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To contribute poetry, short stories, essays, interviews (or other creative writing), black and white photography, and other visual art, please send electronic submissions or inquiries to CRC-LJSubmit@crc.losrios.edu between October 2012 & March 2013.

Send three to five poems and up to three stories or other manuscripts (up to 2,500 words, MS Word or jpeg formats) per year. Also, include a 50-word bio written in the third person—to be used if your submission is published. Reporting time is up to six months.
President’s message
It is my pleasure to share the Spring 2012 Cosumnes River Journal with you.

This unique collection of works is published by our English Department and highlights the academic, artistic and literary talents of our own poets, photographers, and creative writers. At Cosumnes River College we strive to inspire academic excellence, personal growth, and civic responsibility. Our campus possesses a dynamic and supportive learning environment that draws from our talented, culturally rich, faculty and staff.

I encourage you to take a few minutes to peruse and reflect on these works of art—they are truly amazing!

Deborah J. Travis
President

Special thanks
CRC President Deborah Travis
Dean of Humanities and Social Science
Ginny McReynolds
CRC English Department
Beers Books
The Book Collector

We honor their memory and legacy.

Tribute
We dedicate the 2012 Cosumnes River Journal to our late colleagues and mentors Michael Crowley and George Knott, educators whose focus on students remains a legacy at Cosumnes River College.

Crowley, one of the first members of the college’s English department, was instrumental in establishing the standards and culture both in the department and across campus. He was an excellent teacher and mentor whose influence continues to permeate CRC.

All in all, Crowley spent 31 years at Cosumnes River. A testament to his passion for the arts, Crowley helped launch the photography department on campus. Off campus, Crowley continued to exhibit the most admirable of traits by volunteering at regional food banks.

CRC honored him with the 25th Anniversary Award for Innovation, Leadership and Service, and in 2002, the California Federation of Teachers awarded Crowley the Ben Rust Award for personifying leadership.

George Knott served students with excellence, educating and encouraging them toward outstanding academic achievement. Knott will be remembered as a Renaissance man in many ways. Humbly while he was effective at helping students understand the physical sciences and life sciences—from basic biochemistry to ecology, he was also an avid outdoorsman, inspired his friends and colleagues and earned our respect for being the consummate adventurer.

Knott was a great story teller and found ways to infuse physics with a spirit of poetry and encouraged his students to reject the notion that science (in general, and physics in particular) is boring; and

Knott was an inspiration to all of us for his spirit of resilience, for his consistent demonstration of compassion for others, and for being a true exemplar of openness and tolerance.

We honor their memory and legacy.
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Down on Historic Main Street, the merchants are walking down the sidewalks greeting one another as they move like a well-choreographed ballet troupe to their shops, unlocking the bolts and turning the signs. Some of them are bringing out wheelbarrows, while others fill a dish with fresh water for the canine visitors that will certainly stop by today. Several locals stop in at Centro for their morning fix. When the door opens, the smell of freshly ground beans and warm soft pastries pours out of the café doors. One by one, the open signs turn on and the parking spots along the sidewalk begin to fill. This traditional town has been rehearsing the same scene for decades and some of the local families have participated for over 100 years.

The Fausels are moving their goods outside the Hardware store and the Newstand doors swing with a loud creak. The wind blows and the leaves tumble down the sidewalks and across the streets. On the other side of Main Street the sweet smell of Sweetie Pie’s breakfast arouses every nose. The espresso machines from the soda works building are whistling loud and calling to the onlookers to come in and have a quiet moment and a hot drink. This town is full of residents that take comfort in morning walks and coffee with friends.

On the walking trail several cows line the paths near the fence. They too are making their way to their favorite morning spot to soak up the sun and lick the dew of the pasture grasses. The roosters are at it again. When the weather is cold they seem to wake up earlier, as if they were calling for the sun to come over the summit and warm up this sleepy little town.
Placerville is full of rich history. Stories of treasure, tradition and mystery have been passed on to generation after generation. Tales are told of the gold dust in the basement of Hangman’s Tree, supernatural sightings walking on the third floor of the Cary House Hotel, and guarantees of a year of good fortune if you catch a coin from the black cowboy at the end of the Wagon Train Parade. Placerville is a tight knit town of just over 10,000 people, who are either related by blood or married to her cousin’s, husband’s, sister’s best friend. It’s a town that takes comfort in continuing holiday traditions, and seeks adventure through living history.

It’s Black Friday. The creek that runs beneath the shops on the north side of Main Street begins to ice. Like cliff-hangers, the delicate icicles cover the rocks along the water’s edge. The carp become scarce and the crawdads seek solace in the crevices and caves behind the boulders. The kitchen workers on the deck from Las Goteras can be seen fishing in the small swell from the walking trail, solidifying the town’s disinterest in the Taqueria’s fish tacos.

As the day progresses, the townsfolk travel on the trail between the creek and the highway to check on their Christmas trees. The high school students take over Zia’s Café and the Courtyard Plaza. The regulars start to gather at the Liar’s Bench, the locals’ trashy watering hole. Just across the street in the Cary House Hotel the third floor residents talk about the Stan sighting from the night before. Stan was the desk clerk at the Cary House in the late 1800s. Stan is still very much a regular and is often seen coughing in the lobby late at night. On the upper floors many of the suites are rented out on a monthly basis to boarders.

They sit out on the wrought iron patio, smoking cigarettes and watching the town. They point out the tourists based on their parking skills and traffic etiquette.

As evening approaches the Star Volunteers prepare Historic Main Street for the evening’s event. The slowly put up the road blocks at 4:45 p.m. just in time to cause major interruptions to the 5:15 traffic rush. Everyone has known about the closure for months but they are still frustrated. Many will try to plead their case and squeeze in before the last cone is placed. The parking lot is full. Strollers and wagons are unloaded from each SUV and filled with children and blankets. The merchants have called for overtime, planning for a late night surge from irregular shoppers. One by one the people gather by the courthouse. They are packed in the street like little sardines squished in a can. Its 5:58 p.m. and the hum spreads through the crowd as excitement fills the air. Children laugh, dogs bark, lovers embrace, and the darkness permeates through the growing anticipation. The people begin to count. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six… Cameras begin to flash; everyone is looking up at the large evergreen sitting grandly on the corner outside of the District Attorney’s office. Five, four, three, two… The lights come on with a flicker and the street lights up as the colorful Christmas glow covers every face in the crowd. Cheers erupt, singing is heard and hugs are spreading like wildfire. The annual Festival of Lights has begun. The people spread out along the street to enjoy live music at the Bell Tower along with the food and festivities. There is a long line outside of Centro. Some are in line for the café and others are lining up for the stagecoach rides with Doc Wiser and his boys. The people don’t know exactly which line they are in but they know there is a line so it must be worth standing in.

Most people see it as another stoplight along Interstate 50 on their way to Apple Hill, or the 500 yard display of randomly decorated Christmas trees in December when they’re headed to the slopes; it is so much more. Placerville is a place that one leaves to seek out adventure in other parts of the world. It’s a place that welcomes the prodigal back several years later and the local shop owners still remember his name. This town is a place full of mysterious happenings that only frighten tourists. Placerville is a traditional town, welcoming visitors on their way through and locals back home, all with open arms and a hot meal.
“What lies behind us, and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when we bring what is within us out into the world, miracles happen.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The essence of Emerson’s statement is that it is not until one exposes what lies within, can one see the potential of oneself. I found this quote on the prologue of a memoir written by Victor Villaseñor. His book, *Burro Genius*, provides his narrative of growing up as a Spanish-speaking child in an English-dominated community. He was forced to repeat the 3rd grade due to his “lack” of English skills. His teachers claimed that it was because he was raised in a Spanish-speaking household; however, it wasn’t until the age of 40 that he was diagnosed with dyslexia. Despite his teacher’s opinions on a bilingual childhood delaying him, Villaseñor became a successful published writer. After reading this memoir, I grew aware of how bilingual education affected my own life. Fortunately for me, I had the opportunity of attending a bilingual school in which I gradually immersed into the English language. However, because of ESL tests and California standardized tests, my confidence in English did not exist the first few years of my education. I tested “Below Basic” many times, but this was because I was transitioning into the English language at the time. I once considered myself to be bilingual. Today, I consider myself trilingual. I am fluent in English, Spanish, and *Spanglish*. Each language is a part of me, and without one, the other does not exist. It wasn’t until I fully grasped the idea that I was trilingual that I could recognize that my native language and the language I was assimilated into not only connected me, but they connected with each other.

As most, my first teachers were my parents. They spoke Spanish to me every day and when it was time for me to attend school they wished to keep my native tongue in my education. I was enrolled and attended Washington Elementary School from Kindergarten until the third grade. I received four years of bilingual education in which I was instructed in 90% Spanish, and 10% English, beginning in Kindergarten. As I moved up grade levels I was exposed to more English. Instruction consisted of learning the alphabet, translating words, and speaking phrases in both languages. By the fourth grade almost all bilingual services were banned in California, and I was left with no choice but to transfer schools. I was at the 60% Spanish, 40% English level at the time. I had fairly grasped each tongue, yet I felt that neither could ever be integrated. Each belonged to certain people, and due to an abrupt elimination of bilingual education, I grew with the idea that each language was indeed separate.

The idea of a subliminal language never entered my mind. It wasn’t until middle school that I was able to delve into myself and find it. As I stutter stepped into my 8th grade English classroom with a sense of apprehension and a feeling that I “lacked” English competency. At least that is what those dreaded California Standardized tests results told me each year. I was below basic, and sometimes was “lucky” enough to be classified a basic. I didn’t know I had a gift. As usual, I walked to the back corner of the pallid colored room, and took shelter in a blue plastic chair. It was the first week, and blurred, unfamiliar vocabulary words were listed on the pearl white board. Ms. Turner, my teacher, began class by asking, “Can anyone recognize a familiar root word within this word?” Her serene green eyes sparked with interest as if something lay hidden and encrypted within the first word: *florid*. Unaware that my hand had rocketed upward, I murmured out, “flor,” uttering it more as a question than an answer. My heart raced with anticipation and hope that I had responded correctly. Her head nodded with excitement, as the wisps of her maroon colored hair moved up and down. “Exactly, Jose!” she exclaimed. “Can you explain to the class what *flor* means?” With the excitement that I was correct, I blurted “Flower! It means *flor*!” “Exactly, and the full definition of florid means a flowery and ornate complexion. By just having knowledge of Spanish roots, we can discover the meaning of words,” she explained. “In fact grammar rules and vocabulary that come from Spanish roots improve the understanding of the English language.”

That day I walked out of my English classroom with confidence. I walked away grinning from ear to ear. I no longer stutter stepped into that classroom, instead I strutted with pride. My languages weren’t separate, and English was no more important than the other. Instead it was languages that
influenced each other. Both languages made me. I realized I possessed something many other students did not. I became fascinated with language and literature. Math was no longer my favorite subject; instead it was the complexities of English that interested me. Math was formulaic and derived a direct answer, but with English an abundance of answers and discoveries could be made. I was amazed by the connection of words and how easily linked grammar rules were to the Spanish language. Perhaps this was the process for the final 50% English and 50% Spanish level in my life. Not necessarily practicing each individually, but using one for the other. It was Spanglish.

After that class even my parents saw the difference in me. Whereas before I disliked reading, I had now become a bookworm. From my room the sound of pages turning furiously, as I hurried to read my next novel, could be heard. Whoosh! Whoosh! The pages turned and turned, as I lay curled in my bed, nose nearly touching the book, eyes wide with interest. When I read, I was not reading English. I was reading Spanglish. I understood words and sentence structures better because of my teacher, who was the first to teach me about the connection of languages. I learned to appreciate literature and understand that writing was the process of using an internal language to express one’s thoughts. I looked through a new pair of lens.

I became aware that I didn’t just speak Spanglish with my parents. I spoke it with everyone! My sudden awareness of cognates (English words similar to those of the Spanish language) had influenced the way I viewed my native tongue and acquired tongue. With both, I had created another. When I spoke an English word or phrase to a peer, teacher, or friend, I spoke in Spanglish. Some root derived from Spanish within that phrase. When I would write, I would be writing with the benefit and knowledge of two languages. With Spanglish, I obtained an abundance of Spanish words that all had similar meanings, which all connected to different English terms. Perhaps that is why Victor Villaseñor became so talented. Despite his dyslexia, he had Spanglish. And that was something an individual carried: the ability to know and become literate in two languages, or learn a new language, without dropping one.

Despite the efforts and goals of banning bilingual education, I was able to keep my tongue. I know both languages, and that has influenced my view of learning and expanding on language. Because I speak Spanish, I can speak to my abuelitos (grandparents) and hear the cooing sounds of them calling my name, “Mijo or Josesín, Como estás (How are you)?” I am able to keep this relationship and respond, “Bien abuelitos, y ustedes (Good, and you)” Because I can speak English, I can communicate with my community and voice my opinions in more than one language. Because I can speak Spanglish (literally) with my parents I can understand the transitions and connections of languages when I hear them say, “Hola mio! Como te fue at work?” And I can reply “Exellente, or excellent!” because they are one in the same. And finally, because I can speak Spanglish (figuratively) I can understand the connection between: florid (flor); accompany (acompañar); announce (annunciar); envy (envidia), and so on.

In school, we are taught about sentence structures and vocabulary, but rarely to the connections of different languages rise to the surface. Bilinguals grow up believing that the focus is to achieve literacy in English, only. Native language is neglected. There is a lack of attention given to Native languages as it is considered non-essential to re-establish a bilingual educational system. Ironically, two years of a foreign language classes are required in order to complete high school. When I took Spanish in high school, I enrolled to improve my Spanish in order to retain my languages on both ends. My brothers (who now have “broken” Spanish due to a lack of bilingual education) are studying their Native tongue as an attempt to gain the language they lost assimilating into the English language. Because of people like my brothers, English Language Learners (ELL), and students striving to keep their native tongue, I fight to keep my gift. I pursue a dual-major in Spanish and English, and wish to become an instructor who can teach what I was once given. I am trilingual. Spanish is my native tongue, English is my acquired tongue, and Spanglish is the language that lies within me. Without one, my origin is missing, and without the other, the connection is gone. I need both, to keep all three. It is the only way my past and future unite to create the present: me.
So they’re making a movie out of *The Hunger Games*. I’ll be honest, I haven’t read them, and I’ll never see the film. I did read a few chapters of the second book while helping friends film a no-budget picture, and I didn’t like what I saw. Why, you ask? Well, I knew I’d hate it when I saw Stephanie Meyer loved it. Yes that’s right, they let another one of *those people* in the room. I didn’t read or see anything *Twilight*-related either. Actually, writers championing “traditional values” keep employing settings often used by progressives and free thinkers.

Now, if you’ll excuse the rant, there’s a point I’m trying to make. From what I could glean from *Catching Fire*’s repeated and ham-handed attempts to make me feel sorry for its narrator (honestly, after the brutality depicted by the likes of Toni Morrison and China Mieville, I was unimpressed), the novel’s about a girl balancing a life-and-death situation with a love triangle. What’s *Twilight* about? An unbelievable caricature of a damsel in distress caught in the middle of a life-and-death situation while taking a disturbing amount of angsty joy in a love triangle. See the similarities? Of all the lovely things fiction can do for us, why on earth do we keep coming back to the same gut-wrenching situation?

Because it sells, obviously, and there, dear reader, is the rub. While upper-middle class girls swoon and young gentlemen (that phrase must be sneered in the exact same manner as when uttered by Horatio Hornblower) study up on them for transparent attempts at seduction, writers with interesting ideas and their own distinctive use of the written word fall into the writer’s greatest fear, obscurity.

Looking around me, I see a society in decline, from our convoluted day-to-day management to the increasing lack of free thought, and now fiction must join that bloated, plagued list. After all, a society can be judged by the stories they enjoy, as much can be inferred from Ancient Greece by way of the *Iliad*, and the Enlightenment through *Candide*. And if that’s the case, this society values childish, predictable stories that teach the reader nothing, projects upon people with no personality and takes joy in repetition.

The question I’m forced to ask is why. What’s the appeal?

In the end, I suspect the fans of these two series don’t read the books because they actually want to, but out of social necessity. I remind everyone that the *Twilight* books lived in relative nonexistence until a sudden explosion around 2009, and in the space between this summer and news of the movie, I hadn’t heard a word about *The Hunger Games*. Until factually proven otherwise, I put the popularity of these franchises down to fashion, and if fashion dictates fiction, then we are all truly lost.

Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go re-read *Spartacus* one more time.

**LOOKING AROUND ME, I SEE A SOCIETY IN DECLINE, FROM OUR CONVOLUTED DAY-TO-DAY MANAGEMENT TO THE INCREASING LACK OF FREE THOUGHT, AND NOW FICTION MUST JOIN THAT BLOATED, PLAGUED LIST.**

that’s not true. I tried to read the first one, I really did. The mother of a girl I know will be my witness, if one be required. I didn’t last three pages, because I felt like it read for a manual on misogyny.

Unfortunately, I’ve left myself wide open to a counter-argument. If I’ve never explored the material, by what right do I condemn it? The witty non-answer to that question is that like people who damn video games as serial killer training platforms without actually playing one, so therefore I’m within my rights to call both series senseless cash-ins. The thoughtful answer is that I learn all of what I know on the subject from interviewing fans, and their reactions (hive-mind like replies for the most part) have prompted my unease.

Equally, I must point out that Hunger Games’ setting is a post-apocalyptic United States, joining *Twilight*’s butchery of well-known supernatural gimmicks. I must wonder why

To the increasing lack of free thought, and now fiction must join that bloated, plagued list. After all, a society can be judged by the stories they enjoy, as much can be inferred from Ancient Greece by way of the *Iliad*, and the Enlightenment through *Candide*. And if that’s the case, this society values childish, predictable stories that teach the reader nothing, projects upon people with no personality and takes joy in repetition.

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We kissed, we finally kissed! I wasn’t sure what to do next, but I wasn’t always sure we’d get to this stage. I mean, yes, we had talked about it more than just about anything else, and we were so comfortable with each other after such a short time, but I didn’t think we’d actually get to kiss. Not until just before she left, at least. Kissing had been the one thing we were nervous about.

Maybe I should back up a bit and fill you in.

Lauren was the love of my life, or so I thought at the time. To be fair, she thought the same of me. She’s a beautiful redhead, about an inch taller and a few years younger than me. Here’s the catch, though: we met online. Not on like a dating website or anything, get your mind away from those ideas; I’ve never been that desperate. No, we met on a website for our favorite book and became best friends instantly. It’s been nearly three years now and she flew out to stay with me and my family.

She and I have been crazy about each other for nearly as long as we’ve known each other and we finally got the chance to meet in person. We’ve been so happy to be with one another.
We had made food together, got ready in the mornings together, watched movies together, even cuddled in my bed together when I didn’t want to leave for school early and I snuck back into my bedroom. But kissing? Neither of us had our first kiss. Well, one was sort of forced on me back in senior ball—but that’s another story—and I don’t tend to count it. Lauren had said she could be my redo while she was here. We’d held hands, cuddled, laid in bed together, and even talked about kissing, yet we were too nervous to actually let our lips meet.

There we were on my bed just sitting listening to music and talking when we, together, said “we haven’t kissed yet” and turned to one another. We cleared everything off of my bed and just sat cross-legged facing the other. I was nervous. She was nervous. Neither of us knew how to start it, and neither of us really knew exactly how to kiss. It was very much the way you picture two kids for the first time kissing, both starting to lean in but ending up in giggles.

“What do I even do?” I asked her.

“I have no idea,” Lauren said. We just sat looking into each other’s eyes. It’s funny—she has eyes really similar to my own. I’ve been told my eyes are gorgeous many, many times. I remember thinking that if we were to have kids that they’d have absolutely gorgeous eyes. And I hoped they’d have her hair.

I’ve always loved redheads. I don’t know why exactly I always have when so many people aren’t attracted to them. But they’re absolutely beautiful. Their hair is gorgeous, their skin is the perfect creamy color, and their freckles are just downright cute.

And this redhead in particular was special; she was my redhead. But I think there was a real reason we hadn’t kissed. A kiss holds so much. Thus far, we had seemed so compatible but a bad kiss could be a deal breaker.

Would we get the fireworks you always hear about? Does anyone? If we didn’t get the fireworks, does it mean that the kiss would be any less special, though?

But if we did get that magical feeling, then we had an even bigger problem. We lived across the country from one another, and when she left we’d know exactly what we’d be missing while we were apart.

“Lauren,” I said. “I’m scared to kiss you.”

“Why, baby?” she asked me. She took my hand and brought it into her lap and held it, her thumb running along the back of my hand as our fingers intertwined.

“What if it doesn’t work for us? What if we don’t feel as in love because we don’t feel compatible when we kiss?” I was honestly afraid to kiss her at this point. I even tried to take my hand from hers.

“Stop fidgeting,” she said, smacking my hand. “Don’t worry so much, I’m not scared. And even if it doesn’t work, we’re still amazing together. Maybe it will come with practice.”

“And what if it’s the most amazing moment of our lives?” I asked, still nervous despite her reassurances. But I tightened my grip on her hand just enough for her to know I wasn’t going to let go. “Then when you leave I’ll miss you more than usual, and I’d hope you’d miss me too.”

“Then if it’s amazing, we’ll make sure to see each other far more often so we wouldn’t have to miss each other as much,” she said simply.

Suddenly she leaned forward and we were kissing. I was ready, but I wasn’t. The shock didn’t stop me from kissing back, though. It was short and sweet, but it was easy. Easier than we thought it would be. And then we kissed again. And again. And once more, just for good measure.

“That wasn’t so hard, why did we wait so long to do that?” Lauren asked.

“I have no idea,” I said. “Can we do it again?”

And so we did. The seconds turned into minutes, and the kisses progressed through the hours. We were happy to just explore that while we held onto each other tightly, occasionally turning so one of us was on top of the other.

“I wish I didn’t have to leave the bed tonight,” I remember saying, us lying side by side, still wrapped in the other’s arms.

My family hadn’t known there was anything more than friendship between her and I. Looking back, it might be for the best that my family didn’t know there was anything more between us at that time.

Still, leaving the bed that night is one of the only regrets I can truly say that I’ve ever had.

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I grew up the youngest of five children, the apple in my father’s eye. He would always say to me, the Hmong language is a beautiful, tonal language, more sung than spoken. When spoken with love, our lyrics can fill the room with warmth and happiness, engulfing every listener in a warm bath of bubbly tenderness. When spoken with hate, our words crash against the very foundations of our inner being, washing away layer after layer of sentiments. My father possessed the loudest of voices and, for that, the words he spoke in Hmong were felt the deepest in both worlds.

He filled the room with his voice, with his words. He sung about love, loss, and the transformation of the soul. To me, this was the very epitome of the Hmong language, to speak with deep, concentrated reflection about life, and its trials and tribulations. My father was my link to my native tongue.

“Change when the time is right, Mai. Don’t wait until it’s too late,” my dad said.

His voice filled my childhood. Words like, “kuv tub txai,” and “txai zoj,” meant I was being a good girl. “Koj ua txiv yoj,” and “meb nyuab txis pau da txis,” were reserved for those times I was especially naughty. I won’t translate them here.

At seventeen, I went off to college in San Francisco and leaped at the chance to become an adult. “Be responsible. Be a good girl. Remember who you are and don’t lose yourself in the city. Remember where you are from. Remember your family,” he said. He blessed me with his loud alto voice. I was enthusiastic while hugging him goodbye. The moment I reached the Golden Gate Bridge, my literacy slowly faded and hid like the city before my eyes. Five years serenely passed by and I found myself not being able to sound out the complex nuances of my language. Our deep father and daughter dialogues on life became brief conversations over the phone. I vaguely remember the few lines we exchanged with each other a couple of years ago, the ones that made me realize I no longer possessed the authenticity of my tongue.

“Hi Dad!” I said.

“Koj ua daj txis lwm?” my father asked, wanting to know how I was doing.

“Umm, not much, just working and studying.”

“Rau rau siab kwj thawb, noj kuv los?” (Keep working hard in school, you hear me?)

“Okay Dad, I’ll talk to you later, bye.”

“Lis twaj.” (Okay.)

These few lines in English made me feel ashamed because I couldn’t even speak one word to him in Hmong. I asked myself what I could do to brush up on my literacy. My craving tongue wouldn’t be satisfied until I found the books, music, or even simple lines to repeat over, to get me back on board with my father. My only hope was really to sit down and converse with him. Unfortunately, by this time it might have been too late.

I moved back from San Francisco three years ago to take care of my ailing father. He had been diagnosed with a chronic kidney disease and lost all mobility in his legs. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I’d witnessed the cycles of his blood running through the plastic veins on the dialysis machine. When he lay down on his bed and watched The Price Is Right, I’d looked down at my hands. These were hands that had felt a lot, built many dresses and shirts, had sewn plenty of buttons and seams. Here they were now, changing the linens on my father’s bed.

“You speak different. You’re too American now. Do you remember your language?” my father says to me. I look up from my hands and look into his eyes. Those eyes that had always watched me as a child, which had always burned with intensity and fierceness, now shone even brighter. With shame I replied, “Kuv ncoj kwj, tsix.” (Of course I remember, Dad.) He began telling me stories of the war.

He was running with his father through the dense, sticky jungles of Thailand, near the Vietnam border. They were escaping enemy fire. Explosions went off one by one, each one nearer to them than the one before. My dad could see a clearing. “This way, follow me, almost there.” Just a few last steps—CRACK! The sound of thunder shook behind him, the ground erupting in an earthen storm of splinters, rock and dirt. My dad was sent flying
across underbrush, landing on the grassy knoll of the clearing. He looked back and yelled.

“Father! Where are you?” No response from my grandfather. He shouted again, shaking the very banana leaves in front of him with the force of this voice.

“Get up Father, please get up!” Again, no response. A sharp, whistling noise pierced the thick, humid air.

BOOM! Another bomb went off, ripping entire trees from their roots. It was time to leave. He ran and said a prayer as he did so.

“I’m sorry I left you behind!” breathlessly and painfully, he paid his last respects to his father. There was no time. Soon, his father was just another corpse on the battlefield lying restlessly. My father ran into a house up in the mountains, built out of bamboo and wood. While sitting in front of a small fire pit, he grieved for my grandfather throughout the night. This was the time for tears and remorse; he had lost the luminary that once guided him, but gained his powerful voice in return.

More stories continued as the days passed. My father’s words sunk deeper and deeper as my language improved and I began to remember the delicate intricacies and subtle nuances of our native language.

Then one day, the words no longer sung in my household.

I fell to my knees. A ringing noise engulfed me as I pushed my way through my family members and just ran. I ran out to the hallway, shot past the pregnant nurse at the counter, and barged through to the open air. Like my father and his father before, I was escaping my enemy.

“We did all that we could.”

Like a poorly scripted movie scene, these six cliché words cynically became my reality in a terrible instant. They bit and snapped at me as I kept running. I wasn’t going to let them catch me, to let them drag me into their hellhole. I pumped my arms faster, quickened my breathing, kicked back with all the strength in my hamstrings. I pulled forward just a bit, enough to see the exit a few lunges ahead of me. But their bloodlust was far too great. The only thing that could satiate those words was to bring me down into their underworld of rotting despair. One nip at my ankles was all that it took. I tripped and they immediately tore into me. I screamed and wailed from the pain, but nothing came out. They took my voice, my strength, my father. My world went to red.

I’ve been grieving ever since. The house is so quiet now, my father’s booming voice sorely absent. His words gradually dim as my memory fades. How did that song go? “Kuv tub hlub, koj ncoj ncoj koj…” No, that’s wrong. He didn’t sing it that way. I screamed and wailed from the pain, but nothing came out. They took my voice, my strength, my father. My world went to red.

“I love you like a love song, baby! I love you like a love song, MOMMY!”

“Shh, Amanda, the family is still sleeping. You have to be quieter,” I say.

“Oh, I’m sorry!” Amanda yells back to me from the foot of the stairs.

I shake my head and smile, and then I look at her with wonderment. Amanda can always be heard above the fray of the playground; she can always be picked out from the rest of the kids because of her loud, booming—I placed a cupped hand against my surprised, yet growing, grin.

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Voice.

My daughter Amanda smiles every time I scold her. She laughs as I attempt to teach right and wrong. However, words that were meant to chastise and scold fall onto ears that no longer recognize their meaning.

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Voice.
Cardiopulmonary Teaching

I take my position to the right of Anne. I attempt to shake her awake. “No response, calling 911,” my co-instructor calmly says aloud. CAB. Circulation. Airway. Breathing.


And I hear a familiar sound as I began.

Click. Click. Click.

A single click, a single good compression.

Click. Click.

One and a half to two inches down. 30:2. Thirty compressions, two breaths.

Click. Click.

Every compression pumping the heart. Her fake heart. Twenty to 30% of normal.

Click. Click. Click.

I continue.

Click. Click.

It continues and I begin to tire.

Click. Click. Click.

And it comes to me, fading in slowly.

Crack. Crack. Crack.

The sound of ribs breaking as I push down. And then the sound of crepitus. Of broken bones grinding against each other. A slight rubbing and grinding sound originating from the chest. Reminding me of the first time I performed CPR on a real person.

Click. Click. Click.

I fade back in. With my set completed, my friend and I switch. And he continues. Again, it continues. We shock her with an AED and I pronounce she has regained a pulse. She is clinically alive. Once again, I helped save a dummy’s life. No thanks necessary.
I looked down
into myself this morning
    and beheld quite a mob
mulling around in the courtyard
waiting for a chance
to get into the action
of the psychic sun—
    a young conductor
was going over his score
of Beethoven’s Eroica,

fiddling with his baton.
Nearby a wizard
    was repairing his torn robe
with nothing but a needle
and a thread.

There’s a gardener with his unfortunate
black thumb
    and Orpheus
having a heck of a time
tuning his lyre—

suddenly a white doe
springs across the space
    and the dwarf
is handing out
fragments

of one of Sappho’s lost poems.
When the bells rollick at noon,
    everyone retires
to the Green Room
for a buffet

of loaves and fishes.
Sleep

My life is wasted
Supporting these people’s way of life
Cruel, incomprehensible ignorance
Happily they sip their lattes
In their sloppily put together outfits
As if no one would ever notice
That checkered shoes, cut-off shorts and wrinkled shirt
Is no way to go to work
I wake, my uniformed is creased, my boots are shined
And the rest of the world still slumbers
Look how happy they are
Unknowing of the world beyond this sugarcoated country
For a second, if that, their patriotism shows
Buildings fall and people die
And finally they wake from their nap
The president declares and units deploy
And once again they nap
The invisible shield is cracking
And I don’t know if they don’t simply notice
Or they just don’t care
And my life is wasted
Supporting these people’s way of life
Look how they stare and leer at me
“Poor fool” they say
“If he only knew that we just don’t know or we simply just don’t care”
But I know
That life is better spent in awe
And wide awake to the atrocities and nightmares
Than sleepwalking through it in ignorance
But sometimes
I wish I could sleep too.
The sun has set through my window, casting its citrus glow.
On the soft ripples of the sheets. Like memories of my slumber.
I look around to be greeted by warm welcomes and how do you dos.
This is where I am supposed to be. And at this exact moment, I’m certain.
I hear something, but there is silence as well.
Someone is calling, or something. I’m not sure.
I realize it is the clock whispering the time. Seven minutes past two a.m.
I should be sailing through the Caribbean. Speeding down a windy road with great precision.
I reply to the clock with a “I know already” sigh.
The cool Fall air brings gentle goose bumps to my arms, persuading me.
Making me aware of every breath I take.
The brush of my favorite silky seashell blue gown against my legs.
A light passes the window, dancing with pictures on the walls.
A low swish of a car becomes a gentle reminder that time still continues outside my room.
My body begins to nudge me. My eyes slowly opening and closing, readjusting to the darkness.
My tongue gliding across the backs of my recently brushed teeth. Tasting the mint residue.
This is the routine. One I’ve been religiously following since I can remember.
I awake to the sun or the bite of cold air. Get ready for the day.
The day full of disappointment and annoyances. Come home.
Do work. Home work, house work. Work.
But this is what I look forward to. This moment. Everyday.
I savor the thought and feel of having nothing to do. Just sleep.
All I need is sleep.
Sleep for as long as I am allowed.
And when I open my mouth I sang,
“Goodnight.”
I thought I knew everything,
but the more I know,
the less I know—
just to hold on to
the more nothing
I think I know.

Getting Older
After the Japanese, makurakotoba

I know over the Coast Range
the rough-cut seas exist, a mirume-filled bay
and the pencil-slim steeple on the bluff.

Here in the low hills, a hawk’s snow-dusted feather
lands on the fog-splintered railing.
    I hold my silent-mug of tea.

The white-frothed spill bubbles above the creek
where dust-borne grass is white.

The canopy of pines startles me,
    the bower-green candles quake
like sectioned harlequins. One tree, to the side
    is an origami, wrinkled into itself.

I finger my old robe, the elegant flat-feld seams
that never fray.

Soon, I will take the bone-dry pill, lay
on my tear-sodden pillow, misshapen and wet

watch the last purple-veined berry leaves
spotted and waxy, crawl up the lintel.

I think of warmer days,
    nodding narrow-needle grass
nasella cernua and golden-cheeked elderberry.

We gathered armfuls and cooked
yellow blossoms in our butter-creamed omelets.

They’re coming tomorrow, want me
to sell. But, I’ve made up my love-soaked mind!

“I won’t sign anything until…
    I talk to the temple-smashing prophet!”

Soundless, the arched-branched maple changes
to bright scarlet, like the soft-clip of a child’s barrette.
I love to read
In my chair so soft
I will read in that until my hair falls off.
I love to read in my bed
Until my eyes turn burning red.
I love to read in front of the fireplace
I will read at an incredible pace.
I love to read by the window
Where I can see the ducks doing limbo.
I love to read on the couch
Where I like to slouch.
I love to read in the car
Where we will go far.
I will read even if I am
Stuck in tar.
I love to read on the throne
Instead of answering the phone.
It doesn’t matter where I am
I will read as fast as I can.
As you can see...
I love to READ!
Oh dear thumb,
Separated at birth,
Not looking like the others,
Because of your girth.

Although you are alone,
And off to the side,
You are a special digit,
That numbers can't provide.

You keep things balanced,
You keep things steady.
You hold the fork
To eat my spaghetti.

Essential to hitchhikers,
Needed to eat.
Needed to tie
The shoes on my feet.

Thinking about
How important you are,
How much I would miss you,
If you go afar.

Could not join a gang
And throw up signs.
Could not type this poem
And space these rhymes.

Could not use the joystick
While playing a game.
Could not use a pencil
For writing my name.

Could not button my pants
Or play thumb war
Could not give a high five
Only give a high four.
the burglar
   with the giant flashlight

canvases the backyard
   with one colossal eye

when you look up
   she hides in the stars
Before the sun
Feeds the baby,
Starts the coffee,
Fixes PB&J for lunch,

Then rouses the school kids
Pours them bowls of Cap’n Crunch
Makes sure they’re ready:
Teeth brushed, faces washed

She drives them to school
Embarrasses them with “I love you”
Then goes home
To laundry, dishes, diapers

Costco, Safeway, puts gas in the van
Picks up the kids with a smile and a hug
Dance class, soccer team, roller derby
Solves for “X” while the pasta boils

Feeds them, bathes them, tucks them in bed
“Goodnight moon and the red balloon”
Straightens the house before falling in bed
Where she’ll dream of doing it all over again
“Oh, he’s back again.”
“In time for new stock.”
“Why do you think he goes through those old photos? Does he actually hang them at his place or something?”
“It’s just a thing people like to do. We wouldn’t sell them if people didn’t want them.”
“Hmm.”

He’s a young black teenager, still all gangly boy-limbs and a look of neglect to him like most kids in the city. Tattered shirts and Chuck Taylor’s. Comes every once in a while, combing through the vintage photos before taking several home for a dollar.

Only the curious and the poor creep around the little thrift shop, looking to save a few dollars or else bask in the nostalgia of the past. The rest of the shop was quiet—settled in with its dust and wooden aisles loaded with the memories and junk of things left behind. Outdated clothes, scuffed furniture, personalized wall plates, and battered books. A tangled kite hung from the ceiling. Different items were saturated with different smells—of the people who used to own them; their perfumes, foods, plants and pets remained like a coat of film on the surface of everything. “St. James Infirmary Blues” came onto the oldies station and a customer lost among the racks whistled along. The kid came up with a few black and white photos.

“That’ll be 50 cents.”

Out from his back pocket came two quarters, sliding across the desk.

“Find anything good?”
He looked up, casual. “Yeah. Usually do.”
“You keep a collection?”
“Kinda.”
“What d’ya like about em?”
He paused, as if he had never considered that there ought to be a reason. “I don’t know. Guess they just tell a story I’m interested in.” He gave a small shrug, pocketing the photos where his change had been and left. The older employee watched him leave, and thought it seemed odd that people would really pay for these, that someone would want to take home the flat, lifeless faces of strangers.

The rest of the day went on as usual, as people weaved quietly around shelves of knick knacks and faded colors. It was around closing time when the older employee eyed the open cardboard box full of photographs that she had usually thought of as just another piece of decor. It had a somewhat large clutter of faded and monotone pictures inside that had been nonchalantly rummaged through the entire day. Sometimes people would spend all but a few seconds looking it over, while others with grandchildren would point to it and show the younger inquisitive face how people used to dress.

The employee stuck her hand in, newly curious, and picked up a portrait of a freckled girl in a church hat, the sepia glazed eyes filled with a joy that was left behind from another time. Underneath that was a blurry photo of a spring garden, and another wrinkled one of two men in uniform standing by an old car—new for them at least. They seemed like rather average shots, just images of people who had now died in old age, probably outlived by families who had no need for old pictures for whatever reason. The employee turned the picture over. In a curly blue ink was written, “John and James Stausser. MIA.” Her eyes lingered on ‘MIA’ for a moment. Brothers, she supposed, gone off to war, never to return. She looked back to their faces. Same nose and eyebrows. Couldn’t be more than 20-somethings. Smiling together, unaware that they were never to return home.

With the photo still in her hand, the employee looked down to the box again. It was mostly smiles and new houses and babies and family portraits. She felt down a bit deeper, sifting aside the photos, some with a heavy gloss, and others wrinkled like autumn leaves. With both hands, she flipped them a bit flimsily so that the whites of their backs faced up. Her fingers reached for those with handwritten notes. “Grim weather in Philadelphia”, “Walter, KIA France 1944”, “We won first prize”, “Jakobs garten. Alles gut!”, “Please send this back! Jack and me, going to the movies.” She looked at the front of the photo after every inscription to see the faces of those who still had their voice decades later. They seemed like just simple recordings of a time gone by, but they had been recorded for a reason. They had once been important to somebody.

Then there were the more mysterious ones that weren’t so easy to give up their secrets—the ones with little to no information at all. A silhouette, a crying child, a car with a flat tire. On the back of another was a black scrawl, almost illegible: “Before it happened, 1914”.

“Before it happened?” She mumbled to herself, flipping the picture to see the front. It had a young woman in a long dress and floppy hat, sitting on a craggy rock. The ocean swept out behind her, the white caps blurred in grey motion, and a bit of wind brought up high stormy clouds and stirred dark hair around her face. ‘Before
it happened’? Before what happened? Why not say what ‘it’ was? The sea looked choppy and high behind her. Had she drowned? Who had taken the picture? Her eyes were gently fixed, not on the photographer, but off to the distance. Perhaps ‘it’ wasn’t something bad, but a quiet memory that the photographer wanted to keep to themselves. Frowning, the employee looked at the back again. She wouldn’t ever be able to know for sure.

She let the photos drop from her hand and back into the box, letting the flat photos rest within the grave of their lost stories. It was strange to think that there were lives within that box: wars and marriages, comedies and tragedies. A mere stain on paper was all that was left, and she felt a little bit sorry for them. To buy pictures of someone you didn’t know—why would anyone do that? Well, she reasoned, why does anyone read stories? She turned off the lights and pulled down the closing grate.

It was not a week later that the teenager came back. There weren’t any new pictures, as the employee had been keen to keep an eye out for some, but he thumbed through them anyway. The employee watched him, knowing that he was now reliving the fates of those people in the box. Her coworker whistled to Billie Holiday that buzzed over the radio and arranged the sad stuffed animal display.

The teenager walked to the register with a few more photographs in his hand. One of them had the woman by the sea. Before she could stop herself, the question tumbled out, “What do you think ‘it’ is?”

He looked at her for a moment, unsure of what she was asking. “Before it happened.” she said. Both of their eyes fell to the musty photograph.

“Oh, you mean this,” He shrugged. “World War One.”

“Why?”

“1914.” That’s when it started.” He answered confidently, like that the information was fresh from a high school textbook.

He slid his coins over without being prompted and turned away while the employee stood at the dawn of comprehension. She felt strangely relieved, for that likely bit of closure. But the rest of the box had no answers. What about the picture of the crying child or the flat tire? She would have to ask the teen’s opinion of those next time. To buy pictures of someone you didn’t know—why would anyone do that? She watched the teenager leave, and started to think about his story.
The call came during an evening episode of one of those highly-rated crime shows. Random dead body shows up (either somewhere glaringly obvious or highly unimaginable as a murder scene); the investigations, our show’s protagonists get called (usually interrupting an intimate moment); they arrive on the scene; start sprouting deductions within TV seconds of glimpsing the body; and hence initiate the start of a chase to catch the baddie to last the next fifty-six minutes of the show (commercials included).

The hospital room looked like any other one; too small to house the people in it, too large for the relevant occupants, with the now lone corpse stretched out in the middle of it. Traffic had been its usual nightmare, more so as it was the first time we’d dare drive up exploring the horrors of the highway in the night, hunting out the vague location. No one would be expected to correctly assume that the talking GPS’ directional prompts of ‘turn right’ was actually that – when death was on the mind. It caused a ten minute detour (really! does no one make room for a wrong turn on the freeway...); another few in the all hallowed search of destined parking spots; and then the chore of navigating the way through the labyrinth of hospital corridors; so in (finally!) reaching the destination and waiting to be admitted into the sacred door of the MICU: waiting to take a place as a concerned visitor; yet informed that the allocated role today was that of a mourner.

If the blinking machine still hooked up to the body did not have the still, infinite lines running on, still and long, one red, another green it would have been disconcerting to imagine that it was the soul – not the lifeless body – being fervently prayed for.

“Err...Excuse me,” addressed a male resident, who looked like he belonged on a spot on those medical dramas. You know the ones where the patients always pour in with diseases and ailments especially invented by overworked screenwriters which transform them (within a few TV minutes) from the hale hearty to enact the role of teetering inches away from death until the dashing brave new doctor would sweep in and exert all his labours of the next forty minutes in a somewhat vain (pun intended) attempt to find a cure for the impossible. Of course squeezed in would be the details skillfully juxtaposed with the success or failure in his own private (read: love) life. And, of course, there are the times when almost at the brink of giving into his lascivious desires – there looms the threat of the thread of mortality (no wait... I meant) mortality snapping. So while he attempts to break new (fictional) medical grounds, lady love (at least the one hired for those few episodes) walks right out of (the set) his life.

However in real life, watching the light extinguish from a loved one is not allowed to be processed by the timely numerous commercials – selling toothpaste, and life insurance, and a bunch of other drugs that (as informed in a fast, droning, monotone voiceover) may be the yellow-brick road to a similar hospital room. And the understanding sympathetic tone asking if the room could be emptied of the living bodies – (o.k. not exactly in those words; more like these: “If you don’t mind leaving the room for a moment, the doctor needs to pronounce the official time of death.”) – is genuine.

I can appreciate irony. The rain bounding, first off the roof shingles then onto the miniature lake forming on the parapet where patches would take turns falling onto not quite so unsuspecting victims already braced with their nylon umbrellas; the only remnants, a satisfied plop! of a natural compound colliding with a manufactured one until movement flicks it off joining others into invisible spray – just a trace of what was. While stepping inside, discarding our wet-specked coats we were guided to the main hall by the (fluffy hat wearing) fancy-dressed knight (?), then escorted in to pay respects to the living representatives of the vacant vessel of decaying frozen flesh.

Meeting a grieving family has its own state of affairs. For this there are those ready-made formulas to follow; the sympathetic smile; hesitant comforting pat (either on the shoulder or clammy arm); the (somewhat awkward) hug / (barely clasping) handshake as you murmur the standardized words of “I’m sorry for your loss”, “my sympathies”, “my condolences” (take your pick, better yet swap each with each alternate member—add some variety to the whole thing). The most suited were the words etched in sympathy cards tucked away in the bouquets – the basket of flowers agonized over upon for its appropriateness to the situation (hmm...are pink ribbons all right or too cheery, wait... there are red flowers in this one, replace now!)—now lined up with dozen others, another member added to the fleet of floral bridesmaids.

The body lay elegantly in the deceased prized gown; vestiges of pain and the last indelible moments of agonized breath carefully...
massaged away—features (manipulated) gently kneaded into an expression of peace and serenity (qualities bleary eyed mourners vehemently verified were only the peaks of those possessed). The ardent spying out of familiar faces and grateful diffident glance of empty seats in close proximity bore fruit. Seated in the midst of the other payees come to devote this time to a memory that will soon fade. Though quiet meditation and thought was on the menu, the instrumentals serenading in the background were more apt to create a different atmosphere. The dim hues and floral embossments could with some encouragement charge the atmosphere with a mood far removed from mourning. With them filling the void silence would bring lithe daydreams could easily encourage envisioning of cascading movements, gaiety and laughter.

The eulogies (become a bit scary). Each family member transmuting the voice of the silenced (awakening the inner defense lawyer to the rescue; emulating those late night law shows where the out of court drama unfolds quicker than the case at hand, and without that carefully written script their pathos getting the upper hand; ethos quickly forgotten; logos the tried approach extinct after the opening words).

Duty done, weary feet and minds made their way to the noble motored steel steed that loyally awaited their masters’ return. Sinking into the plush cushioned seats (anything was better after the couple hour sojourn out backsides spent on those wooden seats), key in ignition started the ride home back to plain life. As per routine the radio blasted a multi-million dollar canorous antidote of a country singer losing another love and belting out the manufactured heartache that came with it. But this time self-induced silence and reflection were the allocated companions on the journey.
When I Opened My Mouth

I sang…
I’m TIRED!!!!
I’m exhausted, I’m stressed, I’m frustrated and overwhelmed,
And onto this thin string of hope is what I held.
All this distress written on my face;
From the white hairs on my head,
To the lower bags that my eyelids trace.
Everyday, every minute and every hour of the week,
I’m working and thinking,
Trying to keep up with this fast paced, streak.
Homework, deadlines, exams and bills,
Here comes rent, my car, my phone and still,
The hours at work are not enough to survive,
But as a full time student
I have to keep trying and strive.
Working late nights and class early in the morning,
Knowing I should have gotten more sleep
As my classmates laugh at me snoring.
Tired at work but I have to give my best,
Eyes on the prize to pass
As this challenge is my test.
What it takes to succeed,
No one ever told me.
They say hard work pays off,
And here I am without a trophy.
The To-Dos,
To-Finish,
To-Begins’
And Don’t Forgets,
The late assignments I should of turned in,
The failed exams become regrets.
The laundry, cleaning, no sleep or no money to eat,
The sigh of relief in bed after eight hours on my feet.
The life of independence,
I should have known as the same struggles brought
down my parents.
How much longer can I hold on?
As I lose the motivation to stay strong.

The light at the end can sometimes become blurry,
Faith may be become weak
And life becomes full of worry.
But remember who you are,
Where you came from and why you first began.
Don’t forget your family, your friends,
And everyone else who supported you with a
helping hand.
Don’t let them down, and prove to yourself that you
can do it.
Fulfill your goals to live a better life, because you
know that you’ve been through it.
ALEX ARCA DO

Silence

When I opened my mouth to sing, to speak, nothing came out. Silence. I was in shock. What had once seemed like my whole world came crashing down in an instant. One simple phone call, the worst phone call I’ve experienced in my life so far. “I don’t think this is working out.” Complete silence. No words came out. I wanted to cry. I wanted to explain, to change his mind, to tell him how important he is. I opened my mouth to speak, sing, anything. Still nothing. I hear a puzzled “Hello?” on the other end of the phone. Nothing comes out. Complete silence. The longest, most terrifying silence. It ends with another “Hello?” Nothing. That’s when it happened. Click. More silence. Terrible silence, the kind that gets you thinking, and all I could think was, how am I ever supposed to get through this? And still no words came out.
When I Opened My Mouth I Sang

But all I could hear was the gunshots go Bang, Bang.

Somebody tell his mama that her son had been slain, by this cat name Cain.
I can smell the smoke of the guns way down, down deep in my lungs.
As if I had cigarette, but to my amazement I bet the police won’t make that brother pay his debt.
He can’t be blamed, for from his weapon the fire came.
This isn’t the life he exclaimed, t’was only the want, the need of money, bitches and fame.

When I opened my mouth I sang, but all I could hear was the gunshots go Bang, Bang.
I can see, in the back of my eyes, the haze as the weapon with a massive vengeance like a Fourth of July Blaze.
Somebody tell his wife that her man had been slain by this cat name Cain.
He lay dead in the street, as his blood oozes into the cracks of the concrete. To cover him up, for the coroner, it’s not a hustle, so the flies lay eggs in his flesh and muscle.
Onlookers start to arrive, only wanting, not needing, but asking is he dead or alive.

When I opened my mouth I sang, but all I could hear was the gunshots go Bang, Bang.
I can feel the shell residue on my skin, jumping from skyscraper buildings, flakes of the weight of a thousand dead men.

Somebody tell his daughter that her father has been slain by this cat named Cain.
He’s gone now up from where he lay, only the red fluid that remains tells his unfortunate dismay.
Funeral home with full attendance, giving their respects and stating their remembrance.
Who would’ve knew that dressing in crimson and garnet, that you would be assumed
Robert De Niro Has Got Nothing on Me

This is it, my big break. I was finally going to be a star, and not the kind of cheap, plastic, Hollywood vagabond, movie star. No, no no no, I would never sully my good name by participating in the arcane and frivolous world of moving pictures. I only take part in the highest of art forms; I’m going to be a star of the theater. My path to becoming a star commences now. I stand poised on center stage, ready to release a gale of raw acting brilliance. There are other so called actors saying their lines around me, but they are little more then white noise, for once I begin, the audience will be overcome with such a passionate gusto, they will forget there was ever another soul on the stage. Suddenly, the white noise dies down to a dull hum. After an unfathomable number of hours preparing my pristinely pitch-perfect pronunciation, the moment for me to deliver my line has arrived. I extended my arms ever so dramatically, propped my head back, filled my lungs with air, and when I opened my mouth, I sang out. “I’m Idaho the 43rd state. Take a look at me, aren’t I great?” The audience exploded with a roar of applause. As the praises rained down upon, my thoughts were confirmed. Isabel Jackson’s, 2011 kindergarten production of “The American States” was setting me on the path to theatrical stardom.
With a sour expression written on my face. Family vacations were always such a drag and sadly were mandatory. I mean really, what 18-year-old college student wants to spend a week in Switzerland with their parents and annoying brother? A week without them there would be great but they always made things such a drag. As we left the terminal, I saw my Swiss cousin Claudia waiting for us. Mid 70s, grey hair, heavy accent, and a moth eaten coat.

Not exactly the type of person that you want to party with while in Europe. We traveled on the train to the quaint town of Altdorf where there was a surprise party with all our relatives in attendance. My father was ecstatic, yet I remained annoyed with the thought of spending the next four hours with a bunch of older relatives. My mood began to soften when they brought out the most delicious food that I have ever tasted, and then the party really got started. Everybody was dancing and singing, including my family. I couldn’t help the smile that broke across my face. In that moment amidst all of my family enjoying themselves, I realized how precious this gift of family really is, and how I have neglected it for so long. Claudia sat down next to me and told me how happy she was that we were there with them. At that moment they began a new song, and when I opened my mouth I sang along.

"Marquee"

SANDY THOMAS » » » PHOTOGRAPHY
When I Opened My Mouth to Sing

If I cannot fly, let me sing.
— Stephen Sondheim

Every speaker has a mouth; an arrangement rather neat. Sometimes it’s filled with wisdom. Sometimes it’s filled with feet.
— Robert Orben

A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and sings it back to you when you have forgotten how it goes.
— Unknown

A bird doesn’t sing because it has an answer; it sings because it has a song.
— Maya Angelou

I remember when the candle shop burned down. Everyone stood around singing ‘Happy Birthday.’
— Steven Wright

Anything too stupid to be said is sung.
— Voltaire

Love, I find, is like singing. Everybody can do enough to satisfy themselves, though it may not impress the neighbors as being very much.
— Zora Neale Hurston

I hate straight singing. I have to change a tune to my own way of doing it. That’s all I know.
— Billie Holiday

It is difficult to produce a television documentary that is both incisive and probing when every twelve minutes one is interrupted by twelve dancing rabbits singing about toilet paper.
— Rod Serling

He who sings scares away his woes.
— Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come.
— Chinese Proverb
Artist Bios

**Jose Alfaro** is a current student at CRC, and will be transferring fall 2012, to San Francisco State University. He is a current athlete for the SCC swim team. He pursues a dual major in English and Spanish Literature in hopes of finding writing or teaching opportunities. He would like to thank the teachers, coaches, friends, and family who continue to support his dreams, so that they no longer become dreams, but truths.

**Alex Arcado** was born in Sacramento, California and now currently lives in Elk Grove, California. She has been attending Cosumnes River College for two semesters now. She plans on transferring to Sacramento State University and majoring in forensic science. She enjoys painting and being around the people that she loves.

**Jhellies Banaag** is a female student here at Cosumnes River College. She graduated from Monterey Trail High School and is now a junior at CRC. Her goal by the end of Spring 2013 is to transfer to UC Davis or UC Berkeley where she will receive her Master's degree in Psychology.

**Brandie Birchfield** moved to Placerville when she was in elementary school. After graduating from the local high school, she set out on a grand adventure through Europe and ended up in San Diego. She moved back to Placerville twelve years later. Brandie is currently working toward a Bachelor of Science in Professional Aeronautics.

**John Allen Cann** is a fan of Schubert, Szymborska, and Vermeer; he follows the Dodgers the best he can. He loves to tramp the bluffs of the North Coast. His son, Dylan, just received his first degree Black Belt, and his wife, Robyn, is a star 2nd grade teacher. He instructs English at CRC and a Room to Write class at the Sacramento Poetry Center, entitled Nobel Poets.

**Beverly Caouette** is a CRC transfer student with a B.S. in Microbiology from U.C. Davis. She is currently taking PHOTO 302 at CRC to help enrich her love of photography.

**Kayla Christensen** achieved her Associate's degree at CRC and is working towards her Bachelor's and teaching credentials at Sac State University. She writes recreationally; mostly fantasy, sci-fi and children's tales with the desire to inspire creativity and inspiration in others. Kayla currently volunteers at Franklin High Library.

**Emily Curtis** is a third grader who is a voracious reader. She enjoys playing the piano and completes her homework and daily piano practice with almost no prompting. She loves to talk and perform. To keep active, she plays tennis, golf, and softball. She has just completed her fourth year of Girl Scouts.

**Ursala Dana** is a student at Cosumnes River College, who is majoring in Social Science. She plans to transfer to Sacramento State to continue her education. Her poems reflect her feelings of insomnia and the pressures of living in a city of violence.

**Nelson Garcia** was a member of the US Army for twelve years before deciding to give college a second try. He is married to a very supportive wife, and has three overly active children. He has been writing since the age of sixteen and is currently majoring in English at CRC.

When **Allison Her** was first introduced to photography two years ago, she fell in love with it. Her passion for photography got even bigger as she explored the world through the viewfinder of her camera. Every picture that she took made her notice the beautiful things out there that she hadn’t before. Allison is a nineteen year old photography major who enjoys taking pictures of absolutely anything that catches her eye.

**Tracy Hymas** is a CRC photography major. Her eye for photography grew through her world travels during her time in the US Navy. She has yet to find her particular genre, but enjoys a little bit of everything. Microsoft Windows photo gallery has published 2 theme sets of her work: Ghost Town and Dark skies. She’s grateful for all the CRC photo teachers and staff that have helped her excel in her knowledge of photography and accomplishments.

**Daniel Jackson:** Now how on earth did we get here? Two pages of unfocused hatred, from the looks of things. Funny that. Anyway, I’m a twenty-one-year-old antisocial misanthrope whose ambition in life is to become some demented cross between Mark Twain and Yahtzee Croshaw.

**Afton Kern** has been drawing since she was very little. She believes in the phrase “draw what you see” in order to understand the world around her. Afton has interests in many subjects, and is interested in doing illustration. She has had her work published in the Imagine FX magazine, issue 75.
Residing in Elk Grove, California, \textbf{Eugene Le} is a full-time student perusing a biological science degree with career goals in the medical field. He is an avid cyclist, musician since the age of 10 and certified EMT. Appreciating architecture, he hopes to one day design a human heart inspired skyscraper.

While \textbf{Ian Levy}’s list of achievements may seem somewhat anemic at this point in time, Ian would like to assure all readers he will soon return with a plethora of achievements and accolades.

\textbf{Dora Lorenzana} was born in San Francisco, CA and currently resides in Elk Grove. She recently decided to return to school after a ten year break, and will be graduating from Los Rios this May with an AA-transfer degree in Psychology, an AA degree in Arts and Humanities, and an AA degree in Social and Behavioral Sciences. She will be continuing her studies at CSUS this Fall.

\textbf{Victor Mendoza} is a beginning photographer that was fortunate to learn more about the early stages of photography by recently participating in a photo 420. He has become more appreciative of the tedious processes of early photography. He looks toward to the future in continuing his pursuit of photography.

\textbf{Ailsa Menezes}: reading is my drug. I enjoy words and stories, especially the delight and energy of creating one. I try to transpose my experiences—ones I’ve had and ones I wish to have—in my writing. A sylph of two decades, I lived nineteen years in Pakistan, New York, Karachi. Forging ahead, I travel and write whilst aspring of a career in the literary world.

My name is \textbf{Katelyn Morris}, and I was raised to notice the little things, to take time out of my life to see the beauty in my surroundings. As a result, I have witnessed many miracles.

\textbf{Appria Negrete} is a mythical being with deity like qualities, who resides in everyone’s outer consciousness. She is obsessed with microscopic harbinger of death and coral. Currently she is working on a collection of watercolors depicting pathogens. If interested in her work please contact her at Rainbowdeelight_916@yahoo.com.

\textbf{Gerry “GOS” Simpson} is a self-taught Visual Artist/Photographer whose work communicates positive images of his community and the people, places and interesting things around him... GOS” creates vibrant scenarios with the aide of his brushes and the lens of his camera... His main focus is to keep it simple so that the story can be easily told...

\textbf{Stephan Starnes} has always loved writing. He currently attends Cosumnes River College where he is an editor for its newspaper. When not writing, or reading J.K. Rowling or John Green, he likes to browse the internet, play video games, and pretend to be a rock star on his Rock Band drum kit.

\textbf{Jeanine Stevens} was raised in Indiana and has graduate degrees in Anthropology and Education. Her work has appeared in Quercus Review, Poesy, Alehouse, The South Dakota Review, Pearl, Cosumnes River Journal and Poet Lore. Cherry Grove Collections will publish her first book, Sailing on Milkweed in 2012. Her latest chapbook, Women in Cafes will also be released by Finishing Line Press this year. Jeanine is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers.

\textbf{Jeffrey Sumida} is his name. This is how his poem became: While playing a game, his teammate lost his aim, jammed his thumb and caused it pain. Although this was lame and his thumb was inflamed, an idea arose within his brain. He wrote a poem about his sprain and the rest is history, ain’t that insane?

\textbf{Sandy Thomas} is a third generation poet, author of These Stones and Matchbook Girl (Two Trees Indie Press), and women’s self-defense instructor. Her poems and images have appeared in Brevities, Medusa’s Kitchen, Ophidian 01, Poems-For-All, Poetry Now, Primal Urge, Sacramento News and Review, and Sacramento Press. Her email is s.thomas38@yahoo.com.

\textbf{Brianne Tufts}, eighteen, is a single mother of a beautiful baby girl. She has been writing fiction since elementary school, but this is her first attempt at poetry as well as her first publication. She plans to continue writing and hopes to start publishing children’s books.

\textbf{Mai D. Vang} was born and raised in the Central Valley. A self-proclaimed coffee aficionado, she channels the excess energy to chastise her young daughter—and occasionally write short stories she hopes her daughter will read when she’s in high school. As a current student at Cosumnes River College, Mai D. Vang steers in accomplishing Pharmacy school. Her fathers’ scolding words still resonates as her motivation.

\textbf{Chris Zgraggen} is majoring in International Relations with an emphasis in German, and plans on transferring to UC Davis. He also plans on attending law school after finishing his undergraduate work. Writing has always been a passion of his and he feels it is a great way to express feeling and emotion.