

Spring 2021

Shorelines

A Journal of Student Creativity



METROPOLITAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
LONGVIEW



Shorelines

A Journal of Student Creativity

Table of Contents

Longview Lake.....	1	Midwest Angst.....	21
The Fly of Doom.....	2	Waiting for Flight 162.....	22
Grandpas Garden.....	3	Unmatched Freedom.....	24
My Pink Bike.....	4	Pandemic Perspectives.....	26
Lost World.....	5	Dewey Beauty.....	27
I'D H8 2 KNO U.....	6	Memories.....	28
How to Lose Your Prom Date.....	11	Tomb in the Olive Mount.....	33
Homework.....	14	X.....	34
Arab Staircase.....	15	Unexpected Phone Call.....	35
The Speech.....	16	Little Blue.....	36
Vehicle of Fear.....	18	The Harshest Critic.....	37
Guilty Conscience.....	19	Get Well Soon.....	38
My Other Home.....	20	Lovely Winter Time.....	40

Cover Image: **“Dewey Beauty”** by Debbie Atwood, photography



“Longview Lake”
by Debbie Atwood, photography
3rd Place Winner

The Fly of Doom

By Sophia Logan

2nd Place Poetry

The fly circled the classroom.
It buzzed by students
Landed on walls.
Spreading the buzz around the room
Until it landed on my knee.

And I SCREAMED.

A loud piercing scream.
Everyone stopped
Pencils dropped
I was shocked
They glared at me.
I was the girl who screamed.
Because a fly settled
On my knee.

When I explained
Why I had screamed
A chorus of laughter exploded
Like the sound of thunder
During a violent storm
Which overpowers
The once constant buzz
Incasing the piercing scream
Until I laughed too
Unconscious giggles poured
From my open mouth.

I laughed with ignorant glee.
Until the realization hit me
A red-hot slap
My classmates were laughing at me.
I started to sob
Tears gushed down my bright pink face.

Cause I was the girl who screamed.
A fly had landed on my knee
Now everyone was laughing at me
The fly had buzzed away
But I was left with the memory.

I set my sweater across my face
To stifle the sound of my sobs.
This was something
I would never forget,
Frozen in my brain
My scream
And the chorus of laughter.



Grandpa's Garden

By Megan Foster

I wake up late to the sound of
the sweet bird's song in the summer heat.
As I arise from the firm bed
and pull apart the curtains,
the crisp air floods the room.
The potted plants on the wide windowsill
blow along with the breeze.
I turn the dirty door handle to go outside
where I find dew dispersed among leaves and grass.
Grandpas muddy boots make a mess
as they mash the mud onto the front steps.
He starts me off on weed duty,
I am regularly reminded to
retrieve roots so nothing grows back.
Once done he asks me to move
the cold, red-colored concrete bricks
to the back of his blue pickup.
As we finish up most of the yard work
we do one last thing
which he says is most important.
He hands me the sharp shears and
I clumsily cut a bouquet of uneven lilies for Nana.
We go inside and she smiles brightly
at the sight of the beautiful flowers.



My Pink Bike

By Kayla Saunders

I am five years old.
A pink bike was sold,
To my mom and dad.
It is the big gift,
That I wished for my birthday.
The bike sparkles in the wind,
Pink and white tassels
Hanging off the handlebars.
The studded basket
In the front
Has my favorite black dog inside
And he is missing an eye.
My dad is outside
Airing the tires up high,
So I can go on my first ride.
With my bright pink helmet on,
My dad places me on the seat.
He counts down out loud,
'ONE'
'TWO'
'THREE'.
He pushes me around and around

In the cul-de-sac
Where we live.
The pink pedals are hard,
And not easy to push.
My dad tells me
'One day you can ride the bike
All by yourself'.
I cannot stop smiling,
While the summer breeze
Is blowing my brown hair around.
My mom is yelling at my dad,
'PLEASE SLOW DOWN!'
My dad is not listening,
He pushes me around a little faster,
As he is losing his balance.
I look back over my shoulder,
After I did not feel his hands on my back
Then I lose all control.
CRASH.
I hit the grass,
After going over the curb.
Then everyone is over me,

Making sure I am ok.
I feel so much pain
In my lower arm,
Then it is numb
For just a couple of minutes.
I can see on my dad's face,
That he did not mean to hurt me.
He scoops me up
And leaves the pink bike,
Flipped over in the grass,
While he carries me to our house.
All I want is my black dog,
I can see him from the door.
My mom tells my dad
'No more for today'.
The pink bike and black dog
are outside all night,
In the dark,
With no light.
I hope my black dog is alright
And that no one steals,
My pink bike.



Lost World

By Mikayla Pray

There they sit
full of knowledge
tattered and
yellowed pages
collecting dust
now forgotten
by eager hands.
eyes racing
across the page
escaping reality
lost in fantasy.
What use
do they have?
When all
we desire
is in our hands
with bright
enticing lights
compact
and portable.
A whole world
at our fingertips.



I'D H8 2 KNO U

By Halle Hartman

Clara studied the flood of pimply, awkward freshmen passing through the halls and nudged Melaney's side. "Hey. Look at that one."

The unfortunate soul swiveled his head from door to locker, clutching a backpack near bursting at the seams. Clara sniggered. "I bet he'd spill his highlighters across the hall if we tripped him," she imagined. "And then a stampede of people would fall on them. Start this school year off right."

Melaney shrugged, eyes trained out the window. "What? Don't want to cause a little mayhem?" Clara asked. She nudged her again. "Where's your rebellious spirit?"

"We're going to be late to class," she mumbled.

"Yeah, so? Only squares walk in on time. You and I ain't no squares." Clara stretched her arms above her head, exhaling. "I've got the feeling already that this year is gonna blow. Kinley moved away and now we have no one to poke at."

"Mm-hm." Melaney still wasn't looking at her. Clara snapped her fingers in front of the other girl's face with a sharp sigh.

"Look, am I gonna hafta drag your spirits up or what? Spit it out. Tell me what's wrong."

"It's nothing."

"Oh, don't give me that. Last year you were totally on board with my schemes." She waved her hands. "Spill."

"It's fine."

"Ugh, don't be so melodramatic!"

When her shout echoed through the hall, Clara realized just how late it had gotten. "Now we're really gonna be late," she said, stuffing her phone in her bag. "Come on, let's go."

Melaney let herself be dragged like a limp doll to class. Clara's dramatic entrance was less impressive with her slipping from behind like she'd rather be invisible, but that was fine. Everything was fine because she was going to get to the bottom of this and make the year just as good as— no, better than last year.

"I've had it with you," Clara slapped her lunchbox on the table and sat across from her best friend. "I do all this work to get us together in the same classes this year and you don't even talk to me."

"We're supposed to be paying attention." Melaney moodily pushed a fry around her plate.

"Uh, what? Since when do we pay attention?" Clara unpacked her lunch and viciously dragged a carrot through her ranch. "Look. There's something wrong with you, and I know it. You're only going to make things more difficult for yourself by resisting."

Melaney stared downward as if the secrets of the universe lay hidden in her puddle of ketchup.

"Fine," she muttered, almost inaudible. "But you can't tell anybody."

"I am a master of secrets," Clara proclaimed, perhaps a tad too loudly. She leaned forward. "So tell me."

Melaney silently passed her phone across the table. Puzzled, Clara studied the screen, plucked eyebrows lowered in a puzzled frown.

Her blog was open on her phone, open to her inbox. And it said inbox were three messages, no more, no less.

"WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?"

"ATTENTION SEEKING WHORE."

"NO ONE LIKES YOU."

All were anonymous.

Clara's shriek of rage could be heard across the cafeteria, and perhaps in cafeterias around America.

"You can't show me this and then not let me do anything," Clara hissed, ignoring their teacher babbling about the syllabus. "I'll find them and rip their eyes out."

"This is why I didn't want to tell you." Melaney studied the window. "They were anonymous. There's nothing we can do."

"I don't care. I'll figure it out. People confess things under torture." Clara wanted to leap up and storm around the building, shrieking and slamming lockers until whichever dirtbag 'fessed up. No one got to speak to her best friend like that.

"It's not a big deal. Just let it go." With that, Melaney took on the insulting countenance of actually paying attention to the teacher. Clara seethed. There was no way she was going to let this stand.

When the bell rang, she was off like a shot. It didn't take long to find the loser she was looking for. "Lucas! Get over here!" she barked.

Lucas snapped to attention. "Uh--what?" he stammered, dropping a bundle of books.

"Don't what me." she snarled. She may have been two-thirds his height, but she possessed rage he could not even fathom. "Have you been sending messages to Melaney online?"

"I don't even know her." he backed against his locker as if it could protect him. "I'm not—"

"Do you know anyone who has?" she waved a finger before his face. "All you geeks know each other. If you're lying, I will find and out I WILL make you pay."

"No! I don't know anything or what this is about!" he snatched his books from the floor and darted off. "Seriously! Bye!"

Clara hmped and let him get away. That was fine. This was fine. There were others, and it was only a matter of time until one of them squealed.

After a long day of tormenting underclassmen, Clara met Melaney next to their cars. "None of them have given me any leads yet, but it's only a matter of time," she promised. "When I'm through

with whoever it is, they won't be able to type anything again."

Melaney hid her face. "This is dumb," she muttered. "You're not accomplishing anything."

"It's only been a couple of hours! Give me a little more time, sheesh."

"I didn't ask you to do this."

Clara unlocked the door. "No," she said. "But no one gets to do something to you that I don't approve of."

Melaney watched her drive away, hand clutched around her phone.

The next day, Clara was ready to get a head start on her investigation. Rustle up a few sophomores, maybe some people in her own grade to diversify her suspect pool. But when she walked into first period and saw Melaney sitting in her seat, dejected, she knew.

"Hand it over."

"Wha—"

"I don't have time for complaints." She held out her hand, and Melaney pressed it into her palm like a meek child. "Let's see," she muttered, swiping through saved fashion and aesthetic posts to reach the inbox.

"HOW CAN YOU LOOK AT YOURSELF IN THE MIRROR?"

"WORTHLESS WHALE."

"DO US A FAVOR AND STAY HOME."

The phone threatened to crumple like paper in Clara's vice-like grip. "So there's more than one," she hissed. "That makes things harder. But it also means I get more people to pummel."

"Can't you just let it—"

"I've already given you that answer."

Melaney looked at her fully for the first time in over a day. "You're determined," she said. "But I don't get the point."

"That's your problem, Mels. You let people walk all over you." Clara handed the phone back. "I'll have this figured out by the end of the day, you'll see."

Thusly, she spent a few minutes between each class harassing students. She moved on from "known losers" to "anyone who looked mildly suspicious" to "anyone she could interrogate without retaliation." But after several fruitless hours, she sat at their usual table with an aggravated sigh.

"Not going well?"

"It's going great. I'll have them soon." Clara kicked the table leg. "You've got nothing to worry about."

"Hmm."

"I wonder if it could be a teacher?" she mused. "There are enough sick freaks like that in the staff. I bet I could corner a few without any of the others finding out."

Melaney blinked. "Uh, maybe that's not such a good idea."

"You think I'm afraid of teachers? I do what I want and they know it. I'll get one next period." Clara raised her head and slowly scanned the cafeteria. "If the culprit doesn't show themselves during lunch, that is."

"I still think you should maybe let this go."

Clara waved her hand absently. "Melaney, if everyone thought like you, we'd all sit on our hands watching the world burn." She stood. "I bet I can get a head start. I'm not hungry anyway."

But the afternoon didn't yield any results either. Even Mr. Kendall didn't crack under her scrutiny, though he preemptively promised to give her an A on the next quiz. By the time the last bell rang, Clara felt almost dejected—something she had never felt before, ever.

"Hand me your phone again," she said, tapping Melaney on the shoulder. The other girl nearly fell off the decorative rock she was perched upon.

"Why?"

"You know why. Maybe something in their words can point me in the right direction."

Melaney sighed and handed it over. Waiting in the inbox like birds come to roost was a new group of messages.

"DIRTY QUEER."

"YOUR PARENTS SHOULD HAVE ABORTED YOU."

"I KNOW A GOOD BRIDGE YOU CAN JUMP OFF."

Clara barely resisted the urge to chuck the phone

into the horizon. "I don't get it," she snarled. "Who are these people? What's their problem with you, anyway?"

Melaney looked away. "I don't know."

"No, seriously! What kind of loser has the time to pull crap like this! I mean, get over it!" Clara paced in an angry circle. "So, there's more than one, they're total losers and complete morons, they have nothing better to do but harass random people online... that's, like, everyone we know in school. This doesn't help at all."

"It was me," Melaney said.

"No, no shut up. Don't try to make excuses—"

"I said... It was me."

"What?"

She was sitting on the rock, starting over Clara's shoulder. The clouds drifted idyllically overhead and students chattered in the distance. But suddenly, nothing made sense. The same scene she'd witnessed hundreds of times felt alien, and so did the girl sitting in front of her.

"Why are you saying that?" Clara demanded. "You're just trying to get me to give up."

"No, I'm— I'm not lying." Melaney's gaze drifted somewhat closer to Clara's eyes. "I sent those messages to myself."

"That doesn't make sense. What kind of— why?"

In an instant, Melaney was in her face. "Because you never listen to me!" she screamed. "Because

I have no friends, not even you! Because my parents are getting divorced! Because I'm a fatuglyslut and if no one says it, then I have to!"

Clara blinked, stunned. "What are you talking about? Your parents aren't getting divorced."

"I told you! And you didn't even remember!"

"...Oh."

Silence reached icy fingers between them. Clara rubbed her head. "I still don't get why that would make you—"

"UGH! See, you never listen." Melaney turned away, sounding dangerously close to tears. "Look, we aren't even friends. I'm just your— your sidekick. I'm the side character in everybody's lives, and everyone knows that sidekicks are losers."

Clara pursed her lips but said nothing.

"People who are bad and stupid have to be told that they're bad because if they're not told, they'll walk around thinking that they're worth something. And they're not," she babbled. "So that—"

"You're being stupid," Clara interrupted. "Knock it off. This is literally the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

Melaney stilled. "Look, that's the kind of stuff that dumb people who don't know you say," Clara

reminded, staring into the back of Melaney's head as if she could beam the message into her. "And then you kick them in the face because they're losers. But sending that stuff to yourself? What's the point?"

"You don't get it." Melaney faced Clara, regarding her with dull eyes. "You couldn't get it even if you tried. Your life is perfect, No one bothers you, your parents would give you the world— you probably don't have a single negative thought in your head."

"That's not true."

"Sure it isn't." Melaney turned away and opened her car door. "I'm serious, I don't want to talk to you."

As she drove away, Clara stared into the distant treeline. She was right, Melaney was being dumb. What kind of loser harassed themselves? That was like stabbing yourself in the face. Only a moron would do that.

And yet...

No, she was right. She knew what she was talking about, and Melaney needed to get herself together, or something.

Clara got into her car and rested her head against the hot leather of the steering wheel. She closed her eyes and wondered what it would be like, to be someone else.



How to Lose your Prom Date

By Tucker Woodson

3rd Place Winner Nonfiction

Now, I'm sure everyone is dead-set on losing their prom date, it's one of those things you just *have* to do in life (like eating McDonald's at 2 am naked or getting beat up by a bald orphan). Hence, as the world's leading expert on losing their dates (4 of my 6 dates ditched me at dances!), I will be leading you on this quest to self-loathing and regret!

The first key to losing your prom date is being desperate. Don't ask a girl because you genuinely like her, take her because neither of you have a date. Your inferiority complex prevents you from having the confidence to go alone, so take some flirty girl you're moderately friends with, even if she has a questionable past! How should you ask said girl? Something showy and creative, but also improvised and low-budget. Remember: you don't really like her yet. A classic is always just writing "prom?" on a piece of paper and slapping it on the window while a camera is rolling. Truly an iconic method.

Now, as time to the dance runs down, become extra apathetic towards the girl. If she says she may not be able to get into the dance for reasons X, Y, and Z; don't care. This apathy is vital to your success of losing your prom date. Your mentality needs to be an "either way this goes I'm fine." Feelings will not be tolerated. Yet.

Ah, it's the day of the dance. Pull out all the stops; I'm talking a tux, a nice corsage, and borrowing your mom's car because yours is a crappy 2002 Oldsmobile Alero. Pick her up when she tells you to, even if it's around 5 and pictures are 45 minutes away at 5:15. Now, as you wait in her living room while her mother finishes getting her ready. The big reveal is almost here. As your apathy builds, you must get continually antsy about being late for pictures. It's time: she's ready. As she walks down the hall covered with photos of her in her youth, as well as her 5 other siblings, she emerges from the shadows...

She's... hot?

The apathy turns immediately into confused sexual tension. You always knew she was attractive, but you weren't enticed before. Her mother, whom you *must* be friendly with, will tell you some assorted stuff like how to take her dress off in case she needs help later. Now, I know what you're thinking; and no, you don't need to remember that because it will in fact not be relevant.

The next step is showing up to pictures like 40 minutes late. The rest of the group is practically

done, but you must take like 4 group pics and get going. This entire time, it's important to remember that you HAVE to like her more and more by the minute. Get in your car, let her be your map, and let her almost guide you into oncoming traffic in Westport. Getting lost is not optional, it is required.

As far as dinner goes, you gotta show that you take nothing seriously and prom is no exception; go to Dave & Busters (Chuck E. Cheese for adults that don't have a real gambling problem). Enjoy your friends as the tension builds, but continue to flirt with your date. Play some basketball or something with her as onlookers are confused as to why a bunch of 18-year-olds are at a glorified arcade in formal attire. Once you leave, it's time for the dance; and this next part is very important.

Recap: Get a date, don't like her, pick her up, like her, late for photos, and eat somewhere stupid. Now, when you get to the dance, remember that is overhyped as I'll get out as if it's some grandiose

ball when in reality it's just a 3-star hotel ballroom. With this in mind, only show up for like 15-30 minutes. Talk to some people, snag some pics with the people who weren't in your group, and bolt for a party.

Oh! I almost forgot; no, you do not dance with your date.

And by "Party," I mean like 10 friends and some Jack Daniels in a basement. As fun as that sounds, you won't have any because you gotta show up late to that too. Drive your date to her car, then go home and get more comfortable. By the time you show up, the alcohol is gone and you are a designated "mom" (a name given to the sober people taking care of those under the influence). As the clock goes ever so later, you at least attempt to talk to your date. at this point, you can't exactly shoot your shot or that's borderline rape given your sobriety. She clearly does not give a single hoot or hollar about you. Go to bed. That's all you can do.

If you happen to wake up about an hour later, you might notice your date is cuddling with one of the other guys at this party. As the kids say: "oof." Yet again, nothing you can do but sleep. I promise it doesn't end there.

Now, whether you're religious or not, you should know God is a God of justice and vengeance. Ditching your prom date is right under blasphemy, earning it the title "barely forgivable." All that to say, you may or may not be awoken around 3 am to the sound of sweetsweet comeuppance.

And by comeuppance, I mean aggressive vomiting.

That's right! If you get really lucky, your ex-date may just find herself blowing chunks all over some poor guy's floor and an even poorer guy's lap. As a wise man named me once said, "I love the smell of sweet karma in the morning." Of course, some of the other party patrons will tell you it's your job to clean up said barf, which is your opportunity

to assure them she is no longer your date. You've been benched. The dude on the couch is starting varsity now; it is officially not your problem.

After she gets cleaned up along with the floor-puke, there's nothing else to say but goback to bed until 7 am where you, accompanied by your bruised ego and the other sober guys, should get some crappy fast food breakfast. Some slimy, burnt, yet oddly addicting McGriddles should do the trick perfectly.

Now I know what you're thinking: so what do I do now that I caught feelings for my date that ditched me? Well frankly, it isn't my problem. I said I would teach you to lose her, I didn't say I'd tell you how to cope with it. But I will say, if you and your date win "should have been a couple" in the yearbook, it's all worth it in the most bittersweet way possible.

CONGRATULATIONS! You have successfully lost your prom date.

Homework

By Bailey Sanders

3rd Place Winner Fiction

Focus. Focus. Okay well, maybe I will do the dishes first because I didn't do them after lunch, and I don't want the sink to overflow after supper. Before I can do the dishes, I need to clean the counter. The counter is clean now, time for the dishes. The dishwasher is loaded and ready for the supper dishes. I have to sweep the floor now because I wiped the crumbs from the counter down, and I might as well just mop after since I'm already doing it. Okay, back to the desk I don't want to wait for the last minute to do this essay.

Hmm, what should I name it? Eh, I'll just put title for now and come back to it later. Now to start it. "In the 1920s..." too boring, "The history of cars..." no still too boring, "When you're driving down the road..." how can I connect that to the thesis? What is the thesis going to be? Ugh, I can't do this. I'm going to watch one episode of Grey's Anatomy then I'll try again. Now I'm too tired, I'll try again tomorrow, I still have a few days.

Wake up, take a shower, get dressed, make the bed now I can be productive. I'm a little hungry so I'll cook breakfast. Now I have to do the dishes.

I should go for a walk to make sure I get some exercise then I don't have to worry about it later. Time to get to work, think, think. The thesis is done. Now I can finish the rest of the introduction. Perfect, it's almost lunchtime. I'll take a little break, cook lunch, then I can do some more.

Oh my, look at this Amazon sale I saw on my Facebook group. Wow that's such a good deal I better call my mom and sisters. "Did you guys see this sale!! Do you want me to order any for you?" I wonder what breed of dog that was I saw on my walk this morning, "hey Siri show me pictures of poodle mixes." It was definitely that one, wait no, maybe that one. Oh well, doesn't really matter. These dogs are so pretty I wonder how much they cost. "Siri find Goldendoodle breeders near me." Bailey your essay, come on you really need to do it. Wow, my room is a mess. Pick it up, vacuum, dust, wash the mirror. Maybe just tomorrow I don't have anything to do then.

Sunday, the essay is due Monday morning, I have to get it done today. I'll just eat a quick brunch after church then I'll get going on it. I forgot I also

have that math paper let me get that done. That's done why can't I just finish this stupid essay; I already have it started. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. My mind is blank. It's already three o'clock I want to get a good night's sleep so I'm not tired during class and volleyball. Fine, I'll take the Vyvanse. I can just watch part of another Grey's Anatomy episode because it will take about thirty minutes to kick in. It kicked in I can tell, back to the laptop. Where'd I put my blue light glasses I have a headache. Found them, I left them in my bookbag from when I went home last weekend. Okay essay.

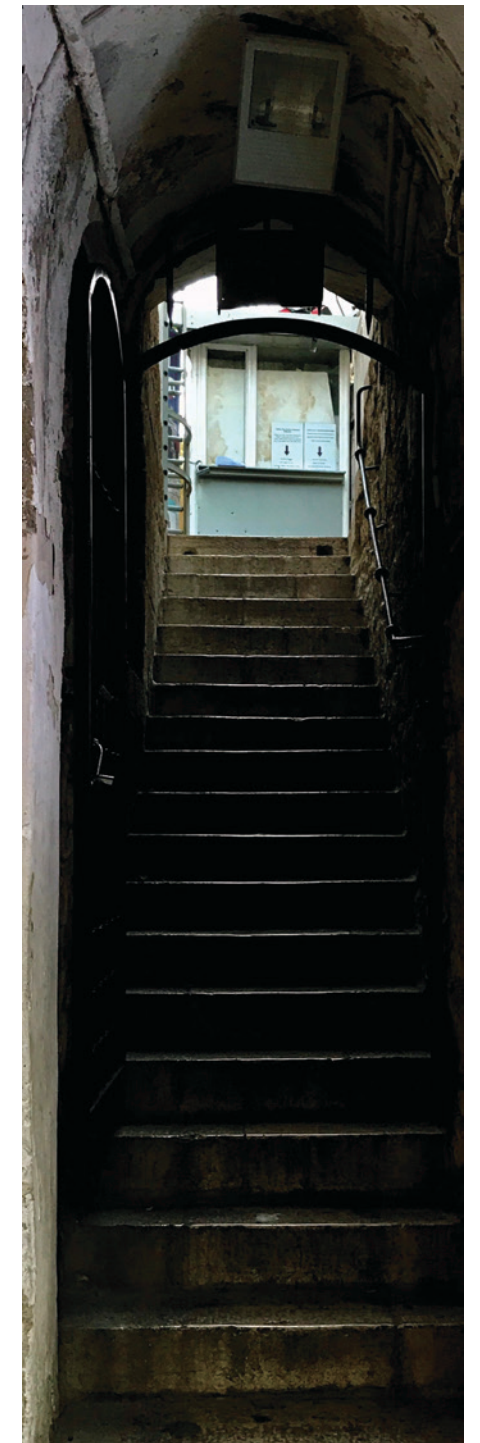
Done. I knocked it out in an hour and a half, it was so easy. Why didn't I just do that in the first place? Why can't I control my mind? How do other people control theirs? Next time I can get it done without the medicine; I know I can. Sometimes I don't need it I just have to figure out how to keep it that way. I can do it, I definitely can... I hope.



"Arab Staircase"

by Danielle Tucker, photography

1st Place Winner



The Speech

By Debbie Atwood

1st Place Winner Nonfiction

I will not be giving a speech at commencement this year. I never really had a shot at being the Valedictorian or the Salutatorian since some grades that followed me from a former institution of higher learning were less than stellar. Still, I will admit that I have pondered the speech I would give. It would be a speech that would not leave anyone out. It would be encouraging, but also realistic. I believe a worthy speech should contain some lessons because no one should ever stop learning. Here is the speech I would give:

The first lesson:

Even if a few of those grades that followed me had been stellar, it is still unlikely that I would have been Valedictorian or Salutatorian because there is always someone better. Always. Even when you are in the top slot, there is someone better out there somewhere. So, if you happen to have earned that top slot, that is fantastic. Celebrate! Ratings are overrated though. There has not been a single employer (and I have had many) who has asked to see my grades. They just want to know that I can do the work for the wage they are willing to pay. My friends and family have also not asked to see my grades although they have had to endure my bragging for every “A” (and I have had many) and my sorrow for my only “B” (it was

in Statistics) here at Metropolitan Community College. Grades do not really matter. What matters is that you finished what you started when so many others quit and gave up. You graduated during a pandemic. That is truly remarkable but stay humble.

The second lesson:

I have often wondered why the person with the highest grade point average gets to make a speech at commencement. Far more interesting speeches would come from elsewhere in the ranking. I want to hear from the student who struggled. The student who worked three jobs and went to school full-time. The single parent. The veteran with PTSD. The student with learning disabilities. The student who slept in their car. The student who suffered loss or dealt with mental illness. This will probably never happen, but I wish it would just once. We need to hear about the struggle and be reminded that the humanity that surrounds us is sometimes struggling and we need to notice and get our faces out of our phones. There is far more to life than selfies. To circle back to the first lesson, everyone sitting in these special seats accomplished the same thing, but some of you walked uphill the entire time, some of you took some short-cuts, and others

went above and beyond that which was expected. You were never alone on this journey and for those of you who were leading the way I do hope that you turned back a time or two to encourage someone else to soldier on.

The third lesson:

This graduation is not for you. It is for the guests who “would not miss this for the world.” Sure, as graduates you are proud of yourselves and you have earned a celebration. I know that graduates want to get out of those robes and remove that mortarboard that messes up their hair. They want to toss that thing up in the air, get in their cars, and go onto the next thing. This is the truth. Everyone wants to graduate, but no one really wants to sit through the ceremony—not even the high-performing, multi-cord, sash, and pin wearing students who have gathered up accolades like the Kardashians gather followers on Instagram. Take some time to think about the many people who made this moment possible. The faculty, the staff, your classmates, your family, your friends, the barista who makes your coffee, the folks at McDonald’s, and the person who loads the vending machines. You did not get here by yourself. Be sure to say, “thank you.” Okay, so this was mostly my “thank you” list. You will have to come up with your own.

The final lesson:

The word “commencement” literally means the start or beginning of something. It seems there

is a great disservice done by congratulating students for finishing this leg of the race when there is so much of the race to be run. The speaker pumps their fist in the air and says something motivating like, “We did it! Now go out there and do great things!” Some of you are transferring to another school, others are entering a new job field, others are hoping their new credentials will gain them a promotion. Even if you decide to never take another college-level course, your education will continue well past today. Instead of starting something, “commencing,” how about continuing something instead. Continue to improve. Continue to learn. Continue to grow.

I have been told many times that I am too wordy. Today, it is my prerogative because it is my speech, but in case I have lost your attention I will sum everything up this way—

Someone is always better, so be humble.

Someone is always struggling, so be ready to encourage and help.

Someone is always nearby to help you, so be sure to thank them.

And finally, do not start something today, just continue it, but do it even better than before.



Vehicle of Fear

By Halle Hartman

When I was a child,
I would sit on the front porch
in the evening light
shivering,
waiting.

When pinprick headlights
appeared at the end of the road
I would lean forward
eagerly, hoping with
bated breath.

And when the car rolled by
I would exhale my
disappointment and
tell myself to
wait just a little
longer.

...



Now I watch them
exit the driveway
turn left,
and disappear into the
vast unknown.

Drunk drivers, icy roads,
light-runners, speeding,
and ultimately,
the knowledge that I will
live with this fear
until they return.

What peace
can I know
until I see
those pinpricks
again.

Guilty Conscience

By Joanna Fowlston

I want to say those three words
but they sting my cheek,
leave my mouth tingling
open. Silence surrounds us.

I croak for the words
to fall from my tongue
but a tug of war
ravages my thoughts.
Warm, bright smiles
and melting hugs
that I long for,
then there's flashes of
harsh screams,
red marks on bare skin,
and a faint heart wounded
from razor-sharp words.

I want to say it.
I really do.
You are the person
I am meant to always
be able to say them to.
Yet, when my lips part,
ready to speak,
my fingers curl and
blood rushes through my veins
as my mind reminds me:
"You're worthless"
"Stupid!" "Ungrateful,"
and those three words evaporate.



My Other Home

By Kyle Hammond

The stage is mine,
It is my home
It is my calling
It is where I truly belong.
I did not ask to be
In my first play
My Mom, she forced me.

The rehearsals started and
They ran for hours.
My thoughts were
My only companions.
How introverted I was.
I knew no one,
I knew no name but my own,
I only knew them
By their characters.

As the weeks passed
My anxiety did quiet
We knew each other well,
As well as I and my character.
The performances approached,
We were ready, waiting, excited
All our hard work
Would not be for nothing.
It was time for us
to put on a show.

The patrons were seated
And whom should I spot
But my parents, my brothers
All come to support me.
I could not have failed
I had to give it my all.

As the first scenes began
My nerves attempted
To swallow me whole
The butterflies in my stomach
Fluttered and flapped.

My first scene
Of our first performance
In my first play.
What if I forget my lines?
What if I trip and fall?
What if I get the dreaded stagefright?
There's my cue, wish me luck.

The lights shone bright as the sun,
My scene partner waited for me.
The Audience was staring as
I stopped in my place
To deliver my line.
And yet, I did not freeze
The butterflies ceased their flapping
And my nerves receded.
My lines flowed from my
Mouth like honey.

The show was soon over
Curtain call approached.
My ensemble was waiting for me
We took hands and bowed.
The audience cheered
And as I rose back up..

It truly overwhelmed me.
The lights, the adoration
The sense of accomplishment.
Without even trying, I found my calling,
I found a talent unknown to me,
I found a sense of belonging.
I may not have been at my house
But I felt nonetheless
Like I was home.



Midwest Angst

By Zack Easley

3rd Place Winner Poetry

As the door softly shuts
almost in slow motion
the sensation of your presence vanishes,
the feeling of your scalp
as my fingers sweep through your hair
ceases to exist
and I fail to realize
what to do from here.

I drown in
my own self-loathing
you did your best
while I settled in the dark
my mind pushed away
all the good you put
into my life.

The door feels
as if it is cemented shut,
I walk alone
through the streets
surrounded by
my buried thoughts,
the world appears to move on
without me,
despair shall swallow me.



Waiting for flight 162

By Nicolette Shultz

1st Place Winner Poetry

Click click click
High heels Hit
the epoxy
Floor where
blue flourishes
Meet yellow swishes.
Just 5 more minutes.
When 6
Turned to 12
Months we had to wait
And again
When 12
Turned to 18
We waited.
Now I wait
Scouring the gate
For even the slightest
Sliver of a service uniform.
Signifying that
Dad has come home

Tick tock
Tick tock
My foot tapping
Rhythm unfound.
Who knew
Clocks still made noise.
Almost a torture
Each second
Of the 3
Remaining minutes.
Just 3,
Till a hug
To hear a father's voice
Not over a computer.
Just 3 minutes
Till dad comes home

The droll of
Bags wheels turning
-2 minutes
Where is he?
Can the powers
That be extend
A deployment
Even if he's on the plane?
Dad is coming home
right?

Speakers whine
As a monotonously
Monotone voice
Announces flight times
Unable to sit
I pace
In between
The colorless walls.
Mom hides her worries
While on her phone.
How can she sit?
Dad's coming home

Boots click
Mom gasps
3 soldiers
Decked in uniform
Purposely stride pasts
This is it
I'm sure he'll be next
Toes push me
Up and down
Up and down
Soon
Dad will be home

Barely audible
A gasp
A hand helps
To turn me from
the merry go round
But for bags
A man
The man
Talking with
Another soldier.
His conversation
Soon forgotten
My concentration
Like sodden cotten
Feet move
before the thought
Had registered
The extra 7
Minutes
Long forgotten.
After all
Dad came home.



Unmatched Freedom

By Joanna Fowlston

2nd Place Winner Nonfiction

My small fingers wrap around my father's hand as we weave in and out of the bustling crowd. He grips my hand tighter, pulling me along as an older lady passes by us quickly, looking frantic and stressed. The mall is full of people racing in and out of shops scrambling for those forgotten last-minute gifts. Everywhere I see is lit with festive, colorful lights, and Christmas-ready displays. Overplayed holiday music floods the streets every time a shop door opens. Snowflakes flurry all around us, slowly falling to the ground and adding to the existing fluffy, white mounds.

Clinging to the big, strong hand of my father, I risk a glance behind me. I am comforted to see my sisters follow close behind, shielding me further from the hustle and bustle of the mall. At seven years old, I was scared of everything, but I always found my sisters close by, ready to protect me just as they are now.

I breathe a sigh of relief as the crowd lightens. In front of us, a large tree stands tall adorned with glowing silver lights and shiny red and gold ornaments. Tilting my head up toward the sky, ignoring the snowflakes falling on my face, I see the bright star sitting atop the deep green Douglas Fir. *Much larger than our Christmas tree*

at home, I ponder inwardly.

"There it is," Father murmurs and points with his free hand.

I quickly swiveled my head toward the direction of his pointed finger. A white tent with points reminiscent of the spires of a castle stands high on the other side of the decorated tree. Below it, people skate around the outdoor ice rink. Laughter drowns out the festive music playing from the speakers hung from above on metal scaffolding. Puffy coats, thick scarves, and knit mittens serve to warn off the cold winter air of December in Kansas City. Cascading lights twinkle down over the skaters. Some cling to the rail, slowly edging along the clear boards that outline the seasonal rink. Other skaters talk amongst their groups, skating halfheartedly along. Some fearless skaters attempt beautiful spins and daring jumps that can only be perfected by years of hard work and practice. I find myself staring in awe at the last group as they zoom across the ice, heads held high, not giving a single glance to those watching them.

I've never found where I click, where I belong. My oldest sister thrives in soccer, but I only ever laid

in the grass gasping for air after running around never even touching the ball. A variety of volleyball medals hang from my other sisters' walls while all I have to show from that sport is bruises and scrapes. I've always been there copying what my sisters do but never truly feeling like I was meant to do any of it. My body begins to shake as I realize that this could be my chance to change that. I could be like those fearless skaters. I could finally escape my sisters' shadows.

Through my nerves and bubbles of excitement, my sisters, my father, and I don our skates in a blur. When the laces confuse me, my oldest sister softly pushes my shaky hands away to tie them for me. Walking out from the locker room was a very focused feat of repeating my father's advice over in my head. *Toe, heel, toe, heel, toe, heel.* Standing at the open gate of the ice rink, I watch my sisters shoot out across the ice, stumbling and flailing their arms to keep their balance. My father glides across easily, his years of playing ice hockey kicking in, but I hesitate with one skate hovering over the slick ice while my other foot is planted firmly on solid ground.

"You ready?" Father asks slowly skating backward, hands outstretched towards me.

Pushing my fears out of my head, willing myself to step out from behind my sisters' shadows, I grab his hands as my toe-pick finally grazes the ice. The screaming shadow of doubt dissipates, and the

weighted breaths stop. The arctic air kisses my cheeks and chills trail down my spine, jumping starting my body.

I feel alive.

I thrust myself forward like a rock in a slingshot. My body takes over, sending me swishing and swirling across the ice. *Push. Glide. Push.* I don't understand how I know what to do, the movements are just automatic. I glance over my shoulder where my father stands, watching him shake his head with a small laugh and a beaming smile.

How did he know I would love this? I wonder.

I skate round and round the rink. Head held high, eyes closed, enjoying the newfound freedom skating brings me. The world disappears around me. The music fades. Chatter from the crowd ceases. I don't notice people leaving, new skaters joining, the day passing by; all that is left is the sound of my skates gliding along the ice.

When I open my eyes and take a look around, I'm suddenly the only one on the ice. Everyone else has vanished. Blinded for a moment, I realize I'm no longer seven years old, skating outdoors for the first time. This is years later, at my very first figure skating competition. There are spotlights roaming around the indoor ice rink, waiting for me to begin. Six pairs of eyes, sitting behind the judge's

table, staring at me, wondering if I will continue to bore them or astonish them with a new routine.

I can do this, I think, willing my nerves to settle.

“My Wish” by Rascal Flatts comes on over the loudspeakers, and I begin to move. I lose myself in the music and the sound of my blade whisking along the ice. Welcomed cold air flows around my dark blue competition dress. That feeling of unmatched freedom coursing through my body when I stepped onto that ice rink that first day with my family is felt every time my toe-pick touches the ice. It’s the feeling that has kept me figure skating for twelve years.



Pandemic Perspectives

By Debbie A. Atwood

Put on a mask
And stay inside
Never leave your home
Don't forget to wash your hands
Everything is closed
Meet on Zoom
Isolation is unbearable
COVID-19 sucks.

Please don't panic
And get outside
Necessary trips are okay
Do your best
Enjoy some downtime
Maybe get some exercise
It will be over soon
COVID-19 sucks.



“Dewey Beauty”

by Debbie Atwood, photography

Memories

By Rebecca Beeson

2nd Place Winner Fiction

I awoke to silence wishing instead for screams. There was a time when I wished for the exact opposite. A time when every night was filled with nightmares and cries for help. Every time, without fail, I would run to give words of comfort and reassurance. I sat up and looked over at the clock. It read 3:36, exactly on time. My body still followed the old schedule. Her schedule. I laid down and tried to drift back to sleep, but it was no use. I was already wide awake. With a heavy sigh, I got out of bed. My feet hit the carpet with a soft thump. I made my way through the darkness, as I had hundreds of times before.

I didn't know why I was doing this. There was no one to comfort. No fears to ease. Not even my own. I walked down the hall and before I knew what I was doing I stood in front of her door. It's closed. I hadn't opened it in months. I ran my fingers over the door. I felt every crack and crevice. It was an old door that had seen many things. I guided my hand to the doorknob, the brass dull and cold. So cold. I held the knob in my hand just on the verge of turning it, opening it, and facing everything. But I couldn't. I let go and walked away. I made my way to the kitchen instead.

I got a glass of water even though I wasn't thirsty. I hadn't been thirsty in a long time, or hungry for

that matter. It's hard to care about yourself, when what you cared about most in the world is gone. But I still tried for my friends' sake. They still cared even when I couldn't. It was the least I could do after everything they've done for me. I sat at the table; covered in letters and cards. Some were from people that truly cared, most were simply obligatory cards with little meaning. I picked up a letter. This one was from Alice, her mother. I had read it three times already but still hadn't bothered sending a response. The woman hardly deserved one. I opened it up and decided to read it once more. Despite how horrible she was, her letter was one of the few I felt were truly genuine.

*Dear Grace,
I'm shocked to hear what has happened. Getting this news has been hard for me and I can only imagine how this is affecting you. I was never the best mother. In fact, I was an awful one. You were twice the parent I could have ever been, and she never let me forget it. You know she talked about you whenever we met up. Not a word about her friends or how her schoolwork was going. It was always about you. What you were doing and how you were doing. I think the only reason she ever accepted my offer to get in touch was so she could brag about her amazing big sister. She thought the world of you. But I'm getting off track.*

I wrote this letter not only to give my condolences, although I don't believe you would want them anyways but because I wanted to offer help. I understand that you two were short on money and I imagine you still are. I would like to pay for whatever you need. Goodness knows funerals are expensive. I understand if you don't want to accept my offer. You both had the worst stubborn streak. I always believed you got it from your father. Nonetheless, please think about it. I would like to do this not just for her but for myself as well. One last act as the mother I should have been.

I had accepted the offer. It had been a hard decision, but I just didn't have the money for it. We hadn't spoken about it either. She had taken my silence as a sign of agreement and that was that. After putting the letter back in its envelope, I finished my water in one big gulp. It was lukewarm, I'd forgotten to add ice. I put it in the sink with a resounding clink. Every sound was loud in an empty house. I made my way back to my room still not tired, but I had work tomorrow and I needed my rest. My boss had been understanding the first few days, but after the funeral, I had to go back or risk losing my job. It was hard getting back to how things were. Since I knew they never would be. Not with such a big piece of my life missing.

Despite planning to go back to bed I found myself once again in front of her door. I couldn't count the number of times I'd stood in front of this cold block of wood. Wondering what I would see on

the other side but too afraid to find out. Well, not this time. I was tired of being afraid. Before I could stop myself, I grabbed the knob and threw the door open. It was exactly what I feared. An empty room. It wasn't empty in the literal sense. It had a bed in the middle and shelves full of books on either side. A dresser sat against one wall, full of clothes folded too nice to have been done by a fourteen-year-old. A chemistry textbook laid open on the desk, covered in organized stacks of paper. All these things were here, filling up space, but there was no spirit.

The room felt hollow, covered in a veil of gray. There was no warmth or life, only memories. I stood in the doorway for a long time simply taking in everything. Finally, I took a deep breath and stepped inside. I tiptoed quietly as if to keep from disturbing what seemed to be the room's own form of mourning. I sat on the bed, careful not to ruin the perfectly made and straightened-out sheets. She was such a neat freak. I looked around again. This time I picked out every bit of *her* that still seemed to reside there. The books on the shelf were far above the reading level of most teenagers. Books on Psychology, Chemistry, Biology, any -ology really, lined the shelves. She loved science and seemed to have trouble picking a specific field to study. Not that she had really needed to worry about that yet. The dresser that held her perfectly folded clothes was old, its white paint was peeling and the knobs for the bottom drawer came off years ago. I had always wanted

to get her a newer, nicer one but even when we did have the money she refused. She said it had character and as long as it still stood, she would keep it. A statement that was tested when one of the legs broke. Now it was held up with a wooden block. I could never argue with her though, so the ruined thing stayed. On top of the dresser was a green hairbrush. As soon as my eyes hit it, I couldn't help but get up to grab it. I held it softly as if it might break from a single touch. It was a simple plastic brush with a good amount of the bristles missing. It shouldn't have been special, but it was.

I had gotten it for her, for her thirteenth birthday. It had been a hard year; I'd lost job after job and I could barely make the rent. Still, thirteen was a big birthday and I wanted to make sure she had the perfect gift. I had saved up for months. Little by little into a box under the bed. Sometimes I could only scrounge up small change but every week without fail I put something in the box. Then the day came. We were next to broke, the rent was almost due, and the kitchen sink was broken, but none of those things mattered as much as giving her the best birthday present ever. That Saturday while she was at a friend's house I went shopping.

Every day I walked her home from school and we always passed this one jewelry shop. She wasn't usually interested in such things but one day a display caught her attention. It was a ring. A simple silver ring with a design of vines and leaves inlaid

in it. It was out of our price range of course and she had never brought it up again after her initial interest. But I had seen the way she lit up. Her smile was so bright, and her eyes seemed to glow. I would have given anything to see that again, so here I was.

We didn't have a car, so I had to walk down to the jewelry shop. I was paranoid the whole way down sure something would happen. But nothing did. I went into the shop bought the ring, I even had a little money to spare, and went out feeling triumphant. I was so excited thinking how happy she would be to get something nice for once. I was so caught up in my good feeling that I wasn't paying attention. I ran right into a rather large fellow and fell to the ground dropping the ring. It started rolling away into the street and I would have run after it if the same man hadn't grabbed me, stopping me from running into the traffic. The ring rolled right across the street and into the sewage grate. I knew there was no getting after that. The man who I bumped into was nice enough. I apologized profusely. But apologies wouldn't bring the ring back.

I walked home dejected. I still had some money left but 2.00 dollars wasn't enough to get something truly nice. Still, I had to get her something. As I walked down the street, I noticed one of our neighbors was having a garage sale. Without any other options, I headed there. It was filled with junk as most garage sales are, but one

thing caught my eye. It was a plastic hairbrush, lime green. Her favorite color. I picked it up. It was light and flimsy and really who would want to buy a hairbrush from a garage sale. But it was still in its original packaging. Possibly a gift that had gone unused. I turned it over to look at the price sticker. 1.99. I had to laugh. I wanted to cry. It was perfect. It was awful but it was perfect. I bought the brush and headed home. Once there I dug around the drawers for some old ribbon but couldn't find any so I settled for pink yarn. I tied it up in a little bow.

When she got home, we had our own sort of party. I let her pick a movie to watch. Let her finish off the tub of ice cream and sang her happy birthday. At the end of the festivities, I brought out my gift. I told her what had happened as I gave it to her and was sure she would hate it but instead her eyes lit up and her smile shined so brightly I thought I'd go blind. I didn't understand how she could like such a mediocre gift, but she said she could feel my love for her in this gift and that made it perfect. I didn't understand what she meant at the time and I'm not sure I do even now, but seeing her happy was all I really needed.

I set down the brush. My eyes were starting to well up, but I pushed away the pain. I hadn't cried in such a long time. I would not start now. I sat back on the bed and I noticed something sticking out from underneath her pillow. I pulled it out. It was a leather-bound book and I wondered what it could be for. She wasn't the type to keep a diary. And

the only journals she wrote in were scientific ones. Usually, I would respect her privacy, but I felt that I had to read this. I opened it to the first page. In it was written

Lucy's Dream Journal. A dream journal. Now I was really curious. I continued to read. *I have been having a lot of nightmares lately. Grace says it helps to talk about these things, but I don't want to burden her more than I already do.* I had to stop a second to wipe away my tears. Did she really think she was a burden to me? Never in a million years or longer would I ever consider her a burden. She meant everything to me. I continued. *She's always there when I wake up from my nightmares, and I know it's because she hears my screams. She always holds my hand and tells me not to worry, that she's there and nothing will ever hurt me.* Except that, that wasn't true. She had been hurt and I couldn't stop it. *But sometimes it's hard to believe that. Especially when my dreams feel so real. Like the one, I had last night. Grace and I were playing in our old living room. I was the same age I am now but Grace was the age she was when we lived with our father. We were playing when suddenly a loud roar resounded through the house. We held onto each other shivering because we knew what was coming. A monster tall and completely black with glowing yellow eyes stalked out of the entryway. He was so large he destroyed everything in his path. Overturning tables, ripping through the couch, crushing the bottles that littered the ground.*

I gasped when I heard the description of the monster. Its actions were telling. I knew exactly who it was. While this creature was described as a formless monster it was obvious that it was a manifestation of her fear of our father. The monster both of us feared. I knew her dreams were bad and I had had my suspicions but I never truly knew. I needed to know more.

The monster would be fine with destruction at first but would eventually grow bored. He would then turn his attention to me and Grace. He would rush at us ready to attack with his fearsome claws. Usually, the monster would be just about to rip us up. After that, I'd wake up but this time the dream was a bit different. Instead of him attacking us while I closed my eyes in fear he stopped. And when I opened my eyes there was Grace, an adult now, and she was standing in front of me. She was staring down the monster and this time it was afraid. They continued to stare at each other until Grace uttered one word. "Leave" and it did! The monster slunk away, and Grace turned back to me with a smile on her face. And that's when I woke up. It was the first time I'd woken up without screaming in fear and fell asleep easily. It's nice knowing Grace will always be there for me.

I couldn't stop myself as the tears streamed down my cheeks. I thought all my tears were used up

the first few days after she was gone. But I couldn't help myself now. She had put so much trust in me. Believed I could protect her from anything. But when push came to shove I couldn't. All it took was a single bullet to destroy everything I loved and break my biggest promise. We couldn't have known what would happen, no one could. We had been to that store dozens of times, how was I supposed to know this time there would be a robbery? I held her hand as it happened. Time seemed far too slow as the bullet moved toward her, and I couldn't move fast enough. But it went far too fast after it hit her. As her life slipped away. I held her hand, it was all I could do. I held her hand and told her she had nothing to worry about that I was there and nothing would hurt her. I talked to her as if she had just woken from a nightmare. And through all that, she believed it. When she was laying on the floor of that store. In the ambulance. While she was laying in the hospital and even during her final breath.

The tears continued to come. I couldn't stop them now. In this room filled with all her things, her thoughts, her. It was like she was still here. But she wasn't. I fell onto the bed feeling too weak to sit up. The tears continued to pour out. I cried and wailed till my voice was hoarse, and my eyes were too tired to stay open. I finally fell asleep surrounded by memories of her.



“Tomb in the Olive Mount”

by Danielle Tucker, photography

2nd Place Winner

X

By Tucker Woodson

Oddly enough I love your nose
it gives you breath
and keeps you alive
keeps you here with me
I love the perfect spacing between your eyebrows
like the valley between the lovely ranges
a lesser known art
but an important art nonetheless
I love your ankles
so small but they hold you
in the same way your small
acts of kindness hold my spirit
(That sounds so weird)
I could
in complete truth
care less about ankles
I don't care
But these belong to you
and now they matter
they have meaning
they are yours
I love the lone freckle on your left cheek

my mother told me something
that freckles were a kiss from God
my turn to be jealous
I love your skin
with a light toning that seems
uncorrupted by the sin of the sun
as beautiful as when it was crafted
I love that one way you do your hair
you know the one
the strawberry pseudo-bun
that makes you a little taller than me
(my fragile ego actually hates that,
but you make it easy to swallow my pride)
You know I talk to God about you?
truly truly I tell you,
it is a daily occurrence
I know He's a fan of you too
I told Him a desire a while back
I prayed that one day
I would tell you everything
I have told Him about you
I love your eyes

but not for their color
your eyes are the way to see into you
and I love when you look into mine
I love your heart
it pumps blood through you
I know you hate that sometimes
You told me on Sunday
I love your heart
in an abstract sense
the way you see others
I want to have a part of it
(I think *that* is what truly defines you)
In honesty
this poem was hard
that sounds bad
but hear me out
it's so hard to point out what I like
in a physical sense because
what I love about you
is beneath the surface



Unexpected Phone Call

By Morgan Crozier

We sat on the bed
The aura carefree,
My mother, my sister
And a nine-year-old me.

Ferocious laughter filled the air
From the flat screen TV.
Watching clip after clip
From the show AFV.

Not a care in the world
As we stayed there with glee,
In that old house of ours
That once was so comfy.

Giddy tears filled our eyes
In our joyful eternity.
Yet, the laughter stopped
Once the phone call rung free.

My mother picked up the phone
Face filled with curiosity.
Her features turned to fear
As she listened intensely.

The only words I heard
From the unknown identity
Were "Uncle Matt", "death"
And "I am sorry."



Little Blue

By Ricky Lynn

1st Place Winner Fiction

At first, there was silence. I close my eyes and hear nothing but silence. I inhale the strong humid air, the smell of freshly cut grass overwhelms my nose. In the distance, the hum of a lawnmower cutting perfect rows. 'Woosh', a car passes by. The wind rushes the leaves into the air. The sound of cicadas overpowers all who want to talk about their day. The lazy Little Blue river flowing by takes a mud turtle sitting on a log to its new destination. Barn Swallows and Red Cardinals, sing their songs out in the mighty oak trees for us to enjoy the symphony of nature's true beauty. The serene countryside with its vibrant green shimmers in the bright sunlight. The sounds of cows bellowing across the field, sauntering home to the barn for a good night's sleep.

A soft rumble emanates from the ground, a sensation so familiar it's a reassuring part that life is still moving forward. I open my eyes and hear the whistle of a train; its long and mournful whistle slowly creeps up to the crossing. Its gold

and rusted brown hull of the engine worn down from years of service pulls through the junction. The rhythmic bells fade as the long line of train cars drags through the crossing. The whaling echo of the whistle makes me cover my ears, I look down at the ground and see small pebbles jumping up and down as if excited to see the train passing by. The roar of the engine passes through the town with a final blow of the whistle. The birds stop singing, the cicadas stop buzzing, and the whaling whistle drifts off into the distance. All is quiet in Little Blue. All I hear is silence, silence, silence.

The warm, humid air gives me a blanket hug as I stare off into the distance. Looking at a setting sun, strong colors of pastel pinks, blues and reds are painted across the sky. As the sun begins to set, I look up to see dozens of cotton candy clouds drifting across the sky, paying no attention to the world below. I close my eyes and feel the cool, wet grass beneath my bare feet. Its Sharp bristles poke

the bottom of my feet and a grasshopper grazes the top of my foot as it jumps away. The crunch of the first fallen leaves squishes beneath my feet as I walk alongside the river's edge. 'Splash', a frog jumps into the water to escape a harmless giant passing by. Soft winds blow, whistling past my ears. The sound of rubber tires crushing the gravel stirs up a cloud of dust rising like a sheet blowing in the wind. I looked over to see mother coming down the long driveway, the sunlight shimmered off her red van. Her golden blonde hair floats as the wind moves about the car. I feel a warm sensation and a smile appears on my face. She stops and I run over to the driver's side window, standing on the running boards like I've been doing for 19 years. Her pearl white teeth gleam to see me, her crystal blue eyes glistened as we walked to the house. I grabbed her arm and felt like nothing can hurt me, I feel safe and just for a moment, happy.



The Harshes Critic

By Angela Alvarado

White fluorescent bulbs surround the mirror, and scrutinize with a bright, piercing gaze that bores into the skin. Ears appear to hang lopsided and one eye is slightly larger than the other. However, it is the glass that truly makes a mockery of one's spilled tears. Liquid runs along the uneven plains, carelessly coating the clusters of dark freckles, and drips from the chin. The deformed reflection blurs the true art that lies beneath the skin.



Get Well Soon

By Rebecca Beeson

Death was not something I thought about much as a child. I was young enough that the threat of old age seemed an eternity away, and no one I had loved or knew closely had experienced it. I knew what death was, I had watched movies, and been read stories, but it was a faraway idea. It was a concept that only existed in fiction and other people's lives. It was a form of loss I had never experienced and had no connection to. Unfortunately, that can never remain the case forever.

I want to say I was around six years old, but that far back it can be hard to remember specifics. The only things I remember strongly were feelings and small flashes of memories. One feeling that still stands out is the feeling of love I had for my Great Grandpa Leo. I have almost no solid memories of him except for one of him playing with me as a child. I was sitting on the floor in my great grandparents' living room. The carpet was soft and shaggy under my tiny fingers. I was playing with the plastic toy soldiers that were always kept in the linen closet. I showed him the green army man I was holding, saying, "Look, great grandpa!" A small moment, but one I cherish. He was kind to me, he played games with me, and he always knew how to make me laugh. My great-grandpa was someone who brought me happiness. So, when I

found out he was in the hospital it understandably made me upset.

Hospitals were never my favorite places. I cannot remember any specific times I would have gone to one at that age, but I still had memories of what they were like. To me, there was always a layer of dirtiness to hospitals that made me uncomfortable. The stinging smell of medicine hurt my nose, the lights were always too bright, and the furniture was strange and uncomfortable. Even at that young age, I knew it was a place associated with sickness and sadness. I never wanted to visit a hospital if I could help it. But when I found out that is where my great-grandpa was, I knew I would have to make the trek. It was the least I could do for a man who had brought me so much happiness.

One word I remember hearing in reference to my grandpa's stay was hospice. At the time I had no idea what that word meant, the only thing I really knew and had gathered from the reactions of my family, was that it was a place worse than a hospital where very few people could visit. I remember asking again and again, when could we visit great-grandpa, could we see him today, what about tomorrow? The answer was always not now, or he cannot have too many visitors at once. I felt like I was being conspired against.

Although looking back, it probably had to do more with my age than anything. But I was not going to be deterred, I wanted to see my great-grandpa. I wanted to do something to cheer him up and help him get better. Get him out of what was supposed to be a dreadful place and make him happy again. If they would not just let me go, I would make a reason for me to go. I would make him a card. The greatest get well card a person could make, and then, through the unending hopeful mind of a six-year-old, I believed they would have to let me see him.

My great-grandpa was sent to the hospital in the summer, and during that time, I was sent to summer school. Both my parents worked full-time jobs, and it was the best solution for my care at the time. Even though it was not my favorite place in the world, it did have an art room and a large amount of crafting supplies. I spent the whole day distracted, waiting impatiently for free time so I could make the card. When the teacher finally announced free time, I practically leapt from the desk that had been confining me all day and rushed for the crafting supplies. I made the card out of yellow and red construction paper. And I glued a red heart on the front. My elementary attempt at mimicking the 3D pop-up cards I had seen in stores. The specific words I wrote down

are lost to me now, but I know the card, written in messy scrawl by crayon, contained a message of love and hope, with one central theme; get well soon.

Eventually, the day came to a close, and we come to the moment I remember most clearly from that day. The sun was already beginning to set, just barely, just enough for the first twinges of orange to fill the cafeteria. The cafeteria itself was dim, lights turned off to preserve energy in the school's inactive summer months. My mother, fresh out of work, walked by my side. I regaled her of tales from my day, playing, learning, and finally, I reached the climax of my tale.

"Look what I made," I told her, as I began to rifle through my cluttered backpack. Then, I pulled out the card, like the sword from the stone. I had taken great care to not let it get crinkled in my bag. It was my pride and joy at that moment.

"Who is that for?" My mother asked, not yet knowing the card's contents.

"It's for great grandpa!" I had told her. My voice was cheery and excited. "It's a get-well card, I made it for when we visit him the hospital."

My mother stopped short. Her shoes squeaking on the linoleum. She looked down at me, and

her voice grew very, very quiet. “Rebecca...great-grandpa passed away today.”

When I heard those words, I cried. That was all I could do at that age. It was the only way to express the tumultuous feelings that swirled through me. It was not just grief. The sting of regret and missed opportunities ached in my chest. Frustration at my inability to see him sooner clawed at my heart. I had been so close. I cried the whole way home. As scenery passed by the car windows, I clenched the card tightly. It was the only thing I could focus on. Even though I would never be able to give it to him, it still held a place in my heart. Still, it was both a reminder of warm feelings and a bitter truth. I wanted to say I did not understand, act as if I had no concept of death. But I knew, I knew what it meant when someone passed away, and now I got to experience that pain, intensely. It was a cruel first introduction to death for a child, but it is also one I will never forget.



Lovely Winter Time

By Hana Harb

The hand is frozen,
Red cheeks, ears, nose, and lips.
The snow is so white
The snow covers the land, cars, and houses
By looking out the window
I see a beautiful painting
Trees bent under the weight
Of snow and ice.
Kids sled and throw snowballs.
See my snowmen round and white
He has a carrot nose.
I gave him a soft red scarf
And a tall black hat
Snowman always made me feel happy.
In the evening I see dark
Without sun and the sky is grey
Winter looks like freezing, cold,
White, dark, ice.
I retreat to the comfort of home.
Close to the warmth of the fire I sit and
A mug of hot brown chocolate
To make the body feel warm.



The *Shorelines* faculty adviser and editors would like to thank the following for their expertise in judging the award-winning entries:

Sarah Ekey is a librarian at MCC-Longview. Before entering the library world, she studied history at KU. After graduating and exploring several different career options including secondary education, she discovered her true passion for librarianship. Sarah has worked in public libraries as a story-time presenter, teen programming coordinator, and branch manager, but her favorite librarian role has been as an instruction librarian and library support at MCC. When not reading and researching, Sarah loves to spend time with her family, both fur and human.

Bill Gray, started as a graphic designer then partnered with a friend to start Nanos and Gray, an ad agency in KC. For the last 15 years, he has enjoyed oil paintings.

In her teaching at MCC-Longview, **Jan Rog** seeks to develop inquiry, active dialogue, and love of learning in her students. Writing alongside them, she extends humor and hope as they “loop letters together.” She has published poetry and prose in *Still Point Arts Journal*, *Scintilla Magazine*, *The Poetry Marathon Anthology* various years, and the collection *Fear and Courage: Timeless Wisdom*. Active with Greater Kansas City Writing Project, she enjoys exploring new opportunities for writing and teaching. When we find our community robust and active again, she looks forward to volunteering in creative organizations.

Matt Varner is an English Instructor at MCC-Longview. His published writing has previously appeared in *Review of Education*, *Pedagogy*, and *Cultural Studies*, *Film Criticism*, and *Short Film Studies*. Varner’s research interests include intersections between Visual Culture and Ecocriticism, the fiction of Thomas Pynchon, and he is currently working on directing a documentary film project.

Student Editors

Jami Cox is a current student at Longview working on an Associate in Arts, before she moves onto the University of Missouri-Kansas City to obtain a Bachelor’s in English in the Fall. She has several pieces published online through the websites *Amazon* and *Smashwords* as an independent author under a pen name.

Jazmine Jones is a student at MCCKC. She is studying to be in the dental field. She has an 8-year-old son, and they love to read poems, books and comics together.

Faculty Adviser

Aisha Sharif is an English instructor whose book of poetry *To Keep from Undressing* was published in 2019. She enjoys reading poetry and Agatha Christie mystery novels.



**METROPOLITAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**
LONGVIEW

500 SW Longview Rd. | Lee's Summit, MO 64081
816.604.1000 | mcckc.edu/lv