, we made our way to her somewhat new truck. I couldn't tell you what year the car was made but it still had its shiny factory paint. The outside air was particularly cold, I got goosebumps as soon as I left the

house.

The drive to the lake was not very long at all; we were in the car for maybe thirty minutes before we arrived at the river. When we arrived, the first thing we noticed was that the river was flooded in some places. The current was aggressively moving downstream. We had to pass this part of the river to get to the spot we wanted to be at. There was only one spot we could cross, and it was one of the areas that was flooded. But my grandmother decided that it was shallow enough to try to drive through. It is important to note that I was eight at the time and didn't know how to swim. I was scared that the truck would either get stuck or get swept away by the current.

I was so terrified at that point - I had an unsettling feeling in my gut that something bad was going to happen. I tried to voice my concerns with my grandmother, who was driving, but she just turned to me and said, "I know it is scary, but sometimes you need to face fears in order to get where you want to go."

Hearing that, I tried my best to muster the courage to face my fear. My stomach started twisting as the truck crossed the river. My eyes were locked on the water underneath the truck to make sure we stayed on the rock path under the surface. My stomach continued to twist until the front tires made it out of the water. Finally, we made it to the other side and the feeling in my stomach subsided.

We continued down the dirt path for about ten minutes until we arrived at our destination. My grandmother got out of the truck and opened the door for my brother and I. As I got out of the truck, I immediately understood what my grandmother was talking about earlier. I faced my fear, and I was rewarded with an amazing view of the section of the river. It was so clear, you could see every detail of the riverbed. I could see small schools of tiny fish along with the occasional crawfish. As I was taking in the scenery around me, my grandmother pulled me aside and said, "This is why I wanted you to be brave and face your fears. Sometimes life throws your deepest fears at you when you least expect it, but if you face your fear head on you will be able to see the beauty behind it."

Memories like this one hold an incredibly special place in my heart since my grandmother passed on. This was the hardest lesson I ever learned. It taught me that we'll all eventually pass on, but in the end, we always leave something behind. So, what will you leave behind?





 Devin Anderson

Consider the Pickle

   By: Dan Bingham

Lo, ye sweet briny treat. Ye cucumber is made squishy and sweet, by clever alchemy and tricky techniques. The pleasure you provide by taste and crunch between the upper cheeks. Can one compare the concoction of the organic flesh and the chemical bath that to create this invention requires no math? Hark! the sound of the pickled one, completely silent all sound in shun. The tongue will marvel at the bumpy exterior only to purr at the exquisite interior.

And yet one must consider the process itself. Left in brine upon a shelf. Can you really claim any skill or technique to bring the cucumber to its peak? To remove it thus could be the secret? To line them up and make a set. Unnecessary.

A pickle is what a pickle does. But what does a pickle mean? What doth it say? Has it a mind of its own? One would submit that it does not. Make it so a lesser thing? What do the table doth it bring? A marvelous taste untold to believe. So carry five concealed in ye sleeve.

Although personally, I don't like them all that much.



Sweet Disdain By: Alishea Skye Preston

How sweet the pain is love to disdain:
like dancing naked to purple rain
emotions run deep allowing the sweet love to creep,
stripping you naked your soul will reap.
pumping the blood, followed by the devastating flood of;
of endless love....
forever and always love your soul shall take;
until your endless breath and you no longer wake...
bonds and chains, chemicals bind your brains love, hate,
to be insane.
held within and mostly without;
filled with self doubt,
codependent a soldier and a codefendant;
Ms. INDEPENDENT is a mirage; the past.
break the chains, escape fast
freedom, control, discipline; at last.
love is long, say goodbye; codependency is gone.
for you are the one who is forever strong
unbreakable; flawed and breathtaking!!!!



 Cassidy Tomeo



 Brianna Lemmon

Howling Mouse

   By: Cassidy Tomeo

'Amelia H. Loveheart'

The words etched on to the slab of marble hold nothing. They hold no meaning whatsoever. Despite that, I could feel warmth radiating from the slab of marble. I place my hand on it. A searing heat burns through my skin to my bones. I bear it as a mother bears through the pain of labor, to birth a beautiful existence. I hold firm as I take a deep breath. I close my eyes slowly. I could feel the cool wind at the nape of my neck, and I could almost see the brilliance rising in the horizon. It shined brighter than I've ever seen in my lifetime. In the distance I could see her.

She dances to the rhythm of her own beat as her hair flutters in the wind around her face. Her dress flows in the wind- white and gold for innocence. Her feet make careful movements. Her body moves as freely as water and I can see the drolms surrounding her, haunting her, begging her to finally join them. She pays them no mind as she dances to her rhythm. Blind to everything around her while seeing everything. It is as if she chooses to be blissfully ignorant to the harsh reality of her situation.

She dances on the toes of her left foot, balancing, as she lifts her arms gracefully into the air. Her mouth open, her eyes closed.

She sings a call for all around to look at her, but I already was.

My spine shivers at the haunting of her voice, and I press my hand firmly on the slab of marble. I squeeze my eyes tightly. Just as I thought I had missed it, I saw it.

She's now in a crouched position as she holds her hands out to one of the drolms. It crawls in her hands as its beaten wings drag on the ground- wings that are purely decorative and have no actual function. She picks the drolm up, and she stands to her full height. A beam of light shines from her hands and the drolm is no longer so pitiful, but becomes a beautiful tretcha. The magnificent creature makes its voice heard as it flaps its wings and flies. A gust of wind follows it and the gust rushes past me. I could see her looking at me, but her eyes aren't seeing me. She sees only the person who came before.

The body I possessed moves forward. I watch her take a few steps forward before dashing and we meet halfway. I engulf her in my arms and I hold her close. I rub her back in comfort.

The lutchings below scratch and scrape at our barren feet and ankles. Our skin itches, but it does not matter. She buries her face into my chest as her small and frail hands cling to my shirt. She cries. I look up from her to the outer vastness of the zetch, and my sadness for the scene before me burdens my heart. I feel greater grief from the body I possessed. My heart squeezes in pain as the breath in my lungs is knocked out of me. I stare at the floating body below; I can see the starvation and abuse society had put upon it. The dress is no longer a beautiful white and gold, but now the color of the void, and as crimson as the blood that soaks the teeth of a quincy.

I look down to the person that I hold in my arms. The warmth I felt before leaves me as I look at the emptiness of my arms. She was no longer there, her soul long gone- free.

My consciousness returns to reality as I sit on my knees before the marble slab. The wind whistles in my ears. I pull my hand away from the stone and return it to my lap. I look up at the sertch as the brilliance shines down on me.

As I stand up I could feel Amelia's soul dancing around me as she dances toward freedom and to her own rhythm. Then, she slowly fades off. Her dance is that of a nomadic wanderer. I turn away from the marble as my heart aches with loss.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I could see Amelia smiling innocently as tears roll down her cheeks. The floor beneath her gives, and her body swings as her neck breaks in two, like a twig, her long black hair covering her face. The cry of her children could be heard in the distance, but is muffled by the cheers of the barbarians below. No love, no hate, no happiness, no grief; it was nothing but a spectacle for the whole world to see.

But, perhaps, there is some hate for the 'witch'.'

I run my hand down the freshly inked page and I watch as the letters smudge together; my handwriting no longer comprehensible for those who will attempt reading the text later on. I am fine with that. I am fine with my history held between me and Amelia.

She is my only true love. I await for her soul to return and bring light to the planet once more.

After all, she is my Howling Mouse.



 CJ Miller



 Brianna Lemmon



 Rochelle Hebert

Fishing Feelings

   By: Vitor Lage Duque

Some people say that vacation was made for having a little bit of fun, but I didn't feel that way. My vacations were to my grandmother's house. Situated in a small rural town, far away from everything, with no access to the internet, and no toys. When I was a kid, my mom always sent me to spend a whole month there. Even though I would enjoy the beginning, I always found myself complaining that there was nothing to do. For a kid, there is nothing more boring than doing nothing. In fact, the boredom scared me. The internet, and all the other trivial things that a big city gives access to were so addicting, that I couldn't spend my time resting or enjoying the country view. I could not shake the feeling that I was throwing my time away- time I couldn't get back. Unfortunately, at the time, I could not understand the complex, poetic feeling that quietness can bring.

Every morning, the overwhelming sound of a rooster's crow would echo through the windows of my room. I awoke, cursing words that I cannot say aloud without making my family cringe. I do not blame that rooster; it is just his nature. In fact, I blame myself for the lack of passion

for my chores. Complaining and crying about the most minor events were normal for me.

I knew that I would be greeted outside by the warmth of the sun on my skin and the smooth chilly air reaching down into my lungs. I would wish, briefly, to stay like that forever. That feeling only takes minutes to disappear. The feeling is replaced by something that is impossible to evade: the unpleasant sensation of boredom. I do not know where boredom comes from, but its grip on my heart, along with disinterest, made me wish I could be numb to it all.

Even though I would have good moments here and there, it was still the same thing every day. I would wake up, feel the breeze in the air, and then stay still, looking up at the sky, waiting for clouds to touch each other. I could spend hours looking at the floor, and nobody could care less about it. It was as if, even with all my efforts to *do* something, I was swallowed by the empty abyss of boredom- waiting for something to happen. Though I knew that nothing could happen if I did nothing. As such, it was the boredom that made me wish to not come here.

Despite my early swirling thoughts—where I found answers for the most trivial of questions in the world- I decided to get out of my bed. I followed the straight hallway, lined with rooms on either side. In the left corner, close to the door that leads to the living room, I saw my grandfather's collection of cowboy hats. I passed them on the way to the kitchen. The smell of coffee and homemade bread wafted on the air.

As I had started to eat, I heard a voice behind me: "Let's go fish, kid."

It was my uncle. I had been refusing his attempts to go fishing for days. I did not like the quiet and boring atmosphere created by fishing. It was no secret that I could not stand by for mere minutes without complaining about something. I would even cry if I needed to. However, for whatever reason, I decided to go with him.

After breakfast, I followed him to the spot on the river. He armed two fishing rods and gave one to me. We sat on a bench to begin. This was the most boring part: no sound allowed, no unnecessary movement. I could feel my hands sweating as I tried to stay as quiet as possible. It was not an easy thing to do. Once again, the creeping feeling of boredom, spurred by the silence, made me think that I was wasting my time. I was there fishing with an old rod, waiting for the unluckiest fish to bite the hook.

The morning gave way to afternoon. The cloudy gray sky threatened us with an upcoming storm. Mosquitos and gnats were everywhere.

I rolled my eyes and I wished that I hadn't come at all. My uncle noticed my agitation, and whispered as low as possible, "See around."

Following his eyes, I saw the lake; a vast and deep column of sweet water. At first, nothing happened. I lifted my eyes up and, miles away, I saw a big hill filled with grass. Near the top was one singular tree. I saw the beauty that my uncle did. All my dull thoughts were nothing compared to how amazing that place was. Immediately, like a singular drop of water in the vast ocean, all my complaints disappeared. All my negative thoughts of boredom vanished from my mind, that quiet scene stuck in my head forever.

With bulging eyes, I was about to whisper something that I cannot remember. Then, I heard angry clouds spitting droplets of water to the ground. In seconds, solid land turned into cold and slippery mud.

"Let's go back," my uncle said.

I reeled the line of my fishing rod in, and I got up off the bench to follow him. It was a heavy storm, something that I had never seen before. The noise of water falling through the cloudy sky was almost deafening. Suddenly, I fell. The cold mud touched my skin, sharp as snow. My uncle looked back, after hearing my sudden scream.

Even though I felt defeated, like I was the unluckiest person in the world, instead of crying, I laughed.



Trapped Within a Cell

 By: Alishea Skye Preston

Trapped within a cell;
a cell destined for hell; you call out, but your cries fall upon deaf ears.
your life for years was filled with sin, so now; your soul shall be,
locked within, locked within
the walls of solitude, walls of cement, cold and crude.
your soul is lifeless and you fall into an eternal slumber; for when you
awaken it is all to clear, you are stuck within a cell; the walls are near.
this is your redemption, you are to make retribution to justice owed.
how could this be your self fulfilled prophecy?
the anger, pain manifesting self disdain, the tears that fall like treacherous
rain.
weak and solemn, melancholy; and abyss filled pain.
lack of control you've got to be insane.
your mind, your body will forever be changed,



 Karen Porter

Two Paths, One Decision

 By: Damaris Nieves

I was three months pregnant, and thrilled. I waited to be called for my three-month prenatal visit in the waiting area at the prenatal doctor's office. After the nurse called my name, she said, "This must be an exciting day for you!"

I answered with a smile on my face, "Sure is." I was overjoyed to be able to see and hear my baby's heartbeat for the second time. She led me to my room, helped me settle in on the bed chair, and told me the sonographer would be there in a moment. The lighting was dimmed, and peace washed over me in the quiet atmosphere. The sun was beginning to set outside the window. Everything was flawless!

I closed my eyes and reclined, daydreaming of the day I could hold my child. The sonographer knocked on the door. She introduced herself and began the examination. She uttered the sound, "hmmm," with an unreadable expression on her face.

“Everything all right?” I asked.

She remained motionless for a moment before saying, “Yes, of course, everything’s all right. I’ll just get the doctor for a moment.” Suddenly, my enthusiasm turned to terror. The sonographer’s reaction did not convince me that everything was okay.

The doctor arrived shortly thereafter.

“Is everything all right?” I asked again. She grabbed my hand and tried to reassure me, but I was already imagining the worst-case scenarios.

The doctor enlarged the ultrasound and pointed to my baby’s fluid-covered neck. “Okay, Damaris, do you see this? This fluid can occasionally indicate that the fetus has Down’s syndrome.”

My life seemed to have suddenly ended. I felt numb, like everything had stopped before my eyes, and the room was closing in on me. Although their voices sounded far away, I could hear the nurse and the doctor asking me if I understood what they were saying. I wanted nothing more than to shut down my thoughts and act as if nothing had happened.

“Damaris!” The nurse said, “Let us help you sit up so we can explain this to you.” She informed me that additional testing was necessary, but, in the meantime, she would connect me with a specialist and a guidance counselor who would go over my options. After the appointment, I made no mention of this news to anyone. In my prayers, I asked God for strength and direction.

I was tense when I returned to the waiting area a few weeks later, as I waited to be called. When the nurse called me up, she did not say, ‘this must be such a lovely day for you’ as she had done the last time. The doctor and a guidance counselor were among the people she introduced to me after escorting me into the gray, dull room. They began by educating me on everything, including what it might be like for a 20-year-old woman to give birth to a child who has Down’s syndrome.

They kept saying that I could choose to get an abortion if I so desired. I hadn’t even considered that to be a possibility. I insisted an abortion was not an option for me. No matter what the circumstances, I was confident that I would do everything in my power to have this child. Though I was afraid and unsure of the future, I knew that this was the best course of action for both the baby and me. The doctors finally understood and recommended that I get a chorionic villus sampling (CVS) test. That test determines most chromosomal disorders and would confirm the results from the ultrasound. After considering the risks and benefits, I opted for the CVS test. The results would take three weeks.

Those three weeks were the longest three weeks of my life. I was

filled with fear and uncertainty. I knew that having a baby with Down’s syndrome would be difficult. But I also understood that these babies were just as capable of living full and happy lives as any other child. I would accept my child whatever the outcome. My child would be loved unconditionally no matter his or her condition. I told myself I was strong enough to love, support, and guide my child just as I would love, support, and guide myself. As I processed these thoughts, I gained the courage to tell my friends and family. My worries and fears faded as I realized that they, too, would love this baby regardless of any difficulties or disabilities.

Finally, I received the call with the results. My heart was pounding, and my hands were shaking as I waited to hear the news. It was a joyful moment. The test found no abnormalities in my unborn baby. I also learned I was having a girl.

I was on an emotional rollercoaster while waiting for the results of the test. Despite the uncertainty, I am grateful to have stuck with my conviction to continue my pregnancy. I look back at the pressure I felt to terminate the pregnancy after the ultrasound with no mention of support or advice should I want to carry on with my pregnancy. I was vulnerable and it would have been easy to make the decision quickly and thoughtlessly because of that pressure.

When I think of mothers in similar circumstances, I understand why some choose abortion. Many young women may not have the kind of family support or acceptance that I am blessed with- that my daughter is blessed with. When I look at my daughter now, she is a reminder that even in the darkest of moments, there is a light of hope.



 Brianna Lemmon

Tears of My Grandfather

✍✍✍ By: Melissa Burgher

My arms wrap around her weak body, she gives me a squeeze as hard as she can, I barely feel anything. I didn't know this was supposed to be goodbye. Just two years ago, my mom sat me down on the couch to tell us that Nana had cancer; the yellow ribbon. A color that's supposed to be bright like the sun, the color of joy, was now the color of despair. I remember being excited when I heard she had cancer. She'd join the club of survivors, like with my mom and other people from town and church.

Little did I know, just years later, I would see my grandfather tear up for the first time, as he placed a rose on the top of her casket. The pain in his eyes pierced my heart, causing my sister and I to weep like never before. That was the first time I had seen someone cry like that, the despair in his heart leaked out into his eyes. His body trembled as he tried to hold back sobs, the cries of his soul revealing his feelings to the world. I knew at that moment, death and mourning could ruin a person.

The first time I visited her grave, I was sixteen. The pain of saying goodbye had faded away. All that was left was a piece of stone etched with her name. Nobody came to visit anymore; it had been almost eight years. It looked a lot different than it did that day; more gravestones surrounded it now. I knew she didn't care much, but I cleaned her gravestone and said a quick prayer. I knew she'd like that.



 Ana Lopes De Lima

Proof