The Cosumnes River Journal is published annually by the English Department of Cosumnes River College, Los Rios Community College District, 8401 Center Parkway Sacramento, CA 95823.

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 2013 & March 2014.

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. Artwork can be submitted in three formats: original prints; high-resolution digital images (>300dpi at the scale of journal); or professional high-resolution scans (>300dpi at the scale of journal). Signed photo releases may be required with certain photos for submission. 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.
special thanks

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

president's message

It is my pleasure to share the Spring 2013 Cosumnes River Journal with you. This inspiring publication engages the mind and the heart with writings of life’s best hand-me-downs, whether clothes, traits or lessons learned.

A unique collection of works, the Cosumnes River Journal is published by the English Department and highlights the imaginative and literary talents of our own poets, writers and visual artists. Our campus possesses an innovative and supportive learning environment that draws from exceptional, culturally rich faculty and staff. At Cosumnes River College we strive to share the valuable hand-me-downs of academic excellence, wisdom, personal growth and civic responsibility with one another and with our community. Such treasures are evident in the works compiled in this newest journal edition.

I encourage you to spend a little time enjoying and reflecting on these writings and works of art. But a word of advice, handed down from me to you, just a few minutes with these creative compositions will turn into many delightful hours!

Deborah J. Travis
President

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We are sincerely grateful to our donors and supporters and for the many writers and artists who submitted their work for consideration. Thank you.
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**Inside Back Cover**

- *Photography* » SPENCER CAVE JR.
Having my First Child

The cold night of October 12, 1998 completely changed my life. While giving birth to my first child that night, I felt nervous and terrified. I had been dreading this night; I was not prepared to be a mother. I was 19 years old and inexperienced about how to take care of a little baby because I was the youngest of my siblings. I was spoiled; everyone in my family treated me like a princess. My family would always do everything for me. And now here I was all alone with my new husband who I barely knew. There would soon be many responsibilities: working, taking care of the baby, and paying the bills. Suddenly, I felt silence surround me. I then thought, What if I cannot do it? Who would help me?

I was so worried that I would have to do everything by myself for this baby. In a vulnerable horizontal position, I felt my tears drip down my face while staring at my husband’s face. The nurse brought my baby to my room wrapped in a white blanket and wearing a soft blue hat on his head. She placed him next to me on my left arm. I could smell my baby’s fresh scent connect to mine as we both inhaled and exhaled to catch our breath. The nurse said, “Congratulations, Mrs. Yang! You have a healthy little boy.” I looked at my baby’s soft face. I thought that he was the cutest little person in the world, but my fears overwhelmed me. I didn’t feel any bliss or pride between myself and the baby at all. I turned to look at my husband and asked him, “Hey, how do you feel?” He looked back at me and said nothing. At that time, I knew that he was not ready either. We both were unprepared for this baby. Then, I asked him again. “Sam, are you ready?” He said, “Yes, of course.” But I sensed his fear by looking into his eyes. We both knew that we had no family or friends around. I tried to think positively, but the situation was still overwhelming.

After only one day in the hospital, the doctor discharged me to go home with my new baby. I still felt like my brain was in the process of working on a blueprint to plan my new life with this baby. No matter what I thought, I could not come up with any solution for my problem. On the way home from the hospital, I didn’t say a word to my husband or the baby. Instead, I looked out to the window, allowing my mind to wander as the rain fell down on the road. The occasional din of traffic made me so annoyed because it was so loud, it was hard to think. My brain was working so hard trying to put everything together to create an image of my life that would include my baby in the picture. That very first night, I was just stupid enough to think about every single possibility of danger that can be found in the world. My baby could choke to death on the pacifier, or maybe I would roll over him during my deep sleep, or the blankets might cover up his face. I forced myself to talk with my husband about us working together to take care of our baby. We needed to build a stable structure for our family. Sam replied, “I’m comfortable and willing to adjust myself to any changes.” While I held my baby on my right arm next to me sitting in the dining room looking at him, I could tell by the tone of his voice that I could not trust him. I responded back to him, “Do you really mean what you just said?” I think I felt that way because my marriage was an arranged marriage. I still didn’t know him well enough to trust him. When I heard my baby cry, I would get so nervous. Nights seemed so long to pass by, I felt so depressed because of the sudden situation that I was faced with.

Although I tried to do my best, I was not very patient when my baby began to cry as I heard the widespread sound of melancholy roaming through my ears. I then closed my eyes and felt the throbbing touch to the bottom of my heart aching. I felt like my husband was no help at all. I got frustrated with him. I am not sure why; maybe it was due to the lack of sleep or because I was so inexperienced with being a mom. I tried to do everything to make my baby comfortable so he would stop crying. From head to toe, I felt my whole body sore by the time my baby went back to sleep. I
would crash on the sofa and feel like I just got back from boot camp. While sitting, I could feel my head and shoulders throbbing and the pains in my stomach increased gradually all over my body. Even when I became so tired, I could not rest. I still had to wash the baby bottles and clean up while he was sleeping.

My life was turned upside down. In addition, finances were still an issue; we both still had to work different shifts to survive. I still had to go to work. Sam said, “You go to work at night; I’m the one who has to wake up a couple of times to feed him and change his diaper, I should be the one who feels more exhausted.” I had to change my shift at work to second shift so my husband and I could rotate babysitting our newborn. I had no energy or motivation going to work in the afternoon. The quick snooze that I had once in a while by collapsing on my desk felt like my whole body was transformed and my energy was restored. I felt so worthless and guilty for not being productive at work.

As time went by, I noticed that my patience came more naturally. My worrying may have increased, but at least the day-to-day physical toll on my body was improving. As my baby got older, I began to ponder the differences between my life now and in the past. When everything was completely silent, I could hear the sound of his heartbeat in his deep sleep as he let his breath in and out. I said to myself, “Finally, my little boy is now growing.” He didn’t need his diaper changed as much as when he was younger. Caring for him became less difficult. My baby was able to sleep through the night. Going through the learning experiences of caring for my baby during the first couple of months, I learned to become a more mature mother to my son. I felt like my husband also had become more mature from the learning experiences we had.

In addition, I started to see happiness in my life. Sam would come home from work and say, “Dear, how was your day? Did you get any sleep today? How is my little guy today?” I started to feel the joys of having a baby and the connections between me, my husband and my baby began to grow. I have to say, I then felt more present minded being a mom to my son and a wife to my husband.

Now that I have four kids, I look back on my experience with my first child. I struggled through many hardships. I think that a young woman should not have a baby until she is done with school and is financially stable. The role of being a young mom is not an easy road for a woman. I feel there should be more resources available to young women about the role of being a mom. I believe that those resources will help young women to understand the experience and know how hard it is to care for a newborn of their own. Mine was a miserable experience. I wish someone had given me advice before I got myself into motherhood. I believe my life would have turned out differently. I will tell my daughters about the struggle and stress that young women have to face if they have kids early. I will implore them to finish their education first so that they will not have as difficult a time as I did.

One of the most important things I learned from my past experience was to trust my husband and to trust myself. Even though we struggled a lot in our marriage, Sam always has stood by my side to support me and was there to help out when I needed him.
As conservative Asian Christians, my parents felt it their duty to shield me from any taboo subjects—heavy emphasis on sex. Conveniently for them, the Venn diagram of sex and things they didn’t want to talk about was a circle. Even the word “boys” lugged around a heavy gravity that felt foreign in my mouth when said in front of their company.

So you can imagine that when I was in fourth grade, on the precipice of puberty, that I got one too many talks about how bad things would happen if I had anything to do with boys. Like, really, really bad things. My parents didn’t even tell me what things would happen; they just trusted that I would cower under their mystical, divine-given, sovereign power and I did. Let it be known that my parents never spanked me with a slipper for sport but if they did, my backside was always an unwilling target.

I didn’t know what would happen if I had anything to do with boys in a sexual—in “that way”, but all I knew was that it was all over if my parents knew anything about it.

Two weeks before Valentine’s Day, my fourth grade class was rehearsing for a musical. I had the sole solo because I was the only one who could confidently sing without counting the tiles on the floor. When we got back to the class, however, there was a note on my desk. Interest piqued, I picked up the nondescript piece of paper which said, “U have the voice of an angle and the face of a really pretty 1 too and pls b my valentine.”

See, normal children who grow up in normal households would take this as a sweet compliment. Maybe they’d even swoon, or blush, or giggle. But you know that familiar trope in horror movies where the serial killer leaves a note in cut up magazine pieces and the detective gets this sickening sense of dread in the pit of his stomach? Yeah. That isn’t even an adequate description of what I felt. My heart was going to break a rib. Oh. Fudgesicle sticks, I thought. I was dead. I was dead, dead, D-E-D, dead. Somehow my parents would know. They’d consult God or something and God would tell them what happened; I could see it now (“Good evening Lord Jesus, what did our daughter do today in school?”) (“Yo guys, you better check yo’ daughter, she’s receiving indecent mail”) and before I could tell them I didn’t start anything, they’d smite me with the special spanking slipper that contained the power of Almighty himself.

The serial love-noter struck again the next day and the day after that. With each compliment, I was attacked by fear, nausea, and vertigo. It was all very Hitchcockian. The serial love-noter even began terrorizing my two best friends, Lee Lee and Alex (the names have been changed to protect the victims).

At the fourth attack, I looked around the class with a murderous expression on my face. The serial love-noter was in this room. This had to end. My anxiety was bordering on diagnosable. So, I did what the detective did in all of those horror movies. I made contact with the serial love-noter. I left an unmistakable cease-and-desist order on my desk saying, “Please stop putting love notes on my desk! Or else something!” The vague “something” tacked on at the end of it made the note seem more intimidating.

But the serial love-noter didn’t stop. I was angry and I was taking it to Level 2: “Operation Nancy Drew,” so named because back then I was obsessed with reading about the girl detective—she always knew what to do. That became my mantra—“WWNDD?” So me and my two lackeys I nicknamed the Hardy Girls, went for the next week trying to find this kid. There were many red herrings and dead ends. My posse and I did our interrogating by the monkey bars and tetherball courts most days. On actual Valentine’s Day Alex got a note on her desk, but found it was just a simple prank from her school janitor uncle. And of course there were actual red herrings; me and my investigative crew had taken to eating Swedish Fish between playing “Good Cop, Bad Cop.”

On February 15th, we cornered him during recess. He was scribbling away in his familiar scrawl on some stolen Hello Kitty stationery and laughing to himself. Ricardo was our man, well, boy—a scrawny, little kid who had a seedy personality and a penchant for mischief. We knew it was him because he hated us, and after some grilling we found that he had been sneaking into the classroom two minutes early to plant his messages. Means, motivation, and opportunity, right there. Nancy Drew would be proud.

So we did what he deserved. We all took turns kicking the sugar out of him (quite literally, as he was chewing on a Blow Pop), and we walked away with a hair flip. Okay, well that’s not entirely true; Lee Lee shoved his face, but her pinky finger got stuck in his nose, Alex kicked him hard in the shin twice, while I did lots of finger-wagging for good measure. I also called him a “loud mouth prankster” because that’s the only insult I thought God would approve of. We did walk away with a flourish-y hair flip, though.

Maybe I’d feel bad today if he actually liked any of us for real, but knowing we were victims of a very stupid prank makes me feel a little better about my harsh finger-wagging. I’m sure God understood, anyway; he knows love notes are a serious crime.
So I had a small nervous breakdown the other morning. My daughter, Elfie, has been getting “mean girlied” at school recently. She’s in first grade, and even though I know kids are capable of this type of thing starting at birth, it’s been depressing because her school really focuses on tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion. That and, apparently, the caste system (they take multicultural studies pretty seriously).

The back story on this is that Elfie is part of a threesome—which we all know is the worst type of relationship unless you’re a guy having a fantasy. She’s become the girl who is dissed whenever the other two are together and the girl who is sought out whenever one of the other two is absent. The situation, in a word, sucks.

Anyway, we’re sitting at breakfast, and suddenly Elfie starts talking about how she doesn’t have any friends at all in her class. How everyone’s paired up, and no one plays with her. That she’s actually being picked on. And then we get the topper. Her big brother, who’s in the neighboring class (they’re all first/second/third grade combos), looks down somberly at his waffle and says, “Yeah, nobody in your class is nice to you. You should move into my class.”

At least it’s good to know that they’re keeping tabs on each other.

So my husband takes them off to school, and I proceed to... ponder. Then I start reading about bullying experiences on other people’s blogs. Then I start to fume. Then I start to do this thing where I imagine various crazy scenarios taking place and how I’d react to them. Like some kid cutting her hair and how I’d demand that the little bitch not only pay to have Elfie’s hair professionally cut, but work to earn the money by doing chores at my house and allow Elfie to cut her hair off as short as she’d like to. Because suddenly I’ve gone all “eye for an eye” psycho-biblical. And then I try to get a grip and imagine how Michelle Obama would react and try to bring myself back down.

I went through all of this in the course of about thirty minutes (I’m getting faster—when you freak out as often as I do, it’s important to be efficient). Unfortunately, I ended up sitting on the bathroom floor, in my robe, crying. Not because my kid has no friends. Not because my over-active imagination is clearly not a plus in these situations. I was crying because I couldn’t talk to my mom.

My mom died from cancer about a year and a half ago. About two weeks before she passed away, I distinctly remember my dad saying to my brother and me, “If there’s anything you want to ask her, you should do it now.” At the time, I couldn’t think of a thing. My mom and I were incredibly close. She’d told me her life stories. We talked every day. So after she died, I was caught off guard the first time a question came into my mind that I wanted to ask her—wished I could ask her—because I didn’t know the answer.

This bullying mess wasn’t the first time I’d wanted to ask her something. But it was the first time it mattered. It was the first time I really, really wished I could hear what she had to say. See, the thing is, I was in almost the exact same situation in third grade. I have my memories of it, but I wanted to hear what she remembered. I wanted to hear how she handled it. And, even though I know we’re going to get through this, I wanted to hear that everything’s going to be okay.

For me, and I think a lot of women, your mom is so much like that third, dissed girlfriend. She may not be your best friend or your favorite person to be around, but you invariably default to her when you need her. She’s always there, especially in a pinch. And there’s really no one else inside your circle quite like her.

Maybe that’s why those of us who’ve lost out moms feel so alone. Mothers are the third-wheel friends who don’t leave even when it’s clear that they’re “second choice.” Without them we lose our safety net. We lose our history. And worst of all, we lose them.

And that, in a word, sucks.

Tammy Soong

The Lost Wheel

SPENCER CAVE JR. » » » PHOTOGRAPHY
I was born in what people still call the “City of Lights,” even though the lack of electricity means the residents spend at least half of their time with the lights off. It is a city rich with the culture of its twenty-one million inhabitants, all of whom hail from different parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is a city that has been broken time and time again, but still manages to pick up the pieces and move on.

I was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and my mother made sure I knew it. We spoke Urdu at home, ate biryani and dressed up in shalwar kameez on the weekends. All of this I felt qualified me to be a Pakistani.

So when my parents first announced the idea of moving, I was all for it. For as long as I could remember, we had lived in the same red brick house in Dearborn, Michigan with the church across the street, the playground on the other side of the block and the library that I loved to visit just a couple streets over. It was so familiar, so boring. I wanted something new; I wanted an adventure.

Summer came, we hopped on a plane and there we were, in Karachi. It was really hot. So humid that just breathing in air was a workout. Our new apartment was empty except for suitcases, borrowed furniture and us. Gradually we made it our own, but unfortunately fitting ourselves into Karachi society wasn’t as easy as decorating the apartment to look like home.

I had to fly all the way to Pakistan to discover how American I really was.

My accent seemed to grate on the ears of those around me. Ignorant of syntax, I tried to speak in Urdu the same way I would in English, even going so far as to translate American slang. On top of my bad grammar, I couldn’t pronounce any of the words right. No one could understand me. Their solution was to ridicule me, and I finally learned how to keep my mouth shut. My teachers in those first few years really have no idea how lucky they were.

I practically choked as I downed glasses of locally purified (read: boiled) water, trying to drown the fire burning in my mouth as I ate at my relatives’ houses. Even the food specially prepared for our American mouths was too spicy. Refusing to eat anything was considered disrespectful, in this instance. In other situations it was important to politely refuse even a mint. All these customs and traditions just left me feeling extremely confused.

At the time, I didn’t think I would ever be able to fit in.

Until it rained.

The excitement in the air was so tangible you could almost lick it. Within minutes of the first drops falling it seemed like everyone in the building had congregated outside. People stood on the steps leading into the building, spilled out onto both sides of the sidewalk and even into the middle of the street. Formalities were forgotten as children, teenagers and even grown men enjoyed themselves in the rain.

We stood outside underneath the darkened sky, allowing the drops of rain to soak into our skin and cool our bodies just as it cooled the air around us. Rain in Michigan had never been so therapeutic. The troubles of the world were forgotten as the rain brought the city back to life.

In that moment I was just like everyone else around me. Someone who loved the rain.

Still, it would take years before I would familiarize myself with Karachi. Before, I would eat breakfast at Boat Basin. Sitting out in the open air on cot-like charpais, dipping deep-fried bread into potato and chick pea curries and breathing in the delicious aroma of spices. Before I would learn that standing on the Sea View beach, as the waves lapped at my feet early in the morning when I should have been in school was freedom. Before every street corner, every restaurant, every monument would ignite a memory.

There was still a long wait before I’d be able to call Karachi home, but I would get there. Eventually.
Peddling or peddling is not really popular in the United States due to strict health regulations and licenses. However, we may see or encounter American types of street vendors such as taco trucks in Los Angeles or hot dog, bagel and roasted chestnut stands in New York City or San Francisco. On the other hand, in Vietnam, peddling is everywhere from the big streets to any corner of the city. You can find anything at the street vendors from common products such as a cup of soymilk or a bag of herbs to fine-dining food such as bird’s nest soup or shark fin stew. What is the origin of peddling in Vietnam? Who knows? But over time, street vendors have become a part of Vietnamese culture. Peddling represents the uniqueness of the cultural aspects of each city in Vietnam.

Peddlers and their services have become cultural symbols since every street corner from the ancient Hanoi city to the modern Saigon city is imprinted by the footsteps of the street food sellers.

Peddling has existed for generations, and nobody seems to remember where, when, and how peddling was started. In the past, when supermarkets and fast food chains...
were not dominant in Vietnam, only local markets and peddling existed. People could find anything from a bowl of noodle soup, a cup of coffee, a bag of spices, or fresh local vegetables with a street vendor that could be found in front of nearly any house. In fact, people’s lives back then pretty much relied on peddling of street food. Not much traffic existed back then since people mostly relied on the public transportation or walking and biking. Only pedestrians and peddlers were using sidewalks, so people could easily access all the items that they wanted through peddlers without going anywhere. With the “don ganh” on the shoulders, which had two bamboo baskets slung from each end of a bamboo pole, the peddlers wandered around the cities from when the rooster was still sleeping peacefully in his cage till all of their products had been sold. For example, I still remember the clattering sound that my neighbor made every morning to prepare her “don ganh,” and the smell of her homemade sticky rice exactly at five in the morning like an alarm to wake me up. Sometimes, I could see her go home early in the afternoon, but on some bad business days, she did not get home till everyone was cuddling in bed.

It was an ideal world for me as I bought an ice-cold sweetened tofu pudding, or fresh and cold fruits such as watermelon, papaya, or pineapple in the middle of a muggy summer day from my house’s front porch without moving an inch. However, on a cold rainy day, nothing could beat a hot bowl of Vietnamese udon sold by a peddler, who delivered instantly to my house. My mom, once in a while, gave me 5,000 dong, which is a U.S. quarter, to buy treats. I felt like I was on an adventure while I was walking past the wares offered by peddlers, wondering, and definitely struggling to make a choice of what I should buy on that day since there were so many choices. One peddler always gave me extra meat when I ordered her “banh mi.” I remember the calls of a man selling sweetened tofu pudding, “Ai dau hu nuoc duong khong! Dau hu nuoc duong de” or “Fresh tofu pudding! Tofu pudding!”, and that shout was echoed mockingly by my parrot. Together, they made some joyful harmony.

However, the beauty of that cultural aspect is disappearing in modern society. In recent years, urbanization and globalization have invaded Vietnam pitilessly. Eight million people in Saigon and six million people in Hanoi are all packed in an area that is even smaller than Sacramento County. Hundreds of skyscrapers have been built. The international fast food chains such as KFC, Burger King, Taco Bell, and Starbucks have opened on every prime location of the cities. The cities are not up to date with all the new developments yet; therefore, the atmosphere in the city is always packed with the smell of murky water in the river, annoying honking noises of motorbikes, and trash, trash everywhere. The sidewalks naturally have become parking lots for motorcycles, and the peddlers have to walk and sell their products on the street.

Urbanization also has invaded suburban and country areas. Thousands of investors have bought farmland to build factories. People from the countryside move to the cities for jobs, and many become peddlers. Obviously, too many peddlers cause competition since spaces in Saigon or Hanoi are scarce. I heard many stories about two or three peddlers arguing and fighting over a street corner. Each of them had legitimate reasons to get that prime spot. For instance, one had sold her products at that spot for a long time by herself, but now, one day, there was another peddler trying to claim that spot since she set up her stand earlier than the other woman. In fact, that corner was not the property of either one of them, but there was no available space around. Day by day, those peddlers have become wicked to survive in the crowded cities. Many of them do nearly anything just to get as much profit as they can. The unstable growing economy has taught those cunning sellers all kinds of tricks and cheats to get a profit. For example, some lie to the customers, say that the products are imported from the U.S. or Australia, but the truth is those products are made in China. Putting all kinds of unknown, harmful chemicals inside the food, many peddlers no longer consider the consumer’s health to make their food look fresher and more appealing to potential customers.

When I think of Vietnam, I picture peddlers traveling through my neighborhood to sell anything from Vietnamese soup to tofu pudding. The peddlers’ shouts and the clattering sounds of “don ganh” have become an essential part of not only me, but also all Vietnamese people. When others still enjoy their sleep, the sound of peddlers cooking and preparing has started in the streets. It becomes a daily routine. When people hear those sounds, they know that it is time to begin a new day. Then, the calls at night from peddlers selling late night snacks tell people that another day has ended. With the little income from peddling every day, those vendors carry on their shoulders the burden of life, the burden of their families, and the future of their kids. They also are the keepers of this extraordinary culture. Peddling and street food will always be a unique cultural aspect of Vietnam; after all, they are the soul of the Vietnamese people.
All of the adults in my family argued when I was little, grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, uncle—everyone. But my mother was notorious for starting and prolonging them. I never knew what it was that set her off; perhaps it had something to do with her day, her husband, the family—Me. Mercifully, my brother and I weren’t always there to witness the verbal matches, but one time—at the age of five—I was.

It was a cool summer evening in the Bay Area, a common and welcome occurrence. The sky was painted with deep violets and blues, with yellows and oranges peeking over the horizon. Crickets chirped softly in the soil bed, interrupted occasionally by the cicadas. It was a perfect night to be out riding my bike or simply walking, but for some reason I was inside.

I remember an explosion of voices around me in the living room. My uncle who at the time was undergoing treatment for cancer screamed at my mother who, of course, screamed back in retaliation. In my family you don’t back down from a fight. I don’t recall what it was they were fighting about, but screaming in Chinese has a distinctive sound, full of random off-key pitches and shrill notes that would have made Beethoven’s deaf ears bleed. I never covered my ears when they argued; I just sort of lifted my shoulders up—Quasimodo style—and hoped that would be enough to muffle the sounds. It never did much, but covering my ears felt too much like crying. It was a vulnerable pose.

My father shortly joined them and I’m not sure if he took a side. Do you take the side of your wife, the mother of your children, or your dying twin brother? Needless to say, once he joined the fray the battle quickly got heated. As with any verbal exchange there was a lot of body language being thrown out: a pointed finger, a pointed jabbing finger, perhaps the other kind of finger, stiff shoulders, the tip-toe towering over your opponent; all of that was enough to overwhelm my five-year-old mind and send me into Flight Mode.

I grabbed my stuffed animal—a blue eyed white cat—and headed outside to the backyard. I silently sat on the swing and trembled. While the door to the house was closed, I could still hear them and see it through the glass pane. I could see my uncle, frail and thin from his chemotherapy, shouting himself red. In a fit of rage, he picked up my giant stuffed tiger and threw it across the room. It didn’t hurt my feelings; I wasn’t fond of that toy anyway, but he had to get his anger out somehow. I admit, I was scared.

The yelling and screaming crescendoed, and as the volume climbed I began to frantically pet my stuffed animal. I tried my best to ignore them. Despite being only five years old I knew that it was a bad omen for parents to fight. It meant instability, aggression, and unhappiness.

I did things to distract myself, like looking up at the now darkening sky, or slowly swinging myself on the swing. I dug little holes in the dirt with my plastic sandals and hummed a tune. I imagined myself being in a happier place with a different family that laughed and smiled all the time. But I didn’t stop petting my cat; after all she (I took the liberty of deeming it a she) had to listen to all of the fighting too. She must have been as distraught as me.

I found myself uttering these words to my stuffed animal, “It’ll be okay, don’t worry. They’ll stop soon. It’ll be okay.”

No one came out to comfort me.

No one said that things were going to be all right.

But somehow saying that to an inanimate object made me feel better. All of this time I felt sorry for myself, but now that I’m older I realize that I have something that my family never had the capacity to do: comfort.
Wrong actions. Unfortunate results.

Scars, for me, are not just reminders of pain, suffering or hurt. They are evidences of life experiences. Moments that are remembered. Some are negative, while others are positive. But all are reminders of the experiences of life.

My scar. My experiences.

I am reminded of the number of scars I have seen. A scar that runs midline down a man’s chest, evidence of cardiac bypass surgery. A two inch scar above the heart, the entrance of a pacemaker. Stretch marks, which are scars, of a lady who has a beautiful family of five. Or the scar of a cesarean section, the necessary action to ensure a beginning of new life.

Their scars. Their unique experiences.

Or the scar on the right side of mother’s chest. Evidence of a pneumonectomy, the surgical removal of one half of the lungs. Three lobes out of five. From what I could determine, necessary due to a severe case of tuberculosis years ago when she was younger.

Her scar. Her experiences.

Or the numerous small scars on my father’s hands and arms due to physical labor since the age of 12. Because his father was silenced due to talking aloud against a Communist government and his mother passing from a broken, weakened heart and body. Leaving him, the oldest of 5, to take over the family responsibilities. Providing a home and paying for an education.

His scars. His experiences.

Scars are not pain. They are experiences. Unique to the individual who has them. Who owns them. Who experiences them.

My scar is mine. Uniquely mine. And your scars are yours. Uniquely yours.

I was eight the first time that I met Allan Bucholtz; I had just ridden over his prized petunias with my bike. He had been watching me from the front porch, where he was plucking away at a guitar and toying with the different strings. The guitar itself looked beaten half to death, but when Allan played that thing, every animal within earshot would shut its trap. Except for me; I rolled over his petunias with my bike instead. He chased me off his front yard, screaming obscenities and wielding his guitar like a crusader with his great blade.

For the next few years, Allan and I had a relationship similar to that of Dennis Mitchell and George Wilson. I would ruin his belongings, eat him out of house and home, and, in exchange, he would yell at me and tell my mother and father that, “There is no method to this child’s madness! Lock him up!” I continued to be a menacing force to Allan until I was fourteen.

It was early December and, on account of a snowstorm, classes had been cancelled that day. I was in my front yard, doing normal snow day activities, when I heard Allan’s guitar creeping up the driveway from behind me. I walked up to our fence and looked through a hole and there was Allan all right, hunkered in his backyard with half a fifty gallon drum that was spitting out a fervency that snapped and sang right alongside Allan’s guitar. I found one of our garbage cans propped up against the fence, climbed on top of it, and said, “Hi, Allan.” He stopped playing and glanced over at me. “Troublemaker,” he said, “Aren’t you supposed to be in school?” “It’s a snow day, Allan. The school gave everyone the day off.” Allan grunted, “It’s not snowing inside the classrooms, is it?” “No, sir, I don’t think it is.” “Well, if it ain’t snowing in the classrooms, why can’t the school have class?” I laughed at the thought of snow falling from the ceiling in my homeroom.

“Allan had died. My mother handed me a note that Allan’s will had specifically stated to give to me when the time came.

Once or twice a week, for the next ten years of my life, I would go over to Allan’s house, next door to mine, rain or shine, and watch him play that guitar. Sometimes he played with the neck of a beer bottle around his pinky, sliding the glass up and down the brass strings, and other times he would fiddle with the tuners on the headstock to give the thing this rich and colorful sound.

I never bothered asking Allan how old he was. He had the liver spots on his head and hands, the brow wrinkles, the overexposed laugh lines, and the fat that hung from his jaw like a rooster’s wattle. But when he played that guitar, something came out of him—this great beast with fingers and hand motions quicker than any sharpshootin’ cowboy I’d ever read about or seen in any movies.

One evening, around the fire, Allan told me with a grin, “This guitar here ain’t anything real special and I don’t play it in any real special way, but she and I have been through thick an’ thin with one another. She’s always been there for me.”

I was in my sophomore year of college when my mother phoned me up and told me to come home.

On a lined, yellow piece of note paper was the following:

Kid,

Ain’t nobody but my wife, and you, ever taken much interest in a guy like me, and I got to thinking that you’re probably just as crazy as she was. Hell, her buying me that guitar in the first place was the craziest thing she ever did. After she died, that guitar was all I really had. So, I did what any reasonable man does and fought the damned thing—fought it until I knew every crack, scratch, and dent that was on that body; fought it until I could play the damned thing behind my back with my eyes closed. After you left, I got to thinking that you and I had a connection there; between that guitar and us. I got to thinking that maybe you could do the same thing that I did with it.
To Grass: A Parody of an English Romantic Ode

Ah Grass! What a lovely sight!
So green, so brown, so blue, so bright!
A place to sit, a place to rest, a place to poop, a place to wed,
a place to play, a place to pray, a place to...
Ah, but be wary for it is cool to the touch, but can be hot to the eyes!
It is grown on our earth, so majestic and free, so unbridled and perhaps sometimes called a weed.
Don’t fret you see, for grass can be yours if you pay a fee; just look in Home Depot aisle 23.
The basis of life, it feeds our food and nourishes our nourishment.
It leads you to water but can hide you from it.
It is as diverse as we, mushy and muddy, straight and dry, prickly and itchy, soft and cozy.
Long and thin, thick and short, for He makes grass of all sorts.
At the bottom of the chain it takes the abuse and hides the pain,
for rain, sun, wind, fire, drought make it wane.
Something so important to be tossed aside from too much sprinkler, not enough sprinkler,
those who ignore “KEEP OFF GRASS,” cleats, teeth of beasts, floods of Roundup or Weed-B-Gon.
Though nothing is as dreaded as the oncoming roar of shirtless Jim on his riding lawnmower,
beer in hand, the damage is done.
for grass needs to be
treasured.
18th green at The Masters, for they understand what grass is to truly be.
Encouraged by wind, the steam disperses
leaving the spout clear.
Hers strong,
she grasps for warmth.
His sweet,
he lifts to sip, gold rim meeting his lips.
A pot of tea, now half, is all that lies between
this taste for two.
A lingered stir, then she too, sips.
understanding
knowledge of the brain
By: Gospel Cruz

the human brain. In the simplest terms, is about
connecting with
complex
adolescence
and
adulthood.
the human brain
desires
and
desires
reason—and even madness.
Most remarkable of all,
the human brain has the ability to

lies

the

brain

is

vibrant
at

discoveries involving
exploration
and evolution of
thought, feeling, and action.
I’ve done this circle perfect one too many times. I think I’m ready to go outside the lines.

I’m ready to scribble and draw something that doesn’t make sense.

I don’t want to be told how to shape my life.

Why does an apple have to be red? What if I dyed it blue instead?

Why does my mind have to have a screw loose? Why can’t it be a particularly special gift?

I’m not unlike you. I’m just more like me which shouldn’t be bad. But you tell me it’s bad.

You tell me to change.

I allow you the power to turn me into something I’m not.

But I don’t feel okay cause this change is yours and now instead of becoming better

I’ve turned into you. I can’t be happy like this. Leave me be. I will change when the wind changes.

When the sea retreats instead of rushing in.

Until then I’ve done this circle perfect one too many times. I’m ready to go outside the lines.
Multiplication

we crouch at ditch’s edge
push plump fingers
to discover through weeds
strings of frog eggs,
gelatinous loops of black
seeds, incipient frogs.

we gather them slimy in
coffee cans, inhale rank
fecundity, pliable earth
smeared on our legs,
squeezed between toes

pour them into buckets,
watch daily as they become
polliwogs, then suddenly
baby frogs, hopping
all over the garden, finding
their way into the garage,

a pharaoh’s plague on the
kitchen floor, burgeoning.
our own pregnant mother
grows ill at the excess.

we catch and herd them
out, but unstoppable
they live, grow, spring out
of garden, old shoes, cast
themselves everywhere:
food for birds and snakes,
flattened under car tires.

we grow dazed at life’s
abundance, dangers, no idea
of what we owe to what
we have brought forth.
We walk past each other every day
Our longest conversations are only a few words long
We know nothing about each other
And don’t care to know more
We are strangers in the same house
I call you ‘Dad’, and you call me ‘Son’
Just strangers with titles
Yassmina Montes

The Death of Her Sight

She will no longer see beauty. No blossoming roses as they unfurl for the sun, no sapphire and emerald hummingbirds feeding on sweet nectar. No majestic sunset or sunrise, no beauty of a clear night sky, and none of the trillions of stars and the brilliance of a full moon.

She will no longer see her family grow up, no longer see them change as they age. She will not see the new babies, families, homes they will create. She will not see the weddings, their entire splendor.

She will have to feel the warmth of the sun on her face instead of seeing the heat in the air. She will have to smell the fragrances of the world. She will have to feel the textures.

She will learn how to live life in a different way, to travel, like before but without fear, because she has no choice. She will not see what a person looks like on the outside; she will know what a person is like on the inside. She will no longer see beauty; she will breathe it, feel it, hear it in your voice.
the desert sun
fluttered by

a memory
in the rain

skinny-dipping
off a waterfall

into a pool
of summer
When they
told me of
death,
her

I did not look at
the leaves leaving. I did not
hear the mockingbirds mocking.
I did not feel their subtle, severe, symp-
pathetic nails raking my back through my
birthday dress. I looked at the ants,
crushed & pulpy beneath my shoes,
& focused on a dandelion
that hung
on
to
its
snow
despite
the
wind.
He passed a city limit sign. It had been five years since he’d seen it, but he still knew every inch of road between there and the county line. His home town and his old stomping grounds.

When he caught himself falling asleep at the wheel, he pulled into a gas station. He turned off the engine and let his mind wander, his dash dimly illuminated by the green, fluorescent parking lot bulbs outside. The bright light of the storefront loomed out at him, burning through the surrounding darkness.

His hand was on the door handle when a woman walked out of the store and got into the van next to him. As she began to pull out, he saw all of the telltale signs on the car next to him. Black hood. Wide and bulky. Doubtlessly a Crown Victoria. Before he even saw the incriminating white trim on the rest of the frame, he knew it was a police patrol car.

For a fleeting moment his body went into a panic. He cocked his head forward, his heart shuddering as he reflexively, abruptly sucked his breath up into his chest. He closed his eyes, put his hands on the steering wheel, and controlled his breathing.

Five seconds breathing in. Five seconds holding it. Five seconds breathing out. Five seconds holding it. He regained focus, and his thoughts regained their linear flow.

Then his eyes slowly opened. Attention never leaving the black and white mass in his peripheral, he left the car and entered the convenience store. The engine was still on, so he took it for granted that a police officer was behind the wheel and probably watching him. It was safest to make that assumption.

He already knew what he wanted, but he walked over to the sunglasses and began picking through and trying on shades. He had no intention of buying any of them. Instead, he looked around the store with the mirror, inconspicuously adjusting the rotation of the rack every so often to get a better view of the rest of the building. In the past—the distant past—doing this would have been part of casing a place. But tonight, it was because the dull click of boot heels on tile crept by. The cop’s eyes narrowed, his forehead wrinkled, and his expression began to reflect the same moment of hazy recollection that the man had experienced a few seconds before. Again he felt his heart drumming in his chest.

The police officer suddenly squared up his shoulders, adjusted his belt and stepped around the aisle. The man moved nothing but his hand, which crept almost imperceptibly towards the steel handle tucked into the waistband of his jeans.

The cop slowly approached him, his hands never leaving the sides of his belt, his eyes never leaving the mirror.

But the silence was shattered as the walkie at the cop’s shoulder abruptly crackled and barked with some unintelligible police dispatch. The cop’s shoulders sank back into a slouch. He rolled his eyes, sighed, and clicked the button on his walkie.

“10-4. Unit 56 responding; we’re in the area, be there in a moment.”

Without a second glance, the officer brusquely strode out of the building and got into the passenger door of the patrol car outside. The car pulled out of the parking lot and shot down the street, sirens and lights exploding through the quiet, moonless dark of the night.

He nearly collapsed as he saw them leave. Adrenaline pounded through his system. It made his thoughts race and his hands shake as he wiped the sweat on his palms onto his pants. It was the kind of rush he would have pursued like a bounty a few years ago. But no longer.

He turned away from the sunglasses rack and quickly grabbed what he came in for. A coffee, a bottle of Yoo-Hoo. Then he walked to the cashier where he asked for a pack of cigarettes, Marlboro Reds. The cashier rang him up. Before he could pay, the cashier stopped and looked him in the eye.

“You a thief?” he asked, rather nonchalantly.

The question caught him totally off guard. His first thought returned to the gun tucked into his jeans.

KEVIN FRODAHL

Letting go
“What?” He stammered.

“You’re going to pay for those sunglasses, right?” The cashier asked as he pointed to the man’s forehead.

“Oh. Huh. Right.”

He took them off his head, dropped them on the counter. They were big, plastic sunglasses with huge, trapezoidal black-out lenses. The kind that high school gym teachers wear. He laughed as he took them in for the first time, but more out of relief than anything else.

“Easy buddy, don’t want to dent that expensive plastic,” said the cashier. “Your total was $10.45, now it’s $15.86. ‘Sthat it kemosabe?”

Something about the cashier’s use of that word cast sparks in the man’s brain, but he couldn’t seem to extract a memory to attach to it.

“That’s it.”

The man paid and turned to leave. Before he got to the door, he heard a voice behind him.

“Say, J.J.?” The cashier asked.

Jerry whipped around; the cashier had a shadow of a smile on his face. He recognized the man’s smirk immediately. For the first time that night, Jerry smiled.

“Good to see you again, man,” the cashier said, “After so long.”

“Good to see you too, Mike.” Jerry said.

He went outside, got into his car and drove off. A mile down the road, he lit a cigarette, occasionally dipping his hand out the window to get rid of ash. Every time he did, tiny sparks erupted from the tip of the cigarette and were driven back into the night by the wind. They twinkled in the inky darkness and disappeared.
On days when the commotion and bustle of his family became too much for Tobias, he loved to dig his old mountain bike out of the garage, pack it into the minivan, and disappear to enjoy the secluded bike paths of the High Sierra. His work was tiring, and he often returned home to an atmosphere and life he detested more every day, and an hour-long drive was certainly worth escaping it. Being alone in nature brought him an inner peace he could find nowhere else.

Tobias didn’t like anyone to know where he was or where he’d been when he ventured out on a day-long retreat. His wife hardly noticed him coming back late and disheveled—her largest concerns anymore were their children and a series of reality shows about mothers in high school—but if she ever asked him where he was or what he was doing, he would lie through his teeth. He didn’t go there to do drugs or meet other women, he merely went there to escape and be alone. To him it was a paradise and he’d be damned if his family would take that away from him.

On a particularly intolerable day, Tobias pulled his bike out of his minivan and began riding down a new bike path in a section of the woods he hadn’t yet explored. His phone rang in his pocket, he pulled it out, saw his wife’s face and instantly sent the call to voice mail. As his minivan faded out of view and seemed to become a distant memory, a huge, otherworldly burden was lifted from his shoulders. His family might as well have been a million miles away. For a while it was as if none of them had ever existed or been a part of his life at all. He exalted in this thought.

Turning around, the sight of the minivan as it shrunk in the distance made a knot in his stomach. It was like an eternal reminder to his emasculation—a symbol of the death of the cool, unique and lively person he had once been. Tobias would rather drive any vehicle on earth before this, and every minute inside of it made him see the with an ocean of self-loathing. He knew he’d sacrificed everything about who he was for the life this minivan was suited for. He could almost imagine his testicles hanging from the rearview mirror, his wife’s initials inscribed on the inseam for everyone to see. Years at its wheel had driven him to ire and an unhealthy appreciation for A.M. radio ranting. Turning his back, he pedaled faster and lost himself in his bike ride again.

As he rode further and further away, Tobias lost himself in the lush Sierra and the abundant life of the mountains surrounding him. He could still hear the occasional car passing on a nearby road, but he appreciated the relative quiet that he couldn’t find at home. Tobias rounded a bend that overlooked a steep, rocky grade. Looking back to the road, he noticed that he was soon going to pass a wide, rusty gate, with two large birds perched on top of it.

Their features grew more distinguishable as he approached. Long masses of tawny feathers cascaded down from their hefty, hunched frames. Their pink heads emerged from the great folds of plumage and ended in jagged, cracked beaks. They loomed forward towards the path, dark specters to every passer-by. The two vultures seemed to watch Tobias as he passed them.

He rounded another bend and the two birds quickly flitted from his mind. His thoughts wandered until they turned uncomfortably to his wife and kids. He wondered what they would think about his day-long retreats. Tobias quickly began to craft the alibi for today. He invented specific details and vague anecdotes to tell his wife about later. He thought up dull names for uninteresting colleagues that didn’t actually exist. He thought up work projects with very general names. His wife never interrogated him further than asking him why he was so late. But he was always prepared to deliver a dramatic performance that would hit every emotional nuance with breathtaking subtlety. It would be a shame that she would never be able to know the mastery behind it all.

Looking up in the sky he saw two birds circling over his head. Were they the same ones as before? They were so high that he could only make out their color and shape, but they were clearly large. He continued to ride down the abandoned path, every minute or so looking back at the birds that continuously circled, spying something below. He wondered what it was they saw.

Tobias picked up speed as he rode downhill, gliding up and over bumps as he let himself coast. At the bottom of the hill he looked up, and saw the two birds hanging in the same position over his head as before. He chuckled a little and started pedaling a little faster, as if to race with the birds. He turned his attention to the sprawling pines that were growing in greater and greater abundance as he progressed along the bike path.

After about an hour of riding, Tobias stopped at the side of the bike trail and began eating a lunch his wife had given him when he had left that day. In his head he noted and scoffed at every mistake she’d made in preparing the meal, finding none of it to be up to his...
The coffee had too much sugar. The apple was bruised. The yogurt had disgusting chunks of fruit in it. The sandwich was on rye and furthermore, the tomato had long since soaked through half of the bread, rendering it entirely inedible in Tobias’ eyes. He tossed it on the ground half-way through eating it and let out an angry, audible grunt. His dessert was an ample helping of home-made lemon meringue pie. He devoured this, but only while irritably contemplating the heartburn it was sure to give him.

“Sixteen years and it’s like she still doesn’t even know me,” Tobias thought with irrational contempt. A tiny part of him regarded every subtle imperfection of his lunch as an intentional, almost malicious negligence on the part of his wife.

After he finished his lunch, Tobias sprawled out on the grass at the side of the bike path and looked up into the sky, to relax a little while after lunch. Much to his surprise, he saw the same two, enormous birds as he had seen before. They continued to silently circle over him, only this time he could make out more of their features—their beaks—their bald heads—their huge wings—he was being followed by the two vultures. Part of him began to feel uneasy. He started off on his bike again. As he got further down the road, he clicked his gearshift and began to pick up speed. He turned to the sun, and noticed that it was beginning to dip below the mountains to the west. The sprawling trees were growing darker, and he still felt compelled to ride on.

Tobias pedaled quickly down the bike path, looking up at the circling birds again and again. Each time he looked, they were closer than the time before. Slowly but surely, they were inching-in on him. For almost two minutes, his eyes didn’t leave the sky above him. His attention was pulled away from steering. He didn’t even comprehend the change in the ground as he pulled off of the main bike trail and onto another. A small bump as the path dipped down brought his attention back to directing his bike.

Within moments, the path took him to an area of the Sierras he wasn’t familiar with. The trees about him grew and multiplied exponentially. Colossal redwoods rose up on either side, and presided over armies of pine. The relatively minute Tobias rode anxiously in their shadows. A pit in his stomach nagged at him more and more as he continued into the miasma. Beneath him, the terrain grew rough and the trail appeared more unkempt. Patches of grass rose up in between bicycle tire marks and rough foot-paths. After
a few moments, Tobias stopped his bike and looked up towards the sky. He saw broken patches of dark blue through the canopy of leaves and branches extending over him, but there were no buzzards. The knot in his stomach loosened.

The eerie quiet was shattered by a musical jingle emitting from his pocket. Pulling out his cellphone, he was chagrined to find that he was still getting service this far out. He silently cursed smartphones, their inventors and all the inconvenience that having one seemed to bring into his life. His wife’s face stared back at him again, told him she was calling. He let the call go to voicemail and counted her distraction as another malfeasance against him.

He looked up and down the road, and realized that he was entirely alone. It was a beautiful thought. But just as he began to deeply appreciate the world around him, his phone rang again. He could ignore her no longer. He yanked the phone from his pocket and pressed it towards his ear.

“Yes?” He asked.

“Where are you?” She asked.

“I’m at the office, is this important?”

“Why didn’t you answer earlier? I’ve called like four times. I texted you.” She broke off and Tobias heard a bang in the background.

“**CUT IT OUT BACK THERE! I’M ON THE PHONE!**”

“Well, don’t be. I’m just working late . . . What do you want?”

“I just wanted to see when you’re coming home. I’m very tired, and I want some help with feeding the kids and putting them to bed. I thought we could watch a movie or something.”

“I’ll probably be home at 9.”

“The kids will be asleep by then.”

“Alright.”

“I’ll be asleep by then, Tobias.”

“Oh,” he replied flatly, choosing to ignore the implication. He was simply no longer interested. There was a pause, and Tobias heard a loud sigh on the other end. There was another long pause.

“If that’s all, I have to get back to work. I want to finish this presentation tonight.”

There was another loud sigh, another short period of quiet. Tobias was startled by another loud bang from the telephone, and muffled shouting rang through the receiver. He shuddered as he imagined what annoying, destructive thing his children were doing.

“Try not to make too much noise when you come in, I guess,” his wife said, clearly exasperated. She did nothing to hide her sound of disappointment.

“I won’t.”

“Alright. Bye.”

Tobias hung up.

Palpable waves of resentment emanated through him as he hung up the phone, and he suddenly felt motivated to press on even further. Part of him wanted to avoid the vultures, but a greater part of him wanted to avoid his family. He hopped onto his bike again and sped off down the bike trail.

Feeling tranquility in renewed solitude, Tobias again felt a relief from his anxieties. He saw a deer cross the path ahead of him. Taking in the nature around him, he began to reflect and was quickly swept up into philosophical thought. He started to think about animals and how they reacted to the ever-growing presence of human life. He realized again its great beauty, and all of its splendid random qualities. He felt moved by it all. It didn’t matter if nature was a product of God or some random coincidence; it was all a miraculous, beautiful wonder. For a moment, everything seemed in tune and life was wonderful.

Tobias came to a hill, and felt himself pulling up to a high peak. He could see golden-red rays of sunlight bursting forth from over the hilltop, and the tree line opened up on the trail ahead. Tobias felt certain that a gorgeous panorama of a Sierra sunset awaited him on the other side. He would not miss it. He began to hasten his pace with great determination. The road grew steeper. He pumped his legs with greater and greater effort to reach the top. The slant of the hillside gave more and more resistance. He looked down at his feet, stood up on the pedals and pushed harder than ever before. His front wheel reached a summit, and then gravity released him and resistance subsided. Tobias broke free with his eyes still at the pedals below.

Suddenly, the entire path cut downwards and Tobias began to shoot down an enormous mountain side. The front bike wheel hit a giant log, and almost immediately he found himself hurtled off the seat and forward over the rocks. He gained more and more speed, and terror gripped him as he flailed his arms and legs, trying helplessly to propel himself away from danger. His screams were abruptly broken off as the first boulder he collided with shattered his ribs and knocked the wind out of him. He ricocheted forward and continued to tumble into a tree below. Sticking one leg out, he managed to catch the trunk of the tree just in time, but unfortunately, the force of the impact shattered his kneecap and he quickly began to roll down the mountain again. Eventually the ground rolled into a vertical rock wall, and Tobias slipped into a free-fall. As the wind flew through his hair, he regretted every single decision he’d made in the last twenty years. Just as he got up to his second child, his body was compacted into the rocky ground below him. A final sigh escaped him. Tobias was dead.

Suddenly the two vultures appeared far above. They lazily descended over the craggy mountainside. The sleek brown birds approached the fresh remains and landed a few feet away from him. One began to gorge itself on Tobias’ entrails, the other looked on across the floor of the ravine, at all the skeletons and bicycles that had accumulated there, satisfied that their scheme had worked once again.
Memories are the greatest form of hand-me-downs. They survive life and death, and no matter who passes away, these memories are forever. Pictures, flowers, cards, even a touch is a feeling that lasts forever. This is dedicated to my uncle. He passed away when I was young, and even till his last day, I was right by his side. One of his favorite things to do was sit under a tree that we had at our house. To this day the tree is still there, and although he isn’t, I know that the one place I can always find him is under that tree.

The leaves fall to the ground, taken away from the tree that stands, a sign of winter quickly approaching. One last flight, falling from the sky, is a legacy once held. Bright blue skies with green leaves of contrast and the sun shining with every step, many wonderful summers were spent under this tree—laughing, enjoying life, and relaxing. For the tree, neither the people nor a single leaf remains in place. The memories are alive like it was fresh. Life isn’t promised; we meet people, and today could be their last day. The things we say could be the last they hear, and the things we do could be the last memories that they will leave with. Memories are the only thing we have left. Each day, we live as they once did. No matter what, they will never come back. Some leave without notice while others leave knowing that their time has come. As their last breath is taken away, the rush of endorphins and the memories flow, one last time, the body released from pain. Pain birthed in the world. Free at last! Free like the bird, even free like the leaves that fall from a tree. One leaf among millions, but this leaf was different. It was the last leaf on the tree. Without that leaf, the tree is gone. Memories in a place, soil wet like the sun shone upon, once a smiling soul and now a memory of my past, never to be forgotten.

The irony is in our culture when a person dies, we light the final pyre with wood and in our case, we used the same wood from the tree that my uncle used to sit under, burning straight through life and death, leaving us with the laughs, jokes and every cherished moment that I hold near and dear to my heart.
Let me tell you a little story all about how
my family passed anything and everything down
from old shirts and shoes, to faded pants.
Buying a new outfit? Not a chance.
This way of recycling has been used for years.
Commonly an article of clothing, just to be clear.
My mother was born in the Philippines.
When she came to the U.S., she was just a teen.
With five younger sisters, times were hard.
She had to stay protective and keep up her guard.
Her mother and father were very conservative,
loved their children and gave them all they could give.
A simple life was the life they lived.
Sharing with each other is what they did.
As the years went by, my mother’s sisters got older.
She would give them old clothes she didn’t wear any longer.
They would wear them, then pass them down
to whoever is next in line to use the shirt, pants, or gown.
To save money and still look presentable,
they had to do this at the time to keep the income stable.
This is where my mother and her sisters got the idea
because my closet is a “hand-me-down” galleria.
My older cousins would give me all of their old, used clothes.
Most were too big and some were beginning to decompose.
And that is how my swagger came to be,
that old school, raggedy look, as you can see.
Clothing passed down the family tree
is exactly what defines me.
As a kid there wasn’t much of anything handed down to me except for one item, a small wooden desk I received from my dad. This was when I was probably in fourth grade. I was in need of a desk so I could work on my assignments. I wanted a cool desk at the time, but my dad couldn’t afford it. He wanted to give me his old desk and said, “I’ve owned this desk from when I was eighteen and was attending college.” At first, I didn’t like the idea because I wanted a brand new desk, but since I couldn’t get what I wanted, I got my dad’s desk. During the following years, many family and friends visited. They would draw on my desk, carve their names, and write quotes. I didn’t read all the carvings and writings because to me, it was just a desk. One day my family and I had to relocate from our house and I was going to toss the desk away when I noticed the writings and quotes. As I read them one by one, I could imagine when, where and what the events were at the time. I smiled and told myself, this wooden desk is not just an ordinary desk but my time machine to look back and reminisce about all the good times of my childhood. This desk, handed down to me, is one of the best items I’ve ever received. I will forever keep this desk so that my future kids can use this desk and listen to my stories because every carving and quote has a tale of memories.
I was born in Russia at the end of the 1980s. These were not the best years for Russia; in the shops were half-empty shelves, and in order to buy clothes, people had to stand in long lines. My sisters and I were lucky our mother was a seamstress. She sewed our clothes, such as no one else had. But since the material was very difficult to buy anywhere, clothes that our mom sewed, we had to continue wearing one after one. I was the second girl in the family, and I had to wear clothes after my older sister. But I wasn’t very upset about that because I used to like clothes that our mom sewed for us, and also no one had clothes like we had.
Hand-Me-Downs

Let me first start off by saying that I am a middle child. Both of my older siblings are girls. That means that when I needed a sweater for winter the obvious choice was to force me to wear my sister’s old worn purple coat. I put off wearing it until I could not stand the cold anymore. Finally in December, the temperature dropped to a frigid 28 degrees and I was forced to wear the hideous coat. I knew I would be teased mercilessly for wearing it, but I was left with no choice. So mounting up my belongings, I headed out to the bus stop to get the day over with. When I got to school, however, nobody said anything about the coat. Don’t get me wrong, I did get a few piercing glances, but for the most part everybody left me alone. I couldn’t understand it until I saw Vincent, the cool guy voted most popular in the school. He wore a black goose-feather jacket that must have been at least three sizes too big for him. He looked a little like a burnt marshmallow with his black jacket starkly contrasting his pale skin. I realized that everybody gets hand-me-downs at some point in time and there was nothing to be embarrassed about.
“When life gives you lemons, you paint that shit gold.”
—Kaylyn Toyama’s mother

“One generation plants the trees, and another gets the shade.”
—Chinese Proverb

“Second-hand books are wild books, homeless books; they have come together in vast flocks of variegated feathers, and have a charm which the domesticated volumes in the library lack.”
—Virginia Woolf

“Nothing in nature is exhausted in its first use.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Let us not be too particular; it is better to have old secondhand diamonds than none at all.”
—Mark Twain

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.”
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer
JoAnn Anglin grew up in Sacramento, graduating from local schools. Her poems have been included in many journals and anthologies. She has hosted and taken part in numerous public poetry readings, and has taught poetry writing in schools and other venues. She is active with Escritores del Nuevo Sol/Writers of the New Sun.

Sumeet K. Bali is a student at Cosumnes River College.

Laura Bell is a student at Cosumnes River College. Despite majoring in Agricultural Business, she has enjoyed a variety of English courses. She plans to transfer to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Laura is currently employed at a local ranch, tending to grass-loving Quarter Horses.

Ashley Boucher enjoys a good cup of tea with even better company. At the age of 20, she has been through many journals and has admired writing since a young age. Each day she works on being present, but does aspire to take her studies of communications and journalism at Cosumnes River College to greater lengths in life.

Beverly Caouette is a Cellular and Molecular graduate student at Sacramento State University. She attended CRC for her part of her undergraduate studies. Photography is one of her hobbies.

Spencer Cave Jr. is a freelance photographer from Brooklyn NY who moved to San Francisco is 1995. His topics usually focus on the macabre, but he often finds beauty in the most mundane aspects of life.

Luan Dinh, 19 years old, who is really greedy (but not cocky) when he mentions choosing schools—three schools for one fancy major: Biomedical Engineering, is the one who can memorize all the complicated calculus equations but sometimes cannot remember his home address.

Trina L. Drotar is a literary and visual artist working in poetry, prose, watercolor, egg tempera, ink, fiber. Her work has been widely published and is held in several collections, notably the Museum of Women in the Arts. She can be found at poetry and art venues throughout California. www.trinaldrotar.blogspot.com.

Kevin Frodahl currently studies at Cosumnes River College and hopes to receive an A.A. with a major in “Batman Studies.” He has successfully completed “Oregon Trail” 6½ times. His interests include puns, dinosaurs, haunted houses, and impersonating David Bowie. When he isn’t defending the streets of Sacramento as a masked vigilante, he’s posing as a mild-mannered journalist, copy-editor and cartoonist for the CRC Connection.

Christopher Green is a student at Cosumnes River College.

Uliana Gudzeva was born in the Caucasus of Russia. There she finished high school. And at the end of 2009, Uliana and her family moved to the U.S. where she presently attends Cosumnes River College. Now that she has finished her ESL classes, she is ready to enter her major, Psychology.

Zachary Hannigan is a 20-year-old student of Cosumnes River College. He has been writing since he was a kid and hopes to one day be a sports journalist. He currently resides in Sacramento, Calif. and his hobbies include photography, hunting, fishing and reading.

Jennifer Ip is a student at CRC, who is striving to become an author. She is deeply intrigued by how humans love and crave good stories, and hopes to give people such stories.

Areeba Jibril currently resides in Canton, Michigan. She has recently entered the world of higher education and is still trying to figure out a major.
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.

Eugene Le lives by the belief that beauty is an absolute, he has been able to find the uniqueness in all he views. From doodles on paper to the placement notes on sheets of music, he has discovered inspiration from everything and anything. Creative, musical and practical best describes him. He also loves sleep.

John Lee was born in Merced, California and lived in North Carolina for three years with his parents, but due to massive floods there, his father decided the area was too dangerous for his family, sacrificed his job and moved the family back to Sacramento where John released his young imagination through backyard adventures. He currently attends Cosumnes River College.

Tifarrah Miller is 20 years old and grew up in Northern California. She always had a love for writing poetry. She started writing poetry at a hard time in her life while struggling with depression. Writing has saved her life. It gives her a lot of joy. She’s glad to be able to share it.

Yassmina Montes is a Cosumnes River College student, and is majoring in English Literature. She has been writing since she was young, making stories for her younger sister. She has been through a lot in her life; her experiences have helped her bring a different outlook to her writing. Losing sight has opened many other worlds to her, and she wishes to share those experiences in her writing.

Alex Motor is a second year student at CRC. He was born in Pittsburgh, PA. His hobbies include fixing old computers and doing Muay Thai. He plans to major in computer programming.

Navin Reddy was born and raised in Sacramento. He spent a longer than short time at Cosumnes River, before transferring to San Francisco State. There he focused on a degree in marketing while traversing the perils of inaccurate bus schedules. Now he has come back to CRC to do science classes.

Tammy Soong is a wife, mom, political junky, chronic complainer, and godless liberal living in Reno, Nevada. She writes about practically everything, including the kitchen sink, on her blog, World’s Worst Moms (www.WorldsWorstMoms.com).

Cosumnes River College student Stephan Starnes is an award-winning journalist and photographer on the campus newspaper. He is the current Student State President of the Journalism Association of Community Colleges. When not taking candid photos of friends, Stephan enjoys spending his time with video games, fine literature, and music from classic songwriters such as Katy Perry.

Sandy Thomas is an Asian American, third generation poet, author of These Stones and Matchbook Girl and women’s self-defense instructor. She hosts Crossroads Reading Series and her poems and images have appeared in Brevities, Late Peaches, Medusa’s Kitchen, Ophidian 01 and 02, Poems-For-All, Poetry Now, Sacramento News and Review, and Sacramento Press.

Jayne West retired from her State of California job of 35 years in 2010. Not sure what to do with the rest of her life and having always enjoyed learning new things, she decided to continue her education in the field of Photography. Having grown up in the rural part of the Sierra foothills, near Jamestown, her primary focus is on landscape, nature and wildlife. She also does some western photography since her mother owns a cattle ranch near Jamestown.