

Edububble

An Educator Zine



Fall 2020

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the zine, educators will be able to...

- Express the challenges and rewards of teaching and counseling
- Encourage educators to view themselves as creatives
- Develop community and self-advocacy among educators
- Dismantle white supremacist culture within education
- Represent the diverse voices of the education community
- Share insights into complexities of teacher & counselor identity
- Spark "joy" and self-care among educators

And above all...

GET MESSY!!!

&

HAVE FUN!

Foreword

As 2020 heads for an uncertain close, it's important that we as educators take time to reflect on all we have lost, but also what we stand to gain. In the wake of COVID-19, rising xenophobia, rampant police brutality, and unmasked racial inequity, there is much to mourn. We have lost our familiar school buildings and classrooms. We have lost our pedagogical grounding. We have lost our beloved extracurricular clubs and athletics. We have lost job stability and mental health. We have lost trust in community leaders and politicians. We have lost the last vestiges of an illusory American Dream. We have lost physical and psychological proximity to the children who need healing the most right now. Some of us have lost family, friends, and even students. But we cannot lose our words.

As we peer at students over masks or through Zoom windows, we must continue to speak up and speak out. In a world that defies explanation, we should not imagine that we will always have the words to say. But in our not-knowing, let us babble on. Let us speak in tongues. Let us pour forth streams of consciousness. Let us jabber in fits and starts. Let us speak in apology, in solidarity, in confidence, in community. Let us talk ourselves into bravery and talk bravery into action. Our words may not always be glib and polished as the lies and half-truths coming from on high, but in their multiplicity and humility they'll ring with more Truths. And therein lies the hope for tomorrow.

By joining our voices and our visions in this zine, we the educators are willing into existence the better tomorrow that we deserve. That our students deserve. Go in love.

Alex Laser & Rafael Ibay

Edubabble Editors

October 17, 2020

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Painting by Adam George

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March 22, 2020

Dear Seniors,

First off, how are you? We're about a week into school closing and it still feels strange to not be at Senn. I hope that you are all staying safe and healthy during these challenging times. With this interruption of our regular schedules, it can be difficult to maintain the connections more easily held in person, so I hope this letter can offer some form of staying connected with you all. From a teacher's perspective, I think it's safe to say that online classes are not the same as teaching in the physical space of a classroom. I miss our class and the insights, curiosity, and effort that you all bring each day; I miss being able to pace around the room as I think aloud on a text; I miss our mindful moments; I miss our spontaneous moments of humor; I miss my trusty projector; I miss my Nicolas Cage poster; I also miss just walking around our school, and the list may as well go on...in short, there's a lot that I miss! **What about you? What do you miss about being away from school?**



Being away from school has caused us to reshape our everyday schedule. Instead of walking to school each morning, I wake up (still early) and post announcements and lesson materials on Google Classroom then have breakfast (fried egg over toasted bread) while listening to a Daily News podcast. Afterwards I grade assignments, lesson plan, respond to emails, and adapt materials for online learning until the early afternoon with a break for lunch in between. I'm still getting used to the online learning platform. Being a teacher, you're used to being on your feet all day, so I'm adjusting to sitting at my desk as I work. When work is finished, I find that I have more time on my hands, and I'm currently finding that staying at home presents twin challenges: 1) boredom and 2) too much screen time. (Can you relate?) This past week especially it's been too tempting to just hop on my phone when I get bored, eating Fritos on my couch while switching from Twitter to Instagram to YouTube until time melts away like a Salvador Dali painting. It's a habit that I'm going to work harder at breaking. Also, since my gym is closed, I'm now having to find new ways of exercising. I think I might try out some YouTube yoga (I'll let you know how it goes!). In the meantime, I'm also getting back in the habit of reading more at home. I'm currently reading the autobiography of the late great Roger Ebert, one of my favorite writers. You may know him as one half of the "Two Thumbs Up!" movie critics of Chicago. It's been fun reading for relaxation! **How about you? What's a typical day look like for you? What are some successes or challenges you face?**

Lastly, I recognize that the world as it is right now may feel upside down. This is why I will continue to advocate for the importance of self-care. Especially at a time like this, we must remember to be kind to ourselves and to others. For my own self-care, I've been exploring a variety of practices. Each morning I'll try to meditate with a mindful moment. Another thing I'll do is cook a delicious meal. My favorite from this past week? A spicy black bean and spinach stew to go with rice and corn tortillas. The trick is to add extra jalapenos, garlic, and onions. The result is just *chef's kiss* In addition, just checking in with friends and family has been great. In many ways, I feel sheltering in place has invited me to slow down and reconnect with people. For instance, I appreciated the text from my uncle checking in to see how I was doing, and I responded in kind by calling him on the phone and having a friendly conversation, catching each other up on our lives. It was nice and comforting. **How about yourself? What are some ways that you have been kind to yourself or to others in the past week?**

Sincerely,

Mr. Ibay



good morning. Photo by Alex Laser

One Day More Parody

by Maureen Kavanaugh (from *Les Miserables*)

One day more
Another day, another quarantine
This never-ending road to COVID -19
They called off school for one whole week
Then Baker came and made it three
One day more

*I did not leave my house today
How can I leave when there's a lockdown?*

One day more

*Tomorrow seems so far away
Guess I'll watch more of The Crown*

One more day all on my own...

Will I ever see my friends?

One more day with no one near me

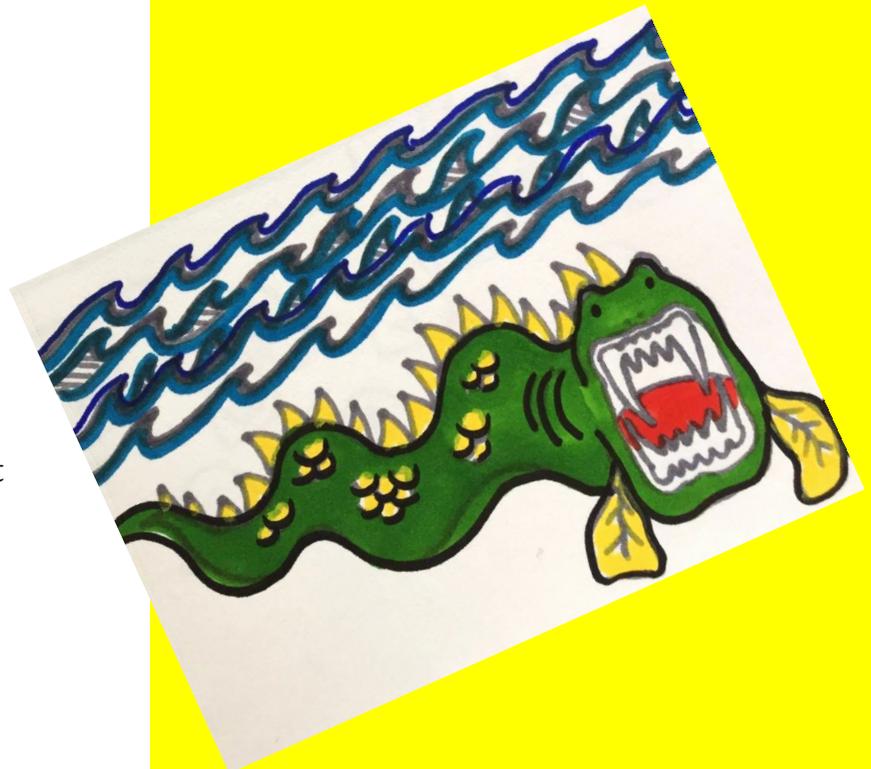
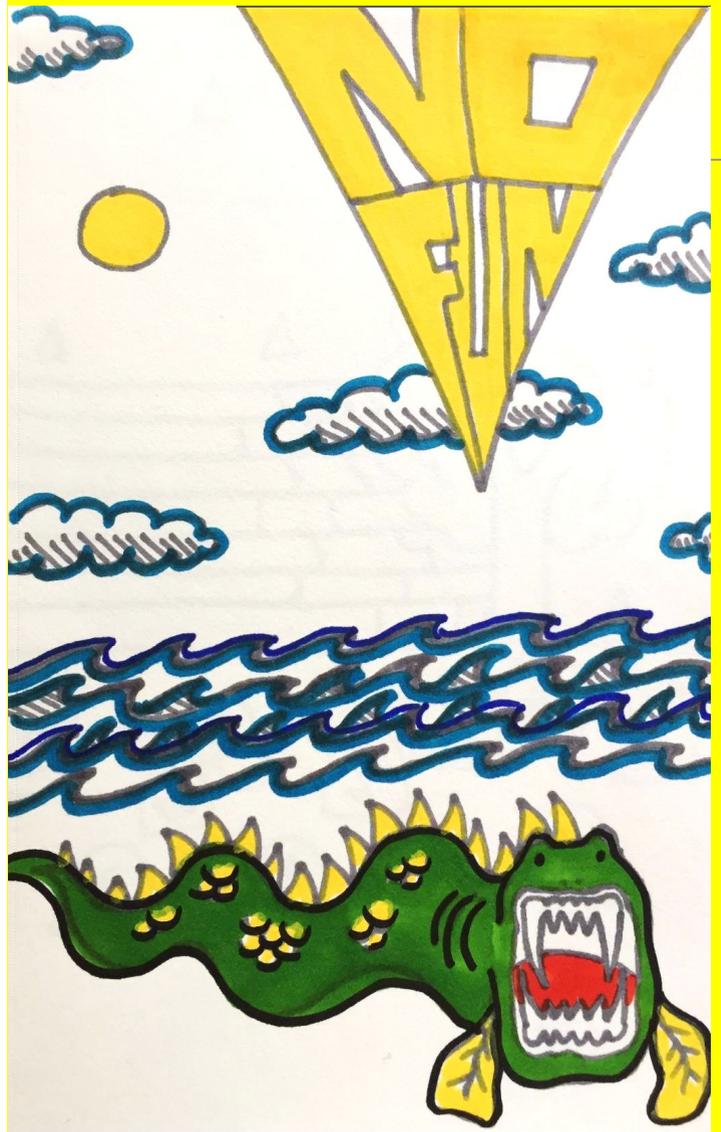
Will I ever see my family?

What a life I might have known

I might actually go crazy

But then COVID screwed us all...

Another day of this whole shitstorm
Do I run out to the store?
Trump has screwed up from the start
For some TP and some beer?
And Pence talks like he's a robot
Do I stay or do I dare?
Will you take your place with me?
The time is now
The day is here
One day more



One day more to stop the spreading
Of this virus that can kill
We'll be ready for that COVID,
While watching RH Beverly Hills
One day more

Watch the bars shut down
And the restaurants, too
Forget about the gym
You'll gain a pound or two
Here's a little tip
Stay six feet apart
Throw some extra hand soap
In your grocery cart

One day to a new beginning
When we'll walk outside again
No more fist or elbow bumps
No more fist or elbow bumps
There's a new world for the winning
There's a new world to be won
Do you hear the people sing?

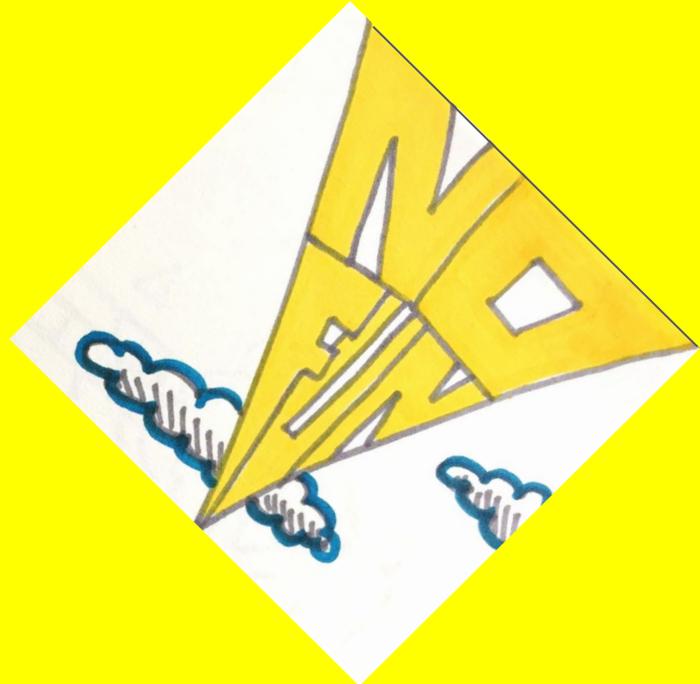
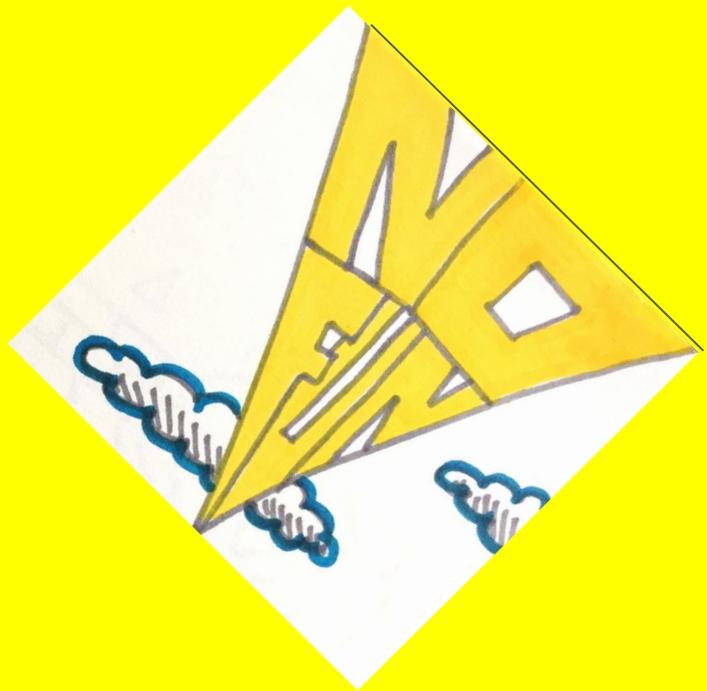
My place is here
I fight with you
One day more

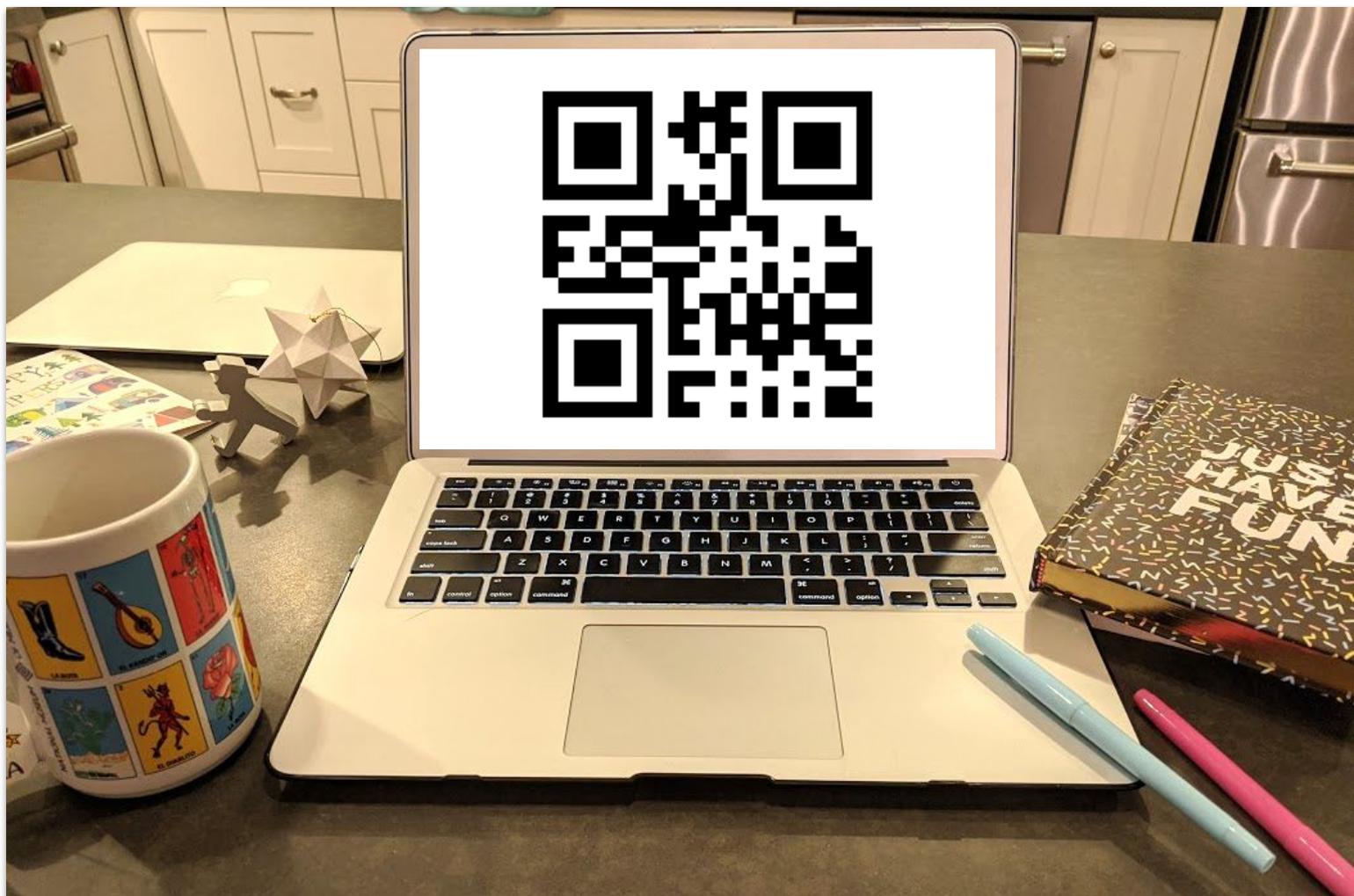
We will join this fight together
We will each do what we can
We will stay inside our houses
We will soon be safe again

One more day of quarantining
We will nip it in the bud
We are ready for this COVID
(Tomorrow is a brand new day)
Tomorrow is the judgment day

Tomorrow we'll discover
What our God in Heaven has in store
One more dawn
One more day...One day more

*Watch the bars shut down
And the restaurants, too
Forget about the gym
You'll gain a pound or two*





Read A Book & Pass It On Video by Kate Mannelly

Labor Day

by Ana Tellado

I am Ed PUZZLED about the CLASS KICK that MENTIMETERS my PADLET on ZOOM. The KAHOOT and QUIZLET were okay, but with a BITMOJI in my GMAIL account I will better reach my SCHOOLOGY class. The KAMI will allow us to annotate all the PDF's, while SANAKO lab will keep me listening to student work for hours as I LOOM everything together to FLIPPITY out of an escape room before my BRAINPOPs in front of the screen.

And I still don't know how to CC everything for the deaf, but VISTA HIGHER LEARNING is mostly text, so that should be okay, except for the blind. I hope all these apps are helping the SEL, UDL, and AR we need to provide as I can't figure out how any of this ties in with the RID workshop I participated in this summer.

But this is what CRT is all about. Is this sea of technological innovation really helping EFD students and teachers?

Oops PEARSONACCESS just sent me a password update, but ASPEN is not yet giving me my class rosters and MOJAVE wants to teach me about some great features, but I just finished updating the OS as per TASC instructions and I am exhausted.

I still need to change all my curriculum for online delivery, but I haven't yet mastered all the tools to do so. And I will meet 100 students in a week and a half. Have to get ready! So much for the long weekend...

Labor days and nights await.

Schedule Send is a Godsend

by Jolleen Filio

Schedule Send: Monday morning at 8am

Because my students and colleagues don't need to know that I'm up
at 3am on the weekends answering emails I received at 1am;
Because the lines between my work, school, and home lives
are blurred beyond recognition;
Because I attempt to respect other people's boundaries
even as each of us tramples all over our own.

Schedule Send: This afternoon 1:00 PM

Because it makes me feel a bit better about procrastinating on more important tasks
if I schedule the non-urgent replies (i.e. to colleagues' TikToks) for later;
Because although I sometimes reply instantly to emails,
people shouldn't expect this of me or anyone else;
Because at other times, I forget to get back to people until Gmail sends me
a not-so-gentle nudge, "Received x days ago. Reply?"

Schedule Send: Friday 7:00 PM

Because I want to make sure that my weekly update helps my students keep track
of the deluge of info they've been receiving throughout the week;
Because it's hard to remember simple tasks like hitting the send button when I hear news
that someone who looks like my beloved was lynched in cold blood for jogging,
that someone who looks like me was brutally assaulted and blamed for the pandemic,
that my loved ones and so many others are losing family and friends to COVID-19;
Because despite the trials, the trauma, and the tears, we need to keep some small sense of
normalcy and spread some positivity.

Schedule Send: Pick date & time

Because days and months are an amorphous blob in quarantine, and the only thing
keeping me anchored to the present are my Google calendar reminders;
Because trying to keep track of the passage of time feels like someone wrapped a clock
in the crumpled remains of a calendar and threw it at my face;
Because just for a moment, I can pretend that I could truly pick a date and time to be in -
not here, not now - and schedule send everything for when this is all over.



Expecting Sculpture by Eileen Gagarin

Apt. 7B

by Dani Johnson (based on a true story)

April 28

Hi Dani,

I love when you work out, and it's very inspiring for me. But I'm worried about the ceiling that bounces like a trampoline. No kidding!

Do I have to be concerned? Is it possible that you'll make a hole, like in the movies? If you think it's okay, please, go ahead!! I also work out in the mornings. Unfortunately, my body doesn't like to jump anymore.

Stay safe,

Greta

April 29

Hi Greta,

Thanks so much for the rose. It was a very surprising gesture.

I'm sorry my exercise routine has been bothering you. It's so hard to figure out a consistent social distancing workout routine without a gym!

I don't think my jumping calisthenics could cause any damage to my floor or your ceiling, but I can see how they can be annoying. I'll move it to my bedroom so I'm not right on top of you and do my best to land soft.

I'm also inspired by you -- your singing is beautiful! Again, I'm so sorry to have bothered you.

Stay well,

Dani

April 29

Hi Dani,

Thank you for the zucchini bread. How thoughtful! I've put it in the freezer because I read online that it was a good way to ensure the safety of homemade foods when they come from an unknown source. But I'm looking forward to tasting it!

I appreciate you moving your workout to your bedroom, but I think the living room would probably be better. I have a lot of delicate antique plates on the walls in my room, and I'd hate for anything to happen to them from the very heavy bouncing.

I did notice you were a singer as well! It seems we like different genres, though! Your bathroom sounds like it has wonderful acoustics (for what I presume to be death metal). I'd be happy to give you some lessons when this is all over. I've been instructing my nieces over Zoom in their singing for the past few weeks.

Stay healthy,

Greta

April 30

Hi Greta,

Thanks for the pork chops. I tried them *immediately*. What an interesting spice rub! Is that garlic and cocoa powder I taste? I never would have thought to put those flavors together. It seems we've all got some time to experiment on our hands. Trial and error make perfect, I always say!

As for my bathroom, yes! It does have great acoustics. I've decided to move my workouts in there from now on. I'm thinking of trying something new -- singing show tunes (my preferred genre) while I sweat. I found these really fun videos on Youtube. Let me know if you'd like the links!

And as for the lessons, I'd love to take you up on your offer when we get out of this. I envy how long you can hold those high notes! Like a true diva, those arias could shatter glass.

Best,

Dan

May 1

Hi Dani,

Thank you so much for that watercolor painting of a cityscape. Handmade gifts are so thoughtful. They have such an authentic, unpolished quality.

It's so nice that we have experimenting with food in common! What was that fish dish you made last week? The whole building smelled of the sea. I was transported for days!

As I mentioned, my body doesn't cooperate the way it used to, so I don't think jumping up and down, flailing around, and singing loudly in my bathroom sounds like the right workout for me.

I prefer yoga.

Listen, I hope my singing hasn't been bothering you. It's just such an important outlet in these trying times -- much as I imagine exercise is for you. You keep bringing it up, so I hope it's not an issue.

Sincerely,

Greta

May 3

Hi Greta,

I couldn't agree more about homemade gifts. Thanks for the scarf. The crochet is very rustic. Of course, I won't be able to wear it until next winter, but it's the thought that counts.

The dish is a fish soup called cahn. It's very mild and quite delicious. Let me know if you'd like the recipe! In consideration of my neighbors, I opened all of my windows (much like you when you're rehearsing your little operas) so the smell didn't waft into the hallways. I'm sorry it came downstairs to you! I didn't notice it anywhere else in the building, but I'll take your word for it.

I appreciate you checking in about the singing. It's not that it bothers me, but, as you may have heard, my dog does seem to be quite enthusiastic to try to sing along. She just barks and howls whenever she hears your beautiful music, bless her heart. I'm surprised you haven't heard it while you're practicing, but I'd hate for her to bother the rest of the building -- especially when it's past 10:00 at night.

Dani

May 4

Dani,

What a lovely birdhouse! Thank you! Is this the racket I heard at 2:00 in the morning last night? You know, you'll want to be careful. The condo association has very strict guidelines about power tools. I'd hate for you to receive a fine.

Thanks for the recipe offer, but I don't like to cook seafood. It's much too smelly. I'll do my best to keep my singing down after 10:00, although the meditative benefits help me sleep -- even when there's ambient noise coming from upstairs. I'm sorry it's bothered you.

By the way. Is that your very large package that's been sitting in the vestibule for three days? I keep hitting it with the door (accidentally of course) when I come in, and it would be just terrible if it were to be damaged when you open it.

Greta

May 10

Yes. It's mine. I hurt my back exercising, and I can't carry it up the stairs.

D

May 11

Dani,

Sorry you're injured. Enjoy this zucchini bread, and get well soon.

Greta

P.S. -- Please forgive the freezer burn.



Photo by Neil Giordano

April 12, 2020

Dear Seniors,

How are you? As I write this letter, I am looking outside my window while lo-fi hip hop plays off YouTube, and past the apartment buildings I can see the white clouds drifting across the sky high above the blue waves of Lake Michigan. It's a pretty scene, a true spring day. Just last year I remember being on spring break in Milwaukee while it snowed the entire day. Funny the way the weather works sometimes. For this year's spring break, my plans to travel were put on hold, and instead I am continuing to stay home and practicing social distancing. My week has been pretty restful so far. I wake up later than usual and have breakfast (toast with peanut butter and jam) while I catch up on the news online. Then I do a little bit of lesson planning to prepare for school. Afterwards I try to do something relaxing, creative, or check in with friends and family. I recently started a creative writing project for a book. This book is still in the brainstorming stage, but I think it's going to be about the nature of dreams, Filipino families, and there will be a bit of the supernatural. I want it to take place in Chicago, too. Aside from writing, I'm also watching a lot of Netflix. Currently, it's "Kim's Convenience," which is about a Korean family in Toronto. It's a fun feel-good comedy! **What have you been up to during spring break?**

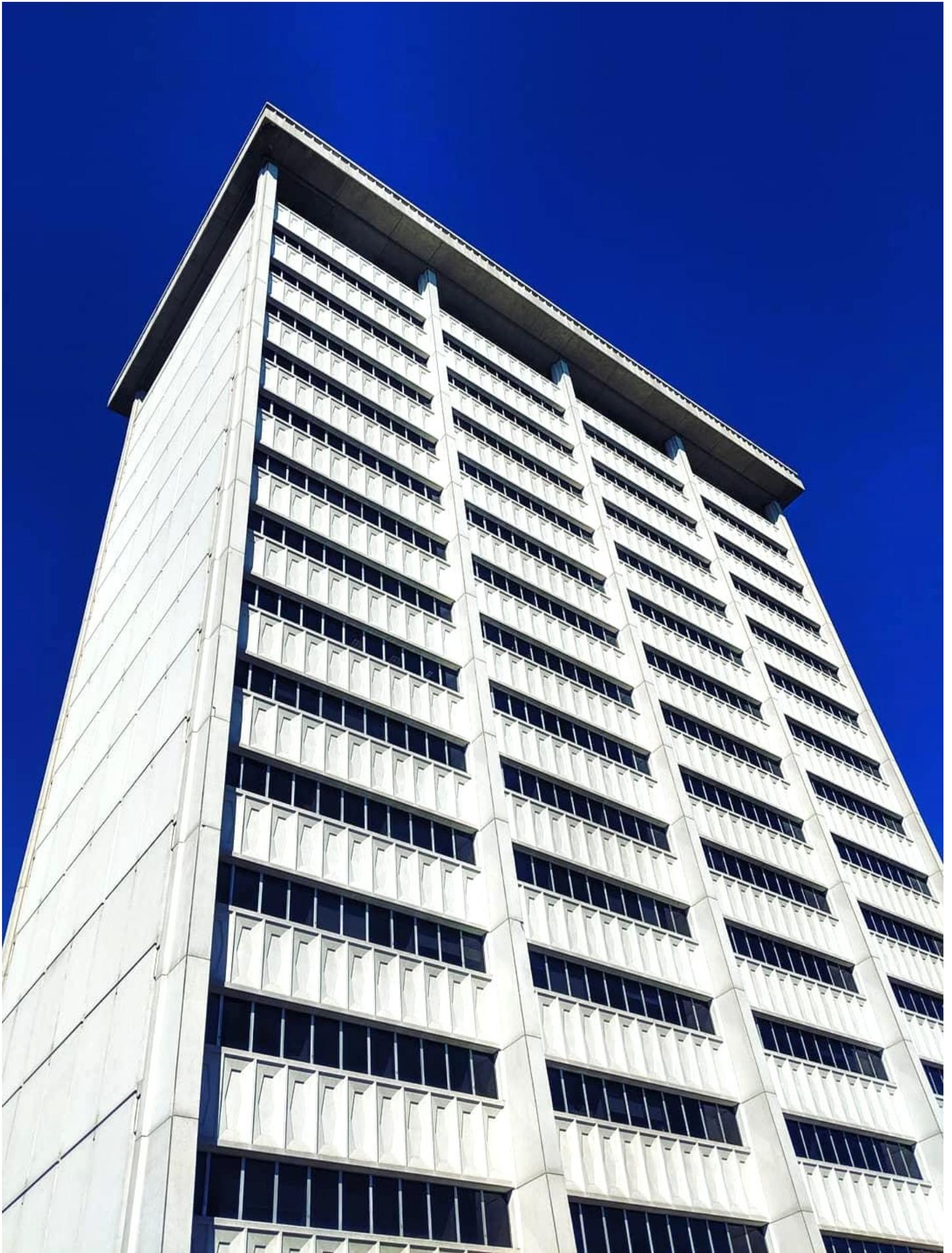


This week we'll be returning to our remote learning on Google Classroom. Like everyone else, I am hoping that the pandemic of Covid-19 ends as quickly and safely as possible, and I am also hopeful that it will be safe enough to return to school before the end of the school year. We are all adjusting to this "new normal," and from my experiences and from reading reflections from students, I have found that having a daily schedule to be immensely helpful. Indeed, my plan is to continue following a balanced schedule that allows me to fulfill my teacher responsibilities while taking time to continue growing in other aspects of my life. For this looks like waking up early to meditate and exercise (I started doing YouTube yoga and it's been challenging but fun!), eat breakfast, then lesson plan, grade, and respond to emails with breaks for lunch. Afterwards I plan to read, work on creative writing, cook dinner, check in with friends and family, and relax. **How about you? What are some tips or a schedule that are helpful for you during distance learning?**

Lastly, in our final unit get ready to explore stories from writers around the world. It is my hope these stories will encourage us to appreciate different perspectives and cultures while recognizing our shared humanity. In preparation, I think it would be nice to return to stories from our own lives. From the book I'm reading now, *Life Itself*, I stumbled on this quote by the writer Roger Ebert, where he visits different places that he's been by simply calling them up to his memory. He writes, "*Sometimes on this voyage through life we need to sit on the deck and regard the waves.*" **What do you think Mr. Ebert means by that?** As I read it, I recognize I cannot physically visit places I've been to right now, but I can travel to them in memory. I'm remembering a fond memory from many years ago. It's summer and the week before I leave South Korea to move back to Chicago. I want to visit my friends one more time and enjoy the beach. I take a bus to Sokcho, a small city on the northeast coast, where I meet my friend Sean. We head into a local diner and order *gamjatang*, a spicy Korean soup made of pork, potatoes, and other veggies. It's delicious. Then we meet up with other friends for a night of beach strolling and karaoke. The sun sets as the sea grows darker. Someone buys fireworks and we light them into the night sky. The sparks fly everywhere like shooting stars. I think about all the adventures I've had in this beautiful country, teaching amazing kids and meeting lifelong friends along the way. My future back home isn't totally clear yet, but in this moment I feel thankful. As my friends dance on the beach, I have a seat on the cool sand and regard the waves. **What about you? What's a favorite memory of yours that you can travel to and describe?**

Sincerely,

Mr. Ibay



zoltar lives here. he lives here. Photo by Alex Laser

Burning Euphony

by Ana Tellado

She moves with the rhythm of the music
slowly stretching, tall, regal, majestic...
She reaches her peak and then collapses,
quickly, shivering, as if she felt cold.

She's suddenly destitute, weak, insignificant...
The rhythm of the music has instructed her to kneel
and she obeys.
Yet the fire that feeds her is stronger than it seems
and she survives the blast.

As the tune becomes a soft whisper,
she begins to slow dance,
touching the sides of the cradle that holds her,
teasing them to join her in the lethargic pace.

And then, with a burst of sound,
she elongates and quivers simultaneously,
as if the constant change of stature and melody,
inflicted a piercing yet delightful pain upon her.

Unaware of her ephemeral existence she will continue to dance to the music,
eating away at the thread that connects her to her soft womb,
melting the walls of her home with ardent kisses,
rising high to plunge into the pool of her melted reality.



Photo by Neil Giordano



Photo by Neil Giordano

Boomerang

by Amy McMahon

you let this one fly--too long

it was that under-
handed grip, so fluid
and free that spun me
into the air

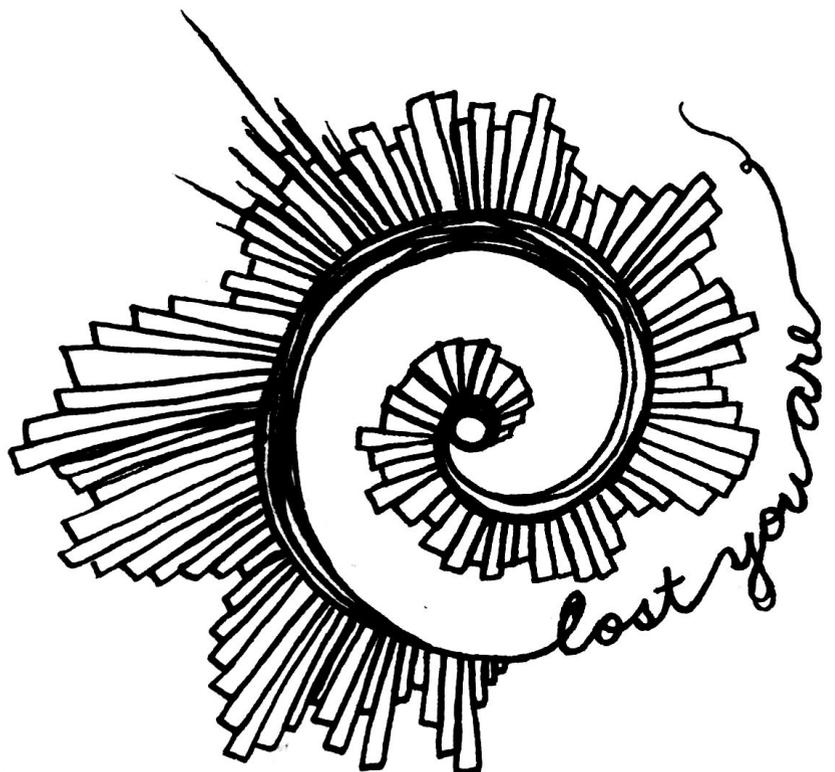
so easily
letting me go

and though my fibers
were pliant enough
to come—again

you would not reach
to touch me, without first
turning your head,

missing me by inches,

but still letting me drop



Lost You Are Art by Denise Billings

Contrite

by Felicia Prass

Devil's sugar
came knocking
while I was trying to quiet my mind.

This interruption was always spoken of.
And now, here,

I stand to peep through.
And stare at what was maybe on the other side

of a bet.

Not tonight!
Go away.
Leave me safe
inside heaven's embrace.

No matter how short lived it may be.

I want this.
Always.

It's not sweet enough.



Photo by Emily Lew

I became a much better teacher when I stopped giving a shit about teaching. (Somewhere, an orchestra cuts out, a martini glass shatters, a damsel gasps and drops to the floor, a politician in a cream linen suit rushes over with some smelling salts...) Let me back up. I didn't say I stopped giving a shit about students. Or English. Or instruction. I stopped giving a shit about my shit. I stopped putting *ME* at the center of my own circumference. Chicago was the first teacher of this geometry lesson. A panic attack was the final exam.

Driving on I-90 the morning of July 1st 2015, my wife Erin and I headed for what was to be our first year in Chicago, and my first in Chicago Public Schools. Under a cool summer sky, we passed stretches of midwestern cornfields and wind farms. A risk-benefit analysis had supported our choice to leave DC, our home of the last ten years, for Chicago. Big city "realness" called to us. But New York and San Francisco were financial nonstarters. Chicago was a neutral,



grey spot on our mental map. Its mystery and affordability was irresistible. Within days of the school year ending, we hired movers, piled our furnishings into a truck, and followed it cross-country in our manual-shift, robin's-egg blue Yaris. Moving was a simple equation. It all added up. But Gary, Indiana was the first sign that we had miscalculated.

Gary is the eastern gateway of Chicago's infernal outer ring. As our car careened through Michael Jackson's birthplace, we were squeezed in on both sides by sooted municipal buildings and blackened billboards. Grey forms of humans crowded about lit only by the smokestacks protruding like fire

tipped cigarettes in the smog-choked sky. The Valley of Ashes in *The Great Gatsby* paled next to the despondence of Gary. Mercifully, the thriller was cut short when the highway swerved north. Erin and I wiped our eyes free of clouds as we passed under a dilapidated tollbooth marked SKYWAY in mid-century sans serif. Our cat in the back seat pooped in her carrier for the third time of the 13 hour ride as we ascended the ramp into the ether.

As the road pitched us skyward, I thought about what compelled me to leave the District of Columbia. My roots were restless to find new soil beyond the 495 Beltway, whose boundary I had never broken my whole life. Although most people might have felt uncertain about rerouting their existence on a whim, DC reared me for wandering.

Few living in the DC I knew were raised there. DC's population transplants are as common as the pigeons defecating on the Smithsonian Mall. The makeup of the city itself is an ecosystem for transients. Like the lattices of a greenhouse, the rational, gridded streets of DC provide a hospitable habitation for the flora of diplomats, college students, politicians,

Bureaucrats, venture capitalists, and teachers from all across the country. Masonic city planner Pierre Charles L'Enfant probably wouldn't have imagined that his alphabetically organized grid system -- and rumored Satanic symbols -- would help drunk political interns find their way home from bars with ease. It could also be said the Enlightened Forefathers probably couldn't have predicted that the Anacostia River, splitting the city's Southeast quadrant, would be a barrier to the reputed "unsavory elements" living in the shadow of Capitol Hill. Undoubtedly, though, the city's shape plays no small part in its attraction. Year after year, DC's constitutionally bound square lures America's most ambitious under its humid lid, fertilizes them with ignorance, waters them with self-importance, lets them grow grotesquely top-heavy with colorful conceit.

I desperately needed to escape the garden. Attending school at The George Washington University brought me in touch with friends hailing from alien lands with nomenclature redolent of America's lost legacies -- names like Sioux Falls, St. Johnsbury, Sacramento, and Long Island. (Mostly, Long Island.) The ease with which most people found their way in DC convinced me I would have little trouble replanting myself elsewhere.

Teaching was no roadblock to moving either. Five years working in DC Public Schools, in under-resourced and overcrowded classes of Northeast DC, juggling the demands of mismanaged special education, and attempting to rebrand a whitewashed colonial English curriculum, had given me the survival instincts to believe I could replicate my modest success anywhere. I wasn't immune to the epidemic of hubris that had contaminated the classrooms of DC too. A plague of self-righteous new college-graduates had descended on the city, feverish with the "can-do" optimism of the Obama zeitgeist. With a Master's in Education from GW, I considered myself an officer class above the Teach for America infantry, but my mantra was the same as theirs: WORK.

Work raised expectations.

Work disciplined students.

Work yielded data for standardized tests.

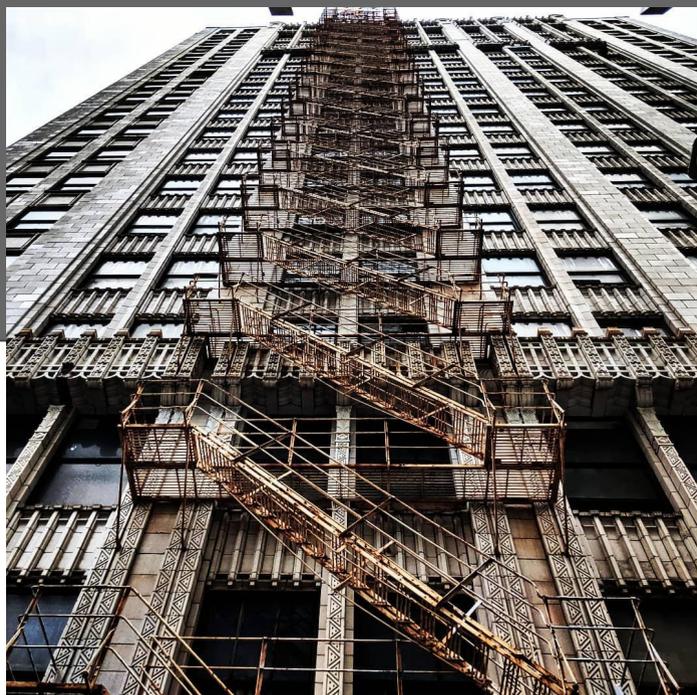
Spending late nights tweaking lesson plans, or rejiggering objectives, or grading stacks of Common Core reading templates, I naively believed that, in my bureaucratic precision, I was single handedly rooting out the inequity of America's horrible legacy of racism. *Work harder. Be smarter. Control the situation*, I mimed in my head. As I sat up until 2 a.m. grading essays on *Animal Farm*, the parallels to Boxer, the inexhaustible horse, were lost on me. If my sanity snapped under the pressure, the DCPS Central Office, like the pig Napoleon, wouldn't have thought twice about sending me to the glue factory.

My students weren't much better off. In the eyes of the Central Office, I didn't have students so much as I had spreadsheets. At the end of the day, the system seemed to only care what data the Black and Brown children under my authority could yield. I did my best to rehumanize my kids-- teaching rebellion through Harlem Renaissance poetry or organizing remixed performances of Shakespeare for live audiences -- but I was becoming increasingly unnerved by plantation style pedagogy that DCPS demanded. For Erin too, Excel wizardry for the government left something to be professionally desired. Moving offered a hard reset.

In rapid succession, I applied to CPS, got a job offer from a promising magnet arts school, and finished the year with a bittersweet goodbye to my students. Jordan and Abdul clasped my hand that last day, giving me a wink and reminding me to watch my back in "Chiraq".

As we ascended the SKYWAY, we cued Sufjan Stevens' "Chicago" on the car speakers and watched the sprawling metropolis emerge impossibly from the blue-black horizon of Lake Michigan. The claustrophobia of Gary surrendered to the agoraphobia of Chicago's skyline.

The gravity of the Midwest pulls horizontally, not vertically. Chicago is a testament to this fact. The city's broad shouldered high-rises don't defy the sky; they audaciously dare the infinite flatness of the lake and prairie to swallow them up. Towers and terrain -- opposed like centrifugal and centripetal propulsions -- threaten to rend the city apart in their eternal struggle. It was plain to me, as I gazed along the towering forts and encampments of the Lakeshore, that humans were no more than collateral damage in the crossfire of a mythical Western shootout. Sufjan's song peaked to a crescendo of bugles and strings. I was becoming extremely conscious of the smallness of my sweaty body, strapped tightly to the seat of our tiny, stinky blue car.



We careened up the Dan Ryan Expressway, descending into the ribcage of the city, a honeycomb of layered concrete buttressing the massive edifices. Hollowness built on hollowness. Chicago's shifting winds refused permanence to every surface. Even as we drove into the shadow of the Sears Tower (disputably Willis Tower) -- the majestic charcoal ziggurat of afar was transmuted into a pixelated mass of dirty black windows, some of which resembled boarded up storefronts from below. Cheekawa, the smelly onion, indigenous trading post, land bathed in blood and bootleg liquor, clearly had no right to exist. And yet, here it was. And here I was too.

I turned to my wife to see a wrinkle of hesitation cross her brow. Perhaps it was dawning on her too that we were voluntary refugees, alone in an unknown world. Sufjan's bellicose horns faded into an angelic choir, then stiffened into melancholic silence. There was a stillness in the car as we took the exit toward our new home in Wicker Park.

Art by Denise Billings



As we began to relax, the city administered one final test of spatial reasoning in its battery of assessments. Off the highway, we were now entangled in a cosmic crisscross of limitless streets. This wasn't DC's gentle grid. Chicago's matrix was not the work of masonic foresight so much as residual scar tissue. I'd later learn how thirsty investors surgically stitched the grid together after the Great Fire of 1871 leveled the wild structures of the burgeoning boomtown to charred prairie grass.

Gridlocked in traffic, just blocks from our new home, I yearned for respite. I glanced up at the patchwork of sandstone facades and yellow-brick warehouses along Division Street. I felt my foot feather the clutch of the stick shift. Suddenly, I realized that I knew close to nothing about this city we had chosen beyond the promises of an Indie Rock single. I wanted to sink into the ground, but like a wildflower on the planes, I had little to cling to in the shallow soil. And a dust storm was approaching.

I spent my first summer in Chicago wandering the city to pass time before the school year. My wife settled into a routine. She continued to work remotely for the government in our new greystone three-flat. I biked and walked back and forth between West Chicago and the Loop, but with every excursion my feeling of alienation intensified. I was bewildered by the absence of pedestrians and cyclists outside the downtown. In DC, hills give every stroll or ride the suspense of exposition, climax and resolution. In Chicago, the city's expansive flatness had no plot, and therefore no depth. As cars skimmed by me on the empty sidewalks, I realized Chicago is a newspaper article. A glance at the headline tells you everything you need to know. The details -- stores, clubs, restaurants, bars, speakeasies -- are for those with the capital to spare and connections to flex. It commands you to see and accept all, including that which you were missing out on. The nakedness of the flatlands only further reinforced my isolation. I became nostalgic for picnics with friends on DC's Meridian Hill, staring down from Columbia Heights at the blinking eyes of the Washington Monument in the sunset. A new city with no companions, no active employment, and no real knowledge of the people. There was nowhere to hide.

Events in my professional life mirrored the isolation of my personal life. In a bizarre turn of events, a week before the start of the school year, my new principal had been fired from the school -- a school I had not even set foot in. She had interviewed and hired me virtually the previous spring. Not only was she gone, but she had been sacked ignominiously for manipulating student test scores to keep special education students out of the competitive arts program. As unsettling as this tabloid was, I was more concerned by the recognition that I had lost my gossamer-thin connection to the school. She had been the one person that I could identify with some certainty from a blurry FaceTime screen. Now she was gone.

Working over this plot twist in my mind, I biked to North Beach for my last free weekend and walked out on the beach's jetty to a small rusty lighthouse. I looked back over the cityscape that had steamrolled my soul into hyperflat submission. I scanned the bleak modernist architecture, locking eyes with the obsidian Hancock Building perched like an Orwellian obelisk over the sparkling capitalist wonderland of the Mag Mile. Its polished indifference mocked the absurdity of my predicament. I glared back in anger. I seethed with indignation at the city. But mostly at myself. What the hell possessed me to think that I could simply pick up and move to a completely new city and just start teaching?



Professional development the following week temporarily eased my mind. If I was living in an absurd alternate timeline, perhaps it was the best possible one. I learned from my new colleagues that the ex-principal was, by their telling, a cruel despot. The hallways still echoed with the sound of her heels. As one teacher informed me, she would put them on whenever she was about to publicly fire and humiliate a disobedient teacher. Staff lived in perpetual fear of the *clack-clack-clack* heading toward their room signalling their possible expulsion. Such cartoonishly evil villains, as I would come to know, were par for the course in the melodrama that is Chicago Public Schools. To paraphrase Nelson Algren, Chicago is a city of squares and hustlers. For now, I wasn't sure which was worse: knowing that I had been square enough to be conned into accepting this job, or being the legacy hire amidst a staff recovering from the trauma of a reviled principal and hustler.

The relief didn't last. The final shock of that training week was learning that my promised schedule of "freshmen only" had been switched, and I would in fact be teaching seniors for the first time in my career with no more than a three-day weekend to prepare. I couldn't believe it. I was terrified. I pictured miniature adults. Here I was myself pretending to be a grown-up, having made an impulsive life decision that seemed to confirm me unworthy of that title, and now I was about to teach these "kids". The city nonchalantly crushed every last vestige of normality in my teaching career. With no other recourse, I stretched my vines higher, and opened my leaves wider, begging the sun to bring nutrients to my shriveled ego.

Work.

Work would again be my answer.

I sat with an open Microsoft Word document over the entirety of Labor Day weekend, tooling and retooling my syllabus to perfection. Erin pleaded with me to take a break and, in frustration, left to enjoy the beautiful weather that weekend on her own. *Work harder. Be smarter. Control the situation.* Monday night, weary minded and bleary eyed, I shut my computer and headed to bed for an agitated and dreamless sleep.

Locker assignments! How could I forget locker assignments? I was greeted with an email from the administration reminding me in friendly terms that lockers were to be assigned in the first period. A knock at the door told me my seniors were arriving early, despite the fact that the bell hadn't rung yet. I scrambled to print the Excel sheet, praying that the InkJet abandoned by the last English teacher they fired, would hold up for

this job. The curling poster of F. Scott Fitzgerald that I brought from DC was staring down at me menacingly with his sunken eyes.

The kids lumbered in. They certainly weren't the pachydermy sized, angular jawed, deep voiced, hormone exuding micro adults that I had expected. But somehow their quietness and inquisitive gazes frightened me even more. I knew that I was being sized up. It felt like the room was suffused with the cologne of my anxiety.

I grabbed the spreadsheets off the tray as my students read through the syllabus they picked up at the door. They seemed unphased by my painstakingly crafted statements of purpose for the school year and my lies therein that "I'm really excited to meet you!"

Goddamn it. Why hadn't I remembered locker combination day? I hadn't planned for this. My voice cracked as I asked the students to follow me outside. Wasn't I a sixth-year teacher? I felt like I was fresh out of grad school. I could have been a new TFA recruit for how unprepared I felt for this day. *Work harder. Be smarter. Control the situation.*

We stepped out into the poorly maintained hallway. Years of budgetary distress and embezzlement had left CPS squeezed out of the state's school renovation plans. Another point for the hustlers! The olive green lockers clashed spectacularly with the red and black checkerboard of the floor. In the darkened hallway, the whites of my students' eyes stared back at me in judgement, brighter than the few flickering fluorescent lights above us now.

My perpetually clammy hands went into overdrive. I shuffled up and down the hall trying to find the first locker on my list.

"Uh, Stacy Alvarez, come on up," I coughed out, feeling the muscles in my diaphragm scrunch into a knot. Students exchanged glances as I thumbed around in my pockets for a stack of Post-it notes. I hastily scrawled Stacy's combination onto the yellow sticky and handed it to her. She took the sweat-soaked square from me and looked back quizzically.

"Um, Rojarious Bigesby, you're next. This is your locker, no wait..." I flipped the spreadsheet. In the dim light, I could feel my vision clouding as I scanned around through the tiny gridded boxes. "No my bad, this one".

I was onto my fourth student or so when Rojarious informed me the locker I gave him was already taken, even though the spreadsheet claimed otherwise. *Stay focused. Be smarter. Control the situation.*

The twenty or so students still waiting were beginning to shift impatiently. Class felt like it had to have been nearly half over at this point, and I hadn't done a damn thing. I could feel my jugular vein pulsating with red hot adrenaline. I felt dull. I felt stupid.

"I think he's stupid." Wait did someone actually say that? My brain had become its own drug, and I wasn't sure whether I was hearing things from this world or the next.

"He's gonna get fired, like that principal," a kid named Carlos said. "She was stupid." Okay, I definitely heard that. Ignore it. You've heard worse in your career. Kids know how to find your weak points. You're a teacher. *Work harder. Be smarter. Control. Control. Control.*

The lockers waffled in and out of my vision. The checkered floor seemed to stretch and warp. A locker door slammed shut behind me with a clatter. I felt my brain clatter against my skull. My body shook. *Clack.*

And there it was. A break. The control was gone. Something dropped inside me. I fell. There's a remarkable amount of time to think in the middle of fainting in front of a class full of teenagers.

Why am I here?

Who do I think I am?

Why did I move to this city?

I don't know this city.

I don't know this school

Don't know these students

Don't know myself.

Know myself.

No self.

So yeah, I'm fainting right now.

I'm about to hit the floor.

I sure hope Ms. Terry doesn't hear and come out.

That lady has been teaching here, like what, 30 years?

She's like the only teacher of color in this really diverse school.

Like how is that?

She seemed friendly,

But damn...I don't need her seeing me like this.

She's definitely seen some shit.

I wonder if she's ever seen a young white guy pass out on the first day.

So...I haven't hit the floor yet.

Will this hurt?

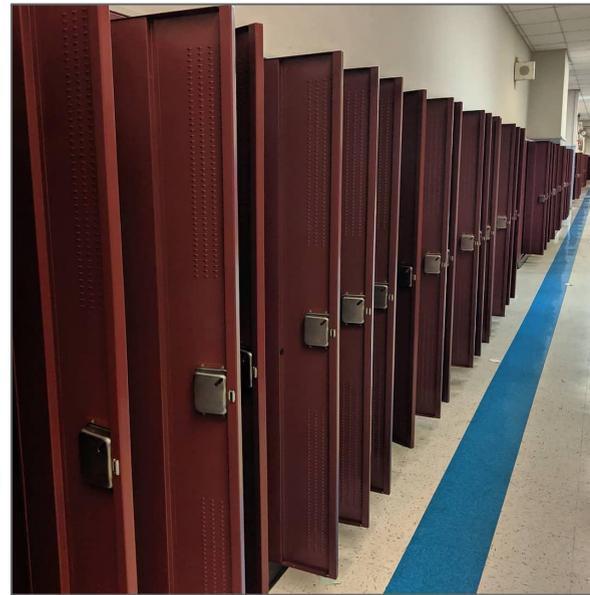
I should get some help.

Like therapy help.

Or medication.

I think you knew this already. Right?

Yup.



Are you going to get some?

Yeah...I think it's time.

Okay? Okay.

I feel my head thunk against the red and black tiles. I'm laid out. Flat. To my relief, Ms. Terry doesn't open her door. But someone's opening mine. I turn and see Stacy already propping open the door, as several students help me to my feet.

Rojarius yells, "Someone grab him some water." Eric and Jorge grab their bottles and run down the hall. After leading me inside, Omar goes to my desk and gets my chair. Sumiyo guides me to it, and I sit down. I gladly accept the lukewarm jug of water from Jorge. In that moment, it tastes as crisp as melting arctic snow.

"You good, man?" Stacy asks. I realize this is the first time I've really looked at her. In her Cubs hat and jersey, she smiles at me warmly. She's just a kid, I realize. A nice kid.

"Man, you had us worried," says Carlos. This was the kid who may have said in this dimension that I "should be fired". Whether or not that fact-checks out, it's clear he wants me to be his teacher now. I take the cue to find my strength again, and I stand up.

"You sure you're good?" Rojarius asks.

"Yes, I'm sure," I say. I actually think I mean it.

Everyone goes back to their seats. I look at the crumpled locker spreadsheet.

"Oh man, we still have to do this..." I get ready to faceplant.

"Oh no, we figured it out." Sumiyo winks. "Everyone picked out their lockers. You can write down the combinations later."

I pick up my syllabus to begin teaching, but I put it down and stop. I look out over the room. Friendly eyes look back at me. There are grins and chuckles, but not at my expense.

"Yeah, so that happened." There's a laugh throughout the room. I look from face to face. I breathe. "Thanks," I say.

I glance at the door and swear I see the blur of Ms. Terry pass the hall window smiling and nodding at me. Did she see? Something tells me nothing gets past her. I find this thought surprisingly comforting. Her smile seems to say, "I've got your back."

A thump startles me. A bird has just flown into the large latticed window of the classroom. It finds its footing on a green branch. It takes a projectile shit on the pane and flies away. The viscous white concoction dribbles down the gridded frame.

I smile to myself. Like the bird, I gotta let shit go.

Better yet, give no shits at all.

Class begins.



Photo by Emily Lew

Lifelong

by Felicia Prass

All side of day and night
we float these streets.
Chilled.
Cigarette smoky glances.
Sunrise catchin' and dancin'.

A murmur from underneath time
crouches.
Us flock.
We slide betwixt
last night's shadows,
dancing with drunk passion to
faint rhythms of alcohol and trumpets.

We slide between colors today.
Last night's fun—
Ain't.
Done. Yet.

A dove forever in flight.

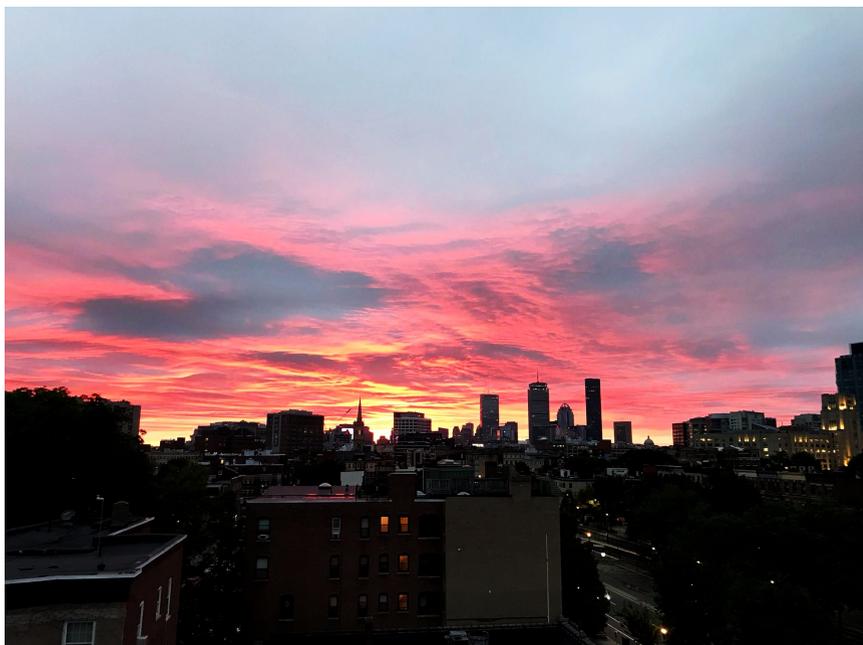


Photo by Emily Lew



Photo by Alex Laser

Auburn

by Felicia Prass

In a field of where this didn't happen.
You laid my body down.

Agazed at the rising of the sun.
Naked truths to behold.
Held by nature's embrace.

A slight chill,
but still warm with you.
Flying above our eyes,
those birds race
the sky's end.

Still.
Serene.
Serenading.



Photo by Emily Lew

i've seen too many sunrises

by Kel Lowndes

i used to love the sun
the rising and melting away from dark indigo into a soft and strong orange
the setting and swirling messily transit from blue to pink to purple to dark

now? now, it just reminds me that i've lost time

up 4pm to 4am

awake from friday to sunday and missing my bed all of saturday

naps are for the week

sitting in my kitchen where the shadows hit wrong

no one can see the bags under my eyes

is the anxiety of all of this or is the lack of stimulus or is the constant sharing into screens that

scientists all warned us about avoiding before bed

it's harder to avoid them than it is to sleep

now? i've seen the bright sun melt and swirl too many times

music is a love language

by Kel Lowndes

i would give up a lot before i would give my spotify premium account

i can't believe someone people don't mind being rudely interrupted

i need the music to interrupt these long days

i can keep track of time beyond a 3-4 minute song. sometimes that doesn't even count because

i play and repeat and look up the chords and memorize and listen to the harmony and

try to hear each instrument's part of the score

i made "504's Reggaeton" playlist because it made home feel like a classroom

curated by my students through google form

may, i played my "St. Jude" playlist, feeling like i was lost and i need to know that other people

feel that way too

june, i "Queer the Queue" and found new and old music celebrating pride and danced and

fought to accept that self love is radical and necessary

"Fresh" was my answer to make the best of this time stuck. the beats are bright and the
themes

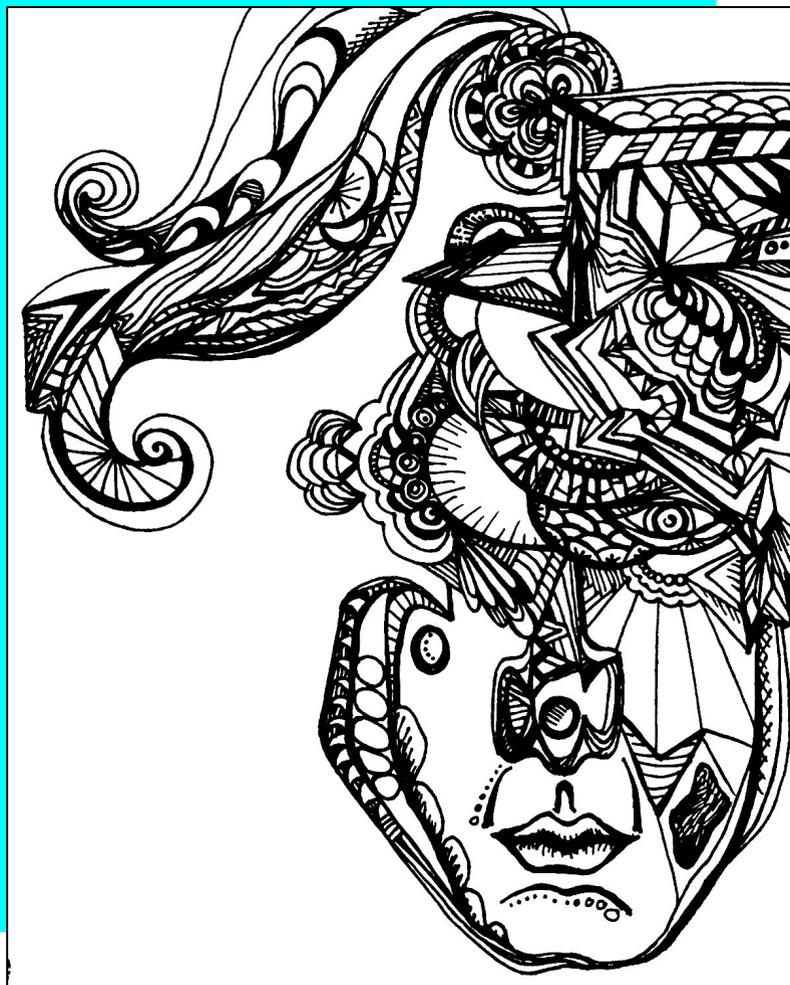
are new and maybe we'll survive

perception is whack

by Kel Lowndes

so stupid i have to be perceived
to say i'm non-binary is easy
my "preferred pronoun" is not to be perceived
he/she/sir/ma'am/miss/mr/they/them//
it's all bullshit
it's not new
it hasn't gotten better or worse since i chopped my hair
if i order a coffee too early in the morning and my voice isn't awake, it's "here you sir"
but if i show my id that has a 21 year old with a big F by the gender section at the liquor store, the
clerk does a double take and "have a nice night ma'am"
and i'm in zoom meetings with various strangers and colleagues with my name (they/them) staring
me down as if trying to challenge me to remove it, intimidating me for drawing attention that most
people don't think twice about
i miss the winter where you have to wear so many layers of clothing and large coats so no one cares
what you are
at least summer i'm not supposed to leave, not supposed to be around people,
by the grace of that not be perceived by anyone

Art by Denise Billings



can y'all stop blaming winter?

by Kel Lowndes

man i love a Chicago winter.

cold. cold in your bones, cold your lungs, cold in your eyes.

walk a lake in polar vortex kind of cold

people look at you like you've lost it as you stand with iced coffee kind of cold

debating if we walk to the place closer even though we hate but we won't freeze walking

kind of cold

Chicago winter, you're like an old friend.

i don't need to see you often, but boy do i love to see you when you're in town

you get too much hate

maybe you come into town too early or stay too late

Chicago winter, you're my friend.

the kind of cold that makes runs by the lake more refreshing and rewards

the kind of cold that makes you appreciate the bus driver more than ever

the kind of cold that lets you pretend to be a dragon when you breathe

so be nice to Chicago winter! better than summer and certainly spring



Photo by Alex Laser



Photo by Neil Giordano

Winter Pains

by Ana Tellado

Every morning Leyda and her three girls got up early and walked over two miles to get to school. They started the walk together, then they split up as Gracia headed over to the high school and Leyda would escort Carmina and Alba to their respective middle and elementary schools. After drop off, Leyda would head to her adult ESL classes in an effort to learn English before renewing her job search. In the afternoon she would go back to pick up the younger girls and meet up Gracia at the library, where they would do their homework. The family would only head home when all the girls had finished their school work. The library was a welcomed luxury. They could do the homework sitting at a table or carrel. Each one also would check out books to read at home. They had books in Spanish! At least they could take a break from all the English around them.

When the pastor came to visit and saw that they had no furniture, except for two mattresses that lay on the bedroom floor, he immediately told some of the members of the English speaking Baptist church. Apparently they had their own charity organization. They just never had anyone in their own church be in such dire need. So they brought over a couch someone had discarded and a small TV stand. Now they had a place to sit and read other than their mattresses. Soon Leyda was able to purchase box springs and the church provided some discarded bed frames. The Salvation Army had window treatments and their bedroom now looked like a welcoming place to sleep. Gracia slept with Carmina and Alba slept with Leyda. They were comfortable and welcomed the proximity as the winter approached.



Photo by Neil Giordano

A few weeks later someone donated a small glass kitchen table with four chairs. It fit like a glove in their eat-in kitchen. Their meals now were more civilized. The picnics on the floor were getting old. Gracia made some friends in school who lived nearby. By December she was able to invite them over to their apartment. Then for Christmas Leyda was able to buy a used TV in the same secondhand store where she had bought kitchenware. A few of the items she had to buy were new and found them at a discount store that didn't sell anything above \$20.00. The parents of one of Gracia's friends showed Leyda how to put plastic over the windows and seal it with tape to make the heat more efficient. They didn't know it then, but one of the perks of a small apartment is that money goes further with the utilities. They kept the thermostat on the lowest possible setting and wore long sleeves at all times. At night time they used multiple blankets in bed. Leyda knew how

to live on a budget and her ingenuity allowed them to stay put for a year in their little nest.

It was their paternal grandmother who had deemed it a nest when she came to visit for Gracia's fifteenth birthday. There would be no *quinceañera* as they had planned all those years ago. Things had changed. The former home-owners went through a couple of months of homelessness and now lived in a one bedroom apartment half the size of their home on the island. Glenda, Alberto's mother, came to see her oldest granddaughter turn 15. She also wanted to see how the new land was treating them. She approved of the modest home furnishings and thought that the three floor walk-up was like a birds nest in a tree top. That's how she described it to the family over the phone. She thought the view was pretty. It was snowing. Everything looked white and cold from above. The apartment was warm and colorful by comparison. She especially loved their flowery couch. It must have had every color in the rainbow. Gracia did not like that, but it had been a gift. She knew better than to say anything. She had learned a long time ago not to look a gifted horse in the mouth.

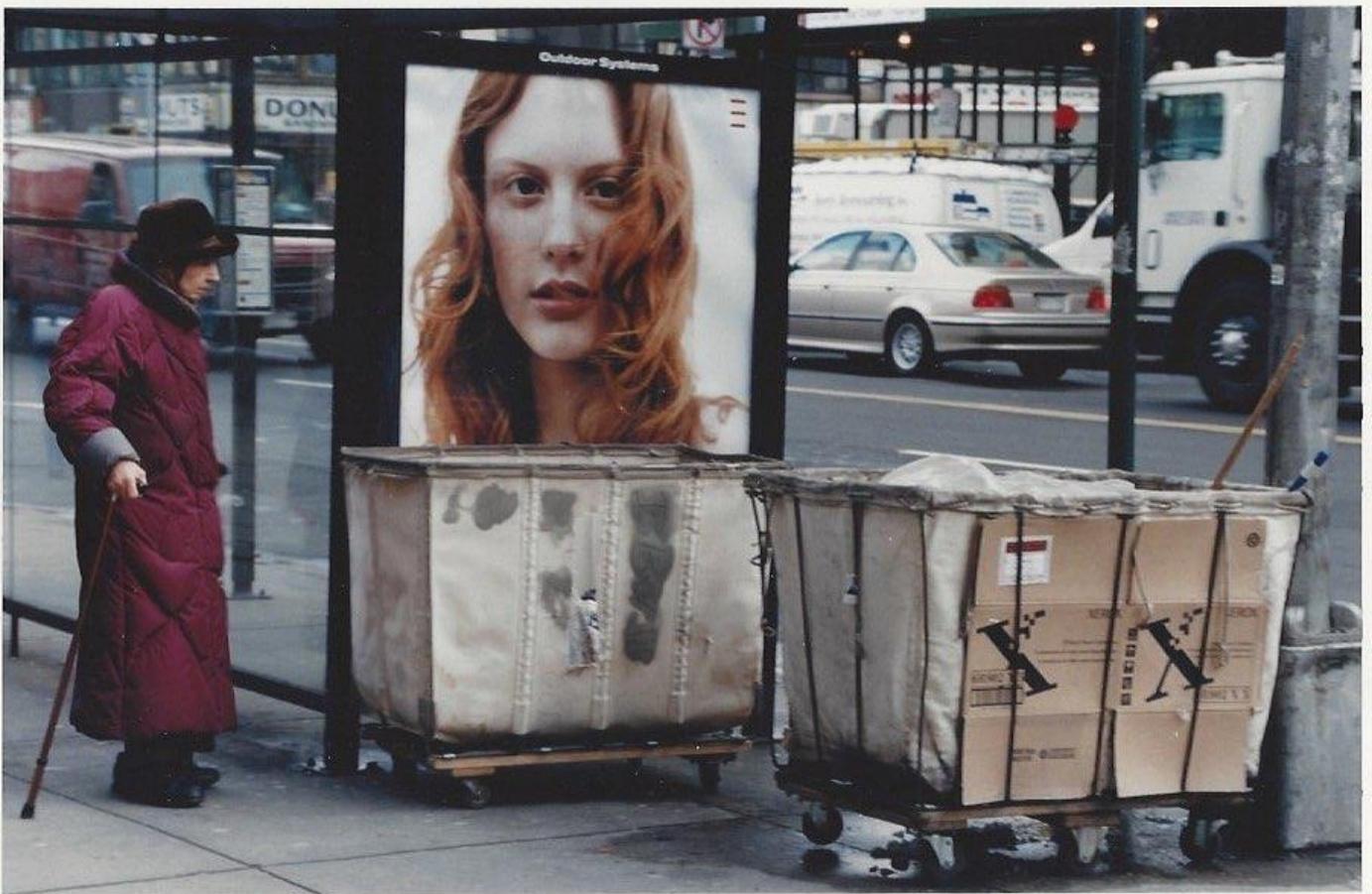


Photo by Neil Giordano

They sang happy birthday at the pastor's home and the youth of the church contributed to the potluck meal. It was nice, but Gracia wondered if she would ever get to wear one of those pretty long dresses that quinceañeras wore. At the moment she was wearing jeans and a sweater. Not very dainty at all, but she was glad that her mom was not living in fear of her father anymore. Hopefully the financial situation would get better by the time her sisters turned 15 or 16. Apparently in the states they had the fanfare for sweet sixteen instead of the traditional fifteen of the island. Glenda returned to Puerto Rico speaking only good things of her daughter in law and her

granddaughters. They were doing well in school, the house was clean and cute, they were learning English.

Then, in the spring, someone broke into their home. It was a complete blow for the family. Alberto had sent walkmen to the girls for Christmas. The thief stole their headphones and their VCR. They even stole clothes! Miraculously they did not take the television. Leyda suspected the thief was a neighbor and they had heard them come in and ran out the back door. The TV had been moved but not taken which made Leyda's theory plausible. She did not want to live in that apartment anymore. First she changed the locks and keys. Then she went on the search for a new dwelling.



Photo by Alex Laser

This time the apartment search was easier. Gracia spoke a little English and the Mirandas knew the neighborhood a little better. They looked in the places that had a reputation of being safer or more residential. Then they found an apartment with a balcony. Another third floor. The Mirandas loved their views and fell in love with this apartment. It had three bedrooms. And the rent was five hundred dollars a month without utilities. It would be

tight. The entire government allowance would go to rent. They would have no money for utilities. But they would find a way. The landlord came to see their current apartment and liked how they lived, he was also surprised to see them all share a bedroom. He was a kind man and approved them on the spot. Then he also referred them to an agency that helped with utilities. They did not qualify for that help because there were no elderly relatives living with them and no children under two. Leyda continued to stretch out her food stamps with the free army surplus provisions. The girls were enrolled in free and reduced breakfast and lunch in their respective schools and that also helped their tight budget.

On moving week they had a new problem. How were they going to get the furniture from one apartment to another? They did not have enough money to hire a moving company. When they had arrived, Leyda had put aside one thousand dollars that she had saved over the years back home. She would be using that money for utilities in the new apartment so they could not touch it. Then it occurred to them that they could take their belongings themselves. The buildings were only six blocks away. So they carried their clothes and the dishes over. They also carried the dining chairs and the coffee table. People saw them walking their belongings and laughed. Then a fellow church goer saw them and offered to help. He borrowed a truck from a friend and moved the remaining

items for them. Good thing because the Mirandas would not have been able to carry the mattresses nor the couch all the way.

Once they settled in their new apartment, they would have to be very frugal with all expenses. On days when it was above freezing they would turn off the furnace which made the house very cold. The library was again their go to place for homework. At least they would be warm there.

The Mirandas lived at the new apartment for a year without incident. The walk to school was longer, but they were used to walking now. They even walked to the grocery store which was almost five miles away. Then they would take a taxi cab home with the groceries.

Walking saved them a lot of money on taxi fare. The Salvation Army dressed them. Aid for Families with Dependent Children paid their rent. Leyda was learning English, though slowly and the Miranda girls were doing well in school. Then Leyda's rainy day fund ran out and the winter was coming.

The Mirandas did not know how the weather could change everything. In Puerto Rico they had been able to use cold water and shade to cool off during heat waves. They never had to worry about the cold. And their house was made of concrete so hurricanes would flood the roads, but their house would stay standing. Yes, they had to live without electricity when the wind took down the wires, but flashlights and candles solved the problem of the dark. They were about to face *el frío pelú*, the hairy cold that Puerto Ricans talked about when they described the winter in the northeast states. It was the winter of 1989-90.



Photo by Neil Giordano

So much of their life now revolved around strategizing to brave the weather. The thermostat on their living room window read 6 degrees below zero for weeks at a time. The Mirandas had never felt so cold. When the heating bill came, Leyda could not believe it. The amount was twice what she paid for rent. She simply could not afford it and said to the utility company that she would live without the heating service.

“You have to shut it off. There is nothing we can do about this horrendous amount.” Gracia translated her mother's words.

The woman at the oil company did not want to shut off the service, but she was left with no choice. There was no way Leyda could come up with eight hundred dollars. Leyda contested the charges. It seemed another dwelling was using the same heat and they were charging her alone. She had no proof though and the problem would not be resolved for another year. As soon as they shut off the heating, Leyda went to an indoor Flea Market and bought two electric space heaters. She put one in the bathroom and one in her bedroom. Luckily the water heater was electric and the cooking stove ran on gas so she did not need to worry about that. Electricity and gas were not as expensive as oil bills so they could continue paying for them.

Their bedtime routine now mirrored their morning one. Each girl put on two pairs of leggings before putting on their jeans or corduroys. They also wore several layers of socks and shirts. They moved the mattress from Carmina and Alba's room to Leyda's room. They were back to sharing a bedroom. Leyda had gotten extra blankets from *Ames* and good old Salvation Army. They would sleep under several sets of covers. Leyda also put a rolled up blanket under the bedroom door so the heat from the electric unit would not escape. Carmina slept on the floor mattress with Alba and Gracia slept with her mom.

Walking to school was like braving the Arctic Circle. The cold mornings made the trek feel longer than it was. If there was snow on the ground, then it took even more time. But the worst was the ice. Gracia did not know how to walk on it and fell so often that she bruised her hips and buttocks and the bruises didn't go away until spring. When Gracia got to school she would run her hands under the hot water in the bathroom sink. She called this process "defrosting". She needed to leave the house earlier than before so she would have enough time to defrost upon arriving at school. She also needed to remove some of her layers and put them in the locker so she would be comfortable with the school's temperature.



Photo by Neil Giordano

Getting home, even though they were relegated to Leyda's room, was heavenly. Leyda would make them hot chocolate and they would hold the mugs and enjoy the warmth. They moved the small electric heater from the bathroom to the kitchen for meals, then to the bathroom again for shower time. On the weekend they moved it to the living room for a couple of hours so they could catch a movie without freezing. All the windows were sealed with plastic and tape. Leyda also put blankets on top of the insulated window treatments to shut out the cold, but it also made it extra dark. There were some nights when all four would sleep in the same bed for extra warmth.

Gracia would often lie awake wondering if they would ever return home to Puerto Rico to their own house that she had seen built. Would she ever have her own bedroom again? Would she enjoy the sun on her skin or long for air conditioning ever again? What would happen if they ever lost electric service as they often did on the island? How would they keep warm?

The wind in the North also liked to howl as it did on the island. Although it never was hurricane strong, it shook the rafters of the buildings, and Gracia wondered if it would take away the roof or a wall. The houses in the North were made of wood, not like the concrete walls that had protected her in childhood. Leyda would hush Gracia and her sisters as if she could hear their thoughts. Or maybe she was hushing the wind. Eventually everyone fell asleep. That was the longest winter.

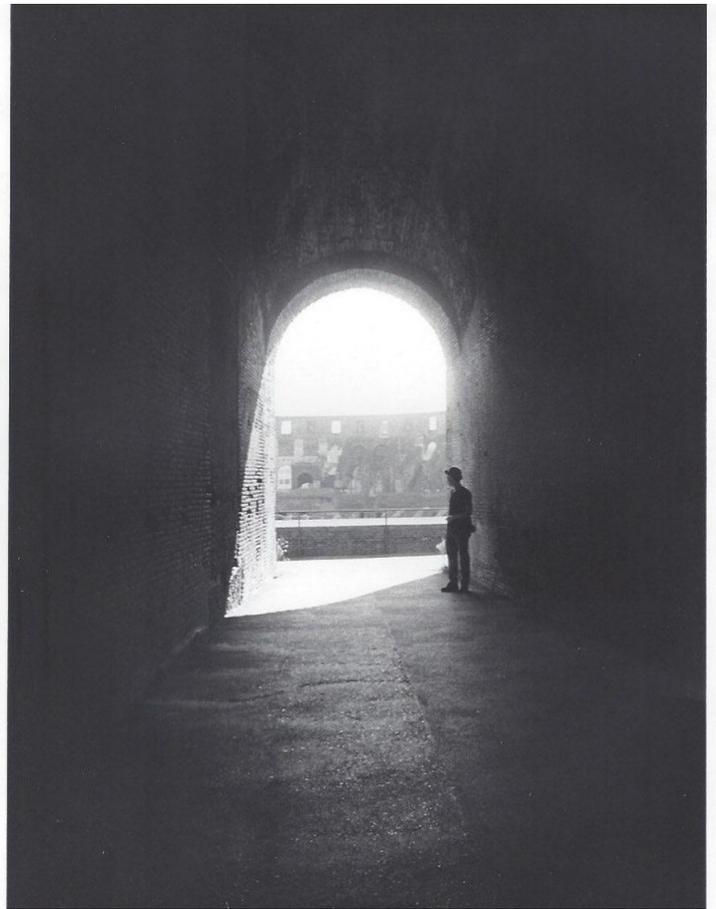


Photo by Neil Giordano

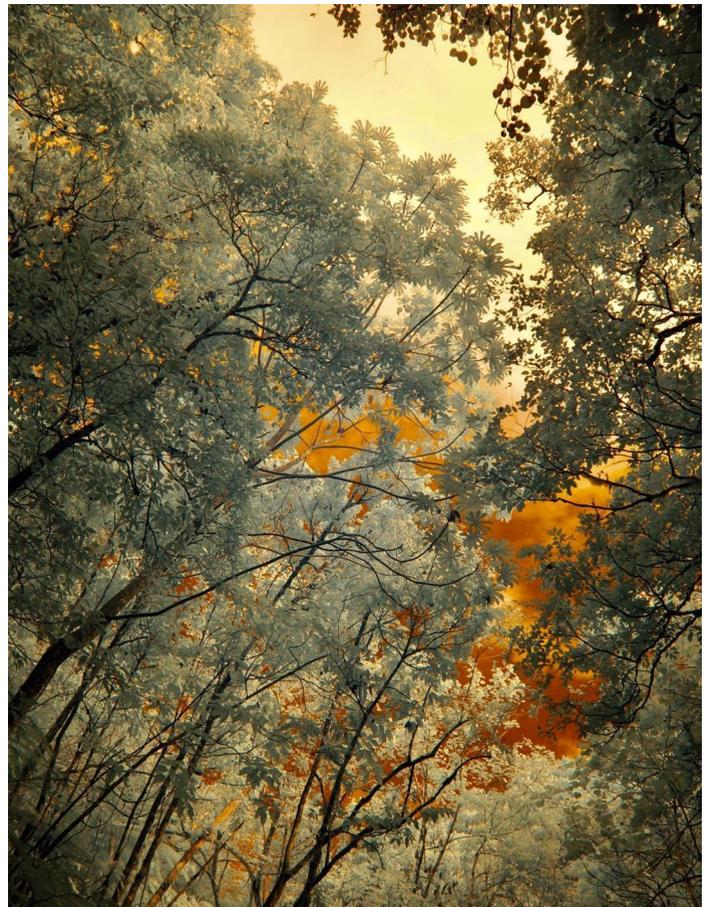


Photo by Neil Giordano



storm warnings Photo by Alex Laser

Hurricane Katrina: A Survivor's Story by Michael Meadows

Photos by Michael Meadows

"It's going to be okay," my mom stated somberly into the phone. "It's going to be okay. I love you. It's going to be okay."

My heart sank. My mom began to fight back tears in the 7th grade hallway of the Ocean Springs Middle School, which was currently serving as our shelter of last resort as Hurricane Katrina raged outside. Since my mom was a teacher at the local high school, we were one of the lucky families able to stay in this shelter for government officials only. We were given an entire classroom to ourselves, much unlike the experience of so many others in New Orleans and throughout South Mississippi. By the time of the phone call, my dad had been gone for over an hour checking on our house; we only lived 5 minutes away from the school, where I was currently a 7th grader. I knew something bad had happened. After hanging up with my dad, my mom turned to me. The tears were now flowing down her face.

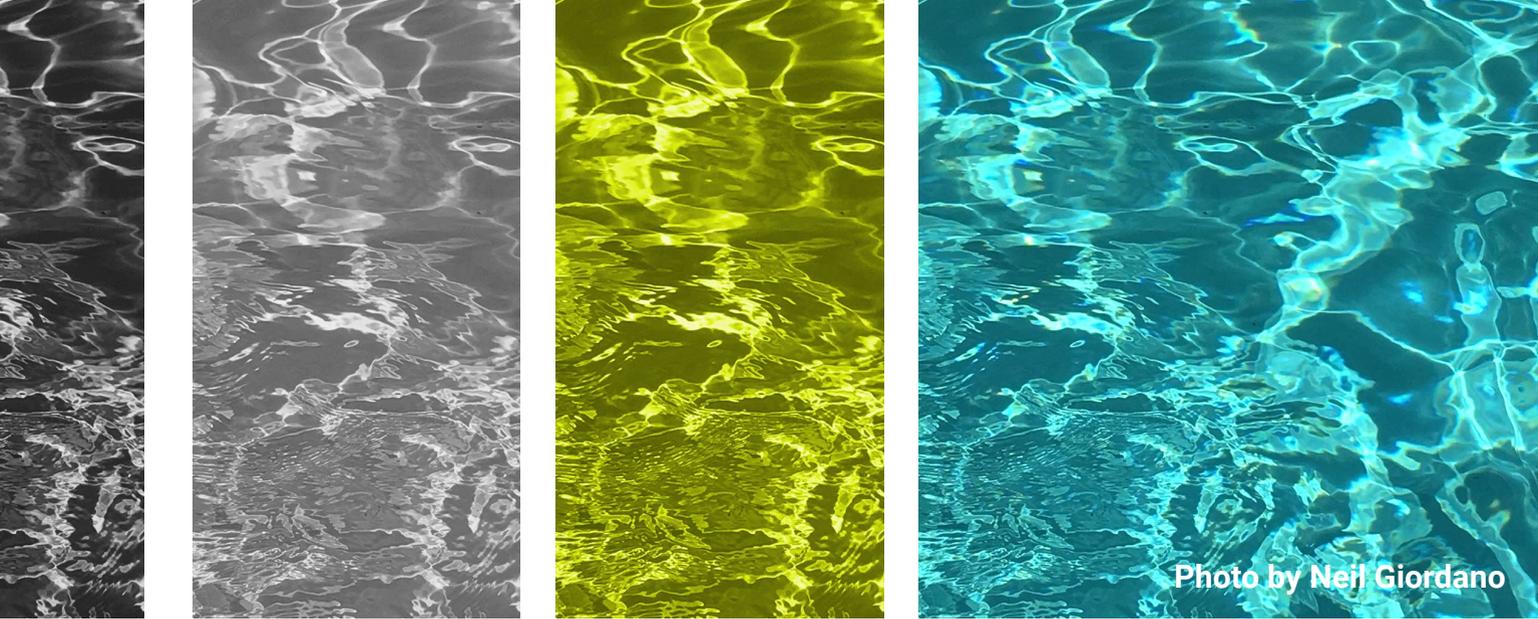


"Our house was completely flooded. Everything is gone."

Through my initial shock, only one thing was on my mind: "What about our pets?" Without answering, my mom looked away and cried harder. I spent the remainder of the afternoon with my siblings, silently waiting for my dad to come back. When my dad returned to the shelter that evening, after burying our pets, we quickly packed up the few belongings we had left and headed to my grandparents' house. Their house was just 15 minutes away, but perched high enough in elevation to avoid Katrina's record-setting storm surge. My brother, sisters, and mom rode together in one car, while I rode silently with my dad in the other. That car trip was the only time I remember seeing my dad cry, a heart wrenching moment for both of us.

Pulling into my grandparents' house that evening, I made a vow to myself to never harm another living creature. The pain I felt at that moment was debilitating, and I didn't want anybody or anything to ever feel that way. I lay on the air mattress in the living room that night, trying desperately to move beyond the shock and sadness to find the comfort of sleep.





Suddenly, I heard a splash outside – in an act of emotional release, my dad had jumped in my grandparents’ pool, despite the black color the water had turned from the debris that lurked within it from the storm. I ran outside to make sure he was all right, and then I heard him laugh. At that moment, despite the darkness surrounding us, I knew we would get through this.

The Aftermath

Walking into my house after the storm was simply heartbreaking. For me, it was no longer a home – it had become the metaphorical graveyard of my childhood and the physical graveyard of my dog, Jack, two cats, Treasure and Midnight, and my sisters’ two guinea pigs, Hermione and Ginny, who drowned there. As a 12-year-old, losing my possessions was certainly rough, and I can only imagine how hard it was for my parents who had worked so hard to secure their forever-home only to see it destroyed in a few hours; but, few feelings compared to losing all of our pets in one event, especially when we felt like we could have done something to prevent the tragedy. Upon arriving at the shelter on the evening of the storm, we discovered pets were allowed. My dad decided not to go back and get them because returning to our home required crossing a bayou on a bridge that flooded easily. He was concerned about getting trapped by floodwaters and being unable to return to the shelter, an





understandable concern in the midst of a major hurricane. Unfortunately, this proved to be a decision that would haunt my dad for a lifetime. My heart was truly broken for my pets, my parents, and my childhood.

While it's hard to capture the feelings of the aftermath of the storm in pictures, there is one photograph that still stirs an emotional reaction every time I look at it. The picture is of all of my two younger sisters' teddy bears lined up in our driveway the day after the storm, my parents' attempt to dry them out and salvage what they could. While most of these toys were eventually trashed and replaced, the gut-wrenching emotion triggered by this photo is the crushing of innocence it represents. My sisters, eight and 10 at the time of the storm, should have been happily enjoying their final years as true, innocent children before venturing into the challenges of being young adolescents. Instead, here they were: walking among a graveyard of their stuffed animals, mourning the lives of their pets and the loss of their childhoods as they knew it.

Leaving

About a week after the storm, my uncle who lived near Detroit, Michigan, drove down to pick up my mom, my older brother, my two younger sisters, me, and my younger cousin to bring us back to stay with him until school started again. School ended up being cancelled for just over a month, and my parents thought it would be best for us to spend some time away from the disaster zone.

Learning about the move was hard. My dad had been the food and beverage director of Harrah's Casino in Biloxi, which was completely devastated by the storm. While we knew my

dad would need to find a new job, it never even occurred to us that that might entail leaving the Coast. We received the call from my dad during the final week of our 3-week stay in Michigan.

“Iowa? Where even is that?” I asked my brother.

My remaining few months in Mississippi after returning from Michigan were a blur. We were among the privileged – my dad had a friend who had a rental house just down the road from my grandparents, and he let us stay there for free. It was tiny for a family of six, but it was much better than the conditions so many Black and Brown people were enduring in New Orleans and throughout the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama coastlines.

When school resumed in the same building that sheltered me during Katrina more than a month later, my friends and

I started a “club” for all of the kids who had lost their homes in the storm. We mainly just hung out on the playground and played foursquare, but there was solace in knowing we were not alone in this.

Perhaps one of the most comforting figures in the months following the storm was my resource teacher, who I had initially disliked before Katrina. Mrs. Harrell was in the shelter, too, during the storm and spoke with me and my siblings shortly after we found out the news about our house. Mrs. Harrell’s home was destroyed as well, but there she was, sympathizing with us. In my last few months attending middle school in Ocean Springs, she would check up on me frequently. The survivor bond was strong and served as a source of relief during this difficult time.

And finally, after saying goodbye to my childhood friends, the day came, December 16, 2005: the day when one chapter in our life ended and another began. That was the day when everything we knew about life was about to radically change. My mom had never lived in a different city from her parents in her entire life. Now she’d be 16 hours away. As we pulled out of the driveway, headed into the unknown ahead, we looked into the rearview mirror to see both sets of grandparents standing outside of our tiny, rental home waving at us. Sure, they had waved goodbye before. Every Sunday for 12 years, they waved goodbye as we set out to start our week, but knowing we would see them again for pizza the following Sunday. But this time, we weren’t sure when we would get to see each other again. We watched as my mom’s parents, who we called Oma and Opa, and my dad’s parents, Oma Rita and Opa Don, became

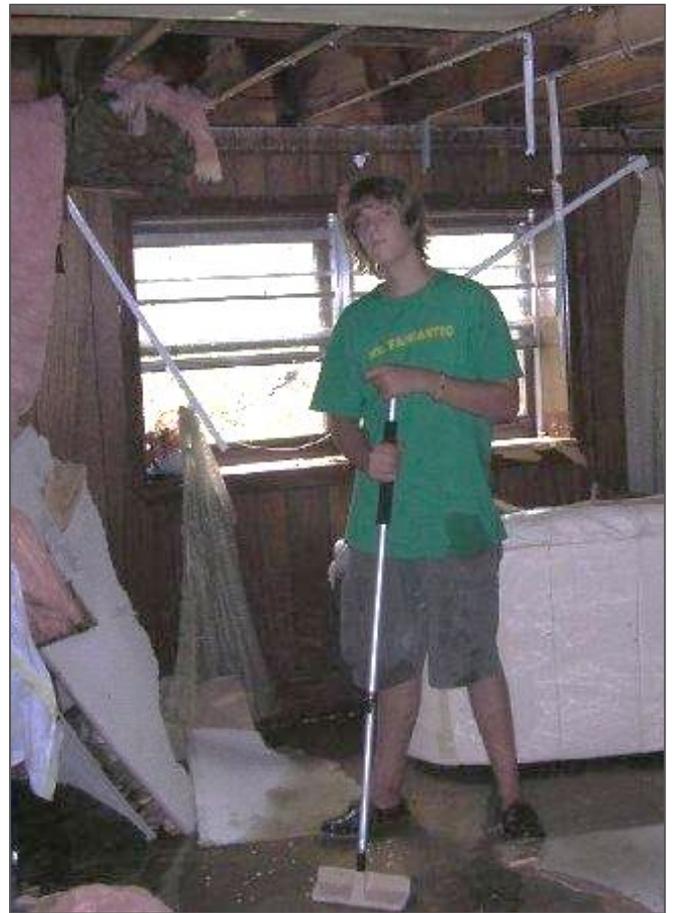




Photo by Allegra Atkinson



smaller and smaller out the back window. Opa had suffered a heart attack just a couple of years prior, and Opa Don was beginning to be in poor health as a result of years of smoking and alcohol abuse. We worried we may not see them ever again. Smaller and smaller still they became, but we could still make out the tears on their faces through their forced smiles. A life without my grandparents living within 10 minutes of us was a sad world to imagine. But, just like that, we turned the corner, and that world became our reality. Silently and somberly, we began the move to Iowa.

Becoming

Upon arriving in Bettendorf, Iowa, I only knew one thing about the state: Iowa stood for Idiots Out Wandering Around. I quickly learned this was an inaccurate representation of Iowans, because no one in their right minds

was walking around Iowa in late December. I once remember my younger cousin visiting us in Mississippi from Utah exclaiming, “snow!” when he saw the white sand beaches of Ocean Springs. If it weren’t for the fact that it was 16 degrees when we arrived in Iowa – a stark contrast to the chilly 70s we had been experiencing in mid-December in South Mississippi – I might have been able to mistake the eight inches of snow on the ground for sand.

We celebrated our first Christmas in Iowa in the Blackhawk Hotel, part of the Isle of Capri Casino where my dad had just begun his new job as food and beverage director. Unfortunately, here Katrina took another victim: my youngest sister’s belief in Santa. As creative as my parents were, it was hard to pull off a legitimate Santa visit in a hotel room.

When the new year started, the honeymoon period in Iowa finally ended, and it was time for my first day of school. I wanted so badly to be cool. In Mississippi, I was always just the quiet kid. I struggled to make more than a few close friends,



Photo by Alex Laser

and I was definitely not cool. But I saw this as a chance to change my identity, to fit in. This move gave me an opportunity to redefine myself; while I never became cool, I met some of my best friends for life in my first year in Iowa through both school and hockey. Without Katrina, I never would have formed relationships with any of my current friends or girlfriend.

In Mississippi, I was a hockey player. Being a hockey player was an integral part of my identity, so much so that my hockey gear was one of the only things I brought to the shelter. After the storm, hockey was crippled in South Mississippi. The local inline rink served as a shelter, and it took over a year to re-open. The local ECHL team suspended operations the year after Katrina because the arena flooded in the storm; it folded after just two years once the team returned. The world of hockey in Mississippi, once surprisingly thriving, was a bleak place in a post-Katrina world.

Iowa, however, gave me the environment to thrive as a hockey player. I had the opportunity to play more hockey than I would have been able to in Mississippi, and I dedicated my life to being a hockey player. As a result of Katrina, I now lived in a location where I had the opportunity to play ice hockey year-round and to develop on high school and junior (post-high school, pre-college) teams. My hard work paid off when I was able to become a professional hockey player for the Quad City Mallards – a dream that never would have been achieved had Hurricane Katrina not hit South Mississippi in August of 2005.



As the hockey chapter in my life began to fold, I met Katie, who at the time was the director of a local after-school program in Rock Island, IL. She was impressed with my ability to raise money when our team shaved our heads for the St. Baldrick's Foundation, and she wanted to bring me in to help raise money for Spring Forward Learning Center, her organization. I remember my first interview with her in the coaches' room at the hockey rink; she still gives me a hard time for staring into the corner of the room for the whole interview. I initially began as an administrative intern working with fundraising, but she pushed me to become a program assistant where I worked directly with students in an educational setting for the first time. My work with Katie and her program is what initially opened my eyes to the wretched inequalities that exist within our school system, and the power of educators to empower students to fight back against these inequities. She was pivotal in my transition from a hockey player to becoming a critical high school math teacher and a champion for social justice within our schools.

Reflecting

Now, over 14 years after the storm made landfall, I find myself here today in Chicago, in a graduate program, as a math department chair in a Chicago Public High School, with a dog, living with my girlfriend in a life that wouldn't be possible if it weren't for Hurricane Katrina. While the legacy of Katrina is often chalked up to its \$125 billion-dollar price tag or its 1,836 fatalities, the true legacy of the storm lies in the stories of the survivors, like those of my siblings, my parents, and myself. Our lives were forever changed by Katrina, and I believe everything that has occurred in our lives since the storm, positive or negative, can be traced back to this single event.



As I have become more critically conscious of the world around me through my experiences becoming a critical educator, I do often stop to think about how the fact that I am from a white, middle-class family has affected my story. I ponder how the color of my dad's skin played a role in how easy it was for him to find food and water, temporary housing, and a new job following the storm. I question how our socioeconomic status and skin color allowed us to so easily find a permanent home in Iowa. This time in our life was certainly not an easy one; but looking back, I think it's impossible to tell my story without addressing how my family's privilege allowed our story to differ so greatly from the many Black and Brown people throughout the Coast who experienced a much different aftermath.

For me, Hurricane Katrina became a blessing in disguise. While early on, my emotions towards Katrina were of hatred and anger, they have transitioned over time to represent thankfulness. I have been blessed with an incredible variety of experiences that I can trace back to August 29, 2005 – the single most important day of my life. Because of the storm, my siblings and I have felt a desire to give back to others, to serve in a way we were served and supported after the storm. So while Katrina took away so many lives, communities, and families, it is my hope that in inspiring people like myself and my siblings to give back to others, we can seek to rectify at least some of the harm the storm caused. I am a teacher and a fighter for my students – I wouldn't be here today serving my students and writing this paper if it weren't for Hurricane Katrina.

Returning



Almost five years after the storm hit, we returned to South Mississippi. Pulling into the driveway of my grandparents' house again after all of those years, we were flooded with memories; memories of the pre-Katrina days, the days where life was still simple and filled with innocence and lots and lots of warmth. It was revitalizing to have pizza again with my family and all four of my grandparents, still alive and well.

And yet, driving around my hometown, I felt lost. Many lots along the beach remained vacant; concrete slabs still served as tombstones for the beautiful homes that once lined these streets. Many businesses never rebuilt, and without these physical landmarks, I didn't know my way around. A feeling of shame crept over me. It didn't seem fair that while buildings and lives remained devastated down here, my life had been resurrected in Iowa.

While we were back, my dad, who like many chefs was also a professional ice-carver, took part in an ice-carving competition in the neighboring town of Biloxi where he once worked. For 45 minutes, my dad worked his chainsaw and chisel on four separate blocks of ice. As time came to a close, other competitors were finalizing beautiful dolphins and pelicans while my dad's ice blocks were still scattered about the ground. Finally, just as time was running out, my dad stacked the blocks of ice he had been working on so diligently. "Home," they spelled.

And it was true – South Mississippi will always be our home. Ocean Springs is the setting of my childhood and so many joyful memories of my youth. Although I do not ever intend on moving back to Mississippi, I cannot escape the fact that my life truly began on the Coast and is forever shaped by the events that took place there on August 29, 2005.

Photo by Allegra Atkinson





Photo by Allegra Atkinson

The Ball

by Jack Murphy

they presented me
at a halftime ceremony
of our last home game,
the very last game
St. Greg's ever played,
scrawled with names
and numbers, organized
by Mrs. Babel, who'd
snuck the girls out to
sign during class or at
lunch, and pulled me
out embarrassed to center
court to wave to the crowd
of alumni and students
while the girls screamed
and laughed-- that ball

has followed me to
three apartments, forever
without a dedicated spot:
no trophy case (I obviously
don't have a trophy case),
no mantle (I've never had
a mantle), no significant place.
Just sits in the corner
near the lamp or
under the end table or
down the hall. Just rolls,
sometimes in the way,
though usually not.

that very special ball
they presented to me
years ago now, dusty
and strange, out of place,
flat, jack-o-lantern orange,
melted sherbert orange,
orange soda orange, my pet
basketball, never dribbled,
never shot, retired, smooth
as a globe, buttery leather,
above ground time capsule:
Shay Floka #32, Stef G #1,
Holla Murphy Na Na #18.



Photo by Rafael Ibay

Belated Gratitude

by Tim Finnegan

You could always seem to find the mirth
In any situation—
Which, come to think of it,
Must have been hard to find
On the back seat of the Honda
Where you front-seat slept
Your way through an entire school year.
That baby blue Civic with rusted ridges
Tell a tale all their own,
But you're sliding on a burgundy tie
To make a first impression
On a bunch of impressionable minds.

You wore you like a character
From an office comic strip—
Bowling ball bellied guffaws
Erupting from a tweed blazer
And thick-black-plastic-owl-framed spectacles—
A pipe was all that was lacking.

I owned my freshman English class
With quick poetic ditties—
Capturing Shakespeare to the tune
Of Beverly Hillbillies.
You drank your Texas tea
From a life-worn Disney couplet,
With a pinky taking temperature
In your climate-controlled laboratory.
It's just a room, an English class,
But you were mad on science—
Of subjects predicating life
On empty modifiers,
Or hearing arguments levied
Against oneself, hurled by oneself.
The circus comes but once a year—
"But no, not so," says you.

Then after school, you took to turf
To sculpt young football minds:
To crash in pads, or crash the weights
In "shorts that show some thigh!"

I'd say you were ridiculous,





Art by Denise Billings

But that's not fair to you;
You proved that being serious
Must matter most to *you*.
You took your tie and tweed and thigh
To a third costume change:
An all-black outfit fit to serve
The local drunken horde
At Beekers, where the beer is cheap
And served in Dixie Cups
Because the clientele there can't
Hold in or onto suds.
They teach you local bullshit lore
To tune you in from Texas;
To them, you're not a Texan
Since their Lonestars are all Cowboys.
"Must have left my Spurs at home,"
You say, with subtle snark.
How do I know that came from you?
My stepdad drunks this crew.

I hope I'll never choose to judge
A man who shaves his face
Or perform his daily business
In a toilet's public place.
You had a world that you could grieve;
Instead, you chose to shine—
To sculpt a crew of hormone stew
And teach us how to think;
To argue things amongst ourselves
And pedestal our words.

Joe Mirtha ("Mr" to us then):
The time has come and gone
To thank you in a timely tune,
For decades drive us on.
But know that there's a chunk of you
Alive inside me still:
It rears its head in dry pen stabs
To separate the limbs
Of language—you said it such:
"A place for everything, there is,
And everything its place."
And when I argue with myself,
I bellow in your place.

Cathedral

by Mike Fieleke

A hard rain falls in the courtyard,
Pours off the roof of the cathedral.
Divine statues stare at each other,
Argue about who is most real.

Nothing compared to my mother's white hair
That set the sky on fire.
When her chariot came, she just disappeared,
What's real turned into a dream.

Mary seems frozen in stained glass windows,
But silence is a host.
She lives where my mother once was,
Where life has come and gone.

Where breath once seemed impossible
I find wind entering in.
She brings cricket songs in the evening
And enters me through my skin.

I wander dark paths of ignorance,
Hollow my eyes and heart,
But stars glow in darkness above me,
And temple bells ring in the night.

I'm called back to the cathedral,
The one that is every place.
Somehow this universe lives through us,
Unearned, underappreciated grace.

Vanishing Light

by Ana Tellado

Like lighting in the night,
Like a fleeting star that races as it burns,
Like daylight hours in a winter sky,
You came, you shone, you sparkled
For a little while

For a little while
We were drunk with the effervescence of your spirit
A catalyst of laughter and dance igniting everyone
Consuming the moment
Yearning for combustion

Like a flame on a short wick
Like a fire near water
Like an extinct comet to the human eye
You came, you shone, you sparkled
For a little while

Then darkness fell over the horizon
The curtains closed on the windows of your eyes
The fire drowned by sorrows
You flew, you sped, you vanished
For a little while

Those who watched you are left with longing
Yearning for your youthful smile
Wishing for an instant
To see you light the night
For a little while



Looking Back at Normal Sculpture by Maria Ambre

Something I Never Said

by Amy McMahon

upstairs in the back room,
I hear your short-heeled shoes
coming down the linoleum hallway,
making quiet steps as you enter my room

barely awake, I am hiding under covers,
in and out of sleep, I see your tight grey and brown curls,
your spongy polyester, pink pattern dress, your necklace
of beads softly clicking

the wood floor creaks as you come over to pull up
my blanket, the baby-blue afghan you crocheted one
grey sky winter

I look out to see the five and ten gold frames of kids and grandkids,
memories adorn the room, books and pillows, curtains and
stories, a light breeze flows in and out of the
luffing, autumn window

brushing my hair back,
you pull the afghan over my shoulders,
and sleep envelops me
in the fading golden light

as you gently close the door

Lies and Love

by Liana Kish

My son's questions are a constant and predictable part of our rides in the car.

"Mom, what's a galaxy?"

"Mom, what makes the colors in the sunset?" And my answers are just as predictable, backed by the laws of the natural world. But when my son asks me, "Mom, are you going to die?" I hesitate. I know the answer. My life is ruled by those same laws.

I know where this question is coming from. D.W.'s parakeet "got dead" on the last *Arthur* episode. Tweetie was buried with grand ceremony in a shoebox under the tree. My son was confused. What does it mean to "get dead"? When I try to explain Tweetie's death, I steal a friend's phrase: "Well, honey, Tweetie just came to the end of his life." But when he asks me about *my* dying, I find I can't use this phrase. Instead, I lie: "I'm your mommy, I'm here to take care of you."

I think of this as I stand in front of my class and ask: "Can deception ever be an expression of love?" Twenty-four ninth graders look back at me. It is not an easy question to answer. I want to believe that this is what I have done. I have deceived my son out of love. But this is not the whole truth.

My mind drifts back to a still, hot, lazy, Miami afternoon. I am on a school break and standing waist high in the pool. The air around me is heavy and palpable with humidity. I rest the open palm of my hand on the surface of the water, feeling its familiar resistance. A sudden storm of movement breaks the calm. It is coming from the large bougainvillea bush. The nest! My parents have been watching it. They have described it to me; the careful building of it, twig by twig, thread by thread, the appearance of the three eggs, then the chicks, the constant vigilance and attention from the parents—all visible from their living room window. They had told me all this over the phone, with me on the other end in New England, amused at their focus on such a small event.

I lean towards the bush and even though it's 90 degrees out, goose bumps spread across my body. There is a snake. I watch in shock as the snake takes one chick and swallows. Even though the chick is small, the swallowing is not quick. The mother bird is flopping and flapping around in a desperate attempt to keep the snake away, to stop what has already happened. The noise she is making moves me from shock, to horror and then revulsion. I want to run from this scene.

Instead, I grab the pool net and move slowly toward the snake. My fear and aversion make the few steps across the coarse grass difficult. I bang the metal pole on the ground trying to scare it away. My attempts are pathetic. The flopping pole mimics the mother bird, only I am silent.

The snake ignores us both and moves back toward the nest. It is unwavering in its mission and this unnerves me. I know I must hit the snake—but I can't do it. I don't want to feel its body even through the pole. The snake continues moving with a confidence that seems to say to me, *You don't belong here; This has nothing to do with you.* Another chick is lost and then the snake is gone, satisfied.

I stand in the grass dripping, ashamed, and still holding the pole.

This moment happened a decade ago, years before I was married and had children. I have kept it carefully put away-- this disturbing scene, my fear, my shame, the simultaneous violation and confirmation of nature's laws. But when my friend dies in October, it returns. She was 35. She was running a marathon to raise money for AIDS. She was married. She had two children.

At one time we had lived together as young single women and we were close. But over the years we moved on to careers, husbands, motherhood and lost touch. I hear about her death from a friend, on my cell phone, sitting in my car in the school parking lot. At mile 22 she collapsed.

I imagine the route filled with runners, a colorful line of jerseys snaking its way towards the finish line. I imagine it snatching her suddenly, unpredictably, and silently, the colorful line enveloping her, the other runners unaware of the seriousness of it all.

I go to her funeral but I am not a good griever. I am filled with anger. Her death feels unnatural. It violates the laws of childhood and mothering.



little bridge Photo by Alex Laser

Later people gather at her home. I feel like a trespasser stealing back into her life when she is not there. The hallway is filled with framed pictures of her wedding, family vacations and the children. I take in the other evidence of her: the grocery list on the fridge, the keys in the basket by the door, her hairbrush on the bathroom counter. I can't bring myself to go into the children's rooms but I know that is why I am there, to see them. And then, there she is, her daughter, Isabel. She is just three, a year younger than my son. As she makes her way through the sea of adults that has flooded her home, I follow behind her.

The need to talk to her, to reach out to her, is overwhelming. Acutely aware of her loss, I want to give her something. She stops in the kitchen and I follow her gaze to the basket of Halloween candy on the counter. I crouch down in front of her, taking her in. She has her mother's curls and blue eyes. She is wearing a blue velvet dress and is sliding her fingers up and down her dress pocket.

"Do you like chocolate?" I ask. She nods her head up and down once. She is watching me warily. As I look in her eyes, I see my son. I feel his hands cupping my chin to command my attention. "Mom, are you going to die?"

I open a small bag of M&Ms and place it in her palm. She gives me a small smile and disappears into the crowd.

The Congregation

by Jill M. Stone

I am the stranger passing through
catching glances across the room
what is this world I've landed in
that's both familiar and alien

They make the drinks here way too strong
the fumes are fueling every song
there is a mania in the air
that seems to mask a deep despair

The music offers every ear
a means to remember and forget
the people pour out their very soul
on the remains of a dance floor

The woman with a rat head looks my way
almost daring me to stay
as my companion melts away
into the center of the fray

Caught up in the tide
my inhibitions cast aside
the congregation moves as one
to the rhythm of the drum

The desperation begins to climb
the bodies whirling next to mine
we've lost our youth
we've lost our way
we've lost our soul

The singer in his Sunday best
whips out a smile and a promise
you must believe
you must rejoice
you must let go

This bacchanalia seems to thrive
on something hidden deep inside
once you name it, it is gone
but like a whisper lingers on



Photo by Rafael Ibay

The Cold Surface

by Laurie Paul

The cold surface is made out of small grains.
Grains from the North, South, East, and West.
Somehow they find their way to a common ground.
They merge together to create a surface.
A surface gathered by various people.

The cold-surface is sculpted into ambiguous shapes.
Shapes that become the table you sit on.
Shapes that become countertops were children peek over
to see what mommy is chopping for dinner.

The Cold surface is cold.
It becomes a surface that is misinterpreted by most.
It doesn't freeze the warm human parts.
It burns.

It burns the human body like methane ice.
Quite deceiving when used for misuse.
Looks are deceiving.
Emotions are deceiving.
Look beyond the cold surface.

Drawing by Elise Patterson



I Didn't Know How to Run

by Laurie Paul

I didn't know how to find my own strength.

I didn't know how to run.

I didn't know how to find a pace that would help me breath so easily.

A pace that would keep me light on my feet.

I didn't know how to find strength in my core.

To build the physical, emotional, spiritual, and soar. I never realized it would be a continual journey. I didn't know I would feel more isolation than consideration. I never realized my steps were so heavy and deep.

I didn't realize my own strength.

I needed to move more lightly on my feet.

I didn't realize how difficult it would be to rid the emotions that kept me from turning my shortness of breath into meaningful steps.

I didn't realize how difficult it would be to train and retrain my body and mind to believe in the process, believe in my core, believe in the rhythmic pattern of learning to run.

Drawing by Elise Patterson





pixelated sunset Photo by Alex Laser

April 26, 2020

Dear Seniors,



How are you? As I write this letter, I am listening to a YouTube playlist called Gentle Spring Jazz and the simple piano melody sounds like what it must feel like to stroll down a favorite street on a sunny day. I'm looking again outside my window and the sky is wrapped in light blue. It has been over a month since we've begun this quarantine, and I am finding it helpful to reflect on the good things (big or small) that happen during my week. I can think of a few right now. One good thing is I got to FaceTime with my nephew, Baby J, during his dinnertime; he's doing the thing now where he hides behind his hands and pops out for peek-a-boo! We're not at conversation level yet, so I mostly make funny faces as he laughs. Another good thing was I got to catch up with my friend (and former Senn English teacher), Mr. Laser. Each week we meet over video chat and hold creative writing sessions where for twenty minutes we do nothing but just write. It's a great way to hone our writing skills while encouraging each other artistically. One other good thing that I'll share is something entertaining I've been watching: The Last Dance on ESPN. I grew up when Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls were unstoppable in the 1990s, so this documentary is bringing me back to those joyful Chicago sports memories. **What have you been up to? What are some good things that have happened recently?**

I've been exploring the topic of storytelling in a powerful Ted Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and for today's writing reflection, I think it would be relevant as we lead up to graduation to reflect on some of the stories that helped inform our own perspectives during high school. I was a high school senior once too in my life, and as I reflect back on my high school years, I can recall a variety of memories that stand out to me. For instance, I can remember being a shy ninth grader and wondering what extracurricular activities to join. I always enjoyed playing soccer for fun, but at the time I felt insecure about my athletic abilities. I worried what my peers (who played on traveling soccer teams) might think if I tried out. I worried that I wouldn't be good enough, and so I never tried out. Now I just wonder what would have happened if I just put myself out there and tried out. I wonder how much fun I could have had playing soccer during high school. If I could give some advice to my younger self, or any incoming ninth grader, I would say, "If there's a sport or after school club you're interested in, then give yourself permission to see what it's all about and have fun. And try not to worry too much what others might think about you. We're all figuring things out along the way." **How about yourself?**

Lastly, when I think about my high school experience, I think about all the ways in which I grew and accomplished something (big or small) that I could feel proud about. As an English teacher, I thought I'd reflect on some pivotal moments that led me towards a path devoted to the study of literature. Believe it or not, back then in high school I was actually more interested in math and science classes. For a while, I even thought I'd go into computer programming. English classes intimidated me. I still remember the writing assignments that frustrated me at the time, and yet proved to be fruitful. From sophomore to senior year, our English teachers would assign us an In-Class Essay every week. We would have only one class period to write an analytical essay in response to a poem, short story, or novel. I dreaded these. Nevertheless, I believe that the repeated practice of writing under those time limits drove me to improve as a student of literature. I had to think quickly and deeply. My focus as a close reader sharpened itself, and I grew confident in my writing abilities. Along the way I discovered great writers like Dylan Thomas and Virginia Woolf, whose writings moved me to discover the sonic beauty of language while exploring what it means to be human. Who knew experiences like these would inspire me to become an English teacher? Certainly not me. Sometimes life is funny like that. **What are some moments from high school that you feel proud or happy about?**

Sincerely,

Mr. Ibay

Labor Day

by Jill M. Stone

Punching in and out of line
headed for the nearest exit sign
someone ignores my little yelp of pain
as they hurry to get off the train
a lady smiles because she understands
and wipes the sweat with the back of her hand
have a blessed day the lady says to me
automatically

Just missed the bus, I'll be late again
the hum of construction greets me like a friend
pass a group of boys putting on a show
and a girl with purple hair talking on her phone
the vendor on the corner gives me a wave
grab some papas fritas and I'm on my way
at the Family Dollar I hear someone say
all of this has changed

Gathered at the school that has long since closed
a carnival of souls make themselves at home
they discuss the latest news in excited tones
in front of tents all lined up in a row
a man greets me with an outstretched hand
I check my pockets which are empty again
have some papas fritas and he smiles at me
incandescently

Yes I am a person
I've been standing here this whole time
you couldn't see me until just now
cause your assumptions made you blind
apologies are nice but I'd rather you see
all the difference inequality
makes in the lives of the people you treat
dismissively

Another day at work, things never change
you don't really mean that I hear him say
because I talk to women everyday
and I have never heard them complain
I smile and swallow what I want to say
and count the hours til the end of the day
they extract a lot for a little pay
and it's a holiday
After work I stop and have a drink
and another just to help me think
got to be a better way I seem to say out loud
and get consensus from the rest of the crowd
I feel I'm working just to pay the rent
and others out there are living in tents
what we need now is some equity
and solidarity

Yes I am a person
I've been standing here this whole time
you couldn't see me until just now
cause your assumptions made you blind
apologies are nice but I'd rather you see
all the difference inequality
makes in the lives of the people you treat
dismissively

Yes I am a person



Photo by Neil Giordano



Passed Time

by Alicia Carrillo

Frozen at my back steps,
a chipmunk--
caught red-handed,
jowls stuffed with the fallen
possibilities she couldn't pass by,
couldn't choke down--
stares through the door
screened against coming and going,
heavy with unopening,
with passed possibility,
stuffy with worry
and loneliness
and stillness.

Still in my slippers,
hands red from scrubbing,
fallen jowls marking passed time,
I peer through the screen,
daring myself
to cough up the stuff,
to open
the possible--
if even
just
the door.

A Ghost Story over ZOOM

by Alex Laser

After following Google Maps from the Gonjiam market, South Korea, to the secluded forest, Ernest and his two friends, Erin and Sean, had found the abandoned mental asylum much as they had pictured it. As night was falling, they scanned over the vacant concrete facade with its windows gaping like the eye sockets of a skull. Barbed wire and fences surrounded the complex to dissuade adventurers who dared to enter.

“Looking back, I’d probably be more mindful of respecting the laws and the authority about trespassing,” Ernest, 32, spoke to me, his voice jerked by a lag in our ZOOM connection. “In my 20s teaching ELL off a certificate in South Korea, adventure was on my mind.” Since I met him three years ago as an English teacher in Chicago Public Schools, Ernest has always been, as he himself put it: “Interested in questions of the supernatural and paranormal.”

Even with the sunlit window behind him throwing his seated frame into pixelated silhouette, Ernest looks much as I remember him. Long black hair, signature turtleneck, and relaxed demeanor that instantly puts me at ease. I catch myself smiling in the ZOOM thumbnail at the top corner of my smudgy MacBook screen, reminded of our times writing together at The Perfect Cup Cafe in Chicago.

“You know this scofflaw ghostbuster image doesn’t really line up with the Ernest I knew in CPS,” I chuckled. I point out that in our time teaching at our North Side high school, Ernest was a circumspect scholar and instructor, ever the steady voice of reason to the dauntless teens in his care. Ernest laughs and admits that his young “passions” may have been kindled in part by Travel Channel’s reality show *Ghost Adventures*. He and his friends even donned black outfits in the fashion of the show’s vigilante paranormal sleuths.

Ernest’s enthusiasm for the occult is intoxicating, but my buffering inner skeptic catches up. “So did you actually see a ghost?”, I ask outright. He grins mysteriously: “I’ll let you decide.”

Photo by Emily Lew



Ernest's low-resolution image flickers. A shadow passes over it. Like so many Americans forced inside during the COVID outbreak, Ernest and I aren't much phased by the interference of bad WiFi. I pay little mind to the blip, dutifully trudging downstairs for a better signal and start the interview over. I relocated to a comfortable couch in the living room. We circle back to the Gonjiam Mental Asylum.

"The cool freaky part was, this building, that has been around since like the 90s, you would like, open a door, and it would be as if the place had *not* changed." Ernest remembers at one point discovering an old Coca Cola bottle from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Each room they explored presented its own spooky head-scratcher. In one, all the beds were upturned. In another, childish drawings were scrawled floor to ceiling on every wall. Yet another, dubbed by previous thrill-seekers as "The Hair Room", contained clumps of hair strewn about the floor. "If you weren't looking carefully, you would have thought they were dead rodents," Ernest notes.

Creepy, yes, but haunted I begin to wonder? But as Ernest threads his story, the creeping details draw me into a web, and I disconnect from the room around me.

"Do you hear that?" Ernest asks. He and his friend Erin freeze, and they turn to each other at the same time. A low growl echoes through the hallway. "Yeah, I heard that," she whispers. They shake it off, and head for the roof leaving Sean with the hair. Fingering the sleeping bag slung over his shoulders, Ernest remembers their plan is to camp under the night sky.

On the roof, the two find themselves in a caged recreational facility. Shattered glass is scattered across the basketball courts. Camping sounds less and less attractive.

"Let's get out of here," Ernest declares. Just then, Sean reaches the top of the stairs. As they look behind him, an orange light flickers in the threshold over his shoulder.

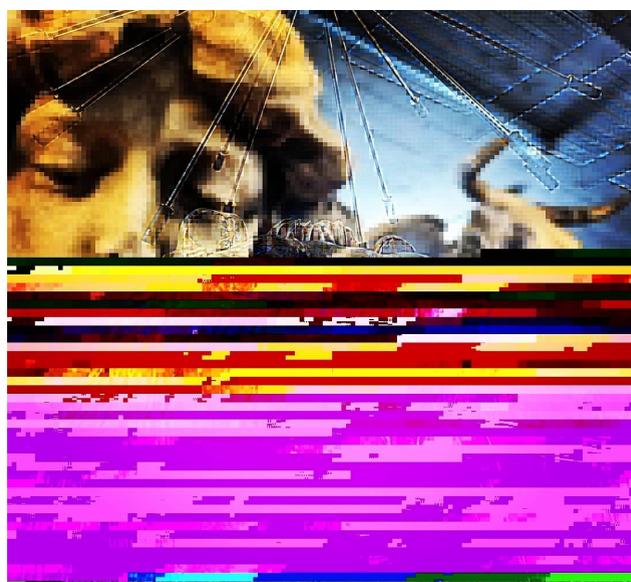
Suddenly, the ZOOM screen goes black. Connection lost. I'm back in my living room jolted. Are the ZOOM spirits telling us not to pry? When Ernest is re-admitted from the waiting room, he's nonplussed at my half-joking suggestion that the ghosts may be intercepting our call.

"Far out," he says nodding as if I've suggested nothing unreasonable. Without hesitation he picks up from the orange light.

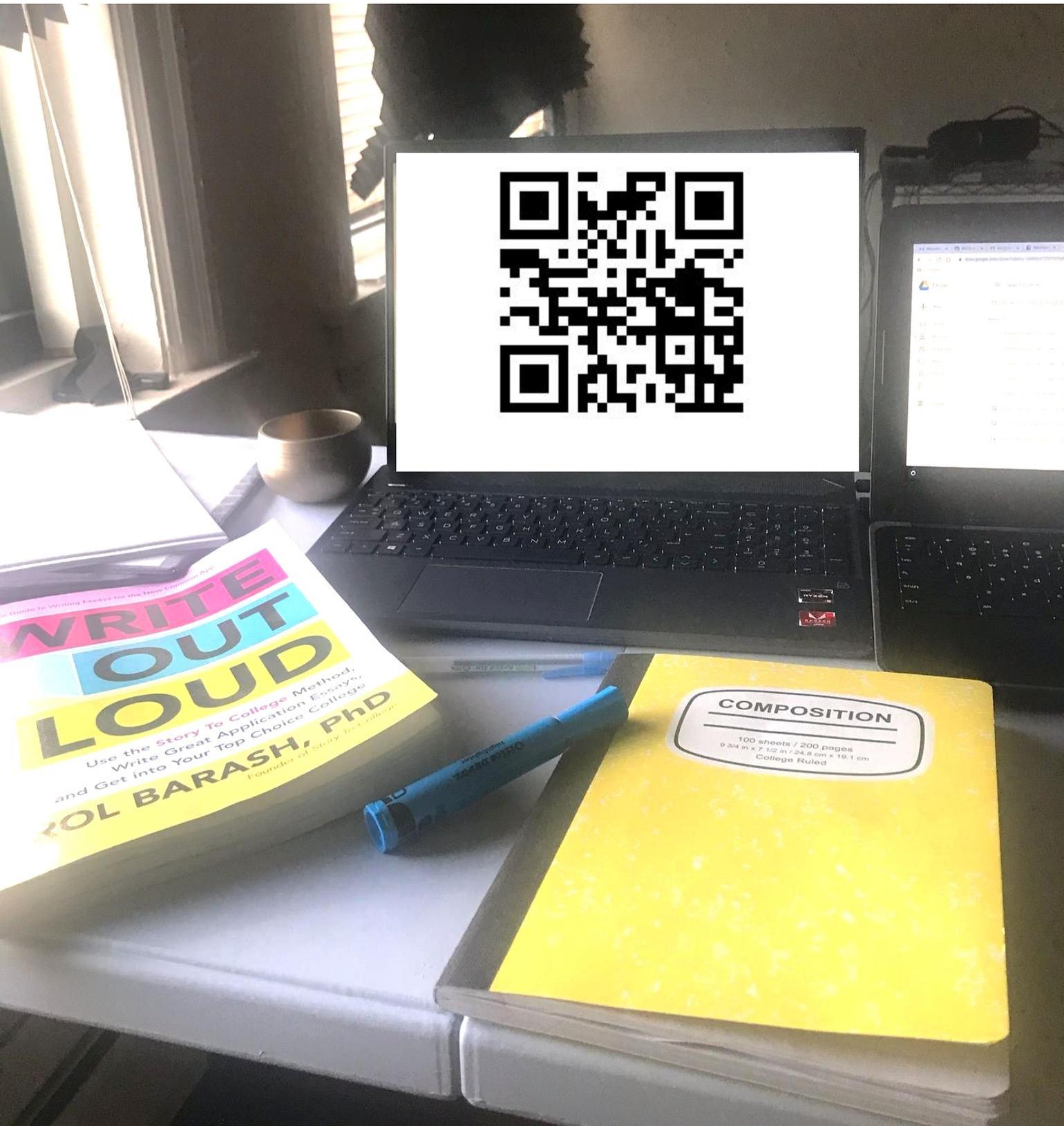
"It wasn't like a lightning bug or anything. We would have been able to tell. It was just a short, brief moment where we saw an orange light in the pitch black doorway."

Skeptic though I am, that orange light burns bright in my mind. I tell Ernest what makes his experience of the paranormal more believable to me is how unassuming the encounter really is. After all, I muse, why would ghosts want to announce themselves to us by rattling chains or shouting "Boo!" like a kid in a Halloween costume? I have to wonder, maybe ghosts are really all around us. It's only when we're out of our element -- in an abandoned asylum or on a pandemic inspired video call -- that we pause to pick up on the little signals that they're sending out.

Maybe ghosts always want to ZOOM with us, but we're just too busy to accept the invite.



glitch in the matrix Photo by Alex Laser



The Jacobs Sing Video by Stephanie Faris

Imagine Parody

by Maureen Kavanaugh

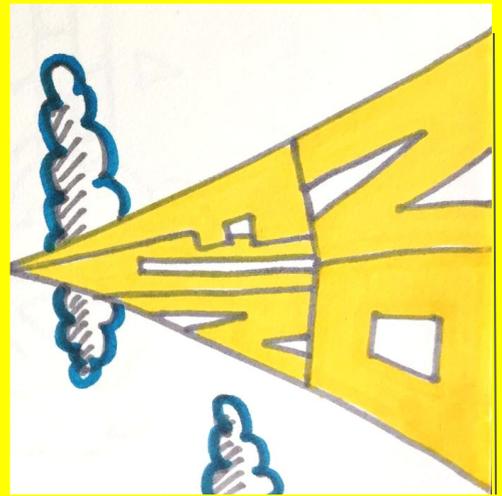
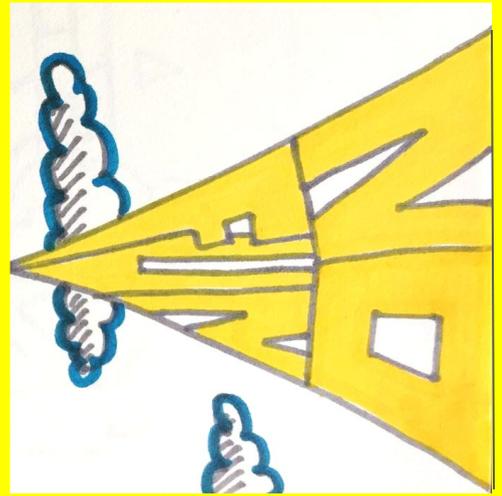
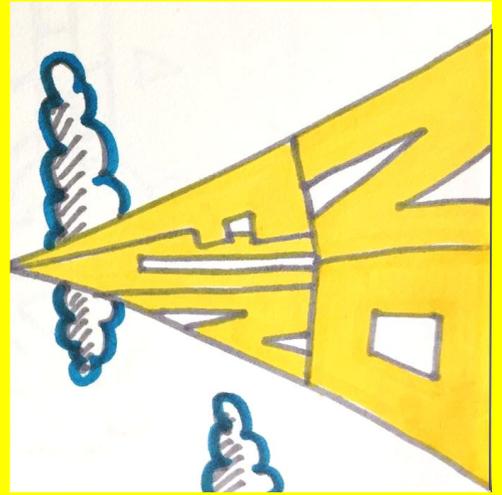
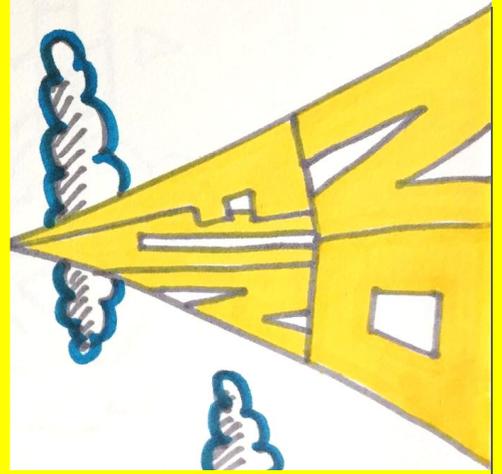
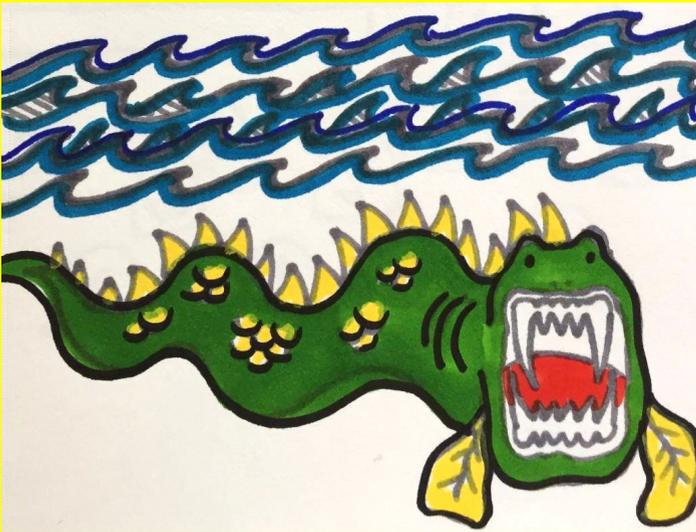
(to the tune of *Imagine* by John Lennon)

Imagine Zoom was lovely?
I wonder if you can:
No hoods, no blankets,
A perfect lesson plan.

Imagine students laughing
And chatting throughout class (hahah)
Instead of texting
And sitting on their ass (es)

Imagine all the students
Giving a shit or two
Youuuuu

You may say I'm a teacher
But I sure don't feel like one.
I hope some day you will join us
And the zooms could be some fun



June 2, 2020

Dear English IV Class of 2020,

As I write this letter, my last to you as your English teacher, the sky outside my window looks grey with hints of blue poking through. In these trying times, we must acknowledge the year isn't ending the way we envisioned. I encourage us all to take care of ourselves. When so much feels uncertain these days, I find that I can turn to literature for some wisdom and perspective. I'd like to share with you some words by Toni Morrison: "*I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.'*" I hope her words may provide some inspiration for you, too. And certainly, amidst everything going on, I wish to extend my highest congratulations to you all for making it to the end of your high school career. I feel so proud of you all and excited for what you will accomplish. **How do you feel about being just a few days away from graduation?**



Before we conclude English IV, I'd like to reflect on our school year. Together we achieved many goals and faced different challenges. You should feel proud of the significant growth you made as readers and writers, collaborating in Reading Groups, Fishbowl Discussions, and Actor's Studios to express your understanding in both critical and creative ways. Looking back, I feel especially fond of our *Hamlet* Unit, where you pushed yourselves as actors and directors, teaming up to craft your own dramatic interpretations, rooted in the language of Shakespeare, and revealing your own creative geniuses. In terms of other activities, I will miss our Mindful Moments, where for a few minutes we shared space to take a step back and just relax. Moving forward, I encourage you to continue to find meaningful ways to practice self-care.

Expanding beyond English IV, I ask you to consider your high school experience as a whole. Within these years we develop a stronger sense of identity, such as by discovering our interests, facing personal obstacles, and forging connections with new people. It was during my high school years, for instance, that I fell in love with indie rock, art house films, and transcendental poetry. Each of these things altered me in some way. They inspired me to seek out the unfamiliar and walk new roads. **What interests did you get into during high school, and how have they shaped your identity?** For me, there were defining moments in high school that stood out. One was during gym class. We were playing handball (think soccer but with hands). Feeling insecure, I decided to take it easy and play goalie. That is until the other team's captain came barreling down court, throwing the ball with such tornado force that I didn't have time to think—in a blink I hopped to the right, my hand swatting the ball away. My opponent shook his head in shock, my team whooped and hollered. This moment was small, but it proved I was capable of things beyond my comfort zone. It awakened a confidence that I nurtured throughout the ensuing years. **What was one "defining moment" during high school that changed you some way?**

At last, alas, some parting words. The ending to your senior year is a difficult one, but don't let this loss inhibit you from celebrating all that you have accomplished or from embracing the new adventures that await you. You all have come too far to not shine. Finally, thank you for being part of our class. Thank you for the energy you put forth each day. And thank you for being you. I cannot wait to witness the ways you and your generation will impact our world. May you go forth dealing good vibes that echo across time. May you find joy and beauty where you least expect it. And may you sculpt your lives like the evolving works of art they are. It's been an honor to be your teacher and I wish you the very best in all your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Mr. Ibay

Thank You

Amidst the backdrop of a rising pandemic and racial injustice, this zine's inciting event occurred over weekly writing sessions held on FaceTime between two English teachers quarantining from Boston and Chicago. What started as a recommitment to the discipline of writing quickly grew into a space for mutual support, creative exploration, and a shared understanding over the joys and challenges of teaching.

In this digital space we found connection in these dark days, and it is an honor to share this space with fellow educators both near and far via this zine. This zine which may serve as one bridge among social distances.

And so, we would like to thank our contributors, whose beautiful writings and art illuminate these digital pages, and in so doing, amplify and give voice to the many dimensions we carry and express as teachers. Whitman said it best. We are indeed large, and our multitudes cannot be contained!

And lastly, of course, we would like to thank you, the Reader. Thanks for checking out our art, and much apreesh for holding space with us.



Painting by Adam George

